

Three Theories of Gender

1.

Gender Essentialism

According to this theory of gender:

-> Nature provided humanity with two sexes (male and female), determined by our external and internal genitalia. This is a binary rooted in biology/nature.

-> Our biological make-up is essentially linked to our gender identity/ expression/role (for example: a woman, who has a vagina and breasts, uterus, xx chromosomes, and an appropriately female hormone balance, will automatically be more emotional than most men, have a tendency toward motherhood and nurturing/caring professions, etc. simply because biology dictates it).

-> "Gender" can be used interchangeably with "sex" because both are rooted in nature, and essentially linked

-> Any gender expression not usually linked with the appropriate biological make-up would then be considered "abnormal" or "unnatural"

2.

Sex - Gender - Sexual Orientation Triangle

According to this theory of gender, sex, gender, and sexual orientation are three separate components of our sexual identities. Each one of us has a sex, a gender, and a sexual orientation, and the combinations of these three components are endless. Our sexual identities, combining these three components, are as unique as our fingerprints.

SEX = body/biology

Characteristics: chromosomes, hormones, external and internal reproductive organs and body parts (breasts, penis, ovaries, etc.)

Options: male, female, intersex

NOTE: intersex is a word describing a category encompassing many types of bodies. It is not a 3rd sex.

GENDER = culture

- Gender Identity: internal sense of who we are in terms of gender
- Gender Expression: the way we communicate our gender identity to the world (clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, etc.)
- Gender Role: set of expectations society places on us regarding how we interact with others in society (family roles, occupations, etc.)

Options: masculine/man, feminine/woman, transgender

NOTE: transgender is a word describing a category encompassing many different gender identities. It is not a 3rd gender.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION = relationship/attraction

Our sexual orientation describes the relationship between who we are (our own gender identity) and who we are attracted to (others' gender identities).

Options: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, pansexual, omniseual, MSM, WSW, same-gender loving, and countless others.

3.

Postmodern Theories of Gender

According to theorists including Judith Butler, Kate Bornstein, and Riki Ann Wilchins:

SEX is an act, i.e. intercourse

GENDER = BODY/BIOLOGY + CULTURE

Therefore:

The categorization of bodies into two sexes is just as socially constructed as the categorization of all other cultural, behavioral, psychological characteristics into two genders.

TRANSGENDER: anyone for whom their gender identity, expression, and/or role doesn't match up with the sex they were assigned at birth.