

# LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams

Becoming familiar with terms used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+) can help you provide patients with the highest quality care. In this glossary, you will find terms relevant to the health care and identities of LGBTQIA+ people.

A few things to keep in mind: 1) Definitions vary across communities; not all of your patients will agree with all of these definitions, so defer to the terms your patients use to describe themselves; 2) There are many terms not included on this list; we tried to keep the list as concise and relevant to health care providers as possible; 3) Terms and definitions change frequently; we will try to update this list to keep up with changing language. If you have a suggestion, please email us at [lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org). Thank you!

**Agender** (adjective) – Describes a person who identifies as having no gender, or who does not experience gender as a primary identity component.

**Ally** (noun) – A person who actively supports the rights of a marginalized community even though that person is not a member of that community; for example, a heterosexual person who campaigns for the rights of gay people.

**Aromantic** (adjective) – Describes a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others, and/or lacks interest in forming romantic relationships. Aromantic people may still have intimate relationships.

**Asexual** (adjective) – Describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexual people may still engage in sexual activity.

**Assigned female at birth/Assigned male at birth** (noun) – Refers to the sex that is assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant's anatomical and other biological characteristics. Commonly abbreviated as AFAB (assigned female at

birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth).

**Bigender** (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity combines two genders.

**Binding** (verb) – The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts. This is achieved through use of constrictive materials such as cloth strips, bandages, or specially designed undergarments, called binders.

**Biphobia** (noun) – Discrimination towards, fear, marginalization, and hatred of bisexual people, or those who are perceived as bisexual. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be biphobic.

**Bisexual** (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and physically attracted to women/females and men/males. Some people define bisexuality as attraction to all genders. See **pansexual**.

**Bottom** (noun) – A slang term for genitals and buttocks. Also used to refer to the receptive partner in anal sex.

**Bottom surgery** (noun) – Slang term for **gender-affirming genital surgery**.

**Cisgender** (adjective) – A person whose gender identity is consistent in a traditional sense with their sex assigned at birth; for example, a person assigned female sex at birth whose gender identity is woman/female. The term *cisgender* comes from the Latin prefix *cis*, meaning “on the same side of.”

**Coming out** (verb) – The process of identifying and accepting one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (coming out to oneself), and the process of sharing one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (coming out to friends, family, etc.).

**Gender-affirming hormone therapy** (noun) – Feminizing and masculinizing

hormone treatment to align secondary sex characteristics with gender identity.

**Differences of Sex Development (DSD)** (noun) – See [intersex](#).

**Drag** (noun) – The theatrical performance of a gender or multiple genders that are not your own. Performers are called Drag Kings and Drag Queens. Most drag performers are cisgender. The terms Drag King and Drag Queen can also be used as an insult.

**Gay** (adjective) – A sexual orientation describing people who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to people of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. Commonly used to describe men who are primarily attracted to men, but can also describe women attracted to women.

**Gender** (noun) – The characteristics and roles of women and men according to social norms. While sex is described as female, male, and intersex, gender can be described as feminine, masculine, androgynous, and much more.

**Gender affirmation** (noun) – The process of making social, legal, and/or medical changes to recognize, accept, and express one's gender identity. Social changes can include changing one's pronouns, name, clothing, and hairstyle. Legal changes can include changing one's name, sex designation, and gender markers on legal documents. Medical changes can include receiving gender-affirming hormones and/or surgeries. Although this process is sometimes referred to as *transition*, the term *gender affirmation* is recommended.

**Gender-affirming surgery (GAS)** (noun) – Surgeries to modify a person's body to be more aligned with that person's gender identity. Types of GAS include chest and genital surgeries, facial feminization, body sculpting, and hair removal.

**Gender-affirming chest surgery** (noun) – Surgeries to remove and/or construct a person's chest to be more aligned with that person's gender identity. Also referred to as *top surgery*. Types of chest surgeries include:

- Feminizing breast surgery: breast augmentation, chest construction, or breast mammoplasty
- Masculinizing chest surgery: mastectomy (removal of breast tissue) and chest contouring

**Gender-affirming genital surgeries** (noun) – Surgeries that help align a person's genitals and/or internal reproductive organs with that person's gender identity, including:

- Clitoroplasty (creation of a clitoris)
- Hysterectomy (removal of the uterus; may also include removal of the cervix, ovaries, and fallopian tubes)
- Labiaplasty (creation of inner and outer labia)
- Metoidioplasty (creation of a masculine phallus using testosterone-enlarged clitoral tissue)
- Oophorectomy (removal of ovaries)
- Orchiectomy (removal of testicles)
- Penectomy (removal of the penis)
- Phalloplasty (creation of a masculine phallus)
- Scrotoplasty (creation of a scrotum and often paired with testicular implants)
- Urethral lengthening (to allow voiding while standing)
- Vaginectomy (removal of the vagina)
- Vaginoplasty (creation of a neo-vagina)
- Vulvoplasty (creation of a vulva)

**Gender binary structure** (noun) – The idea that there are only two genders (girl/woman and boy/man), and that a person must strictly fit into one category or

the other.

**Gender-diverse (adjective)** – Describes the community of people who fall outside of the gender binary structure (e.g., non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid people).

**Gender dysphoria (noun)** – Distress experienced by some people whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis for people whose distress is clinically significant and impairs social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The degree and severity of gender dysphoria is highly variable among transgender and gender-diverse people.

**Gender expression (noun)** – The way a person communicates their gender to the world through mannerisms, clothing, speech, behavior, etc. Gender expression varies depending on culture, context, and historical period.

**Gender fluid (adjective)** – Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of more than one gender, but may feel more aligned with a certain gender some of the time, another gender at other times, both genders sometimes, and sometimes no gender at all.

**Gender identity (noun)** – A person's inner sense of being a girl/woman/female, boy/man/male, something else, or having no gender.

**Gender role (noun)** – A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived gender. These roles change with time, culture, context, and interpersonal relationships.

**Genderqueer or gender queer (adjective)** – An umbrella term that describes a person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary of male and female. Some people use the term *gender expansive*.

**Heteronormativity (noun)** – The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, or that only heterosexuality is “normal.” Also refers to societal pressure for everyone to look

and act in a stereotypically heterosexual way. Heteronormativity can manifest as heterosexism, the biased belief that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

**Heterosexual** (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes women who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to men, and men who are primarily emotionally and physically attracted to women. Also referred to as *straight*.

**Homophobia** (noun) – Discrimination towards, and fear, marginalization, and hatred of lesbian and gay people, or those who are perceived as lesbian or gay. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be homophobic.

**Intersectionality** (noun) – The idea that comprehensive identities are influenced and shaped by the interconnection of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality/sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, physical disability, national origin, religion, age, and other social or physical attributes.

**Intersex** (adjective) – Describes a group of congenital conditions in which the reproductive organs, genitals, and/or other sexual anatomy do not develop according to traditional expectations for females or males. Intersex can also be used as an identity term for someone with one of these conditions. The medical community sometimes uses the term *differences of sex development (DSD)* to describe intersex conditions; however, the term *intersex* is recommended by several intersex community members and groups.

**Lesbian** (adjective, noun) – A sexual orientation that describes a woman who is primarily emotionally and physically attracted to other women.

**Men who have sex with men/women who have sex with women (MSM/WSW)** (noun) – Categories used in public health research and programs to describe people who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. People rarely use the terms *MSM* or *WSW* to describe themselves.

**Minority stress** (noun) – Chronic stress faced by members of stigmatized minority groups, such as sexual and gender minority people. Minority stress is caused by external, objective events and conditions, expectations of such events, the internalization of societal attitudes, and/or concealment of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Minority stress is compounded when a person holds multiple marginalized identities.

**Misgender** (verb) – To refer to a person by a pronoun or other gendered term (*e.g.*, *Ms./Mr.*) that incorrectly indicates that person's gender identity.

**Chosen Name/Name Used** (noun) – The name a person goes by and wants others to use in personal communication, even if it is different from the name on that person's insurance or identification documents (*e.g.*, birth certificate, driver's license, and passport). *Chosen name* is recommended over *preferred name*. The terms *Chosen name* or *Name used* can be put on patient health care forms alongside *Name on your insurance (if different)* and *Name on your legal identification documents (if different)*. In conversation with patients, health care staff can ask, "What name do you want us to use when speaking with you?", or "What is your chosen name?"

**Outing** (verb) – Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Non-binary** (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity falls outside of the traditional gender binary structure of girl/woman and boy/man. Sometimes abbreviated as *NB* or *enby*.

**Open relationship** (noun) – Describes a relationship between two partners who consensually agree to non-monogamy (*i.e.*, intimacy outside the primary partnership).

**Pangender** (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity is comprised of many genders or falls outside the traditional cultural parameters that define gender.

**Pansexual** (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and physically attracted to people of all gender identities, or whose attractions are not related to other people's gender.

**Polyamorous** (noun) – A sexual and/or romantic relationship comprising three or more people. Polyamorous can also describe a person in a polyamorous relationship. Sometimes abbreviated as *poly*.

**Pronouns** (noun) – Pronouns are the words people should use when they are referring to you, but not using your name. Examples of pronouns are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs. The appropriate phrasing is “What are your pronouns?” when seeking this information.

**QPOC** (noun) – An acronym that stands for *queer person of color* or *queer people of color*.

**Queer** (adjective) – An umbrella term describing people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term *queer* as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Although queer was historically used as a slur, it has been reclaimed by many as a term of empowerment. Nonetheless, some still find the term offensive.

**Questioning** (adjective) – Describes a person who is unsure about, or is exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Same gender loving (SGL)** (adjective) – An alternative to the terms *gay* and *lesbian*. SGL is more commonly used by African-American/Black communities.

**Same-sex attraction/attracted (SSA)** (noun/adjective) – Describes the experience of a person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the same sex or gender, but does not necessarily engage in same-sex sexual behavior. Used most commonly by people who live in religious communities that are not accepting of LGBTQIA+ identities. People who use SSA as an identity term may not feel



comfortable with the terms gay, lesbian, queer, or bisexual.

**Sex** (noun) – See **sex assigned at birth**.

**Sex assigned at birth** (noun) – The sex (male or female) assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant’s anatomical and other biological characteristics.

Sometimes referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, or sex; however, sex assigned at birth is the recommended term.

**Sexual orientation** (noun) – How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

**Social stigma** (noun) – Negative stereotypes and lower social status of a person or group based on perceived characteristics that separate that person or group from other members of a society.

**Straight** (noun) – See **heterosexual**.

**Structural stigma** (noun) – Societal conditions, policies, and institutional practices that restrict the opportunities, resources, and well-being of certain groups of people.

**Top** (noun) – A slang term for the chest. Also refers to the insertive partner in anal sex.

**Top surgery** (noun) – Slang term for **gender-affirming chest surgery**.

**Transgender** (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not correspond based on traditional expectations; for example, a person assigned female sex at birth who identifies as a man; or a person assigned male sex at birth who identifies as a woman. Transgender can also include people with gender identities outside the girl/woman and boy/man gender binary structure; for example, people who are gender fluid or non-binary. Sometimes abbreviated as *trans*.

**Trans man/transgender man** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity

is boy/man/male may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will use the term *man*.

**Trans woman/transgender woman** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is girl/woman/female may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will use the term *woman*.

**Trans feminine** (adjective) – Describes a person who was assigned male sex at birth and identifies with femininity to a greater extent than with masculinity.

**Trans masculine** (adjective) – Describes a person who was assigned female sex at birth and identifies with masculinity to a greater extent than with femininity.

**Transphobia** (noun) – Discrimination towards, fear, marginalization, and hatred of transgender people or those perceived as transgender. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be transphobic.

**Transsexual** (adjective) – A term used sometimes in the medical literature or by some transgender people to describe people who have gone through the process of medical gender affirmation treatments (i.e., gender-affirming hormones and surgeries).

**Trauma-informed care** (noun) – An organizational structure and treatment framework that centers on understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.

**Tucking** (noun) – The process of hiding one's penis and testes with tape, tight shorts, or specially designed undergarments.

**Two-Spirit** (adjective) – Describes a person who embodies both a masculine and a feminine spirit. This is a culture-specific term used among some Native American, American Indian, and First Nations people.

*Continued on next page...*

## Outdated and Insensitive Terms to Replace

Most people consider the following terms outdated and insensitive. We recommend replacing these words with the suggested terms provided.

| Outdated term                                                     | Recommended term                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Berdache                                                          | Two-spirit                                     |
| Biological female/male                                            | Assigned female/male at birth                  |
| Cross-sex hormone therapy; hormone replacement therapy            | Gender-affirming hormone therapy               |
| Disorders/differences of sex development                          | Intersex                                       |
| Female-to-male (FTM) and Male-to-female (MTF)                     | Transgender man and transgender woman          |
| Gender nonconforming                                              | Gender non-binary                              |
| Hermaphrodite/Ambiguous genitalia                                 | Intersex                                       |
| Homosexual                                                        | Gay or lesbian                                 |
| Legal name                                                        | Administrative name or Name on legal documents |
| Preferred name                                                    | Chosen name or Name used                       |
| Preferred pronouns                                                | Pronouns                                       |
| Sex change/Sex reassignment surgery/Gender reconstruction surgery | Gender-affirming surgery                       |
| Sexual preference/lifestyle                                       | Sexual orientation                             |
| Transgendered                                                     | Transgender                                    |

## Sources

Definitions for this glossary were developed and reviewed by the National LGBT Health Education Center and other experts in the field of LGBTQIA+ health, as well as adapted from glossaries published by the Safe Zone Project and the UCLA LGBT Resource Center.

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)) as part of an award totaling \$449,985.00 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).