



By [Brittany Schiesel](#)

As someone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ community, I've encountered many experiences — likely unintentional— where, at best, I haven't felt supported and, at worst, have felt excluded. I've often filled out forms for my kids — for gift registries, sports, school, and healthcare — where I'm met with the dreaded form label "Father." My wife and I both identify as "mom" / "mother," and this experience doesn't account for our identities or family structure.

For better or worse, the people who design the touchpoints of society determine who can participate and who's left out. —Kat Holmes, [Mismatch](#).

As UX practitioners, we have the responsibility (and gift) of designing products and services that support the needs of a beautifully diverse world — including gender identities. And ensuring your customers feel valued, included, and seen for who they are, is core to building long-lasting customer relationships.

While it may sound obvious, inclusivity isn't something we can achieve by default — it takes consistent, intentional practices and choices throughout the product and service design process. Inclusive products impact not only our customers' lives but also the companies we work for. They can promote positive brand perception, boost sales, and [increase market share](#).

So, how do we get there, and where do we start? As much as I'd like to offer a checklist for every project, inclusive design isn't a one-and-done activity. It starts with you and permeates your process. **In this article, I'll focus on tips and resources that you can apply to your research and design process that lead to creating gender-inclusive experiences.** But first, let's talk about how you, as an individual, can contribute to gender inclusion.

Gender inclusion starts with you

The most important thing to remember is that **ongoing education is your most powerful tool**.

Checking your bias and committing to continued education is essential in designing gender-inclusive experiences. You can only design experiences that reflect your awareness and understanding gained through experience, education, and research. Topics like gender are fluid and continue to evolve. Commitment and curiosity go a long way in staying up-to-date and ensuring customers feel valued, seen, and acknowledged.

Part of your continuing education is assessing, reflecting, and questioning your experiences. Here's a [helpful framework](#) from Josh LaMar, founder of Amplinate, for inclusive design — in this article, we talk mostly about the “outer layer” mentioned in the framework. Still, for sustainable practices, it's important to also reflect on the “inner core” work of inclusive design.

Remember, it's okay to make mistakes as long as you make continuous effort. Any progress forward is good progress, and it's how we continue to get better together. Once you've had a chance to reflect on your starting point, it's important to understand what you're trying to achieve and why.

What is a gender-inclusive experience?

Gender-inclusive experiences make people feel included when interacting with your company and using your products and services.

Bachul Koul says it best in their [RetailDriver article](#):

Customer inclusion is about understanding your customers for who they are — and the reality that they may not fit easily into one box regarding gender, sexuality, race, or any other aspects of their identity.

As we're talking about gender-inclusive experiences, here are a few terms that are helpful to understand — and not use interchangeably:

- **Sexual orientation:** A person's physical and/or emotional attraction to other people (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.)
- **Sex:** A biological status typically assigned at birth (e.g., male, female, intersex).
- **Gender/Gender identity:** A social construct; how a person refers to themselves regardless of biology (e.g., man, woman, non-binary, etc.)
- **Gender expression:** How a person represents their gender outwardly through their clothing, behaviors, or other characteristics (e.g., masculine, feminine, etc.)
- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Now that you have a sense of the basics, let's dive into the specifics. All great customer experiences start with user research. To be effective, inclusive practices need to be ingrained in your research processes.

Conducting gender-inclusive research

Recruit a diverse sample of participants

Including people from sexual and gender minorities (SGM communities) in your research reveals unique perspectives and amplifies underrepresented voices. However, you don't want to force people to answer gender identity questions that can be uncomfortable to answer during your screening process.

When asking a person how they identify, incorporate a diverse range of gender options and allow people to express their identities. At Blink, we use this screener question to ask about gender:

Which of the following best describes your gender identity

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-Binary
- Prefer to self-describe _____
- Prefer not to answer

If your research has a reason to include a question about sexual orientation, the options might look like this:

- Heterosexual/Straight
- Gay/Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Prefer to self-describe _____
- Prefer not to answer

Providing multiple options lets people describe themselves how they want to be described, and you won't risk misidentifying your diverse sample or excluding people right off the bat. Review your screeners and surveys to check the questions and the answer options that you have. There should be options for everyone, regardless of how they identify.

Use inclusive language in interviews and participant communications

Conduct an audit of all the touchpoints a participant has with your company during the research process and your study. Do you have recruiting emails? Do you have automated confirmation messages? A screener phone call? When you are reviewing these touchpoints, look for:

- **The necessity of questions:** Just because you can ask a question doesn't mean you should. Make sure the information you are collecting is necessary for your research. Gender and sexuality can be very personal, sensitive topics for some folks and may even bring up past traumas.
- **Appropriate answer options:** Inclusive answer options allow participants to identify accurately and authentically.
- **Gendered language:** Replace binary identifiers, such as "Ms., Mrs., Mr.," and other terms with gender-neutral language, for example, using "child" instead of son/daughter or "firefighter" instead of "fireman." This ensures inclusive language at every interaction.

For more tips on gender-inclusive research, including assessing the necessity and appropriateness of questions, check out this [guide](#) from Northwestern University.

Refer to participants as they describe themselves

It's important to mirror participants' language throughout your interactions and conversations to honor their identity. At the beginning of the session, you may ask [which pronouns they use](#) so that you can refer to them accurately during the research and in your research reporting.

Additionally, there are many ways someone may choose to label or describe their relationship. Use their terms instead of making assumptions. This is true for same-sex and heterosexual couples. For example, if someone describes who they are married to as their wife as opposed to their partner, use that term.

Protect participant well-being and privacy

Research ethics and confidentiality are critical to all research studies but are even more important when researching sensitive topics and working with marginalized and vulnerable populations. You can protect participant well-being by creating a psychologically safe environment, not probing into topics that may bring up negative experiences or past traumas, and allowing them to opt out at any time.

Design guidelines to make your customer experiences more inclusive

Foster a sense of belonging

Create a welcoming and inviting customer feeling by representing gender diversity in your product photography, website, and printed marketing materials. Here are some resources to get you started:

[The Gender Spectrum Collection](#) is a stock photo library featuring images of trans and non-binary models that go beyond clichés. This collection aims to help the media better represent members of these communities as people not necessarily defined by their gender identities — people with careers, relationships, talents, passions, and home lives — just like anyone else.

[“Queer in Tech,”](#) by Mapbox, is a free collection of stock photos created to promote the visibility of queer and gender-nonconforming (GNC) people in technology.

Give response options for gender identity

Like your research screener, check your forms, registration/onboarding processes, and questionnaires to ensure you're providing a range of different ways for people to identify themselves. Making gender or sex-related questions optional is also a best practice to give people the choice to disclose personal information. Here are a couple of sneaky excluding questions to look out for:

- Asking for a binary identifier (Ms., Mrs., Mr.) in your registration process
- Providing product recommendations based on gender alone

Use inclusive language throughout your product copy

Audit your product copy either throughout or in key flows to ensure your language is gender neutral; for example, instead of “mailman,” use “mail carrier.”

The first step toward gender-inclusive

experiences

Remember, education is your most powerful tool for creating products and services that make our customers feel valued, included, and seen for who they are. The tips in this article are a great starting point, but check out the additional resources below for more information.

If you have any questions about designing gender-inclusive products, or you'd like to work with Blink, [get in touch with our team!](#)

Additional Resources:

- [The Gender Spectrum Collection](#)
- [Queer in Tech](#)
- [Gender Inclusive Language](#)
- [4 Design Principles for Gender-Identity Inclusion](#)
- [Beyond Binary: Designing for Gender Inclusivity](#)
- [Gender inclusive design is the only way](#)
- [Gender-Inclusive Design: Sense of Belonging and Bias in Web Interfaces](#)
- [How to make content gender inclusive](#)
- [The Definitive Guide to Pronouns](#)
- [Peeling Back the Layers of Inclusive Design](#)
- [An Inclusive Customer Experience for Non-Binary People is Necessary](#)