



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
Spirituality · Community · Justice

“Identity and Inclusion: Transgender Liberation, part 2 of 2”

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Last summer, when **The United States Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage**, we celebrated a watershed moment in the struggle for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual equality. And as significant as that victory was, the struggle for equal rights — for equal protection under the law — is not yet complete.

Even though same-sex marriage is legal in all fifty states, “Twenty nine states lack anti-discrimination laws that include sexual orientation or gender identity, and there is no federal law protecting access to employment, housing and public accommodation, like hotels or restaurants.” In the words of one activist, **“In a lot of places, you can [now] go to your county clerk, get a marriage license, get married, and then get fired the next week because now you are openly gay.”**

Relatedly, there has been a lot of recent controversy around “a North Carolina law passed in March [that] made it illegal for transgender people to use public restrooms that match their gender identity.” Here in Maryland, a transgender rights law was finally passed in 2014. But work remains to be done in many surrounding states and across the country to ensure the rights of the **“1.4 million adults in the United States [who] identify as transgender.”**

And the issue is not only North Carolina. To date, twenty-one states are suing “the federal government...over a directive to public schools on bathroom use by transgender students.” Regarding this debate, the single best advice I can give is to **“trust that individuals know which restroom is most comfortable and appropriate for them.”**

In the wake of these debates, I wanted to take some time to reflect this morning on identity and inclusion because here at UUCF we are certified through what the UUA calls its “[Welcoming Congregation Program](#),” an intentional process designed to dismantle homophobia — and later expanded to include dismantling transphobia. It is significant that **in 2006 when this congregation became an “out and proud” LGBT Welcoming Congregation, only Massachusetts had legalized same sex marriage**, which they did in 2004. The next state to do so, California, would not come along until summer 2008. It’s important to remember and celebrate the times that we were on the right side of history as a way of potentially inspiring ourselves when the next hard ethical choice comes along — and it always does.

But even though we have been a Welcoming Congregation for a full decade, in our heteronormative culture, there remains ongoing work for us to remain as authentically welcoming as possible. In particular, given all the controversy around transgender rights, I would like to invite us to reflect particularly on gender identity and inclusion.

To briefly address the most basic terminology, I suspect most of you are more familiar with the term transgender than with the term cisgender. The term **transgender** adds the Latin prefix “*trans-*” (meaning “on the other side of”) to indicate a person whose gender identity or gender expression does not match their biological sex. **Cisgender** adds the Latin prefix *cis-*, (meaning “on this side of”), indicating a person, whose gender identity and gender expression for the most part matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Speaking for myself, owning the label *cisgender* helps me to resist the all-too-common perception that transgender folk are deviant from an alleged “norm,” instead of seeing both **cisgender and transgender as two (among many) legitimate points on a continuum that spans the diverse human condition.**

Along these lines, I would like to share with you the **single most useful tool I have found for understanding how all the various identities interrelate and where we *human beings* can find ourselves in all our diversity** — represented by the lengthening acronyms of [LGBTAIQ](#). You should have an insert to your Order of Service labeled “[The Genderbread Person](#).” You may find, as I have, that this chart — available for free (just Google it) — is a helpful teaching tool for yourself and others.

This chart is a playful attempt to visualize Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Biological Sex, and Sexual Attraction. The biggest “aha!” moment for me was noticing that **these four different attributes are each on different, non-intersecting lines.** Any given individual might identify at any point on each of these four lines.

Starting at the top of the chart. **Gender Identity** is in your *mind*: inside your head, do you think of yourself as more of a woman, man, or somewhere in between (irrespective of biology, whom you are attracted to, or how you express yourself)?

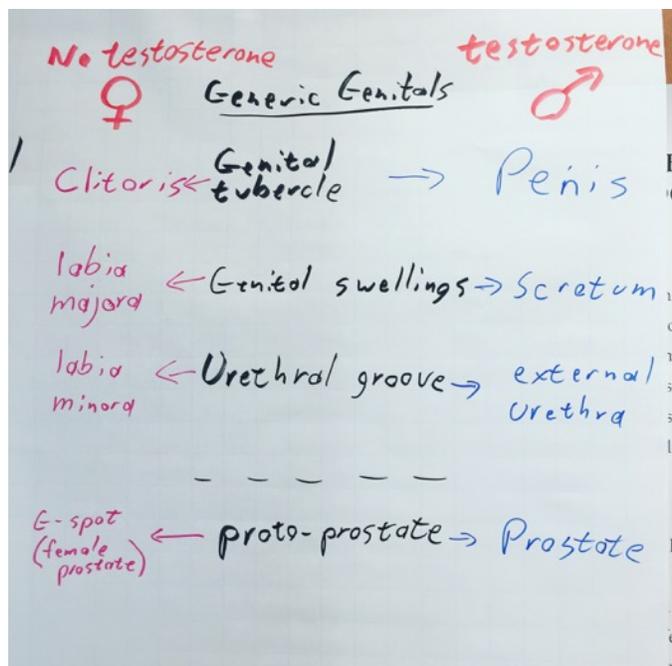
Gender Expression is the dotted line: how you appear *externally*. In your clothes and behavior, do you present yourself to others as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or gender fluid?

The third category, **attraction**, is in your *heart*: are you are sexually (and/or romantically) attracted to men/males/masculinity, women/females/femininity, both, or neither?

Finally, there is a spectrum regarding **Biological Sex**. And it is helpful to remember that someone who is intersexual has a chromosomal genotype or sexual phenotype other than a simple XY-male and XX-female. According to the [Intersex Society of North America](#), “If you ask experts at medical centers **how often a child is born so noticeably atypical in terms of genitalia that a specialist in sex differentiation is called in, the number comes out to about 1-in-1500 to 1-in-2000** births. But a lot

more people than that are born with subtler forms of sex anatomy variations, some of which won’t show up until later in life.” (Relatedly, a professor of Anatomy and Physiology reminded me recently that we generally exaggerate the differences between males and females — and that all the parts and pleasures, so to speak, have correlates. See photo.)

On the other side of your Order of Service insert is a list of “**10 Ways to be**



More Welcoming and Inclusive of Transgender People.” For now, I’ll limit myself to highlighting only a few points from this list, but I invite you to reflect further on your own for any insights from this list for yourself, for UUCF, or for other groups of which you are a part.

Number one is a good starting point: **“Avoid making assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation.”** You can avoid a lot of confusion, awkwardness, or unintentional insults by avoiding assumptions.

Skipping to number three, **“Do not assume a trans person wants to speak about trans issues and only trans issues.”** A related mistake is rushing to introduce a new visitor who is transgender to another member of the congregation who is transgender. To risk being frank, this mistake is also often made with young people, people of color — or anyone else who differs from the alleged norm of the straight, white, cisgendered, able-bodied male. Instead, the recommended best practice, as you can perhaps guess, is to **treat people as human beings and get to know each person as an individual.**

Finally, as a way of highlighting how we are all on an ongoing journey of coming to know ourselves and one another better — and struggling to build a beloved community together amidst all our diversity and difference — I should note that our closing hymn this morning does not follow the best practice listed in number five of “Use terms that encompass all genders rather than only two.” The reason is that our gray hymnal was published in 1993, when the UUA had had a feminist awakening, but was not yet fully conscious of transgender issues. You will see a much greater sensitivity, probably sometimes in the next few years whenever the next major UU Hymnal is published.

For now, I will leave you with a few thoughts inspired by Leslie Feinberg’s book [*TransLiberation: Beyond Pink and Blue:*](#)

The truth that *gender is a spectrum* that doesn’t always match the biological sex one is assigned at birth is a truth that is as clear to me as every little “boy” who has been teased for being a sissy or every little “girl” who has ever been derisively called a tomboy.

The need for *greater gender freedom and fluidity* is, likewise, as clear to me as the need to create a world in which no child is ever mocked for their gender expression — whether masculine, feminine, both, or somewhere in between.

We already live in a world in which the “race box” is optional or expanded on many forms. The trans-liberation movement challenges us that the “gender box” should also be optional, eliminated, or divided into many more options.

In the silence to follow, I invite you reflect on how you individually — or we collectively — may be called to be part of building a more *gender-liberated world*.