

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

The last stage of the infection from Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that attacks a person's white blood cells. This means they can no longer fight off sickness and disease.

Ageism

The belief that older persons are debilitated, unworthy of attention, or unsuitable for employment. It is a process of systematic stereotyping or discrimination against people because they are old. Ageism is manifested in individual and institutional levels—such as stereotypes and myths, outright disdain and dislike, avoidance of contact, and discriminatory practices in housing, employment, policy, and services.

Ally

A person who works for social change for a group that faces injustice or disadvantage. The ally is not a member of that oppressed group but supports and fights for equality on behalf of the group, e.g. heterosexuals who support LGBT rights.

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

The APA is the primary professional organization of psychiatrists in the United States. It publishes the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), a book that lists all accepted psychiatric disorders and is used to diagnose those disorders. The APA's listing of homosexuality as a mental disorder in the 1950's contributed to prejudice and mistreatment of LGBT people. The organization reversed this designation in 1973, creating opportunities for improved conditions for LGBT people. The APA continues to list "Gender Identity Disorder" as a mental illness of transgender people.

Birth-Assigned Gender

Gender decided by doctors at birth based upon the appearance of one's genitalia. A person is then expected to grow up and exist within a certain set of gender roles "appropriate" to one's assigned gender.

Bisexual, Bi*

An individual who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women. "Bisexual" does not suggest having equal sexual experience with both men and women. In fact, some people who call themselves "bisexual" have not had any sexual experience at all.

Cisgender

A term used for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Closeted, In the Closet or Stealth*

Describes a person who does not share with others, or only shares with a few "safe" people, that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

Coming Out*

A lifelong process of self-acceptance of one's sexual or gender identity that may include a sharing of that identity with others. How much people are "out" may differ by setting, people they are with, and life stage. The process is unique for each individual, and is the choice of each individual. LGBT older adults often hide their 'sexual orientation or gender identity from their health care and social service providers (do not "come out") for fear of being treated badly.

Discrimination*

Unfair and unequal treatment in favor of or against an individual or group based on being identified as belonging to a certain group; e.g. African American, female, Arabic, youth, or LGBT. Discrimination is the actual behavior towards the individual(s).

Dyke

Slang for a lesbian. It originated as a negative label for a masculine or butch woman, and this usage still exists. It has been reclaimed by some as a positive word.

Faggot/Fag

An offensive, negative slang sometimes used to describe gay men.

Family of Choice

Diverse family structures usually created by LGBT people, immigrants, and racial or ethnic minorities, that include but are not limited to life partners, close friends, and other loved ones not biologically related or legally recognized but who are the source of social and caregiving support.

Feminist

A person who fights for and defends equal rights for women.

Femme

Describes feminine traits, behavior, style, expression and self-perception.

Gay*

A word used to describe anyone, mainly men, who have primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to someone of the same sex, e.g., gay man, gay people. Many gay people prefer this term over "homosexual" which retains negative connotations. Lesbian can be a preferred term for a gay woman. While younger men may use the term "queer," this term is generally considered offensive to older people.

Gender

A person's sex, as in male, female or other. Also, the socially decided upon behaviors, expectations, roles, clothing, grooming, values, and beliefs typically assigned to males or females.

Gender Affirming Surgeries

A wide range of gender affirming surgeries available to transgender people including those specific to gender affirmation, as well as procedures commonly performed in non-transgender populations.

Gender Expression*

How a person outwardly expresses their gender identity and/or role; how they dress, walk, wear their hair, talk, etc. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned gender.

Gender Identity*

The gender you feel you are inside (man, woman, neither or both). For transgender people, their birth-assigned gender and their personal sense of gender identity do not match. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For example, a transgender woman who was assigned a male gender at birth and is attracted to other women may self-identify as a lesbian.

Gender Role

Societal or ethnic/cultural expectations about how a person should dress, look, talk, and behave based on whether they are female or male.

Going Stealth

A person living as a gender different from what was assigned to them at birth without people knowing or being able to tell that the person is transgender.

Heterosexual*

Used to describe people whose primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex; also known as straight.

Heterosexism*

Belief that heterosexuality is the only “natural” sexuality and that it is inherently healthier or superior to other types of sexuality, including LGBT sexuality. The term refers to the negative attitudes, bias, and discrimination exhibited by people with this belief.

Homophobia/ Transphobia/Biphobia*

Homophobia refers to a fear of lesbians and gay men. Biphobia is used to describe a fear of bisexual people. Transphobia is used to describe a fear of transgender people. These phobias reflect prejudice, hatred, antipathy, and avoidance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Homosexual

An outdated clinical, medical term that is no longer the preferred word used to describe someone who is gay or lesbian. It has taken on negative connotations because of its previous use as to denote a mental illness.

Hormone Therapy

Use of hormone treatments to create characteristics that reflect the sex with which a person identifies.

Identity or Self-Identify

What people call themselves that expresses their internal reality. This may be different from external characteristics or how others might view them.

Internalized Homophobia/Transphobia/Biphobia*

Refers to characteristics of people who self-identify as LGBT, but have a fear or dislike of themselves because of it. They direct anti-gay, anti-bisexual, or anti-transgender cultural messages toward themselves, both consciously and unconsciously. For example, they may think that people in the community who are too flamboyant, too out, or too political reflect poorly on them or the LGBT community. Over the years, researchers have linked internalized homophobia to a variety of negative psychological, behavioral, and medical outcomes, including depression, substance use, and sexual behaviors that put people with these phobias at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Many believe that the higher rates of substance abuse and suicidal thinking in the LGBT community are directly related to internalized homophobia/transphobia/biphobia – each offering a means of escape from the pain of feeling that one is fundamentally not O.K., or that one is somehow “less than.”

Intersex*

A person having biological characteristics of both males and females. There are many genetic, hormonal, or anatomical variations that can make a person’s sex unclear. Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex babies a sex and perform surgical operations to match the baby’s body to that assigned sex. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term intersex is not interchangeable with or a synonym for transgender. Historically, people born with both male and female genitalia or reproductive organs were referred to as “hermaphrodites.” While some intersex persons continue to refer to themselves as hermaphrodites, the Intersex Society of North America believes that “hermaphrodite” is a stigmatizing and misleading term. The Society reports a growing movement to eliminate the word “hermaphrodite” from medical literature and use only the word “intersex” in its place.

Lesbian*

A woman whose primary physical, romantic, and or/emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women. Many lesbians view “homosexual” as a derogatory term. While younger women may use the terms “dyke” or “queer,” these terms are generally considered offensive to older people.

LGBT/GLBT*

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. LGBT and/or GLBT can be used interchangeably.

LGBT Older Adults

The preferred term for LGBT people 65, the current standard age of retirement, or older. The term “older adults” may be preferable to “old,” “senior,” “elderly” or “aging” (terms which many don’t identify with personally). Also acceptable are “older LGBT people” or “LGBT older people” depending on context.

Lifestyle*

Term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lives, generally considered offensive to LGBT people. Just as there is no one straight “lifestyle,” there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender lifestyle.

Minority Stress

The damaging physical and mental health effects of being stigmatized and/or the focus of prejudice and discrimination, which create a hostile and stressful environment.

MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) or **WSW** (Women who have Sex with Women)
A public health term used to define sexual behaviors, regardless of gender identity, motivation for engaging in sex, or identification with any particular “community.”

On the Down Low

People who identify as straight publicly and who secretly have sex with members of the same sex. This term originated in the African American community.

Openly Gay*

Describes people who self-identify as lesbian or gay in their personal, public and/or professional lives. Terms such as openly lesbian, openly bisexual, and openly transgender are also used. Sometimes referred to as being “out,” as in, “She is an out lesbian.” Openly gay people generally continue to scan each new environment for its level of safety before speaking of their LGBT identity.

Outing*

The act of publicly telling (sometimes based on rumor and/or speculation) or revealing another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s consent. It is considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBT community, and can be very damaging socially, personally, and/ or professionally to the individuals who are “outed.”

Partner

A nondiscriminatory and gender neutral way to describe one of the people in a committed, long-term relationship.

Prejudice*

A prejudice is a belief, opinion, or judgment about a group of people or a person based on their race, physical ability, social class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, or other single characteristic. It usually refers to negative beliefs, opinions or judgments.

Queer*

Historically a negative term, it is now being used by some LGBT people—mostly younger ones and as a broader term—to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless quoting or describing someone who self-identifies that way.

Questioning*

A person who is unsure about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-Gender Loving (SGL)*

A cultural term used most frequently in communities of color that affirms the same-sex attraction of men and women. The term may be favored by some over the labels gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Sex*

The classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on genitals.

Sexual Minority

Refers to those who are not heterosexual.

Sexual Orientation*

A person's primary physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations. It is the accurate term and should be used instead of the offensive term "sexual preference," which conveys the suggestion that being gay or lesbian is a choice and therefore can be "cured" or changed.

SOFFA

Significant Others, Friends, Families, and Allies who frequently provide practical, financial, professional, and/or emotional support, assistance, and/or services to one or more transsexual, transgender, or intersex persons.

Transgender*

An umbrella term 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 and cross-dressers. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). It is important to 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

The process of changing genders in order to match the gender a person identifies as. This can include: Male to Female or Intersex and Female to Male or Intersex.

Transsexual*

An older term that 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.

Two-spirit*

The term refers to LGBT people and reflects traditions among many Native American nations that accept and celebrate the diversity of human gender, spirituality, and sexuality.

Veteran

Can be used when referring to a group of people involved in a certain struggle, movement, or war such as "veterans of the LGBT movement," "Stonewall veterans," or "Vietnam veteran."

SOME ADDITIONAL TERMS ARE:

People will sometimes use common, neutral terms to describe their relationships such as, "**COUSINS**" and "**ROOMMATES**" and "**FRIENDS.**"

ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

*Adapted from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLADD) Media Reference Guide
www.glaad.org

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