

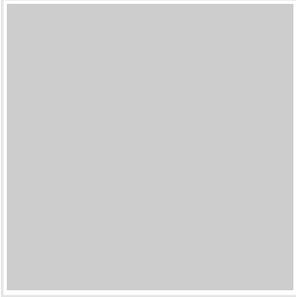
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## Guest Column: To 'T' or not to 'T'

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As a consultant in learning and development for over 20 years, I've created and delivered plenty of online and face-to-face training programs on a wide range of topics, including race and ethnicity, age and generations, gender, the LGBT community, and most recently, gender identity and gender expression.

If I take a step back and look at all of these topics listed these are all a basic understanding of the human experience. We all are born to a certain time period that shapes our perspective. My *race* (white) shapes my experience, as does my *ethnicity* (Italian-Polish with English and Native American sprinkled in). Each person has multiple facets of their diversity that makes them beautiful individuals, and the list above is simply one of a wide variety of ways in which we understand who we are as individuals and help others understand us.

We all strive for people to be open to see things from our perspective, treat us fairly and equally, and not judge us based upon what is "seen" on the surface.

With all that being said, one of my identifiable aspects of diversity is being *gay*, so I'm often referred to as a "member of the LGBT Community." With greater visibility on trans issues of late, the question begs to be asked: should we group transgender equality ("T") with lesbian, gay, and bisexual equality ("LGB")? After all, "LGB" all focus on sexual orientation— who we're attracted to physically and emotionally — while "T" has to do with self-identity related to gender and how gender is expressed.

Some say that we (as an equality movement) have confused matters by grouping "T" with "LGB," specifically because of the "sexual orientation vs. gender identity and

expression” definition difference. According to the American Educational Research Association, the term “LGBT” didn’t come into use until around 1988, with popular use coming in the 1990s. Prior to that, “homosexuals” (1950s–60s) was popular, followed by “gay” (1970s), then an effort to further identify the variety of same-sex relationships pushed the popularity of “gay-lesbian,” (later in the 1970s). In the late 1970s and early 1980s is when “transgender” and “bisexual” terms were also folded into the mix by those in the community who didn’t fit under “gay” or “lesbian.”

Some say that this inclusivity has led to much confusion among the mainstream and thus “crippled” the advancement of LGB equality.

On the other side, some argue that “LGBT” encompasses all those in society who “violate gender norms. LGB people “bunk the system” same-sex attraction, unlike the “norm” where you should be attracted to the opposite sex only. Transgender people “bunk the system” further by self-identifying their gender and/or expressing based upon their feelings and thoughts versus their biological sex assigned at birth or whom they are attracted to.

This “we want others to understand our perspective – being different from the gender norm” is the critical common thread we all share.

There are a few other area where we are more alike than different.

Coming out, for example. LGBTs are all classified as gender minorities by sociologists. That results in “minority stress,” which includes external stressors like facing prejudice and internal stressors of hiding who we truly are.

We also all own the issue of marriage equality. There have been strides, but that progress has created a lot of mess as well. Similarly, transgender people see inconsistent laws across the nation which leave them open to immediate invalidation.

And workplace discrimination is something all LGBTs must worry about. We’re all vulnerable based on who we are. While some forward-thinking organizations have moved to include transgender as part of their non-discrimination policies where sexual orientation may already exist and include benefits for same-sex partners as well as medical benefits specific to transgender needs, there’s still way too many organizations out there that can easily fire us for simply being who we are.

It's things like Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that will universally protect us in the workplace and provide us with the equal treatment in the workplace we deserve.

Openness and inclusion should be part of who we as an LGBT community. My personal hero is Benjamin Franklin (partly by growing up in the Philadelphia area). He wonderfully said during the early days of our nation building, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." We're a community, and we are all trying to get others to understand our individual facets of diversity and see us equally and treat us with respect without bias.

To "hang together" and leverage the strength of our commonalities (versus fight about what makes us different) we need broader awareness of the distinct needs of our brothers and sisters in this fight for fair treatment, and each group has some homework to do.

LGBs must try to truly understand the perspectives of our trans brothers and sisters. Don't use derogatory terms when talking about them, and be open and respectful to their needs and desires to be understood. Start by knowing that it's "transgender" not "transgendered," just like it's "gay" not "gayed." And "tranny" is a really distasteful term, don't use it.

Ts must help others understand where you're coming from, but also have patience when we ask you to explain (probably for the 1,000<sup>th</sup> time) your experience learning about your own gender identity. Yes: LGB folks and T have some similar perspectives and experiences, but LGB folks might need some extra coaching on all the issues you have and continue to face that are different. Be patient but help us learn, too. Don't get mad when LGBs get something wrong; just nicely correct us.

And as an extra note to everyone, please understand the perspective of our "B" (bisexual) brothers or sisters, too. It's not a "stop on the way to Gayville or Lesbiantown." I think gays and lesbians tend to marginalize our bisexual friends as we do our transgender friends.

All of us need to spread our understanding of *all* facets of the LGBT community to others to gain greater knowledge on our community as a whole and reduce misconceptions.

So what should our “label” be?

Personally speaking, I like using “LGBTQA”: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and alternative or allies. This to me seems to be a greater umbrella term for our community and those who support our fight for equality, understanding, fairness and respect.

Or better yet, simply use “human.”

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