

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Glossary

Changes in thinking and attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identity are continually taking place in society as a whole and within the LGBTTTIQ communities. These terms and definitions are not standardized and may be used differently by different people and in different regions. The discourse around LGBTTTIQ issues and the definitions in this glossary will change over time. These are primarily English language terms that may not easily translate into other languages, however there may be equivalent terms in other languages.

Asexual: a word describing a person who is not sexually and/or romantically active, or not sexually and/or romantically attracted to other persons.

Autosexual: a word describing a person whose significant sexual involvement is with oneself or a person who prefers masturbation to sex with a partner.

Biphobia: irrational fear or dislike of bisexuals. Bisexuals may be stigmatized by heterosexuals, lesbians and gay men.

Bi-positive: the opposite of biphobia. A bi-positive attitude is one that validates, affirms, accepts, appreciates, celebrates and integrates bisexual people as unique and special in their own right.

Bisexual: a word describing a person whose sexual orientation is directed toward men and women, though not necessarily at the same time.

Cisgender: A gender identity formed by a match between your biological sex and your subconscious sex. May also be used as a synonym for non-transgender ('trans' means across; 'cis' means on the same side).

Cissexism: The belief that transsexual genders are less valid than cissexual genders.

Cissexual: "[...] people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned" (Julia Serano)

Cissexual privilege: Experienced by cissexuals as a result of having their fe/maleness deemed authentic, natural and unquestionable by society at large. It

allows cissexuals to take their sex embodiment for granted in ways that transsexuals cannot.¹

Coming out: the process by which LGBTTTIQ people acknowledge and disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, or in which transsexual or transgendered people acknowledge and disclose their gender identity, to themselves and others (See also “Transition”). Coming out is thought to be an ongoing process. People who are “closeted” or “in the closet” hide the fact that they are LGBTTTIQ. Some people “come out of the closet” in some situations (e.g., with other gay friends) and not in others (e.g., at work).

Crossdresser: A person who dresses in the clothing of the other sex for recreation, expression or art, or for erotic gratification. Formerly known as “transvestites.” Crossdressers may be male or female, and can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Gay/bisexual male crossdressers may be “drag queens” or female impersonators; lesbian/bisexual female crossdressers may be “drag kings” or male impersonators.

Dyke: a word traditionally used as a derogatory term for lesbians. Other terms include lezzie, lesbo, butch, bull dyke and diesel dyke. Many women have reclaimed these words and use them proudly to describe their identity.

Fag: a word traditionally used as a derogatory term for gay men. Other terms include fruit, faggot, queen, fairy, pansy, sissy and homo. Many men have reclaimed these words and use them proudly to describe their identity.

Family of choice: the circle of friends, partners, companions and perhaps ex-partners with which many LGBTTTIQ people surround themselves. This group gives the support, validation and sense of belonging that is often unavailable from the person’s family of origin.

Family of origin: the biological family or the family that was significant in a person’s early development.

Female-to-Male (FtM): Adjective to describe individuals assigned female at birth who are changing or who have changed their body and/or gender role from birth-assigned female to a more masculine body or role.

Gay: a word to describe a person whose primary sexual orientation is to members of the same gender or who identifies as a member of the gay community. This word can refer to men and women, although many women prefer the term “lesbian.”

¹ The definitions of the “Cis” terms were from the Trans 101 glossary compiled by Helen G http://www.thefword.org.uk/features/2008/03/trans_101

Gay-positive: the opposite of homophobia. A gay-positive attitude is one that affirms, accepts, appreciates, celebrates and integrates gay and lesbian people as unique and special in their own right.

Gender conforming: abiding by society's gender rules, e.g., a woman dressing, acting, relating to others and thinking of herself as feminine or as a woman.

Gender dysphoria: Distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth (and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics) (Fisk, 1974; Knudson, De Cuypere, & Bockting, 2010b).

Gender identity: a person's own identification of being male, female or intersex; masculine, feminine, transgendered or transsexual. Gender identity most often corresponds with one's anatomical gender, but sometimes people's gender identity doesn't directly correspond to their anatomy. Transgendered people use many terms to describe their gender identities, including: pre-op transsexual, post-op transsexual, non-op transsexual, transgenderist, crossdresser, transvestite, transgendered, two-spirit, intersex, hermaphrodite, fem male, gender blender, butch, manly woman, diesel dyke, sex radical, androgynist, female impersonator, male impersonator, drag king, drag queen, etc.

Gender identity disorder: Formal diagnosis set forth by the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition, Text Rev (DSM IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Gender identity disorder is characterized by a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and a persistent discomfort with one's sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex, causing clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Gender nonconforming: Adjective to describe individuals whose gender identity, role, or expression differs from what is normative for their assigned sex in a given culture and historical period.

Gender role or expression: Characteristics in personality, appearance, and behavior that in a given culture and historical period are designated as masculine or feminine (that is, more typical of the male or female social role) (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). While most individuals present socially in clearly masculine or feminine gender roles, some people present in an alternative gender role such as genderqueer or specifically transgender. All people tend to incorporate both masculine and feminine characteristics in their gender expression in varying ways and to varying degrees (Bockting, 2008). It includes sexual signals, dress, hairstyle and manner of walking. In society, gender roles are usually considered to be masculine for men and feminine for woman.

Gender queer: Identity label that may be used by individuals whose gender identity and/or role does not conform to a binary understanding of gender as limited to the categories of man or woman, male or female (Bockting, 2008).
Internalized Transphobia: Discomfort with one's own transgender feelings or identity as a result of internalizing society's normative gender expectations.

Gender transition: the period during which transsexual persons begin changing their appearance and bodies to match their internal identity.

Genderism: the belief that the binary construct of gender, in which there are only two genders (male and female), is the most normal, natural and preferred gender identity. This binary construct does not include or allow for people to be intersex, transgendered, transsexual or genderqueer.

Hate crimes: offences that are motivated by hatred against victims based on their actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

Heterosexism: the assumption, expressed overtly and/or covertly, that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression that reinforces silence and invisibility for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Heterosexual: term used to describe a person whose primary sexual orientation is to members of the opposite gender. Heterosexual people are often referred to as "straight."

Heterosexual privilege: the unrecognized and assumed privileges that people have if they are heterosexual. Examples of heterosexual privilege include: holding hands or kissing in public without fearing threat, not questioning the normalcy of your sexual orientation, raising children without fears of state intervention or worries that your children will experience discrimination because of your heterosexuality.

Homophobia: irrational fear, hatred, prejudice or negative attitudes toward homosexuality and people who are gay or lesbian. Homophobia can take overt and covert, as well as subtle and extreme, forms. Homophobia includes behaviours such as jokes, name-calling, exclusion, gay bashing, etc.

Homosexual: a term to describe a person whose primary sexual orientation is to members of the same gender. Most people prefer to not use this label, preferring to use other terms, such as gay or lesbian.

Identity: how one thinks of oneself, as opposed to what others observe or think about one.

Internalized homophobia: fear and self-hatred of one's own sexual orientation that occurs for many lesbians and gay men as a result of heterosexism and homophobia. Once lesbians and gay men realize that they belong to a group of people that is often despised and rejected in our society, many internalize and incorporate this stigmatization, and fear or hate themselves.

Intersex: a person who has some mixture of male and female genetic and/or physical sex characteristics. Formerly called "hermaphrodites." Many intersex people consider themselves to be part of the trans community.

Lesbian: a female whose primary sexual orientation is to other women or who identifies as a member of the lesbian community.

LGBTTTIQ: a common acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, two-spirit, intersex and queer individuals/communities. This acronym may or may not be used in a particular community. For example, in some places, the acronym LGBT (for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered/transsexual) may be more common.

Male-to-Female (MtF): Adjective to describe individuals assigned male at birth who are changing or who have changed their body and/or gender role from birth-assigned male to a more feminine body or role.

MSM: refers to any man who has sex with a man, whether he identifies as gay, bisexual or heterosexual. This term highlights the distinction between sexual behaviour and sexual identity (i.e., sexual orientation). A person's sexual behaviour may manifest itself into a sexual identity, but the reverse is not always true; sexual orientation is not always reflective of sexual behaviour. For example, a man may call himself heterosexual, but may engage in sex with men in certain situations (e.g., prison, sex work).

Out or Out of the closet: varying degrees of being open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Passing: describes transgendered or transsexual people's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender. The term refers primarily to acceptance by people the individual does not know, or who do not know that the individual is transgendered or transsexual. Typically, passing involves a mix of physical gender cues (e.g., clothing, hairstyle, voice), behaviour, manner and conduct when interacting with others. Passing can also refer to hiding one's sexual orientation, as in "passing for straight."

Polysexual: an orientation that does not limit affection, romance or sexual attraction to any one gender or sex, and that further recognizes there are more than just two sexes.

Queer: traditionally, a derogatory and offensive term for LGBTTTIQ people. Many LGBTTTIQ people have reclaimed this word and use it proudly to describe their identity. Some transsexual and transgendered people identify as queers; others do not.

Questioning: people who are questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation and who often choose to explore options.

Sex: Sex is assigned at birth as male or female, usually based on the appearance of the external genitalia. When the external genitalia are ambiguous, other components of sex (internal genitalia, chromosomal and hormonal sex) are considered in order to assign sex (Grumbach, Hughes, & Conte, 2003; MacLaughlin & Donahoe, 2004; Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Vilain, 2000). For most people, gender identity and expression are consistent with their sex assigned at birth; for transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming individuals, gender identity or expression differ from their sex assigned at birth.

Sex reassignment surgery (gender affirmation surgery): Surgery to change primary and/or secondary sex characteristics to affirm a person's gender identity. Sex reassignment surgery can be an important part of medically necessary treatment to alleviate gender dysphoria.

Sexual behaviour: what people do sexually. Not necessarily corresponding with sexual orientation and/or sexual identity.

Sexual identity: one's identification to self (and others) of one's sexual orientation. Not necessarily congruent with sexual orientation and/or sexual behaviour.

Sexual minorities: include people who identify as LGBTTTIQ.

Sexual orientation: a term for the emotional, physical, romantic, sexual and spiritual attraction, desire or affection for another person. Examples include heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality.

Significant other: a life partner, domestic partner, lover, boyfriend or girlfriend. It is often equivalent to the term "spouse" for LGBTTTIQ people.

Straight: a term often used to describe people who are heterosexual.

Trans and **transpeople** are non-clinical terms that usually include transsexual, transgendered and other gender-variant people.

Transgender: Adjective to describe a diverse group of individuals who cross or transcend culturally-defined categories of gender. The gender identity of

transgender people differs to varying degrees from the sex they were assigned at birth (Bockting, 1999). A person whose gender identity is different from his or her biological sex, regardless of the status of surgical and hormonal gender reassignment processes. Often used as an umbrella term to include transsexuals, transgenderists, transvestites (crossdressers), and two-spirit, intersex and transgendered people.

Transition: Period of time when individuals change from the gender role associated with their sex assigned at birth to a different gender role. For many people, this involves learning how to live socially in another gender role; for others this means finding a gender role and expression that is most comfortable for them. Transition may or may not include feminization or masculinization of the body through hormones or other medical procedures. The nature and duration of transition is variable and individualized.

Transgenderist: someone who is in-between being a transsexual and a transgendered person on the gender continuum, and who often takes sex hormones, but does not want genital surgery. Transgenderists can be born male (formerly known as “she-males”) or born females (one called he/shes”). The former sometimes obtain breast implants and/or electrolysis.

Transphobia: irrational fear or dislike of transsexual and transgendered people.

Transpositive: the opposite of transphobia. A transpositive attitude is one that validates, affirms, accepts, appreciates, celebrates and integrates transsexual and transgendered people as unique and special in their own right.

Transsensual: a term for a person who is primarily attracted to transgendered or transsexual people.

Transsexual: a term for a person who has a n intense long-term experience of being the sex opposite to his or her birth-assigned sex and who typically pursues a medical and legal transformation to become the other sex. There are transmen (female-to-male transsexuals) and transwomen (male-to-female transsexuals). Transsexual people may undergo a number of procedures to bring their body and public identity in line with their self-image, including sex hormone therapy, electrolysis treatments, sex reassignment surgeries and legal changes of name and sex status.

Transvestite: see “Crossdresser.”

Two-spirit: an English term coined to reflect specific cultural words used by First Nation and other indigenous peoples for those in their cultures who are gay or lesbian, are transgendered or transsexual, or have multiple gender identities. The term reflects an effort by First Nation and other indigenous communities to

distinguish their concepts of gender and sexuality from those of Western LGBTTTIQ communities.

WSW: refers to any woman who has sex with a woman, whether she identifies as lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. This term highlights the distinction between sexual behaviour and sexual identity (i.e., sexual orientation). For example, women who identify as lesbian can also have sex with men and not all wsw identify as lesbian or bisexual.