

# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally General Definitions

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**Ally** - A person who supports and respects sexual and gender diversity, acts accordingly to interrupt and challenge homophobic and heterosexist remarks/behaviors, and is willing to explore these forms of bias within her/himself.

**Bisexual** - A man or woman with a sexual and affectional or emotional orientation toward people of both sexes. Bisexual men and women have sexual and romantic attractions to both men and women. Depending upon the person, his or her attraction may be stronger to women or to men, or they may be approximately equal. A bisexual person may have had sex with people of both sexes, or only of one sex, or he or she may never have had sex at all. It is important to note that some people who have sex with both men and women do not consider themselves bisexual. Bisexuals are also referred to as "bi."

**Closeted** - Not being open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Usually used for LGBT people who have not "come out" to others.

**Coming Out** - Refers to the experiences of some, but not all, LGBT people as they explore their sexual identity and tell others about their sexual orientation. There is no correct process or single way to come out, and some LGBT individuals choose not to come out. The process is unique for each individual, and it is the choice of the individual.

**FTM or MTF** - Female to Male or Male to Female - Terms used to describe a person's transition from one sex to another.

**Gay** - 1. Term sometimes used to refer to a homosexual person of either sex. For example, some lesbians identify as "gay." However, "gay" most commonly refers to men who primarily have emotional and sexual attraction to men. Self-identified gay men do not necessarily have sex only with men, but may occasionally engage in sex with women.

2. A man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men. He may have sex with men currently or may have had sex with men in the past. A smaller number of gay men may never have had sex with another man for many reasons such as age, societal pressures, lack of opportunity, fear of discrimination, but nonetheless realize that their sexual attraction is mainly to other men. Some gay men have sex with women and some don't. It is important to note that some men who have sex with other men, sometimes exclusively, may not call themselves gay.

# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally

## General Definitions (con't)

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**Gay** (con't) - 3. An inclusive term encompassing gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, and sometimes even transgender people. However, this has become less common, and "gay" is usually used to refer only to gay men. The term is still often used in the broader sense for LGBT events, as in "The Gay Pride Parade."

**Gender Identity** - A person's sense of self as being either male or female. Gender identity does not always match biological sex. For example: a person may be born biologically male yet have a female gender identity. At birth, we are assigned one of two sexes, usually based on our visible genitals. For many people, this sex assignment fits and feels comfortable and they never think about it further. Others do not feel as comfortable with their assigned sex, either because they find the two-sex binary system too limiting or because they feel greater identification with the sex opposite that to which they were assigned at birth. People deal with this discomfort in many ways, sometimes only in personal ways, and sometimes in ways visible to others.

**Gender Role** - How "masculine" or "feminine" an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how men and women should behave. Although the argument is made that dominant normative behavior is a dynamic, often evolving, process.

**Gender-variant** - Displaying gender traits that are normatively more typical of the opposite biological sex. "Feminine" behavior or appearance in men is gender-variant as is "masculine" behavior or appearance in women. Gender-variant behavior is culturally specific.

**LGBT** - Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

**Hate Crime** - Hate crime legislation defines a hate crime as an act committed on the basis of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person. Hate crimes, or bias-motivated crimes, are defined as offenses motivated by hatred against a victim based on his or her race, religion, sexual orientation, handicap, ethnicity, or national origin.

**Heterosexism** - Belief that heterosexuality is the only "natural" sexuality and that it is inherently healthier or superior to other types of sexuality. An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior. Condone discriminatory practices and violence against LGBT individuals and creates unique developmental challenges otherwise not present, such as overcoming internalized homophobia and coming out.

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**Heterosexual** - Individual with a primary sexual or emotional attraction toward persons of the opposite sex. A man or woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the other sex. She or he may or may not have had sex with another person, but still realize that his/her sexual attraction is mainly to people of the other sex. Some people who consider themselves heterosexual have or have had sexual contact with people of the same sex. Heterosexuals are sometimes referred to as "straight."

**Homophobia** - Irrational fear or hatred of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people. The responses of fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people. Often is manifested in the form of discrimination and prejudice.

**Homosexual** - Individual with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction toward persons of the same sex. Male homosexuals are often referred to as "gay," whereas female homosexuals are referred to as "lesbians."

**HRC** - Human Rights Campaign - A political action group in Washington D.C. that works for equal rights for LGB people.

**Intersex** - An intersexual person is born between (inter) sexes, having partially or fully developed pairs of female and male sex organs.

**Lesbian** - A woman with a primary sexual and affectional orientation or emotional attraction towards other women. Sometimes a lesbian engages in sexual behaviors with men, even though she may self-identify as lesbian. She may have sex with women currently or may have had sex with women in the past. Some lesbians may never have had sex with another woman for a host of reasons (age, societal pressures, lack of opportunity, fear of discrimination), but nonetheless realize that their sexual attraction is mainly to other women. It is important to note that some women who have sex with other women, sometimes exclusively, may not call themselves lesbians.

**National Coming Out Day** - On October 11, 1987, LGBT people from across the U.S. marched through Washington, D.C. to call attention to the need for gay rights. It was the first gay march on Washington and thought to be one of the largest marches ever. Since then, every October 11th has been a day of celebrating visibility and pride amongst LGBT people and their allies.

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**NGLTF** - National Gay and Lesbian Task Force - A national progressive organization working for the civil rights of LGB people, with the vision and commitment to building a powerful political movement.

**Oppression** – Very simply, the systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to power, the result of which benefits the group in power. Maintained by social beliefs and practices. Extremely complex issue.

**Out or Out of the Closet** - Refers to varying degrees of being open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Outing** – Involuntary disclosure by someone else of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Often it is politically motivated or intended to harm.

**Pansexual** – Also called omnisexual. Attracted to all sexes, genders, and forms of sexuality equally. Exhibiting many forms of sexual expression.

**PFLAG** - Parents and Families/friends of Lesbians and Gays - One of the most active parent/family organizations in the country that serves to support their LGBT sons and daughters, fight oppression, and stand up for LGBT rights.

**Queer** – 1. A gender and/or sexual non-conformist label for those who resist heteronormative social structures.  
2. A reclaimed word and concept that has been used as a pejorative by some. For some, it is a political identity.

**Rainbow Flag** - The LGBT Rainbow Freedom Flag was designed in the late 1970's to designate the great diversity of the LGBT community. It has been recognized by the International Flag makers Association as the official flag of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights movement.

**Sexual Identity** – How people understand themselves as sexual beings. A few labels are "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "bi," "queer," "questioning," "undecided," "heterosexual," "straight," and "asexual." Sexual identity evolves through a multistage developmental process, which varies in intensity and duration depending on the individual. Sexual identity also refers to a person's erotic and affectional response to another with respect to gender: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or transgender. A consistent, enduring self-recognition of the meanings that sexual orientation and sexual behavior have had for an individual.

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**Sexual Identity Development or Foundation** - The process of coming to recognize one's attraction to members of one or both sexes and to define or label oneself on the basis of that attraction. A process that evolves over time rather than a decision one makes at a particular point in time. The way in which one views oneself as a sexual being and chooses to present oneself may change significantly over the lifespan, particularly for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Individuals born in this society are presumed to be heterosexual, learning the norms and expectations related to heterosexuality. Thus, developing an alternative identity requires two processes: letting go of an ingrained heterosexual identity and learning what it means to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Given the heterosexist and homophobic society in which we live, neither process is easy. Because the relative anonymity of the college environment presents an opportunity to redefine oneself away from family monitoring, the two tasks of exiting heterosexuality and developing a new identity become real possibilities for the first time in many college students' lives.

**Sexual Orientation** - Sexual orientation refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction. Those whose sexual orientation is to people of the opposite sex are called "heterosexual." Those whose sexual orientation is to people of the same sex are called "homosexual" (or lesbian or gay), and those whose sexual orientation is to people of both sexes are called "bisexual." The term "sexual preference" is misleading because it implies that this attraction is a choice rather than an intrinsic personal characteristic. Sexual orientation is not necessarily the same as sexual behavior.

**Significant Other** – Other labels include: life partner, domestic partner, lover, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Because same sex couples are not allowed to marry legally in most of the United States, "significant other" is often equivalent to the term "spouse" for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

**SRS** -SRS stands for Sex Reassignment Surgery, a series of surgeries that facilitate the physical transition from one biological sex to another.

**Straight** - A term often used to identify persons who are thought to be heterosexual.

**Stereotype** – A preconceived or over-simplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard to individual differences.

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally General Definitions (con't)

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**Transgender** - 1. A broad term for all individuals whose biological sex and gender identity are incongruent. For example, a person who is biologically female-bodied may experience their gender identity as male.

2. An umbrella term for people who are gender non-conformist such as transsexuals, cross-dressers, people who are intersex, etc. Transgender is not the same as sexual orientation, and transgender people may identify along the continuum of sexual orientations. Being transgender stems from understanding and accepting the authenticity of one's gender identity.

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

**Transition** - A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transsexuals align their gender anatomy with their gender identity.

**Transsexual** - Individual whose gender identity is that of the opposite sex. There are female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals. Transition may or may not include sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Individuals may or may not choose SRS because of various reasons such as financial support or limitations, health considerations, cultural barriers, personal choice, etc.

**\*Many definitions provided by Appalachian State University**