

The ABCs of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+

By [Michael Gold](#)

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When I came out as gay more than 10 years ago, there were only four letters commonly used to group various sexual and gender minorities: L, G, B and T.

These letters were an evolution toward inclusion — an expansion of the language used to represent a disparate group that had often just been called “the gay community.”

Despite their intent, the letters proved to be limiting.

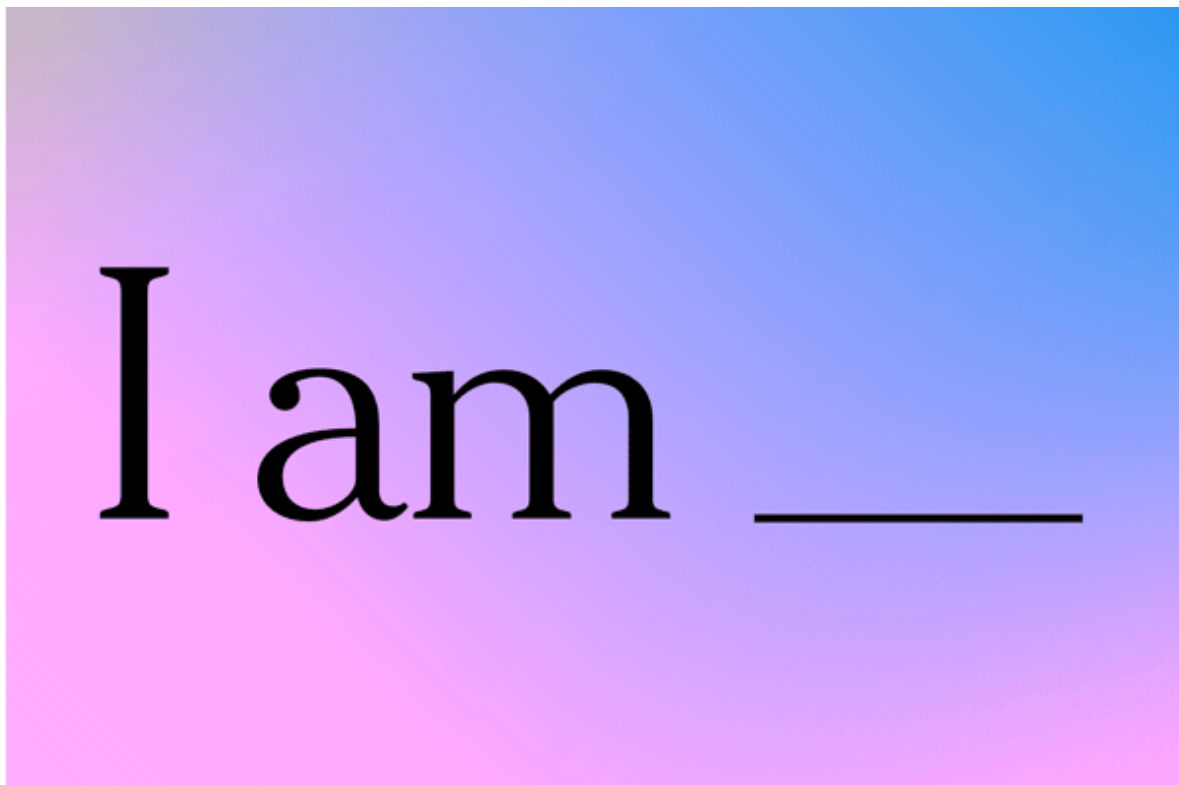
Times and attitudes have changed, and the language used to discuss sexual orientation and gender identity has also changed. As a result, the established L.G.B.T. abbreviation has acquired a few extra letters — and a cluster of ancillary terminology around both sexuality and gender. Not everyone has adopted them yet.

Take, for example, the addition of “Q” that became increasingly popular as the 20th century turned into the 21st. Some insisted this stood for “questioning,” representing people who were uncertain of their sexual orientations or gender identities. Others declared it was for “queer,” a catchall term that has shed its derogatory origins and is gaining acceptance.

Now there's also I, for intersex; A, for ally (or asexual, depending on whom you're talking to); and often a plus sign meant to cover anyone else who's not included: L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+.

However that's just the beginning. In the year since The New York Times first published this article in Summer 2018, the language used to describe the gender and sexuality spectrums has grown, with new terms becoming more prominent.

As World Pride, the annual celebration of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+ identity, comes to New York City for the month of June, The Times is asking readers to [share how they identify](#). We have updated this list to reflect more common themes among the responses.



[Tell Us Who You Are](#)

[Ahead of World Pride in June, we want to capture the ever-evolving ways in which we describe ourselves. What labels do you choose for yourself?](#)

What follows is a by-no-means inclusive list of vocabulary.

GAY AND LESBIAN It's important to start with the basics, and "gay" and "lesbian" are as basic as it gets. As "homosexual" began to feel clinical and pejorative, gay

became the de rigueur mainstream term to refer to same-sex attraction in the late 1960s and early '70s. Gradually, as what was then called the gay liberation movement gained steam, the phrase “gay and lesbian” became more popular as a way to highlight the similar-yet-separate issues faced by women in the fight for tolerance.

Gay is still sometimes used as an umbrella term, but these days, it also refers specifically to men, as in “gay men and lesbians.”

BISEXUAL Someone who is attracted to people of their gender or other gender identities. It is not a way station from straight to gay, as it had once been described.

The stereotypes around bisexuality — that it’s a transitional stage or a cover for promiscuity — have been at the center of fraught conversation within L.G.B.T.Q. circles [for years](#). The musical television show “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” which features a bisexual male character, had [an entire song refuting this](#).

As advocates speak out more about what they see as “bisexual erasure” — the persistent questioning or negation of bisexual identity — the term has become resurgent. But some people also argue that the prefix “bi” reinforces a male/female gender binary that isn’t inclusive enough.

PANSEXUAL Someone who is attracted to people of all gender identities. Or someone who is attracted to a person’s qualities regardless of their gender identity. (The prefix “pan” means “all,” rejecting the gender binary that some argue is implied by “bisexual.”)

Once a more niche term used by academics, pansexual has entered the mainstream, pushed in part by celebrities bringing it visibility. The singer Miley Cyrus [identified as pansexual in 2015](#). In April, after the singer [Janelle Monàe came out as pansexual](#) in a “Rolling Stone” article, searches for the word on Merriam-Webster’s website rose 11,000 percent, according to the dictionary.

ASEXUAL Or “ace.” Someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction. They are not to be confused with “aromantic people,” who experience little or no romantic attraction. Asexual people do not always identify as aromantic; aromantic people do not always identify as asexual.

More generally, some people (asexual or otherwise) identify as having a romantic orientation different than their sexual orientation. The terminology is similar: homoromantic, heteroromantic, biromantic and so on.

DEMISEXUAL Someone who generally does not experience sexual attraction unless they have formed a strong emotional, but not necessarily romantic, connection with someone.

GRAYSEXUAL Someone who occasionally experiences sexual attraction but usually does not; it covers a kind of gray space between asexuality and sexual identity.

CISGENDER Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

TRANSGENDER A wide-ranging term for people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

TRANSGENDERED Not a word. Often used as one.

TRANS* OR TRANS+ Two umbrella terms for non-cisgender identities.

GENDER NONCONFORMING, OR G.N.C. One who expresses gender outside traditional norms associated with masculinity or femininity. Not all gender-nonconforming people are transgender, and some transgender people express gender in conventionally masculine or feminine ways.

NONBINARY A person who identifies as neither male nor female and sees themselves outside the gender binary. This is sometimes shortened to N.B. or enby. One notable example: Taylor Mason, a financial analyst on [the show “Billions.”](#) who is believed to be the first gender nonbinary character on television and is played by the nonbinary actor Asia Kate Dillon.

GENDERQUEER Another term often used to describe someone whose gender identity is outside the strict male/female binary. They may exhibit both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities or neither.

GENDER FLUID A term used by people whose identity shifts or fluctuates. Sometimes these individuals may identify or express themselves as more masculine on some days, and more feminine on others.

GENDER-NEUTRAL Someone who prefers not to be described by a specific gender, but prefers “they” as a singular pronoun (the American Dialect Society’s [2015 Word of the Year](#)) or the honorific “Mx.,” a substitute for “Mr.” or “Ms.” that [entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015](#).

M.A.A.B./F.A.A.B./U.A.A.B. Male-assigned at birth/female-assigned at birth/unassigned at birth.

INTERSEX A term for someone born with biological sex characteristics that aren’t traditionally associated with male or female bodies. Intersexuality does not refer to sexual orientation or gender identity.

+ Not just a mathematical symbol anymore, but a denotation of everything on the gender and sexuality spectrum that letters and words can't yet describe.

Caroline Cox-Orrell contributed reporting.

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