

Defining a Common Language

Ally – An individual whose attitudes and behavior are anti-heterosexist and who is active in combating homophobia and heterosexism, both on a personal and institutional level.

Androgyny – Displaying physical and social characteristics identified in this culture as both female and male to the degree that the persons' outward appearance and mannerisms make it difficult to determine the androgynous person's biological sex.

Bisexuality – A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to both genders.

Boi – A boyish gay guy or a biological female with a male presentation.

Coming Out – Also, "coming out of the closet" or "being out," this term refers to the process through which a person acknowledges, accepts, and in many cases appreciates her or his lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. This often involves sharing of this information with others. It is not a single event but instead a life-long process.

Crossdresser – A person (typically heterosexual) who wears clothes that are considered by the mainstream culture to be appropriate for another gender (preferred term to 'transvestite').

Family - A term widely used by LGBT persons to identify other LGBT people.

FTM – A female-to-male transsexual, or a transsexual man. Some transsexuals reject this term, arguing they have always been a male and are only making the identity visible. (Also, MTF or male-to-female transsexual).

Gay – A common and acceptable word for male homosexuals, but used for both genders.

Gender – Traditionally defined as a person's biological sex: traditionally male, female, and intersexed. Gender is more appropriately viewed as a social construct in relation to Gender Identity. A person may self identify as purely male, purely female, or as possessing characteristics of both.

Gender Expression – How an individual chooses to express his or her gender identity.

Gender Identity – How an individual views himself or herself in terms of characteristics traditionally identified in this culture as male or female. Gender Identity refers to a person's actual or perceived sex, and includes a person's identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth.

Gender Queer – Someone who views the gender options as more than just male and female and or doesn't fit into the binary male-female system.

Heteroflexible – A straight person with a queer mind-set.

Heterosexism – The cultural, institutional and individual assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of LGBT people while it gives advantages and privileges to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression that reinforces realities of silence and invisibility.

Heterosexuality – a sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

Homophobia – The fear, dislike, and hatred of same-sex relationships or those who love and are sexually and emotionally attracted to those of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Homosexuality – a sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.

In the closet – to be "in the closet" or being "closeted" means to hide one's homosexual identity in order to keep a job, a housing situation, friends, or in some other way to survive. Many LGBT individuals are "out" in some situations and "closeted" in others.

Internalized homophobia – the fear and self-hate of one's own homosexuality or bisexuality that occur for many individuals who have learned negative ideas about homosexuality throughout childhood. One form of internalized oppression is the acceptance of the myths and stereotypes applied to the oppressed group. It can result in depression, alienation, anxiety, and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Intersexed – Individuals whose bodies cannot neatly be classified as male or female. This includes people who have chromosomal sex other than XY or XX, or primary or secondary sex characteristics that defy medical definitions of male and female. At birth, attending physicians often choose which gender to raise the child and perform reassignment surgery on individuals with ambiguous genitalia. Many who identify as intersex believe that early childhood surgical intervention is not only unnecessary but cruel and advocate counseling and support for children and families.

Invisibility – The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders LGB people, youth in particular, invisible and seemingly nonexistent. LGB adults and youth are usually not seen or portrayed in society, and especially not in schools and classrooms.

Lesbian – A common and acceptable word for female homosexuals only.

LGBT – The acronym that means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. The addition of a "Q" at the end often means "questioning."

Monosexism – The assumption that everyone is either heterosexual or homosexual, and if not, should be (i.e., They're sitting on the fence). The systematic oppression of bisexual persons.

Pansexual – A person attracted to people of multiple genders.

Queer – Some LGBT people use this term as a way of reclaiming the power associated in the past with this and other derogatory terms (such as fag and dyke). Others use it as a more general all-inclusive term to represent a variety of sexual orientations and/or gender identities or anything that defies easy definition or categorization. Like any term or label, there is no general consensus on what Queer means, and it is still considered offensive by some people.

Same Gender Loving (SGL) – A term used often by gay and lesbian African-Americans as an alternative to 'gay' or 'lesbian.' It helps provide an identity not marginalized by racism within the gay community or heterosexism in society.

Sexual minority – a person may identify as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, or transvestite.

Sexual orientation – a person's emotional, physical, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction with other individual. There is ongoing debate among medical and psychological experts as to whether sexual orientation has a biological basis (nature) or is the result of environmental factors and individual choice (nurture). Although the nature-versus-nurture debate continues, many believe that sexual orientation is probably one of the many characteristics with which people are born. The term "sexual orientation" is favored over "sexual preference," as the latter term implies a choice, and many lgb folks do not view their attractions as a choice.

Trannydyke – A transgender person (whose gender is different than the one assigned at birth) attracted to people with a more feminine gender.

Transgender – An umbrella term for people who transgress society's view of gender as necessarily fixed, unmoving, and following from one's biological sex. They view gender on a spectrum, rather than a polarized, either/or construct. This is a broad term that encompasses cross-dressers, intersexed people, gender benders, transsexuals and those who defy what society tells them is appropriate for their gender. The sexual orientation of transgender persons varies just as it varies among the remainder of the human population.

Transsexual – A person whose gender identity is opposite their assigned sex. Transsexuals may live as the "opposite" sex, undergo hormone therapy, and/or have sex reassignment surgery to match their bodies with their gender identity.

Transvestite – A person who dresses in clothes traditionally associated with persons of the opposite gender. (Preferred term 'cross-dresser').

Two Spirit – A Native American term for people who blend the masculine and feminine. Often used by LGBT Native Americans to describe themselves.

*One of the most important things to remember is the importance of self-definition:
allowing people to define themselves, as they like.*