



A Glossary of Gay, Lesbian, Bi, and Transgender Terms

Feeling nervous about what words you should use when expressing your support or learning more about gay issues? Fear not - this short list of terms should help get you started to being equality-literate.

Ally: A friend, supporter, assistant, partner, collaborator. Being an ally to the gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender community means being supportive of equality in its many forms.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation or an ally who is not open about his/her support for equality.

Coming out: A process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life. People establish a lesbian, gay, bi or transgender identity first to themselves and then *may* reveal it to others. There are many different degrees of being out; some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, some may be out only to themselves. One can be out at different points on this spectrum, and it's important to remember and respect that not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out.

Gender expression: A person's way of showing their gender identity to others through means such as dress and/or manner.

Gender identity: One's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (boy or girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

GLBT: An acronym for gay, lesbian, bi and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi, transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as GLBTA to include allies – straight and supportive individuals. The acronym sometimes includes Q for queer or questioning.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay people. Major media outlets restrict the use of the term and replace it with "gay" or "lesbian" to refer to people who are attracted to individuals of the same sex.

Intersex: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of gay people. The term is disliked by the gay community because it implies that being gay, lesbian, bi, or transgender is a choice.

Out: Describes people who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bi, transgender, or allied in their public and/or professional lives.

Queer: Traditionally a negative term, queer currently is used by some people in the gay community to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, and some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community. Nevertheless, some within the gay community dislike the term. This word should be avoided unless quoting someone who self-identifies that way.

Sexual orientation: Permanent emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. Straight individuals experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. Gay or lesbian individuals experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. Bi individuals experience these feelings for people of both sexes.

Transgender: A term describing the state of a person's gender identity which does not necessarily match his/her assigned gender at birth. Other words commonly used are female to male (FTM), male to female (MTF), crossdresser, and gender queer. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Transsexual: An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many transgender people prefer the term "transgender" to "transsexual." Some transsexual people still prefer to use the term to describe themselves; however, unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term, and many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.