



Union Guide to Discussing LGBTQ+ People and Issues

As LGBTQ+ issues continue to be at the forefront of our national dialogue, it is important for union members and leaders to be able to discuss these topics effectively and non-offensively. This guide seeks to introduce the basic language and concepts inherent in any discussion of the LGBTQ+ experience in the workplace.

Pride at Work's Perspective

- We are pro-union and pro-equality. In keeping with the labor movement motto, “an injury to one is an injury to all,” we support a strong and progressive labor movement that promotes full equality and respect for LGBTQ+ workers and their families.
- Unions have a moral and legal obligation to their members to provide fair representation, which includes representing LGBTQ+ union members and their unique issues equally.
- Unions have a proud track record of standing up for civil, human, and women’s rights, and union organizing continues to be one of the most effective ways for the LGBTQ+ community and all workers to fight discrimination, poverty, and income inequality.

The Basics

LGBT/LGBTQ+ – Stands for **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender**, and **Queer (or sometimes Questioning)** The order and letters included can vary, but LGBTQ or LGBTQ+ are considered standard. The + denotes inclusion of other identities not specifically named and speaks to the expansive nature of sexuality and gender identity. *Note: LGBTQIA+ is also becoming more common. The I and A stand for Intersex and Asexual (or sometimes Ally), all of which are defined below as well.*

Lesbian – a woman whose primary romantic, emotional, physical, and sexual attractions are to other women.

Gay – a man whose primary romantic, emotional, physical, and sexual attractions are to other men. The term is also sometimes used generically to describe sexual orientation regardless of gender.

Bisexual – a person who has significant romantic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions to more than one sex or gender. The frequency, intensity, or quality of attraction is not necessarily directed toward both sexes equally.

Transgender – a broad term relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex. It includes people who feel their biological sex fails to reflect their true gender, and people who refuse to identify with any gender. "Trans" is a prefix that signifies over, beyond, or on the other side. Combined with gender, it gives the idea of a gender spectrum, rather than a male vs. female dichotomy.

Non-Binary – umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a non-binary person).

Questioning – a term for people who are unsure of their sexuality or gender identity and are still in the process of exploring and wish not to be labeled.

Queer: an umbrella term used by some in place of LGBTQ+ to be more inclusive (e.g. “The queer community crosses all demographic lines”). Also sometimes used as a term of identity (e.g. “I am queer.”) which generally indicates an anything not fitting cultural norms around gender identity/expression and sexuality.

Use of the word “Queer” Opinions vary on the use of “queer” – it has historically been a slur, but some in the LGBTQ+ community have reclaimed it as their own. For broad public usage and in formal written materials, and especially for allies, “LGBT” or “LGBTQ+” are more appropriate.

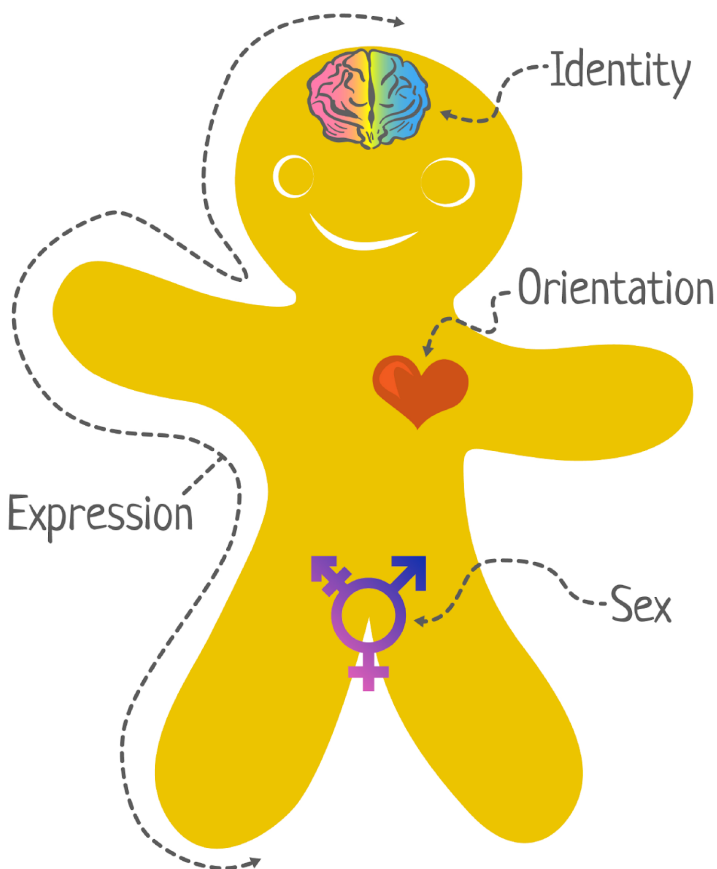
What is an ally?

In this context, an ally is a non-LGBTQ+ person who actively supports and respects members of the LGBTQ+ community, and is willing to actively challenge homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. More generally, an ally is a person who actively supports and respects members of a marginalized community to which they don’t belong.

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Biological Sex

As the graphic below illustrates, sexual orientation, biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression are separate and distinct parts of everyone’s identities. Understanding these concepts is key to understanding LGBTQ+ issues and priorities.

The Genderbread Person



Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It’s the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.



Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.



Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.



Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.

What is Gender?

Gender is not the same as sex. Sex refers to the DNA, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify a person as female or male or intersex. Gender refers to the different social roles that define women and men in a specific cultural context. Your gender is assigned at birth based on those attributes. Gender identities and roles vary greatly in different societies and cultures. Age, race, and class are major factors that determine our gender roles. Over a lifetime, these roles can be fluid.

Gender identity: A person's innate sense of gender – how one thinks of one's own gender. For most of us, our biological sex and gender identity are not in conflict.

Gender expression: The way in which a person presents their gender – the outward way one's gender identity is expressed.

Biological sex: a medical term used to refer to the DNA, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify a person as female or male or intersex. Often referred to as simply “sex,” “physical sex,” “anatomical sex,” or specifically as “sex assigned at birth.”

Sexual orientation: Everyone has a sexual orientation, even if we haven't thought about it. Sexual orientation is simply how we describe physical and emotional attraction between two people. Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual are examples.

Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. “Trans” is shorthand for “transgender.” *Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus “transgender people” is appropriate but “transgenders” is often viewed as disrespectful. In the same vein, “transgendered” is also not an appropriate term. The converse term is cisgender.*

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person who is comfortable with the gender identity and expression they were assigned due to their physical attributes. The converse term is transgender.

Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia

Homophobia is negative feelings, attitudes, actions or behaviors towards anyone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. - or perceived to be any of these. Institutionalized homophobia refers to homophobic laws, policies, and positions taken by social and governmental institutions.

Transphobia and **Biphobia** refer to similar feelings, attitudes, and actions specifically directed towards transgender or bisexual people, respectively.

From dismissive to derogatory to dangerous, anti-LGBTQ sentiment takes many forms and can often be easily overlooked. It is important to take reports of homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia seriously and not dismiss or diminish the impact these behaviors have on those who are on the receiving end.

Additional Terms

Below we've included some other terms to be aware of.

Asexual: A sexual orientation characterized by a persistent lack of sexual attraction toward any gender.

Pansexual: A sexual orientation characterized by sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to “pan.”

Gender non-conforming: Refers to people who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.

Transsexual: An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seeks to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical.

Genderqueer: A term used to describe those who do not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identify with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.

Intersex: A term used for people who are born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that does not seem to fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex conditions are also known as differences of sex development (DSD).

Cross-dresser: The appropriate term for someone who cross-dresses, or dresses in clothing typically associated with the opposite sex. *Note: many people who identify as transgender do not identify as cross-dressers and many cross-dressers identify as cisgender and straight.*

Transvestite is an outdated term you may have heard that was sometimes used to refer to people who cross-dress.

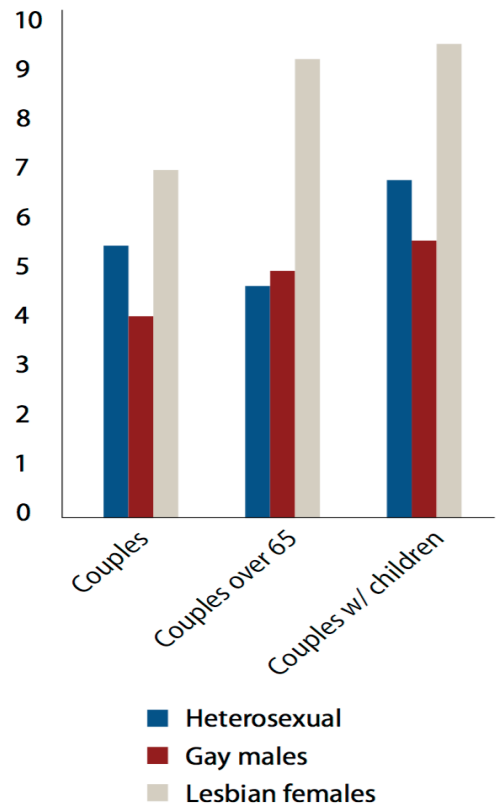
LGBTQ+ Economic Facts

- Among women 18-44 years old, more than a quarter of bisexual women are poor (29.4%) and more than 1 in 5 lesbians are in poverty (22.7%), a rate higher than the poverty rate among heterosexual women (21.1%).
- Similarly, a greater percentage of gay (20.5%) and bisexual men (25.9%) fell at or below the federal poverty line than heterosexual men (15.3%).
- For both women and men in the Gallup data, one in five LGBTQ+ people who live alone report an income at or below the poverty level. The poverty rate for heterosexual people living alone is lower.
- Children in same-sex couple households are almost twice as likely to be poor as in married different-sex couple households.
- African American children in gay male households have the highest poverty rate (52.3%) of any children in any household type, and the rate for African American children living with lesbian couples is 37.7%.
- Low levels of education tend to increase poverty more for women in same-sex couples than for men.
- Women in same-sex couples are more likely to be among the “working poor,” with higher poverty rates than for men in same-sex couples or different-sex married couples.
- Women in same-sex couples who have a disability are more likely to be poor.

Graphic Source: Center for American Progress
Economic Data Source: Williams Institute

Poverty amongst couples and families

Poverty rate



About Pride at Work

We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender labor and our allies. UNION YES!

Pride at Work is a nonprofit organization and an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations.) We build power for LGBTQ+ working people and organize support between the organized labor movement and the LGBTQ+ community for social and economic justice. In addition to our national Pride at Work office, we have chapters that organize at the state and local level around the country.

Our Mission

We seek full equality without restrictions or barriers for LGBTQIA+ individuals in our workplaces, unions, and communities, creating a Labor Movement that cherishes diversity, promotes inclusion, encourages openness, and ensures safety & dignity. We do this through education, alliances, and building solidarity across our large and diverse communities.

Organizing in the spirit of “An Injury to One is An Injury to All,” we oppose all forms of bias and discrimination on the job, in our unions, and in the public square based on sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, veteran status, national or ethnic origin, immigration status, age, disability, HIV status, marital status, religion, or political views.

We recognize that true justice and equality can only be achieved through an organized and empowered working class. We seek to promote the ability of all working people to self-organize and act collectively to advance the power, needs, and interests of the working class in addition to the principles of justice, true democracy, and equality.

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