Asking About Gender: A Forum for Youth Program Funders

Thursday, October 13, 2022

Agenda

- Goals

- Expectations for Engagement

- Recognizing The Land

- About YouthREX + LGBT YouthLine

- Social Service Paradox & Barriers to Change

- Overview: Gender, Common Misconceptions & Transphobia

- Resource: Asking About Gender Toolkit & Inclusive Gender Menu

- Request: An Ask to Youth Program Funders

- Discussion: Overcoming Barriers to Institutional Change

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Goals

- Understand gender, its common misconceptions, and transphobia

- Introduce the toolkit as a resource

- Ask you – youth program funders – for support in change-making

- Discuss strategies for overcoming barriers to institutional change

Expectations for Engagement

- Privacy and Confidentiality

- Presence and Connection

- Questions and comments in the spirit of honest inquiry and allyship

Recognizing The Land

Learn More: native-land.ca

About YouthREX

Our Vision

An Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth.

Our Mission

To make research evidence and evaluation accessible and relevant to Ontario's youth sector through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and evaluation leadership.

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Knowledge Exchange

Learn by YouthREX

Youth Program Supports

Community-Engaged Research

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About LGBT YouthLine

Our Vision
Youth of all sexual and gender identities are celebrated and supported.

Our Mission
A 2SLGBTQ+ youth-led organization that affirms and supports the experiences of youth (29 and under) across Ontario.
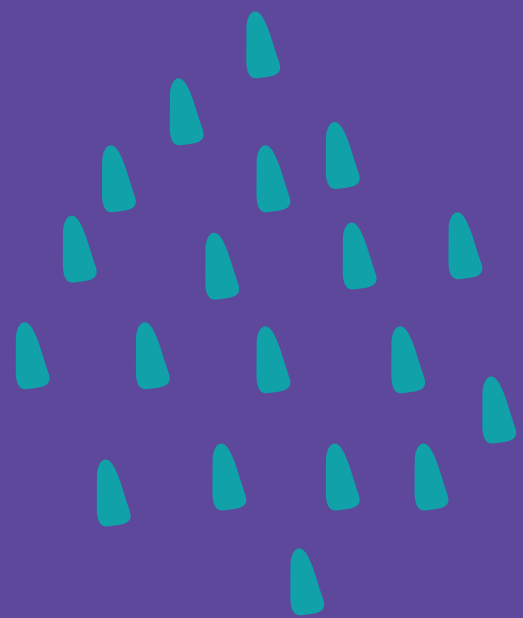
Anonymous Peer
Support & Referrals

Training Youth to Provide
Support to Other Youth

Providing Resources
for Informed Decision-Making

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Social Service Paradox

Those *most* in need of our programs are also
the least likely to receive appropriate care in them.

Addressing the Paradox

It is our responsibility to reflect on,
and to take action against, our complicity.

Barriers to Change: Anonymous Zoom Poll

Bureaucracy: too many protocols, which slow down and inhibit change

Knowledge: lack of expertise and thus uncertainty about what's 'right'

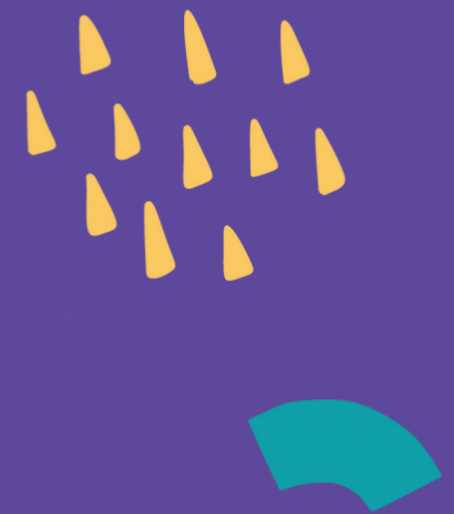**Finances:** lack of financial resources to institute change

Time: lack of human power to institute change

Consensus: failure among the team to arrive at agreement of what's 'right'

Internal Politics: tension and hierarchies, which slow down and inhibit change

Other

None!

Overview: Gender, Common Misconceptions & Transphobia

What is the 'problem' with gender?

Gender is **hegemonic.**

It dictates our lives and our expectations of how others 'should' be – but most of us can't even define it!

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So, what *is* gender?

An aspect of personal identity associated with social norms and expectations.

Features:

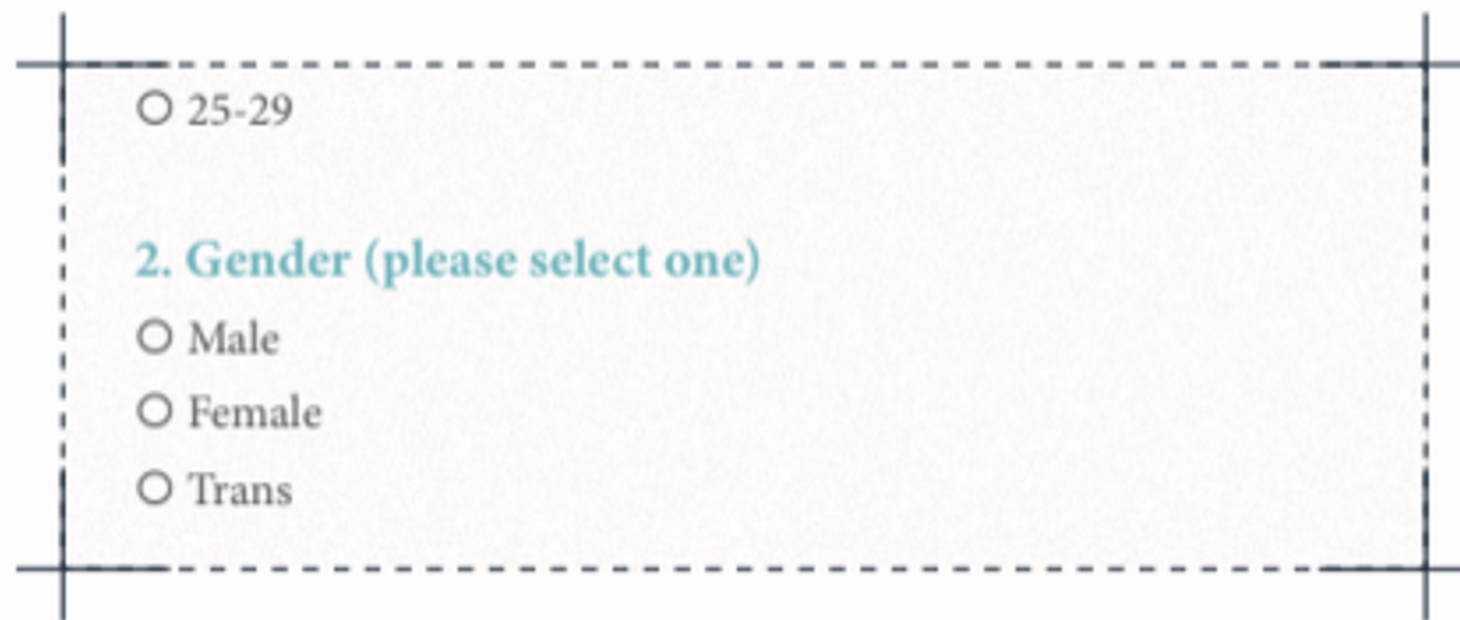- Far-reaching
- Unstable
- Limiting
- Liberating

So, what *is* gender?

We both **identify with gender** and gender is imposed upon us.

We must challenge problematic assumptions that create divergence between how we experience gender for ourselves and how others relate to us on that basis.

Example: Common Demographic Question

○ 25-29

2. Gender (please select one)
○ Male
○ Female
○ Trans

What problematic assumptions underpin this problematic question?

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Assumption 1: Gender = Sex

**Where it shows up:** 'male' and 'female' are listed as gender options.

Why it's wrong: 'male' and 'female' are biological terms that refer to a person's sex. Gender, however, refers to embodiments and expressions and includes options such as 'man' and 'woman'.

Assumption 2:
You can either be a 'man' or a 'woman'

Where it shows up: 'gender non-conforming' and 'non-binary' are not listed as gender options.

Why it's wrong: since gender is socially constructed, not biologically determined, it includes a diversity of options beyond the man/woman binary.

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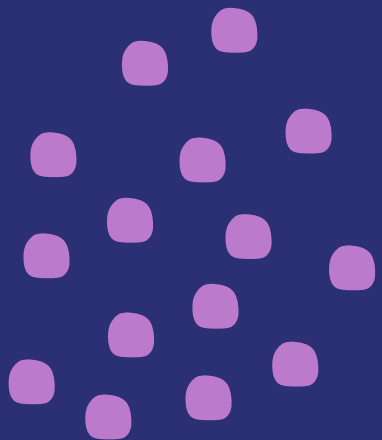
Assumption 3: 'Trans' is a distinct and comprehensive gender identity

Where it shows up: 'trans' is listed as an exclusive option for gender.

Why it's wrong: since 'trans' refers to a person's gender journey, it can co-exist alongside a gender identity. It is entirely possible – and common – for a person to identify as 'trans' as well as 'man', 'woman' or another gender.

Assumption 4: Cis is 'normal'

Where it shows up: 'cis' is not included alongside 'trans' as a gender option.

Why it's wrong: social privilege manifests through invisibility. Failing to include 'cis' perpetuates it as the invisible default – reinforcing it as 'normal' and anything else as 'different'.

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Assumption 5: Western sex & gender frameworks are neutral & adequate

Where it shows up: 'Two-spirit' is not included as a gender option.

Why it's wrong: failing to include 'Two-spirit' is an act of colonial erasure; it sustains the authority of Western sex/gender frameworks, while failing to acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous communities in defining their own personhood and relationality.

All of us are harmed by a dominant approach to gender – but those who cannot abide by the dominant 'rules' are *most immediately* and *explicitly* harmed: namely Two-spirit, trans, gender non-conforming, and gender non-binary people.

Case Study: LGBT YouthLine

Reflections from a youth organization on the harms and challenges of current demographic data collection norms.

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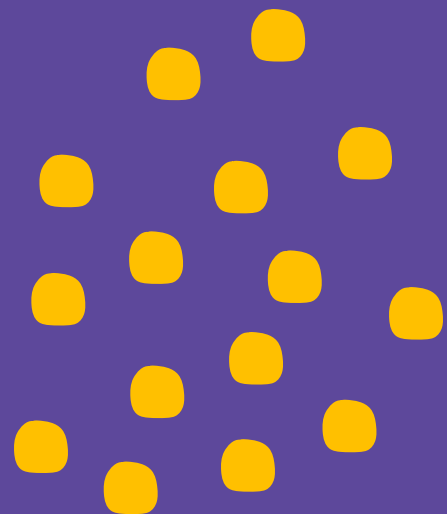
Transphobia Defined

Transphobia is the collection of ideas and behaviours that incite and justify personal and structural violence against trans and other non-normatively-gendered people, and that uphold negative perceptions of trans-ness, gender- non-normativity, and any deviation from gender 'rules'.

How does transphobia manifest?

- **Culturally:** 'gender reveal' parties; expectation to 'come out'

- **Interpersonally:** misgendering; bullying; hate crimes; familial eviction

- **Institutionally:** binary gender washrooms; underemployment; lack of appropriate healthcare and other services

- **Legally/Politically:** lag in mandated protections; lack of funding for surgery

- **Economically:** poverty; housing discrimination

- **Representationally:** lack of trans characters; lack of trans actors; negative or tragic representation of trans people/trans-ness

Various studies show that trans/non-normative people
experience worse psychological, physical, social, and economic outcomes.

There is nothing wrong, pathological or tragic about
trans-ness and non-normativity. Worse outcomes are attributable
entirely to **transphobia.**

Transphobia & Intersections

Intersectionality asks us to consider social categorizations in concert with one another, since oppression/privilege within these categories interact to produce outcomes different and greater than the sum of their parts.

Example: transphobia & classism

Challenging Transphobia

Challenging transphobia requires constant interrogation of the assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours that uphold our participation in enforcing gender 'rules'.

Reworking our gender menus to be more inclusive and exhaustive – and hence accurate! – **is only one step towards this.**

Resource: Asking About Gender Toolkit & Inclusive Gender Menu

Asking About Gender:
A Toolkit for Youth Workers
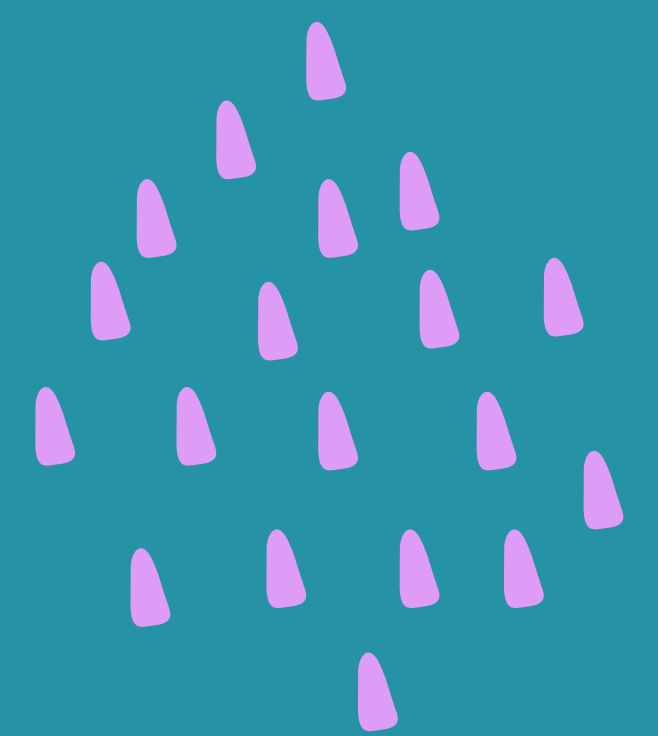
Asking About Gender: A Toolkit for Youth Workers supports the youth sector in accurately and respectfully responding to those we work with, in all of their gendered diversity. It does this by:

a) Unpacking **ubiquitous but implicit assumptions** inherent in demographic questions about gender.

b) Providing an **inclusive gender menu** to use as an alternative.

Example: Inclusive Gender Menu

What a more inclusive (and accurate!) gender menu could look like...

WHAT IS YOUR GENDER? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

- [ ] Boy/man
- [ ] Girl/woman
- [ ] Cisgender
- [ ] Intersex
- [ ] Non-binary
- [ ] Non-conforming
- [ ] Transgender
- [ ] Two-spirit (for Indigenous people)
- [ ] Questioning/exploring
- [ ] Prefer not to answer
- [ ] I don't know
- [ ] I identify with another gender: _____

How does it address the assumptions?

✓ **Recognizes distinction between sex and gender:** replaces 'male' / 'female' with 'boy/man' / 'girl/woman'

✓ **Acknowledges gender beyond the binary:** non-conforming and non-binary are options

✓ **Recognizes gender categories are not mutually exclusive:** asks to *select all that apply*

✓ **Undoes 'cis' as default:** 'cis' is an option

How does it address the assumptions?

✓ **Recognizes non-exhaustiveness of Western sex/gender:** 'Two-spirit' is an option

✓ **Recognizes gender's infinite possibilities:** option to write-in

✓ **Integrates humility:** option to write-in

✓ **Recognizes non-universality of gender:** offers definitions!
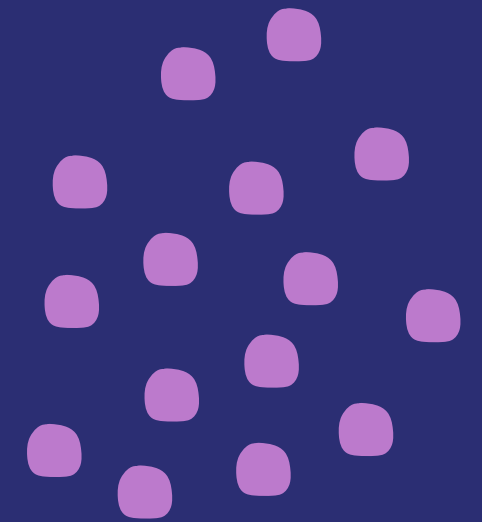
Request:
An Ask to Youth Program Funders
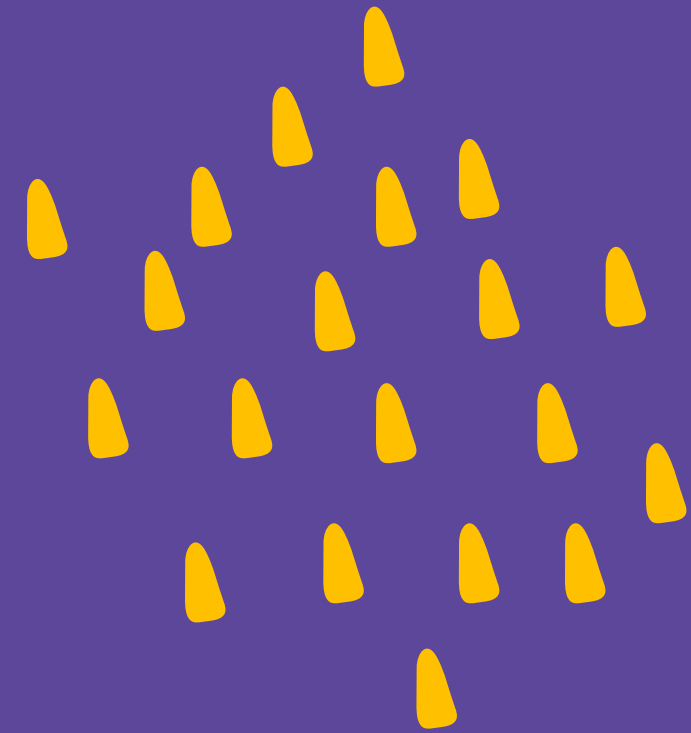
Questions?

Supportive Resources

✓ Asking about Gender: A Toolkit for Youth Workers

✓ Youth Program Supports, YouthREX – info@youthrex.com

✓ Pledge

✓ Community of Practice

Thank you for joining us!

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