

Gender Basics

Q&A: 'What is a man? What is a woman?'

Ask those basic questions to the visitors. Have two pieces of paper, labeled 'man' and 'woman', and discuss things that would assign people to those categories, whether those are physical configurations, personal identities, or anything else they can think of.

Counter-responses:

'If you, yourself, got in an accident and had your penis—assuming you have one, of course—damaged and had to have it removed, would that make you no longer a man?' 'If someone grafted a penis to you, would you suddenly be a man?' 'What if you were born with both sets of genitalia? Because you don't have specific genitalia, does that mean that you cannot be a woman or a man, or that you have to choose?'

Activity:

The Ideal Man/Woman

Hand out pieces of paper to participants, and ask them to draw versions of what they see as the 'ideal man' or 'ideal woman'. After they're done, come and talk to them about the stereotypes that their pictures represent. (For example, if someone draws a picture of an 'ideal man' with bulging muscles and a can of beer, let them know how that exemplifies a certain sort of male stereotype. Do the same if someone draws a picture of an 'ideal woman' with gigantic breasts and long blonde hair.)

Q&A: 'Is there a "right way" to act as a specific gender?'

Ask people these questions. Chances are, people will talk about how people 'do womanhood wrong' or 'do manhood wrong'. 'Those trans people hanging out in the Tenderloin have beards and don't shave their legs!'

Activity: Have clients draw or write about when they first realized that they were the gender they are, or when they became aware that there were social rules attached to being a certain gender.

Q&A: 'Is it better to be one gender than the other?'

Chances are, some people will say why it's better to be a man (or a woman) than the other way around.

Q&A: Do you think there are other gender identities, like bigender, and genderless?

Some people are probably going to say that there aren't, because of lack of exposure, or prejudice against those who aren't strictly male or female. Explain how gender identity works, and why it doesn't have to be explained via genitalia.