

# Gender Identity & Gender Expression

A Guide for Students, Faculty, and Staff

## WHAT IS GENDER EXPRESSION?

Gender expression refers to the external attributes, behavior, appearance, dress, etc., by which a person expresses their gender and through which others perceive that person's gender.

## WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

Gender identity refers to an individual's intrinsic sense of self. It relates to how an individual defines their gender regardless of their assigned biological sex. Terms to describe gender identity may include but are not limited to:

**Transgender:** people whose life experience includes existing as another gender or in more than one gender. This may include people who identify as transsexual, and people who describe themselves as being "genderqueer" or gender non-conforming.

**Intersex:** people who are not easily classified as "male" or "female", based on their physical characteristics or external sex organs at birth or after puberty. This term replaces the inappropriate term "hermaphrodite".

**Transitioning:** refers to a multi-step process that trans people may pursue to affirm their gender identity. This may include changes to name, dress, use of pronouns, and may or may not include other medical or physical changes. Transitioning takes time to complete and may be an ongoing process. York University is committed to providing

accommodation to people who are transitioning upon request and on a case by case basis.

**Two-Spirit:** refers to a person who has both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used in some indigenous cultures to describe sexual orientation, gender and/or spiritual identity. As an umbrella term it may encompass same-sex attraction and a wide variety of gender variance, including people who might be described in Western culture as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, gender queer, cross-dressers or who have multiple gender identities.

**Transsexual:** a person whose biological sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity. They may seek or undergo one or more medical treatments to align their bodies with their gender identity, such as hormone therapy, sex re-assignment surgery or other procedures. They may transition socially to align external attributes and appearance with their gender identity.

**Genderqueer:** a person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Some gender queer people identify under the transgender umbrella while others do not.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** a person who doesn't conform to society's expectations of gender expression based on the gender binary, expectations of masculinity and femininity, or how they should identify their gender.

## DO YOU KNOW YOUR RIGHTS?

### True or False

If I cannot identify the gender of an individual, that person must leave the washroom if I am uncomfortable.

**False** - All individuals have the right to use a public washroom of their choosing. Demanding someone, who is using the services of the facilities, to leave the washroom can be a form of harassment. Gender neutral washrooms are available across York's campuses. For a full list, visit <http://maps.info.yorku.ca/keele-campus/>

### True or False

Being Cisgender basically means that my gender identity and the sex I was assigned at birth are aligned.

**True** - We should not assume that every person is cisgender. That assumption can marginalize those who identify as trans\*.

### True or False

Students and staff have a right to request an accommodation based on gender identity and/or gender expression.

**True** - In 2012, Gender Identity and Gender Expression were added as separate grounds in the Ontario Human Rights Code. An accommodation might include changing academic documents to reflect the gender of the persons choosing.

## PRACTICING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Language is a powerful tool for increasing inclusivity. Inclusive language strives to promote all people as full and valued members of society. Provided below are a list of recommended guidelines and tips on how to enhance verbal and written communication when referring to sex and gender identity.

### General Tips:

- When referring to gender identity it is important to be aware of, and use 'All-gender' terms and phrasings. All-gender terms and phrasings are language free of explicit or implicit reference to gender or sex.
- Gender identity/expression is not binary, but a continuum.
- Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex, whereas gender identity refers to a sense of oneself as male, female, transgender, or where a person fits on the gender constellation.
- Trans, Transgender and Transsexual refer to gender identity, not to sexual orientation.
- Address individuals by their desired pronoun. Avoid making assumptions about a person's gender based on their appearance.

Instead of...	Use...
His/Her	Their
He/She	They, Them
Bring your boyfriend or wife	Bring your partner or spouse
Cleaning lady, Policeman, Chairman	Cleaner, Police Officer, Chair
Hi Guys!	Hi Folks, or Hi Everyone

## LINKS TO YORK RESOURCES

For more information on inclusive language, contact the Centre for Human Rights.

### LINKS TO YORK POLICY

#### Gender-Free Language Policy

<http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/gender-free-language-policy/>

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

#### Ontario Human Rights Commission

[http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/code\\_grounds/gender\\_identity](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/code_grounds/gender_identity)

### SOURCES

#### American Psychology Association

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>

#### Centre for Addiction & Mental Health

<http://lgbtqhealth.ca/community/two-spirit.php>

#### Humber College

<http://hrs.humber.ca/support/support-resources/humanrightsresources/human-rights-diversity.html>

#### UC Berkley Gender Equity Resource Centre

[http://geneq.berkeley.edu/lgbt\\_resources\\_definiton\\_of\\_terms](http://geneq.berkeley.edu/lgbt_resources_definiton_of_terms)

#### University of British Columbia

<http://styleguide.sites.olt.ubc.ca/style-guidelines/inclusive-language-guidelines/>

#### University of Victoria

<http://communications.uvic.ca/publications/style/section-5.html>

#### The Free Dictionary

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gender-neutral>

#### University of Windsor

[http://www.uwindsor.ca/ohrea/sites/uwindsor.ca/ohrea/files/AccessibilityBroch3\\_RespLanguageImages\\_Sep2109.pdf](http://www.uwindsor.ca/ohrea/sites/uwindsor.ca/ohrea/files/AccessibilityBroch3_RespLanguageImages_Sep2109.pdf)

## MAKING YORK UNIVERSITY REDI

The Centre for Human Rights (CHR) contributes to York University's vision of social justice and accessible education. We strive to build a respectful, equitable, diverse and inclusive (REDI) community at York by advancing, promoting, and upholding human rights at York in accordance with provincial human rights legislation and the University's policies.

### Contact the Centre for Human Rights if you:

*Have questions or concerns about human rights on campus*

*Are seeking human rights education*

*Are interested in human rights research*

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*This fact sheet provides general information about human rights related accommodation to York University students, staff, and faculty members and should not be construed as legal advice.*