

LGBT Inclusion—Understanding The Terminology

Terms to Know A to Z

Bisexual: A person whose emotional, sexual, or romantic attractions are to both men and women. Bisexuals need not be “equally” attracted to, or have had equal sexual experience with, both sexes. Nor do they need to have attractions toward both sexes at the same time.

Coming out of the closet: The process of self-acceptance and disclosure of sexual orientation to others. People can disclose to none, some, or all of the people they know.

Gay/Homosexual: A woman or a man whose emotional, sexual, or romantic attractions are primarily to members of the same gender.

Gender: This term refers to the external, socially constructed rules, roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for women and men; gender categories are “women” and “men.”

Gender expression: How an individual manifests a sense of femininity or masculinity through appearance, behavior, grooming, and/or dress.

Gender identity: One’s inner sense of being a woman or a man, regardless of biological birth sex; different from sexual orientation.

Gender role: Rules assigned by society that define what clothing, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc., are considered appropriate and in-appropriate for members of a given sex.

Heteronormative: Cultural rules (including social, family, and legal) that pressure everyone to conform to a heterosexual standard of identity.

Heterosexism: The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation. Heterosexism denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, relationship, or community. Heterosexism often takes the form of ignoring or discriminating against LGBT individuals or discounting their experiences altogether.

Homophobia: The hatred, hostility, disapproval, or fear of people who are identified as, or assumed to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

In the closet (Closeted): LGBT individuals who do not openly disclose their sexual orientation to others. People can disclose to none, some, or all of the people they know.

Lesbian: A woman whose emotional, sexual, or romantic attractions are primarily to other women.

LGBT: This is the acronym most commonly used in the United States to address the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The acronym can vary in a number of ways, including GLBT and GLB, and can include additional letters, such as Q (queer; also questioning); and A (straight ally).

Non-LGBT: Anyone who does not identify as part of the LGBT community; most commonly refers to straight/heterosexual individuals.

Out employee: An employee who discloses his or her LGBT identity to a few, some, or all of his or her coworkers.

Queer: A fluid term with numerous meanings. It is commonly used to describe sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heterosexual norms. The term is often used to refer to the general LGBT community. It can be either a positive or a negative term, depending on the context in which it is used.

Sex: This term refers to the biological characteristics that define an individual; sex categories are “female” and “male.”

Sexual minority: Individuals who do not identify as part of the sexual majority or cultural mainstream (e.g., straight). Individuals can identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer, for example.

Sexual orientation: A term commonly used to refer to a person’s emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender (women or men).

Straight/Heterosexual: A person whose emotional, sexual, or romantic attractions are primarily to members of the opposite sex.

Straight ally/LGBT supporter: An individual who identifies as non-LGBT and who supports the LGBT community in a direct way, such as attending LGBT group meetings, acting as an executive sponsor, or volunteering at an LGBT group event.

Transgender: People who identify with the characteristics, roles, behaviors, or desires of a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth. This is an umbrella term that can be used to include transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people.

Transsexual: Transsexuals change (or seek to change) their physical characteristics to a gender different than what they were assigned at birth—for example, individuals born as males seek to change their sex to female. These changes can include sex reassignment surgery and/or hormone therapy.