

Introducing Gender Identity

Level: Grade 6

Goals

- Learn how to better understand the influence that gender roles, stereotypes and social norms have on their daily lives;
- Establish respect for gender diversity and difference through recognizing their role in social equality.



Learning content in Sexuality Education

- Outlining the various impacts of stereotypes
 - social/gender norms
 - sexism and homophobia
- Discussing the roles you can play in respecting sexual diversity and difference
 - Denouncing injustice/inequality
 - Equality as a social value

Cross-Curricular Competencies

1. To exercise critical judgement
2. To construct their identity
3. To cooperate with others
4. To communicate appropriately

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to instill in Mi'gmaq youth both the confidence and the appropriate language to discuss gender identity in a culturally-relevant way, develop critical intelligence with regard to colonialism-inherited stereotypes, as well as to better understand how to establish harmonious relationships by preventing discrimination related to gender and sexual diversity.

Youth at this age level are likely going through physical and emotional changes which may or may not align with how they perceive their gender identity, therefore it is important to ensure that students have the correct language and resources to better explore these variations, as well as reduce harm by addressing bullying which targets students based on their gender.

Introducing Gender Identity

Lesson Plan

Materials

1. Markers
2. Poster Board
3. Projector
4. Every Body PDF
5. Worksheets
 - a. Gender Match Game
 - b. Harmful Stereotypes handout (double sided)

Essential Questions

- What is the difference between biological sex and gender?
- What is the difference between gender identity and gender expression?
- How do gender stereotypes influence the way we go about our daily lives?
- How can we actively avoid and prevent harmful behaviours related to gender?

Using Gender Inclusive Language

When discussing topics such as sexual identity with youth it is important to use accessible and inclusive language which does not reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is normal and expected or that there are only two genders. Heterosexual and cisgender (non-transgender) identities are often considered normal and the only identities valued in the dominant society. Because of this, people are prone to using words that assume everyone is heterosexual and cisgender. An example of this would be assuming that female students will have a boyfriend while male students will have a girlfriend. A more inclusive approach would be to instead use the term “partner”, which does not assume the gender or sexual orientation of students or the people they date. This is something that is crucial when teaching as many sexual and gender minority youth, known as two-spirits youth in many First Nations, face challenges throughout their life because of these harmful social norms.

Terms

- Gender Identity
- Gender Expression
- Transphobia
- Two-Spirits

Introducing Gender Identity

Development/Teaching Methods [30 min]

1. Begin the lesson by establishing ground rules conducive towards a “safer” space. If the class already has these rules in place it might be beneficial to re-emphasize them now, to ensure that students feel comfortable sharing things that are of a more sensitive nature. Due to the sensitive nature of these topics, remind students to avoid speaking about the experiences of their fellow classmates. Consider letting students suggest rules or limits of their own for the class to be mindful of throughout the discussion.
2. Ask the class what a stereotype is. If necessary, use the definition: an assumption about a person based on how they look or how they act. Explain that assumptions based on gender or sexuality can seem normal or harmless; however, assumptions can hurt people by making them feel left out or abnormal.
 - a. Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5. Ask the students to use the markers and poster board to brainstorm some stereotypes related to gender identity.
 - b. Prompt the class by asking: What are some assumptions and expectations about boys and girls. For example, things they can and can't do (e.g. girls can't play sports, boys can't wear dresses)?
3. After the brainstorm session, ask each group to present their brainstorms. Write down the main ideas or reoccurring stereotypes that arise related to specific genders. Encourage the students to reflect on how these stereotypes are limiting, harmful and untrue.
4. Once every group has presented, explain how many of the stereotypes that were brainstormed are examples of different types of discrimination related to gender identity and expression.
 - a. Tell the class that gender discrimination is causing harm or fearing someone based on their actual or perceived gender.
 - b. Further elaborate on this by using some of the stereotypes that were brought up by students and relating them to the harm they cause. For example, if a student raises a stereotype related to the idea that boys can't cry or display emotion, highlight the fact that that hurts boys by not allowing them to say how they are feeling.
 - c. Explain that the first step of preventing harmful stereotyping or discrimination is understanding that gender is more like a range or spectrum instead of the two distinct choices of boy or girl. The way someone feels about their gender doesn't always align or match up with what we see on the outside.

Introducing Gender Identity

d. Elaborate on the concept as a gender spectrum and the separation of gender and sex by introducing the “Genderbread person” infographic. Have a different student read aloud each category to the class. For this lesson, you can focus on the categories dealing with biological sex and gender rather than sexual orientation, as sexual orientation could be introduced in a whole lesson on itself. Ask students to try to define the various terms on the infographic, and give them help when necessary.

- **Gender identity** – gender identity is how you, in your head, experience and define your gender, based on how much you align (or don't align) with what you understand the options for gender to be. Most commonly known gender identities are girl, boy, non-binary or two-spirits. Reinforce that it is ok to identify as a boy, a girl, non-binary, or else, and that people of all genders should be treated with respect.
- **Anatomical sex** – it is the physical traits you're born with or develop that we think of as "sex characteristics," as well as the sex you are assigned at birth according to genitalia. Explain that when someone is born, a doctor looks at them and decides what sex they are. Usually if a doctor sees a penis they will say the baby is male, if they see a vulva they will say the baby is female, and if they see that the baby's genitalia don't quite look like either, they'll say the baby is intersex. Explain that although people usually assume that people with a penis are boys and people with a vulva are girls, sex does NOT always match with gender identity (i.e. someone with a penis might identify as a girl).
- **Gender expression**– this is how you present gender (through your actions, clothing, and demeanor, to name a few), and how those presentations are viewed based on social expectations – Emphasize that it is important not to make assumptions! For instance, someone wearing a dress might not be a girl, and not only girls wear dresses!
- Explain that pronouns are words like he, she and they. Explain that you should use the pronoun that a person wants you to use for them (he, she, they/them) and that if you are unsure, the best way to figure out someone's pronoun is to ask!
- Now compare the Genderbread person to **the L'nu model**, a gender identity model developed by John Robert Sylliboy, a Mi'gmaq two-spirits man.
 - **Two-spirits:** a term used to describe aboriginal people who assume cross- or multiple-gender roles, attributes, dress and attitudes for personal, spiritual, cultural, ceremonial or social reasons.
 - Ask students what differences and similarities they see between the two models.

Introducing Gender Identity

5. End the lesson by distributing the **Harmful Stereotypes** handout and explaining the instructions for this activity. Be sure to emphasize that students leave their names off of their paper to ensure anonymity. Also advise students to provide examples which do not involve other students in the classroom, instead, have students come up with scenarios that draw from their own personal experiences.

Culmination [15 min]

Have students fill out the first two questions on the **Harmful Stereotypes** handout. Once they have completed the handout, instruct students to pass their answers to the front. Shuffle the papers and redistribute them, making sure each student gets a new sheet. Have students fill out the last two questions, responding to the first student's answer. End with a brief discussion of interesting things students learned from this experience.

Performance Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe gender stereotypes in our society;
- Identify the difference between biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression;
- Understand how gender identity can be expressed in Mi'gmaq culture;
- Identify the ways gender stereotypes influence our day to day lives;
- Identify the ways gender stereotypes can be harmful;
- Understand and realize the role they play in challenging situations of gender stereotyping.

Assessment Ideas

1. Have the students complete the "Match Game" handout and successfully identify the various definitions learned in class;
2. The next time a novel or film is presented in class have the students write a short reflection on how the characters' gender identities play a role in shaping their character development, do they challenge gender stereotypes or reinforce them?

This activity has been adapted from the "Introducing Gender Identity" lesson plan developed by the ACCM. The original version is available here: <https://sexedtoolkit.com/lesson-plans/elementary-school-identity-gender-stereotypes-roles-social-norms/jgs-e6a-introducing-gender-identity/>