

GENDERED LANGUAGE



TIME
TO
WAKE
UP
TO
YOUR
GENDERED
LANGUAGE.

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INTRODUCTION

You're part of mankind, you admire your heroes and heroines and remember your forefathers. Gendered language is all around you, albeit hidden in countless normalised expressions. You might consider yourself woke but chances are, you're unintentionally reinforcing gender norms with your words. So how do you kick this binary habit?

Reading this is probably a good way to start.

When writing this guidebook, we tried taking a lighthearted approach to a relevant yet complicated topic. Because let's be honest, who can keep up with Simone de Beauvoir? As far as guidebooks go, we also took a more nuanced approach. Gendered language depends heavily on context and is looked at from many views, which are all – to some extend – valid. So who are we to tell you what your view should be? Instead, we offer you a selection of stories, theories, facts, observations, tips and tricks. Hopefully, they'll keep you awake at night.

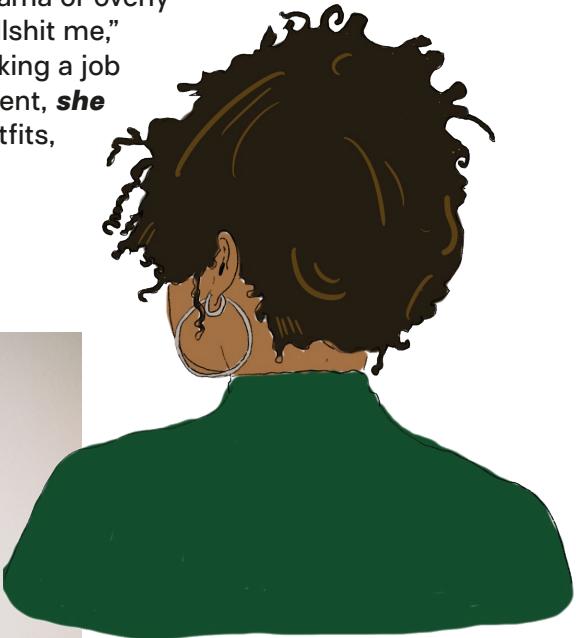
- (A)WAKE



R's shoulders jerk with laughter after making a funny comment. Although always up for a spontaneous chat, you shouldn't come to R with drama or overly intimate topics. "Just don't bullshit me," R says matter of factly. Working a job that requires constant movement, R spends every day in casual outfits, asserting a laid-back attitude everywhere.

RORIENA

Her shoulders jerk with laughter after making a funny comment. Although always up for a spontaneous chat, you shouldn't come to **her** with drama or overly intimate topics. "Just don't bullshit me," **she** says matter of factly. Working a job that requires constant movement, **she** spends every day in casual outfits, asserting a laid-back attitude everywhere.



7. THE INDEFINITE DEFINITION OF GENDER

What does gender even mean? Sadly, we can't provide you with a one-word definition, hence our need to dedicate an entire chapter to this hot topic. From scholarly journals to smug mansplanations, from politicians to dancers in a gay bar; everyone's definition will differ. Even science defines gender as complex and not fully understood. But there's one thing we can say with full certainty: The western idea of gender is changing.

The popular belief of the gender binary - you are born with a penis or a vagina so you're either a boy, doing boyish things or a girl, doing girly things - is increasingly seen as flawed. Because what about the boys who love to dress up like princesses? What about intersex people or those who identify as trans? Are they simply mythological creatures? Of course not! That's why a different perspective is emerging, defining gender as a social construct.



Daniel:

"To me, gender means fluidity, to express my femininity and masculinity freely and comfortably."

Katie:

"Gender has been important to me because for a long time I was not sure where I fit in, then I found out you can fit into this big grey area between man and woman and that's fine"

Roos a.k.a. Thorn Vineyard:

"I see gender as something very diverse, so not just black and white. I also see gender identity as fluid instead of set in stone."

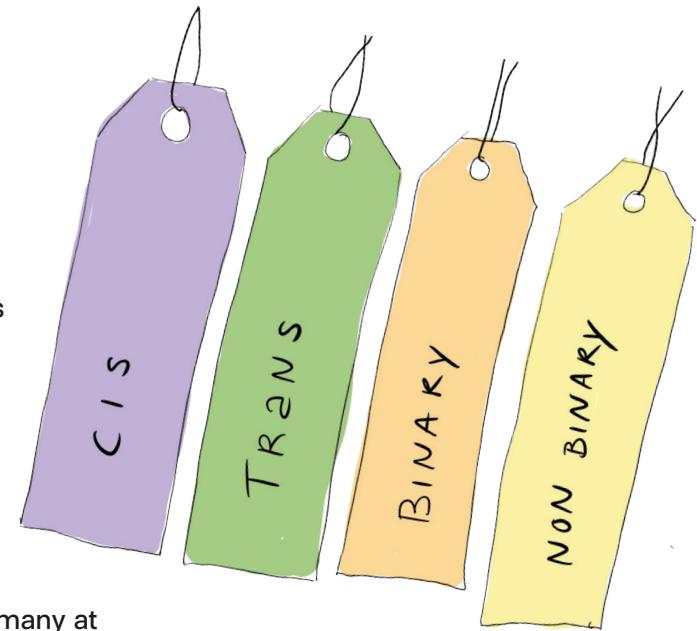
Roziena:

"For me, I feel like because I'm a girl I can do whatever the fuck I want."

Identities and labels

It's one thing to see gender as a construct, but deconstructing it is an entirely different story. Even the most woke of us still catch ourselves accidentally reinforcing the binary. To explain this, a famous scholar named Judith Butler created the theory that defines gender as performative. A social construct we bring to life by performing it – using fashion, speech, movements and more – without realising we're doing so.

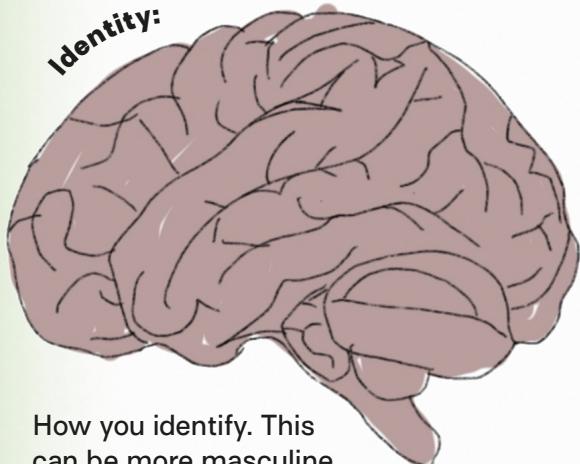
There are an infinite amount of labels naming specific parts in the spectra of identity, expression and orientation. It's important to note that these labels are not written with permanent marker; meaning you can switch, identify with many at once or none at all. Some people greatly value labels. They name something which would otherwise remain abstract and connect people who identify with the same label. Others prefer to go label-less, viewing it as an additional construct or restriction.



Cis:	When your sex matches your gender identity
Trans:	When your sex doesn't match your gender identity
Binary:	When your gender identity fits into the male/female binary
Non-binary:	When your gender identity doesn't fit into the male/female binary

THE DIFFERENT SPECTRA

Identity:

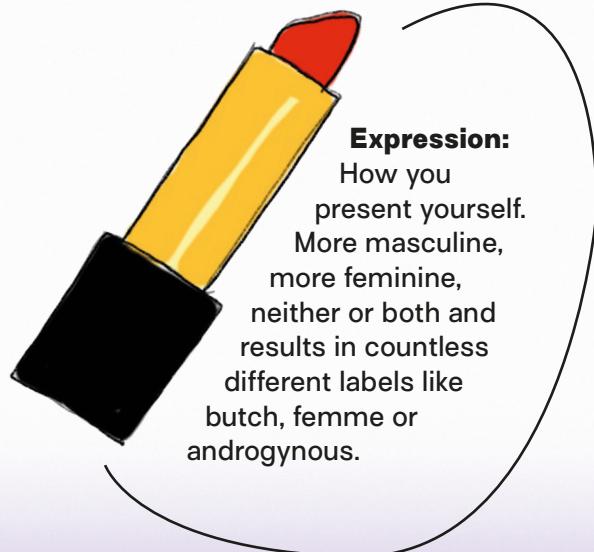


How you identify. This can be more masculine, more feminine, neither or both, and results in countless different labels like cis, trans, non-binary or gender-fluid.

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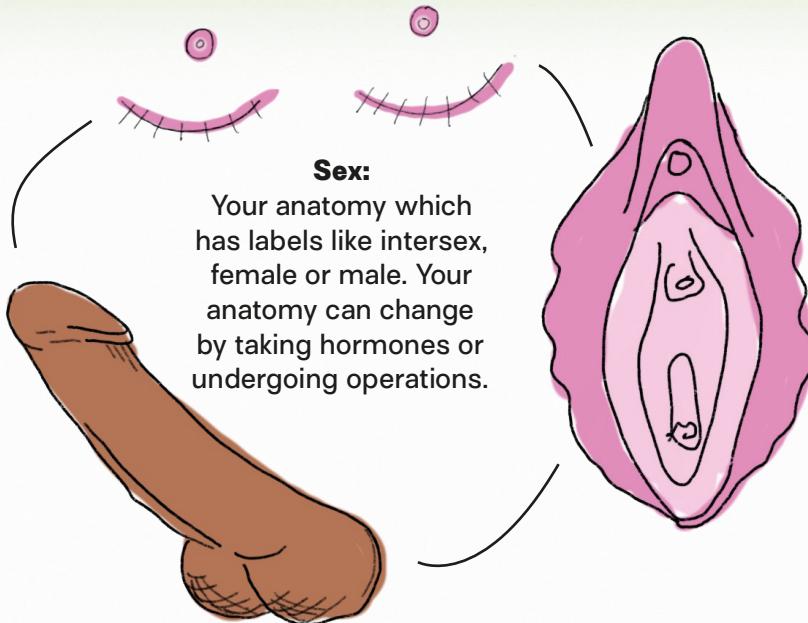
Expression:

How you present yourself. More masculine, more feminine, neither or both and results in countless different labels like butch, femme or androgynous.



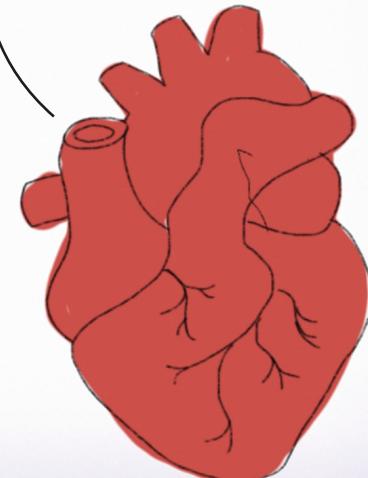
Sex:

Your anatomy which has labels like intersex, female or male. Your anatomy can change by taking hormones or undergoing operations.



Attraction:

Who you are attracted to. Resulting in labels like gay, straight, bisexual or asexual.



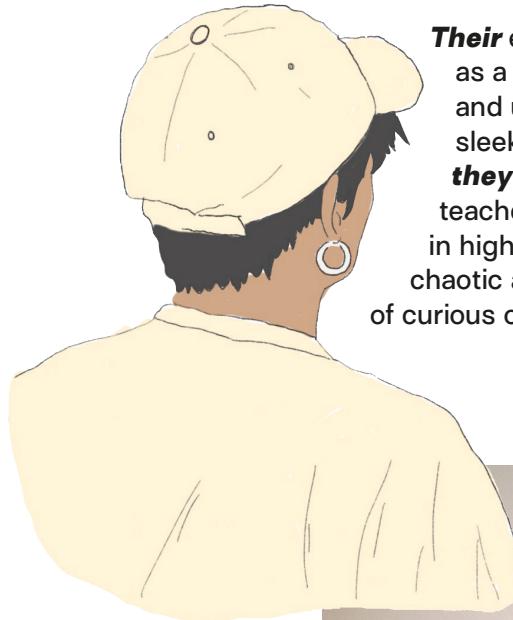


Where language comes in

From the moment we speak our first words – usually mama or papa – we start internalising and reinforcing gender norms. This goes on as we mature, we call our friend a pussy, start manning jobs and say “hi guys” to our group of girlfriends. Times are changing as we’re collectively criticising traditional gender norms. Too bad our language is stuck in 1950. By not updating our words we teach young girls and everyone who identifies outside of the binary that, although they matter now, they don’t matter enough to be explicitly mentioned or to change our language for that matter.

K’s ensemble can best be described as a mindful mess. Chunky chains and undone hair contrast against a sleek checkered blazer. Altogether, K gives the impression of a cool teacher, like the one you wish you had in high school. Thoughtful, albeit a tad chaotic and always open to the questions of curious observers.

KATIE



Their ensemble can best be described as a mindful mess. Chunky chains and undone hair contrast against a sleek checkered blazer. Altogether, **they** give the impression of a cool teacher, like the one you wish you had in high school. Thoughtful, albeit a tad chaotic and always open to the questions of curious observers.



2. A CRASH COURSE INTO GENDERED LANGUAGE

Albert Heijn recently started a campaign to promote the bargain prices of their basic brand. Posters saying “Good news for mothers of hungry teenagers” graced supermarkets around the country. Upon first, second and even third glance it seemed like a fine ad. Until it raised the question: why does the poster only address mothers instead of all parents? You would expect some type of backlash from our hypercritical, digital society, but none came. Both the poster and the lack of response to it illustrate the depth of the internalisation of our gendered language.

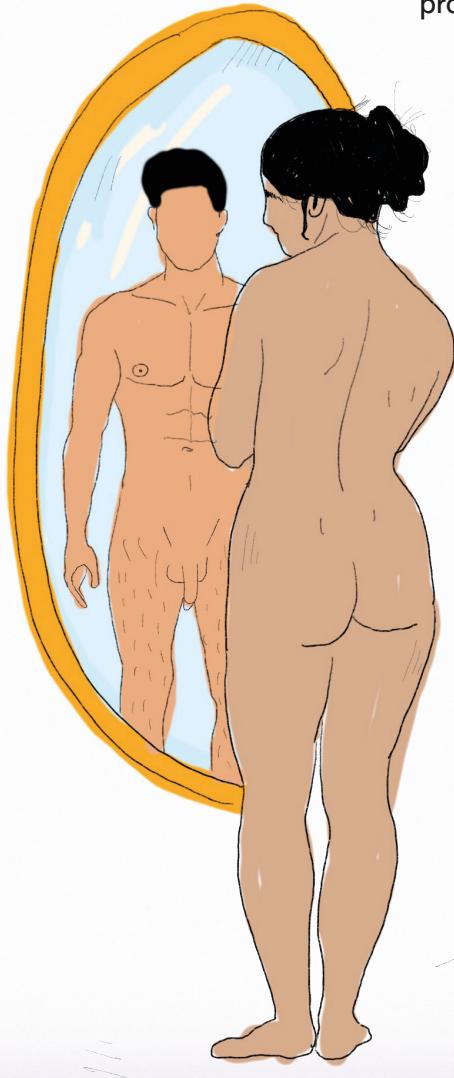
Roos a.k.a. Thorn Vineyard:

“We’re all products of our system, and language might be the biggest system of all. The way our language is constructed doesn’t leave space for certain people, something can only exist if we have a word for it”

It takes more than a few words to keep the binary alive. The way we speak, are spoken to and are spoken about all help reinforce traditional gender norms. There are an infinite amount of specific words, grammatical examples and broader contexts, but if we go into all of them this book wouldn’t be so accessible anymore. So let’s take a crash course into gendered language.

Explicit ways

Nouns and pronouns are already a big point of discussion. Justly so, they’re vital to addressing and describing people but also result in misaddressing and misdescribing.



It’s not always possible to tell someone’s pronouns from their looks, or even their gender identity. Some languages don’t have gendered pronouns at all, whereas others even assign genders to objects. A French car, for example, is a smooth and sensual woman.

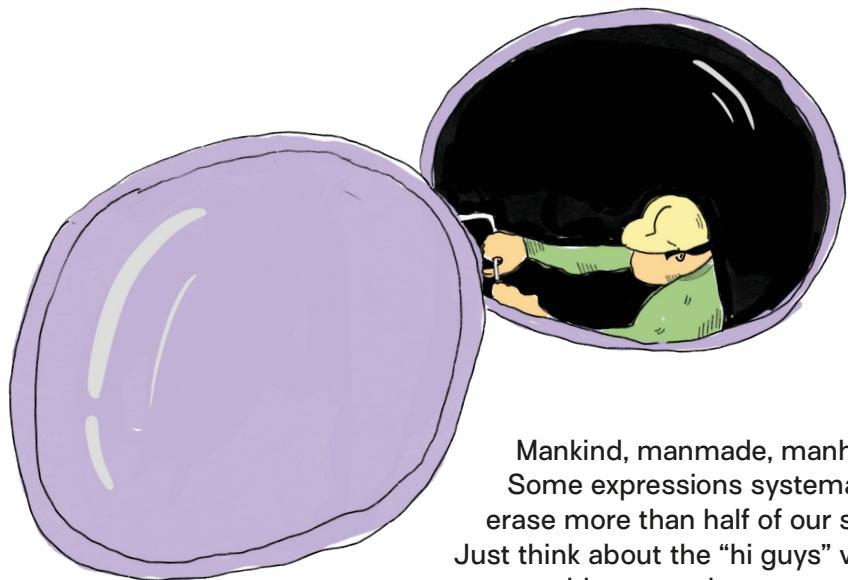
Indonesian is one of the languages with only gender-neutral pronouns.

Charly:

“I’ll still mix it up in english and accidentally call my very cis male friend a she.”

This also proves how deeply specific pronouns are embedded in our minds.

Another prominent topic is the linguistic otherness of women. It sounds complex but simply means the word woman is derived from the word man, along with many female descriptions (think steward – stewardess). Apart from the fact that this is binary as fuck, it establishes men as the norm and women as the other. That's why the term womxn is sometimes used instead. Womxn also explicitly includes all trans women and women of colour, who are often left out of the western conversation on gender.



Mankind, manmade, manhole... Some expressions systematically erase more than half of our society. Just think about the "hi guys" which we use to address nearly everyone. Not only do expressions like these establish men as the norm, but they also teach non-binary people and women it's okay to be forgotten or not explicitly named. A problem cis men never had to face.

Implicit ways

When reading the sentence "her lover is very handsome" You'll probably picture her lover as man, which shows the heterosexual default in our language. The word handsome also plays a part in that. Some words are almost exclusively used to describe men or women; think handsome vs beautiful, or words like bossy or feisty.



Roziena:

"I've always had a problem with the word honey on the work floor. I've had guys coming up to me to explain something and starting with: "Oh honey." This always felt really denigrating to me"

You're probably aware of the fact that women are visually objectified, but did you know they're linguistically objectified as well? This mainly happens in the media but slip into casual conversations as well. Women can be dismissed as "a mother of two" or "a beautiful blonde" in situations where a man would be described based on his profession or accomplishments. The trending of feminism has also brought forward a new form of objectification. Reducing powerful female figures to their gender. Think of headlines like "big-ass company so-and-so hires female CEO." We're all for more female CEO's, but should their female-ness be our main point of interest?



Finally, there's a difference in the speech patterns of men and women, although this depends on the context of the conversation and can't be said for everyone. Learning from a young age how to discuss emotions and how to be taken seriously in a man's world, women tend to use proper vocabulary and discuss serious, emotional topics. Men, who are traditionally perceived as more authoritative yet taught to keep their feelings bottled up, use more slang and abbreviations in their chill conversations.

The bechdel test

The Bechdel test was made to uncover sexism in films and follows 3 simple criteria.

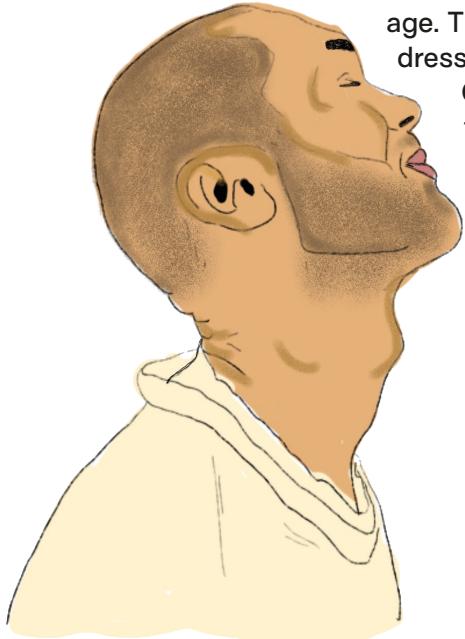
- (1) It has to have at least two named women in it
- (2) who talk to each other
- (3) about something other than a man.

Even today, surprisingly many films fail. Some of them being: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, Finding Nemo, 500 Days of Summer, Narnia and several of the Harry Potter movies.

M loved to dress up as a princess at a young age. The romance, gentility and beautiful dresses fitted M like the glass slipper fitted Cinderella. Years passed and M still likes to dress up, although the outfits and occasions have matured. M's sensitive and romantic side has grown as well, although that might be a bit racier than Disney allows.

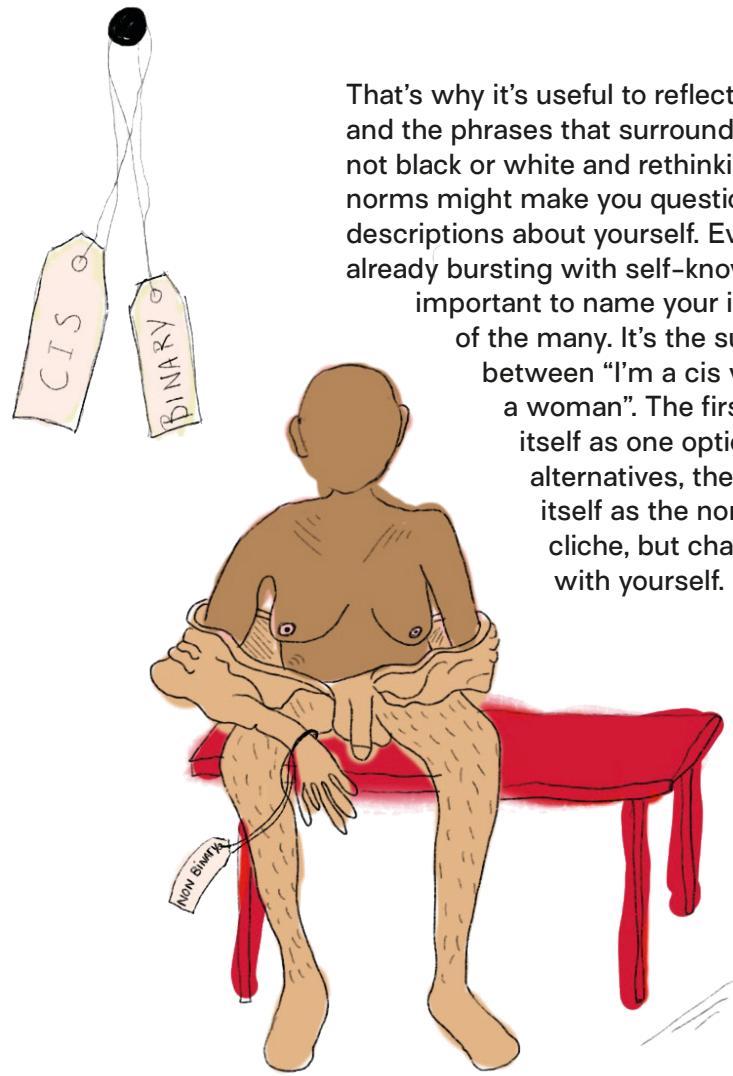
MARVEN

He loved to dress up as a princess at a young age. The romance, gentility and beautiful dresses fitted **him** like the glass slipper fitted Cinderella. Years passed and **he** still likes to dress up, although the outfits and occasions have matured. **His** sensitive and romantic side has grown as well, although that might be a bit racier than Disney allows.



3. HOW TO NOT BE A CUNT TO YOURSELF

We all receive them, compliments we used to love but that now make us cringe. Comments like “you drink like a real man” or “you’re so cute” that you spend your gender-conforming teenage years loving, only to find out you hate them as an adult. In addition, being called “weird” “rude” or “sensitive” might no longer feel like the insult it used to be. As our identities develop, so do the words that hurt or charm us and a lot of that has to do with gender norms.



That's why it's useful to reflect on your gender and the phrases that surround that. Identity is not black or white and rethinking internalised norms might make you question certain descriptions about yourself. Even if you're already bursting with self-knowledge, it's important to name your identity as one of the many. It's the subtle difference between “I'm a cis woman” and “I'm a woman”. The first acknowledges itself as one option amongst many alternatives, the second positions itself as the norm. It sounds so cliché, but change starts with yourself.

Katie:

“For a long time, I wasn't sure where I fit in gender-wise. I tried to ignore it for a while, but then I found out you don't have to be 100% men or woman, you can be somewhere in-between and that's fine. But I'm still finding my way in some things”

77 questions to help you reflect on your gender, and the language surrounding it.

NOBODY IS THE NORM
ON THE NORM
THE NORM DOESN'T EXIST
IT'S NORMATIVE

What does gender mean to you?

Seeing gender as a spectrum, how would you describe your identity, expression and attraction?

What is it about you that makes you identify yourself as such?

Are any of these elements particularly fluid or consistent?

Do you want to label your identity, expression and attraction?

If yes, what would that label be?

Which pronouns do you prefer?

Do you mind if people misgender or mispronoun you?

Would you rather be titled hero, heroine or something else entirely?

Which well-intended compliments make you cringe?

How would you like to be described, beyond explicitly gendered language?

This might seem like a daunting interrogation, but don't stress. There are no right or wrong answers and your answers might even change over time. The list is mainly there to show how we all differ. Nobody is the norm, the norm doesn't exist.



With blazing red hair meticulously matching the top below, D looks like someone who values appearance. Not just as a means of self-expression, but as an act of resilience. It's as if D's alluringly made-up face and curved body are daring you to gaze. But D's chipped nail polish and nonchalant expression reveal how little D really cares about onlookers.

DANIEL



With **their** blazing red hair meticulously matching the top below, **they** look like someone who value appearance. Not just as a means of self-expression, but as an act of resilience. It's as if **their** alluringly made-up face and curved body are daring you to gaze. But **their** chipped nail polish and nonchalant expression reveal how little they really care about onlookers.



4. HOW TO NOT BE A CUNT TO OTHERS

Imagine, It's a late Saturday night as you sit down in the smoker's area of a queer party. Between the smoke-clouds sit, stand and dance a diverse group of people. One dancer catches your attention, a masculine body dressed in a red satin dress that stands out in a sea of bodies wearing black leather and latex. You stare at the dancer as you wonder how to approach them, should you ask for pronouns? But what if she is a trans woman trying to pass? Before you can come to a decision, the dancer approaches you. "Here, have some water," they say. "Are you okay? You've been staring at me for the past 15 minutes". Your face turns the colour of their dress as you realise they are right.



From slip-ups with pronouns to calling women bossy. How we describe and approach people is heavily influenced by internalised gendered language. As the story above illustrates, this can manifest before the conversation has even started. For those who are curious about how this not-so-fictional story ends: The dancer in question is named Giaco and he identifies as male. He explained that he gets stares all the time but liked it when people took a genuine interest by asking about his appearance. "Next time, just ask before staring for hours" he concluded laughing.

Striking up a conversation

Approaching people who express beyond the binary can be a bit intimidating. Talking to a stranger always is, emphasised by the fact you don't want to make rude assumptions. Unfortunately, there's no specific set of etiquette rules you can follow. You're not a 1950's housewife and neither are the people you're trying to approach. Other than the obvious; be positive and respectful, we all have our ways in which we like conversations to start.



You can ask yourself if gender identity is even relevant when starting a conversation with a stranger. If someone seems cool, just talk to them. Borrow a smoke, compliment their outfit, bitch about the weather or rave about the DJ. Whatever works for you, just don't awkwardly stare at them for 15 minutes.

Once you've struck up that conversation

Once you've gathered enough courage (or drank enough tequila shots) to get chatty, how do you not sound like the patriarchy? It's all about increasing your awareness, but let's dive into some specifics.

Katie:

"My appearance can be confusing to people, but if they have questions I always try to explain my identity. I'm like, "I'm confusing and this is why."

Daniel:

"When I go outside I'm aware I go against everything. I want people to see me because I want their ideas to shift, for people like me to become normalised. I do feel very alone walking down the street, that's why it's great to have a sense of community."

Roos A.K.A. Thorn Vineyard:

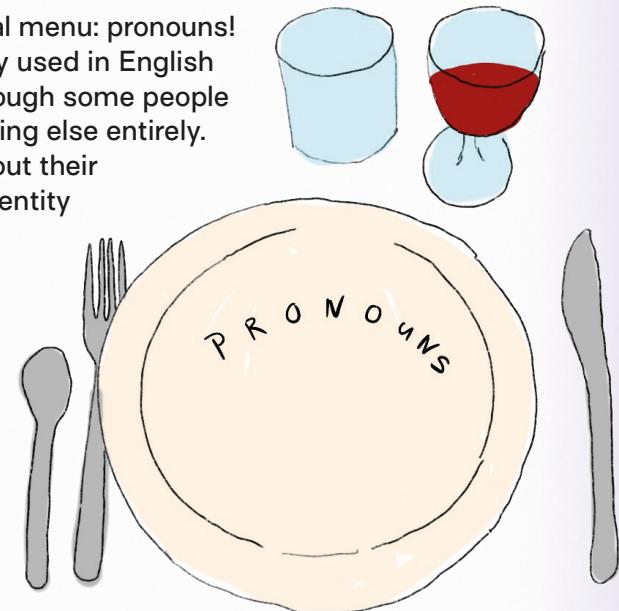
"In my daily life, I get a lot of negative questions like "I don't get it. Are you a man or a woman?". When I'm in drag, people use the same words but they phrase it positively. "OMG, amazing, I can't see if you're a man or a woman!"

First on the conversational menu: pronouns!

The ones most commonly used in English are he, she and they, although some people prefer ze or hir or something else entirely.

It's best to ask people about their pronouns since gender identity isn't always an indication.

Try to refer to someone using proper pronouns, even if they're not around. You're being a cunt if you don't, but it also helps you normalise pronouns that might otherwise not be natural to your vocabulary.



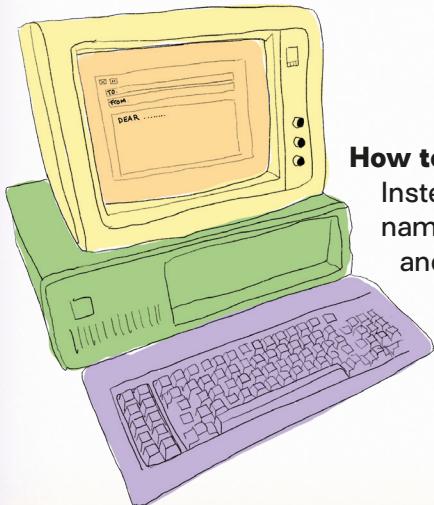
We all have gender-based pre-judgements like somehow considering it more raunchy when a woman talks sex. For most of us, it's a subconscious feeling rather than an outspoken opinion and it's important to stay mindful of that. Would you take the breakup of your male friend as serious as that of your friends with other genders? Do you look the same way at women spitting and swearing in public?

Charly:

"I often get shit about my vulgar choice of words, when I'm swearing people tell me to speak like a lady, what does that even mean?"

Also, consider the way you describe people. Like adding an irrelevant “and she’s so pretty” when talking about a woman’s skill or creativity. Look for creative ways to describe people you don’t know. Instead of saying “that guy over there” say; “that dancer in the leather pants”. Even NS is doing it, having recently changed its message from “dames en heren” to “beste reizigers”.

Unlike NS, however, we can’t decide to re-record an automated message and be done with it. We have to practice, repeat and normalise. But it can be done, just look at “woke”, “mansplaining” and all the other slang words that easily made it into our vocabulary.

**How to address an email in 2020:**

Instead of dear sir/madam, write dear (insert name) team. Or you can forget about email and slide into those DM's, it's 2020 for crying out loud.



“Nicht heute,” it says tattooed on C’s arm, a mark of a club kid. An ex-girlfriend once asked about the tattoo. To which C said to have an instinctive link with free-spirited Berlin, despite its vast distance from C’s conventional hometown. C doesn’t listen to rules and listens to music instead, spending every weekend sweaty, shirtless and dancing at the club.

CHARLY

“Nicht heute,” it says tattooed on **her** arm, a mark of a club kid. An ex-girlfriend once asked about the tattoo. To which **she** said to have an instinctive link with free-spirited Berlin, despite its vast distance from **her** conventional hometown. **She** doesn’t listen to rules and listens to music instead, spending every weekend sweaty, shirtless and dancing at the club.



5. HOW TO DEAL WITH THE CUNTS

The frustrating thing about gaining awareness yourself is that you start noticing cunts everywhere. From disappointedly reading sexist pieces in your favourite newspaper to being called a “crazy bitch” after angrily confronting some catcallers. The idea of having to adapt our language is often met with anger, labelled as too dramatic or seen as an attack on our freedom of speech. Which proves how both the convenience and power of mainly cis white men seems to be more important than the equality of everyone else.

We acknowledge this is a sensitive and nuanced topic. Every battle is different and who are we to tell you how to fight them? It seemed naive, however, to write a book about challenging the norm without acknowledging that you'll get shit for doing so, you'll even get shit for not being the norm. So how do you deal with the cunts?

Media

Advertisements, magazines and newspapers are some of the biggest perpetrators of gendered language. If you notice a gendered message in the media, you can start by patting yourself on the back, as this requires a solid amount of awareness. Congratulations, you are now woke! Unfortunately, the internet is a deep, dark k-hole filled with alt-right forums and heteronormative girl tips on how to please your man. When you find yourself in such a hole, it helps to be selective. Pick your battles, pick your media outlets.

HEY pussy!

Catcallers

A highly relatable situation for anyone who reads as female, are catcallers. Their harassing comments can leave you feeling frustrated or utterly powerless. Many of us learned to ignore them “it’s a compliment” and “boys will be boys” were frequently uttered arguments. But ignoring is something people are no longer comfortable with. So what can you do? For starters, it’s good to know that catcalling has little to do with acquiring dates, or even sex. You can just send dick pics for that right? Sociolinguists argue that instead, it’s meant as an affirmation of the catcallers masculinity, which is – traditionally – defined by a man’s authority over and attraction towards a woman. That’s why, if it feels safe, confronting your catcallers is the way to go. This way you reclaim your position as a powerful human being rather than a sexual object. You can express your compassion for their fragile ego’s, tell them “no thank you” or simply to fuck off.



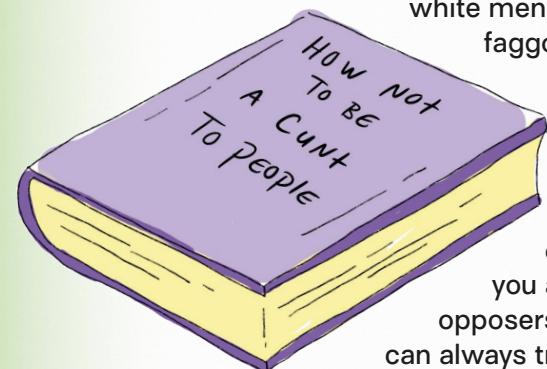
Charly:

“I always say: At least introduce yourself before we get so intimate, what’s your name?”

CONGRATULATIONS!

Everyone else

The breakdown of the gender binary terrifies some people. Partially because of much of their identity is based on societal norms and partially because the breakdown of this particular binary proves that other binaries (rich vs poor, caucasian vs people of colour, oppression vs repression) can be broken down as well, which questions the power of certain people. Fear turns into anger and anger turns into



white men calling every unfamiliar person a faggot. Sadly, this insight doesn't help you much when you're dealing with these comments every day, there's little we can say that will. Just remember that you are yourself, regardless of norms, which already makes you a million times happier than your opposers. If that doesn't offer comfort, you can always try to hit them with this book.

You are now...



GLOSSARY

ALT-RIGHT:

Alternative right-wing political advocates and followers, usually spending most of their day on Reddit

BINARY / NON-BINARY:

Black and white / everything in-between

BIOLOGICAL SEX:

Anatomy, which can be changed by operations or taking hormones

BUTCH:

A label for masculine gender expression

CATCALLING:

Something some guys with fragile ego's do to affirm their masculinity

CUNT:

A word which meaning differs per context, either female genitals, an insult or just a casual way to greet your friends, reappropriate as you wish.

CISGENDER:

Someone whose gender identity matches their biological sex

FEMME:

A label for feminine gender expression

GENDER:

A hot and complex topic, see chapter 1

GENDER EXPRESSION:

The way you express yourself, for example through your wardrobe or body language

GENDER IDENTITY:

How you identify, gender-wise

JUDITH BUTLER:

A very famous scholar who wrote a lot of great yet complex books on gender studies

PATRIARCHY:

Cunts who mistakenly believe men should hold all power

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

Who you are attracted to, sexually. Can be similar or different from romantic orientation

TRANSGENDER:

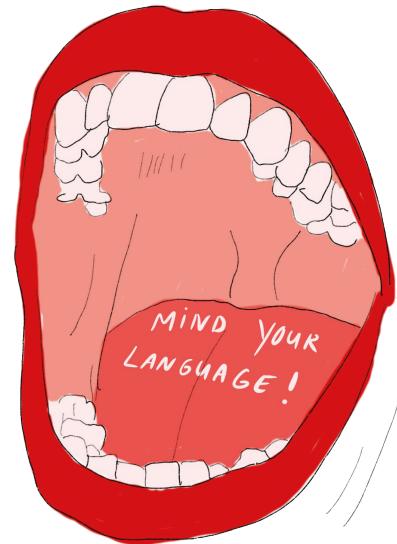
Someone whose gender identity doesn't match their biological sex

WOMXN:

A more inclusive term for women sometimes used by feminists

WOKÉ:

What you are after reading this book



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a-wake.world
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