

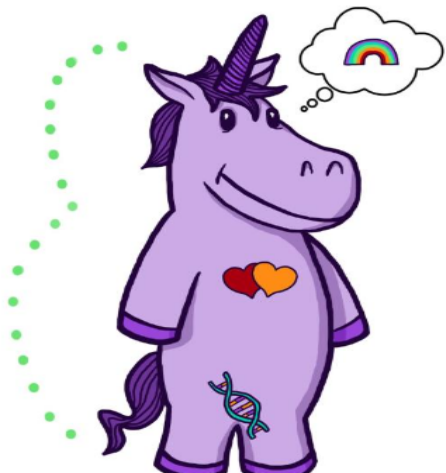
The Difference between Gender, Sex and Sexuality

Gender, sex and sexuality are all pretty complicated ideas – and definitely not as black and white as some people might think. The most important thing to realise is that you’re not defined by your sexuality or gender. You’re you, and that’s awesome.

To help us understand how these concepts are different from each other, and where they might overlap, Trans Student Educational Resources, an organisation in the US, has developed a handy graphic called ‘The Gender Unicorn’.

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by: **TSER**
Trans Student Educational Resources



- Gender Identity** (Rainbow icon)
 - Female/Woman/Girl
 - Male/Man/Boy
 - Other Gender(s)
- Gender Expression** (Green icon)
 - Feminine
 - Masculine
 - Other
- Sex Assigned at Birth** (DNA icon)
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other/Intersex
- Physically Attracted to** (Heart icon)
 - Women
 - Men
 - Other Gender(s)
- Emotionally Attracted to** (Heart icon)
 - Women
 - Men
 - Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to: www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

The Gender Unicorn

The Gender Unicorn is designed to help us understand gender, sex and attraction (sometimes referred to as 'sexuality'). You can see that some of the concepts have arrows next to them, and others just have dots. This is because some concepts are on a spectrum or range, while others are more fixed.

If you were to fill out this graphic, you would put an 'X' as far along the arrow as you feel is accurate for you, or an 'X' in the circle you identify with. Filling it out might help you get a better sense of how you feel about these parts of yourself.

Gender identity

On the image, you can see that gender identity has the rainbow symbol next to it, and that the unicorn is thinking about the symbol. This is because gender identity is inside us; it's how we feel about our own gender.

We may have been taught that male and female are the only gender identities. This is the 'binary' view of gender. But actually, there are many different understandings of gender. If you don't identify exclusively with being a male or a female, and instead feel like you fit somewhere between the two, you might identify with being 'non-binary'. Many cultures have broader ideas around gender than just 'male' or 'female', and have done so for a very long time. Check out the two-spirit people in Native America, bakla in the Philippines and fa'afafine in Samoa.

How much do you feel like a man, a woman, or something else? This is your gender identity. This is a spectrum, because you could feel a little like a man, a lot like a woman, and maybe also a bit like

something else. Or you could feel like none of these. That would make you agender, meaning that you don't feel any of these gender identities fit you. That's okay, too!

Gender expression

You can see that the green dots that symbolise 'gender expression' are outside the unicorn (i.e. not in its thoughts). This is because your gender expression is what's visible about your gender to other people. How much do other people read you as masculine, feminine, a bit of both, something else, or perhaps nothing at all? This could depend on how you dress, walk, talk or act, or on your body shape. Some of your gender expression – like your haircut, clothing or makeup – could change from day to day.

Sex assigned at birth

When you were born, the doctor or midwife assigned you a sex based on your body's physical characteristics. This is a fixed category that may be different from how your gender self-identity develops as you grow. Does your birth certificate say you're male, female, or intersex or other? Most people are assigned 'male' or 'female' when they're born, based on their external genitalia. Some people might be classified as 'intersex' (or something else) when their sex characteristics, chromosomes or hormones are a bit ambiguous and don't fit neatly into what we designate as 'male' or 'female'.

Physical and emotional attraction

Near where the unicorn's heart would be are the orange and red hearts for physical and emotional attraction. These two have a lot of overlap, and generally represent parts of your sexuality or sexual orientation.

Physical attraction refers to the characteristics of a person that might make you physically or sexually attracted to them. Physical attraction can come from a variety of factors, including someone's gender identity, gender expression, or the sex they were assigned at birth.

Emotional attraction relates to the characteristics of a person that might make you emotionally or romantically attracted to them. This can also come from a variety of factors, including gender identity, gender expression, or the sex they were assigned at birth.

Both physical and emotional attraction can also come from a lot of other places, like someone's personality or even the things you have in common.

Some people might be attracted to the same gender as them (gay people and lesbians), and others might be attracted to people of the opposite gender to themselves (straight people).

Attraction is presented as a spectrum because some people (like bisexual or pansexual people) are attracted to multiple genders, and could be attracted to different genders in different ways, or to one gender more than another.

Many people find that these labels don't fully explain their attractions. Some of these people might call themselves 'queer'. Thinking of attraction as a spectrum allows us to fully explore our attractions without boxing them into a category that might not feel quite right.

Some people don't feel any kind of physical attraction to other people, and that's called being asexual. Similarly, aromantic describes those who don't feel emotional attraction to people.

How do all these concepts overlap?

While the sex you were assigned at birth is a fixed category, your gender identity and gender expression could be a much more fluid combination of masculine/feminine and other genders. Some people, known as cisgender people, have a gender identity that matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Hopefully, the Gender Unicorn helps to make things a little less confusing. Just remember: no matter what your gender identity is, or who you're attracted to, you are enough, exactly as you are. You don't have to fit a neat label. You can just be you.