

**Transgender Students in the Choral  
Classroom:  
Creating Safe & Accepting Environments**  
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She/her

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# Why did I do this?

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- Bubble of Inclusivity
- Turning Point
- Realizing my privilege
- Discovering how to be an ally: helping without isolating
- According to 2016 study (Williams Institute): 1.4 million out transgender people in the United States

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# Why is choir so un-necessarily gendered?

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- Very gendered, traditional uniforms (e.g. tuxes & long, formal dresses, heels)
- Heteronormative, stereotype-enforcing repertoire & text
- Choir names (women's choir and men's choir)
- Gendered language (e.g. “women sing measure 2”)

# What is Cis-curiosity?

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The attitude/mindset of curiosity that some cisgender people to ask transgender people un-necessary and intrusive questions that they would ONLY as a trans person (e.g. what surgeries, genitalia, birth name). This can lead to mis-gendering.

“The person asking questions is usually not malicious in intent, but these questions are dangerous because they may out someone, as well as being very intrusive and inappropriate. (e.g. You wouldn’t ask your parents what their genitals look like or how they have sex or whatever, so why would you ask a stranger?)”

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# Terms to Know

Source: GLAAD

- **Gender Identity:** “A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices” (e.g. non-binary)
- **Gender Expression:** “External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.”
- **Sexual Orientation:** “Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.”
- **Sex:** “a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.”
- **Transgender:** “An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.”
- **Cisgender:** “A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender.” Synonym: non-transgender

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- **Trans-man (FTM):** An individual that was assigned female at birth and identifies as a man.
- **Trans-woman (MTF):** An individual that was assigned male at birth and identifies as a woman.
- **Transition:** “Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person.”  
**Avoid the phrase "sex change"**
- **HRT:** Hormone Replacement surgery (either Testosterone or estrogen)

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# The Importance of Language

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## Instead of....

- John Doe was “born a girl”
- Sex change
- “a transgender” or “transgenders”
- “Transgendered”

## Try...

- John was “assigned female at birth”
- Gender Reassignment Surgery
- A transgender person
- Transgender (e.g. they are transgender)

# Effects of transition on the voice

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## **FTM:**

- Testosterone: a powerful hormone (deepened voice, physical effects)
- Chest Binders: fainting, bruising, reduced lung capacity

## **MTF:**

- Estrogen (physical changes, no voice changes unless started before puberty)
- Vocal Feminization (apps, speech pathologists, pitch alteration surgery)



# What can you do as an ally?

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- Don't assume someone's gender
- Set the tone for inclusivity: introduction with pronouns, etc
- Never out someone
- Cis-curiosity: Don't ask about a transgender person's genitals, surgical status, or sex life.
- Make sure the individual knows you are willing to help, and do so if they ever need it
- Listen
- Educate yourself!

**Overall: People are people and meet people where they are**

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# What can you do as a future educator?

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- Establishing trust before asking questions (and only necessary questions)
- Respecting an individual's choice (e.g. uniforms)
- Create an inclusive classroom (e.g. classroom décor, quote discussions)
- Use inclusive language
- Talk to colleagues about these changes and encourage it elsewhere

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## ISSUE

### Social

Use of gendered language (e.g. boys & girls, ladies & gentleman)

Use of binary uniforms (e.g. dresses-women, tuxedos-men)

Lack of open dialog in the classroom about social, societal and gender issues

### Musical

Use of highly gendered or heteronormative repertoire (e.g. fragile women falling for a strong man)

Negative effects of chest binders on singing and breath (e.g. fainting, loss of breath, pain & bruising)

Stagnant vocal part assignments (e.g. a transitioning person not allowed to switch voice parts)

Voice parts assigned by gender rather than true vocal range (e.g. a woman with tenor range, but assigned alto)

## SOLUTION

### Social

Use student names or vocal part (e.g. soprano, alto, tenor, bass)

Use unisex uniform (e.g. robes), color palette or choice of uniform

Regular open discussions about inclusivity (e.g. quote discussions)

### Musical

Use repertoire with diverse themes (e.g. music written by LGBTQ+ composers, music about nature)


Teach proper & efficient breathing technique (benefits all students, but especially those wearing binders)

Test vocal range regularly & reassign accordingly (e.g. move a transitioning singer from alto to tenor)

Eliminating gender as a factor for vocal parts (e.g. a person of any gender singing any vocal part)

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"The Beauty of  
Standing Up for Your  
Rights Is Others See  
You Standing &  
Stand Up As Well"

- Cassandra Duffy

**Difference  
shouldn't  
make a  
difference**

- Anonymous



xie/hir

other

HELLO MY  
NAME IS

she/her

they/them

& MY  
PREFERRED  
PRONOUNS  
ARE

he/him

ze/zir

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**THIS IS A**



**SAFE**



**SPACE**



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# Resources to Check Out!

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- Classroom Toolkit ([katecrellin.com/research](http://katecrellin.com/research))
- Youtube Channels & Videos
- GLAAD.org
- Trevor Project
- Josh Palkki's "Queeringchoir.com"
- Transgender Rights: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)
- The gender unicorn, genderbread person

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