

# “Confused”

How to effectively introduce gender concepts to 15-year-old boys?

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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# Introducing teen boys in gender concepts

GALE: the Global Alliance for LGBT Education ([www.gale.info](http://www.gale.info))

## G.EDU:

Gender is a construct based on heteronormativity and patriarchy

Teenage boys come from 15 years of upbringing in heteronormativity, and are likely to think patriarchy, roles of males and females and being hetero is natural, the standard and normal.

How can we introduce boys in a ways of thinking that is quite alien and new for them?

## Four strategies considered

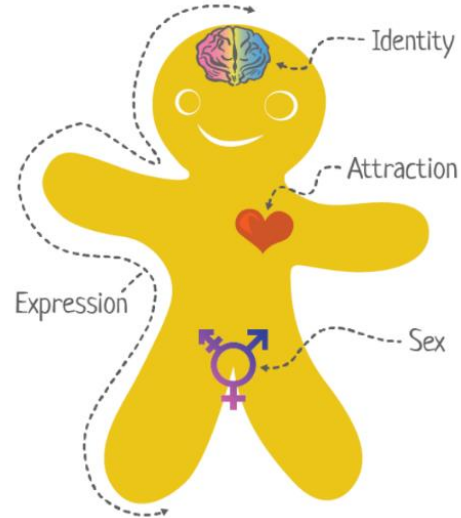
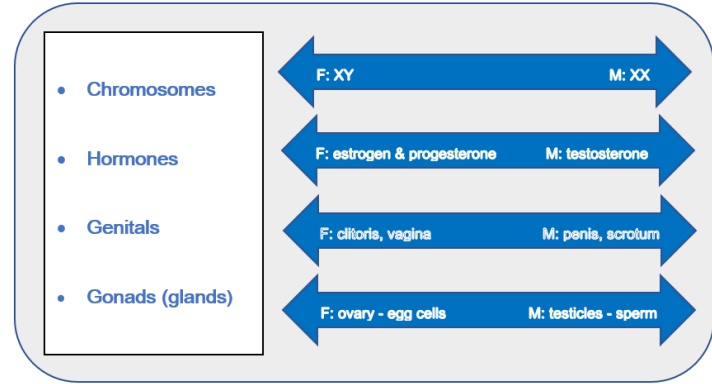


# 1. A factual explanation

Offer academic definitions

Explain the difference between sex, gender, gender expression, gender identity (and attraction)

(Gender Bread Person)



# A factual explanation: disadvantages

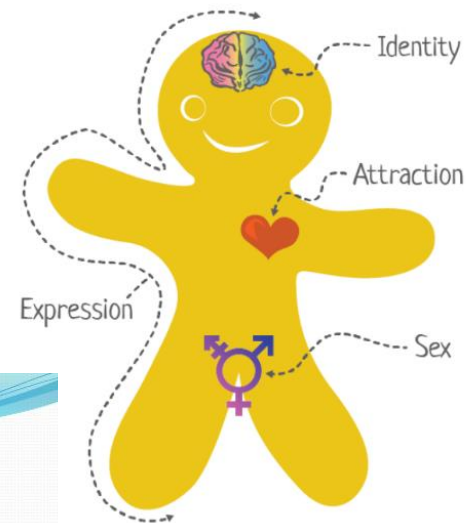
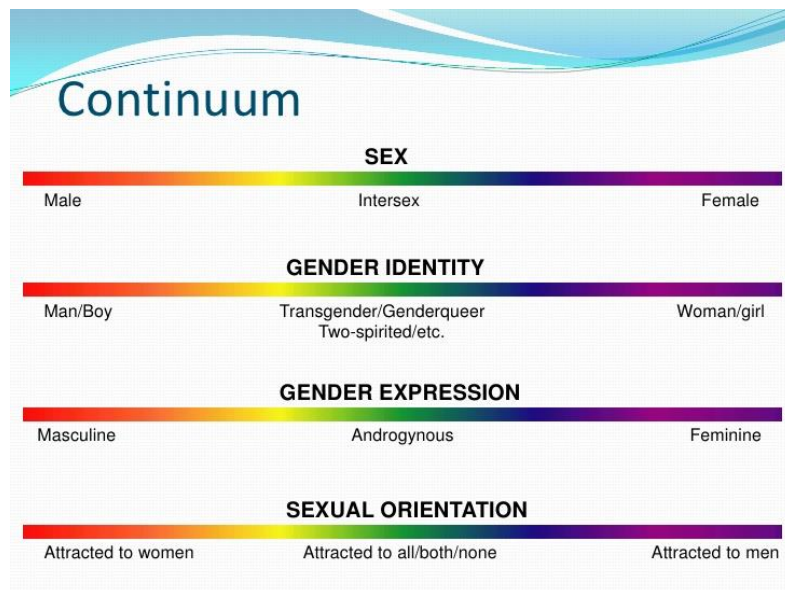
- **Gender** is the range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them. Depending on the context, this may include sex-based social structures (i.e., gender roles) and gender identity.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> **Academic definitions are complicated, not formulated to influence attitudes, and (for teen boys) plain dull**
- The **Gender Bread Person** explanation **may elicit disbelief and not be “convincing”**

## 2. Discussion about free choice

Explain gender aspects as continuums

Do activities that help boys reflect on their own and others' gender aspects

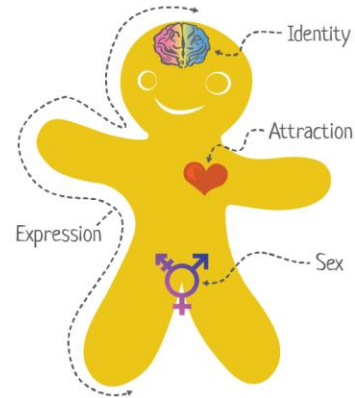
(The Astronaut)



# Discussion about free choice: disadvantages

- Exploring the flexibility of gender aspects is mainly interesting for boys who already doubt their gender or sexual preference
- Rating yourself or others on a gender or sexual continuum can be a threatening exercise
- There has been criticism on the Gender Bread continuums as reconfirming gender binary thinking

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual com



⊖ means a lack of what's on the right side

Gender Identity

⊖ → Woman-ness  
⊖ → Man-ness

Gender Expression

⊖ → Femininity  
⊖ → Masculinity

Anatomical Sex

⊖ → Female-ness  
⊖ → Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex  
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth  
□ Female □ Intersex □ Male

Sexually Attracted to... and/or (a/o)

⊖ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People  
⊖ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Romantically Attracted to...

⊖ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People  
⊖ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

# 3. Showing role models

Peer educators (strong women, caring men, LGBTI people)

Images, video





# Showing role models: disadvantages

- Normative role models are assigned higher status
- Normative role models may reinforce stereotypes
- Alternative role models tend to be seen as exceptions to the norm
- Non-normative role models may even elicit aversion and reinforce stereotypes





## 4. A new method:

# Emotional reflection through cognitive dissonance

1. Introduce principles of diversity and prejudice experientially
2. Show normative role models and ask an obviously prejudiced question
3. Discuss the arising doubt
4. Reflect on the mechanism

# The introduction to the course (1)

Trigger video "[Bob](#)" (3:10) awareness of misleading first impressions/ stereotypes

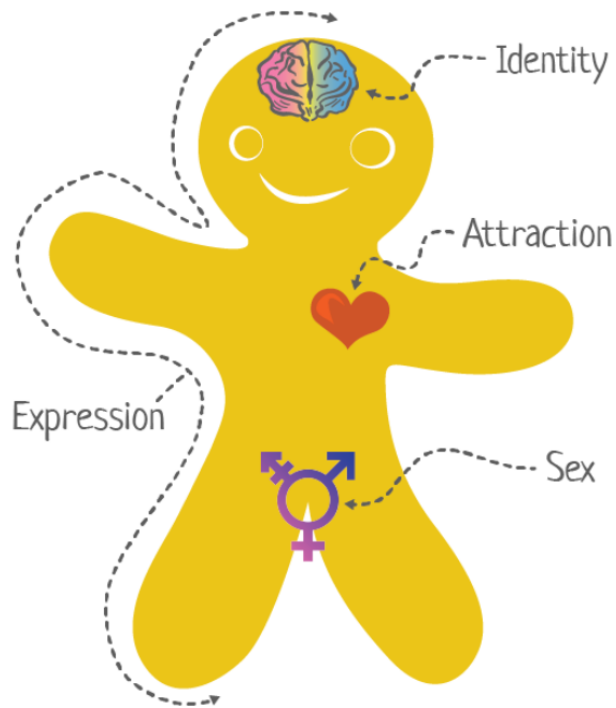


## The introduction to the course (2)

### Short introduction Gender Bread Person

This figure is called the “genderbread” person.

It shows how “sex” is located in your genitals (although biological sex can also have markers in your not directly visible genes and hormones), how gender identity originates in your brain, how sexual attraction has to do with love, and how expression is your choice how you overall present yourself. There are no limits.



# The introduction to the course (3)

Is this a man or a woman?



# Hanne Gaby Odiele

Model Hanne Gaby Odiele photographed by Ed Kavishe for Fashion Wire Press. In 2017 Odiele disclosed that they have the intersex trait androgen insensitivity syndrome.

Hanne prefers to be called “they” instead of “he” or “she” because their gender is neither male nor female.

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Roshaante Andersen (intersex)



Jaime Wilson (trans man)



Loiza Lamers (trans woman)

## *Intersex and trans identities*



# The introduction to the course (4)



Conchita Wurst (drag / transvestite)



Jiro Ghianni (gender free)



Kelsey Campbell (gender fluid)

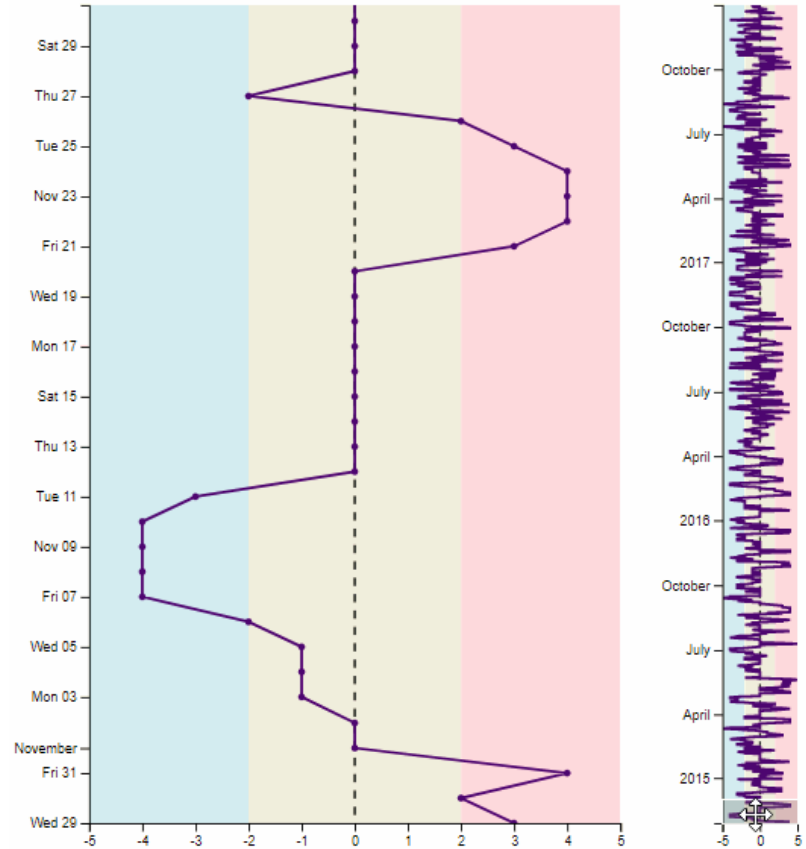


# Tracking gendered feelings

*I was asked by a therapist to start tracking my gender fluctuations so that I could understand them better. It was good advice, and because I am a data nerd, I ended up taking it to a whole other level.*

**What do you think: is Kelsey more masculine or feminine?**

Source: <https://www.gaytascience.com/plot-me-genderfluid/>



# “Confused”

We did a pilot with the method on a lower vocational school in the Netherlands.

This school caters for (mainly) boys, with a second-generation immigrant background and mostly from Muslim families. The school is for boys who are not able to function in a regular school because of their behavioral problems, but they also cannot go to a “special” school (for students with psycho-behavioral disorders).

[A fragment from the pilot...](#)

# “Confused”: who is confused?

- The students say (more or less) the intersex person is confused
- They want to be seen as strong and masculine, they don't admit they are confused themselves
- The teacher is confused by the insistent “guessing” of the students, tries to solve it by explaining “facts”
- The boys cannot harmonize the “contradictory” facts with their strong need to categorize (cognitive dissonance)

# Discussing cognitive dissonance as a method

- Group safety is a precondition
- It helps when students have reflected on preconceptions before
- Teachers are used to “transfer knowledge” but often feel helpless when they have to deal with emotions, aversion or limiting beliefs
- This was just the start of the course; the boys became more tolerant after a week with 5 lessons of 1,5 hours
- The teachers recommend to **not** offer these lessons as **one block**, but to **spread them over the academic year**, the entire school career and reflects on these learning experiences in **short pedagogic interventions throughout the teaching**.