

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Service Members 101

Background

The Comprehensive Review Working Group (CRWG) has been tasked by the Secretary of Defense with providing analysis and advice on implementing new policy when the DADT law is repealed. The Military Outreach Committee (MOC), a group of LGB and straight, junior and senior, enlisted, officer, active, retired, reserve and discharged service members has offered their collective expertise on LGB issues to assist the CRWG in understanding the impact of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) law on LGB service members. Members of the MOC range in rank from E-5 to O-8; it includes representation from the chaplaincy, support and combat arms Military Occupational Specialties.

Military LGB Values

Although sexual orientation is an important characteristic, it does not define a person. The vast majority of military LGB service members identify with a military culture: they are military members who happen to be gay, rather than representatives of gay society who happen to be in the military. They share the same core values as do their fellow service members. Reveille and lights out take place at the same time for everyone. All troops train and prepare for combat. And all troops look forward to the day when they return from deployment to see their loved ones.

Language

Below is a list of useful terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

[NOTE: The acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) is used frequently through this glossary as it is the most common inclusive term for members of the "gay community." The word "gay" itself most often refers to homosexual men, so we have chosen to use the more inclusive "LGBT." There are many people within the LGBT communities who use a variety of other terms to describe themselves, including queer, questioning, same gender loving, and pansexual. Though we have chosen to use LGBT consistently here, we encourage you to respect the terms that individuals in your command have chosen to describe themselves. *It is extremely important, however, to realize that the DADT law, the Department of Defense regulations implementing the law, and the efforts to repeal the law are focused solely on LGB military members. Transgender individuals are dealt with in the military under medical and other regulations separate from those addressing homosexual and bisexual service members.*]

Biological Sex: This term describes one's anatomical and physiological identity. It is determined by chromosomes (XX for females; XY for males); hormones (estrogen/progesterone for females, testosterone for males); and internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina for females, penis and testicles for males).

Bisexual: This term describes the *sexual orientation* and identity of someone who is emotionally, sexually, and romantically attracted to people of more than one sex. While some people who identify as bisexual may be confused about their sexuality or not ready to accept being gay or lesbian, most bisexual people are clear and comfortable with their identity. Most bisexual people aren't interested in dating men and women at the same time, and are just as likely as anyone else to form monogamous relationships. Many bisexual people describe themselves as falling in love with people rather than genders, and find their attractions fluid rather than fixed in one place along the sexuality continuum.

Civil Union: This term describes the State-based relationship recognition for gay and lesbian couples that offers some or all of the state (though none of the federal) rights, protections and responsibilities of marriage.

Closeted: This term describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation.

Coming Out (of the Closet): To be "in the closet" means to hide one's identity. Many LGBT people are

“out” in some situations and “closeted” in others. To “come out” is to publicly declare one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a life-long process—in each new situation a person must decide whether or not to come out. Coming out can be difficult for some because reactions vary from complete acceptance and support to disapproval, rejection and violence. Coming out is a personal decision and not one that can be forced upon the service member by anyone else.

Cross-Dressing: To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the biological sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. “*Cross-dresser*” should NOT be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex or who intends to do so in the future. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.

Domestic Partnership: Civil/legal recognition of a committed relationship between two people that sometimes extends limited protections to them, depending on the state. There are no current federal protections.

Gay: This term describes the *sexual orientation* and identity of someone who is emotionally, sexually, and romantically attracted to other people of the same sex. Gay can be used to refer to people of all sexes and genders; though it is used most commonly to refer to males. Some females choose not to identify as gay. Avoid identifying gay people as “homosexuals”: an outdated term considered derogatory to many lesbian and gay people.

Gender Identity: One’s internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or a girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Expression: This term refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and emphasizing, de-emphasizing, or changing their bodies’ characteristics. Typically, *transgender* people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

Heterosexual: This term describes people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also known as “*straight*.”

Homophobia: This term refers to an individual’s fear or hatred of homosexuality, especially in others, but also in oneself (internalized homophobia). While *heterosexism* is best thought of at a societal or institutional level (and can therefore be changed through social action), homophobia describes an individual’s psychological fear or hatred of homosexuals.

Homosexual or Homo: Outdated clinical term considered derogatory by many gay and lesbian people. *Gay* and/or *lesbian* accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Lesbian: This term describes the *sexual orientation* and identity of a female who is emotionally, sexually, and romantically attracted to other females. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay or as gay women. Avoid identifying lesbians as “homosexuals,” a derogatory term.

LGBT / GLBT: Acronyms for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” LGBT and/or GLBT are often used because they are more inclusive of the diversity of the community. Care should be taken to ensure that audiences are not confused by their use.

Lifestyle: This is an inaccurate term used to denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives. As there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender lifestyle.

Openly Gay: This term describes people who self-identify as lesbian or gay in their personal, public and/or professional lives. It is not indicative of overly flamboyant or flaunting behavior. Similar terms

include openly lesbian, openly bisexual, openly transgender. With regard to LGB members of the military, "openly gay" is sometimes used as a negative term suggesting the types of unusual behavior often shown by media images of gay pride parades.

Outing: The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumor and/or speculation) or revealing another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBT community.

Queer: Historically a negative term used against people perceived to be LGBT. More recently, "queer" has been reclaimed by some people as a positive term describing all those who do not conform to rigid notions of *gender* and sexuality. However, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless quoting or describing someone who self-identifies that way. Queer is often used in apolitical context and in academic settings to challenge traditional ideas about identity ("queer theory").

Questioning: This term refers to people who are uncertain as to their *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. They are often seeking information and support during this stage of their identity development.

Sex: The classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitals.

Sexual Identity: Sexual identity labels include "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "bi," "queer," "questioning," "heterosexual," "straight," and others. Sexual identity evolves through a development process that varies depending on the individual. Sexual behavior and identity (self-definition) can be chosen by the individual.

Sexual Orientation: This characteristic of an individual is determined by one's sexual and emotional attractions. Categories of sexual orientation include *homosexuals*—*gay*, *lesbian*—attracted to some members of the same sex; *bisexuals*, attracted to some members of more than one sex, and *heterosexuals*, attracted to some members of another sex. Orientation is influenced by a variety of factors, including genetics and hormones, as well as by unknown environmental factors. Though the origins of sexual orientation are not completely understood, it is generally believed to be established before the age of five. For this reason, the term "sexual preference" should be avoided; sexual orientation is the preferred terminology.

Sodomy Laws: These are 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 gay, lesbian or bisexual relationships or sexuality. Specifically, "*sodomy*" refers to a term used in the law to describe the act of "unnatural" sex, which depending on jurisdiction can be one or more of oral sex, anal sex or bestiality.

Transgender: This is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (*transgender*, *transsexual*, *cross-dresser*, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. When referring to transgender people, use the pronoun they have designated as appropriate, or the one that is consistent with their presentation of themselves. If an individual's gender expression is ambiguous, try to use gender-neutral language or ask that person how she or he prefers to be addressed. [Note: Because the issue of transgender is so poorly understood by the public, by Congress and by most members of the military, and because opponents of LGB service members frequently use that misunderstanding to foment fear and distrust of LGB military members who want to serve honestly and honorably, it is essential to underscore the fact that repeal of DADT is focused solely on the issue of sexual orientation (gay, lesbian and bisexual service members) and not on the issue of sexual or gender identity (transgender or transsexual) of service members].

TERMS TO AVOID

Derogatory: “homosexual”

Preferred: “gay” (adj.); “gay man” or “lesbian” (n.); “gay person/people”

Please use “gay” or “lesbian” to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual,” the word is aggressively used by opponents of gay equality to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.

Derogatory: “homosexual relations/relationship,” “homosexual couple,” homosexual sex,” etc.

Preferred: “relationship” (or “sexual relationship”), “couple” (or, if necessary, “gay couple”), “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 derogatory and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by opponents of gay equality to denigrate gay people, couples and relationships. As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship “gay,” “lesbian” or “bisexual” 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 a person’s sex and/or sexual orientation through the names of the parties involved, your depictions of their relationships, and your use of pronouns.

Derogatory: “sexual preference”

Preferred: “sexual orientation” or “orientation”

The term “sexual preference” is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.” *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 straight men and women

Derogatory: “gay lifestyle” or “homosexual lifestyle”

Preferred: “gay lives,” “gay and lesbian lives”

There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase “gay lifestyle” is used to denigrate lesbians and gay men, suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.”

Derogatory: “admitted homosexual” or “avowed homosexual”

Preferred: “openly lesbian,” “openly gay,” “openly bisexual”

These are terms used to describe those who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual or who have recently come out of the closet. The words “admitted” or “avowed” suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive. Avoid the use of the word “homosexual” in any case.

Derogatory: “gay agenda” or “homosexual agenda”

Preferred: Accurate descriptions of the issues (e.g., “inclusion in existing non-discrimination and hate crimes laws,” “ending the ban on openly gay service members”)

LGBT people are motivated by many of the same hopes, concerns and desires as all other 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 is one they share with many allies and advocates who are not necessarily LGBT. Notions of a so-called “homosexual agenda” are rhetorical inventions of opponents of gay equality seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity for LGBT people as sinister.

Derogatory: “special rights”

Preferred: “equal rights” or “equal protection”

Opponents of gay equality frequently characterize equal protection of the law for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as “special rights” to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive non-discrimination laws.

DEROGATORY LANGUAGE

“Fag,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,” “sodomite,” “she-male,” “he-she,” “it,” “tranny” and similar epithets

The criteria for using these terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other minority groups: they should not be used.

“Deviant,” “disordered,” “dysfunctional,” “diseased,” “perverted,” “destructive” and similar descriptions

The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association discredited the notion that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a psychological disorder in the 1970s. Today, words such as “deviant,” “diseased” and “disordered” often are used to portray gay people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society.

Associating gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people or relationships with pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest

Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is neither synonymous with nor indicative of any tendency toward pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest. Such claims, innuendoes and associations often are used to insinuate that lesbians and gay men pose a threat to society, to families, and to children in particular. Such assertions and insinuations are defamatory and should be avoided.

FINAL THOUGHTS

An abundance of reference material on LGBT issues exists in the public domain. Many of the definitions in this paper were derived from the work of organizations such as Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and even the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission. Just as there are many layers to an individual, to a family, to a city and to a nation, there are many layers to the LGBT community. The MOC is dedicated to assisting the CRWG and the Department of Defense in its mission of national security. Once DADT is repealed and LGB members can serve honestly and honorably under the same rules and regulations as their heterosexual counterparts, the MOC will remain available to assist the Department of Defense in the design of personnel training and education programs dealing with LGB issues.

Very Respectfully

The Military Outreach Committee