

# LGBTQIA Terminology

## (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual)



**A note about these definitions:** Each of these definitions has been carefully researched and closely analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives for cultural sensitivity, common usage, and general appropriateness. We have done our best to represent the most popular uses of the terms listed; however there may be some variation in definitions depending on location.

Please note that each person who uses any or all of these terms does so in a unique way, especially terms that are used in the context of an identity label. If you do not understand the context in which a person is using one of these terms, it is always appropriate to ask. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation.

**Aesthetic Attraction** – Attraction to someone’s appearance, without it being romantic or sexual.

**Agender** – A person who is internally without a gender.

**Ally** – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; has a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and asexual people; and has a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

**Androgyne** – A person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

**Asexual** – Someone who is not sexually attracted to anyone and/or does not have a sexual orientation, but may have a romantic orientation. Asexual people do not experience sexual attraction, but some feel other types of attraction. In this context, it refers to a mental or emotional force that draws people together.

**Bicurious** – A curiosity about having sexual relations with a same gender/sex person.

**Bigender** – A person whose gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

**Biphobia** – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexual people, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQIA community, as well as in general society.

**Biromantic** – A person emotionally, mentally and/or physically, attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

**Bisexual** – A person sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

**Cisgender** – A non-trans person.

**Coming Out** – May refer to the process by which one accepts one’s own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersex person (to “come out” to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one’s sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status with others (to “come out” to friends, family, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for individuals in the LGBTQIA community.

**Cross-dresser** – An individual who, regardless of motivation, wears clothing, hairstyles, makeup, etc. that are considered by the culture to be appropriate for a gender other than one’s own. Preferred term to “transvestite”.

**Demisexual** – Someone who can only experience sexual attraction after an emotional bond has been formed. This bond does not have to be romantic in nature.

**Discrimination** – Prejudice plus power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

**Down Low** – See the definition for *In the Closet*. Also referred to as “D-L”.

**Drag** – The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically.

**Drag King** – A male-presenting cross-dresser who performs masculinity theatrically or for entertainment purposes. Drag Kings are often, but not always, lesbian women.

**Drag Queen** – A female-presenting cross-dresser who performs femininity theatrically or for entertainment purposes. Drag Queens are often, but not always gay men.

**FTM / F2M** – An abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender or transsexual person. An individual assigned female at birth who identifies as male. Some transmen reject being seen as “FTM,” arguing that they have always been male and are only making this identity visible to other people.

**Gay – 1.** Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, emotional and/or sexual sense. Not all men who engage in homosexual behavior identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution.

**Gay – 2.** Term used to refer to the LGBTQIA community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

**Gender** – The social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone's gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender).

**Genderism** – The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege cisgender (non-trans) people and subordinate and disparage trans and gender-nonconforming people.

**Gender Binary** – The idea that there are only two genders: male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. See also the definition for *Identity Sphere*.

**Gender Cues** – What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

**Gender Expression** – How one chooses to express one's gender identity through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body characteristics, etc.

**Gender Identity** – A person's internal sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

**Gender Normative** – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society. Also referred to as *Genderstraight*.

**Gender Variant/Gender Diverse/Gender Nonconforming** –

Alternative terms for transgender people, meaning one who varies from traditional "masculine" and "feminine" gender roles. May also mean, a person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.).

**Genderqueer** – A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. This identity term is particularly common among trans youth.

**Gray-asexual (gray-a) or gray-sexual** – Someone who identifies with the area between asexuality and sexuality, for example because they experience sexual attraction very rarely, only under specific circumstances, or of an intensity so low that it's ignorable.

**Hermaphrodite** — An out-of-date and offensive term for an intersex person. See the definition for *Intersex Person*.

**Heteronormativity** — The assumption, in individuals or institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, etc.

**Heterosexism** — Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice (including those backed by institutional power) that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.

**Heterosexual** — A person at one end of the gender continuum who is physically and/or sexually attracted to people at the other end of the continuum.

**Heterosexual Privilege** — Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexual, bisexual, asexual people, etc. Also, the benefits homosexual, bisexual, and asexual people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or by denying their natural sexual identity.

**Hir** — A non-gender specific pronoun sometimes used instead of “her” and “him.”

**Homophobia** — The irrational fear or hatred of homosexual people, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

**Homoromantic** — A person primarily emotionally, mentally, and/or physically attracted to members of the same sex.

**Homosexual** — A clinical term for a person sexually attracted to members of the same sex, gay men and sometimes lesbian women. Although the word is still frequently used in the media and by some older gay men, it is largely rejected by members of the gay community (most prefer “gay men” or “LGBTQIA people” instead).

**Identity Sphere** — The idea that gender identities and expressions do not fit on a linear scale, but rather on a sphere that allows room for all expression without weighting any one expression as better than another.

**In the Closet** — Also known as *Down Low* (or D-L), this term refers to a homosexual, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and/or asexual persons who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”. For example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family.

**Intergender** — A person whose gender identity is between genders or a combination of genders.

**Institutional Oppression** – Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

**Internalized Oppression** – The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

**Intersex or Disorders of Sexual Development** — Congenital conditions in which development of chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical sex is atypical (preferred term to “hermaphrodite”). About one in 1,500-2,000 children are born with an intersex condition.

**Intersex** — Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to “correct”, whenever possible, intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical history from the patient.

**Lesbian** – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, sexually, and/or otherwise to other female-identified people. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups, including African-American people, embrace the term “lesbian” strictly as an identity label.

**LGBTQIA** – A common abbreviation for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual community.

**Male Lesbian** — A male-bodied person who identifies as a lesbian. This differs from a heterosexual male in that a male lesbian is primarily attracted to other lesbian, bisexual or queer identified people. May sometimes identify as transgender, gender variant, or as a female/woman.

**Metrosexual** – First used in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, who coined the term to refer to an urban, heterosexual male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. This term can be perceived as derogatory because it reinforces stereotypes that all gay men are fashion-conscious and materialistic.

**MTF / M2F** – Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person. An individual assigned male at birth who identifies as female. Some transwomen reject being seen as “MTF,” arguing that they have always been female and are only making this identity visible to other people.

**Oppression** – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Outing** – Involuntary disclosure of one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

**Pangender** – A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions.

**Panromantic** - A person emotionally, mentally and/or physically, attracted to all or many gender expressions. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

**Pansexual** – A person who is sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

**Passing** – Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or race/ethnic identity or to be seen as heterosexual.

**Polyamory** – Refers to having honest, usually non-possessive, relationships with multiple partners and can include: open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves multiple romantic relationships with sexual contact restricted to those), and sub-relationships (which denote distinguishing between a “primary” relationship or relationships and various “secondary” relationships).

**Prejudice** – A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members.

**Queer** – **1.** An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively-heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbian women, gay men, bisexual people, transpeople, intersex people, asexual people, the radical sex communities, and many other sexually “marginalized” (underworld) explorers.

**Queer** – **2.** This term is sometimes used as a sexual orientation label instead of “bisexual”, as a way of acknowledging that there are more than two genders to be attracted to, or as a way of stating a non-heterosexual orientation without having to state who they are attracted to.

**Queer** – **3.** A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group, who use it as a term of defiant pride. For decades “queer” was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1980s the term began to be used by gay and lesbian activists as a term of self-identification. Eventually, it came to be used as an umbrella term that included gay men, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and asexual people.

Nevertheless, a sizable percentage of people to whom this term might apply still hold the term “queer” to be a hateful insult, and its use by heterosexual people, who are not allies, is often considered offensive and derogatory. Similarly, other reclaimed words are usually offensive to the in-group when used by outsiders, so extreme caution must be taken concerning their use when one is not a member of the group.

**Romantic Attraction** – The desire to be romantically involved with another person.

**Romantic Orientation** – The desire for emotional or emotionally intimate relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

**Same Gender Loving** – A term sometimes used by members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life. (Sometimes abbreviated as “SGL”.)

**Sensual Attraction** – The desire to have physical, non-sexual, contact with someone else (like affectionate touching).

**Sex** – A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics, and hormonal balances. Because it's usually subdivided into “male” and “female”, this category does not recognize the existence of intersex bodies.

**Sexual Attraction** – The desire to have sexual contact with someone else or to share one's sexuality with another.

**Sexual Identity** – How a person identifies physically: female, male, both, in between, beyond, or neither.

**Sexual Orientation** – The desire for sexual or sexually intimate relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

**Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS)** – A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's sex. In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance.

**Sexuality** – A person's exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

**Sie or Ze** – A non-gender specific pronoun sometimes used instead of “she” and “he”.

**Stealth** – This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. Also referred to as “going stealth” or “living in stealth mode”.

**Stereotype** – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Though often negative, can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact, however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

**Straight** – Another term for a heterosexual person.

**Straight-Acting** – A term usually applied to gay men who readily pass as heterosexual. The term implies that there is a certain way that gay men should act that is significantly different from heterosexual men. “Straight-acting” gay men are often looked down upon in the LGBTQIA community for seemingly accessing heterosexual privilege.

**Trans – 1.** An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

**Trans/Transgender – 2.** Most commonly used as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity and/or expression is sometimes or always different from the gender assigned to them at birth. A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity. Trans people include transsexual persons, crossdressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueer individuals, and others who cross traditional gender categories.

**Transactivism** – The political and social movement to create equality for gender variant persons.

**Transgender (Trans) Community** – A loosely termed category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

**Transhate** – The irrational hatred of those who are gender variant, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

**Transition** – This term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression. The period during which a person begins to live out how they internally identify as their gender. It may include changing one’s name, taking hormones, having surgery, and altering the gender marker on legal documents.

**Transman** – An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexual people to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females. Also referred to as “transguy(s)”.

**Transphobia** – The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**Transsexual** – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexual people often undergo hormone treatments and gender confirmation surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity, but not all desire or are able to do so.

**Transvestite** – Someone who dresses in clothing generally identified with the opposite gender/sex. While the terms “homosexual” and “transvestite” have been used synonymously, they in fact signify two different groups. The majority of transvestite people are heterosexual males or male lesbian people who are more comfortable dressing in women’s clothing. The preferred term is “cross-dresser”, but the term “transvestite” is still used in a positive sense in England and in some other areas.

**Transwoman** – An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexual people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males.

**Two-Spirited** – Native American/First Nation persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of male and female articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. It was also commonly used in the past to describe female-assigned individuals who took on the roles and/or dress of men and male-assigned individuals who took on the roles and/or dress of women (preferred term to “berdache”). The term “two-spirit” is usually considered to be specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include “one-spirit” and “wintke”. The term is also often used by contemporary LGBT Native American and First Nation people to describe themselves.

## Local Worcester Resources

**Worcester State University**  
486 Chandler Street, Worcester, MA 01602

**Student Organization: Pride Alliance**

Meeting Schedule Spring 2015: Tuesdays 2pm  
Student Center: Lancer Landing  
Faculty Support: Jeremy Andreatta  
Club President: Shannon McGinty  
[smcginty@worchester.edu](mailto:smcginty@worchester.edu)

**Worcester Pride Alliance**

Worcester Pride Committee  
President: John Trobaugh  
Mailing Address: Worcester Pride  
P.O. Box 1126, Worcester, MA 01613  
Meeting Schedule: 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays  
6:30pm at Central Mass AHEC  
35 Harvard Street, Worcester, MA 01608  
[worcesterpride@gmail.com](mailto:worcesterpride@gmail.com)  
<http://www.worcesterpride.org/>

**SWAGLY**

Supporters of Worcester Area Gay & Lesbian Youth  
Program Director: Luis Cantres  
508.755.3773  
AIDS Project Worcester  
85 Green Street, Worcester, MA 01604  
[swagly@aidsprojectworcester.org](mailto:swagly@aidsprojectworcester.org)

## Additional Information

**AVEN**

Asexual Visibility & Education Network  
<http://www.asexuality.org>

**BRC**

Bisexual Resource Center  
<http://www.biresource.net>

**Consortium of Higher Education**

LGBT Resource Professionals  
<http://www.lgbtcampus.org>

**National LGBTQ Task Force**

<http://www.thetaskforce.org>

**Stonewall Center UMASS Amherst**

An LGBTQIA+ Resource Center  
<http://www.umass.edu/stonewall>