

## **Trans\*: Gender identity inclusion**

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The third Expanding Potential Meet Up focused on the topic of gender identity. Billy Curtis of [UC Berkeley's Gender Equity Resource Center](#) presented on foundational concepts and critical information about gender identity and trans\*-related issues, which allowed participants to better integrate trans\*-inclusive practices into their work practices and department.

As a whole, each field, department, and individual needs to take action. Recognizing students and professionals that identify as gender-expansive in classroom and lab environments in a safe and respectful manner is a must for them to feel like they can be their whole selves, including expressing their gender identity along with their many additional identities. Many assumptions are made in departments based on an individual's appearance and antiquated gender norms in our society. These assumptions are harmful and can create an unsafe environment.

Knowing what place an individual is coming from when taking action is crucial. Each person has the choice to do nothing or compassionately ignore these issues (i.e. "feel bad for"). Another approach is to recognize the spectrum of gender identities for compliance purposes, which Billy describes as "dancing on a high ledge". The better reason for taking actions is empathy and understanding one's own privilege, or even more effective is to want justice for all individuals.

The meet up addressed the understanding and acceptance of gender identity and provided new information and knowledge and a great dialogue throughout the session that cannot be conveyed through a summary. Instead, I want to highlight a few methods Billy used in the workshop that engaged all of the participants, created a safe space to discuss often uncomfortable topics, and resulted in self-discovery and empathy towards all genders.

Starting with a video that challenges society's concept of gender being binary (male, female) in a compassionate manner, Billy set the tone for acceptance. While this may seem like a given, creating a safe space can be difficult when it challenges our own perceptions and biases (unconscious and explicit). He was able to achieve these even further by introducing his multisectional identity, setting guidelines for the dialogue, and having us share our motivations for attending.

Beyond definitions of gender, gender pronouns, gender fluidity, sexual orientation, transgender vs cisgender identities, multisectionality, amongst many more (to learn more, [genderspectrum.org](#) is a valuable resource), the meet up engaged us through multiple videos and activities that allowed for experiential learning. Perhaps the most telling were the activities that had each participant recognize their own privilege based on their gender (for example, transgender individuals are not afforded the same health care due to their gender identity – a fact that I, myself as a cisgender female, am privileged not to face). Billy also led us through an activity where a fish has to describe how being wet feels to be wet. I suggest everyone try this activity, as it will open eyes to what privilege really means and how to start recognize one's own privilege beyond just one identity.

Throughout the meet up, we watched videos, heard examples, and gave our own examples of a vast array of gender identities, all of which are valid and valuable. Sharing each individual's gender pronouns being used for a particular event or meeting is important. Using the correct pronoun for each individual in that space is a must. Sharing your gender pronouns in your email signature, if you feel comfortable doing so, is a good practice. In the end, letting each person express their gender as they wish to do so is their choice and it is our responsibility to respect that.