

Summary and Intended Use

This report is intended to serve as a primer for people invested in grasping the landscape of gender and sexuality among current cohorts of undergraduate students, largely members of the Millennial and Gen Z generations. This document defines gender and sexuality, provides statistics with regards to demographic trends in gender and sexuality, and suggests best practices for the University going forward.

Research has demonstrated the need for schools to “become safer and more welcoming for trans [students], even before these [students] make themselves known to school staff” ([Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey](#), 2015). Constructing material and policy environments in tandem with students’ understandings of gender and sexuality is integral to fostering a healthy University environment.

Gender

Gender is a socially constructed identity category. The concept refers to a person’s internal sense of themselves as any number of a vast array of different genders. Gender in Western contexts is often mistakenly understood as a binary, where there are two genders that are “opposites” from one another: female/girl/woman and male/boy/man. In reality, there are an infinite number of genders. Many people’s genders don’t comply with common understandings of the gender binary.

The erroneous notion that there are only two genders is a very common one, and informs the way that people are assigned genders at birth based only on their perceived sex as determined by external genitalia (phenotype). **Cisgender** (shortened to cis) is an adjective used to describe people who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, while **transgender** (shortened to trans) is an adjective used to describe people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth.

There are a number of different adjectives used as identification terms by people whose gender is not the same as the one assigned to them at birth and by people whose genders do not comply with common—inaccurate—understandings of gender as a binary. These include **non binary**, **genderqueer**, **gender fluid**, and **agender**. These words reference experiences of gender that include having multiple genders, having no gender, having gender that is variable, and or having gender that falls outside the descriptive capacities of the gender binary. All of these words mean different things to different people who use them.

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to a person’s experiences of aesthetic, romantic, and physical *attraction* to others; their *behaviour* when it comes to enacting or not enacting these experiences of attraction; and their internal sense of themselves when it comes to these experiences and behaviours (*identity*). Sexuality is often understood in extremely limited terms. Aesthetic, romantic, and physical attraction are phenomena that people experience in varying ways—from not at all, to under certain circumstances, to often—in ways that range from mutually exclusive to simultaneous. Further, many people experience attraction to people of multiple genders, while some experience attraction to people of only one gender. People also choose to enact their experiences of attraction in a multitude of ways: none of these experiences of attraction or behaviours detract from a person’s felt sense of their own sexuality.

There are a number of different adjectives used as identification terms by people who do not comply with the vision of all humans as heterosexual, sexual, romantic, and monogamous. Some of these terms include **lesbian**, **gay**, **bisexual**, **queer**, **two spirit** (a closed term specific to Indigenous people), **pansexual**, **aromantic**, **asexual**, and **non-monogamous**. In addition to these, there is a vast array of identity terms because language will always be innovated to suit the needs of its user base, including the creation of words not yet in our contemporary lexicon.

LGBTQ2SPIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, two spirit, pansexual, intersex, asexual, and more).

People marginalized by virtue of their gender and or their sexuality—that is, people whose genders and sexualities are considered “different” by normative standards—also have intersecting identities in terms of their racialization, ability, age, neurological experience of the world, and wealth. For example, the “2S” in acronyms such as LGBTQ2SPIA+ represents the word **two spirit**, which is a term employed by many Indigenous people to describe their experiences of gender and/or sexuality as it relates to their Indigeneity.

Statistics

[A majority of youth identify as LGBTQ2SPIA+](#). Studies completed in the past five years estimate that over 50% of Gen Zs (those born after 1995) do not identify as strictly heterosexual. Further, 56% of 13-20 year olds in 2016 said they knew someone who used gender neutral pronouns such as "they" or "ze." 70% of Gen Zs actively support the desegregation of gendered bathrooms in favour of all-gender facilities; 66% of Gen Zs don't purchase clothes designed for their gender. [74% of Canadians](#) know someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and 28% have a family member who is LGBT.

Best practices¹

- The rights and needs of campus community members with a variety of sexualities and genders must inform policy and design decision making.
- Eliminate gender-segregated spaces in favour of universally accessible physical environments (e.g. washrooms, changerooms, sport and recreation programming, etc.)
- Ensure all members of the university community are provided with information regarding sexuality and gender in ways that don't pathologize LGBTQ2SPIA+ communities. LGBTQ2SPIA+ campus community members are not somehow separate from the “average” student or staff member.
- All individuals have the right to be addressed by their chosen name and pronouns. This is true whether or not the individual has obtained legal documentation of name or gender designation (e.g. birth certificate); institutions don't have the right to verify medical records on this front.
- Be proactive in ensuring that community members are addressed in University correspondence and documentation according to their chosen names rather than their legal names unless there is a legal reason for using the latter.
- The sole measure of an individual's sexuality and gender ought to be self-identification; gender and sexuality are metrics that institutions do not necessarily need to know.
- If gender and sexuality are metrics that must be collected, provide room in documentation for people to self-report rather than pre-determining people's responses with set lists of response options. It is not possible to know an individual's pronouns from their name or their gender; provide a space for individuals to self-report their pronouns on all paperwork.

¹ Further reading

Veale J., Saewyc E., Frohard-Dourlent H., Dobson S., Clark B. & the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey Research Group (2015). [Being Safe, Being Me: Results of the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey](#). Vancouver, BC: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia.

[Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions](#). Minister of Education, Alberta Education. 2016.