LGBTQIA Defined

Many people have the desire to be allies to the LGBTQIA community. Often these people are teachers, doctors, friends, and family, anyone really. However, a lack of base knowledge of the community can be an impeding factor for these allies. For any in-depth conversation to take place, common vocabulary must be established. Below are commonly accepted definitions for the letters in LGBTQIA:

- **L**esbian: women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women.
- **G**ay: individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to men who are attracted to other men, but can be applied to women as well.
- **B**isexual: a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders or sexes an individual may be attracted to.
- **T**ransgender: A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth based on anatomical sex.
- **Q**ueer*: used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight. Also used to describe people who have a non-normative gender identity, or as a political affiliation. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, it is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQ community.
- **Q**uestioning: an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **I**ntersex: term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Formerly known as hermaphrodite (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now outdated and derogatory.
- **A**sexual: experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.
- **A**lly: a (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action in support and respect.

Definitions provided by ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com

Bonus point:

What does cisgender mean?

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

*Why Queer?!

Why would we use the term queer with a definition like this: strange; odd.

Many people in the LGBTQ+ (another way to refer to it) community don't just simply fall into one category of being L, or G, or B, or T… etc. I'll use my friend Chris as an example, he is:

- Transgender- female-to-male
- Attracted to women, but is questioning in his desire to sleep with men
- Someone that passes for cisgender male

So every time Chris decides to tell someone that he isn't a cisgender, heterosexual man (which is what you would think if you met him), he just says he's a queer male. And that's to avoid saying, "Well, I'm a trans, female-to-male, man, certainly attracted to women, so straight I guess, but also questioning in my desire for men, so maybe bisexual?"

That is quite an introduction, especially if it's being said to someone that he isn't even attracted to or interested in dating. Ergo, it is a lot simpler to say, "I'm a queer male."

The Four Spectrums of Gender and Sexuality

To someone who is heterosexual and cisgender, it may seem as though we all operate on two, options: Either you're male or female, and either you're straight or gay (maybe also bisexual). And for those people, this makes the most sense. But upon further inspection, and as awareness of Gender and Sexuality Diversity (GSD) grows, there are in fact four:

- The Sex Spectrum
- The Gender Spectrum
- The Gender Expression Spectrum
- The Sexuality Spectrum

All of these options may seem overwhelming to someone straight and cisgender, which is totally understandable. There are such strong ties between society and gender, as well as, society and sexual orientation. Those ties can make it hard to believe that there are so many possibilities out there. We even gender-stereotype from birth and early-childhood:

- Is it a boy or a girl?
- She's gonna be my little princess
- Mommy's little man of the house
- Are you gonna sign Krystal up for ballet?
- I bet Dashawn is gonna play basketball just like his daddy!

So for someone who finds themselves outside of the norm, to say it out loud can feel like a slap in the face to everything society has expected them to be their entire lives. However, once we assess GSD and learn about the four spectrums that we ALL operate on, it can be a little less scary.

The Sex Spectrum:

> This is the easiest one to start with because it's simple: what were you assigned at birth based on your anatomy. Even simpler would be: a penis is a boy, and a vagina is a girl. We're all assigned a Sex a birth, and that sex tends to be what society pressures us to behave like.
>
> So the options here are: Male, Female, and Intersex
>
> It is important to note that this is called Sex, not Gender.

The Gender Spectrum:

Here is where things can be confusing. Let's do a quick refresher on the science of our body shall we? When we're born we tend to have one of two sexual reproductive organs: a penis, or a vagina. Part of that reproductive system are organs that produce hormones, either testosterone (the testicles), or estrogen (the ovaries). As we enter puberty, those organs begin pumping either testosterone or estrogen into our system. Those hormones tell our body it's time to transform from child to adult.

Testosterone causes things like body hair growth, lowering of the voice, muscle development, among other things. Estrogen causes the body to shift its fat storage to prepare the hips for birth, menstruation, and development of breast tissue. However these two sets of organs don't act alone. There is a gland in the brain, the pituitary gland, that aids in the production of, and stimulates production of several other hormones. During puberty, this little guy gets to work. And in the vast majority of people, the work that it does in aligned with the biological sex assigned at birth.

But what if it doesn't? For this very reason, we must define Gender as something different from Sex. Much research has been done on the transgender brain, and while we cannot say it with 100% certainty, there is some consensus that the transgender brain produces hormones that are at odds with the birth genitalia.

As more research is done, and more people come forward with their own personal gender identity, it is becoming clear that Gender is defined in the mind, and is a spectrum. That spectrum ranges from male to female, and everything in between, above, below and around it. Especially true today, the younger generation has forged a belief that gender is experienced differently for each person, and that it is not strictly binary.

The Gender Expression Spectrum

Have you ever stopped to assess how you individually express your gender? What kind of shoes do you where? How do you get your hair cut? Do you wear a purse or carry a briefcase? And have you thought about why?

Gender Expression lives outside of the Sex or Gender that you are. Gender Expression is comprised of how we let the world view us. It isn't simply in a shirt, or a pair of slacks. Some people, regardless of their Gender or Sex, feel really comfortable in clothing or accessories that are made for the gender that they don't identify with. I'll use myself as an example: I was a full-time, professional, drag queen in New York

City. Seriously. I performed four to five nights a week as various clubs, restaurants and bars, telling stand-up, lip-synching, and looking fabulous.

Outside of drag I wore only men's clothing, I only wore make-up during performances, and identify as male in both Sex and Gender. However, for those hours that I was in performance mode, my Gender Expression was purely female. And after the show? A few make-up wipes and a change of clothing later my Gender Expression was male again.

If you look around, or even, within, you'll see that there are many people who don't always abide by Gender stereotypes when Expressing the Gender. There is a whole movement of women wearing tuxedos. And men getting glitter or flowers put into their beards. And that has nothing to do with the people they are attracted to.

The Sexuality Spectrum

As you may know, Alfred Kinsey became well-known for his research into human sexuality in the 40's. His institute published a comprehensive book of research in the field of sexuality in 1948. And what he found was that regardless of gender, there is a spectrum on which we all fall. His scale for this ranges from 0 to 6 with 0 being "exclusively heterosexual," and 6 being "exclusively homosexual."

While it might be easy to make these two end of the spectrum the only options, his work found that many people who live as straight, married men and women had sexual urges, and even experiences with the "opposite sex." Ergo, we have to allow for a range of attraction between the two.

Where do you fall? Are you a zero? Six? Four? Regardless of where you fall, the most important thing to remember is that we all have a right to exist on that spectrum, wherever we may be, without judgement.

Challenging Gender and Sexuality Norms in Curriculum

Gender and Sexuality stereotypes are culturally established. Often our curriculum reinforces those norms by adhering to these stereotypes in an innocent and overlooked kind of way.

Take for instance, the below word problem:

> Lisa has 3 times as many books as she has dolls. Lisa also has 10 more dolls than her age at her upcoming birthday party. Lisa was born April 4th, 2009. How many books does she have?

The math would look like this:

> Upcoming age: 2017 minus 2009 equals 8, so 8 plus 10 equals the number of dolls: 18, and 18 times 3 equals the number of books: 54.

Now, what would change if we just did this?:

> Andrew has 3 times as many books as he has dolls. Andrew also has 10 more dolls than his age at his upcoming birthday party. Andrew was born on April 4th, 2009. How many books does Andrew have?

That math would look like this:

> Upcoming age: 2017 minus 2009 equals 8, so 8 plus 10 equals the number of dolls: 18, and 18 times 3 equals the number of books: 54.

Exactly the same. So what have we done?

Using the below problem, how can you challenge the Gender and Sexuality norms by leaving the math exactly the same and editing the nouns?

> John's mom is driving from home at 60 miles per hour to pick up John's dad at the Crossfit club. The club is 30 miles away. Assuming there is no traffic in both directions, and that we add 5 minutes for John's dad to get into the car, how long will it take John's mom from leaving the house to returning to the house?

Telling the Whole Story

"Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." While this quote is used a lot, I would offer a modification: "Those whose stories **are not told** by history are doomed to **repeat them**."

Any study of the French Revolution will tell us of the inherent danger of monarchy with no representation for the poor. Study of slavery will teach us that there is value in all human life, and we cannot allow that to happen again. Also, we find heroes in our history like Martin Luther King Jr. or Susan B. Anthony. A friend of mine even noted a shift in the response of black school children to the question, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" before and after Barack Obama was elected. Before, precious few black children said President of the United States, but after, many more seemed to like the idea of it. We need to see ourselves in the history we learn in order to learn from it, and in order to make effective change.

Do you know about the Civil Rights Movement? And who was the leader of the Civil Rights Movement that organized the famed March on Washington? And who was a master in peaceful protest? And who actually studied under Gandhi to learn about the practice that led to a huge shift in Civil Rights in America?

That's right! Bayard Rustin. Oh... were you thinking of someone else?

Everyone knows that MLK Jr. was the leader of the Civil Rights Movement and his famed "I Have a Dream" speech from the March on Washington will live in infamy. However, Bayard Rustin was the man who actually organized the March. He also lived in India, so that he could master the art of non-violent protest from the current master, Mahatma Gandhi. And Bayard Rustin was gay. But his narrative has been largely withheld from the Civil Rights readings because of that very fact.

Bayard didn't believe in living a half truth, and he felt that fighting for Civil Rights for Black America went hand in hand with fighting for Civil Rights for gay America. But he was often tamped down by religious objection and the conservative notions of being a male leader. It cannot be denied that he contributed greatly to the Civil Rights Movement, and yet, we don't learn about him.

What does it mean to a child of color to read about MLK Jr? To watch his speech? To hear of his murder? And in turn, what **could** it mean to a queer child to hear about a man that fought for equality long before it was acceptable? A man whose passion for change led him halfway around the world? The man that organized the very March that gave a

platform for MLK Jr to speak his dream?

If our hope as educators is to inspire a new generation to act, which I feel it should be, how can we do that without including every child in the room? Whatever our beliefs, it is undeniable that we live in a global community. Our phones can access news from tomorrow in Japan. Our students know about something happening in England through twitter faster than most major news stations. And our young people are diverse in gender, sexuality, race, religion, creed and country of origin. It is our responsibility as educators to be the holders of truth, and to provide an education that encourages each student in the classroom to live up to their own heroes, not the heroes history books have chosen.