

Key Concepts for Understanding LGBT Identity Development

Please see the complete Terminology handout for more definitions.

Ally – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

Biphobia - The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQI community, as well as in general society.

Bisexual – A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Coming Out – May refer to the process by which one accepts one's own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersexed person (to "come out" to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersexed status with others (to "come out" to friends, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed individuals.

Discrimination – Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

Gay – 1. Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in "homosexual behavior" identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2. Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

Gender Identity – A person's sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

Heteronormativity—The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality.

Heterosexism – Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power – that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.

Heterosexual Privilege –Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

Homophobia – The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

In the Closet – Refers to a homosexual, bisexual, transperson or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to "correct," whenever possible, intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical

history from the patient. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”; for example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family. Also known as ‘Downlow’ or ‘D/L.’

Institutional Oppression – Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

Internalized Oppression – The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

Intersexed Person—Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

Lesbian – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups, including African-Americans, embrace the term ‘lesbian’ as an identity label.

Oppression – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Outing – Involuntary disclosure of one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

Prejudice – A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members.

Sex - A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because usually subdivided into ‘male’ and ‘female’, this category does not recognize the existence of intersexed bodies.

Sex Identity – How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.

Sexual Orientation – The desire for intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

Sexuality – A person’s exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

Stereotype – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Though often negative, can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact, however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

Transgender – A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

Transition – This term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

Transphobia – The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

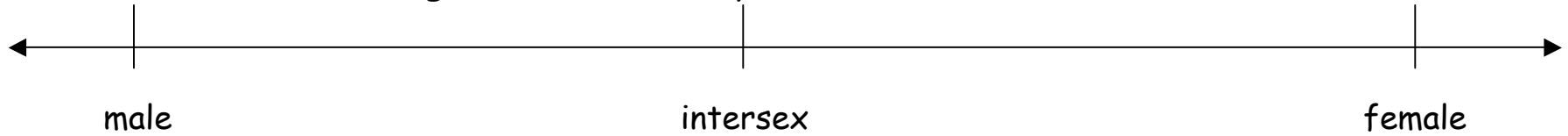
Transsexual – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.

Diagram of Sex, Gender, & Sexuality

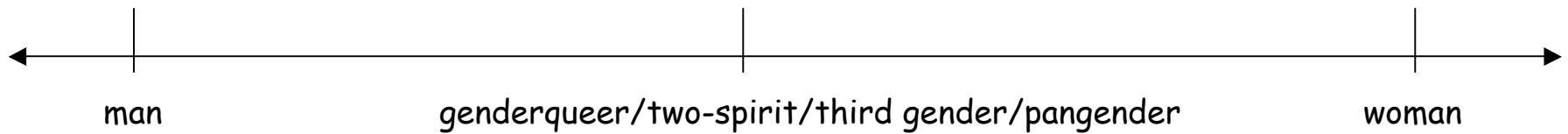
"Normative Man"

"Normative Woman"

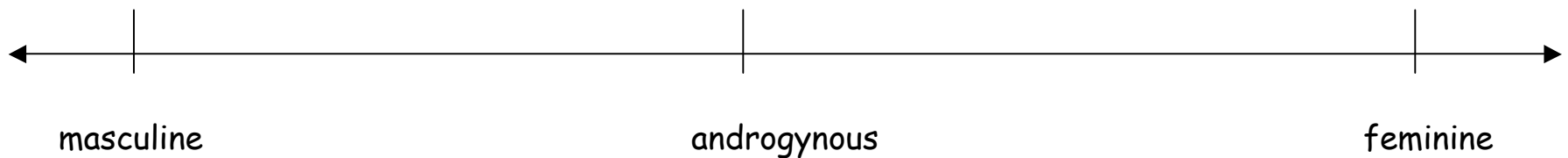
Biological Sex (anatomy, chromosomes, hormones)



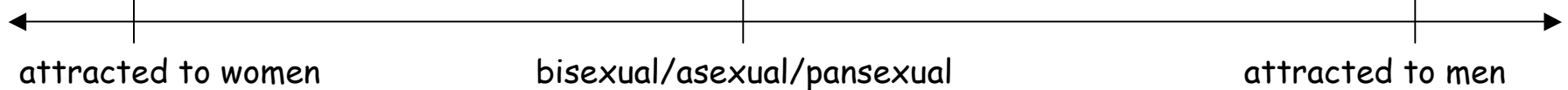
Gender Identity (psychological sense of self)



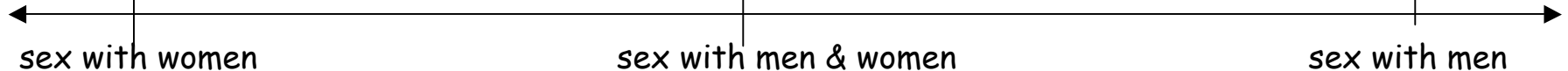
Gender Expression (communication of gender)



Sexual Orientation (identity of erotic response)



Sexual Behavior (sexual behavior)



Adapted from "Diagram of Sex & Gender," Center for Gender Sanity, <http://www.gendersanity.com/diagram.shtml>

Riddle Homophobia Scale

1. **Repulsion**

Homosexuality is seen as a crime against nature. Gays/lesbians are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. Anything is justified to change them: prison, hospitalization, negative behavior therapy, violence, etc.

2. **Pity**

Heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming "straight" should be reinforced, and those who seem to be born that way should be pitied.

3. **Tolerance**

Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people grow out of. Thus, gays/lesbians are less mature than heterosexuals and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays and lesbians should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behavior.

4. **Acceptance**

Still implies there is something to accept. Characterized by such statements as "you're not a lesbian, you're a person" or "what you do is your own business" or "it's fine with me, just don't flaunt it".

5. **Support**

Work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays. People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the homophobic climate and irrational unfairness.

6. **Admiration**

Acknowledges that being gay/lesbian in our society takes strength. People at this level are willing to truly examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.

7. **Appreciation**

Value the diversity of people and see gays/lesbians as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.

8. **Nurturance**

Assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gays/lesbians with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be allies and advocates.

The Riddle Homophobia Scale. Taken from: Wall, V. (1995). Beyond Tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus. A handbook of structured experiences and exercises for training and development. American College Personnel Association.

Cass Model of Coming Out

Identity Confusion

See self as member of mainstream group.
Denial of inner feelings.

*Who am I?
Am I different?*

Identity Comparison

Begin to come out of the "fog."

*Maybe I am gay.
I'm alone.
What are gay people like?*

Identity Tolerance

Encounter someone or something that breaks through the denial system.

*I accept the possibility that I may be gay.
Looking for gay contacts.*

Identity Acceptance

Exploring subculture activities, readings, etc.

*I am gay. Am I okay?
Come out to some people with care.*

Identity Pride

Feel arrogance/pride in new identity and deep rage toward majority culture.
May adopt/heighten stereotypical behaviors or characteristics.
(i.e. "I'm different and proud of it!")
May isolate self from mainstream values and activities.

*I am proud to be gay.
I don't (and won't) pass for straight.*

Identity Synthesis

Acceptance and integration of new identity.
May go through five stages of grief to let go of old identity
and all advantages of heterosexual privilege.
Internalize pride/positive feelings about identity.
Typically is "out" (with friends, family, at work).
More at peace with self.

I am an okay person who happens to be gay

D'Augelli's Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Development

D'Augelli identified six interactive processes (not stages) involved in lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development.

Exiting heterosexual identity

Recognition that one's feelings and attractions are not heterosexual as well as telling others that one is lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status

A "sense of personal socio-affective stability that effectively summarizes thoughts, feelings, and desires" (D'Augelli 1994). One must also challenge internalized myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Developing a personal identity status must be done in relationship with others who can confirm ideas about what it means to be nonheterosexual.

Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity

Creating a support network of people who know and accept one's sexual orientation. Determining people's true reactions can take time. Reactions may also change over time and with changing circumstances.

Becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring

Disclosing one's identity to parents and redefining one's relationship after such disclosure. D'Augelli noted that establishing a positive relationship with one's parents can take time but is possible with education and patience. This developmental process is particularly troublesome for many college students who depend on their parents for financial as well as emotional support.

Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status

This is a more complex process than achieving an intimate heterosexual relationship because of the invisibility of lesbian and gay couples in our society. "The lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive" (D'Augelli, 1994).

Entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community

Making varying degrees of commitment to social and political action. Some individuals never take this step; others do so only at great personal risk, such as losing their jobs or housing.

D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 312-333). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Adapted from:

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 96-98). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.