

Issue Guide: Lizzie Friedman (she/they), Margaret Veglahn (she/her), Cindy Zhang (she/her), Olivia Barker (she/her)

How Do We Decide Who Gets a Seat at the Table when Discussing Gender?

How do we create a safe space for queer people and non queer people to collectively talk about their gender journies?



Concerns from the Community

To prepare for this forum, we spoke to a wide range of people about the issues of gender identity, expression, and having productive conversations.

The concerns we gathered fell into 4 major categories: gender identities allow more room for freedom, gender identities can be limiting, how to protect queer people from harm, and how to give space to those who are learning about this topic.



Our stakeholders and concern gathering participants:

- Trans and non binary youth
- Trans and non binary activists
- Parents
- Queer scientists
- Sexual health educators
- People curious about exploring gender

Introduction

Discussions about gender identity and expression can be difficult. For many, this topic is deeply personal, and it can be emotional and burdensome for queer people to have conversations about the validity of their identities. For others, these conversations are daunting -- the linguistic and cultural barriers involved with navigating conversations about gender are not small. What is the most effective way to have conversations about gender? How do you protect queer people from harm while also making space for those who are trying to learn? Is one of those things more important than the other?

Science Background



Gender Identity: One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

Gender Expression: The ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity through behavior, clothing, haircut, and other forms of presentation.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The designation made at birth as "male," "female," or "intersex" based on an individual's genitalia.

Sexual Orientation: Describes an individual's enduring physical, emotional, romantic, and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

Cisgender/Cis: Describes individuals whose gender identity or expression aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Nonbinary: This is an umbrella term that encompasses people who have gender identities outside of "man" or "woman."

Pronouns: Words we use to refer to others in place of their name. Pronouns are often tied to gender identity, so assuming someone's pronouns can be harmful.

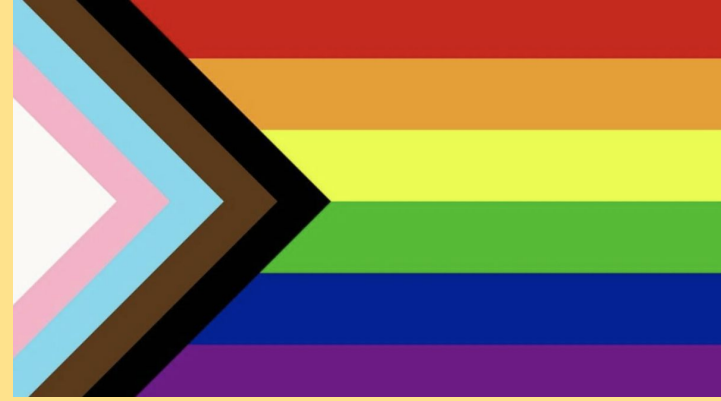
Option 1: Protecting queer people from harm is the most important; queer people need to be centered in a safe space to develop their thoughts about gender.



- “More than 1 in 3 LGBTQ Americans faced discrimination of some kind in the past year, including more than 3 in 5 transgender Americans” (American Progress).
- “Transgender individuals faced unique obstacles to accessing health care, including 1 in 3 who had to teach their doctor about transgender individuals in order to receive appropriate care” (American Progress).

Creating an all queer space will alleviate any potential harm from non queer people. This would allow the conversation to flow more easily. Queer people would be able to share parts of their identity without the need to explain themselves to the non queer members. The drawback of this option is that it doesn't allow for non queer people to learn about the topic from those whom it affects.

Option 2: We need a balance; invite queer people and cisgender people into these conversations and try our best to prevent harm towards everyone.



Inviting in both queer and non queer perspectives would allow for the most diverse perspectives. It would also allow for non queer people to hear directly from queer people and vice versa. Agreements can be used to try and protect people from harm, but one major drawback is that you cannot ensure the safety of those who hold marginalized identities.

- Having a diverse group of ideas will lead to dialogue groups that share different perspectives.
- This would prevent the forum from becoming an echo chamber.
- Cis people need to explore their gender identities.



Growing shares in U.S. know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns

% saying they personally know ...

Someone who is transgender



Someone who goes by gender-neutral pronouns



Note: The term transgender was defined for respondents as someone who identifies as a gender that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 14-27, 2021.

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Option 3: Growth is the most important; cisgender people who are not informed need to have space to make mistakes, even if it harms queer people sometimes.

Creating a majority non queer space will allow for a lot of growth and learning. People with the least amount of knowledge would be able to ask questions and begin their journeys. Non queer people would be able to learn more about queer identities without any fear of causing harm. The drawback of this option is that it doesn't allow for queer perspectives. It brings up the motto "nothing about us without us".

- Because so many people use they/them pronouns, it is important for non queer people to learn.
- If non queer people have the space to learn, they will become better allies outside of the forum.



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