

Resources for Trans Inclusion & Allyship

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What is Allyship?

In the most general sense, allyship means helping each other out, or working together – being in alliance. In the context of social justice activism, it means supporting someone (or some group) who is impacted by oppression or inequality differently than you are. Sometimes, allyship refers specifically to people with a privileged identity, supporting people who do not share that privilege – for example, straight people who work for LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) rights or white people who support racial justice movements. Other times, allyship can include people within the group – like trans people seeking to support trans people who are different from ourselves. Sometimes, allyship refers to an attitude – such as believing that people should not be discriminated against – and other times it requires more active engagement.

When ally is used to refer to an attitude, the term can become so watered down that it doesn't mean much and even becomes counterproductive. Activists and scholars have written about the problems that arise when people become so attached to their ally "identity" that they defend it even at the expense of the people they claim to be in alliance with. If you want to read more about that, Mia McKenzie's book *Black Girl Dangerous* is a great place to start.

For the purpose of this training, being an ally is not something you are (like an identity), nor something you think or feel (like an attitude), but something you *do*.

Allyship is informed, accountable action that contributes to other people's ability to survive and thrive in a context of inequality.

You can be an ally to an individual, a group, or a whole category of people.

The Liberatory Consciousness of Effective Allies

Based on Barbara Love, "Developing a Liberatory Consciousness," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, 3rd ed.* (2013). Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters, & Zúñiga, Eds. New York: Routledge.

Adapted from *Trans Allyship Workbook* by Davey Shlasko, published by Think Again Training. Available October, 2017 in stores and at www.thinkagaintraining.com



Assessing Your Allyship

Thinking about your allyship to trans people in your community. Using the 4As as a structure, reflect on your existing skills and your opportunities for growth in each area. First, rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement:

Awareness

In my daily life, I consistently pay attention to the language I use, behaviors I engage in, and thoughts and feelings I experience, related to trans people and trans communities.



I am aware of the general patterns of how inequality, power dynamics, or “-isms” impact trans people in my community.



Analysis

I have a well-thought-out understanding of how cissexism and other systems of oppression work: in general, in relation to my own gender identity, and in relation to trans people in my community.



I apply my understanding to my work, workplace, and professional relationships, before determining what action to take in support of trans people in my community.



Action

I respond effectively to in-the-moment needs for trans allyship that might come up. (For example, I intervene when someone says/does something that defames or harms trans people.)



I regularly engage in proactive action that supports trans people in my community – not only when reacting to a specific momentary harm.



Accountability

What are your relationships of accountability, relevant to trans people in your community? Jot down a quick list of individuals you know personally, individuals you follow on social media, authors whose work you look to, and/or organizations whose leadership you trust around trans community issues:

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-
-
-
-
-

Look at the people on your list, and ask yourself: Do they include people of different ages, genders, races, class backgrounds, professions and experiences, who bring those experiences into their analysis of trans issues? Do they include people who can be vulnerable with, who can help you work through your own hangups or internalized oppression?

Look at the organizations on your list, and ask yourself: Who do these organizations represent? Who is in leadership? Do leaders include people of a variety of genders, ages, races, classes, etc., who bring those experiences into their leadership?

What patterns do you notice? What voices might be missing from your accountability networks?



sexual orientation

- sexual attraction
- emotional attraction
- sexual behaviors
- partnership decisions
- identity
- community

gender expression

behaviors that express, or can be interpreted as expressing, something about gender.

gender identity

one's understanding of oneself in relation to concepts like man, woman, trans, genderqueer, and many others.

biological sex

includes genotype, internal and external sex organs, hormone levels, secondary sex characteristics, etc.

assigned sex

category assigned on id documents

Anyone is free to copy, distribute and adapt this one-page handout, for non-commercial purposes. This version was created by Davey Shlasko and Think Again Training, 2017. The first genderbread cookie was developed by youth activists with Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center (SMYRC) in Portland, OR around 1997, drawing on ideas developed by many scholars and activists. The first published version was in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, 2nd edition* in 2007. www.thinkagaintraining.com

Gender and Sexual Orientation Terminology

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

Gender and Sexual Orientation Concepts

Binary gender system refers to the system of beliefs, structures, policies and practices based on the idea that there are exactly two genders (where gender and sex are assumed to be interchangeable).

Biological 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. **Biological sex markers** include internal and external reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as facial hair and breasts.

Sex assigned at birth (or "assigned sex") is the sex category assigned to each of us on ID documents, beginning with the birth certificate.

Gender expression refers to appearance and 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, and so on.

Gender identity refers to one's own understandings of oneself in terms of gender categories like man, woman, boy, girl, transgender, genderqueer, and many others. Gender identity cannot be observed; the only way you can know someone's gender identity is if they tell you. Some people's gender identity is consistent for their whole lives; other people experiences shifts in their gender identity over time.

Gender-neutral usually means inclusive of all genders, as opposed to gender-specific. A "gender neutral" restroom is one that everybody can use.

Passing means being seen as belonging unquestionably to a particular group, e.g. being seen as a woman or as a man. Often, it refers to a trans person being seen as the gender they are; sometimes it refers to being seen as the gender as which one wants to be seen at the moment, for safety or other reasons. Some people use "passing" to mean being seen as cisgender (e.g. when a trans woman is assumed by others to be a cisgender woman, she is "passing"), while for others it is not that specific. Passing is a complex and problematic concept, with regard to not only trans issues but also race, class, and other systems of categorization and power. Useful thoughts on some of the problems with "passing" can be found in Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* (Chapter 8).

Pronouns are words used in place of nouns, such as he, she, I, we, you, and they. Calling trans people the pronouns they want to be called (usually those that most closely match their gender identity) is a crucial sign of respect.

Sexual orientation describes an individual's patterns of romantic and/or sexual attraction, in terms of gender. For example, someone may be attracted to people of the same gender as themselves, to people of a particular other gender, or to people of all genders. Sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity. People of any gender may have any sexual orientation.

Transition can refer to any of the medical, social, legal, spiritual and personal processes that a trans person may go through in order to live their life in a way that works for their gender.

Identity Categories

Terms of self-identity are complicated. When talking about a particular person, use whichever terms that person uses for themselves, bearing in mind they may not use terms exactly as they're defined here. This list covers many of the most commonly used terms, but it is far from exhaustive (especially internationally).

Many of these terms are sometimes used as nouns rather than adjectives, e.g. "transsexuals" rather than "transsexual people." Unless you are talking about a group you are part of, it's most respectful to stick with adjectives, and talk about "transsexual people," "gay people," etc., not "transsexuals" and "gays."

Agender (adj.): Someone who does not experience themselves as having a gender identity; someone who does not identify as a man, woman, or any other gender category.

Asexual (adj.): Someone who experiences little or no sexual desire (but may desire nonsexual romantic connection).

Assigned male at birth (AMAB); Assigned female at birth (AFAB): Identifies how an individual's sex was categorized at birth. Used to avoid assumptions and overgeneralizations about identity and biology. For example, AFAB might be used in place of "girls" or "biological females" if you intend to include everyone raised as a girl, across variations in anatomy as well as current identity.

Bisexual (adj.): Describes people who are attracted to both men and women; or, people who are attracted to those of the same gender as their own and those of a different gender.

Cisgender (adj.): Not trans. From Latin cis- meaning "on the same side," as opposed to trans- meaning "across." Describes people whose gender identity matches what is expected of them based on their sex assigned at birth – people assigned male at birth who identify as men and people assigned female at birth who identify as women.

Cross Dresser (n.): Someone who enjoys dressing in clothes typically associated with the other of the two binary gender categories. Most cross dressers are heterosexual men who enjoy wearing women's clothes occasionally.

Drag Kings and Drag Queens (n.): Drag is the practice of dressing and acting in an exaggerated masculine or feminine way, usually playfully for theatrical performance. **Drag Queens** are usually men whose performances highlight femininity; **Drag Kings** are usually women whose performances highlight masculinity. People with nonbinary gender identities can also do drag.

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

Gender creative (adj.): Used to describe children whose gender expression and/or identity stands out, and who may or may not turn out to be transgender in the sense of needing to transition.

Genderqueer (adj.): One of many identity labels used by trans people whose gender identity is outside the binary. Genderqueer means different things to different people, and genderqueer people look, act and describe themselves in a wide variety of ways.

Gender fluid (adj.): Someone whose gender identity (not only expression) varies from day to day.

Hijra (adj., n.): A traditional gender category in South Asia (including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). Hijras are neither men nor women. They are usually AMAB (although many are intersex), and transition

as adults (sometimes but not always including surgery). Hijras occupy a unique role in the social, economic and family life of the community, different from the roles expected of men or women.

Intersex (adj.): Describes someone whose anatomy or physiology is not easily categorized as simply male or female. This may be apparent at birth, or may become apparent at puberty. Some intersex people are also trans, and many are not.

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

LGBT/GLBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans. Also sometimes includes Q (queer, questioning), I (intersex), S (same-gender-loving), A (ally, especially in youth spaces), A (asexual) and others.

Nonbinary (adj.): Broad term for any gender identity other than man and woman, such as genderqueer, two-spirit, hijra, gender-fluid, and so on.

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 nonconformance 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 history as a slur, this term should be used thoughtfully. If you're not queer, or for public communications, LGBTQ is often more appropriate.

Trans* (adj.): Anyone whose **gender identity** and/or **gender expression** differs significantly from what is expected of them in their culture based on their **sex assigned at birth**. This broad category includes transgender, transsexual and nonbinary people, cross dressers, drag queens and kings, masculine women and feminine men, and more. The asterisk is a reminder that trans* includes everyone who could be described this way, not only a particular subset. We use the term so broadly because it enables us to talk about issues facing the whole range of trans* people; at the same time, it's important to remember that not everyone who could be described as trans* self-identifies as a trans* person.

Trans (adj.): Can be used as broadly as trans*, or can be short for transgender as defined below.

Transgender (adj.): Can be used as broadly as trans*, but more often refers specifically to people who have an experience of transitioning (socially, legally and/or medically) from living as one gender to living as another gender. **Tip:** Transgender should almost always be used as an adjective. As a noun (e.g. "she's a transgender") it sounds disrespectful to many people, and as a past-tense verb ("transgendered") it does not make any sense.

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 originated as a medical diagnosis, and many people do not identify with it for that reason.

Trans man (or transgender man, or transsexual man) (n.): Someone assigned female at birth who now identifies and lives as a man. Also **FTM/ F2M/ FtM (adj.)**

Trans woman (or transgender woman, or transsexual woman) (n.): Someone assigned male at birth who now identifies and lives as a woman. Also **MTF/ M2F/ MtF (adj.)**.

Two-Spirit (adj., n.): A contemporary Native American term describing a range of gender and sexual orientation categories from cultural traditions, both historical and current, across North America (and sometimes the rest of the hemisphere) that are outside the Euro-American binary system.

Selected Resources

Allyship is a lifelong practice. Practice may not make perfect, but practice makes better practice! Here are a few resources to inspire and inform you on your way. This list is not exhaustive, and the resources listed are not perfect. We encourage you to use the models and ideas discussed in our training session to think critically about these and other resources you encounter, and to share your thoughts and further resources with each other.

General Trans Allyship for Anyone

Trans Allyship Workbook: Building Skills to Support Trans People in Our Lives. (2017). By Davey Shlasko. Madison, WI: Think Again Training. Available at A Room of One's Own in Madison, or at <http://thinkagaintraining.com/resources/publications/trans-ally-workbook/>

The Gender Book. Mel Reiff Hill & Jay Mays (2013). <http://www.thegenderbook.com>

US Trans Survey (2015). <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/report>

Trans and Gender-nonconforming resources from Smith College School for Social Work:
<https://www.smith.edu/ssw/tgnc>

Stryker, S. (2017). *Transgender History : The Roots of Today's Revolution.* Berkeley : Seal Press, 2017.

Intersectional (not Trans-Specific) Allyship Resources

Readings for diversity and social justice, 4th edition. (2018). Edited by Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W., Catalano, C.J.C., DeJong, K., Hackman, H., Hopkins, L., Love, B., Peters., M., Shlasko, D. & Zúñiga, X. New York: Routledge.

Chesca Leigh Ramsey's video guide on how to apologize: <https://tinyurl.com/jpgdcwm> and "5 Tips for Being a Good Ally": <https://tinyurl.com/kcq92je>

Jay Smooth on "How to Tell Somebody They Sound Racist" (also, generally how to give feedback): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0Ti-gkJiXc>

Jay Smooth on empathy and accountability (regarding Rachel Dolezol): <https://tinyurl.com/ycm55sjs>

Black girl dangerous: On race, queerness, class and gender. (2014). Mia McKenzie. Oakland, CA.

"Accomplices not allies: Abolishing the ally industrial complex." (2014). Indigenous Action Media. <http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact. (2010). Edited by Derald Wing Sue.

Microaggressions in Everyday Life : Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation. (2010). Edited by Derald Wing Sue.

Super Smart Trans Analysis

Enke, Finn. (2012). *Transfeminist perspectives in and beyond transgender and gender studies.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (Yup, you found it – no, don't worry that the first name may appear to be wrong.)

Namaste, Viviane. (2005). *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism.* Toronto: Women's Press.

Spade, Dean. (2015). *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Green, Kai M. (2016). Troubling the waters: Mobilizing a trans* analytic. In Johnson, E. Patrick, Ed. *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Driskill, Qwo-Li. (January 01, 2010). Doubleweaving Two-Spirit critiques: Building alliances between Native and Queer Studies. *Glq: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 16(1-2), 69-92.

Local, Regional, and National-level Orgs that Work on Trans Rights

Outright Vermont <http://www.outrightvt.org/>

Green Mountain Crossroads <https://www.greenmountaincrossroads.org/>

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) - <http://masstpc.org/>

National Center for Lesbian Rights (<http://www.nclrights.org/>)– NCLR's work includes advocacy and services related to trans immigrants seeking legal status in the U.S.

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) (<http://www.transequality.org/>) works on federal-level policy issues affecting trans people.

Transgender Law Center. (<http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/>) Policy advocacy at federal and state levels. Resources include research, policy briefs, action kits and video testimonials.

Interact – Advocates for Intersex Youth. <http://interactadvocates.org/> Advocates for the legal and human rights of children born with intersex traits.

SONG (Southerners on New Ground) (<http://southernersonnewground.org/>)

Sylvia Rivera Law Project (<http://www.srlp.org/>)

Interact – Advocates for Intersex Youth. <http://interactadvocates.org/>