

Gender Menu



The Personal Reflection

What does it mean to be a gender explorer? How do you feel about your gender identity? How do you feel about your gender expression? How do you feel about your gender roles? How do you feel about your gender equity? How do you feel about your gender justice?

A conversation guide for Gender Explorers.



Pathways to Gender

Key Artifacts

the actual
imagine more

actual Be

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PATHWAYS TO GENDER IDENTITY

An Engagement Framework for Gender Inclusion in Educational Institutions.

by Christian Smirnow, a transdisciplinary designer with a focus on environmental and social sustainability. He is passionate about projects that manifest at the intersection of social innovation, sustainability strategy, and organizational change.

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SPECIAL THANKS

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ABSTRACT

Identity is an increasingly complex aspect in our globally networked society. Not only do the internet, globalization and mass migration reframe what boundaries of identity and belonging are. An international trend of reactionary policy-making reinforces social and cultural dynamics that put power in the hands of the privileged who wield the agency to make decisions about the poor, vulnerable, marginalized. Especially diversified gender identities – transgender, non-conforming and intersex people – are threatened by the traditional gender binary that defines the values, emotions, and beliefs of significant parts of the U.S. population. With increasing visibility for trans* and non-conforming people, our society is facing new challenges and opportunities to understand and debunk the social construction of the gender binary.

This thesis addresses the importance of a continuous representation of gender contingencies within educational institutions as a multiplicity of biological, social and psychological components. It presents ideas about how service design can intervene in the current system. With a human-centered approach to research and communication, service design will enable educational institutions to introduce the gender identity dialogue to students, staff and faculty alike. In this way, actual value exchange and mutual learning about social norms will empower all members of the education organization. Only when organizations take on the responsibility to educate new generations to question current social norms will it be possible to change deadlocked mindsets and trigger social innovation incrementally.

Keywords: *Gender Identity, Transgender, Trans*, Non-binary, Service Design, Communication Design, Toolkit, Workshop, Engagement, Learning, University, Anti-Oppression, Organizational Culture*

MY PERSONAL MOTIVATION

You may wonder: What is the designer's motivation behind this project? How do you see yourself acting in that territory? My immersion in the field of gender identity and trans* experience was triggered by a student of mine who – writing about an innovation they had recently adopted – stated the significance of gender pronoun use. It occurred to me that I knew nothing about gender theory, even though I, a German gay man, am myself part of the so-called 'LGBTQ+ community.'

Until this project began, I have been plainly negligent of the urgency of trans* issues. And my experience is not unique: Each LGBTQ-subgroup has their particular social norms, ideas of identity (and issues) that often create separation rather than community. I felt inspired to challenge my assumptions and leave my comfort zone to serve the TGNC community as an ally humbly. I believe that, with a design practice, we can create opportunity spaces to introduce a new paradigm of gender identity in education and society.

IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY ^{1,2}

“Cis” and “Trans” are prefixes borrowed from biology. “Cis” means “on the same side,” “trans” means “on opposite sides.”

Cisgender: If a person’s gender identity is congruent with their sex assigned at birth, meaning if a biological male is assigned male at birth and his identity is male and man, he is cisgender. A cisgender person can have any sexual orientation. Cisgender is everyone who isn’t transgender.

Gender: The concept of gender conveys the interrelated complexity of social norms, expectations, values, beliefs, expectations, expressions and perceptions. Gender is not a biological concept. It is a “social construction based on a group of emotional, behavioral, and psychological characteristics that classify an individual as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ or ‘androgynous’ or ‘other.’ Gender has several components including gender identity, gender expression, affectional orientation, and sex assigned at birth.”

Gender-fluid: A more flexible interpretation of gender expression, role, and identity that may change from day to day. Somebody who is gender-fluid may feel more feminine one day, and more masculine another day, which shows that the capability of gender-fluidity does not depend on biological markers (genitalia, chromosomes, hormones) and sexual orientation.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is the personal, inner feeling of self. This can be “man, woman, gender-queer person, bi-gender person, transgender person, or another gender identity altogether. The Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity state that ‘gender identity is understood to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may, involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.’”

GNC (Gender non-conforming, non-binary): GNC people have a gender identity that is neither male nor female, which is often rooted in the rejection of the socially constructed gender binary.

Pansexual: A sexual orientation that describes people who are attracted to people of any gender.

Puberty Blockers: A recent medical/pharmaceutical development. Injections or implants that block hormones in youth before puberty. This can delay puberty up to 18 months, extending the decision-making time about a possible transition.

Questioning: Often used to describe (young) people who are currently uncertain about their gender and may be willing to explore/change their gender identity.

Sex assigned at birth/biological sex: This distinction allows us to understand that our legal sex, certified on a birth certificate, is defined by assignment through doctors or nurses solely because of biological and physiological markers (chromosomes, genitalia, and hormones). Sometimes the sex assigned at birth is not congruent with somebody’s gender identity. This can lead to complicated and frustrating limitations for trans* individuals, when it comes to changing their gender on legal documents that are necessary to get access to many public services, housing, work, etc.

Trans* (with an asterisk): An umbrella term that captures all gender identities that are different from cisgender. This includes “transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderfuck, genderless, agender, non-gendered, third gender, two-spirit, bigender, and trans man and trans woman.”

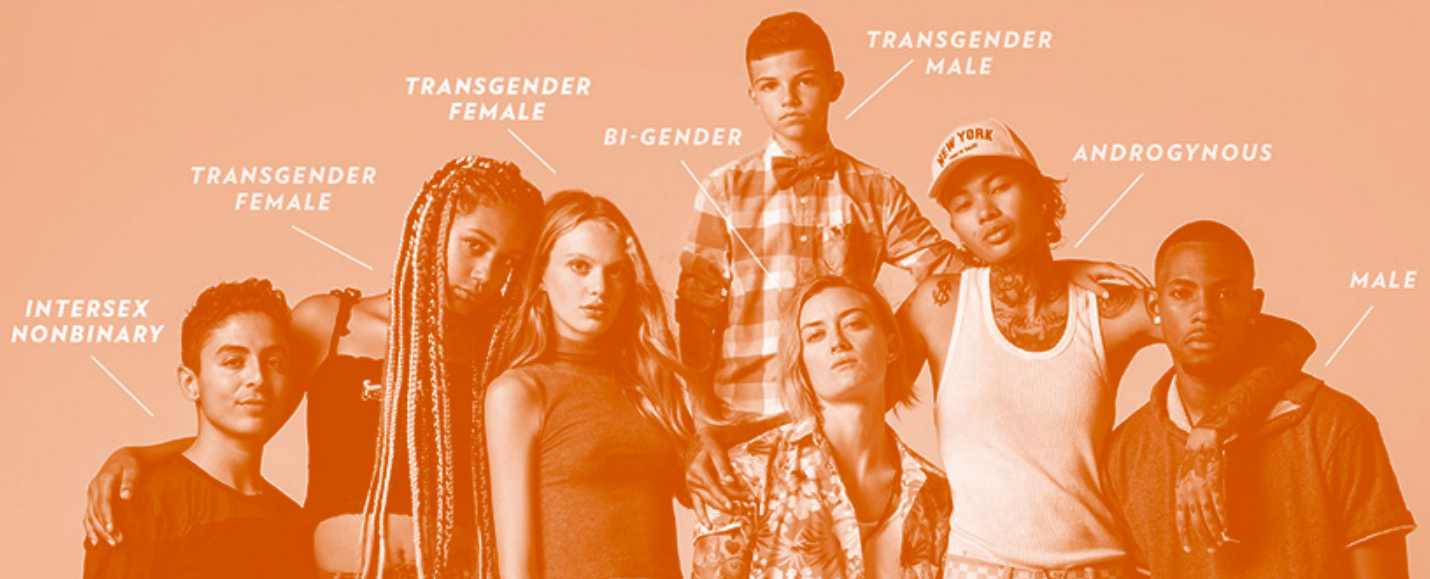
Transphobia: “The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans* people, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society. Transphobia manifests in violent and deadly means. It’s safe to say that trans* people are far more likely than their cisgender peers (including LGB people) to be the victims of violent crimes.”

SOCIAL CONTEXT: A POLARIZED CULTURE

Let's begin with a brief thought experiment: Imagine you woke up one morning with the genitalia of the 'opposite' sex. As a man, you now have a vagina. As a woman, you now have a penis. Take a minute and think about our identity. Do you believe that this physiological change would have a direct impact on your gender identity? Would you feel less a 'man' or 'woman' (or any variation) than the day before?

In a culture that is dominated by the male-female-binary, it can be difficult to understand that biological sex and gender identity are indeed related, but not eternally connected. For many people – trans*, intersex, non-binary – their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity don't correspond with each other. But in the public perception, trans* is still fixated on mostly physical forms. One can say that there is a general lack of inclusivity and protection for gender diversity.

The United States culture and politics are polarized on social, political, economic and cultural levels, leading to discrimination against the vulnerable. Binary concepts dominate how we perceive the world and fellow humans. Male or female, rich or poor, citizen or immigrant, able or disabled, white or black, Republican or Democrat. Heteronormativity, sexism, ableism and racism are a few of many oppressive thought constructs ingrained in our society. The intersectionality of these identity determinants allows privileged 'agent groups' to wield power over 'target identities,' often administered using so-called societal expectations about gender, sexual orientation and gender roles. We must not forget that societal expectations and assumptions derive from our own socialization, our shaped perception.



Consequently, being transgender has implications on employment, sexuality, parenthood, religion, mental health, medical services, relationships, and culture.³ The lived experience of 'both genders' creates unique challenges that reveal underlying biases within broader societal dynamics. About 33% of the respondents to the '2015 U.S. Transgender Survey' had at least one negative experience with a healthcare provider, meaning verbal harassment, refusal of treatment or having to explain how to treat a trans* body medically.⁴ Not only is there a lack of expertise, but also a lack of willingness to serve trans* people with dignity.⁵ Transgender people are often perceived as threats to society. For example, trans women are stigmatized with sex work and HIV/AIDS. Trans men, especially when their identity intersects with race, experience society's overt fear of masculine criminals. *"I have to be very careful not to be staring at kids. I can look at a mom and her baby, but I can't look for too long. I miss being seen as not a threat."*⁶ Additionally, especially trans men who pass as male and masculine, are at risk of being exposed to professional environments in which patterns of misogynist language and hyper-masculinity perpetuate.⁷

The '2015 U.S. Transgender survey' confirms that societal expectations threaten the lives of trans* and intersex people: 39% of respondents experienced severe psychological distress in the month they responded to the survey. 24% of individuals who were out as trans in college were physically, verbally or sexually harassed. 40% of all transgender people have attempted suicide at least once in their lives.⁸ These threats for trans* people exponentially increase where gender, socioeconomic status and race intersect. One in eight transgender people has been evicted because of their gender; which accumulates to one in five transgender people who have experienced homelessness at one point in their lives. Approximately 40% of all homeless youth in the United States identify as LGBTQ+ and, among that, 26 % identify as Latino, 44% identify as black.⁹

“It was not until the invention of “gender” as a medical concept from the 1940s-60s that a two-sex system was reinstalled. Only then were masculinity and femininity imposed as the proper endpoint of human development [...].”

– Julian Gill-Pettersson¹⁰

LEFT

IMG 01: Cover of the National Geographic: Gender Revolution Special Edition. January 2017.

ONGOING STRUGGLES

What Arlene Lev calls the ‘Gender Revolution’ has been a long legacy of gender and sexual liberation. Many argue that ‘transgender’ is a trend more than a necessity progression. Over the past decade an increasing number of TV shows, movies and documentaries with (and about) trans* and queer characters, has slowly shaped social perceptions about trans* people. In New gender protocols, on social media and online dating platforms, signal a deviation from normative gendering. (IMG) But even with increased visibility, the political and social inequality perpetuates violence, ignorance and social barriers against trans* people. It is no secret that transphobia also exists within LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) communities, feminist groups and politically liberal movements.

Transgender identities are historically pathologized.¹² Gender dysphoria is a mental disorder that describes a constant feeling of unease, insecurity, discomfort and psychological distress, experienced due to being transgender. New scientific evidence is beginning to shift this notion to a symptom caused by the internalization of societal pressures put on gender-variant people. Societal pressures penetrate institutional/organizational structures and – perpetuated through personal relations – and become internalized by the target identity.¹³

Additionally, the current reactionary policy-making of the Trump-administration risks amplifying systemic discrimination against TGNC identities. The 17-year old transgender man Gavin Grimm became a national figure in the successful fight for restroom access until the new administration withdrew the Obama-era interpretation of Title IX¹⁴ that mandated all public education institutions in the U.S. to allow (transgender) students to use the restrooms that corresponded best with their personal gender identity.¹⁵ With this statutory change, the Supreme Court decided not to hear the case after two years of fighting.¹⁶

Such federal level decisions contradict the increased need for protection for trans* people. Researchers estimate that 1.4 Million people in the U.S. are trans* – 0.6 percent of the population and twice as high as previous estimations.¹⁷ Scientists believe that at least one in every 1,500 newborns is ‘intersex,’ born with ambiguous genitalia or ambiguous genetic, biological and physiological conditions.¹⁸

With all this, where can we intervene in our systems debunk the gender-binary? How might educational environments facilitate a safer society for gender-variant people?

“Decades of progressive politics, spearheaded by feminism and various minority civil rights struggles, and the rise of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual liberation, as well as the current transgender ‘tipping point,’ has set the stage for the emergence of this gender revolution.”

– Arlene Lev¹¹



ABOVE

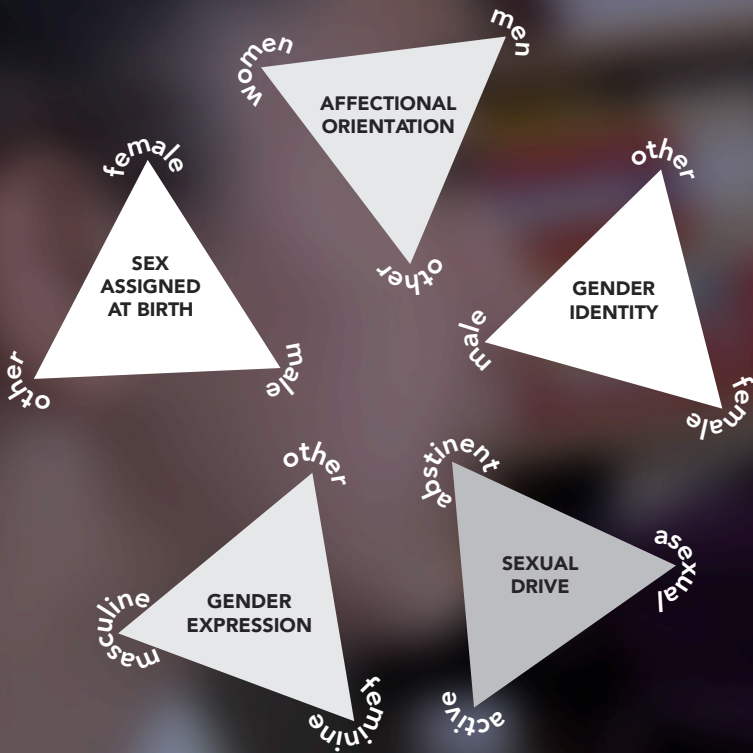
IMG 02: Gavin Grimm during a Rally in front of the White House. Photo by Geoff Livingston. 2017.

WERE YOU EVER MISGENDERED?

When I was younger, I looked more androgynous and each time someone mistakenly called me 'miss,' I immediately started questioning whether I dressed 'wrong' or behaved 'wrong.' For many TGNC individuals, being misgendered is a daily experience which can lead to high levels of emotional distress.

New York City has been at the forefront of legislation to protect TGNC people from being misgendered in public. A 2015 bill by the 'NYC Commission on Human Rights' makes discrimination against TGNC people illegal for service providers in public spaces, the workplace, and in housing.¹⁹ In other words, service providers have to respect every individual's gender pronouns (e.g. 'ze/hir,' 'they/them,' 'he/him,' 'she/her.'). This language behavior adopted from leading academic institutions shows how academia can have an influence on policies for public language use.

Language is one of the root-causes of existing power dynamics. Language creates categories – small, seemingly understandable units – that define and often misrepresent human complexity. Thus, categorical thinking, or the scientific method, can only generalize and dehumanize experiences, observations and information.²⁰ On the contrary, language can also 'normalize' and 'destigmatize' social constructs. *"I didn't want to be the trans 'Survivor' player. I wanted to be Zeke, the 'Survivor' player,"* said Zeke Smith, who was publicly outed as transgender on the TV show 'Survivors.'²¹ Dropping labels is one way to change mindsets for the benefit of gender-variant people. What tools do we need in order to de-categorize our language about identity contingencies that imposes stigma on trans* identities?



GENDER IDENTITY FRAMEWORK

(adapted from 'Genderbread Person'²²)

This framework deconstructs gender and sexuality into inter-related aspects that comprise one's gender identity, introducing three facets of gender and two facets of sexuality.

Sex assigned at birth and **gender identity** are interrelated, but not connected. Every newborn is assigned male or female by a doctor or nurse. This assigned sex may or may not be congruent with a person's individual, inner feeling of who they are.

A trans woman, for example, was 'born male' but 'feels female,' her sex assigned at birth and gender identity incongruent. Most people are cisgender, which means their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression is the way a person presents their gender on the outside, as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or fluid. A woman who dresses, moves, talks more masculine, has a different gender expression than a very feminine woman.

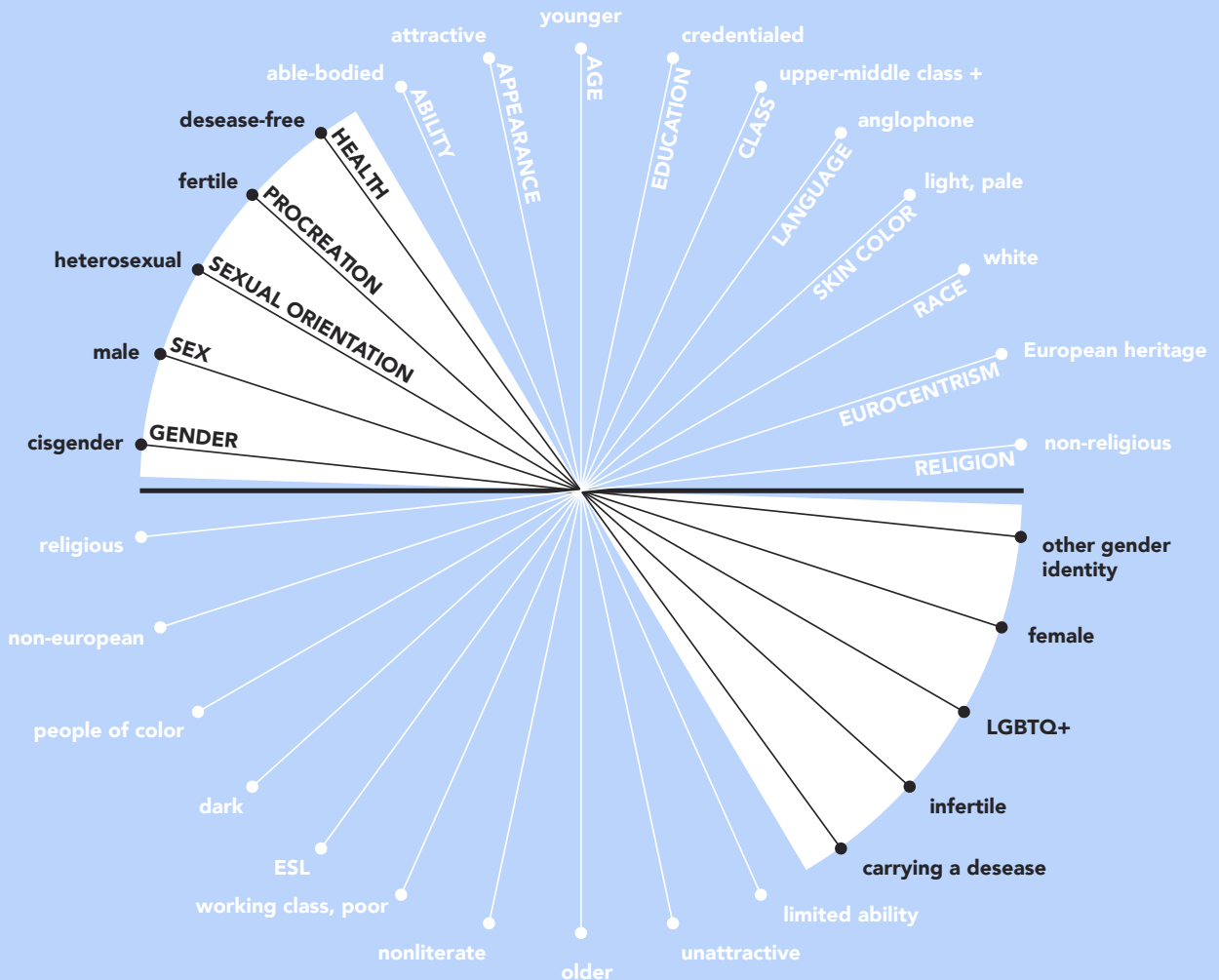
Affectional orientation/sexual orientation describes the emotional and erotic attraction to others. Straight, gay, lesbian and bisexual describe different types of sexual orientation. With a variety of gender identities, one may be attracted to someone who does not fit into the binary of male or female.

Sexual drive adds a layer of cultural and religious values regarding the ability/willingness to procreate, and sexual pleasure.

INTERSECTIONAL WHEEL

(adapted from Kathryn Paaty Morgan²³)

Issues of gender, race, socioeconomic, education, ability (and many others) intersect for every individual. This framework highlights aspects that distinguish people as either agent of privilege or oppressed 'target identities.' This framework needs to be viewed critically though, because the continuums are missing a standard measure. Some of the listed facets are actual continuums; some others are binaries; some are matters of choice, others biological reality. This framework does not represent the contextual relativity of privilege and oppression.



GENDER THEORY: GENDER IS SOCIETAL, SOCIETY IS TRANSITIONAL

According to Frank Browning, gender is a topic that applies to every household, every family in America. He highlights that trans* identities are important signals for a larger ‘transition’ of our cultural mindset and societal psychology. *“Transition is the norm that we [...] collectively share as we transition through time, through attachment, through desire, and through self-discovery.”*²⁴ Browning thereby confirms that advanced human intelligence allows us to unravel a universal societal transition with no endpoint. He writes that *“trans continues to be among the most difficult of contemporary gender terrains because [...] it cuts across physical (and physiological), social and linguistic categories. [...] Trans covers multiple identities, not all of which are the same.”*²⁵ Charlotte Alter eloquently describes such unique perspective that trans* individuals have on the gender-related social dynamics:

*“Yet experiences of transmen can provide a unique window into how gender functions in American society. [...] Men who were raised and socialized as female described all the ways they were treated differently as soon as the world perceived them as male. They gained professional respect but lost intimacy. They exuded authority but caused fear.”*²⁶

We all have a gender, but how do we experience and perform it in society? Judith Butler writes: *“The ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them.”*²⁷ Accordingly, gender is a performative act, unconscious in its execution, but directed and restricted by social norms, rather than individual personhood. And yet, we should have the ability to detach from the interrelation of gender performance and social norms. Only in this way, can we gain a critical understanding of the oppressive systems.

Having one’s personhood recognized by society is a necessity of a viable life, while the conditions for recognition make life unlivable, particularly for intersex and transgender people. To change social norms, we need to collaborate and work collectively. *“One’s own position is not sufficient to elaborate the spectrum of the human. [...] One must enter into a collective work in which one’s own status as a subject must, for democratic reasons, become disoriented, exposed to what it does not know.”*²⁸

Only by continuously interrogating these conditions will society be able to deconstruct, unlearn, and ‘undo’ the norms that govern us; the social construct that inherently marginalizes gender identities that live outside the binary. Thus, it is more important than ever that new generations be given the opportunity to understand gender contingencies.



ABOVE

IMG 03: The New School University Center Cafeteria. New York, 5th Avenue.



LEARNING THEORY: WHY (HIGHER) EDUCATION?

An individual's capability to identify is rooted in the culture of the society in which they grow up. Education shapes people's ways of making sense of themselves and the world. John Dewey describes the social impact of democratic socialization in education. *"Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality of and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group."*³⁰ Educational institutions have the mission to support youth in becoming active, critical citizens. But the education system itself inherently defines social groups, structures, norms and hierarchies. And this is tightly connected to the knowledge, values, and beliefs of the social structures in which this education resides.

Social groups have a tendency of exclusivity, commonly stemmed from fear and negative experiences with people who aren't like the members of the group. And it is the exclusion that leads to misunderstanding, ignorance or conflict about diversity. Wherever patterns of privilege and oppression emerge, marginalized people are unsafe, at risk. These patterns pivot between education and society, often reinforcing underlying patterns of systemic and institutionalized marginalization, especially against diverse gender identities.³¹

But education can also teach relationship-building to bridge differences in interests or social backgrounds. According to Dewey, "Diversity of stimulation means novelty and novelty means challenge to thought." Such challenge to thought is the critical mindset education should foster. That means, with more and more diversified gender identities, openness to personal inquiries of identity find increasing relevance in the classroom. Shared interaction between teachers and students will amplify youth's capacity to adjust to uncertainty and strengthen progressive societal norms for gender. Paulo Freire supports the argument of instructor-instructed-reciprocity when he writes that education is successful when the problem questions allow for students and teachers to engage with each other critically.³²

The 'Community Action Framework' by Gambone and Conell³³ depicts the incremental development of youth leadership and advocacy. Beginning with affirmed individual agency – understanding oneself and one's role in society – youth will be able to lead with others, then lead others, and ultimately spearhead social movements. If we apply this concept to education, then we can see education's potential for true social change. And if understanding oneself is the starting point of developing social agency, then education should enable everybody to understand their gender identity.

How can design foster safe environments for inclusion and reflection about gender contingencies? In what ways can we nurture a progressive, gender-fluid mindset within all stakeholders in education?

“Yet experiences of transmen can provide a unique window into how gender functions in American society. [...] Men who were raised and socialized as female described all the ways they were treated differently as soon as the world perceived them as male. They gained professional respect but lost intimacy. They exuded authority but caused fear.”

– Charlotte Alter²⁹

“Forging one’s own identity amidst a world that limits, constrains, and attempts to define youth [...] is incredibly challenging work. Youth struggle to find the words to explain their experiences to their elders who, too easily and too often, dismiss these explorations.”

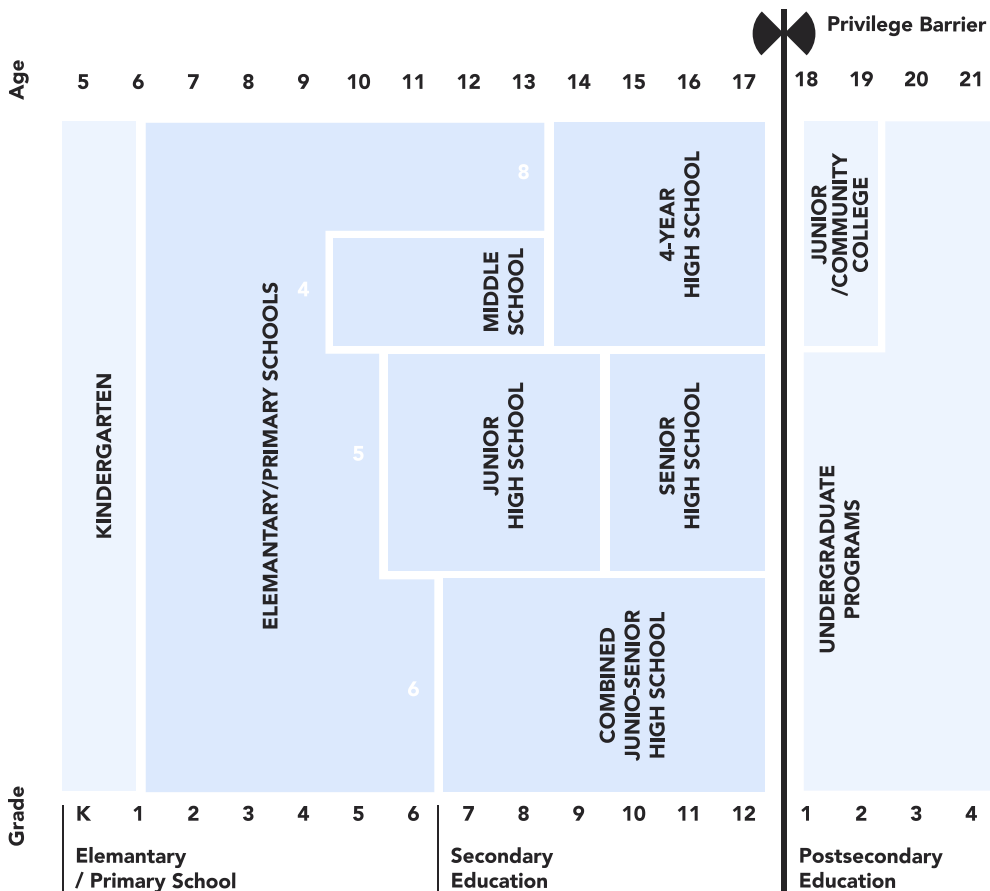
–Alene Lev³⁴

MOMENTS OF TRANSITION

My design-led research found two particular moments of transition within the U.S. education timeline: (1) The transition from middle school to high-school, which coincides with puberty. Complicated physical, psychological and relational changes that define identity happen during that time. (2) The transition to college/university often signifies a profound shift in youth’s independence and often brings changes in environment, social density, diversity, access to knowledge and awareness of sociocultural resources. This allows previously constrained youth to explore their identity with autonomy.

Additionally, “universities are places that thrive on new discovery and [...] universities find it thrilling to feel like [...] we are able to figure out how to transform society as a consequence.”³⁵ So why not begin university with a welcoming introduction to gender multiplicities?

U.S. EDUCATION TIMELINE





ACCESS POINT: THE NEW SCHOOL UNIVERSITY (TNS)

For reasons of accessibility and proximity, I chose The New School (TNS) for institutional research and prototyping of different design tactics. Granted, higher education is not accessible to all, but universities face a persistent struggle with gender inclusivity. TNS is known as a socially progressive university with a large population of transgendered and non-binary people. This external and internal perception perpetuates the assumption that everyone in the academic ecosystem is willing to interact with progressive social ideas. This seems to have an opposite effect on institution's capacity to build resources for its vulnerable communities.

Progress With Barriers

Conversations and interviews with trans*, non-binary and cisgendered faculty, staff and students included Tamara Oyola-Santiago and Tracy Robin (Student Health & Wellness Services), two passionate TGNC advocates; the 'Queer Collective' students; Brita Servaes, librarian and instructor of TNS Safe Zone training; Andrea Geyer and Shana Agid, both Professors at TNS; and others. The 'Transgender Work Group' has gained support by President David Van Sandt to advance university gender inclusivity: all-gender restrooms, name-change options in IT systems, coverage for hormone treatment in the University health insurance. Interestingly enough, TGNC-advocacy is not well reflected in the University's awareness- and knowledge-building capacities.

Lack of Tools: Gender Pronoun Use

There is an unmet need to address gender pronoun use among faculty and students. The existing 'best practices' by invested faculty and students only have local impact and do not scale across the University. This may be because there is no designated staff for gender issues, nor is there an overarching communication strategy between the different actors. In general, TNS does not provide any tools for the successful engagement about gender pronouns, even though several faculties I spoke to (and myself) find it hard to have this conversation with new students at the beginning of each semester.

Lack of Resources: Dedicated Staff and Safe Spaces

TNS does not provide physical space allowing for personalization and ownership by students (e.g. flags, posters, comfortable furniture, etc.), be it for queer, TGNC, students of color, or any other identity group. Nor is there designated staff to help navigate the scattered resources and tools. This hinders self-organization and belonging for those students who are looking for community. They are left to find external resources in NYC, thus detaching them from the University society. On the other hand, tools to build capacities within the human resources could help spread a welcoming mind-space across University. Essentially, physical and virtual spaces need to be strengthened in an Organization that pushes for gender-inclusivity. And the visibility of those on an official University online resource could become a strong attraction point for applying students.

DESIGN HYPOTHESIS: SERVICE DESIGN IN EDUCATION

Guided by this research, the design hypothesis emerged: Design can intervene in education to seed a new mindset more inclusive of gender-variances among all members of the educational organization. It can do so by introducing service design with its four main capacities:

- 1. A strategic and systems approach** that visualizes and addresses complex situations with a holistic view.
- 2. Human-centered research** driven by design ethics with high levels of empathy.
- 3. Value exchange and gain** for all stakeholders through shared information flows.
- 4. Situational, interaction-based learning** facilitated by designed tools and mutual reflection.

In what ways might we use service design to establish a generative dialogue about gender identity contingencies among all members of an educational institution?

A SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

My initial research fleshed out some of the social, political, educational and design contexts revolving around gender-variance. According to Browning³⁶ and Alter³⁷, the increased visibility of trans* and intersex identities is an indicator of a gradual shift in human consciousness towards a more gender-fluid reality. Individuals with trans* experience gain perspectives, and live unique experiences, that mirror many underlying biases and inequalities of our society. With ongoing transphobia and violence against trans* people, it is incredibly important to make society safer for everybody whose identity does not fit into the dominant, normative narrative. We may eventually get a much deeper and nuanced understanding of societal dynamics influenced by existing gender norms.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

A series of design principles addresses the hypothesis. I rely on insights from both the initial group project³⁸ and my particular research on gender identity. According to David Price, three main types of engagement are necessary for educational contexts: Cognitive (Thinking), Behavioral (Operative) and Emotional (Affective) engagement.³⁹ These and the 'Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change' by Prochaska and Velicer⁴⁰ solidify the temporal dimension of cognitive and performance-based aspects of the project.

Design for Transition

To create engaging, safe spaces to critically reframe assumptions, beliefs and understanding during times of change, growth and transition, helping to overcome barriers that result from pre-established and deeply ingrained social roles, boundaries and hierarchies.

Accessible, Mutable System

Not only the activities (but the system itself) should be accessible, open sourced and 'hackable' to tailor experiences to different contexts and levels of understanding/engagement.

Mutual Learning through Exploration

Teachers, staff and students engage simultaneously in learning to generate data with values beyond the individual social context within the University.

Facilitated Learning About Oneself and Others

Moments that enable and encourage 'deeper learning' for all participants. A variety of resources offered (and a clear 'game plan') allow for self-directed reflection.

Multiple Levels of Intimacy

The scale of reflection on both levels, individual and group, plays an important role in building trust and processing the key takeaways about gender contingencies.

At Your Discretion

Openness and mutual learning are encouraged but, the disclosure of sensitive information happens only according to the comfort level of each individual.

PROJECT GOALS

With a growing number of transgendered people in society, it should be imperative for higher education institutions to accommodate learning about identity contingencies for all their members.

This project aims to enable learners to understand that every person has a gender identity. The strategic vision around learning engagement through service design offers a broad spectrum of strategies and tactics that enable educational institutions to build new capacities in that realm. Like that, educators and students are supported to co-create a safe space for the theoretical and practical discourse about gender identities.

The service proposal will lead to new information-flows that generate value for institutions, staff, faculty and students. By revealing identity, the project strengthens the participants' personal responsiveness to gender-variance and supplies tools to carry on a socially progressive mindset.

These goals are embedded in a social change theory that incrementally shifts individuals' behaviors and perceptions to ultimately impact societal norms.

To be clear: The danger of misinterpretation and misuse of strategies that this project proposes has been acknowledged and taken into deep consideration along the way. 'Gender policing' is a method of oppression that wields power over people. This project does not intend to make 'gender policing' a daily routine in any educational discourse. Every piece of data about individual and collective identity is considered confidential to the people involved. Within each context, it is left to the discretion of each individual to determine what they want to disclose.

WHY SERVICE DESIGN? SYSTEMS-THINKING, INTERACTIONS & SCENARIOS

Service design poses opportunities to intervene in education to counteract the overt and institutional marginalization of trans* identities. Not only can service design humanize and visualize complex systems through research and scenarios, but it can create new relations and interactions between actors that generate new knowledge.

Service design is rooted in research, visualization and a strategic, systems-oriented, approach. It can identify pain-points and build missing connections to improve systemic functionality.⁴¹ Services bring a value exchange to provider and user⁴², who collaboratively generate new flows of knowledge, care, emotions or other social units. Thus, the service-logic puts into perspective an individual's relational impact on others and their community.

STRATEGY BLUEPRINT

Touch Points

Tactics

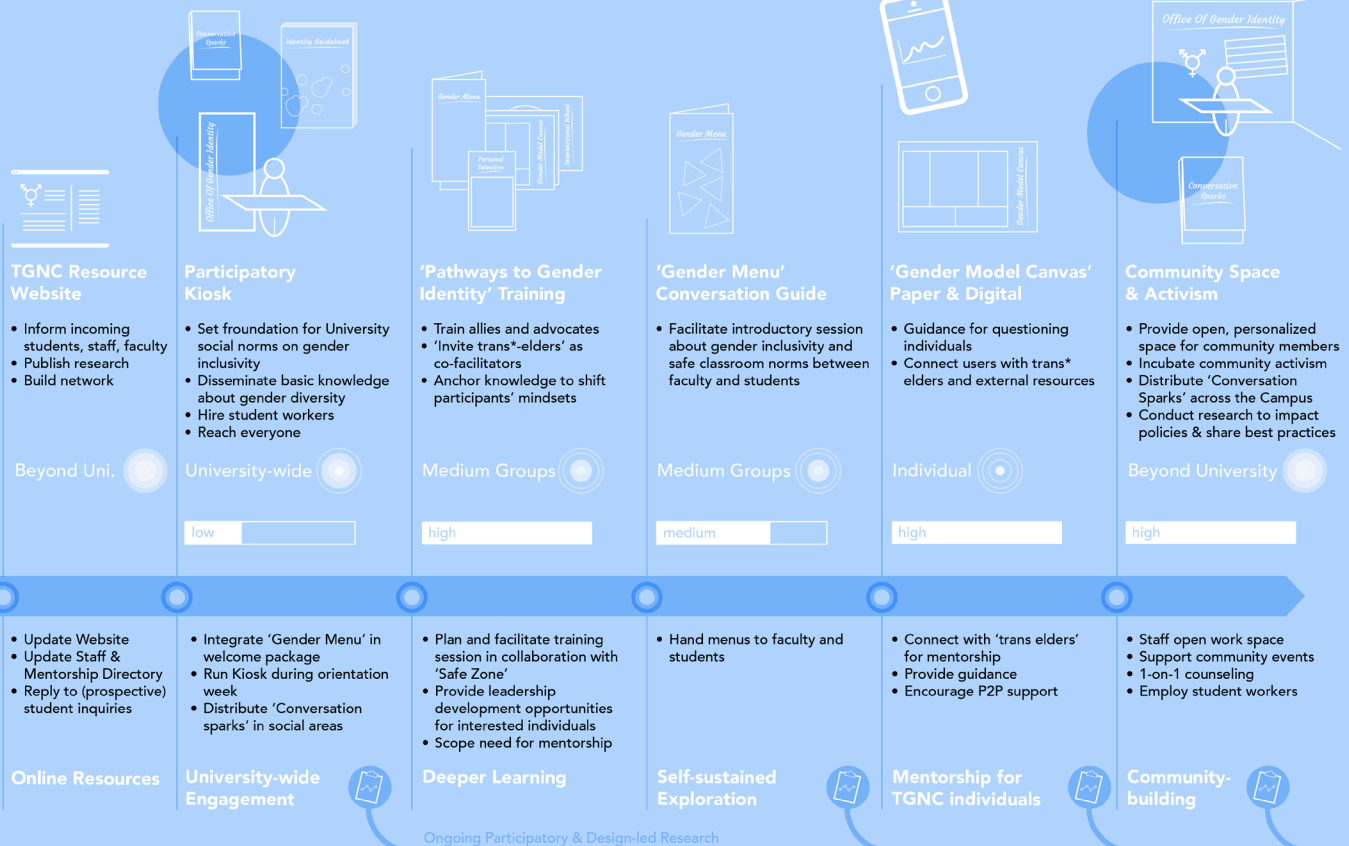
Goals

Scope

Depth of Engagem.

Staff Activities

Service Offering



The design practice mediates between the general and particular, between the categorical and the real. Where the scientific method introduces categories that abstract, dehumanize reality, the design practice reintroduces the human dimension.⁴³ The design mindset helps to gain a more holistic understanding of environments, behaviors, emotions, interactions and relations. With designed and human-centered approaches, *“design will have to find a new paradigm, a different mode of ‘working’—one based less on performance and more on communication, emotion and joy.”*⁴⁴ We have realized that gender has an influence on every human interaction. And by understanding the intersectional complexity of human identities, we are able to better represent the full socialized human and their interconnectedness with the social construct.

Design can record and describe complex system dynamics. Thus it can introduce new human interactions that scale from the individual to the collective and gradually facilitate social transformation. The exchange between individuals and the collective unlocks new interactions that build relationships and foster community. Education is a space of physical and mental interaction, and interactions are inherently mutual in their human experience. Service design is the key to creating new value flows between providers, users and the system. Service situations are situational and ephemeral, experienced by those directly involved. If, according to Dewey⁴⁵ and Freire⁴⁶, mutual learning and curiosity for social differences are necessary for successful socialization and democratization, then service design brings the tools to establish these circumstances.

Victor Margolin describes that *“as creators of models, prototypes, and propositions, designers occupy a dialectic space between the world that is and the world that could be.”*⁴⁷ Scenarios and storytelling are aspects of service design that can capture both individual human experiences, emotions and actions, and visions of preferred societal states. In this sense, scenarios become role models of situations that potentially become real-life situations in which communication and mutual learning emerge.

Franke echoes this notion in saying that *“Fictional design objects provide alternatives to the actual world that make one think about the social conditions of the actual world. Since fictional worlds are not self-contained, but also refer to aspects of the actual world, they may cause one to look anew at certain situations and may lead one to reconsider morals or concepts.”*⁴⁸ In this way, we can start to imagine a world in which those stranded in-between, and in the margins, are acknowledged.

BEST PRACTICE ANALYSIS

Throughout the project development I participated in student group meetings, workshops, training, and conversation groups (within and outside TNS) to learn different education approaches for gender topics. Additionally, online platforms (e.g. 'Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER)'⁴⁹, 'Safe Zone Project'⁵⁰) built out my knowledge about existing practices. Most of the investigated resources lack engaging, interaction-based activities because they come from traditional curriculum design, but I was able to identify components that are transferable to the design project.

PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

With the design hypothesis in mind I analyzed precedent projects including media products, digital solutions, business and service innovations and learning tools.

Documentary: Gender Revolution (2017)

A National Geographic special issue and a 90-minute documentary both give accessible, in-depth information about TGNC issues, opportunities and 'hot topics,' such as gender-pronouns and all-gender restrooms in schools and universities. This documentary uses simple language and an 'I am curious'-approach to understanding the contemporary philosophy and language of gender identity.

Online: Gender Tag Project (2015)

Ashley Wilde (non-binary poet and activist), created this self-initiated YouTube video-tag. The prompt is simple: answer a list of questions on the website about our gender identity and expression. Open-ended questions about makeup, body-hair, and clothing do not require anyone to label themselves with gender-terms but describe individual behaviors, artifacts, and habits of gender expression. A good example of crowd sourced data on identity, with more than 740,000 entries on YouTube.

Business: Bindle & Keep www.bindleandkeep.com

An NYC-based tailor shop that caters to customers who want suits that fit their bodies while presenting the characteristics of the 'opposite' gender. Details about the store (location of the fitting room, style of the interior design, etc.) and the service interactions (trans* people working with and for trans* people) create a much higher interaction value for the customer, who feels treated with dignity and empathy.

INFLUENCE OF PRECEDENTS ON DESIGN WORK

The precedent analysis revealed that design would be most successful when it includes open-ended questions, when it elicits interactions and knowledge exchange, and when it evokes creative and generative thoughts about a preferred future state of the social system. Supported by design tools, such interactions can break traditional learning patterns, and stabilize new social norms, within the learner group. The precedent and best practice analyses lead to the conclusion that the design proposal should include some of the existing, successful questions and activities. I was also able to clarify the intentions of the project with a series of design questions:

- How can design capture the particularities of real-life gender experiences and use these as a resource for education in real time?
- How might we build on best practices and existing resources with new tools and interactions?
- How might a design-led program reveal new deeper consciousness about the social perception of gender and normativity?
- How can design foster willingness in all stakeholders to build alliances with their most vulnerable and marginalized communities?

Book: Rethinking Sexism, Gender, and Sexuality

A collection of anecdotal writings by teachers who actively incorporate gender and sexuality in their classroom conversations. Many anecdotes explain situational engagement methods with children to 'unschool' the normative gender binary. Anecdotal scenarios based on real-life interactions give new skills and tools to lead this sensitive conversation with young children. Many of the described methods are adaptable to workshops for teenagers, adolescents, and young adults.

Children's books: Meet Polkadot, It's ok to Sparkle, I am Jazz

Several children's books (by trans* authors) that depict stories of TGNC kids. Children's books trigger the imagination and creativity about possible realities. Creatively constructed characters and storytelling give parents permission to share with their children the discovery of social topics, fears, issues and problem-solving. Children's books bring an affordance of interaction between guardians and kids that socialize children in unique ways. *"Fictional design objects and fictional worlds may also challenge and even subvert moral concepts and values. Thereby social [...] and ethical values, as well as scientific and technological limitations, are open for exploration and re-assessment."*⁵¹ They mediate between the current and the preferred social reality and behaviors.

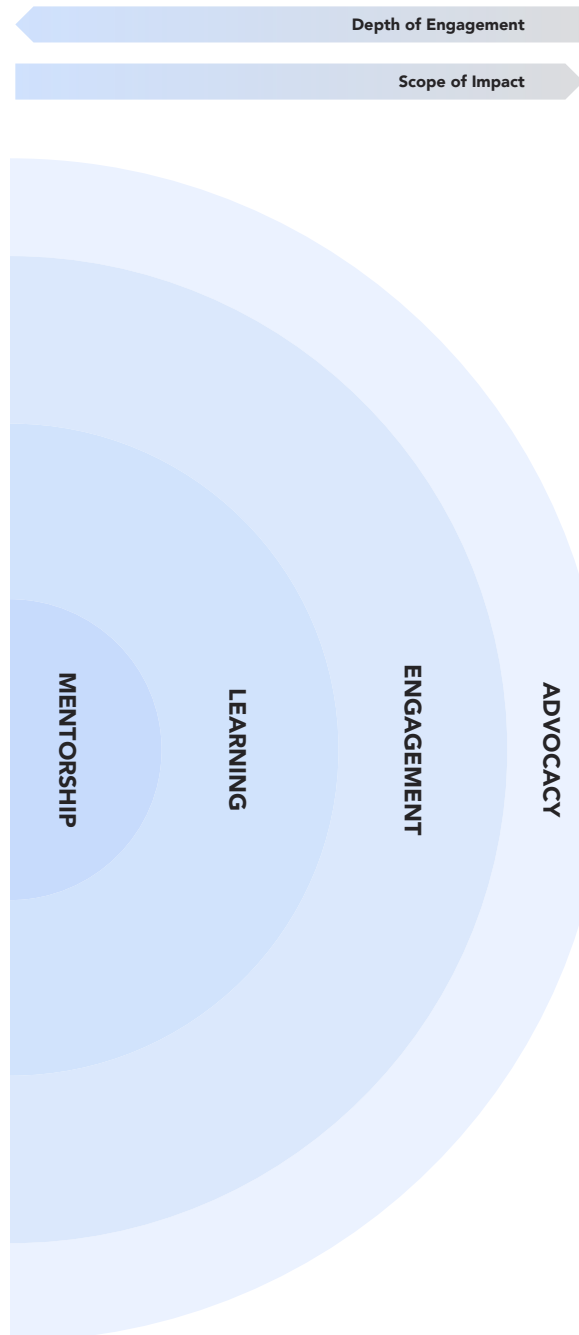
The background consists of several overlapping documents and forms, all rendered in a monochromatic orange color. Visible text on the documents includes "Gender Alliance", "Identity Check", "Model Canvas", "Key Artifacts", "e actu", "gine mon", "y actual Be", "All rights reserved. Copyright © 2017", and "1917". There are also some faint circular logos and arrows on the forms.

“Transition is the norm that we collectively share as we transition through time, through attachment, through desire, and through self-discovery.”

—Frank Browning

STRATEGIC VISION: OFFICE OF GENDER IDENTITY (OGI)

The imaginary 'Office of Gender Identity' is a University-wide entity in charge of enhanced gender inclusivity and advocacy. The OGI brings high capacities of empathy and a user-centered design approach to the day-to-day University operations. Participatory research and communication design capture the complexity of the academic community to serve faculty, students and staff alike with four core competencies:



Advocacy

The Office supports student and employee efforts to foster advocacy for gender issues. Projects include name-change processes in data information systems, transformation of all-gender restrooms, as well as student groups and events. The OGI also builds and sustains relationships with existing resources beyond the University as a strong support network for shared research and policy change.

Engagement

University-specific ongoing user-centered research informs customized, innovative communication materials that spark both facilitated and self-sustained dialogues about gender identity across Campus. Interactive information kiosks, with small exploration activities and information materials, guarantee the visibility of OGI throughout the academic year.

Learning

Introductory trainings and 'Lunch'n'Learns' actively disseminate awareness, and 'how-to-knowledge', for a respectful gender identity conversation among all stakeholders within the Institution. Facilitated trainings offer a general introduction to the complexity of the topic and several gender-exploration activities. Unique toolkits, such as the 'Pathways to Gender Identity' framework, further help generate self-sustained, mutual learning about the subject matter.

Mentorship

Individual support for all those who question their gender identity. External community partners provide expertise and experience about behavioral and environmental changes that a transitioning person will experience. External mentorship (by trans-elders) and peer-to-peer mentorship shape an individual's identity and their personal agency.

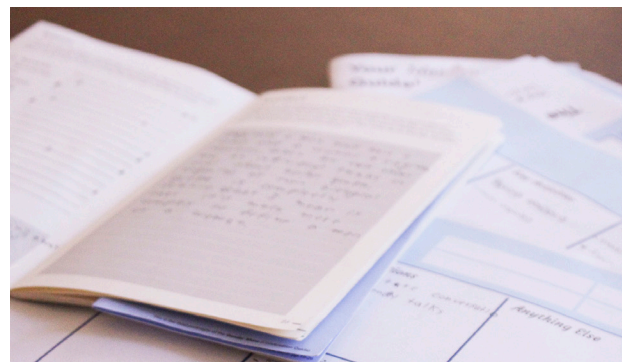
CORE COMPONENT: PATHWAYS TO GENDER IDENTITY

A semi-facilitated workshop offered during orientation week. It is mandatory for all students, staff and faculty. A code of conduct, derived from existing safe space methodologies, will guide participants towards mutual respect and acceptance and establish a safe space. The series of specially developed group exercises, mapping tools and reflection prompts is inspired by the metaphor the 'menu,' which indicated freedom of choice and natural social interactions. There is no prescribed order for the activities. The participants' curiosity and their willingness to dive into the individual and collective reflections drive the classroom dynamics.



CORE COMPONENT: YOUR IDENTITY GUIDEBOOK

This workbook contains basic information about trans* identities and eleven exercises for individual reflection about one's gender and its interrelatedness to other humans. This step-by-step workbook is handed out to all university members before they begin other workshops or trainings offered by the OGI. Those who thoroughly work through all the content and exercises of this book will learn facts, questions and examples that highlight the urgency of a more inclusive society to counteract violence, ignorance and oppression against the many people whose gender identity does not fit into the dominant normative culture. Reflections noted in the guidebook are useful starting points for conversation during the 'Pathways to Gender Identity' workshop.



PROTOTYPING: PATHWAYS TO GENDER IDENTITY (PGI)

Summary

This workshop toolkit provides educational institutions the much-needed tools and interactions to nurture mindsets for a future society with increased gender-inclusivity. It is a series of related activities that allow for both individual and collective reflection about gender identities. The four activities included in this set are 'Gender Menu,' 'Gender Model Canvas,' 'Trans-Reality Check' and 'Personal Selection.'

What this Prototype Wants to Achieve

Individual and collective reflection activities challenge assumptions about the gender binary and heteronormativity. The workshop aims to make participants understand that everybody, cis or trans*, has a gender identity that has social, political and cultural implications.

Gender Menu

The 'Gender Menu' is a folded card with four content areas: (1) The gender identity framework, on which participants can mark their position on the continuums. (2) A glossary that introduces the most important modern gender vocabulary. (3) Conversation prompts to start the conversation about gender identity with a partner. (4) A list of gender pronouns.

Gender Model Canvas & Trans-Reality Check

These two canvasses prompt the user to map out their relational, emotional, physical and behavioral resources, which are important to their gender identity or a change of their gender identity. Users can brainstorm next steps for how they will act upon their gender identity in the future.

Personal Selection (List of Fears)

A prompt card asks participants to write down fears and insecurities about their involvement with gender-variant people and the dialogue about gender identity. This reflection externalizes fears and makes them visible, to act upon them. Awareness of personal assumptions and fears is the first step to leading a successful dialogue about any sensitive topic.

TEST 1: PGI, WORKSHOP WITH PARSONS GRADUATE STUDENTS

Participants: 3, Duration: 120 min

Process

I sent out email invitations to my student and faculty network, put up announcements around the University and personally handed out roughly 150 invitations to students in several University buildings. Eventually only 3 (cisgendered) friends participated in the workshop. The workshop was set up as a lunch-table, with snacks and decoration. After a 10 minute introduction of the thesis topic and research, we delved into the five exercises. Each exercise was timed at 10 minutes, plus a 10-minute debrief.

Participant Comments

"It was hard for me to imagine what it would feel like if I wanted to change my gender identity. My thoughts went a cliché route, where I imagined to transform from female into a super masculine male."

"This was great, but I'm wondering how there could be more learning involved. I liked the youtube examples about trans people. They gave some more context to the exercise."*

Key Takeaways

1. An invitation 4 days in advance of an event (held on a Sunday) is too close, especially in an academic environment where many events happen everyday.
2. The activities make sense together, to delve into different aspects of gender identity, but they don't necessarily need to happen in a specific sequence
3. Persona-cards of trans* people would be helpful to give more detail about potential threats and experiences society poses to them.
4. The 'Intersectional Wheel' exercise seems rigid and not very revealing. All participants thought it could be perceived negatively by 'target-identities.'



TEST 2: PGI, FOCUS GROUP WITH TNS QUEER COLLECTIVE STUDENTS

Participants: 4 (1 graduate, 3 undergraduate students), Duration: 90 Minutes

Process

I joined the weekly meeting of the Queer collective and first introduced my thesis idea and some research. Then we talked in detail about the 'Gender Menu,' the 'Gender Model Canvas,' the 'Personal Selection' and the 'Intersectional Wheel.' The QC folks also helped analyze the implications and weaknesses of the graphic design.

Participant Comments

"Just seeing that someone puts so much thought and work in such beautiful materials to support gender-variant people would be very meaningful to me as an incoming student who is looking for community."

"The readability of the graphic design can be improved but the colors and everything else is great. Don't brand it like TNS, it should stick out from the rest of the communication at the University."

"Your thesis looks incredibly well done and it has the potential to be a useful tool at TNS in the future."

"Can I keep one of these? I want to try this out at home."

Key Takeaways

1. Improve graphic design, but keep individual graphic identity.
2. Activities are perceived as helpful (and useful) to cisgendered and non-binary LGBT activists at the University.
3. The 'Intersectional Wheel' exercise doesn't make much sense.
4. Let go of the strictly structured workshop sequence, deconstruct the activities.

TEST 3: GENDER MENU, SPONTANEOUS TESTING DURING MID-TERM PRESENTATION

Participants: 24 graduate students, faculty and guests Duration: 5 Minutes

Process

“Turn to the person next to you and use the prompts on the menu.” With this prompt my entire audience, at my mid-term presentation, was given the chance to talk about gender identity. It was an unannounced intervention in which I did not participate. I observed participants’ interactions and emotional expressions. We did not debrief about the learnings afterwards.

Participant Comments

“As part-time faculty, I wish we had such simple tools that already make it much easier to imagine the introduction of gender pronouns in a classroom full of undergraduate students.”

“I would prefer for this conversation to happen (for faculty and students) separately, because of confidentiality reasons.”

Key Takeaways

1. The time for the conversation needs to extend
2. Without a debrief the exercise does not seem to be very memorable
3. It seemed easy in this setting, where almost everybody was familiar with everyone in the rooms, but could turn out completely differently if that’s not the case.

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TEST 4: GENDER MENU, WORKSHOP AT THE INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (UNION SQUARE)

Participants: 8 Students (10th, 12th grade), 7 Teachers, Duration: 20 Minutes

Process

“Get familiar with the Gender Menu and use the conversation prompts to talk with a person in the room that you usually don’t talk to.” After explaining the menu, we formed pairs and started individual conversations. The energy in the room was

very high and everyone was very engaged in the topic. I spoke with a chinese girl, who talked to me very openly about many biases that traditional chinese culture has about homosexual and trans* people. After about 10 minutes, we did a quick debrief.

Participant Comments

“I find it confusing that this talks only about gender, and less about sexual orientation.”

“With the third question, we quickly started talking about other topics like race and religion.”

“Also, do you have a PDF of that pamphlet that we used last time as well? I would love to share that activity with teachers.”

Key Takeaways

1. The conversation triggered by the menu has potential to extend to 20-30 minutes
2. In a group of gender-savvy youth, the menu was perceived as viable and useful.

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TEST 5: GENDER MODEL CANVAS, INDIVIDUAL TEST WITH A TRANS* PERSON

Participants: 1 (graduate student), Duration: Overnight, as ‘homework’

Process

We first talked in detail about my project ideas and about the frameworks. I then gave him the canvas to take home and he sent me the response in an email after he had filled it out.

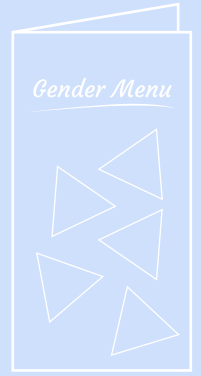
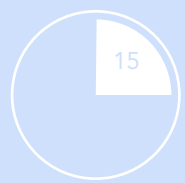
Participant Comments

“This thesis idea you have is so very meaningful and I’m looking forward to seeing how it turns out. This is one of those rare and unique opportunities to make something that could be both monetized and serve a greater social good.”

“Everybody should do this exercise. This is not only for transgender people.”



Gender Menu



Key Takeaways

1. The graphic design of the canvas can be clearer and less rigid
2. This exercise should (ideally) be repeated several times, over a longer period, to notice changes and patterns
3. The canvas can (and should) be used by everyone to reflect on the ways their gender identity influences others, or is influenced by others.

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TEST 6: GENDER MODEL CANVAS, WORKSHOP AT THE INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (UNION SQUARE)

Participants: 6 Students (11th, 12th grade), 6 Teachers, Duration: 30 Minutes

Process

“Map all key allies, activities, artifacts, interactions and relations that play a unique role for your gender identity.” After explaining the canvas, I asked participants to fill out what they managed

in 10 minutes. We then had a conversation about what participants felt comfortable sharing. The conversation quickly spiralled into broader topics, where students reflected on the intersection of religion/nationality and gender.

Participant Comments

“Can you please explain a little bit more and give some examples?”

“I am a muslim girl and my hijab plays a big role for my gender identity.”

Key Takeaways

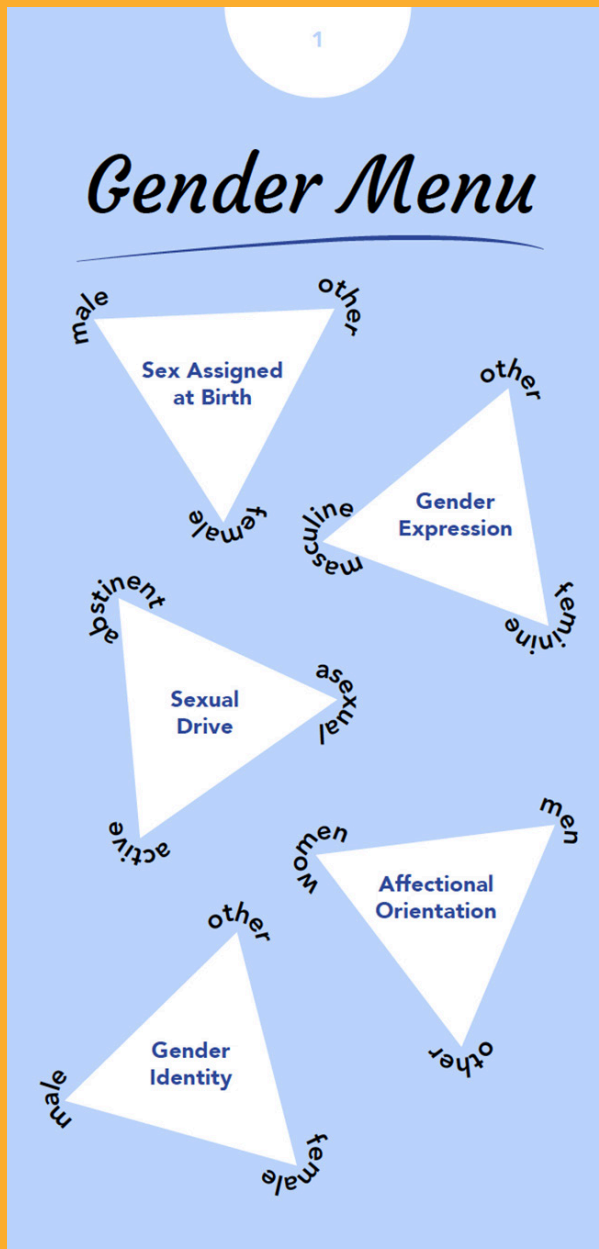
1. The canvas is a great trigger to kickstart a conversation but it is complex and somewhat inaccessible, because the prompts for each section are too vague.
2. Presenting all sections at the same time is overwhelming and confusing; it may be helpful to break it up into three or four micro-steps.
3. The canvas alone, in a group of 5-10 people, can suffice for a deeper conversation of 30-40 minutes length.

DETAIL: THE GENDER MENU

Teachers, students and staff would find this conversation guide during orientation week at the university. The light, playful and engaging visual language will attract curiosity and help establish a self/sustained dialogue about gender identity, while introducing the topic and key terminology.

Front Page

Gender Identity Framework highlighting the five interrelated components of gender: Sex assigned at Birth, Gender Identity, Affectional/Sexual Orientation, Gender Expression, and Sexual Drive.



Center Left Page

Glossary with Important terms for gender explorers. This vocabulary is crucial to understanding the complexities of gender multiplicities and to lead respectful dialogues.

For Gender Explorers

Affectional Orientation is a recent term used to refer to variations in the object of **emotional and sexual attraction**. These categories can be referred to as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, sapiosexual, etc.

Agender people do not experience having a gender.

Asexual orientation describes individuals who do not experience sexual attraction.

- **Cisgender** people's gender identity is the same as the one assigned at their birth.

- **Gender** is a **social construct** based on a group of emotional, behavioral, and psychological characteristics that classify an individual as "man", "woman" or "other." **Gender can be understood to have several components** including gender identity, gender expression, and gender role.

- **Gender Identity** refers to a person's inner sense of being man, woman, genderqueer, transgender, or another gender identity. The "Yogyakarta Principles" (International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) state: '**Gender identity is understood to refer to each persons' deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender**, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may, involve modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means.

Gender Dysphoria is a psychological term used to describe the negative feelings that arise from a transgender person's conflict between gender identity (internal experience) and biological sex (external experience).

Gender Expression refers to **how an individual expresses their socially constructed gender**. This may refer to how an individual dresses, their general appearance and the way they speak.

Genderfluid conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviours that may change over time; has nothing to do with genitalia nor sexual orientation.

Center Right Page

Glossary continued.

Genderqueer (Non-Conforming, Non-Binary) is a catch-all term for gender identities other than man and woman, thus outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity. In essence, **genderqueer is a person whose gender expression is not normative in relation to what is socially expected** (which includes bigender, agender, personal gender, non-binary, etc.)

Intersex refers to an individual born with the anatomy or physiology that differs from societal ideals of female or male. Intersexual people may be born with “ambiguous genitalia”.

Pansexuality is characterized by the potential for aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire for people, regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.

- **Queer** is used to describe **someone who is non/heterosexual**. This term is often as much a political statement as a label. It is more inclusive of race, class, ability and gender that is present in LGBTQ+ communities.

Questioning refers to people who are in the process of questioning their current gender identity.

- **Trans* (-gender)** is an umbrella term (adj.) for **people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth**. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Trans people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Transition is the time period when a transgender individual shifts from expressing one gender to another in her/his personal life and workplace; involves Social (different dress, behavior) and Biological Transition (hormone therapy, and possibly – though not always – one or more forms of surgery).

Back Page

Three simple conversation prompts to kick-start the dialogue about gender identity and an overview of gender pronouns in relation to the gender identity that they belong with.

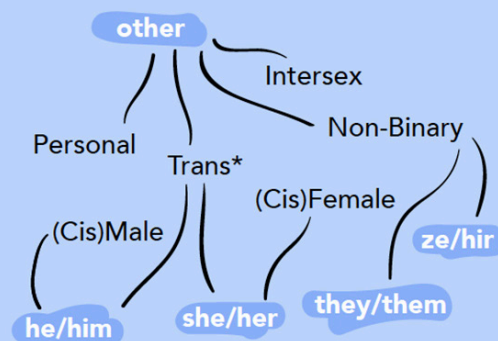
Conversation Starter

Introduce Yourself 2
to the people next to you with your name and your pronouns.

Ask your Partner 2
if they identify as cisgender or if they have a different gender identity. If you're uncertain what “cisgender” means, use the Glossary to have a conversation!

Share your Experiences 2
about the effects that your own gender identity has on people and your reactions to people with non-normative identities.

Gender Pronouns



DETAIL: THE GENDER MODEL CANVAS

Once in the middle of the gender exploration, this canvas will let every person (no matter if cisgendered, transgendered or anything else) inspect the relational, behavioral and environmental components surrounding their gender identity. E.g. Which artifacts present/influence the way you are a female?

Top Part

Cells to map allies, activities, resources, artifacts, relations, interactions, and other aspects that define and are defined by one's own gender identity. Repeating this agile canvas shows changes over time.

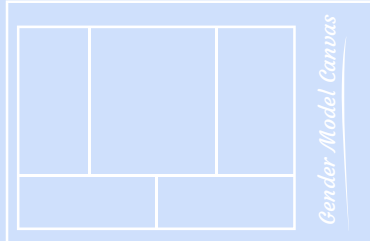
Bottom Part

The introspective exercise of mapping all environmental, behavioral and relational aspects of one's gender identity may lead to new insights, thoughts, and next steps to take to address those.

4

Designed by		Designed for		
<i>Key Allies</i>	<i>Key Activities</i>	<i>Key Artifacts</i>	<i>Relations</i>	<i>Anything</i>
	<i>Key Resources</i>		<i>Interactions</i>	
<i>Current Thoughts</i>		<i>Steps to take</i> 1. 2. 3.		

This canvas has been adapted from the Strategyze



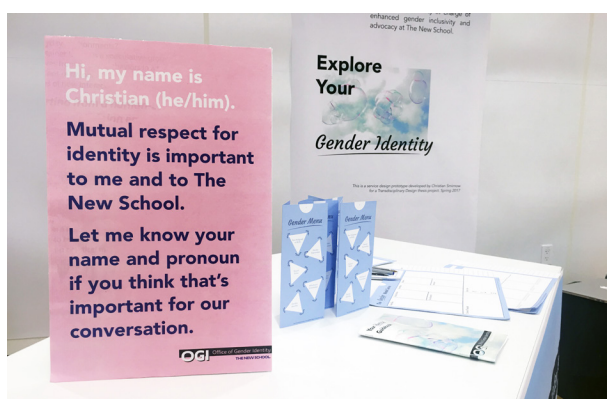
PROTOTYPING: OFFICE OF GENDER IDENTITY KIOSK

Summary

One of the traditional communication tactics of the OGI is a pop-up kiosk. The OGI staff and student workers set up the kiosk in different places across Campus throughout the year. This kiosk attracts attention with several visual and information materials. The kiosk attracts students and informs them about the mission of the OGI. It is a spot that offers curious students the opportunity to do a brief introspection exercise for immediate learning about gender identity.

What this Prototype Wants to Achieve

The first kiosk set-up on the 6th floor of the TNS Graduate Center is supposed to give insight about the engagement qualities and service interactions between the OGI staff and curious students. This is a test of the attractiveness of the communication materials as well as an opportunity to get some additional feedback about the developed tools.



TEST: POP-UP AT TNS GRADUATE CENTER, 6TH FLOOR

Participants: 6-7, Duration: 2 h , Wed. Afternoon

Process

I set up a pop-up kiosk surrounded by several visual materials and some exercise templates on the table. Without active engagement, I waited for students to follow their curiosity about the big prompt on the poster “Explore Your Gender Identity.” Within two hours a group of four students came over and asked for information. After explaining about my thesis project and the idea of the OGI, a few more students joined in the group. Instead of the intended interactive information kiosk, the situation turned into a Q&A between me and the participants. One Student filled out the ‘Personal Selection’ Card.

Participant Comments

“During my time here, none of my faculty ever introduced gender pronouns to their classes or to me individually.”

“Especially the personal insecurities around having such a conversation are interesting to reflect upon.”

Key Takeaways

1. The location for this pop-up was not ideal since students in that space are mainly focused on their work and not looking for different engagement. Different locations should be tried out.
2. The kiosk (the concept in general or the visuals I prepared) did not attract many people
3. Active engagement is necessary to activate potential participants.



PROTOTYPING: YOUR IDENTITY GUIDEBOOK

Summary

This short introductory guidebook combines information about trans* identities with questions and exercises for introspection about one's gender identity. It is a simple printed tool that can be handed out to all students, faculty and staff when they arrive at the University.

What this Prototype Wants to Achieve

This guidebook is dedicated to a university's ambitious goal to create a more inclusive, respectful and socially progressive safe space for all identities within their population. It sets the tone for social norms; only with an open-minded and reflected vision of gender identity will it be possible to impact current systems of oppression for the better. Creativity, intellect and agency will prepare users with the necessary awareness to engage in a respectful conversation with others about one's gender identity.

TEST: OPTIONAL HOMEWORK FOR STUDENTS AT IHS (UNION SQUARE)

Participants: 3 Duration: 1 Week

Process

I presented the guidebook to the 'Gay Straight alliance' and handed three copies to volunteer students. Only one student was able to read the guidebook and fill out some exercises within one week. We had a 5-min. chat about the experience.

Participant Comments

"The content is interesting and welcoming at the same time, and I understood everything."

Key Takeaways

1. He confirmed the structure of the guidebook is very smooth and not too heavy on data.
2. The student found the exercises (1-5) helpful, especially the reflection about expectations of gender roles.



You Guide

Glossary

As mentioned
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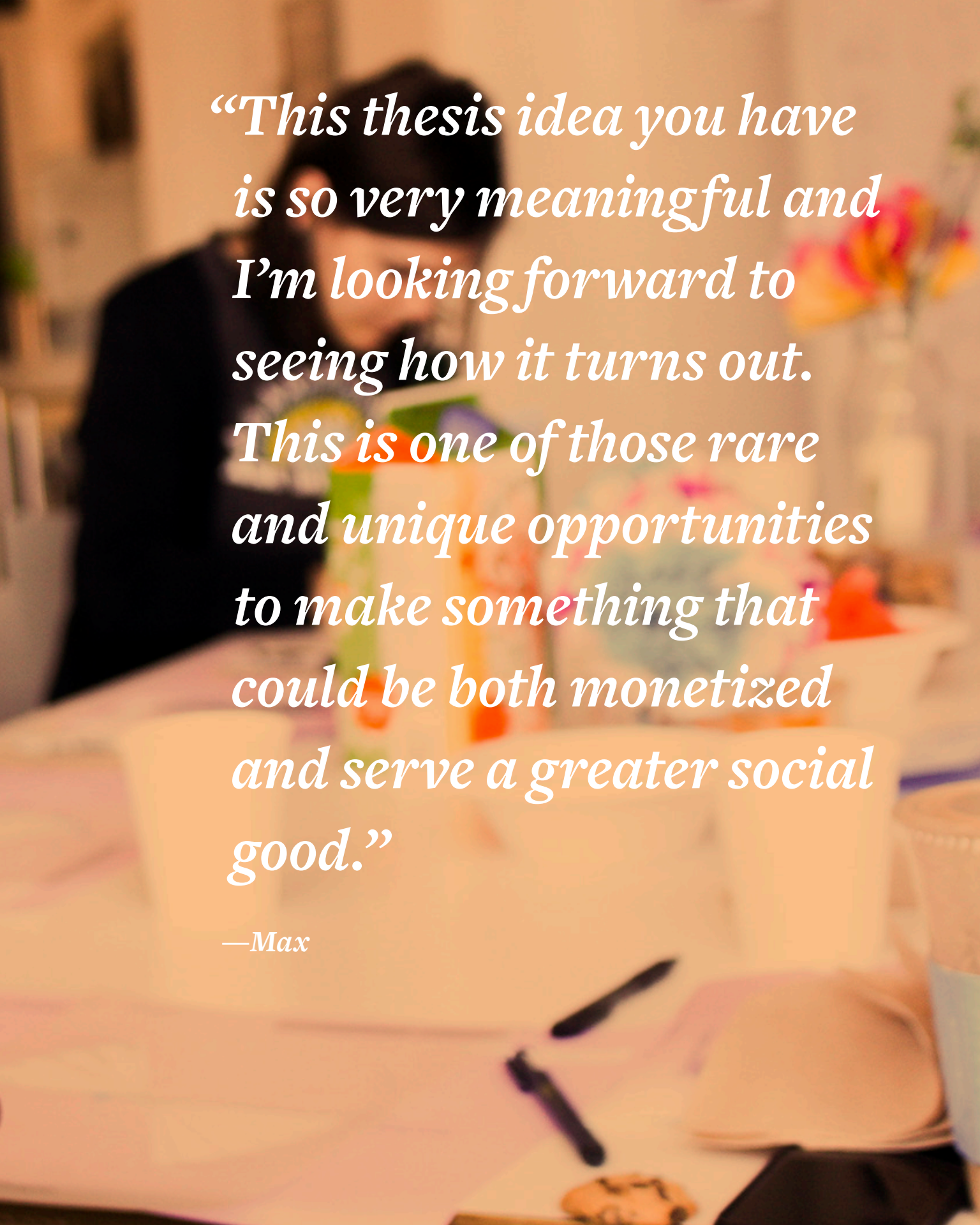
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A person with dark hair is seated at a table covered with a white tablecloth. They are looking down at a document on the table. The table is cluttered with various items, including several sheets of paper, a black pen, and a small round object. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a vase with colorful flowers. The overall lighting is warm and indoor.

“This thesis idea you have is so very meaningful and I’m looking forward to seeing how it turns out. This is one of those rare and unique opportunities to make something that could be both monetized and serve a greater social good.”

—Max

REFLECTIONS

New Interactions, New Mindset

With this project, I was able to prove the hypothesis that service products can serve the value exchange between providers (the institution) and users (faculty, staff, students) in the realm of cultural and ethical awareness. By sharing one's gender identity with others, participants gain a perspective on their individual perceived relational impact on others. This will decrease relational uncertainty and increase personal agency. Collectively, these learnings will set inclusive social norms, improve group dynamics and seed a progressive mindset for fluid gender concepts and complex identity systems.

New Roles for Designers

The separate tactics for engagement came together under the strategy concept of the 'Office of Gender Identity,' which presents a more systemic and organizational approach to a creative contribution, rather than only communication design and workshop facilitation. As a future design practitioner, I am aware that the integration of designers in the workforce of larger organizations can be a viable, and necessary, step to take for continuing innovation towards social equity – not only to tackle gender issues, but also other sensitive topics. I strongly believe that such entities will play a crucial part in continued social innovation.

A Strong Visual Language to Identify With

I was continually surprised about the positive feedback, and supportive comments that I received, for my intentions and the actual design outputs I created. Both cisgendered and transgendered people who I've been in touch with have confirmed the viability and the need of these tools. I enjoyed the positive perception of the colors and other graphic components I chose, which represent both a traditional binary gender-divide, but are also the colors of the transgender flag – baby blue and light pink.

Working on Systemic Issues as an Individual

Nevertheless, this project also weighed heavy on me, specifically from the perspective of individual work vs. group work. I am very group-oriented and not only do I enjoy group work more than working individually, I need the shared vision and mutual accountability to motivate myself for challenging projects. In this case, being alone, many of the challenges and insecurities that I had to face made me question my ability to design and my creativity. The lack of shared creativity really impacted my design process in that I presented more insecurity, and a more introverted, less engaging designer-role. My main finding here is that there are limitations to my own capacities as a human, and as an individual and, sometimes, I cannot design past those limitations without a collaborative support system.

Becoming an Ally Through Design

This project is, of course, reflected upon as both my role as an individual in society and my role as a designer who aims for positive social change by advocating for a marginalized community. Even though my interactions as a designer-researcher with trans* were limited, they were integral to formulating and validating many of the design arguments. This project did empower me to become an ally to the trans* community. As a cisgendered person, I will never be able to fully empathize with people who identify as trans* or non-binary. But I feel confident about my ethical and human approach to design, which led to new knowledge and insights about the identity discourse. Even though I cannot claim to be an expert in the field of gender identity, I see my design profession as capable of identifying specific needs and I can proudly call myself an ally to a community that was not, originally, readily accessible to me.

EMERGING DESIGN ETHICS

With every conversation, testing session and workshop conducted during this project it became evident that one of the major ingredients for successful entry in this field of practice is thoroughly defined, human-centered design ethics. Seven guidelines shall allow a conscious designer-researcher to start envisioning service design for gender identity:

1. **Be authentic** about yourself, your curiosity and your intentions – always act with dignity!
2. **Bring awareness** about your own gender identity, that speaks only to your life-long personal process of socialization, and how it projects assumptions and values on others.
3. **Come prepared** and informed about the subject matter, but be honest about gaps in your knowledge and experience, e.g. when it comes to using the correct language.
4. **No assumptions** about anyone's gender identity to be able to act and react responsibly when entering conversations
5. **Value every collaborator** as an expert of their own gender identity and gender expression.
6. **Present your willingness** to learn from your conversation partners and be respectful of their individual gender-experiences.
7. **Be mindful** of the confidentiality of every conversation and the ways new insights will inform your design proposal.

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END NOTES

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IMAGE SOURCES

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IMG 01: Detail of Cover Photograph of *The National Geographic Special Edition: Gender Revolution*. Photographer Unknown. National Geographic. January 2017. Source: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/01/>

IMG 02: Gavin Grimm during a Rally in front of the White House. Photo by Geoff Livingston. 2017. Last Visited on April 19th, 2017. Source: <https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/court-decision-gavin-grimm-case-will-bring-tears-your-eyes>

IMG 03: The New School University Center Cafeteria. Photographer Unknown. Last Visited on May 5th, 2017. Source: http://www.newschool.edu/uploadedImages/Parsons_NEW/Student_Life/012814_UC_Architectural_004_750x563.jpg

IMG 04: The New School University Center Front View. Last Visited on May 5th, 2017. Source: https://static.dezeen.com/uploads/2016/11/parsons-school-of-design-new-york-launches-new-digital-design-masters-programme_dezeen_hero.jpg