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# 2021 LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms

# 2021 LGBTQ Glossary of Terms

## 2021 LGBTQ+ GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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”

### **Allosexual**

Is a term used most commonly in the asexual community to refer to someone who is not asexual. A sexual orientation generally characterized by feeling sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality.

### **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 (i.e. White Ally for People of Color).

### **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.

### **Bigender**

Having two genders, exhibiting cultural characteristics of masculine and feminine roles.

### **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.

### **Cross Dresser (CD)**

A word to describe a person who dresses, at least partially, as a member of a gender other than their assigned sex; carries no implications of sexual orientation. Has replaced “Transvestite”.

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## Demisexual

Demisexuality is a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond. Most demisexuals feel sexual attraction rarely compared to the general population, and some have little to no interest in sexual activity. Demisexuals are considered to be on the asexual spectrum, meaning they are closely aligned with asexuality

## 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 (an overtly/stereotypically masculine or masculine-acting woman) 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.

## Femme

Historically used in the lesbian community, it is being increasingly used by other LGBTQIA people to describe gender expressions that reclaim/claim and/or disrupt traditional constructs of femininity.

## 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 dysphoria

Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term - which replaces Gender Identity Disorder - "is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

## 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 Fluid

A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations. Being fluid in motion between two or more genders.

## 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").

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## 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.

## In the Life

Often used by communities of color to denote inclusion in the LGBTQ communities.

## 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.

## LGBTQ+

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.”

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## 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 Loving Men (MLM)

Commonly used by communities of color to denote the attraction of men to men.

## 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).

## Non-binary

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.

## 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.

## Polyamory

Denotes consensually being in/open to multiple loving relationships at the same time. Some polyamorists (polyamorous people) consider "polyam" to be a relationship orientation. Sometimes used as an umbrella term for all forms of ethical, consensual, and loving non-monogamy.

## Polygender, Pangender

Exhibiting characteristics of multiple genders, deliberately refuting the concept of only two genders.

## 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.

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## 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".

## Women Loving Women (WLW)

Commonly used by communities of color to denote the attraction of women to women.

## Trans man

A person may choose to identify this way to capture their gender identity as well as their lived experience as a transgender person. Some trans men may also use the term FTM or F2M (Female to Male) to describe their identity.

## Trans woman

A person may choose to identify this way to capture their gender identity as well as their lived experience as a transgender person. Some trans women may also use MTF or M2F (Male to Female) to describe their identity.

## Transgender

Adjective used most often as an umbrella term, and frequently abbreviated to "trans." This adjective describes a wide range of identities and experiences of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Not all trans people undergo medical transition (surgery or hormones).

## Transition

An individualized process by which transsexual and transgender people "switch" from one gender presentation to another. There are three general aspects to transitioning: social (i.e. name, pronouns, interactions, etc.), medical (i.e. hormones, surgery, etc.), and legal (i.e. gender marker and name change, etc.). A trans individual may transition in any combination, or none, of these aspects.

## Transsexual (TS)

A person who lives full-time in a gender different than their assigned birth sex and gender. Many pursue hormones and/or surgery. Sometimes used to specifically refer to trans\* people pursuing gender or sex confirmation.

## 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.

## 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).

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## PROBLEMATIC TERMS

### ✘ PROBLEMATIC

**“transgenders,” “a transgender”**

**“transgendered”**

**“sex change,” “pre-operative,”  
“post-operative”**

### ✔ 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.”

**“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.

**“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.





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## DEFAMATORY TERMS

**“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.

**“she-male,” “he-she,” “it,” “trannie,” “tranny,” “shim,” “gender-bender”**

These words only serve to dehumanize transgender people and should not be used.

**“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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## OFFENSIVE TERMS TO AVOID

### ✘ OFFENSIVE

**“homosexual”** (n. or adj.)

Please use “gay” or “lesbian” to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual,” it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.

**“homosexual relations/relationship,”  
“homosexual couple,” “homosexual sex,” etc.**

Identifying a same-sex couple as “a homosexual couple,” characterizing their relationship as “a homosexual relationship,” or identifying their intimacy as “homosexual sex” is extremely offensive and should be avoided.

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship “gay,” “lesbian” or “bisexual” unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship “straight” if engaged in by someone of another orientation.

**“sexual preference”**

The term “sexual preference” is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.” Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and straight men and women.

**“gay lifestyle” or “homosexual lifestyle”**

There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase “gay lifestyle” is used to denigrate lesbians and gay men, suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.”

### ✔ PREFERRED

**“gay”** (adj.); **“gay man”** or **“lesbian”** (n.);  
**“gay person/people”**

**“relationship”** (or **“sexual relationship”**),  
**“couple”** (or, if necessary, **“gay couple”**),  
**“sex,”** etc.

**“sexual orientation”** or **“orientation”**

**“gay lives,” “gay and lesbian lives”**

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## ❌ OFFENSIVE

**“admitted homosexual” or “avowed homosexual”**

Dated term used to describe those who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual or who have recently come out of the closet. The words “admitted” or “avowed” suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive.

## ✅ PREFERRED

**“openly lesbian,” “openly gay,”  
“openly bisexual”**

## DEFAMATORY TERMS

**“fag,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,”  
“sodomite,” “she-male,” “he-she,” “it,”  
“shim,” “tranny” and similar epithets.**

The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups.

**“deviant,” “disordered,” “dysfunctional,”  
“diseased,” “perverted,” “destructive” and  
similar descriptions**

The notion that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Today, words such as “deviant,” “diseased” and “disordered” often are used to portray gay people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society.

**Associating gay, lesbian, bisexual and  
transgender people or relationships with  
pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality,  
bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest**

Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is neither synonymous with nor indicative of any tendency toward pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest. Such claims, innuendoes and associations often are used to insinuate that lesbians and gay men pose a threat to society, to families, and to children in particular.



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