

Supporting Trans* Students

Resource Packet

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Davey Shlasko

845.417.6518

davey@thinkagaintraining.com

www.thinkagaintraining.com

Sexual Orientation

Sexual or romantic attraction, as defined by the gender or genders of people one is attracted to



Gender Identity

How you understand yourself in terms of gender

How you feel inside or who you know yourself to be, in terms of ideas like man, woman, boy, girl, transgender, genderqueer and so on

Biological Sex

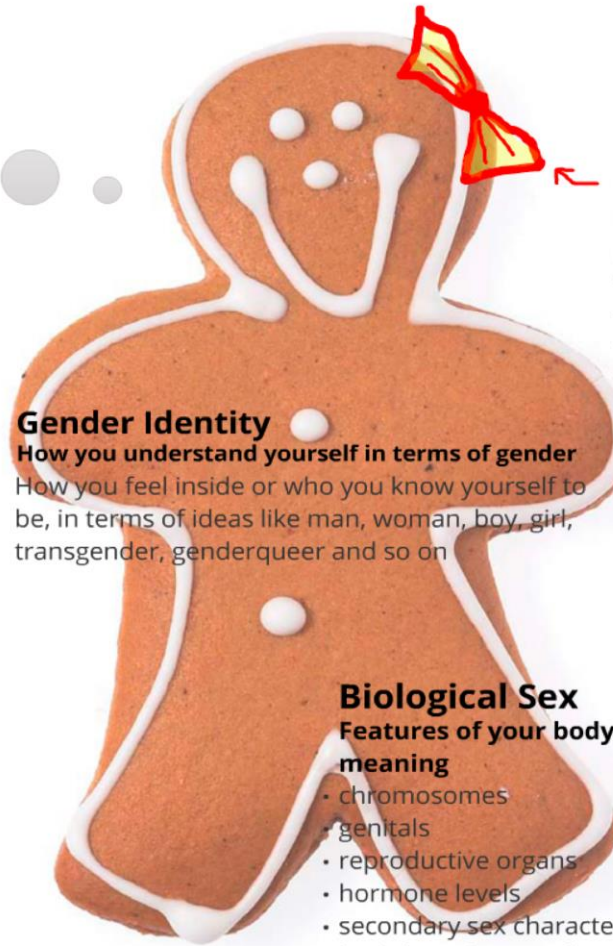
Features of your body that have gendered meaning

- chromosomes
- genitals
- reproductive organs
- hormone levels
- secondary sex characteristics like breasts, body hair, fat/muscle ratio and fat distribution.

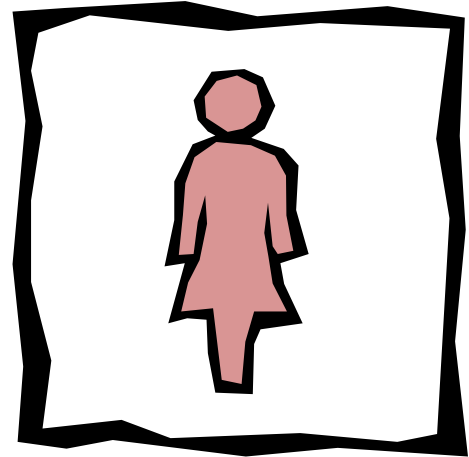
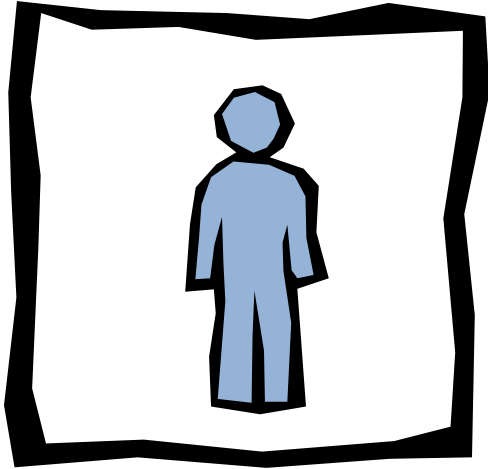
Gender Expression

Behavior that has gendered meaning:

- attire
- language
- demeanor
- activities



The Sex / Gender Binary



The Sex/ Gender Binary refers to the faulty assumption that an individual's **sex**, **gender identity**, and **gender expression** always line up in predictable ways - for example, that everyone who is born with a uterus identifies as a women and express herself through femininity – and further that there are two and only two sexes, and two and only two genders (where identity and expression are conflated).

This is just not true.

At the same time, since most of us are taught to believe in this model, its impact on our lives is very real.

Gender and Sexual Orientation Terminology

The terms below are defined as they are usually used in U.S. English. The definitions are guidelines; they are not meant to be authoritative or immutable. Different people use them in different ways. Use them thoughtfully.

Gender and Sexual Orientation Concepts

Biological Sex/Assigned Sex: “**Sex**” refers to one’s body. The physiological and anatomical characteristics of maleness and femaleness with which a person is born or that develop with physical maturity. Sex markers include internal and external reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormone levels. Sometimes we say “assigned sex” to highlight how we are each assigned a sex category (male or female) on id documents, beginning with the birth certificate, which can have legal implications later.

Gender Identity: “**Gender identity**” (or sometimes just “gender”) refers to a person’s self-identity. People’s own understanding of themselves in terms of gendered categories like man and woman, boy and girl, transgender, genderqueer, and many others. How they feel inside or what they believe themselves to be.

Gender Expression: “**Gender expression**” refers to appearance and behavior. Behaviors that convey something about one’s gender identity, or that others interpret as conveying something about one’s gender identity, including clothing, mannerisms, communication patterns, etc.

Gender-neutral: Inclusive of all genders; not gender-specific. A “gender neutral” restroom is one that everybody can use. It is not only for “gender-neutral” people.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation describes a person’s romantic or erotic attraction, in terms of their own gender and the gender of their preferred partners. For example someone may be attracted to men, women, transgender people (or particular kinds of transgender people), or any combination. People of any gender may have any sexual orientation.

Identity Categories

Terms of self-identity are complicated. When talking about a particular individual, it’s best to use whichever terms that individual uses for themselves. Even so, keep in mind they may not use the term exactly as it’s defined here. When talking about a community or group of people, the definitions below should serve you.

Many of these words are sometimes used as nouns as well as adjectives, e.g. “transsexuals” as well as “transsexual people.” If you do not identify with a particular category, it’s best to stick to adjectives, and talk about “transsexual people,” “gay people,” etc. rather than “transsexuals” and “gays.”

GLBT / LGBT: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender. Also sometimes includes Q (queer, questioning), and I (intersex).

Gay (adj.): Describes men and women whose primary romantic and erotic attraction is to people of their same gender, i.e. men who are attracted to men and women who are attracted to women. Sometimes used to refer only to men.

Lesbian (adj.) (n.): Describes women whose primary romantic and erotic attraction is to women.

Bisexual (adj.): Describes people who are attracted to both men and women.

Queer (adj.): An umbrella term describing a wide range of people who do not conform to heterosexual and/or gender norms; a reclaimed derogatory slur taken as a political term to unite people who are marginalized because of their non-conformity to dominant gender identities and/or heterosexuality. Sometimes used as a shortcut for LGBT. Other times used to distinguish politically queer people from more mainstream LGBT people. *Because of its origin as a derogatory slur, this term should be used with caution. If you're not queer, or for public communications, LGBT is often more appropriate.*

Transgender (or sometimes just “trans”) (adj.) (1): An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs significantly from what is expected of them in their culture based on anatomy, and for whom this difference is central to their identity and/or a significant part of their everyday experience. May include transsexuals, cross dressers, drag queens, drag kings, genderqueer people, and more. Not everyone who could be described as belonging to this broad category identifies as a transgender person (see Transgender (2) below).

Transgender (or sometimes just “trans”) (adj.) (2): Someone who identifies as a gender other than that assigned to them at birth based on their anatomy. For example, women who were assigned male at birth, men who were assigned female at birth, and people who identify as neither men nor women.

Transsexual (adj.): Usually, a person who experiences an intense, persistent, and long-term feeling that their body and assigned sex are at odds with their gender identity. Such individuals often (but not always) desire to change their bodies to bring them into alignment with their gender identities. This term comes from the medical establishment, and many people do not identify with it for that reason.

Genderqueer (adj.): Someone whose gender identity does not fit into either of the two culturally accepted gender categories (men and women).

FTM/ F2M/ FtM (adj.): Female-to-Male, or Female-toward-Male, trans person.

Trans man (or transgender man, or transsexual man) (n.): An FTM trans person.

MTF/ M2F/ MtF (adj.): Male-to-Female, or Male-toward-Female, trans person.

Trans woman (or transgender woman, or transsexual woman) (n.): An MtF trans person.

Cross Dresser (n.): A person who enjoys dressing in clothes typically associated with the other of the 2 socially sanctioned genders.

Drag (n.): The practice of dressing and acting in an exaggerated masculine or feminine way, usually playfully and for performance. Drag Queens are usually men who dress as women for performance; Drag Kings are usually women who dress as men for performance.

Cisgender (adj.): Non-trans. From a Latin-derived prefix meaning “on the same side,” as opposed to trans- which means “across” or “on the opposite side of.”

Intersex (adj.): Describes someone whose anatomy or physiology is not easily categorized as male or female. This may be noticed at birth, or may not be apparent until puberty. For more information regarding intersexuality, see <http://www.accordalliance.org/>

Challenges Faced by Trans* Students

- Health and mental healthcare access
- ID cards, forms, class rosters
- Restrooms and locker rooms
- Residence halls
- Harassment, Violence, and Exclusion
- Loss of family support
- Financial Aid & Selective Service
- Transcripts and resumes

Supporting Trans* and Cisgender Students Around Trans* Issues

- ☐ Respect the right of each person to identify their own gender identity
- ☐ Learn the name and pronoun that each student wants you to call them, and use them without exception.
- ☐ Know the campus and community resources available for trans* people and people seeking more information
- ☐ Understand the current policies, and their limitations
- ☐ Understand the current policies and practices in place, and their limitations.
- ☐ Build your competency in trans*-specific issues in your field.
- ☐ Respect everyone's learning processes around trans issues
- ☐ Help people distinguish between their personal or religious beliefs about transgender issues, and their obligation to behave in ways that maintain a safe and respectful environment
- ☐ Interrupt bad gender situations
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TRANSGENDER ETIQUETTE

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID:

🔔 **ASSUMPTIONS.** PARTICULARLY ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT A TRANS PERSON'S

- GENDER IDENTITY
- PRONOUN PREFERENCE
- TRANSITION STATUS/PLANS/DIRECTION
- AGE
- SEXUAL ORIENTATION

ALSO, DON'T ASSUME THAT ALL LGB PEOPLE "GET" TRANS STUFF, OR THAT ALL TRANS PEOPLE "GET" EACH OTHER

🔔 **INTERROGATING.** NOT EVERY TRANS PERSON IS AN EXPERT ON GENDER OR ON TRANS ISSUES. EVEN IF THEY ARE, THEY MIGHT NOT WANT TO BE EXPLAINING TRANS STUFF 24/7.

🔔 **COMING TO A TRANS PERSON TO WORK OUT YOUR DISCOMFORT AROUND TRANS ISSUES.**

🔔 **COMMENTING ON A TRANS PERSON'S "PASSING," OR NOT PASSING, AS THEIR GENDER.** FOR ONE THING, NOT ALL TRANS PEOPLE WANT TO PASS. FOR ANOTHER, COMMENTING ON SOMEONE'S PASSING CAN REINFORCE GENDER STEREOTYPES, AND PERPETUATE HIERARCHIES THAT REWARD TRANS FOLKS FOR BLENDING IN WITH THE DOMINANT GENDER CULTURE.

AND SPEAKING OF PRONOUNS . . .

PRONOUNS ARE POSSIBLY ONE OF THE MOST STRESSFUL THINGS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE LEARNING TO BE TRANS ALLIES. THEY'RE EVEN MORE STRESSFUL FOR TRANS PEOPLE.

IT IS ALMOST ALWAYS OKAY TO ASK WHAT PRONOUN SOMEONE PREFERS. ASK IN PRIVATE, NOT IN FRONT OF A LARGE GROUP. ASK RESPECTFULLY.

FOR EXAMPLE, "I WANT TO CHECK IN WITH YOU BECAUSE I WANT TO BE RESPECTFUL OF YOUR IDENTITY, AND I WONDERED WHAT PRONOUNS YOU PREFER TO USE FOR YOURSELF."

IT IS ALSO SOMETIMES OKAY TO ASK A MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE WHO WOULD KNOW.

BEHAVIORS THAT ARE HELPFUL:

🔔 **RESPECT.** FOR EXAMPLE YOU SHOULD RESPECT A PERSON'S ...

- **PRONOUN CHOICE.** (WE ALL MESS UP ON PRONOUNS. DON'T DWELL ON IT. APOLOGIZE AND MOVE ON.)
- **SELF IDENTITY.** IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU THEY IDENTIFY AS A WOMAN, THEY ARE A WOMAN, WHETHER OR NOT THEY LOOK/SEEM LIKE A WOMAN TO YOU.
- **PRIVACY.** DON'T ASK INAPPROPRIATELY PERSONAL QUESTIONS OF A TRANS PERSON YOU'VE JUST MET, LIKE, "WHAT DO YOUR GENITALS LOOK LIKE?" OR "HOW DO YOU HAVE SEX?"
- **NAMES.** USE A PERSON'S CHOSEN NAME, ALWAYS. THAT IS THEIR "REAL" NAME, AND THE ONLY ONE YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT.

🔔 **BE HONEST** ABOUT YOUR LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING, AND YOUR PREPAREDNESS (OR NOT) TO BE AN ALLY.

🔔 **EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS.**

🔔 **INTERRUPT BAD GENDER SITUATIONS.** (WHEN YOU'RE READY!) THIS TAKES A LOT OF CONFIDENCE AND DISCERNMENT. IT'S GREAT, FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU KNOW WHEN TO PIPE UP AND SAY "ACTUALLY, MY FRIEND IS A GUY, NOT A LADY," OR "I'M SURE WE ALL KNOW WHICH BATHROOM WE'RE IN, THANKS."

IT'S A JUDGMENT CALL . . .

? **ASKING QUESTIONS.** SOME TRANS FOLKS ARE OKAY WITH ANSWERING ALL YOUR QUESTIONS. BUT IT'S NOT THEIR JOB. SO IT'S GOOD TO ASK PERMISSION AND GIVE PEOPLE AN OUT RATHER THAN JUST SWAMPING THEM WITH QUESTIONS.

? **OUTING.** SOMETIMES IT IS GREAT TO HAVE A FRIEND/ALLY "OUT" US AS TRANS, SO WE DON'T HAVE TO DO IT. SOMETIMES IT'S DISASTROUS. IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO CHECK IN WITH YOUR TRANS FRIENDS SO THAT YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'D PREFER IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS. SOME THINGS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT: SAFETY - WILL THIS PUT MY FRIEND AT RISK? MOTIVE - WHY AM I OUTING THIS PERSON? FOR THEIR COMFORT? FOR MINE? FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S?



Selected Readings on Transgender Issues

Trans 101-399: Concepts, History, and Politics

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- Teich, N. (2012). *Transgender 101*. New York: Columbia University Press.
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Valentine, D. (2007). *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

The Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, <http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/index.html>

The Facts: Research, Reports, and Policy Recommendations

Improving the Lives of Transgender Older Adults: Recommendations for Policy and Practice. SAGE (Service and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) and NCTE (National Center for Transgender Equality). (2012).
<http://transequality.org/Resources/TransAgingPolicyReportFull.pdf>

Injustice at Every Turn: A report of the national transgender discrimination survey.
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Transitioning our shelters: A guide for making homeless shelters safe for transgender people. Mottet, L., & Ohle, J. (2003).
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<http://www.transpeoplespeak.org/>, a project of the Massachusetts Trans Political Coalition (MTPC)

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Readings on Intersex Experience and Politics

- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Kessler, S. J. (2002). *Lessons from the intersexed*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Colapinto, J. (2000). *As nature made him: The boy who was raised as a girl*. New York: Harper Collins.

Novels

- Bohjalian, C. (2001). *Trans-sister radio*. New York: Vintage.
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