

ON THE CONTINUUM

Exploring Gender-Based Violence and Bringing Awareness to the Gender Binary

This activity has been developed for pre-service teachers, licensed classroom teachers, community facilitators, and any other person who is interested in working with youth and/or adults on the topic of gender-based violence and queer inclusive practices. This activity brings awareness to the gender binary and works towards deconstructing gender ideologies that are widely maintained in Western culture.

1. For Real?

Materials Required: chart paper, scrap paper or sticky notes; markers, and tape.

Approximate Time: 15 – minutes

- Invite participants to form small groups. Each group will receive one piece of chart paper and markers. If chart paper is not available, any type of paper or sticky notes will suffice.
- The groups are to discuss what a “real” girl/woman and “real” boy/man is like, and record their answers on the paper provided. It is recommended that each group be designated one gender rather than both. Make sure at least one group brainstorms a “real” girl/woman and at least one group brainstorms a “real” boy/man.
- Participants can consider what a “real” girl/woman or boy/man looks like, acts like, and what they are interested in or like to do, to formulate their thoughts.
- After all of the groups seem to have generated a number of ideas on their papers, invite one person from each group to post their papers on the classroom wall. Keep the papers together by gender and read them as a group. Consider what themes are emerging. Ask participants if this is really how girls/women and boys/men are?
- Discuss with participants that this is only a perception, but not the truth of what it means to be female or male. Point out that the lists represent stereotypes of girls/women and boys/men and that people do not fit into these boxes easily. Ask participants where these messages come from? When do we begin learning these messages? What is the point of stereotypes? Are all stereotypes bad? The teacher/facilitator can decide how much or how little dialogue to have at this stage in the activity.

2. The Gender Binary

Materials Required: gender binary resource, chalkboard or white board, chalk or marker.

Approximate Time: 5 – 10 minutes

- Using the gender binary resource as a guide, draw a continuum on the chalkboard/white board and demonstrate how in many cultures, particularly Western cultures, gender is viewed as a binary where there is a particular way to be female or male.
- At one end of the continuum write “real” girl/woman and at the other end write “real” boy/man. Put a vertical line through the middle of the continuum to explicitly show the divide.
- Explain to the participants that gender is fluid rather than a binary. Rarely do people fit into extreme gender ideologies, as indicated by what is “real,” but place themselves across a continuum where femininity and masculinity are not so clearly delineated.

3. On the Continuum

Materials Required: envelope containing photos and two cards (“real” girl/woman and “real” boy/man written on each card).

Approximate Time: 20 – 25 minutes

- Participants can continue to work in their small groups. Each group will receive an envelope containing photos of people. These photos represent diversity in a number of ways such as gender, age, race, religion, and ability. Invite the participants to become familiar with the photos. The envelopes also contain two cards with “real” girl/woman written on one, and “real” boy/man written on the other.
- Using a table or the floor, groups are to put the cards with “real” girl/woman and “real” boy/man at opposite ends of their work area, with the open space in between acting as a continuum. The participants are to work together and place the photos on the continuum wherever they deem appropriate. They are to consider why they are placing the photos where they are. Groups can also choose not to place a photo on the continuum, but they must justify this choice. Once all of the groups have placed their photos on (or off) the continuum, a discussion about the process can take place. Time can also be allotted for participants to walk around and look at how other groups have placed their photos.
- Possible Discussion Questions:
 - Was there a particular way the groups chose to do this activity?
 - What photos were easy to place? Why?
 - What photos were difficult to place? Why?
 - What photos were not placed on the continuum? Why not?
 - Who in the photos is most at risk of being harmed physically, verbally, and/or emotionally? Why?
 - What words might people be called who do not seem to “fit in” to the idea of what it means to be a “real” girl/woman or a “real” boy/man?
 - What are other ways people might be harmed?
 - What negative words might be used towards girls/women who fit in to, or are near to, the “real” end of the continuum? Why do you think this happens?
 - What negative words might be used towards boys/men who fit in to, or are near to, the “real” end of the continuum? Are they comparable to the names girls/women are given? Why is it different? IMPORTANT: negative words and put-downs are regarding all things feminine.
- It is also recommended, during this lesson or in a future lesson that participants engage in a discussion of OPPRESSION. The following points can be used as a springboard:
 - Beliefs and Attitudes: bias, stereotyping, and prejudice
 - Behaviours and Actions: discrimination

4. The Pyramid of Power

Materials Required: envelope containing photos.

Approximate Time: 15 – minutes

- Continuing in small groups, participants are invited to rearrange their photos into the shape of a pyramid. All photos must be placed on the pyramid from top to bottom. As the participants work together in their groups they must consider why they are making the choices they are. Who is at the top of the pyramid? Who is at the bottom of the pyramid? Why?
- Once the groups have completed the new placement of photos ask them talk about the process. Time can also be allotted for participants to walk around and look at how other groups have placed their photos.
- During the discussion ask participants questions about their process for placing the photos on their pyramid.
 - Who is at the top of the pyramid? Are you surprised? Why or why not?
 - Who is at the bottom of the pyramid? Are you surprised? Why or why not?
 - Compare the pyramids in the room. What is similar about them? What is different about them?
 - What other criteria, besides gender, was considered when photos were placed on the pyramid (e.g. race, age, ability, religion)? What are the implications of this?
- It is also recommended, during this lesson or in a future lesson that participants engage in a discussion of POWER. The following points can be used as a springboard:
 - Individual: discriminatory behaviours and actions (e.g. exclusion, physical violence, name-calling, cyber-bullying)
 - Big Ideas: beliefs and attitudes based on stereotypes, and prejudice (e.g. boys are tough and girls are weak, being homosexual is abnormal, white people are queer)
 - Systemic/Institutional: discriminatory beliefs and behaviour that perpetuated norms (e.g. school based/work place violence and/or bullying, media depiction of gender stereotypes, curriculum that assumes heteronormativity)

5. Investigating the Iceberg

Materials Required: gender binary resource (copies for each group)

Approximate Time: 10 – minutes

- Use the image of an iceberg to help participants understand gender further. An iceberg is a large mass of ice floating in the ocean. A small portion of the iceberg can be seen above the surface of the water, whereas the majority of the iceberg is hidden below. This can be compared to gender. How we read people based on codes of gender, also known as *gender attribution* which is based on gender stereotypes, are above the surface. We are always using codes to categorize people as fitting into the binary or not. However, what is below the surface that we cannot see, are the parts of gender that are much more complex. How people feel about their own *gender identity* and what their *sexual orientation* is cannot be determined just by looking at a person. Nor can we make assumptions of a person's gender based on their *gender expression* (e.g. walk, talk, choice of clothing, hairstyle), or the gender they were assigned at birth. Simply, *gender identity* is an emotional state of mind/how someone feels in their heart, *gender expression* is the way in which gender is performed outwardly to the world, and *gender assignment* is based on what is between our legs.
- The gender binary resource invites participants to view gender more completely on a continuum with the intention that binary thinking is unsettled.