

an instant help book for teens

the
gender quest
workbook

a guide for teens & young
adults exploring gender identity

* **express**
yourself

* **navigate**
social situations

* **find**
support

RYLAN JAY TESTA, PhD
DEBORAH COOLHART, PhD
JAYME PETA, MA

“We invite youth today to embark on their own unique gender journey. But imagine hiking into the wilderness without a map. Now, with the publication of *The Gender Quest Workbook*, Rylan Jay Testa, Deborah Coolhart, and Jayme Peta have provided just such a detailed topographical map for gender exploration. *The Gender Quest Workbook* is an invaluable resource for any youth wanting to explore their gender, and for the professionals and family members accompanying the youth on their venture. Just a generation ago, youth gender quests remained a topic of which we did not speak. *The Gender Quest Workbook* has broken that sound barrier by giving youth a place for their voice, inviting them to put words to their own journey as they engage in the exercises so brilliantly laid out by Testa, Coolhart, and Peta.”

—**Diane Ehrensaft, PhD**, director of mental health at the Child and Adolescent Gender Center, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, and author of *Gender Born, Gender Made* and *The Gender Creative Child*

“This workbook is an important resource for the transgender community. I wish I’d had something like it when I was coming out to myself.”

—**Greta Gustava Martela**, cofounder and executive director of Trans Lifeline, the first national crisis line for transgender people

“Informative, supportive, and fun. These playful and engaging exercises are powerful tools for self-discovery. I wish I’d had this guide as a teenager. Any young adult exploring gender will find freedom in these pages.”

—**Nick Krieger**, author of *Nina Here Nor There*

“The only book of its kind, *The Gender Quest Workbook* is an invaluable resource for transgender and gender-questioning youth, their families, the professionals in their lives, and anyone who is interested in ‘undoing gender brainwashing.’”

—**Zander Keig, LCSW**, coeditor of *Letters for My Brothers* and *Manning Up*, and featured in the documentary *Zanderology*

“*The Gender Quest Workbook* is a wonderful new resource for exploring the evolving landscape of gender. Providing a road map for young people of any gender to examine their own experiences and understanding of this core aspect of self, this important tool also affirms the authenticity of individuals who find themselves in the less crowded terrain somewhere along the gender spectrum. Whether cisgender or gender expansive, more and more young people are personalizing their gender stories. *The Gender Quest Workbook* will play a critical role in shaping the narratives they create.”

—**Joel Baum, MS**, senior director of professional development and family services at Gender Spectrum, and founding member and director of education and advocacy at the Child and Adolescent Gender Center at the University of California, San Francisco

“*The Gender Quest Workbook* is the perfect answer for anyone who is tired of textbooks and looking for a little fun! What better way to explore this topic than to get a chance to think about all the aspects of your gender in a step-by-step book.”

—**Laura Erickson-Schroth, MD, MA**, psychiatrist and editor of *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*

“*The Gender Quest Workbook* took me, a well-balanced adult transsexual, on a journey of gender discovery, showing me parts of myself I did not know existed. The overwhelming benefit of this kind of self-examination for our transgender youth is an utmost necessity for early identification. A positive future for our transgender children is greatly enhanced by teachers, clinicians, and parents utilizing this outstanding resource.”

—**Rachael Rose Luckey**, filmmaker and transgender rights advocate

“*The Gender Quest Workbook* is an excellent resource for any young person who would like to explore gender. The authors really cover all the bases and bring to life the process by which a person can feel supported in bringing self-determination and creativity to expressing their gender. The language used is clear and user-friendly. I would absolutely recommend this to my clients. Testa, Coolhart, and Peta make excellent tour guides through this journey!”

—**Sand Chang, PhD**, clinical psychologist and gender specialist in the Kaiser Permanente Multi-Specialty Transitions Department, chair of the American Psychological Association (APA) Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (CSOGD), and coauthor of the APA *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People*

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Instant Help Books
An Imprint of New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

2015032696

Publisher's Note

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Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books

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Instant Help Books

New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

5674 Shattuck Avenue

Oakland, CA 94609

www.newharbinger.com

Cover design by Amy Shoup

Illustrations by Katja Tetzlaff and Julie Olsen

Cover photo by Ryan Donahoo @FreakMighty

Acquired by Tesilya Hanauer

Edited by Melanie Bell

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Testa, Rylan Jay, author.

The gender quest workbook : a guide for teens and young adults exploring gender identity / Rylan Jay Testa, PhD, Deborah Coolhart, PhD, Jayme Peta, MA, MS ; foreword by Ryan K. Sallans, M.A. ; afterword by Arlene Istar Lev, LCSW-R, CASAC.

pages cm. -- (Instant help books)

ISBN 978-1-62625-297-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-1-62625-298-1 (pdf e-book) -- ISBN 978-1-62625-299-8 (epub) 1. Transgenderism--

Juvenile literature. 2. Gender identity--Juvenile literature. 3. Sex differences (Psychology)--Juvenile literature. I. Coolhart, Deborah, author. II. Peta, Jayme, author. III. Title.

HQ77.9.T47 2015

306.76'8--dc23

This book is dedicated to all of those who embark on a Gender Quest. Your courage, creativity, and vision are changing how the world understands gender and creating pathways for transgender and gender expansive young people in the future.

Contents

CHAPTER 1: GENDER IDENTITY

- the difference between gender and sex
 - sex
 - more about sex
 - gender
 - gender identity
 - gender expression
- undoing gender brainwashing
- exploring your gender identity
- summary

CHAPTER 2: GENDER EXPRESSION

- my past gender adventures
- observing gender
- expressing yourself beyond gender
- getting ready to experiment with gender
- before jumping in the pool
 - putting it all together!
- let's go swimming!
 - what's next?
- permanent changes
 - for youth before puberty
 - hormone or puberty "blockers"
 - for people after puberty
 - to appear in a more feminine way:
 - to appear in a more masculine way:
 - for anyone considering medical interventions
- what to do if you are considering permanent changes
 - final note
- summary

CHAPTER 3: FAMILY

- sharing your gender with family members
- family openness
- conversations with family members
- bumps in the road toward acceptance
- expressing what you need in family relationships
- summary

CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL AND WORK

- advocating for yourself
 - middle, junior, and high school

college

at work

name and pronouns

bathrooms, locker rooms, and uniforms

harassment and bullying

dealing with ignorance

summary

CHAPTER 5: FRIENDS AND OTHER PEERS

should I talk about my gender thoughts and experiences?

am I ready to talk?

where should I start?

who should I talk to?

preparing for different reactions

dealing with negative experiences

summary

CHAPTER 6: DATING AND SEX

sexual and romantic orientations

sexual orientation

romantic orientation

more about sexual and romantic identities

dating

figuring out how, when, or if to come out to potential partners

safety when talking to partners

sex

figuring out what brings you sexual pleasure (and what does not)

communication about sex

summary

CHAPTER 7: BALANCING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

privilege

intersectionality

race and ethnicity

religion

socioeconomic status

other identity factors

summary

CHAPTER 8: DEALING WITH THE HARD STUFF

the stress of stepping outside of your “comfort zone”

the tricky brain

gender minority stress

consequences of gender minority stress

signs of stress

dealing with stress

figuring out emotions

when do I need more help?

~~where can I get help?~~

group support

hotlines

therapists

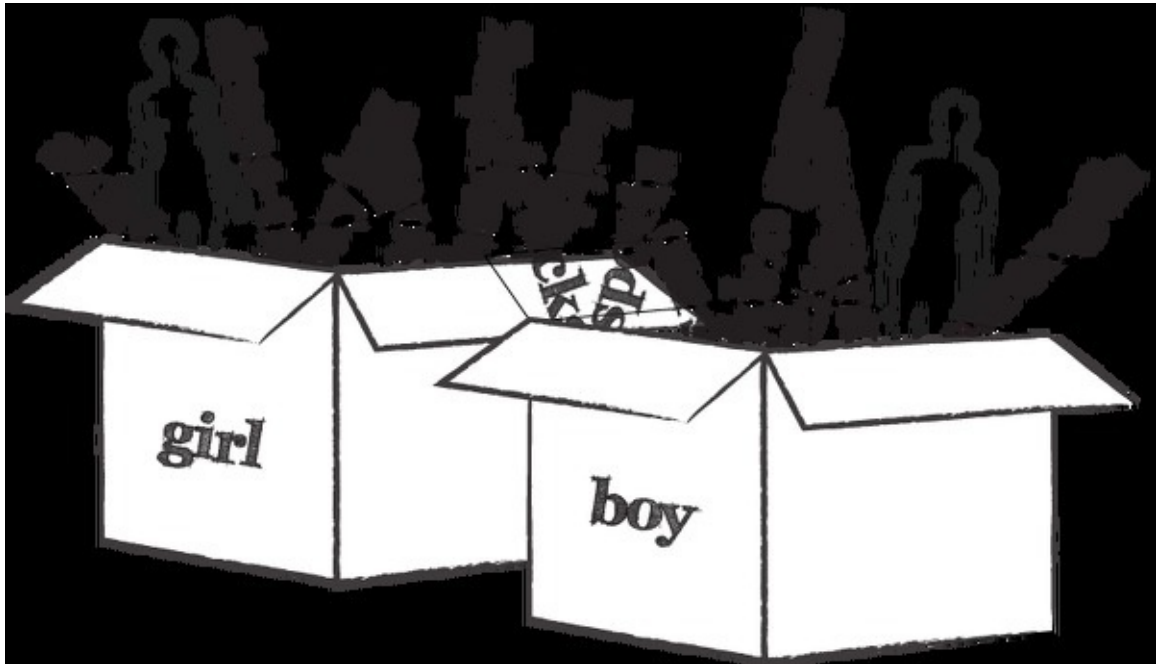
when to seek emergency care

summary

CONCLUSION

AFTERWORD

gender identity



What is gender, anyway?

To give a very complicated question a simple answer, gender is both (1) how you express masculinity, femininity, or for most people, some mix of the two and (2) how your identity, or sense of self, relates to masculinity and femininity. Gender can be expressed in how you style your hair, what clothes you wear, how your voice sounds, or even through what hobbies you choose. In our view, there are about as many different gender identities as there are people. The options are infinite. It seems that even the people who appear most comfortable in their gender still have their own nuanced feeling for what it means to be them. And figuring that out, well, that's a Gender Quest.

Gender is a confusing topic for most of us. Here are just a few of the questions the authors have answered over the years:

How is gender different from sex?

Has gender always been around? Will it always be around?

If I move to Jupiter, will gender exist there?

Do all animals have genders?

How many genders are there?

Can a person's gender change over time?

Does your gender come from how you're raised? Or is it from your genes or brain?

In the space that follows, write some questions you have about gender. Don't be shy; this is a space to say whatever comes to mind.

Answers to any of these questions aren't simple. Gender is actually a pretty complicated and interesting thing. Let's take a look...

the difference between gender and sex

In mainstream American culture, "gender" is often equated with "sex." Even when people do know these two words mean different things, they may be confused about how.

sex

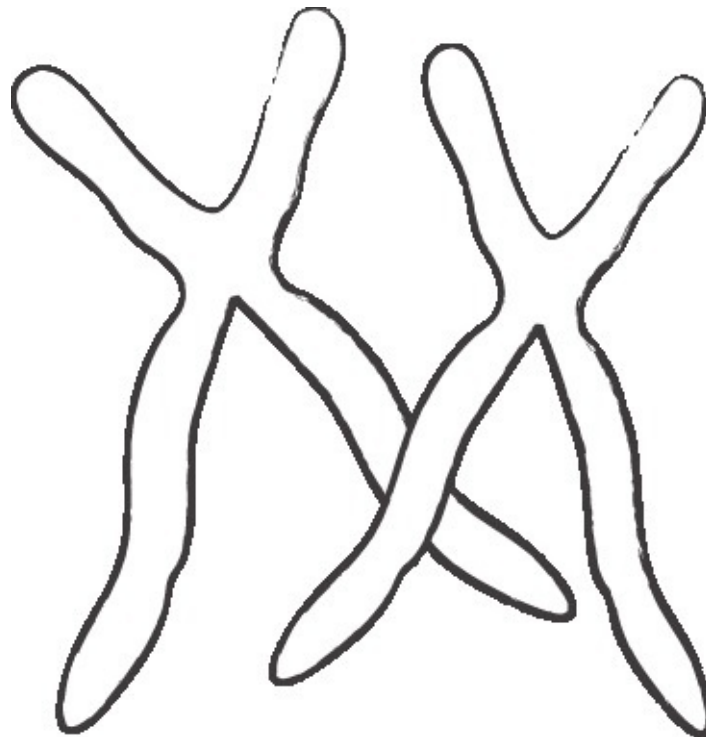
The word "sex" is tricky itself, because it is used to describe two very different things. Sex can be used to talk about:

physical intimacy between people ("what happens between the sheets")

or to refer to

whether someone is "male," "female," or "intersex" ("what's between the legs").

It is this second definition, relating to the words "male," "female," and "intersex," that people often think of as being the same as "gender." But guess what? It's not! Sex and gender are different things!



[more about sex](#)

Many people think that all mammals, including humans, naturally come in one of two varieties—males or females. They also think it is simple to tell who goes in which category. Many kids are taught that the difference between males and females is whether or not the person has a penis or a vagina. When people get older and take some biology classes, they may think that the difference is sex chromosomes (part of your genes). We are taught that males have the genes XY, whereas females have the genes XX. Notice that in both cases, whether we are talking about genitals or chromosomes, there are only two options—male or female.

Few people are told the truth about sex—that nature doesn't fall neatly into these categories. In fact, many healthy babies are born with genitals that are not clearly "male" or "female" (intersex babies). Some people are born with genes different from XY or XX (like XXY, for example). There are also people whose genes and genitals don't "match" as expected (like people with XY genes who have a vagina). Finally, even people who are not intersex often have some characteristics that we would consider unusual for their sex. When people grow up, their bodies produce hormones, and they develop "secondary sex characteristics" like facial and body hair, deepening voice, breasts, wider hips, or more muscle mass. We usually think about things like facial hair as being a "male-only thing" and things like breasts as being a "female-only thing." But actually, many people with penises develop some breast tissue, and many people with vaginas develop some facial hair. All perfectly natural. Just not widely talked about.

Try It Out!:

Find a time and place in your day when you can do some people watching. You can observe people walking by on the street, shopping, or playing outside. They shouldn't be people on television shows or movies, since these people are often selected and made up to look a certain way. Give yourself time to observe at least fifteen real-life females and fifteen real-life males and answer the following questions:

Do you see any females who have some biological traits we usually categorize as male? Maybe bigger muscles on their arms, a deeper voice, thinner hips, some hairs on their face, or other examples? Write down what you find:

What about the males? Do they have any traits we usually categorize as female? Maybe some of them are shorter than most males? Do you notice any who don't have much hair on their bodies or face, who have a higher voice, wider hips, some breast tissue, or other examples?

Did you notice yourself judging any of these people's traits as good, bad, pretty, handsome, or ugly? Most of us have been taught that having masculine traits is good if you are a man, but bad if you are a woman, and similarly, that having feminine traits is good if you are a woman and bad if you are a man. In fact, after learning this lesson, some people go to great lengths, spending time and money to remove hair, add hair, remove breasts, get bigger breasts, gain muscle, lose weight, and so on, all to look more like what they are taught they are supposed to look like based on their sex.

Do you know anyone who does these things? Or have you tried any of these things? Write any examples here:

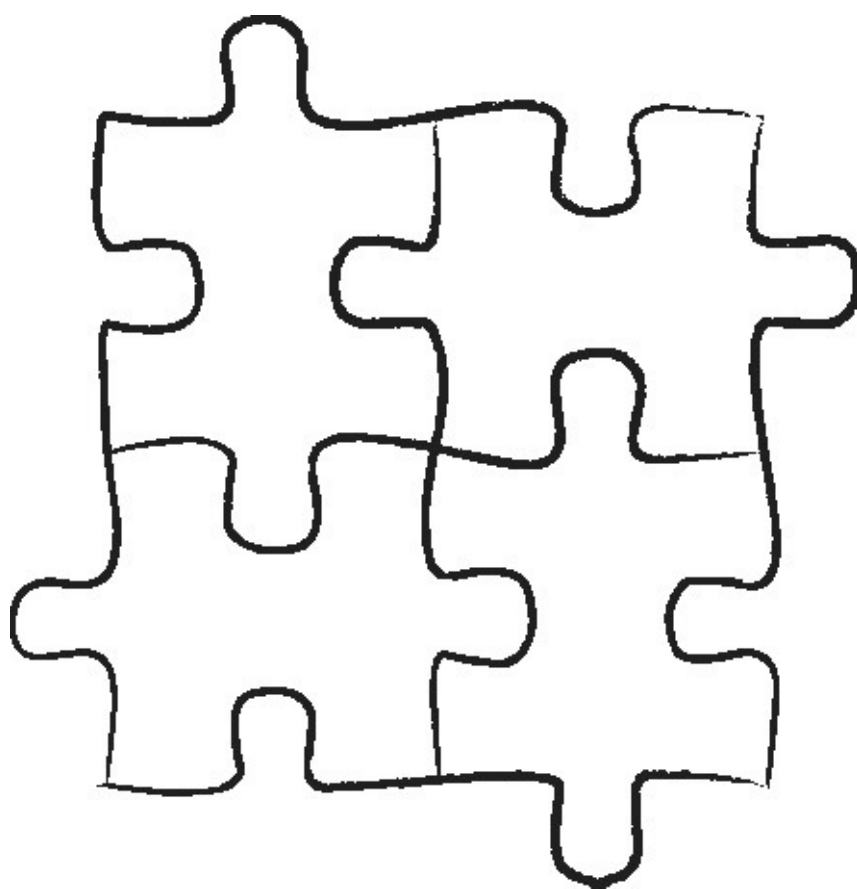
So to sum it up, sex has to do with *biology*. From what you wrote down above, you can probably see that sex doesn't fall into two neat categories. Instead, sex is the biology of how male, female, both, neither, or in-between someone is.

gender

Gender is a very different thing from sex. Gender isn't "what's between your legs," it's "what's between your ears." In other words, gender is how you think and feel about yourself, and how you behave or express yourself in the world. You cannot tell a person's gender from their biology. Instead of talking about whether someone is "male" or "female," we most often use the words "man/boy" or "woman/girl" when referring to someone's gender. Many people think if someone has a penis that means they must be a man or boy. This is not true. When a person is born with a penis the doctors may shout, "It's a boy!" but what they actually mean is that this person's sex is male.

How do you know if you are a boy, a girl, or another gender?

And how do you know what gender someone else is if you can't see it?



Well, here's a puzzle for you to solve:

If a girl went to a magician who mistakenly had her vagina turn into a penis, would she suddenly become a boy?

No! She would still know she was a girl. Just a girl with a penis.

Another puzzle:

If a boy lost a really big bet and had to dress and act "like a girl" for the rest of his life, would he become a girl?

No! He would still be a boy. Just a boy in a dress who was acting "like a girl."

As mentioned above, gender has to do with both how you think and feel about yourself (called your “gender identity”) and how you behave or express yourself in the world (called “gender expression”).

gender identity

Because people have all sorts of thoughts and feelings about their genders, people have all sorts of gender identities. For example, a person may identify as a man, woman, transgender man, transgender woman, genderqueer, bigender, Two-Spirit, or something very unique and creative, like a “gender Prius,” “gender Oreo,” or “gender swirl.”

Here are how some of the more common gender identities are usually defined:

Agender: *Someone who identifies as having no gender.*

Androgynous: *A person who has both masculine and feminine traits. This may also be used to refer to a person whose gender is hard to determine visually.*

Bigender: *Some people use this word to describe themselves as switching gender in different contexts. One example is someone who is very masculine at their welding class, but loves to dress in heels and a skirt to go out to a club.*

Cisgender: *This refers to someone whose gender identity and expression is a good match for their natal sex. They appear to fit cultural expectations of what a “man” or “woman” should look and act like. Some also say “gender normative.”*

Cross-Dresser: *This refers to someone who, in specific situations, wears clothes, makeup, hairstyle, and so on that are usually reserved for another gender. While this identity is sometimes put under the “transgender” umbrella, often cross-dressers do not identify as transgender. Some people cross-dress as part of performance (“drag queens” and “drag kings”). The word “transvestite,” often used to describe a person who cross-dresses, is considered offensive.*

Female to Male / FTM / F2M / Trans Man: *This is a person who was assigned the sex “female” at birth and has transitioned socially, physically, or both to live as a man. Some refer to themselves as “trans men,” as it can sound a little less “clinical.”*

Gender Diverse / Gender Expansive: *Those who don’t conform to the expectations that society has for their gender. Many prefer this over “gender variant,” which implies that those who don’t identify with society’s expectations are “abnormal.”*

Gender Fluid: *Some people identify as gender fluid to describe a sense that they are comfortable with a shifting and changing notion of their own gender. They do not feel that their gender identity is “fixed.”*

Gender Nonconforming: *This describes a person whose gender doesn’t conform to societal expectations based on their natal sex. Similar to “gender diverse” or “gender expansive.”*

Genderqueer: *Those who identify as genderqueer feel that their primary sense of felt gender is neither “male” nor “female” but somewhere in between.*

Male to Female / MTF / M2F / Trans Woman: *This is a person who was assigned the sex “male” at*

birth and has transitioned socially, physically, or both to live as a woman. Some refer to themselves as “trans women,” as it can sound a little less “clinical.”

Natal Sex / Natal Gender: The sex or gender that was assigned to you at your birth. Some say “birth sex” or “birth gender.” This is preferable to “biological” sex because for many transgender people quite a bit about their “biology” has changed over time through use of hormones, surgeries, and other aspects of transition. We also don’t say “genetic sex” because very few of us have had our genetics tested to confirm our assumptions that we don’t have a genetic variation.

Pangender: Those who identify as pangender embrace all genders in their identity. They reject the notion that there are only two genders.

Transfeminine: Those who were assigned male at birth, but now identify as transgender and more strongly with the “feminine” end of the gender spectrum.

Transgender: This is a term that can apply to all people for whom their current gender identity is different from what would be expected from them by society. This can include those who have chosen to physically or socially transition and those who have not. Remember, even though the term “transgender” is often used alongside the terms “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual” (as in LGBT), transgender is a gender identity, not a sexual orientation!

Transmasculine: Those who were assigned female at birth, but now identify as transgender and more strongly with the “masculine” end of the gender spectrum.

Two-Spirit: This is an identity that is specific to those in indigenous North American cultures. Indigenous Americans belong to a diverse number of cultures, each of which has a different understanding of gender. However, this is a general term used by some Native Americans to describe those who have gendered appearances or identities other than “male” or “female.”

gender expression

Gender expression also can’t be divided into two simple categories. Gender expression is how we present ourselves in the world, including how we carry ourselves, dress, and talk. In mainstream American culture, we tend to recognize certain behaviors and traits, such as wrestling and assertiveness, as “masculine,” and other behaviors and traits, such as wearing makeup and being caring, as “feminine.” Of course, people of all gender identities have behaviors and traits that are considered masculine and considered feminine. Thank goodness, since ideally all people could be both assertive and caring! But when we sum together a person’s behaviors, we may think they end up high or low on either scale.

Try It Out!:

Choose two family members and two friends. Where do you think each falls on the following scales of gender expression—femininity and masculinity? Notice people can be high on both or low on both scales at the same time.

Family Member 1:

Femininity:

None A Whole Ton

Masculinity:

None A Whole Ton

Family Member 2:

Femininity:

None A Whole Ton

Masculinity:

None A Whole Ton

Friend 1:

Femininity:

None A Whole Ton

Masculinity:

None A Whole Ton

Friend 2:

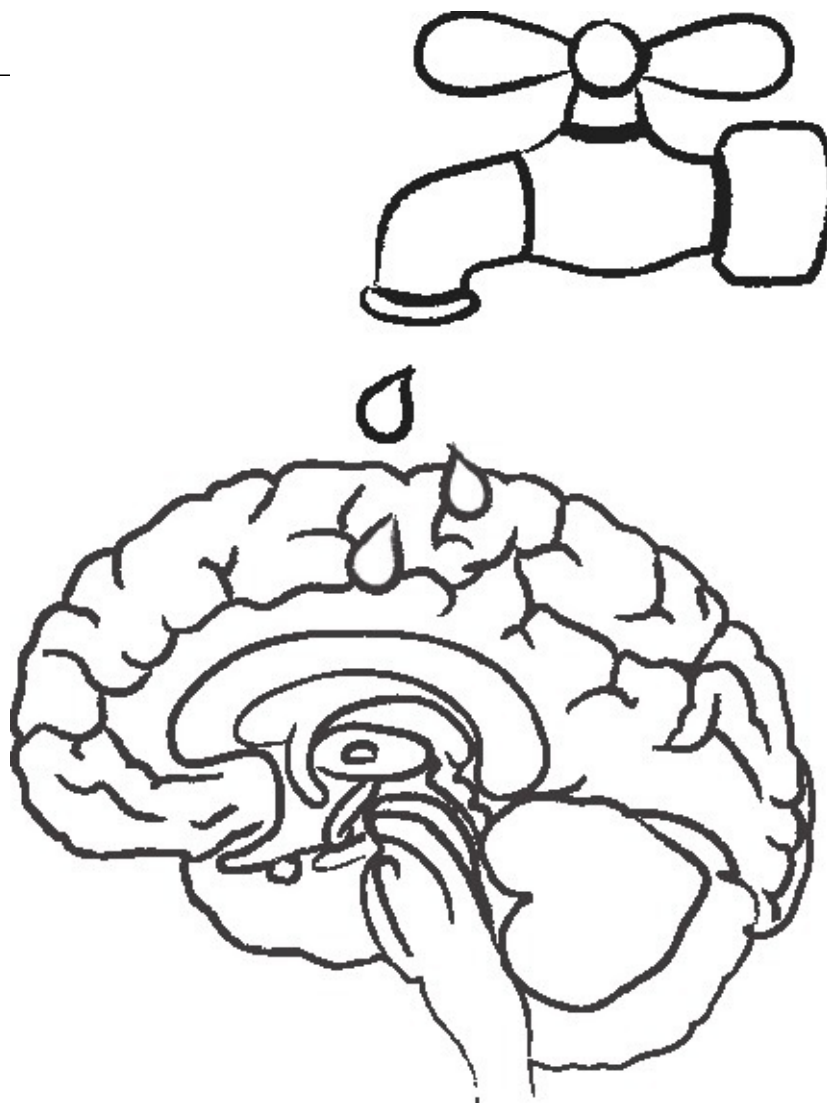
Femininity:

None A Whole Ton

Masculinity:

None A Whole Ton

undoing gender brainwashing



Like we've been saying, we are all taught certain lessons about gender, like how many genders there are and what someone of a particular gender should look like or act like. When everyone is taught these same lessons, it can seem like they're facts. But as we look at the realities of people's appearances and their experiences, we begin to realize that our beliefs about gender are not based on fact. We realize...Hey! We've been gender brainwashed!

The bad news is, being gender brainwashed can really put a stop to a Gender Quest. If we keep relying on our old knowledge that tells us that there are two sexes, and that all females should be pretty, polite girls and all males should be strong, domineering boys—well, there's really not much to explore. If we are to have any hope of truly understanding gender, we have to find a way to undo our gender brainwashing.

The good news is we found a way to undo the gender brainwashing. First we have to explore the lessons we've been taught. Then we have to examine what different stories are out there about gender. This will let us begin to form our own, more informed beliefs. You can get started with the activities that follow.

Try It Out!:

Let's start by examining your gender beliefs. When you rated your family members and friends in the

last activity, how did you know what to classify as masculine and feminine? Have you learned ideas about gender from the people and images around you? Write down some ideas you have been taught about what is masculine and feminine below:

What have all of these lessons taught you about what is masculine? Draw a picture of what comes to mind below:

What have all of these lessons taught you about what is feminine? Draw a picture of what comes to mind below:

As we mentioned earlier, not only does mainstream American culture teach us certain lessons about what is masculine or feminine; it also teaches us that it is “good” when females are women and feminine, and when males are men and masculine. This idea that people fall into two boxes is an overly simple understanding. Picture males, men, and masculinity all squished to one side of the spectrum with a box drawn around them, and females, women, and femininity all squished to the other side, in their own box.

We get so used to these boxes of male/men/masculine and female/women/feminine that it is often shocking to realize they don’t really exist! But in fact, there are many examples of entirely different understandings of gender.

For example, many Native American tribes recognize three or more genders. And the modern term “Two-Spirit” is used by many Native American people who do not identify as men or women. Two-Spirited individuals traditionally held roles of distinction within their tribes and were often shamans. There are numerous other examples across the globe, including the Katoey or “ladyboys” of Thailand, the Salzikrum of the Middle East, the Hijra caste of India, the Fa’afafine of Samoa, the Travestis of South America, the Burrnesha of Albania, and the Muxhe of Southern Mexico. Breaking the gender binary has occurred all over the world throughout history!

Try It Out!:

We barely scratched the surface with our examples above. It’s your turn to explore this topic on your own. An easy way to begin is simply to search the Internet. Try searching some of the peoples we mentioned above, or search under topics like “third gender,” “transgender people in Thailand,” or “transgender people in history.” Look up different countries, historical times, and eras. American history also has its own rich history of transgender individuals. If you are not much into Internet research, and even if you are, we encourage you to check out this book too: *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* by Leslie Feinberg. Individuals who defy the gender binary are woven throughout history. You simply have to look to find them!

Did you research the presence of a third/fourth/fifth gender within different cultures? What did you find?

Have you found any individuals who have defied the gender binary? What was it like to discover the story of these individuals?

Try It Out!

While mainstream American culture continues to hold the two gender boxes, gender roles have changed immensely over the past fifty years.

Find a woman you know who is over fifty and grew up in a culture similar to yours. Ask her: “What has changed for women over your lifetime?” Take some notes below. If she isn’t sure what you mean, ask her whether it is acceptable for women now to do different things, wear different things, work different jobs, or have a different role in a family than when she was born.

Ask the same questions of a man you know who is over fifty and grew up in a culture similar to yours and write your notes here:

You may see in your notes that cultural expectations for gender expression do change in a culture over time. Recently, people have become more visible who not only break societal rules about gender but who also make society question its boxes. The visibility of gender diversity in mainstream American culture continues to shift our understanding of gender. Let’s hear from some people who are on the forefront of this knowledge:

Prior to the birth of my two kids I was a pediatric nurse. Now I am a stay-at-home dad and I have never been happier. People often make comments about the supposed role reversal in our home but for the most part they are easily ignored. I have always been most comfortable in the “caregiver” role while my wife greatly enjoys her career as a corporate attorney. We are happy in our roles and that is what is important to us.

I love both my feminine and masculine sides. I am just as comfortable in a dress as I am on the football field.

Dressing in drag is my escape. I am a handsome gay man by day and a beautiful drag queen by night. I am comfortable as a man and in no way want to be a woman, but I love being a drag queen.

When I was a little “girl,” my parents said I refused to play with dolls and just hated pink. I would only wear boy clothes. So, it wasn’t a surprise to them when I announced I was a boy at seven, and later, at eighteen, started to physically transition to be a man.

My sister tells me that I loved hanging out with her friends when I was a really young boy, and that I didn’t get into “boy stuff” in middle school. When I was in college, I realized I was much happier as a woman. Now, I’m pretty feminine but love that I can change the oil on my car.

So how does your brain feel? Are you still stuck in your gender brainwashing, or is it beginning to come undone? If you find that your ideas about gender are getting more complicated or confusing, or are starting to be more clear, or are changing in any way at all, then congratulations! You are starting to break free of gender brainwashing!

exploring your gender identity

Now that we know a bit about what gender is, let’s take a look at our own gender identities.

Remember, gender identity is what is on the inside, “between your ears,” and separate from gender expression (things on the outside that others can see).

How do I know what gender I am?

Because gender identity is on the inside, that means you are the only one who can determine what your gender identity is. For some that feels good to hear, because no one else can control their identity. However, if you are feeling a bit confused about your gender, it can also be a little scary to hear you are the only one who can figure it out. The good news is, you don't have to figure it out alone. That's why we're here!

Is there a test I can take?

Nope. Some people wish there were a test. They may think it would be easier to get others to accept them, or even to figure things out themselves, if there were. But no worries! We have designed some activities below to help you find out more about your gender identity.

Try It Out!:

To explore your inner thoughts and feelings about gender, get in a safe, quiet space so you can answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

What are some of your earliest memories related to gender? (For example: *I remember my dad saying, "Are you sure you don't want a blue balloon? Blue is for boys." Or, I remember wanting to be in Boy Scouts like my brother, but my parents said I couldn't because I was a girl.*)

Were you ever told you looked or acted like a boy? Like a girl? How did you feel when this happened? How would it or does it feel when people see you as a boy or man?

(A note for this question and the next two: Sometimes when you imagine these scenarios, the first thing you feel is fear. Fear can overshadow other emotions. So if you feel fear, write that down, but then put down what other emotions you would feel after that. It may help to think of this happening in a special situation where there would be no possible danger or rejection.)

How would it or does it feel when people see you as a girl or woman?

How would it or does it feel when people see you as a gender other than girl/woman or boy/man (for example, as androgynous or Two-Spirit)?

Who are your gender role models? In other words, if you could be like anyone in terms of gender, who would you be like?

Fold a piece of paper in half, like a book. Draw on the cover of this book how you think other people see your gender. Now open the book. Draw how you see your gender, or how you would like the world to see your gender. If they are different, draw both on different sides of the inside of your book. How do you feel when you look at each version of yourself?

Read the following examples. Underline parts of people's experiences that feel "right on" to you. Cross out parts that feel different from your experience. Some parts won't have an underline or cross; they will just be neutral or unsure, and that is fine.

My whole life I felt like something just wasn't right. Sometimes I would look in the mirror and feel like I was looking at someone else. Like it wasn't me. The person I

saw in the mirror and the person I felt I was were not the same.

I love to be surprising: I make sure that people know that even though they see me as a girl, I love sports. Or, if they think I'm a "tomboy," that I also have a huge number of dresses.

As a child it never really crossed my mind that I was transgender. I seemed to like all the same things that the other boys liked. I liked sports and I liked girls. It was not until high school that I started to think that my experience was different. It is hard to describe how I felt or why I felt that way but I just did not feel like a guy. When I say that I am a woman it feels right. I feel like I have always been a woman and not much has really changed. I still like sports and I still like girls.

I've spent a lot of time trying to prove to people that I'm not gay. As hard as I try, though, people always seem to notice that I'm more feminine than other guys. My parents criticize me a lot for this.

I love being a girl and I always have!

I always hated dresses. I hated dolls. I hated Barbies. I preferred playing with all my brother's toys and never touched my own. As a kid my mom would always say I was a tomboy and tell my dad that I would outgrow it. I never did. There never came a time when I wanted to wear a dress or paint my nails. I never really cared or thought about whether I was a girl or a boy until I was around twelve years old. My body started to change and I did not like it. It felt wrong, like something was happening that I could not control. Something I did not want.

I never really felt like a boy, but I never really felt like a girl either. I just wish I could move somewhere that gender doesn't exist and be me—not a boy or a girl.

Kids at school always make fun of me for acting "like a girl." The truth is, I do kind of feel more like a girl than a boy. But it's hard to say that.

I'm a total boy and that's just me. But I also really like that I was raised a girl when I was younger. I think it made me better able to understand different perspectives.

Now combine all the parts of the above experiences that felt "right on" to you and write them below:
Does this represent your experience? What is missing?

summary

In this chapter we covered a ton of information. While it may seem a bit overwhelming now, remember you can come back and review it at any time. In fact, we encourage you to revisit the

chapter later in your quest and see if you still feel the same. For now, let's take a few minutes and reflect on your journey so far.

What did you learn from this chapter or what stuck out the most?

Did you discover anything about yourself? What?

How do you feel about your discovery? Are you surprised? Confused? Relieved?

What questions do you still have?

gender expression

Congratulations on getting this far! You now know a lot more than most people about gender!

So far, your Gender Quest has been a journey into what you feel like on the inside. But that course leads to the next question: *What does that mean about how I look on the outside?*

As we said in chapter 1, *gender expression* is how people present their gender to the world. Since all sorts of things are seen as related to gender, gender expression can include how you walk, dress, talk, gesture, wear your hair—the list is endless.

This chapter will guide you in exploring the many ways gender can be expressed, how others express gender, and how you would like to express your gender. We'll ask you to do some observations and experiments. As always, you should not do anything you feel is too unsafe or uncomfortable for you. At the same time, know that while thinking about and trying on gender expressions can be a little uncomfortable for anyone, that doesn't mean it won't be fun or exciting too!

my past gender adventures

When we are young, before we are taught that certain ways of dressing, talking, walking, and acting are okay and others are not, we often feel more free to experiment with different ways to look. Maybe you played dress up, put on costumes for Halloween, used markers to make “nail polish,” put a bandanna over your face to be a cowboy, used towels to make pretend hair, or wore your dad's shirt and ties to pretend to go to work. One of the authors' dads would put shaving cream on his kids to make it look like the white beard of an old man! Maybe you did a bunch of these things on the same day. All of this is part of the normal exploration of self-expression that all kids go through.

Try It Out!:

When you were younger, what ways did you experiment with your self-expression? List at least three times you remember experimenting with gender and what you did. Then list how you felt, and how others saw you, what that was like.

Age

What you did

How you felt

Age

What you did

How you felt

Age

What you did

How you felt

Age

What you did

How you felt

What did you think about yourself as a result of these instances?

observing gender



Now that you're older, there may be more things you consider when expressing your gender. For example, you might wonder: *What would my friends think if I did that? What would my parents say if I did that? What about other people? Is that safe for me to do? Is that even possible for me to do?*

All this wondering can get very stressful! And some people may even want to abandon the Gender Quest!

But we know that if you have gotten this far, you have what it takes for a Gender Quest. And we are here to help you figure out what will be both safe and satisfying for you.

So get ready—time for your next journey!

Just like you did when you were younger, experimenting with your appearance can help you get a sense of how you are most comfortable with your gender expression. Some people might assume we're just talking about clothes or makeup but there are actually a whole lot of ways you can play around with self-expression—especially when it comes to gender!

Try It Out!:

Where is gender? Well, once you start looking, it turns out it's just about everywhere! Let's see what you can find.

In chapter 1, we did some people watching to observe biological characteristics, like body shape and hairiness. This time we are going to do another half hour of people-watching to observe behaviors related to gender, such as clothes people wear, how they style their hair, whether they wear makeup or

nail polish, and their body language. You can go watching anywhere you can see a lot of people—at a coffee shop, on the street, at school, or in a mall. (Just remember to blink occasionally—we don't want your eyes drying out or anything!) You can go several places if you think you might look suspicious staying in one spot. Afterwards, answer the following questions:

What are the different things you see that go into people's gender expression?

Focus for a little while on the people you saw as "girls" or "women." Did all of them express gender in the same way? Write down some ways these people showed feminine, masculine, and neutral gender expressions:

Feminine:

Masculine:

Neutral:

Now let's focus on the "boys" or "men." Did all of them express gender in the same way? Write down some ways these people showed feminine, masculine, and neutral gender expressions:

Feminine:

Masculine:

Neutral:

Now that your eyes made it through the half hour, think back over your observations. What ways of expressing gender did you find yourself admiring? Remember, no judgment here in this book, so write as honestly as possible.

Now let's put our heads together. Here are some forms of self-expression and style we've seen on people of different genders. Did we miss any? If so, fill them in below:

- Hair: Long, short, spiky, colored, curly, straight, braided, pulled back
- Clothes: Funky, conservative, floral prints, ties
- Shoes: Boots, heels, flip-flops, oxfords, tennis sneakers, flats
- Jewelry: Earrings, cuff links, piercings, necklaces, watches
- Fingernails and toenails: Polished, plain, long, short
- Scent: Fruity, musky, floral
- Makeup: Subtle, dramatic, none
- Glasses: None, thick-rimmed, sunglasses, sparkly
- Body language: Swaggering, delicate, confident, flirty



Many people are surprised to find the huge variety in gender expression that's just a part of everyday life. You may have discovered guys wearing floral prints or necklaces. Or you might have seen that you don't need to be a "guy" to have short hair or a masculine walk. Your gender expression is just that: yours.

expressing yourself beyond gender

So we know we keep saying gender is everywhere, but that doesn't mean it is everything! When you observed people, I bet you noticed that people's presentations can fall along a few different spectrums. Look at the different spectrums below.

| | | |
|----------------|--|--------------|
| Casual | | Fancy |
| Funky | | Conservative |
| Fashionable | | Traditional |
| Gender-neutral | | Feminine |
| Gender-neutral | | Masculine |

For example, on a Monday morning one transgender girl dresses for school in jeans and a cute, sparkly T-shirt, leaves her hair long and down, wears no makeup, no jewelry, and has fun sneakers with big colorful laces. She is quiet and soft-spoken in class. She is very athletic and plays on the school soccer team. So, on this Monday morning at school we might see her self-expression like this:

| | | |
|-------------|---|--------------|
| Casual | X | Fancy |
| Funky | X | Conservative |
| Fashionable | X | Traditional |
| | | |

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