



A workbook to support your journey to  
becoming an ally for LGBTQ2+ Seniors

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# What's this workbook for?

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We wrote this workbook to support people who want to learn more about the experiences and care needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2+) Seniors. Many care providers want to provide optimal care to this group of seniors, but aren't necessarily sure how to do that! This workbook guides you to various resources for you to view and to read. We also invite you to engage in some self-reflection about your own beliefs and assumptions about sexual orientation, gender identity and LGBTQ2+ communities. We hope that by the end of your learning journey with this workbook that you will feel more confident in your ability to provide knowledgeable, compassionate and affirming care to LGBTQ2+ seniors. Thank you!

## Who are LGBTQ2+ Seniors and what do they need?



- Photo by Marcus Spiske



# The Basics

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Before we dig into the experiences and care needs of LGBTQ2+ seniors, understanding some of the terminology and concepts related to LGBTQ2+ communities might be helpful. Language and ideas related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are ever-evolving and reflect our changing understanding of ourselves and who we are in the world. Language is related to identity and visibility and is often experienced as deeply important to members of LGBTQ2+ communities.



## Activity #1 - LGBT 101: An introduction to the Queer Community:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE7bKmOXY3w>

What were you surprised to learn in this video?

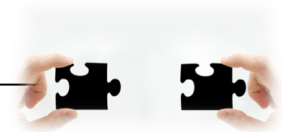
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## Activity #2 - Match Up



*Draw a line between the word in the left column to match up with the definitions on the right*

### Word

### Definition

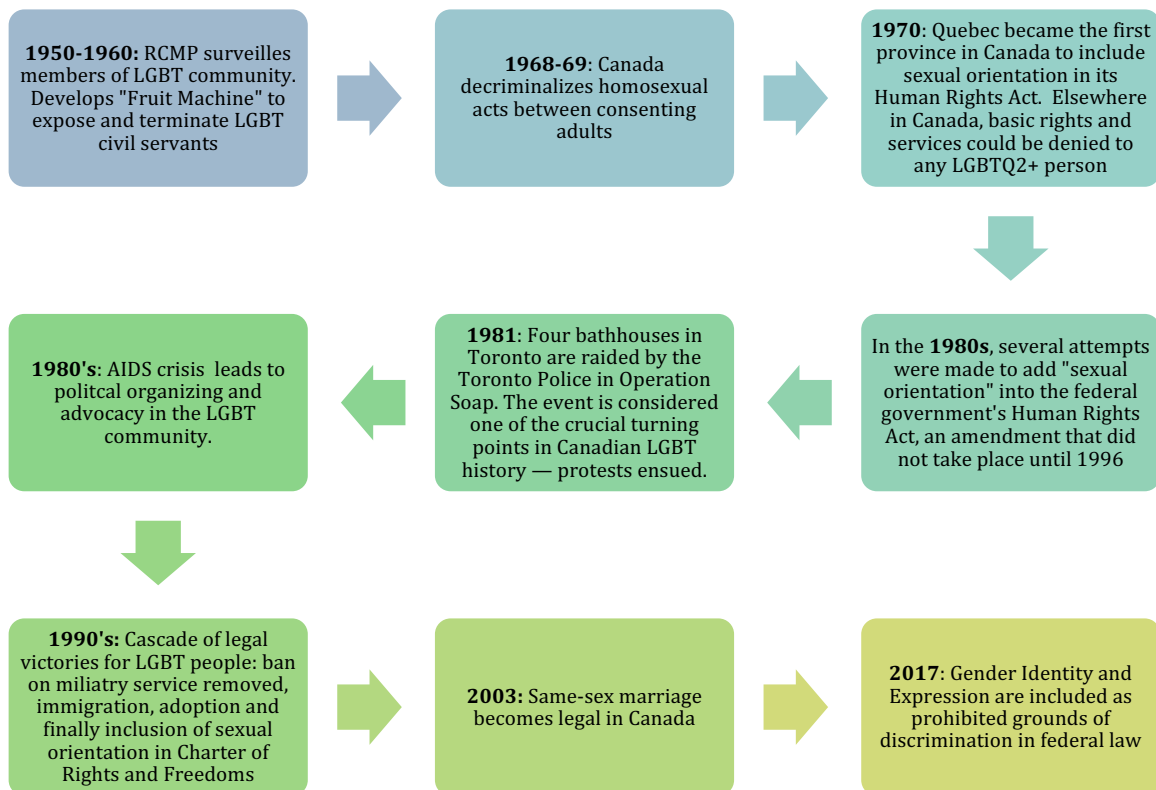
Intersex	Historically, a derogatory term for homosexuality, used to insult LGBT people. Although still used as a slur by some, the term has been reclaimed by some members of LGBT communities, particularly youth. In its reclaimed form it can be used as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity, or as a means of challenging rigid identity categories.
Gender Identity	A heterosexual and/or cisgender person who supports queer identities and interrupts or challenges queer-phobic and heterosexists comments and actions
Cisgender	How one outwardly manifests gender; for example, through name and pronoun choice, style of dress etc.
Ally	A term used by some North American Aboriginal societies to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender roles and sexual orientations.
Passing/To Pass	An individual having reproductive organs or external sexual characteristics of both male and female.
Two-Spirit	A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex—often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions.
Gender Expression	Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity.
Gay	The view that there are only two totally distinct opposite and static genders (masculine and feminine) to identify with and express.
Queer	A person mostly attracted to those of the same gender; often used to refer to men only.
Transgender	A term sometimes use to refer to the stat of an LGBTQ2+ person not being visibly recognizable as LGBTQ2+. This term is most commonly used in relation to trans people.
Gender Binary	

*\* See answer key in Appendix A*

# A Bit of History...

Although much has changed for LGBTQ2+ communities in the past 40 years, the journey has not always been an easy one. This generation of LGBTQ2+ seniors has lived through decades of negative messaging about their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Some have experienced physical violence and likely all have experienced prejudice, rejection and discrimination.

Follow the timeline below to see a few of the major events in LGBTQ2+ history in Canada:



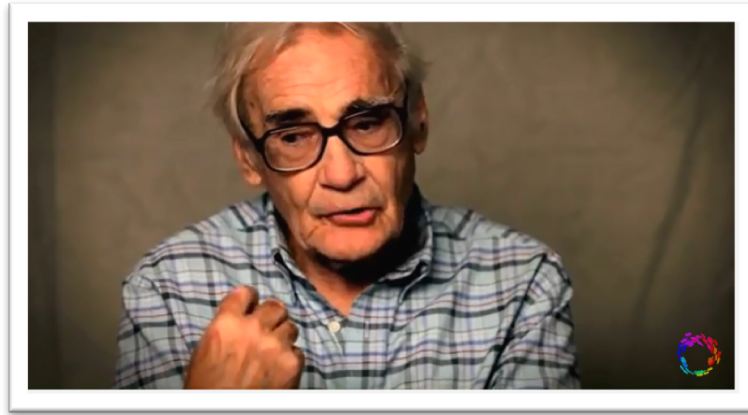
For a more detailed exploration Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Canada go to:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-rights-in-canada>

# In their own words...

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So, what was it really like growing up LGBTQ2+ for today's seniors?



## Activity # 3 - LGBT Seniors Tell Their Stories at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDOdv792rBA>

What impact do you think these experiences might have on LGBTQ2+ seniors' expectations of care?

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*Note:* Even now, LGBTQ2+ seniors are at increased risk of abuse and neglect because they are more isolated, have fewer informal supports looking out for them and/or protecting them from people who would take advantage of them, and because of on-going homophobia and transphobia.



## Belonging

*As human beings  
we have a deep  
need to be  
connected to other  
human beings; a  
need to belong.*



Recent reworking of Maslow's hierarchy of needs challenges the notion that social connections are only important once "basic" needs for food and shelter are met. It is likely far more accurate to state that social and community connections are in fact, required for survival. In earlier times we could literally only survive if we were part of a community of people who hunted, gathered sheltered and protected each other. We are hardwired to seek social bonds and the pain of rejection or exclusion from "the group" is not so different from the pain of physical injury (Weir, 2012). Researchers have found that social rejection activates many of the same brain regions involved in physical pain (Eisenberger, 2015). There is some evidence to suggest that social exclusion can have consequences to our physical health as well.

The details of how and why our pain response systems act this way is fascinating but beyond the scope of this workbook! The main thing to take away from this section is that LGBTQ2+ seniors have most likely experienced repeated episodes of rejection and exclusion and the pain from those experiences is very real. These past experiences contribute to fear and anxiety for LGBTQ2+ seniors when they find themselves in new situations with people who may or may not be welcoming and inclusive.

**Visibility + Acceptance = Belonging**

## Activity # 4 - Insider/Outsider \*

You don't have to be LGBTQ2+ to know what it feels like to belong or be excluded!

### Activity # 5 - Social Isolation

Find *Social isolation of seniors: A focus on LGBTQ seniors in Canada* at

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-lgbtq.html#h2.9> and answer the following questions:

Think of a time when you were part of a team, a cohesive group, part of the "in group" in some way. What feelings did/does that generate?

1. What kinds of prejudice/discrimination has Lisa Fang experienced?

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2. What percentage of LGBT seniors report feeling isolated?

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3. What are the seven steps to countering social isolations for LGBT seniors:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 2. |
| 3. | 4. |
| 5. | 6. |
| 7. |    |



## Next Steps...

Now that we have learned about some of the history, needs and experiences of LGBTQ2+ seniors, let's spend some time exploring how to make our services more welcoming and inclusive for LGBTQ2+ Seniors

### Activity # 6 - Self-Reflection Exercise

Being aware of our own assumptions, attitudes and beliefs is a great first step towards inclusive care. We all like to think that we are bias free and welcoming of everyone. However, we all grew up in societies that reflect positive and negative messages about types of people and we have in many ways internalized those messages and attitudes to varying degrees. Read the following statements and consider your responses. You may be surprised to find some hidden beliefs or assumptions!



***Respond to the following statements with True or False.***

1. I am comfortable around queer people, unless they flaunt it.
2. I would feel uncomfortable if I found out that my adult son feels he is actually a woman.
3. LGBTQ2 teachers shouldn't be 'out' to their students at school.
4. It would disturb me to find out that my doctor is a lesbian/gay man.
5. I would feel uncomfortable knowing that my son's male teacher is gay.
6. I would feel uncomfortable to see a person I assumed to be trans in the same public washroom I was in.
7. I am surprised to meet LGBTQ2 couples that have been together a long time.
8. I would be disturbed if I found out that my sister's husband likes to dress in women's clothing.
9. I would be insulted if someone mistook me for a gay, bisexual or lesbian person.
10. I would be surprised to meet a Muslim lesbian wearing hijab.
11. I'm okay with same-sex marriage, but it bothers me that LGBTQ2 couples are allowed to adopt.
12. I would be confused if I saw a trans acquaintance of mine with a heterosexual partner.



13. I would be very upset if I saw my child's daycare worker kissing their same sex partner before work.
14. I would feel uncomfortable seeing two lesbians/gay men holding hands at my gym.
15. I feel annoyed that Sexual Reassignment Surgery is covered by MSIP.
16. I would be upset if my child told me that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual.
17. I would feel offended if someone mistook me for a trans person.
18. I feel uncomfortable if my co-worker divulges information about his same-sex relationship.
19. I would feel surprised if a colleague invited me to go the Pride parade with them and their LGBTQ2 friends.
20. I would be surprised to meet a Black trans person or lesbian.
21. One would expect a child raised by LGBTQ2 parents to be queer also.
22. I would be upset to find out that my child is learning about LGBTQ2 identities/communities/families as part of school curriculum.
23. I would be uncomfortable if I learned that my church, temple or other religious group was welcoming to people with LGBTQ2 identities.
24. I would be upset if my child brought home an openly gay/lesbian/bisexual friend.
25. I would not expect a man using a wheelchair to be gay.
26. I would feel uncomfortable if someone of the same gender expressed romantic interest in me.
27. If I saw two women communicating in sign language, I would be surprised to learn that they are lesbians.
28. I would feel comfortable working with clients/patients who identify as LGBTQ2.
29. I feel knowledgeable about LGBTQ2 issues as they pertain to my area of work.
30. I get upset and speak up if someone tells a homophobic joke.
31. It bothers me when people say "That's so gay!"
32. I do/have done research on LGBTQ2 issues to educate myself.
33. I use gender neutral language to describe my own sexual partner/relationship status, e.g partner vs. wife/boyfriend, etc
34. I am comfortable working with colleagues of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
35. I encourage education about sexual orientation and gender identity in my workplace.

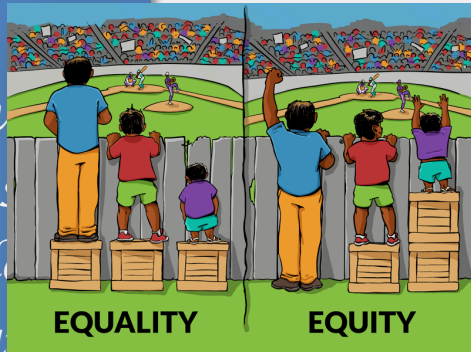
*\*From Training for Change: Practical Tools for Intersectional Workshops*

# The Myth of Equality...

One of the most important myths to address on the road to inclusive care is the belief that all we need to do to provide inclusive care is to treat everyone the same. We all have the need to be treated with respect and kindness, but how we get these needs met might look different depending on a person's life experiences.

*It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."*

*– Audre Lorde*



- Original image by  
Craig Froehle

Sometimes a picture is worth 1000 words! As depicted in the image above describe the difference between equity and equality:

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If you want to read more about the differences between Equity and Equality see *Equity Vs Equality: 20 differences between Equity and Equality* at <https://www.publichealthnotes.com/equity-vs-equality/>

**QUESTION:** Why can't we treat everyone the same?

**ANSWER:** Because we are *not* all the same! Everyone has had vastly different life experiences based on who they are and how they show up in the world. When we say we "don't see skin colour" or "sexual orientation doesn't matter" we are minimizing the impact of racism and homophobia.

The important take away message from this section is that sometimes treating everyone the same means that we don't recognize and respond to the unique needs of the person in front of us. Since we all don't have the same privilege or power, treating everyone "equally" is not actually "fair".

# Two-Spirit Elders

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As described in the match up exercise, Two-Spirit is a term used by some North American Aboriginal societies to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender roles and sexual orientations. Myra Laramie coined the term in 1990; it was adopted at a gathering of Native American and Canadian LGBTQ people in Manitoba.

Pre-contact, two-spirit people were accepted and integrated into their communities. They often held respected and valued positions. Colonization brought a denigration of differing sexual orientations and gender identities. Two-spirit people describe a layered challenge navigating both an LGBTQ identity and an Indigenous identity. Listen to Ma-Nee Chacaby a two-spirit Ojibwa-Cree elder, talk about her memoir, *A Two-Spirit Journey*:

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/andrew-pyper-kim-izzo-and-the-mystery-panel-1.4161894/what-being-two-spirit-means-to-indigenous-elder-ma-nee-chacaby-1.4162460>



*“Two Spirit identity is about circling back to where we belong, reclaiming, reinventing and redefining our beginnings, our roots, our communities, our support systems and our collective and individual selves”*

– Alex Wilson



For more information and resources go to:  
<https://egale.ca/portfolio/two-spirits-one-voice/>.

# What does inclusive care look like?



## Activity # 7 – Making Changes

***Safe and Visible: Creating a Care Facility Welcoming to LGBT Seniors:***

<https://vimeo.com/203529467>

*There are 4 vignettes approximately 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s (min 24:00) of the way through the video that you are invited to pay special attention to as they illustrate what can go awry when we don't recognize and honour the differences between us. After each vignette, you are invited to answer the following questions:*

1. What changes did the marketing director make to help Leonard and Joe feel more safe and visible?
2. What changes did the caregiver make to help Carmen feel more safe and visible?
3. What changes did the nurse make to help Rose feel more safe and visible?
4. What changes did the activities director make to help Lee feel more safe and visible?
5. And lastly, as described in this video, what are some things you can do to intentionally create an inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ2+ seniors?

*Some unique considerations for trans seniors:*

- Older trans adults have had very different experiences than today's trans youth
- Unlike LGB seniors, transgender seniors are not always able to "pass" or be invisible if they choose to live as their preferred/authentic gender.
- Poverty and social isolation are even more common for trans seniors than LGB seniors
- Trans seniors are a diverse group of people who have overcome many obstacles and challenges to live an authentic life!

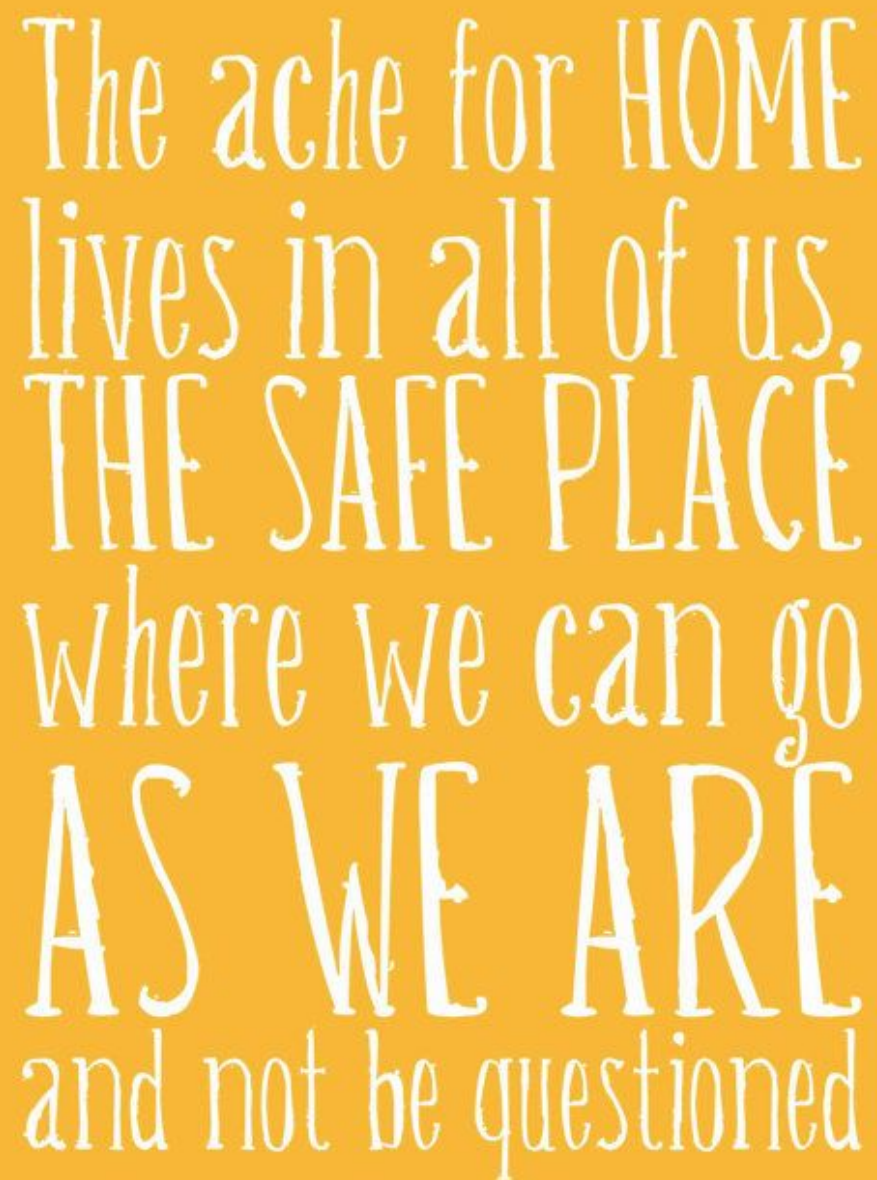
# LGBTQ2+ Competencies

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**So, how do we affirm and include seniors of all different sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions?**

- ☉ Don't assume everyone you meet is heterosexual and cisgender!
- ☉ Learn up to date and accurate terminology for the range of ways people in LGBTQ2+ communities self-identify.
- ☉ Actively challenge homophobia and transphobia when you see it or hear it. Promote an atmosphere of respect and post signs of visible inclusion for LGBTQ2+ seniors.
- ☉ Learn more about health disparities between LGBTQ2+ seniors and non LGBTQ2+ seniors and factor those into health care assessments and planning.
- ☉ Explore your own assumptions and beliefs about LGBTQ2+ people and reflect on how those beliefs and assumptions might impact the care you provide.
- ☉ Understand that "coming out" can be a complex and on-going process for some LGBTQ2+ seniors.
- ☉ Learn more about the unique needs and challenges for trans seniors.
- ☉ Explore the impact of heterosexism and homophobia/transphobia on the mental, emotional and physical health of LGBTQ2+ seniors over their lifespan.
- ☉ Learn about LGBTQ2+ resources and community groups in your area.
- ☉ If you make a mistake, its okay! Just apologize and move on.

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A quote by Maya Angelou is presented on a solid orange rectangular background. The text is in a white, serif font and is arranged in seven lines. The words 'HOME', 'SAFE', 'PLACE', 'AS WE ARE' are in all caps, while the other words are in title case. The quote is framed by a white border, which is itself set against a larger white background.

The ache for HOME  
lives in all of us,  
THE SAFE PLACE  
where we can go  
AS WE ARE  
and not be questioned

- *Maya Angelou*

# Check it out...

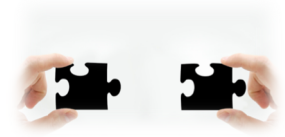
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It can be hard not to feel overwhelmed with the amount of information out there. The following list of resources has been chosen to provide you with some places to start:

- **LGBT Toolkit:** Creating LGBT Inclusive and Affirming Care and Services:  
[https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce\\_uploads/2014/08/lgbt\\_toolkit\\_2008.pdf](https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/08/lgbt_toolkit_2008.pdf)
- **Gen Silent:** *Gen Silent* is the critically acclaimed documentary from filmmaker Stu Maddux that asks six LGBT seniors if they will hide their friends, their spouses- their entire lives in order to survive in the care system. Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV3O8qz6Y5g>
- **BEING ME: Project report on best practices in learning and education to support LGBT ageing care and wellbeing:** <https://beingme.eu/public/application/downloads/resources/being-me-best-practices-world-cafe-report.pdf>
- **National Long-term Care Ombudsman Resource Center page:**  
<https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/lgbt-elders>
- **Project Visibility:** a foundational on-line course that will take participants approximately 30 minutes to complete: [http://www.fx170.com/bcaaa/review/LynnPatrick\\_v2/story\\_html5.html](http://www.fx170.com/bcaaa/review/LynnPatrick_v2/story_html5.html)



## Appendix A: Match Up – Answer Key



*Draw a line between the word in the left column to match up with the definitions on the right*

### Word

### Definition

Intersex	Historically, a derogatory term for homosexuality, used to insult LGBT people. Although still used as a slur by some, the term has been reclaimed by some members of LGBT communities, particularly youth. In its reclaimed form it can be used as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity, or as a means of challenging rigid identity categories.
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Passing/To Pass	An individual having reproductive organs or external sexual characteristics of both male and female.
Two Spirit	A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex—often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions.
Gender Expression	Refers to a person whose biological sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity.
Gay	The view that there are only two totally distinct opposite and static genders (masculine and feminine) to identify with and express.
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Gender Binary	A term sometimes use to refer to the stat of an LGBTQ2+ person not being visibly recognizable as LGBTQ2+. This term is most commonly used in relation to trans people.

# References

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(Includes only references not previously noted in the body of the workbook)

- Eisenberger, N. (2015) Annual Review of Psychology, Vol 66, p 601-629. Accessed at <https://sanlab.psych.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2016/08/A-84.pdf>
- Weir, Kristen. (2012). The Pain of Social Rejection. American Psychological Association. Vol 43, No 4. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/04/rejection.aspx>

Notes....

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