

# LGBTI-related Terminology

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To appropriately communicate with LGBTI inmates, it is useful to understand LGBTI-related terminology. Please review the list of terminology and their corresponding definitions:

**Asexual:** a person who is not romantically or sexually attracted to another person of any gender.

**Bisexual:** a person who is romantically or sexually attracted to both males and females.

**Cross dresser:** a person who wears clothing, jewelry, or makeup not traditionally associated with their anatomical sex, and who generally has no intention or desire to change their anatomical sex.

**Gay:** exclusively attracted to others of the same sex. Most commonly used to refer to men who are attracted to other men, but may also be used to refer to women who are attracted to other women (lesbians).

**Gender:** a socially constructed concept classifying behavior as either “masculine” or “feminine,” unrelated to one’s genitalia.

**Gender conforming:** when gender identity, gender expression and sex assigned at birth “match” according to social norms.

**Gender dysphoria (formerly gender identity disorder):** the formal diagnosis used by psychologists and physicians to describe persons who experience significant discontent with the sex they were assigned at birth and/or their gender roles associated with that sex.

**Gender expression:** a person’s external expression of their gender identity, including appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech, and social interactions.

**Gender identity:** distinct from sexual orientation and refers to a person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female or something else.

**Gender non-conforming:** gender characteristics or behaviors that do not conform to those typically associated with a person’s biological sex.

**Gender “norms”:** the expectations associated with “masculine” or “feminine” conduct, based on how society commonly believes males and females should behave. Gender variant behavior: conduct that is not normatively associated with an individual’s biological sex.

**Heterosexual:** sexual or romantic attraction to the opposite sex.

**Homosexual:** an increasing derogatory term with an historical negative context for sexual, emotional, or romantic attraction to persons of the same sex. Not recommended for use.

**Intersex:** an uncommon condition in which a person is born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, chromosome patterns, or an endocrine system that does not fit typical definitions of male or female.

**LGBTI:** acronym for a group of sexual minorities including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals. Many variations of this acronym may be used depending on context. **Lesbian:** commonly refers to women typically attracted to other women (the term “gay” may also be used to describe these individuals).

**Queer:** historically a negative, derogatory term, it has been reclaimed by some LGBTI individuals particularly among youth. Its use is not recommended, especially in a professional environment.

**Questioning:** an active process in which a person explores his or her own sexual orientation or gender identity and questions the cultural assumptions that they are heterosexual or gender conforming. LGBTQ or LGBTQI is often associated with adolescents and young adults.

**Sex:** the designation of a person as either male or female based on anatomical make-up, including genitalia, chromosomes, and reproductive system.

**Sexual orientation:** an enduring personal quality that inclines people to feel romantic or physical attraction to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, or both.

**SOGI:** acronym for sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Transgender:** an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. May be used interchangeably with “transsexual” depending on context.

**Transgender girl/woman:** a person whose birth sex was male but who understands herself to be female and desires to live her life as a female.

**Transgender boy/man:** a person whose birth sex was female but who understands himself to be male and desires to live his life as a male.

**Transition:** sometimes used to describe the process people go through to change their gender expression or physical appearance. May refer to everything from changing identity documents to medical intervention (e.g., hormones, surgery).

**Transsexual:** a person whose physical anatomy does not match his or her gender identity, and seeks medical treatment (sex reassignment surgery or hormones). May be used interchangeably with “transgender” depending on the context.

**Transvestite:** a person who mainly cross dresses for pleasure in appearance and sensation.

**Two spirit:** a term used by some Native Americans to identify LGBTI and gender variant persons within their community. Historically, in some cultural traditions, two spirit people were viewed as privileged and sacred.

## References

Smith, B. V., & Yarussi, J. M. (2015). *Policy review and development guide: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons in custodial settings* (2nd ed.). National Institute of Corrections. [https://info.nicic.gov/sites/info.nicic.gov/lgbti/files/lgbti-policy-review-guide-2\\_0.pdf](https://info.nicic.gov/sites/info.nicic.gov/lgbti/files/lgbti-policy-review-guide-2_0.pdf)