

UNDERSTANDING GENDER IDENTITY & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

What is Gender Identity?

When learning about any aspect of an individual's identity, it is important to leave assumptions at the door and to lean in with curiosity. This provides an opportunity for your coworker, leader, trade partners or likewise to bring their full selves to work, maximizing participation and collaboration. One's gender identity and sexuality are just a few components of a person's identity that can impact their comfortability, sense of belonging, and inclusion within the workplace.

To begin, it is helpful to start by defining key terms. According to Harvard's Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Glossary:

- **Gender Identity:** One's internal sense of being male, female, neither, both, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. For transgender and gender non-conforming people, their sex assigned at birth, or natal sex, and their internal sense of gender identity are not the same.
- **Gender Spectrum:** The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth align.

What is Sexual Orientation?

Sexual orientation is an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. An individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity. There is a spectrum of sexual orientations represented in our society and workplaces today. This spectrum is often referred to as the acronym LGBTQ+ which stands for:

- **L:** Lesbian, used to describe women who are attracted to women.
- **G:** Gay, used to describe men who are attracted to men, but often used an embraced by people with other gender identities to describe their same gender attractions and relationships.
- **B:** Bisexual, used to describe someone who is attracted to both men and women.
- **T:** Transgender, an umbrella term used to describe people who have a gender identity different than their sex assigned at birth.
- **Q:** Queer, historically a derogatory term used against LGBTQ people, it has been embraced and reclaimed by LGBTQ communities. Queer is often used to represent all individuals who identify outside of other categories of sexual and gender identity.
- **+:** Signifies inclusion of those who represent other sexual orientation & gender identities.

As an industry it is important for us to not confuse these terms with harmful stereotypes that have been prevalent in our industry's history which have perpetuated sexism, homophobia, and ultimately contributing to a hostile work environment for those in our organizations that identify on any part of the spectrum. By learning more and practicing inclusive language, we promote a work environment that is safer, where all our employees can thrive.

SELF REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. Do you have different expectations for people based on their gender? Do you think these expectations limit or amplify your interactions with those around you?
2. Have you ever assumed your coworker's partner is a certain gender?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. When was the last time you thought about whether you could share a part of who you are? What provoked you to think about that?
2. When was the last time you questioned whether you could talk about your partner or family at work?




RISK OF GENDERISM IN CONSTRUCTION

Words Matter: Belonging Subtractor and Belonging Booster

As we discussed in Part 1 of the Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Toolbox Talk Series, teams thrive when everyone can bring their whole self to work without fear of exclusion because of who they are. It is important to understand the factors that become signals to individuals on whether a work environment is going to include or exclude parts of their identity. Microaggressions and Micro-affirmations can be important signals of belonging. Here are their definitions and some examples.


Belonging Subtractor: A comment or action that unconsciously or unintentionally expresses or reveals a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group. These small, common occurrences include insults, slights, stereotyping, undermining, devaluing, delegitimizing, overlooking, and excluding someone.

- A person refuses to call a coworker by their gender or name that they have specifically requested.
- A person uses gendered terminology to shame a teammate or assume their abilities: e.g. "You're such a girl!" or "Can you even lift that?"
- A person uses sexual orientation or assumptions about body parts as the basis of a joke; or asks invasive questions.

 **SCENARIO:** You are a part of a proposal team that is interviewing for a large project in your region, and you are the only woman on the call. After the interview, the executive on the team receives an email from the owner's rep thanking the team for their time and providing feedback that it was an extraordinarily strong interview. The executive decides to forward the email and congratulate the team members for their contribution to a successful presentation. He forgets to add you to the list, and the superintendent on the team has to forward it to you and say "They forgot to send this over, but wanted to share the good news!"

Belonging Booster: A small gesture of inclusion, caring, or kindness. They include listening, providing comfort and support, being an ally, and explicitly valuing the contributions and presence of all. It is particularly helpful for those with greater power or seniority to model affirming behavior.

- A person uses the gender or name requested by a crew member.
- A team lead or manager begins a meeting by sharing what their pronouns are normalizing the sharing of pronouns for the rest of the team.

 **SCENARIO:** You are a project manager on a job site who has been working with their project team for over three years. Due to your overall comfortability, you have been open about identifying as nonbinary and your team has been incredibly supportive. You realized that there was a problem with the material selected to complete one part of the project, so you flag it to your leadership team and provide a recommendation to resolve the issue. Your executive has decided to invite you to a meeting with the owner to discuss the idea. The executive kicks off the meeting, presents the idea, and before he can finish the owner interrupts to praise him for what a wonderful idea it was and that it was approved. The executive politely says, "Thank you for your comments, but actually my project manager here is the one who came up with the idea, it is completely their contribution."

SELF REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. Have you ever had an experience where someone assumed something about you that was not true? How did that make you feel? How did that impact your interactions?
2. How would it make you feel if someone called you the wrong name, repeatedly, even after you had corrected them?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. In your own words, describe why you think it is important that everyone bring their full self to work? Imagine you are starting on a new job, and you find yourself consistently feeling misunderstood. How does this impact your comfortability performing your job?
2. What are some ways that your coworkers have made you feel safe and comfortable?



GENDER INCLUSION & SAFETY CULTURE

Inclusion & Belonging is Critical for a Safety Culture

In our industry safety is our number one priority, and when environments become unsafe for individuals, they are distracted, or do not feel comfortable asking questions, the safety of the entire team is at risk. The split-second distraction can create an unsafe environment if a teammate is more focused on personal and professional challenges than the task at hand.

A sense of inclusion and belonging is essential to maintaining a safe workplace. The more included an individual feels included, the more likely they are to experience a sense of belonging, or essentially that their team "has their back". This level of connection to a team is critical to creating a culture that is safe psychologically and physically.

Benefits & Impacts of Belonging

A sense of belonging solidifies that what the individual does matters and improves engagement and overall culture. When an employee experiences exclusion there is also a tangible impact on the team.

BENEFITS OF BELONGING

Productivity Increases
Deeper Employee Engagement
Greater Focus & Attention to Details
Innovation and Creativity Thrive
Stronger Relationships Amongst Team
Increased Morale

IMPACTS OF EXCLUSION

Low Productivity
Below Average Engagement
Lack of Focus
Disinterested in Collaboration
Lack of Connection to Team
Decreased Morale

Simple Things that Promote Inclusion

- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Participate in employee engagement surveys and be honest.
- Continuously seek ways to improve your inclusion skills.
- Engage in conversations, invite people to talk about themselves, lean in with curiosity.

SELF REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. Reflect on a time when you experienced inclusion at work. How did that impact your day?
2. Reflect on a time when you experienced exclusion at work. How did that impact your day?
3. In the above reflections, what actions from others contributed to these experiences?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What have others done that have really made you feel included?
2. What are tools and techniques you can use to determine whether someone on your team is experiencing a sense of belonging or exclusion?



ALLYSHIP IN ACTION: INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Gender Inclusive Language

When it comes to our sense of belonging, words matter and as Brene Brown says, "Clarity is kindness." Our words can reinforce harmful stereotypes or they can contribute to breaking down barriers and cultivating psychological safety. Gendered language has a bias towards a particular gender and refers to any language which implies or assumes the gender identity of the person who it is referring to.

As an industry it is important for us to look at our common language and evaluate where there is opportunity to replace gendered nomenclature for more gender-neutral terminology. Language has the power to shape expectations and can exclude many from seeing themselves in our industry. Here are some examples of ways to make our language more inclusive:

GENDERED	GENDER-NEUTRAL
Guys	People, Y'all
Mankind	People, Human Beings, Humanity
Craftsmen	Craftsperson, Craft Worker
Foreman	Foreperson
Journeyman	Journeyperson
Manhours	Worker Hours
Manpower	Staff, Workforce
Tradesman	Tradesperson
Manlift	Personlift
Chairman	Chairperson
Man-made	Machine-made, Synthetic, Artificial

Pronouns

By definition a pronoun is a word that substitutes for a noun, typically used to refer to a person after initially using their name. Gendered pronouns include she and he, her and him, hers and his, and herself and himself. Personal/ Preferred gender pronouns are the pronouns that people ask others to use in reference to themselves. They may be plural gender-neutral pronouns such as they, them, or their(s).

When we assume a person's pronouns, we can inadvertently leave them feeling misunderstood, excluded, or unsafe. Here are practices that can be adopted to promote gender inclusion in the workplace:

- Begin virtual meetings by inviting participants to update their name and include their pronouns.
- Practice gender neutral pronouns, and if a coworker shares their pronouns with you know that this is a sign of trust and safety.
- Do not assume gendered pronouns, trust those around you to share when they feel comfortable.
- Pay attention to the language you use and be okay with correcting yourself if you have used gendered terms. Changing our language takes practice, and modeling humility goes a long way in promoting inclusion and allyship.

SELF REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. Imagine that you are a female carpenter who belongs to the "United Brotherhood of Carpenters" what do you think that experience would be like?
2. When it comes to inclusive language practices, it can be helpful to identify one change you can focus on and practice. If you had to choose one language change for a one-month period, what would it be?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What stands out to you most from this lesson? What is your one personal takeaway?
2. How do you see inclusive language impacting your work environment?

