

LGBTQ Terminology

(adapted from many sources by Douglas W. Pollock)

Every thorough discussion about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community starts with some very basic but often confusing terms. You may be surprised by some of the terms. Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification on these terms. The definitions of some of these terms are changing as the climates for the community change.

Affectional Orientation: A recent term used to refer to variations in object of emotional and sexual attraction. The term is preferred by some over “sexual orientation” because it indicates that the feelings and commitments involved are not solely (or even primarily, for some people) sexual. The term stresses the affective emotional component of attractions and relationships, including heterosexual as well as GLBT orientation.

Ally: An individual whose attitudes and behavior are anti-heterosexist and who is active in combating homophobia and heterosexism, both on a personal and institutional level.

Androgyny: Displaying physical and social characteristics identified in this culture as both female and male to the degree that outward appearance and mannerisms make it difficult to determine the androgynous person’s biological sex.

Biological Sex: The dichotomous distinction between female and male based on physiological characteristics, especially chromosomes and external genitalia. (See **Intersex**)

Bisexual/Bi: A person who has sexual and emotional relationships with or feelings towards both women and men, although not necessarily at the same time

Butch/Femme: A lesbian or gay woman, who prefers traditionally masculine (butch)/feminine dress, style, expression, or identity. Use caution with these terms for they can still be taken offensively, mainly because they are still often used offensively. Avoid use of the term “lipstick lesbian” and stick to “femme.”

Camp: In LGBT circles, people (especially gay men) may be described as “camp” or “campy” if they behave in a manner that exaggerates gay mannerisms or stereotypes. Such exaggeration is often powerful in its ability to reveal the absurdity of gender expectations.

Cisgender: An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity conforms to their birth biological gender.

Closeted/In the Closet: The confining state of being secretive about one’s true Sexual Identity.

Come Out (Of the Closet): Also, “coming out of the closet” or “being out,” this term refers to the process through which a person acknowledges, accepts, and learns to appreciate her or his lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. Sharing this information with others is not a single event but instead a life-long process.

Demisexual: An individual who only enters into a sexual relationship after a strong, loving non-sexual relationship develops. (*Demi* is a prefix that means half.)

Drag: (also Drag King, Drag Queen, Female/Male Impersonator) - wearing the clothing of another gender, often with exaggerated cultural/stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as Drag Kings (female in drag) or Drag Queens (male in drag). Drag often refers to dressing for functional purposes such as entertainment/performance or social gatherings. Drag has held a significant place in LGBT history and community.

Dyke: Derived from the term “dyke-loupers” from old Scotland. Recent history has abused lesbians with the use of the term in a hateful manner. Within the community, some have grasped the term as a pride word.

Effeminate: Used to identify a person (usually male) who expresses and/or presents culturally/ stereotypically feminine characteristics. This is often viewed as a culturally negative term.

Faggot/Fag: According to Webster’s, “a bundle of sticks or twigs.” Historically, gay men were gathered, tied together and used for “kindling” when burning someone at the stake who was worthy of a “real” execution (like a witch or a heretic). Within the community, some have grasped the term “fag” from its painful past and use it as a pride word.

Family: A term widely used by LGBT persons to identify other LGBT people.

Family of orientation (Choice): Persons forming an individual’s social, emotional, and practical support network and often fulfilling the functions of blood relations. Many LGBT people are rejected when their families learn of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or they may remain “closeted” to their biological relatives. In such cases, it is their partner/significant other and close friends who will be called on in time of illness or personal crisis.

Family of Origin: The biological family, or the family in which one was raised. These individuals may or may not be part of a LGBT person’s support system.

Femme: A person who identifies with being a woman, who understands the power and seduction of the feminine spirit and one who is willing to be powerful as a woman. Can be used to identify a person who expresses and/or presents culturally/stereotypically feminine characteristics. Can be used either as a positive or negative term.

FTM: Female to Male. A term that refers to male-identified people who were categorized as female at birth. (See also **MTF** and **Transgender**.)

Gay: A socio-political term used to describe homosexual men though the term can be used to refer to both male and female homosexuals and the homosexual community at large. Many homosexual women prefer to be called Lesbian.

Gender: A person’s biological sex: traditionally male, female, and intersexed. This term can also be used to describe characteristics of masculine and femininity that are learned or chosen. A person’s assigned sex does not always match their gender (see **Transgender**), and most people display traits of more than one gender. Gender is different from sexuality.

Gender Bending: Blurring the binary gender roles.

Gender Dysphoria: An intense, continuous discomfort resulting from an individual's belief in the inappropriateness of their assigned gender at birth and resulting gender role expectations. Also, clinical psychological diagnosis, which many in transgender communities are offended by, but is often required to receive hormones and/or surgery.

Gender Expression: An individual’s characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

Gender Fluid: A person’s internal, deeply-felt sense of being both male/female, something other, or in between.

Gender Identity: How an individual views himself or herself in terms of characteristics traditionally identified in this culture as male or female. A person may self identify as purely male, purely female, or possessing characteristics of both.

Gender Non-conforming: A person who is or is perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Use “gender creative.”

Gender Queer: People who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as completely male or female.

Gender Reassignment Surgery: GRS (also Sex Reassignment Surgery-SRS) - permanent surgical refashioning of genitalia to resemble the genitalia of the desired gender. Sought to attain congruence between one's body and one's gender identity.

Gender Recognition: Recognizes only two genders and regulates behavior. The idea is that all males should be male-identified/masculine, and all females should be female-identified/feminine.

Gender Roles: The socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on women (femininity) and men (masculinity).

GLBT: Stands for **Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual / Transgender**. You may also see the letters Q and A added at times; these letters stand for **Questioning Youth and Allies**. (Used on the east coast)

Heterosexism: A set of attitudes that are consistent with the belief that heterosexuality is a superior psychological, social and moral stance. This serves to create an invisibility or lack of validation and representation for other than an opposite sex, sexual orientation.

Heterosexuality: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

Heterosexual Privilege: The benefits and advantages heterosexuals receive in a heterosexist culture. Also, the benefits lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people receive as a result of claiming or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

Homo-negativity: general disregard/dislike – likely to support legislation that restricts equal rights.

Homophobia: Fear or hatred of those assumed to be LGBT and anything connected to their culture. It is when a person fears homosexuality, either in other people or within themselves. This term represents the most extreme set of negative attitudes and beliefs and can include overt threats or expressions of hostility/violence. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Homosexual: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender. This is a “clinical” term that originated in the 1800’s term that is rarely used within the gay and lesbian community. The religious right often uses this term and as such it can have a somewhat negative connotation.

Hormone Therapy (also Hormone Replacement Therapy, HRT, Hormonal Sex Reassignment): Administration of hormones to affect the development of secondary sex characteristics of the opposite assigned gender; HRT is a process, possibly lifelong, of using hormones to change the internal body chemistry. Androgens (testosterone) are used for female to males, and Estrogens are used for male to females. (See **Hormone Blocker**)

Hormone Blocker: Puberty blockers, also called puberty inhibitors, puberty suppressors, or hormone suppressors, are a group of medications used to inhibit puberty. They were originally used to treat children with precocious puberty or other such early onset of puberty.

Internalized Homophobia: The fear and self-hate of one's own homosexuality or bisexuality that occur for many individuals who have learned negative ideas about homosexuality throughout childhood. One form of internalized oppression is the acceptance of the myths and stereotypes applied to the oppressed group. It can result in depression, alienation, anxiety, and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Intersex: A person born with physically ambiguous genitalia which doctors have trouble classifying as "female/girl" or "male/boy". Avoid use of the clinical term, "hermaphrodite," which is generally found offensive. Although intersexuality is relatively common, intersexed people and infants are often regarded as "deformed" or "monsters" and are subjected to surgery while still infants.

In the closet: To be "in the closet" means to hide one's homosexual identity in order to keep a job, a housing situation, family/friends, or in some other way to survive. Many LGBT individuals are "out" in some situations and "closeted" in others.

Kinsey Scale: The continuum model devised by Alfred Kinsey in 1948 that plotted sexuality from 0 to 6, 0 being exclusively heterosexual and 6 being exclusively homosexual. It was the first scale to account for bisexuality. According to a 1954 survey using the scale, 70% of people fell between 1 and 5. It's been criticized for being too linear and only accounting for behavior and not sexual identity.

Lesbian: Preferred term for a female homosexual. A common and acceptable word for female homosexuals only; a name taken from the island of Lesbos where Sappho, the great women-loving poet of 600 BC lived. Most women-loving women adopt this name with pride.

LGBTQ: A socio-political acronym for the community comprised of Lesbian, Gay Men, Bisexuals and Transgendered individuals. The addition of a "Q" at the end refers to individual who may affiliate with the community and are "questioning" some aspect of their gender or sexuality, or it represents "queer."

M2F (Male to Female): Used to identify a person who was male bodied at birth and who identifies as a female, lives as a woman, or identifies as feminine.

Men who have Sex with Men (MSM): This term is often used when discussing sexual behavior and sexual health. It is inclusive of all men who participate in this behavior regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. The acronym MSM is conventionally used in professional literature

Metrosexual: A term from the 1990's referring to a heterosexual male who assumes characteristics traditionally associated with gay male stereotypes. While the term suggests a shift in sexual orientation it more accurately reflects a loosening of restrictions around male gender role adherence.

Openly Gay: Used in instances where the Sexual Orientation of the individual is relevant to the story and the individual has previously Outed her/himself. As in: "The openly gay legislator voted against the measure denying civil rights to gays."

Outing: Publicly revealing the Sexual Orientation of an individual who has chosen to keep that orientation a secret. Some activists, political groups and media believe outing is justified and/or newsworthy when the person involved works against the interests of lesbians and gays. Others oppose it entirely as an invasion of privacy.

Pansexual: Individuals whose sexual attraction, romantic love, or emotional attraction is toward people of any sex or gender identity.

Partner or Significant Other: Primary domestic partner or spousal relationship. May also be referred to as “girlfriend/boyfriend,” “lover,” “roommate,” “life partner,” “wife/husband,” or other.

Passing: With regards to sex, gender, and sexuality, passing means being seen as a sex, gender, or sexuality other than the one you were assigned or with which you identify.

Pink Triangle: An inverted triangle adopted by lesbian and gay culture starting in the 1970’s in remembrance of the homosexuals who were forced to wear pink triangles in Nazi concentration camps. Lesbians often wore the red and black triangles.

Pre-Op (also Pre-Operative): Transsexual individuals who have not attained gender reassignment surgery, but who desire to and are seeking that as an option. They may or may not “cross-live” full time and may or may not take hormone therapy. They may also seek surgery to change secondary sex characteristics.

Post-Op (also Post-Operative) Transsexual individuals who have attained gender reassignment surgery, and/or other surgeries to change secondary sex characteristics.

Pride: A healthy safe respect, which, in the context of the gay community, promotes empowerment, education, safe living, and the sense that it is “okay to be gay.”

Pride March: A public procession or parade of lesbians and gay men to proclaim the pride, solidarity, and unity of gay people.

Queen: A Gay man who prefers traditionally feminine dress, style, expression or identity. If you identify as straight, use caution with this term.

Queer: Once known as a derogatory term for homosexual, “queer” was reclaimed by lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists in the 1980’s as a proud name for themselves. Queer blurs both gender and sexual orientation and is regarded as a more inclusive of variance than **lesbian** or **gay**; in other words, it acts as an all inclusive or “umbrella” term for all LGBT individuals. It’s not ok to use “queer” as an offensive term to degrade LGBT people. Use some caution, as many in the **LGBT** community consider it only appropriate that other **LGBT** people use the term.

Rainbow Flag: Designed in 1978 by artist Gilbert Baker signifying the diversity of the LGBT movement. Originally, there were eight colors in the flag; pink for sexuality, red for light, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for natural serenity, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit. In 1979, the flag was modified to its current six-stripe format (pink was omitted, blue was substituted for turquoise and indigo, and violet became a rich purple).

Same Gender Loving (SGL): A term used often by gay and lesbian African-Americans as an alternative to ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian.’ It helps provide an identity not marginalized by racism within the gay community or heterosexism in society.

Sex: The biological traits used to categorize someone as either male or female. A better word to use is *gender*.

Sexism: The societal/cultural, institutional and individual beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and denigrate women-identified values (male chauvinism). Women can also practice sexism in their attitudes about men.

Sexuality: Who you like and what you do. Sexuality is distinct from gender identity and biological sex. It refers to the labels we assign to sexual desires and practices: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, etc.

Sexual Identity: How you identify your sexual feelings and desires; not necessarily your practices

Sexual minority: A person may identify as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, or transvestite.

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, physical, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction with other individuals. There is ongoing debate among medical and psychological experts as to whether sexual orientation has a biological basis (nature) or is the result of environmental factors and individual choice (nurture). Although the nature-versus-nurture debate continues, many believe that sexual orientation is probably one of the many characteristics with which people are born. The term "sexual orientation" is favored over "sexual preference," as the latter term implies a choice, and most gay men and lesbians do not view their attractions as a choice.

(Innate) Sexual Attraction: In all instances, use this term or "Sexual Orientation" instead of "Sexual Preference" or other misleading terminology.

Sexual Preference: Avoid this one. It is a misleading term; the majority of queer individuals will tell you that being queer is not a preference. Sexual Orientation is used more often.

Straight: A term originating in the gay community describing heterosexuals and meaning "to enter the mainstream," or "to go straight."

Stonewall Inn: A tavern in New York City's Greenwich Village. The site of violent protests following a police raid committed on June 28, 1969 for no other reason than that it was a queer bar. Although not the nation's first gay-rights demonstration, Stonewall is now regarded as the birth of the modern **LGBT** movement.

Straight: A heterosexual; a **non-Queer** person.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people who transgress society's view of gender as necessarily fixed, unmoving, and following from one's biological sex. They view gender on a spectrum, rather than a polarized, dichotomous construct. This is a broad term that encompasses intersex individuals, transsexuals and those who defy what society tells them is appropriate for their gender. The sexual orientation of transgender persons varies just as it varies among the remainder of the human population.

Transphobia: Hatred and/or discrimination against people who break or blur gender roles and sex characteristics. Like biphobia, it is prevalent in both straight and gay/lesbian communities.

Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is opposite their assigned sex. Transsexuals may live as the "opposite" sex, undergo hormone therapy, and/or have sex reassignment surgery to match their bodies with their gender identity.

Transvestite: A person who dresses in clothes traditionally associated with persons of the opposite gender.

Two-Spirit: Native American concept across North America and parts of Central and South America. It is a term of reverence, traditionally referring to people who display both masculine and feminine sex or gender characteristics. Named "berdache" by European colonists, those who are Two-Spirited are and were traditionally respected and may be healers or leaders thought to possess a high spiritual development.