LGBT 101: Definitions

✔ Developing a shared language increases understanding and facilitates better communication
✔ For people whose experiences have largely been defined by others, having the ability to define their own experience is powerful
✔ Some terms (especially ones that have been reclaimed) are subject to ownership

**Biological Sex:** Refers to a person’s biology in terms of anatomy, chromosomes, and/or hormones, ie. XX (female), XY (male). There are many combinations of these physical characteristics. Sex is also a label assigned at birth by doctors, parents and others based on characteristics developed by science and social constructs.

**Intersex:** A person born with biological characteristics (anatomy, chromosomes, and/or hormones) that don’t seem to fit in the current system of sex assignment. Approximately 1.7% of the population.

**Gender:** Social construct and process of roles and expectations assigned based on biological sex.

**Gender Identity:** How a person feels inside about who they are in relation to social definitions of gender. Everyone has a gender identity and for most people gender identity aligns with their biological sex.

**Gender Expression:** How a person expresses their gender to the outside world. Refers to an individual’s characteristics and behaviors, such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

**Trans/Transgender:** Refers to someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations for their biological sex. It can be broad term for all people who do not match society’s expectations regarding gender, including transsexuals and cross-dressers; a political word that binds together multiple communities of people who experience trans oppression. Transgender refers to gender identity, not sexual orientation.

**Transsexual:** A person who adopts a sex identity different from that assigned at birth, who may or may not take hormones or alter their body surgically.

**Sexual orientation:** is defined by a person’s enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Again, this "scale" can be thought of as a continuum whereby most people fall somewhere between "attracted to women" or "attracted to men."

**LGBTQ:** Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. Can include an "I" for intersex and “A” for ally.

**Queer:** a term used to describe a sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society. Queer is often preferred by those who strongly reject traditional gender identities, by those who reject distinct sexual identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight, and by those who see themselves as oppressed by the heteronormativity of the larger culture. It can be preferred because of its ambiguity, which allows "queer" identifying people to avoid the sometimes strict boundaries that surround other labels. In this context, "queer" is not always a synonym for LGBT as it creates a space for "queer" heterosexuals as well as "non-queer" ("straight-acting") homosexuals.

**Genderqueer:** Umbrella term for gender identities other than man and woman. People who identify as genderqueer may think of themselves as being both male and female, as being neither male nor female, or as falling completely outside the gender binary.
Ally 101: Ways to Show Your Support

- Remember that there are people in your halls, classes, clubs, and jobs who are LGBTQ.
- Don’t automatically assume your students are heterosexual (or gay).
- When teaching, include LGBTQ people in examples in classes, workshops, and presentations.
- Display affirming materials in a public location to raise awareness and show support.
- Have a good understanding of sexual orientation and be comfortable with your own.
- Be aware of the attitudes toward and stereotypes you may hold concerning LGBTQ people.
- Understand how heterosexism and homophobia affect both LGBTQ people and people who are not LGBTQ.
- Attend LGBTQ events, meetings, and programs.
- Talk with and learn from LGBTQ friends, classmates, and colleagues.
- Educate yourself about LGBTQ history, culture and issues.
- Avoid homophobic remarks, jokes, and statements. As you feel comfortable, confront these actions of hatred.
- Provide correct information when you hear myths and misperceptions about LGBTQ people.
- Respect the boundaries of the students with whom you have contact.
- Do not "out" people unless given permission to do so.
- Be aware of the coming out and transitioning are dynamic processes.
- Remember that behavior does not equal identity (and vice versa).
- Be supportive of students who identify as heterosexual but are attracted to people of the same gender.
- Support your student with their decisions about “coming out.”
- Refer students for counseling when appropriate.
- Respect students’ rights to remain closeted: for many students there can be tremendous negative consequences to coming out, including loss of friends, family, financial support, and basic safety.
- Join with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons to protect their civil rights and constitutional freedoms.
- Encourage your group or organization to adopt a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Suggest changes to publications and forms to remove non-inclusive language.
- Use inclusive language. Ask, "Are you seeing someone?" or, "Are you in a committed relationship?" instead of, "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" or, "Are you married?" Use "partner" or "significant other" instead of assuming that someone has a husband or wife.
- Validate people's gender identity by using their chosen name and pronouns. If you are unsure how to refer to a person's gender, simply ask them in a respectful manner. Privately asking, “What pronouns do you prefer?” is far more appropriate than asking, “Are you a man or a woman?” in front of others.
- Provide support to LGBTQ individuals who are targeted or subjects of heterosexist or homophobic jokes, comments, or assumptions - this can be done publicly or privately.
- Remember that LGBTQ people are a diverse group. Each community within the larger LGBTQ community has unique needs and goals.
- Support LGBTQ students because they add to the vibrancy of thought, activity and life on campus - not because it's politically correct.
- Help students understand that LGBTQ people are a presence on campus and in society. You do not have to condone behaviors, but they must learn to live peaceably with them.