

Glossary of LGBT-Related Terms

The glossary is designed to provide basic definitions of words and phrases commonly used in discussions about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and related issues. All language is constantly evolving; new terms are introduced, while others fade from use or change their meaning over time. This remains true for the following terms and definitions. For terms that refer to people's identities, people must self-identify for these terms to be appropriately used to describe them.

Ally: A member of the majority or dominant group who works to end oppression by supporting or advocating for the oppressed population. For example, any non-LGBT person who supports and stands up for the equality of LGBT people. (sometimes referred to as a "straight ally")

Androgynous: Having the characteristics or nature of both maleness and femaleness; neither specifically feminine nor masculine.

Biphobia: An irrational fear of or aversion to bisexuality or bisexual people.

Bisexual: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some males and some females.

Coming Out: Declaring one's identity, specifically, being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, whether to a person in private or a group of people. To be "in the closet" means to hide one's identity.

Drag: Wearing the clothing typically associated with another gender, often involving the presentation of exaggerated, stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as drag kings (in drag presenting as male) or drag queens (in drag presenting as female) when performing gender as parody, art or entertainment.

FTM or F2M (female-to-male): An identity of a person who was assigned female at birth, and who identifies as male, lives as a male or identifies as masculine. Other related terms include: transgender male, transman and affirmed male.

Gay: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of the same sex. Although gay can refer to both males and females, many prefer the term "lesbian" for females. Gay is sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to all lesbian, gay and bisexual people, but some prefer the more inclusive term "LGBT."

Gender: A social construct based on a group of emotional, behavioral and cultural characteristics attached to a person's assigned biological sex. The gender construct then classifies an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous or other. Gender can be understood to have several components, including gender identity, gender expression and gender role.

Gender Binary: The concept that everyone is of two genders: male or female. It also describes the system which society divides people into male and female roles, identities and attributes.

Gender Expression: An individual's physical characteristics, behaviors and presentation that are linked, traditionally, to either masculinity or femininity, such as: appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.

Gender Identity: How we identify ourselves in terms of our gender. Identities may be: male, female, androgynous, transgender and others.

Gender-Neutral Pronoun: A pronoun that does not associate a gender with the person being discussed. Two of the most common gender-neutral pronouns are “zie” replacing she and he, and “hir” replacing her and him.

Gender Non-Conforming or Gender Variant: An identity of a person who has gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal binary gender expectations.

Gender Orientation: An individual’s internal sense of their gender (e.g., feeling male, female or neither). Gender orientation doesn’t necessarily align with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Role: The social expectations of how an individual should act, think and/or feel based upon one’s assigned biological sex. A set of traditional and stereotypical roles, traits, dress, characteristics, qualities, mannerisms and behaviors that are associated with societal norms of what is male and what is female.

Genderism: The systematic belief that people need to conform to the gender role assigned to them based on a gender binary system which allows only female and male.

Genderqueer: An identity of a person who identifies as and/or express themselves as somewhere in the continuum between maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity or outside of the gender binary system. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as LGBT.

Heterosexism: Applies to attitudes, bias and discrimination in favor of heterosexual sexuality and relationships. It includes the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that male/female attractions and relationships are the norm and therefore superior. It is the belief that everyone is or should be straight.

Heterosexual: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of another sex (specifically, a male who is attracted to some females or a female who is attracted to some males). Often referred to as “straight.”

Homophobia: An irrational fear or aversion to homosexuality or lesbian, gay or bisexual people.

Homosexual: An identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of their own sex; originated in the medical and psychological professions. Currently, many prefer the term lesbian or gay.

Intersex: 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. Intersex conditions can affect the genitals, the chromosomes and/or secondary sex characteristics.

Lesbian: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is female-identified and who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some other females.

LGBT: An umbrella term referring collectively to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. Sometimes the acronym is written as LGBTQ, with the “Q” referring to those who identify as questioning and/or queer. In the past “gay” was used as a general, overarching term, but currently the more inclusive terms LGBT and LGBTQ are regularly used and preferred by many LGBT people and allies.

MTF or M2F (male-to-female): An identity of a person who was assigned male at birth, and who identifies as female, lives as a female or identifies as feminine. Other related terms include: transgender female, transwoman, affirmed female.

Queer: An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society. While it is used as a neutral, or even a positive term among many LGBT people today, historically it has been used negatively and is still considered derogatory by many.

Questioning: An identity of a person who is uncertain of their sexual orientation/identity and/or their gender orientation/identity.

Sex or Biological Sex: This can be considered our “packaging” and is determined by our chromosomes (such as XX or XY), our hormones and our internal and external genitalia. Typically, we are assigned the sex of male or female at birth.

Sexual Behavior: What we do sexually and with whom.

Sexual Identity: What we call ourselves in terms of our sexuality. Such labels include “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “queer,” “heterosexual,” “straight,” and many more.

Sexual Orientation: The inner feelings of who we are attracted or oriented to sexually and emotionally.

Transgender: An identity of a person whose gender identity is not aligned with their sex assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression is non-conforming.

Transition: The myriad of actions a person may take to transition from one gender identity to another. These may include social, psychological and/or medical processes. Transitioning is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time, it is not a one-time event.

Transphobia: The irrational fear or aversion to transgender people or of those who are perceived to break or blur societal norms regarding gender identity or gender expression.

Transsexual: A term, originated in the medical and psychological communities, that historically referred to people whose gender identity was not aligned with their sex assigned at birth.

Two-Spirit (also Two Spirit or Twospirit): Used in many Native Americans to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender non-conforming. The term usually implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body and has been adopted by some contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Native Americans to describe themselves.