

SUPPORTING THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

*A GUIDE TO IDENTITIES, HISTORY,
AND HOW TO BE A GOOD ALLY*



by Zoe Stoller



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A NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER

WELCOME

The aftermath of sexual assault is a weight no one ought to carry. While sexual abuse and assault occurs in many contexts, its prevalence on college campuses has increased rapidly in recent years.

Universities are aware, and have put forth mixed efforts geared toward prevention and appropriate safety measures. Nonetheless, students, parents, and educators continue to express confusion about how to address this rampant, and devastating social and relational travesty.

If you have endured sexual assault on campus, we hope the information in this paper provide some resources, and at the very least, assurance that you are not alone.



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PART OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

The LGBTQ+ community -- i.e. the community for everyone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and more! -- is the overarching affinity group for those whose sexuality and/or gender do not fit the societal “norm” of being straight and cisgender.

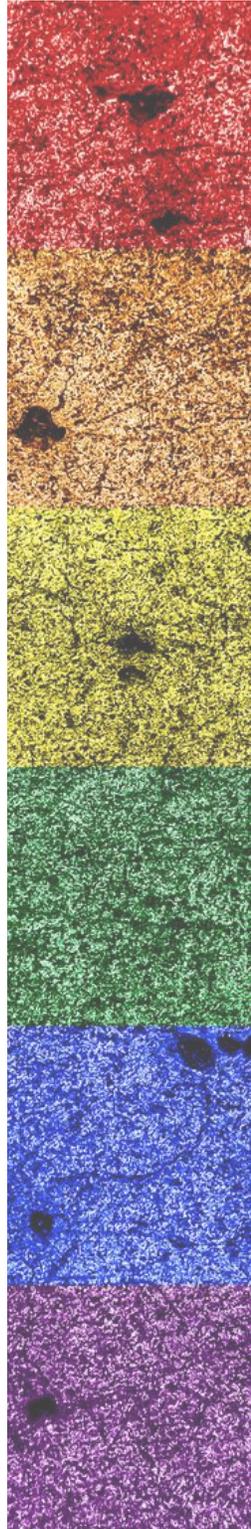
Cisgender is the opposite of transgender and refers to people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth--whereas transgender people’s gender identities are different from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Cisgender is often shortened to “cis,” and transgender is often shortened to “trans.”)

There are many sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ community for those with similar identities or gender expressions to connect and support each other. For example, there are distinct gay male communities, transgender communities, asexual communities, and more.

Some people within the LGBTQ+ spectrum will hold multiple related identities (for example, someone can be both bisexual and non-binary -- and thus have both their sexuality and gender fall within the community), whereas others will just hold one identity (for example, someone can be a cisgender lesbian).

Either way, each individual in the LGBTQ+ community has a completely unique experience that is beautiful and valid.

And while there is some inner-community gatekeeping (such as some trans people believing non-binary people are not “trans enough”), for the most part, the members of the community support each other and are an ally to all LGBTQ+ rights, even for identities that are not their own.





WHY IS THERE A DISTINCT COMMUNITY FOR LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES?

To put it simply, this distinct community exists to connect and empower those whose identity experiences are deemed “abnormal” by society, and whose lives, rights, and wellbeings are affected as a result.

The LGBTQ+ community has historically been abused, denied rights and services, misdiagnosed with mental illness, and been the victims of violence -- for no reason other than their sexual orientation or gender. Yet despite that, the community as a whole has continued to pursue their true selves and fight for better treatment.

It's important for any marginalized group to have an overarching community like this because otherwise, it would be easy for those in power to continue to take advantage and try to diminish the rights of the community.

Many people wonder why there is no straight and cis community or pride celebration. The answer is simple: straight and cis people do not face the same adversity that LGBTQ+ people face. In fact, they're in a position of power in the world.

It is not a bad thing to be straight and cis, but it does not warrant a specific community or celebration -- much like white people should not have a specific movement and organization, whereas Black people should (i.e. the Black Lives Matter movement).



A HISTORY OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AND THEIR RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

LGBTQ+ people have always existed, but their human rights have not, especially in the United States. In fact, sodomy (i.e. homosexual intercourse) was a crime in the 19th century -- and it wasn't until 2015 that same-sex marriage became legal across the country!



But the community and allies have been fighting for LGBTQ+ rights since long before that.

Some of the earliest instances occurred in the early 20th century -- In 1924, the first gay rights organization was created (called The Society for Human Rights). And in 1936, the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), took on its first LGBTQ+ case.



But while the community worked to change how the world viewed them, they, unfortunately, continued to be mistreated. Specifically, in 1952, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) created the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) -- and included homosexuality as a mental illness.



This truly put the community at a disadvantage and singled them out as a “bad” part of society (though in reality, being LGBTQ+ is not a mental illness, and those with mental health struggles are not bad or damaged.)

For example, in 1953, President Eisenhower prohibited gay people from working for the government, since their “mental illness” would be a security risk.

However, in 1956, psychologist Evelyn Hooker performed a study trying to locate the differences between gay and straight men -- and when she determined that there were no mental differences, and homosexuality was not a clinical issue, the public perception of gay people started to change.

In fact, two years later in 1958, in the case of One, Inc. v. Olesen (when a gay magazine was deemed lewd and inappropriate by the Los Angeles postmaster, who petitioned that it should not be published), the Supreme Court determined that LGBTQ+ people should, in fact, receive 1st Amendment rights to free speech and press.

And in 1962, Illinois decriminalized homosexuality, making it the first state to repeal the long-standing sodomy laws, with many states following suit in later years.



One of the next parts of LGBTQ+ history in the United States is more commonly known and discussed, as it spearheaded the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement--the Stonewall Riots of June 1969.

Led by Black trans women including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, the riots began when Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, was raided (yet again) by police. But these women (and many others) fought back and continued to do so for several days.

The following year, in 1970, a parade was held to commemorate the Stonewall Riots - a celebration that has since translated into the annual Pride parades!

But it didn't stop there: in 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM, thereby agreeing that it is not a mental illness. And in 1974, Kathy Kozachenko was elected to the Ann Arbor, Michigan City Council, becoming the first openly gay person to hold public office.

Later, in 1977, this trend continued with the election of Harvey Milk to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, where he introduced an ordinance that prevented gay people from being fired from their jobs.

The community continued to see public successes like these, but it also continued to struggle -- especially in the 1980s, when the AIDS epidemic hit the gay community (so much so that AIDS was originally called Gay-Related Immune Deficiency Disorder).

AIDS not only led to many deaths but also negatively impacted the public's perception of gay people and caused a great deal of stigmatization (which still continues today - for example, as gay men cannot donate blood for 3 months after having intercourse with another man).



Over time, however, the AIDS epidemic became more supported by the country, and in 1990, President Bush signed the Ryan White Care Act (named after a teenager who contracted AIDS from a blood treatment and subsequently was expelled from school), which gives medical funds and care to people living with AIDS.

The next major hurdle came in 1996, though, when President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which recognized legal marriages as valid only if between a man and a woman -- and also said that each state didn't have to recognize any same-sex unions from other states.

Under President Obama, though, LGBTQ+ people received more protection. The Matthew Shepard Act was passed in 1809 (named after a 21-year-old gay man who was brutally murdered because of his identity), which added to the 1969 U.S. Federal Hate Crime Law to incorporate hate crimes resulting from the victim's identity (gender, sexuality, and/or disability).



In 2011, the U.S. Military policy “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was repealed (after being enacted in 1994), meaning members of the LGBTQ+ community could openly enlist and serve.

And finally, in 2015, gay marriage was officially legalized in the entirety of the United States, after a historic Supreme Court rule in the Obergefell v. Hodges case.



While LGBTQ+ lives continue to be threatened today (for example, with actions by former President Trump, including the transgender military ban, and the increasing murders of Black trans women), it is clear that the community is resilient and proud -- and that individuals will continue to pursue and amplify their authentic identities.



Note: This is by no means a complete history of LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. These are simply some of the most significant milestones to outline the struggles and successes of the community.



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDER & SEXUALITY?

Sexuality and gender identities are both part of the LGBTQ+ community - so many people wonder what the differences and similarities are between the two.

In short, gender identity is a feeling within people that allows them to categorize and understand themselves and where they fall on the vast gender spectrum – male, female, both, neither, or anywhere else.

Some genders include (but are not limited to!) man, woman, non-binary, genderqueer, and agender.

Sexuality, on the other hand, is focused on what kinds of people someone is attracted to (and in what ways they're attracted to them). In other words, it describes their outward connections with other people, as opposed to their inner connections to themselves.

Some sexualities include (but are not limited to!) gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual.

Despite their differences, both sexuality and gender identities are included in the LGBTQ+ community because the purpose of the community is to reflect and support any experiences that are different from “the norm,” which includes being both straight and cis (i.e. “the norm” of personal identities includes both sexuality and gender).



Gender Terms + Definitions

Gender - a feeling within people that allows them to categorize and understand themselves within the context of the larger world and vast gender spectrum.

Binary Gender - a gender that falls within the socially constructed dichotomy of either man or woman.

Non-Binary Gender - a gender identity that falls outside of the man-woman binary. Some people feel their gender is partially connected to man or woman, while others feel completely separate from the binary. Non-binary can also be an umbrella term for any gender that isn't strictly man or woman. (Non-binary is often shortened to "enby.")

Man - within the gender binary; typically associated with masculine/testosterone-based traits, such as dominance and assertiveness. However, the only requirement for identifying as a man is feeling a connection to that label. You don't have to display the "typical" male characteristics.



Woman - within the gender binary; typically associated with feminine/estrogen-based traits, such as sensitivity and nurturing abilities. However, the only requirement for identifying as a woman is feeling a connection to that label. You don't have to display the "typical" female characteristics.

Cisgender - describes someone whose gender identity is the same as what they were assigned at birth. It is the opposite of transgender.

Transgender - describes someone whose gender identity is different from what they were assigned at birth. This can include non-binary people as well, though not all non-binary people will feel comfortable describing themselves with the transgender identity label.

Agender - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who does not have a gender, or whose identity feels gender-neutral.

Genderfluid - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone whose gender identity changes over time. This looks different for each person and can contain an infinite number of possibilities. (Ex. you might sometimes feel like a woman, sometimes like a man, sometimes agender, etc.)

Genderflux - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone whose gender changes over time in terms of intensity. In other words, sometimes you might feel strongly like a woman with a bit of you feeling agender -- and other times, you might feel strongly agender, and slightly like a woman. The genderflux experience will vary from person to person.

Genderqueer - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who doesn't conform to typical gender understandings, but who may identify (at least partially) with any or all genders. Each genderqueer person will have a different experience with gender, and it can also be used as an umbrella term (similar to non-binary) that describes a spectrum of gender possibilities.

Demigirl - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels partially connected to being a girl, but not completely. Demigirls may or may not identify with other genders as well.

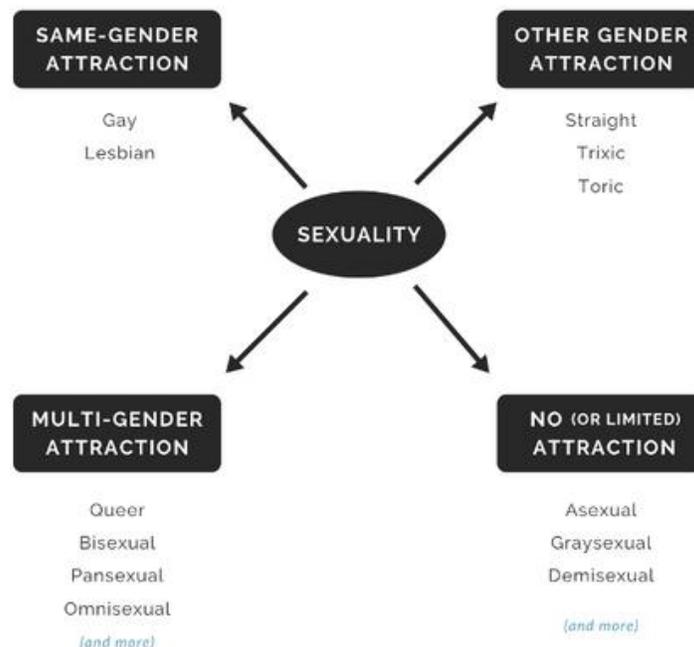
Demiboy - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels partially connected to being a boy, but not completely. Demiboy may or may not identify with other genders as well.

Bigender - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels connected to two genders at the same time (or they fluctuate between two genders). The bigender experience will vary from person to person.

Trigender - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels connected to three genders at the same time (or they fluctuate between three genders). The trigender experience will vary from person to person.

Pangender - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels connected to any and all genders at the same time (or they fluctuate between those genders). The pangender experience will vary from person to person.

Omnigender - within the non-binary umbrella; describes someone who feels connected to most -- but not all -- genders. The omnigender experience will vary from person to person.



Sexuality - describes which gender(s) someone is sexually attracted to (if any). Each sexuality also has a romantic orientation counterpart, which describes which gender(s) someone is sexually attracted to (if any).

Straight - describes someone who is attracted to people of the “opposite” gender; thinking in binary terms, the opposite of man is woman, and vice versa. (Straight people, like anyone of any sexuality, can be both cis or trans.)

Gay - describes a man who is attracted to men (romantically and/or sexually). The word gay is also used by the larger non-straight community to describe their sexuality; it is not solely reserved for just men.

Lesbian - describes a woman who is attracted to other women (romantically and/or sexually). It can also be defined as a non-man who is attracted to non-men, to more inherently include non-binary lesbians.

Queer - describes someone whose sexuality is not straight and/or cis (the term can refer to either sexual orientation or gender identity). The term queer might be used by people who are attracted to (and/or experience) multiple genders, or just one gender; the word is vast and open, and many queer people do not feel the need to further narrow themselves down.

Bisexual - describes someone who is attracted to 2 or more genders, which can be both binary or non-binary. (The related term, biromantic, describes someone who is romantically attracted to 2 or more genders.)

Pansexual - describes someone who is attracted to all genders, without any preference for one over another. (The related term, panromantic, describes someone who is romantically attracted to all genders, with no preference.)

Omnisexual - describes someone who is sexually attracted to all genders, but has a preference for certain genders over others. (The related term, omniromantic, describes someone who is romantically attracted to all genders, but with a preference.)

Trixic - describes a non-binary person who is attracted to women. (Though not all people who fit this definition will relate to the term.)

Toric - describes a non-binary person who is attracted to men. (Though not all people who fit this definition will relate to the term.)

Asexual - describes someone who does not experience romantic attraction, or who does so under certain circumstances. (The related term, aromantic, describes someone who does not experience romantic attraction, or who does so under certain circumstances.)

Graysexual - within the asexual umbrella; describes someone who experiences limited sexual attraction, or whose attraction fluctuates or only appears during certain circumstances. (The related term, grayromantic, describes someone whose romantic attraction is limited or fluctuates.)

Demisexual - within the asexual umbrella; describes someone who does not experience sexual attraction to someone until they've closely bonded with the person. (The related term, demiromantic, describes someone who only experiences romantic attraction after forming a close emotional bond.)





However, it's also important to mention that it's okay to not come out right away (or at all) - not everyone is in a position where it is safe to do so, and not everyone feels it is necessary to share that part of themselves.

Wherever you are in the process of coming out as your authentic self, your experience is valid.





WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS ARE NOT ACCEPTING OF YOUR IDENTITY?

It can be very upsetting and cause a lot of uncertainty if your family or friends do not accept you for who you are. And the first (and perhaps most important) thing to do is to recognize that this is not a reflection of you in any way.

Rather, it is a reflection of those who are not accepting you, as they are putting their personal beliefs over your mental health and safety. Keep reminding yourself that you are a wonderful person and there is nothing wrong with you -- especially not your LGBTQ+ identity.

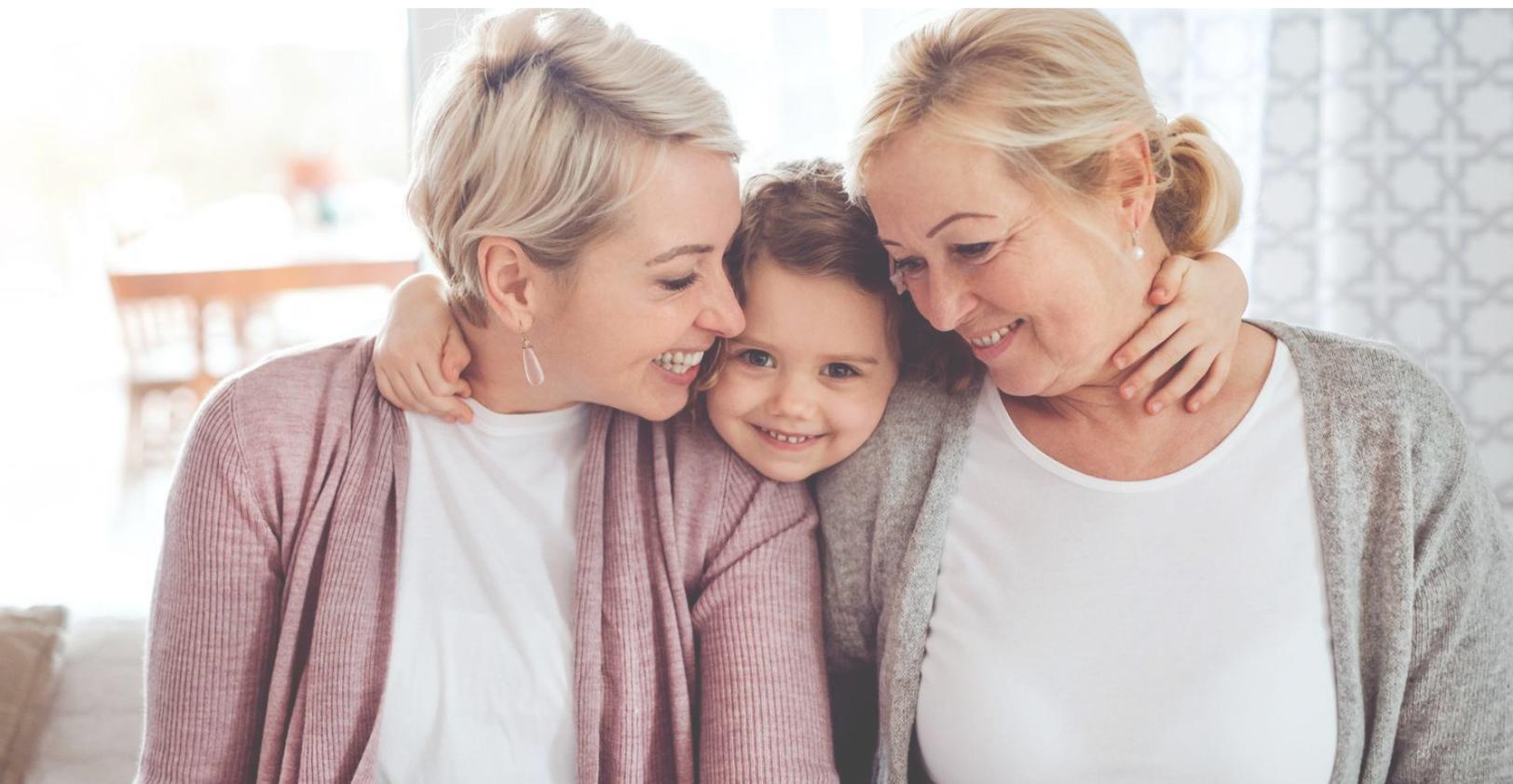
The second important step to take is to consider your safety. Some families choose to not allow their LGBTQ+ child to stay in their house, and others can be violent and abusive.

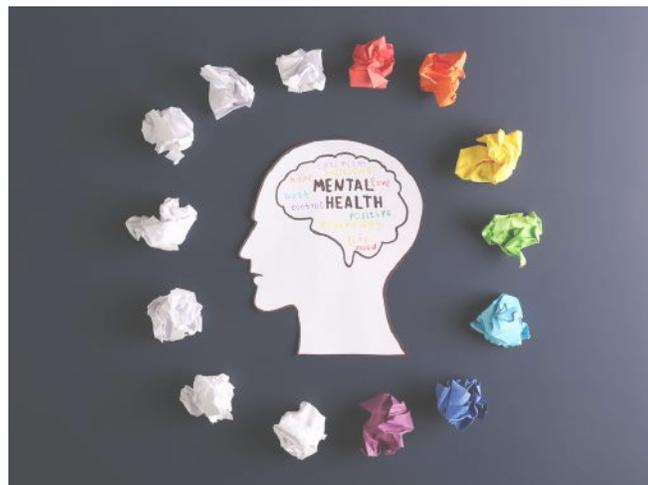
In these cases, it's important to find other locations to stay (which can be challenging, especially during the pandemic), such as a friend's house or with a different, more accepting family member.

Also, it can be really helpful to consider individual therapy to work through your emotions surrounding your identity (most practices now offer therapy completely online), as well as surround yourself with someone who will provide extra support and validation where it is lacking elsewhere.

Another great option to replace a supportive physical community is to find a strong online community. (This is especially helpful while quarantining, as you're already restricted from being with much of your in-person community).

There are so many people and communities out there who share your identities, and who want to be a good friend and ally to you. And these exist all over the internet, whether it's a [subreddit](#) or [Discord](#) server, or even finding creators who share their stories on places like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube.





IS THERE A CORRELATION BETWEEN BEING LGBTQ+ & STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH?

Though being LGBTQ+ used to be defined as a mental illness, the act of being not-straight or not-cis is (luckily) no longer perceived in this way.

However, there still is a correlation between being LGBTQ+ and struggling with mental health, mainly because of the ways LGBTQ+ exist and are treated in the world.

This is particularly the case with younger members of the community, who face many adversities including bullying, harassment, invalidation, and lack of support, discrimination within healthcare settings, conversion therapy, homelessness, and much more.

To put this into numbers, LGBTQ+ young people are twice as likely to experience depression and four times as likely to have attempted suicide.



However, along with these struggles comes a great deal of resilience. Because LGBTQ+ people are so often discriminated against, they have to learn how to still thrive and succeed in the world.

And part of this resilience comes in the form of seeking mental health services -- LGBTQ+ people tend to use these services 2.5 times more frequently.

To reiterate, the LGBTQ+ community does face more mental health struggles than the cis/straight communities, but this is largely due to outside adversities and is not at all caused by being LGBTQ+.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ALLY?

An ally is someone who can be counted on to amplify a community's message and join in (productively) to fight for their rights -- even though they themselves are not a member of that community.

Allies are helpful for every community that is marginalized or denied rights, which includes the LGBTQ+ community. (It's important to note that everyone can be an LGBTQ+ ally -- both those who are not within the community, and those who are, as you can be an ally to identities that are not your own.)

The support of allies is very important and essential to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in times when LGBTQ+ voices are actively being silenced or ignored. In these times, non-LGBTQ+ allies' voices can often break through those barriers to spread education and awareness to those who might not otherwise receive it.



How to Be a Good Ally & Best Support the LGBTQ+ Community

While many people might call themselves an ally of any community, not everyone is a good ally. And there truly is a distinction.

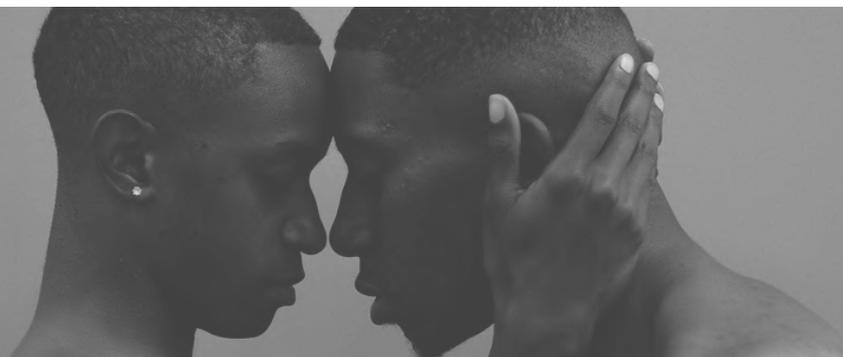
A “bad” or insincere ally is someone who says they’re an ally but doesn’t truly help the LGBTQ+ community (or does the bare minimum for the “clout”).

A good ally, on the other hand, is someone who actually dedicates themselves to the community and fights for them as if they were part of it. This kind of ally is the one that can create real change and be a true asset to the community.

There are many ways to be a good ally, some of which include:

- Educating yourself on LGBTQ+ matters and issues (reading this post is a great start!)
- Showing up as an LGBTQ+ ally during all times of the year, not just during Pride month
- Recognizing where you have privilege, and how you can use that to make a change
- Calling people out if they say something homophobic or transphobic
- And having conversations with LGBTQ+-phobic family and friends to try to change their perspectives and understandings

Overall, to be a good ally, it’s important to be in the mindset of wanting to help other communities because their rights and wellbeing are important -- not just because it “looks good” on your resume or social media.



LGBTQ+ ROLE MODELS & CELEBRITIES

There are many wonderful LGBTQ+ role models and celebrities to look to for inspiration, education, and visibility. These include professional athletes, movie stars, writers, scientists, and more! They all come from a variety of backgrounds and hold a variety of identities.

Below are just a few of the many famous LGBTQ+ people who might inspire and interest you (specifically, in the United States, though prominent LGBTQ+ people most certainly exist worldwide).

The celebrities are segmented into 5 different LGBTQ+ identities: transgender/non-binary; lesbian; gay; bisexual/pansexual; and asexual.

Transgender / Non-Binary

- [Elliot Page](#) (he/they pronouns), actor and producer
- [Aaron Phillip](#) (she/her pronouns), fashion model
- [Laverne Cox](#) (she/her pronouns), actress and activist
- [Chella Man](#) (he/him pronouns), artist and actor
- [Harrison Browne](#) (he/him pronouns), athlete and speaker

Lesbian

- [Sally Ride](#) (she/her pronouns), astronaut and physicist
- [Megan Rapinoe](#) (she/her pronouns), soccer player
- [Lena Waithe](#) (she/her pronouns), actress, writer, and producer
- [Tammy Baldwin](#) (she/her pronouns), United States Senator
- [Hayley Kiyoko](#) (she/her pronouns), singer-songwriter

LGBTQ+ ROLE MODELS & CELEBRITIES

Gay

- [Dan Levy](#) (he/him pronouns), actor and writer
- [Anderson Cooper](#) (he/him pronouns), CNN anchor
- [Anthony Romero](#) (he/him pronouns), executive director of the ACLU
- [Wade Davis](#) (he/him pronouns), former NFL player
- [Tim Cook](#) (he/him pronouns), CEO of Apple

Bisexual / Pansexual

- [Keiynan Lonsdale](#) (he/him pronouns), actor
- [Janelle Monáe](#) (she/her pronouns), singer-songwriter
- [David Cicilline](#) (he/him pronouns), US Representative
- [Bella Thorne](#) (she/her pronouns), actress and director
- [Cara Delevigne](#) (she/her pronouns), model and actress

Asexual

- [Tim Gunn](#) (he/him pronouns), fashion consultant and TV personality
- [Janeane Garofalo](#) (she/her pronouns), comedian and actress
- [Bradford Cox](#) (he/him pronouns), singer-songwriter
- [Paula Poundstone](#) (she/her pronouns), comedian and author
- [Edward Gorey](#) (he/him pronouns), writer and artist



THOUGHTS ON BEING A GOOD ALLY

As you can see, the LGBTQ+ community is vastly diverse and nuanced, with a rich history of both oppression and triumph.

There is not a great deal of education about the community, which is why it's important to spread awareness -- especially because LGBTQ+ people are so prevalent in so many parts of society.

Whether you yourself are part of the LGBTQ+ community, or you're looking to be a better ally, the hope is that you received helpful information from this guide!

If you're struggling with your identity or your mental health, you might consider looking into [individual therapy](#). It not only enables you to discover more about yourself, but it also serves as a safe, supportive space where you can be your full self.





MEET THE AUTHOR

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Zoe Stoller (she/they) is a professional writer and digital marketer based in Philadelphia. She is passionate about sharing education and motivation about the LGBTQ+ and mental health communities, and her goal is to inspire others to be their fullest, most authentic selves. She is a recent Summa Cum Laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, and in her spare time, she loves to read and write poetry.

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*"Everyone deserves a safe,
empowered, and
pleasurable relationship
with sex."*

DR. KATE BALESTRIERI