Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual 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 (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.
* **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.
* **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 Avoid identifying gay people as “homosexuals” an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.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.
* **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.
* **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, Omnisexual, and Pomosexual**  (postmodern sexuality): Sometimes substitute terms for bisexual that rather than referring to both or ―Bi gender attraction, refer to all or ―Omni gender attraction, and are used mainly by those who wish to express acceptance of all gender possibilities including transgender and intersex people, not just two. Pansexuality sometimes includes an attraction for less mainstream sexual activities, such as BDSM.
* **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.”
* **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 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.”
* 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

* **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*.

OFFENSIVE TERMS TO AVOID

* **Offensive: “homosexual” (n. or adj.)**
* **Preferred: “gay” (adj.); “gay man” or “lesbian” (n.); “gay person/people”**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.
* **Offensive: “homosexual relations/relationship,” “homosexual couple,” “homosexual sex,” etc.**
* **Preferred: “relationship” (or “sexual relationship”), “couple” (or, if necessary, “gay couple”), “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.
* **Offensive: “sexual preference”**
* **Preferred: “sexual orientation” or “orientation”**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.
* **Offensive: “gay lifestyle” or “homosexual lifestyle”**
* **Preferred: “gay lives,” “gay and lesbian lives”**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.”
* **Offensive: “admitted homosexual” or “avowed homosexual”**
* **Preferred: “openly lesbian,” “openly gay,” “openly bisexual”**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.
* **“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.