

## LGBTQ+ Glossary

Please note: *While Tanenbaum prefers to use fully inclusive terms whenever possible, this resource reflects acronyms and definitions that are widely, however not universally, accepted. The way an individual self-identifies takes priority over the definitions presented in this resource. Please consult this resource for general information about referencing the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.*

### **Asexual**

Sometimes abbreviated as ace, the term refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction. Each asexual person experiences relationships, attraction, and arousal differently. Asexuality is distinct from chosen behavior such as celibacy or sexual abstinence; asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily define sexual behaviors. Asexual people exist on a spectrum of sexual attraction and can use terms such as gray asexual or gray ace to describe themselves.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bisexual**

Commonly referred to as bi or bi+. According to bi+ educator and advocate Robyn Ochs, the term refers to a person who acknowledges in themselves the potential to be attracted—romantically, emotionally and/or sexually—to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree. The "bi" in bisexual can refer to attraction to genders similar to and different from one's own. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal sexual or romantic experience—or equal levels of attraction—with people across genders, nor any experience at all; attraction and self-identification determine orientation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Gay**

A term used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience. Attraction and self-identification determine sexual orientation, not the gender or sexual orientation of one's partner. The term should not be used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ people, e.g., "the gay community," because it excludes other sexual orientations and genders. Avoid using gay in a disparaging manner, e.g., "that's so gay," as a synonym for stupid or bad.<sup>3</sup>

## **Intersex**

Intersex is the current term used to refer to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female. This can be through variations in hormones, chromosomes, internal or external genitalia, or any combination of any or all primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. While many intersex people are noticed as intersex at birth, many are not. As intersex is about biological sex, it is distinct from gender identity and sexual orientation. An intersex person can be of any gender identity and can also be of any sexual orientation and any romantic orientation. The Intersex Society of North America opposes the practice of genital mutilation on infants and children who are intersex, as does PFLAG National. Formerly, the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudohermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.<sup>4</sup>

## **Lesbian**

Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience: Attraction and self-identification determines orientation, not the gender or sexual orientation of one's partner.<sup>5</sup>

## **LGBTQ+**

An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, sometimes stated as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or, historically, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The addition of the Q for queer is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term queer focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition. The Q can also stand for questioning, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The "+" represents those who are part of the community but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity.<sup>6</sup>

## **Queer**

A term used by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use—and valued by some for its defiance—the term is also considered by some to be inclusive of the entire community and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are LGBTQ+, some people within the community dislike the term. Due to its varying meanings, use this word only when self-identifying or quoting an individual who self-identifies as queer (e.g., "My cousin identifies as queer" or "My cousin is a queer person").<sup>7</sup>

## **Transgender**

Often shortened to trans, from the Latin prefix for “on a different side as.” A term describing a person’s gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression—such groups include, but are not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous. See above for common acronyms and terms including female to male (or FTM), male to female (or MTF), assigned male at birth (or AMAB), assigned female at birth (or AFAB), nonbinary, and gender-expansive. “Trans” is often considered more inclusive than transgender because it includes transgender, transsexual, transmasculine, transfeminine, and those who simply use the word trans.<sup>8</sup>

## **Two-Spirit**

According to the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board [NPAIHB], a term used within some American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities to refer to a person who identifies as having both a male and a female essence or spirit. The term—created in 1990 by a group of AI/AN activists at an annual Native LGBTQ conference—encompasses sexual, cultural, gender, and spiritual identities, and provides unifying, positive, and encouraging language that emphasizes reconnecting to tribal traditions. Non-indigenous people should not use this term.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9</sup> PFLAG National. (2023b, December 21). *PFLAG National Glossary* - PFLAG. PFLAG. <https://pflag.org/glossary/>