

Defining a Common Language

Ally- Any non-lesbian, non-gay man, or non-bisexual whose attitude and behavior are anti-heterosexist and who is proactive and works toward combating homophobia and heterosexism, both on a personal and institutional level.

Asexual- An individual lacking sexual attraction and/or romantic feelings towards others

Bicurious- A heterosexual- identified person who wishes to “experiment” with their sexuality.

Biphobia - the fear, dislike, and/or hatred of bisexuality or those who love and are attracted to those of both sexes. Biphobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Bisexual erasure - the minimizing or complete denial of bisexuality in general or of a specific person's bisexuality.

Bisexuality- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to both genders.

Cisgender: Cisgender refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth.

“Coming out”- Also, “coming out of the closet” or “being out”, this term refers to the process in which a person acknowledges, accepts, and in many cases appreciates her or his lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. This often involves sharing of this information with others. It is not a single event but instead a life-long process. Each new situation poses the decision of whether or not to come out.

Commitment Ceremony- A ceremony where two partners come together and commit themselves to one another for life, publicly. This ceremony is also considered a form of gay marriage.

Cross-Dressing (CD)*- Occasionally adopting the clothes or appearance commonly associated with another gender. Avoid transvestite, an outdated clinical term.

Drag*- Stylized performance of gender, usually by female-bodied drag kings or male-bodied drag queens.

F2M, FTM, or FtoM- Acronym for “female to male.” A transgender person who has a biological identity of female but a gender identity of male.

Gay- A man who is attracted to other men. The term is also used sometimes as an umbrella term, referring to individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or queer.

Gender*- Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes considered by the general public to be “appropriate” for one’s sex as assigned at birth. Gender roles vary among cultures and along time continuums.

Gender Binary – The concept that everyone must be one of two genders: male or female.

Gender Expression - Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through clothing, haircut, chosen names, actions, etc. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity*- One’s personal sense of his or her correct gender, which may be reflected as gender expression. Not necessarily the same as an individual’s biological identity.

Gender Role- Set of roles and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: masculine and feminine

Genderqueer*-Those rejecting binary roles and language. Synonyms include androgynous.

He/She/Ze: Pronouns that are used to refer to one’s gender as either male, female or gender neutral, respectively.

Heteroflexible- Someone bisexual with a heterosexual dominance

Heterosexism- The assumption 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 which reinforces realities of silence and invisibility.

Heterosexuality- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

Homoflexible- Someone bisexual with a homosexual dominance

Homophobia- The fear, dislike, and/or hatred of same-sex relationships or those who love and are sexually attracted to those of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Homosexuality- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.

In the closet- To be “in the closet” means to hide one’s homosexual identity in order to keep a job, a housing situation, friends, or in some other way to survive. Many lgbt individuals are “out” in some situations and “closeted” in others.

Internalized homophobia- The fear and self-hate of one’s own homosexuality or bisexuality that occurs for many individuals who have learned negative ideas about homosexuality throughout childhood. One form of internalized oppression is the acceptance of the myths and stereotypes applied to the oppressed group. Internalized oppression is commonly seen among most, if not all, minority groups.

Intersex (IS)*- Those born with both female and male characteristics in their internal/external sex organs, hormones, chromosomes, and/or secondary sex characteristics.

Invisibility- The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders gay and lesbian people, youth in particular, invisible and seemingly nonexistent. Gay and lesbian people and youth are usually not seen or portrayed in society, and especially not in schools and classrooms.

Lesbian- A woman who is attracted to other women.

M2F, MTF, or MtoF- Acronym for “male to female.” A transgender person who has a biological identity of male but a gender identity of female.

Queer- Despite the negative historical use of this term, it has been embraced in the last decade, particularly by younger members of the GLBT community. It is an umbrella term that many prefer, both because of convenience (easier than ‘gay, lesbian, etc) and because it does not force the person who uses it to choose a more specific label for their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Pansexuality – sexual attraction, sexual desire, romantic love, or emotional attraction toward persons of all gender identities and biological sexes

Same Gender Loving** – A term sometimes used by members of the African-American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life. (Sometimes abbreviated as ‘SGL’.)

Sex*-Biological characteristics including chromosomes, genes, anatomy, gonads, hormones, etc.

Sexual Identity** – How a person chooses to label their sexual orientation. Labels do not always “match” the sexual orientations.

Sexual orientation- A person’s emotional, physical, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction. Although a subject of debate, sexual orientation is probably one of the many characteristics that people are born with.

Sexual minority- A term used to refer to someone who identifies their sexuality as different from the dominant culture (i.e., heterosexual), for example, homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or transgender (although the latter two typically refer to gender rather than sexuality).

Sex Reassignment*- Establishing one’s affirmed sex via legal and medical steps.

Trans** - An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender diverse person. This use allows a person to state a gender diverse identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender diverse community as a whole.

Transgender (TG)-The experience of having a gender identity that is different from one’s biological sex. A transgender person may identify with the opposite biological gender and want to be a person of that gender. A transgender person may or may not be pre-or post-operative; if they are, they are likely to refer to him/herself as transsexual. This has become an umbrella term for nonconforming gender identity and expression.*

Trans Woman or Trans Man*-Informal descriptors used relative to one’s affirmed gender. Variants include T*, trans person, and trans folk.

Transsexual (TS)*- Typically refers to those taking all available medical and legal steps to transition from their assigned sex to their affirmed sex. Transitioning across the sexual binary can go from female to male (FTM) or male to female (MTF). Some go stealth, hiding their transsexual history.

Transition*- Adopting one’s affirmed, nonbiological gender permanently. Rarely, regretful people re-transition.

Two-Spirited** – Native persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of male and female articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term ‘two-spirit’ is usually considered to specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include ‘one spirit’ and ‘wintke’.

Ve, Vir- Additional gender-neutral pronouns

Best to Avoid

- *She-male, tranny, transie, se change, he-she, shim
- Sexual preference (suggests choice)
- Hermaphrodite (an outdated clinical term)

*=taken from:

Wenzel, Ryan. (2007). "Gay Vs. Trans in America." The Advocate. 999 Dec 18, 2007: 48.

**=taken from:

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