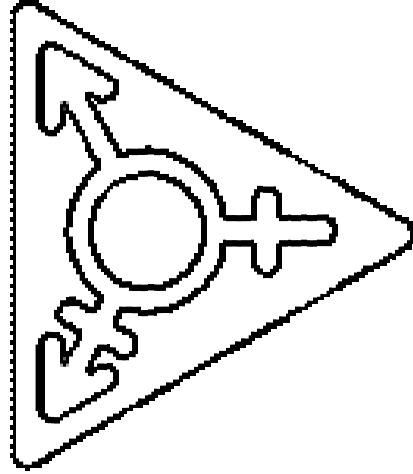


Trans—Allies

Supporting Transgender Friends and Family in Our Communities



Publication of Gender Queer (GQ), a subgroup of the University of Oregon, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Alliance

Draft for First Edition

What is does transgender mean?

Transgender people are people whose gender identity (one's internal sense of being male or female) or gender expression does not conform to societal expectation. The transcommunity includes transsexuals who have or wish to alter their bodies to better match their gender identity, crossdressers who wear clothing typically not associated with their birth—sex, butches and sissy—boys (masculine women and feminine men respectively) and a myriad of other peoples whose lives are not fully or accurately described by the gender they were assigned at or near birth.

The term transgender is still being defined by the transcommunity itself, and describes several separate but related groups. Many people in these groups use other terms to self-identify. Many transsexuals don't feel particularly transgender. Many post-operative transsexuals don't identify themselves as transsexual. It is important to remember that it is the right of every person to self-identify, and the first part of being a trans—ally is respecting other people's perceptions of themselves.

Transphobia in our Communities

Transphobia is the fear or hatred of transgender people. It can be found in forms ranging from jokes to violence to simply not acknowledging that transgender people exist. Transphobia hurts transsexuals first and foremost. It also sends a message out to the population at large that anyone who tries on any expression or identity that does not conform to societal expectations of their gender will be ridiculed, silenced, economically marginalized, assaulted, or even killed. Often transphobia is used to keep people in rigid gender roles through intimidation. Everyone has something to gain from combating transphobia, even if you do not know of anyone in your life who is transgender.

Fighting Transphobia

The first and best way to fight transphobia is to speak out against violence and hateful speech about or directed towards transpeople. Movies that display transgender people as a joke or as psychotic should be denounced publicly for encouraging harmful stereotypes. When someone speaks of transpeople as "disgusting," "exotic," "funny," "sick," or other stereotypes that dehumanize transpeople let them know it is not okay to say hateful or hurtful things in your presence. The first big way allies can help is by calling people, media, and politicians on their comments and publicly acknowledging that they are being transphobic.

The other way to help transpeople is to know the facts about transpeople and their lives and educate people when transphobic myths are being perpetuated. Some common myths about transpeople are:

Myth: All transpeople are "gay."

Some transpeople are attracted to the gender opposite of what they identify, some are attracted to the same gender as they identify, and some pick and choose among the genders. The simple truth is that gender identity has very little to do with sexual orientation.

Myth: Most transpeople are male-to-female.

Most media images of transpeople, especially of crossdressers and transsexuals, have been MTF (male-to-female) but there are just as many FTM (female-to-male) transgender people in the world.

Myth: All this transgender stuff is a trend.

Transgender people have existed in every documented society and culture in human history. Recently transpeople have been coming out more and talking about their lives, and more attention has been focused on their issues. Breaking the silence is an important part of securing safety for transpeople.

Myth: All transgender people want to change their sex.

Some transfolk do but many other transpeople are perfectly happy with their bodies but simply express or think of themselves in terms of a gender they were not assigned at birth.

Myth: Transpeople are miserable/ disturbed people.

Many transgender people have a lot of stress and anxiety, in large part due to the massive lack of acceptance of them and their identity. However many transfolk still live meaningful, accomplished lives. Those who transition into a new gender role may find much relief, but many transpeople find happiness and health across the many stages of their lives.

Myth: Transpeople are erotic/exotic.

The sexualization of transgender people is a huge industry and perpetuates many myths about transpeople and their sexuality. The objectification and exoticization of transpeople hurts and detracts from their basic humanity.

Myth: Transwomen are not "real women" or transmen are not "real men."

Many people, upon finding out someone they know is transgender comment something like "Oh! You mean *he's really a woman!*" Transgender people are really the gender they identify as, and usually have been so their whole lives, while it is true their experiences at times differ from someone who might have been assigned their gender at birth, difference of perspective does not make for authentic gender.

Supporting Transgender People

Apart from speaking out against transphobia and educating our communities about the realities of transgender people and their lives, allies can also make an effort to be respectful and supportive of transpeople and their experience. If you know transgender people in their community be sure to respect their identity and expression.

Validate their identity. Simply acknowledging and believing a transperson's gender can be an extreme relief. Be sure to use their preferred pronoun and name.

Respect their privacy. Many transpeople want only a few trusted people to know their history or physical status. Make sure it is okay with the person to discuss with other people that they are transgender or other related specifics of their lives.

Consider transgender people when announcing community events. At present when a "men's event" or "women's event" is announced, transpeople cannot always assume they are welcome. Specify women or men-identified. Remember also that some people identify as both, neither, or other, "all genders welcome" is an good all-inclusive phrase.

Include protection for transgender people in worker contracts and laws. It is currently legal in most areas to discriminate on the basis of gender expression and/or identity. A big way allies can help is by advocating and implementing explicit protection for trans workers and citizens.

Be aware of gendered spaces. Be sensitive to the fact that bathrooms, locker rooms, and gender-specific events can be a place of potential embarrassment or violence for transpeople.

Just ask! If you are not sure what pronoun a person prefers or how they identify, just ask. If for some reason asking doesn't feel comfortable, try to

speak without using gender-specific pronouns.

If you make a mistake, apologize and move on. Occasionally you might accidentally use a wrong pronoun or say a wrong name when addressing someone transgender. Apologize and correct yourself, but not too profusely.

Acknowledge their experience. If a transperson does talk about their body, identity and experience you at times might be surprised to hear that their lives do not match up to your expectations. For instance, a male you know might have given birth at some point. This is simply part of the trans experience. Accept it and learn!

Safer Communities

Above all it is important to send the message out to transgender people in our communities that they are welcome, appreciated, and that transphobia will not be tolerated. By holding people accountable for transphobic actions and by including transpeople in our events we can all benefit from living in safer communities.

Contacts in Lane County

If you are interested in learning more about the transgender community or how to make trans-inclusive spaces/events the following groups are in Lane County:

Gender Queer via the UO LGBTQA. Erb Memorial Union Suite 34. (541) 346-3360

EMERGENCE/GITA contact Ms. Blackburn (541)302-9777

PFLAG/T-NET contact Elise R. Self (541)686-2280