

HARMFUL GENDER NORMS: HOW CAN ALLIANCES BE BUILT BETWEEN WITH QUEER (LGBTQ+) MOVEMENTS TO HELP PREVENT SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MORE EFFECTIVELY?

WEB CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Ensuring that prevention efforts reflect the diversity of each community is a fundamental part of a commitment to health equity. This topic highlights the need to engage directly with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQI+) community members in the decision-making process to advance prevention outcomes. Alignment with LGBTQ+ movements and identities can help counter the harmful aspects of gender norms that lead to sexual and domestic violence.

PRACTITIONERS & ADVOCATES FEATURED

- **Lolan Buhain Sevilla**, Community Organizer
- **Liat Wexler**, Training Specialist, [Center for Community Solutions](#)

KEY FINDINGS

A. Narrow assumptions about gender and sexuality are reflected in how terms like sex, gender expression and roles, gender identity, and sexual orientation are often conflated and misused. Use of appropriate terminology can help practitioners be more inclusive. Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that make someone

female, intersex⁶, or male (e.g., genitalia, internal reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones). The sex binary is socially constructed and tends to ignore or force-fit intersex people. Gender is also a social construct, a set of expected attributes, behaviors, roles, and appearances that traditionally only recognizes two categories: women and men. People are typically assigned a gender based on visible sex at birth, however gender identity is an internal and personal sense of self and where one fits on this map of gender, if at all. A person's gender may or may not align with sex assigned at birth.

Two terms that are based on self-identification and often get conflated are gender identity and sexual

⁶Intersex is a term used for a variety of conditions where a person is born with sexual or reproductive anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. (Source: [Intersex Society of North America](#))

EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS & LINKAGES

orientation. For instance, sometimes transgender-identified people are labeled as “gay,” but a transgender person might identify as straight, queer, lesbian, etc. Gender identity is unique to every individual and reflects a person’s internal and lived understanding of their gender. Sexual orientation refers to romantic, sexual and/or spiritual attraction. Acknowledging these distinctions can help in preventing high levels of violence and discrimination, such as homophobic and transphobic attitudes, which stem from assumptions around sex and gender.

Tip: Remember that identities and language for these communities is constantly evolving, which can be both exciting and frustrating for people new to learning about it.

B. Harmful and narrow gender norms contribute to sexual and domestic violence against and within LGBTQ+ communities. For example, gender specific bathrooms contribute to violence against people who are transgender and gender non-conforming. As the image here shows, narrow gender norms can leave transgender and gender

non-conforming people in uncomfortable and unsafe situations, as they often experience harassment and violence regardless of which bathroom they use. Harmful norms around masculinity or femininity can also increase the marginalization LGBTQ+ communities face. Harmful gender norms contribute to other myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people, which can lead to violence against LGBTQ+ people and create barriers for survivors seeking help. Assumptions that sexual and domestic violence only occur between masculine perpetrators and feminine victims can leave people feeling dismissed, left out, or even



Gender-specific bathrooms can leave transgender individuals in difficult and unsafe situations. [Image of person with short hair facing two bathroom doors, one with woman figure and sign that says “get arrested” and the other with man figure that says “get assaulted.”]

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accused of being aggressors before being given the space to seek safety. For instance, these norms can result in transgender women being treated as presumed offenders of sexual assault, based on both the constructed idea that women are not violent and that trans women are not “real women.”

- C. Engaging directly with LGBTQ+ community members at the decision-making table can protect against harmful aspects of gender norms that lead to sexual and domestic violence.** Ways to do this include ensuring appropriate representation of identities when building networks and writing policies and outreach materials, using community-based participatory research methods, supporting community representation in coalition-building and hiring, and creating inclusive

physical spaces, such as restrooms. It critical to incorporate LGBTQ+ movements and identities from the initial planning stages of efforts and to show up for the communities when support is needed (e.g., to oppose discriminatory policies or pass progressive ones). By building meaningful relationships with LGBTQ+ organizations and communities, practitioners and advocates can develop collaborations that simultaneously address homo/bi/transphobia and sexual and domestic violence.

Tip: Put those most marginalized at the center of prevention efforts, both understanding their experiences and advancing their agency.

RESOURCES

- [Web Conference Link](#)
- [Web Conference Slides](#)
- [Universe Model of Gender](#)
- [Action Steps for Being a Trans Ally](#)
- [2015 Transgender Survey](#)
- [PreventConnect Podcast on Queering the Curriculum LGBTQ Inclusivity in Sexual Assault Prevention](#)
- [A Cis-Privilege Checklist](#)
- [Intersex Roadshow](#)