

# RECOGNIZING OUR ROOTS

## FACILITATION GUIDE

This activity is designed to help individuals to visually trace their story of gender back to its roots while engaging in principles of self-determination in relation to gender. This practice may help participants bring into awareness their own growth with gender and support them to recognize that their gender tree tells a story that exists among a vast forest of valid stories of gender.

Some participants may be very familiar with the process of exploring gender, and other participants may be newer to this process. We encourage you to engage participants in principles of self-compassion and a growth mindset as you support them to reflect on and trace their story with gender. **Materials Needed:** poster paper or blank sheet of paper + colored pen or pencils



### Roots: What did you learn about gender as a child?

Begin by drawing the roots of a tree near the bottom of the blank sheet of paper. As participants draw roots, prompt them to consider what they were taught about gender as children. Instruct participants to write answers to the prompts among the roots on their page.

What words would you use to describe your gender as a little kid?  
What were kids of your gender supposed to be interested in?  
What were you interested in?  
How was gender modeled for you?  
Were there any people you looked up to gender-wise?



### Trunk: How do you understand your gender now?

Growing up from the roots, have participants draw the trunk of their tree.

Using the example questions below, invite participants to consider how they understand their gender now.

How do you know you are the gender you are?  
How do you express that gender?  
When do you feel most aligned or at home in your gender?  
What words do you use to describe your gender?

### Ground: What filters influence and inform your current understanding of gender?

Above the roots, have participants draw ground (including grass, flowers, & whatever else they'd like). As they draw the ground, prompt participants to write experiences, institutions, and milestones that informed what they brought from their early understandings of gender into their current life stage. For example:

- Being in relationships (familial, platonic, romantic)
- Consuming particular media - books, movies, shows
- Educational experiences ("formal" or informal)
- Entering the workforce
- Living situation, including living with family or experiencing housing insecurity



### Branches: What part(s) of your gender do you still want to grow?

Next, have participants draw branches on their tree. Using the example questions below, have participants consider and write among the branches areas of gender identity or expression they would like to explore.

Is there something you've always wanted to try with gender, but have been afraid to?  
Are there words, concepts, etc. to describe gender that you'd like to learn more about?  
How do you want to talk about gender with friends and family?  
What would it feel like to wear \_\_\_\_ (lipstick, ties, eyeliner, particular colors or fabrics, etc.) more often or less often?

## Leaves: What steps can you take to continue to explore your gender?



Now participants will draw leaves on their branches. Using the example questions below, have participants consider and write down a few concrete steps to try out ideas from the branches.

Who are the people in your life you feel comfortable exploring gender with?  
What is one thing you could do this week to celebrate your gender?  
If you have one wish for the future of gender, what would it be?



## Sun: What nourishes you?

Lastly, participants will draw a sun shining down on their tree. Using the example questions below, invite participants to consider activities, people, and places that they enjoy so much they aren't even thinking about gender or who they are in relation to others.

For some people, the following may transcend the experience of gender.

- Spending time in nature
- Spending time animals or pets
- Reading or writing
- Playing sports or exercising
- Specific spiritual practice

## Reflect and Debrief: What did we learn?

After participants complete the drawing and writing portion of this activity, engage the group in small group debrief discussions, using the prompts below:

- What did you notice about yourself as we worked through this activity?
- Did you notice a particular story of your gender emerge?
- Is there anything in any of your layers that you'd like to share with the group?

## Origins of Recognizing our Roots

Via Dulwich Centre on Narrative Therapy & Community Work: Originally created by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough. Ncazelo, with the support of Denborough from the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia developed the "Tree of Life" exercise in her work with children who had lost their parents to HIV/AIDS. The aim of the project was to allow these children to believe in their own abilities, acknowledge their dreams and stand on a safer place from where they could talk about their difficult experiences in ways that are not retraumatizing, feeling stronger in themselves. The use of "the Tree of Life" as a metaphor to enable people to share stories about their lives has been a common approach within popular education.



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