



# Becoming An Ally



## Working With LGBTQ+ Veterans

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## Why is this important?

- Despite the fact that Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed in 2011, LGBTQ+ service members are still experiencing harassment and discrimination.
- For Veterans who served under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, there have been lasting emotional consequences as a result of having to conceal their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Even years after discharge, Veterans are experiencing PTSD symptoms and increased anxiety and depression due to the fear that was fostered by being forced to live in the closet through their entire military service.

(Levinson, 2019)



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## Why is this important?

One Veteran wrote an article for the New York Times describing the death threats he received once he began serving as an openly gay man in the Army. He was receiving anonymous notes from his fellow soldiers, that started with what could be seen by some as jokes in poor taste: “Taking ridicule—smiling at the most vile and offensive slights with the understanding that they were nothing more than jokes—is the most important social capital in the military.” The Veteran feared reporting the notes and then being seen as weak or incompetent, resulting in retaliation from his unit. So even when the notes included death threats, he still remained silent.

(Fanning, 2019)



# Prevalence of Transgender Military Service

- In 2014, there were approximately 15,500 transgender individuals serving in active duty, in the Guard, and in the Reserves.
  - Also estimated that there were 134,300 transgender Veterans.
- 21.4% of transgender Americans had served in the military as of 2014, while only 10.7% of cisgender adults had served.
- Under President Trump, transgender individuals were no longer allowed to enlist.

(Gates & Herman, 2014; Tucker, 2019)



## Recent Policy Change

- President Biden reversed President Trump's policy. The new policy allowed all transgender individuals to enlist as their self-identified gender.
- The new policy also allowed for service members to undergo transition while serving, procedures were developed to change a service member's gender marker, and no service member may be involuntarily discharged or denied reenlistment based on their gender identity.

(Wamsley, 2021)



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## Mental Health Concerns for the LGBTQ+ Population

- LGBT individuals consistently show increased stress and psychological vulnerability when compared to their non-LGBT peers.
- LGBT civilians have higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD and substance use compared to non-LGBT individuals.
- Minority stress theory states that as major life events and chronic circumstances accumulate, an individual becomes less equipped to adapt, adjust, and tolerate continued life stressors.



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# Mental Health Concerns

- It is unknown whether minority stress theory can be applied to military culture, but it is a reasonable place to start.
- LGB Veterans utilizing the VA were more likely to screen positively for PTSD, depression, and alcohol use than non-LGB Veterans.
- The 2015 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey found that lifetime history of non-suicidal self-harm was reported by 26.5 percent of LGBT military personnel.

(Cochran et al. as cited in Goldbach & Castro, 2016, p.2)

(Meadows, et al., 2015)



# Suicide Risk

As it is, the Veteran suicide rate is around twice that of the general population.

- For lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, the attempted suicide rate is 3 to 4 times higher than the rest of the population, and up to 10 times higher for transgender Americans.
- Transgender Veterans who use VA services die by suicide at double the rate of the general population of Veterans receiving VA care.

(Levinson, 2019; Tucker, 2019)





# Mental Health Concerns

- The 2015 Department of Defense Survey also found that 39.9 percent of LGBT service members have experienced unwanted sexual contact.
- The previously held DADT policy likely perpetuated rates of same-sex sexual assault, as these survivors of rape, assault, and sexual harassment are reluctant to report the violence because of fears that the experiences may be seen as ‘homosexual’ activity.

(Goldbach & Castro, 2016; Meadows, et al., 2015)



# Treatment Considerations

Even after DADT was repealed, Biddiz et al. found that while coming out to a medical provider could no longer be used as a reason for discharge from the military, only 70% of participants in their study stated comfort talking about their sexual orientation with a military provider, and 56.7% believing the military cares about their well-being despite their sexual orientation.

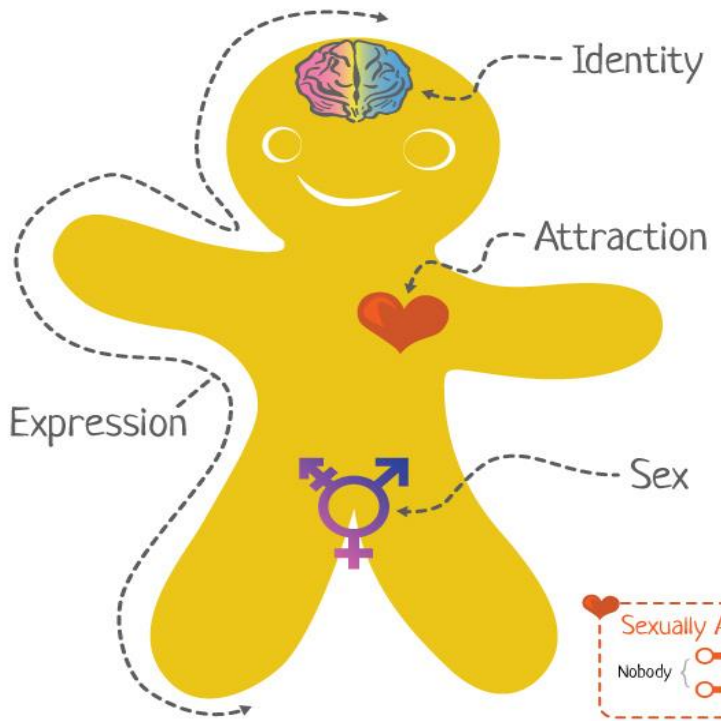
(Goldbach & Castro, 2016)



# The Genderbread Person v3.3

by its pronounced **METROsexual**.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.



Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity, combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread. 4 (of infinite) possible plot and label combos

**Gender Identity**

⊘ Indicates a lack of what's on the right

Woman-ness  
Man-ness

How you, in your head, define your gender, based on how much you align (or don't align) with what you understand to be the options for gender:

**Gender Expression**

Feminine  
Masculine

The ways you present gender, through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

**Biological Sex**

Female-ness  
Male-ness

The physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

**Sexually Attracted to**

Nobody { Women/Females/Femininity  
Men/Males/Masculinity

**Romantically Attracted to**

Nobody { Women/Females/Femininity  
Men/Males/Masculinity

In each grouping, circle all that apply to you and plot a point, depicting the aspects of gender toward which you experience attraction.

For a bigger bite, read more at <http://bit.ly/genderbread>

## What's the difference?



# Terminology: Gender Identity

- Transgender: an umbrella term of anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, but does not identify as a man).
- Transsexual: a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.



## Terminology: Gender Identity

- Gender dysphoria: clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. A transgender person can feel dysphoric about some parts of their body, their entire body, or may not experience dysphoria at all.
- Cisgender: a gender description for when someone's sex assigned at birth and gender identity correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man). The word cisgender can also be shortened to "cis".



# Terminology: Gender Identity

- Non-binary: an adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.
- Other terms for non-binary identities: gender non-conforming, gender fluid, genderqueer, gender variant, agender, bigender



## Terminology: Gender Identity

- Preferred pronouns: these are the pronouns that a person identifies the closest with and/or that creates the least amount of dysphoria. Not all transgender people like this term; it can feel invalidating.
- Passing: trans people being accepted as, or able to “pass for”, a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans. Also: an LGB/queer person who is believed to be or perceived as straight.
- Transition/transitioning: referring to the process of a transgender person changing aspects of themselves (e.g., their appearance, name, pronouns, or making physical changes to their body) to be more congruent with the gender they know themselves to be (as opposed to the gender they lived as pre-transitioning).



# Terminology: Gender Identity

- Gender confirmation surgery: a newer, more affirming term to describe sex reassignment surgery (SRS), or the group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex.
- Top surgery: this term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.
- Bottom surgery: A colloquial way of referring to gender affirming genital surgery.





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## Terminology: Gender Expression

- Gender expression: the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.
- Androgyny: a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity.
- Drag king/drag queen: someone who performs either (hyper-) masculinity or (hyper-) femininity theatrically.



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# Terminology: Sexuality

- **Bisexual:** a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for both men and women. This can include either trans men or trans women or both. Often shortened to “bi”.
- **Pansexual:** a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to “pan”.



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## Terminology: Sexuality

- Heteronormativity: the assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities: for example, when learning a woman is married, asking her what her husband's name is. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.



# Terminology: Other terms

- LGBTQ+; GSM; DSG; TGNC: shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality; there are many different acronyms people prefer. LGBTQ+ is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (the + at the end is in an effort to be more inclusive); GSM is Gender and Sexual Minorities; DSG is Diverse Sexualities and Genders; TGNC is Transgender and Gender Non-conforming (sometimes you'll see "NB" added for non-binary).
- Queer: an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight and/or cisgender. Can also be used as a slur to refer to someone who isn't straight and/or cisgender. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, and how it is still used as a slur in many communities, it is not embraced or used by all LGTBQ people.



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## How to be a great ally

- Be willing to listen; never assume anything.
- Respect each Veteran's pronouns.
- Know your terminology.
- Keep an open mind.
- Be mindful of your questioning.
- Be careful of the jokes you make; confront your own biases and prejudices.
- If a Veteran comes out to you, that is not your story to tell others.



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## Other Guidelines

- Work hard not to misgender a Veteran. Be sure to use a person's preferred pronouns. If you make a mistake, correct yourself and move on; do your best.
- It is important not to ask someone if they've had "the surgery" (referring to gender confirmation surgery).
- Take cues from the person you're speaking to about what language to use; do not refer to someone as "queer" when that is not their preferred label. Better to steer clear of the term if this is unclear.



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## When providing case management services

- If you notice that a Veteran is using a chosen name instead of their birth name (sometimes referred to as their “dead” name), ask them if they want to change their name legally. It is valuable to know how someone would go about changing their name, in case they want help.
- It’s best not to ask if a transgender Veteran plans to transition or if they are transitioning; this is very personal. However, if they share with you that they are indeed transitioning, and bring you in on the conversation, you can ask them how it’s going when they have related appointments.
- Again, do your absolute best to use each person’s preferred pronouns. If you are unsure, ask them, “What pronouns do you use?” It’s much better to ask, than to assume.



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