



# An Introduction to Social Identity, Bias, and Power Dynamics in Helping Relationships: A Primer for Working with LGBTQIA+ Participants

**Presented by:**

**DJ Ralston**, M.A., Ed.D. Candidate, George Washington University

**Development and Contributions from:**

**Katherine Hurley**, M.A., M.F.A., NCC, Ph.D., George Washington University

# Bio: DJ Ralston – Pronouns: they/them/theirs

- Non-Binary/TransMasc, Queer, Geriatric Millennial, Foodie and Muppet Enthusiast
- Professional Background
  - Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Public Workforce Development
  - Technical Assistance – Disability and Employment
- Education
  - Certified (Partner) Work Incentive Coordinator
  - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
  - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
  - Supporting LGBTQIA+ Populations including LGBTQIA+ Students & Youth
  - Social Social Security Work Incentives and Financial Empowerment
  - Organizational Change, Relationship Building, Partnership Development, Training Development



# Session Objectives

- Increased understanding of how social identity contributes to one's mental model including bias(es).
- Increased understanding of intersectionality and the influence of oppression.
- Increased understanding of the inherent power dynamics in helping relationships and how those impact relationships.
- Increased understanding of the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation.

# Early Social Identity Theory

- According to Henri Tajfel, the founder of Social Identity Theory, Social Identity is a person's sense or understanding of who they are based on group membership.
- Tajfel asserted that the groups people belong to give persons a sense of pride and self-esteem.
- Group membership is our connection to the social world and thus give us a social identity.
- Social Identities not only describe who people are, they can also prescribe people's behavior based on those social expectations associated with the group.

# Early Social Identity Theory (cont.)

- Tajfel also asserted that humans as part of their typical cognitive process categorize things and in doing so tend to over-exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities within groups. These groups are then referred to as the “in group” and the “out group”.
- Social Identity Theory posits that the “in group” will seek out negative attributes of the “out group” as a means to enhance their own self image.
- This idea of the human cognitive tendency to categorize or group things coupled with Social Identity Theory’s assertion that humans are prone to over-exaggerate differences and similarities helps explain how identity is socially constructed and how implicit bias occurs.

# Common Examples of Embodied Social Identity(ies)

## Macro Level

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Ability/Disability
- Class/Socioeconomic Status
- Education
- Religion/Faith

## Micro/Meso Level

- Family Member
- Profession (i.e. Lawyer/Doctor/VR Counselor/Teacher/Student)
- Community Member (i.e City Council/School Board Member)
- Identity By Interest (i.e. Baker/Reader/Gardener/DnD)
- Identity by Cause (i.e. Climate Change, Social Justice, Cancer Survivor)



## From Social Identity Theory to the Human Brain, Unconscious Bias, and Mental Models

- Information Processing
  - Consciously aware of only a very small portion of the millions of bits of data we process every second, so our brain creates cognitive shortcuts to help us process.
- Subconscious Mind
  - Categorizes
  - Creates Associations
  - Fills in the Gaps
- Mental Models
  - The frames that help us understand and navigate the world (e.g. the knowledge paradigm). Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions.

# From Social Identity Theory to the Human Brain, Unconscious Bias, and Mental Models



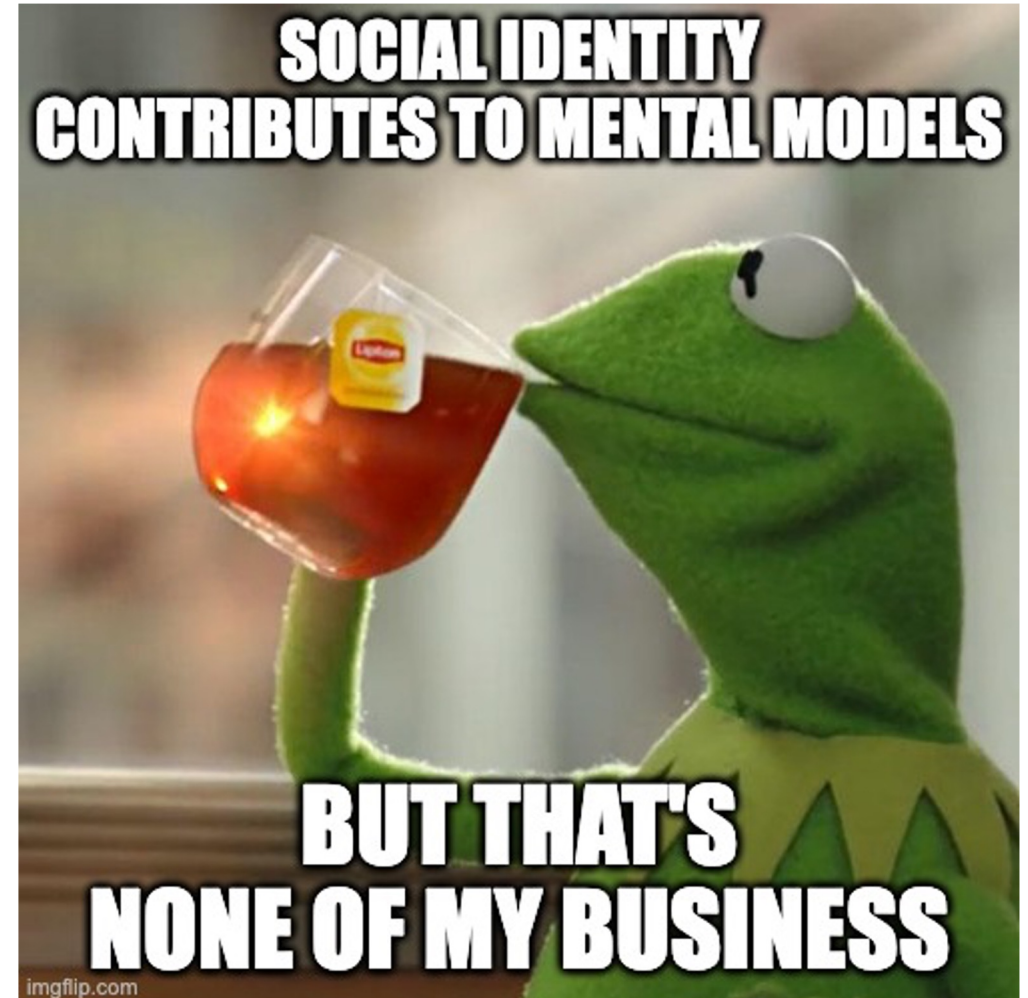
- Unconscious Bias is the result of our limited cognitive capacity
- It is our unintentional preferences formed by our socialization and experiences, including exposure to (social) media
- There are an overwhelming number of studies that have shown the significant impact unconscious bias can have on human cognitive processes
- Unconscious biases are unavoidable we all have them
- What do we do about Unconscious Bias?



# From Social Identity Theory to the Human Brain, Unconscious Bias, and Mental Models (cont.)

## Mental Models

- Shapes what we think and how we understand
- Shapes the connections and opportunities we see
- Shapes the way we simplify complexity
- Shapes our reasoning and how we assign relevance



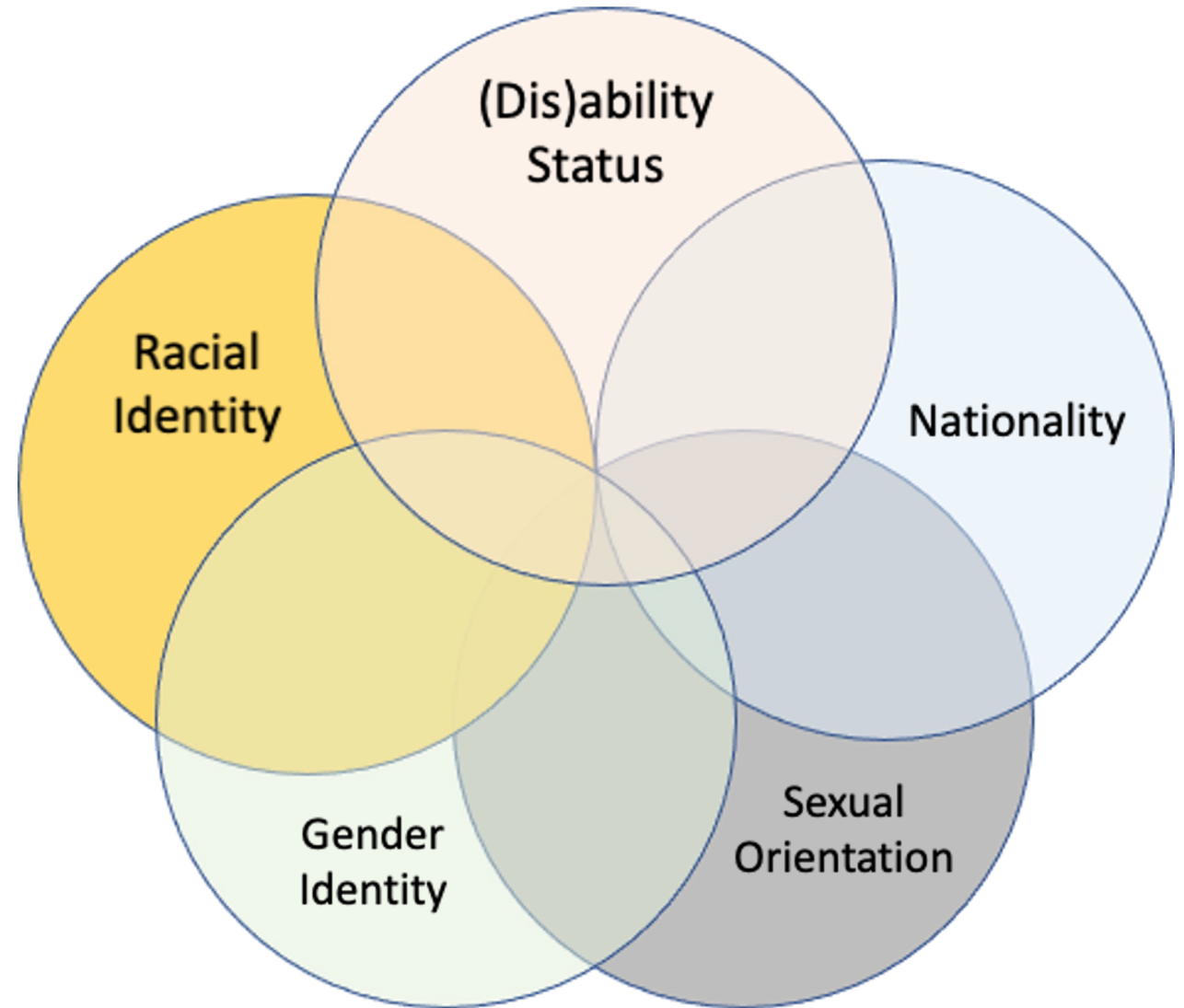
# The Evolution of Social Identity

- The social construction of identity is far more nuanced and dynamic than originally understood and conceptualized (Ratts, Et. Al. 2015).
- Early research and literature understood identity as single variables as opposed to the linked parts which consequently ignores the interconnected system of identities that comprise human identity (Ratts, Et. Al. 2015).
- Mainstream discourse on intersectionality asserts that human identity is comprised of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, religion and disability and that all of these are socially constructed and intersect fluidly a different points in time contributing to one's dynamic positionality as in society (Ratts, Et. Al. 2015).
- What's more this shapes people's understanding and experience of privilege and oppression with their environment influencing which identity is most salient at a given moment in time (Ratts, Et. Al. 2015).
- Recognizing the existence of multiple identities is paramount to understanding the complexities for persons from systematically and historically marginalized and excluded groups.

# Intersectionality

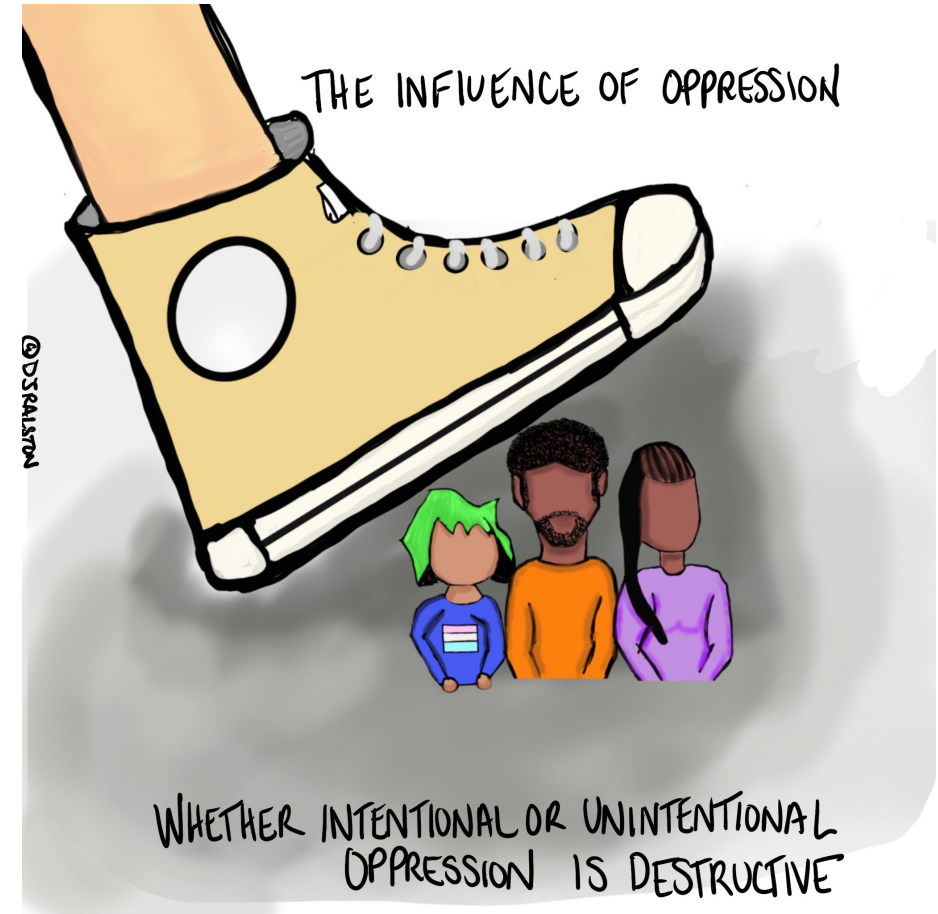
“the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”

- Oxford Dictionary

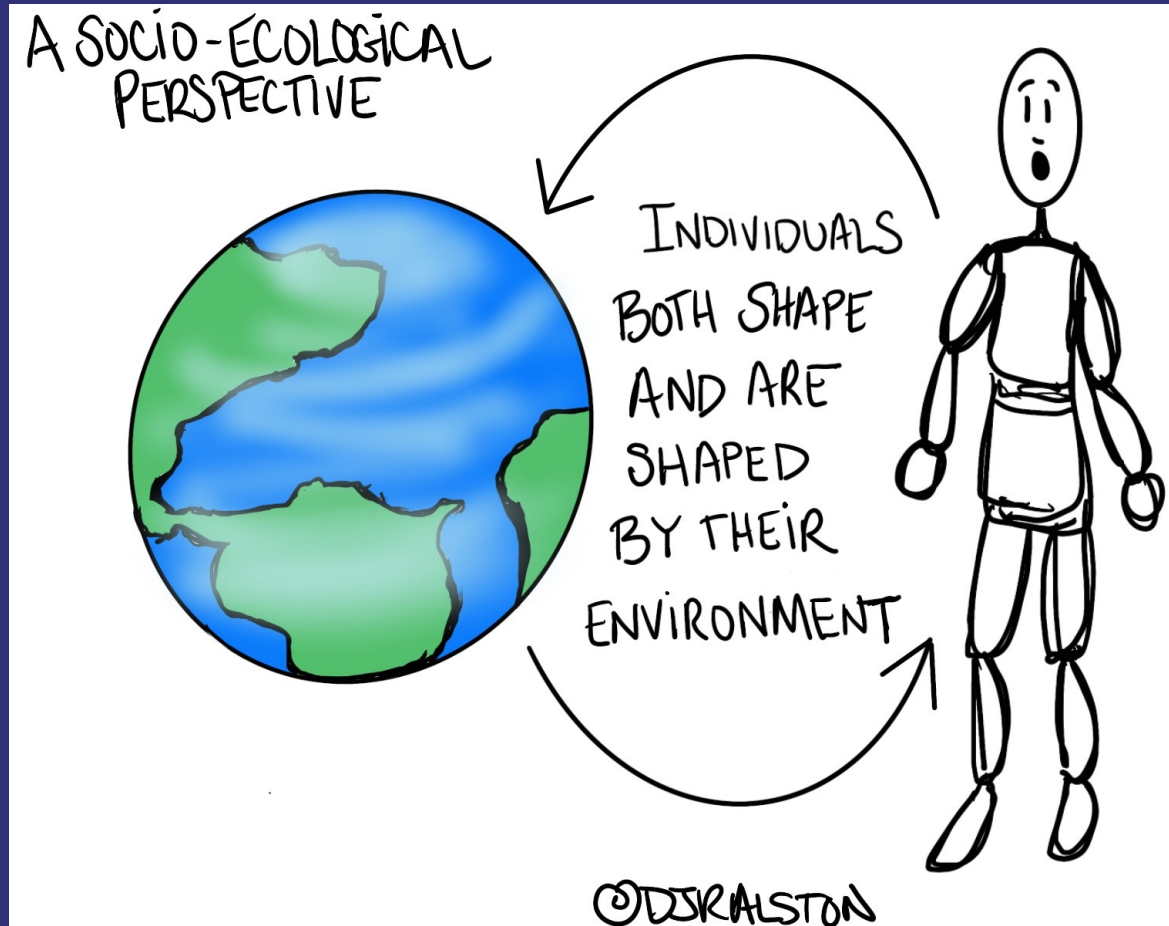


# The Influence of Oppression

- According to Adams, Bell, & Griffin (2007) oppression exists in several forms (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, ableism, etc.) and is experienced at both individual and systemic levels.
  - Individual – Microaggressions (i.e., being misgendered)
  - Systems – Policies, Rules, Laws & Institutions (i.e., sub-minimum wage)
- Regardless of whether intentional or unintentional, oppression has destructive ramifications on the mental health and well-being of systematically and historically marginalized and excluded individuals, populations, and communities.
  - Minority Stress
    - Transgender Suicide Rate
    - Poverty
- Oppression has a biopsychosocial impact



# Socio-Ecological Perspective



- A socioecological perspective accounts for the idea that individuals both shape and are shaped by their environment and provides a framework to understand to what degree oppressive environmental influences impact the mental health and well-being of individuals.
- Exploring social environments is crucial to understanding the impact of intersectionality and oppression on an individual's well-being and mental health (Ratts, Et. Al., 2015).

# Socio-Ecological Perspective

- 5 Levels of Influence Contributing to Health Behaviors (McLeroy et. al., 1988)
  - Intrapersonal (individual attitudes, knowledge, behaviors and skills)
  - Interpersonal (social network and support systems)
  - Institutional (schools, churches, businesses and community organizations)
  - Community (norms and values of the community)
  - Public Policy (local, state, and federal policies and laws)
- Together participants and helping professional can determine whether strategies and interventions should target one or any combination of the above factors.

# Power and Privilege



# Power: Let's Reflect

What does having Power mean to you?

- Physical might?
- The ability to make in impact on the lives of those around us?
- The ability to make decisions that govern the way we live?
- In the way others live?

All of these are true.



# Power: Let's Focus

Let's focus on these three:

- Physical might?
- The ability to make in impact on the lives of those around us?
- The ability to make decisions that govern the way we live?
- In the way others live?

All of these are true.



Photograph: Stringer|AFP|Getty Images, 1964



Photograph: AP | Kevin Wolf, 2020



Photograph: Grey Villet, 1965



Photograph: Getty Images | Chip Somodevilla, 2013



Photograph: Tom Ollin, 1973

# Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.

- Oxford Dictionary

# Types of Privilege

- Right-handed Privilege
- Heterosexual Privilege
- Cisgender Privilege
- Religious Privilege
- Educational Privilege
- Able-Bodied Privilege
- Occupational Privilege
- White/Light Skinned Privilege



# Privilege and Advantage

## Privilege

- Privilege applies to all members of a group
- Privilege is about what you are
- The dichotomy between privilege and advantage highlights how privilege and oppression can exist simultaneously

## Advantage

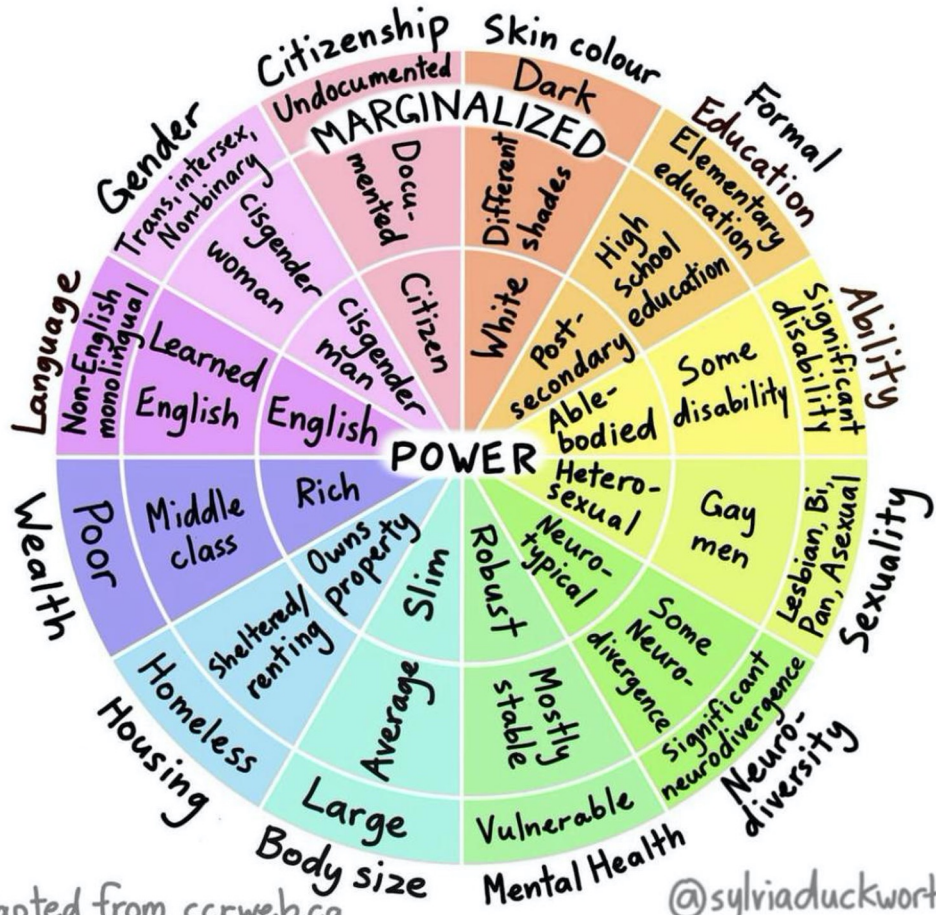
- Some members of a privilege group can access and operationalize that privilege in ways that other members of the group cannot giving them advantage.
- Advantage is about who you are and your ability to capitalize on what you are (privilege)
- The concept of privilege and advantage, though it has some relation to power is different than intersectionality.



sylviaduckworth  
Based in Canada



# WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



Adapted from ccrweb.ca

@sylviaaduckworth

# Privilege and Proximity to Power

# Personal Narrative Reflection

- What are the narratives about your sexual orientation you received?
- When did you know what gender(s) you were attracted to? How did you know?
- What are the narratives you've heard about non-heterosexual individuals?
- Where did you hear these narratives?
- What are narratives about your gender you've received?
- When did you know you your gender? How did you know?
- What are the narratives you've heard about transgender and non-binary individuals?
- Where did you hear these narratives?

# LGBTQ+ or LGBTQIA: Acronyms and Definitions

- **Lesbian** - A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay** - A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.
- **Bisexual** - A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.
- **Transgender** - Umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.
- **Queer** - Umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual and cisgender.
- **Intersex** - Umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth, and in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.
- **Asexual** - The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

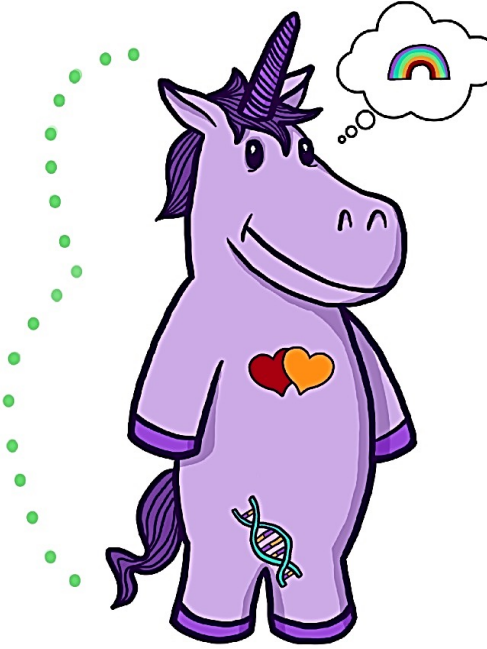


# Gender Identity vs. Sexual Orientation

- **Gender**
  - Identity
  - Expression
- **Sex Assigned at Birth**
  - AMAB
  - AFAB
  - Intersex/Other
- **Sexual/Affectual Attraction (Orientation)**
  - Physical
  - Emotional

## The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by: **TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



**Gender Identity**

- Female/Woman/Girl
- Male/Man/Boy
- Other Gender(s)

**Gender Expression**

- Feminine
- Masculine
- Other

**Sex Assigned at Birth**

- Female
- Male
- Other/Intersex

**Physically Attracted to**

- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

**Emotionally Attracted to**

- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

# REFERENCES

- Adams, M. E., Bell, L. A. E., & Griffin, P. E. (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). *Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging*
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64964/>
- McLeod, S. A. (2019, October 24). Social identity theory. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>
- McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glanz, K. (1988). An ecological perspective on health promotion programs. *Health education quarterly*, 15(4), 351-377.
- [Nine Types of Bias](#)
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44(1), 28-48.
- Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., Austin, W. G., & Worchel, S. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *Organizational identity: A reader*, 56-65.

Find us on:  

#transitionTA | transitionTA.org | [ntact-collab@uncc.edu](mailto:ntact-collab@uncc.edu)



Office of Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant (H326E200003) from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.