Beyond the Binary: A Look at Gender Identity and Sexuality

Sydney Harris
sfharris@carroll.edu

Kaia Roberge
kroberge@carroll.edu

Hailey Vietz
hvietz@carroll.edu

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Harris, Sydney; Roberge, Kaia; and Vietz, Hailey, "Beyond the Binary: A Look at Gender Identity and Sexuality" (2018). Carroll College Student Undergraduate Research Festival. 38.
https://scholars.carroll.edu/surf/2018/all/38

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Introduction

Individuals’ expressions of self are not binary, yet our society thinks of two opposite and complementary categories of humans—male and female. In reality, the expression of gender is fluid and varied. We explore what makes up a person’s identity and how gender expression can be linked to sexuality. By doing so we hope to show people that gender and sexuality are fluid and that there is no “proper” combination of the two.

Gender and Sexuality in Other Cultures

The idea of a “third gender” occurs in many cultures around the world. For example, many Native American cultures had three recognized genders: male, female, and berdache; males expressed as berdache women and females expressed as berdache men. This is different from the Western view of transgendered individuals because berdache do not fall within the two-gender binary. They had “two-spirits,” which resulted in them being neither male nor female, rather, a completely separate gender.

Sexual Orientation Continuum - Kinsey 1953

People are not fully heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual - Helps people figure out where they may fit on this continuum.

Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

It advances ideas of continuum. Sexual orientation can change; it is not static.

Terms to Know

Gender: behavioral, social, cultural, etc.
Sex: biological; male = XY, female = XX, intersex= chromosomal and/or biological variations
Gender binary: idea that there exists only male and female
Gender identity: which gender you view yourself as. Biologically if we are XY, we will identify as male and vice versa
Gender expression: the way you externally show your gender identity; masculine or feminine
Sexual orientation: which sex you are attracted to
Gender roles: your place in society as a male or female

“Doing Gender”

Gender is a routine, it is something that we accomplish in our everyday lives. “Doing gender” refers to the idea that make men and women different from each other. These activities are not natural, we do them in order to appear as masculine or feminine as possible. If people don’t adhere, there may be consequences and repercussions. Sandra Bem’s Sex Role Inventory studied people’s adherence to gendered behavior. The majority of both men and women are actually androgynous (Figures 3 and 4). Being masculine or feminine requires rejecting the opposite gender norms.