

General Terms Used in the LGBT Community

BIPHOBIA:

The fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as bisexual.

Bisexual

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

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 sexual orientation may or may not be part of coming out.

Dehumanizing:

To take away humanity, to remove or deny human qualities, characteristics, or attributes. Please refrain from saying "that gay", or "a gay". You can say "Tom is a gay man" or "My husband's friend, Tom, who is gay."

Down Low

Initially used to refer to black men who secretly have sex with men, often while in relationships with women, but do not identify as gay or bisexual. She may be his wife, girlfriend, or just a friend with benefits, but the down-low specifies that she is not "in the know" about his gay activities. This can also be used to refer to women who secretly have sex with other women while in sexual relationships with men.

Down Low is found in all cultures, ethnicity, and countries, not just among black men.

Gay

The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian (n.) is often a preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as "homosexuals"

GENDER:

shown on the top scale, includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, and fat distribution. These characteristics are objective in that they can be seen and measured (with appropriate technology). The scale consists not just of two categories (male and female) but is actually a continuum, with most people existing somewhere near one end or the other. The space more in the middle is occupied by intersex people (formerly, hermaphrodites), who have combinations of characteristics typical of males and those typical of females, such as both a testis and an ovary, or XY chromosomes (the usual male pattern) and a vagina, or they may have features that are not completely male or completely female, such as an organ that could be thought of as a small penis or a large clitoris, or an XXY chromosomal pattern.

Gender Identity

How people think of themselves and identify in terms of sex (man, woman, boy, girl).

Gender identity is a psychological quality; unlike biological sex, it can't be observed or measured (at least by current means), only reported by the individual. Like biological sex, it consists of more than two categories, and there's space in the middle for those who identify as a third gender, both (two-spirit), or neither.

We lack language for this intermediate position because everyone in our culture is supposed to identify unequivocally with one of the two extreme categories. In fact, many people feel that they have masculine and feminine aspects of their psyches, and some people, fearing that they do, seek to purge themselves of one or the other by acting in exaggerated sex-stereotyped ways..

Gender Expression

Everything we do that communicates our sex/gender to others: clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, way of speaking, roles we take in interactions, etc. This communication may be purposeful or accidental. It could also be called social gender because it relates to interactions between people. Trappings of one gender or the other may be forced on us as children or by dress codes at school or work.

Gender expression is a continuum, with feminine at one end and masculine at the other. In between are gender expressions that are androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) and those that combine elements of the two (sometimes called gender bending). Gender expression can vary for an individual from day to day or in different situations, but most people can identify a range on the scale where they feel the most comfortable. Some people are comfortable with a wider range of gender expression than others.

GENDER QUEER:

A term used by many trans youth who do not identify as either male or female and who often seek to blur gender lines.

GENDER VARIANT:

An alternative term for transgender, meaning someone who varies from traditional expressions of “masculine” and “feminine.”

HETEROSEXISM:

The cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuals and subordinate and denigrate LGB people. The critical element that differentiates heterosexism (or any other “ism”) from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systematic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.

Heterosexual Man / Woman

A person whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also straight.

HOMOPHOBIA:

The fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as lesbian or gay, including the fear of being seen as lesbian or gay yourself. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbians and gay men, to verbal abuse, to acts of physical violence. (Some people choose not to use the word "homophobia," preferring instead to include anti-GLBT attitudes and behavior in how they define "heterosexism").

Homosexual

Clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay people. Gay and/or lesbian accurately describe people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Lesbian

A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction is to other women.

LGBT / GLBT

Acronyms for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender." LGBT and/or GLBT are often used because they are more inclusive of the diversity of the community.

Lifestyle

Term often used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives. Avoid using. As there is no one heterosexual or straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender lifestyle.

MSM:

Acronym for "men who have sex with men." Term used usually in communities of color to describe men who secretly have sex with other men while maintaining relationships with women. Not synonymous with "bisexual."

Openly Gay

Describes people who self-identify as lesbian or gay in their 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 without his or her consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of

the LGBT community.

Queer

Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. Some value the term for its defiance and because it can be inclusive of the entire LGBT community. Nevertheless, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless quoting someone who self-identifies that way.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

The desire for intimate emotional and sexual relationships with people of the same gender (lesbians and gay men), another gender (heterosexuals), or more than one gender (bisexuals).

TRANS or TRANSGENDER:

An umbrella term for someone whose self-identification or expression challenges traditional notions of “male” and “female.” Transgender people include transsexuals, cross dressers, drag queens and kings, gender queers, and others who cross or transgress traditional gender categories.

TWO SPIRIT:

A Native American/First Nation term for people who blend the masculine and the feminine. It is commonly used to describe individuals who historically crossed gender boundaries and were accepted by Native American/First Nation cultures. It is also often used by contemporary GLBT Native American and First Nation people to describe themselves.