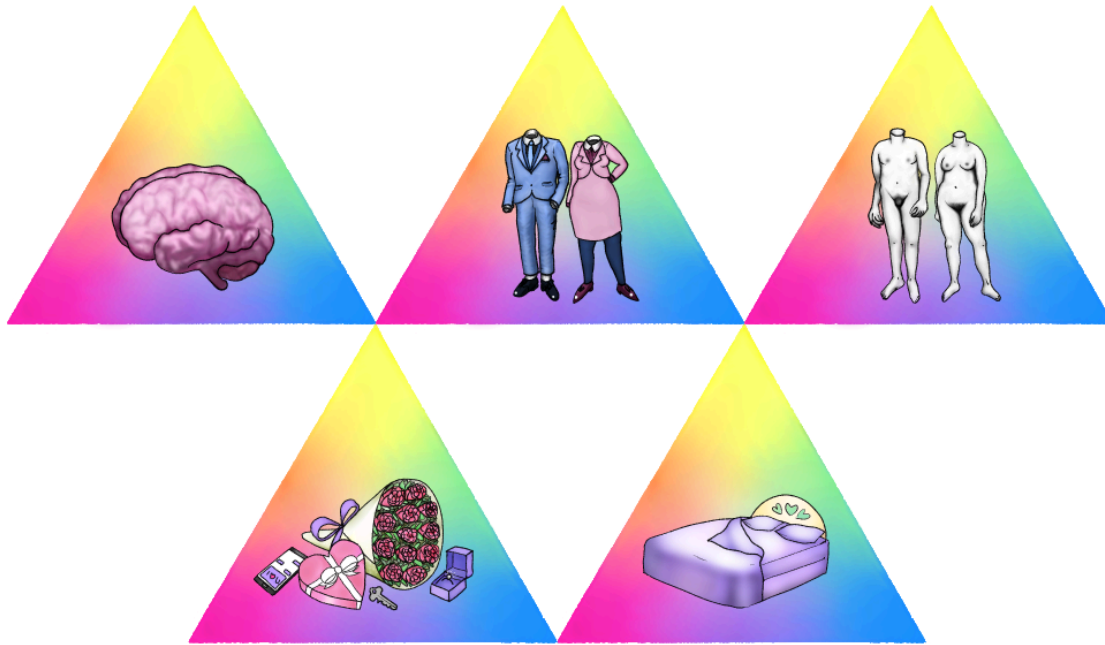


THE FIVE TRIANGLES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Laura Davis/InfraGhosts, Melbourne, Australia, 2020, Version 2.0



Gender, expression, physicality, romantic and sexual attraction

The Five Triangles, a Preamble

This document and diagram are basic tools for understanding gender and sexuality.

The top line refers to the self and the bottom to the other. For simplicity it uses blue for male/masculine, pink for female/feminine and yellow for traits distinct from both feminine and masculine and not in between. While this diagram and document do not cover all aspects of gender and sexuality, it does cover most of them and can be used both exploratively and creatively.

Do note that while gender roles (where in society you are destined due to your gender) such as the 'head of the household' are social constructs (made up), gender itself, like sexuality and physicality, is real and formed in the brain of all individuals around week 6 of human gestational development. After this point gender and sexuality are for the most part formed in the human brain, even though those personal truths will only be discovered later in life. From these discoveries conversations can be had and sometimes external changes put in place. These changes are not because of any internal structural change during a person's lifetime, but due to a change in recognition or self realisation.

Terms and labels mean different things to different people and this is a general guide for a wider audience. Labels and charts are only one interpretation of these terms and will not be universally accepted. It will still get you a long way towards understanding any individual term and how alike we all are in our differences.

An Overview of the Gendered Self

Gender

How you feel, what you like, what you're like, how you behave. How you treat, respond to and expect to be treated by others. Individual responses can be masculine, feminine, androgynous or none of these, but it's the amalgamation of every response your brain has the potential to make that makes a whole gendered experience. The term identity has been hijacked for sensationalism, so instead think of gender as an act of being that relates to how the brain functions, filters and responds, than an act of identification

Expression

Clothes, hair, accessories, voice, posture. Regardless of how you relate or react to the world, what your current expression is telling others. A tomboy wearing masculine clothes doesn't mean they're male. Unlike a transgender woman, a drag queen is likely more comfortable being seen as a man when not performing (there's always exceptions). Expression is as changeable as clothes and can be safe and even fun to experiment with... if your environment is safe and fun.

Physicality

What your body looks like under your clothes. For many people their physicality aligns with their gender (cisgender); for others their physicality does not align with their gender (transgender or non-binary). A gender is usually assigned to you at birth based on your physicality. AFAB stands for assigned female at birth, AMAB assigned male. It is no more an indicator of gender than expression but both will affect others' perception of you.

An Overview of the Gendered Other

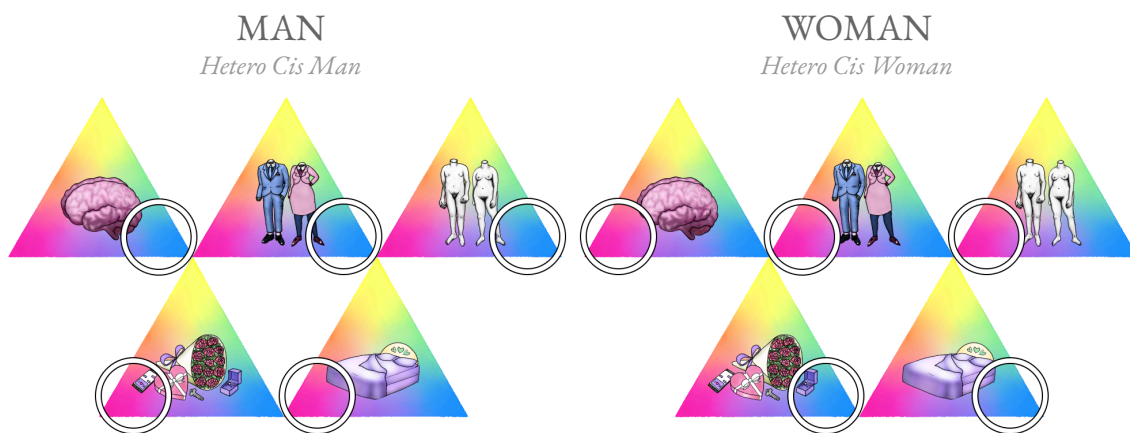
Romantic Attraction

Who you'd like to date, read to, give flowers to and be around as "more than friends".

Sexual Attraction

Who you might be interested in taking to the bedroom in a "more than sleeping" kind of way. For many people the two attractions, romantic & sexual, are aligned, for others they are not.

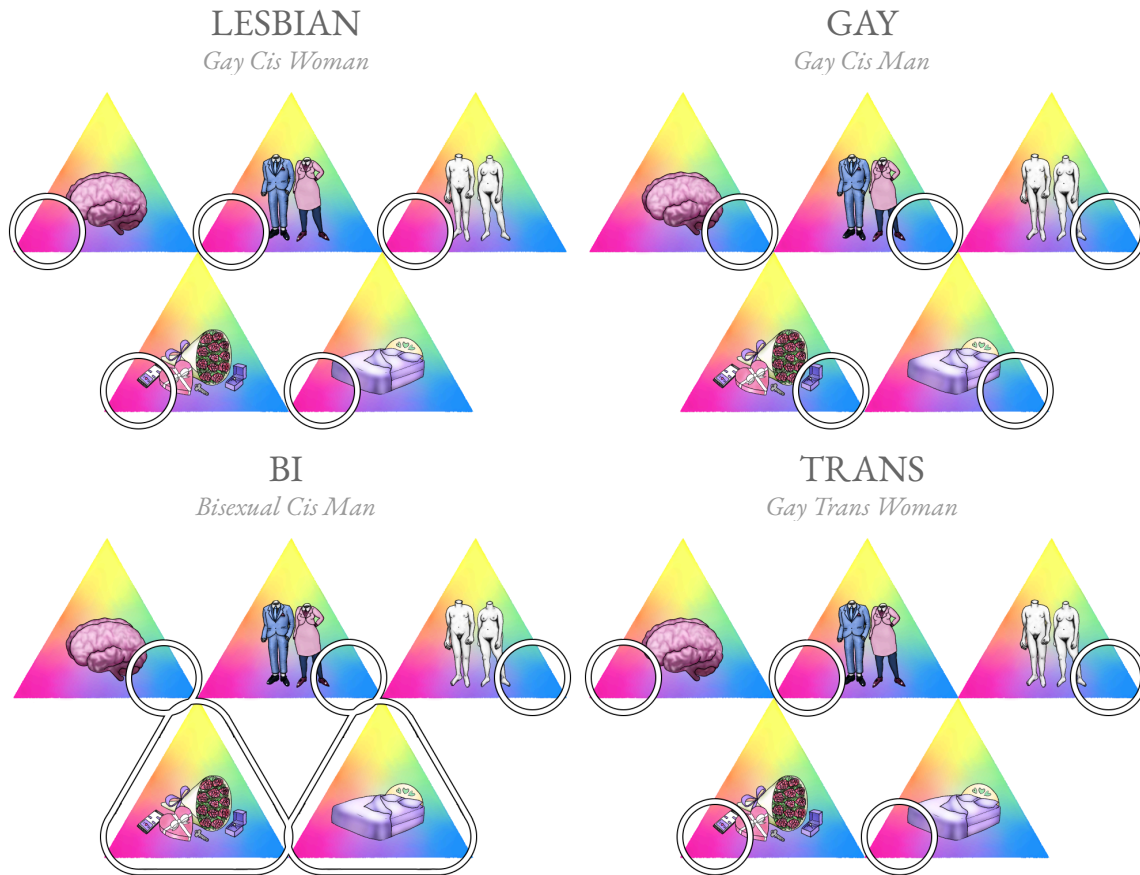
Five Triangles in Action



A Heterosexual Cisgender Couple

Here's the majority of people we get to see in the media. It's a straight woman and a man, a heterosexual cisgender couple. Hetero means they are attracted to what they are not. Cis means they were born with their gender and physicality in alignment. Notice how all the markers to do with self align, as do the markers for attraction. Because they align so well in many cis and hetero people they can think these aspects are intrinsically linked.

LGBT



Lesbian & Gay

People who are attracted to those of the same gender. These two are cisgender but need not be.

Bisexual

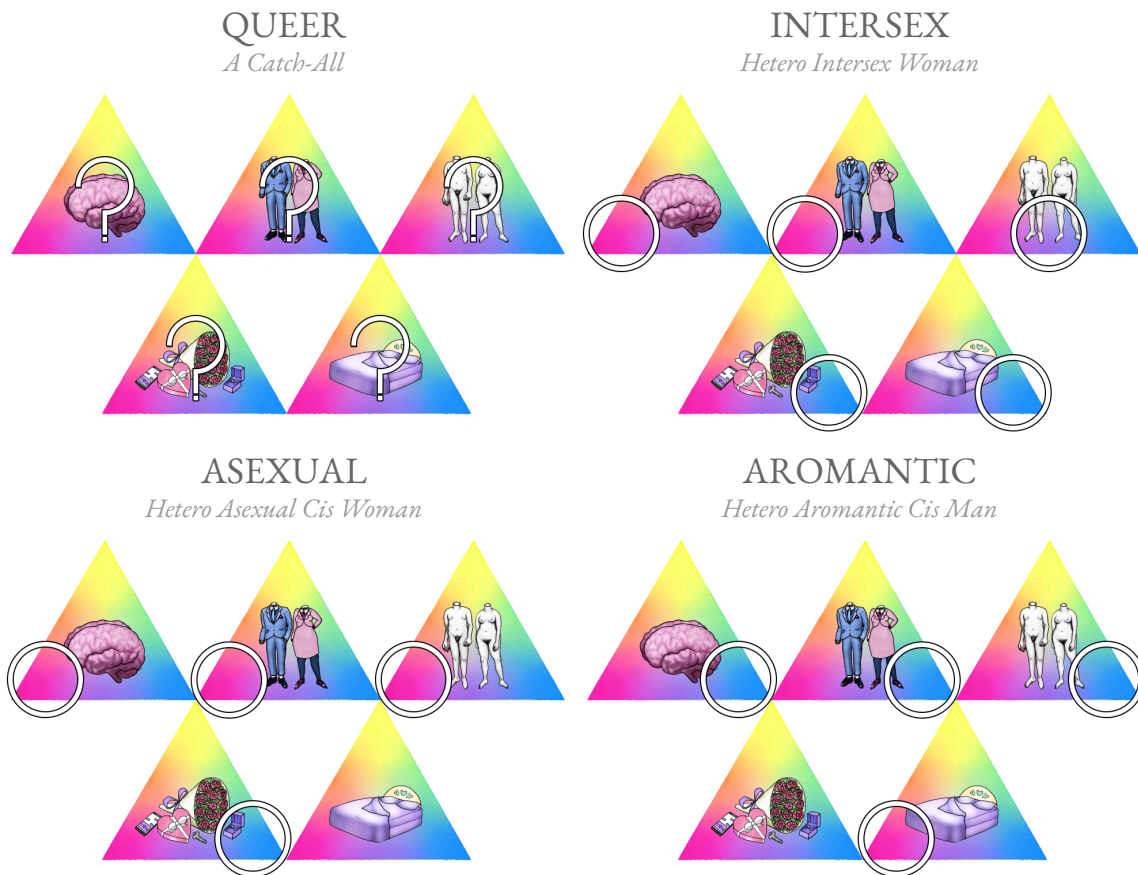
Bisexual means to be attracted to people of more than one gender. They may or may not be attracted to individuals of all genders. Many use the term interchangeably with pansexual

Transgender & Non-Binary (diagram below)

These terms apply to people whose gender and physicality was not in alignment at birth. Many transgender and non-binary people feel the divide between their physicality and gender to be greatly distressing. Some may choose to align these traits to have their gender more accepted by themselves or others. Others feel no need to seek alignment for acceptance and may instead work on changing society's understanding of gender.

There's no way to change the brain's gender, it's part of who you are. Which means to align gender and physicality a person may "transition" physicality. This is often achieved with hormones or surgery. We all have unexpressed gendered information encoded into our DNA; hormones can allow this gendered information to be acted upon by our hormonal systems.

Non-binary people find their gender is not aligned closely with masculinity or femininity. They are not cisgender and many find the term transgender doesn't apply to them either. Because of this the pronouns 'she' or 'he' can make a non-binary person feel misunderstood and uncomfortable. We can use the words 'they' and 'them' to describe them to help them feel like we see them for who they are. A tough part about being non-binary is that it's really hard to express without words that you're neither female or male. Most forms of expression are seen as either masculine or feminine displays with little room for neither. But just as it might seem that there's no right way to be non-binary, there's also no wrong way to be non-binary either.

*Intersex*

An intersex person is born with their physicality existing between masculine or feminine. Some intersex people feel that their bodies are in alignment with their gender and some do not. Some may have been subject to gender assignment surgery in the mistaken belief that gender is developed as a result of hormones. This can lead to an intersex person facing the challenges of having a physicality and gender out of alignment, with the added complexity of knowing their gendered physicality was taken from them unnecessarily. An intersex person may be cis, trans, straight, gay or any other combination just like everyone else.

Queer

A queer person is anyone not cisgendered and heterosexual. Queer people use this term to feel part of a larger collective group. Some use it interchangeably with gay or LGBTIQ+.

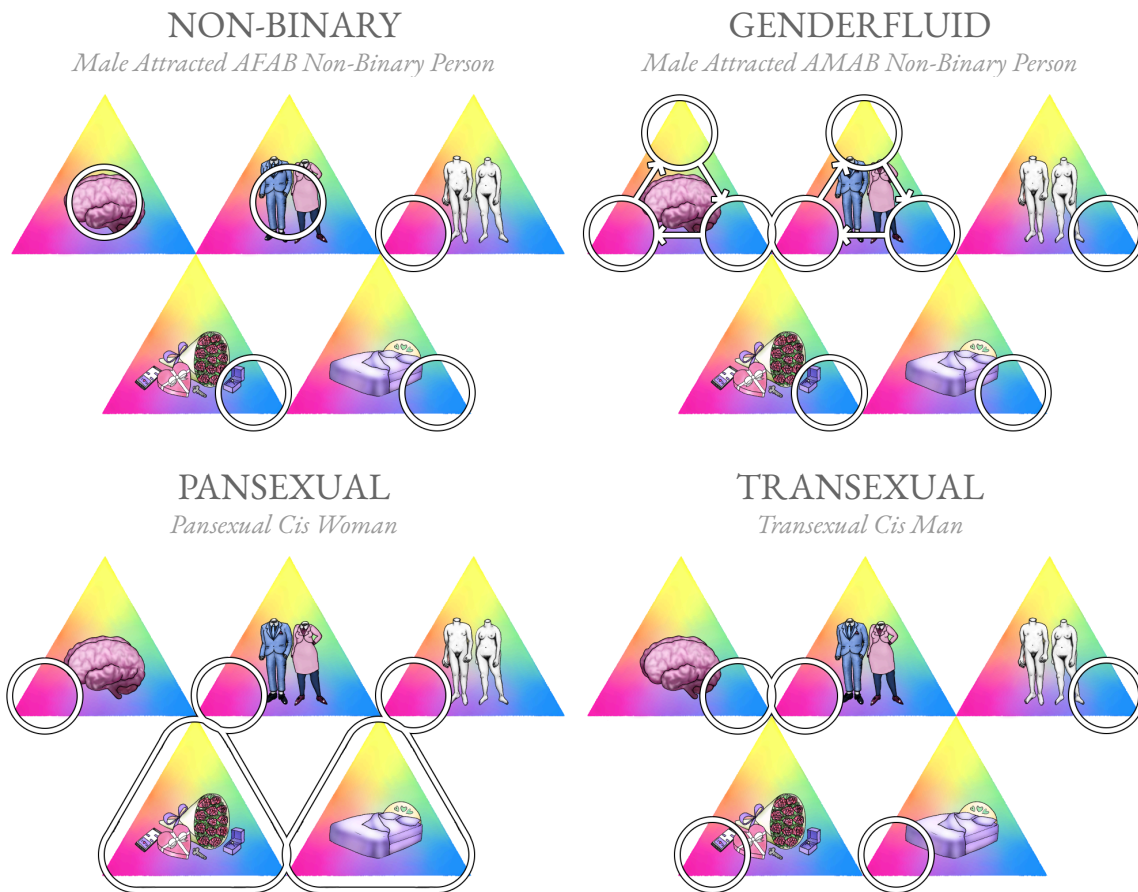
Asexual

An asexual person may or may not feel romantic attraction but is unlikely to feel sexual attraction. Sex may be a means of procreation, a way to please others or off the table entirely. This is distinct from being uninterested or unable to have sex for a period of time. People on the asexual scale sometimes describe themselves as gray-asexual

Aromantic

An aromantic person is unlikely to feel romantic attraction, while they may or may not still feel sexual attraction.

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The plus is for queer people who don't fit neatly into a combination of L, G, B, T, Q, I or A.

Non-Binary

A non-binary person's gender sits outside the definition of male or female. Some interpretations are that a non-binary person's gender sits between male and female where some believe it sits outside the scale of male to female (See Transgender above for more details)

Gender Fluid

Some people experience the different aspects of their brain's gender at different times and interpret these varying responses as a shifting experience of gender. For these people gender doesn't feel consistent or set in the same ways as it is for others.

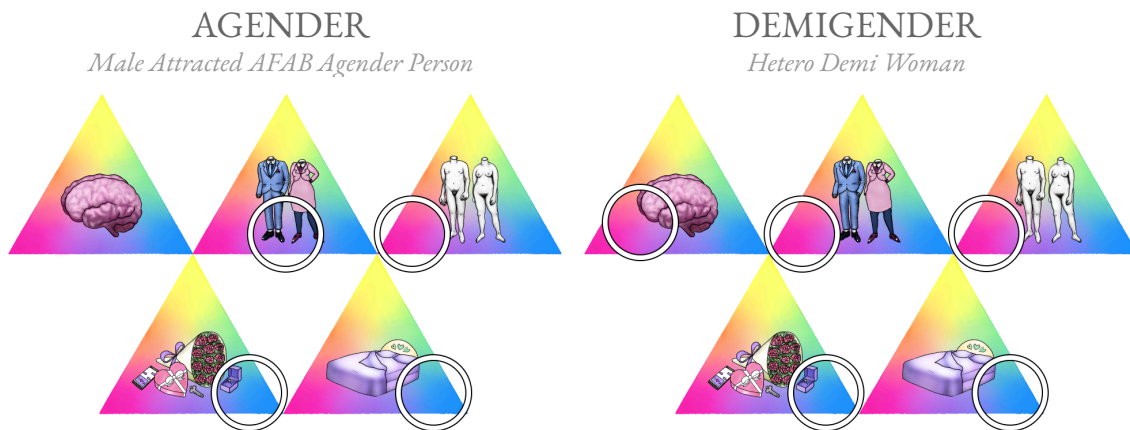
Pansexual

Pansexual people find they are attracted to individuals regardless of gender. This ideologically differs bisexuality but less so functionally and the terms are often used interchangeably

Transsexual

Transsexual refers to people who enjoy wearing another gender's expression, while not experiencing their gender as different from their physicality.

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Agender

An agender person might describe their experiences as having a lack of gender or having one in a way that is not male or female nor inbetween in a way that is distinct from being non-binary

Demi

A demigendered person's gender may encapsulate parts of binary and non-binary genders

Two Spirit

Many first nations and indigenous people have unique understandings of gender diversity. The term two spirit is used by some while others find it inappropriate. If you are interested in indigenous interpretations of gender diversity you are encouraged to research them online

Summary

No one decides to be gay, trans or non-binary in exactly the same way as no one decides to be straight or cis. It's really just all up to chance where in the spectrums we find ourselves. I hope you can see too, that all the many labels really only describe a small shift in a single triangle and we're really all more the same than we are different. We almost all fit somewhere in the five triangles.

It's Complicated

Most of these terms can and are used together. Someone could be an asexual biromantic intersex non-binary person and with this guide you can now work out what that means all together. Though it's best to let them work it out for themselves first and once it's complicated enough to require quadruple-barrel labels they're likely to just say they're queer or LGBTIQ+ and tell you about their individual experiences when they're ready

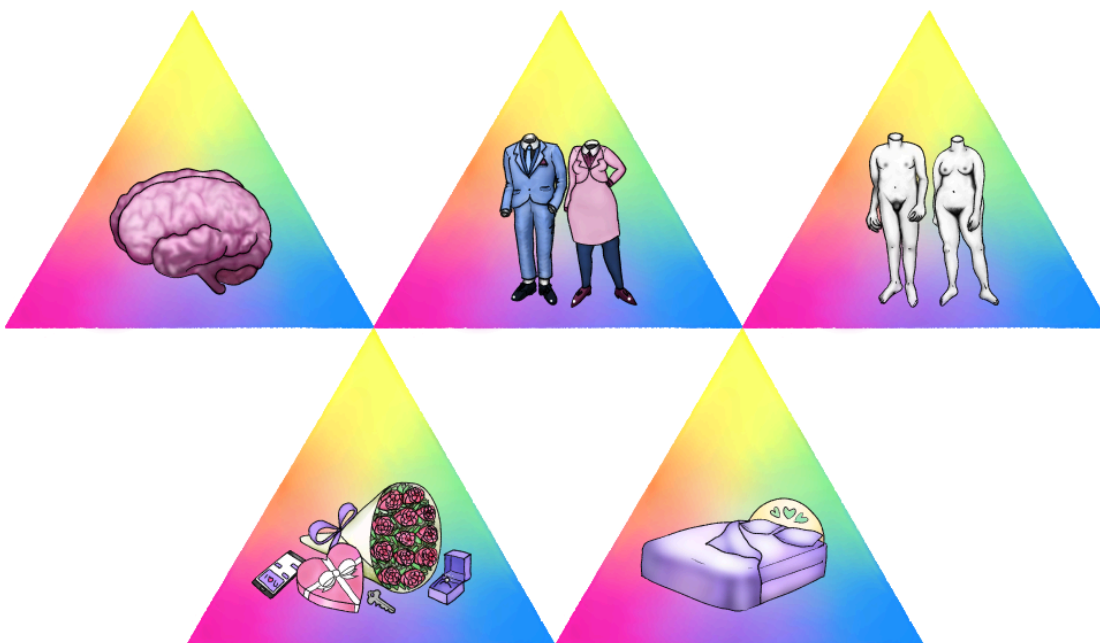
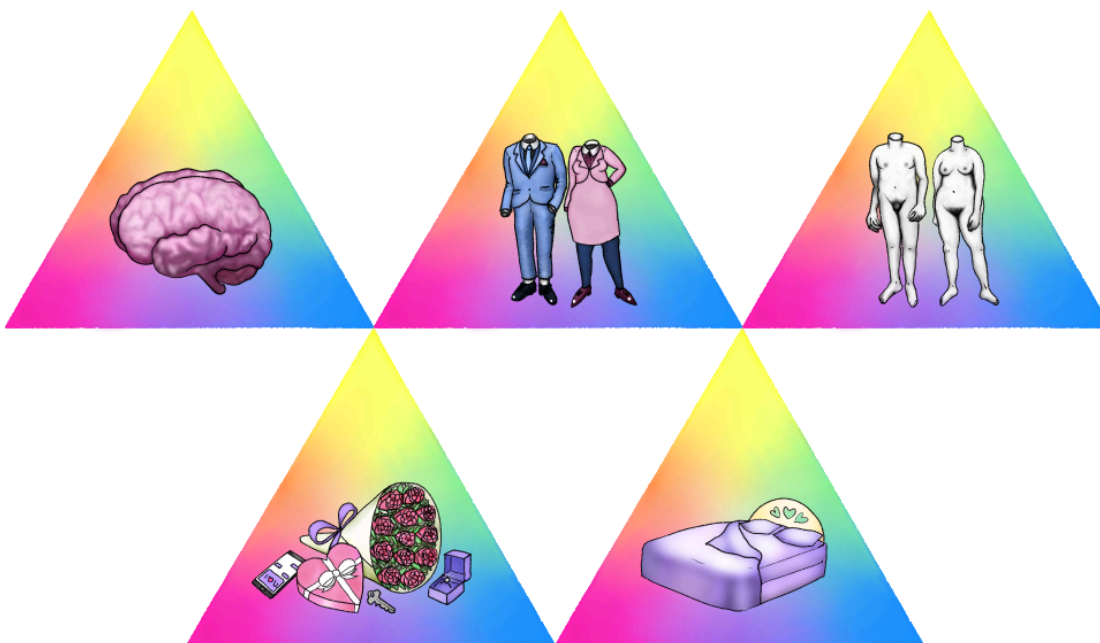
On Changes

As time passes someone might change how you see them relating to these aspects illustrated in the five triangles. Most who do have the same internal gender workings as before they did so. Nothing has changed but how they interpret these inner workings. Some will change their interpretations more than once and that's okay too. A transgender person deciding that they are nonbinary is a refreshed interpretation of how they understand themselves to be.

Do note that in some very rare occasions a person will "detransition" or announce that they are no longer queer. It's extraordinarily rare and most do so because of how unsafe it may have become after becoming more open about themselves. They will still have the feelings and brain structures that led them to coming out but it may have proven too unsafe at this point.

The Five Triangles of Gender

Fill one in and compare it to the ones above or use them to compare with your friends, role models or others. Be creative, use your own interpretations, have fun and learn something



Supplement I - What's With All the Fighting?

Boobs Do Not a Woman Make (Physicality Gender)

Some people experience gender and physicality as intrinsically linked, one and the same. It's part of their truth and it's part of their reality. If someone says that gender is not linked to physicality they may even get angry at them for invalidating reality or gaslighting them. From here, if you see a non-passing trans-woman and say 'that's a man' you are correct. Because you are seeing and talking about the traits of someone's physicality

All Gender is Fluid (Expression Gender)

Instead of intrinsically linking gender with physicality some link it with expression. All gender can and is fluid; change your clothes and now you're whatever gender you want to be. People say things like this when they're trying to be good allies to trans and non-binary people. If you saw a transgender woman wearing woman's clothing and said 'that's a woman', then you are correct. Because you are seeing and talking about the traits of someone's expression

I Don't See Gender (Gender is an Outdated Construct)

If you don't link gender to physicality or expression you might believe that gender is a constructed concept with little meaning in the modern world. If you saw a transgender person 'that's a person' then you are correct. Because you are choosing to ignore the presence of a gendered traits they are portraying through both their physicality or expression

Gender is Internal (Brain Gender)

Being transgender or non-binary means having a gender that is not fixed to physicality or expression but it still exists as part of how they process, interpret and respond to reality. This means there's no need to transition or state pronouns in order to be transgender or non-binary, it's the way you experience existence and who you are. Some find that changing their expression and physicality to match their gender aligns the triangles and leads to a much easier existence both for their internal existence and how they're treated in the world. If they experience the world with the emotional experience of being a woman and say 'I am a woman', they are correct. They are seeing and talking about the traits of their own existence which match the traits they have witnessed in gendered beings around them

Everyone is Right?

Yes and no. Right in their own minds maybe. Reality and truth are individual and subjective. When using the same words but people are ideologically hearing different questions then getting different answers is a given. While these ideas clash and fill comment sections with spite, anyone having to deal with their gender not being tied to their physicality or expression is just trying to exist and survive without getting caught in the crossfire. To them 'gender is physicality', 'gender is expression' and 'gender is a construct' isn't true because they're thinking and feeling with the traits of someone who's physicality and expression they might not share.

Physicality is also still important though, not because it's linked with gender but because it still exists and it's real. Everyone still uses physicality along with behaviour and expression to assess other people. Accepting that while also believing people who have a lived experience in gender diversity about their gender diversity is a safe bet. Gender exists and it exists differently in different people

You can see now that the arguments are actually about what triangle you're looking at when you're talking about gender, semantics and linguistics. Unfortunately people will always fight over semantics and linguistics, it's human nature and the internet still exists