

Glossary of LGBTQ Terms

ACCOMPLICESHIP: A step beyond allyship. In social justice circles, the word “accomplice” is used in contrast with “ally” to emphasize the importance of standing “with” instead of “for” marginalized communities. Accomplices go a step further by using their privilege to actively work towards dismantling structures and systems of oppression to create equity. The word aims to stimulate critical thought around privilege while engaging in social justice work. An accomplice is willing to give up power in order to stand up for those facing marginalization.

ALLY: A person who actively supports, respects, and advocates for members of the LGBTQ community and actively works to confront heterosexism and homo-, bi- and transphobia in society.

ANDROGYNOUS: An identity or presentation which is not perceived as either masculine or feminine.

AROMANTIC: Also referred to as “aro.” A person does not experience romantic attraction to others.

ASEXUAL: Also referred to as “ace.” Someone who does not experience sexual attraction to others or lacks a desire for sex/sexual partners.

BISEXUAL: Someone who experiences attraction towards more than one gender.

BIPHOBIA: Intolerance of bisexual identity, both within the heterosexual and LGBTQ communities. Can be expressed as a range of negative attitudes that can also include intolerance, erasure, and discomfort.

BLENDING: See the term “passing” below. Blending is a term that has gained popularity in the transgender community to describe a transgender person’s ability to be externally perceived as the gender they identify with. The term is seen as less stigmatizing than “passing” because it does not invoke pass/fail language.

CISGENDER: Refers to those individuals whose internal sense of gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

COMING OUT: The ongoing process of sharing one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others.

DEMISEXUAL: One who does not experience sexual attraction until a strong emotional connection has been formed.

ENBY: Pronounced "N.B." An abbreviation for non-binary. Enby was adopted by the non-binary community instead of the two letters "NB" to ensure the community was not appropriating language used by the black community to describe non-black (NB) people of color.

F2M or FTM: Stands for female-to-male. An older term used to describe an individual who is transitioning or has transitioned from female to male. In other words, a transgender man.

GAY: Synonymous with same-sex attraction. Primarily defines men who are attracted to men, though many women who are attracted to the same sex also identify as gay.

GENDER AFFIRMING SURGERY: A variety of surgical procedures that change the body to better align with one's gender identity and expression. May be referred to as gender reassignment/gender confirmation, or, in some medical literature, as sex reassignment surgery.

GENDER BINARY: The belief that human gender only exists as male and female, and that individuals must be strictly gendered as either/or.

GENDER EXPRESSION: Gender expression refers to external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions. Social or cultural norms can vary widely and some characteristics that may be accepted as masculine, feminine, or neutral in one culture may not be assessed similarly in another.

GENDER IDENTITY: The term "gender identity"—distinct from the term "sexual orientation"—refers to a person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's sex assigned at birth (the sex originally listed on a person's birth certificate).

GENDER NONCONFORMING: Someone whose identity and expression of gender does not ascribe to the gender binary, or, rather, traditional male/female expressions.

GRAYSEXUAL: On the spectrum between sexual and asexual, graysexuality sits in between. A graysexual person is one who experiences sexual attraction rarely and in specific circumstances.

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT: Someone who experiences attraction towards those of the “opposite” gender.

HETEROSEXISM: A system of biases, attitudes, assumptions, and discrimination which favors heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships that is expressed both through institutional policies and interpersonal actions. The belief that heterosexuality is not only normative, but superior to other sexual orientations.

HOMOSEXUAL: Considered to be a clinical, pathologizing word for individuals who experience attraction toward those of the same sex. Not commonly used as a term of self-identification by lesbian or gay people.

HOMOPHOBIA: Intolerance, fear, and hatred of gay/lesbian people and/or same-sex attraction.

IN THE CLOSET: Refers to someone who will not or cannot disclose their true sexual orientation or gender identity.

INTERSEX: Someone born with male, female, or non-gender-specific genitalia. May identify as any gender. Incorrectly called “hermaphrodite.”

KINK: A term often used to describe sexual practices that go outside of traditional conventions. Going further, many in the kink community view the term as an identity and orientation—one that is immutable and fixed from within—rather than a practice or behavior.

LESBIAN: A woman who is attracted to other women.

LGBTQ: Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

M2F or MTF: Stands for male-to-female. This term describes an individual who is transitioning or has transitioned from male to female. In other words, a transgender woman.

NON-BINARY: a gender identity which falls outside of the gender binary, meaning an individual does not identify as strictly female or male. A non-binary person can identify as both or neither male and female, or sometimes one or the other. There are several other terms used to describe gender identities outside of the male and female binary such as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, and bigender. Though these terms have slightly different meanings, they refer to an experience of gender outside of the binary

PANSEXUAL: A person who can be attracted to anyone, regardless of their gender identity. The term pansexuality aims to reject the gender binary.

PASSING: A term used by the transgender community to refer to a transgender person who is seen outwardly as the gender they with which they identify. Furthermore, passing refers to a trans person's ability to not be seen as transgender.

POLYAMORY: A form of consensual non-monogamy. The practice of having more than one romantic or sexual partner simultaneously.

QUEER: A word with multiple meanings. Individuals often use queer as a shorthand way of referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals as a whole group. For others, the term is also used as a specific self-identification. Individuals sometimes use queer to denote their existence on the continuum of sexual orientation or gender identity. Historically a derogatory term used to demean LGBTQ people; queer is an in-group reclaimed term that can be considered offensive to some. It should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer.

QUESTIONING: Someone who is unsure of or is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: An individual's internal experience of sexual/romantic/emotional attraction towards others.

TRANSGENDER: A person whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth. A transgender man is someone who was assigned female at birth (AFAB) and identifies as a man. A transgender woman is someone who was assigned male at birth (AMAB) and identifies as a woman.

TRANSFEMININE: An AMAB individual who identifies with femininity more than masculinity, and may take steps to transition (taking hormones, gender affirmation surgery, etc.) but may not wish strictly identify as female.

TRANSMASCULINE: An AFAB individual who identifies with masculinity more than femininity, and may take steps to transition (taking hormones, gender affirmation surgery, etc.) but may not wish strictly identify as male.

TRANSITIONING: The term “transitioning” refers to the process through which a person modifies their physical characteristics or manner of gender expression to align with their gender identity. This transition may include hormone therapy, gender affirming surgery, or other procedures and is generally conducted under medical supervision based on a set of standards developed by medical professionals.

TRANSPHOBIA: Irrational fear of, discrimination against, or intolerance of trans*/transgender people, the transgender community, or gender ambiguity generally.

TWO SPIRIT: A term used by Native communities and predates modern LGBTQ terminology. Two Spirit individuals possess both a masculine and feminine spirit. Only those in Native communities should use this term to identify themselves.

Terms to Avoid

- **TRANSGENDERED (v.), TRANSGENDERS (n.), or A TRANSGENDER (n.):**
 - Always use the word “transgender” as an adjective, not a noun.
 - PROBLEMATIC: Melanie is transgendered or a transgender.
 - SOLUTION: Melanie is a transgender (or trans) woman.
- **SEXUAL PREFERENCE or LIFESTYLE CHOICE**
 - The terms “sexual preference” and “lifestyle choice” suggest that lesbian, gay, or bisexual people have the ability to choose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Historically, anti-LGBTQ groups have used these terms to imply that LGBTQ characteristics are chosen characteristics, and, thus, can be “cured.”
 - PROBLEMATIC: Mathias should be able to talk openly about his sexual preferences at work.
 - SOLUTION: Mathias should be able to talk openly about his sexual orientation at work.
- **A GAY or GAYS**
 - Gay should be used as an adjective, not a noun.
 - PROBLEMATIC: She works hard to ensure gays feel accepted at work.
 - SOLUTION: She works hard to ensure gay employees feel accepted at work.
- **HOMOSEXUAL**
 - “Homosexual” is an outdated clinical term often used by anti-gay extremists to insinuate that being a gay or lesbian person is a disease or illness.
 - SOLUTION: LGBTQ individuals use a variety of different terms to self-identify. The best course of action is to listen to how the individual self-identifies and use that term.
- **YOU GUYS or other gender specific language**
 - Using “you guys” or other gender specific language can alienate those in the office who do not identify with that particular gender. Try using gender-neutral language to ensure all individuals feel included.

- PROBLEMATIC: I know I can count on you guys to do a good job on this report.
 - SOLUTION: I know I can count on all of you (or y'all) to a good job on this report.
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- **DEFAMATORY LANGUAGE:** It should go without saying that there are a number of words that the majority of the LGBTQ community find hurtful and offensive. Individuals should demonstrate respect and humanity towards the LGBTQ community and refrain from using defamatory language.