



LGBT Glossary Of Terms

Ally (Heterosexual Ally, Straight Ally) - Someone who is a friend, advocate, and/or activist for LGBTQ people. A heterosexual ally is also someone who confronts heterosexism in themselves and others. The term ally is generally used for any member of a dominant group who is a friend, advocate or activist for people in an oppressed group.

Androgynous - Term used to describe an individual whose gender expression and/or identity may be neither distinctly “female” nor “male,” usually based on appearance.

Asexual - A sexual orientation generally characterized by not feeling sexual attraction or desire for partnered sexuality. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity. Some asexual people do have sex. There are many diverse ways of being asexual.

Biphobia - The fear, hatred, or intolerance of bisexual people.

Bisexual, Bi - An individual who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men and women. Bisexuals need not have had sexual experience with both men and women; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual.

Cisgender - a term used to describe people who, for the most part, identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Closeted - Describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation.

Coming Out - A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity first to themselves and then may reveal it to others. Publicly identifying one’s orientation may or may not be part of coming out.



Down Low - Pop-culture term used to describe men who identify as heterosexual but engage in sexual activity with other men. Often these men are in committed sexual relationships or marriages with a female partner.

Drag Queen/Drag King - Used by people who present socially in clothing, name, and/or pronouns that differ from their everyday gender, usually for enjoyment, entertainment, and/or self-expression. Drag queens typically have everyday lives as men. Drag kings typically live as women and/or butches when not performing. Drag shows are popular in some gay, lesbian, and bisexual environments. Unless they are drag performers, most Trans people would be offended by being confused with drag queens or drag kings.

Gay - The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., *gay man*, *gay people*). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* (n. or adj.) is often a preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as “homosexuals” an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

Gender Expression - Refers to how an individual expresses their socially constructed gender. This may refer to how an individual dresses, their general appearance, the way they speak, and/or the way they carry themselves. Gender expression is not always correlated to an individuals' gender identity or gender role.

Gender Identity - Since gender is a social construct, an individual may have a self perception of their gender that is different or the same as their biological sex. Gender identity is an internalized realization of one's gender and may not be manifested in their outward appearance (gender expression) or their place in society (gender role). It is important to note that an individual's gender identity is completely separate from their sexual orientation or sexual preference.

Gender Neutral - This term is used to describe facilities that any individual can use regardless of their gender (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms). This term can also be used to describe an individual who does not subscribe to any socially constructed gender (sometimes referred to as “Gender Queer”).



Gender Non Conforming - A person who is, or is perceived to have gender characteristics that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations.

Gender/Sexual Reassignment Surgery – Refers to a surgical procedure to transition an individual from one biological sex to another. This is often paired with hormone treatment and psychological assistance. A “Transsexual” individual must go through several years of hormones and psychological evaluation and live as the “opposite” or “desired” gender prior to receiving the surgery (see intersex).

Gender Role - A societal expectation of how an individual should act, think, and/or feel based upon an assigned gender in relation to society’s binary biological sex system.

Heterosexual - An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also *straight*.

Homosexual - (*see Offensive Terms to Avoid*) Outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people. The Associated Press, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* restrict usage of the term. *Gay* and/or *lesbian* accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Homophobia - Fear of lesbians and gay men. *Prejudice* is usually a more accurate description of hatred or antipathy toward LGBT people.

Intersex - People who naturally (that is, without any medical interventions) develop primary and/or secondary sex characteristics that do not fit neatly into society’s definitions of male or female. Many visibly intersex babies/children are surgically altered by doctors to make their sex characteristics conform to societal binary norm expectations. Intersex people are relatively common, although society’s denial of their existence has allowed very little room for intersex issues to be discussed publicly. Has replaced “hermaphrodite,” which is inaccurate, outdated, problematic, and generally offensive, since it means “having both sexes” and this is not necessarily true, as there are at least 16 different ways to be intersex.



Kinsey Scale - Alfred Kinsey, a renowned sociologist, described a spectrum on a scale of 0-6 to describe the type of sexual desire within an individual. 0 Completely Heterosexual – 6: Completely Homosexual. In his 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The Kinsey Scale is often used to dissect the bisexual community and describe the differences between sexual orientation and sexual preference.

Lesbian - A woman whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women.

LGBTQQIA - An acronym used to refer to all sexual minorities: “Lesbian, Gay/Gender Neutral/Gender Queer, Bisexual/Bigender, Transgender/Transvestite/Transsexual, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, and Allies/Androgynous/Asexual.”

Lifestyle - (*see Offensive Terms to Avoid*) Inaccurate term used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives. As there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender lifestyle.

Men Who Have Sex with Men - men, including those who do not identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual, who engage in sexual activity with other men (used in public health contexts to avoid excluding men who identify as heterosexual).

Openly Gay - Describes people who self-identify as lesbian or gay in their personal, public and/or professional lives. Also *openly lesbian, openly bisexual, openly transgender*.

Outing - The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumor and/or speculation) or revealing another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBT community.

Pansexual - not limited in sexual choice with regard to biological sex, gender, or gender identity.

Queer - Traditionally a pejorative term, *queer* has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless someone self-identifies that way.



Questioning - The process of considering or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation - The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations. Avoid the offensive term "sexual preference," which is used to suggest that being gay or lesbian is voluntary and therefore "curable."

Sexual Behavior - Refers to an individual's sexual activities or actions (what a person does sexually). Though often an individual's sexual orientation is in line with their sexual behavior, it is not always the case.

Sexual Minority - An all inclusive, politically oriented term referring to individuals who identify with a minority sexual orientation, sex identity, or gender expression/gender identity.

Sexual Preference - (*see Offensive Terms to Avoid*) This term refers to an individual's choice in regards to attraction. Sexual preference can be based on gender/sex, physical appearance (height, weight, race, ethnicity), or emotional connection. It is important to note that sexual preference denotes a "choice" and has a negative connotation when used to describe the LGBTQ population.

Straight - Pop culture term used to refer to individuals who identify as a heterosexual, meaning having a sexual, emotional, physical and relational attraction to individuals of the "opposite" gender/sex. The term "straight" often has a negative connotation within the LGBTQ population, because it suggested that non heterosexual individuals are "crooked" or "unnatural".

Transvestite - This term is often thought to be outdated, problematic, and generally offensive, since it was historically used to diagnose medical/mental health disorders.

Zie & Hir - The most common spelling for gender neutral pronouns. Zie is subjective (replaces he or she) and Hir is possessive and objective (replaces his or her).



Transgender Specific Glossary of Terms

GENERAL TERMINOLOGY

Gender Identity - One's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or a girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Expression - External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through "masculine," "feminine" or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

Sex - The classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitals.

Sexual Orientation - Describes an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual. For example, a man who transitions from male to female and is attracted to other women would be identified as a lesbian or a gay woman.



TRANSGENDER-SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Cross-Dressing - To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. "Cross-dresser" should NOT be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex or who intends to do so in the future. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) - A controversial DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-variant people. Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. Replaces the outdated term "gender dysphoria."

Intersex - Describing a person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations that make a person's sex ambiguous (e.g., Klinefelter Syndrome). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex infants a sex and perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term *intersex* is not interchangeable with or a synonym for *transgender*.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) - Refers to surgical alteration, and is only one small part of transition (see *Transition* above). Preferred term to "sex change operation." Not all transgender people choose to or can afford to have SRS.

Transgender - An umbrella term (adj.) for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (*transgender*, *transsexual*, *cross-dresser*, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.



Transition - Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step process; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, legal and medical adjustments: telling one's family, friends and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more forms of surgery.

Transsexual (also Transexual) - An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. While some transsexual people still prefer to use the term to describe themselves, many transgender people prefer the term *transgender* to *transsexual*. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

TRANSGENDER TERMS TO AVOID

PROBLEMATIC TERMS

- **Problematic:** “transgenders,” “a transgender”
- **Preferred:** “transgender people,” “a transgender person”
- Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, “Tony is a transgender,” or “The parade included many transgenders.” Instead say, “Tony is a transgender man,” or “The parade included many transgender people.”
- **Problematic:** “transgendered”
- **Preferred:** “transgender” The adjective *transgender* should never have an extraneous “-ed” tacked onto the end. An “-ed” suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. For example, it is grammatically incorrect to turn *transgender* into a participle, as it is an adjective, not a verb, and only verbs can be used as participles by adding an “-ed” suffix.
- **Problematic:** “sex change,” “pre-operative,” “post-operative”
- **Preferred:** “transition” Referring to a sex change operation, or using terms such as pre- or post-operative, inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.



DEFAMATORY TERMS

- **Defamatory:** “deceptive,” “fooling,” “pretending,” “posing” or “masquerading” Gender identity is an integral part of a person’s identity. Do not characterize transgender people as “deceptive,” as “fooling” other people, or as “pretending” to be, “posing” or “masquerading” as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are defamatory and insulting.
- **Defamatory:** “she-male,” “he-she,” “it,” “trannie,” “tranny,” “shim,” “gender-bender” These words only serve to dehumanize transgender people and should not be used.
- **Defamatory:** “bathroom bill” A new term created and used by far-right extremists to oppose non-discrimination laws that protect transgender people.

TRANSGENDER NAMES, PRONOUN USAGE & DESCRIPTIONS

- **Always use a transgender person’s chosen name.** Often transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to change their name legally. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who lives by a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).
- **Whenever possible, ask transgender people which pronoun they would like you to use.** A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or had some form of surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender.
- **If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun he or she prefers, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person’s appearance and gender expression.** For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are appropriate.
- **It is never appropriate to put quotation marks around either a transgender person’s chosen name or the pronoun that reflects that person’s gender identity.**
- **When describing transgender people, please use the correct term or terms to describe their gender identity.** For example, a person who is born male and transitions to become female is a *transgender woman*, whereas a person who is born female and transitions to become male is a *transgender man*.



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