

THINKING TRANSGENDER

Transgender
Gender
Gender identity
Trans*
Gender non-conforming
Transman
Transwoman
Cis-gender
Gender expression
Access
Privilege
Coming out
Violence
Gender pronouns
Women
Gender-based violence
Sexual orientation
Sex

- ✓ 1. To help learners understand the challenges faced by transgender people.
- ✓ 2. For learners to identify gendered activities in their daily lives.

- 🕒 2 hours [exercise can be broken up into 2 sessions according to Part 1 and Part 2.]
- ★ Board and Markers

PROCEDURE

PART 1

- 1 Ask learners to write a detailed description of everything that they did the previous day or that they do in a typical day. They should record all activities from the time of waking up in the morning until going to bed, and make a note of everyone they spoke to, and what they spoke about.
- 2 After learners have written their actual or typical daily routine, ask them to read back through their story and circle, underline, or highlight every time their **gender** was relevant. This includes things such as: using the bathroom, getting dressed, talking about partners and relationships with their friends, playing on a single-gender sports team, referring to a friend as 'she' or 'he', or hearing someone talk about them.
- 3 Next, ask learners to re-write their routines by removing all references to their gender so that someone reading their reflection would not know what gender they are. That is, **gender identities** and activities should be avoided altogether so as not to expose the writer's gender. This includes activities such as going to the bathroom, playing on gendered sports teams, or having the teacher refer to the person as a specific gender.
- 4 Now ask learners to reflect on their two stories. Specifically ask them:
 - a. How difficult was it to write down your daily routine?
 - b. How hard was it to do this without referring to your gender?
- 5 Write the word **Transgender** on the board and ask learners if they know what the word means. Write the following definition from the GLOSSARY on the board:

TRANSGENDER: All people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the social expectations or norms for the (biological) sex they were born with.

In order to explain the concept further, refer to other terms in the **Glossary** such as: **trans***, **gender non-conforming**, **transman**, **transwoman**, **cis-gender**, **gender identity**, **gender expression**, **access**, and **privilege**.

Explain to the class that many transgender youth choose not to **come out** (not to tell others) because of fear of rejection by family and/or friends, humiliation or **violence**. By trying to conceal their **gender** when writing down their daily routines, learners may get some small sense of the difficulties that transgender youth face daily.
- 6 Ask learners how **gender** affects experiences in daily life. For example, ask learners how they are treated in certain classes. How much confidence would it take for a girl to admit she loves rugby if all her peers tease her and tell her that she should play netball? How about a boy whose favourite subject is English literature? Can you think of times in your life when your gender felt like it didn't quite fit, or when it constrained you? For example, when you were told you couldn't do something because of your gender.

PART 2

Come together as a class and 'brainstorm' the typical daily activities of a high school learner. Write a list of these activities on the board.

- 1 The following activities could be included:

- Waking up and getting dressed for the day.
- Eating breakfast
- Walking to school
- Attending classes, such as English, Science, Maths, Physical Education
- Going to the bathroom
- Eating lunch with friends
- After school, playing soccer or some other sport
- Hanging out with friends
- Doing homework
- Eating dinner with family
- Watching TV or going online before bed

- 2 Have learners consider all the different ways in which gender affects these typical daily activities. Specifically, ask the group to consider how a **transgender** person would perform these activities. Discuss:
 - a. What does a transgender person need to consider when using public bathrooms? How about someone who is **cis-gendered** (non-transgender)? Have you ever seen a gender-neutral bathroom? How about a gender-neutral change room at a gym, public swimming pool or soccer club?
 - b. When getting dressed in the morning, what thoughts may a transgender person have about performing their gender identity? If a **transwoman** wants to wear a dress, do you think she would be made fun of if society sees only her male physical characteristics? Do you think it could jeopardise her safety?

If a transgender teen loves playing soccer, but a school only has a boys team, how might this be a challenge? What could the school do to accommodate and respect the person's gender identity rather than their sex characteristics?
 - c. How might a closeted **transman** feel if his teacher and peers always refer to him as 'she' because he was born with larger breasts and feminine physical attributes? How may this affect the conversations that he has with his friends about things such as sex and dating? How about the conversations he has at dinner with his family? What if a transgender person knows that they will be kicked out of their home or community for revealing their gender identity?

d. What messages might a transgender person see while watching TV or going online every day? Are transgender identities represented on TV shows or in popular movies and songs?

e. Are **cis-gender** (non-transgender) people given privileges that transgender people do not have access to? If certain people have **privileges** and **access** to certain activities simply because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, what does that say about society?

g. Do you think that your school and community are welcoming to people who are transgender or **gender non-conforming**? Why or why not?

h. In which daily situations would a transgender person find it most difficult to hide their gender identity? Why? How might a transgender person feel when confronting these struggles every day, while their peers take the same activities for granted?

i. How would you feel if your friend or classmate asked you to refer to them as 'she' rather than 'he' (which is what you assumed they would be called based on their physical characteristics)?

- 3** To wrap up, explain to learners that it is very important to be aware of varying gender identities. Learners can use gender-neutral terms such as "partner" instead of "boyfriend" or "girlfriend." They can also ask people what **gender pronouns** (such as he or she) they prefer to use in order to avoid labelling someone inaccurately.

Please provide learners with the following resources for transgender people in South Africa:

<http://www.genderdynamix.org.za/>

(This is the only organisation in South Africa aimed specifically towards helping transgender individuals. They provide resources, information, and support.)

<http://www.genderdynamix.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/GDX-Safer-Sex-Bklt-Eng.pdf>

(A link to a safer-sex guide for transgender individuals which offers comprehensive information related to preventing STIs and HIV)

TEACHER TIPS

General

Gender identity affects almost every social activity. If learners are having trouble identifying activities that are gendered, it may be useful to give examples of very basic activities to illustrate how frequently gender identity comes up throughout a day. It is important to emphasise that most people do not question gender stereotypes, but people who do not conform to traditional gender identities or roles are constantly reminded of it throughout their daily activities.

Making the Link with Gender & Violence

Learners should consider the implications of a **transgender** person revealing their **gender identity**. Many transgender people face isolation from their communities, and many face violence as well. Transgender people challenge the traditional roles of what it means to be a man or a **woman**, and therefore are often the targets of **gender-based violence**. They are subject to stigmatisation, harassment and sexual violence by families, communities and the police, which increases their risk for contracting HIV, developing mental health issues, and living in poverty.

Assessment Ideas

Depending on how much these were discussed in class or if learners have access to the **Glossary**, learners can be quizzed on the following terms: **transgender**, **trans***, **gender non-conforming**, **transman**, **transwoman**, **cis-gender**, **gender identity**, **gender expression**, **access**, and **privilege**.

Alternatively, learners can write a response explaining what each of these terms means, and how someone's gender identity relates to the privileges they have access to in their daily routines. Learners should provide specific examples of how gender identity affects the way someone is treated; their responses should focus on empathising with someone who does not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

Variation

'Being Closeted for a Day'

- Suggest to learners that they go an entire day without revealing their **gender** to anyone. This means not revealing gendered activities or interests, avoiding gendered washrooms, change rooms and other spaces (or trying to use them unseen).
- At the end of the day, ask learners to write a reflection that answers the following questions:
 - How did it feel to be secretive and constantly aware of your **gender**?
 - When did you find it most difficult to avoid disclosing your gender?
 - Did anyone question you or look at you strangely in those situations?
 - What did you learn from this exercise?

