



## Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

### WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Anyone whose identities fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. This includes sexual orientations like lesbian, gay, bi+, asexual, queer, etc.; gender identities and forms of gender expression like transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, agender, gender-diverse, etc.; and intersex people. Though some terms may be relatively new, LGBTQIA+ people have *always* existed in every culture.

**NOTE ON LANGUAGE:** Identity is deeply personal, and language used to describe it is ever-evolving. We must be open to new language as understanding shifts. In the real world, it's vital to use the terms, names, and pronouns others use for themselves. As writers, we choose how our fictional characters identify, but we must be intentional about how we depict their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or intersex status onscreen.

### OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Tragedy:** Characters with sad lives (e.g., HIV/AIDS tragedy porn, forced in the closet, family rejection) that often end in death. So commonplace, the trend is referred to as "Bury Your Gays."
- **Coming Out:** While a common experience, coming out is not the *only* narrative about LGBTQIA+ people to depict, especially portrayals of forced disclosure. Coming out is only one step of the queer journey, and LGBTQIA+ people often explore their identities over time.
- **Are They Even Queer?:** LGBTQIA+ characters shown without distinct queer identifiers or behaviors (e.g., "not into labels," "happens to be gay," queerbaiting) or whose experiences are censored (e.g., shorter/less

## LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

### An Introductory Primer

realistic sex scenes than straight counterparts). These portrayals ignore how LGBTQIA+ people think, feel, act, build community, and understand themselves.

- **Tokens:** LGBTQIA+ characters shown only as sidekicks with no queer friends or dating lives of their own. These characters are used to "diversify" storylines but aren't realistic because most LGBTQIA+ people depend on queer friends and community.
- **Casual Discrimination:** Anti-LGBTQIA+ slurs and jokes that go unscrutinized, especially about trans people. These depictions lead to real-world violence and abuse.

### THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Support & Joy:** Characters of all ages with supportive familial, romantic, and platonic relationships; as positive role models; happy in their careers; healthy and thriving; interacting with knowledgeable healthcare providers; and in community with other queer people.
- **Queer Culture:** Stories about LGBTQIA+ activities and spaces (e.g, sports leagues, Pride, bars, school clubs, support groups) all over the world. Show LGBTQIA+ contributions to history at large and queer history, especially spotlighting the roles of trans and/or BIPOC people.
- **Underrepresented Identities:** Characters under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella who are often overlooked onscreen (e.g., asexual, BIPOC, disabled, from different religious backgrounds, intersex, living in rural areas, older, migrant, non-binary, parents, poor, trans). Examine their specific experiences (e.g., older adults relying on chosen family; intersex children undergoing unnecessary surgeries; lack of social support in rurality; hurdles to adoption and/or parenting).
- **Reclaiming Identity:** Characters that subvert and refute the Eurocentric LGBTQIA+ lens and reclaim their cultural and/or Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality, often erased by Western colonization (e.g., Two-spirit, hijra, māhū, kathoey).

- **Total Inclusion:** Characters in every genre, role (e.g., protagonist, superhero, love interest), and storyline. Depict all kinds of backgrounds, personalities, and jobs.
- **Activism:** Characters fighting for rights, services, and inclusive education. Show solidarity across LGBTQIA+ identities and cisgender, heterosexual characters in solidarity with the queer community.
- **Breaking Norms:** Characters who don't conform to heteronormative standards (e.g., non-nuclear families; gender non-conforming; desire for pleasure and relationships outside societal norms).

### QUICK FACTS

- ➔ In 2021, *20.8% of Gen Z Americans* reported being LGBTQIA+, the highest of any generation. In total, 7.1% of U.S. adults now self-identify as LGBTQIA+.
- ➔ *~3 million LGBTQIA+ Americans* have had a child, and as many as 6 million Americans have an LGBTQIA+ parent.
- ➔ LGBTQIA+ characters are far more likely to be *sexually objectified onscreen* (6.3%) than straight characters (0.6%).
- ➔ LGBTQIA+ youth make up *~40% of all unhoused youth*, while BIPOC queer and trans youth experience homelessness at *even higher rates*.
- ➔ *37% of parents* are uncomfortable with LGBTQIA+ history being taught in school.

Cultures around the world have their own understandings of gender and sexual orientation that fall outside of the Eurocentric LGBTQIA+ lens. Many of these identities also carry communal and spiritual roles within their communities.

## Starting Points

**Identity:** An intrinsic, embodied part of who someone *is* (e.g., race, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability), not the various experiences, ideologies, and preferences they identify *with* (e.g., careers, politics, hobbies). Identity shapes our everyday life, psychology, culture, relationships, behavior, and shared history.

**Gender Identity:** Someone's internal, deeply held understanding of gender (i.e., who they are—man, woman, agender, non-binary, etc.). It's not visible to others, *nor* is it determined by someone's biology or sex characteristics (e.g., chromosomes, reproductive organs).

**Sexual Orientation:** How someone experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction. It's an inherent part of who a person is, not dependent on their sexual experience(s).

**Queer:** A word with many meanings: An umbrella term for the entire LGBTQIA+ community. A way for some to explain they aren't straight but don't feel words like "gay," "lesbian," or "bi" describe their *sexual orientation*. A way for some to describe their non-binary *gender identity* (e.g., queer, genderqueer). Note: Historically, "queer" has been used pejoratively and may still be considered a slur to some, especially older LGBTQIA+ people—but the term is now widely used and accepted by younger generations.

**Remember!** While gender identity and sexual orientation might be fluid for some, they are *not* phases or merely preferences. Also, they are two different things (i.e., a trans person may be straight, gay, bi, etc.).



## Gender Identity Concepts

**Gender Binary:** The *false*, long-held societal and cultural categorization of gender into just two distinct, opposite terms: man or woman—with gendered traits, behaviors, and appearances attached to these distinctions. However, gender *isn't* binary; it's an infinite spectrum, with identities falling between and outside of the man/woman framework.

**Cisgender (or "cis"):** Someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. (The term "cisnet" refers to someone who's both cisgender and heterosexual/straight.)

**Transgender (or "trans"):** Someone whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Like cisgender, trans isn't a gender itself; there are trans women, trans men, trans non-binary people. Note: Trans identity doesn't depend on physical appearance or medical procedures.

**Non-binary:** Someone whose gender identity doesn't fit into the man/woman binary. There are a number of non-binary gender identities (e.g., agender, genderqueer).

**Gender-diverse:** A term to describe gender identities, roles, and expressions outside of the binary framework. Gender diversity specifically acknowledges the many *ways* (e.g., culturally, spiritually) people identify outside of masculine/feminine norms.

**Gender Expression:** The way someone communicates their gender through external means (e.g., clothing, appearance, mannerisms). For many people, their gender expression affirms their gender identity, but this isn't always the case (i.e., wearing masculine clothes doesn't necessarily mean a person is a man or even identifies as "masculine").

**Remember!** Someone can be any gender, regardless of the pronouns they use, their gender expression, or if they've medically transitioned. For some, gender can be fluid, changing over time.

## Sexual Orientation Concepts

**Lesbian:** Women who are only or predominantly sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to other women (or girls who are attracted to other girls).

**Gay:** Men who are only or predominantly sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to other men (or boys who are attracted to other boys). Note: "Gay" can also be used to describe people of other genders who aren't straight (e.g., some women prefer "gay" to "lesbian").

**Bi+:** An encompassing term for people of all genders with the capacity to be sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to more than one gender (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, queer).

**Asexual (or "ace"):** People who experience little or no sexual attraction (to people of any gender). Rather than explaining *who* someone's attracted to, asexuality describes *how* they experience attraction—if they do at all.

**Remember!** Like gender identity, sexual orientation isn't always fixed. For some, it can be fluid, changing over time.

## The "I" in LGBTQIA+

**Intersex:** An umbrella term for anyone born with a wide range of sex characteristics (e.g., genitals, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive organs) that don't adhere to binary male/female bodies. Being intersex simply refers to a person's status (whether someone *is* intersex or not).

**Remember!** Just like everyone else, intersex people can be any gender (e.g., man, woman, non-binary) and sexual orientation (e.g., straight, queer, asexual).

More detailed explorations of these identities, terms, and concepts can be found in the ensuing factsheets and in our [Expanded Glossary](#).