



Safe Zone

DEFINITIONS

Terms Commonly Associated with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Communities

Language is dynamic; it grows, changes, and develops. This is particularly true with the language of diversity and the terms (labels) used to identify ourselves. As respectful individuals in a civil society, we should strive to be sure that our language does not demean, exclude, or offend. We must allow others to self identify, for definitions of terms will vary for everyone. These definitions provide a starting point for discussion and understanding.

Lesbian: This is one of the oldest and most positive terms that labels the affectional or sexual preference or orientation of women towards other women. A woman who forms her primary loving and sexual relationships with other women; a woman who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic preference for someone of the same sex. Some lesbians prefer to call themselves "lesbian" and use the term "gay" to refer to gay men; others use the term "gay" to refer to both gay males and lesbian females. Term of pride.

Gay: A man who forms his primary loving and sexual relationships with other men; a man who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic and/or erotic preference for someone of the same sex. A term adopted by the gay male community, though some lesbians use it also, as a sign of pride in their sexual orientation.

Bisexual: A person who has an affectional, emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to men and women. Degree of preference and choice of primary relationship partner varies for each bisexual.

LGBTQ: Often referred to the gay alphabet that takes the first letter of each gender identity a person may select such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Questioning/Queer. These letters may be seen in different order (example: GLBTQ, BGLTQ, etc.).

Heterosexual: A heterosexual is a man who forms primary loving and sexual relationships with women or a woman who forms primary loving and sexual relationships with men; a woman who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic preference for men (or vice versa). Heterosexuals usually (but not necessarily) engage in overt sexual relationships with people of the other sex.

Homosexual: A clinical and technical term that is not generally used by lesbian and gay people or their community. For example, Congressman Barney Frank refers to himself as gay, or openly gay, not as a confirmed homosexual or a practicing homosexual.

Coming Out: An ever-evolving process of self-acceptance and integration of one's sexual identity. It is an intra-personal as well as interpersonal process and may include public proclamation of identity as well as political action in the larger society.

Being Out or Out of the Closet: A term which means being open and public about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. A closeted person hides the fact that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Some people are "out" in some settings (for example, with friends) and not "out" in other settings (for example, at work or with family).

Out-ed: Being “Out-ed” is a term used when a LGBTQ individual’s sexual identity is disclosed inappropriately by another person.

Heterosexism: "The societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, acceptable sexual orientation."

Gender identity: refers to how a person sees himself or herself socially: as a woman, as a man, as masculine, as feminine, as a combination, or as neither.

Gender expression: is how an individual chooses to express their gender. For example, regardless of their body or what they claim as a gender identity, if a person dresses and acts in a manner that is consistent with society's definition of being female, that person is expressing a female gender.

Sexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex or gender and thereby it’s right to dominance.

Heterosexist Privilege: "The benefits and advantages heterosexuals receive in a heterosexual culture. Also, the benefits lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity." The assumption is that all people are heterosexual.

Homophobia: "The fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, or any behavior that is outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles. Homophobia can be manifested out of fear of association with lesbian or gay people or being perceived as lesbian or gay. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbian and gay people to physical violence against people thought to be lesbian or gay."

Biphobia: The discomfort and fear others feel around bisexual people and the myths that exist about bisexuality. Bisexuality is often misperceived as an invalid sexual orientation. Biphobia is structurally supported by monosexism, "the structural and cultural privileging of sexuality directed toward only one sexual orientation (heterosexuality or homosexuality)." Bisexual people are not only stigmatized by heterosexual people, but also by lesbian and gay people because they "blur the boundaries between insider and outsider."

Heterosexual Ally: "Heterosexual person who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others out of self-interest, a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and a belief that heterosexism is a social justice issue."³

Lover, Partner, Domestic Partner, and Significant Other: Terms that lesbian, gay and bisexual people use to identify those people with whom they have romantic or sexual relationships. In addition, used by adults who are not legally married, who share resources and responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitments to one another over a period of time. Legal definitions may vary among city ordinances, corporate policies, and by individuals and families.

Family, or Family of Origin, or Family of Choice: “Two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitments to one another over a period of time. The family is the climate that one comes home to; and it is the network of sharing and commitments that most accurately describes the family unit, regardless of blood, or adoption, or marriage.” Source: American Home Economics Association. In addition, “Family” is often a term used by LGBTQ individuals to describe their close circle of support since many have been abandoned or ostracized by their natural/biological family.

Queer: Originally a derogatory label used to insult lesbians and gay people or to intimidate and offend heterosexuals. More recently this term has been reclaimed by some lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, and transgender people as an inclusive and positive way to identify all people targeted by heterosexism and homophobia. Some lesbians and gay men have similarly reclaimed previously negative words such as "dyke" and "faggot" for positive self-reference." **Caution:** Many LGBTQ individuals dislike this word and view it as pejorative.

Sex: An act, or series of acts, which are natural part of human expressions of desire, love, and affection, or the identification of biological sex.

Sexual Orientation: Research indicates that gender identity develops some times between birth and 3 years of age. Sexual Orientation refers to the gender of the person(s) that someone is attracted to, emotionally and physically, i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and others in between, as well as asexual.

LGBTQ Activist: An individual who engages in a continuum of direct action in the service of securing civil rights and social justice for people of all sexual orientations. This continuum of action can range from educating oneself on the issues to recognizing and interrupting homophobic and heterosexist behaviors on a personal level to participating in rallies, protests, and other efforts with the aim of achieving political and social change on a community level.

Rainbow Flag: Artist Gilbert Baker first proposed the Rainbow Flag as the symbol for the 1978 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. Volunteers hand-dyed and hand-stitched two huge flags out of organically grown cotton. The original design used eight colors, but hot pink and turquoise were eliminated because of cost. The six colors of the resulting flag displayed at the 1979 parade symbolized the following: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for harmony with nature, blue for art, and purple for spirit. Within the first two years of production, the flag became so popular that it used up the world's supply of purple flag cotton. The Rainbow Flag became nationally known after a 1988 lawsuit in which John Stout, a gay man living in West Hollywood, CA. successfully fought his landlord's attempt to keep him from flying the flag from his apartment balcony. A mile-long rainbow flag weighing over 7,000 pounds was carried by over 10,000 people as part of the 1994 New York City Pride Parade, marking the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion.

Transgender Definitions:

Transgender: A broad term that covers many aspects in the gender experience. People who identify as transgender feel that their prescribed gender role does not fit with their internal experience of their gender. Transgender people can be, but are not always, transsexuals. Some people decide to redefine themselves by changing their gender expression only and others feel that they also need to change their bodies. Sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery, or sex reassignment surgery can help people make a physical change that feels more congruent with their self-image. The term transgender includes the following.

- **FTM (female to male):** People who were born female but see themselves as male.
- **MTF (male to female):** People who were born male but see themselves as female.

Bigenderist: A person who develops and expresses a distinctly male persona and a distinctly female persona. A bigenderist might, for example, work as a women or socialize as a man (or vice versa). See also: Crossdresser.

Crossdresser: A person who dresses in the clothing of the opposite biological sex. Crossdressers generally want to relate as, and be accepted as, a person of the gender they are presenting. Cross-dressing may be partial or total in amount of time and amount of clothing worn. See: Bigenderist. Crossdressers may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Drag: Dressing in the clothing of the opposite biological sex, or in a manner different than how one will usually dress (i.e. “corporate drag” or “military drag”). “Drag” is often theatrical, and often presents a stereotyped image. Individuals who dress in “Drag” may or may not consider themselves part of the transgender community. They also may identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Female or Male Impersonator: Person who crossdress as performance art and/or as stage personalities. They may also consider themselves as “drag performers”. They may or may not consider themselves to be crossdressers or bigenderists, and they may identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is other than their biological sex. This person may wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception. Most transsexuals would like to alter their bodies through hormonal therapy, sex reassignment surgeries or other means.

Transvestite: Often a person who may achieve sexual pleasure through the use of clothing or personal adornments of the other gender. Often incorrectly used interchangeably with “Crossdresser”. There is no correlation between sexual orientation and transvestite behavior. Transvestites may identify as heterosexuals, gay, lesbian, or bisexual in their sexual orientation.

Transition: In the parlance of Transgender issues, the “transition” is the time period when an individual changes from expressing one gender to another in their personal life and/or workplace. For most individuals the workplace transition is very carefully planned, often including appropriate levels of management in early discussions, and the transition process may be weeks to months in length. The personal life transition, also eagerly anticipated, may be more sudden.

Intersexed: Some babies are born with genitalia of both sexes (an outdated term would be: Hermaphrodite). In the past, most intersexed individuals have had surgery shortly after birth in an attempt to give them an “identifiable gender”. Some parents and doctors elect surgery for the infant and assign a gender. Because a person's true gender cannot be known by their genitalia, an assignment at birth can be wrong. Parents often feel forced to make a quick decision with little information. Most intersexed persons are raised as girls/women. Intersexed people have been treated differently by different societies over history. In some other cultures they are given special places in the group and revered as special. Generally, the more homophobic a society, the less understanding and acceptance there will be for trans- or inter-sexed people.