

Definitions & Distinctions

Ally

A person (typically heterosexual) who identifies her/himself as being openly supportive of LGBT persons and issues.

Androgynous

A term that generally refers to a combination of both masculine and feminine qualities.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally/romantically/physically attracted to both men and women.

Butch

A slang term used to refer to a person (often to a female) who is masculine in appearance.

Closeted

The opposite of being “out,” being closeted means taking steps to ensure that a person or group of people does not know one’s sexual identity, or erroneously presumes one to be heterosexual. Because of repressive laws, discrimination in employment and housing, violence and harassment, and other kinds of oppression and abuse, most non-heterosexual people elect to closet themselves at some points in their lives or with some groups of people all their lives.

Coming Out

This phrase refers to the act of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation or identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered). “Coming out” can occur privately, to oneself, or publicly, to another person or group of people.

Crossdresser

A person who enjoys wearing clothing typically associated with the opposite sex. See also “Transvestite.”

Drag King

A woman who presents herself as a man (or with a combination of male and female attributes), either on- or off-stage. Drag King performers may display exaggerated or stereotypically "male" attitudes as part of their act.

Drag Queen

A man who presents himself as a woman, either on- or off-stage.

Femme

A slang term used to refer to a person (often to a female) who is feminine in appearance.

Gay

Sometimes used as a general term for persons attracted to the same sex; or, more specifically, used to refer to a man who is emotionally/romantically/physically attracted primarily to men.

Gay Pride

This is a common name for celebration commemorating the Stonewall riots. In most cities (including St. Louis), Gay Pride is held in June. Activities usually include a parade, booths, speakers, workshops, picnics, and musical entertainment.

Gender Identity

A person's view of his or her social/interpersonal self as male, female, or a combination of the two.

Hate Crime

Assault, rape, arson, and murder are crimes under any circumstance, but when the victim of such a crime is chosen simply because of his or her affiliation with a minority group, the FBI considers the crime a "hate crime." In some states, hate crimes carry an additional penalty beyond the standard penalty for assault, murder, etc. Missouri's hate crimes protections cover those who are victimized on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Heterosexism

Sometimes, even if individual people are not bigots or homophobes, institutions and cultural norms may still be discriminatory or even oppressive by favoring heterosexual people at the expense of non-heterosexual people. Such institutions and norms are heterosexist, and people who do not protest against them or resist them may also be said to be heterosexist.

Homophobia

The fear of homosexuality, LGBT persons, and of all things associated with being a sexual minority. Some people who experience homophobia simply avoid gay and lesbian people, places, events, and topics of conversation; others actively abuse non-heterosexual people verbally and physically.

Homosexual

A generic term referring to those attracted to same-sex partners. This term initially emerged in a (now outdated) context of pathology and is viewed as derogatory by many gay men, lesbians, bisexual persons, and allies.

Intersex Person

This term is most commonly used to describe a person who displays physical/sexual characteristics of both genders, either at birth or during the process of sex reassignment surgery. In the latter case, the phrase "transsexual in transition" is sometimes used.

LGBTQQI

An abbreviation sometimes found in references to sexual minorities. The letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex. Other combinations of letters are also used, including LGBT and GLBT.

Lesbian

A woman who is emotionally/romantically/physically attracted primarily to women.

Outing

To “out” someone is to declare their sexual orientation/identity publicly, without their permission.

PFLAG

An acronym for the national organization Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Queer

Originally a derogatory term (and still viewed as such by some people), this term is sometimes used by non-heterosexual persons who wish to describe their sexual orientation using an alternative to the standard labels (gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.)

Questioning

Refers to an individual who is in the process of learning about their sexual/affectual orientation and who may not yet have incorporated a specific view of themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.

Sexual Identity

A person’s view of him/herself as being physiologically male, female, or a combination of the two.

Sexual Orientation

One’s emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction—either to same-sex, opposite-sex, or both-sex partners.

Stonewall

On June 28, 1969, New York City police attempted a routine raid on the Stonewall Inn, a working class gay and lesbian bar in Greenwich Village. Unexpectedly, the patrons resisted, and the incident escalated into a riot that continued for several days. Most people look to this event as the beginning of the American Gay Liberation Movement and all subsequent LGBT movements.

Transgendered Person

A broad term used to describe individuals who view their gender differently from the gender that they were assigned at birth. The term is sometimes applied to more specific groups, including transvestites, transsexuals, and androgynous individuals. Many transgendered people have heterosexual identities, but since both the legal system and the general public tend to discriminate against them in ways similar to the discrimination against other sexual minorities, many work with lesbian, gay, and bisexual organizations, and many of these organizations have enlarged their mission statements to include transgendered persons.

Transsexual

A person who identifies as being of the opposite sex from the anatomical sex with which they were born. Some transsexuals choose to undergo surgical and/or hormonal alterations, so that their external appearance matches their internal identification. Transsexuals are described according to the gender with which they identify. Thus, a person who was born with male genitalia but identifies as being a woman would be called a transsexual female, or MtF.

Transvestite

A person who enjoys wearing clothing typically associated with the opposite sex. Most but not all transvestites are heterosexual.