

# LGBT Terms and Definitions

Here are some of the words and acronyms that are commonly used in American English for LGBT issues.

**LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQA, TBLG:** These acronyms refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Ally. Although all of the different identities within “LGBT” are often lumped together (and share sexism as a common root of oppression), there are specific needs and concerns related to each individual identity.

**Ally:** An ally is a person who is a member of the dominant group who works to end oppression in his or her own personal and professional life by supporting and advocating with the oppressed population.

**Biphobia:** The fear or hatred of bisexual people. This term addresses the ways that prejudice against bisexuals differs from prejudice against other queer people. There is often biphobia in lesbian, gay and transgender communities, as well as in straight communities.

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender. Also called “bi”.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity and expression matches the gender typically associated with their biological sex. For example: a female who identifies as a woman.

**Coming Out:** To declare and affirm both to oneself and to others one’s identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc. It is not a single event but instead a life-long process.

**Gay:** A homosexual person, usually used to describe men but may be used to describe women as well.

**Gender expression:** Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice and emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their body’s characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

**Gender identity:** The sense of “being” male or “being” female. For some people, gender identity is in accord with physical anatomy. For transgender people, gender identity may differ from physical anatomy or expected social roles. It is important to note that gender identity, biological sex, and sexual orientation are not necessarily linked.

**Genderqueer:** A term which refers to individuals or groups who “queer” or problematize the hegemonic notions of sex, gender and desire in a given society. Genderqueer people possess identities which fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary. Genderqueer may also refer to people who identify as both transgendered AND queer, i.e. individuals who challenge both

gender and sexuality regimes and see gender identity and sexual orientation as overlapping and interconnected.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted and committed to the members of a gender or sex that is seen to be the “opposite” or other than the one with which they identify or are identified. Also called “straight”.

**Homophobia:** Thoughts, feelings, or actions based on fear, dislike, judgment, or hatred of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Homophobia has roots in sexism and can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence.

**Homosexual:** A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of what they identify as their own sex or gender. A clinical term that originated in the late 1800s. Some avoid the word because it contains the base word “sex.” The terms “lesbian, bi and gay” are preferred by many in the LGBT community.

**In the closet:** To be in the closet means to hide one’s LGBT identity in order to avoid negative social repercussions, such as losing a job, housing, friends or family. Many LGBT individuals are “out” in some situations and “closeted” in others, based on their perceived level of safety.

**Lesbian:** A homosexual woman.

**Queer:** Used as an umbrella identity term encompassing lesbian, questioning people, gay men, bisexuals, non-labeling people, transgender folks, and anyone else who does not strictly identify as heterosexual. “Queer” originated as a derogatory word. Currently, it is being reclaimed by some people and used as a statement of empowerment. Some people identify as “queer” to distance themselves from the rigid categorization of “straight” and “gay”. Some transgender, lesbian, gay, questioning, non-labeling, and bisexual people, however, reject the use of this term due to its connotations of deviance and its tendency to gloss over and sometimes deny the differences between these groups.

**Sexual orientation:** A person’s emotional, physical and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction with other individuals. Some of the better-known labels or categories include “bisexual” (or “multisexual”, “pansexual”, “omnisexual”), “lesbian”, “gay” (“homosexual” is more clinical), or “heterosexual”.

**Transgender:** This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who deviate from their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system. This includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, genderqueers, drag kings, drag queens, two-spirit people, and others. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond or outside of those two genders.

**Transphobia:** The fear or hatred of transgender people or gender non-conforming behavior. Like biphobia, transphobia can also exist among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as well as among heterosexual people.

**Transsexual:** A person who, through experiencing an intense, long-term discomfort resulting from feeling the inappropriateness of their assigned gender at birth and discomfort of their body, adapts their gender role and body to reflect and be congruent with their gender identity.

**Please Note:** It is very important to respect people's desired self-identifications. One should never assume another person's identity based on that person's appearance. It is always best to ask people how they identify, including what pronouns they prefer, and to respect their wishes.

Definitions have been modified from the following websites:

<http://lesbianlife.about.com/od/trans/g/GenderExpressio.htm>

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/advise/perspective.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homophobia>