

# Acronyms Explained

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The language used to talk about LGBTIQ people is constantly evolving. New terms appear. Terms that were forgotten or unused, even terms that at some point were deemed derogatory, have been reclaimed and have entered into common parlance today. In a move towards inclusivity, the older, shorter, acronym - LGBT - has been expanded.

What follows is an explanation of that acronym and the meaning of terms it refers to. It's worth noting that these definitions are not set in stone. Definitions of terms, like language itself, are constantly evolving. Moreover, they mean different things to different people. After all, we are talking about identity, sexuality and relationships, so there are as many definitions as there are people.

The (not-so) basics:

**LGBT** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

**Lesbian** – This term refers to a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other women

**Gay** – This term refers to a man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other men

**Bisexual** – This term refers to someone who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to more than one gender. This used to exclusively mean attraction to men and women. More recently the term “bisexual” is used to refer to someone who is attracted to two or more genders out of the many gender identities. Gender identity is the internal perception of one’s gender and how a person labels themselves, based on how they align or do not align with what they understand gender to be. There are many gender identities, such as man, woman, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or transgender.

**Transgender** – This term is used to describe someone whose gender identity or expression does not conform to what is expected based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender expression is the behavior, mannerisms, interests, and appearance a person uses to express their gender in a particular cultural context. The term transgender encompasses many different gender identities (more on this later in this posting), and transgender people have different sexual orientations, some may identify as straight, while others may identify as LGB.

Now, some expansion.

**LGBTQIA** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual and/or Ally

**Queer** – Queer is often used as an umbrella term referring to anyone who is not straight and not cisgender. Cisgender people are people whose gender identity and expression matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Historically the term queer was used as a slur against LGBTQIA people, but in recent years it has been reclaimed by LGBTIQ communities. However, some LGBTQIA people still find the term offensive. Queer is also often used as a broad rejection of labels. In this context, this could be a rejection of any type of label, but most often refers to a rejection of labels for gender and sexual orientation.

**Questioning** – This term refers to someone who is not sure how they identify. Someone can be questioning their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

**Intersex** – This term refers to people who naturally have biological traits which do not match what is typically identified as male or female. There are many different intersex variations. Some intersex people have XXY chromosomes, some have ambiguous genitalia or internal sex organs. Some intersex people have internal sex organs or hormones released during puberty which don't match their genitalia. Being intersex is a naturally occurring variation in humans; it is not pathological. Being intersex is not linked to sexual orientation or gender identity; intersex people can have different sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

**Asexual** – Often referred to as “Ace”, this is an umbrella term used for individuals who do not experience, or experience a low level, of sexual desire. This identity can include those who are interested in having romantic relationships, and those who are not. People of different sexual orientations and gender identities can be asexual.

**Ally** – People who identify as cisgender and straight, and believe in social and legal equality for LGBTIQ+ people are allies. In many contexts, the “A” in LGBTQIA will only refer to Asexual people. The “A” is more likely to be short for both Ally and Asexual when LGBTQIA is being used to talk about a broader community that believes in the human rights of LGBTIQ people.

It's fairly uncommon for someone to use a variation of the LGBT acronym that is more than six letters, but, for educational purposes, let's add a few more letters.

**LGBTIQAPD** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and/or Ally, Pansexual, and Demi-sexual

**Pansexual** – Often referred to as “Pan”, this is a term used to describe a person who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

**Demisexual** – Often referred to as “Demi”, this is a term used to describe someone who can only experience sexual attraction after an emotional bond has been formed. This bond does not have to be romantic in nature.

This list of letters can and does continue. As previously mentioned, the terms that are used to talk about LGBTIQ people are constantly evolving. In an effort to be inclusive, while maintaining the practicality of a shorter acronym, some people use symbols in the acronym.

**LGBTIQA+/LGBTQ+** – Adding a “+” to the acronym is an acknowledgement that there are non-cisgender and non-straight identities which are not included in the acronym. This is a shorthand or umbrella term for all people who have non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation.

**LGBT\*IQ** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Intersex, and Queer and/or Questioning.

**Trans\*** – The asterisk next to trans refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum, other than people who identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth. Including the asterisk after trans denotes a special effort to include all non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming identities. Trans (without the asterisk) is a shortened and more casual version of transgender. Trans (without the asterisk) is also often used to describe people whose gender identity and expression does not match their assigned gender at birth. Transgender is usually used to describe people whose gender identity and expression does not match their assigned gender at birth, and their gender identity and expression is either on the masculine side of the gender spectrum (e.g. identifies as a transman, a man, or as masculine) or the feminine side of the gender spectrum (e.g. identifies as a transwoman, a woman, or as feminine). The gender spectrum is a way of describing gender without conforming to the gender binary. This allows for the inclusion of gender identities besides male and female. For a deeper explanation of gender and the gender spectrum, please read the short article [“Understanding Gender”](#).

**Non-binary & Genderqueer** – These terms are actively debated within the LGBTIQ+ community. Both terms are similar in scope. Non-binary refers to people whose gender identity falls outside of the gender binary (i.e. either male/man or female/woman) and was coined as a descriptive term, used to describe experiences that fall outside of the binary gender model which undergirds much of society. Genderqueer refers to people who have a non-normative or queer gender. Genderqueer is often used to refer to people who reject labels and conformity to specific gender norms. Non-binary tends to be more of an umbrella term, which encompasses genderqueer people, along with other non-binary genders.

**Gender non-conforming** – this term is used to refer to someone who does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate gender expression for their perceived gender.

There are plenty of acronyms to go around when talking about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, so here are some additional ones that you might run into that tend not to be added to the LGBTIQ acronym.

**FtM/F2M** – female-to-male; An FtM/F2M transgender person is someone who was assigned female at birth but identifies on the masculine side of the gender spectrum (e.g. identifies as a transman, a man, or as masculine).

**GSM** – Gender and Sexuality Minority; This is a shorthand or umbrella term for people who are non-straight and/or non-cisgender.

**MSM/WSW** – men who have sex with men/women who have sex with women. This is used to distinguish sexual behavior from sexual identities. Someone can identify as straight and have sex with people of the same gender. This is a term that is most often used in the field of public health and HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and research.

**MtF/M2F** – male-to-female. An Mtf/M2F transgender person is someone who was assigned male at birth but identifies on the feminine side of the gender spectrum (e.g. identifies as a transwoman, a woman, or as feminine).

**PGPs** – Preferred Gender Pronoun; This is often used during introductions to indicate the way someone would like to be referred to (e.g. They/their, he/his, she/hers, ze/zir)

**QPOC/QTPOC** – Queer People of Color and Queer and/or Trans People of Color.

**QUILT BAG** – Queer and/or Questioning, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Trans\*, Asexual, Two-Spirit, Bisexual and/or Allied and Gay and/or Gender Queer

**SAAB** – Sex Assigned at Birth; this is a phrase used to intentionally recognize a person's assigned sex at birth. Sometimes "designated sex at birth" (DSAB) is used instead. AFAM or "Assigned Female at Birth" and AMAB or "Assigned Male at Birth" are more specific variations of SAAB

**SGL** – Same Gender Loving; this term is sometimes used by members of the African-American or Black community to express a non-straight sexual-orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

**SOGI** – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; This is an inclusive acronym used to talk about both sexual orientation (the type of sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction that one has the capacity to feel for others) and gender identity (the internal perception of one's gender and how they label themselves, based on how they align or do not align with what they understand gender to be). SOGI is most often used in the United Nations and in the context of international human rights.

**SOGI ESC** – Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Characteristics. See SOGI. This is an inclusive acronym like SOGI, which includes Gender Expression (the behavior, mannerisms, interests, and appearance a person uses to express their gender in a particular cultural context) and Sex Characteristics (physical or behavioral traits of a person which are indicative of their sex). The expanded acronym - SOGIESC - is newer and is most often used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), often in the context of international human rights.

**SRS** – Sexual Reassignment Surgery; SRS is used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical operations that alter a person's biological sex. "Gender confirmation surgery" is considered by many to be a more affirming term.

**TGNC/TGNCNB** – Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming; sometimes "NB" is added for non-binary identities.

Help us try to keep up with the running list of evolving acronyms and let us know if you think there are any missing, please feel free to tag us on social media @OutRightIntl or email mmoneymaker [at] outrightinternational.org.

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