HOW TO COMMUNICATE TRANS STORIES WITHOUT MESSING IT UP IN THE PROCESS

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IN RECENT YEARS, WE HAVE OBSERVED HOW CERTAIN MEDIA OUTLETS HAVE APPROACHED TRANS* STORIES WITH CONCEPTUAL ERRORS THAT REINFORCE STEREOTYPES AND MISINFORMATION. THEREFORE, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RELEASE OF NIÑXS, A DOCUMENTARY THAT EXPLORES THE STORY AND THE PROCESS OF SELF-DISCOVERY OF KARLA, A TRANS* TEENAGER IN TEPOZTLAN, MEXICO, WE HAVE PREPARED THIS GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY AND SUPPORT THE MEDIA COVERAGE AROUND NIÑXS.

HERE ARE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONTRIBUTE TO ACCURATE, RESPECTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF TRANS* PEOPLE AT 2025.

ABOUT NIÑXS

TITLE: NIÑXS
LENGTH: 84 MIN
COUNTRY: MEXICO, GERMANY
LANGUAGE: SPANISH
YEAR: 2025
DIRECTOR: KANI LAPUERTA
PRODUCER: SULEICA PINEDA RODRÍGUEZ
CO-PRODUCERS: ANKE PETERSEN, DIRK MANTHEY, MARTHA OROZCO
PRODUCTION: LA SANDÍA DIGITAL
CO-PRODUCTION: SPARROWS ON ROOFTOPS, MARTFILMS
ACCESIBILITY: SUBTITLES IN SPANISH, ENGLISH AND GERMAN. AUDIODESCRIPTION IN SPANISH & LSM INTERPRETATION.

SYNOPSIS:
IN THE MAGICAL TOWN OF TEPOZTLÁN, MEXICO, FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD KARLA INTIMATELY, AND UNABASHEDLY, GUIDES AUDIENCES IN HER JOURNEY FOR SELF-DISCOVERY, AS SHE NAVIGATES THE JOYS AND UNCERTAINTIES OF ADOLESCENCE, ALONGSIDE SOCIETY'S GENDER PREJUDICES.

WHILE KARLA NAVIGATES HER TRANSITION, KANI SHAPES EIGHT YEARS OF FOOTAGE INTO A JOYFUL FILM. THROUGH KARLA'S EXPLORATION OF HER TRANSGENDER IDENTITY, THE FILM PRESENTS AN EMPOWERING, YET SWEET COMING-OF-AGE STORY ABOUT SELF-EXPRESSION, RESILIENCE, AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF GROWING UP, THAT IS AS SPECIFIC AS IT IS UNIVERSAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF MINDFUL COMMUNICATION OF TRANS* STORIES IN 2025

Trans narratives not only challenge us: they enrich us. They show us that there are other ways of inhabiting the world, of building bonds, of naming and reinventing ourselves.
In a context where discourses of hate still exist, narratives of affirmation, tenderness, joy and possibility become even more valuable.

From a human rights-based communication approach, it is not only a matter of avoiding harm, but of amplifying what is already flourishing: families that accompany, communities that support, children who know they are valuable just as they are. Stories like Karla's, in NIÑXS, remind us that being trans is also love, creativity and collective strength.

Taking care of how we name, how we frame and how we tell trans stories is also a concrete way of committing to social justice and the right to a dignified life for all people. It is to recognize that communication can be a tool for structural transformation: that it not only informs, but also shapes imaginaries, sensibilities and possible realities.

That is why, instead of focusing on morbidity, scandal or supposed controversy, we are committed to telling the luminous, the courageous, that which is already changing the world. Because in diversity there is beauty, in authenticity there is power, and in every story told with dignity there is a possibility for the future.

Communicating responsibly about the experiences of trans and non-binary people also means choosing words that affirm life, that build justice, that embrace humanity in all its forms and that show trans and non-binary children and adolescents that their existence is not condemned to violence or pain, but that it is also capable, valuable, dignified and full of power. Telling trans stories from the perspective of hope and respect is a way to support them, to open the way, to tell us - with facts and narratives- that we deserve to inhabit the world with freedom and joy.

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMUNICATION OF NIÑXS

This guide is grounded in a human rights-based approach to communication, radical tenderness and hope. It recognizes that narratives have power: they can reinforce systems of oppression or open paths to more just futures.

At NIÑXS, we are committed to a communication that:

Recognize trans people as subjects of rights, knowledge and decisions.

Visibilize agency, not just pain.

Avoid reinforcing hierarchies, stereotypes or biomedical discourses.

Protect those who have been historically vulnerable without reducing their identity to a state of risk.

Dialogue with love and care, avoid talking with condescension.

Make the voice of those who live the experiences the focus, not those who give their opinions about the experiences from the outside.

GLOSSARY ⚧

Sex assigned at birth: Newborns are assigned a sex ("male" or "female") according to the appearance of their external anatomy, which is recorded in official documents. However, the development of the human body is complex; sex is neither binary nor determined solely by genitalia. Up to 1.7% of people are born with intersex characteristics.

Gender identity: The internal and personal experience of a person's gender, which may or may not coincide with the sex assigned at birth.

Transgender: It is a broad and general term. It refers to people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from the identity assigned at birth based on their biological sex. It is considered appropriate for anyone to use the abbreviated term trans, so that will be the term we will use in this document to refer to this population, always accompanied by a noun (people, community, population, talent, etc.). [2]

Trans Youth: Children and Adolescents whose gender identity does not correspond to the one imposed at birth.

Transsexual: This is an older term that comes from the medical and psychological fields. Many transgender people reject the use of the word "transsexual" and instead replace it with the word transgender. Do not use transsexual to describe a person unless it is a word they use to describe themselves. Some people within the trans community are taking up the use of the word transsexual as a political rallying cry; but it is always best to ask which term the person prefers to use to describe their gender identity. If the person prefers to use transsexual, use it as an adjective: transsexual man or transsexual woman.

Transvestite: Should not be used to describe a transgender person unless that person self-identifies as such. The term Travestite was initially used as a slur, but some trans women have began to reclaim it, especially in countries such as Argentina and Brazil.

Non-Binary Person (NB): Someone whose gender identity does not conform to the gender binary, what we know as male and female. Some non-binary people prefer to use gender-neutral or neo-pronouns.

[2] Baker McKenzie. Manual de Inclusión de personas trans en los espacios laborales. Actualización 2025

Trans Man: A man who was assigned female at birth. He may use this term to describe himself or simply identify as male. Use whatever term the person tells you to use to describe their gender.

Trans woman: A woman who was assigned male at birth. She may use this term to describe herself or simply identify as a woman. Use the term the person uses to describe their gender.

Gender Affirmation (Avoid the term "sex change"): Gender Affirmation is the process a person undertakes to align their gender expression and/or body with their gender identity. It is a complex process that occurs over a variable period of time and the exact steps involved will also vary from person to person. Affirmation may or may not involve social aspects (telling family, friends and co-workers, using a different name, using different pronouns, dressing differently, starting or stopping wearing makeup and jewelry, etc.), legal aspects (changing name and/or sex marker on official documents), medical aspects (hormone therapy and/or one or more surgical procedures).

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity coincides with the sex assigned at birth according to their genital characteristics.

Cisnormativity: Expectation, belief or stereotype that all people are cisgender, or that this condition is the only normal or acceptable condition.

Transphobia: Aversion, fear or hatred towards trans people. It can manifest itself in many different ways

Misgendering: Referring to a person using a name, pronoun or treatment that does not correspond to their gender identity. It may occur intentionally or unintentionally, but it always generates negative effects and constitutes a form of violence.

Inclusive language: Refers to any verbal or written expression that uses neutral vocabulary, or uses both feminine and masculine terms clearly. It brings visibility to population groups that are under-recognized, discriminated against or excluded. It also avoids generalizations of the masculine for situations and activities where both women and men appear.

Deadname: Name assigned at birth that a trans person no longer uses to refer to themselves.

Gender expression: It is the manifestation of a person's gender. It may include the way of speaking, mannerisms, mode of dressing, personal behavior, behavior or social interaction, body modifications, among other aspects. It constitutes the expressions of the gender that each person lives, whether imposed, accepted or assumed.

ANTI- GLOSSARY

By avoiding these terms and expressions, we contribute to a more dignified, accurate and respectful coverage of trans stories:

""Born in the wrong body."

This phrase pathologizes the trans experience. Trans bodies **ARE NOT WRONG**, they are beautiful and valid.

"Sex change".

This expression simplifies the trans experience to a physical change.

""They used to be a boy/girl."

This sentence denies continuity of identity, and does not provide any relevant information about the person.

"They haven't made their full transition yet".

This phrase is not correct, it has a medical and binary charge, rendering social, emotional or symbolic processes invisible.
It can evoke the idea that trans people were on "one side" and are now "moving to another". We instead recommend to talk about "identity affirmation".

""Transsexuals."

This expression is dehumanizing and generalizes; it would be more correct to say "Trans people" or "transgender people".

"He went from boy to girl".

Being trans is not a "change" from one thing to another, but the recognition of one's identity that has always been there and that is mutating in all people (cis or trans) throughout their life.

Questions about surgeries or genitalia

Not only are they unnecessary, they also divert attention from the really important issues..

To ask "When did your transition begin?"

This question can be invasive. It is better to only ask this question if the person mentions it before and to show respect for their privacy. Instead, you can ask them about their hobbies, likes, profession, etc..

FUNDAMENTAL PRINICIPLES FOR THE COMMUNICATION AROUND NIÑXS*

* IN RESPECT OF IDENTITIES

Always use the name and pronouns chosen by the person. Never use their "deadname" or place quotation marks around their name or pronouns.

Gender Identity IS NOT THE SAME as Sexual Orientation.
A trans person, just like a cisgender (non-trans) person, can have any sexual orientation.

Trans voices first.
Trans people are the first experts on their own experiences. Always prioritize talking to them over "CIS experts". If you need a medical or psychological perspective, seek out trans professionals for a more authentic view.

Trans people don't just talk about gender!
Trans people, apart from being trans, can give their opinion on other topics, in fact, there are trans people who are experts in almost every field of knowledge. Invite them to talk about other topics beyond gender, such as health, art, science, or their experience watching NIÑXS 🙂.

It is time we leave the narrative of suffering behind.
Trans people are not here to be talked over, defended or pitied. We are here to live our lives like anyone else: to love, learn, play, create, make mistakes, change our minds, lead, rest... To communicate responsibly about trans and non-binary childhoods is to recognize all that they already are, what they feel, what they want and what they bring to the table. It means to stop focusing on the pain and start talking about what makes them special beyond their gender identity.

Let's forget the Closet for a moment.
This narrative is more than covered. Focus more on stories that explore accomplishments, leadership and contributions of trans people in various fields, leaving the basic, repetitive questions behind.

* GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Do not record without informed consent (of the person, and their accompanying adults)

Avoid publishing publicly identifiable images without prior approval.

Avoid exposing personal information such as school or family relations.

Take care of their voice, bodily integrity, and/or situations that may violate them.

Prioritize how they want to be narrated (if at all)

Remember: That our words do not define trans youths, but open the way for them to narrate their own stories and their truths. To communicate with dignity is also to open the possibility of a more just world.

GOOD SOURCES OF REFERENCE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

US:
Resources for trans youth, their parents and educators
https://www.transyouthequality.org/for-youth
https://www.transyouthequality.org/for-parents
https://www.transyouthequality.org/for-educators

Resources for transgender youth and their families
https://www.childrens.com/keeping-families-healthy/community-resources/resources-for-transgender-youth-and-their-families

UK:
Resources, access to help lines, youth communities and information:
https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/young-people/

National charity offering LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing resources
https://lgbt.foundation/

Germany:
Peer-to-Peer Beratung, Ratgeber, Rechtliches
https://dgti.org/

Information für Eltern von transgender Kindern
https://dgti.org/2023/06/22/eltern-von-transgender-kindern/

Switzerland:
Transgender Network Switzerland - Rechte, Links & Literatur
https://www.tgns.ch/de/information/kinder_jugendliche/

Switzerland-wide resources and links
https://queerz.ch/en/ressourcen/


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