

## Some Definitions for the LGBTQ Community (and Allies)\*

*A Note on Definitions:* Please know that all definitions and labels do not mean the same thing to all people. Use the preferred terminology of the person/people with whom you are interacting. This list represents common usages and meanings of these terms within communities, but is neither exhaustive nor universal.

**Bi-gendered:** One who has a significant gender identity that encompasses both male and female. Some may feel that one gender or another is stronger, but both sides are there.

**Bisexual:** A term used to indicate attraction or potential for attraction to more than one gender.

**Butch or Stud:** An identity term most frequently used by people with a more masculine gender identity and/or gender presentation

**Coming Out:** The process by which a person begins to self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, or queer. Coming out can happen over a long or short period of time and at different levels (i.e. a person may be out to their friends, but not to their family).

**Cross-dresser:** A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intention to live full-time as the other gender.

**Down Low (DL):** A controversial term describing the phenomenon of MSMs (men who have sex with men) who publicly identify as heterosexuals and maintain sexual relationships with women, “The Down Low” has become synonymous with sensationalized claims that MSMs are spreading HIV into “the general population.” Avoid inaccurate suggestions that “The Down Low” is a phenomenon exclusive to communities of color. In general, the more accurate descriptor is MSM, which should be reserved for clinical or statistical contexts. Only use the term “Down Low” to describe men who self-identify that way.

**Drag King:** Refers to women who dress as men (often celebrity men) for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events.

**Drag Queen:** Refers to men who dress as women (often celebrity women) for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events. It is also used as slang, sometimes in a derogatory manner, to refer to all transgender women.

**Dyke:** Historically, this term was used to refer to lesbians or women who were less feminine than people believed they should be. Originally meant to be a slur, it has been “reclaimed” by many lesbians.

**Fag/Faggot:** Historically, the term was used to refer to men who were seen as less masculine than people believed they should be and has become the slur most commonly used to abuse gay men and men perceived to be gay. The term has also become a general insult that is often used to humiliate any men. However, it is also been “reclaimed” by many gay men.

**Femme:** An identity term most frequently used by people with a more feminine gender identity and/or gender presentation.

\* Compiled from the 2006 National Domestic Violence Report (NCAVP), the Wingspan Anti-Violence Project, and *Transitioning Our Shelters* published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute; National Coalition for the Homeless

**FTM:** A person who has transitioned from “female-to-male,” meaning a person who was assigned female at birth, but now identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a “transgender man.”

**Gay:** Term most commonly used by male-identified people who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other male identified people. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual men and women. Also a term used to describe the LGBT community. Some men who have sex with men do not identify as gay.

**Gender:** The set of meanings assigned by a culture or society to someone's perceived biological sex. Gender is not static and can shift over time. Gender has at least three parts:

a) *Physical Markers* - Aspects of the human body that are considered to determine sex and/or gender for a given culture or society, including genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, and internal reproductive organs.

b) *Role/Expression* - Aspects of behavior and outward presentation that may (intentionally or unintentionally) communicate gender to others in a given culture or society, including clothing, body language, hairstyles, voice, socialization, relationships, career choices, interests, and presence in gendered spaces (restrooms, places of worship, etc).

c) *Identity* - An individual's internal view of their gender. Their own innermost sense of themselves as a gendered being and/or as masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc. This will often influence name and pronoun preference.

**Genderqueer:** A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor female. Genderqueer is an identity more common among young people.

**Gender Non-conforming:** This term can refer to gender identity or gender role and refers to someone who falls outside or transcends what is considered to be traditional gender-norms for their assigned sex.

**Hermaphrodite:** Considered a derogatory term, referring to a person who is intersex.

**Heterosexism:** Systematic belief that heterosexuality and the binary gender system are superior or more valid. Gives people who follow more culturally traditional heterosexual lifestyle greater power, as well as increased opportunities for legal, medical, and economic social privilege, assistance, and status.

**Heterosexual:** Type of sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally and sexually attracted to the ‘opposite’ sex (males attracted to females, females attracted to males).

**Homophobia:** Societal, systemic, and interpersonal oppression against LGBTQ people and communities. Also can be experienced by those who are perceived to be LGBTQ. Can often be internalized by someone who is having difficulty with his/her own gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. A direct result of heterosexism.

**Homosexual:** Type of sexual orientation in which a person is attracted to the same sex (males attracted to males, females attracted to females). A term originally used by the medical community to “diagnose” people who were not heterosexual. Considered a derogative term to some people who prefer the terms “gay”, “lesbian”, or “queer”.

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**Intersex:** A term referring to people who have physical markers that differ from the medical definitions of male or female. Most commonly, it is used to speak about people whose genitalia are not easily classifiable as 'male' or 'female' at birth. It can also be used to refer to any biological marker that falls outside medical norms for masculine and feminine including, but not limited to, external genitalia, chromosomes, or internal reproductive systems.

**Lesbian:** Term most commonly used by female-identified people who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other female identified people. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual women. Can also refer to the community and culture of women who love/are attracted to other women.

**LGBT:** Common abbreviation for (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, and (T)ransgender.

**Maricón, joto/a:** derogatory term similar to “faggot” in English, generally used to describe effeminate men. But can also be a term of endearment much like English usage.

**Mariposa:** Also a derogatory term similar to “faggot” in English, generally used to describe effeminate men. The literal translation is butterfly.

**MSM:** Abbreviation for Men who have Sex with Men, a term used to describe men who engage in same sex sexual behavior but who may choose not to label themselves as ‘gay/bisexual.’

**MTF:** A person who transitions from “male-to-female,” meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but now identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a “transgender woman.”

**Passing:** A term that is used by people who are transgender to mean that they are seen as the gender they self-identify as. For example, a transgender man (born female) who most people see as a man.

**Queer:** A political and sometimes controversial term that some LGBT people have reclaimed, while others still consider it derogatory. Used most frequently by younger LGBT people, activists, and academics, the term can refer to either to gender identity, sexual orientation, or both and can be used by any gender.

**Questioning:** A term that can refer to an identity or a process of introspection whereby one learns about their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Can happen at any age and multiple times throughout ones lifetime.

**Same Gender Loving:** A term created by African American communities and used by some people of color who may view labels such as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as terms referring to and/or representing white people.

**Sex:** 1. Verb: Consensual, intimate physical contact between adults. 2. Noun: Biologically based and socially constructed determination of a person’s label of “female” or “male.” Often based on a doctor’s visual assessment of a baby’s genitalia.

**Sexual Orientation:** The culturally-defined set of meanings through which people describe their sexual attractions. Sexual orientation is not static and can shift over time. Sexual orientation has at least three parts:

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- a) *Attraction* - One's own feelings or self-perception about to which gender(s) one feels drawn. Can be sexual, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and/or political.
- b) *Behavior* - What one does sexually and/or with whom.
- c) *Sexual Identity* - The language and terms one uses to refer to their sexual orientation. It may or may not be based on either of the above and can also be influenced by family, culture, and community.

**Sex Reassignment Surgery:** Surgical procedures that change one's body to make it conform to a person's gender identity. This may include "top surgery" (breast augmentation or removal) or "bottom surgery" (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries. "Sex change surgery" is considered a derogatory term by many.

**Straight Ally:** Someone who is not LGBT, but advocates for the fair treatment of individuals who are.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including, but not limited to transsexuals, cross-dressers, individuals who are androgynous, genderqueers, and gender non-conforming people. Transgender is a broad term and is good for providers to use.

**Transgender Man:** A term for an individual who is transgender and currently identifies as a man (see also FTM).

**Transgender Woman:** A term for an individual who is transgender and currently identifies as a woman (see also MTF).

**Transition:** The period during which a person begins to live as their new gender. Transitioning MAY include changing one's name, taking hormones, having surgery, or changing legal documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security number, birth certificate) to reflect their new gender.

**Transphobia:** Societal, systemic, and interpersonal oppression against people of transgender experience. Also something experienced by some gender queer and gender nonconforming people.

**Transsexual:** A term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth. Often, but not always, individuals who are transsexual alter their bodies through hormones or surgery in order to make it match their gender identity.

**Transvestite:** A term for a cross-dresser that is considered derogatory by many.

**Two-Spirit:** An English translation of a concept present in *some* North American indigenous cultures. Refers to someone who is assigned one sex at birth, but fulfills the roles of both sexes or of another sex.