

Lesson Plan – Gender Variance

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Overview

The objective of this lesson plan is to teach students about the diversity of human sex and gender – both in terms of physically observable variations outside of a simple “Male – Female” model, and in terms of the many ways in which human beings experience and express their identities through concepts of “maleness” and “femaleness”. This knowledge then becomes the basis for discovering and understanding the way in which the lives of such people are allowed or disallowed by different cultures.

Teaching Goals

Students are expected to discover and learn that:

- ❖ Sex and Gender Diversity is one of the last great secret taboos in our society
 - People are not always simply male or female
 - Sex and Gender are separate concepts from each other and both are distinct from sexual orientation
 - There are many different forms of variance
 - Intersex variations affect as many as one in every hundred people
 - Gender variance is quite commonplace too
- ❖ Different cultures treat such variations in different ways
 - Sex and Gender variance can be found in the histories of different civilisations, including ours
 - Some societies have many more gender “roles” than we do
 - Some cultures treat gender variance with reverence
 - Sex and Gender variance, like the role of women and the place of homosexual people, has been obscured in the recording of history by dominant majorities
- ❖ All sex and gender variant people have suffered badly in the past within the Western World, especially in the second half of the 20th Century
 - Through misrepresentation in films, books and newspaper reports
 - Through the suppression of knowledge to understand the real lives of sex and gender variant people
 - Through direct discrimination and lack of legal protection
 - Through actual violence

Age Group

This teaching material is primarily designed for pupils aged 15 and above. The depth to which some aspects may be explored will depend on prior teaching in areas such as human biology, sexuality, anthropology, politics and history

Recommended Resources

Background Reading

The Transgender Debate – The Crisis Surrounding Gender Identities

Dr Stephen Whittle, South Street Press, (2000). ISBN 1 902932 16 1. (66pp £3.50)

An ideal introduction and pocket reference to most of the topics relating to gender variance in this lesson plan. Also contains a more extensive further reading list.

Sexing the Body : Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality

Anne Fausto-Sterling, Basic Books (2000) ISBN 0 465077 13 7 (473pp £15.39)

An accessible book that lays out the historical assumptions about sex and gender and subjects them to insightful critique. "Sexing the Body" reveals the important role science has played in reinforcing social consensus on the nature of sexuality and effectively erasing sexually ambiguous bodies from society – Amazon Reviewer

Note that there is a very rich and varied literature on transsexual, transgender and intersex topics, ranging from the purely autobiographical through to specialist textbooks in the fields of law, medicine and sociology. There are also several books in-between (like the examples above), which serve as an accessible introduction to the interdisciplinary nature of gender issues.

See <http://www.pfc.org.uk/amazon/theory.htm> for one of many reading collections.

Key Internet Sites

Press for Change www.pfc.org.uk – Leading UK lobby for the social and legal recognition of transsexual people. The site contains over 850 resource pages including transcripts of groundbreaking legal rulings, extracts from Hansard on the Gender Recognition Act, guidance on employment rights for trans people and profiles of the leading campaigners in this field. The site includes a powerful search engine, a detailed index and is richly hyperlinked to provide a guided reading experience for researchers of all ages. A separate archive at <http://www.pfc.org.uk/pfclists/news-arc/index.htm> charts the social progress of trans people around the world over the last decade.

Intersex Society of North America www.isna.org – Highly respected organisation supporting and campaigning on behalf of people with Intersex bodies. Includes many online resources and book reviews

Note that this is another area where there is a large variety of choice. Sites dealing with support and advocacy for people with physical intersex conditions are most easily reached via the “ISNA” site above.

There are four types of site dealing with trans issues in some shape or form: Nowadays there are many sites offering support and community (often hosting electronic discussion boards); then there are those providing political advocacy, research and background. A third category is personal sites and “blogs”; many of these are very creative and informative and represent a significant desire on the part of many transsexual / transgender people to share and explain their experiences. Unfortunately the internet also plays host to a fourth category of web site too – those catering for the erotic interest which some people have in highly sexualised images and exploitation of transsexual people – usually referred-to on those sites as “She Males”. Trans people have made significant advances over the last few years in trying to reduce the risk of this kind of material coming up in normal web searches; however, teachers should be aware of this risk when preparing pupils to research the topic on the internet and could include a discussion of the implications into their overall handling of the topic.

Popular Cultural References

Note that all of these references have been tested as easily researchable via Google

Big Brother – Real life contestant Nadia Almada (Channel 4 / Endemol TV)

Eurovision Song Contest – Real life contestant Dana International

Fascinating Aida – Female entertainment trio in which one member is famously transsexual

Paddington Green – Real life fly on the wall documentary subject Jackie McAuliffe (BBC)

Professional Golf – Mianne Bagger is a transsexual woman who has recently won the right to compete alongside other women in professional competition

Grayson Perry – Turner Prize-winning artist who is “out” about his transvestism

Eddie Izzard – Comedian whose transvestism is a part of his act. How does Eddie compare with the earlier phenomenon of Boy George?

Ladyboys of Bangkok – Entertainment drawing on the substantial gender-crossing culture in Thailand and some other far-eastern cultures

Boys Don’t Cry – 1999 film directed by Kimberley Peirce, which won an Oscar for Hilary Swank portraying the true life story of Brandon Teena, a young trans man murdered in 1993

Different for Girls – 1996 film directed by Richard Spence, described by some as the first transgender love story. This is a film that benefited from having a real transsexual woman as script, casting and production consultant.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch – 2001 film directed by John Cameron Mitchell depicting a transsexual punk rocker

Coronation Street – Fictional character of Hayley Cropper (Granada TV)

For Your Eyes Only – 1981 “Bond Film” including the trans model Caroline Cossey

Silence of the Lambs – 1991 Film based on Thomas Harris novel, directed by Jonathan Demme with a central character presented as having gender issues

The Crying Game – 1992 Film Directed by Neil Jordan portraying gender variant central character in a problematic manner

Psycho – 1960 Film directed by Alfred Hitchcock with central character portraying transvestite people as murderously psychotic

Tootsie – 1982 Film directed by Sydney Pollack utilising a common dramatic theme of people passing themselves as members of the opposite sex for “practical” reasons (rather than as an expression of their identity). A similar theme exists in many other films such as “Some Like It Hot” and “Mrs Doubtfire”)

This is not a comprehensive list; however, it could be used as a starting point for exploring the fascination which people have with the idea of gender-crossing – whether through media attention directed at living examples or through a long tradition of gender-crossing themes in drama and literature.

Pupils could consider the place of cross-gender disguises in the works of Shakespeare through to modern playwrights and screenplay writers. Pupils might also examine the differences between fictional representations and those of real gender variant people.

Note that there are few (if any) popular cultural examples of intersex people or communities such as the Indian Kothi and Hijra. Note also that cultural examples of crossdressing for a practical purpose (the “Tootsie” genre) or in a problematic way (the “Psycho” genre) dominates in films produced prior to the late 1990’s.

Documentaries

Make me a Man – Directed by Katie Buchanan for Channel 4 and first broadcast in July 2002 this two part documentary follows the lives of four transsexual men at different stages in their life trajectories

Dr Money And The Boy With No Penis – The full life story of David Reimer, the boy famously brought up as a girl on the instructions of the psychologist John Money. BBC Horizon (Nov 2004). Note that a full transcript of this programme is available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/horizon/dr_money_trans.shtml

Note that the number of documentaries in this area has increased considerably since the mid-1990's. Prior to that time television and radio documentaries were quite rare – the main example from before that period being the trilogy of films by the BBC entitled “George and Julia”. The first example above is worthy of note because it is one of the few documentaries to have really looked at transsexual MEN. The second film is a good source of discussion material concerning the practice of assigning gender to babies with ambiguous or damaged genitalia to a particular sex, without any prospect of their consent.

Pupils could debate and explore what the strongly expressed maleness of David Reimer teaches us about the innateness of gender; the ethics of assigning sex to babies; and how or why transsexual men generally come to be forgotten when thinking about transsexuality.

Historical Figures to Research

The lives of all these people are well-documented and easy to research via internet searches

April Ashley – Transsexual woman whose famous divorce case at the end of the 1960's created a legal precedent which defined trans people in terms of their birth sex for more than a third of a century.

Jan Morris – Travel writer and author, whose 1972 autobiography, “Conundrum”, became an early classic of the genre

Christine Jorgensen – Former US “GI” whose transition from male to female in 1953 captured the attention of the world's press and established many of the journalistic principles still used in reporting the lives of transsexual people today

Stanislawa Walasiewicz (aka Stella Walsh) – Polish American athlete who won medals as a competitor in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. In 1980 she was killed as an innocent bystander in an armed robbery. An autopsy showed that her body was in fact intersex, with externally female genitals, but with testicles as well.

Lilly Elbe – Danish artist who underwent the world's very first gender reassignment surgery in Germany in 1930.

Billy Tipton – a Jazz musician, Billy was born female but from the age of 19, in the year 1933, lived as a man, marrying five women, adopting and fathering three boys. The first wife knew of his transgender status... the rest did not. Billy's life story is told in the book, “Suits Me” by Diane Wood Middlebrook

Dr James Barry – respected British army surgeon, a contemporary of Florence Nightingale, joined the army as a young man 1813 but was discovered 40 years later after death to be anatomically female. James Barry's life was claimed for decades as a feminist example of women needing to go to extraordinary lengths to pursue a career. Nowadays his life story is being reinterpreted more accurately as that of a 19th Century trans man.

Joan of Arc – was Joan a trans man too?

The Chevalier d'Eon – (1728-1810) – Perhaps the most famous cross-dresser in history. Would the Chevalier's life be nowadays classified as a classic example of a trans woman?

Anthropological References

The following section is extracted directly from “The Transgender Debate” (Whittle, SW.) See Recommended Resources for more details of this useful pocket reference.

Anthropologists first began to take note of cross-living behaviour amongst various peoples in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Waldemar Bogoras (in *The Spirit and the Flesh; Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* by W.L. Williams, Boston, Beacon Press, 1988) lived amongst the Chukchi of Siberia from 1890 to 1908. He describes seven gender categories in addition to the categories woman and man – used by the Chukchi. Though individual Chukchi could choose to ‘change sex’ there were other genders which Chukchi could take up which did not involve a change from one sex to another, but rather from one gender to another. Most noticeably they could choose not to stay in their original gender, but they did not necessarily become of the opposite gender as we understand it. One example is that of the yirka-la ul. S/he was anatomically male but would arrange his/her hair as if s/he was a woman, associate in the life of women in the tribe, and usually marry a man. The yirka-la ul was respected as a shaman for his/her healing and spiritual powers. The husband of a yirka-la ul would have high status amongst their people because of his marriage to a shaman, but in the home he would take a secondary role to the spirit husband of the yirka-la ul.

Similar categories were recognised in other groupings such as the Koryak and Kamchadel in Siberia. The practice was also found by Langsdorff (as mentioned in *Voyages and Travels*, 1814) to be common across the Bering Straits in Alaska amongst, among others, the Aleuts and the Kodiak Island Eskimos (Ellis, 1948).

A number of North American tribal Indian groups have recorded examples of cross-gender living, amongst which the institution of the Bedarche has been well documented. The North American concept of the Bedarche includes many different types of gender that existed in these native societies, but it is difficult for those of us who live in a world of binary gender roles to fully grasp their meaning. However in Western European modernist terms it could be said that the Bedarches did include some transgendered individuals.

Similarly, in Polynesian societies there are records of the Mahu, Fa’aFine and Wakawawine, who like the North Americans manifested a range of cross-living or transgendered behaviour. Also, amongst the various ethnic groups that inhabit Northern Albania and the Western Balkans there are still being reported cases of the ‘sworn virgin’. The sworn virgin is an anatomical female who adopts the role, dress and behaviour of a man, and who is accorded the privileges and status which are afforded to men in their societies.

It must be noted that cross-gender living is not necessarily synonymous with a desire to ‘change sex’ but is often closely related. It can be argued that if surgery and hormone treatment had been available to people who historically had led cross-gender lives, then they might have chosen to refer to themselves as transsexual, or if not that, at least use some of the facilities that are now available to transsexual people. Examples of groups who have done this are the Hijari of Northern India and the She-males of Singapore and Thailand

See also “The Third Gender” (Oaxaca Times) :

<http://www.pfc.org.uk/pfclists/news-arc/2004q2/msg00071.htm>

Legislative References

The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999

<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si1999/19991102.htm>

The Gender Recognition Act 2004

<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040007.htm>

These two pieces of Parliamentary legislation provide the framework for the current employment, privacy, marriage and non-discrimination rights of transsexual people in the UK.

Recommended Teaching Approach

Gender variance is a much larger subject than many at first imagine. The resources list contained in this document contains enough material on its own to act as the basis for many themed lessons in history, sociology, biology and media studies. Whilst the subject *can* be taught in a lecturing style, the topic involves challenging notions about the apparently cut and dried nature of sex and gendered identity and is perhaps therefore best introduced to students by means of guided discussion and group discovery.

The following script contains more than enough material for a double period or more, plus a homework or essay assignment. Teachers may find that the sections are best used as a menu from which to pick out a selection of areas to cover in whatever time is actually available.

The script is organised as a series of statements or questions to class, each accompanied by notes containing more substance and the kinds of responses which may be anticipated from class debate.

	<u>Teacher Script</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1.	<p>What defines sex?</p> <p>Genitals?</p> <p>Gonads (internal sex organs)?</p> <p>Chromosomes?</p> <p>A sense of being a man or a woman?</p>	<p>This introductory session distinguishes between biological sex and the concepts of social gender role and personal gender identity</p> <p>These are the four ways in which sex can be defined in medicine, law and social interactions. For most people these are completely congruent so that we tend never to question what we are, how we come to be that way or whether we are happy with the outcome.</p> <p>Issues arise when, for whatever reason, one or more of these factors are not in line with one-another.</p> <p>Gender variance is all about those people who, for whatever reason, don't find things quite so simple and unquestionable</p>
2.	<p>Class exercise – What defines sex on a day to day basis?</p> <p>Imagine someone you know well, but not intimately. E.g. A close friend, a neighbour – the head teacher!</p> <p>Is that person a man or a woman? How do we know that? Have you seen their genitals? Can you be sure they have the genitals you assume?</p> <p>Genitals, internal sex organs and chromosomes help to define sex if you are a doctor or a biologist. Do the rest of us really use these criteria or do we rely on other cues? (E.g. Dress and behaviour).</p> <p>Are we confused when sexing a woman in trousers? What about a man in a skirt?</p> <p>When do we actually need to be sure of the genitals a person has?</p>	

	<u>Teacher Script</u>	<u>Comments</u>
3.	<p>Are Gender Roles Fixed?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Childbearing (b) Child rearing (c) Wearing trousers (d) Preparing meals (e) Going out to work (f) Cleaning the toilet (g) Car maintenance (h) Fighting (i) Getting drunk with mates 	<p>All societies have different roles for each sex. Some aspects may be physically defined (e.g. childbearing) but others are more arbitrarily assigned (e.g. child <i>rearing</i>).</p> <p>By following a role, people are able to advertise what sex they are to others – in the absence of being able to show their genitals or secondary sex characteristics</p> <p>Consider the examples given. How many of these roles or activities are fixed by nature? How many have remained unchanged since the 1950’s. How many may be different in other cultures?</p> <p>The conclusion is that although we seem to need to have gendered roles for people and rely on some of them to have a sense of being a proper member of one of two sexes, they are mostly arbitrary – created according to how society needs to divide responsibilities between people.</p>
4.	<p>Class Exercise – Discussing Gender Roles</p> <p>Are certain behaviours really innate or culturally defined? Are women different to men? Are those differences the same in (say) London, Tokyo, Calcutta or Tehran?</p> <p>What do people do in each of those places to help others immediately know what sex they are? Why is that culturally important – even in societies which claim to be eliminating gender inequality? How would you feel about being consistently identified and treated as the opposite sex?</p> <p>What happens to people who don’t conform to the appropriate roles? In what ways might the rules be broken? Are some transgressions viewed as more serious than others? (e.g. Men cross-dressing vs women wearing clothes made for men). Why are people more upset by some transgressions than by others?</p>	
5.	<p>How do we identify which gender role to follow?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) What our genitals tell us (b) What other people tell us (c) What we feel intuitively <p>But also consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (d) Children may not learn about genital differences till older (e) Physical factors we don’t know (e) What if our genitals are ambiguous? (f) What if our feelings are ambiguous? 	<p>How do we know whether we are men or women?</p> <p>We are told by our parents and siblings. If we have seen others naked and know about body differences then that will help us deduce our sex too.</p> <p>Would you feel as comfortable being the opposite sex?</p> <p>Consider the story of David Reimer – born a boy, raised as a girl. He was told he was a girl and his body looked like a girl’s too – yet it didn’t feel right. The cues were so strong that he wouldn’t have been able to understand the feelings coming from inside – the feelings that differentiate boys and girls psychologically. He could only make sense of that when his history was revealed.</p> <p>Gender identity is the name given to that intuitive sense we have of “belonging” to one sex or the other.</p> <p>External genitals are the “easy” way of sexing most of us. They are usually a safe guide because the way we look on the outside usually matches the way we feel on the inside.</p> <p>Gender Identity becomes more important if everything isn’t in sync though.</p>

	<u>Teacher Script</u>	<u>Comments</u>
6.	<p>Class Exercise – In what ways might the different indications get out of step?</p> <p>Boys and men normally have an XY chromosome pair whereas girls and women have XX. Sometimes these ‘rules’ can be turned on their heads – producing boys with XX and girls with XY. This can be completely invisible and may only be discovered in a chromosome test, of the sort they used to perform on athletes.</p> <p><i>If you found you had the “wrong” set of chromosomes, would that change whether you felt yourself to be a man or a woman? Should it change someone else’s opinion?</i></p> <p>People can also have many different “in-between” chromosome variations such as XXY, XXYY, XO. Some of these can mean that people are less stereotypically built as men or women – they might develop as very tall women, they may fail to develop secondary characteristics, or they may be infertile.</p> <p><i>If you were one of these people, what would you base your sense of self upon? Would you rely on your genital sex, the way you look overall, or the way you feel inside?</i></p> <p>People can be born with ambiguous external genitalia, or differences between their external or internal construction.</p> <p><i>If you had a child like this and were able to tell at birth, which way would you raise them? Would it be possible to raise a child without assigning them a definite sex?</i></p> <p><i>If you were that child, how might you feel about having your sex chosen by parents and doctors? Supposing you grew up to feel differently inside?</i></p> <p>These are all ways in which people can be born with so-called “Intersex” conditions. There are more than 70 different kinds of Intersex condition – some are obvious and some are not. Intersex conditions affect more than 1 in 100 children born. That means there may be several in this school / college.</p> <p><i>Why is the topic treated with such secrecy?</i></p> <p>Are there any other ways in which sex characteristics might be inconsistent? Could someone have apparently consistent physical attributes and yet simply feel uncomfortable in the same sort of way that David Reimer did?</p> <p>Trans People are those who feel uncomfortable about the gender role they are expected to comply with even though everything about them appears to be <i>physically</i> consistent with that sex.</p>	
7.	<p>When is a woman not a woman?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) A woman who is infertile (b) A woman who looks ‘manly’ (c) A woman with facial hair <p>When is a man not a man?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (d) A man who is infertile (e) A man who has a very small penis (f) A man whose penis is lost (g) A man with breasts 	<p>Quite apart from the Intersex conditions described above, there are many people who don’t fully comply with the definitions we often use to characterise men and women.</p> <p>Is a woman a woman if she can’t conceive or has had a hysterectomy?</p> <p>Many adult women develop facial hair as they grow older; some medical conditions may make this more pronounced.</p> <p>Many soldiers have their genitals wounded or amputated altogether through bullet or shrapnel wounds. Testicles may have to be removed for medical reasons.</p> <p>Is a man a man if he doesn’t have an erectile penis?</p> <p>Gynaecomastia is a very common condition in which boys or men develop noticeably large breasts.</p> <p>All these things happen to lots of ordinary people; therefore our understanding of sex and gender has to be flexible enough to accept such realities and still be respectful to the individual.</p>

	<u>Teacher Script</u>	<u>Comments</u>
8.	<p>Class Exercise – Do we need more than two gender roles or none at all?</p> <p>We started with the assumption that people are either male or female. We’ve seen that in many ways that isn’t entirely true. Lots of people are physically somewhere in between two extremes for a huge variety of different reasons.</p> <p>We’ve also seen that gender roles tend to reflect our assumptions about the binary nature of sex, but that the things allocated to one role or another can often be quite arbitrary – they vary between cultures and also within individual cultures over time.</p> <p><i>Should we have more gender roles? Would that enable people to feel as though they “fit” better?</i></p> <p><i>How would our society look if we made it easier for some boys to take on what we currently regard as feminine roles and vice versa for girls?</i></p>	
9.	<p>Is this just a Western phenomenon?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Chukchi of Siberia (b) Berdache (North America) (c) Polynesian Mahu, Fa’a Fine & Wakawawine (d) Hijra of India (e) Muxe of Oaxaca 	<p>Some cultures have recognised and revered the existence of multiple genders for as long as they can remember</p> <p>The “Chukchi” of Siberia have no fewer than seven genders for people – though, of course, they are still all biologically male or female or intersexed variations of these.</p> <p>Multiple genders like these are not primarily about accommodating physical variations, but about the different ways people can feel inside.</p> <p>The closest we come in the west is to think about “effeminate men” or “butch women”. Neither of these are meant as respectful or socially approved descriptions though.</p> <p>Some of these cultural groups compare in many ways to the people whom we describe in the West as “transsexual” or “transgendered”. As western culture and medical technology has spread to some of these peoples, they see surgical gender change in much the same way, as a means to express how they feel about their gender role in bodies that match expectations.</p> <p>Could it ever work the other way? Could societies easily change to accept people performing roles that weren’t appropriate to their bodies?</p>
10.	<p>Is this just a modern phenomenon?</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Christine Jorgensen (b) Stella Walsh (c) Lilly Elbe (d) Billy Tipton (e) Dr James Barry (f) Chevalier d’Eon (g) Joan of Arc? 	<p>Just as we now know that gender variant people exist in many different cultures, they have also existed through history too.</p> <p><i>Why might it be difficult to find historical examples?</i></p> <p>(Histories get written by dominant cultures, terminology changes with the evolution of knowledge and options)</p> <p><i>Was Joan of Arc a transgendered man or a historical feminist heroine? Who claims historical figures?</i></p> <p><i>What may have happened to those with physically obvious gender ambiguity in past times?</i></p>

	<u>Teacher Script</u>	<u>Comments</u>
11.	<p>People who cross gender boundaries</p> <p>Consider:</p> <p>(a) Transsexual People</p> <p>(b) Transgender People</p> <p>(c) Transvestite Men</p> <p>(d) Drag Queens</p>	<p>All of these are examples of people who cross gender role boundaries in western society, although they each have different kinds of explanations for why they do.</p> <p>Transsexual and Transgender People describe themselves in terms of an overpowering sense of inappropriateness in their original gender role, and find a sense of belonging and identification in another.</p> <p>Transgender has several different meanings. Some use it as a wide and inclusive term to embrace everything from transvestism to Transsexualism. Americans tend to use the term to denote people who adopt a permanent gender role (e.g. clothing, name, work, ID documents, etc..) but without the hormonal or surgical intervention sought by transsexual people to complete the change.</p> <p>Transvestite men strongly identify as the men they are, but enjoy cross-dressing for pleasure and relaxation.</p> <p>Drag is a specific cultural phenomenon within gay culture – often involving a severe parody of the female gender role</p> <p><i>Are non-operated (transgender) people more or less easy to understand and accept than surgically and hormonally altered (transsexual people)? What reservations might people have?</i></p> <p><i>Are there women who cross-dress in the way that transvestite men and drag queens do? Why are these less noticeable?</i></p>
12.	<p>Class Exercise – How does society accommodate or reject gender crossing?</p> <p>It is estimated that about 1 in 11,900 people born apparently male will grow up to be transsexual girls and women. Roughly half or a third as many girls grow up to be transsexual boys and men. These ratios between the sexes seem to vary in other countries though.</p> <p><i>To what extent might our different attitudes towards male and female gender transgressions account for different rates of crossing? Might there be less transsexual men because, as women, they have more flexibility to bend their role to fit?</i></p> <p><i>Is it a mental illness to be different in this way? Is it a mental illness to be gay or lesbian? (Hint: It once was considered that way). Are either phenomena an act of choice or the way someone is born?</i></p> <p><i>If someone is born in a way that will lead them to gender change, how should we think of them as men or women? Do we make that change in our own perception only when they've had "the op" (suppose they can't have surgery?). Do we make that change in how we see them when they start dressing and living as the new sex or when they start taking hormones? To what extent could we think of them as having been that sex all-along?</i></p> <p>Until the Gender Recognition Act in 2004, the law regarded people who change their sex as belonging to the sex they were registered at birth.</p> <p><i>What effects would that have:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>On the ability to marry?</i> - <i>On rights to claim pensions and benefits?</i> - <i>On buying things like insurance?</i> - <i>On maintaining privacy?</i> 	

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13.	<p>Class Exercise – Where does sexual orientation fit into this?</p> <p>Gender crossing challenges the definition of hetero and homo-sexuality. How is gender identity (how you feel) connected with sexual orientation (who you fancy)?</p> <p>Transsexual people don't change roles just to be able to have sex in a more acceptable way. Indeed some may <i>become</i> homosexual in other people's eyes as a result of their change. Some people may discover that their sexual orientation changes when they cross between genders (perhaps because they are then free to explore that aspect of themselves more freely); other people say that their interest in men or women (or both) did not change.</p> <p>Transsexual and physically Intersex people can have the same range of sexual orientation as anybody else. There are people who (after their role change) fancy the opposite sex; others are attracted to the same sex; some are bisexual; some say that they actually have no sexual attraction to anyone at all (asexual).</p> <p><i>How would you define 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' if someone isn't exactly male or female?</i></p> <p><i>Do you base it on the genitals they had or the chromosomes in their cells?</i></p> <p><i>What if those genitals are ambiguous?</i></p> <p><i>Do you base it on whether they have had surgery yet?</i></p> <p><i>Do you base it on their legal status?</i></p> <p><i>How do you classify a transsexual woman partnered with a straight man?</i></p> <p><i>Does the definition depend on whether the trans woman has had gender reassignment or not? Does a straight man "become" homosexual through seeing and fancying a transsexual woman? Would it depend whether he knows her medical background or not? Do we need a better definition of homosexual?</i></p>	

Suggested Individual or Group Research Exercises

These exercises are provided in addition to the teacher-facilitated class exercises above and involve the use of the Internet or other search tools to find out more about trans and intersex people's lives.

1. Research as many contemporary examples of transsexual people as you can find, either on the Internet or in films, TV and books. Consider to what extent your list may be biased in any way. (The majority of trans people do not advertise the fact – they are not “out”). What sort of jobs do people do? What ages are they? What can you discover about their family connections?
2. Find out as much as you can about the history of gender variant (trans and intersex) people in the western world and any examples you can find of people in different cultures. What do these examples have in common?
3. Discover what you can find about political activism among transsexual and intersex people in the UK and the rest of the world. What other kinds of (non-political) organisations are there too? Why would people organise in these ways. What do they seek to achieve? What advances have they made?
4. Imagine someone in your family or a friend told you that they were going to change their gender. Write an essay about the problems and challenges you think they would be likely to face and the ways in which people might be able to help them. What sort of things would they need to change? What prejudices would they encounter? Discuss what might change in their relationships with friends, family and colleagues.