



Research and Practice with LGBTQ+ Populations: What You Need to Know

LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience a host of mental, behavioral, and physical health inequities (e.g., mental health, substance use, cancer, cardiovascular disease, weight control behaviors) as a result of stigma and misunderstanding. This document is meant to provide researchers and service providers basic information on sexual orientation and gender identity, the LGBTQ+ community, and the health needs of LGBTQ+ people.



Why is it important to consider LGBTQ+ status in your research and practice?

- LGBTQ+ youth and adults are subject to unique social factors that shape their health and wellness across the life course. These include rejection, exclusion, harassment, discrimination, victimization, and structural factors that limit access to resources.
- **LGBTQ+-related health disparities.** Given the aforementioned social factors, LGBTQ+ youth and adults are at increased risk for:
 - Suicidal ideation and behavior
 - STIs and HIV
 - Mood and anxiety disorders
 - Smoking, alcohol use, and substance abuse
 - Food insecurity and homelessness, particularly among youth
 - Educational and economic opportunities, particularly among transgender people
- LGBTQ+ people are likely to be participating in your studies and accessing your services. If you do not assess sexual orientation or gender identity, you will miss important information about their experiences and the development of appropriate and effective interventions
- Despite great need, LGBTQ+ people often experience limited access to health care, exclusion from research, negative experiences of discrimination or prejudice from a health providers, and a lack of health provider knowledge of or experience working with LGBTQ+ people. These healthcare experiences specific to LGBTQ+ status can be discouraging and lead to a decrease of engagement of services.

» *These social factors can be further amplified for those who hold multiple marginalized identities across race, ethnicity, nativity, socioeconomic status, religion, age, and ability.*

» *Research shows that reducing LGBTQ+ people's exposure to stigma and discrimination improves their health and wellbeing.*



How to be more aware of LGBTQ+ status in your work

- **Asking about sexual orientation and gender identity.** Measuring LGBTQ+ status accurately is important to make patients comfortable and to inform service evaluation and decision making.
 - Make sure that your forms are inclusive: Provide spaces to report sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronouns
 - Use language that does not assume sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., partner or spouse instead of husband or wife)
- **Build LGBTQ+ affirmative resource and referral networks.** It's important to make conscious referrals for LGBTQ+ clients. Make sure to have a list of LGBTQ+-specific resources available and accessible and to vet the referrals to ensure that services are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of LGBTQ+ community members.
- **Engage in LGBTQ+-related continuing education.** Be intentional about seeking out LGBTQ+-specific continuing education opportunities.
- **Create an inclusive space.** The use of language and symbolism is important in making LGBTQ clients and research participants feel welcome and affirmed. For example:
 - Use gender inclusive alternatives (e.g. 'everyone' or 'colleagues' instead of 'ladies and gentlemen')
 - Share your pronouns with clients and on your website, business cards, and emails
 - If possible, upgrade bathrooms to be all-gender and/or single occupancy
 - Create and post non-discrimination policies that explicitly include protections for LGBTQ+ people
 - Display symbols of allyship (e.g., rainbow or trans flag stickers)



Language 101

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are distinct and multifaceted concepts.

- **Sexual orientation** reflects patterns of sexual identity, sexual behavior, and sexual desire or attractions.
 - **Sexual attraction and behavior** range along a continuum from exclusively other gender to exclusively same gender. Others may experience no sexual and/or romantic attraction and/or behavior. The extent to which people report these attractions and behavior may change over their lifetime.
 - **Sexual identity** is both a personal and social identity that typically reflect a relatively enduring patterns of sexual attraction and behavior as well as membership in a social group based on shared experiences (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer).
 - For some, patterns of sexual attraction, behavior, and identity are relatively consistent across the life course, for others these characteristics can be more fluid.
 - Many people who report same gender attraction and behavior may not identify with common sexual identity labels such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For example, same gender loving is a term preferred by some, particularly in the African American community.
- **Gender identity** refers to one's innermost concept of themselves on spectrum of male to female identity, neither, or both, which may or may not be different from their sex assigned at birth.
 - **Transgender** people are individuals whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth.
 - **Cisgender** people are individuals whose gender identity is consistent with their sex assigned at birth.
 - The use of proper **personal pronouns** (e.g., she/her, he/him, they/them) are an important way to affirm people's gender identity. It is good practice to not assume someone's pronouns. Misgendering someone, by using the wrong pronouns, can be harmful to a person's mental health.
- **Gender expression** is the way someone presents their gender externally through actions, clothing, and/or mannerisms. This expression does not necessarily indicate an individual's gender identity.

>> *It is important to remember that sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity and expression. Everyone has a sexual orientation, everyone has a gender identity, and everyone has unique expressions of sexuality and gender.*

>> *Given the social nature of identity, [language and labels](#) used by the LGBTQ+ community are often changing, especially among youth.*

>> *It is important to not assume someone's gender identity or pronouns based on their gender expression. The only way to know someone's pronouns is to ask them.*

>> *Practice creating a more comfortable environment by providing your own pronouns when introducing yourself, or by having name tags, business cards, email signatures, and website bios that include pronouns.*

Other Helpful Resources

- [Institute of Medicine Report on LGBT Health](#)
- [The Fenway Institute and The National LGBT Health Education Center](#)
- [The Williams Institute](#)
- [SAMHSA LGBTQ Resource Kit](#)
- [Providing Inclusive Care for LGBTQ Patients](#)
- [University of Maryland Prevention Research Center](#)
- [UCSF Center of Excellence for Transgender Health](#)



If you are looking for consultation on research and practice with LGBTQ+ populations, feel free to contact the [UMD Prevention Research Center](#) or the [UCSF PRC's Center of Excellence for Transgender Health](#).



LGBTQ+ and "Sexual and Gender Minority"

- LGBTQ+ is an acronym often used to refer to people and communities that are represented by various forms of sexual orientations and gender identities that are not cisgender and/or heterosexual.
- Sexual and gender minority (SGM) is an umbrella term often used by medical professionals and researchers to describe people whose sexual orientations and gender identities are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. This term is often not used in community contexts.
- The use of these terms, like all LGBTQ+ terms, depends on the context, community, and individual(s) involved.