

Useful Definitions & Guidelines in Dealing with LGBTQ Issues

GENDER: Means a person's sex-related or gender-related characteristics, including one's gender identity. For legal purposes, "gender" has the same meaning as "sex".

GENDER IDENTITY: A person's innate, deeply held knowledge of their own gender as a man, a woman, or some other status, which may or may not correspond with their external body or sex assigned at birth (i.e. listed on their birth certificate). All people have a gender identity, not just transgender people.

SEX (or GENDER) Assigned at Birth: Means the sex that someone was thought to be at birth, typically recorded on their original birth certificate. The sex and / or gender someone was assigned at birth may or may not match their gender identity.

GENDER EXPRESSION: The external manifestation of a person's gender identity, which may or may not conform to the socially-defined behaviors and external characteristics that are commonly referred to as either masculine or feminine. These behaviors and characteristics are expressed through movement, dress, grooming, hairstyles, jewelry, mannerisms, physical characteristics, social interactions, and speech patterns (voice).

GENDER NON-CONFORMING: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations and/or stereotypes related to gender. Not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender.

GENDERQUEER: Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term may be used by individuals whose gender identity and/or role does not conform to a binary understanding of gender as limited to the categories of man or woman, male or female.

NON-BINARY: People whose gender identity is neither male or female often use the term non-binary to describe themselves. Other terms people may use include genderqueer, agender, gender fluid, gender expansive or others. All of these terms speak to an experience of gender identity that is not simply male or female. Non-binary individuals may use the pronouns "they", "them", "theirs" to refer to themselves.

<http://writing.umn.edu/sws/quickhelp/grammar/nonbinary.html>

INTERSEX: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the medical definitions of female or male. These characteristics may include, but are not necessarily limited to, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, and sex chromosomes.

<http://www.isna.org>

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/ or gender expression differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). *Not all transgender people want to live as the sex opposite of the one they were assigned at birth.* The preferred use of the word transgender is as an adjective and not a noun or verb. (*Tony is a transgender man. NOT Tony is a transgender, OR Tony is transgendered.*)

TRANSGENDER MAN: A term for a transgender individual who, assigned female at birth, identifies as a man. This is sometimes shortened to transman.

TRANSGENDER WOMAN: A term for a transgender individual who, assigned male at birth, identifies as a woman. This is sometimes shortened to transwoman.

CISGENDER: A term for individuals whose gender identity, expression, or behavior conforms with those typically associated with their sex and/or gender assigned at birth.

GENDER Confirmation, Gender Affirmation or Transition: When an individual begins to live as the sex different from the one assigned at birth that process is referred to as going through the gender confirmation or gender affirmation process. It is also referred to as transitioning. Gender transitions are individual and may involve different steps for every person. The steps each person takes depends on their individual needs and access to resources. Medical procedures may be part of the gender confirmation process, but are not necessary, for someone to transition.

GENDER DYSPHORIA: A strong and persistent cross-gender identification and persistent discomfort with one's sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role or sex which causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Some, but not all, transgender individuals have gender dysphoria.

Gender Confirming Surgery or Gender Affirming Surgery: Terms that refer to various surgical procedures that change one's body to align gender identity and presentation. Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact, there are many different surgeries.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A term describing a person's attraction to members of the same gender and/or different gender. Sexual orientation and gender identity are different concepts.

GAY: Refers to a person who identifies as a male who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. "Gay" is also sometimes used as an umbrella term for people who are emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to those of the same gender.

LESBIAN: Means a person who identifies as a female and is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted primarily to members of the same gender.

BISEXUAL: Means a person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to both sexes.

QUESTIONING: Term used to describe a person who is unsure and is questioning their sexual orientation, or in some cases their gender identity.

HETEROSEXUAL / STRAIGHT: Terms used to describe a person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted to persons of the opposite sex.

LATINX: A gender neutral or non-binary alternative - used to refer to a person of Latin American origin or descent. Used as an alternative to Latino (masculine) or Latina (feminine).

Mx: An honorific that does not indicate gender; an alternative to gender based honorifics such as Mr., Mrs., or Ms. A gender neutral title.

LGBTQ Cultural Competency Etiquette

Words NOT to use with a Transgender Individual: because they are out dated or considered offensive – “trannie”, “tranny”, “it”, “transvestite”, “sex change”, “sex change operation”.

Use of the word “transgender”: The preferred use of the word transgender is as an adjective and not a noun or a verb. (Tony is a transgender man. **NOT** Tony is a transgender. **OR** Tony is transgendering).

Whenever possible, use a transgender person’s chosen name even if it is not their legal name. Often transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to change their name legally. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who lives by a name other than their birth name (e.g. celebrities).

Words not to use with Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Individuals:

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Homosexual” (n. or adj.)
- **PREFERRED:** “Gay” (adj.); “Gay Man” or “Lesbian” (n.); “Gay Person / People”.

Please use gay or lesbian to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual”, it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically / emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please avoid using “homosexual” except in direct quotes. Please also avoid using “homosexual” as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word “gay”.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Sexual Preference”.
- **PREFERRED:** “Sexual Orientation” or “Orientation”.

The term “sexual preference” is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured”. **Sexual Orientation** is the accurate description of an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and / or emotional attraction to members of the same and / or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, as well as straight men and women.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Homosexual Relationship/ Relationships”, “Homosexual Couple”, “Homosexual Sex”, etc.
- **PREFERRED:** “Relationship”, “Couple” (or if necessary, “Gay Couple”), “Sex”, etc.

Identifying a same-sex couple as a “homosexual couple”, characterizing their relationship as “a homosexual relationship”, or identifying their intimacy as “homosexual sex” is extremely offensive and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate gay people, couples and relationships.

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship gay, lesbian or bisexual unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship “straight” if engaged in by someone of another orientation. In most cases, your listeners will be able to discern people’s sexes and / or orientations through the names of the parties involved, your depictions of their relationships, and your use of pronouns.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Gay Lifestyle” or “Homosexual Lifestyle”.
- **PREFERRED:** “Gay Lives”, “Gay and Lesbian Lives”.

There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase “gay lifestyle” is used to denigrate lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured”.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Admitted / Avowed Homosexual”.
- **PREFERRED:** “Openly Lesbian”, “Openly Gay”, “Openly Bisexual” or simply “Out”.

Dated term used to describe those who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual in their personal, public, and / or professional lives. The words “admitted” or “avowed” suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive. You may also simply describe the person as being out, for example: “Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico”.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Gay Agenda” or “Homosexual Agenda”.

Notions of a so-called “homosexual agenda” are rhetorical inventions of anti-LGBTQ extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity of LGBTQ people as sinister (see AP Reuters, & New York Times Style).

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Fag”, “Faggot”, “Dyke”, “Homo”, “Sodomite”, and similar epithets.

These derogatory terms should be treated in the same manner as vulgar epithets used to target other groups. They should not be used except in a direct quote that reveals the bias of the person quoted. So that such words are not give credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, “The person used a derogatory word for a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person”.

- **OFFENSIVE:** “Deviant”, “Disordered”, “Dysfunctional”, “Diseased”, “Perverted”, and similar descriptions.

The notion that being LGBTQ is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Today, words such as “deviant”, “diseased” and “disordered” often are used to portray LGBTQ people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society. Words such as these should be avoided in stories about the LGBTQ community. If they must be used, they should be quoted directly in a way that clearly reveals the bias of the person being quoted.

- **BISEXUAL:** Do not imply that being bisexual is a phase and that bisexuals are “on their way” to being gay or lesbian. People who self-identify as bisexual are not confused, indecisive, or lying. Studies show that bisexuality and the numerous identities under the bisexual umbrella are distinct sexual orientations and not experimental or transitional stages.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Best Practices

Whenever possible, ask everyone you encounter which pronouns they use in advance of meeting with them or going on the record or using a particular pronoun. This information could be gathered on a sign-in sheet or when checking in with staff.

If it is not possible, avoid the use of pronouns all together. For example, use the person’s title (“Defendant”, “Counsel”) and their last name if you feel this is necessary to further identify them. Default to the use of “they” as a singular pronoun, such as “Counsel, have you had the opportunity to confer with opposing counsel? They have not checked in with my staff. Plaintiff Smith is present in the courtroom but Attorney Jones is running late.”

If someone has specifically asked for the use of a particular pronoun, you should use it when referring to them, even if you think a different pronoun fits them.

If you mistakenly use the wrong pronoun, correct the mistake respectfully and move on quickly.

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