



Glossary of Terms

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender expression identity because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously; a bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

Coming Out | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay | A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

Gender Expression | External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through masculine, feminine or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

Gender Identity | One's personal sense of their gender. For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own sense of gender identity do not match.

Genderqueer | A word people use to describe their own non-standard gender identity or expression.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Internalized Homophobia | Self-identification of societal stereotypes by an LGBT person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Lesbian | A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

LGBT | An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.”

Living Openly | A state in which LGBT people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them.

Outing | Exposing someone’s sexual orientation as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to others, without their permission; in essence “outing” them from the closet. Outing someone can have serious employment/economic/safety/religious repercussions in some situations.

Queer | Often used interchangeably with “LGBT.” Be mindful that the term may have negative or derogatory connotations for some people; however, many younger people are comfortable using it.

Same-Gender Loving | A term some prefer to use instead of “lesbian” or “gay” to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sexual Orientation | An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, opposite-sex orientation or a bisexual orientation.

Sexual Preference | What a person likes or prefers to do sexually; a conscious recognition or choice not to be confused with sexual orientation.

Straight Supporter | A person who supports and honors the diversity of sexual orientation, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself.

Transgender | A term describing a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect. It is an umbrella term that includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming.

Transphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

Transsexual | A medical term describing people whose gender and sex do not line up, and who often seek medical treatment to bring their body and gender identity into alignment. Avoid using this term unless an individual self-identifies as transsexual.