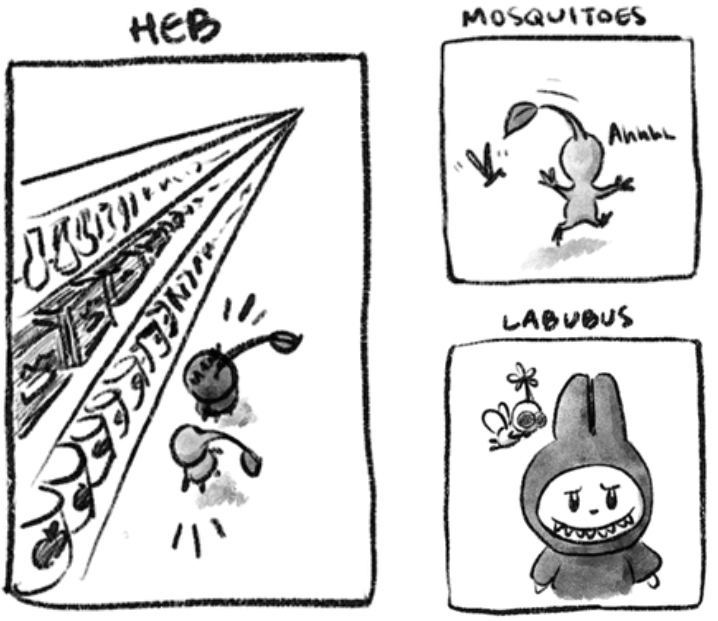
GENDER 101

a zine by Tian-Tian He

When my crew and I first landed on Earth, we discovered a lot of strange and interesting things that we'd never seen before...



We thought we'd never understand anything at all! But we've picked up a few things during our stay.

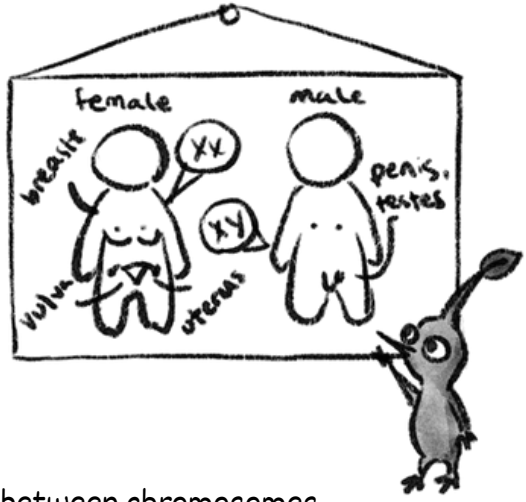
One of the most important things to know about humans is their system of gender. It's very complex and humans themselves don't even agree on many aspects of it. We can only cover the basics here, but we've listed some resources on the last page if you want to learn more!

What are SEX and GENDER ?

Humans classify each other into two categories called

sexes (male and female)

based on the biological differences between their bodies.



These include differences between chromosomes, reproductive organs, and hormone levels.

Since doctors typically assign a sex to babies when they are born, some people refer to "male" as "Assigned Male at Birth" (AMAB), and "female" as "Assigned Female at Birth" (AFAB).

But "male" and "female" do not capture all of the sexual variation between humans. Intersex people's bodies do not fit into the standard definitions of "male" and "female". For example, they may have:

- XX chromosomes, a vulva, and no uterus;
- XXY chromosomes, a penis, and breasts;
- XY chromosomes and a vulva;

and many more variations of traits.

1.7% of people worldwide are intersex - that's about the same as the population of Mexico!

Meanwhile, gender refers to people's socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities that are related to sexual difference. They are traditionally contained within boxes of male and female (the gender binary). But, like sex, this binary doesn't capture the wide spectrum of human gender identities.

For example, a person assigned female at birth may identify as male. Since his gender is different from his assigned sex, he is transgender.

A person who is assigned female at birth may also identify as female. Since her gender is the same as her assigned sex, she is cisgender.

People may also be nonbinary, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming, meaning that they don't identify strongly with being either male or female all of the time. They might feel like they are in-between; or more masculine at times and more feminine at others; or like something outside of the gender binary; or that they have no gender at all.

Gender non-conforming people may use a wide range of pronouns including she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/zir, or a mix like she/they.

The terms genderqueer, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming are sometimes used interchangeably, and they typically fall under the umbrella of "transgender". In addition to these terms, there are many more labels that people use to describe their gender.

Check out this list for more! bit.ly/gender-IDs

Debunking myths

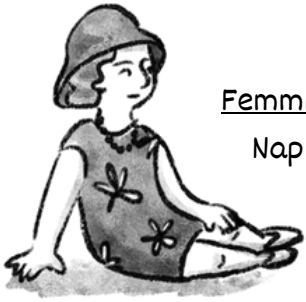
Even among humans, there are a lot of misconceptions about gender. But the more you learn about gender, the less foreign and more fascinating it gets! Here are some common misconceptions we've found.

Myth #1: New gender identities are just a trend

Gender identities outside of the male/female binary have existed for thousands of years all around the world! Some of these identities were not just accepted in society, but upheld as having special skills, spiritual powers, or bringing good luck.

Ihamana
Zuni

Fa'atama
Samoa



Femminielli
Naples

Hijra
South Asia

Myth #2: Being trans or genderqueer is a mental illness

Currently, the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 doesn't define being trans or genderqueer as a mental illness. Rates of anxiety and depression are higher among trans people, but this is mainly due to higher rates of social exclusion and abuse.

Gender dysphoria–a condition that trans people may experience–is a psychiatric diagnosis in the DSM-5, and it can be effectively treated with gender-affirming care.

Gender-affirming care involves the free exploration of gender expression, such as wearing different clothing or changing one's name and pronouns. It can also include medical transition: taking puberty blockers and/or hormones, or surgery (for adults). When trans people can live in a way that aligns with their gender identity, this greatly relieves mental distress.

Myth #3: Kids are too young to know they're trans or genderqueer

Cis children typically know their gender identity by age 3, and the same goes for trans children! But because of social stigma, the age that trans children become aware of their gender identity varies a lot. Kids can know that they are trans by age 3, but it can also take until middle age or later for many people to realize they are trans. What matters is that kids are supported in whichever gender expression they choose.

Myth #4: Social pressure can make kids trans or genderqueer

The number of people identifying as trans has, indeed, increased over the years. But it's not likely that kids are "becoming" trans because it gives them more social status: rates of school bullying are still much higher among trans students than cis, straight students (in 2019, 45.5% of trans

kids had experienced bullying compared to 16.6% of cis kids).

Instead, the increasing number of people identifying as trans might relate to greater acceptance of diverse gender identities. If a person who was already trans knows what being transgender is, and feels that their loved ones would accept them for it, they might be more likely to come out openly as trans.

Myth #5: Many people regret transitioning

A 2018 literature review found that only about 0.3% to 3.8% of research study participants who have medically transitioned regret transitioning. Additionally, rates of regret have declined over the years as treatment methods have improved.

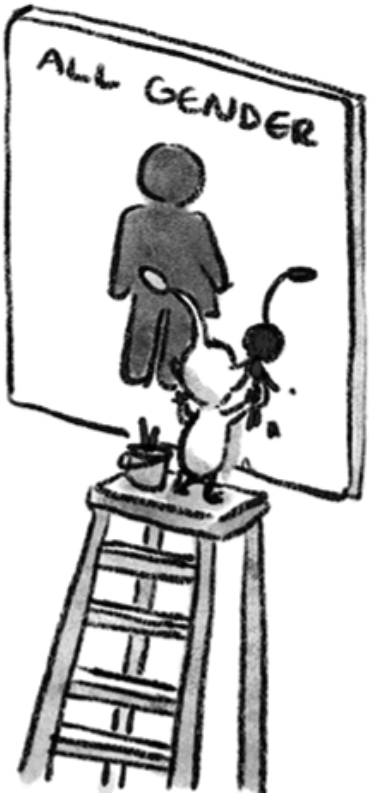
And choosing to detransition doesn't always come with feelings of regret: some patients say that transitioning "helped them better understand their gender-related care needs". (AP News 2023) So, regret is certainly a possibility after gender transition, but it is extremely rare.

Myth #6: It's dangerous to allow trans women to use the women's restroom

As of 2026, 20 states in the U.S. (including Texas) prohibit trans people from using the bathroom that matches their gender identity in some or all state-owned buildings. Supporters say these laws are meant to prevent trans people from harassing others in public bathrooms.

But according to GLAAD, research shows no evidence of safety risks for cisgender people when trans people use restrooms aligning with their authentic gender.

In fact, trans people are at elevated risk for harassment and violence in bathrooms. Plus, these laws have actually lead to increased harassment of both cis and trans people in bathrooms as their gender presentation is scrutinized, and some are even asked to "prove" their gender.



"What's your experience of gender?"

We collected stories from friends and other writers!

Lucina, she/her

As I transitioned, it felt like a butterfly's life cycle. I was in a cocoon slowly changing and staying still while the world continued. Then I began to pierce that cocoon to be free. I fluttered my wings and saw the beauty of my true form. Everything finally felt right. ... This is who I am and I will continue to live my life authentically.

I have always felt myself to be a woman, but now I can no longer resist being changed into something else as I'm taking hormone treatments for cancer, leaving me with no sex drive. It makes me sad that feeling like a woman or having sexual pleasure in my own body must be cut out leaving me sometimes female, but never male - fae gender.

Faye, she/her

Jason, he/him

With the centrality of the male gaze, women's bodies exist to be drooled over and men's bodies have no reason to exist. At least, that's how it felt as a kid. [I had] this hopeless resignation that no crush could reciprocate my feelings. Later I heard about fujoshis - women who read gay romance comics. No joke, the thought of girls fantasizing about two men in love finally let me love myself as a man.

Before and during my transition I was so sure I was a man. Access to transitioning allowed me to explore the non-binary aspects of my gender identity. Am I really a man? Who knows. I am not a woman, that much I know. Now that I've reached a point of being male-assumed, I feel less pressure to fit into the binary. I don't have to box myself in anymore to convince doctors and lawyers.

- from Rethinking Gender by Louie Laüger, p. 141

Resources

Visit bit.ly/4poaWak to see our bibliography!

More recommended reading:

Books

Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us
Kate Bornstein

Gender Queer: A Memoir
Maia Kobabe

Real Queer America: LGBT Stories From Red States
Samantha Allen

Rethinking Gender: An Illustrated Exploration
Louie Laüger

Transgender History
Susan Stryker

Web

The Montrose Center - Houston LGBTQ community center
montrosecenter.org

The Trevor Project
thetroverproject.org

Texas Trans Kids
txtranskids.org

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Support the artist! <3 Venmo @Tian-Tian-He

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write about power."