

# Untwisting the Two Identity Strands in the LGBTQIAA+ Community

Educational White Paper

Authored by Gary Walker-Roberts, Ph.D.  
Illustrated by Narissa Grieser, BFA



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# Abstract

This educational white paper by Dr. Walker-Roberts covers the following topics: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Plus (LGBTQIAA+) key terms, a brief history of two events that forced the identities to form a community, and gender identity and lovealities/sexuality terminology. Two different identities make up the LGBTQ+ community: gender identities and lovealities/sexualities. Many people ask, “How did gender identities (beyond the binary gender system) and lovealities/sexualities (beyond the romantic love/sex between a male and a female) become twisted together to form one community?” This educational white paper aims to provide answers to the question. The two identities are separated into two strands. A comprehensive review of each identity strand is provided independently from each other. Additionally, a re-imaged conversational flow is presented so people can avoid the unproductive apologetic cycle when assumptions are made regarding the two identities. When people face new ideas, skills, concepts, and beliefs, they must accept using the growth heartset theory before relying on the growth mindset theory. The growth mindset theory is well-known, whereas the growth heartset theory is new. Characteristics of the growth mindset and the growth heartset theories are explained in this educational white paper. Ms. Grieser, a passionate graphic designer, illustrated the art tiles. The tiles illustrate the two independent strands (one red and one purple) that twist together to represent the LGBTQ+ Community. The art tiles create a spectacular visual learning experience as the strands are untwisted and then re-twisted in this education white paper.

# LGBTQIAA+ Community: Gender Identities & Lovelialties/Sexualities



Inspired by Dr. Gary Walker-Roberts; Illustrated by Narissa Grieser

## Introduction

The LGBTQIAA+ community has formed a unified group through shared struggles, activism, and the recognition of intersecting identities and experiences. Many factors and events twist this community together. Some people often wonder how the LGBTQIAA+ community united with two specific identity strands: gender identity and lovelialty/sexuality. Rightfully so, the question "How did gender identities (beyond the binary gender system) and lovelialties/sexualities (beyond the romantic love/sex between a male and a female) become twisted together to form one community?" has been posed.

People's curiosity about this question became the impetus for this educational white paper. This educational white paper will present key events contributing to the twisting of the two identities (gender

identities (gender identities and lovelialties/sexualities). The twists will be untwisted, and content will be presented independently on each strand. The red strand represents gender identities, while the purple strand represents lovelialties/sexualities (the DNA of the community).

Content on how to appropriately and accurately communicate with others, with correct terminology will be showcased. Growth mindset theory is necessary to apply new ideas and concepts; however, a growth heartset theory is necessary to want to learn about new concepts and ideas. Where the heart goes, the mind will follow.

# Key Terms

**Community:** A collection of people with similar characteristics and factors that group them as a whole, differentiating them from other people or groups.

**Gender Identities:** Gender identities are terms people use to express their gender. Sex is assigned at birth, typically “male” and “female,” which becomes the societal term for a person’s gender identity (the baby is not given a choice). However, many people do not choose to conform to the gender binary system imposed upon them: “male” and “female.” There are many gender identities to which people use to express their correct gender.

**Growth Heartset Theory:** A heartset where people are willing to be open to new ideas and concepts even when their ideology and long-term belief systems are challenged. They understand the executive functioning stage of their cognitive growth is in progress but enter spaces with love and safety for others at the top of their minds.

**Growth Mindset Theory:** A mindset where people are willing to grow cognitively. They reimage challenges as growth opportunities and view failures as a way to learn to become better.

**LGBTQIAA+:** This is an abbreviation that represents the key terms to identify people in the minority community: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Ally. The plus (+) is an inclusive gesture to other terms such as two-spirit (2SP) and Mahuwahine. Scholars may shorten the long name to abbreviations, such as LGBT+ or LGBTQ+, in scholarly literature. The critical factor is that the “+” should always be added for inclusivity.

**Lovealities:** Lovealities is a term coined to elevate the “love” between people versus focusing on the “sexual” activities that may come to mind when using sexuality terms.

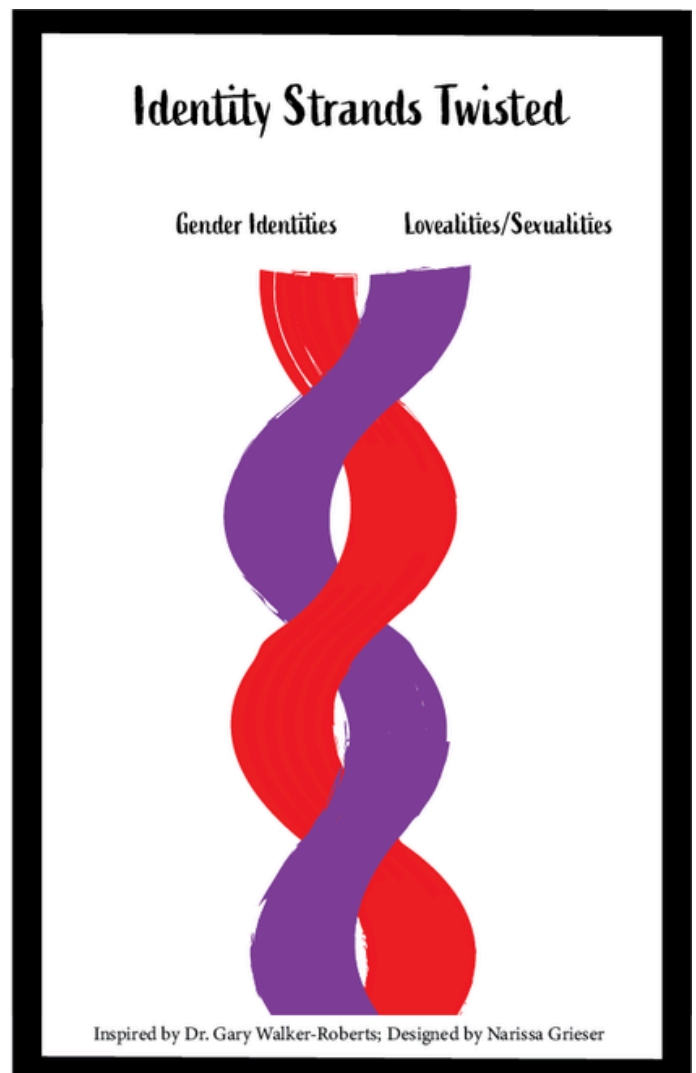
**Sexualities:** Sexuality is how people express themselves when engaging in sexual activity.

**Twist:** Curving or winding two or more concepts together to form one. For the sake of this educational paper, gender identity and lovealities/sexualities are the concepts curved together to form one community.

Many historical events caused the formation of the community. These events forced the twisting of the two identities that co-exist in the community. Being "othered" by mainstream society (or the majority population) was the community's genesis. There are two historical events to illustrate the rise in society's ideology that "othered" LGBTQ+ people. These events gave agency to many people in the majority population to apply homophobia and transphobia in the 20th century and beyond. They paved the way for the openness to dehumanizing LGBTQ+ people by criminalizing their actions. The Holocaust, in the period of Nazi Germany, is known for the horrific abuse and murder of many LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ people were targeted for capture by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Military. LGBTQ+ people were placed in the concentration camps. Additionally, the harassment and criminalization of LGBTQ+ people in large United States of America (USA) cities such as New York City (NYC) contributed to the "othering" of LGBTQ+ people in the 40's, 50s, and 60's (Bronski et al., 2023).

In the concentration camps, Nazi soldiers put an upside-down pink triangle on the arms of Jewish and non-Jewish gay, transgender, and gender non-conforming people to shame them. LGBTQ+ people were tortured and murdered for their perceived egregious "lifestyle" choices. These atrocities granted permission for homophobic and transphobic people to express hate and perpetrate violence toward LGBTQ+ people openly. As a result, LGBTQ+ people went into the "closet" for their safety. LGBTQ+ people have been fighting against and kicking down closet doors to be visible ever since. Many LGBTQ+ people remain in the closet today to remain safe in their living situations and covertly lean on the community for acceptance and support. However, the community has turned the upside-down pink triangle, once worn as a badge of shame resulting in torture and death, into the symbol of visibility, proud existence, and perseverance.

Additionally, in NYC and other major American cities, in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, police officers harassed many transgender and non-conforming people for wearing what is considered "female" attire in public. They learned quickly the more female attire they wore, the more likely the police would harass them. The harassment often led to them being physically abused and ultimately arrested. Although the police would use outdated laws and unrelated charges to arrest queer



people, the community called this particular harassment the "three-article law." The three-article law, not an actual law in the books, was another way to keep people in fear and closeted. The non-stop harassment and arrests of the brave queer people living their actual authentic lives, despite the harassment, led to a communal uprising against the NYC police officers. LGBTQ+ people turned to one another for support, love, acceptance, and validation throughout the USA and worldwide.

The result of being othered twisted the two identities to become one community. This shared history has created a sense of solidarity between the two different identities that make up the community. The community has strengthened its togetherness, loudly and proudly, ever since the 1996 Stonewall Uprising (Bronski et al, 2023). The LGBTQ+ community stands strong to fight for civil rights, engage in activism, advocate for equity in social systems, and celebrate at LGBTQIAA+ Pride events.

Lastly, educational efforts such as this educational white paper are elevated to expand the wealth of knowledge among people internal and external to the community. Knowledge is power.

Understanding the difference between gender identity and lovealities/sexualities is crucial. Each strand refers to distinct aspects of a person's experience with gender identity and lovealities/sexualities. Recognizing the nuances between the red strand (gender identities) and the purple strand (lovealities/sexualities) can help increase respect and inclusion. Honoring a person's identity, when informed, helps improve a level of understanding and respect. When people respect each other's identities and experiences, they can create more inclusive spaces where people enjoy a sense of belonging by being valued, seen, and validated.

Knowing the difference between the two identities allows people to understand how to better support or advocate for an LGBTQ+ person. Whether it be your family members, students, colleagues, friends, clients, or a passerby, you can address specific needs quicker and more accurately without creating an unsafe or uncomfortable environment. Education on each of the strands independently helps to reduce misinformation, unconscious or conscious microaggressions rooted in biases, and the "othering" of an LGBTQ+ person unintentionally. People become empathetic and understanding after learning key distinguishing concepts between the two identity strands. Understanding the difference between gender identity and lovealities/sexualities can contribute to personal experience. Meaning that people belonging to the community but do not realize it yet have space to question and discover through curiosity. Knowing the difference between the two identities can lay the foundation for self-acceptance and bolster a more robust overall mental well-being. Lastly, understanding the nuanced differences can help strengthen accurate communication on a day-to-day basis during interactions with one another. Accurate communication regarding identity will help eliminate mistakes with terminology. Correct terminology will eliminate potential hurtful feelings and bolster a stronger sense of belonging. A deeper dive into communication will be discussed later in the educational white paper.

There are critical differences between the two identities. Remember, who a person is in terms of gender identity is determined in the brain. People choose gender identities. It so happens that our society is used to gender identity being assigned at birth, but nowadays, many people are voicing concern that the gender they were assigned at birth does not fit the gender they identify as in their brain. Gender identity tends to dictate gender expression in many areas of life. For example, the clothing people wear or their roles at work or home. Our society has even

assigned gender expression to color: pink for "girls" and blue for "boys." Loveality/sexuality is about who a person romantically loves and engages in sexual actions with. Lovealities are determined by the emotions in a person's heart, while sexuality is determined by attraction and chemistry. The two strands are genuinely two different identities that are independent. One does not determine the other. For more information, find the Gender Bear (a visual aid to explain gender identity and lovealities/sexualities) in a separate article linked here: [Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment for LGBTQIAA+ Individuals \(merlot.org\)](https://www.merlot.org/merlot/viewdoc.aspx?id=1444444).

Understanding the provided distinctions between the two identity strands is essential to accepting the fact there are other ways of living outside of the binary gender system and the heterolovality/heterosexuality systems. Information and education erode fear that fuels homophobia and transphobia. Awareness creates more supportive and inclusive environments in multiple facets of life, from personal relationships in our personal lives to relationships in our professional lives.



Let us learn about the red strand in the twist: gender identity is an individual's deeply felt internal sense of their gender. Sometimes, an individual's gender identity does not match with the sex they were assigned at birth. It encompasses one's personal sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither. This internal understanding of gender is distinct from physical attributes and external perceptions, and it can influence how people express themselves through behavior, clothing, and other forms of presentation. Gender identity is an intrinsic part of who a person is and can play a significant role in their sense of self and well-being.

A best practice when seeking to identify another person's gender identity is to give full identity agency to the person you have inquired about. It is crucial to understand that gender identities are diverse and numerous, and there is no definitive list of gender identities. Gender identities continue to emerge and shift as more people are allowed to identify their deeply felt internal experiences centered around gender. However, a good launching pad for learning about some commonly recognized gender identities is as follows:

- 1. Agender:** A person who identifies as being gender-neutral or does not identify as having a gender identity at all.
- 2. Bigender:** A person who identifies as two genders, either as one or switching between them.
- 3. Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity matches one of the binary sexes they were assigned at birth. They use binary gender pronouns: she/her or he/him.
- 4. Genderfluid:** A person whose gender identity shifts between different genders at different times.
- 5. Intersex:** Intersex is a term that describes individuals who typically have genitals that do not fit the definition of the binary sex definitions of "male" and "female."
- 6. Mahuwahine:** A traditional term used in Native Hawaiian culture to describe people who embody both male and female spirit, often fulfilling roles that encompass both genders.
- 7. Non-binary:** A person whose gender identity does not fit within the traditional cisgender binary of male and female categories. They use non-binary gender pronouns: they/them, or zi/zem.
- 8. Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.
- 9. Two-Spirit:** A culturally specific identity among some Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (Partly known today as North America), encompassing a variety of gender identities.

The above-listed gender identities represent only a few of the many gender identities with which people can identify. Gender identity can be viewed as a spectrum, and everyone's experience is unique and ok.

# Gender Identities

Agender

Bigender

Cisgender

Genderfluid

Intersex

Mahuwahine

Non-binary

Transgender

Two-Spirit

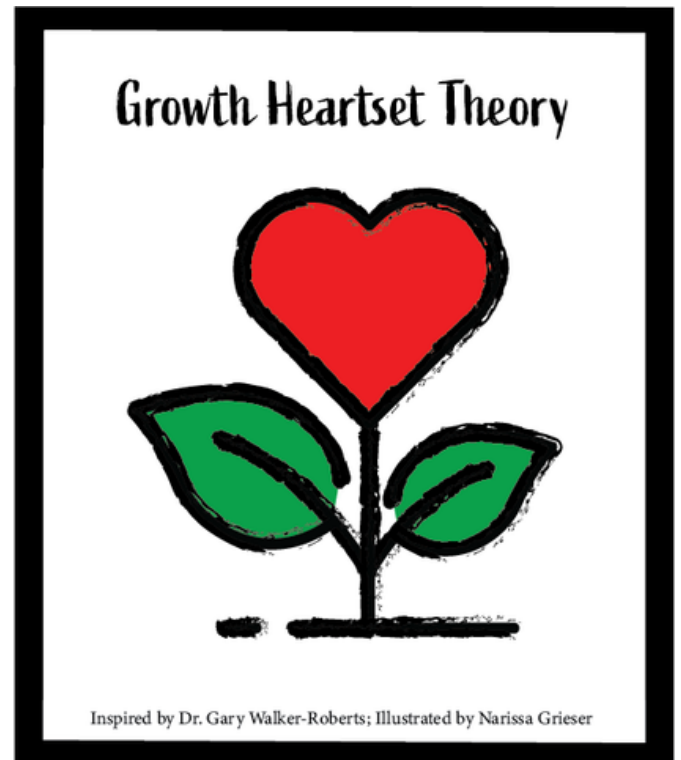
Inspired by Dr. Gary Walker-Roberts;  
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The growth mindset theory is well-known. People embrace the growth mindset when they face new ideas, skills, concepts, and beliefs. The theory's central idea is that people can develop cognitively through learning, practice, and perseverance. People who embrace a growth mindset are more likely to achieve their goals success and benefit from mindful transformation (Dweck, 2007). The opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset. People with a fixed mindset refuse to embrace ideas, concepts, and beliefs that differ in their thinking. However, people who apply a growth mindset embrace the characteristics of the theory:

1. They believe they can improve skills and intelligence on new ideas, concepts, skills, and beliefs
2. With practice, they can overcome challenges.
3. They are willing to apply constructive feedback without gaslighting.

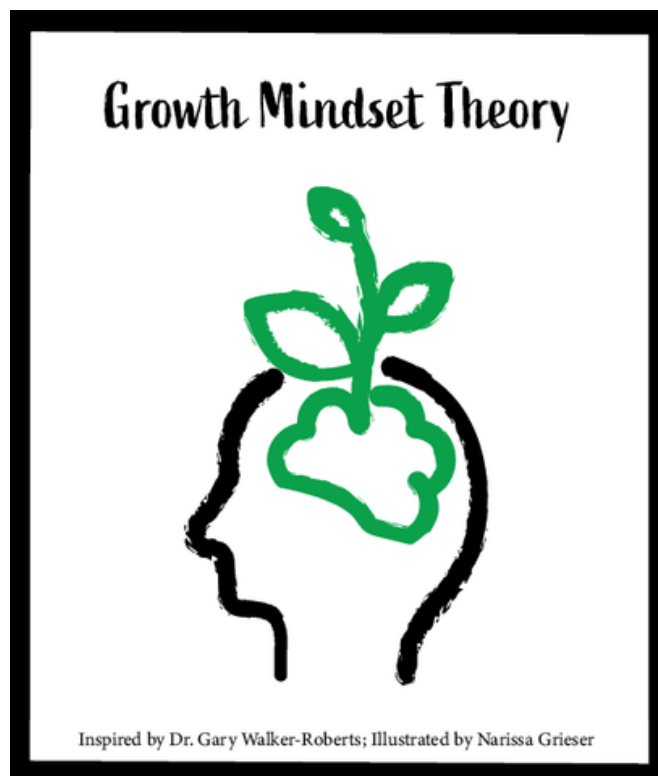
Growth mindset theory focuses on intellectual and cognitive abilities. Gender identities beyond the gender binary system and lovealities/sexualities outside of the heterolove/heterosexual sexuality may be new ideas or concepts. Being able to learn new terminology and use them correctly requires a growth mindset. People use the growth mindset theory to express that they have seen improvement or mastered pronouns (beyond binary pronouns) daily. Additionally, they have done so by practicing their communication skills and embracing feedback to reach their goals successfully. However, before cognitive development in the brain can be re-wired, a person must embrace the growth heartset theory. The growth heartset theory is the gateway to the growth mindset theory.



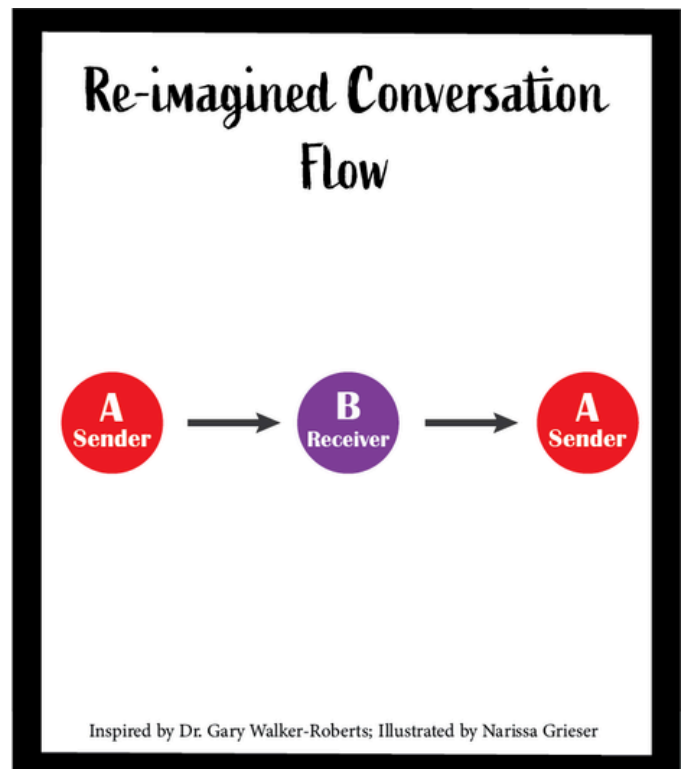
The growth heartset theory is not as well-known as the growth mindset theory. The growth heartset theory, like the growth mindset theory, can be applied when people face new ideas, skills, concepts, and beliefs that challenge the ideology they have held for many years. Differently, the growth heartset theory focuses on a person's emotional capacity through compassion to trigger an empathetic response. According to Walker-Roberts (2023), the primary principle of the theory is people must "make a choice, in their hearts, to want to learn" about new ideas, skills, concepts, and beliefs when they "challenge deeply rooted ideologies" (p. 247).

Where the heart goes, the mind will follow. The heart is the emotional key that opens the door to find compassion. Recognizing someone's suffering, unsafe, and in danger when they do not feel the same suffering, unsafety, and in danger is an example of a growth heartset. When the heart feels compassion, or the feeling of concern, care, and desire to understand someone else's way of experiencing a situation, empathy will trigger a growth mindset into action. The heart will feel, and the mind will act. Before a person can practice a growth mindset, they must embrace a growth heartset. More research needs to be conducted on the growth heartset theory.

Gender identities beyond the gender binary system and sexualities outside of the heterolove/heterosexual sexuality may be new ideas or concepts to some people. When they are new ideas or concepts, people must enact a growth heartset first and a growth mindset second. By embracing the growth heartset theory, a person can begin to self-reflect on reasons for resisting and refusing the choice of compassion when learning an LGBTQ+ person is potentially suffering, feeling unsafe, and in danger when they choose to double down on their existing ideologies. By focusing on self-growth (education, listening for understanding, self-reflection), they will experience growth in their heart, leading to cognitive development in their minds.



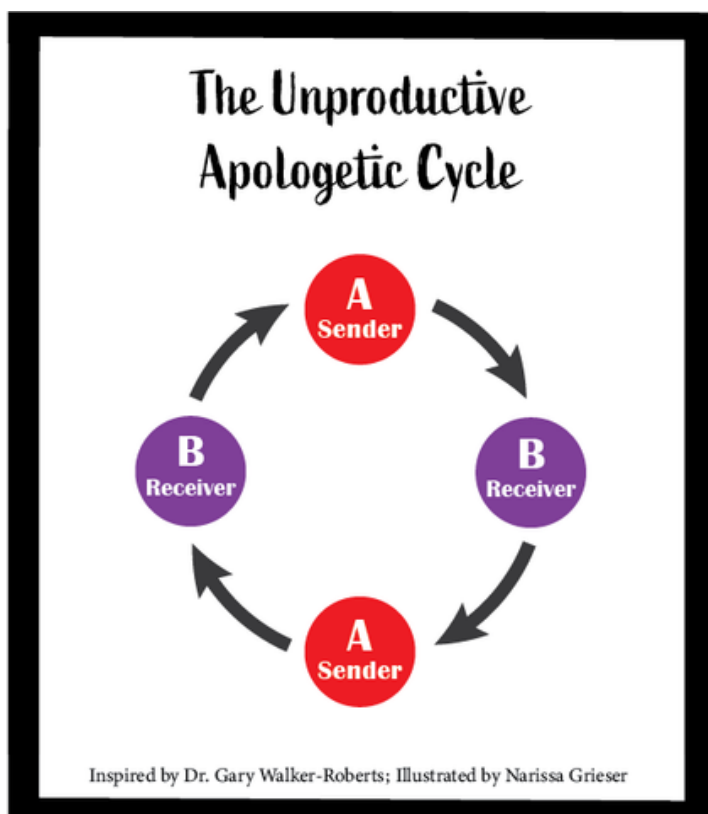
As mentioned above, understanding the nuanced differences between the identity strands can help strengthen accurate communication on a day-to-day basis during interactions with one another. Accurate communication regarding identity will help eliminate mistakes with terminology. Using correct terminology will eliminate potential hurtful feelings and bolster a stronger sense of belonging. Now, let us take a deeper dive into the typical conversation flow and explore how the conversation flow can be re-imagined. An unproductive apologetic cycle commences when people accidentally use the wrong identity terminology. For example, suppose Sender A assumes (based on outwardly physical appearance) that Receiver B's gender identity is cisgender (incorrect) and uses erroneous pronouns. In that case, Receiver B has all the right to correct Sender A. Now, Sender A may feel terrible for making Receiver B feel hurt or unsafe, so they immediately apologize to Receiver B. Sender A may dig deeper into a black hole by justifying the mistake. Receiver B, hearing everything, may feel bad for bringing up the mistake and, in turn, apologize to Sender A for bringing it up (maybe the timing was off or the way they approached the correction). Leaving an awkward silence on the spot. The apologetic cycle makes no one feel good, and nothing is accomplished.



corrective action. There are two approaches to a new conversation flow void of the apologetic cycle. Using the same example aforementioned, let us see how each approach unfolds. The first approach, Sender A, assumes Receiver B's gender identity and misgenders them. Receiver B corrects Sender A and informs them of their correct identity. Sender A acknowledges the correction with appreciation and informs Receiver B they will aim to be better in the future. Receiver B recognizes the willingness to do better in the future. \*\* At times, in the right setting, Sender A may take the opportunity to ask for more education on the situation if Receiver B is open and willing. \*\*

The second approach: Sender A does not assume Receiver B's gender identity or loveality/sexuality and only uses gender-neutral language in terms of both gender identity (they/them or zi/zem pronouns) and loveality identity (partner/spouse) until Receiver B alters the conversation with binary gender-specific language (she/he and wife/husband).

A person's goal should be the second approach; however, every person is at different points in the journey to better communication. The first and second approaches are more productive than engaging in the non-productive apologetic cycle. Moreover, these two approaches leave everyone feeling better and may open the door for an educational conversation (Walker-Roberts, 2023). Practice with an accountability partner.



Therefore, re-imagine the unproductive apologetic cycle with a conversation flow that is more intentional, where both the sender and receiver engage in a more productive conversation. This intentionality will leave everyone feeling better about the mistake and

# Conclusion

People forced the formation of the community in the wake of many harmful events that “othered” LGBTQ+ people. People within the majority population pushed people living outside of the gender binary system and beyond the hetero/lovality/heterosexual sexuality identity to the margins of society. The community formed and existed covertly for many years, but today, they overtly unify through shared struggles, activism, and the recognition of intersecting identities and experiences. The question “How did gender identities (beyond the binary gender system) and lovealities/sexualities (beyond the romantic love/sex between a male and a female) become twisted together to form one community?” has been answered in this educational white paper.

This educational white paper reviewed vital events contributing to the twisting of the two identities. A re-imagined conversation flow was

articulated. People can use new terminology to communicate accurately and create more inclusive environments in educational, work, and social settings. In order for people be more accepting and accurate with LGBTQ+ terminology, a growth heartset must be adapted. After people accept a growth heartset, the learning process will flow swimmingly.

Applying new language skills will cognitively improve through utilizing the growth mindset theory. LGBTQ+ people have always existed, in the past, exist now, and will exist in the future. People have the choice, through a growth heartset, to make the world a less harmful and dangerous place. Hurtful people forced the twist of the two identity strands through a lens of “othering.” This caused the formation of the community; but there should be no mistake: the LGBTQIAA+ community proudly remains twisted together by choice today!

## Gender Identity & Loveality/Sexuality: Twisted by Choice



Inspired by Dr. Gary Walker-Roberts; Illustrated by Narissa Grieser

## Author's Biography



**Gary Simeon Walker-Roberts, Ph.D.** (they/them/theirs), is a proud LGBTQIAA+ scholar who began their educational journey at the local community college in California. After earning an Associates of Arts in Arts and Humanities at Los Medanos College, Dr. Gary earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexualities at California State University, East Bay (CSUEB). Thereafter, they earned a Master of Arts in English at Arizona State University and obtained a Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a specialization in E-Learning at legacy Northcentral University, now known as National University (NU). Dr. Gary is a Professor in the Global Innovation, Social Emotional Learning, and Education Technology (GSET) of the Sanford College of Education at NU. Dr. Gary enjoys their role as Professor, Dissertation Committee Chair, and Subject Matter Expert where they successfully facilitate doctoral candidates to reach their terminal degrees. Lastly, Dr. Gary is a prestigious 2023 Award-winning National University Faculty Member: Jerry C. Lee Presidential Award.

## Illustrator's Biography

**Narissa Grieser** (she/her/hers), is a passionate graphic designer and a current Chico State undergraduate. She began studying at Chico State with a major in Communication Design in August of 2022 and later started a student graphic designer position at the Associated Students of Chico State and also does freelance on the side. At Chico State she's had the opportunity to create a variety of projects from poster design to magazine layouts in the Adobe Creative Cloud, she has also had the opportunity to work with web design in Adobe Dreamweaver. Whether the projects she is working on are in teams or solo, she thrives on challenges that push her to think outside the box and explore new creative avenues. She has always had a passion for art and an admiration for animation. She hopes to graduate with honors and become a graphic designer in marketing and make beautiful designs. When she is not immersed in design work she likes to visit lavender farms and go roller skating in Bidwell Park.



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