# Queer Theory Worksheet

Queer Theory is a field of critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of queer studies (often, formerly, gay and lesbian studies) and women’s studies. The term can have various meanings depending upon its usage, but fundamentally it is the study of gender and sexual practices that exist outside of heterosexuality, and the notion that heterosexual desire and behavior is ‘normal.’

According to theorist Jay Stewart, “Queer Theory and politics necessarily celebrate transgression in the form of visible difference from norms. These ‘Norms’ are then exposed to be norms, not natures or inevitabilities. Gender and sexual identities are seen, in much of this work, to be demonstrably defiant definitions and configurations.”

Queer Theory challenges how society portrays gender. Its goal is to undo hierarchies and fight against social inequalities, and challenge dominant definitions of what is considered “normal” behavior. It works to actively critique “heteronormativity,” exposing and breaking down traditional assumptions that sexual and gender identities are presumed to be heterosexual or cisgender (which means having a gender identity that relates to the physical gender one is at birth).

Theorist Teresa de Lauretis’ in her text “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” claims there are at least three interrelated projects: refusing heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formations, a challenge to the belief that lesbian and gay studies is one single entity, and a strong focus on the multiple ways that race shapes sexual bias.

* **Do other people have different definitions of Queer Theory?**
* **What are some other topics Queer Theory raises?**
* **Who are some of the central figures, and what do they have to say?**