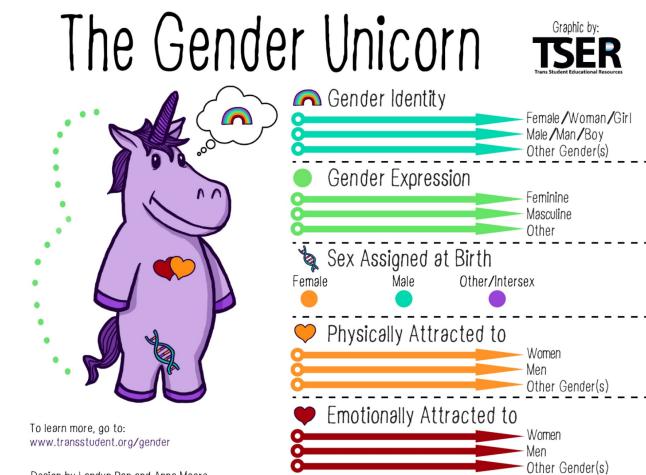


## "Somewhere Over the Binary": Addressing Myths about the Gender Binary

While more people than ever seem to accept the concept of sexuality and attraction existing on a spectrum, the same might not be said for the concept of gender on a spectrum. Though there are many reasons for this, the main culprit is the gender binary: the ever-looming presence of strict definitions for women, men, and the rigid characterizations and stereotypes we have of each. The gender binary is defined as "the belief that sex is binary and determines gender," or the idea that sex determines gender, of which there are only two (Thekla 2021). For a breakdown of the different aspects of gender, please refer to the gender unicorn. The gender binary is present everywhere and in everything, and its inflexible definitions make it difficult for many people to understand gender as a spectrum.



**With that being said, let's examine three myths that perpetuate the gender binary...**

**Myth #1:** *Biologically, there are only two sexes, therefore there are only two genders.*

Fact #1: Biologically, there are actually more than two sexes. We often carry the belief that the chromosomes that often make the distinction between sexes, the X and Y chromosomes, are found neatly as either XX or XY, which help determine your physical reproductive characteristics. However, there are many conditions and instances where a person may be born with an additional X or Y chromosome, which can change much of their physical makeup. For example, an additional X chromosome, or XXY, is what is known as Klinefelter syndrome, which can manifest in many ways, including more feminine secondary sex characteristics. Even without an additional chromosome, around 1.7% of all people are born intersex, meaning that they were born with some reproductive organs of both sexes. Additionally, 0.5% of people also experience sexual or reproductive variation, meaning that the idea that there are only two biological sexes is a myth (Woodcome, 2021).

**Myth #2:** *Gender is about presentation. If you present feminine, or masculine, it determines your gender.*

Fact #2: While presentation may be an expression of one's gender, it does not determine a person's gender. A person's presentation boils down to personal preference, or may be what is safe for them at the time. Their presentation does not determine their gender in the slightest. A person's Gender Identity is something that they determine themselves, and they may dress or act as masculine or feminine as they want without it affecting how they choose to identify. A familiar example is that of drag queens, where men dress as an exaggerated version of femininity without identifying as a woman.

**Myth #3:** *Gender is static. If you decide that you are one gender, then that is what you are forever.*

Fact #3: Gender, like Sexuality, is fluid. A person's relationship with their gender and identity may change over time, and the way that each person experiences gender is specific to them. Their relationship with the things tied into gender, such as their pronouns, fashion sense, presentation, etc. can also change over time. No one is tied to a Gender Identity that no longer feels comfortable for them, and there is nothing wrong with experimenting until we find what feels right, or changing things again if they begin to feel uncomfortable. The road to self-understanding and acceptance is nonlinear. People's experience with gender may not change very much, or it may change day by day. Or perhaps, they don't identify with the experience of gender at all.

**It is always important to continue learning and....**



No matter the case, it is important that we address these myths that perpetuate the gender binary, as continuing to uphold this system has dangerous consequences for those of us who do not fit inside the mold. Gender nonconforming or nonbinary individuals are harmed by a binary that does not quite fit them. Constantly being sent messages that the way that they choose to identify themselves isn't right can do tremendous harm to one's self-image, self-esteem, and their perception of themselves and others.

**Collectively, we all need to work on dismantling these myths and understanding the fluidity of gender in order to make the world a safer and better place for everyone in it.**

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ZCenter aims to end sexual violence, mobilize and educate the public, and support survivors of sexual assault. Our blog addresses issues related to ending oppression and violence, since all oppression and violence are intersectional with sexual violence. All ZCenter blog posts are written by state certified staff, interns, and volunteers. For questions on authorship or content, please email [info@zcenter.org](mailto:info@zcenter.org).

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