



Asking About Gender: Confronting Assumptions and Challenging Transphobia

Human Services & Justice Coordinating Committee

Wednesday, September 20, 2023

ABOUT YOUTHREX

OUR VISION

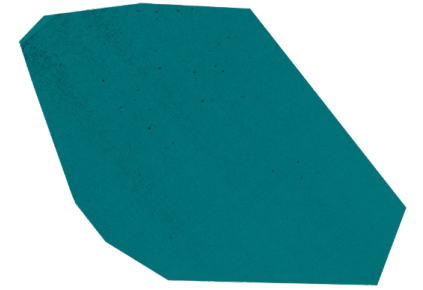
An Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth.

OUR MISSION

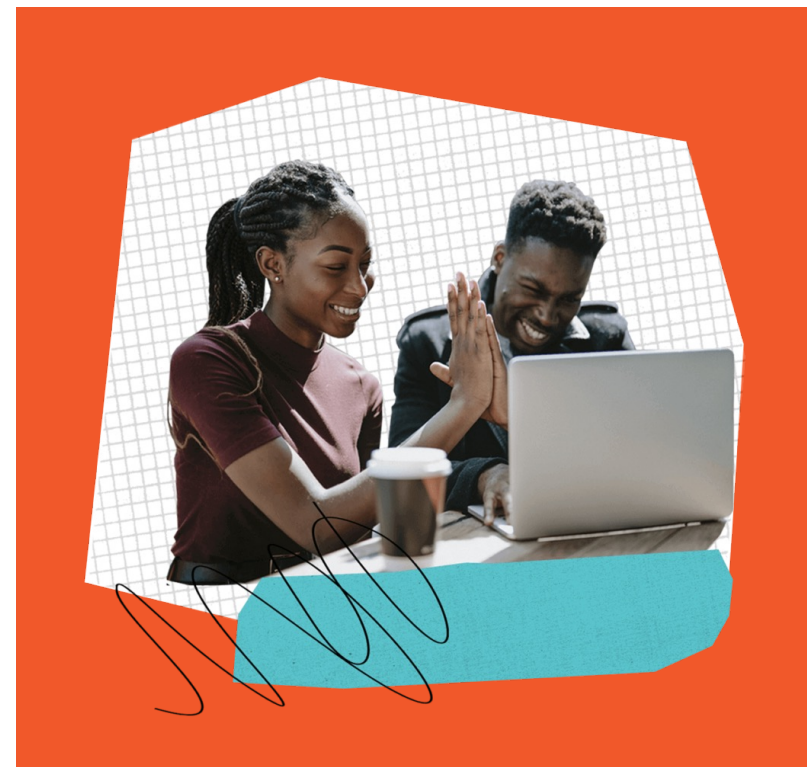
To make research evidence and evaluation accessible and relevant to Ontario's youth sector through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and evaluation leadership.



PROGRAM OBJECTIVES



**Knowledge
Exchange**



**Learn by
YouthREX**



**Youth Program
Supports**



**Community-
Engaged Research**

ABOUT LGBT YOUTHLINE

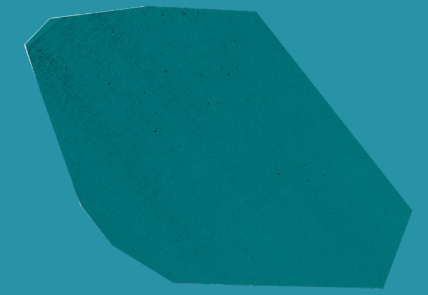
A 2SLGBTQ+ youth-led organization that affirms and supports the experiences of youth across Ontario by:

- Providing anonymous peer support and referrals;
- Training youth to provide support to other youth; and
- Providing resources so youth can make informed decisions.

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



Why are we here?



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.



Why are we here?

Systems of oppression – race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, class – underpin the necessity of our work with youth ... *and* inform how we engage in this work.

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

Example: Demographic Surveys



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Why are we here?

- To understand gender & its common misconceptions.
- To understand – and challenge – transphobia.
- To introduce the Toolkit & Inclusive Gender Menu.





Tips for Engaging

- Not learning – but *unlearning*
- Not arriving – but *travelling*
- Not attempting kindness – but *justice*
- Not serving others – but *ourselves*
- Not revolutionizing – but *reforming*



What is the 'problem' with gender?

Gender is hegemonic – both pervasive and invisible.

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



So, what *is* gender?

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

Features:

- Far-reaching
- Unstable
- Limiting
- Liberating



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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.



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Example: Common Demographic Question



25-29

2. Gender (please select one)

Male

Female

Trans

What problematic assumptions underpin this problematic question?





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'.



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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.

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.



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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'.

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 .



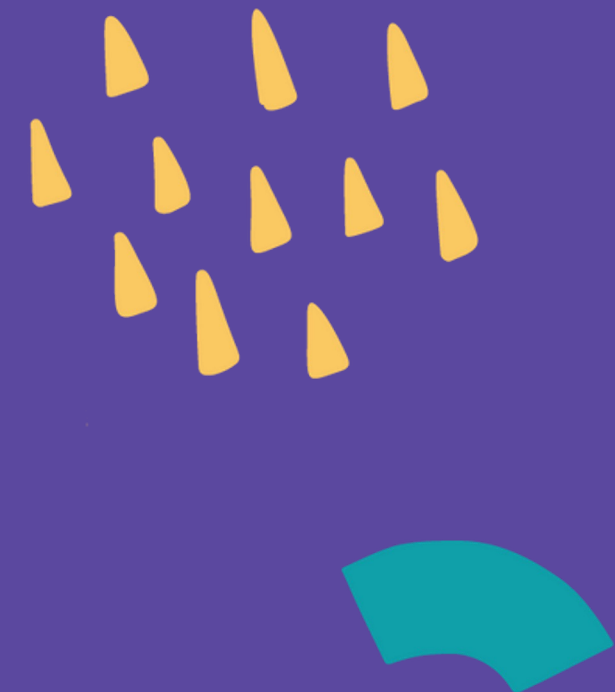
All of us are harmed by a dominant approach to gender – but those who cannot abide by the dominant ‘rules’ are *most immediately and explicitly* harmed: namely Two-spirit, trans, gender non-conforming, and gender non-binary people.



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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.



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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*.

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!



Questions?

Please share in the Q & A box!

You can also 'Like' 👍 or comment 💬 on other's questions!

Thank you for joining us!

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