AN INTRODUCTION TO QUEER PEOPLE AND QUEER IDENTITY
The University of Texas at San Antonio

Have you ever wondered about the historical and political implications of the term queer? This workshop challenges the traditional views of gender and sexuality through a brief exploration of queer people and queer identity.

Queer: A Not-So-Simple Definition

The term “queer” is unidentifiable because this word contains multiple meanings and has multiple uses. Many of these meanings and uses are contested. There are 3 general uses of the term queer:

1. Personal Identity
2. Collective Identity
3. An Idea/Concept/Verb

A Brief History

Queer was used (and still is used) as a hateful way to refer to people…

- who appeared to be of a sexual and/or gender minority.
- who appeared to be, behaved as, or were otherwise outside the norms of sexuality and gender.

Queer Reclaimed

- The term queer, a word previously used in hate, was turned into an empowering reclamation.

Present Day

- Queer Agenda: a broader movement to change the way we understand identity, sexuality, gender, and desire.

Foundational Understanding

Society has greatly influenced the way we view sexuality and gender. Our society is based on strict gender roles and inflexible norms of sexuality that enforces beliefs, practices, and oppression.

Queer: The Collective Identity

The use of queer in regards to the collective identity provides a more inclusive and fluid expression. It also represents a refusal to organize one’s sense of self or identify oneself based on society’s norms. This use of queer defies categories.

Queer: The Individual Identity

The use of the term queer in regards to one’s individual identity includes the same implications as when related to the collective identity. On the individual level, the use of queer also has political implications. It signals a defiance with the value-statements and related oppressions placed on people based on norms of sexuality and gender. The use of queer also challenges the assumptions that we can come to understand someone and have expectations about others being based on the words they use to describe themselves.

Queer Identity in our Community

- Queer Bomb: This is a public demonstration to celebrate queer identity in Austin, TX.
- QT (Queer and Trans*) Committee of GLTBQ of UTSA: This is a committee within a student organization here on the UTSA campus. This committee is involved in an educational effort to inform those on campus of underrepresented and often misunderstood identities.
- Queer the Census: This is a movement where activists add new identity categories to the census to document and account for the full range of sexual identities.

What Can We Do?

- Challenge your own assumptions and expectations.
- Listen! Let people self-define and self-name.
- When in doubt, ask politely.
- Use gender neutral language.
- Encourage those around you to engage in the same queer friendly practices.