



Beyond the Binary: The Power of Language

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“If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything.”

- Confucius

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Language

SEX...

- In our language, sex is one's bio-physiological make-up.
- It is a complex relationship of genetic, hormonal, morphological, chromosomal, gonadal, biochemical and anatomical determinants that impact the physiology of the body and sexual differentiation in the brain (Caroll & Wolpe, 1996; Ettner, 1999; Migeon, Wisniewski, & Gearhart, 2001; Money, 1993; Wilson & Reiner, 1999).

GENDER...

- Can be described as the "socially imposed division of the sexes...that transforms males and females into 'men' and 'women' (Ruben, 1975).

GENDER IDENTITY...

- Refers to a sense of one's own gender as appropriate and consistent within the contexts of a larger dynamic of oneself (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997).

GENDER EXPRESSION(s)/ROLE(s)...

- Refers to socialized aspects of gender. They are tied to one's "appearance, behavior, and personality" (Shively & DeCecco, 1993).
- May be a reflection of someone's gender identity.

GENDER DYSPHORIA...

- A term adopted to some extent by many people who are transgender and/or gender variant to refer to those who have been assigned to one sex/gender (usually at birth on the basis of their perceived anatomy), but identify as belonging to another sex/gender, and/or does not conform with gender roles their respective society prescribes to them.

GENDER DIVERSITY...

- Transgender
 - Transexual
 - Genderqueer
 - Third-gender
 - Transboi
 - Self-identify
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CISGENDER/CISSEXUAL...

- Colloquial terms for people who are neither transgender, nor transsexual, and refers here to individuals for whom relationships between sex and gender are relatively consistent over the course of ones life.
- Can be viewed as analogous to someone identifying as "heterosexual" in relation to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.
- Adjective describing people who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and their gender of rearing. The prefix "cis-" is from Latin, and means "on this side", as in "cislunar", "cisalpine".

GENDERISM/GENDERIST...

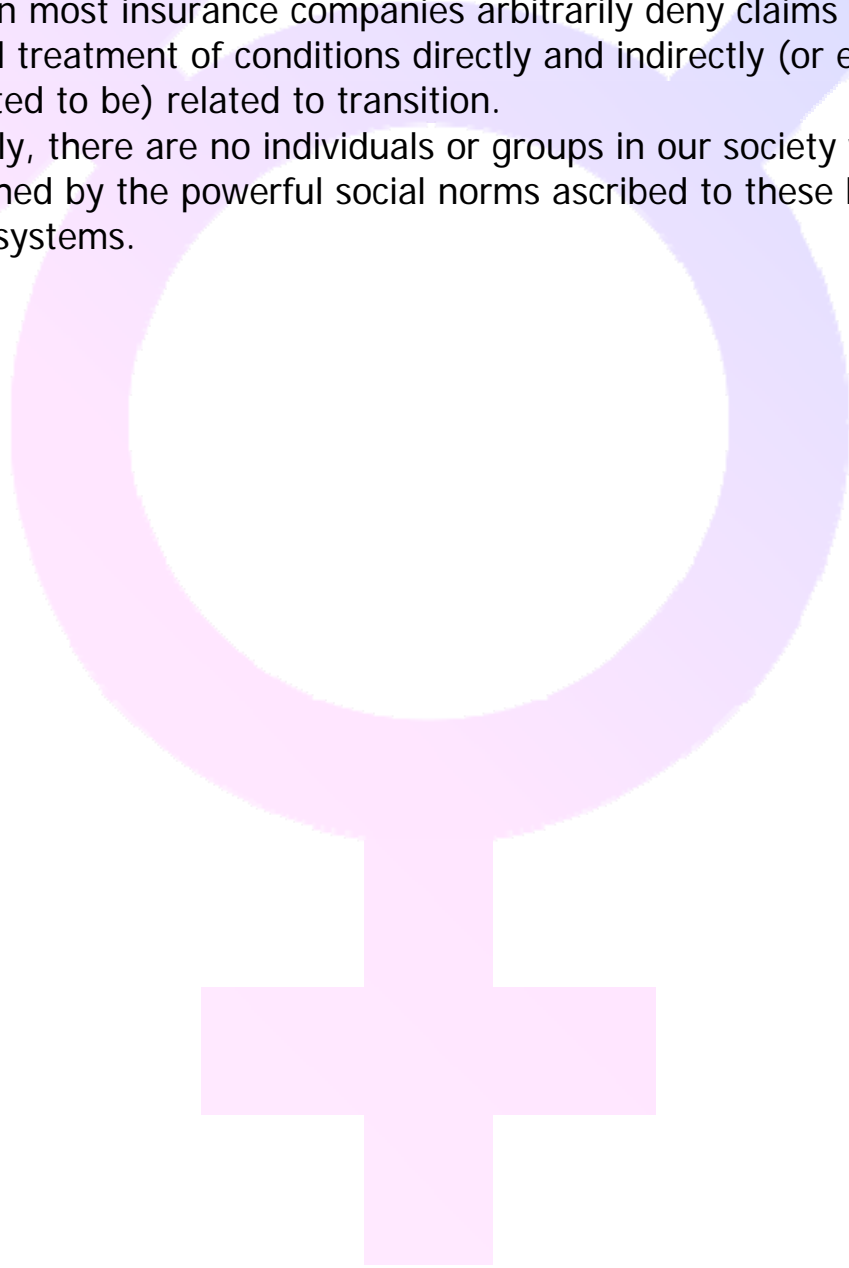
- Refers to systemic privileging of a binary, two-gender system (Wilchins, 2002).

CISGENDERIST...

- Can be used somewhat interchangeably with "genderism" or "genderist" as it refers to the same binary sex and gender systems of unearned privileges and institutional inequalities associated with being cisgender (Rankin & Matheis, 2008).

CISGENDERIST/CISGENDERISM...

- Refers to institutionalized and acculturated systems of privileging binary, two-sex and two-gender classifications and related values.
- When applied to real persons genderism accounts for unearned privileges associated with being cisgender, such as the ease of filling out forms that refer solely to “males” and “females” with no apparent regard for people who are not included in those binary terms.
- These terms also refer to institutionalized inequities in social systems, as when most insurance companies arbitrarily deny claims for legitimate medical treatment of conditions directly and indirectly (or even suspected to be) related to transition.
- Arguably, there are no individuals or groups in our society who are left untouched by the powerful social norms ascribed to these kinds of binary systems.



Checking My Own “Stuff”

- Recognize that you have a gender identity and you express gender in ways that may garner unearned privileges.
- Examine your own attitudes toward people who are gender variant.
- Gender is complex. Accept that understanding gender requires willingness to struggle with complexity; these matters cannot be simplified or reduced to easy answers.
- Learn the importance of language and support people in self-identifying by respecting the language each person rightfully chooses to use.
- Learn about salient issues for working with students who are trans/gender variant.
- Seek opportunities to learn new skills for understanding and supporting students who are trans/gender variant.
- Adopt a student-centered approach to affirm each student in telling hir story (e.g., listening, empathy, and safe environment).
- Gain knowledge of referral and consultation resources at local, state and national levels.
- Develop a general understanding of hormone therapy, surgical reassignment procedures, and other medical processes related to transition (e.g., support systems for HIV prevention, sexual assault prevention (especially for MtF clients), and experiences with discrimination.
- Take opportunities to help administrative peers and students challenge transphobia .
- Help alleviate feelings of shame, isolation, and secrecy experienced by many people who are gender variant.
- Encourage each student in hir adjustment to hir new gender, and affirm each unique gender identity.
- Be aware that not all people who are gender variant have the same experiences and consciousness about gender identity and Transgender political movements.
- Seek out special training for working with individuals who are gender variant (e.g., conference, workshops).

Questions We Should Ask

- How do you respond to people who are gender variant?
- How do you respond to allies to gender variant communities?
- When considering the design of gender-variant student support initiatives, what is the nature of your institution's unique political and sociohistorical contexts, and how do these influence patterns of behavior among gender variant students, such as "outness" and visibility?
- Given political and sociohistorical contexts, how supportive will institutional leadership be in implementing a range of support initiatives for students who are gender variant?
- In what way do other factors such as race, ethnicity, age, disabilities, class, spirituality/religion, sexuality/affectionality, etc. influence your own, or a student's understanding of his or her own gender and experiences?
- Do you advocate for political, social and economic rights for people who are gender variant?
- If you teach, in what ways does your curriculum include, represent or honor those who are gender variant?
- Are students expressing their gender identities at small, private, politically liberal institutions differently than at large public land-grant institutions with relatively conservative governing boards?
- What types of strategic advocacy for students who are gender variant are best suited to secure sustained institutional support?
- Are advocacy strategies selected in collaboration with students who are gender variant in a manner that empowers identity exploration, construction and expression?
- Are students integral in decision-making and implementation processes?

Understand Relevant & Salient Issues

- Institutional Support Systems: Lack of adequate support systems / The need for adequate systems of support
- Family: Prevalence of family-related issues or impact of gender variant identity on families
- Societal Pressures: Social and emotional stressors resulting from pervasive patterns of discrimination and prejudice; living in a society that is generally not accepting of gender variant behavior
- Health: Medical concerns (e.g., access, or lack of access to counseling, hormone therapy, aesthetic surgery, sexual reassignment surgeries (SRS's))
- Professional Development: Career planning and professional development (e.g., "coming out as trans/gender variant in the workplace)
- Role Models: The need for role-models across co-curricular and academic experiences
- Social Support Systems: Need for peer social networks
- Facilities and Accommodations: Accessible facilities (e.g., housing, restrooms, locker rooms)
- Record-keeping: Changes to legal documents, employment paperwork, medical records, digital identifications, etc.

Knowledge of Health Concerns

- Mental Health: 71% (n = 544) of participants in Beeymn and Rankin (in press) indicated that they have experienced mild, moderate or severe depression that substantially affected a major life activity
- Suicide & Self-Harm: 50-88% of youth who are gender variant have considered or attempted suicide (Korrell & Lorah, 2007)
- Anxiety Conditions: 60% of individuals who are gender variant within the U.S. have experienced some sort of harassment or violence, 37% some form of economic discrimination (Korell & Lorah, 2007)
- Eating Disorders & Body-Image Conditions: Estrangement from the body can cause individuals who are Transgender to experience heightened body dissatisfaction and excessive concern with appearance (Lev, 2007)
- Substance Abuse & Addictions: Risk factors: street lifestyle, lack of education and job opportunities, and low-self esteem (Lev, 2007)

Curriculum Transformation

- Develop innovative pedagogical strategies for educating all students about gender diversity.
- Use videos and digital media that explore the experiences of people who are gender variant and the history of Transgender political movements.
- Invite speakers who are gender variant, facilitate discussions on gender identity and expression, and coordinate opportunities for people who are gender variant to share their experiences with a broader community.
- Assign or recommend books, movies and other media focusing positively on gender diversity (e.g., *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* (Kate Bornstein); *Trans-Sister Radio* (Chris Bohjalian); *Dear Sir or Madam* (Mark Rees).
- Assign cultural immersion activities in which students interview individuals who are gender variant or visit Transgender organizations, doing so with appropriate permission.

Outdated & (often) Inaccurate Terms

INTERSEX

People who are born with one of six typical biological conditions resulting in physical features that are uncommon, such as one testicle and one ovary, enlarged clitoris, micropenis, etc.

HERMAPHRODITE

- An organism that can reproduce with itself, or one that has genitalia and/or features of more than one sex.
- An outdated term once applied to people who are intersex, gay & lesbian, transsexual, etc.

TRANVESTITE

- Someone who dresses in the attire of another sex for the purposes of sexual and/or erotic gratification.
- An outdated, inaccurate term for people who are transgender or transsexual.

TRANNY

- A shortened version of “transsexual” or “transgender.”
- This term is almost always derogatory, unless self-applied and chosen by someone who is transgender or transsexual.
- Some people who are transgender or transsexual may use the term, but this should not be mistaken as an invitation to use it casually, e.g. without regard for the term’s history and meanings.

CROSS-DRESSER

Someone who dresses in the attire of another sex and/or gender, or alters physical expression of sex and gender for various reasons, possibly including:

- Performance art by drag kings or drag queens
- Sexual or erotic gratification, such as someone who explores transvestitism
- Personal comfort, such as wearing comfortable clothes whether or not they were “meant” for a particular sex/gender
- A transperson who is in certain stages of transition
- Changing attire for work-related reasons, such as aprons, hats