

## LGBT GLOSSARY

*If your SPLC on Campus club focuses on LGBT rights issues, it is important to understand specific terms to communicate effectively and respectfully. This glossary defines many of the terms you will encounter as your club works to advance the rights of the LGBT community.*

**Asexual:** In its broadest sense, asexual refers to the lack of sexual attraction to others or the lack of interest in sex. Those who identify as asexual may still be romantically attracted to others.

**Assigned sex:** The sex one is considered to be at birth based on a cursory examination of external genitalia.

**Bigendered:** An individual who feels that they have both strong “male” and “female” aspects to their personalities.

**Biphobia:** The fear, hatred, or intolerance of bisexual men and women.

**Bisexual:** A person whose emotional, romantic and sexual attraction is for both men and women. Because bisexual assumes a binary between male and female, many individuals now use the term pansexual, which includes all genders.

**Cisgender:** A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. “Cis-” is a Latin prefix meaning “on the same side as,” and is therefore an antonym of “trans-.” The term “cisgender” is a way of accounting for privilege and an attempt to counteract the tendency to only name that which is different.

**Coming out:** The process by which lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals recognize, acknowledge, accept and typically appreciate their sexual identities.

**Drag or in drag:** Wearing clothes considered appropriate for someone of another gender.

**Gay:** A person whose emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions are primarily for individuals of the same sex, typically in reference to males, sometimes used as a general term for gay men and lesbians.

**Gender dysphoria:** A term of the psychiatric establishment which refers to a radical incongruence between an individual’s birth sex and their gender identity. Many in the trans community find this term offensive or insulting as it often pathologizes transgendered individuals.

**Gender expression:** The external manifestation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics.

**Gender identity:** One’s internal, personal sense of gender. A common misunderstanding is that gender identity is tied to biology. However, a person’s gender identity is much more complex. It is connected to a multitude of social and cultural factors. Many people believe in a more fluid gender identity than simply “male” and “female.”

**Genderqueer:** Genderqueers possess identities that fall outside of the widely socially accepted sexual binary.

**Gender role:** The clothing, characteristics, traits and behaviors of an individual which are culturally associated with masculinity and femininity.

**Gender transition:** The period of time a person begins to live in a gender role that is in accordance with their internal gender identity. This could include, for instance, the period of time when a person assigned “female” at birth but has a male gender identity begins to live “in role” by dressing as a man, taking testosterone therapy, or undergoing surgery.

**Gender variant:** A term that refers to individuals who diverge from socially accepted gender roles in a given culture.

**Heterosexism:** The societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuals and subordinate and denigrate lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The critical element that differentiates heterosexism (or any other “ism”) from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systemic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.

**Heterosexual ally:** Heterosexual people who confront heterosexism in themselves and others out of self-interest and a concern for the well-being of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

**Heterosexual privilege:** The benefits and advantages that heterosexuals receive in a heterosexist culture. Also, the benefits that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming a heterosexual identity and denying a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity.

**Homophobia:** The fear of homosexuals and homosexuality. Despite this literal definition, this term is generally applied to anyone who dislikes LGBTIQ people and/or uses any derogatory sexuality-based or gender-based terms. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbians and gay men, to verbal abuse and violence.

**Intersex:** Intersex people are born with physical sex markers (genitals, hormones, gonads or chromosomes) that are neither clearly male nor female. They are sometimes defined as having “ambiguous” genitalia. Intersex people were previously described as “hermaphrodites.”

**Lesbian:** A woman or girl whose emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions are primarily for other women or girls.

**LGBT:** An acronym that stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.” Other versions may add “Q” for Queer or Questioning, “I” for Intersex, and “A” for Allied.

**Sex-reassignment surgery (SRS):** The term given to an operation and procedure which physically transforms the genitals using plastic surgery. It is often called a “sex-change operation” in popular culture. SRS refers to the alteration, and is only one small part of transition. Not all transgender people choose or can afford to have sex-reassignment surgery.

**Sexuality:** Sexuality is a broad term that refers to a cluster of behaviors, practices and identities in the society. It is an imprecise word often used with other social categories, such as race, gender and sexuality.

**Sexual orientation:** This term describes an individual’s physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Trans and gender-variant people may identify with any sexual orientation.

**Trans:** An umbrella term that refers to cross-dressers, transsexuals and others who permanently or periodically don’t identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans is preferable to “transgender” to some in the community because it does not minimize the experiences of transsexuals.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

**Transition:** Transition includes some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments necessary to alter one’s birth sex: telling family, friends, and/or co-workers about the transition; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly surgical alteration.

**Transphobia:** The irrational fear and hatred of all those individuals who transgress, violate or blur the dominant gender categories in a given society. Transphobic attitudes lead to discrimination, violence and oppression against the trans, drag and intersex communities.

*Definitions developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center.*