



IOWA LGBTQ  
MEDIA GUIDE



# Purpose

**During the celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month in June, and all year long, it is crucial to have appropriate representation of the LGBTQ community in the media.**

The Iowa LGBTQ Media Guide has been compiled as a resource for local press and community leaders, using local and national expertise. This guide is meant to provide a foundation of understanding, as well as a starting point for contacts in the LGBTQ community as well as elected officials. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive glossary of language used within the LGBTQ community, nor is it a prescriptive guide for LGBTQ people.

## Overview: LGBTQ in Iowa

[Source: Movement Advancement Project]

**Total Iowa Population: 3,190,369**

**Total LGBTQ Population: 106,000**

**LGBTQ Percentage of Adult Population: 3.6%**

**LGBTQ Percentage of Iowa workforce: 4%**

**Percentage of LGBTQ Population Raising Children: 28%**

**“This Pride month we join in celebrating the diversity of our community while remembering all those who came before us. June may be a focal point for the LGBTQ community, but the work of preserving and advancing equality for LGBTQ Iowans happens year round. We look forward to working with our media partners to communicate the joys and struggles of LGBTQ Iowans throughout the year, and invite you to learn more by utilizing this guide.”**

**-Courtney Reyes,  
Executive Director,  
One Iowa**



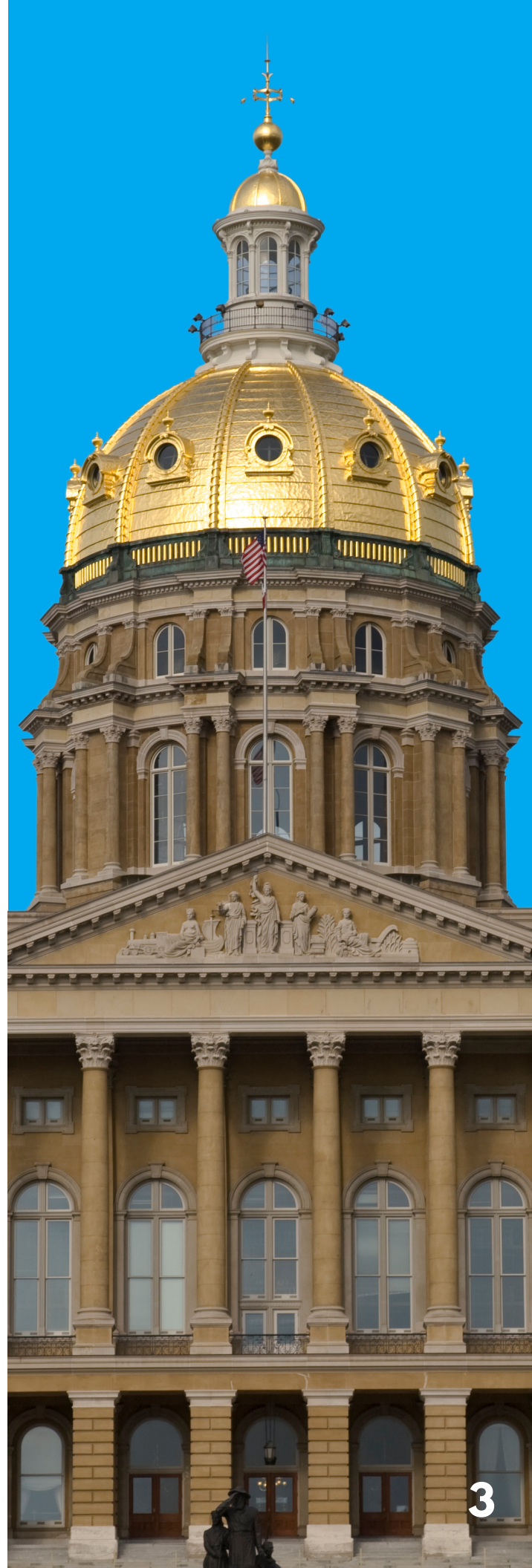


# Iowa's mixed picture on LGBTQ rights

**[Source: Movement Advancement Project]**

Iowa has a rich, progressive history when it comes to equality and civil rights. From the first Supreme Court decision in re: Ralph which abolished slavery in our state, to *Varnum v. Brien* unanimously affirming the freedom to marry for same-sex couples, Iowans are proud of being ahead of the curve when it comes to equality. But those highlights in our history don't tell the whole story about where we are as a state when it comes to LGBTQ rights, and we have much work ahead in Iowa to ensure fairness and equality for all our residents.

In fact, just this year, 15 different pieces of anti-LGBTQ legislation were introduced into the legislature. In 2019 the legislature wrote discrimination into the Iowa Civil Rights Act by allowing Medicaid to deny medically necessary surgical care to transgender Iowans. The legislature has also taken extreme measures to block access to comprehensive and inclusive healthcare services—including abortion services—that many LGBTQ patients require to thrive.



# Here are additional obstacles LGBTQ people and their families face to full equality in Iowa:

## Adoption and Parenting Laws:

Iowa law allows statewide access to adopt for same-sex parents, but lacks non-discrimination protections for adoption and foster care by LGBTQ parents. This is particularly troubling given ten states now allow child welfare agencies to discriminate against prospective caregivers and families as long as they cite a religious or moral objection. Nondiscrimination provisions for foster and adoptive parents are crucial to ensure that all qualified families are considered to provide loving, stable homes to children in the child welfare system.

The state does not currently permit second parent adoption for unmarried couples, which would allow unmarried LGBTQ parents to secure legal ties to the children they are parenting, nor has the state updated its parenting laws in accordance with the Uniform Parentage Act to recognize as parents unmarried people who have a child using assisted reproductive technology.

## LGBTQ Youth Laws and Policies:

Non-discrimination and anti-bullying laws exist in Iowa to ensure that all children can attend school safely, but there is no law prohibiting the harmful, and widely discredited and dangerous practice of so-called “conversion therapy.”

**“Iowa Safe Schools is glad to be partnering on this media guide for Pride Month. Factual and respectful reporting has been essential in highlighting the issues faced by LGBTQ Iowans throughout recent history. On behalf of our students, we hope you find this guide as a useful resource as you navigate through future stories.”**

**- Becky Ritland,  
Executive Director,  
Iowa Safe Schools**





## Ability for Transgender People to Correct Name and Gender on Identity Documents:

Iowa law restricts the ability of transgender people to correct their gender on official identity documents by requiring a physician signed affidavit which indicates they have irreversibly changed their gender. Transgender individuals born in Iowa are required to first correct their birth certificate before correcting their drivers licenses. Those born outside of Iowa may submit similar documents to the Iowa Department of Transportation. Social Security cards, passports, citizenship documents, etc. all follow different processes. More information about the process for correcting these documents can be [found by clicking here](#).

## Criminal Justice Laws and Policies

Iowa law recognizes hate crimes based on sexual orientation, but does not enumerate gender identity as a basis for prosecuting a hate crime. In March of 2016, the Iowa Senate passed legislation that would add gender identity to Iowa's hate crime law, but the bill was not allowed a vote in the House of Representatives. The state also lacks legislation banning the use of so-called “gay” or “trans” panic defense in court.

**“When Iowans learn about LGBTQ people’s lives in a way that is fair, accurate, and inclusive then their acceptance of LGBTQ continues to grow. At the heart of acceptance is fair, accurate, and inclusive storytelling. That’s where this guide will come in handy.”**

**- Ross Murray, Senior Director, GLAAD Media Institute**



## Marriage and Relationship Recognition:

While same-sex couples can marry in Iowa, and the state ensures medical decision-making authority for married same-sex couples, the state lacks a state family and medical leave law that would allow workers paid time or extended time away from work to care for their families, which is an important issue for LGBTQ people and their families.

## LGBTQ Youth Laws and Policies:

Iowa has non-discrimination laws that protect LGBTQ people in housing, employment, public accommodations, credit and lending, and for state employees. However, nationally and in Iowa, there is a coordinated and widespread push to pass a variety of religious exemptions laws that would give businesses, government agencies and individuals a right to discriminate on religious or moral grounds. These license-to-discriminate bills would undermine Iowa's nondiscrimination laws not just for LGBTQ people, but for women, minority faiths, people of color, and people with disabilities.

**"This pride month we must remember that pride was born out of a resistance to police violence and the Stonewall uprising was largely led by trans people of color. The lgbtq community must out of moral obligation and our own survival stand with all disenfranchised people, this includes the wholesale rejection of the Republican party that continues to oppress us and friends we should stand in solidarity with."**

**-Black Hawk County Supervisor Chris Schwartz**





# Best practices for LGBTQ coverage

[Adapted from the GLAAD media reference guide]

## Identify lowans accurately.

If someone clearly states that they identify as bisexual, do not identify them as gay, lesbian, or straight instead. Simply because a person is currently in a relationship with someone of the same sex, that does not negate the person's bisexual orientation. Similarly, if a person is in what appears to be a heterosexual relationship, that also does not negate the person's bisexual orientation. Ask the person included in your press coverage how they identify before making that assumption. Note that transgender people also have a sexual orientation – that being transgender and a lesbian are not mutually exclusive, for example.

## Use the pronoun that matches the person's authentic gender.

A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or undergone surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender. If you are not certain which pronoun to use, ask the person, "What pronouns do you use?"

## Other terms you might hear:

Some people who have the capacity to be attracted to people of any gender may consider themselves part of the bi+ community and/or choose other words to describe their sexual orientation, such as: pansexual, polysexual, omnisexual, fluid, queer, and more. Some people prefer to avoid any label at all. Given the lack of understanding of even the word bisexual, it's best to only use alternate words if someone specifically self-identifies that way and asks for their preferred term to be used.



## **Always use a transgender person's chosen name.**

Many transgender people are able to obtain a legal name change from a court. However, some transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to legally change their name. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who uses a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities). Do not reveal a transgender person's birth name without explicit permission from them. If the person is not able to answer questions about their birth name, err on the side of caution and do not reveal it.

## **Some people use the singular they to reflect their non-binary gender identity.**

In 2015, The Washington Post updated its style guide to include the singular they to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression."

**"Interfaith Alliance of Iowa is a proud ally of the LGBTQ+ community working on issues of inclusion and fighting against discrimination for more than two decades. We will always advocate for the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ Iowans and stand against any effort that misuses religion to discriminate. We encourage the media to be a partner in this effort by studying the guide and using it as a trusted resource for respectful language based in best practices."**

**-Connie Ryan,  
Executive Director,  
Interfaith Alliance of  
Iowa**





# Glossary of Terms

## Advocate

noun : A person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group.

verb: to actively support/plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance, educate others, etc.

## Agender

a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.

## Ally

A (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action in support and respect.

- “Coming out” as an ally is when you reveal (or take an action that reveals) your support of the LGBTQ community. Being an active supporter can, at times, be stigmatizing, though it is not usually recognized, many allies go through a “coming out process” of their own.

## Androgyny/ous /“an-jrah-jun-ee”; “an-jrah-jun-uss”/

A gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy.

## Androsexual / Androphilic

Being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some men, males, and/or masculinity.

## Aromantic

Experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior. Aromanticism exists on a continuum from people who experience no romantic attraction or have any desire for romantic activities, to those who experience low levels, or romantic attraction only under specific conditions, and many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demiromantic). Sometimes abbreviated to “aro” (pronounced like “arrow”).



## Asexual

Experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. Asexuality exists on a continuum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex, to those who experience low levels, or sexual attraction only under specific conditions, and many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demisexual). Sometimes abbreviated to “ace.”

- Asexuality is different from celibacy in that it is a sexual orientation whereas celibacy is an abstaining from a certain action.
- Not all asexual people are aromantic.

## Bigender

A person who fluctuates between traditionally “woman” and “man” gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender).

## Bicurious

A curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).

## Biological Sex

A medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex. Often referred to as simply “sex,” “physical sex,” “anatomical sex,” or specifically as “sex assigned at birth.”

## Biological Sex cont.

Often seen as a binary but as there are many combinations of chromosomes, hormones, and primary/secondary sex characteristics, it’s more accurate to view this as a spectrum (which is more inclusive of intersex people as well as trans\*-identified people).\* – Is commonly conflated with gender.

## Biphobia

A range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express towards bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the LGBTQ community as well as straight society. Biphobic – adj. : a word used to describe an individual who harbors some elements of this range of negative attitudes towards bisexual people.

- Example of bi-invisibility and bi-erasure would be the assumption that any man in a relationship with a woman is straight or anyone dating someone of the same gender means you’re gay. In neither case do we assume anyone could be bisexual. (cont. on pg. 10)





## Biphobia cont.

- Really important to recognize that many of our “stereotypes” of bisexual people – they’re overly sexual, greedy, it’s just a phase – have harmful and stigmatizing effects (and that gay, straight, and many other queer individuals harbor these beliefs too).

## Bisexual

- 1) a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women.
- 2) a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of their gender and another gender
- 3) a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of two or more genders

There are many usages of the term which will differ based on the person’s conception of gender and its relationship to themselves and their partners. This attraction does not have to be equally split or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders or sexes an individual may be attracted to.

- Can simply be shortened to “bi.”
- Many people who recognize the limitations of a binary understanding of gender may still use the word bisexual as their sexual orientation label, this is often because many people are familiar with the term bisexual (while less are familiar to the term pansexual).

## Butch

A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but is also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

## Cisgender /“siss-jendur”/ – adj.

A person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and assigned male at birth). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not transgender, they are cisgender. The word cisgender can also be shortened to “cis.”

- “Cis” is a latin prefix that means “on the same side [as]” or “on this side [of].”

## Cissexism

Behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow better or more “right” than being transgender, and/or makes other genders invisible.

## Cisnormativity

The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans\* identities or people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.



## Civil Union

Historically used in the U.S. to describe state-based relationship recognition for same-sex couples that offered some or all of the state (though none of the federal) rights, protections, and responsibilities of marriage. While many Western countries (including the United States) have now legalized marriage for same-sex couples, others only legally recognize same-sex relationships through civil unions.

## Closeted

An individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for one's safety, peer or family rejection or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc. Also known as being "in the closet." When someone chooses to break this silence they "come out" of the closet. (See coming out)

## Coming Out

- 1) The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexuality or gender identity (to "come out" to oneself).
- 2) The process by which one shares one's sexuality or gender identity with others (to "come out" to friends, etc.).
  - This is a continual, life-long process. Everyday, all the time, one has to evaluate and re-evaluate who they are comfortable coming out to, if it is safe, and what the consequences might be.

## Cross-Dresser

While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different gender role, the term cross-dresser is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with women. Those men typically identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. Replaces the term "transvestite" which is now widely considered offensive.

## Demiromantic

Little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong sexual or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a sexual relationship.

## Demisexual

Little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a romantic relationship.

## Domestic Partnership

Civil/legal recognition of a committed relationship between two people that sometimes extends limited protections to them.



## Down Low

Typically referring to men who identify as straight but who secretly have sex with men. Down low (or DL) originated in, and is most commonly used by communities of color.

## Drag King

Someone who performs masculinity theatrically.

## Drag Queen

Someone who performs femininity theatrically.

## Dyke

Referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it is sometimes adopted affirmatively by lesbians (both more masculine and more feminine presenting lesbians not necessarily masculine ones) as a positive self-identity term.

## Emotional Attraction

A capacity that evokes the want to engage in romantic intimate behavior (e.g., sharing, confiding, trusting, interdepending), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense). Often conflated with sexual attraction, romantic attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.

## Feminine-presenting; Masculine-presenting

A way to describe someone who expresses gender in a more feminine/masculine way. Often confused with feminine-of-center/masculine-of-center, which generally include a focus on identity as well as expression.

## Femme

Someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman.

## Fluid(ity)

Generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight).

## FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F

Female-to-male transgender or transsexual person; male-to-female transgender person. Outdated term. Better to use language that affirms the identity of the individual. So simply “transgender man” in the case of someone who is a man that was assigned female at birth.

## Gay

1) individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to men who are attracted to other men, but can be applied to women as well. (cont. on pg. 13)





## Gay cont.

2) An umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

- “Gay” is a word that’s had many different meanings throughout time. In the 12th century is meant “happy,” in the 17th century it was more commonly used to mean “immoral” (describing a loose and pleasure-seeking person), and by the 19th it meant a female prostitute (and a “gay man” was a guy who had sex with female prostitutes a lot). It wasn’t until the 20th century that it started to mean what it means today. Interesting, right?

## Gender Binary

The idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

## Gender Expression

The external display of one’s gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally made sense of on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as “gender presentation.”

## Gender Fluid

A gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days.

## Gender Identity

The internal perception of one’s gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don’t align with what they understand their options for gender to be. Common identity labels include man, woman, genderqueer, trans, and more. Often confused with biological sex, or sex assigned at birth.

## Gender Neutrois

See agender.

## Gender Non-Conforming

- 1) A gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man)
- 2) A gender identity label that indicates a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Often abbreviated as “GNC.”

## Gender Normative / Gender Straight

Someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society’s gender-based expectations.



## Genderqueer

A gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).

- may combine aspects man and woman and other identities (bigender, pangender);
- not having a gender or identifying with a gender (genderless, agender);
- moving between genders (genderfluid);
- third gender or other-gendered; includes those who do not place a name to their gender having an overlap of, or blurred lines between, gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation.

## Gender Variant

Someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender-queer, cross-dresser, etc).

## Gynesexual / Gynephilic / “guy-nuh-seks-shu-uhl”/

Being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some woman, females, and/or femininity.

## Hermaphrodite

An outdated medical term previously used to refer to someone who was born with some combination of typically-male and typically-female sex characteristics. It’s considered stigmatizing and inaccurate. See intersex.

## Heteronormativity

The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual (e.g. asking a woman if she has a boyfriend) and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.

## Heterosexism

Behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more “right” than queerness, and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

## Heterosexual

A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as straight.

## Homophobia

An umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTQ community. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTQ. (cont. on pg 15)



## Homophobia

Homophobic – adj. : a word used to describe an individual who harbors some elements of this range of negative attitudes towards gay people.

- The term can be extended to bisexual and transgender people as well; however, the terms biphobia and transphobia are used to emphasize the specific biases against individuals of bisexual and transgender communities.
- May be experienced inwardly by someone who identifies as queer (internalized homophobia).

## Homosexual

A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender. This [medical] term is considered stigmatizing (particularly as a noun) due to its history as a category of mental illness, and is discouraged for common use (use gay or lesbian instead).

- Until 1973 “Homosexuality” was classified as a mental disorder in the DSM Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This is just one of the reasons that there are such heavy negative and clinical connotations with this term.

## Homosexual cont.

- There was a study done prior to DADT (Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell) being revoked about peoples’ feelings towards open queer service members. When asked, “How do you feel about open gay and lesbian service members,” there was about 65% support (at the time).” When the question was changed to, “How do you feel about open homosexual service members,” the same demographic of people being asked – support drops over 20%. There are different connotations to the word homosexual than there are to gay/lesbian individuals for both straight and queer people.

## Intersex

Term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Formerly known as hermaphrodite (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now outdated and derogatory.

## Lesbian

Women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women.



## LGBTQ; GSM; DSG

Shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer. LGBTQ is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (sometimes people add a + at the end in an effort to be more inclusive); GSM is Gender and Sexual Minorities; DSG is Diverse Sexualities and Genders. Other options include the initialism GLBT or LGBT and the acronym QUILTBAG (Queer [or Questioning] Undecided Intersex Lesbian Trans\* Bisexual Asexual [or Allied] and Gay [or Genderqueer]).

- There is no “correct” initialism or acronym — what is preferred varies by person, region, and often evolves over time.
- The efforts to represent more and more identities led to some folks describe the ever-lengthening initialism as “Alphabet Soup,” which was part of the impetus for GSM and DSG.

## Lipstick Lesbian

Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

## Marriage

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that every American has the constitutional right to marry the person they love. When reporting on marriage for same-sex couples, preferred terminology includes marriage equality and marriage for same-sex couples. Note, the terms “gay marriage” and “same-sex marriage” should be avoided, as they can suggest marriage for same-sex couples is somehow different than other marriages.

## MSM / WSW

Men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women, to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities: because a man is straight, it doesn’t mean he’s not having sex with men. Often used in the field of HIV/Aids education, prevention, and treatment.

## Mx. / “mix” or “schwa” /

An honorific (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) that is gender neutral. It is often the option of choice for folks who do not identify within the gender binary: Mx. Smith is a great teacher.





## Out

A person who self-identifies as LGBTQ in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. For example: Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico. Preferred to openly gay.

## Openly Gay

Describes people who self-identify as gay in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. Also openly lesbian, openly bisexual, openly transgender, openly queer. While accurate and commonly used, the phrase still implies a confessional aspect to publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity. See out above.

## Outing

Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

## Pansexual

A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to “pan.”

## Passing

- 1) transgender people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans\*.
- 2) An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.
  - Passing is a controversial term because it often is focusing on the person who is observing or interacting with the individual who is “passing” and puts the power/authority in observer rather than giving agency to the individual.
  - While some people are looking to “pass” or perhaps more accurately be accepted for the identity that they feel most aligns with who they are “passing” is not always a positive experience.
  - Some individuals experience a sense of erasure or a feeling of being invisible to their own community when they are perceived to be part of the dominant group.
  - It is best not to repeat this term in the media even though some may use it for themselves. See the chart on outdated and offensive terms for additional explanation.



## PGPs

Preferred gender pronouns. Often used during introductions, becoming more common in educational institutions. Many suggest removing the “preferred,” because it indicates flexibility and/or the power for the speaker to decide which pronouns to use for someone else.

## Queer

Used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don’t identify as straight. Also used to describe people who have a non-normative gender identity, or as a political affiliation. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, it is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQ community. The term “queer” can often be used interchangeably with LGBTQ (e.g., “queer folks” instead of “LGBTQ folks”).

- If a person tells you they are not comfortable with you referring to them as queer, don’t. Always respect an individual’s preferences when it comes to identity labels, particularly contentious ones (or ones with troubled histories) like this.
- Use the word queer only if you are comfortable explaining to others what it means, because some people feel uncomfortable with the word, it is best to know/feel comfortable explaining why you choose to use it if someone inquires.

## Questioning

An individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

## QPOC / QTPOC

Initials that stand for queer people of color and queer and/or trans people of color.

## Romantic Attraction

A capacity that evokes the want to engage in romantic intimate behavior (e.g., dating, relationships, marriage), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense). Often conflated with sexual attraction, emotional attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.

## Same Gender Loving (SGL)

Sometimes used by some members of the African-American or Black community to express an non-straight sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.



## Sex Assigned at Birth (SAAB)

A phrase used to intentionally recognize a person's assigned sex (not gender identity). Sometimes called “designated sex at birth” (DSAB) or “sex coercively assigned at birth” (SCAB), or specifically used as “assigned male at birth” (AMAB) or “assigned female at birth” (AFAB): Jenny was assigned male at birth, but identifies as a woman.

## Sexual Attraction

A capacity that evokes the want to engage in physical intimate behavior (e.g., kissing, touching, intercourse), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense). Often conflated with romantic attraction, emotional attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.

## Sexual Orientation

The type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often confused with sexual preference.

## Sexual Preference

Generally when this term is used, it is being mistakenly interchanged with “sexual orientation,” creating an illusion that one has a choice (or “preference”) in who they are attracted to. Use “sexual orientation” instead.

## Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex. “Gender confirmation surgery” is considered by many to be a more affirming term. In most cases, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. Some refer to different surgical procedures as “top” surgery and “bottom” surgery to discuss what type of surgery they are having without having to be more explicit. **Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process.**

## Sexual Orientation

The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/ or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual (straight) orientations. Avoid the offensive term “sexual preference,” which is used to suggest that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is voluntary and therefore “curable.” People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all.



## Skoliosexual

Being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some genderqueer, transgender, transsexual, and/or non-binary people.

## Sodomy Laws

Historically used to selectively persecute gay people, the state laws often referred to as "sodomy laws" were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). "Sodomy" should never be used to describe same-sex relationships or sexual orientation.

## Spiritual Attraction

A capacity that evokes the want to engage in intimate behavior based on one's experience with, interpretation of, or belief in the supernatural (e.g., religious teachings, messages from a deity), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-none, to intense). Often conflated with sexual attraction, romantic attraction, and/or emotional attraction.

## Straight

A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.

## Stud

Most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as 'butch' or 'aggressive'.

## Third Gender

For a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognize three or more genders, both contemporary and historic, and is also a conceptual term meaning different things to different people who use it, as a way to move beyond the gender binary.

## Top Surgery

This term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

## Trans

Used as shorthand to mean transgender or transsexual - or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella. Because its meaning is not precise or widely understood, be careful when using it with audiences who may not understand what it means. Avoid unless used in a direct quote or in cases where you can clearly explain the term's meaning in the context of your story.





## Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including transgender. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures

- Because sexuality labels (e.g., gay, straight, bi) are generally based on the relationship between the person's gender and the genders they are attracted to, trans\* sexuality can be defined in multiple ways. Some people may choose to self-identify as straight, gay, bi, lesbian, or pansexual (or others, using their gender identity as a basis), or they might describe their sexuality using other-focused terms like gynesexual, androsexual, or skoliosexual (see full list for definitions for these terms). Since there are a wide range of conventions, its best to listen to how someone defines themselves rather than assume a label for them.
- A trans person can be straight, gay, bisexual, queer, or any other sexual orientation.
- “Transgender” is always an adjective. Someone is never “a transgender” or “transgendered”.

## Transition / Transitioning

A term referring to the process by which a transgender person shifts toward a gender role different than the one they were assigned at birth. This can include social transition, (changing one's name, pronouns, or clothing), medical transition (hormonal or surgical care), spiritual transition (religious rites or rituals related to one's gender), or something else. Transgender people may do all, some, or none of these things as each transition is different.

## Transgender man / transgender woman

Identity labels which point in the direction of a person's transition. A transgender man is a man who was assigned female at birth. A transgender woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth. **Transgender women are not cross-dressers or drag queens. Drag queens are men, typically gay men, who dress like women for the purpose of entertainment. Be aware of the differences between transgender women, cross-dressers, and drag queens. Use the term preferred by the person. Do not use the word "transvestite" at all, unless someone specifically self-identifies that way.**



## Transphobia

The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of transgender people, the transgender community, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society. Transphobia is often manifested in violent and deadly means. While the exact numbers and percentages aren't incredibly solid on this, it's safe to say that transgender people are far more likely than their cisgender peers (including LGB people) to be the victims of violent crimes and murder. Transphobic – adj. : a word used to describe an individual who harbors some elements of this range of negative attitudes, thoughts, intents, towards transgender people.

## Transsexual

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities which is sometimes considered offensive. Still used by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender. It is best to ask which term a person prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual woman or transsexual man.

## Two-spirit

An umbrella term used by some Native American people to recognize individuals who fall outside of the gender binary. Usage covers a wide range of identities which are culturally specific. Because of this, some Native American communities have rejected this term in favor of their traditional community terms.

## Ze / Zir / “Zee”, “Zerr” or “Zeer”/

Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some transgender people. They replace “he” and “she” and “his” and “hers” respectively. Alternatively some people who are not comfortable/do not embrace he/she use the pronoun “they/their” as a gender neutral singular pronoun.



# Terms to Avoid

## OFFENSIVE

### **"homosexual" (n. or adj.)**

Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual,” it is aggressively used by anti-LGBTQ extremists to suggest that people attracted to the same sex 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.” The Associated Press, The New York Times and The Washington Post restrict use of the term “homosexual” (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).

### **"homosexual relations/relationship," "homosexual couple," "homosexual 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-LGBTQ extremists to denigrate LGBTQ people, couples, and relationships.

## PREFERRED

### **"gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people"**

Please use gay, lesbian, or when appropriate bisexual or queer to describe people attracted to members of the same sex.

### **"relationship," "couple" (or, if necessary, "gay/lesbian/same-sex couple"), "sex," etc.**

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion, or relationship gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer unless you would call the same activity, emotion, or relationship “straight” if engaged in by someone of another orientation. In most cases, your readers, viewers, or 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

### **“Sex reassignment surgery”**

This and similar language like “sex change” has a negative connotation and implies that a person is making a choice to change genders, which is inaccurate.

### **"sexual preference"**

The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being attracted to the same sex is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured."

### **"gay lifestyle," "homosexual lifestyle," or "transgender lifestyle"**

There is no single LGBTQ lifestyle. LGBTQ people are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrases "gay lifestyle," "homosexual lifestyle," and "transgender lifestyle" are used to denigrate LGBTQ people suggesting that their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (see Transgender Glossary of Terms) is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured" (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).

## PREFERRED

### **“Gender confirmation surgery or gender affirming surgery”**

This phrasing indicates an understanding that the surgery only confirms what is already true about a person’s gender.

### **"sexual orientation" or "orientation"**

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, and queer people, as well as straight men and women (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).

### **"LGBTQ people and their lives"**





## OFFENSIVE

### "admitted homosexual" or "avowed homosexual"

Dated terms used to describe those who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. The words "admitted" or "avowed" suggest that being attracted to the same sex is somehow shameful or inherently secretive.

### "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 for LGBTQ people as sinister (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).

### "special rights"

Anti-LGBTQ extremists frequently characterize equal protection of the law for LGBTQ people as "special rights" to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive nondiscrimination laws (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style). As such, the term should be avoided.

## PREFERRED

### "out gay man," "out lesbian," or "out queer person"

You may also simply describe the person as being out, for example: "Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico." Avoid the use of the word "homosexual" in any case (see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).

### "Accurate descriptions of the issues (e.g., "inclusion in existing nondiscrimination laws," "securing equal employment protections")

LGBTQ people are motivated by the same hopes, concerns, and desires as other everyday Americans. They seek to be able to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love. Their commitment to equality and acceptance is one they share with many allies and advocates who are not LGBTQ.

### "equal rights" or "equal protection"



## OFFENSIVE

### **"transgenders," "a transgender"**

Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders."

### **"transgendered"**

The adjective transgender should never have an extraneous "-ed" tacked onto the end. An "-ed" suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. It also brings transgender into alignment with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer. You would not say that Elton John is "gayed" or Ellen DeGeneres is "lesbianed," therefore you would not say Chaz Bono is "transgendered."

### **"transgenderism"**

This is not a term commonly used by transgender people. This is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanize transgender people and reduce who they are to "a condition."

### **"sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative"**

Referring to a "sex-change operation," or using terms such as "pre-operative" or "post-operative," inaccurately suggests that a person must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.

## PREFERRED

### **"transgender people", "a transgender person"**

For example, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."

### **"transgender"**

### **"being transgender"**

Refer to being transgender instead, or refer to the transgender community. You can also refer to the movement for transgender equality and acceptance.

### **"transition"**



## OFFENSIVE

**"biologically male," "biologically female," "genetically male," "genetically female," "born a man," "born a woman"**

Problematic phrases like those above are reductive and overly-simplify a very complex subject. As mentioned above, a person's sex is determined by a number of factors - not simply genetics - and a person's biology does not "trump" a person's gender identity. Finally, people are born babies: they are not "born a man" or "born a woman."

## **"passing" and "stealth"**

While some transgender people may use these terms among themselves, it is not appropriate to repeat them in mainstream media unless it's in a direct quote. The terms refer to a transgender person's ability to go through daily life without others making an assumption that they are transgender. However, the terms themselves are problematic because "passing" implies "passing as something you're not," while "stealth" connotes deceit. When transgender people are living as their authentic selves, and are not perceived as transgender by others, that does not make them deceptive or misleading.

## PREFERRED

**"assigned male at birth," "assigned female at birth" or "designated male at birth," "designated female at birth"**

**"visibly transgender," "not visibly transgender"**



# References

## **GLAAD Media Reference Guide**

<https://www.glaad.org/reference>

## **Iowa's Equality Profile from the Movement Advancement Project (information on state laws)**

[http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/profile\\_state/IA](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/profile_state/IA)







IOWA LGBTQ  
MEDIA GUIDE

