

FINDING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Essential Vocabulary for Working with the LGBT Community

Sexual Orientation Terms

Lesbian: A woman or girl whose primary sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the same sex.

Gay: A man or boy whose primary sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the same sex. While many people use this word to refer to men, others use it as a general term to include both men and women, e.g. “the gay community.”

Bisexual: A person whose sexual and romantic feelings may be for people of “either” sex.

Queer: An inclusive term which refers collectively to lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender folks and others who may not identify with any of these categories but do identify with this term. While once used as a hurtful, oppressive term, many people have reclaimed it as an expression of power and pride.

Homosexual: Refers to any person whose sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the same sex. While once widely used, it is generally not preferred as it did not emerge from within the community and was used to describe a mental illness.

Fag/Dyke/etc: Terms which some people have chosen to reclaim despite their history of being used in hurtful ways, but which may be oppressive if used by people outside the community.

LGBT: An abbreviation some people use to refer to lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning folks collectively.

Homophobia: The systematic oppression of lesbians and gay men based on their sexuality.

Biphobia: The systematic oppression of bisexual people specifically because they are neither gay nor straight.

Heterosexism: The belief that heterosexual relationships and people are ideal and better or more normal than queer relationships and people.

Heterosexual Privilege: Unearned privileges that go to straight people simply because they are straight: e.g., the ability to legally marry a partner and talk publicly about crushes and intimate relationships.

Gender, Intersex, & Trans Terms

Sex: A medical term used to describe the physical characteristics one has such as genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones. Because usually subdivided into 'male' and 'female', this category does not recognize the existence of intersexed bodies.

Gender Identity: One's personal view of one's own gender.

Gender Expression: External and socially perceived. May include one's behaviors, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions. How one communicates their gender.

Gender Role: The collection of a society's assumptions, expectations and traditions for how a person of a particular gender is supposed to act and be acted upon socially.

Intersex: A category that reflects biological variation in sex.

Transsexual: Having a gender identity of man or woman not matching their physical birth sex. Typically people bring their gender expression to match their gender identity, sometimes using medical intervention.

FtM, MtF: Female-to-Male, Male-to-Female

Non-Op, Post-Op, Mid-Op, Pre-Op: Referring to transsexual people, these terms indicate people who: decided against surgeries, completed all intended surgeries, completed some intended surgeries, and have not yet had any intended surgeries.

Cross-Dresser: Someone who wears clothes that social custom dictates belong to a different gender role. Gender identity and assignment based on physical sex still match.

Drag King/Queen: Cross-dressing for performances and not as often interested in having gender attributed on basis of clothing.

Transgender: An umbrella term that encompasses anyone whose identity falls outside of the binary, stereotypical gender dichotomy, such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, or drag kings/queens. Also known as gender variant, gender queer, or gender non-conforming.

Transphobia: The systematic oppression of transgender people because they do not fit societal expectations of how men and women are supposed to act and look.