

Supporting the LGBTQIA community

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IG @littleredbirdbotanicals

- Introductions and agreements
- The basics
- LGBTQIA experiences with herbalism
- Considerations for community herbalism
- Considerations for practitioners
- Building community options for accessibility



Agreements

We are here to explore ways to reduce the harm that is often done to people when we misunderstand or make assumptions about sexuality and gender.

- Share from your own experience
- Recognize that there is a range of experiences in the room
- Please ask questions and share information from a place of compassion and curiosity, not judgment or arrogance. Be aware that, while all questions are important and welcome in this space, some questions may feel hurtful to others.
- Feel free to take care of yourself in any way you need
- I welcome any and all feedback about the way this information is presented

Who I am

- Identities: cisgender queer white woman
- Relationship to land: colonizer on Piscataway/Nacotchtank territory
- Herbalist working in queer, trans, & nonbinary communities (among others)
- 42 years old (this informs my ideas about gender and sexuality based on degrees of visibility of those communities over time)

Who I'm not

- Professional facilitator
- Trans or nonbinary identified
- Expert in gender or sexuality studies



Definitions: LGBTQIA...

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Queer or questioning
- Intersex
- Agender or asexual



Ricky Bratz, NC @cazimihealing_nc

An acronym can never encompass all possible identities!

What are some words that help you express your sexuality/gender?

Basics

- Definitions we are using today may not include everyone because language is slow to adapt. Let's make our best effort as a group to be open and flexible in our thinking and adapt our language to respect each other.
- Gender identity vs. sexuality
 - Gender identity refers who you are
 - Sexuality refers to who you are physically, sexually, and/or romantically attracted to
 - Both gender and sexuality may change or stay the same for different people
 - Someone's gender does not imply their sexuality, and vice versa

Gender vs. sex



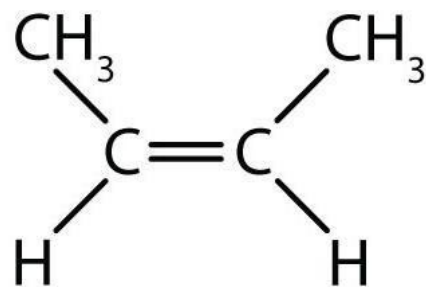
Sade Musa, CA

@rootsofresistance

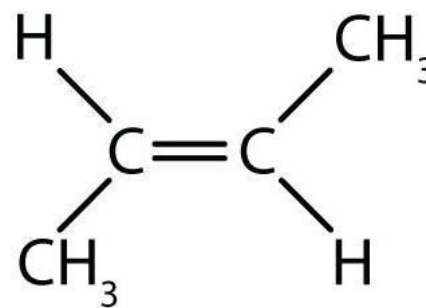
- Gender is an identity
 - Gender is expressed in many ways, including outward appearance and the ways we think about ourselves
- Sex refers to the genitals and/or chromosomes a person has

Gender vs. sex

- Most people are assigned a gender at birth based on their genitals (in some cases, doctors first surgically change genitals to conform to societal expectations)
- Many people feel comfortable with the gender they have been assigned. This is called being cisgender (cis meaning “same side”)
- Many people realize at some point that the gender they were assigned at birth is NOT their gender. The term for this is transgender (trans meaning “across”)

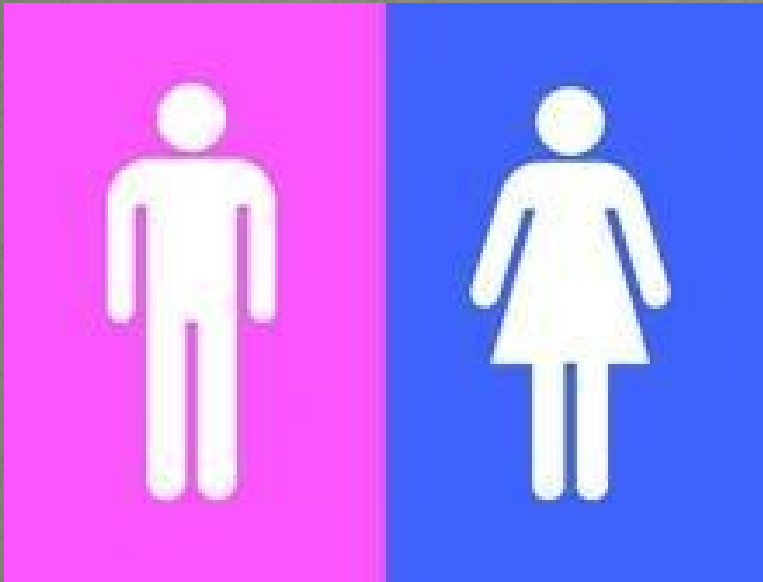


cis-2-butene



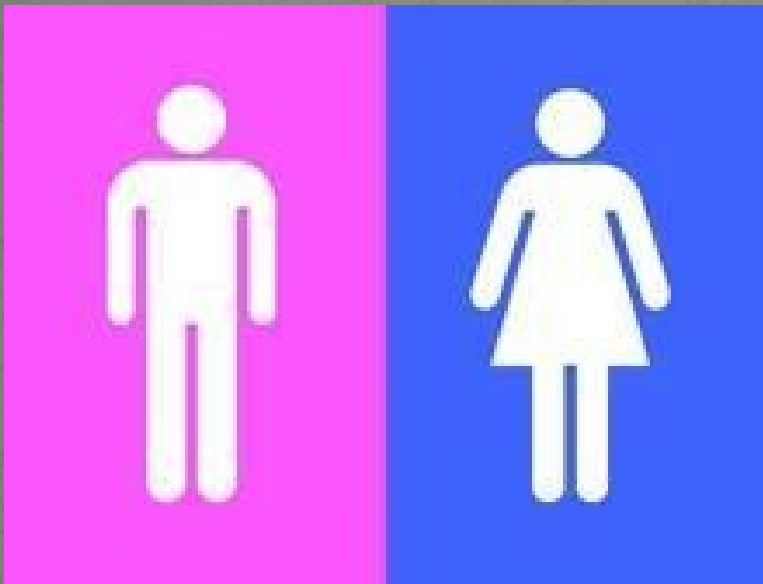
trans-2-butene

The gender binary



- Asserts that there are two genders, male and female, and everyone falls into one or the other
- Enforced through social pressure, rules, and/or violence against people who defy expectations for their assigned genders
- Different from, but relevant to, the idea of gender roles
- Gender essentialism refers to the belief that people have intrinsic qualities based on their gender

The sex binary



- Asserts that there are two sexes, male and female, and everyone falls into one or the other
- Enforced through medical assumptions, surgeries, and invisibility of intersex people
- Relies on the myth of biological binaries

Intersex Justice Project:
<https://interactadvocates.org>

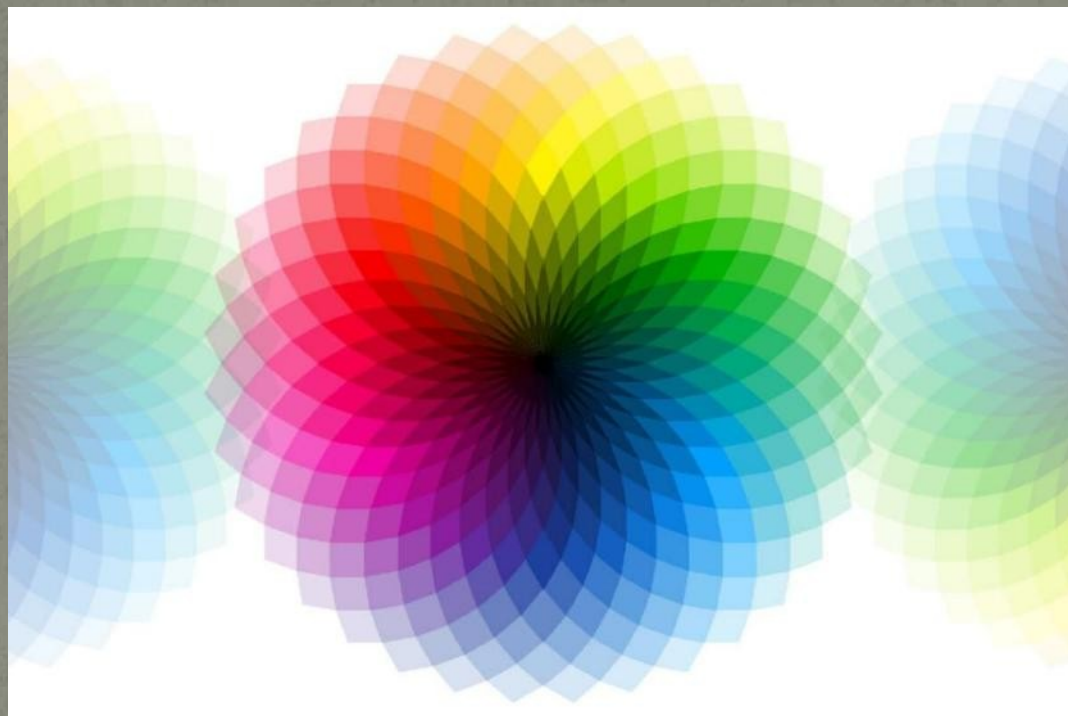
Gender, sex, and sexuality as spectra



- What's in between the binaries? LOTS!
- Represents many more identities than the binary model

BUT.....

Identities are not linear either



- Lots of identities do not fit into a linear spectrum
- Common examples include non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, gender non-conforming, two-spirit, androgynous, queer, asexual, bisexual

Pronouns

- **Pronouns** are words used to refer to people. Some examples include:

- They/them
- He/him
- She/her
- Ze/hir
- Many others!



Angel Putney Noe, CT

- A person's pronouns are the words that refers to them in a language that has gendered pronouns
- Using a person's pronouns correctly shows respect
- Changing the way we talk can be difficult-- practice really helps!
@practiceyourpronouns

Some terms

- The term Two-Spirit is a term some Indigenous people use to refer to themselves (many indigenous people ask that this term not be used by non-indigenous people)
- Language is always changing. Some terms you may have heard are **not** commonly used anymore:
 - Transsexual
 - MTF or FTM
 - Tranny (this word in particular has a history of use as a derogatory term)
- BUT, some people do use these terms to refer to themselves. It's always good to ask how someone wants you to refer to them.

Challenging
the gender
binary
benefits ALL
of us

How does it benefit
you?



Isa Coffey, NY
Wisebodies.org

LGBTQIA experiences

- Personal experiences such as isolation, bullying, harassment, or exclusion from family
- Structural inequities such as employment discrimination, lower wages, housing discrimination
- More likely to experience homelessness in youth
- Threat of violence (real and perceived)
- Lower and/or stereotyped media representation
- Feeling unseen or feeling too seen
- Feeling nervous about coming out to new people

We are living under the cis-heteropatriarchy: a system that empowers, privileges and normalizes the experiences of straight cisgender men

Intersections

- People of marginalized sexual and gender identities come from a diversity of backgrounds with respect to race, ethnicity, class, ability, etc.
- Gender/sexuality oppression may not be the only form of oppression someone is experiencing
- Whitewashing, classism, and the erasure of LGBTQIA people with disabilities are prominent in the history of LGBTQIA movements
- LGBTQIA people with the most privilege have often set the agenda for national policy priorities and have been the most visible in the media

Intersections: examples

- Murder epidemic for Black transgender women
- LGBTQIA people face homophobia and violence in ICE detention facilities
- LGBTQIA youth who are rejected by family have fewer resources to rely on if they come from impoverished communities
- Rural LGBTQIA people face limited choices when choosing providers and may not be able to find a supportive provider
- Erasure of Indigenous models for gender and sexuality

Gender, sexuality and colonialism

- The cis-heteropatriarchy was created alongside capitalism and colonialism to uphold their dominance
- Indigenous models of gender and sexuality are diverse and often expansive
- Heterosexuality, the gender binary, and the nuclear family model support and enable systems like capitalism and white supremacy
 - Defined roles for who does invisible labor
 - Passage of property and accumulation of wealth
 - Gender and sexuality historically used to rationalize racism

A great resource: ALOK Vaid-Menon

@alokvmenon www.alokvmenon.com goodreads.com/alokvmenon



Be sure to compensate them for their labor
There's a link to send \$ in the "support" tab on their website



LGBTQIA people & health care

- Members of LGBTQIA communities are more likely to experience harassment, abuse, and/or assault in health care settings
- There are often barriers to gender-affirming care
- LGBTQIA people have historically been pathologized, dehumanized, and considered abnormal by mental health professionals



LGBTQIA people & health care

- Increased use of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use compared to general population
- Discrimination in health care around fertility, pregnancy, and childbearing
- Transgender people denied access to gender-affirming care
- Less likely to have health insurance
- Increased incidence of suicide



LGBTQIA people & health care

These statistics and patterns are indications of problems with cultural norms around gender and sexuality.

They do NOT indicate that there is something wrong with us!

ALSO / AND / BUT

Even though the dominant culture teaches us otherwise....

expressing your gender, loving who you love, and finding your true self are GREAT.

Lots of us love being queer (or however we identify).

We create resilient communities where we can thrive

Allies: don't feel bad for us, help us fight back!



Vilde Chaya Fenster-Erlich, PA



Adaku Utah, NYC
www.adakuutah.com

How does this impact herbalism?

- Access to herbal appointments (financial, fear of homophobia)
- Lack of representation in marketing
- Inappropriate or inconsiderate care
- Replication of traumas experienced in conventional health care settings

How does this impact herbalism?

- In general, LGBTQ people face barriers to health care that may have impacted health over the long term, leading to unaddressed health issues
- Some people seek out herbs to support them through gender-affirming surgeries or hormone therapy
- Homophobia and transphobia cause *some* people to have body shame or dissociation

How does this impact herbalism?

People from these communities MAY* have specific mental health experiences as a result of :

- Chronic stress from dealing with the cis-heteropatriarchy
- Anxiety (in response to structural, family, or interpersonal homophobia, see above)
- Body dysphoria (in response to transphobic norms of what bodies “should” look like)
- It is important to remember that these mental health experiences are reasonable responses to BIG societal problems, not individual failings or overreactions

*But don't assume that we DO

Becoming accomplices: Community herbalists

- Strive to use non-gendered language when teaching classes or educating individuals about herbs
 - Talk about bodies, not genders
 - If you don't know someone's pronoun, ask! If you can't ask, refer to them without using one
 - Ask people to share pronouns during class intros
- Be conscious of gendered marketing
- Advocate for gender-neutral bathrooms in spaces where you hold events, classes, or clinics
- Know resources in your area that you can share with LGBTQ people seeking health care (and keep track of which providers and institutions people may wish to avoid!)

Core values for accessibility in herbal practice

- Humility
- Body-positivity
- Rejection of the imagined gender binary
- Respect for different concepts of healing
- Awareness of our own assumptions
- Awareness of our own relationships to power and privilege (and how those relationships affect others)
- Recognition that feedback is a gift



Sára Abdullah, NY
Earthseedholistic.com

Herbal considerations

In many ways, working with LGBTQ people is the same as working with anyone else. Compassion, listening, and respect are important for anyone of any gender or sexual identity. Other health problems are often the focus, and gender or sexuality may not be.

Some people seek out specific support related to gender-affirming care:

- Support for gender-affirming surgery
- Side effects of medications
- Side effects of exogenous hormones, including injection site care
- Side affects of gender-affirming practices like binding, hair removal, tucking, etc.
- Feminizing or masculinizing effects of herbs

Herbal considerations: Stress and anxiety

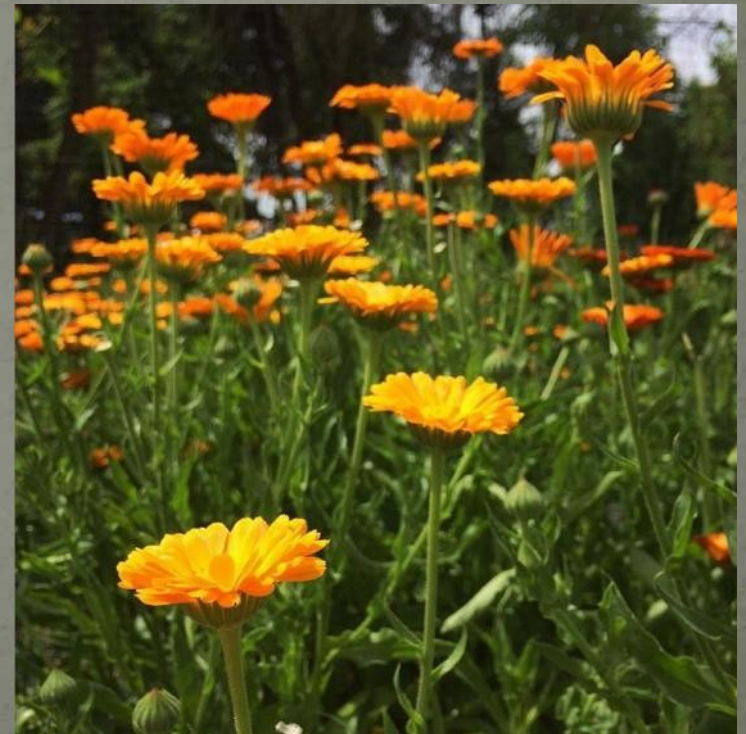
- Adaptogens: ashwagandha, holy basil/tulsi, reishi
- Nervines: motherwort, skullcap, milky oats, blue vervain, betony, lemon balm, mimosa
- Heart support and boundaries: rose, hawthorn
- Community, resistance, and resilience
- Connection to nature



Owen Taylor, PA @seedkeeping
Chris Bolden-Newsome, PA
(Seeds and Their People podcast)

Surgery support

- Scar-healing
 - Antimicrobials: yarrow, lavender,
 - Vulneraries: plantain, calendula, gotu kola
 - Lymphatics: calendula, poke, self heal
- Post-anesthesia support
 - For brain fog: rosemary, gotu kola
 - Liver support: artichoke leaf, dandelion root, milk thistle
- General
 - Homeopathic arnica
 - Anti-inflammatory foods



Herbal considerations:

Miscellaneous

- Bringing is back into our bodies: betony
- Support for side effects of binding: lymphatics (calendula, poke, cleavers), antispasmodics (cramp bark, black cohosh, pedicularis)
- Feminizing and masculinizing herbs????? Mostly theoretical
 - It's reasonable to try these for gender-affirming effects
 - Small doses of estrogenic herbs do not generally cause feminizing effects and are OK to use for other purposes (e.g. fennel, red clover, hops, alfalfa, licorice) BUT, check in first!

Herbal considerations:

Miscellaneous

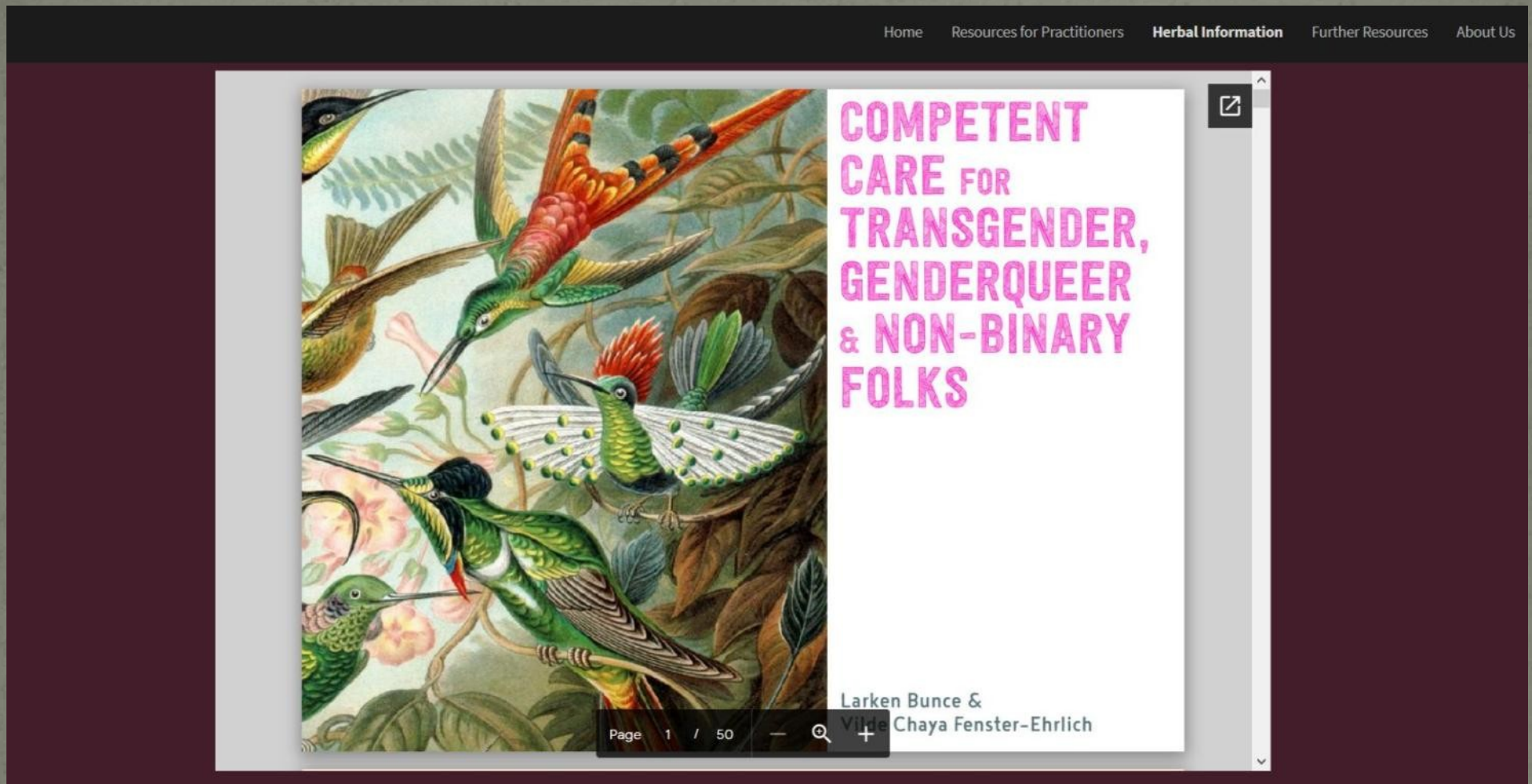
- Side effects of hormone therapy
 - Testosterone: acne, hair loss, injection site irritation, elevated cardiovascular disease markers
 - Estradiol: inflammation, blood clots, potential elevated risk of CVD
 - Anti-androgens: low libido; spironolactone may cause low blood pressure, elevated blood potassium, stomach or esophageal irritation

Herbal considerations: Being in our bodies

- Strengthening the mind-body connection: betony (Stachys)
- Bringing us back into the moment: aromatic plants
 - Rose, rosemary, cedar, citrus, lemon balm, meadowsweet
 - Any that feel significant to the person in question
 - use as mist/spray, bath, tea,
 - aromatherapy, annointment



This resource



is amazing!!!

[Tinyurl.com/herbaltranshealth](https://tinyurl.com/herbaltranshealth)

Do plants have gender???

- No.
- Yes?
- Maybe....
- How would we know???



Do plants have gender???

Options for gender-neutral botany

- Staminate vs pistillate
- Pollen-bearing vs. seed-bearing



Robin Wall Kimmerer on plant pronouns:
<https://orionmagazine.org/article/speaking-of-nature/>

Mens' and womens' herbs

????????????

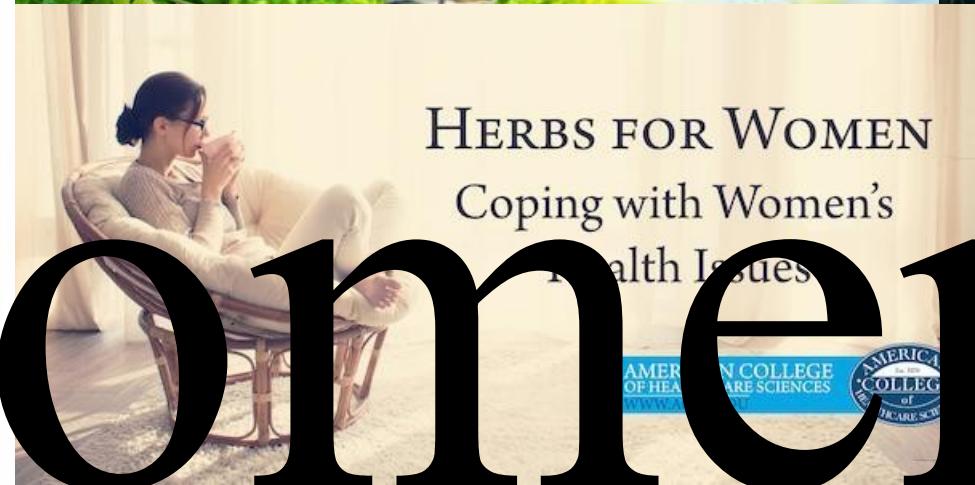
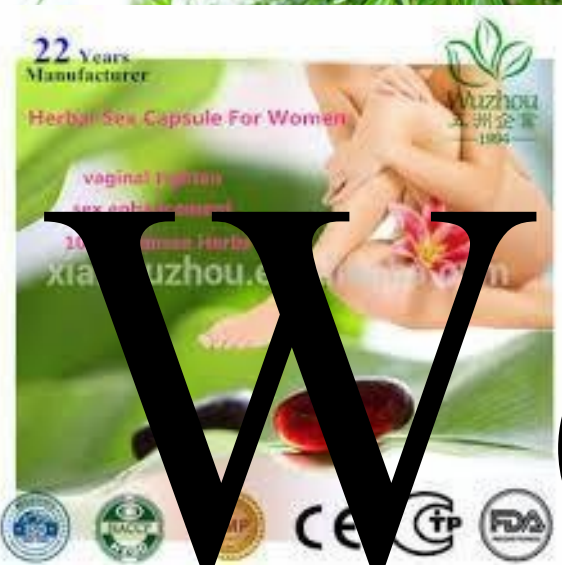
- Herbs don't work on gender identities, they work on bodies
- Most herbs that are pigeonholed as useful for one type of body can actually be used for many types of bodies
- What are some herbs that get construed as mens' or womens' herbs?
- When is it important to communicate about herbs that are gendered by mainstream marketing or by herbalists?

Which plants help you explore your gender?

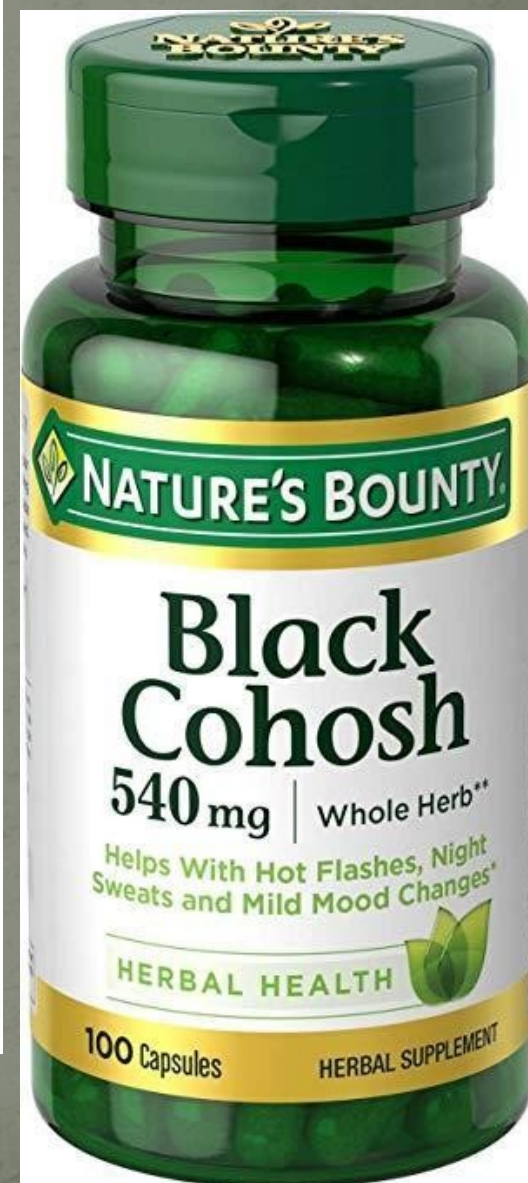
Herbs

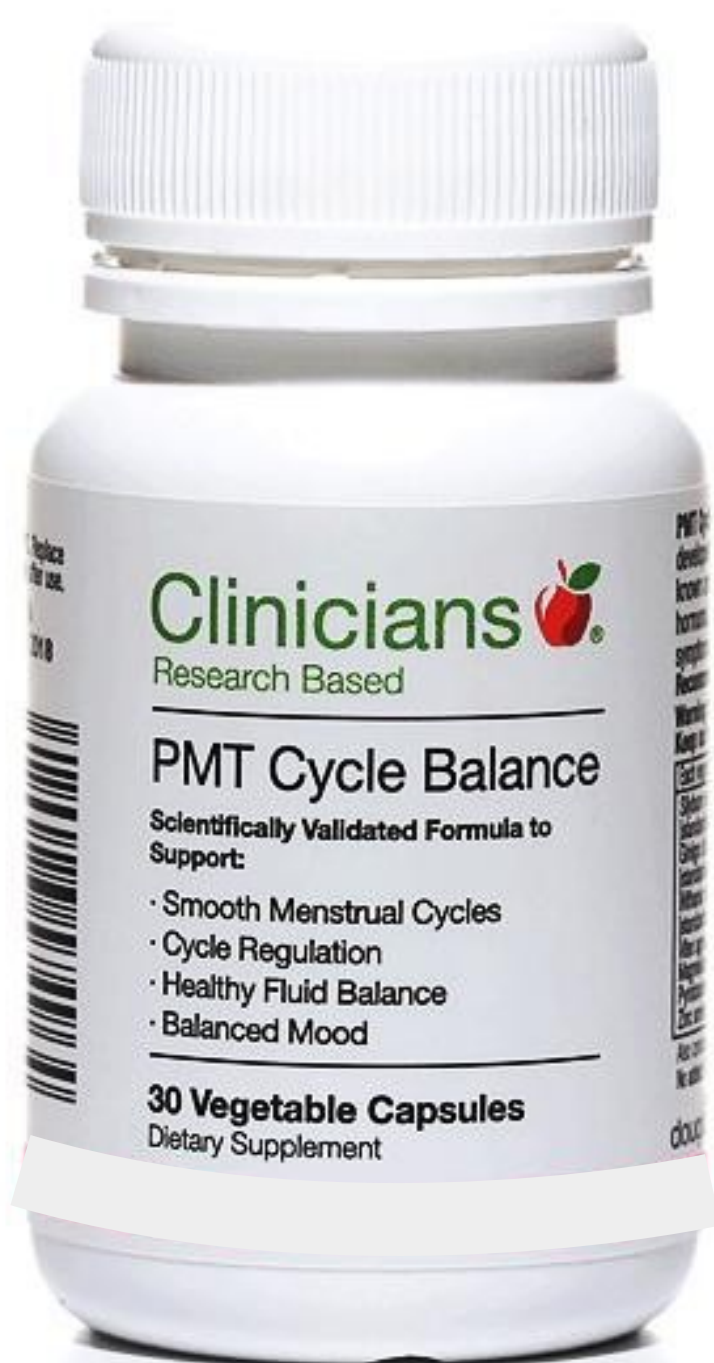
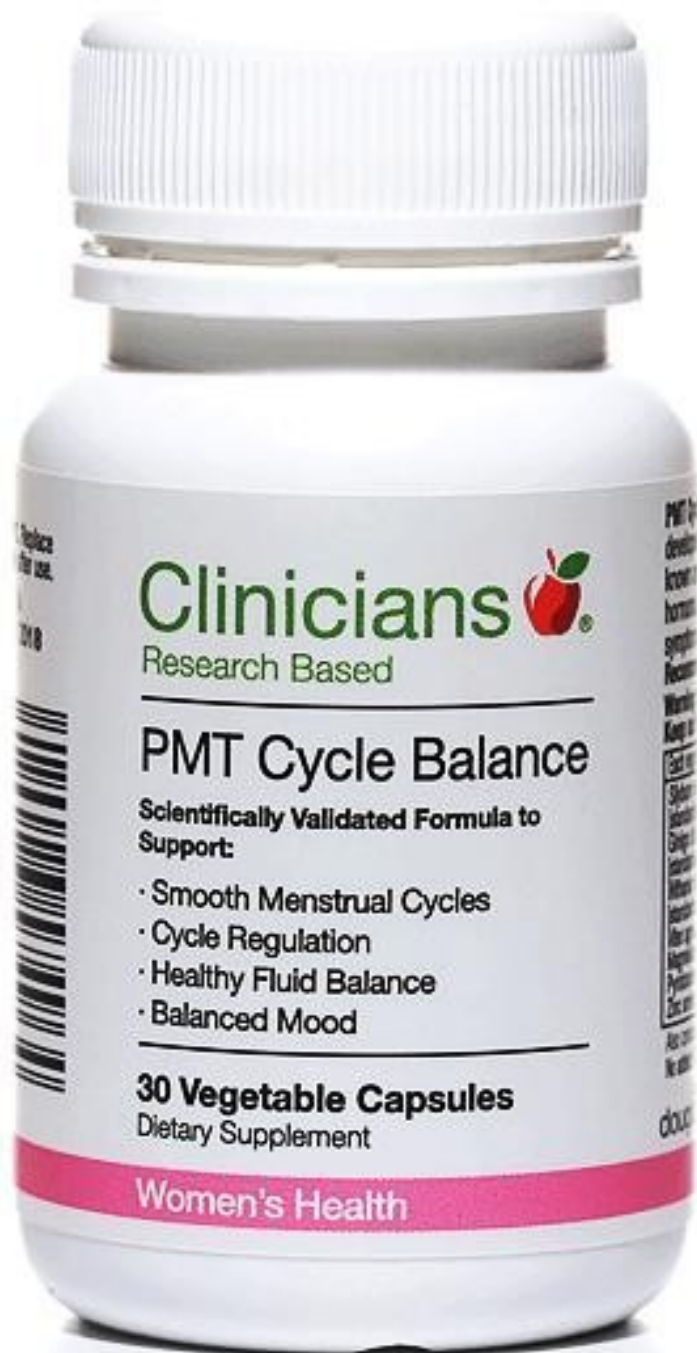
for

women









Becoming accomplices: considerations for practitioners

- Use form questions that respect sexuality gender identity:
 - Pronouns
 - Name you would like me to call you (may be different from legal or given name—avoid calling these “real” names)
 - Questions reflect anatomy, not gender (e.g. use the category “uterine health” or “menstrual health” instead of “women’s health” or “female reproductive system”)
- Ask only what is needed for assessment and protocols

Becoming accomplices: Client interviews



Dori Midnight, MA

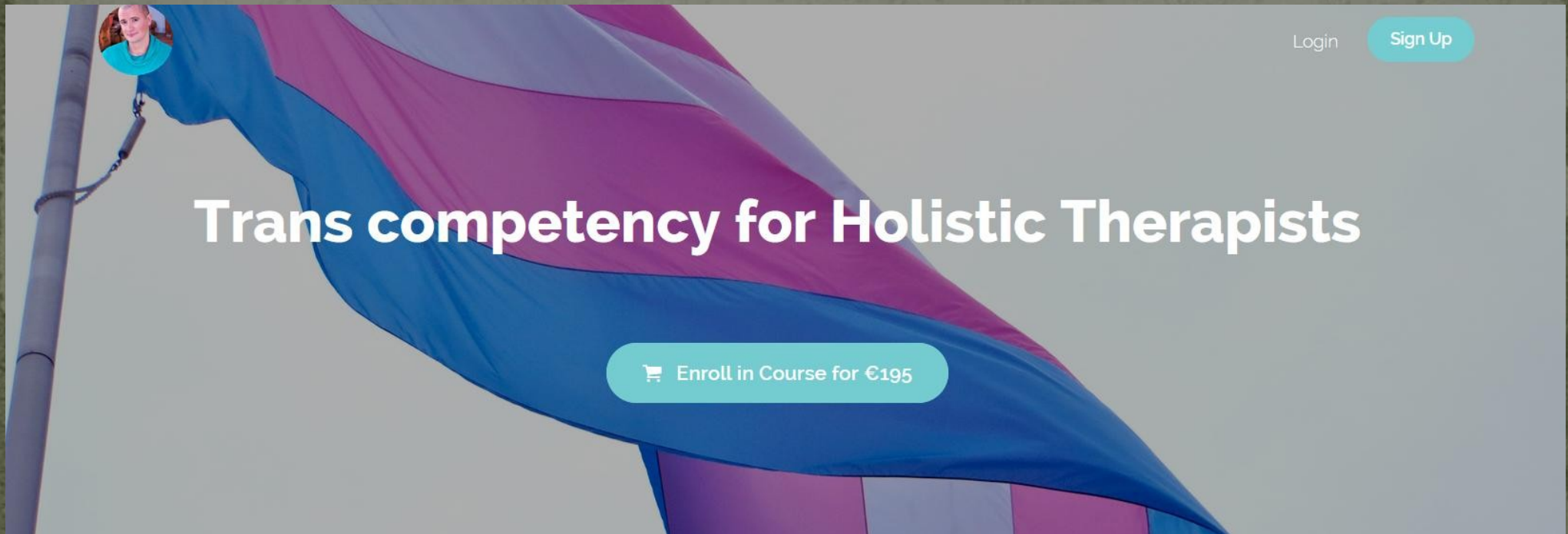
@dorimidnight

- Give reasons for asking sensitive questions
- Ask only what is helpful for the intake; avoid asking questions that serve only your curiosity
- Respect boundaries-- for example, “please feel free to share as much or as little as you are comfortable with”
- If a boundary is present, give information without requiring an answer
- Avoid assumptions about the kinds of sex people have (or don't have)

Becoming accomplices: Focus on client priorities

Healing may look different to your client than it does to you.
Here are a few questions I have found useful:

- “What are your top priorities in working with herbs?”
- “What are your goals for healing in this visit?”
- “Tell me how your body would feel if you were healing from _____”



Otter Liefte

<https://murmurs-of-resistance.teachable.com/p/trans-competency-for-holistic-therapists>



Derrick Jackson, LAc.,
Maryland

Becoming accomplices: Assumptions

Think of a time in your life when someone has made an assumption about you that was inaccurate. What was the assumption based on? How did it affect you?

Think of a time you have made an assumption about someone else that was inaccurate. What did you learn from this experience?

Assumptions, assumptions....

- What are some common assumptions made about...

- Queer people
- Transgender people
- Lesbians
- Gay people
- Transfeminine people
- Transmasculine people
- Intersex people
- People who hold other identities



Avi-Rose, NYC avi-rose.com

- How do these assumptions interrupt someone's care?

Remember....

None of us will never be perfect, but we can educate ourselves and approach clients with respect, humility, and an open heart.

“This is new to me. I respect your gender identity and I’d like to know if there is a way I can reflect that in my language or actions.”

“I welcome any feedback about how this can be a supportive space/experience for you.”



When you do harm

Recognize harm without centering your own feelings

Ask what changes are required in order for someone to feel respected

Educate yourself later



Feedback and accountability



Loba, CA @lalobalocashares

- How do clients give you feedback about your presence or practice?
- Is there a way for those who do not use your services to give feedback?
- What are your emotional responses to feedback?
- How do you use feedback to inform your practices?

What other steps
can we take to
reduce harm and
build an herbal
community that
celebrates all
genders and
sexualities?



Community accessibility: Maybe it's not about you



Accessibility doesn't necessarily mean that people come see you-- how can you support accessibility of herbalism in your community?

Toi Scott, PR

queerherbalism.blogspot.com

Community accessibility: Maybe it's not about you

- Refer people to queer or trans practitioners who practice in their own communities
- Create educational opportunities for members of these communities-- offer scholarships, work trade, or discounts for people whose economic status has been hindered by the forces of the cis-heteropatriarchy
- Help to build LGBTQ community by offering spaces that are safe and comfortable (e.g. when you hold classes, events, etc)

A Few Resources:

people courageously sharing their experiences

- Janet Mock - Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More
- Leslie Feinberg: Stone Butch Blues
- Kate Borenstein: A Queer and Pleasant Danger
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha – Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice
- <https://www.terraincognitamedia.com/features/bleeding-while-non-binary2019>

A Few Resources websites

- Toi Scott: queerherbalism.blogspot.com
- Thebodyisnotanapology.com
- <https://sites.google.com/vtherbcenter.org/transhealth/>
- <https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Providing-Affirmative-Care-for-People-with-Non-Binary-Gender-Identities.pdf>
- Medicine County Herbs:
<http://www.medicinecountyherbs.com/blog/herbalism-as-a-tool-for-social-justice>
- HRC report on fatal anti-trans violence, 2018:
https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/AntiTransViolence-2018Report-Final.pdf?_ga=2.103866755.2085756050.1542665379-16668192.1529444533

A Few Resources

Instagram badasses

- @lalobalocashares
- @thebodyisnotanapology
- @queernature
- @dorimidnight
- @rootsofresistance
- @catalystcommunityherbals
- @seedkeeping
- @alokvmenon

Thank you for being here!

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