



Terms Commonly Associated with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Questioning Communities

Language is dynamic and value-laden; it grows, changes, develops and has impact on lives and experiences. This is particularly true with the language of diversity and the terms (labels) we use to identify ourselves and others. Therefore, as respectful individuals and dutiful professionals, we should strive to be sure that our language is accurate and inclusive, that it does not demean, exclude or offend. So while these definitions provide a *starting* point for understanding and discussion, we must allow others to self-identify and -define, recognizing that a complexity of terms is needed to reflect the complex diversity of people.

LGBTIQ: One acronym used to briefly describe the diverse communities outside the social dominant norms of heterosexuality and sex/gender-conformity. Made up of the first letter of “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning/Queer.” These letters may be seen in different orders (example: GLBTQ, BGLTQ, etc.), and/or include additional letters for additional identities, for example A for Ally.

SEX (or ASSIGNED SEX): A typically binary system (male/female) set by the mainstream medical system that is assigned to people at birth based on physical traits such as genitalia, hormones, chromosomes and secondary sex characteristics. A person’s assigned sex may or may not fit into this binary system (see Intersex) or match with their gender identity.

GENDER IDENTITY: The gender that a person sees themselves as: ex. As a woman, as a man, as a transgender/gender queer person, as a combination, or as none of these categories. A person’s gender identity may or may not conform to the conventional expectations for their birth sex. For example, a person may be assigned male at birth and identify as a woman.

GENDER EXPRESSION/PRESENTATION: How an individual expresses their gender through clothing, behavior, mannerisms, hairstyle, speech, grooming, etc. A person’s gender expression may differ from their gender identity and/or their sex. For example, regardless of their body or what they claim as a gender identity, if a person dresses and acts in a manner that is consistent with society’s definition of being feminine/a woman, that person is expressing a woman gender.

Sex, gender identity and gender expression/presentation do NOT indicate a person’s sexual orientation.

Transgender: An *umbrella* term for individuals whose gender identity is not accurately or adequately described by the sex they were assigned at birth. This term includes individuals who live in accordance with their gender identity even when this does not match their assigned sex. It can apply to a spectrum of gender identities and expressions and includes transsexuals, cross dressers, genderqueer, and gender variant people. *Not* a sexual orientation.

Some terms commonly related to transgender communities:

- **FTM (female to male):** Person born female who identifies as male. Many also use the term “trans-man.”
- **MTF (male to female):** Person born male who identifies as female. Many also use the term “trans-woman.”
- **Transsexual:** A person who lives as a sex other than the one they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals may or may not desire to alter their bodies through hormonal therapy, sex reassignment surgeries or other means. Distinct from cross-dressers and drag kings/queens, whose non-conformity is usually temporary (not constant), and for different purposes.
- **Transition:** The process by which individuals change their body (sex) and gender presentation/expression to align with their gender identity. This may include a name change, pronoun change, and hormonal and/or surgical modifications. Transition is an individual process that can include any, all, or none of these changes. An individual may be transitioning currently, or be pre-, post-, or non-transition.
- **Two Spirit:** An individual who has a hold on both spirit worlds. An English-language term for a family of identities/concepts present in some Native American cultures that an individual can express or exist in both masculine and feminine realms.

Intersex: A condition describing a person whose reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones and/or secondary sex characteristics don’t seem to fit the typical definition of male or female, or which combine features of the male and female sexes. Arbitrary medical guidelines have often decided whether intersex babies will be assigned male or female sex (usually what’s easier to “fix” anatomically); and can create problems if/as the child’s gender identity develops not in keeping with the assigned sex.

Cisgender/Cissexual: An individual who is not transgender/transsexual. Someone who is gender/sex-conforming.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, spiritual, affectional, and/or relational attraction to another person or persons. It can involve fantasy, behavior, and self-identification; a person's general makeup or alignment in terms of partner attraction. Sexual orientation evolves through a multistage developmental process, and may change over time. One's sexual orientation is not necessarily associated with a person's gender identity; and the two can be completely unrelated. Self-labels might include the terms below, and/or others, and may change over time or by setting.

Lesbian: Someone who is female-identified whose primary emotional, romantic, sexual, spiritual affectional, and/or relational attraction is to other people who are female-identified.

Gay: Someone who is male-identified whose primary emotional, romantic, sexual, spiritual affectional, and/or relational attraction is to other people who are male-identified. Sometimes used colloquially as an umbrella term to include gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, and even transgender people although many view this as essentializing and problematic.

Bisexual: (also "bi") A person whose emotional, romantic, sexual, spiritual affectional, and/or relational attraction is to men and women, or to many genders (aka pan-/omnisexual). Degree of attraction and choice of primary relationship partner(s) varies for each bisexual person.

Same Gender Loving: Used within some communities of color, most frequently in the African American community, to describe someone who experiences affectional, emotional, sexual, and/or spiritual attraction to people of the same gender.

In the Life: Similar to Same Gender Loving, this term is used within some communities of color, most frequently in the African American community, this term refers to someone who experiences affectional, emotional, sexual, and/or spiritual attraction to people of the same gender.

Down-low (the DL): Term avowed by and ascribed to men (media coverage has focused on African American men, but it applies to all races/ethnicities) who engage in romantic or sexual relations with other men while also living heterosexual lives. Men on the down-low may have a variety of reasons for being so, and may or may not be in relationships with women.

Heterosexual: An individual whose primary emotional, romantic, sexual, spiritual, affectional, and/or relational attraction is to people of a gender different from their own. Heterosexual people are also referred to as "straight."

Homosexual: Originally a medical diagnosis, a clinical and technical term that is no longer generally used by lesbians and gay men or their communities.

QUEER:

NOTE: Some in the LGBT communities feel the word has been hatefully used against them for too long, and so are reluctant to embrace it. Levels of use and acceptability vary by generation, region and individual.

- 1) An umbrella term used by some to refer to all LGBTI people, as more inclusive and/or succinct than any acronym.
- 2) A political statement that advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. An individual may relate more to its use in terms of sexual orientation (sexual fluidity), sex/gender (genderqueer) or political orientation (critically questioning dominant ways of thinking about a variety of issues, including sexuality and gender).
- 3) A label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders, or a heterosexual man who does not fit society's narrow view of acceptable masculinity.

QUESTIONING: A person who is struggling to understand and/or accept their sexual orientation, gender identity/expression (or other identities).

ALLY: Label earned (not claimed) when a member of a dominant group recognizes social inequalities privileging their own group and oppressing others, and takes action to confront unjust words, behaviors, attitudes, policies, practices and systems in themselves and others. Typically used for a heterosexual person advocating for LGB persons, or a cisgender person (of any orientation) fighting alongside the trans-communities; but applicable more widely.