

**Understanding Sexual and Gender Diversity**

* As the visibility of the LGBTQ community continues to grow, it is important to acknowledge that sexual and gender diversity have a global cultural history and sexuality and gender, though related, are two different components of identity and are not interchangeable.
* Rather than being a modern concept or new phenomenon, the roots of sexual and gender diversity can be found in indigenous societies throughout the world, predating our current structure and language of LGBTQ identity. From the Zapotec culture of Southern Mexico recognizing *muxes* as a third/mixed/hybrid gender to the Zo’é peoples of Amazonia who practice non-monogamy traditionally and same-sex relations documented in the pottery of the ancient Peruvian Moche culture, historical examples of sexual and gender fluidity are abundant.
* The idea of diversity is the allowance of a range of possibilities. Both sexuality and gender have more modernly been referenced as existing on a spectrum. Yet, this spectrum can often be restrictive when it has been used to classify people as being gay or straight, male or female, and it is at times the in-between that can cause confusion or be negated altogether. Rather, sexual and gender diversity exists as a universe of options, as an expansiveness that allows for evolution and exploration to discover one’s identity and to build on the historical foundation of the community.
* In order to present this universe of options, it is important to provide distinction between sexuality and gender. While sexuality often refers to an individual’s physical, sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction and preferences towards others, gender relates to one’s body and their innate sense of self. The LGBTQ acronym itself combines sexuality and gender which can often be misleading and is not comprehensive for the range of identities that may be applicable for a person. A plus (+) is often used when discussing the LGBTQ(+) community to account for the identities not explicitly named in the acronym.
* Sexuality often but not always references another person’s gender. For example, someone who is asexual does not experience sexual attraction to anyone, regardless of their gender while a bisexual may have attractions to someone who is their gender in addition to another gender. In regards to gender, it is necessary to distinguish between sex and gender. Sex is a designation at birth based upon visible anatomy and listed on one’s birth certificate typically as male or female. This may exclude Intersex individuals who may have a reproductive or sexual anatomy that exists outside of the strictly binary designations of male or female. If a person identifies with their sex designation from birth, they are cisgender. If one’s identity differs from this sex designation, they are transgender. Transgender is an umbrella term that includes a vast array of gender possibilities. Both cisgender and transgender people can also have a range of sexualities. A transgender woman can be a lesbian who is attracted to women who may be cisgender or transgender.
* While there is no definitive list of how many sexualities and genders exist, we must remember that languages and identities are constantly evolving. What we know to be true about ourselves cannot always be named but can be felt. Providing individuals the language and/or the opportunity to define for themselves who they are is a form of empowerment we all must continue to encourage.

**What can we do?**

To be an LGBTQ ally requires a willingness to educate others about the discrimination and violence the community faces, to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, and to uplift and center voices of the community. Educating oneself about the cultural and revolutionary history of sexual and gender diversity is vital to ally ship.

Likewise, for members of the LGBTQ community, we must be allies to each other as part of a shared struggle and shared pride. In the legacy of our diversity lies our beauty and our strength.

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/articles/understanding-gender>

<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/08/20/indigenous-sexualities-resisting-conquest-and-translation/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/different-types-of-sexuality#a-c>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders#a-d>