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Gender Binaries and Gender Identity

For transgender and gender non-binary individuals, the simple task of entering a gendered restroom or locker room can subject them to physical violence and/or alienation. The word “woman” or “man” cannot capture the diversity of gender identity and sex in North American society. My brief paper will summarize as to why. 'Gender' refers to the roles and meanings assigned to men and women, based on their presumed biological sex, aka, their genitals. It is a social function, neither time- less nor historical (Namaste, 2011).

Biology is used quite arbitrarily in sex assignment (Lorber, 2015). At birth, if not prior to birth, babies are assigned one of two gender markers (now with the ability of having a third) according to the characteristics of having either a penis, or a vagina. The gender assignment that they get according to their genitalia will stay with them for the course of their lives, without them providing prior consent as to such. Trans people reject the gender assigned to them at birth (Singh, 2013). However, there are more than two genders. Until the 18th century, Western philosophers and scientists thought there was only sex and women's internal genitals were the inverse of male's external genitalia (Laqueur, 1990). Until 1968, females in the Olympics were often asked to “parade naked” in front of a board of examiners. Only breasts and a vagina were needed to certify one's femininity (Fausto-Sterling, 2013).

Sex and the body are complex and anti-trans activists don't help to make it any easier, either for the individuals affected or to society in general. In *“Pissing Without Pity:*

Disability, Gender, and the Public Toilet", scholar David Serlin (2017) states that trans and queer activists use the public restroom as a space for direct action. These are similar tactics used in the Black liberation / civil rights movement to disrupt a place, practice, or process. The impact of gender differentiation is real.

According to Feinberg (1992a), the term 'transgender' refers to a variety of people who challenge a mimetic relation between biological sex and social gender. The definition of public space is intimately linked to culturally sanctioned gender identities. This has profound implications for people who live outside normative sex-gender relations: 'ordinary' public space as well as regions demarcated as gay ghettos are sites where the potential of being verbally abused, and/or physically assaulted, is remarkably high (Namaste, 2011). Harassment in public places is prevalent.

Trans individuals face discriminatory and hostile environments (Singh, 2013). In terms of educational institutions, not much is known about the specific daily lived experiences of trans college students (Singh, 2013). However, what we do know is that trans individuals experience verbal insult, physical violence or the threat of physical violence, sexual violence, threatening to disclose gender identity or sexual orientation to others on a regular basis (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). For many trans youth, high school where they experience harassment, and discrimination (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006) and are most likely to report victimization than cis-gendered students (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). The victimization that they endure causes psychosocial adjustment challenges in gender-nonconforming young adults (Toomey et al., 2010).

We find that these students are also less likely to attend college than their cisgender peers (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009).

To protect trans individuals from victimization in public settings, certain interventions need to be adapted to promote trans inclusion: *first*, post-secondary and secondary enrollment policies that clearly state and enforce prohibitions against transphobia; *second*, the availability of gender-neutral locker rooms, restrooms and safe-places, that trans people *may* access and have the *right to* access but are not *forced to* access. *Third*, education for cisgender students and society members as to why transgender individuals have great difficulties to access gendered restrooms and locker rooms at schools and in public spaces and how to assist trans people to be more comfortable in these spaces. *Fourth*, teaching individuals how to de-escalate incidents of transphobia where it *may* turn violent. *Fifth*, we *need* to change restroom and locker-room signage to state *trans people welcome* or make it more trans-inclusive, such as adding sanitary product dispensers into male-identifying and female-identifying restrooms and locker rooms.

In conclusion, trans-inclusive interventions are there to advance the inclusion of trans people in society. As explained, the words “man” and “woman” cannot capture the diversity of gender identity and sex in North American society, but it can certainly show the level of discrimination that anti-trans individuals go to dehumanize trans individuals. With violence against trans individuals, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals is rising at an alarming rate (Namaste, 2011), more needs to be done to protect these individuals. Many say that sex and gender aren’t the same thing, but they do intersect in significant

ways (Namaste, 2011). Male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals are often, to dehumanize them, referred to as “men” (Namaste, 2011). Together, as a society, we can do more to eliminate gender discrimination and gender-based abuse. As an example, often the colours “pink” and “blue” are associated with gender, being that “pink” refers to girls and “blue” refers to boys (Bullough & Bullough, 1993), but there’s nothing in these colours that inherits them to a specific gender (Namaste, 2011). Can two colours differentiate “man” and “woman”? My argument is no, it cannot.

In Western societies, it is claimed that there are only two genders – men and women (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981), but that is far from true. Fusing gender and sexuality has implications for violence. (Namaste, 2011). As Rubin (1984) has stated, merging gender and sexuality enables people to write about erotic desire, particularly feminists. It also enables gender-bashing. TERF’s often scream “privacy” and “women’s rights” when mentioning that trans individuals have rights saying they’ll be attacked by a trans person in a locker room or a restroom. That’s far from the truth.

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