

LGBTQ+ History Month

History Month 101: What does LGBTQ+ stand for?

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, QUILTBAG? Confused? Don't be!

Let's break down some very commonly used terms in the community, starting with LGBTQ+.

Lesbian



A woman who loves women, sometimes also use the word gay. While nowadays homosexuality as a term does not distinguish between men or women, initially in early law and sexology it was used as a term solely to describe men, while lesbian was used to describe women.

Not every woman who loves women will use this word, for many women it is an identity and a culture beyond a simple description of who you love or have sex with.

Gay



Usually a man who loves men, often used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ (see, Gay Pride, Gay Bar etc). Not everyone who uses this word will be a man. Historically because much of the activism and liberation was fronted and lead by men it tended to focus on gay rights and men's issues, which is why we often saw things called gay rights, gay marriage, and so on. We use more inclusive language like LGBTQ+ now to reflect the great diversity in our

community and the distinct challenges they face.

Importantly gay is not a synonym for bad! It's not a word to be used as an insult or to describe something you don't like. Even if people don't mean to offend anyone, when you use gay or similar words to describe something negatively, the message you're sending is that it is bad to be gay.

Bisexual



Someone who loves men and women and more! When bisexual was first coined it was purely describing two genders, men and women. We now know there are people who exist outside of the binary who love and are loved, and bisexual can apply to someone who loves more people than just men, or just women. Pansexual, a more recent term, used to describe people who love regardless of gender is often included within bisexual communities.

Transgender



Transgender, often shorted to trans, describes someone who's gender is different to the one they were assigned at birth. The opposite of this is cisgender, or cis. For example, a trans woman may be someone who at birth was assigned a boy by the doctor, but later knew that they were a woman. Trans people usually transition, which will mean that they begin living as their authentic gender. This may or may not involve medical intervention, and is totally specific to each person. When we describe transgender people, we use trans or transgender as a separate word, not "transman", and not as "transgendered". A shortened version of transgender ending in a Y (t***y) is an offensive slur, and is not a word we use. While trans is a very common word now, trans people especially of different generations may have all kinds of language for themselves, but unless we know better we use the word trans or transgender.

Queer



A reclaimed slur, queer means different things in different situations. Here, in LGBTQ+, queer is a political identity, and an umbrella term for a variety of identities that do not neatly fit into the above categories. It might be describing people who are non-binary or third gender, or people who are attracted to non-binary people. It might be describing a political stance that challenges stereotypes around being gay, or trans. Queer first came about in the 90s as a political movement that wanted to advance the rights of LGBTQ+ people but in counterpoint to the more mainstream "Gay Rights" movement of the time. It comes from query, to question, and is a reclaimed slur, which means that it was and sometimes still is used as a word to hurt LGBTQ+ people, but in an effort to remove the power from that insult, people started using it to describe themselves and their own politics. Not all LGBT+ people like the word, as for many it still holds painful memories, so it is not a word to be used to describe everyone.

Questioning

In some LGBTQ+ groups, q means questioning, and in other questioning comes as part of queer, or the +. Questioning is for anyone who may not know who they are, or who they love. A huge part of many LGBTQ+ people's lives is discovering themselves, after being told for much of their lives that they are straight, or cisgender. Lots of people first come to the community not knowing where they belong, but knowing something is different about them, and we recognise their value and place being on their own journey.

And the +?

The + is a fluid changing part of the community, with language evolving and new identities emerging all the time. We recognise them while still trying to maintain consistent terminology for the community. Most often in addition to LGBTQ+ we see I and A, for intersex and asexual.

Intersex



People who are born with a range of sexual characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female bodies. This may be chromosomes, sexual organs or more. They face complex challenges and stigma from the medical and wider community, with much misinformation existing about them. We will talk in more detail about intersex people later this month!

Asexual



Asexuality is a broad term for a collection of sexual or romantic identities that relate to having little or no sexual attraction to other people. Commonly thought to describe people who do not experience attraction at all, this is actually just one of many different people that are asexual. Some people only experience attraction in very specific situations, or feel strong romantic feelings, but no sexual attraction. It is another identity that is often misunderstood and will be explored later in the month.