

Insights Guide
LGBTQIA in the Workplace



Understanding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Terms

Many common terms and symbols used by people in the gay and lesbian community may not be easily understood by everyone. Comprehending the terminology helps facilitate communication between gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people and their friends, relatives and co-workers.

Ally

An ally is a straight, or cisgender, person who supports equality and acceptance for LGBTQIA people and their causes.

Asexual/Asexuality

These terms refer to a lack of sexual attraction to others, or little desire for sexual contact with others.

Bisexual or Bi

These terms refer to a person who is physically attracted to both men and women. Bisexuals can be in relationships with either an opposite- or same-gender partner.

Cisgender

A term used by some to describe people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Civil Union

A civil union typically gives same-sex couples legal rights and protections as determined by the country, state or county law. Some countries that legally recognize same-sex marriage and/or civil unions include Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain and Sweden.

In the Closet/Not Out

People who are not open about being gay or lesbian are said to be “in the closet” or “closeted.” Gays and lesbians who are open about their sexuality are said to be “out of the closet.”

Coming Out

This phrase refers to the process of a person publicly identifying him or herself as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This term is a shortening of the phrase “coming out of the closet.” The “coming out process” refers to the time it takes for a person to be honest about his or her sexuality to friends, relatives and co-workers (also see Outed).

Domestic Partner (or Partner)

This term is sometimes used to refer to the significant other when both people in a couple commit to each other but are not married. The couple does not have to be united in a civil union or marriage to be considered partners. These individuals may live together, share living expenses, and/or have a child or children together.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

This is a shortened version of the military policy “Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue, Don't Harass.” According to the policy, instituted in 1993, the military was not to ask service members about their sexual orientation and allowed them to serve as long as their orientation was not public. Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) was the official United States policy on homosexuals serving in the military from December 21, 1993

to September 20, 2011. On July 6, 2011, a ruling from a federal appeals court barred further enforcement of the U.S. military's ban on openly gay service members. The official end of DADT was September 20, 2011 and the new law allows gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Drag

Drag refers to dressing in costumes (and acting in a manner) commonly associated with the opposite gender. Drag shows often present men who dress as women. However, both women and men may adopt a drag look.

Family

Often this term is used by individuals in the LGBTQIA community to describe their close circle of friends. Sometimes, this is a reaction to having been ostracized by their biological family.

Femme

This word is typically used to describe a lesbian who has feminine traits. Another term is "lipstick lesbian." The opposite to this term is "butch," which is generally considered pejorative.

Gay

This term usually refers to men who are emotionally and sexually attracted to men. In recent decades, the term being "out" has become more acceptable.

Gay Pride

June is celebrated as "Pride month" in the United States and Europe. The month was originally designated to commemorate The Stonewall Riots. During Pride month, communities hold dances, parades, film festivals, street fairs and other special events. The focus is on LGBTQIA awareness, celebration, support and progress toward equal rights (also see Stonewall).

Genderqueer

A term used to describe people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of male and female. This may mean they define gender as somewhere in between male and female, or that they identify as completely different from these terms. This is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if the person self-identifies as genderqueer.

LGBTQIA

LGBTQIA is the abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual.

Homophobia/Homophobic

These terms refer to a fear of LGBTQIA people. It is often displayed as intolerance or hatred.

Homosexual

An outdated and derogatory term for someone who is emotionally and physically attracted to people of the same gender. The terms "gay" and "lesbian," in the appropriate cases, are preferred.

Lesbian

A lesbian is a woman who is physically and romantically attracted to other women.

National Coming Out Day

National Coming Out Day (held every October 11) is an awareness day that encourages people to be open and honest about their sexuality and demonstrate their presence in all walks of life.

Outed

Being “outed” is a slang term used when an LGBTQIA person’s sexual identity is disclosed by another person. This may happen in the media when a celebrity’s sexual identity is made public. However, it can occur in the workplace or other situations when someone’s sexual identity is made known without his or her consent (also see Closet).

Pansexual

Someone who is attracted to others regardless of sex or gender.

Pride Flag (or Rainbow Flag)

A flag with stripes in a rainbow of colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown and black) is considered a universal symbol of the LGBTQIA community. It signifies diversity and inclusiveness.

Queer

Formerly a derogatory slur, the term has been embraced and reclaimed by many in the LGBTQIA community to identify people who are not heterosexual.

Sexual Orientation

This term is used when referring to the words heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual; people use these words when defining their sexuality. This is not the same as sexual preference, as that phrase implies that there is a choice in sexuality.

Stonewall

The Stonewall Inn Tavern in New York City’s Greenwich Village was the site of a number of violent conflicts between the New York City Police and groups of gays who patronized the tavern. On June 28, 1969, a raid on the tavern was resisted and it became a clash people now refer to as the Stonewall Rebellion, Stonewall Riots or simply Stonewall. It is considered a bold statement of civil rights for the gay community.

Straight

This term is used to describe anyone who is heterosexual.

Transgender

This is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender persons may elect to take hormones or undergo surgery to change their bodies, but not all transgender people will take those steps.

Resources

- Human Rights Campaign: www.hrc.org
- Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays: www.pflag.org
- National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association: www.nlgja.org
- GLAAD: www.glaad.org

What does transgender mean?

Transgender individuals are people with a gender identity—their internal sense of being male, female, both or neither—that is different from the sex assigned to them at birth.

The way an individual expresses their gender identity is frequently called “gender expression,” and may or may not conform to social stereotypes associated with a particular gender. Someone who was assigned the male sex at birth but who identifies as female is a transgender woman. Likewise, a person assigned the female sex at birth but who identifies as male is a transgender man.

Gender identity is neither the same as, nor necessarily related to, sexual orientation. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Some individuals find it necessary to transition from living and working as one gender to another. These individuals often seek some form of medical treatment, such as:

- Counseling
- Hormone therapy
- Gender confirmation surgery

Be aware that not all transgender individuals follow the same pattern. Some individuals do not pursue any forms of medical treatment because of their age, medical condition, lack of funds, or other personal circumstances.

Transitioning

A transgender individual’s gender transition usually proceeds in the following order:

- Meet with a mental health provider to ascertain what steps are most appropriate to address the lack of congruity between their gender identity and the sex assigned to them at birth.
- After appropriate evaluation and counseling, the individual may begin a course of hormone therapy, usually under the supervision of both a health provider and an endocrinologist.
- After a period of time, an individual may be ready to commence the “real life experience,” which is when an individual transitions to living full-time in the gender role that is consistent with his or her gender identity. It is at this point that employers and co-workers are most often made aware that an employee is transgender and undertaking a gender transition.

Note that an employee’s transition should be treated with as much sensitivity and confidentiality as any other employee’s significant life experiences. Employees in transition often want as little publicity about their transition as possible.

During the “real-life experience” stage of a co-worker’s gender transition, individuals live and work full-time in the target gender in all aspects of their life. This includes:

- **New clothing.** Once an employee has informed management that they are transitioning, the employee will begin wearing clothes associated with the gender to which the person is transitioning.
- **Changing names.** Managers, supervisors and co-workers should use the name and pronouns appropriate to the employee’s new gender in employee records and in communications with others regarding the employee.
- **Restroom access.** Once a transitioning employee has begun living and working full-time in the gender that reflects their gender identity, they will want access to restrooms and (if provided to other employees) locker room facilities consistent with their gender identity.
- **Pronouns.** Some transgender people will prefer to be identified with the pronoun, such as he/him, she/her, of their gender identity. Other transgender and non-binary people prefer the gender-neutral terms they or them in all cases.

Coming Out at Work

For transgender people who wish to be open about themselves, coming out of the closet is a process of accepting oneself as well as opening up publicly to others.

The decision and process are very personal. There is no standard set of rules or steps to coming out. A person may choose to come out slowly to just a few trusted friends or to everyone at once. Additionally, the reactions of those who are told will vary. Thus, coming out is often viewed as an act of bravery and authenticity.

Coming Out

For gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQIA) people who wish to be open about their sexual orientation, “coming out of the closet” is a process of accepting oneself as well as opening up publicly to others. The decision and process are very personal. There are no set of rules or steps to take as each situation is unique. An LGBTQIA person may choose to come out slowly to just a few trusted friends or to everyone at once. Additionally, the reactions of those who are told will vary. Thus, coming out should be viewed as an act of bravery and authenticity.

Being in the Closet

While being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is more visible in today’s society, it is still taboo in many communities. Thus, many LGBTQIA people are “in the closet” and live secretive lives.

LGBTQIA people can be in the closet in varying degrees, from outright denial of their own sexuality to simply not discussing their personal life at all.

Being closeted can cause great stress as it takes energy to maintain such a level of secrecy at all times. While some LGBTQIA people never come out, others find the masquerade too difficult and the hiding they do keeps them from developing honest relationships with others.

Coming out can be a very scary process. However, people who do come out usually find the experience to be liberating and empowering. They often find personal satisfaction in being honest about themselves.

When should someone come out?

Each person’s situation is unique and there are no definite “right” times or ways to come out to family, friends or co-workers. Before coming out, an LGBTQIA person generally considers the following:

- **How they feel about themselves.** The LGBTQIA person should be comfortable with their sexual identity before deciding to come out to anyone else.
- **Researching how others have come out – especially in the local community – and have a plan.** Being prepared makes the process easier.
- **Coming out is not a one-time event; it is a process.** LGBTQIA people can choose to tell some people and not others depending on their comfort level. The person coming out should not feel pressured to reveal everything right away. Nor should someone else step in to “out” that person.
- **Getting support.** It is important that they have somewhere or someone to turn to if coming out is met with disappointment or angry reactions.

Who should be told?

In the coming out process, it is good for LGBTQIA people to start by telling the people who they are closest to and trust the most. When the time is appropriate, others can be approached. LGBTQIA people should not feel there is anybody who “must” be told.

If an LGBTQIA person feels the need to come out but does not know where to start, they may consider visiting a counselor or an LGBTQIA organization for insight and support. Additionally, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) guidance counselors can connect LGBTQIA people with local experts.

How to Handle Reactions

The reactions people have when they learn someone is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender will be different in every situation. If you know someone considering coming out, he or she should consider the following:

- Allow people time to adjust to the announcement. Friends, family and co-workers might need to let the information sit before they are able to ask questions or react.
- Some people may question why they were told. Someone who is coming out should be prepared for such questions but should not feel obligated to answer them.
- Some people may be supportive. Others may react harshly. Someone who is coming out should be prepared for both reactions. Unfortunately, they also should be prepared for negative reactions.
- LGBTQIA people who come out at work and face discrimination and/or harassment should document the events and actions. Depending on company policy, supervisors or human resource personnel should be notified. The Supreme Court has upheld LGBTQIA workers' rights and many states have enhanced laws to protect those rights, so there may be legal recourses available.

Coming Out at Work

The benefits to employees coming out at work, include:

- Increased morale
- Elimination of daily stress caused by hiding or misleading
- Possibility of trusting professional relationships
- The breakdown of barriers to understanding diversity
Here are some ideas and practical steps that employees may want to consider prior to coming out at work:
- Even with the recent Supreme Court ruling protecting LGBTQIA persons' jobs, you can still inquire if your employer has a written policy of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- If possible, network with other LGBTQIA people at work who have come out. Ask for their advice about and insight into how they approached the process and about their experiences afterward.
- Decide who to tell and what to say. It may be easier to find another LGBTQIA person or an ally to talk to.
- Consider visiting a counselor or an LGBTQIA organization for support. Additionally, your EAP can connect people with local experts.
- Coming out at work does not require making a major announcement. Many times subtle hints are appropriate. For example, employees might refer to their partners, or inquire about domestic partner benefits offered by the company for those who are not married.
- If an employee comes out to you, do not make the assumption that they are out fully. As a general practice, it is best not to discuss someone else's sexuality or gender identity with others, even if you have both received news of the person coming out.
- Join an LGBTQIA professional organization, if there is one in the workplace or in the industry as a whole. Many organizations exist on the local and national level. They offer workshops, conferences, networking and provide labor law information for creating safe and equitable workplaces for LGBTQIA people.



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