

Made in God's Image: Gender Diversity and Our Communal Role

What You Need to Know:

Biological sex is the physical sex characteristics someone is born with and develops, including body shape, voice pitch, hormones and chromosomes.

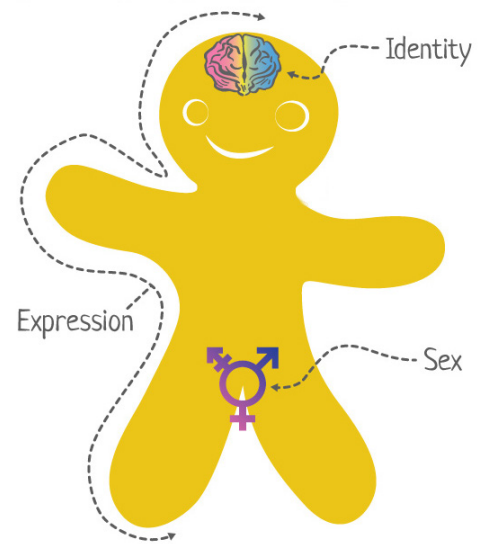
Gender expression is the way that someone presents their gender- for example, through hair, clothing, name, pronouns, etc.- and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

Gender identity is how someone defines their gender based on how much they align (or don't) with the understood options of gender (man-ness and woman-ness).

Gender non-conforming is an umbrella term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

LGBT is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

Transgender is a term for people whose gender identity, expression, and/or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally or surgically. "Trans" is shorthand for transgender.



Genderbread Person by Sam Killermann

Why Inclusivity Is Important:

Jewish Tradition teaches that all humans are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, "in God's image" and we are obligated to respect human dignity, *kavod habriyot*. Members of the transgender and gender non-conforming communities have an important perspective that adds richness to our communal tapestry; at the same time, these communities face particular ongoing legal and cultural bigotry and discrimination. Transphobia, which is the fear of gender variance in society, impacts all parts of life. 75% of transgender students feel unsafe in their school, and often experience physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Oftentimes, this results in youth running away from home. Around 37% of homeless youth identify as LGBT. Transgender adults face discrimination in many places including employment, healthcare, and social services. Our Reform Jewish community has made great efforts to be more inclusive toward the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities, and there is still more work to be done to make our Movement and our society fully inclusive of transgender and gender non-conforming people.

rac.org/trans

For More Information

For more information about how Keshet can support your congregation to be more inclusive of transgender members, contact Daniel Bahner, Keshet's National Manager of Education and Training, at 617-524-9227 or daniel@keshetonline.org.

A full guide for congregational transgender inclusion will be available in the coming months. Please email Tracy Wolf at twolf@rac.org for more information.

Things To Do To Make Your Congregation More Inclusive of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals

Education and Programming: Educate yourself, congregational staff and congregants in order to create a welcoming and safe environment for members and visitors.

- Visit the Religious Action Center's resources on LGBT Rights and Keshet's resource library and blog to learn more about the ongoing struggles for LGBT rights, especially those specific to the transgender and gender non-conforming community.
- Add your congregation to Keshet's national Equality Guide at keshetonline.org/guide.
- Partner with a local LGBT organization to establish your congregation as an ally.
- Dedicate religious school and youth program time to discussions and sensitivity trainings related to gender identity and transgender inclusion.
- Invite transgender Jewish speakers to your synagogue.
- Include Jewish sources in text study and teaching. For some ideas, visit Keshet's TransTexts resource at TransTorah.org.
- Publicly affirm support for the transgender and gender non-conforming communities from the bimah or in a newsletter.

Affirm Identities: Recognize that being out as trans often means people's identities are seen as less legitimate or real, and can lead to discrimination and marginalization. Respecting congregant and staff genders, pronouns and preferred names in all public and private communication is an important part of being an ally.

- Notice how often your congregation asks for people to identify their gender, and how often knowing that information is actually necessary. If you don't need it, don't ask for it!
- On registration and membership forms, ask about "gender" not "sex," ask for preferred pronouns, and allow for a blank write-in space instead of requiring people to select from "Mr." and "Mrs." options.
- Avoid using gendered titles and honorifics such as "Mr.," "Mrs." or "Ms." on preprinted nametags or in emails or letters – use first names instead.
- Offer members your preferred pronouns and, in a private setting, ask members how they prefer to be called.

Gendered Spaces:

- Avoid gendered programming whenever possible. For example, don't split youth programming by boys and girls for the sake of convenience. For an alternative, split by birth month (Jan-June, July-Dec) or day (1-15, 16-31).
- Talk to your congregational WRJ and MRJ chapters to set transgender and gender non-conforming-inclusive policy.
- Ensure that your congregation has at least one gender neutral restroom, and that it is marked appropriately. A gender neutral restroom can be used by anyone.

More Ideas:

- Learn about legislative advocacy opportunities to support equal rights for the trans community through the Religious Action Center's at rac.org/trans.
- Reach out to a local organization working on transgender rights and partner with them in their efforts.
- Publicly mark Trans Day of Remembrance on November 20, and Trans Day of Celebration on May 20, and include additions of special prayers and readings into your Shabbat services. Examples are available from Keshet's resource library at keshetonline.org/resources.

