

LGBTQQA* BASICS

Wow – that’s a mouthful! Now, what do all those letters stand for?

Gay – Typically used to describe anyone attracted to members of the same gender. Some may use it only when referring to males attracted to other males.

Lesbian – A female who is sexually and romantically attracted to other females.

Bisexual – A person (male or female) who is attracted to both males and females.

Transgender – An umbrella term to describe a person whose gender assigned at birth does not match their personal gender identity. People who identify as transgender may or may not live the lifestyle of the gender they identify with and they may or may not have had surgery to physically change their external gender characteristics.



Questioning – some people believe the “Q” stand for “questioning.” This refers to a person who may be exploring their sexual orientation and questioning whether they may be gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Queer – a slang term for a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person.

* No single acronym will capture the diversity of identities related to sexual orientation, gender identity and their intersections. A sample of related terms includes queer, genderqueer, pansexual, two-spirit, same gender loving, fluid, intersex, asexual etc.

Genderqueer – (Non-binary) for gender identities other than man and woman

Intersex - Presence of intermediate or atypical combination of physical features that usually distinguish female and male

Asexual – A lack of sexual attraction for other people

Sexual Fluidity – The idea that there are more identities than just straight, lesbian/gay, and bisexual. The Kinsey scale on sexual orientations can describe this concept more.

Pansexual – Sexual and/or emotional attraction towards people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Just how many people are LGBTQ*?

We don’t really know since no one has ever specifically asked and the fear of discrimination will always keep some people from revealing their sexual orientation. Different kinds of research have been done with different numbers being reported:

- The most common figure identified is that 10% of the population is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etcetera.
- A 2006 study estimated the total U.S. gay, lesbian, and bisexual population at 8.8 million.

So are there words or terms that I should avoid?

Sexual preference – Most LGBT* people bristle at the assumption that their sexual orientation is a “preference.” It isn’t a choice, anymore than being straight is a choice. The more accepted term is “sexual orientation,” which indicates it is a “way of being” rather than a “choice.”

Queer – A term sometimes embraced by people who are LGBT*; especially younger people. Other people (even LGBT* people) may find this offensive.

Gay – Although this term may be used appropriately to describe same gender relationships or culture, it is often used in a derogatory way, especially by young people. An example of using “gay” derogatively is saying “That’s so gay” to describe a negative item or behavior.

Husband/Wife; girlfriend/boyfriend; mom/dad - Automatically using these terms is a form of heterosexism. Assuming that all partnerships consist of one female and one male or that all people have one male and one female parent diminishes the existence and worth of same-gender couples. It is more encompassing and descriptive to instead use words such as “partner” or “parent.”

Fag – A negative slur used to describe a gay or effeminate man. Like many other negative terms, however, this word may be used and embraced by some people who are gay.

Dyke – A negative term used to describe a lesbian or masculine woman. Like many other negative terms, however, this term may be used and embraced by some lesbians who use the term positively to describe strength or assertiveness.

Tranny – This term is often used to talk negatively about people that are identified or perceived to be transgender.

Transvestite - This is an outdated term used to talk about individuals who identify as transgender. “Transgender” is now the more appropriate term.

