



illustrating gender

text

Gerard Coll-Planas

illustrations

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translation

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For Ramon

For Kai and Sara

First edition in English 2016

Translation from Catalan Pau I. Crego Walters

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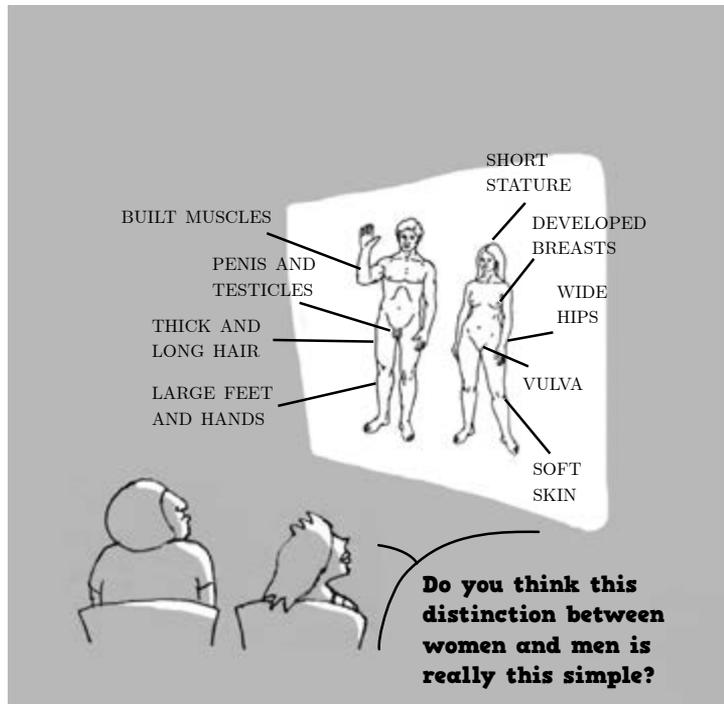
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1. Sex and gender

Let's begin by distinguishing between two concepts about which there may be some confusion: sex and gender.

Sex distinguishes us as female or male based on our bodies' biological characteristics: internal and external genital organs, secondary sex characteristics, chromosomes and hormones.

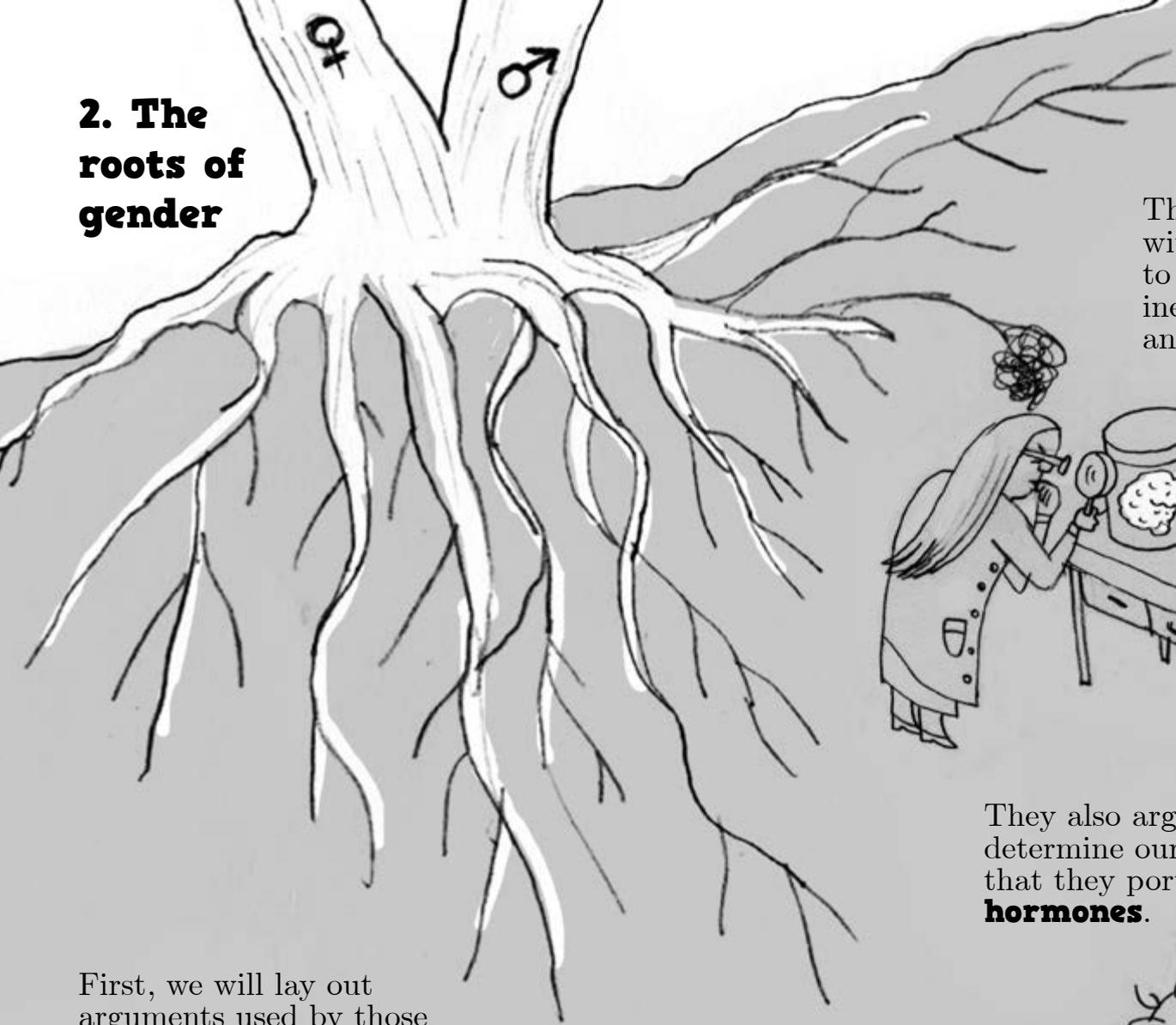
Gender, however, designates the roles that are socially assigned to people based on their sex.



Exactly, it's more complicated than that... this is what we will try to illustrate in the following pages...

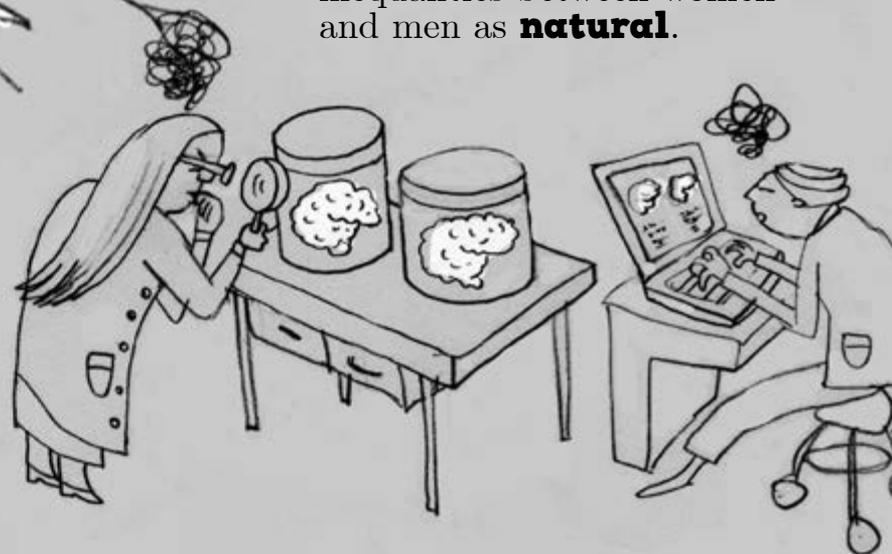


2. The roots of gender

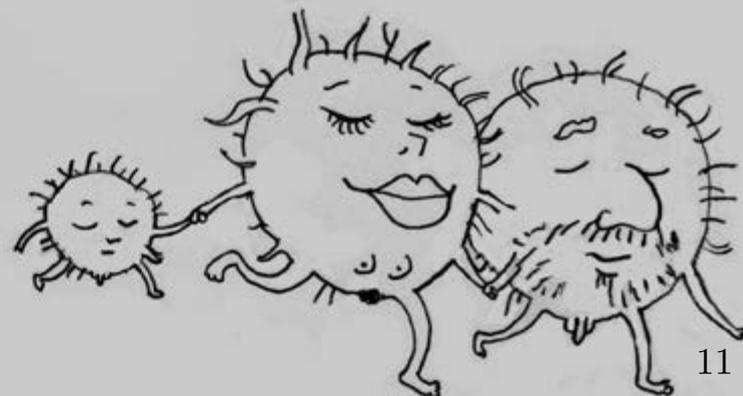


First, we will lay out arguments used by those who assert that our gender identity is determined by biological factors, meaning they believe sex determines gender.

These people are obsessed with finding brain variations to justify the differences and inequalities between women and men as **natural**.

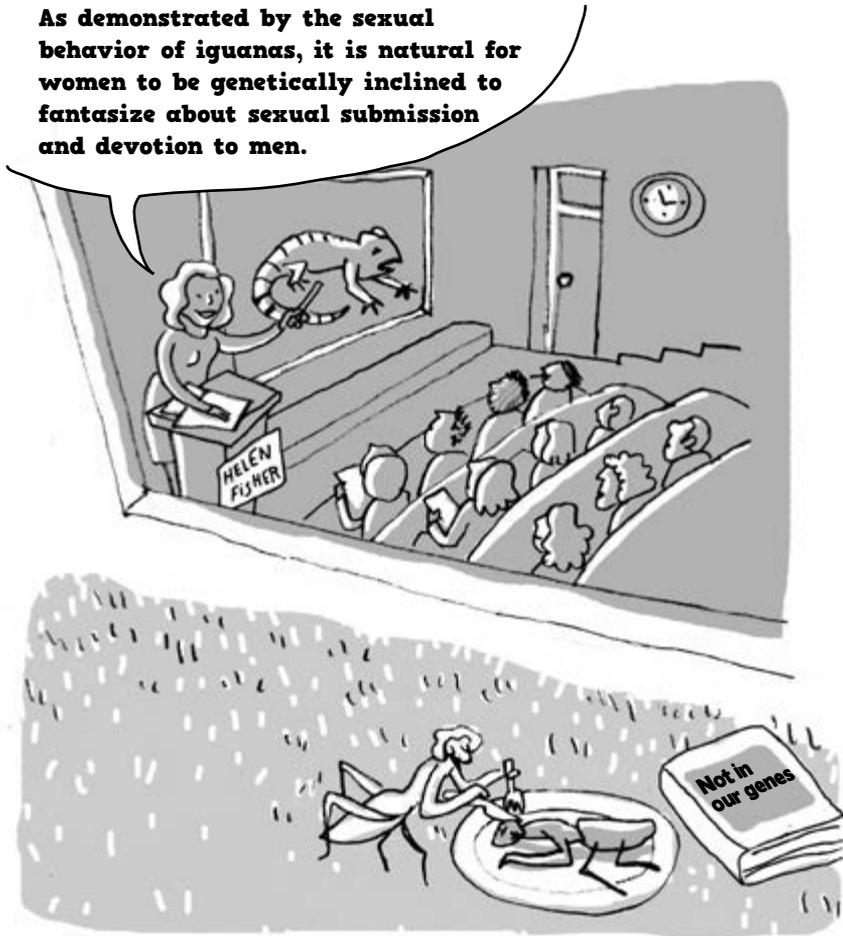


They also argue that hormones determine our behavior to the extent that they portray us as walking **hormones**.



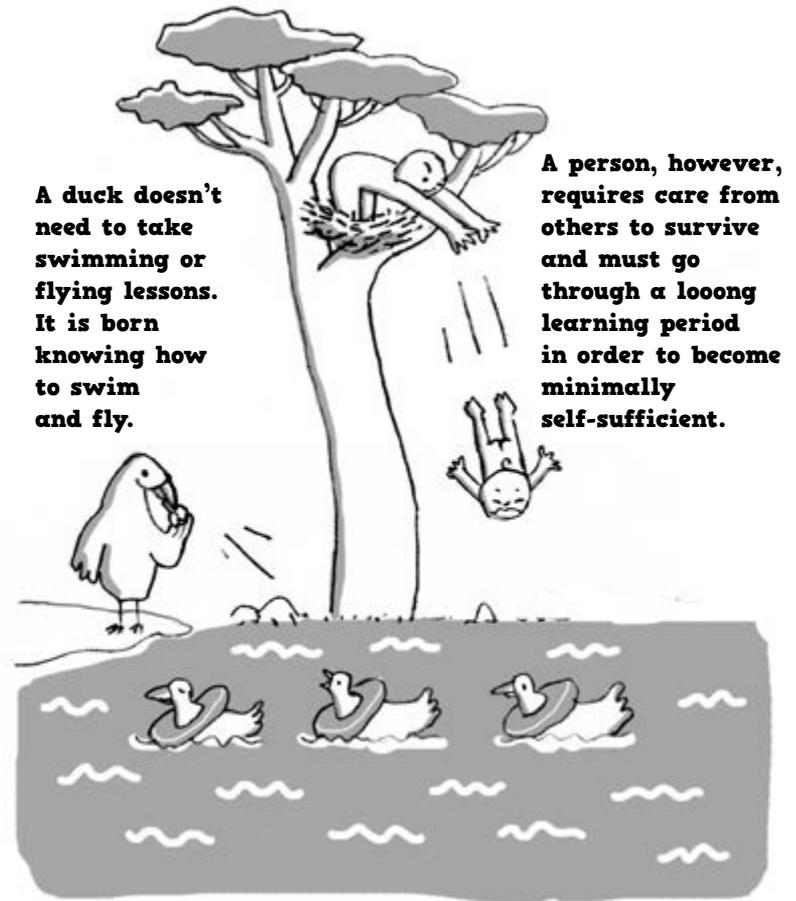
Another classic argument involves comparing us with other animal species. However, the criteria that leads to choosing some comparisons and omitting others is unclear...

As demonstrated by the sexual behavior of iguanas, it is natural for women to be genetically inclined to fantasize about sexual submission and devotion to men.

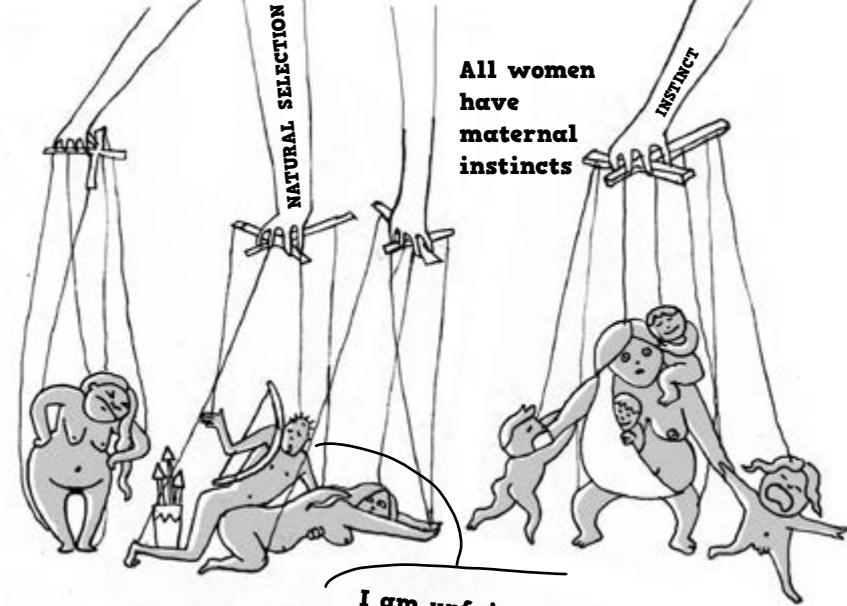
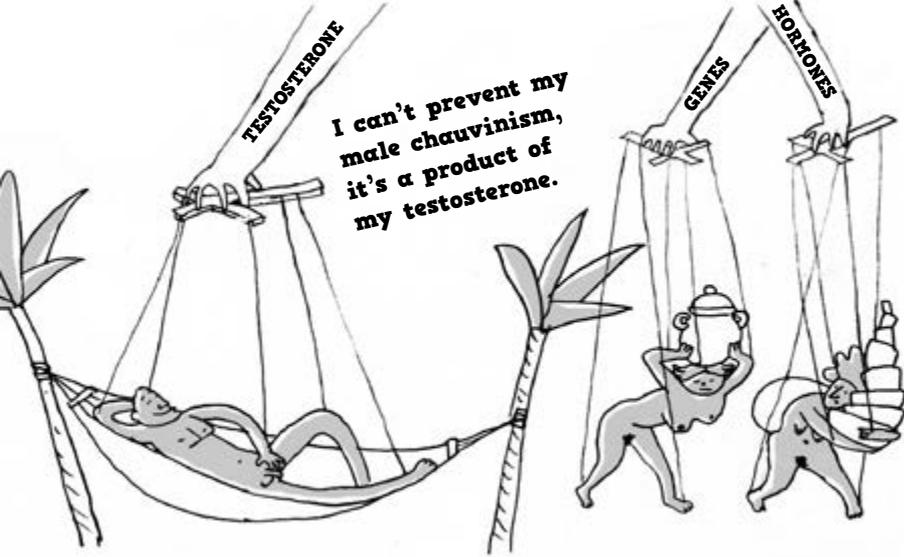


Why do they focus on iguanas instead of praying mantis, who eat the males after mating?

Comparisons with other animal species do not account for the fact that, as opposed to all other animals, humans are not born **genetically** preprogrammed.



Desire and identity are configured during this time period.



The biologist discourse has also been critiqued because it justifies and deems **unchangeable** the differences and inequalities between men and women.

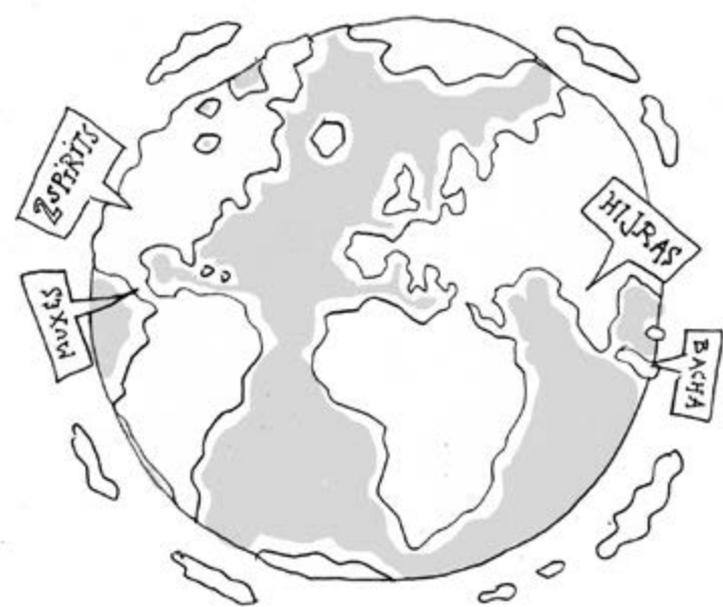
Men are naturally aggressive and tend to dominate. Therefore, patriarchy is the social reflection of men and women's different natural abilities.

STEVEN
GOLDBERG
(SOCIOLOGIST)



Explanations such as this one don't lead us to acknowledge the responsibility we each have in maintaining differences and inequalities between men and women.





Additionally, in other cultures and historical moments, gender differences have been constructed in a variety of ways.

Some cultures acknowledge the existence of a third gender to group people who express both masculine and feminine traits, or who cannot be classified within the categories of woman/man.

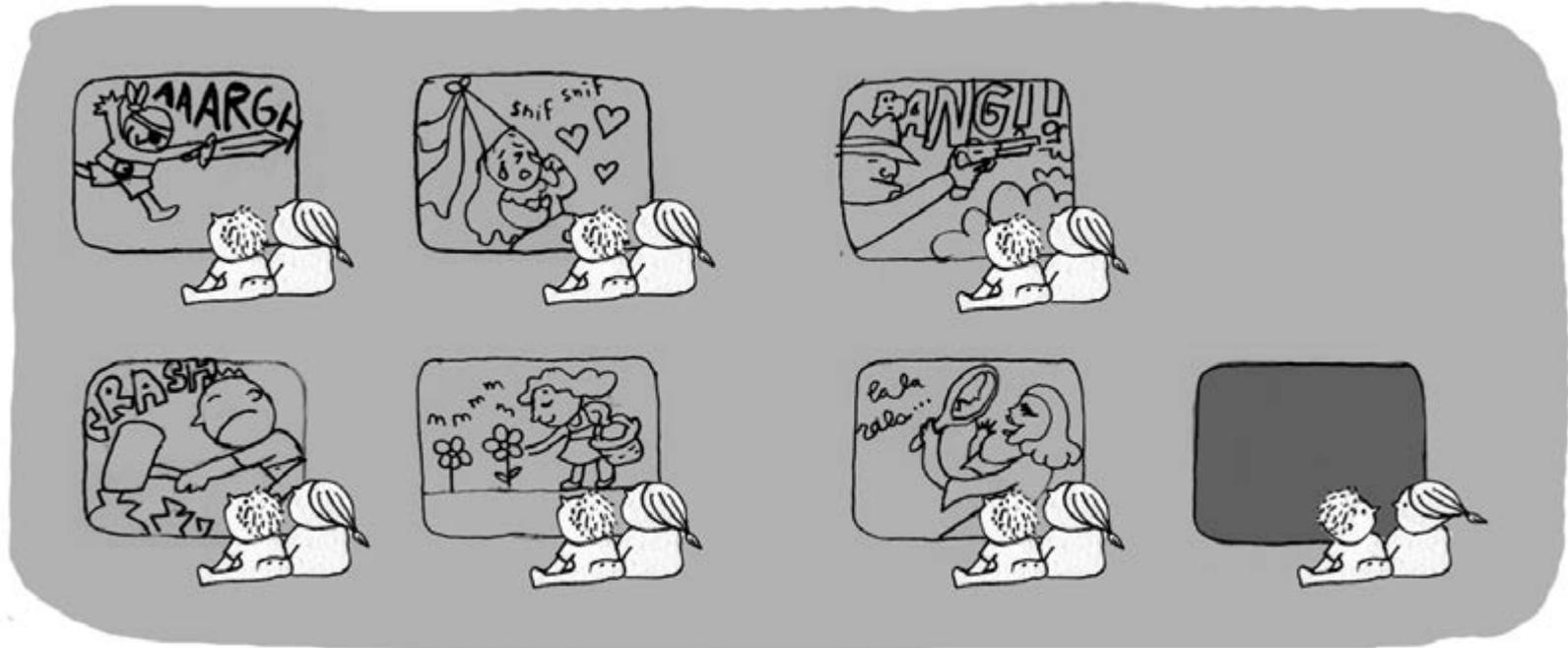
Native American cultures recognize the 'two spirit' figure, one that combines feminine and masculine characteristics in attire and social roles. 'Two spirit' people hold important social roles as healers, transmitters of tradition or people with the ability to predict the future.

Since prior to Spanish colonization, the Zapotec culture in Mexico includes the muxe figure: people with male bodies who dress and behave in feminine ways. They are considered to be neither men nor women, but a third gender.

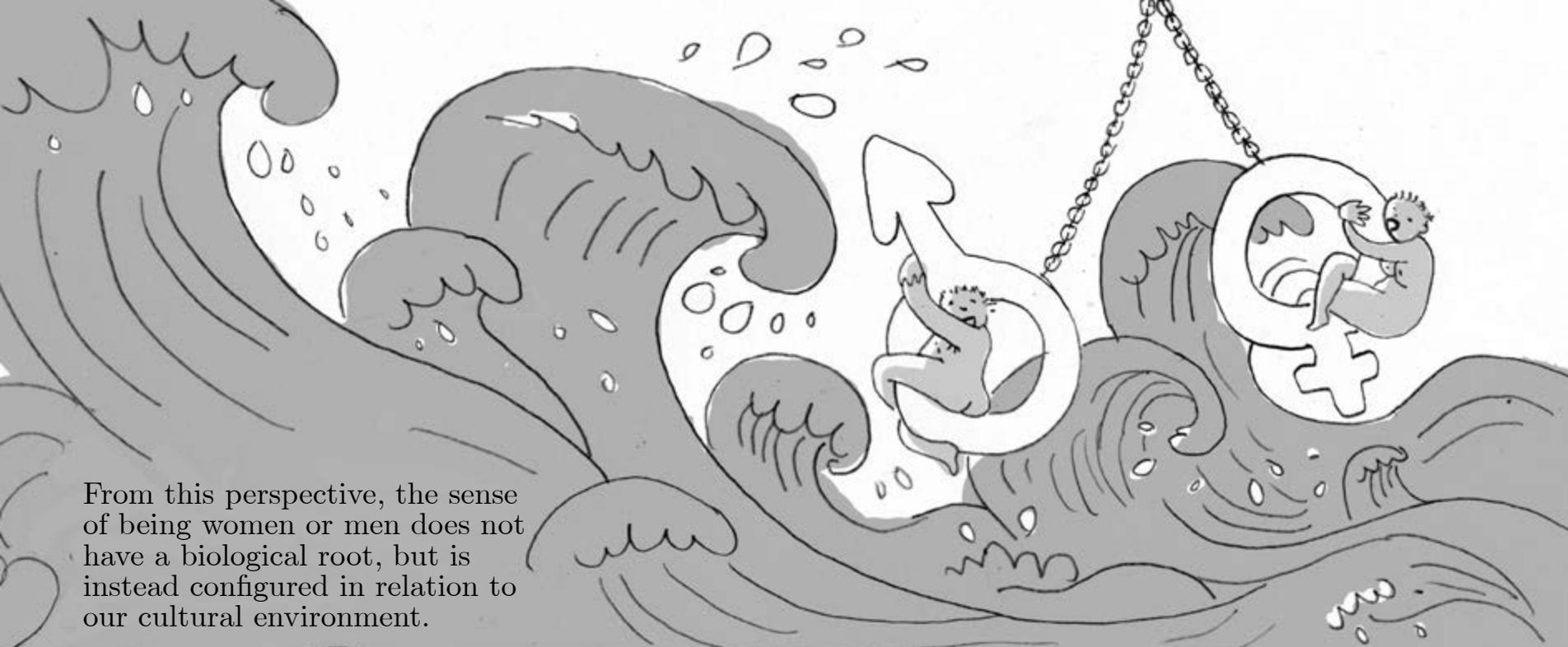
In India there are over five million hijras, people with male bodies who wear feminine clothing and do not identify as women or men.



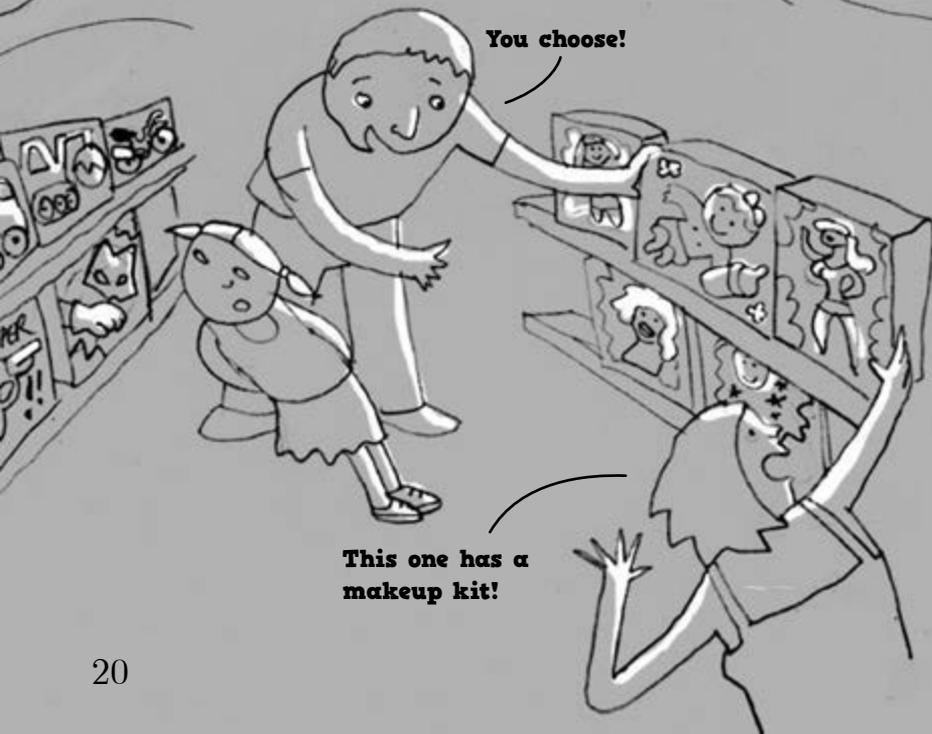
3. The social construction of gender



After discussing the position that defends that biological sex determines gender in the previous chapter, now we will consider gender as a result of the **cultural processes** that construct us as women or men.



From this perspective, the sense of being women or men does not have a biological root, but is instead configured in relation to our cultural environment.



You choose!

This one has a makeup kit!

Our identities and our desire are molded throughout our life, especially during infancy.

Gender identity is the effect of this **social construction** and is translated into an intimate sensation of BEING men or women.

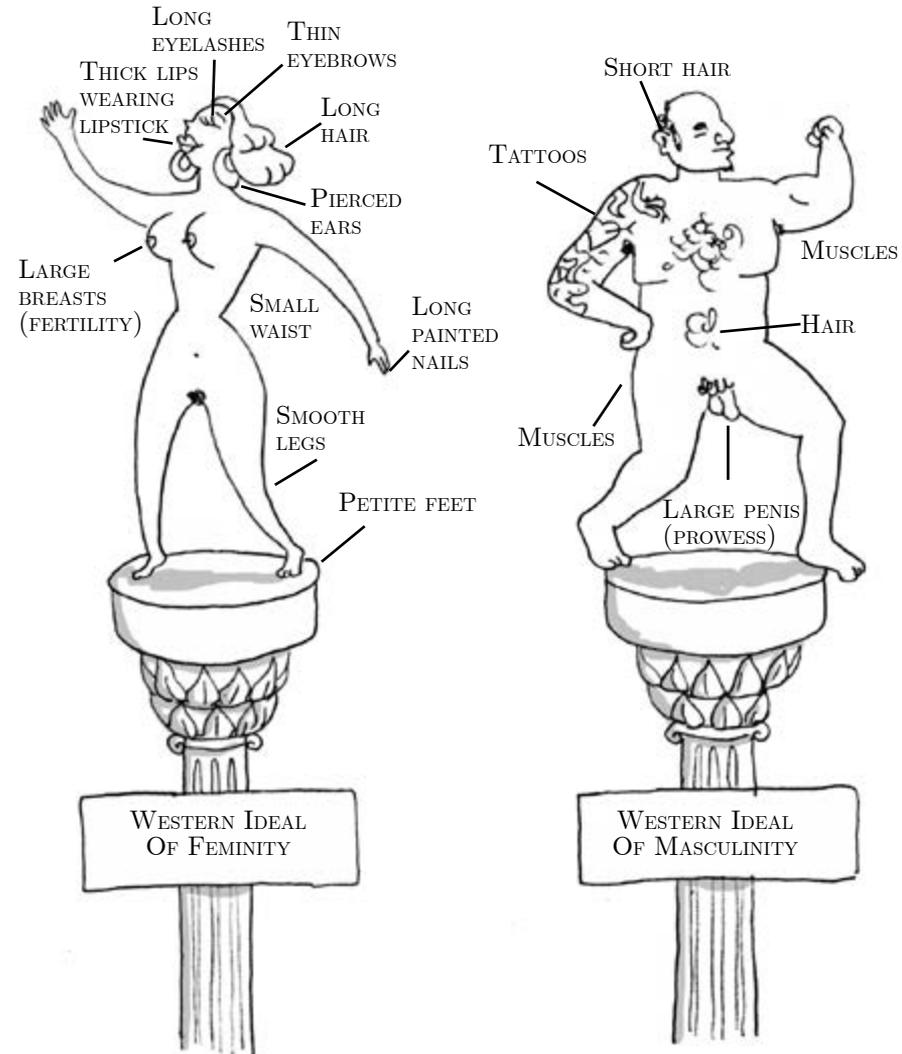
We cling to these gender categories because they allow us to be socially recognized and to construct an identity.

We may find an example of this process in the social pressures we receive from childhood to adapt to the gender we are socially assigned.



Social punishments are activated when we do not meet the expectations.

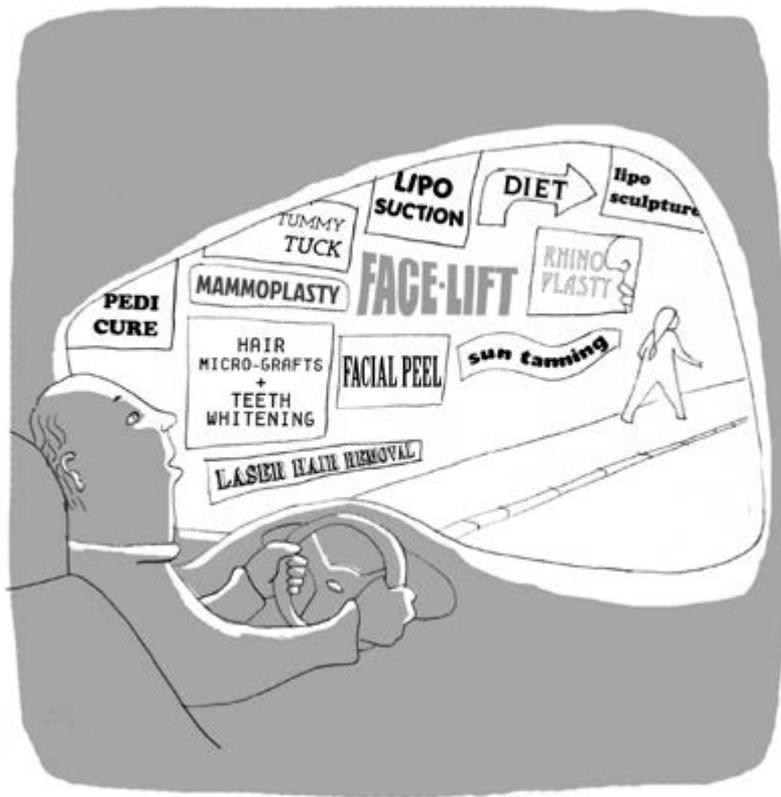
In fact, the distinction between males and females itself is a cultural product. It is culture that gives meaning to our bodies and creates the differences between a woman's body and a man's body.



In this sense, we can reverse the argument that sex (the biological dimension) creates gender, and assert instead that it is gender that creates sex.

Because, first, gender is what gives meaning to our bodies, it tells us how we should read them.

And additionally, because these gender normative ideals lead us to transform our bodies.



4. Gender makes us human

We cannot imagine people abstractly, without knowing if they are men or women.

To be recognized as human, we must follow the norms established by society.



MICHEL FOUCAULT
(HISTORIAN OF IDEAS)

Gender is so rooted in how we view and understand the world that we are constantly classifying people as men or women.

**Boy or
girl?**

**I don't know,
we'll see how
s/he defines
herself/himself.**

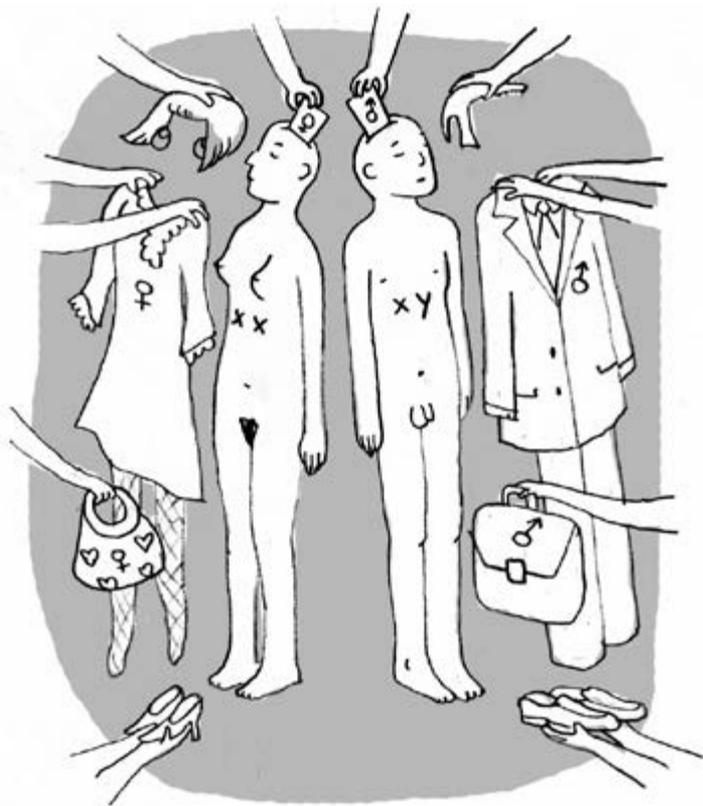
When we are faced with someone who we cannot clearly identify as a woman or a man, we feel discomfort or rejection.

We need to classify this person to reestablish the order we know and feel comfortable with.

It is for this reason that, when a woman is pregnant, the most common question she is asked is if it's a boy or a girl: assigning a gender to babies makes them more real, more human.

This shows us that gender is a core element in how we relate to others and how we structure social life.

5. Differences and inequalities between women and men



Our society is sexist because we are classified as men or women based on our sexual characteristics, as if these were two fixed, clearly delimited and central categories in our definition of a person.



Nowadays, gender is usually assigned when a pregnant woman gets an ultrasound at around the third month of gestation.



When the doctor announces "it's a girl" (or "it's a boy") the cultural mechanism of gender is put in motion.

Therefore, even before birth, the person is already marked by culture: the clothes and expectations that will drape them, the meaning of each part of their body, the pressures to control their behavior... will be either feminine or masculine.

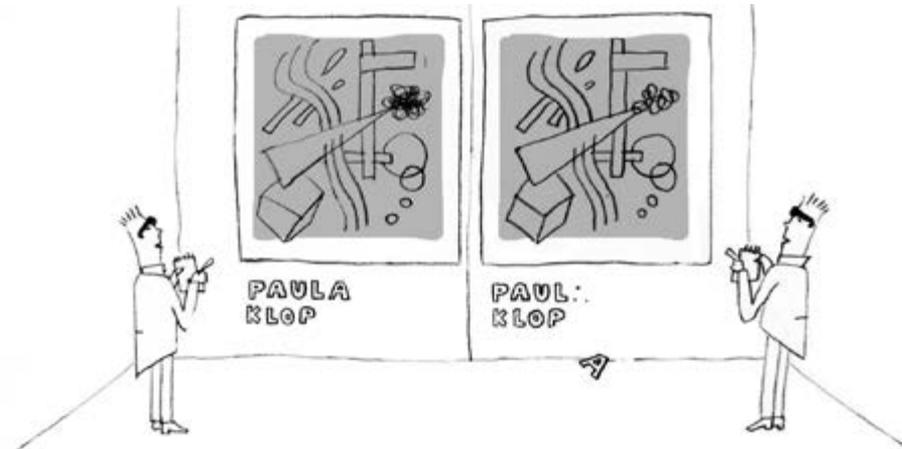
The social environment, and especially mothers and fathers, reproduce this initial gender assignment through the toys they purchase for us, how they clothe us, and the way they treat us...



Even their reactions to the cries of boys and girls differ, thereby reinforcing the supposedly innate differences.



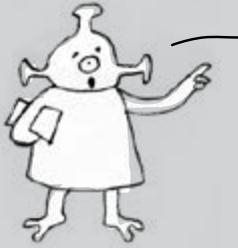
We interpret what we see based on the gender of the person:



PRECISE,
SENSITIVE,
SOFT,
EXQUISITE,
SUBTLE,
EMOTIONAL,
INVITING,
REFINED,
WARM

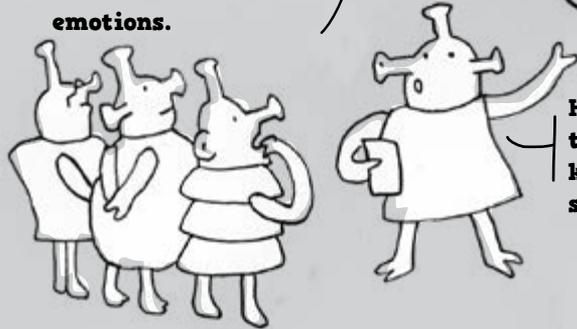
CONVINCING,
BOLD,
TOUGH,
IMPRESSIVE,
TENSE,
AGGRESSIVE,
CALCULATED,
COLD,
DEVASTATED

This way, each and every one of us reinforces the supposedly essential characteristics assigned to women and men on a daily basis.



Now we will take a look at what features are assigned to men and women.

The human male is rational and demonstrates strong control over his emotions.



His repression of them is basic to keeping his clan safe.



When the clan is in trouble, he activates his aggression.



Sometimes, in order to reinforce his virility, the male also engages in rituals with other males to release excess aggression.



The human female, on the contrary, is moved by emotions. This makes her more apt to care for the young and be the mediator in situations of conflict.



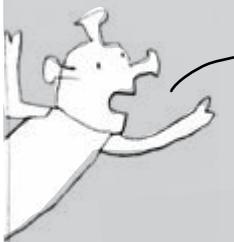
However, this also makes her less reliable to be in charge of big responsibilities, since she is more emotionally volatile.



She is not aggressive and thus needs the male's protection.



The male is active by nature. When he isn't in captivity he does his own thing, in solitude or as the leader of the clan, leading it in whichever direction he sees convenient.



This feature makes him more appropriate for governing and making important decisions affecting the survival of both the clan and the species.



The female complements the male nature perfectly, since she is defined by being passive and having the capacity to adapt to the desires of others. She is especially qualified to concern herself with others' needs.



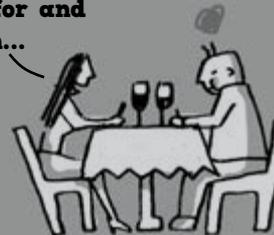
But, watch out, being passive does not mean that she does nothing; instead, she makes others act as though they were extensions of herself.



It's your decision to ask for it or not...



I won't tell you what to ask for and when...

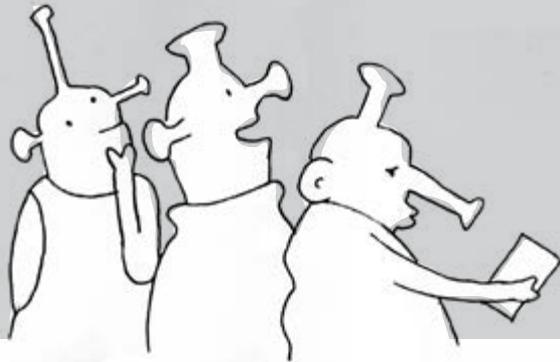
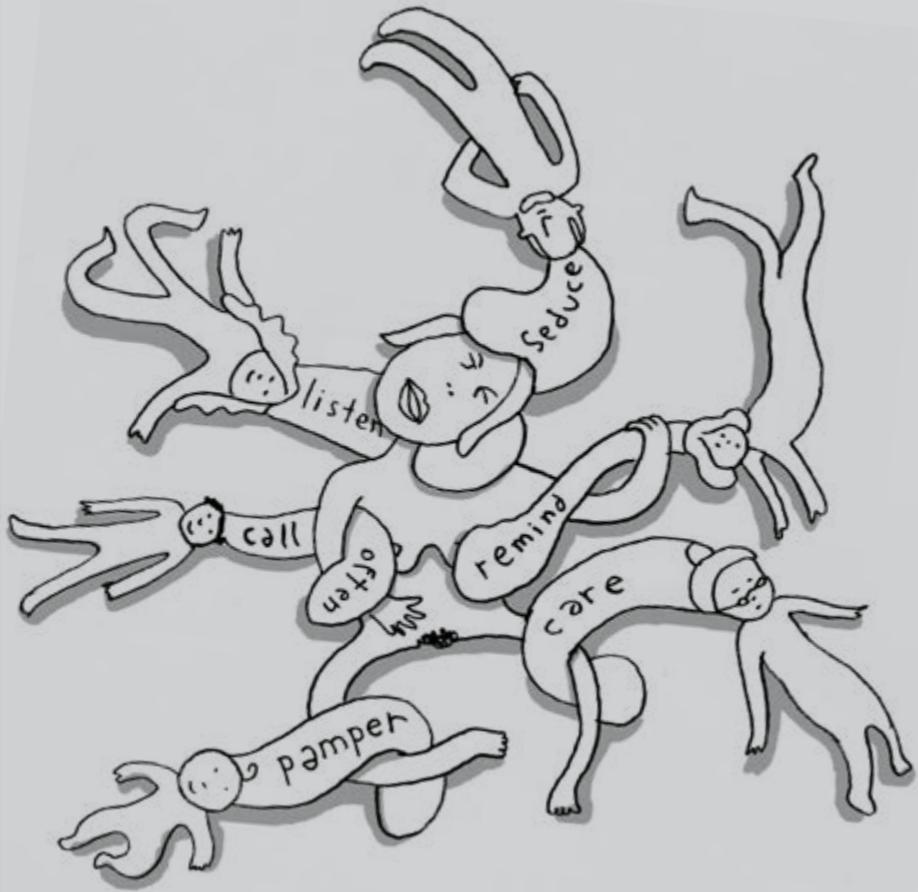


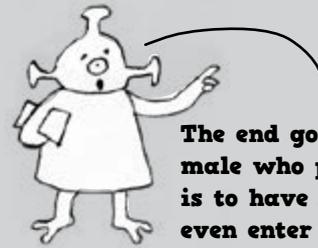
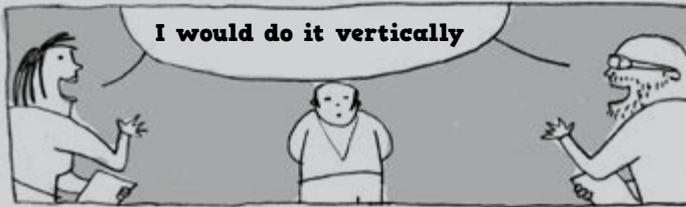
Oh, if you're afraid to ask...



Um, I've come to ask...







The end goal of any male who prides himself is to have sex. He may even enter a stable union with a female in order to guarantee the possibility of copulating on Thursdays, Saturdays, and holidays.

Most males don't fully understand what the hell sex has to do with love.

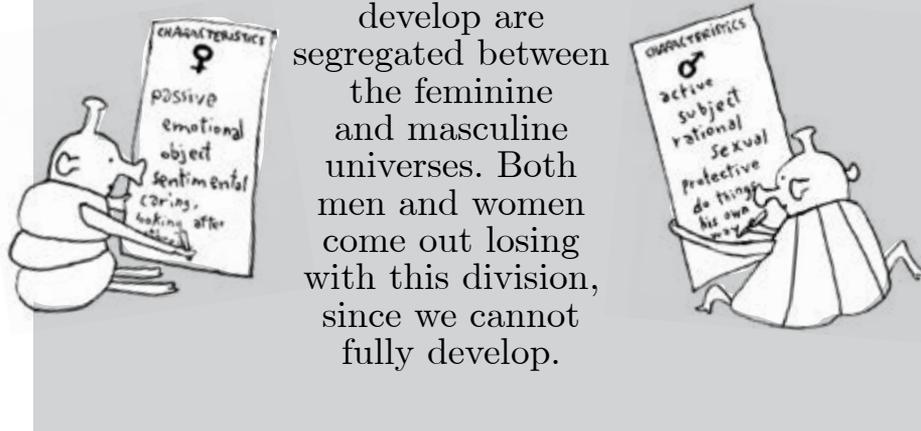
For females, however, it is impossible to separate fornication from emotions. They tend to fantasize that each male to approach them at a club wants to be a father to their offspring.

In the coupling act, the male is the subject, while the female gives in to his desire.

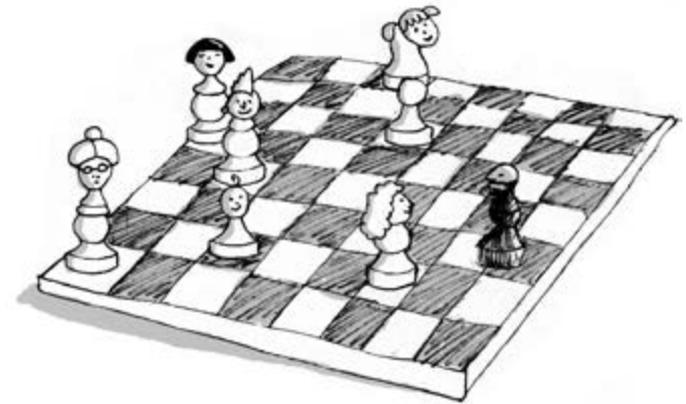


Men speak with women to get them into bed, while women go to bed with men so they can talk for a while after having sex.

Within a sexist framework, features that we all could develop are segregated between the feminine and masculine universes. Both men and women come out losing with this division, since we cannot fully develop.



Nevertheless, we can only generalize to a certain extent, because gender mandates are different, for example, for a 58-year-old Dutch woman born in Morocco who works as a nurse, and a 9-year-old low-income Canadian girl in a wheelchair. What is demanded of them socially, in terms of gender, stems from the intersection of the various axes of inequality they experience.



What happens when we do not meet the expectations?

Women in positions of power are criticized for attempting to imitate men.

It is also considered inappropriate for a woman to overtly take initiative during sex.

In contrast, a boy who expresses his emotions is often insulted through feminization.

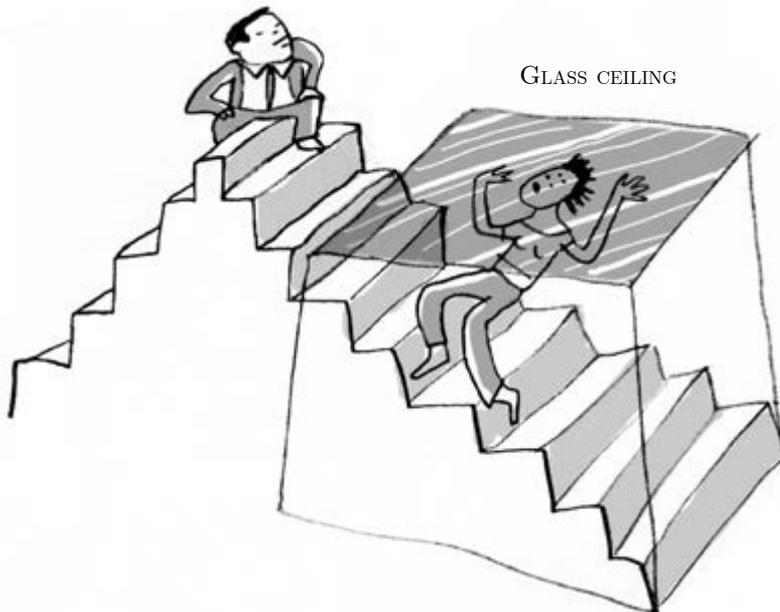
The problem is not that women and men are constructed as different from one another but that we are placed in an unequal structure in which masculinity is more valued socially.



Inequality can be found in all spheres of life. Here we will focus on power, labor, physical space and sex.

... on power:

The places of high responsibility in the most powerful social institutions (governments, associations of business owners, unions, banks, political parties...) are occupied by men, with few exceptions, and despite our sloooow move toward greater parity.



... on labor:

The so-called gendered division of labor supposes that tasks, levels of responsibility, recognition and payment are distributed unequally among men and women.



Adult men hold a privileged position in the job market: they obtain better jobs, better schedules and greater incomes, while women earn less for the same work and are overrepresented in the jobs least valued.

... on space:



Men have a tendency to take up space, to walk with decision, to act as though physical space belongs to them, while women tend to go through the world being on the lookout for others, not bothering, not tripping up, not occupying too much space, with fear of walking alone through certain places...

... on sex:

Women are assigned to an object position devoted to masculine desire. Passivity in sexual relations, associated with femininity, has negative connotations in our culture: expressions such as “Sticking it up their ass” or “Fuck someone over” are used to degrade or humiliate.



In our society, gender inequality is eroticized. If we don't question what we do in bed, we will not be able to create equal relationships between women and men.

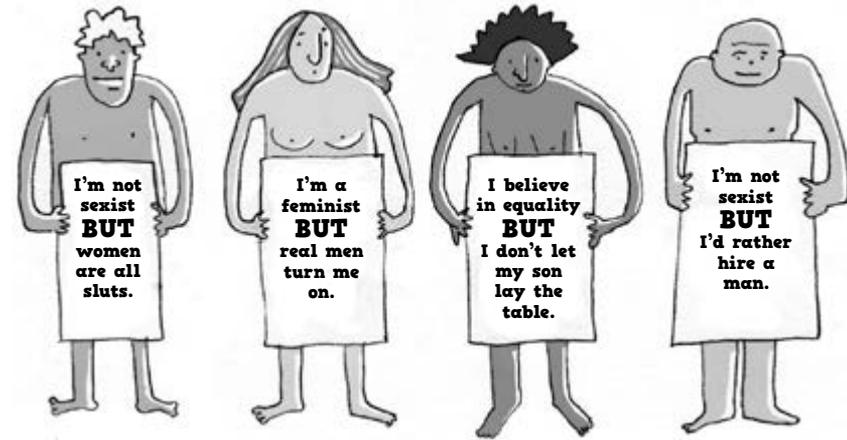
SHEILA JEFFREYS
(FEMINIST THEORIST)

It should be noted that these differences and inequalities are not recreated because somebody forces women to aspire to jobs that are under valued, to earn less than their coworkers, to take on more of the domestic work or to give up space for men.



As human beings we have leeway in how we act, we have the possibility of disrupting what is expected from us, but we are very conditioned by our identifications, by our learning, by the need to be socially accepted, by fear of punishment...

This leads us all to reproduce the differences and inequalities between women and men more than we are willing to acknowledge.



The recognition of our uneasiness in the world is accompanied by resistance to recognize that the facts, even those we don't like, take place with our participation. We create reality, by naming it and recreating it in our life practices.



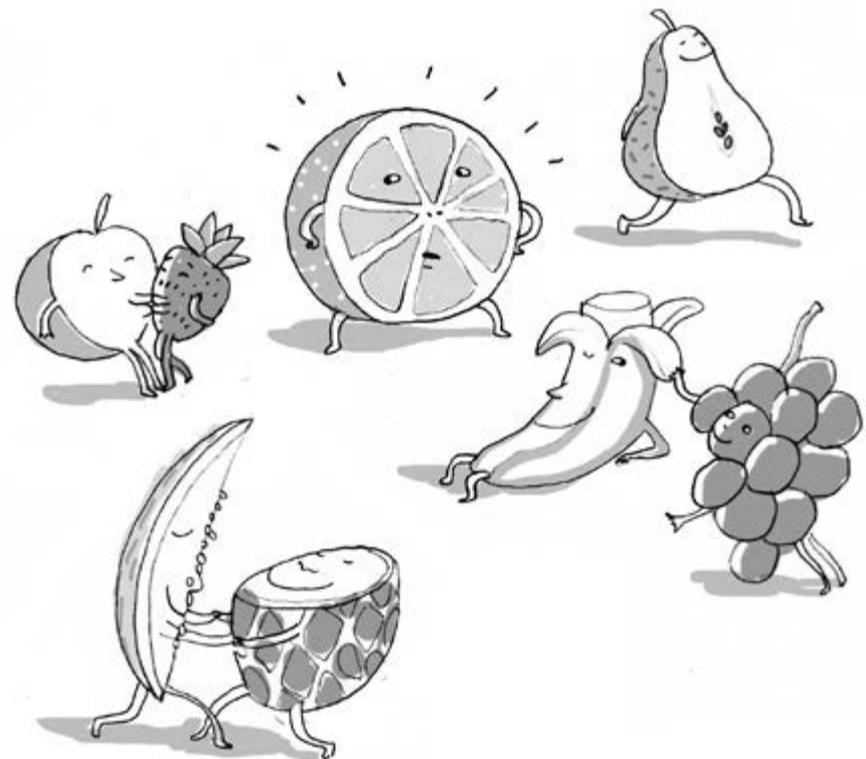
M^a JESÚS IZQUIERDO
(SOCIOLOGIST)

These socially constructed differences and inequalities contain the seed of miscommunication between women and men and of so-called gendered violence.



Assaults and murders of women by their partners or ex-partners could be considered the result of taking the regular dynamic in relationships between men and women to the extreme: believing that the man has the power, that he owns his partner, that the woman must bend to his needs and desires...

Romantic ideals represented in most songs and films broadcast the idea that we must find our other half: that unique person in the world who will complement and complete us. This expectation places an unbearable pressure on the relationship and does not acknowledge that nobody can complete us, that what we need to do is accompany each other in our own emptiness...



Men often complain that women do not give them enough personal space and they are usually wrongly convinced that their need for greater personal space is “true freedom.” Women, on the other hand, complain that men are not sufficiently aware of women’s emotional needs and they are erroneously convinced that their need for greater attention is “true love.”

Based on gender stereotypes, it is assumed that women are more loving and dependent than men, and that men are more free and independent than women. Our gender stereotypes confuse women’s “fear of loneliness” with love, and men’s “fear of dependency” with freedom.



TERESA FORCADES
(BENEDICTINE NUN)

6. Gender and exclusion

GOES HEAD OVER
HEELS WHEN THE
GRANDCHILDREN
CALL HER
GRANDMA

DREAMS OF
MOVING IN
WITH HIS
LOVER

WORRIES S/HE
MAY HAVE
GOTTEN HER/HIS
GIRLFRIEND
PREGNANT

WONDERS
ABOUT
HAVING
BREAST
SURGERY

HATES HAVING
TO SHAVE
HER/HIS BEARD
SO OFTEN

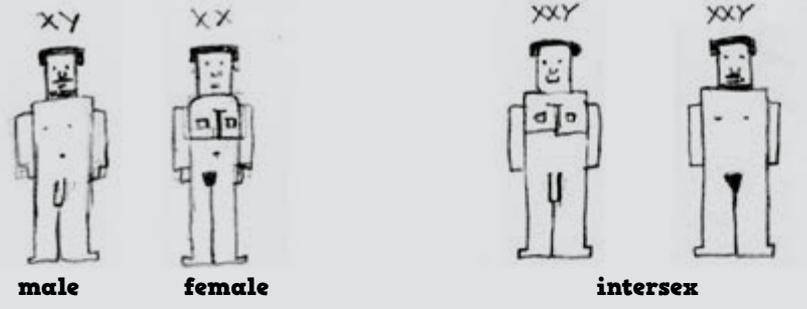
AT WORK
S/HE IS CALLED
ISAAC AND AT
HOME ISA

ENJOYS WEARING
HER/HIS
GIRLFRIEND'S
CLOTHING



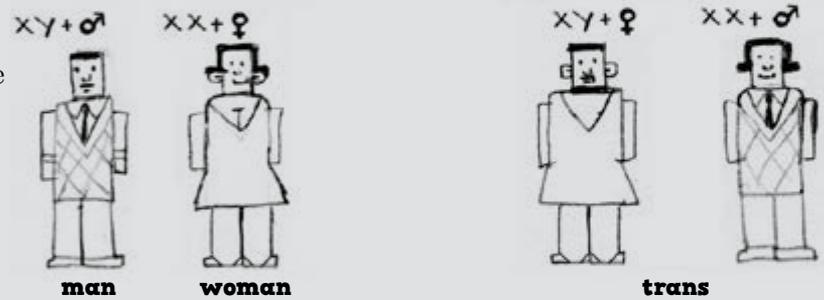
The gender system has three dimensions:

Sex, that is, our biological characteristics. These take on meaning through contact with culture. It is presupposed that everybody has either a male or female body.

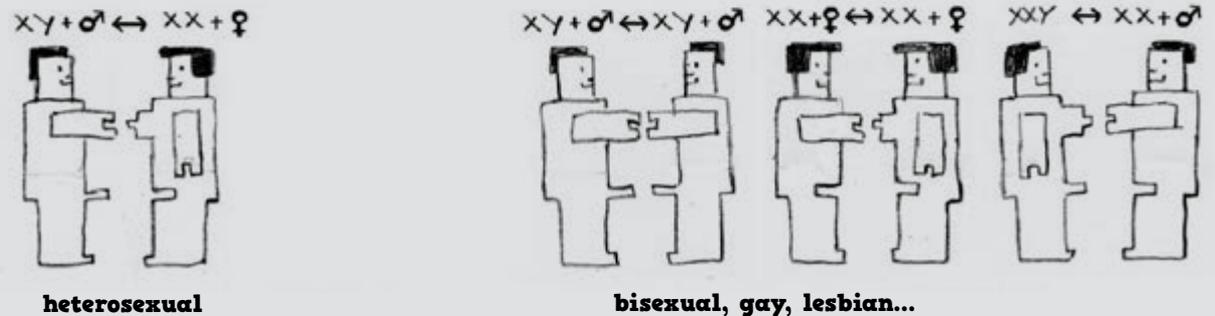


As we will see in the following pages, the mandates in these three dimensions lead to the exclusion of intersex people, trans people, lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Gender, which is related to our identity and behavior. In this case it is assumed that, if you have a female body, you must feel and behave as a woman; and, if you have a male body, you must identify as a man and behave as such.

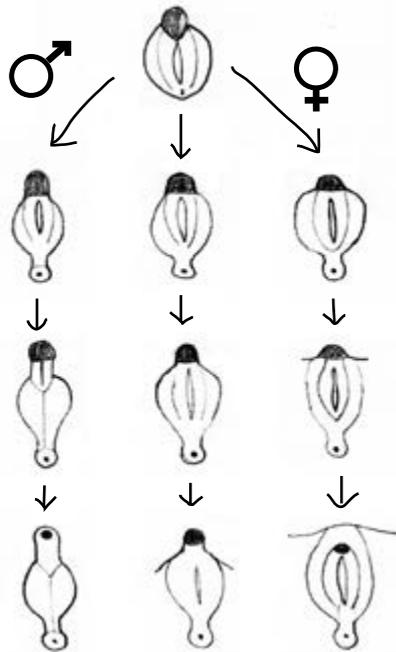


Sexual orientation, in other words, who we are sexually attracted to. To close the circle, it is believed that plenitude is achieved through combining masculinity and femininity. Therefore, it is assumed that women must be attracted to men; and men must be attracted to women.



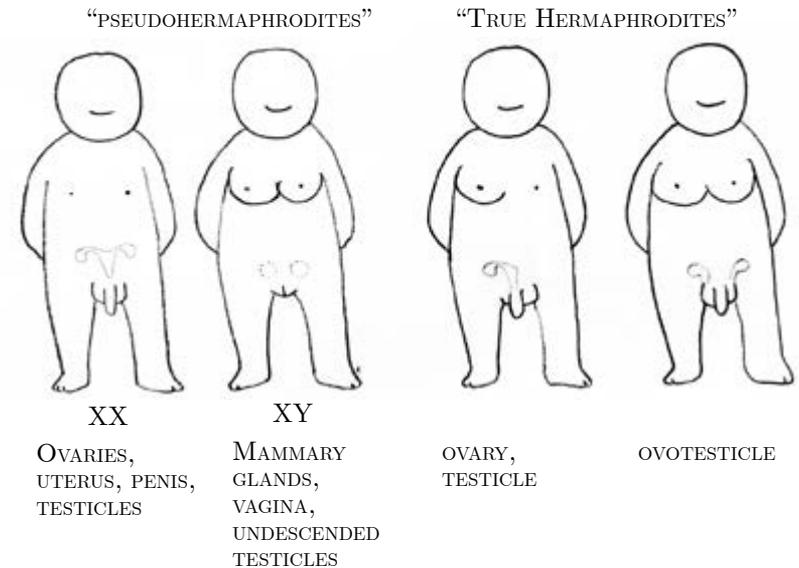
7. Intersex

Intersex people have bodies that cannot be classified as either masculine or feminine. About 1 in 100 births presents some difference in sexual development and 1 in 2,000 newborns has genital organs different enough to cloud the question of whether they are a girl or a boy. In these cases, gender assignment is problematic.



DEVELOPMENT OF GENITALS DURING GESTATION

The existence of intersex people demonstrates that, on a biological level, our division between males and females is not so clear. The medical literature recognizes a great deal of sexual variability. Among other classifications, the existence of five sexes has been proposed: men, women, feminine pseudo hermaphrodites, masculine pseudo hermaphrodites and true hermaphrodites. The latter three are grouped in the intersexuality category.



These are the most common types of intersexuality:

**Congenital
suprarenal
hyperplasia**

IN NEWBORNS WITH XX CHROMOSOMES IT CAUSES A GENITAL MASCULINIZATION FROM BIRTH OR LATER IN LIFE. IN SOME CASES IT AFFECTS ONE'S METABOLISM AND CAN BE A HEALTH RISK.

Hypospadias

THE URETHRA DOES NOT HAVE AN OPENING TO THE EXTERIOR ON THE TIP OF THE PENIS.

**Klinefelter
syndrome**

STERILE MEN WITH XXY CHROMOSOMES WHO OFTEN DEVELOP BREASTS DURING PUBERTY.

**Androgen
insensitivity
syndrome**

XY NEWBORNS WITH FEMINIZED GENITALS. CELLS CANNOT RECEIVE TESTOSTERONE AND THE BODY DOES NOT MASCULINIZE. DURING PUBERTY THEY DEVELOP BREASTS AND A FEMININE SILHOUETTE.

**Turner
syndrome**

WOMEN WITH ONLY ONE X CHROMOSOME. OVARIES DO NOT DEVELOP, THEY ARE SHORT IN STATURE AND HAVE AN ABSENCE OF SECONDARY SEX CHARACTERISTICS.



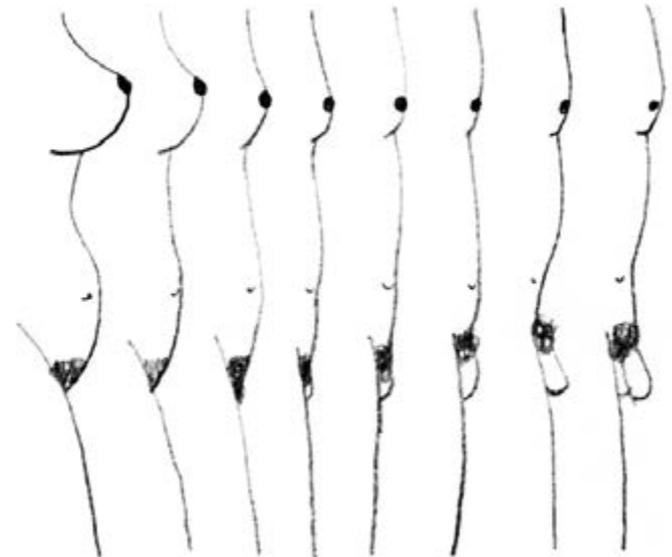
CHERYL CHASE
(INTERSEX ACTIVIST)

My genitals were not ambiguous at all: they were exactly what they were. It was the powerful gender binary system that classified my genitals as ambiguous.

On a biological level, we can state that sex is a broad and infinitely malleable spectrum that exceeds the restrictions of the masculinity and femininity categories.



ANNE FAUSTO-STERLING (FEMINIST BIOLOGIST)



Faced with an intersex newborn, usually a multidisciplinary team examines the baby, runs some tests and, in agreement with the parents, assigns a gender. Then the baby is subjected to surgical interventions and hormonal treatments that may last a lifetime in order to adapt their body to the assigned gender.

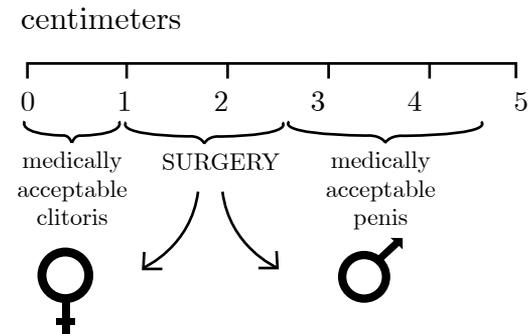


Sex has many dimensions (genitals, gonads, chromosomes, hormones...), so it is impossible to fix one criteria in order to establish in a reliable way the “true sex” of the baby.

The criteria for assigning the sex, then, are variable and depend on the diagnosis.

Appearance and genital functionality are often prioritized, centering on the size of the penis/clitoris. The masculine gender is assigned to those considered to have “sufficiently” large genitals to be functional (which is concretized in the future

possibility of penetrating a woman and being fertile). The rest have their genitals amputated, since it is considered that the clitoris should not be visible.



During the 1960s, the medical literature viewed surgeries of “overly large” clitoris in a positive light with clitoris ablation practices in some African cultures.

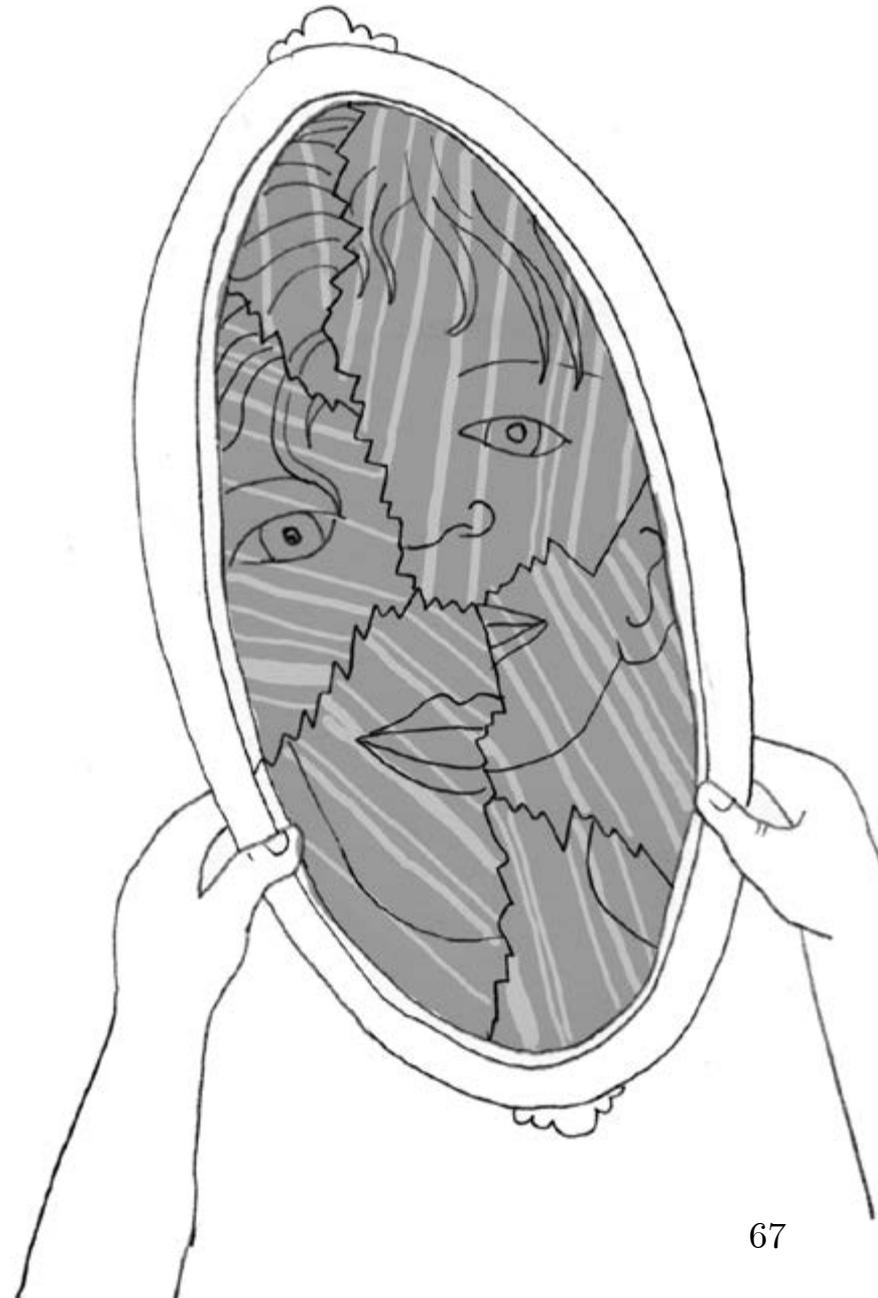
In some cases, ambiguous genitals generate discomfort or obstruct urine, and it is necessary to intervene on them, but in most cases they are not harmful or present any health risks. Usually, then, these surgeries are not in response to health issues but instead to the cultural necessity to maintain clear distinctions between both sexes.

The Intersex Society of North America defends that surgery should only be used for strictly health-related reasons and that parents should be offered information and support so they may accept the physical differences of their children. They believe it should be intersex people themselves who decide whether to modify their own bodies.



Yet the debate goes beyond whether it is convenient or not to operate after birth. Many people who have undergone surgery critique that their bodies were modified without their consent, while those who did not undergo surgery tend to reject this decision because having a body that cannot be classified as masculine or feminine has caused them much suffering.

The underlying problem is that cultural norms do not allow for bodies that do not fit into the gender models to be conceivable, or they are considered monstrous.

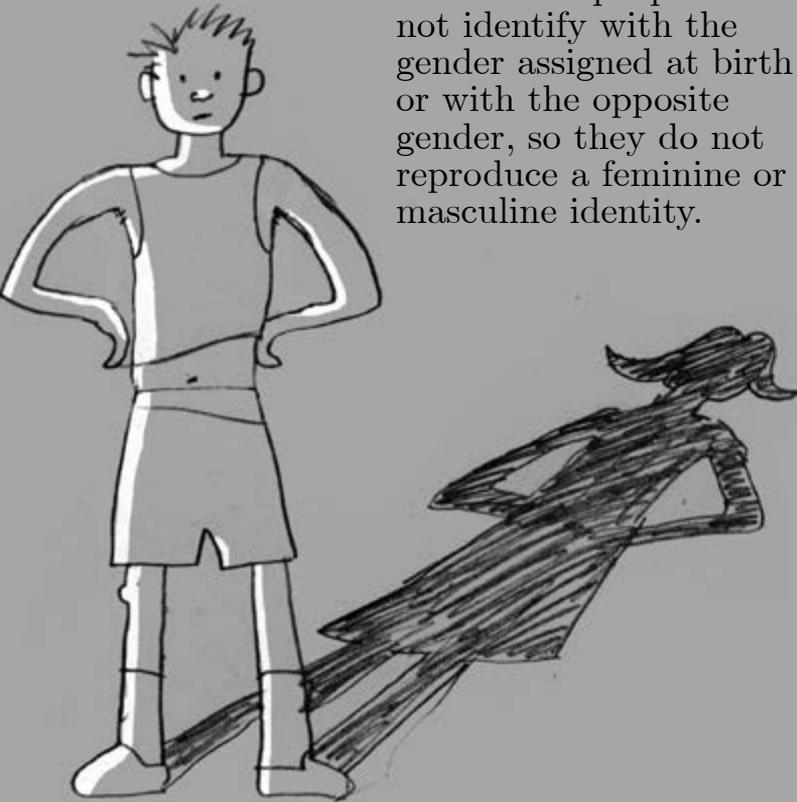


8. Trans

Trans people are excluded because their gender identity does not correspond with the one assigned to them at birth based on their genitals.

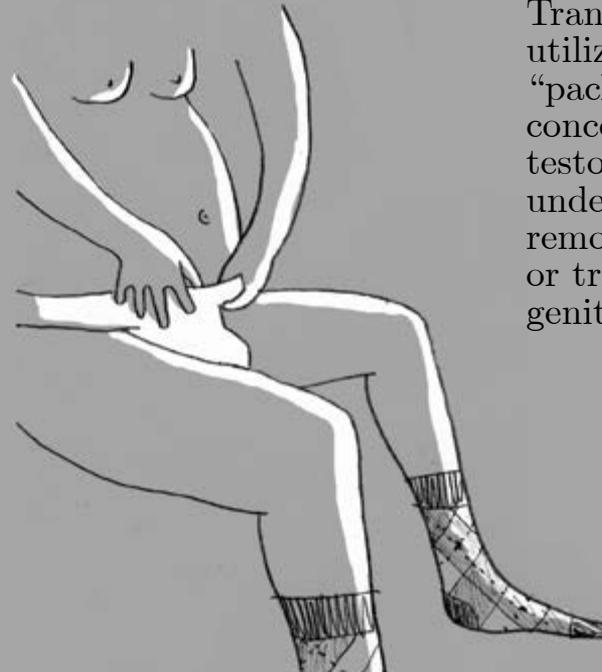
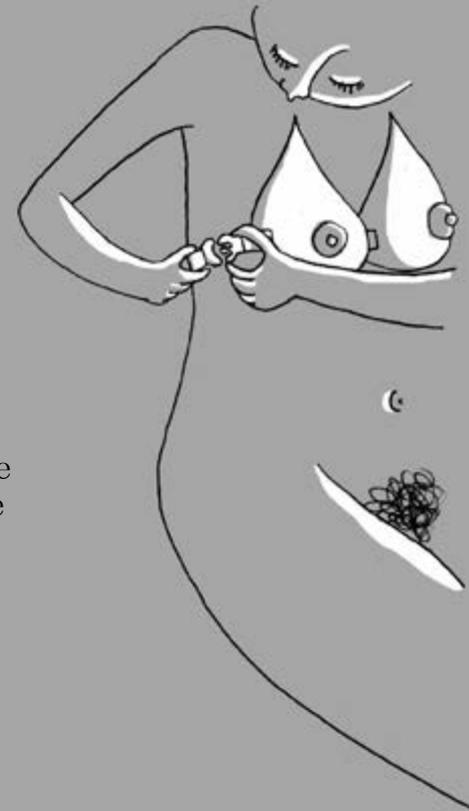
Trans men are, thus, people who were born with a female body and identify as men. Trans women, on the contrary, were born with a male body and identify as women.

Some trans people do not identify with the gender assigned at birth or with the opposite gender, so they do not reproduce a feminine or masculine identity.



Trans people utilize different strategies to transform their bodies.

Trans women can use prosthetics to simulate breasts, take hormones to feminize their appearance and voice, get breast implants and modify their genitals.



Trans men can utilize prosthesis to “pack”, binders to conceal breasts, take testosterone and undergo surgery to remove their breasts or transform their genitals.

These body changes can be motivated by the wish to adapt to body ideals of their gender identity, due to the need for others to treat them according to their gender or because they want to pass unnoticed to avoid discrimination and assault.

Due to the overwhelming employment discrimination that trans women experience, and because many men are aroused by the idea of having sex with a trans woman with the genitals assigned at birth, many trans women are sex workers.



Nowadays the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association consider transexuality a mental health disorder.

In some countries, the requirements to legally change one's gender marker and name include having undergone gender reassignment surgery, having taken hormones and/or providing a mental health disorder certificate.



In order to receive the disorder certificate that will open the door to a name change and to hormones, one must meet with psychologists and psychiatrists, who will decide whether one is “truly” transexual or not.

The criteria utilized by mental health professionals in charge of diagnosing transsexuality have been questioned for reproducing the most ancient sexist stereotypes. They use, for example, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test, which establishes femininity through responses expressing interest in working in a library or not thinking about sex. Masculinity signs include liking car magazines or enjoying talking about sex.

A section of trans activism critiques the pathologization of transsexuality.



* REAL QUESTIONS
FROM THE MINNESOTA
PERSONALITY TEST



9. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people

Lesbians and gay men are people who feel attracted to persons of the same sex. Bisexual people can feel attracted to a person independently of their sex.

Until 1990 the World Health Organization considered homosexuality to be a mental illness.

In many Western countries homosexuals were legally persecuted until the second half of the 20th century. This led to many of them being sent to internment camps where they were subjected to electroshock treatments in order to modify their sexual orientation.



While the repression of gay men tended to be more explicit, lesbians generally did not experienced such direct persecution because they were rendered invisible from public space and repression was delegated to their families.

On a rights' level, bisexual and gay people are no longer discriminated against with regard to issues such as access to marriage or parenting.

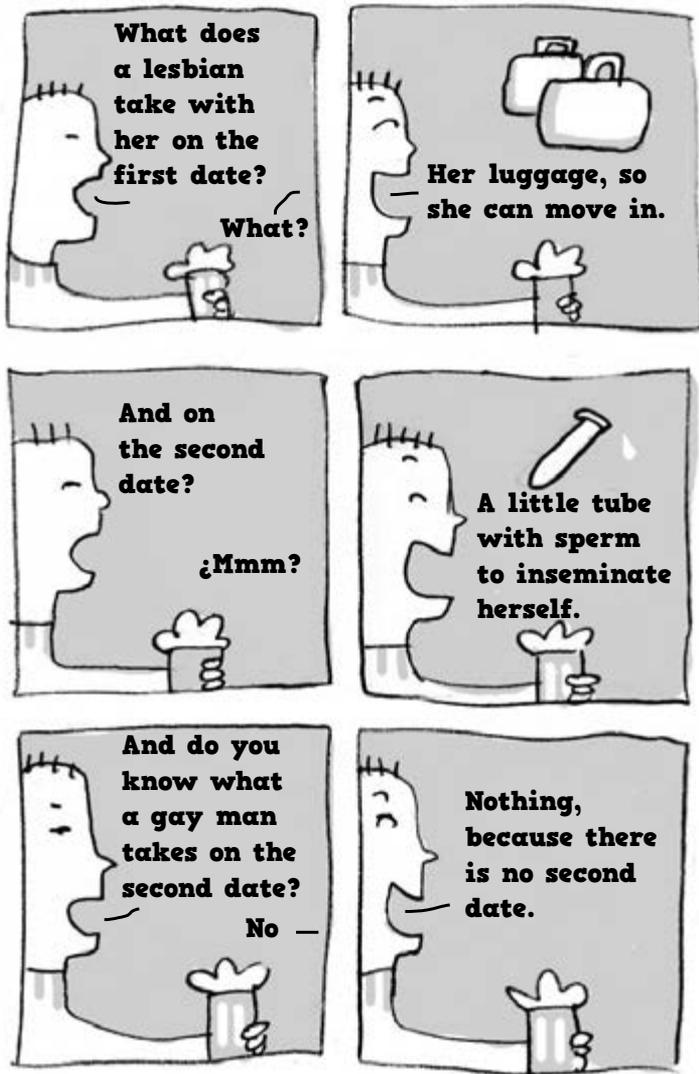


Despite these advancements, lesbian and gay people continue to be stigmatized. This is evidenced in people's fear to express affection out on the streets, in attempts to hide one's sexual orientation at work to avoid employment problems, or in concerns about gay or lesbian people being caregivers for minors.



Gay men are often stereotyped as obsessed with sex, as narcissists, as unable to commit, and associated with AIDS. They are also viewed as being more sensitive, as being interested in interior design, and as having higher purchasing power.

Although there is not such a fixed social image of lesbians, the generalized perception is that they cannot have “real” sex with each other, since female sexuality can only be understood based on—or in submission to—male sexuality. Their lesbianism is attributed to having bad sexual experiences with men: they have not been treated well, have felt pressured by them or have not received attention from them due to being viewed as unattractive.



Despite the increased tolerance toward gay men and lesbians, homophobia is part of a wider web connected to the perpetuation of gender differences and inequalities. Therefore, while sexism exists there will be no full equality.

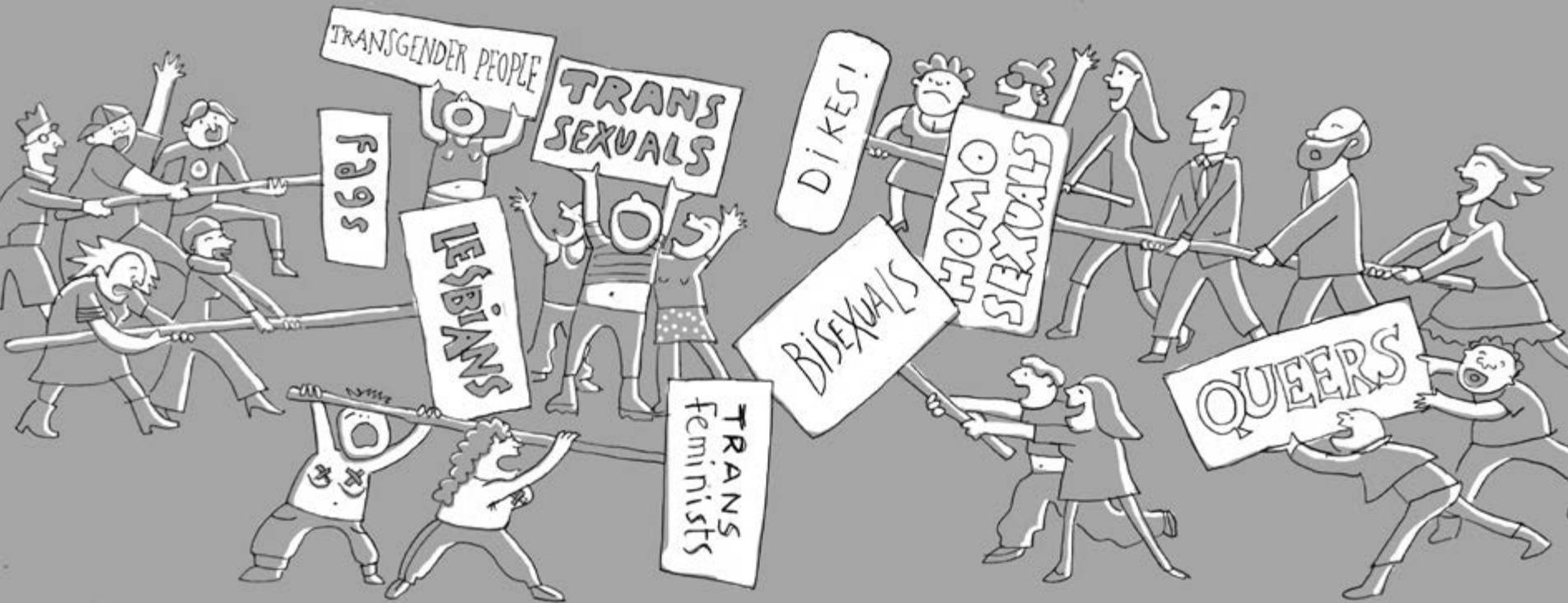
Relationships between collectives of lesbians, bisexuals, gay men and trans people are not exempt of conflicts...

Many gay men and lesbians believe that trans people give them a bad image which creates barriers to their own social acceptance. Thus, they often reject being linked with trans people.

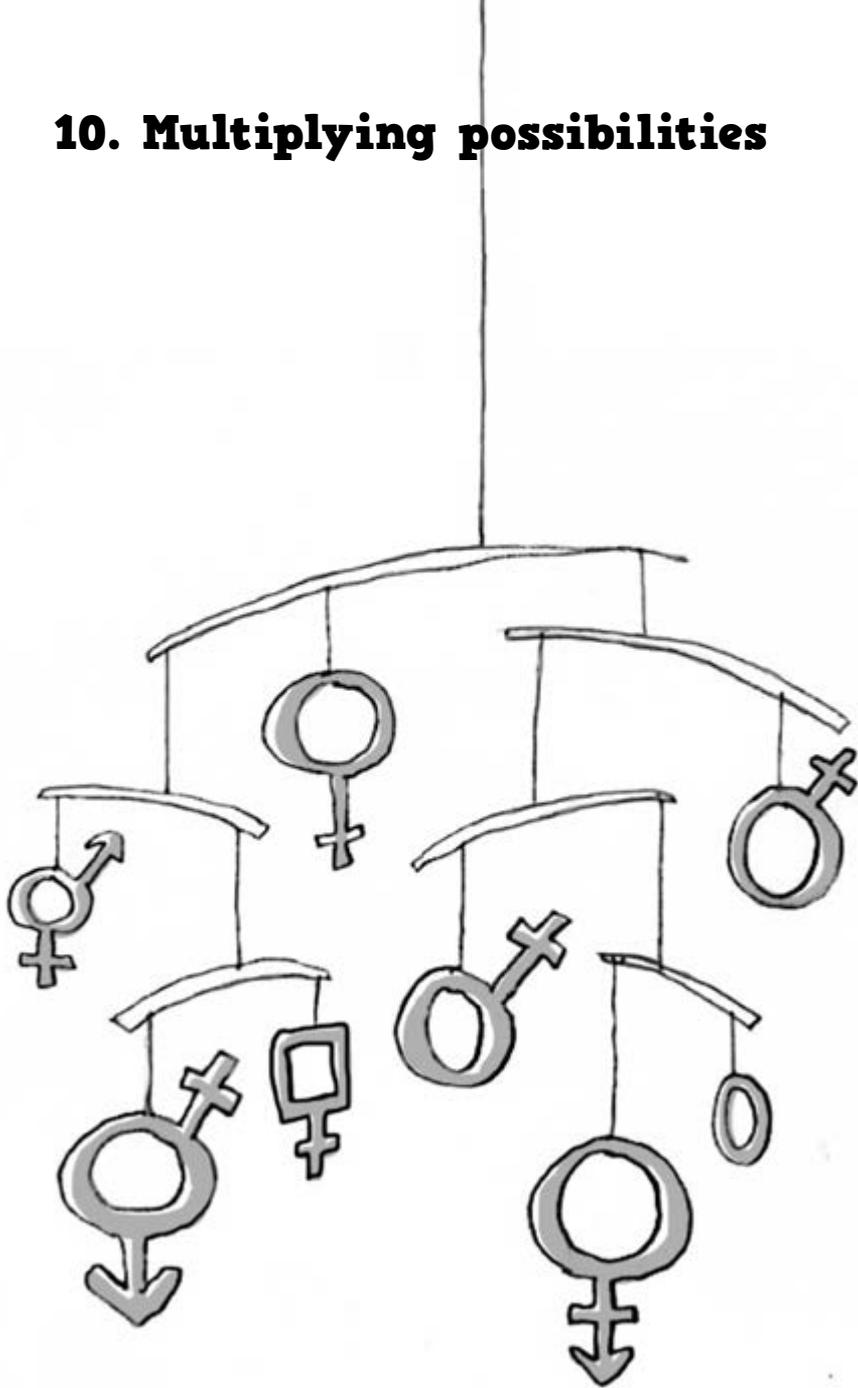
Many bisexuals feel misunderstood both by gay men and lesbians, and by heterosexuals.

When working together in joint advocacy organizations, gay men often impose their discourses and requests over those of lesbians.

Indeed, these groups are not beyond the replication of gender differences. Sometimes they repeat the masculine and feminine binary in their relationships, while on other occasions they subvert them by showing that relationships do not necessarily have to be based on masculine/feminine complementarity.



10. Multiplying possibilities



Why is gender so important in our society?

On a social level, gender is a very effective way of classifying persons to allow for the structuring of areas as important as labor division, family, caregiving or reproduction. That is why there are powerful economic and political factors that contribute to maintaining this binary and unequal structure.

It is an element that provides much stability to social relationships, making them more predictable.

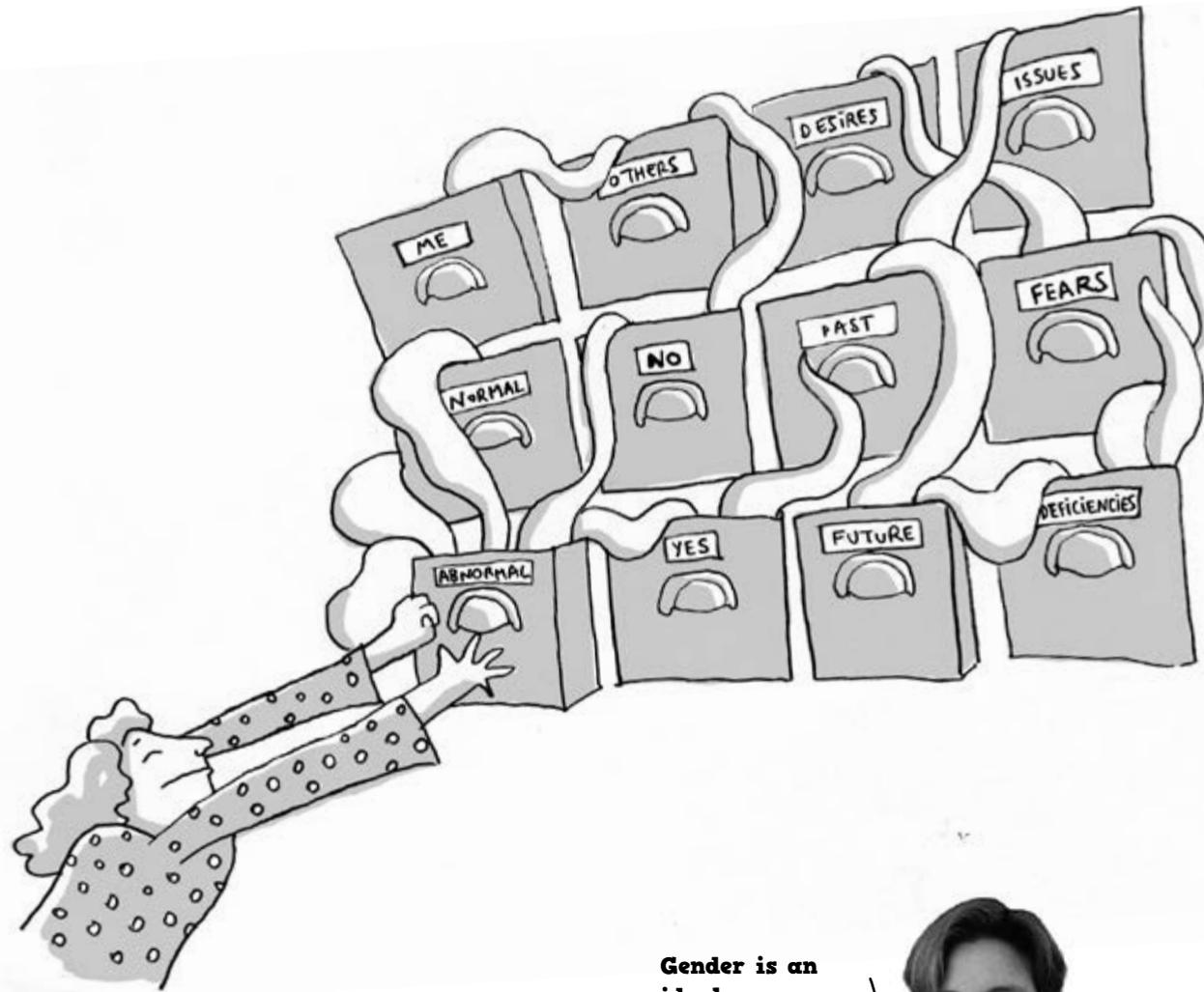


Additionally, gender gives us stability on an individual level: it is a way of making sense of our lives, of constructing our identities and structuring our relationships with others.

As people we are much more complex than what categories like “man”, “woman”, “lesbian”, “intersex”, “bisexual”, or “gay” could ever reflect.

However, we are afraid of our own complexity, and we are reassured by clinging onto social categories that provide us stability, order our experience, and allow us to be recognized by others...

In any case, our representation of gender is always threatened. One movement (for example, crossing one’s legs a certain way), a desire toward someone of the same sex, a hobby that is attributed to the other gender... All of these can bring into question our gender identity and activate our inner repression and that of others, through mean glares, insults, assaults...



Gender is an ideal we can never fully inhabit.



JUDITH BUTLER
(PHILOSOPHER)

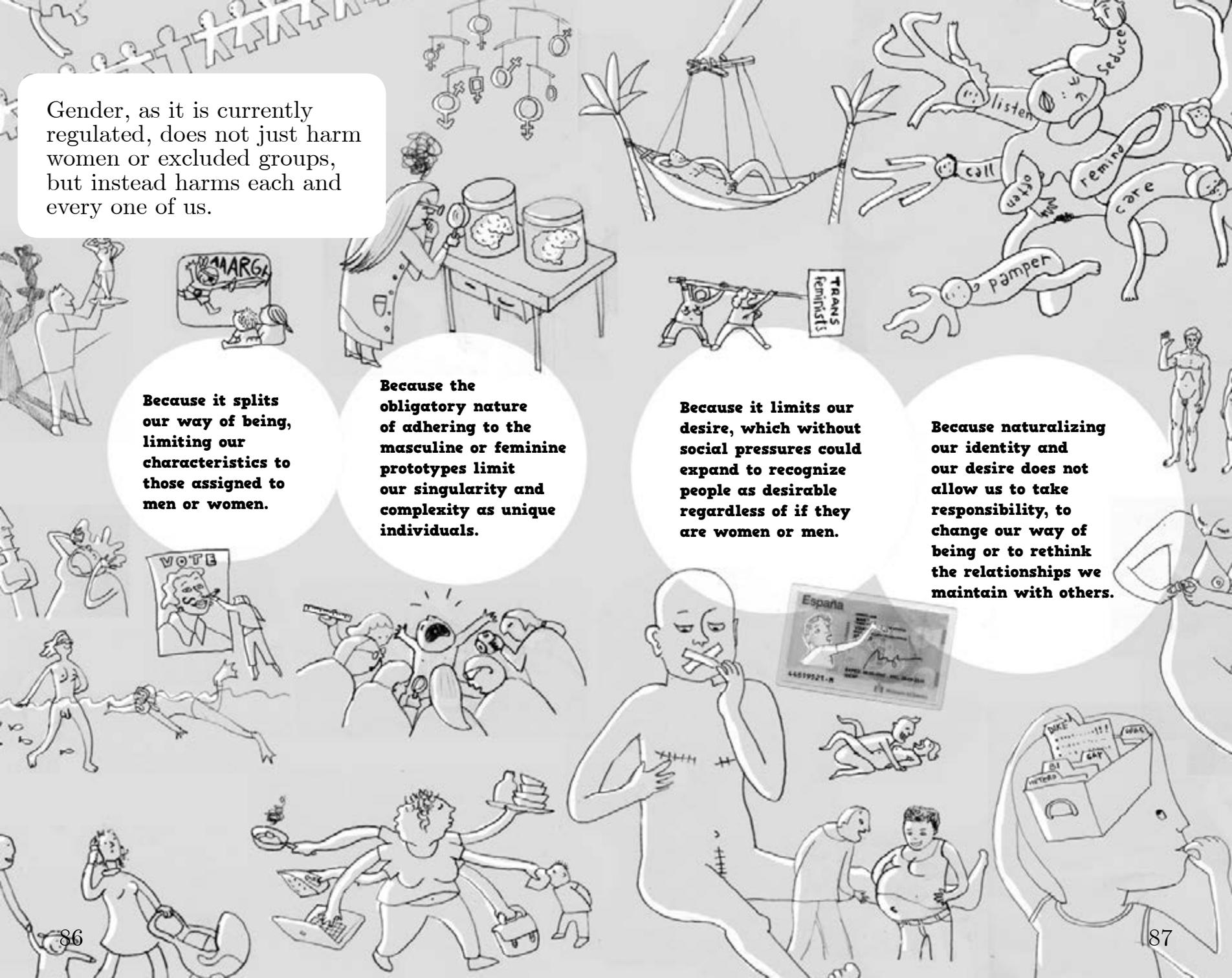
Gender, as it is currently regulated, does not just harm women or excluded groups, but instead harms each and every one of us.

Because it splits our way of being, limiting our characteristics to those assigned to men or women.

Because the obligatory nature of adhering to the masculine or feminine prototypes limit our singularity and complexity as unique individuals.

Because it limits our desire, which without social pressures could expand to recognize people as desirable regardless of if they are women or men.

Because naturalizing our identity and our desire does not allow us to take responsibility, to change our way of being or to rethink the relationships we maintain with others.





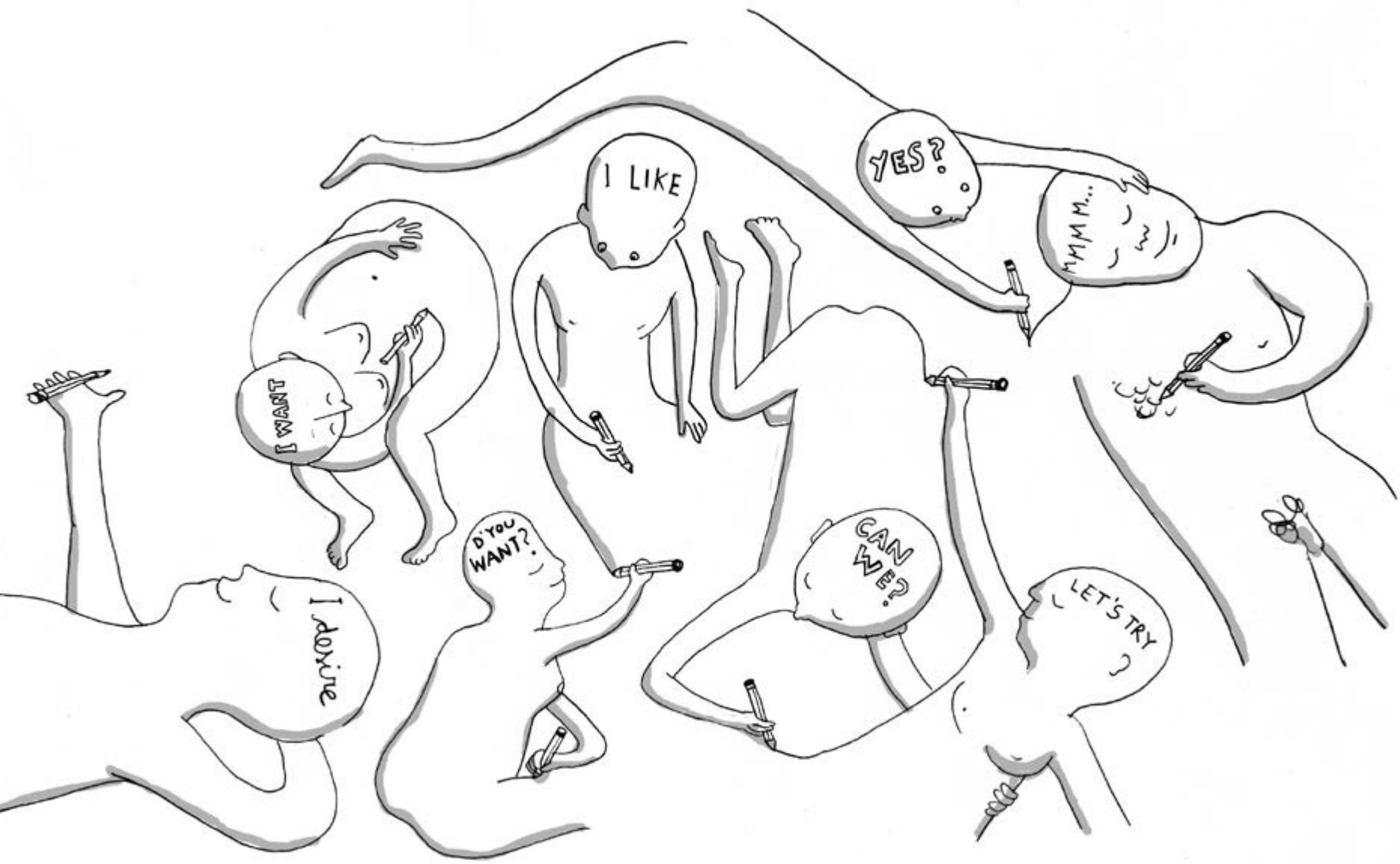
Being accountable means being able to give our own particular and intimate responses of how each one of us is involved or implicated in what makes one suffer.

MANUEL BALDIZ
(PSYCHOANALIST)

If somebody was hoping to end the book with profound answers, we hope you don't feel frustrated, since we have only been able to offer a handful of questions and a challenge:

to dare
(re)illustrate
our
gender





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Bios

Gerard Coll-Planas completed a doctorate in Sociology in the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona and is faculty in the Universidad de Vic, where he directs the Centre d'Estudis Interdisciplinaris de Gènere. He has published the following books: *La voluntad y el deseo. La construcción social del género y la sexualidad: el caso de lesbianas, gays y trans* (Egales, 2010), *La carne y la metáfora. Una reflexión sobre el cuerpo en la teoría queer* (Egales, 2012) and has edited, with Miquel Missé, *El género desordenado. Crítica en torno a la patologización de la transexualidad* (Egales, 2010). His areas of specialty are sexual and gender diversity public policies, the historical memory of the LGBT community and health from a feminist perspective.

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Maria Vidal is an illustrator and graphic designer. She has worked for over a decade both for the publishing world and for public entities and cultural and research dissemination organizations. She has published 15 books, including the collection *Històries de la història* (Museu Arxiu Tomàs Balvey de Cardedeu, 2007-2015), *Astrónomos olvidados* (CSIC, 2008), *Nora i el jazz* (La Galera, 2007), *Somnis de mariner* (Planeta&Oxford, 2005) and *L'encàrrec del vell Hayyam* (Eumo, 2002).

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