

Promoting Trans Literacies  
Supplementary Resource  
*Updated Sept 2016*

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Promoting Trans Literacies

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## Glossary of Terms

This glossary is in three sections – **green**, **yellow** and **red**. **Green** items are things that you can say with confidence, **yellow** are words and expressions to use cautiously and **red** items should be avoided. These colours are used throughout this Supplementary Resource.

This glossary was compiled using items from the GLAAD Media Reference Guide ([www.glaad.org/reference/transgender](http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender)), and the Transgender Terminology listing on the website for the National Centre for Transgender Equality (<http://transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>), as well as Dean Spade’s About Purportedly Gendered Body Parts (<http://www.deanspade.net/2011/02/03/about-purportedly-gendered-body-parts/>) and the Intersex Society of North America (<http://www.isna.org>).

As trans communities and people change and grow, the terminology used is subject to change. We recognize the historical legacy of some of these terms, as well as acknowledge the right of any trans person to reclaim terms that have been used against them. Trans people of diverse ages, races, abilities, and other identities may use terms that are not listed here, or may challenge some of the ways issues and identities are framed within this glossary. The contested nature of terminology is reflected in the ‘red, yellow, green’ format of this glossary. Rather than being prescriptive, this glossary aims to serve as a guideposts through an ever-changing trans-lexicon.

### GREEN!

DO use **sex** to refer to the classification of people into the categories of **male** and **female**. This is a medical and legal assignment made at birth, based largely on the external genitals of newborn infants. DO use **female-assigned at birth**, **male-assigned at birth**, **people with testes**, **people with vaginas**, **people who menstruate**, etc. This recognizes that sex is an assignment, and allows you to speak about individuals with particular bodily experiences in general.

DO use **intersex** as an umbrella term for the variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of male or female.

DO use **gender** to refer to the social meaning ascribed to these sexed differences. This includes gender **norms**, **roles**, **stereotypes**, as well as gender **identity**, **expression** and gender **conformity** or **non-conformity**.

DO use the **sex/gender binary** to refer to the social construction of mutually exclusive categories of male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine, misogyny/misandry, etc. DO recognize that some trans people reject the binary and do not identify with terms or expressions aligned with the binary.

DO use the word **trans** as an umbrella term to refer to all people whose gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth do not align. Some trans people use **trans**, a term derived from library and online search functions, where an asterisk stands in for all possible endings to a term. The asterisk is either spoken aloud, or it is implied. Please note that we will be using trans throughout this supplementary resource.

DO use the word **cisgender** as an umbrella term to refer to all people whose gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth do align. DO shorten this to **cis**.

DO use the word **transition** to refer to the process that some trans people undertake to change their sex – this may including legal, medical and personal steps.

DO use **transphobia** to refer to the prejudice against trans people as reflected in antagonistic attitudes, feelings, institutions, policies and practices. DO use **trans-bashing**, **transmisogyny** (the intersection between transphobia and misogyny), **gender panic** or other language to describe different kinds of transphobia.

DO use **people of all and no genders** to recognize that non-gender, agender, gender neutral and other non-binary trans people do not have a gender and are thus not included in statements like “people of all genders.”

DO use **Two-Spirit** as a term to encompass sexual, gender, cultural, and/or spiritual identity within some Indigenous communities. This umbrella term was created in the English language to reflect complex Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures. See page 11/12 for a more comprehensive definition.

DO use culturally specific terms such as **hijra** (India), **fa’afafine** (Samoa), **indeterminate** (various), **third-gender** (various), **kathoey/ladyboys** (Thailand), **khawaja sara** (Pakistan), and other terms used by various communities across the world to refer to non-normatively sexed and/or gendered people.

DO use **cross-dresser** or **CD** to refer to a person who is typically male-assigned at birth, who wears traditionally women’s clothing for various reasons. DO use **cross-dressing** to refer to the process that a person undertakes as a crossdresser to explore (typically) femininity.

## YELLOW!

DO use **transsexual** to refer to trans people who refer to themselves this way. DO use this term if you are acknowledging its role in the past and present medicalization and pathologization of trans people. AVOID using transsexual as an umbrella term. Many people are trans, but do not identify with the term transsexual. Others object to the focus this term gives to the medical interventions that some trans people use to alter their sexed bodies.

DO use **pre-, post- or non-operative** to refer to trans people who refer to themselves this way. AVOID grouping all trans people into the categories of pre, post- or non-operative. This centralizes the medical interventions that some trans people use to alter their sexed bodies. Along with transsexual, these terms have a legacy in medicalization and pathologization of trans people that continues today.

DO use **tranny** in those specific instances where this term is being reclaimed, eg. the tranny stroll, a term used by transwomen to describe the area where they work as sex workers. AVOID giving credibility to media sources that use these terms except in a way that reveals the bias of the person quoted. AVOID using tranny to refer to trans people in general. AVOID using tranny as a derogatory, dehumanizing slur.

DO use **sex-reassignment surgery** or **gender-confirmation surgery** if a trans person uses these terms to refer to their own relationship to doctor-supervised surgical interventions. AVOID using either term as the umbrella term for the process undertaken by trans people to change their legal sex. This overemphasizes the role of surgery in the transition process and does not reflect the number and variety of surgeries involved in any one individual's transition, not to mention hormonal interventions. AVOID using **sex-change** or **gender change**.

DO use **transgendered** as a **verb** to refer to the process by which a person has been 'made' transgender. This might include the retroactive reclaiming of Joan of Arc as a trans figure, for example. Through this retroactive reclaiming, Joan of Arc is transgendered. AVOID using transgendered as a **noun** to refer to a person. AVOID adding an **-ed** to other words when used to refer to an identity (i.e. intersexed, cisgendered).

DO use **preferred name and/or pronouns** if an individual uses multiple names and/or pronouns and there are particular ones that they prefer. AVOID **speaking generally** about names and/or pronouns as preferred as this denotes that pronouns are optional, or merely a preference.

## RED!

AVOID **transgenders** or a **transgender**.

AVOID the word **transformation** to refer to the process that some trans people undertake to change their sex. DO use **transition**.

AVOID using the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders** for information and terms to use regarding trans people, their identities or experiences. AVOID using 'symptoms' or other medical and/or pathologizing language.

AVOID using **women and trans people**. This assumes that women and trans are mutually exclusive categories. It makes a distinction between cisgender women and transwomen, for example. AVOID using **real, authentic, actual**, or other terms that create a hierarchy of identity.

AVOID using **men** and **women** without qualifying whether you are speaking about cis or trans people. AVOID **female-bodied** or **male-bodied**.

AVOID using derogatory terms and expressions, historically or in contemporary society, without context or without acknowledging the bias of the term or expression. This includes, among others, he/she, it, tranny, shemale, transvestite, man in a dress, hermaphrodite, berdache, or freak.

## Asking Questions and Making Mistakes

We all have questions, and we all make mistakes. These may be about the person we are speaking about or to, or about an issue or experience we do not fully understand. When mistakes are made, it is best to:

1. Apologize,
2. Reflect and learn from the mistake,
3. And then move on.

DO respect trans people's **right to consent to educate**. Asking questions should be done in a way that acknowledges how trans people are often placed in the position to be the educators on trans issues, or asked to speak on behalf of trans people. When you can, you should research an item yourself, before asking a trans person.

DO recognize the difference between a **trans scholar** and a trans person. A trans scholar is a person, cis or trans, who focuses on trans theories, issues, experiences within their research. Whereas it may be appropriate to ask certain questions to a trans scholar, these questions would be inappropriate to ask a trans person.

### ***How to ask someone about their pronouns***

#### GREEN!

DO politely and privately ask **what pronouns do you use?**

DO use **they/them** pronouns, **the person's name** or **that person** if you do not know the pronouns the person uses, until you are corrected.

DO respect if a person uses **different pronouns in different settings**. Someone may reveal to you that they use one set of pronouns in private, and another set at work, or with their family.

DO acknowledge that people from diverse communities, cultures, countries, ethnic and racial backgrounds and identities may use **different pronouns beyond those available in English**.

DO use the **gender neutral pronouns** that have been created by trans people to refer to themselves. This may include **ze/hir, per, hu/hus/hum, hen** (Swedish), **co**, etc.

DO **practice**. Using gender neutral pronouns may be new to you. Practice to yourself.

#### YELLOW!

DO use **preferred name and/or pronouns** if an individual uses multiple names and/or pronouns and there are particular ones that they prefer. AVOID **speaking generally** about names and/or pronouns as preferred as this denotes that pronouns are optional, or merely a preference.

**RED!**

AVOID **assuming anyone's pronoun** based on their physical appearance, sexed body, gender expression or any other factor.

AVOID citing whether something is **grammatically correct** or not as a reason for not using it. Not only is it factually untrue that singular plural they/them are grammatically incorrect, it is also not a valid reason to use the wrong pronouns. Grammar is subject to change and challenge. DO practice using pronouns that are new to you, if they seem grammatically or linguistically difficult.

### ***How to make a mistake about a person's pronoun and/or name***

**GREEN!**

DO **say you are sorry** as soon as possible. This can be within the next sentence, a few minutes later, or days later. You can acknowledge and correct your error at any time.

DO **ask again** if you have forgotten something about the person.

**YELLOW!**

DO **apologize again and again** if you keep making the same or different mistakes. AVOID having to do this, by being accountable to yourself, and **asking for support** in how to remember how to correctly refer to the person or issue.

**RED!**

AVOID providing a **reason or explanation** for your mistake.

AVOID **over-apologizing** for mistake you have already apologized for.

### ***How to correct someone who is using the wrong name and/or pronoun***

**GREEN!**

DO privately and respectfully **correct the speaker**. DO say, for example, "I've noticed that you are calling (correct name/pronouns) by (the incorrect name/pronouns). I'm not sure if you know, but (correct name) uses (correct name/pronouns)."

DO ask what you can do to **support** someone else in remembering to use the correct name, pronoun or other term to refer to a person.

### YELLOW!

DO **stand up for trans people** and be an **ally**. AVOID **outing** a trans person by revealing details about their body, medical history, previous names and/or pronouns, etc. AVOID **asking one trans (or cis!) person about another trans person's** body, medical history, previous names and/or pronouns, etc.

### RED!

AVOID **calling anyone out** in public about using the incorrect name or pronouns. AVOID judging or shaming someone for making a mistake.

### *How to make your language trans inclusive, in general*

### GREEN!

DO use **folks, you all, everyone,** or other gender neutral language to speak to a group of people.

DO **describe the person's clothing** or another distinct feature when asking someone to speak, if people raise hands to ask questions in your classroom. DO say, for example "the person in the red shirt in the back row," instead of "the guy in the back row."

DO **acknowledge the potential for trans people being in the space** by using expressions like 'for those of us who are cisgender' as opposed to 'as cis people, we...'

### RED!

AVOID **guys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, sir, ma'am, miss, boy.** These terms are laden with assumptions about sex and gender, and have also historically been used to describe people of particular classes and/or races.

DISCOURAGE students from asking questions that focus on the **genitals, surgical or hormonal history,** or other **private** and **personal** details about any individual trans person.

## Intersectionality

Remember that trans people have various identities and experiences that intersect with their identities as trans. This results in multifaceted and complex people, lives and issues. There are trans people of all ages, classes, races, religions, cultures and abilities. Trans people are members of families both chosen and heteronormative, they are parents, children, siblings. The parents, siblings and children of trans people are also among our students and staff. Some trans people choose and/or are able to live as 'just' men or women, and do not identify as trans at all or as members of trans communities. Others may centralize their trans identity, in active and radical ways. It is important to bring an intersectional analysis to discussions regarding trans people.

## Passing and Privilege

Some trans people may **pass** as cisgender – this means that they are not visibly identifiable as a trans person. The ability to pass is inaccessible for some, as not all people are in a position to afford the kinds of things (surgeries, hormones, clothing, haircuts, binders, packers) that facilitate passing. Other trans people have medical barriers that prevent them from accessing hormonal or surgical interventions, and thus these will never be part of their transition. Here some notes and challenges on passing and privilege:

- a. Some trans people do not want to pass, and so passing becomes a hurdle rather than a privilege. Some trans people want to be visibly trans. If a person 'passes' for a cisgender man, and is referred to constantly by strangers as 'he/him,' but is a non-binary genderqueer person, than passing in this case, is not a positive experience, or something that is desirable. It may have negative effects on this person's health, wealth or well-being.
- b. Whether or not some trans people can access 'male privilege' in particular, has been the subject of much debate, and the ability to access this male privilege has been used against some trans people. An intersectional analysis of male privilege reveals that it is laden with class and race-based assumptions. For example, someone who passes for a Black cisgender man will experience the world differently than someone who passes for a White cisgender man. To say that both can and do access male privilege is a simplistic interpretation of **cisgender privilege**.
- c. Passing has been used as the benchmark for acceptance and inclusion – that is, some sex-segregated spaces, including feminist and women-only spaces, have

excluded those who do not pass as the fixed, binary sex/gender position of 'woman' that they see as within their purview.

It is important to remember that there is violence and discrimination **within trans communities**, as trans people struggle for inclusion, recognition, safety, etc in different spheres. Some of this violence is reflected in a **hierarchy of oppression** that validates the ranking of negative experiences in some kind of order. (Note: this hierarchy is also imposed from the outside of trans communities.)

## Alphabet Soup

Trans people are often just the "T" on the alphabet soup acronym of LGBT(TTQIA, etc). AVOID conflating trans people with lesbian, gay and bisexual people in particular. Sexual identities and gender identities are not the same – a trans person may ALSO be lesbian, for example. A trans person may identify as straight, and resist being lumped in with people with diverse, non-normative sexual identities.

## Understanding Intersections of Race and Colonialism

When considering intersectionality, it is crucial to employ an anti-racist and anti/de-colonial framework. TBIPOC folk (trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour) often do not identify with Western/white conceptualizations of "trans-ness", and often have their own methods of understanding, making intelligible, and expressing their gender and sexuality. Some TBIPOCs have particularized relationships with English pronouns, and may prefer to be addressed in pronouns in their own language.

Given the intersection of race and sexuality, it is important to understand that the experience of space, safety, and belonging of a TBIPOC is vastly different than that of a white trans person. TBIPOC folks face disproportionate instances of violence, discrimination, assault, homicide, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, trans people of colour are 2.5 times as likely to experience discrimination as white trans people (See: Lavers, Michael. "70 Percent of Anti-LGBT Murder Victims Are People of Color." Colorlines 18 July 2011. Web.

<http://www.colorlines.com/articles/70-percent-anti-lgbt-murder-victims-are-people-color>)

There are various TBIPOC activists and artists speaking back to these forms of race- and gender-specific discrimination and violence, as well as providing forms of resistance through art, healing, activism, and community organizing. Some folks include:

- Kai Cheng Thom: <https://ladysintrayda.wordpress.com/>

- Vivek Shraya: <http://vivekshraya.com/>
- DarkMatter: <http://darkmatterrage.com/about/>
- CeCe McDonald: <https://supportcece.wordpress.com/>
- Micha Cárdenas: <https://femmedisturbance.tumblr.com/>

## Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit is a term used within some Indigenous communities, encompassing sexual, gender, cultural, and/or spiritual identity. This umbrella term was created in the English language to reflect complex Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures.

This term may refer to cross, multiple, and/or non-binary gender roles; non-heterosexual identities; and a range of cultural identities, roles, and practices embodied by Two Spirit peoples. (Definition borrowed from VCH's Transgender Health Information Program which uses it with permission from Battered Women's Support Services).

Due to Canada's ongoing history of colonization, Indigenous trans, queer, and/or Two-Spirit peoples must survive and resist the legacy of the colonial gender binary on a daily basis. The heteropatriarchal structuring of Canada continues to inflict violence on Two-Spirit folks (who were previously understood as healers, medicine people, and mediators) and Indigenous cisgender women (who commonly held positions of power and leadership in various Indigenous nations). Today, these violences manifest in murder, disavowal, genocide, and poverty, as seen in the case of the 1200+ missing and murdered Indigenous cis and trans women and 2-Spirit folk in Canada. Notably, however, Indigenous peoples and nations have been engaging in creative resistance, struggle, reclamation, and survival for centuries. Among various forms, this work is occurring through art practices, language revitalization, reproductive activism, youth work, land defense, sovereignty, academia, and community organizing.

Some resources and examples include:

- The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (based in Toronto, Six Nations territory): <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/>
- Harlan Pruden (Cree)/Two-Spirit Journal: <http://twospiritjournal.com/?author=1>
- Annual Downtown Eastside Women's Memorial March (based in Vancouver BC, unceded Coast Salish Territories): <https://womensmemorialmarch.wordpress.com/>
- Urban Native Youth Association (based in Vancouver BC, unceded Coast Salish territories): <http://www.unya.bc.ca/>

- 2-Spirit/Trans/Intersex Playwright Alec Butler (Metis, Mi'kmaq): <http://www.alecbutler.com/whitewolf/>

Note: It is important not to conflate Indigenous 2-Spirit people with Indigenous queer or trans people. 2-Spirit is a term that has historical and cultural significance for gender variant Indigenous peoples, and should be named alongside, not be hidden within, the terms “trans” or “queer.” When discussing non-cisgender and non-heterosexual Indigenous peoples, one should say “queer, trans, and/or 2-Spirit Indigenous peoples”. For more info, please read this article by âpihtawikosisân, a Métis person from the Plains Cree speaking community of Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta: <http://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/03/language-culture-and-Two-Spirit-identity/>.

## Speaking in Plurals and Being Specific

In order to acknowledge this intersectionality, speak in plurals. For example, talk about **trans communities** rather than ‘the trans community.’ There is no singular trans community and to refer to trans people as a unified group is to gloss over the diversity of trans people and their experiences.

### GREEN!

DO **specify** who are you taking about – “those people who pass as cisgender men,” “those people who identify as transmen,” “those people who were female-assigned at birth.”

DO **think about who is being left out** – in terms of the language we use, the services we provide, the material we teach, there are undoubtedly some people being left out. By thinking about those being left out, we can consider an issue from an intersectional approach.

DO use and encourage others to use **my community** (experience, etc).

### YELLOW!

DO use **some, may, could** and other non-restrictive modifying clauses in order to AVOID over-generalizing, universalizing or oversimplifying by using restrictive modifying clauses like **all, will** or **every**.

## How to make your syllabus more trans-inclusive

### GREEN!

**DO acknowledge the potential for trans students in the class**, by including a short statement in the introductory paragraphs of the syllabus, similar to the statement made about students with disabilities.

“Gender neutral bathrooms are available in this building. They are located (include location within the building, which floor). Please indicate if you have a preferred name that you’d like to be called (you can update your preferred name in the UBC system by informing your enrolment services professional of the change – contact them if you have questions about legal name changes, as well - 604.822.9836). Also let me know what pronoun you use. This classroom is a trans-inclusive space. Please e-mail me or your TA if you would like to discuss the climate of our classroom for trans students.”

**DO include articles by trans-identified authors** whenever possible as assigned readings.

**DO dedicate lecture time**, space on powerpoint slides and in handouts to trans people and issues whenever appropriate.

### YELLOW!

**DO encourage students to ask questions** that relate to trans issues or people for assignments. **AVOID** focusing on the negative – research on trans people is often about negative health outcomes and access issues, on negative representation in the media, etc. **DO** focus instead on resilience, well-being, stories of success, satisfaction, etc.

**DO invite guest lecturers** to talk about trans issues, if you do not feel equipped to do so yourself. **DO** be mindful of how you include trans-related content. **AVOID tokenizing** trans issues and people by, for example, inviting more than one guest lecturer or a panel to ensure that a single person is not singled out as speaking for all trans people, or to all trans issues.

### RED!

**AVOID transploitation** which is the tokenistic and superficial inclusion of trans issues or ideas. Trans people have often been the **objects** of scientific and scholarly inquiry, without being **invited as active subjects** in the creation of knowledge about their lives. See Anne Tagonist’s Fuck You and Your Fucking Thesis: (<http://tagonist.livejournal.com/199563.html>).

**AVOID cis-plaining** which is the tendency of cisgender people to speak on behalf of trans people. **DO** challenge cis-plaining when it happens in your class, in lectures or written papers.

**AVOID retroactive reclaiming** of narratives that are not trans narratives. For example, wartime or working class passing women should not be reimagined as examples of trans people.

## Resources for Trans Students

### On Campus

**Pride UBC** is an AMS resource group that offers educational and social services dealing with sexual and gender diversity at UBC. Pride UBC provides support to those who self identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, Two-Spirit, asexual, queer, questioning, intersex, those who do not identify and allies. Pride UBC assists people who are coming out; supplies a forum for dialogue; holds social events, and educates the wider UBC community about the variation in human sexuality and gender identity.

**The Network** provides a community and support network for queer graduate students and hosts regular social nights and meet-ups. They also aim to provide opportunities for academic and professional collaboration among graduate students interested in gender and sexuality studies.

**The Global Queer Research Group** connects scholars, activists, and community members around research and policy issues concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex communities. All are welcome.

### Off Campus

**CampOUT!** is a four-day summer camp committed to creating an inspiring and welcoming space for queer, trans, and allied youth between the ages of 14 and 21. CampOUT! is run in affiliation with UBC. Cabin leader opportunities are available for UBC students between the ages of 19–25. Care Team and Community Resource Volunteer opportunities are available for community members aged 26 and up.

The **Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre** provides low-barrier wellness services to transgender and gender non-conforming people. Services include health care, a community kitchen, counselling, yoga, art therapy. Appointments with a lawyer and nutritionist are also available. <http://www.cwhwc.com/>

The **Transgender Health Information Program** is a resource hub that provides information to anyone in BC with a transgender health question. <http://transhealth.vch.ca/>

The **Trans Alliance Society (TAS)** is a registered non-profit with the British Columbia government and is governed by the society act and its constitution. They broadly summarize they aims, goals and mission as transgender support, education, outreach and advocacy. In

each of these areas, TAS can provide the resources and information needed by trans-persons in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia, going out and speaking at schools and the workplace, enlisting the support and participation of allied individuals and groups, and pushing for reforms, wherever needed. <http://www.transalliancesociety.org/>

The **Vancouver Coastal Health Trans Youth Drop-In** provides recreation and snacks for trans youth ages 13 to 24, and their loved ones. They also provide information about health and support resources. Meets Thursdays from 5 pm to 8 pm. Facilitated group, and peer-driven. No registration required. Broadway Youth Resource Centre, 2455 Fraser Street, Vancouver, BC. 604-734-1514 [transyouthdropin@vch.ca](mailto:transyouthdropin@vch.ca)

**Qmunity** is a group passionate queers and allies who are committed to actively listen and innovatively respond to their communities' needs, to proactively support our peers, to strengthen their communities, and to move equality forward. They are currently focused on: education (Promoting and helping to create inclusive spaces), support (Providing support to those affected by discrimination and homophobia), connection (Strengthening our communities through meaningful connections) and advocacy (Offering a unified voice to advance our communities' interests). Volunteer opportunities available. <http://qmunity.ca/>

## Suggested Reading List

This is a list of a few references that you may find helpful.

- Association of American Medical Colleges. (2014). *Implementing curricular and institutional climate changes to improve health care for individuals who are LGBT, gender nonconforming, or born with DSD: A resource for medical educators*. (A. Hollenbach, K. Eckstrand, & A. Dreger, Eds.). Washington, DC.
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