straight FOR equality SM

equality literacy 101

Feeling a little nervous about what words you should use when expressing your support or learning more about GLBT issues? Fear not – this short list of words will help get you started to being equality-fluent. When you're ready to learn more, visit www.straightforequality.org.

Ally: A friend, supporter, assistant, partner, collaborator. Being an ally to the gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender community means working towards equality in its many forms and through a wide variety of different methods, both personal and public.

Bisexual: An individual who is emotionally, romantically, physically, and/or spiritually attracted to men and women. People who are bisexual do not need to have had equal sexual experience with both men and women; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual. Sometimes stated as *bi*.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation, or an ally who is not open about his or her support for equality.

Coming out: A process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life. People establish a gay, lesbian, bi or transgender identity first to themselves and then may reveal it to others. There are many different degrees of being out. Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, some may be out only to themselves. One can be out at different points on this spectrum, and it's important to remember and respect that not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people whose enduring emotional, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., *gay man*, *gay people*). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* is often a preferred term for women. Avoid identifying people who are gay as "homosexuals" – see *homosexual*.

Gender expression: A person's way of showing their gender identity to others through means such as dress and/or manner.

Gender identity: One's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (boy or girl), or something in-between. For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender nonconforming: A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society.

GLBT: An acronym for gay, lesbian, bi and transgender, which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as GLBTA /LGBTA to include allies. The acronym sometimes also includes *Q* for *queer* or *questioning*.

WAIT! THERE'S MORE! Over, please...

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many people who are gay. Whenever possible, replace this word with *gay* or *lesbian* to refer to people who are attracted to individuals of the same sex.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are GLBT. The term is disliked by the GLBT community because it implies that being gay, lesbian, bi, or transgender is a choice. Try using *GLBT lives* instead.

Out: Describes people who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bi, transgender, or allies in their public and/or professional lives.

Queer: Traditionally a negative term, queer sometimes is used by some people in the GLBT community to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, and some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community. Nevertheless, some within the GLBT community dislike the term. This word should be avoided unless referring to someone who self-identifies as queer.

Sexual orientation: Permanent emotional, romantic, spiritual, or sexual feelings toward other people. Straight individuals experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. Gay or lesbian individuals experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. Bi individuals experience these feelings for people of both sexes.

Transgender: An umbrella term describing the state of a person's gender identity which does not necessarily match his/her assigned gender at birth. Other words commonly used in this context are *female to male (FTM)*, *male to female (MTF)*, *crossdresser*, and *genderqueer*. People who are transgender may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Transsexual: An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many people who are transgender prefer the term transgender rather than transsexual. Some people who are transsexual still prefer to use the term to describe themselves; however, unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term, and many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.