

LGBTQ Terminology

Below is a list of words and terms that are common within the LGBTQ community. This is not an all encompassing list, but is a good place start if you are unfamiliar. You may have heard some of these words and didn't know what they meant. The purpose of this list is to help you understand the terms, and to educate on common terms and preferred terms within the LGBTQ community.

AIDS / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome – The stage of HIV infection. An HIV positive person is diagnosed with AIDS when their immune system is so weakened that it is no longer able to fight off illness. People with immune deficiency are much more vulnerable to infections such as pneumonia and various forms of cancer. These diseases are called opportunistic infections because they take advantage of the weakened immune system. Ultimately, people do not die from AIDS itself, they die from one or more of these opportunistic infections. It is believed that all people who become HIV+ will eventually have AIDS.

Ally – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and gender-straight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social.

Androgynous - An appearance and/or identification that is neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

Asexual – Someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are. Asexual people still have the same emotional needs as anyone else, and experience attraction. However, they feel no need to act out that attraction sexually.

Assigned Sex - When all of us are born, a doctor or other official surveys the evidence and assigns us one of two sexes: “male” and “female.” If the available physical evidence at birth is unclear, many times the evidence is “fixed” surgically to conform to one of those two boxes.

Bicurious – A curiosity about having sexual relations with a same gender/sex person.

Biphobia – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQ community, as well as in general society.

Bisexual – A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to male/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Bulldagger - Most often used in a derogatory way to describe a masculine lesbian; most often used in African American communities.

Butch – A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

LGBTQ Terminology

Cisgender - Literally “not transgender.” This is a less problematic term for people who are not transgender – preferred over terms like “real man/woman,” “biological man/woman,” or “natural man/woman.”

Coming Out – May refer to the process by which one accepts one’s own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersexed person (to “come out” to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one’s sexuality, gender identity, or intersexed status with others (to “come out” to friends, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed individuals.

Cross-dresser – Someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

Discrimination – Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individuals acts of hatred of injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

Down Low – See ‘In the Closet.’ Also referred to as ‘D/L.’

Drag – The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. This is gender as purely performance, and doesn’t necessarily reflect the person’s gender identity.

Drag King – A person who performs masculinity theatrically.

Drag Queen – A person who performs femininity theatrically.

Dyke – Derogatory term referring to a masculine lesbian. Sometimes adopted affirmatively by lesbian (not necessarily masculine ones) to refer to themselves.

Fag/Faggot – Derogatory term referring to someone perceived as non-heterosexual.

Femme – Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.

FTM / F2M – Abbreviation for female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

Gay – 1. Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2. Term used to refer to the LGBTQ community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

Gender Binary – The idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or.

Gender Cues – what people use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

LGBTQ Terminology

Gender Expression - The gender everyone sees: the way in which an individual externally represents their gender identity and presents it to the world.

Gender Identity – A person’s internal sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered. The way individual identifies their individual gender; this does not always align with their sex.

Gender Normative / Gender Straight – A person who either by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society.

Gender Queer - A person who redefines or plays with gender, or who refuses gender altogether. An identity taken up by many people who bend/break the rules of gender and blur the boundaries.

Gender Variant / Gender Non-Conforming – A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender- based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender-queer, cross-dresser, etc.).

Hermaphrodite – An out-of-date and offensive term for an intersexed person. (See ‘Intersexed Person’).

Heteronormativity – The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality.

Heterosexism – Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power – that subordinated people because of their sexual orientation.

Heterosexual Privilege – Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

HIV / Human Immunodeficiency Virus – A virus that attacks the immune system (the body's defense against infection). HIV uses healthy white blood cells to replicate itself, breaking down the immune system and leaving the body more susceptible to illness. Without treatment, most people infected with HIV become less able to fight off germs that we are exposed to every day. Someone who has HIV is called "HIV positive" or "HIV+".

HIV-phobia – The irrational fear or hatred of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Homophobia – The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

Heterosexual – A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to member of the same sex.

LGBTQ Terminology

In the Closet – Refers to a homosexual, bisexual, trans-person or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to “correct,” whenever possible, intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical history from the patient. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”; for example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family. (also known as ‘Down Low’ or D/L).

Institutional Oppression – Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

Internalized Oppression – the process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppression group.

Intersexed Person – a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside. Or a person may be born with genitals that seem to be in-between the usual male and female types—for example, a girl may be born with a noticeably large clitoris, or lacking a vaginal opening, or a boy may be born with a notably small penis, or with a scrotum that is divided so that it has formed more like labia. Or a person may be born with mosaic genetics, so that some of her cells have XX chromosomes and some of them have XY.

Lesbian – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups, including African-Americans, embrace the term ‘lesbian’ as an identity label.

LGBTQ – A common abbreviation for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning

LGBTQQAAP – A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersexed, asexual, ally, and pansexual community.

Lipstick Lesbian – Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way, depending on who is using it. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is seen as automatically passing for heterosexual.

MAAB/FAAB - “Male Assigned At Birth” and “Female Assigned At Birth” respectively. These terms are preferable to some more commonly used ones like “born male” or “born female.”

Male Lesbian – A male-bodied person who identifies as a lesbian. This differs from a heterosexual male in that a male lesbian is primarily attracted to other lesbian, bisexual, or queer identified people. May sometimes identify as gender variant, or as a female/woman.

LGBTQ Terminology

Meterosexual – First used in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, who coined the term to refer to an urban, heterosexual male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. This term can be perceived as derogatory because it reinforces stereotypes that all gay men are fashion-conscious and materialistic.

MTF/ M2F – Abbreviation from male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

Oppression – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Outing – Involuntary disclosure of one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

Pansexual – A person who recognizes more than two genders and experiences the human need for warmth, affection, and/or love from a person of any gender.

Passing – Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or race/ethnicity identity of to be seen as heterosexual.

Polyamory – Refers to having honest, usual non-possessive, relationships with multiple partners and can include: open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves multiple romantic relationships with sexual contact restricted to those), and sub-relationships (which denote distinguishing between a 'primary' relationship or relationships and various "secondary" relationships).

Prejudice – A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members.

Queer – Different. 1. An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual orientations, and habits or the not-exclusively- heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. 2. Once used primarily as a pejorative term, queer is being reclaimed by many LGBT+ people in an attempt to blur rigid labels. Many who choose to use the term feel that it is more inclusive, allowing for diversity of race, class, and gender that are often underrepresented in the LGBT community. Other LGBT people find this term degrading.

Questioning – Someone who is questioning their sexual orientation, identity, etc. These individuals may be exploring their feelings or unsure of their own sexuality.

Same Gender Loving / SGL – A term sometimes used by members of the African- American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990s with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life.

Sex – A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because usually subdivided into 'male' and 'female', this category does not recognize the existence of intersexed bodies.

Sex Identity – How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.

LGBTQ Terminology

Sexual Identity - The way a person views and identifies their sexual orientation.

Sexual Orientation – The “direction” of the desire for intimate emotional and/ or sexual relationships with people. Sexual Orientation is not necessarily the same as sexual behavior.

Sex Reassignment Surgery / SRS – A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person’s ‘sex’. In most stated, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance.

Sexuality – A person’s exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

Stealth – This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. (Also referred to as ‘going stealth’ or ‘living in stealth mode’.)

Stereotype – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact; however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

Stone Butch / Femme – A person who may or may not desire sexual penetration and/or contact with the genitals or breasts. (See also ‘Butch’ and ‘Femme’).

Straight – Another term for heterosexual.

Straight-Acting – A term usually applied to gay men who readily pass as heterosexual. The term implies that there is a certain way that gay men should act that is significantly different from heterosexual men. Straight-acting gay men are often looked down upon in the LGBTQIAAP community for seemingly accessing heterosexual privilege.

Stud – An African-American and/of Latina masculine lesbian. Also known as ‘butch’ or ‘aggressive’.

Top Surgery – This term usually refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest, but may also refer to breast augmentation.

Trans – An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

Transactivism – The political and social movement to create equality for gender variant persons.

Transgender – A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex or assigned sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

Transgendered (Trans) Community – A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in

LGBTQ Terminology

a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

Trans-Hate – The irrational hatred of those who are gender variant, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

Transition – this term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

Transman – An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females. Also referred to as ‘transguy(s)’.

Transphobia – the irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

Transsexual – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.

Transvestite – Someone who dresses in clothing generally identified with the opposite gender/sex. While the terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘transvestite’ have been used synonymously, they in fact signify two different groups. The majority of transvestites are heterosexual males who derive pleasure from dressing in “women’s clothing”. The preferred term for most people is ‘cross-dresser’.

Transwoman – An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males.

Two-Spirited – Native persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of male and female articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term ‘two-spirit’ is usually considered to specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include ‘one-spirit’ and ‘wintke’.

WSW/MSM - “Women who have sex with women” or “men who have sex with men” respectively. Regardless of how they identify themselves; many people choose not to take on the sexual identities of “homosexual” or “bisexual.” These terms provide a way to talk about sexual acts without forcing sexual self-identities.

Ze / Hir – Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some gender variant persons. Pronounced /zee/ and /here,/ they replace “he” and “she” and “his” and “hers” respectively.