

# LGBTQ+ GLOSSARY

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[<http://ise.risd.edu/ise/lgbtq/lgbtq-education/glgbtq-glossary/>]

Each of these terms and definitions have been compiled to equip the RISD community with the language that they should both use and be sensitive of when interacting with members of the LGBTQ community. Each of these definitions have been carefully researched and closely analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives for cultural sensitivity, common usage, and general appropriateness. In putting these together, we have done our best to represent the most popular uses of the terms listed; however, there may be some variation in definitions depending on the location. Please note that each person who uses any or all of these terms does so in a unique way (especially those terms in reference to identity labels). If you do not understand the context in which a person is using one of these terms, it is always appropriate to ask. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation. It is clear that some terms may be considered “street talk” and carry with them further cultural meanings and understandings. Part of being a successful ally is simply being aware of terminology and sensitive to their proper and acceptable usage. Finally, some terms that represent certain activities may not be in compliance to some religious teachings; however, we believe that it is important to promote the free exchange of the realities that exist to better serve, help, and support our students and allies.

**Agendered:** Person is internally ungendered.

**Ally:** A person who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay bisexual, trans, and intersex people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

**Androgyne:** A person appearing and identifying as neither man nor women; presents a gender either mixed or neutral

**Asexual:** A person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation.

**Berdache:** A generic term used to refer to a third gender person (woman-living-man). The term ‘berdache’ is generally rejected as inappropriate and offensive by Native Peoples because it is a term that was assigned by European settlers to differently gendered Native Peoples. Appropriate terms vary by tribe and include: ‘one-spirit,’ ‘two-spirit,’ and

**Bicurious:** A curiosity about having sexual relations with the same gender/sex person.

**Bigendered:** A person whos gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

**Bisexual:** A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same and opposite sexes.

**Butch:** 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 it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

**Coming Out:** Refers to the process by which one accepts one’s own sexuality (to come out to one’s self); refers to the process by which one shares one’s sexuality with others (to come out to others); a continuous, circular, and life-long process.

**Coming Out Week:** A week of pro-gay activities, often hosted on college campuses by LGBT student groups, to celebrate the LGBT community and increase its visibility. (NCOD refers to National Coming out Day).

**Cross-dresser:** A heterosexual individual who enjoys dressing up as someone of the opposite sex; often for casual enjoyment, not as a lifestyle choice.

**Discrimination:** Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to the other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

**Down Low:** See 'In the Closet.' Also referred to as 'D/L.'

**Drag:** The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically.

**Drag King:** The common term used for lesbians who dress up as men and perform on stage.

**Drag Queen:** The common term used for gay men who dress up as women and perform on stage; used interchangeably with "female impersonator;" sometimes considered offensive to female impersonators.

**Dyke:** A derogatory term used to describe a masculine lesbian.

**Fag(got):** A derogatory term used to describe a gay man; derived from the word "faggot" meaning a stick or sticks; evolved from the burning of homosexuals during the Middle Ages.

**Fag Hag:** A term primarily used to describe women who prefer the social company of gay men. While this term is claimed to an affirmative manner by some, it is largely regarded as derogatory.

**Femme:** Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.

**Female Impersonator:** A gay man who dresses up as a woman and performs on stage as his profession of choice.

**FTM/F2M:** Abbreviation for female-to-male transgender to transsexual person.

**Gay: 1.** A term primarily used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in "homosexual behavior" identify as gay, and such this label should be used with caution. **2.** Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as in an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

**Gender Binary:** The idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (See also "Identity Sphere.")

**Gender Clues:** What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hair-style, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

**Gender Identity:** A person's sense of being male or female.

**Gender Normative:** A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society. (Also referred to as 'Genderstraight').

**Gender Variant:** A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender queer, cross-dresser, etc.).

**Genderqueer:** A gender variant person who gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

**Genderstraight:** See 'Gender Normative.'

**Hegemony, Hegemonic:** A term developed by Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci to refer to the process by which those in power secure the consent of their "subordinates" by making their position/power seem natural and normal through the use of pleasure, fascination, humor, etc. In other words, this is not a type of power that works through overt force; instead, hegemony seduces us into believing that things are the way they are because; "they're supposed to be." For example, the idea that men and women should only be attracted to members of the opposite gender is a hegemonic belief system

**Hermaphrodite:** An out-of-date and offensive term for an intersexed person. (See 'Intersexed Person')

**Heteronormativity:** 1. Anything that goes against what is seen as mainstream and/or heterosexist 2. The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality. (cont.)

(cont.) This is a concept used to describe how many social institutions and social policies reinforce the belief that human beings fall into two distinct and complementary categories, male and female, and the subsequent belief that those genders ought to fulfill complementary roles – that is, among others, that sexual relationship ought to exist only between males and females. To describe a social intuition as heteronormative means that it has visible or hidden norms, some of which are viewed as normal only for males and others which are seen as normal only for females. Its purpose, as with many critical terms, is to help identify voices that have “fallen through the cracks” and who do not feel that they have an adequate means of expressing themselves within the current social worldview.

**Heterosexism:** Sexual orientation prejudice combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice; usually used to the advantage of the group in power; any attitude, action, or practice backed by institutional power that subordinates people because of sexual orientation.

**Heterosexual:** A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex.

**Heterosexual Privilege:** Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

**HIV-phobia:** The irrational fear or hatred of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

**Homophobia:** The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

**Homosexual:** A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

**Identity Sphere:** The idea that gender identities and expressions do not fit on a linear scale, but rather on a sphere that allows room for all expression without weighting any one expression as better than another.

**In the Closet:** Refers to a homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to “correct,” whenever possible intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical history from the patient. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”; for example, a person can be out of their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family. Also known as “Downlow” or “D/L.”

**Intergender:** A person whose gender identity is between genders or a combination of genders.

**Institutional Oppression:** Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

**Internalized Oppression:** The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

**Intersexed Person:** Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

**Lesbian:** The common and accepted term for homosexual females. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups including African-Americans, embrace the term ‘lesbian’ as an identity label.

**Lesbian Baiting:** The heterosexist notion that any woman who prefers the company of woman, or who does not have a male partner, is a lesbian.

**LGBTQI:** A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexed community.

**Lipstick Lesbian:** Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way, depending on who is using it. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is seen as automatically passing for heterosexual.

**Metrosexual:** First used in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, who coined the term to refer to an urban, heterosexual male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. This term can be perceived as derogatory because it reinforces stereotypes that all gay men are fashion-conscious and materialistic.

**MTF/M2F:** Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual.

**Oppression:** The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Outing:** Telling someone a person is homosexual without that person's permission.

**Pangendered:** A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions.

**Pansexual:** A person who is sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions.

**Passing:** Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or race/ethnic identity or to be seen as heterosexual.

**Polyamory:** Refers to having honest, usually non-possessive, relationships with multiple partners and can include: open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves multiple romantic relationships with sexual contact restricted to those), and sub-relationships (which denote distinguishing between a "primary" relationship or relationships and various "secondary" relationships).

**Prejudice:** A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members.

**Queer:** 1. An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively-heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons, the radical sex community, and many other sexually transgressive (underworld) explores. 2. This term is sometimes used as a sexual orientation label instead of 'bisexual' as a way of acknowledging that there are more than two genders to be attracted to, or as a way of stating a non-heterosexual ordination without having to state who they are attracted to. 3. A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group, who use it as a term of defiant pride. 'Queer' is an example of a word undergoing this process. For decades 'queer' was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1980's the term began to be used by gay and lesbian activists as a term of self-identification. Eventually, it came to be used as an umbrella term that included gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Nevertheless, a sizable percentage of people to who this term might apply still hold 'queer' to be a hateful insult, and its use by heterosexuals is often considered offensive. Similarly, other reclaimed words are usually offensive to the in-group when used by outsiders, so extreme caution must be taken concerning their use when one is not a member of the group.

**Rainbow Flag, Rainbow Pride:** A symbol of the LGBT community that denotes the unity and diversity that is present within it. The colors, red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple are striped across its cloth.

**Sex:** A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because usually subdivided into 'male' and 'female', this category does not recognize the existence of intersexed bodies.

**Sex Identity:** How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.

**Sexual Orientation:** The desire for intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

**Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS):** A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's "sex". In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance.

**Sexuality:** A person's exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

**Stealth:** This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. (Also referred to as 'going stealth' or 'living in stealth mode').

**Stereotype:** A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Though often negative, can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact; however, simply because they involved broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

**Straight:** Another term for heterosexual.

**Straight-Acting:** A term usually applied to gay men who readily pass as heterosexual. The term implies that there is a certain way that gay men should act that is significantly different from heterosexual men. Straight-acting gay men are often looked down upon in the GLBTQ community for seemingly accessing heterosexual privilege.

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

**Transactivism:** The political and social movement to create equality for gender variant persons.

**Transgender:** A person living as the gender opposite to his or her anatomical sex.

**Transgendered (Trans)Community:** A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

**Transhate:** the irrational hatred of those who are gender variant, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

**Transition:** Term primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their proffered gender expression.

**Transman:** An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females. Also referred to as 'transguy(s)'.<sup>7</sup>

**Transphobia:** The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**Transsexual:** A person who identifies him or herself as the gender opposite to his or her assignment at birth; has undergone surgery to change his or her gender.

**Transvestite:** Someone who dresses in clothing generally identified with the opposite gender/sex. While the terms 'homosexual' and 'transvestite' have been used synonymously, they in fact signify two different groups. The majority of transvestites are heterosexual males who derive pleasure from dressing in "women's clothing." (The preferred term is 'cross-dresser,' but the term 'transvestite' is still used in a positive sense in England.)

**Transwoman:** An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males.

**Two-Spirited:** Native persons who have attributes of both gender, 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 specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include 'one-spirit' and 'wintke'.

**Ze/Hir:** Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and proffered by some gender variant persons. Pronounced /zee/ and /here,/ they replace "he"/"she" and "his"/"hers" respectively.

\*This terminology was compiled by Christopher Lauth at Canisius College. Some select explanations within the definitions were created by Eli R. Green and Eric N. Peterson at the LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside © 2003-2004. Used, altered, and reprinted with permission.