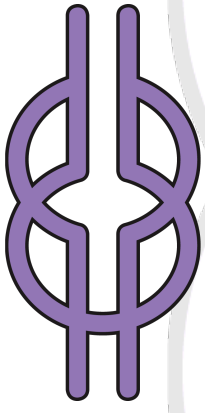
National Black Justice Coalition

NBJC.org

LGBTQ/SGL

Cultural Competency Training: Definitions & Terminology



It can sometimes be difficult for a university community to talk about sexual orientation and gender expression identity because it feels uncomfortable, taboo, or because you're afraid to say the wrong thing. This terminology review is created to assist university personnel and student leaders in learning about the LGBTQ/SGL community.

GENERAL LGBTQ/SGL TERMINOLOGY

ADVOCATE:
A person who actively works to end intolerance, educates others, and support social equity for a marginalized group.

ALLY:
(typically straight- or cis-identified) person who supports, and respects for members of the LGBTQ community. While the word doesn't necessitate action, we consider people to be active allies who take action upon this support and respect, this also indicates to others that you are an ally.

FAMILY OF CHOICE (CHOSEN FAMILY):
Persons or group of people an individual sees as significant in his or her life. It may include none, all, or some members of his or her birth family or origin. In addition, it may include individuals such as significant others, domestic partners, friends, and coworkers. NOTE: Often times, LGBTQ youth are rejected from birth family and kicked out of the home. There are networks within the LGBTQ community that take in LGBTQ youth and give them a home in transition.

EQUALITY VS. EQUITY:
Equality is the fairness of everyone being afforded justice, Equality has become synonymous with "leveling the playing field." Equity is being granted the accessibility as everyone to receive justice. We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality. "more for those who need it".

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

LIFESTYLE:
An offensive term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ is a choice.

LGBTQIA+:
An umbrella term that stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersexual, asexual, ally, and others”.

MARGINALIZED:
Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

OPPRESSION:
Systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of and misinformation about people who are (perceived to be) members of a particular group. Oppression is always backed up by social norms and cultural power.

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION:
The process by which, an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

INVITING IN:
The practice of disrupting the expectation that LGBTQ/SGL people must come out and otherwise recite the moment when they were told by the world that they are not “normal” or otherwise “like every one else”. Inviting In celebrates the diversity that exists within the Black community and emphasizes the importance of everyone doing the work to demonstrate competence and compassion such that at some point others may invite you into knowing intimate parts of themselves.

OTHERING (OTHERIZE):
Language that refers to them or —others; typically used to identify a separation between and among groups. It has been used in social sciences to understand the processes by which societies and groups exclude 'Others' whom they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society.

OUTing:
OUTing refers to revealing someone else‘s sexual orientation or gender identity to others without the consent of the person.

TERMS TO KNOW: Sexual Orientation

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
This is determined by whether someone is attracted to people of the same sex, the opposite sex, both sexes, or neither sex. It encompasses sexual behaviors as well as desires and fantasies.

ASEXUAL:
Having a lack of (or low level of) sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest or desire for sex or sexual partners. Asexuality exists on a spectrum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex to those who experience low levels and only after significant amounts of time, many of these different places on the spectrum have their own identity labels.

BDSM (Bondage, Discipline/Domination, Submission/Sadism, and Masochism):
Terms referring to deriving pleasure from inflicting or receiving pain, often in a sexual context. Practices of BDSM are often misunderstood as abusive, but when practiced in a consensual manner, it can be part of a healthy sex life.

BISEXUAL:
A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to male/men and females/women.

BICURIOUS:
A curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning and some prefer to use it instead of bisexual).

BIPHOBIA:
A range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have/express towards bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the queer community as well as heterosexual society.

BOTTOM:
A person who is said to take a more submissive role during sexual interaction.

SEXUAL FLUID(ity):
Generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

PANSEXUAL:
A person who is fluid in sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This is characterized by the potential for aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire for people, regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.

LESBIAN:
Term given for females who are sexually and emotionally attracted to some other females.

GAY:
Term used to describe males who are sexually and emotionally attracted to other males.

MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM):
Men who engage in same-sex behavior, but who may not necessarily self-identify as gay.

HOMOPHOBIA:
Hatred or fear of homosexuals - that is, lesbians and gay men - sometimes leading to acts of violence and expressions of hostility.

INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA:
The experience of shame, aversion, or self-hatred in reaction to one‘s own feelings of attraction for a person of the same sex.

HETERONORMATIVITY:
An (often subconscious) assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and the attitudes associated with that assumption. Heteronormative behavior often shows up in unintentional ways in everyday life.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

HETEROSEXISM:
The system of oppression that reinforces the belief in the inherent superiority of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships, thereby negating gays', lesbians', and bisexuals' lives and relationships. NOTE: Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE:
Term that describes the personal and legal right/benefits granted to heterosexual individuals and couples that are denied to non-heterosexual individuals and couples.

QUEER:
Used as an umbrella term by some within the LGBT community to refer to a person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex or transgender. Queer can also be a political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.

QUESTIONING:
For some, the process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression takes time. Their sexual orientation may be fluid, so an umbrella term is used to be inclusive, sometimes used by LGBTQ people to refer to the entire LGBT community.

SAME GENDER LOVING / SGL:
Term used by members of the African-American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of Anglo/European descent.

GYNESEXUAL/ GYNEPHILIC:
Being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to woman, females, and/or femininity.

DEMISEXUAL:
A person who does not experience sexual attraction unless they form a strong emotional connection with someone.

Terms to Know: GENDER IDENTITY/EXPRESSION

GENDER BINARY:
The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

GENDER-EXPANSIVE: Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUN:
A preferred gender pronoun, or PGP, is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. NOTE: In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, which can create an issue for transgender and gender-nonconforming people, who may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. (e.g. he, him & his, she, her & hers or they, them & theirs).

GENDER SPECTRUM:
The concept that gender exists beyond a simple "male/female" binary model, but instead exists on an infinite continuum that transcends the two. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

GENDER EXPRESSION:
The ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, etc.

GENDER IDENTITY:
One's innermost concept of self as male, female, or intersexual.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GENDER ROLE:
The socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on females (femininity) and males (masculinity).

GENDER CONFORMITY:
When your gender identity and sex “match” (i.e. fit social norms). For example, a male who is masculine and identifies as a man.

GENDER TRANSITION: The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.

GENDER DYSPHORIA:
Psychological term used to describe the feelings of pain and anguish that arise from a transgender person‘s conflict between gender identity (internal experience) and biological sex (external experience).

GENDER-NEUTRAL:
Nondiscriminatory language to describe relationships-e.g. “spouse” and “partner” are gender-neutral alternatives to the gender-specific words “husband”, “wife”, “boyfriend”, and “girlfriend”

GENDER QUEER:
Person whose performance of gender is not normative in relation to what is socially expected. A rejection of the gender binary (male/female) in favor of a more fluid, nontraditional identity. This term became popular as increasing amounts of gender variant people voiced discomfort in and exclusion from the transgender community.

***GENDER FLUID(ity):**
Generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

GENDER NON-CONFORMING/GENDER VARIANT:
People who have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. May or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.NOTE:These individuals possess gender traits that are not normatively associated with their biological sex. For example, “Feminine” behavior or appearance in a male is gender-variant as is “masculine” behavior or appearance in a female. Gender-variant behavior is culturally specific .

INTERSEX:
People born with biological aspects of both sexes to varying degrees.

TRANS/TRANSGENDER:
Person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on sex assigned at birth. Trans with an * is often used to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term. NOTE: Referred to as Transgender, not Transgendered.

PASSING:
Term for trans* people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender/sex identity (regardless of birth sex) or a LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

FTM:
Abbreviation for “female to male” that describes a transgender individual who was born a female and identifies as male. Also known as a Trans man.

MTF: Abbreviation for “male to female” that describes a transgender individual who was born a male and identifies as female. Also known as a Trans woman.

TRANSPHOBIA:
Hatred, fear or sense of disgust, related to trans* people.
**Offensive Related Terms: He-She, Tranny & It*

CISGENDER:
A person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and male-assigned). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not Trans*, they are cisgender.

CISNORMATIVITY:
The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to Trans* identities or people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.

ANDROGYNY/OUS:
A gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; Occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy.

EFFEMINATE:
An offensive term used to describe a man whose behavior, appearance, or speech is considered to be similar to that traditionally associated with women or girls.

METROSEXUAL:
A man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy, or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender normative.

FEMININE OF CENTER: Phrase that indicates a range of terms of gender identity and gender presentation for folks who present, understand themselves, relate to others in a more feminine way.
*URBAN RELATED TERMS: Femme or Feminine.

MASCULINE OF CENTER:
Phrase that indicates a range of personal understanding both in terms of gender identity and gender presentation of lesbian/queer women who present, understand themselves, relate to others in a more masculine way.
*URBAN RELATED TERMS: Butch, AG (Aggressive) or Boi

URBAN LGBTQ TERMINOLOGY

AG/AGGRESSIVE:
A Lesbian that looks and dresses like a tomboy or is masculine.

IN THE CLOSET/CLOSETED:
An individual who is not open to themselves or others about their sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for one's safety, peer or family rejection or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc. Also known as being "in the closet." When someone chooses to break this silence they "come out" of the closet.

BUTCH:
Term to describe a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. "Butch" is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but is also proclaimed as an affirmative identity label for some.

BUTCH QUEEN:
Term to describe a gay man that is neither extremely feminine, nor extremely masculine and can easily portray both mannerisms.

BOI:
A term used in the lesbian community, a young transgendered/androgynous/masculine person who is biologically female and presents themselves in a young, boyish way; a boidyke; often also identifies as gender queer.

DRAG KING:
An individual who performs masculinity theatrically.

DRAG QUEEN:
An individual who performs femininity theatrically.

FAMILY:
A contextual term that can mean chosen family or recognition of another LGBTQ person.

FEMME:
Individual who identifies themselves as feminine, whether physical, mental or emotionally. This is often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman. The socially-constructed gender role assigned to females.

LATINX:

1. Gender non-conforming people of Latin American descent.
2. LGBT/Queer people that identify with their adopted gender as opposed to their biological sex, and with Latin culture.
3. The community of trans and gender-neutral people in the Americas that identify with their Latino* heritage.

LIPSTICK:

Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Sometimes used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

QUEER:

Term that originally meant strange or odd, but now can be used by anyone who is sexually different but may or may not mean gay. Queer covers any type of gender or sexual attitudes that are outside of the mainstream of one man one woman monogamy. You can be Queer and still have a heterosexual orientation if you have unusual sexual or gender identities, philosophies or habits.

MX.:

Typically pronounced mix, a title (e.g., Mr., Ms., etc.) that is gender neutral. It is often the option of choice for folks who do not identify within the cisgender binary.

POC:

(People of Color) term used to describe both Black & Brown people.

STUD:

Term most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as ‘butch’ or ‘aggressive’.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TERMS TO AVOID

HOMOSEXUALITY:
Offensive term used to define attraction (sexually, physically, and emotionally) to the same sex, and is one orientation on the continuum from homosexual to bisexual to heterosexual. *Preferred - "gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people".*
NOTE: Please use gay or lesbian to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered.

***BULL DAGGER:**
An offensive term used to describe very masculine lesbian, which often carries a more racialized meaning than its synonyms bulldyke, bulldiker, and diesel dyke. (African-American centered)

***DYKE:**
An offensive term referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it can is adopted affirmatively by many lesbians (and not necessarily masculine ones) as a positive self-identity term.

***FAGGOT:**
An offensive term used to describe a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. It is occasionally used as a self-identifying affirming term by some gay men, at times in the shortened form ‘fag’.

***SISSY:**
An offensive term used to describe an effeminate man.

***TRANSVESTITE/TRANSEXUAL:**
An offensive term negatively used to describe a person who dresses as the binary opposite gender expression for any one of many reasons, including relaxation, fun, and sexual gratification (often called a “cross-dresser,” and should not be confused with Transgender) Offensive Crossdresser - someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

Web Sources:

http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/iftoolkits/toolkitrelatedlinks/equalityequity
http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx
http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=effeminate
http://www.glaad.org/reference/offensive
http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms
http://lesbianlife.about.com/od/herstory/g/Bulldagger.htm
http://queerdictionary.blogspot.com/
https://www.pflag.org/glossary