

GENDER IN 50 MIN OR LESS

BY RACHEL GOLD

Expanded and updated edition with an introduction by
poet and Harvard professor Stephanie Burt

being emily

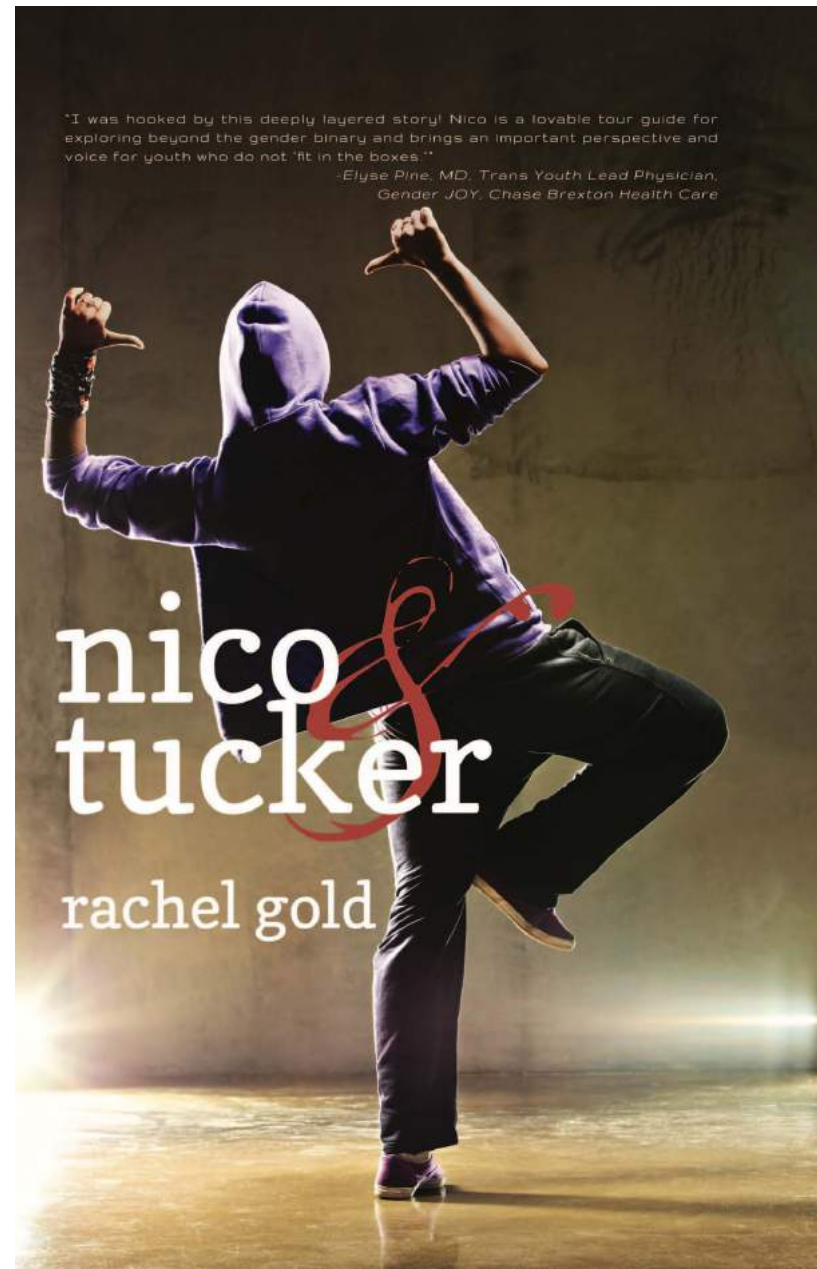
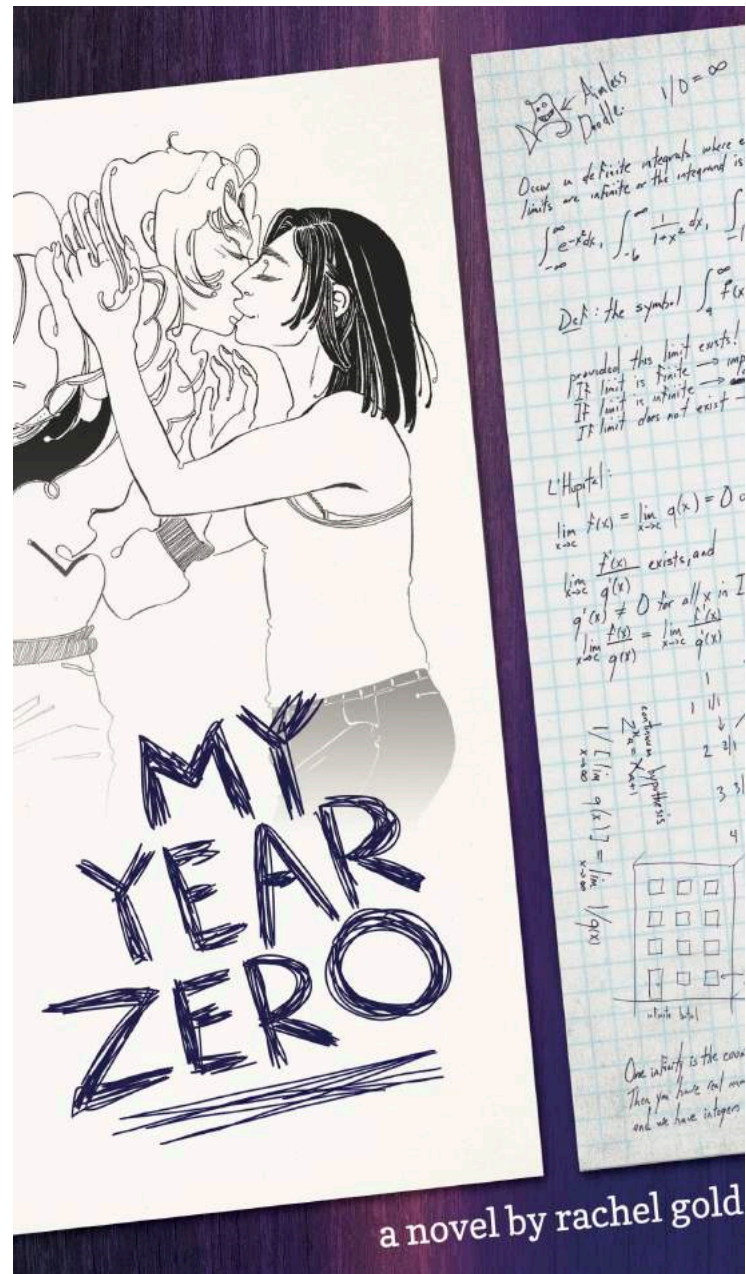


rachel gold

From the award-winning author of *Being Emily*

justgirls

rachel gold



FROM MY JOURNAL AT 14:

“Okay, first kiss, damn it! Not a good experience. Why the hell did I let Bryan kiss me? (To get him out of the door.) Obviously I didn’t like it ...”

Conclusions:

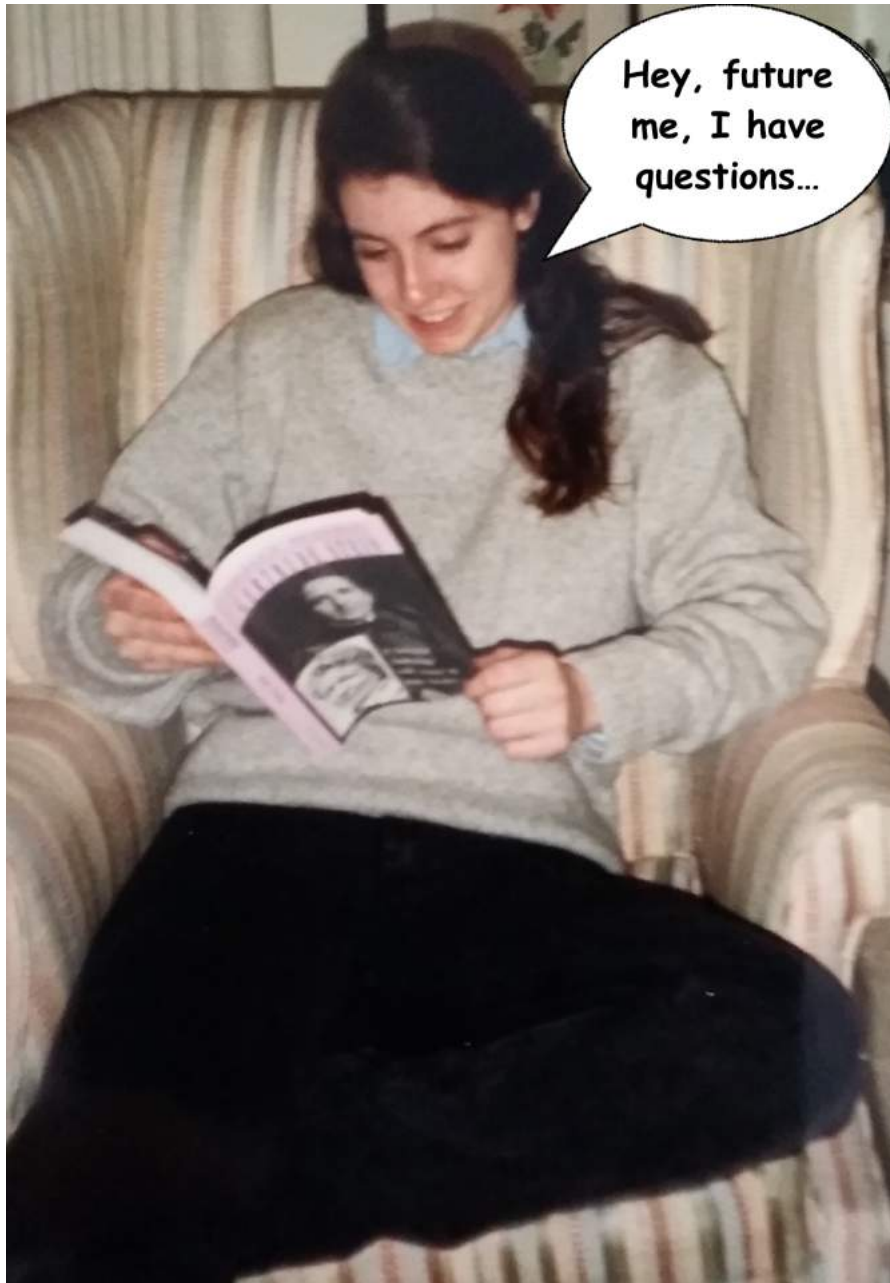
- boys are gross, girls are wonderful
- we have two genders/sexes
- I want to kiss girls

AT 15:

In *The Descent of Inanna*, from about 2000 BCE, the god Enki creates **two beings “neither male nor female.”**

“He gave the food of life to the *kurgarra*.
He gave the water of life to the *galatur*.”

Wait?! There are genderless beings in ancient Sumer who are entrusted with the food and water of life! How is that possible?



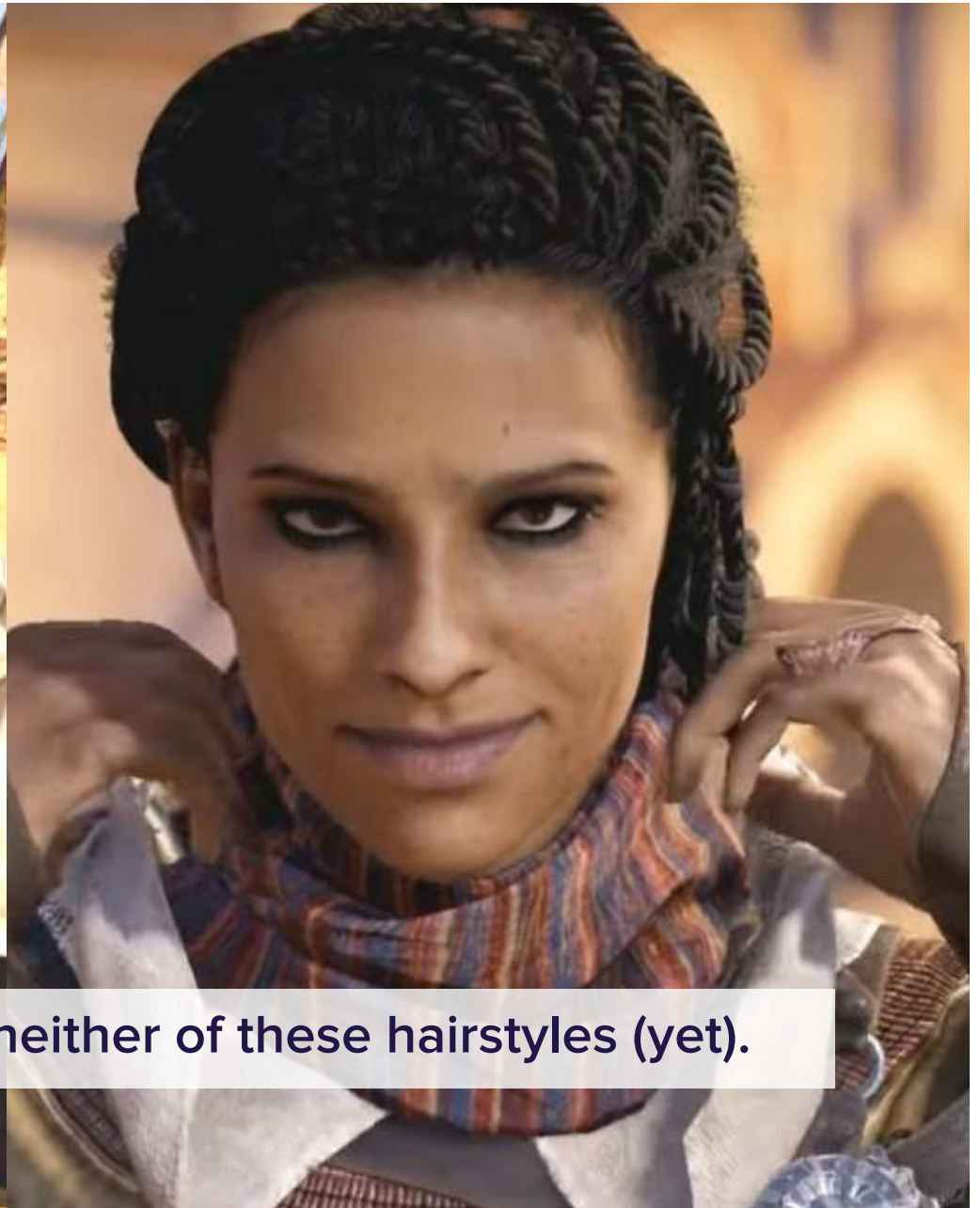
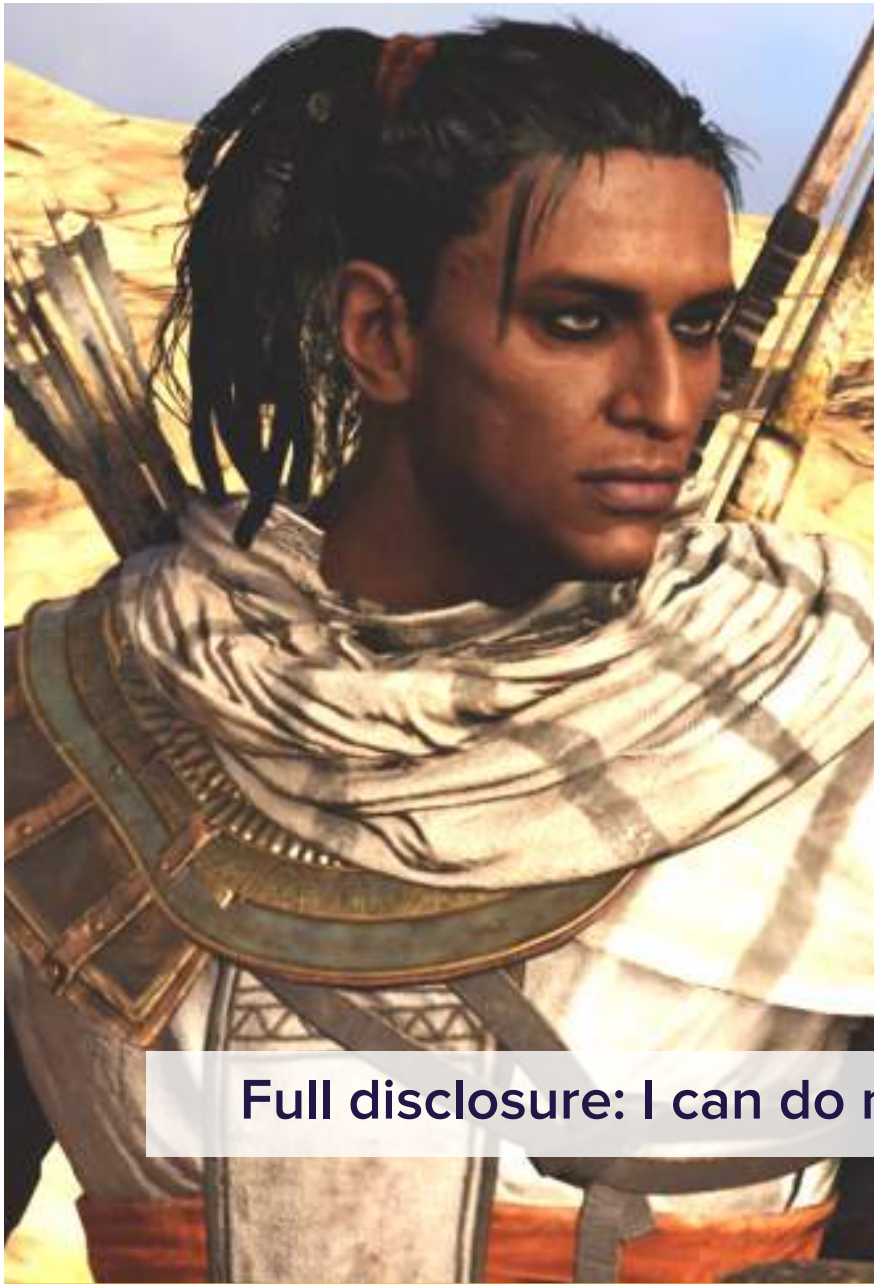
AT 17

What if I love dating girls, but feel like I'm *not only* a girl?

If gender is constructed does that mean it's real or not?

Am I my biology?

Should I ask that girl out?



Full disclosure: I can do neither of these hairstyles (yet).

GENDER STARTS WITH ...

At birth, babies are assigned a gender.



Female/
Girl



Male/
Boy

SEX & GENDER

We're constantly learning more about what goes into both of these categories, but:

Sex = some facts about bodies

Gender = what our culture prioritizes & says those facts mean
+plus+ your life in our culture (social, psychological, spiritual, and biology)



AS YOU GROW UP:

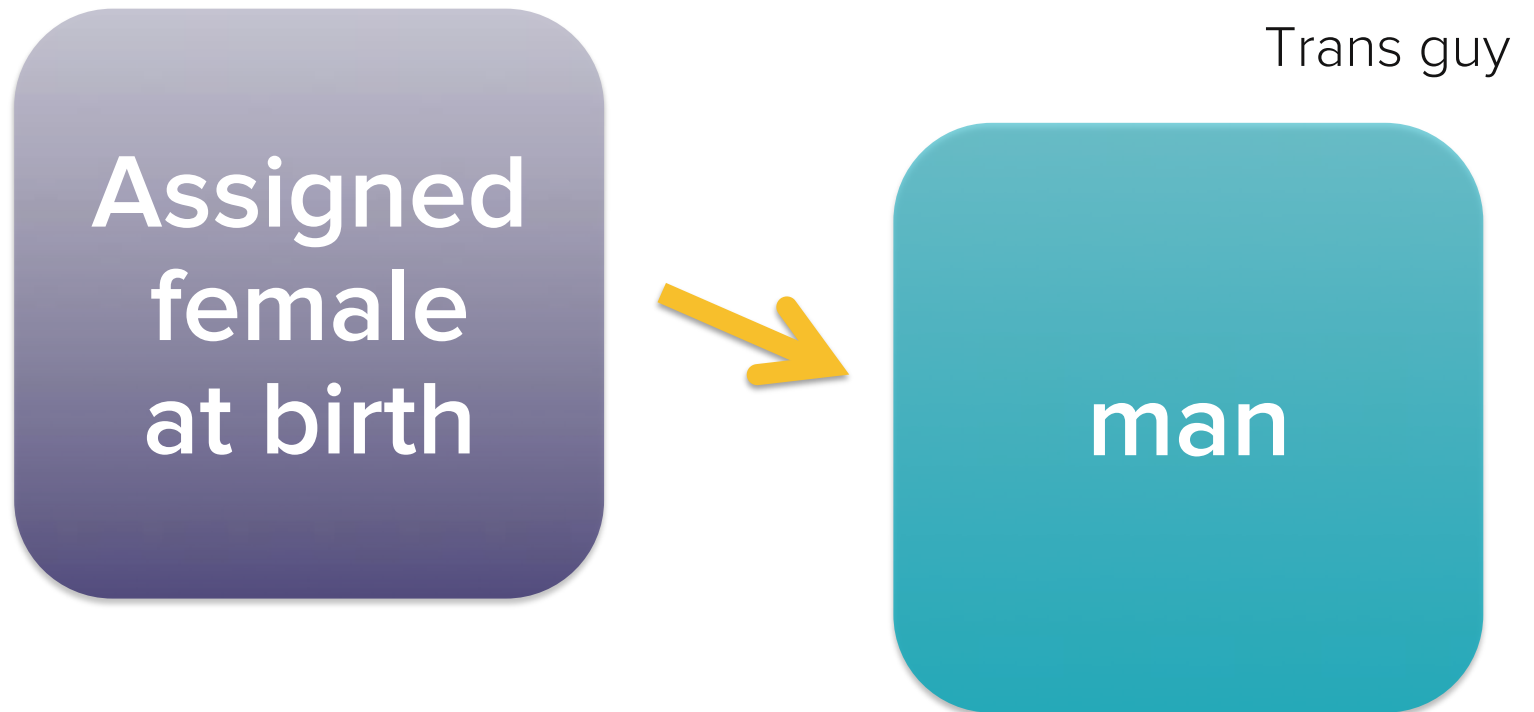
If you stay in your box, you're cisgender:



From “cis” meaning “on the same side of” + gender.

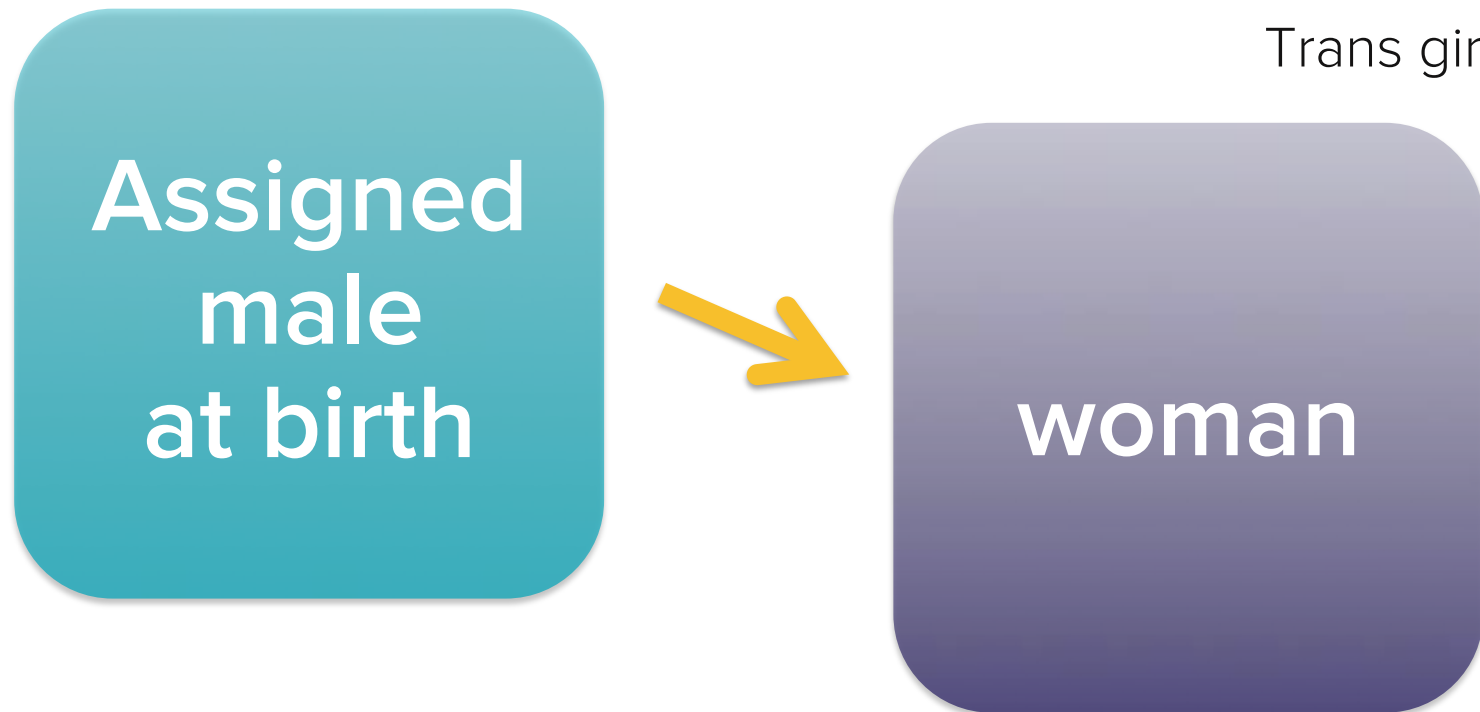
AS YOU GROW UP:

If you move boxes, you get to call yourself transgender (from the prefix “trans” meaning “beyond, across, through” + gender) :



AS YOU GROW UP:

If you move circles, you get to call yourself transgender:



10,000 years of gender

(and 40,000+ years
of something else)



THE OLDEST KNOWN DILDO

31,000 years old!



THE LIKELY PAST

“ ... the transition from Neolithic to Bronze Age may have involved ... a new social configuration of gender: **perhaps a shift from something you did to something you were.**”

“What we take as a ‘normal’ gender system may in fact have a specific European historicity extending only a few thousand years.”

– from *Becoming Gendered
In European Prehistory*

THE BIRTH OF FIXED GENDER

Climate change → settled agriculture → patriarchy:

“Systems of male control—patriarchies—emerged that exist to this day.”

— from *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong*

CREATING FIXED GENDER

Early cultures show evidence of struggling with fixed gender. In ancient Sumer, the goddess Inanna could “turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man.”



GENDER COLONIZATION

“I came to realize that the fundamental category ‘woman’ — which is foundational in Western gender discourses — simply did not exist in Yorùbáland prior to its sustained contact with the West. ... prior to the infusion of Western notions into Yorùbá culture, the body was not the basis of social roles, inclusions, or exclusions; it was not the foundation of social thought and identity.”

– Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*



SAMOA: FA'AFINE

“They are men, but they are our sisters.”

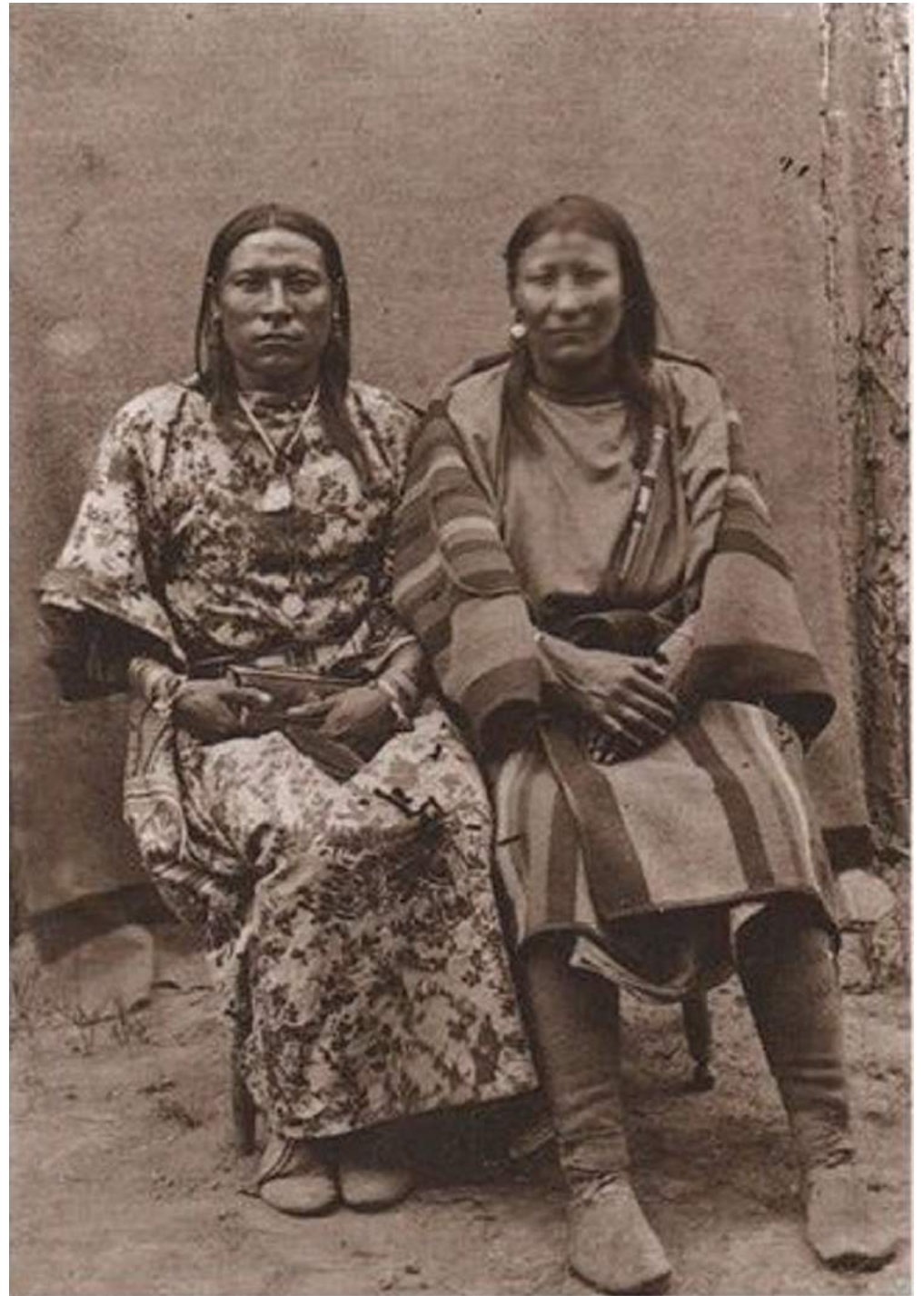


(c) John Correy 2007

NATIVE AMERICAN: MANY GENDERS

Gender systems varied
from tribe to tribe.

Some had five genders
and required a spiritual
context to be understood.



INDIA: HIJRA



Reach for your seat belt,

JEWISH CULTURE: SIX GENDERS

- *Nekeivah*/נְקִיבָה
- *Zachar*/זָכָר
- *Androgynos*/אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס
- *Tumtum*/טוּמְטוּם .
- *Ay'lonit*/אֵילוֹנִית
- *Saris*/סָרִיס



THAILAND: TOMS

“It depends on each person, but I personally want *toms* to be cute ...*Toms* are basically women, and they should keep their girliness.”



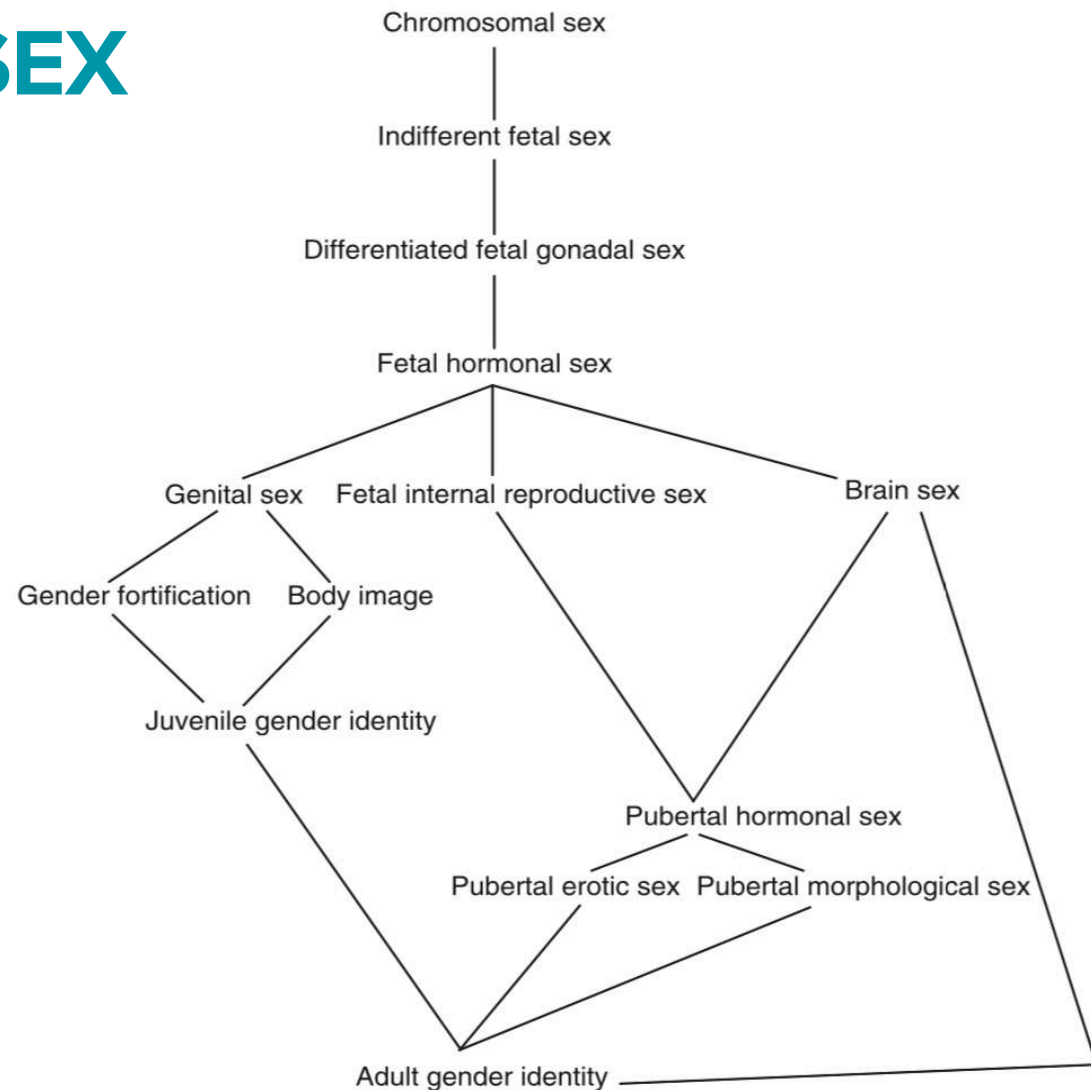
Biology

(does not operate in
a vacuum)



LAYERS OF SEX

Why “what sex are you?” is not only impolite, but really hard to answer.



From: *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (The Routledge Series Integrating Science and Culture)

Figure 2.2 Layers of sex.

REAL LIFE IMPLICATIONS

“I was expelled from our athletes’ residence, my sports scholarship was revoked, and my running times were erased from my country’s athletics records. I felt ashamed and embarrassed. I lost friends, my fiancé, hope, and energy.”

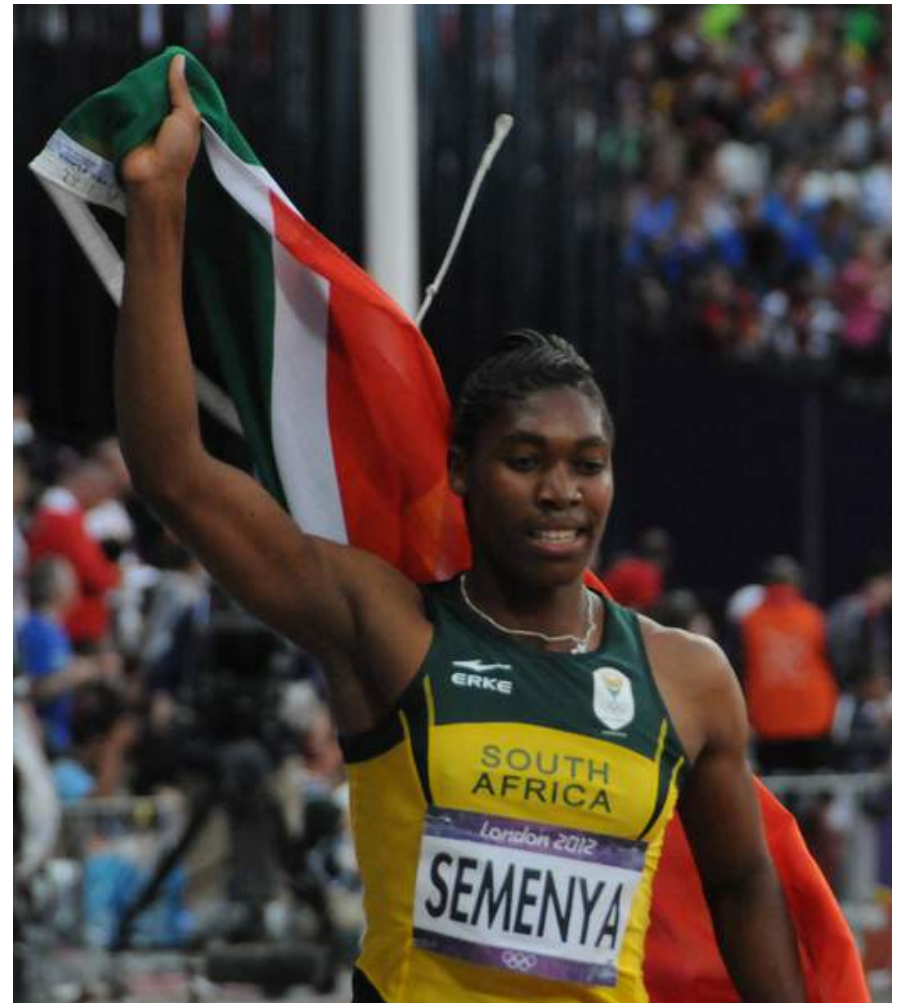
– María José Martínez-Patiño, Spanish national champion hurdler



REAL LIFE IMPLICATIONS

“I think [sport] is all about loving one another. It’s not about discriminating against people. ...When you walk out of your apartment you think about performing, you do not think about how your opponent looks.”

– Caster Semenya, South African Olympic gold medalist



EXAMPLE: HORMONES

We call them “sex” hormones but:

- a) They do a lot of other things in the body
- b) Every person has all of them

Female bodies need testosterone.

Male bodies need estrogen.

Human bodies can turn testosterone into estrogen and vice versa.



HOW GENDER WORKS

The brains of straight transgender women respond like the brains of straight cisgender women to men's pheromones.



HOW GENDER WORKS

People who smell good to lesbians:



HOW GENDER WORKS

“These results provide evidence that, early in development, transgender youth are statistically indistinguishable from cisgender children of the same gender identity.”

– *Gender Cognition in Transgender Children,*
Journal of Psychological Science, 2015

IS GENDER A HUMAN UNIVERSAL?

Gender is both constructed and real.

This is one reason why some people experience a fixed, life-long gender (women, men, nonbinary) and some people have blended, fluid, contextual genders or no gender.

All of these are valid, real ways of being human.

Welcome to the future



HOW IS GENDER REAL?

Gender is like money—real, important in our lives, capable of shaping us biologically.

For example, poverty-induced stress can “change the way in which the body copes with the environment and the way in which the brain develops.”



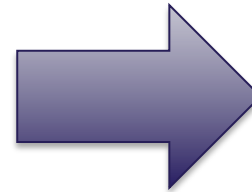
HOW GENDER IS REAL

“... osteoporosis is culturally mediated.”

*“That gender can produce biological findings of sex differences—that, as Fausto-Sterling puts it, ‘**our bodies physically imbibe culture**’—is well documented.”*

— Sarah Richardson, *Sex Itself*

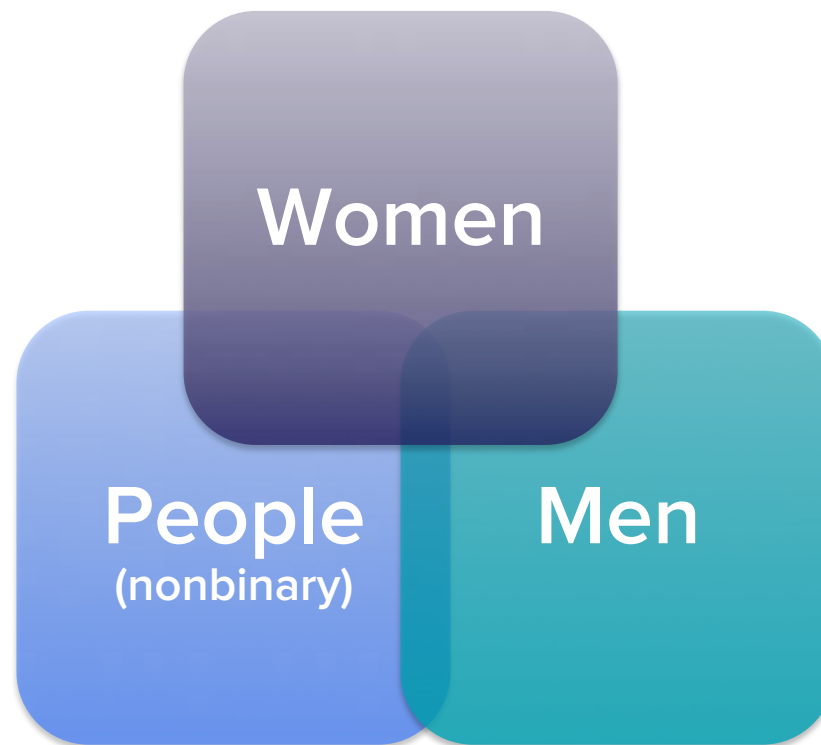
HOW GENDER IS REAL



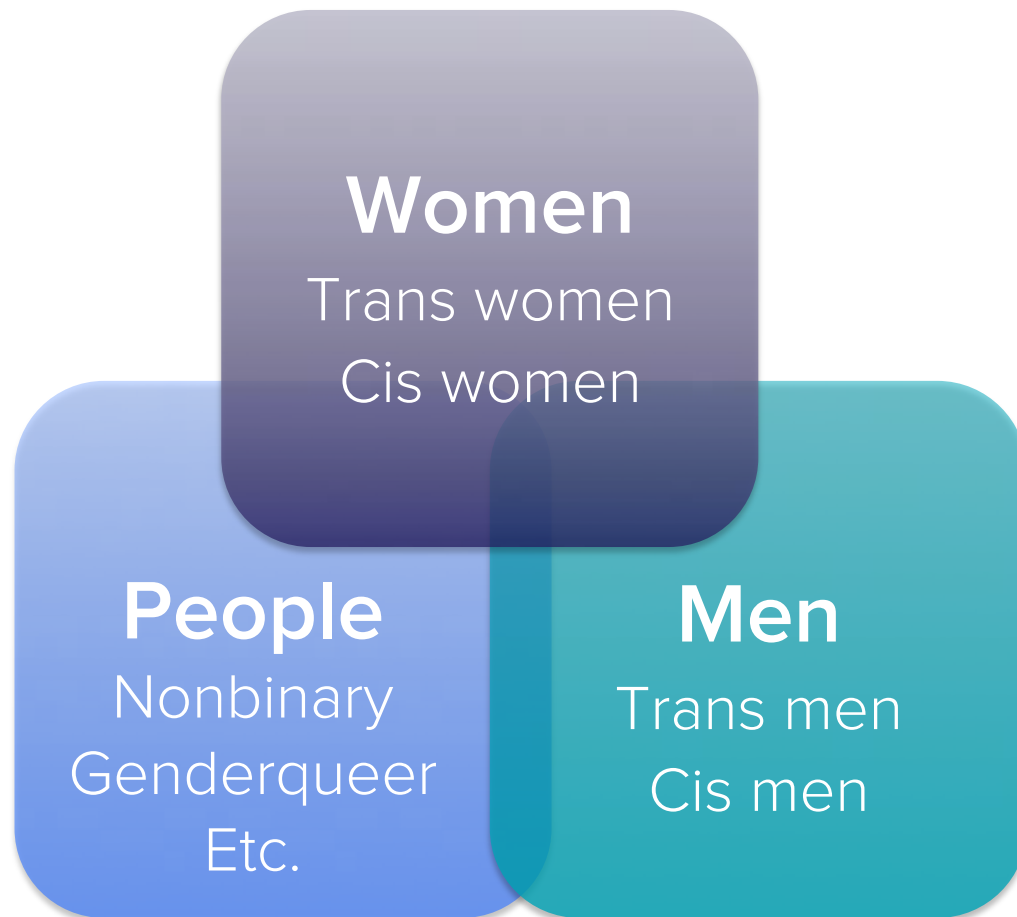
Estrogen causes boobs.
Boobs + culture increase risk of osteoporosis.

WESTERN CULTURE

We can and should evolve gender as a system. The U.S. is moving toward recognizing three genders (and other countries are ahead of us):



OUR THREE GENDERS AGAIN:



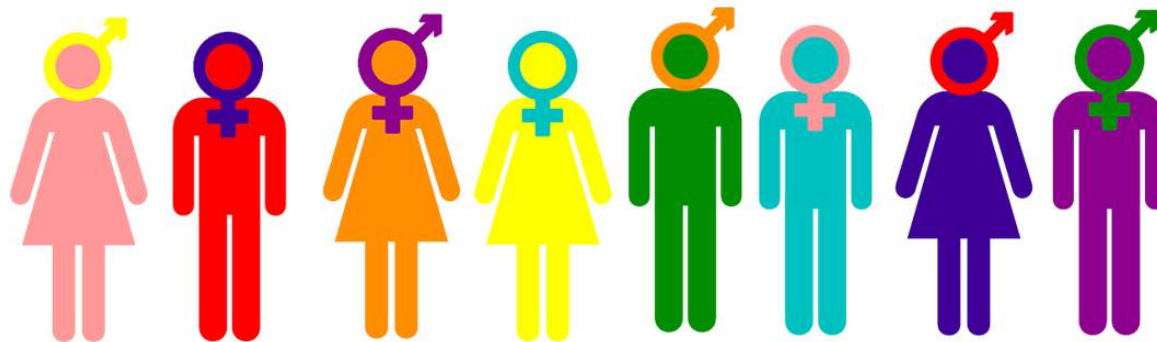
Some people move between boxes as adults (genderfluid), or avoid the boxes (agender).

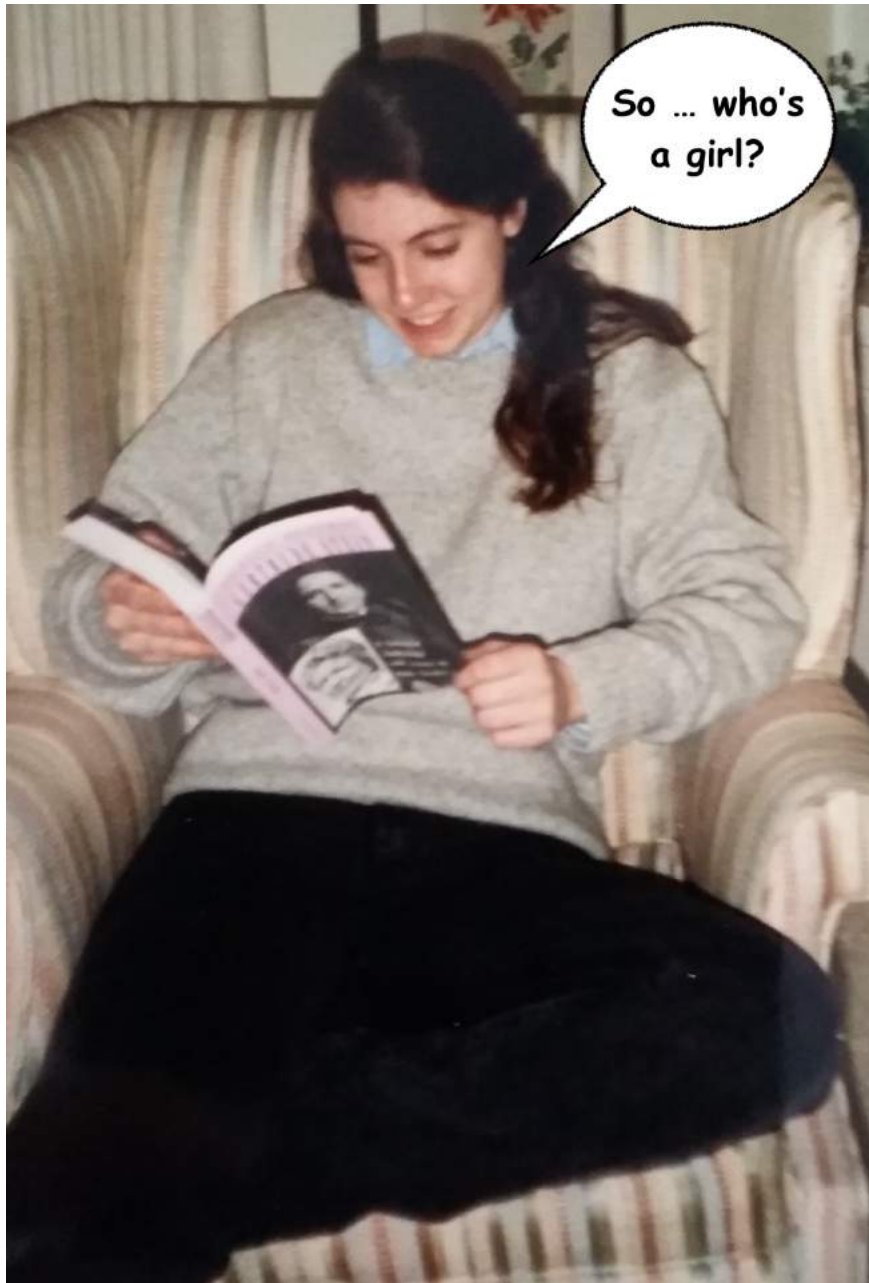
Those people are also often considered nonbinary. (But it's up to them if they identify as nonbinary or not.)

MORE GENDERS!

Studies have shown 3-5% of people identifying as nonbinary.

Israel study: general population (2225 participants) over 35% felt they were to some extent the other gender, both genders and/or neither gender.





Lesbians include:

“... cis women, trans women, and the subset of genderqueer/ nonbinary individuals who identify as both female and male (e.g. two-spirit, bigender, pangender) ...”

– Prof. Charlotte Tate,
Journal of Lesbian Studies

WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

Cis women and trans women



WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

Kate Bornstein:
genderfluid
person whose
genders include
woman.

Pronouns: ze/hir

Included? Yes!



WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

Dr. Charlotte Tate:
butch trans lesbian.

Pronouns: she/her

Included? Yes!



WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

Ari Fitz:
androgynous
trans, she/her/
daddy

Included? That's
for Ari to say!



WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

C. N. Lester:
genderqueer, pronouns:
they/them


Included? Up to them!



WHO IS INCLUDED IN “LESBIAN?”

What about me? ... If Kate's in, I'm in!





I'd love to. I'm a
femme writer, can I write
a book about you, too?

I'm a
genderflux
demiboy, want
to go out?

Thank you!

Questions?

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