

Treball de Recerca

# What Is Gender?

An investigation about the social meanings of gender



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“I think the question we should ask ourselves is not what makes a person not identify with the gender that matches their biological sex, but what makes a person identify with any gender at all”.

- Miquel Missé

## **Abstract**

Gender can be defined in many different ways from a social point of view. This research paper consists in a study of the work about gender of some of the best known philosophers and authors in the field of gender studies and queer theory. The research has been carried out with the reading of some books on the topic, and the investigation about the theories and thoughts of these authors. With the information and the knowledge obtained from this investigation, the main goal is to come up with a real definition for gender, more adequate to present-day society than the ones that can be found in recognized dictionaries or world-wide known institutions. Also, another goal of this work is to make a group of teenagers think and meditate over the meaning of gender, through an interactive and dynamic exposition that implicitly introduces some of the thoughts from the investigated authors and philosophers.

El gènere es pot definir de moltes maneres diferents des d'un punt de vista social. Aquest treball de recerca consisteix en un estudi de les obres sobre el gènere d'alguns dels autors i filòsofs més reconeguts en el camp dels estudis de gènere i la teoria queer. La recerca s'ha dut a terme amb la lectura d'alguns llibres sobre el tema, i la investigació dels pensaments i teories d'aquests autors. Amb la informació i el coneixements obtinguts amb aquesta investigació, l'objectiu principal és elaborar una definició real de gènere, més adient a la societat actual que les que es poden trobar en diccionaris reconeguts o institucions de renom mundial. A més, un altre objectiu d'aquest treball és aconseguir fer pensar i meditar sobre el significat del gènere a un grup d'adolescents, a través d'una exposició dinàmica i interactiva que introdueix implícitament alguns dels pensaments dels autors i filòsofs investigats.

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# 1. Introduction

What is gender? If you look up the answer to this question in google, many different definitions come up for the term gender. Here are some of them:

- Oxford Languages dictionary: Gender is either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.
- Wikipedia: Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them.
- World Health Organization: Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed.
- Council of Europe: Gender is a series of socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men.

But even if these are definitions by recognized dictionaries or world-wide known institutions, that does not mean they are true or accurate enough.

If we asked an expert in this subject, for example an author or a philosopher, they would probably have a much more complex definition that we wouldn't even understand. However, if we asked an uninformed person, maybe they would tell us that gender is an invention by leftists or they would not be able to answer.

In this research paper, the main goal is to come up with a real definition of gender, adequate to today's society and based on the thinking of some of the most renowned philosophers and writers in the field. To do so, the research consists in a study of some of these authors' works, theories, thoughts, experiments and investigations, which is all summarized in the theoretical mark.

The reason I have chosen this topic and this research question is because gender studies and queer theory is something that interests me a lot, and I thought I would have a better time conducting research on something that I found interesting. Also, the adversities gender non-conforming people have to face it is something that I experience firsthand in my daily life, as I have an "androgynous" gender expression.

Therefore, gender identity and gender in philosophy is something that I had investigated about and put a lot of thought into before even deciding the theme of my TR. This way, although this topic is really complex and challenging, I felt brave and prepared enough to do my research on it.

To conduct the research, I started by reading some introductory books on the theme, like *Queer: una historia gráfica* and *Género: una guía gráfica*, both of them by Meg-John Barker and Jules Scheele. After I had an overview on the theme, I kept on reading some more elaborate and dense books, like: *A la conquista del cos equivocat* by Miquel Missé, *Las teorías queer: una introducción* by Lorenzo Bernini and *Teoría queer: políticas bolleras, maricas, trans i mestizas* by David Córdoba, Javier Sáez and Paco Vidarte. With the reading of these books, I was able to obtain a lot of information and knowledge on the theories of many different authors. However, I decided to include only five of these authors in the theoretical mark, which are: John Money, Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Judith Butler and Miquel Missé. I chose these authors because I thought their theories the most interesting of the ones I had learned about, and the information on their thoughts was more accessible. Other authors I read about and I learned about their theories, but I did not include in the final list were: Fina Birulés, Christine Delphy, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Michel Foucault, Jack Halberstam, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Paul B. Preciado and Gayle Rubin.

At first, I was really indecisive about what to do for the practical mark. I thought about writing my own “gender theory” and many other possibilities, but neither of them felt imaginative or creative enough. Then, I remembered that a long time ago I had seen a TED Talk by a young teenager who identified as non-binary, called Audrey Mason-Hyde. Seeing them talk about their gender identity and expression, and their experiences related to gender in front of a large audience had a great impact on me. So I decided to make my own attempt, and add my own twist.

For the practical part I have prepared a didactic and dynamic exposition for Batxillerat students from my high school, with the help of all the information and knowledge obtained during my research. The goal of this presentation is to make the audience meditate and think about the topic of gender, and to essentially change their perception of it.

To understand the content of this research paper, it is of vital importance to know and understand the meaning of a few basic concepts, like gender, sexual orientation and biological sex, which are often confused by society. These concepts along with some others, all underlined the first time they appear in this research paper, are explained in a brief glossary.

## 2. Theoretical Part

### 2.1. John Money



John William Money (New Zealand, 1921 - Maryland, 2006) was a psychologist, sexologist, professor and author known for his research into psychoendocrinology and biology of gender. He was one of the first researchers in the world to publish theories on the influence of societal constructs of gender on individual formation of gender identity.

Money is the first author in history who introduced numerous definitions related to gender, and developed several theories and related terminology, including gender identity or gender role.

Up until the 1950s decade, the word “gender”, derived from the latin *genus*, was only used as a grammatical term. John Money was the first to use the word in a new context in an academic article on intersexual children from 1955. In the article, he first talked about “gender identity” to describe the individual conscience of one self as a man or a woman. Money defended that gender identity was mutable and could be constructed, at least in the case of intersexual children. In this sense, he stated that one’s gender identity depended on how they are raised and educated, and that it could differ from biological sex.

In his opinion, making a child identify as a boy or a girl only required a reconstruction of the genitals and an appropriate environment for that sex in particular. He believed that it was possible to change the biological sex in a person, and that children born with ambiguous genitals could be assigned a different sex through a surgical modification.

Money also created the term gender role, which he differentiated from the more traditional concept sex role, and is now commonly used in society. To invent this term, he relied on his understanding of sex differences among human beings.



According to him, the genitalia and erotic sexual roles, apart from all the non-genital and non-erotic activities defined by the conventions of society to apply to males or to females, were included under this new and more general term.

In his article *An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism*, he defined gender as:

"all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively. It includes, but is not restricted to sexuality in the sense of eroticism. Gender role is appraised in relation to the following: general mannerisms, deportment and demeanor; play preferences and recreational interests; spontaneous topics of talk in unprompted conversation and casual comment; content of dreams, daydreams and fantasies; replies to oblique inquiries and projective tests; evidence of erotic practices, and, finally, the person's own replies to direct inquiry."

John Money, 1955

Money established the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic in 1965, the first clinic in the United States to perform sexual reassignment surgery. But Money's history as a doctor remains still nowadays really controversial.

In 1966, he performed a surgical intervention on David Reimer, a small boy that had suffered great damages in his penis in a circumcision surgery. Money told his parents that the child should be raised as a girl and supplied him feminine hormones in order to develop feminine traits in his childhood. Brenda, which is the name the parents chose for the child, grew up to be a really masculine girl, both physically and expressively, and when she was 14 she suffered from depression due to her discomfort with her body. Then, her parents agreed to tell her that she had been born a boy, and Brenda decided to transition back to boy, and therefore stopped taking hormones and submitted himself to surgical interventions. He lived the rest of his life tormented by this traumatic experience and had to deal with several mental illnesses, and therefore he committed suicide at the age of 38. The case of David Reimer is really popular and commonly brought up in the debates on sex reassignment surgeries.

In conclusion, Money made the concept of gender a broader, more inclusive concept than one of masculine or feminine. From his point of view, gender included not only one's status as a man or a woman, but was also a matter of personal recognition, social assignment, or legal determination. Money's definitions of "gender identity" and "gender role" also relied on the argument that gender is not a biological but a social issue, and his publications were some of the first in the academic world to refer to gender as a social construction. And even though his reputation as a doctor has affected his legacy as an author, his texts still remain really influential on the academic world nowadays.

## 2.2. Simone de Beauvoir



Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir (Paris, 1908-1986) was a French existentialist philosopher, writer, teacher, social theorist, and feminist activist. Her most popular work, the treatise *The Second Sex*, is considered a foundational tract of contemporary feminism and has influenced both feminist existentialism and feminist theory.

De Beauvoir's work related to gender centers especially around the figure of women and its oppression. She parts from the question: "What is a woman?"; asking herself if being a woman is only a biological fact that depends on one's sex, or if it is also a cultural process. With the distinction between the concepts "female" and "woman", Beauvoir establishes that the second one is a result exclusively of culture. In this sense, she affirms that a human being is born female or male, but has to go through a long process to become a woman or a man. This distinction is the base of the concept of gender, that differs from sex because it is not something given (a destiny, in Beauvoir's words), but rather a social construction that each individual carries out in their own different ways. This construction is partly voluntary, because it depends on the vital actions we do, and partly involuntary.

The author states that there is no coincidence between natural identity and gender identity, and she warns us that femininity should not be considered as a fact determined by a biological or organic reality, but rather that it should be understood as a social construct. In this sense, she makes the famous quote:

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"

Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

From Beauvoir's point of view, sex is an invariant and anatomical aspect of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meaning and form that the body acquires. With this distinction, it is not possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and by consequence, we cannot refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behavior. Therefore, all genders are, by definition, unnatural.

Another insight from Beauvoir's thought is that, if gender is the cultural interpretation of sex, then it lacks the fix and enclosed characteristic of identity. Furthermore, gender must be understood as a process of interpretation of bodies, giving them cultural form. In other words, to be a woman is to become a woman; it is not a matter of submitting to a fixed status, in which case one could be born a woman, but, rather, an active process of appropriating, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.

De Beauvoir admits that not only becoming a woman is a process, but also becoming a man. Nevertheless, she sustains that the woman is the "marked" gender, the place of disturbing and even dangerous difference, while the man is the place of "neutral", and therefore of also the positive values. On this matter, the famous sentence "the woman is the other to the man" must be interpreted in this sense: men have thought about women as a unique and negative model, in an opposed sense to all that men represent. Often, this difference with effects of inequality has been justified according to the "nature" of the two sexes. In this regard, she affirms:

"When women act like women, they are accused of being inferior. When women act like human beings, they are accused of behaving like men."

Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

To sum up, Simone de Beauvoir's thought about gender comes from her interest in finding the cause for the oppression of women. Therefore, she gives a lot of importance to the question of femininity and the difference between the concepts "female" and "woman", and she concludes that gender is an unnatural social construction that each individual carries out in its own different ways.

### 2.3. Monique Wittig



Monique Wittig (Dannemarie, 1935 – Tucson, 2003) was a French philosopher, theorist, author, feminist and lesbian activist. Her work, focused on the investigation about overcoming socially enforced gender roles, has had a great influence on materialist feminism, radical feminism and lesbian feminism.

Monique Wittig, like most of the French feminist theorists, such as the already mentioned Simone de Beauvoir, considers gender as a system of social domination and exploitation roles. The main goal of this group of materialist feminists is the construction of a theory about gender inequality that takes into account the processes and structures that constitute it, and in the case of Wittig, this theory is the regime of heterosexuality.

In *The Straight Mind*, her best known work, the author writes about heterosexuality as a social binary system based on the oppression of women by men that produces the doctrine of the difference between the two sexes to justify this oppression. The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual. In this sense, “man” and “woman” are opposite political concepts that result from the oppression of the first over the second.

Heterosexuality is the political regime that, from Wittig’s point of view, assures the reproduction of this structure of exploitation and domination of women. The category of women and the differentiation of sex is just a product of the mechanisms of the structure of subordination, and an individual can only become a woman in entering this mark of relationships.

Wittig’s model of heterosexuality is a totalizing and enclosed structure that does not present any cracks or fissures, and therefore any identity that does not respond to its mechanisms automatically does not belong to the system. This results in the famous quote from the philosopher:

“It would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women”.

Monique Wittig, 1978

This conclusion is the only possible exit to the enclosed model Wittig presents. If every identity constituted in the interior of heterosexuality's regime responds to the logic of its reproduction, it is only from the rejection of these categories that this regime can put into question.

In the essay from 1981 *One is not born a woman*, the author predicts that the fight of classes between men and women will advocate the extinction or abolition of the two concepts. For Wittig, the social or gender category "woman" exists only through its relation to the social or gender category "man". On this matter, Wittig affirms:

“What makes a woman is a specific social relationship with a man, a relationship that we previously called servitude, and that implies both a personal or physical obligation, and an economic one”.

Monique Wittig, 1981

Thus, "women" without relation to "men" would cease to exist: just as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men. Wittig thought that the expression of one's identity and the liberation of desire require the abolition of these gender categories, leaving individuals freed from social constructs and categories dictating behavior or norms.

Wittig affirms there is not any natural trait to sex difference beyond the ideological effects of the heterosexual political regime, and she reaches the same point in her investigation as Judith Butler, which is later developed in this work. But Butler and other queer theorists deny the structuralist and totalizing nature of Wittig's heterosexual regime: gay, lesbian and bisexual identities are not completely exterior to this regime. Therefore, heterosexuality can be considered a threatened system by the possibility of being subverted.

To sum up, from Monique Wittig's perspective, gender, or to say the least, gender categories man and woman, only exist inside the regime of heterosexuality. Therefore, everyone whose sexuality does not fit in this system does not have a gender, or cannot be considered a man or a woman. Another important aspect from the author's work is her vision of "women" as an opposite political concept to "man", a relationship that sustains on the oppression and exploitation of the second over the first. Finally, the categories of "man" and "woman" exist only in a heterosexual system, and to destroy it would end in the abolition of these, freeing individuals from the roles and norms of the gender social construct.

## 2.4. Judith Butler



Judith Pamela Butler (Cleveland, 1956) is a non-binary person with Jewish roots from the United States. Her work as a philosopher, writer and gender theorist has heavily influenced political philosophy, ethics, feminism and queer-liberation movements. She is best-known for the book *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*, which is considered the foundational work of queer theory.

Judith Butler's most influential thought in queer theory is the performative production of gender and sexual identity. In it, Butler denies that any manifestation of gender responds to an interiority or essence that expresses itself through that manifestation. This way, she rejects the idea of the causal chain between the concepts: gender, sexual orientation and sex, giving a change of causal directionality in the relationship between the three, especially between sex and gender. On this matter, Butler shares the vision with Monique Wittig and the rest of French materialist feminists in which gender is no longer an expression of sex, but sex is an effect of the social division between genders.

This vision of the relationship between sex, gender and sexual orientation is opposed to the normative regime of sexuality in which sexual identities are produced, a model she names heterosexual matrix. Butler affirms that not only the individuals in which there is coherence between sex, gender and sexual orientation (cisgender and heterosexual men and women) are produced by the heterosexual matrix, but the non-normative and minority sexual identities do too. In this regard, the author also states that the heterosexual matrix produces the discourse in which sex is a category of gender, and gender is a category of the heterosexual desire. For this reason, the concept of sexual orientation no longer "works" when the binary interpretation is put into question: because gender and sex derive from (hetero)sexual orientation.

More specifically, Butler defines gender as a staging behind which there is no natural or interior essence; and sex as an effect of the process of naturalization of the social



structure of gender and the heterosexual matrix. Furthermore, behind any acts or gender performances, there is not an essence of which these acts or performances are expressions or externalizations; on the contrary, it is the performances themselves, in their compulsive repetition, that produce the effect-illusion of a natural essence. In this sense, Butler states:

"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."

Judith Butler, 1990

Butler uses the art of drag as an example in her work. In this type of art, performers of masculine sex called "drag queens" stage an exaggerated femininity in their gesture, clothing, hair and make-up, often without completely hiding their masculine body; and performers of feminine sex called "drag kings" act with masculine clothing and mimic an exaggerated masculinity, often without completely hiding their feminine body. Butler affirms that drag performance is a space in which the causal chain between sex, gender and sexual orientation established by the heterosexual matrix is broken. What is brought into play in these performances is a mechanism of imitation that ends with the idea of an original, and at the same time reveals the imitative structure of gender.

A drag queen or king copies or mimics a specific gender, like woman or man, respectively, but it does so in a non-conventional context. This produces an effect of denaturalization of that specific gender and its formulas. Furthermore, drag art points out that the structure of gender is itself an imitation of a normative and unreachable ideal in all gender performances, and not only in the case of drag artists. On this matter, only the legitimacy given by the normative mark of the heterosexual matrix can distinguish a naturalized imitation from a parodic one.

To sum up, from Butler's point of view, drag art destabilizes the distinctions between natural and artificial, between interior and exterior, and proves that every gender is not a status, but a "doing", and that gender itself is a performance. About drag art, Butler affirms:

“There is no original or primary gender a drag queen or king imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.”

Judith Butler, 1990

The question Butler asks herself in this context is if the denaturalization and the destabilization of gender created by drag performance truly produce a subversion of the gender structure and the heterosexual matrix. The answer she comes up with is that any parodic act or performance of gender cannot be subversive by itself. In this sense, any repetition or imitation of a gender identity is open to producing an unpredictable effect in a determined context, and therefore it is not possible to predict if these effects are going to be subversive of the gender norms or are simply going to look like a parody or comedy of this gender identity.

In conclusion, Butler denies the existence of an interior essence that gender expression is a result of, and she meditates about the role in the system she names heterosexual matrix of the individuals whose gender performance comes out as non-normative. Butler’s vision of gender in her work points out its performative character, and she uses drag performers as a great example of this imitation of an unreachable ideal that gender itself is.

## 2.5. Miquel Missé



Miquel Missé Sánchez (Barcelona, 1986) is a transgender catalan writer, sociologist and LGBTQ+ activist. He has taken part in several trans liberation movements or organizations, like the 2012 international campaign Stop Trans Pathologization, and he has worked with renowned authors like Judith Butler.

Miquel Missé is the writer of *A la conquesta del cos equivoccat* (Conquering the “wrong” body), a book that centers on the debate about the relationship between transgender people and their bodies. On this work, he questions the myth that the discomfort transgender people suffer resides in their bodies. To do so, he hardly criticizes the idea of gender as a biological condition that relies inside our brains. On this matter, he affirms that this narrative contributes to consider the transgender issue as a disease, and goes against the depathologizing movements. He declares that this approach on gender encourages transgender people to transform their body in order to cease their pain and discomfort. He also points out that the cosmetic surgery field has taken advantage of it, especially in the case of transgender minors. In this regard, he states:

“The need to transform our bodies, as well as gender identity, is socially and symbolically constructed; and it depends on the possible lives that one can have with their body, the context in which one has to live in that body, and on the possible sexuality that awaits them in their body.”

Miquel Missé, 2019

To demonstrate to his readers that gender is not a biological but a social issue, or a “network of relationships and social meanings”, as he defines it, he proposes a few exercises. One of them is the *estranyament*, a social investigation method.

This method consists in observing everyday situations and trying to analyze them as if they were not. In this case, the situation we have to analyze is gender identity in our society. Gender identity is the gender category in which a person identifies with, and in our society we are given two options: man and woman. Nevertheless, most people do not really know what these two identities mean or why they identify with one of them, and some people don't even know they have a gender identity. They just know they are a man or a woman because society has taught them so.

To make it easier, we can imagine we are an alien from another planet who has no idea of human culture and the way our society works. If someone tried to explain to this alien what gender identity is, and how it works, he would end up really confused. He would probably have a lot of questions, like: How do people know they are a man or a woman? What do you feel when you are a man or a woman? Can you not feel like a man or a woman? Can you feel like a man or a woman at the same time? Can you not know how you feel? Does this feeling have anything to do with the biology of our bodies?

The truth is, if we tried to answer these questions to the alien, we would probably fail, because we do not even know what the answers to these questions are. This proves how relative gender identity and the feeling of being a man or a woman is. It also proves how gender identity has nothing to do with biology, but is a socially built experience.

Besides gender identity, in his work he also pays importance to the following concepts: sex and gender expression. In the current western society, these three categories are associated with each other: having (what modern medicine understands as) a biological male body is associated with the gender identity man and a masculine gender expression/having a biological female body is associated with the gender identity woman and a feminine gender expression.

According to him, it is vital to know the differences and similarities between the three of them to understand the complexities of the gender spectrum. He affirms that if all combinations of these three categories were socially accepted, and thus being born with a certain biological characteristics was not associated with any gender identity nor any gender expression, people would live their gender way more freely. This would result in a flourishing of diversity within the gender spectrum and, from

the author's point of view, transgender people would not feel the need to modify their bodies in order to fit into the binary system. Consequently, the idea of gender being a rigid and fixed category would disappear. This would prove that gender is a social construct because it can be socially deconstructed, an event that, if it took place, could free all people (not only transgender people, but also gender-conforming) from the oppressive gender roles and the rules of the binary gender system.

I personally have read Miquel Missé's book and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the transgender cause and the gender identity issue, as it perfectly links the two topics. To finish, I have translated one of my favorite lines from the book, that says:

“I think the question we should ask ourselves is not what makes a person not identify with the gender that matches their biological sex, but what makes a person identify with any gender at all”.

Miquel Missé, 2019

## **3. Practical part**

### **3.1. Introduction**

For the practical part of my TR, I prepared an oral exposition for groups of 1st and 2nd of Batxillerat from my high school. My intention was to create a sort of presentation similar to a TED talk, to essentially talk about gender and raise awareness on the topic.

So, after conducting research on the thoughts about gender in the work of some philosophers and authors, I started to write the script of my exposition. In it, I tried to introduce implicitly some of the concepts I had learned about during my research, like Butler's theory of performativity or the idea that gender is a social construct. My goal was not to make people learn about these concepts or ideas, but to change people's perception of gender. To put it more plainly, my main goal was to make my public think and meditate over the meaning of gender and maybe even their own gender identity.

Like I said in the introduction, to do my speech I found a lot of inspiration from Audrey Mason-Hyde and other people's TED talks. Seeing people talk about their personal experiences with gender expression and identity in front of a large audience really encouraged me to do the same. Therefore, I decided to also talk a bit about my personal experiences related to gender, aside from talking about a few basic concepts.

### **3.2. Script of the exposition**

After putting a lot of thought into it, and rewriting it several times, this was the final result:

*Hi everyone, you may already know me, but in case you don't, I'm a second year student of Batxillerat here in this high school. This presentation that I have prepared for you today is part of the practical part of my "Trell de Recerca".*

*I'm sure you have already noticed that the presentation is going to be in English, and that is because I'm doing all of my T.R. in English. I'm going to try to use a vocabulary and a language as simple and comprehensible as possible, so you can all understand, and I'm sure you all will because I'm sure your English is great. However, if any of you doesn't understand something that I'm saying at any point of the presentation, please raise your hand or let me know so I can repeat, explain or translate whatever is necessary. I don't mind if you interrupt me, as long as you do it politely.*

*That being said, I am going to briefly explain what my T.R. is about. My T.R. is basically about gender studies and queer theory in philosophy, and my main goal is to answer the following question: "what is gender?" To accomplish that, I have been reading and learning about some of the theories and thoughts about gender of the most renowned philosophers and authors in this field. For the practical part, I have prepared this oral exposition, presentation, ted talk, or however you want to call it; that I'm going to be doing in different classes of 1st and 2nd of Batxillerat in this high school.*

*I want and I need this presentation to be really interactive, so hopefully, I will not be the only one to participate or intervene. I'm going to ask you some questions along the way, so please raise your hand to answer if you feel like doing so. There are no right or wrong answers, so I will not judge you on what you say, and I hope that your classmates don't either. However, I want everyone to feel comfortable and safe in this space during this presentation, so I won't be accepting any answers that involve homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, or really anything that can offend or make fun of anyone in this classroom.*

*Another thing I would like to comment on is that the script of this presentation is written to be performed for a group of people that don't know me, or have never seen me before, so keep that in mind.*

*Finally, I'm sure you have all noticed that I'm recording the presentation. Don't worry, the camera is only recording me, but please keep this in mind too, especially the ones who are seated close to it.*

*If you have any questions about the functioning of this presentation, or If you haven't understood something I've said, now is the time to ask. If not, we can start.*

*Let's start! Like I have said before, the main goal of my T.R. is to find the answer to the question: "what is gender?"; but I think that this question is too difficult and complex to start the exposition with. So, to make it simpler, the question (or questions) I would like you to answer now is: "what is a man?" or; "what is a woman?" If you find it easier, you can answer by explaining why you are a man or a woman, or why you feel like a man or a woman (if you do). Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, and you don't need to think too much about it. I think it's better if you all answer in English, but if some of you don't feel comfortable with the language, you can also do so in Spanish or Catalan.*

*I can see that most of you are a bit shy, but I had this possibility in mind, so I have prepared a plan B. Now, you can take out your computers or mobile phones, you look for this web, [mentimeter.com](http://mentimeter.com), on the internet, and you can type in the following code. This way, you will be able to answer the questions anonymously and without having to do so out loud in front of all the class. Not all of you have to answer, only the ones who want to, but if any of you doesn't know the answer or think that it's really difficult to put into words, you can also type that in. Apart from answering this question, you will also see that on the lower part of your screen there is a small box with the letters Q&A (questions and answers). In that box, you will also be able to type in your other questions during the presentation, if you are too shy to ask them out loud.*

*After reading and talking about your answers, which have been really interesting, I have another question for you, but this one is much easier: "do I fit in your idea or your definition of man, or woman?" The answer is no, I obviously don't. You may*



*be thinking right now that this is a really foolish thing to say, but with your help I can prove to you that it's not, or at least I will try.*

*When I walked into this classroom today for the first time, with the exception of someone that may have already known me, I bet that most of you wondered for a moment what my gender was. You probably thought that I looked too feminine to be a boy, and too masculine to be a girl. If you ended up deciding in your mind that I am a boy, you probably asked yourselves why I'm wearing a crop-top, earrings, long hair or platform shoes. And if you ended up deciding that I was a girl, even though my chest is flat and my jaw is too big, you were probably really surprised when I told you what my name is. And you were definitely surprised when I said it with a deep, rather masculine voice. And that is what happens to me everytime I walk into a room full of new people that I have never seen before.*

*It also happened last week, when a substitute teacher took the register for the first time in my class. When she called out my name and I said: here!, she looked at me longer than she had to any other student in my class. I bet she thought she was looking at the wrong person, that it had been someone else that had said: here!, or that I was just messing with her. And that is because my gender confused her, just like it may have confused you.*

*It also happened yesterday, when I was filling my water bottle in the high school bathroom and a boy I did not know walked in. When he first saw me he was shocked to see me there, and then he probably thought: well, he kind of looks like a girl but he is in the boys bathroom, so he has to be a boy. But I could still feel him being uncomfortable. Imagine how uncomfortable and out of place I felt!*

*It also happens every single time I walk across a family with young kids in the street. When the kids notice me, they stop whatever they're doing to take the longest and deepest stare they can. Needless to say, young kids are not the only ones who look at me like that, sometimes old people do too. That's because they can't figure out whether I'm a boy or a girl, because they have been taught that everyone is either a boy, or a girl.*

*And it also happened last summer, when I was in the swimming pool with my two year old cousin, and she saw me in a swimsuit for the first time. She looked at me*

*really confused and she asked: are you a boy or a girl? My own cousin did not know!*

*So I have another question, but this one is a rhetorical question. I don't need you to give me an answer, I only need you to think: "if the world can't decide whether I'm a boy or a girl, if I don't fit in your idea of being a boy or a girl, why should I be any of the two?"*

*There is a really low chance that when I walked into this classroom today some of you thought that I was non-binary, agender, gender-fluid or something similar. Maybe when you couldn't decide what my gender is, some of you just thought that I was something weird, something between a girl or a boy, or neither of them. Or maybe you just didn't pay any attention or importance to it, you just didn't care. But like I said, there is a really low chance that this happened.*

*That is because we all see the world and our society from a gendered perspective, including myself. All of us, even if unconsciously, try to assign a gender for most of the things we see or relate with in our life. Think about it. We try to define a gender for colors, clothes, hairstyles, TV shows, music, sports, objects, animals, emotions, behaviors, smells, and the list goes on and on. We even assign a gender to human beings, we assign a gender to ourselves. That is something that bothers me a lot, and I'll tell you why. I bet that the same way that I don't fit into the categories man and woman, you don't fit perfectly or exactly into these two categories either.*

*In my case, it may be way more obvious because of how I behave and express myself, but I bet that none of you behaves or expresses exactly like a man or a woman should (or like society has taught us that a man or a woman should).*

*For example, I'm sure that all of the boys in this class have a really sensible and caring side, but most of them don't show it because they're afraid to be considered less of a man. And in the case of girls, or women, it's even more exaggerated, because in our society, women are more oppressed by these gender roles. I'm sure that most of them in this class are more determined and sure of themselves than they are allowed to be. I could give many more examples of these situations, and I'm sure that you could think of many more too.*

*Now, I'm not saying that because you don't fit into society's definition of man or woman, you're suddenly not allowed to be one. The point I want to make is that we should not let society define what a man or a woman should be. We should not let society define the differences between these two categories, and we definitely shouldn't let it define who belongs to which category. We should all just behave, express, dress, walk, talk, act, look, communicate, dance, write, pose, feel, and do everything we do however we want to, without trying to fit into any category.*

*So, what is gender? I wish I had a universal answer to this question. But I don't, because I don't think there is one. I think gender is something personal, something that each of us creates by being our true selves. So I would like to finish this presentation by encouraging you to try to break free from gender roles, to avoid fitting into any category or identity and to live and create your own gender. Thank you!*

*Now, If you have any questions about the presentation or if you want to discuss anything, I would love to talk to you about it. If you have any questions about my T.R. or something related to it, I can answer those too.*

*I want to thank you again for your attention and your participation. It has been a pleasure to share this moment with you.*

*I would like to ask you now to answer a short google questionnaire, which should not take you too much time. It's anonymous and remember, there are no right or wrong answers, so please answer as sincerely as possible. It will be really helpful to me to know if I have reached my goal with this presentation, and to improve something for the next time I do it.*

*Thank you again!*

I think it is important to point out that, given the fact that the exposition requires the participation of the audience, the script may vary or differ a bit from the original depending on which group of students the exposition is performed for.

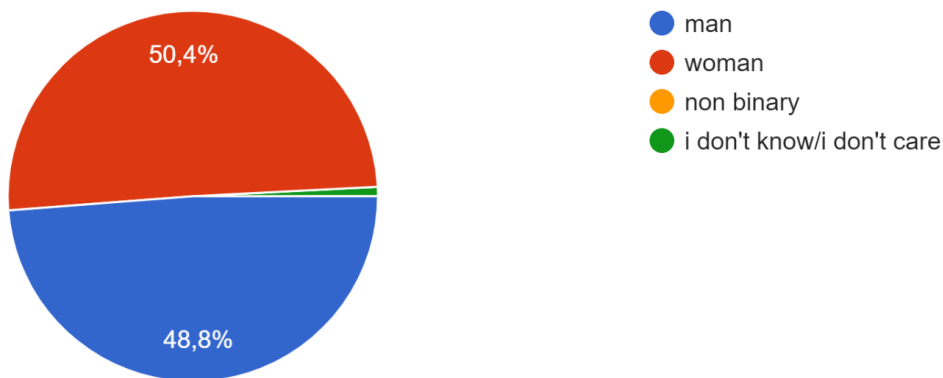
### 3.3. Questionnaire

Like you can read in the script of the exposition, I also prepared a short google questionnaire for my public to answer after I had finished, in which I received a hundred and twenty three answers. With these answers, I have been able to learn the public's reaction to my presentation, and know if I had reached my goal, which was, like mentioned before, to make people meditate and think over gender. The questionnaire only had eight questions, most of which were to choose from multiple options. These are the questions, with the respective analysis of the results:

#### 1. What class are you from?

The only reason I decided to include this question in the questionnaire was to find out how many people answered from each class I did the presentation in. This way, the results of this question do not influence the answers to the rest of the questions.

#### 2. What gender do you identify with?



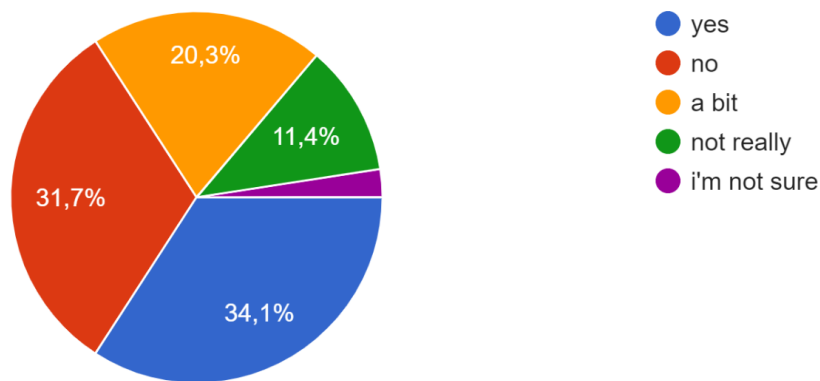
Approximately, half of my public identified as a woman (50,4%), and half as a man (48,8%). This translates to nearly all of the public identifying as either a man or a woman, in fact, only one person answered that they did not know or care about their gender identity. Like I was expecting, nobody answered that their gender identity corresponded with non binary. I think this data is really interesting considering that teenagers and young people are the population group that manifest discomfort

within the gender binary system more commonly, and only one person of a hundred and twenty three (0,8%) expressed this discomfort.

The reason I asked this question is because I think that usually, the gender that we identify with influences our thoughts and political opinions. And I thought this would be relevant in a questionnaire about gender, a really political topic in our society. In addition, I was curious about the gender identity of the audience.

I think it is important to mention that in this question, I received five answers that I had to delete because, in an attempt to be funny, they did not make any sense. This shows that gender is a topic that some people do not take seriously at all, and think it is funny to make jokes about it. The rest of the answers of the questionnaire of these five people were also deleted, so their answers are not included in the graphics or percentages shown.

3. Had you ever thought about your gender identity or the general idea of gender before this presentation?

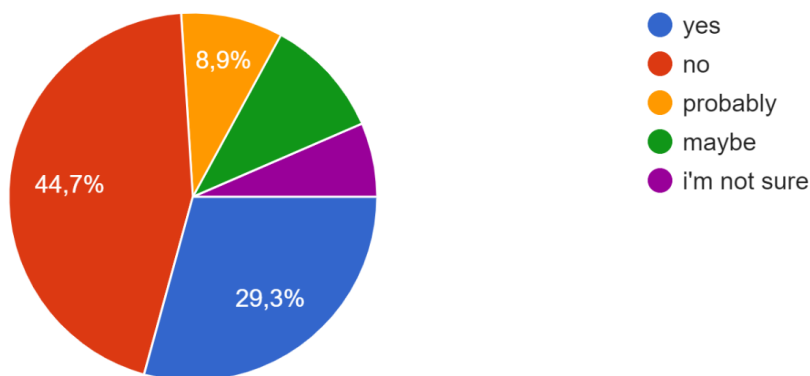


More than one third of the audience (34,4%) answered that they had already thought about their own gender identity or the concept of gender in our society before the presentation. Also, about one fifth of the audience (20,3%) answered that they had put a bit of thought into their gender identity or the general idea of gender. These two numbers combined, which resulted in more than half of the audience (55,4%), were a big surprise for me, because I thought gender identity is not something that people put a lot of thought into. Even so, nearly another third of the audience (31,7%) answered that they had never thought about gender before, a number that seemed

small to me. Finally, 11,4% of the audience answered that they had not really thought about it, and only 2,4% answered that they were not sure.

I think it is important to point out that out of those who answered that they had never thought about gender before (including those who answered “not really”), about 62% were men, and the rest were women. I think these numbers are due to the fact that women are more oppressed by binary gender roles than men, and they have a harder time with their gender experience, which leaves them more reasons to think about it.

4. Will you think about your gender identity or the general idea of gender after this presentation?



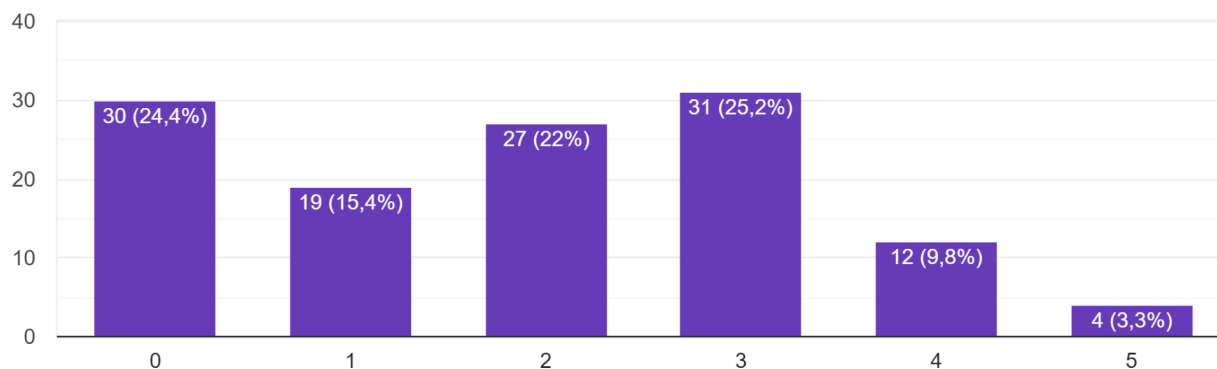
About half of the audience (44,7%) answered that they would not think about their gender identity or the general idea of gender after the presentation. This number did not surprise me, but rather disappointed me a bit, because my main goal was to make people think and meditate about gender. Even so, nearly a third of the audience (29,3%) answered that they would think about the topic, and 8,9% answered that they would probably think about it. These two numbers combined, although I was hoping for a larger number, are still a great result. From the rest of the audience, 20,6% answered that they would maybe think about it, and 6,5% answered that they were not sure.

Again, I think it is important to point out that of the 55 persons that answered “no”, 38 were men (69,1%), and the rest were women. I think this number is due to the fact that when talking about a topic like gender, men can feel “threatened” or “pointed out”, when the goal is to make everybody (and not only women) think about it,

independently from the level of affectation the topic has on them. Therefore, men can show a defensive or protective attitude towards the conversation, and answer more negatively to the questions made.

The reason I asked this question and the previous one, was to see the difference of percentages before and after the presentation. The number of people who answered “no” went from 39 (31,7%) to 55 (44,7%), and out of the first 39, 33 answered “no” in this question (meaning only 6 people answered first “no”, and then something different). The number of people who answered yes went from 42 (34,1%) to 36 (29,3%), and seeing this number decrease was a disappointment for me. The comparison between the results of the two questions do not make up for a good result, but overall I still achieved my goal with nearly a third of the audience.

5. On a scale of 0 to 5, has your perception/idea of gender changed after the presentation?



Approximately, a quarter of the audience (24,4%) answered that their idea or perception of gender had not changed at all, opposed to only 4 people (3,3%) who answered that their perception had changed completely. In between, 25,2% answered a 3, and 22% answered a 2. The number of people who answered 0 was a big disappointment for me, but overall I was happy with the results because I was able to change the majority of the audience’s perception, even if just a little bit.

The reason I asked this question was to see how people believed that their idea or perception of gender had changed, and to essentially be able to know if I had reached my main goal. So, even if I was hoping for a much larger number of people who

answered that their perception had changed completely or a lot, I was still satisfied to see that I accomplished my goal with some of my public.

6. How would you define gender? You can give a short and simple answer, or a more elaborate one.

This one was an open-ended question because I thought it would be relevant to see the definition of gender of each person from the audience, and I received a great variety of answers.

Most of the answers stated that gender is a feeling or an identity, something that we identify with depending on how we feel. These answers were really simple but still really significant, because they show that most of the audience knows that gender is not something that has to do with biology, but something that has to do with an identity or a feeling. Nevertheless, there was a really small number of answers that said something that involved reproductive organs or other biological traits.

I thought there were some really interesting answers that talked about gender roles, stereotypes or socially constructed characteristics. Some of these answers said that gender is something assigned to us at birth, or an idea influenced by society to divide humans into two different categories. I think this shows that in fact, young people are quite conscious of the social aspect of gender, and the oppression that the binary gender system causes.

I think it is also essential to mention that there were eight people who did not know how to answer, who were not able to write a definition for gender. I think this is really interesting, because: how can some of us be unable to write a definition of gender, when it is a concept that we encounter really often in our day to day life? How can someone identify with a gender, but be unable to write a definition for the concept?

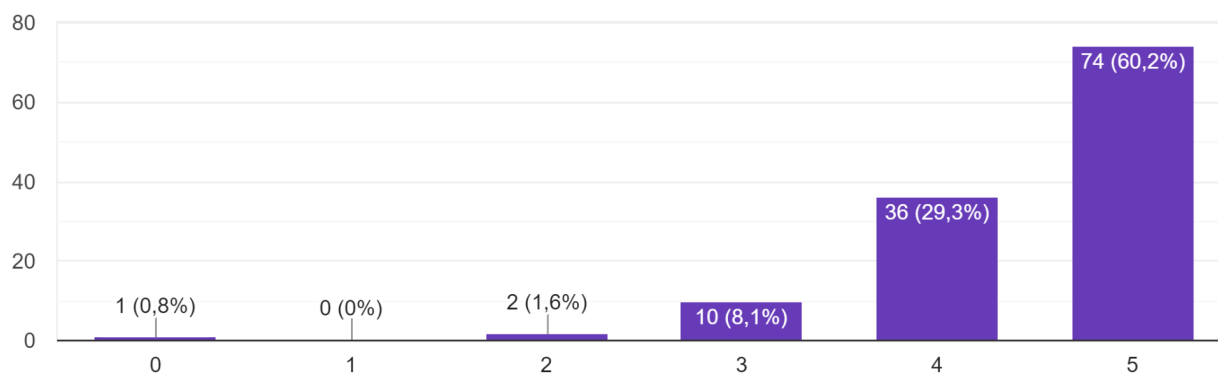
The reason I asked this question was to get an overview of what my audience thought gender was, and the results were really satisfactory.



7. If you want to, give your opinion or some feedback about the presentation.

This open-ended question was voluntary, and its only purpose was to receive some feedback to improve the future presentations. This way, I was also able to learn the reactions of the audience to my presentation, which were mostly really good. Anyway, the answers to this question do not have any impact whatsoever to the content of my TR or the rest of this questionnaire.

8. On a scale of 0 to 5, have you enjoyed the presentation?



More than half of the audience (60,2%) answered that they had enjoyed the presentation a lot, a number that made me really content. Only one person out of a hundred and twenty three answered that they had not enjoyed the presentation at all, which is a great result. Overall, I received a great response and participation from the audience, which was really pleasing and gratifying.

Again, the only purpose of this question was to learn the reactions of the audience to my presentation, and therefore its result is not significant to the content of my work.

## 4. Conclusions

What is gender? The easiest thing to answer would be that gender is just a social construct that should be reconsidered because it has become outdated, and no longer takes into consideration all the existent variety of identities and expressions. But, let's face it, gender is much more than that.

According to John Money, gender can be defined as: all those things that a person says or does to disclose themselves as having an individual, mutable and constructed status.

Considering Simone de Beauvoir's opinion, gender can be thought of as: an unnatural, partly voluntary and partly involuntary social construction that each individual carries out in its own different ways.

Taking into account Monique Wittig's theory, gender can be understood as: a system of social domination and exploitation roles that can only exist inside the binary regime of heterosexuality.

Regarding Judith Butler's thought, gender can be considered as: a performative imitation of an unreachable ideal, behind which there is no natural or interior essence.

In accordance with Miquel Missé's work, gender can be seen as: a socially and symbolically constructed network of relationships and social meanings.

Finally, like one person from the public of my exposition interprets, gender can be: a concept created by society to try to define who we are, and classify us into two different boxes.

Yes, gender can be all of the above, but to simplify it, I would define gender as: an experience shaped by the social interpretation of oneself's behavior.

I can gladly say that I have achieved the main goal of my work, as I have been able to come up with my own definition of gender, and answer the research question: What is gender? As for the practical mark, I have also accomplished my goal, which was to make the audience of my exposition meditate and think about the topic of gender, and to essentially change their perception of it. According to the answers of my

questionnaire, I have only accomplished this with a reduced number of my audience. Nevertheless, given the fact that it is impossible to know for sure, I am hopeful and I truly believe that I have been able to make a larger group of people put at least a bit of thought into the topic of gender.

The process of conducting this research paper has been incredibly nourishing and rewarding. Investigating and reading about the work of some of the most distinguished authors of gender studies and queer theory has led me and allowed me to learn more than I could have ever imagined. Nonetheless, it has been really hard, especially writing the theoretical mark of this research paper, which has been at times even tedious. Regarding the practical mark, preparing and doing the exposition for an audience of teenage students in my high school has been a really fun and liberating experience. It has allowed me to explain my feelings and experiences related to gender to my schoolmates, which has made me feel understood and comprehended.

Although I feel that I have learned a lot in my research, I think the investigation could have been a broader one as this topic addresses a really large amount of information. Therefore, gender studies is something that I can see as my dedication in the future, because the research conducted in this work has left me wanting for more and deeper knowledge.

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## 7. Glossary

This glossary includes a few concepts in alphabetical order, that may result unknown or confusing to some people, and are essential to fully understand the content of this research paper.

- Agender is a term used to describe someone who does not identify with any gender identity.
- Androgynous is a term used to describe someone who is not distinctly masculine or feminine in appearance or in behaviour.
- Biological sex, sometimes referred to as sex, is the trait that determines whether a sexually reproducing animal or plant produces male gametes or female ones. In a human issue, sex is an immutable trait based on medical biological factors (including your hormones, chromosomes, and genitals) which can be male, female or intersexual.
- Cisgender is a term used to describe a person whose gender identity corresponds to their biological sex assigned at birth.
- Gender expression is a person's behavior, mannerisms, interests, and appearance that are associated with gender, specifically with the categories of femininity or masculinity.
- Gender-fluid is a term used to describe someone whose gender transitions or fluctuates in a permanent or sporadic way.
- Gender identity is each person's internal and individual experience of gender, and it can correlate with be their birth-assigned biological sex or differ from it.
- Gender non-conforming is someone whose gender expression does not match their society's prescribed gender roles or gender norms for their gender identity.
- Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analyzing gender identity and gendered representation, and its correlation in all the fields of knowledge.
- Intersexual or intersex is a term used to describe an individual born with any of several sex characteristics including chromosome patterns, gonads, or genitals that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.
- Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not solely male or female—identities that are outside the gender binary.

- Queer theory is a field of critical theory that questions the essentialist, “naturalist” and static visions about gender, sexual orientation and biological sex.
- Sexual orientation, also referred to as sexuality, is an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or to both sexes or more than one gender. In a social issue, sexual orientation consists of an altering and self assigned identity or label, which can be lesbian, bisexual, gay...
- Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe someone whose gender identity does not correspond with their biological sex assigned at birth.



