



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, mähü, 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](#).



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WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Women who are only or predominantly sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to other women, and girls who are attracted to other girls. This includes *all* women and girls: transgender (or “trans”), intersex, and cisgender (or “cis”). “Lesbian” is a sexual orientation, an embodied part of a person’s identity, no matter their relationship status or sexual/romantic experience. Note: Some non-binary people predominantly attracted to women also identify as lesbians.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Despite strides in representation, Hollywood’s portrayals of lesbians are still sometimes sexist and homophobic. Lesbians onscreen are often depicted as white and feminine, with no nuance that differentiates them from straight characters, or they’re simply flattened to a token whose only personality trait is their orientation. These portrayals ignore the diverse experiences of lesbian women and girls, especially those who fall outside heteronormative* beauty standards. This lack of mindful representation creates a gap in understanding around lesbian issues (e.g., minority stress, workplace discrimination, lack of tailored healthcare), leading viewers to falsely believe there’s no more work to be done to protect lesbians. It also contributes to the erasure of distinct lesbian culture, spaces (e.g., bars, social groups), and history, which are unique and joyous experiences that should be portrayed onscreen.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Some women prefer to call themselves “gay” or “wlw*” rather than “lesbian.” As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves.

LESBIAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Sad & Dying:** Lesbians with sad, hopeless lives (e.g., lonely, in love with a straight best friend, rejected by family or community, conflicted over coming out) or killed off (usually to further a straight character’s story). Equating lesbian identity to tragedy and angst is false and harmful to depict.
- **Skinny & Feminine:** Characters, usually white, whose physical appearance and gender expression conform to feminine, Eurocentric beauty standards. While femme* lesbians do exist, these depictions erase the majority of other lesbians (e.g., BIPOC, large body type, older, disabled, butch*).
- **Predatory Butch:** Storylines about butch lesbians, especially Black ones, sexually preying on other women or perpetuating violent crime. This leads to a false perception that butch lesbians are violent, causing them to be over-criminalized and over-policed and less likely to be believed as victims (e.g., in intimate partner violence*).
- **Unstable:** Lesbians portrayed as obsessively jealous, homicidal, suicidal, or experiencing psychosis, often treated as villains. This inaccurately paints lesbians as threatening *and* ignores real issues they face (e.g., lack of access to mental healthcare).
- **U-Hauling:** Jokes about and portrayals of two women moving in together on the second date. This both reinforces the falsehood that lesbians lack boundaries in relationships and that “settling down” is the most important life goal for women.
- **Hypersexualization:** Objectifying depictions of two+ women together sexually/romantically (e.g., “girl-on-girl”), often framed through the male gaze. Not only are these portrayals sexist, they also reduce lesbian identity to sex acts *and* perpetuate sexual violence against lesbians and all women.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Underrepresented Experiences:** Nuanced portrayals of different kinds of lesbians (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, trans, intersex, ace, older, butch), allowing their identities to shape their beliefs and behaviors. Explore lesbian and queer culture from non-white, non-Western lenses (e.g., same-gender-loving African Americans).
- **Community:** Lesbians of all ages in friendship, community, and spaces tailored for them with other queer women and girls – not just as the token lesbian among straight characters. Show them helping each other through real issues lesbians face (e.g., discrimination, navigating dating).
- **Joy:** Thriving, happy characters in hopeful, carefree storylines with happy endings (e.g., having hobbies, ambitions, respectful relationships). Show lesbian women and girls who are out, proud of their identity, and celebrated because of it (i.e., not just characters who “happen to be” lesbian).
- **Varied Attraction:** Attraction and romance between lesbians of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, trans, intersex, ace, older, butch, different body types) with other queer women. Portray different types of consensual and pleasure-positive relationships (e.g., dating, marriage, casual sex, polyamory, sex toys) and desires.
- **More Masc:** More butch and masculine-presenting lesbians comfortable in their identity and driving their own stories (e.g., friendships, dating, careers), especially in community and healthy relationships with other butch lesbians.
- **Role Models:** Lesbians of all ages in ambitious roles (e.g., running for office, achieving in academics, in successful careers, mothers) and as the protagonists in stories about more than *just* their lesbian identity.

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ For the first time in history, lesbians represented the majority of LGBTQIA+ characters (40%) on broadcast TV in the 2021-22 season.
- ➔ Of women characters on children's TV in 2020, only 0.5% were LGBTQIA+.
- ➔ While lesbian and bi+ women only make up 8.3% of women in the general population, they are overrepresented in U.S. prisons (33.3%) and local jails (24.6%). Queer girls make up 40% of the juvenile justice system.
- ➔ Studies show lesbian and bi+ women get less routine healthcare than other women due to barriers like fear of discrimination from healthcare providers, negative experiences with healthcare providers, and lower rates of health insurance.
- ➔ 44% of lesbians experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, compared with 35% of straight women.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- [Autostraddle: "Why 'Sapphic' Is Back in Style"](#)
- Bridgewater State University: ["The Frequency of Stereotypical Media Portrayals and Their Effects on the Lesbian Community"](#)
- Center for American Progress: ["Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for LGBT Women in America"](#)
- Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media: ["See Jane 2020 TV: Historic Screen Time & Speaking Time for Female Characters!"](#)
- GLAAD: ["Glossary of Terms: LGBTQ"](#)
["Where We Are On TV, 2021-2022"](#)
- GLMA: ["Top 10 Things Lesbians Should Discuss with their Healthcare Provider"](#)
- Huffington Post: ["8 Things Later-in-Life Lesbians Want You To Know"](#)
["Why Lesbian Identity Matters"](#)
- NPR: ["The 'Criminal' Black Lesbian: Where Does This Damaging Stereotype Come From?"](#)
- Prison Policy Initiative: ["Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system"](#)
- Teen Vogue: ["10 Lesbian Myths About Lesbians You Need to Stop Believing Now"](#)
- *Them*: ["Screen On Screen: Hollywood Needs to Recognize a World Where Black Girls Kiss"](#)
["InQueery: The REAL Meaning of the Word 'Butch'"](#)

GLOSSARY

Butch:

In lesbian culture, "butch" refers to a woman whose gender expression and traits present as typically masculine (e.g., clothes, short hair, pursuing more men-dominated careers and roles). For lesbians, being butch challenges society's understandings of gender and what it means to be masculine. The term is sometimes used by other LGBTQIA+ people, particularly non-binary and genderqueer people.

Femme:

Used to describe someone who exhibits feminine identity (e.g., physical appearance, clothes, behavior). To some, "femme" should only be used to describe LGBTQIA+ people and is understood as an identity that subverts traditional femininity (i.e., not synonymous with being a straight and/or cis woman).

Heteronormativity:

The inaccurate belief that heterosexuality is the default, natural, or normal expression of sexuality. It upholds the false gender binary and the notion that sexual and marital relationships should be between people of "opposite" sexes (i.e., a man and a woman who conform to rigid notions of gender, sexuality, and gender roles).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):

Physical, verbal, psychological, economic, or sexual violence committed by a current or former partner. While most IPV portrayals feature women in straight relationships, LGBTQIA+ people experience IPV at comparable rates but are less likely to report it due to stigma, lack of resources, and perceived power balance in same-gender relationships.

WLW:

Stands for "woman-loving woman" or "women-loving women." This term has become a unifying label for a woman who is attracted to and/or has emotional, romantic, and sexual partnerships with other women (e.g., lesbians, pansexual women, sapphics, same-gender-loving women). Often stylized as "wlw."

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **gender binary, gender expansive, the male gaze, minority stress, non-binary lesbian, polyamorous, queer, queerbaiting, same-gender-loving, sapphic, and stud.**

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



[GLAAD.org](#)

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[SeeJane.org](#)



[HRC.org](#)

SRC Partners^o

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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website:
[WriteInclusion.org/factsheets](#)

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WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Men who are only or predominantly sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to other men, and boys who are attracted to other boys. This includes *all* men and boys: transgender (or “trans”), intersex, and cisgender (or “cis”). “Gay” is a sexual orientation, an embodied part of a person’s identity, no matter their relationship status or sexual/romantic experience. Note: Some non-binary people predominantly attracted to men also identify as gay.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

While tremendous gains have been made in representation, gay men and boys are still rarely depicted in leading roles in TV and film, especially those who aren’t white and/or masculine. Without their own arcs and stories, mindful exploration of gay identity is often impossible, erasing the shared history (e.g., activism, HIV/AIDS epidemic) and culture among gay men, as well as the specific challenges they face (e.g., homophobia, body dysmorphia*, increased risk of physical and sexual violence). The portrayals that do exist tend to fall into caricatures or palatable, heteronormative* versions of gay identity for straight audiences. These depictions erase the nuances and wide-ranging experiences of the many men and boys who make up the gay community and their unique, joyous culture.



*Gay and queer men face significant discrimination **globally**, including the death penalty in some countries.*

GAY MEN AND BOYS

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Prizing Masculinity:** Depictions that *only* center masculine gay characters (i.e., those with traditionally masculine bodies, mannerisms, and interests) and/or devalue gay characters who are more traditionally feminine (i.e., softer or higher voice, smaller body type, emotional). This upholds femmephobia*, a harmful bias for all audiences to internalize.
- **BIPOC Fetishization:** BIPOC men being objectified (e.g., “fiery” Latinx lover, musclebound Black man, submissive Asian), especially by white gay protagonists. It’s dehumanizing and removes BIPOC queer men’s agency.
- **Gay Best Friend:** Sidekicks to straight protagonists whose primary purpose is providing comedic relief (e.g., stereotypically sassy, overly dramatic) without their own stories or goals (e.g., having queer friends, romantic/sexual partners).
- **Off-Limits Crushes:** Gay characters who obsess over straight characters, romantically and socially. This falsely depicts gay men and boys as predatory, holds up only straight men as desirable, and overrepresents this kind of attraction. Most gay men are predominantly attracted to other queer men.
- **Queer-Coded Villains:** Campy and feminine (sometimes disabled) antagonists and villains who are implied to be gay. These harmful portrayals depict queer people as deviant, justifying violence and murder of gay and queer characters, usually killed by straight, masculine heroes.
- **Gay Panic:** Men afraid that any intimacy or physical touch with another man will make them appear gay (e.g., paranoid straight guy, closeted homophobe). Even when played for comedy (e.g., the offensive “no homo”), this paints being gay as wrong, disgusting, and to be avoided.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Care & Community:** Gay characters in supportive community with other queer people, helping one another through challenges related to their identity (e.g., depression, familial rejection) *and* modeling positive behaviors (e.g., gay joy, seeking mental health resources).
- **Breaking Gender Norms:** Gay characters of all kinds breaking perceived “gender norms” (e.g., emotionally vulnerable, avoiding violence, enjoying “feminine” hobbies).
- **Destigmatizing HIV:** Positive portrayals of HIV+ characters living healthy and successful lives, dating, in relationships, and having sex with supportive partners. Tell stories about getting tested, discussing HIV status, using medications (e.g., ART, PrEP, PEP*), and disparities in access to treatment for underprivileged communities.
- **Safe & Consensual Sex:** Depict healthy sex (e.g., using protection, taking HIV medications) and consent. Show these behaviors as the norm, not prudish or overly cautious, and dispel the myth that gay men welcome *all* sexual contact, which perpetuates the false belief men can’t be sexually assaulted.
- **Varied Attraction:** Attraction and romance between gay characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, trans, intersex, older, HIV+, feminine). Portray different types of consensual relationships (e.g., casual, monogamous, polyamorous), sex, and desires.
- **Body Positivity:** Characters with a wide variety of body types who are celebrated and supported. Show gay characters dealing with their bodies (e.g., getting professional help for eating disorders; finding a balance of fitness, diet, and body acceptance).
- **Reframed Violence:** Without exploiting as trauma porn, address violence against gay men and boys (e.g., intimate partner violence*, sexual assault, hate crimes), through their own POVs. Show both the difficulties (e.g., stigma against men as victims, lack of resources for gay men) *and* empowering portrayals.

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ Of the 138 series regular and recurring LGBTQIA+ characters on cable TV in the 2021-22 season, 45 were gay men, including one trans man.
- ➔ 26% of gay men are disabled, but only seven gay characters were disabled in the 2020-21 TV season.
- ➔ Over 10% of all FBI-reported hate crimes in 2019 were committed against gay men.
- ➔ Gay and queer men face significant discrimination globally, including the death penalty in some countries. The U.S. Supreme Court only fully decriminalized sex between two men in 2003.
- ➔ ~1.2 million Americans are HIV+, but only two HIV+ characters appeared in the 2021-22 TV season. As of 2020, 88% of Americans acknowledged stigma around HIV (e.g., the FDA's discriminatory ban on queer men donating blood).

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- The Atlantic: "[Cruising In The Age Of Consent](#)"
- Avert: "[What Is An Undetectable Viral Load?](#)"
- GLAAD: "[Glossary of Terms: LGBTQ](#)"
"[State Of HIV Stigma Study, 2020](#)"
"[Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022](#)"
- GQ: "[Why Body Image Issues Pervade the Gay Community](#)"
- Human Rights Campaign: "[How HIV Impacts LGBTQ People](#)"
- Juvenile Justice: "[The Other Side of the Rainbow: Young, Gay, and Homeless in Metro Atlanta](#)"
- Painted Brain: "[Queer Men: A New Face to Body Dysmorphic Disorder](#)"
- Pew Research Center: "[The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists](#)"
- Talkspace: "[The Mental Health Issues Gay Men Deal With](#)"
- Them: "[Almost Half of Gay Male Couples Experience Intimate Partner Violence, Study Says](#)"
- ThoughtCo: "[The American Gay Rights Movement](#)"
- VOX ATL: "[Media Vs. Me: A Gay Teen's Journey To Self-Actualization](#)"
- The Washington Post: "[It's easier now for gay men to adopt. But they still face lots of push-back, and weird questions.](#)"

GLOSSARY

ART, PrEP, and PEP:

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication treats and manages HIV in HIV+ people. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) are used by HIV- people at risk of getting HIV through sex or injection drug use. When taken correctly, these medications can make HIV+ people undetectable (i.e., reduce the amount of HIV in the body to untransmittable levels) and prevent the spread of HIV.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD):

A body-image disorder characterized by persistent, intrusive preoccupations with perceived flaws or defects with any part of one's body, which, in reality, might be slight or nonexistent. BDD affects 2.2% of men and 2.5% of women in the U.S.

Femmephobia:

Discrimination or hostility toward someone who's perceived to embody or express femininity (including effeminate gay men). Femmephobia can come from both cis het and queer people, often rooted in internalized homophobia and toxic masculinity.

Heteronormativity:

The inaccurate belief that heterosexuality is the default, natural, or normal expression of sexuality. It upholds the false gender binary and the notion that sexual and marital relationships should be between people of "opposite" sexes (i.e., a man and a woman who conform to rigid notions of gender, sexuality, and gender roles).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):

Physical, verbal, psychological, economic, or sexual violence committed by a current or former partner. While most IPV portrayals feature women in straight relationships, LGBTQIA+ people experience IPV at comparable rates but are less likely to report it due to stigma, lack of resources, and perceived power balance in same-gender relationships.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **affirmative consent, femme, gender binary, gender expansive, HIV/AIDS, minority stress, mlm, polyamorous, queer, queerbaiting, queer coding, same-gender-loving, toxic masculinity, and undetectable.**

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WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

“Bi+” is an umbrella term for people of all genders whose sexual orientation falls outside concepts of straight and gay. This includes bisexual (or “bi”)*, pansexual (or “pan”)*, sexually fluid*, queer*, and other sexual orientations with the capacity to be sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to more than one gender (not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree). Someone’s bi+ identity is valid—and should be respected—no matter their relationship status, sexual/romantic experience, or the gender of their partner(s).

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Despite making up the largest portion of the LGBTQIA+ community, bi+ people are significantly underrepresented onscreen and are frequently reduced to harmful tropes, leading to a widespread misunderstanding of bi+ people and the false idea that they’re confused, going through a phase, or experimenting. These forms of biphobia* and bi erasure contribute to higher rates of mental health struggles, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. In addition to experiencing discrimination from straight people, bi+ people are often excluded or erased from queer spaces and conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues, which reduces their access to resources and support.



BI+ PEOPLE

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Devious:** Bi+ characters as inherently untrustworthy, cheaters, obsessive, greedy, or villainous, who often use sex as a tool of manipulation. These harmful depictions paint an entire community as evil.
- **Oversexualized:** Characters who are overly promiscuous and willing to have sex with anyone. These kinds of portrayals can fuel hate, putting bi+ people in danger of real-life sexual violence.
- **Unnamed & Erased:** Bi+ characters who have a vague, unexamined identity (e.g., “I don’t really do labels”) or stories where their identity is only hinted at. This contributes to bi+ erasure because, unless their sexual orientation is named onscreen, the character will read as straight or gay based on their partner/love interest.
- **Biphobia:** Storylines and dialogue that make fun of, denigrate, and/or invalidate bi+ identity (e.g., jokes that a character is “mostly straight” or that “everyone’s a little bit queer”; paranoid partners assuming bi+ people will cheat). Even when played for “comedy,” these biphobic messages are harmful for all viewers to internalize.
- **Straight To Gay:** Stories where characters have one same-gender romantic/sexual experience and are immediately depicted as *exclusively* gay. This wrongly portrays orientation as either straight or gay, with no room for bi+ identity.
- **Plot Device:** Revealing a bi+ character’s attraction to more than one gender as a plot twist or temporary story, especially when their identity is never referenced again. Bi+ people shouldn’t be used as props whose only role is to further other characters’ stories.
- **Bis In Tris:** Characters in love triangles (with a man and a woman) and/or approached for threesomes. These depictions can lead audiences to believe a bi+ character is choosing to be straight or gay (based on their partner) and wrongly equate being bi+ with desiring/having sex with multiple people at the same time. (Like anyone, bi+ people *can* be in polyamorous relationships, but being bi+ doesn’t equate to a desire for multiple partners.)

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Out & Thriving:** Confident and comfortable bi+ characters with explicit identities (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, queer) whose sexuality is believed and supported by other characters. Show them in community with other bi+ people.
- **Bi+ Men:** More men and masculine characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, HIV+, disabled, trans) with explicit bi+ identities. Not only are bi+ men greatly underrepresented onscreen, there is also a long-held *false* societal belief that they don’t exist.
- **Healthy Relationships:** Bi+ characters in romantic and sexual relationships with partners who support, celebrate, and defend their identity. In particular, show bi+ characters in monogamous partnerships. Of course, bi+ people can seek all kinds of relationships (e.g., casual, polyamorous), but explicitly bi+ characters in monogamous relationships help portray that sexual orientation is a part of who you are and not dictated by the gender of the person you’re with.
- **All Ages:** Characters of all ages and in all stages of their bi+ journey, especially in friendship and/or mentorship with one another. Show them navigating the joys of being bi+ together, as well as the challenges (e.g., repeatedly coming out in a biphobic society; navigating microaggressions and erasure; facing poor mental health).
- **The “B” Belongs:** Bi+ characters participating, being accepted, and taking on leadership roles in LGBTQIA+ spaces. Show that their identity, history, and culture deserve respect within the community.
- **Gay Allies:** Gay and lesbian characters, standing in support of bi+ people, who confront and work to dismantle the biphobia within the LGBTQIA+ community (e.g., being inclusive and accepting of bi+ people, no matter the gender of their partner; pushing back on biphobic behavior; in healthy relationships with bi+ people).

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ Bi+ people make up 57% of LGBTQIA+ adults but only 29% of queer characters on TV in the 2021-22 season (with 124 bi+ women, 50 bi+ men, and nine bi+ non-binary characters).
- ➔ 15% of Gen Z adults and 6% of millennials in the U.S. self-identify as bi+, making it the most common orientation in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- ➔ 61% of bi+ women and 37% of bi+ men experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, the highest of any sexual orientation for each gender.
- ➔ In 2019, 66% of bi+ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless, compared to 27% of their heterosexual peers and 49% of their gay/lesbian peers.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- The Advocate: [“13 Things Never to Say to Bisexual People”](#)
- Bi.org: [“Questions”](#)
- Bisexual Resource Center: [“Bi+ Info: What it Means to be a B\(ee\)”](#)
[“Understanding Issues Facing Bisexual Americans”](#)
- Gallup: [“LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 71%”](#)
- GLAAD: [“6 college students explain what being pansexual means to them”](#)
[“Accelerating Bi+ Acceptance”](#)
[“For Celebrate Bisexuality Day, let’s break some bisexual myths”](#)
[“Some questions to ask yourself as you become a better bi+ ally”](#)
[“Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022”](#)
- Huffington Post: [“9 Things Pansexual People Want You To Know”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [“Coming Out: Living Authentically as Bisexual+”](#)
- Movement Advancement Project: [“Bisexual People Face Invisibility, Isolation, And Shocking Rates Of Discrimination And Violence”](#)
- Princeton University: [“Bi/Pan/Fluid 101”](#)
- Teen Vogue: [“What is Pansexual? A Guide to Pansexuality”](#)
- Them: [“9 LGBTQ+ People Explain How They Love, Hate, and Understand the Word ‘Queer’”](#)
- The Trevor Project: [“How to Support Bisexual Youth”](#)
[“Understanding Bisexuality”](#)
- Women’s Health: [“Okay, So What Does It Actually Mean To Be Sexually Fluid?”](#)

GLOSSARY

Biphobia:

Prejudice or hatred directed at bi+ people, including jokes or comments based on stereotypes that seek to undermine the legitimacy of bi+ identity. Biphobia occurs both within and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Bisexual (Bi):

A person of any gender who has the capacity to form enduring sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to people of *two or more genders* (e.g., women attracted to women, men, and non-binary people; non-binary people attracted to non-binary people and men) with gender influencing the type of attraction they experience. These attractions can manifest in differing ways and to differing degrees over a person’s lifetime (meaning bi people aren’t necessarily attracted to different genders equally).

Pansexual (Pan):

A person of any gender who has the capacity to form enduring sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to people of *any gender or regardless of gender*.

Pansexual vs. Bisexual:

Some people are comfortable identifying as both bi and pan and may use them interchangeably, while others only identify with one. (Neither term excludes attraction to trans people—both terms are trans-inclusive.)

Queer:

A word with many meanings. In the context of bi+ identity, queer is used by some people as a way to explain that they aren’t straight but don’t feel like their sexual orientation falls into categories like gay, lesbian, bi, or pan.

Sexual Fluidity:

When one’s sexual orientation isn’t fixed, meaning who they are sexually attracted to can change over time (sometimes influenced by their relationship, situation, or environment). Sexual fluidity is not the same as bi+ identity and doesn’t negate sexual orientations. Instead, it captures the idea of a spectrum or *fluidity* among the orientations.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **bi erasure**, **bi visibility**, **intimate partner violence**, **minority stress**, **mlm**, **omnisexual**, **polyamorous**, **transphobia**, and **wlw**.

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT: [Alex Love, SHRM-CP](#)



A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website: [WriteInclusion.org/factsheets](#)

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Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Transgender (or “trans”) people have a gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes all trans people, regardless of the pronouns or name(s) they use (or those on their legal documents), their gender expression, or medical history. Note: Some trans people have binary gender identities—either man or woman—while others are non-binary (but not all non-binary people are trans).

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

In 2021, only 31% of Americans reported personally knowing someone who is trans, meaning onscreen representation is the primary reference point for trans people for a majority of the U.S. Harmful stereotypes that depict trans people as deceitful, violent, and disordered, along with the dissemination of misinformation, fuels rampant fear-mongering and discrimination (e.g., anti-trans healthcare and sports bills). This leads to a wide variety of negative outcomes (e.g., poverty, police brutality, poor mental health, targeted violence), especially for Black and Latina women who comprise the overwhelming majority of victims of anti-trans violence and murder. Therefore, authentic, humanizing portrayals are vital to the cultural understanding and safety of trans people.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: As TV writers, we can model good language practices by affirming a trans character's identity (e.g., saying “she is a woman” rather than “she identifies as a woman”). Always use “trans/transgender,” never “transgendered” or offensive language (i.e., transphobic slurs).

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Gender Reveal:** Revealing a character is trans for shock or comedy and centering a cisgender (or “cis”)* character's reaction and/or arc (e.g., grief, disgust), rather than the trans character's. This falsely implies trans people are “hiding” or deceiving people if they're private about their gender history.
- **Forced Disclosure*:** Trans characters outed or made to disclose their gender history (e.g., medical transition*), especially to romantic/sexual partners. The false expectation that trans people are obligated to disclose to anyone leads to staggering rates of violence against them, particularly BIPOC women.
- **Sensationalized Bodies:** Focusing on or questioning a trans character's anatomy, medical history, or how they have sex. This objectifies their bodies and suggests interrogation is acceptable.
- **Trans Pain:** Tragic stories (e.g., romantic failures, as victims of violence) and stories that *wrongly* depict transitioning as dangerous (e.g., complications from surgeries or hormone replacement therapy*, health issues related to sex assigned at birth). While trans people face hardship due to a transphobic society, these portrayals erase the fulfilling lives they lead.
- **“Psycho” Killer:** Violent, obsessive, and unstable portrayals. This fuels the false narrative that trans people are deviant, sexually predatory, and dangerous.
- **Always Sex Workers:** Trans sex work stories that ignore the interrelationship between survival, criminalization, and empowerment (e.g., reduced to *only* victims of violent crime). These portrayals erase the many other contributions of trans people to society *and* ignore the reasons trans people, especially women, can be forced into sex work (e.g., employment discrimination, familial rejection).
- **Bad Behavior:** Characters mistreating trans people without rebuke or correction (e.g., misgendering; deadnaming; panicking, joking, and/or complaining about pronouns). This teaches audiences that it's acceptable to abuse and mock trans people.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Beyond Transition:** Stories that go beyond transitioning and disclosure. Show trans characters through their own POVs, with careers, romances, families, and hobbies.
- **Varied Experiences:** Nuanced portrayals of trans people of all kinds (e.g., non-binary, BIPOC, HIV+, disabled, poor, older, intersex), showing how their identities shape their beliefs, behaviors, and experiences (e.g., living safely with HIV; disability impacting clothing options/gender expression). Don't *only* depict challenges; trans joy is equally true and important.
- **Trans Men:** More trans men, especially as protagonists. Go beyond depictions of pregnant trans men (while not necessarily problematic, these often sensationalized pregnancies shouldn't be the *only* story about them).
- **Happy Youth:** Young trans people, with supportive friends and family, thriving in their communities (e.g., in school, at jobs, volunteering). Show them living happy lives and bonding with trans people of all ages.
- **Affirming Care:** Trans youth and adults receiving healthcare from knowledgeable, supportive providers (e.g., doctors, therapists, educators). Portray what all legitimate research proves: gender-affirming care (e.g., puberty blockers, HRT) leads to optimal outcomes for *all* trans people.
- **Sex & Love:** Trans characters (of all sexual orientations) dating, having consensual sex, and in healthy, loving relationships with both trans and cis partners.
- **Athletes:** Trans characters of all ages playing sports. Dispel the myth that trans people's bodies or hormones give them an athletic advantage.
- **Trans History:** Trans characters in stories across every time period and culture. Trans people have always existed and their contributions to global history and culture deserve to be depicted.
- **Comedy:** Trans people humanized through humor, allowing viewers to laugh with trans characters, not at them.

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ There were no trans characters in comedies on broadcast TV in the 2021-22 season.
- ➔ In 2021, 110 legislative bills were introduced in 37 states that attempted to prevent trans youth from playing sports, using gender-affirming restrooms, and/or accessing gender-affirming healthcare, putting 45,100+ trans youth at risk of losing critical support.
- ➔ In 2021, there were 36 trans people elected to national, state, and local political offices.
- ➔ An estimated 29% of U.S. trans adults live in poverty, the result of widespread anti-trans employment discrimination, especially for BIPOC trans people. The poverty rate increases to 35% for Native and Indigenous trans adults, 39% for Black trans adults, and 48% for Latinx trans adults.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- Autostraddle: [“This Is an Essay About Penises”](#)
- Center for American Progress: [“Fact Sheet: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth”](#)
[“Protecting and Advancing Health Care for Transgender Adult Communities”](#)
- The Conversation: [“I’m a pediatrician who cares for transgender kids—here’s what you need to know about social support, puberty blockers and other medical options that improve lives of transgender youth”](#)
- Gallup: [“Mixed Views Among Americans on Transgender Issues”](#)
- Gender Spectrum: [“Some Common Myths About Gender”](#)
- GLAAD: [“A Guide To TRANSform Hollywood”](#)
[“Transgender FAQ”](#)
[“Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022”](#)
- GLSEN: [“I’m a Trans, Disabled Young Person, Not One or the Other”](#)
- The Guardian: [“Mapping the anti-trans laws sweeping America: ‘A War on 100 fronts’”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [“Seven Things About Transgender People That You Didn’t Know”](#)
[“Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ”](#)
[“Understanding the Trans Community”](#)
- Netflix: [“Disclosure”](#)
- Them: [“Nearly 1,000 LGBTQ+ People Have Been Elected to Office in the U.S.”](#)
- Transgender Law Center: [“Trans Agenda For Liberation”](#)
- The Washington Post: [“The murder of Black transgender women is becoming a crisis”](#)

GLOSSARY

Cisgender (Cis):

Someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Disclosure:

The act or process of sharing one’s gender history with another person. Trans people should never be forced or coerced to disclose to anyone, and if, how, and when they do *should* be entirely up to them.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):

The use of hormones (e.g., estrogen, testosterone) in medical treatment. For trans people, HRT is an empowering way to medically transition by bringing their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Documented benefits of HRT include improved mental health, physical wellness, and reduced gender dysphoria.

Transition:

When a trans person transitions, they are not “becoming” a different gender, rather they are aligning their gender expression and/or body with the gender identity they’ve always been. This is a complex process that can occur over a long period of time and varies from person to person. It *can* include: **social transition** (e.g., telling family and friends; dressing differently; using a new name/pronouns); **legal transition** (e.g., changing name and/or sex marker on legal documents); **medical transition** (e.g., HRT, surgeries). Some trans people choose not to, don’t want to, or are unable to transition in one or all of these ways for many reasons (e.g., financial barriers, don’t feel like they’re in the “wrong body”). Being transgender is not dependent on physical appearance or medical procedures.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **assigned female/male at birth, binder, cisnormativity, deadnaming, gender dysphoria, gender euphoria, gender expression, gender identity, gender non-conforming, minority stress, passing, pronouns, puberty blockers, TERFs, transfeminine, transmasculine, transmisogyny, and transphobia.**

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



[GLAAD.org](#)

Storyline|Partners|

[StorylinePartners.com](#)



[SeeJane.org](#)



[HRC.org](#)

SRC Partners^o

[SRC-Partners.com](#)



[TransFilmCenter.org](#)

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT: [Laura A. Jacobs, LCSW-R](#)

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Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

“Non-binary” is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression* doesn’t fit within the man/woman gender binary—people who are non-binary*, agender*, genderfluid*, genderqueer*, and more. Note: Many non-binary people consider themselves trans but not all do.

While not a perfect fit, this factsheet also includes gender-diverse* people who fall outside Eurocentric concepts of gender and sexuality (e.g., Two-Spirit, hijra, mähū)—more on these cultural and/or Indigenous identities in our [Expanded Glossary](#).

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Non-binary and gender-diverse people face significant erasure onscreen, making up less than 1% of series regulars in the 2021-22 TV season. Existing portrayals often center cisgender (or “cis”) characters who are confused by non-binary people. These depictions suggest non-binary and gender-diverse identities are illegitimate when, in fact, they’ve existed—and been revered—throughout history. This erasure also perpetuates discrimination, resulting in harmful policies and a lack of protections for non-binary people (e.g., bathroom bills, limited gender options on documents). Non-binary and gender-diverse people deserve to see themselves onscreen, and mindful representation of these identities can lead to a safer, more inclusive world for all.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Someone can be non-binary regardless of their pronoun(s), name(s), gender expression, or medical history. As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves.

NON-BINARY AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Misgendering Missteps:** Cis characters mocking the idea of gender identity (e.g., “I identify as a helicopter”) and/or panicking or joking about pronouns (e.g., they/them, ze/zir, she/they) without rebuke or correction. These depictions lead to real-world harassment, violence, and micro-aggressions against non-binary people.
- **Gender Interrogation:** Characters asking invasive, insensitive questions about a non-binary person’s identity, body, and/or gender expression (especially in medical, first responder, education, and workplace settings). This teaches viewers that this disrespectful behavior is acceptable.
- **Always Androgynous:** Non-binary characters, often assigned female at birth, who *only* fit an “androgynous” look (e.g., small-framed, short haircut, masculine clothes). This erases the many other forms of gender expression among non-binary people, who can have any expression (e.g., masculine, feminine, a combination of both).
- **Binary Only:** Storylines and dialogue that reinforce the false gender binary (e.g., “ladies and gentlemen,” boys vs. girls storylines, baby gender reveals). These depictions, however small, ignore the existence of non-binary people.
- **Non-Human Non-Binary:** Supernatural, genre, or fantasy beings depicted as non-binary. These portrayals paint non-binary people as inhuman, perpetuating the lie that they’re “abnormal.”
- **Reduced To Pronouns:** Non-binary characters whose *only* trait is their use of they/them pronouns. This reduces the non-binary community to one particular characteristic when the experiences of non-binary people are more diverse and nuanced.

“Non-binary and gender-diverse people deserve to see themselves onscreen...”

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Varied Identities:** Nuanced portrayals of different kinds of non-binary people (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, older, trans), allowing their identities to shape their beliefs and behaviors. Depict characters with a range of gender expressions, identities (e.g., agender, genderqueer, genderfluid), and pronouns.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Gender-diverse characters representative of the many culturally specific gender identities around the world (e.g., South Asian hijra, Native Hawaiian and Tahitian mähū, Thai kathoey, Samoan fa'afafine/fa'afatama, Native American Two-Spirit). Explore their history (e.g., erasure due to white, Christian colonization; spiritual/religious roles in communities) and tell stories set in modern day (e.g., characters reclaiming these identities).
- **Everyday Inclusion:** Stories with non-binary and gender-diverse characters in everyday professions and roles (e.g., teacher, nurse, teammate). Show non-binary people, especially as protagonists, with stories told through their own POVs (e.g., in friend groups, navigating careers, pursuing hobbies).
- **Toppling The Binary:** Storylines that call out gender discrimination against non-binary people (e.g., activism, in everyday conversations). Depict an inclusive world (e.g., gender-neutral sports teams, sex education, bathrooms), and show all characters modeling inclusive behaviors (e.g., sharing pronouns, parents practicing gender diversity with children).
- **Exploring Gender:** Characters of all ages exploring their gender and discovering what fits best (e.g., changing pronouns, using puberty blockers). Gender can be fluid or constant, depending on each character’s unique life journey.
- **Love Interests:** Non-binary and gender-diverse characters who are desirable without having to conform to beauty standards of the gender binary. Show them in healthy and positive romantic/sexual relationships.

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ There was one non-binary series regular character on broadcast TV in the 2021-22 season, representing less than 1% of all series regulars.
- ➔ ~1.2 million non-binary adults live in the U.S., but only 26% of American adults report knowing someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., they/them).
- ➔ ~25% of all LGBTQIA+ youth use pronouns other than he/him or she/her.
- ➔ While someone's understanding of gender can manifest in different ways at any age, most children have a sense of their gender identities by age four, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- ➔ 150+ pre-colonial Native American tribes acknowledged third genders (i.e., genders beyond man/woman).

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- Autostraddle: [“What It Means To Call Ourselves Non-Binary: An Autostraddle Roundtable”](#)
- Electric Lit: [“We Need More Non-Binary Characters Who Aren't Aliens, Robots, or Monsters”](#)
- Gender Spectrum: [“Some Common Myths About Gender”](#)
- GLAAD: [“9 young people explain what being non-binary means to them”](#)
[“New GLAAD study reveals twenty percent of millennials identify as LGBTQ”](#)
[“Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [“Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ”](#)
- Human Rights Watch: [“Transgender, Third Gender, No Gender”](#)
- PBS: [“A Map Of Gender-Diverse Cultures”](#)
- Pew Research Center: [“Rising shares of U.S. adults know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns”](#)
- Smithsonian Magazine: [“LGBTQIA+ Pride and Two-Spirit People”](#)
- Them: [“Inqueery: Indigenous Identity and the Significance of the Term ‘Two-Spirit’”](#)
- The Trevor Project: [“Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth”](#)
- United Nations Human Rights: [“The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons”](#)
- University of California: [“Exploring the history of gender expression”](#)
- The Williams Institute: [“Nonbinary LGBTQ Adults in the United States”](#)

GLOSSARY

Agender:

A person who doesn't experience or express *any* gender (while most non-binary identities typically do have a gender, just one that isn't binary).

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:

How any person communicates their gender through external means, including makeup, voice, clothing, appearance, or 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 that a person is a man or even identifies as “masculine”).

Genderfluid

A person whose gender identity is fluid, not consistently adhering to one fixed gender. At different times, they may understand their gender to be aligned with a particular gender identity (e.g., non-binary, man, woman) or a combination of identities.

Genderqueer:

A person who blurs and/or rejects the boundaries of the man/woman gender binary—seeing themselves as both man and woman, neither, or outside of these categories. Genderqueer people often, though not always, have a queer sexual orientation as well.

Non-binary:

Both an umbrella term *and* a specific, individual identity for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression doesn't fit within the man/woman gender binary. Most but not all non-binary people use gender neutral pronouns. Also referred to as “enby.”

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **androgyny, assigned female/male at birth, bigender, butch, cisgender, fa'afafine/fa'afatama, fakaleitī, femme, gender binary, gender expansive, gender identity, gender non-conforming, hijra, kathoey, māhū, metis, minority stress, muxe, neopronouns, third gender, transgender, and Two-Spirit.**

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANTS: Alex Love, SHRM-CP, Kiki Rivera



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WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:





Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

“Intersex” is a term describing ~2% of the population born with a wide range of sex characteristics* (e.g., genitals, hormones) that don’t adhere to false binary notions of male or female bodies. Being intersex simply refers to a status (whether someone *is* intersex or not). Some intersex traits are identifiable at birth, some at puberty or later, and some people never learn they’re intersex. Intersex people can be any gender (e.g., man, woman, non-binary) or sexual orientation (e.g., straight, bi+). Note: Intersex people can also be transgender, but the two are separate and shouldn’t be conflated.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Intersex people currently have no representation on TV. This total erasure contributes to a misunderstanding of and stigma against intersex people, perpetuating lies that they aren’t real or that they need to be medically “fixed.” This has harmful consequences. Intersex people (usually babies) are often subjected to non-consensual, unnecessary surgeries* on their genitals to make them fit the male/female binary. Some intersex people have their medical history hidden from them or are told to hide it (by doctors and/or parents), causing feelings of shame and isolation. Intersex people are also subjected to constant body policing (e.g., athletes disqualified over hormones). Mindful portrayals can educate society on the intersex experience and promote equality, protections, and autonomy for intersex people.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Not all people born with intersex characteristics choose to identify as “intersex.” As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves

INTERSEX PEOPLE

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Medicalization:** Storylines with doctors “correcting” or looking to “fix” an intersex person’s body to fit the false male/female binary with surgery, hormones, and procedures (e.g., doctors encouraging parents to “pick” their intersex baby’s gender).
- **Disclosure Twists:** Characters whose intersex status is only revealed for a big twist that shocks an endosex* character (e.g., before having sex, changing in a locker room, birth portrayed as shocking). These depictions are highly problematic because they paint intersex people as lying and deceitful, reduce intersex people to their genitals and bodies, and tell intersex stories through endosex characters’ POVs.
- **Freaks:** Making fun of intersex people or traits (e.g., calling a character “it” or “he/she”). This includes intersex people being interrogated about their bodies, genitals, and/or medical history *and* endosex people being paranoid that someone is intersex (e.g., spreading rumors about their genitals). This behavior is offensive and fuels the falsehood that there’s something wrong with being intersex.
- **Unsupportive Family:** Stories about parents and relatives ashamed of their intersex family member, who treat their diagnosis as a burden and/or who hide their medical history from them to “protect” them. Treating intersex people as if any part of them should be kept a secret is a damaging message for all viewers to internalize.
- **Offensive Language:** “Hermaphrodite” is an outdated, medically inaccurate, and derogatory term. The term “Disorders of Sex Development” (DSD) is controversial and pathologizing. Neither should be used to describe an intersex person, even in medical settings. (“Differences of Sex Development” is a more acceptable synonym for intersex.)

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Intro to Intersex:** Characters and storylines with accurate and thoughtful explanations of what being intersex really means.
- **Reframed POV:** Intersex protagonists with their own arcs told from their own POVs. Give them stories focused on more than *just* their intersex status (e.g., friendships, relationships, careers, hobbies).
- **Varied Experiences:** Nuanced characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, older) with a variety of intersex traits and experiences. No intersex person is the same as another, all have different experiences, bodies, medical histories, and feelings about being intersex (e.g., little impact to life-altering).
- **Joy:** Joyful, carefree, and hopeful stories about intersex people.
- **Affirming Healthcare:** Show healthcare providers treating intersex people with dignity (e.g., providing resources like therapy and support groups; not questioning intersex traits for unrelated issues like a cold; not pushing for unnecessary procedures) and being knowledgeable on intersex issues. Show intersex people, families, and providers making informed and *consensual* care choices without shame or secrecy (e.g., parents waiting for children to be old enough to choose the procedures they desire, if any).
- **Dating & Relationships:** Characters (of all sexual orientations) in relationships and having a variety of romantic and sexual experiences with people who are respectful of their intersex status.
- **Activists:** Intersex and endosex characters engaged in intersex activism (e.g., protesting non-consensual surgeries, supporting bills and laws that protect intersex people).
- **Impact of Ignorance:** Stories that examine the long-term effects of a misinformed, unaccepting society toward intersex people (e.g., depression, anxiety, more vulnerable to abuse, scrutiny in sports) and of non-consensual, unnecessary intersex surgeries (e.g., pain, infertility, poor mental health).

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ ~150 million people are born with intersex traits, comparable to the number of genetic redheads or the population of Russia.
- ➔ Only 1 intersex series regular character has ever been featured on television despite making up ~2% of the total population.
- ➔ Non-consensual intersex genital surgeries on children are considered human rights violations by the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and many human rights organizations.
- ➔ There are over 35 variations of intersex traits (e.g., Klinefelter syndrome, androgen insensitivity syndrome, hypospadias), all presenting in different ways (e.g., some intersex people are infertile, others aren't).

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- The Conversation: *"Ten ethical flaws in the Caster Semenya decision on intersex in sport"*
- GLAAD: *"not invisible: debunking 10 intersex myths"*
"why we need to keep the 'i' a part of the lgbtqia conversation in politics"
- Human Rights Campaign: *"Understanding the Intersex Community"*
- InterACT: *"FAQ: Intersex, Gender, and LGBTQIA+"*
"FAQ: What is intersex?"
"InterACT Media Guide"
"Intersex Definitions"
- Intersex Campaign for Equality: *"How Intersex People Identify"*
- Intersex Justice Project
- LGBTQ&A Podcast: *"Hilda Vioria: Born Both, An Intersex Life"*
- The New York Times: *"This Intersex Runner Had Surgery to Compete. It Has Not Gone Well."*
- TED Talk: *"The way we think about biological sex is wrong"*
- United Nations Free & Equal Campaign: *"Intersex Awareness"*
- WGA West: *"Invisible No More: The Need for Intersex Stories"*

GLOSSARY

Endosex:

The opposite of intersex; someone who possesses innate physical sex characteristics that align with binary concepts of female or male bodies.

Sex Characteristics:

Biological traits such as genitals, gonads (i.e., ovaries, testes), hormone production, hormone response, chromosomes, and reproductive organs. Secondary sex characteristics are features that may appear during puberty or exposure to hormones, including breast growth, facial hair, and body hair.

Unnecessary Intersex Surgeries:

Some intersex children and babies undergo unnecessary, irreversible surgeries without their consent for no other reason than to make their bodies conform to traditional notions of what it means to be male or female. The vast majority of these surgeries are not medically necessary, lead to complications (e.g., physical pain, loss of genital sensitivity, poor mental health), and could instead be delayed until the intersex person can decide whether surgery is right for them.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **gender binary**, **ipso gender**, **minority stress**, and **transgender**.

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



InterACTAdvocates.org



GLAAD.org

Storyline|Partners|

StorylinePartners.com



SeeJane.org



HRC.org

SRC Partners^o

SRC-Partners.com

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT: [Kimberly Zieselman, JD](#)

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WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

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Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Asexuals (or “aces”) are an umbrella community of people of any gender who experience little to no sexual attraction. Asexuality* is considered a sexual orientation, but rather than explaining *who* someone is attracted to, it explains *how* someone experiences attraction—if they do at all. Aces experience various levels of sexual, sensual, romantic, emotional, physical, and aesthetic attraction, and they desire a variety of relationships and types of intimacy.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

The near complete erasure of ace characters onscreen leads many people to wrongly believe asexuality doesn't exist or to mistake it for abstinence, celibacy, or low sex drive. Asexuality is not a choice or any sort of disorder, but when improperly depicted as such, it creates a culture that supposes aces “need to be fixed.” This causes aces a great deal of emotional pain and leaves them vulnerable to harassment and violence, even cultivating dangerous exclusionist beliefs against aces within the larger LGBTQIA+ community. Mindful ace representation can help educate society on asexual identity *and* break new ground, as most ace experiences have yet to be depicted onscreen.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Many aces use the split attraction model*, which differentiates between *romantic* and *sexual* attraction, to explain their identity (e.g., homoromantic asexual, aromantic* asexual). Also, many aces use the term “ace” rather than “asexual” (in the same way that many use “gay” instead of “homosexual”). As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves.

ASEXUALS

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Broken:** Storylines and characters that depict asexuality as a phase (e.g., saying they “just haven’t met the right person” or “had good enough sex”) or a disorder that can and should be corrected. These misrepresentations can put ace people in harmful situations (e.g., forced therapy or medications, sexual assault, rape).
- **Totally Sexless:** Characters who are *only* depicted as sex-averse or sex-repulsed (i.e., having visceral, negative reactions to sex). While these aces do exist and should be respectfully portrayed, other aces are sex-indifferent (i.e., neutral towards sex) or sex-favorable (i.e., open to sex). Even without attraction, some aces experience arousal, masturbate, and enjoy different kinds of sex, just like allosexuals*.
- **Cold Robots:** Characters who are closed off, inept at navigating human interactions, and averse to human touch (e.g., the “genius” who isn’t interested in attraction). Aces have personalities, express emotions, and desire various levels of touch and intimacy like everybody else.
- **Cheap Laughs:** Storylines and jokes that make fun of ace people and depict the lack of sexual experience and/or attraction as something irregular and wrong (e.g., jokes about virgins and late bloomers). These portrayals put sexual pressure on viewers of all identities.
- **Sad & Alone:** Aces who are depressed because they don’t have romantic and/or sexual partners. These depictions erase the happy lives of aces who find fulfillment in other kinds of relationships and activities.
- **Aliens:** Supernatural, genre, or fantasy beings depicted as asexual. These portrayals paint asexuality as inhuman and fake, perpetuating the lie that aces are “abnormal” and don’t fit in society.
- **Same Ol’ Love Story:** Love stories that always involve or lead to sex. Even allosexuals experience love, romance, intimacy, and attraction in a variety of ways that don’t make sex the be-all-end-all. Forcing these kinds of “standards” can be a source of shame and depression for aces.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Visibility:** Ace characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, older), with explicit ace identities, representing the variety of ace experiences (e.g., aromantic, graysexual*, demisexual*). Show ace characters in stories beyond their orientation (e.g., friendships, hobbies, careers).
- **Supportive Community:** Characters supported, accepted, and celebrated by friends, family, and partners when they come out or identify as ace.
- **Ace Friendships:** Characters in community with other aces, allowing them to explore and help each other through their shared experiences. Aces often find each other online, and this kind of community shouldn’t be depicted as weird or “less than” in-person relationships.
- **Dating & Relationships:** While not all aces seek any type of partnership, many do. Show stories of aces dating, in love, and in a variety of relationships (e.g., casual, romantic, sexual, queerplatonic*, polyamorous) with other aces and allosexuals. Show aces getting married and building families.
- **Gener-ace-ions:** Characters of all ages on various stages of their ace journey (e.g., older aces discovering their asexuality later in life; teenage aces out and proud at a young age).
- **Sexual Communication:** Ace *and* allosexual characters discussing their sexual, romantic, and intimate desires and boundaries in partnerships. More open conversations show that there’s no singular or “right” way to experience attraction and that respectfully navigating relationships takes work, no matter how someone sexually/romantically identifies.

“Aces have personalities,
express emotions, and desire
various levels of touch and
intimacy like everybody else.”

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

➔ Of the 637 LGBTQIA+ characters across the 2021-22 TV season, only two were known to be asexual.

➔ While measuring sexuality and sexual orientation is complicated, several studies suggest that ~1% of the population is asexual, with 10% of LGBTQIA+ youth identifying along the ace spectrum.

➔ 26% of aces identify outside of the man/woman binary, and 27% identify as transgender (or are unsure).

➔ Attitudes toward sex vary among aces. About 37% are repulsed by the idea of engaging in sex, 18% are uncertain, 28% are indifferent, and 8% are favorable to the idea of having sex.

➔ 32% of aces identify along the aromantic spectrum. Others have romantic orientations such as hetero-, homo-, bi-, and panromantic, though some choose not to describe their romantic and sexual orientations separately.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- [The Ace Community Survey](#)
- [Aces & Aros: "The aromantic umbrella" "The asexual umbrella"](#)
- [The Asexual Visibility & Education Network: "Asexuals and Attitudes Toward Sex" "General FAQ"](#)
- Autostraddle: ["Coming Out Twice: On Being Gay and Asexual in a World Without Representation"](#)
- GLAAD: ["7 young people discuss their ace identities and what people get wrong about asexuality" "Accelerating Acceptance 2021" "explore the spectrum: guide to finding your ace community" "Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022"](#)
- Huffington Post: ["Battling Asexual Discrimination, Sexual Violence And 'Corrective' Rape"](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: ["Understanding the Asexual Community"](#)
- LGBTQ&A Podcast: ["Angela Chen: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex"](#)
- The Mary Sue: ["We Need More Asexual and Aromantic Representation in Television"](#)
- Odyssey: ["The Hardships Of Being An Asexual Woman of Color"](#)
- Rewire: ["Here's What Asexual People Want You to Know"](#)
- The Trevor Project: ["Asexual and Ace Spectrum Youth" "Understanding Asexuality"](#)

GLOSSARY

Allosexual:

The opposite of asexual; someone who regularly experiences sexual attraction toward other people.

Aromantic:

A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction. Aromantics might or might not experience sexual attraction.

Asexuality:

The total or near total lack of sexual attraction to anyone and/or the lack of desire for sexual contact. Asexuality is not a choice; it shouldn't be conflated with celibacy, abstinence, or low sex drive. It's also a spectrum, with a diversity of needs and experiences among the ace community. Note: While some aces consider "asexual" their sexual orientation, others feel like they have no orientation.

Demisexual:

A person who doesn't experience sexual attraction to another person unless or until they've formed an emotional connection with them. Many demisexuals consider themselves ace, but some identify as allosexual, and others in between.

Graysexual (Gray-A):

A catch-all term for someone who identifies somewhere on the asexual spectrum or between "sexual" and "asexual" (i.e., in the "gray area").

Queerplatonic:

An umbrella term for a partnership/relationship that defies the divide between romantic and "just" friends. It may involve a greater degree of intimacy or commitment than platonic friendship but doesn't often include sexual or romantic elements.

Split Attraction Model:

The idea that *romantic* attraction and *sexual* attraction are separate from one another, meaning someone's romantic orientation and sexual orientation can be different (e.g., someone romantically attracted to multiple genders but not sexually attracted to anyone might identify as "panromantic asexual").

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **a-spec**, **abstinence**, **celibacy**, **heteronormative**, **minority stress**, **perioriented**, and **polyamorous**.

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