

Sexism, Heterosexism, and Trans* Oppression: An Integrated Perspective

QUADRANT 1

HANDOUT: EXPLORING LANGUAGE

Terms and definitions were expanded and adopted from:

Catalano, McCarthy, & Shlasko (2007). "Transgender oppression curriculum design," in Adams, Bell, & Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Asexual: An individual who indicates a lack of sexual attraction, the lack of interest in and desire for sex, and/or the lack of a sexual orientation. Asexuals, while typically lacking in sexual desire, may engage in emotional, intimate, and/or romantic relationships. Each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. People with this identity sometimes use "ace" or "ace/sexual."

Ally: Someone who recognizes, understands, and confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Allyship is a continuous process that requires heterosexual and cisgender people to understand the dynamics of privilege through self-awareness and self-exploration. Allies are concerned for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, ace/sexual, intersex, and queer people; and have a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and trans oppression (or genderism) are social justice issues.

Biological Sex/Assigned Sex: The physiological and anatomical characteristics of maleness and femaleness with which a person is born or that develop with physical maturity. These markers include internal and external reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, and body shape. Infants are usually assigned to a sex category (male or female) at birth on the basis of such characteristics (primarily the appearance of the external genitals). We therefore use assigned sex to refer to the sex designation that appears on birth certificates and other legal documents. See also *intersex*.

Bisexual: An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic, and/or affectional attraction is to both men and women. Bisexual identity does not require a history or current activity that includes sexual experiences with men and women.

Cisgender: Non-trans*. The word is from a Latin-derived prefix meaning "on the same side," as opposed to trans-, which means "across" or "on the opposite side of."

Coming Out: Coming out is a process of understanding, accepting, and valuing one's sexual or gender identity. Coming out includes both exploring and sharing one's identity, and it is a very personal process that happens in various ways and occurs at different ages for different people. Coming out is a continuous, sometimes lifelong process. Coming out is a personal decision and should not be imposed on people.

Cross-Dresser: A person who enjoys dressing in clothes typically associated with the other of the two socially sanctioned genders.

Discrimination: When prejudiced feelings or beliefs move into the realm of behavior and people are denied equality of treatment. It can be conscious and deliberate, or it can be unconscious and unintentional.

Drag: Originally used in Shakespeare's Globe Theater to mean "dressed as a girl," referring to male actors playing female roles. Now the term is used to describe the action of dressing in clothes associated with a gender other than one's own, usually playfully or for performance. Currently, this term is used with "king" or "queen" to indicate a male-bodied (drag queen) or female-bodied (drag king) performer.

Drag King: A female-bodied person who dresses as a man, sometimes including facial hair and other theatrical costuming, and who performs with masculine mannerisms and style for entertainment purposes.

Drag Queen: A male-bodied person who dresses in glamorous and flamboyant clothing usually associated with women. They often imitate female movie stars or singers with a theatrical style and intent.

Gay: An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic, and/or affectional attractions are to people of the same sex, sometimes used specifically to refer to gay men.

Gender: A social identity usually conflated with biological sex in a binary system that presumes one has either male and masculine characteristics and behavior, or female and feminine characteristics and behavior. In addition to being a major social status experienced by individuals, this is also "a social institution" by which human lives are organized.

Gender Expression: People's behaviors that convey something about their gender identity, or that others interpret as meaning something about their gender identity, including clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, communication patterns, social roles, etc.

Gender Identity: A person's own understanding of themselves in terms of gendered categories like man and woman, boy and girl, transgender, genderqueer, and many others. It is how they feel inside or what they believe themselves to be.

Gender Identity Disorder/Gender Dysphoria: A psychiatric/medical diagnosis included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* to describe when a person assigned one gender based on their assigned sex identifies as a different gender, or does not conform with the gender roles associated with their assigned sex. This can manifest in many ways, including varying levels of body dysphoria, and general discomfort living as the assigned sex and/or gender. People respond to these feelings in a variety of ways: Some privately cross-dress, others live part or full-time in another gender, and some pursue sexual reassignment surgery or other physical changes.

Genderqueer: An identity label sometimes claimed by people whose gender identity does not fit into either of the two culturally accepted gender categories. It may be characterized by the desire to challenge norms of gender role/presentation, to "play" with gender, and/or to express a fluid gender identity. As a term of self-identification, it should not be imposed.

Heteronormativity: As a term, it describes the processes through which social institutions and social policies reinforce the belief that human beings fall into two distinct sex/gender categories: Male/man and female/woman. This belief (or ideology) produces a correlative belief that those two sexes/genders exist in order to fulfill complementary roles, i.e., that all intimate relationships ought to exist only between males/men and females/women. Often used hand-in-hand with heterosexism, this term is the pervasive culture that ensures “normal” is seen as heterosexuality and cisgender culture, and any violation is deviant, strange, or unthinkable.

Heterosexism: The cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, and acceptable sexual orientation.

Heterosexual: An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the “opposite” sex.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people. See the GLAAD Media Reference Guide, www.glaad.org/reference. *Gay* and/or *lesbian* accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Intersex: A group of medical diagnoses describing a person whose anatomy, physiology, and/or chromosome variation differs from cultural ideals of male and female in terms of external genitalia, internal genitalia, and/or hormone production levels. Intersex individuals are typically assigned as “male” or “female” at birth, and often undergo surgery on their genitals in infancy to force a more culturally acceptable gendered appearance. The intersex movement has challenged the ethics of infant genital surgeries that are not medically necessary, pointing out that many intersex people who undergo such surgery in infancy later report feeling a sense of loss of an essential aspect of themselves. About 2–4% of all births are intersex to some degree. This is sometimes not evident until puberty. For more information, see: <http://www.accordalliance.org/>

Lesbian: An adjective used to describe women whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic, and/or affectional attraction is to other women.

LGBT: A common abbreviation and moniker used to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

MTF/ M2F/ MtF and FTM/ F2M/ FtM: Terms used to indicate the direction of a trans* person’s transition and/or identification, as in Male-to-Female, or Male-toward-Female, trans* person or Female-to-Male, Female-toward-Male, and trans* person.

Misogyny: A term to refer to the hatred or dislike of women and/or girls.

Oppression: “We use [this term] rather than discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry to emphasize the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. The term oppression encapsulates the fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that shade most aspects of life in our society... Woven together through time and reinforced in the present, these patterns provide an example of the pervasiveness of oppression” (Bell, 2010, RDSJ2).

Pansexual/Pansexuality: A sexual orientation characterized by enduring physical, sexual, romantic, and/or affectional attraction toward people without regard for their gender identity or biological sex. Pansexuality encompasses all kinds of sexuality; it is not limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice.

Passing: Successfully (convincingly) presenting one's self-defined gender category or sexual orientation. It may be intentional or unintentional. In trans* communities, passing is a contentious term and has different meanings for different people. For example, many trans* people do not feel that they are presenting as anything but themselves, whereas "passing" seems to imply that they are fooling people or hiding something. In addition, some trans* people do not desire to "pass" as non-trans, but rather to be respected for their identity and expression, even though people know that their identity or expression is different from the one typically associated with their sex. In LGB communities, some people use the phrase "straight acting" or passing as straight to refer to how they are not targeted for a non-heterosexual sexual orientation. There is also tension about value given to those who try to or can "pass" as heterosexual.

Phobia: Negative attitudes, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and/or fears about an identity or situation. In the context of this workshop, it can often be found in terms such as homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

Polyamory: The practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved.

Prejudice: To hold an adverse opinion or belief without just ground before acquiring specific knowledge, often against people or groups of people who are perceived as being "different" or having "different values."

Privilege: A "system of advantage" that gives people from more powerful social groups access to resources and opportunities that are denied to others (and usually gained at their expense) simply because of the groups they belong to (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Wildman & Davis, 1996, 2000).

Queer: An umbrella identity term taken by people who do not conform to heterosexual and/or gender binary 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.

Sexism: The cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and denigrate values and practices associated with women.

Sexual Orientation: An enduring pattern of attraction that determines the focus of our sexual/erotic drives, desires, and fantasies, and the inclination or capacity to develop intimate, emotional, and sexual relationships with other people. Sexual orientation is usually quantified in terms of gender—both an individual's own gender and the gender(s) of the people to whom that person is attracted and/or with whom they engage in intimate relationships and/or sexual behavior.

Sexuality: This term is broader than sexual orientation because it encompasses not just a pattern of attraction, drives, desires, thoughts, feelings, etc., but our broader sexual

experiences, which can include variations not limited to partner choice. Adapted from the *Encyclopedia of Psychology*.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS): Surgery to change the sex characteristics of one's body, including genitals and/or secondary sex characteristics. Common preference is to use "gender confirmation surgery," since there is no such thing as "one surgery" that changes a person's sex.

Stereotype: A standard/generalized belief, perception, and/or assumption about an individual or a group of people. Stereotypes can oftentimes be considered negative, untrue, and not connected to reality.

Trans*: This abbreviation began as a way to be more inclusive/concise in reference to the myriad number of identities that could be referenced by using the term. The asterisk is used to imply that trans* encompasses transgender, transsexual, and other transitional identities such as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, non-binary gender, and many others.

Transgender: An older but still common umbrella term that may include transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queens, drag kings, and other people who transgress the socially constructed confines of gender. As a term of self-identification, it should not be imposed on people. Nevertheless, we may use it descriptively to encompass anyone who falls under this broad definition, whether or not they would describe themselves this way.

Transman (or Transgender Man, or Transsexual Man): A Female-to-Male (FtM) trans* person.

Transwoman (or Transgender Woman, or Transsexual Woman): A Male-to-Female (MtF) trans* person.

Transgender Oppression: The hegemony of gender expectations and roles based on a rigid binary of male (masculine) and female (feminine) that is limiting and oppressive to everyone, but especially to those who transgress gender norms. Further, U.S. cultural hegemony dictates that the gender/sex binary is "natural" and any other genders outside the categories of man and woman do not exist (in some literatures referred to as genderism).

Transition: The process of changing sex or gender, including but not limited to social (e.g., changing one's name, cross-living) and medical (e.g., hormones and/or surgery) actions.

Transsexual (TS): 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. As a term of self-identification, it should not be imposed on people.

Two-Spirit: Describes any of the many mixed gender roles found traditionally among many American Indian and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups. The term usually implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body and was coined by contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Native Americans to describe themselves and the traditional roles they are reclaiming (source: Wikipedia).

Ze/Hir: “Ze” and “Hir” are pronouns, like he, she, him, her, his, and hers. English speakers have been experimenting with newly coined non-gendered pronouns for about 200 years. Such pronouns have been used in trans* communities for at least 15 years. There are several sets in use, of which ze/hir seems to be the most popular. For more information on non-gendered pronouns in English, check out the Wikipedia entry.