

Some LGBTQ Terminology

This document provides quick language tips to health professionals working with LGBTQ persons; it is not intended to be exhaustive.

advocate – **1 noun** : a person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group. **2 verb** : to actively support or plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance or educate others.

agender – *adj.* : a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.

ally /"al-lie"/ – *noun* : a (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action on in support and respect.

aromantic /"ay-ro-man-tic"/ – *adj.* : experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior. Aromanticism exists on a continuum from people who experience no romantic attraction or have any desire for romantic activities, to those who experience low levels, or romantic attraction only under specific conditions. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demiromantic). Sometimes abbreviated to "aro" (pronounced like "arrow").

asexual/ ace – *adj.* : experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. Asexuality exists on a continuum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex, to those who experience low levels, or sexual attraction only under specific conditions. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demisexual). Sometimes abbreviated to "ace."

bicurious – *adj.* : a curiosity toward experiencing attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).

bigender – *adj.* : a person who fluctuates between traditionally "woman" and "man" gender-

based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (or sometimes identifying with either man or woman, as well as a third, different gender).

binder – *noun* : an undergarment used to alter or reduce the appearance of one's chest(worn similarly to how one wears a sports bra). **binding** – *adj.* : the (sometimes daily) process of wearing a binder. Binding is often used to change the way other's read/perceive one's anatomical sex characteristics, and/or as a form of gender expression.

biological sex – *noun* : a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex. Often referred to as simply "sex," "physical sex," "anatomical sex," or specifically as "sex assigned at birth."

biphobia – *noun* : a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express toward bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the LGBTQ community as well as straight society. **biphobic** – *adj.* : a word used to describe actions, behaviors, or individuals who demonstrate elements of this range of negative attitudes toward bisexual people.

bisexual – *noun & adj.* : a person who experiences attraction to some people of their gender and another gender. Bisexual attraction does not have to be equally split, or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders an individual may be attracted to. Often used interchangeably with "pansexual".

butch – *noun & adj.* : a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally, or emotionally. 'Butch' is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but is also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

cisgender /"siss-jendur"/ – *adj.* : a gender description for when someone's sex assigned at birth and gender identity correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not transgender, they are cisgender. The word cisgender can also be shortened to "cis."

cisnormativity – *noun* : the assumption, in individuals and in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans* identities and people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.

cissexism – *noun* : behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow better or more "right" than being transgender, and/or makes other genders invisible.

closeted – *adj.* : an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for

one's safety, peer or family rejection, or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc. Also known as being "in the closet." When someone chooses to break this silence they "come out" of the closet. (See coming out)

coming out – **1 noun** : the process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexuality or gender identity (to "come out" to oneself). **2 verb** : the process by which one shares one's sexuality or gender identity with others.

constellation – **noun** : a way to describe the arrangement or structure of a polyamorous relationship.

demiromantic – **adj.** : little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong sexual connection is formed with someone, often within a sexual relationship.

demisexual – **adj.** : little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic connection is formed with someone, often within a romantic relationship.

down low – **adj.** : typically referring to men who identify as straight but who secretly have sex with men. Down low (or DL) originated in, and is most commonly used by, communities of color.

drag king – **noun** : someone who performs (hyper-) masculinity theatrically.

drag queen – **noun** : someone who performs (hyper-) femininity theatrically.

dyke – **noun** : referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it is also reclaimed affirmatively by some lesbians and gay women as a positive self identity term.

emotional attraction – **noun** : a capacity that evokes the want to engage in emotionally intimate behavior (e.g., sharing, confiding, trusting, inter-depending), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none to intense). Often conflated with sexual attraction, romantic attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.

fag(got) – **noun** : derogatory term referring to a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. While often used derogatorily, it is also used reclaimed by some gay people (often gay men) as a positive in-group term.

feminine-of-center; masculine-of-center – **adj.** : a phrase that indicates a range in terms of gender identity and expression for people who present, understand themselves, and/or relate to others in a generally more feminine/masculine way, but don't necessarily identify as women or men. Feminine-of-center individuals may also identify as "femme," "submissive," "transfeminine," etc.; masculine-of-center individuals may also often identify as "butch," "stud," "aggressive," "boi," "transmasculine," etc.

feminine-presenting; masculine-presenting – *adj.* : a way to describe someone who expresses gender in a more feminine/masculine way. Often confused with feminine-of-center/masculine-of-center, which generally include a focus on identity as well as expression.

femme – *noun & adj.* : someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman or people.

fluid(ity) – *adj.* : generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

gay – **1** *adj.* : experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of the same gender. Can be used to refer to men who are attracted to other men and women who are attracted to women. **2** *adj.* : an umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who is not straight.

gender binary – *noun* : the idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

gender expression – *noun* : the external display of one's gender, through a combination of clothing, grooming, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally made sense of on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as "gender presentation."

gender identity – *noun* : the internal perception of an one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be. Often conflated with biological sex, or sex assigned at birth.

gender neutrois – *adj.* : see agender.

gender non-conforming – **1** *adj.* : a gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man). **2** *adj.* : a gender identity label that indicates a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Often abbreviated as "GNC."

gender normative / gender straight – *adj.* : someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society's gender-based expectations.

genderqueer – **1** *adj.* : a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman. **2** *adj.* : an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).

gender variant – *adj.* : someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc).

heteronormativity – *noun* : the assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities: *when learning a woman is married, asking her what her husband's name is*. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.

heterosexism – *noun* : behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more “right” than queerness, and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

heterosexual/straight – *adj.* : experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of a different gender.

homophobia – *noun* : an umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have toward LGBTQ people. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTQ. **homophobic** – *adj.* : a word used to describe actions, behaviors, or individuals who demonstrate elements of this range of negative attitudes toward LGBTQ people.

Intersex/ Difference of Sexual Development (DSD) – *adj.* : term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Formerly known as hermaphrodite (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now outdated and derogatory.

lesbian – *noun & adj.* : women who are primarily attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other women.

LGBTQ; GSM; DSG – *abbr.* : shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer. LGBTQ is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (sometimes people add a + at the end in an effort to be more inclusive); GSM is Gender and Sexual Minorities; DSG is Diverse Sexualities and Genders. Other options include the initialism GLBT or LGBT and the acronym QUILTBAG (Queer [or Questioning] Undecided Intersex Lesbian Trans* Bisexual Asexual [or Allied] and Gay [or Genderqueer]).

lipstick lesbian – *noun* : Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

MSM / WSW – *abbr.* : men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women, to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities: *because a man is straight, it doesn't mean he's not having sex with men*. Often used in the field of HIV/Aids education, prevention, and treatment.

Mx. / “mix” or “schwa” / – *noun* : an honorific (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) that is gender neutral. It is often the option of choice for folks who do not identify within the gender binary: *Mx. Smith is a great teacher*.

outing – *verb* : involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

pansexual – *adj.* : a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to “pan.”

passing – **1** *adj. & verb* : trans* people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans*. **2** *adj.* : an LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

PGPs – *abbr.* : preferred gender pronouns. Often used during introductions, becoming more common as a standard practice. Many suggest removing the “preferred,” because it indicates flexibility and/or the power for the speaker to decide which pronouns to use for someone else.

polyamory (polyamorous) – *noun* : refers to the practice of, desire for, or orientation toward having ethical, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners). Often shortened to “poly.”

queer – **1** *adj.* : an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight and/or cisgender. **2** *noun* : a slur used to refer to someone who isn't straight and/or cisgender. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, and how it is still used as a slur in many communities, it is not embraced or used by all LGBTQ people. The term “queer” can often be used interchangeably with LGBTQ (e.g., “queer people” instead of “LGBTQ people”).

questioning – *verb, adj.* : an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

QPOC / QTPOC – *abbr.* : initialisms that stand for queer people of color and queer and/or trans people of color.

Same Gender Loving (SGL) – *adj.* : sometimes used by some members of the African-American or Black community to express a non-straight sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

sex assigned at birth (SAAB) – *abbr.* : a phrase used to intentionally recognize a person's assigned sex (not gender identity). Sometimes called “designated sex at birth” (DSAB) or “sex coercively assigned at birth” (SCAB), or specifically used as “assigned male at birth” (AMAB) or “assigned female at birth” (AFAB): *Jenny was assigned male at birth, but identifies as a woman.*

sexual attraction – *noun* : a capacity that evokes the want to engage in physically intimate behavior (e.g., kissing, touching, intercourse), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense). Often conflated with romantic attraction, emotional attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.

sexual orientation – *noun* : the type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often confused with sexual preference.

sexual preference – *noun* : the types of sexual intercourse, stimulation, and gratification one likes to receive and participate in. Generally when this term is used, it is being mistakenly interchanged with “sexual orientation,” creating an illusion that one has a choice (or “preference”) in who they are attracted to.

sex reassignment surgery (SRS) – *noun* : used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex. “Gender confirmation surgery” is considered by many to be a more affirming term. In most cases, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. Some refer to different surgical procedures as “top” surgery and “bottom” surgery to discuss what type of surgery they are having without having to be more explicit.

skoliosexual – *adj.* : being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some genderqueer, transgender, transsexual, and/or non-binary people.

stealth – *adj.* : a trans person who is not “out” as trans, and is perceived/known by others as cisgender.

straight – *adj.* : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to some people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.

stud – *noun* : most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as ‘butch’ or ‘aggressive’.

third gender – *noun* : for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognise three or more genders, both contemporary and historic, and is also a conceptual term meaning different things to different people who use it, as a way to move beyond the gender binary.

top surgery – *noun* : this term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

trans* – *adj.* : an umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially-defined gender norms. Trans with an asterisk is often used in written forms (not spoken) to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary identities, as well as transgender men (transmen) and transgender women (transwomen).

transgender – **1** *adj.* : a gender description for someone who has transitioned (or is transitioning) from living as one gender to another. **2** *adj.* : an umbrella term for anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, but does not identify as a man).

transition / transitioning – *noun, verb* : referring to the process of a transgender person changing aspects of themselves (e.g., their appearance, name, pronouns, or making physical changes to their body) to be more congruent with the gender they know themselves to be (as opposed to the gender they lived as pre-transitioning).

transman; transwoman – *noun* : An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as assigned female sex at birth. (sometimes referred to as transguy) 2 Identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transgender people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as assigned male sex at birth.

transphobia – *noun* : the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans* people, the trans* community, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society. Transphobic – *adj.* : a word used to describe an individual who harbors some elements of this range of negative attitudes, thoughts, intents, towards trans* people.

two-spirit – *noun* : is an umbrella term traditionally within Native American communities to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.

ze / zir / “zee”, “zerr” or “zeer”/ – alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some trans* people. They replace “he” and “she” and “his” and “hers” respectively. Alternatively some people who are not comfortable/do not embrace he/she use the plural pronoun “they/their” as a gender neutral singular pronoun.

Pro tips

- **LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+** are all safe professional terms to use when referring to the full population. SOGI is often used to talk about data collection. SGM is a full population term often used by scientists and government agencies.
- The opposite of LGBTQ is not heterosexual; it's cisgender heterosexual (or "non-LGBTQ").
- Gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression are fluid, meaning that they are not set, and often shift over the course of a person's lifetime.
- Putting your own pronouns after your name in an introduction or an email tagline is a very simple way to show you're LGBTQ welcoming.
- Pronoun tips: If you don't know someone's pronoun, ask. If you make an error, apologize quickly and move on. If you are having trouble with pronouns, practice by yourself.
- Avoidance of terminology can come across as discomfort with LGBTQ people. So, practice using the terms above. If you make an error: sincerely thank them for their correction, learn more, and keep going!

To learn more, visit

- <https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq>
- <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>
- <http://www.whatisasexuality.com/files/3114/6933/2042/Glossary.pdf>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/lgbtqia-safe-sex-guide>
- <https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/>