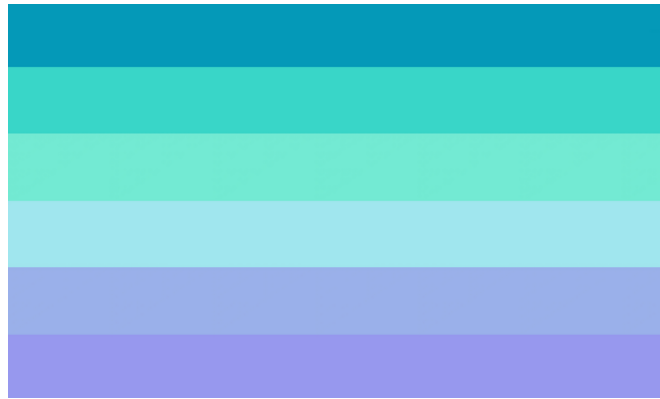


LGBTQIA2S+ Letters: Lesbian/Gay

Neptunic flag



Lesbian Flag



Lesbian and gay identities are often thought of as "women attracted to women" and "men attracted to men." However, these identities in practice are often much more nuanced than this. Lesbianism, for example, has always included gender non-conforming people; lesbians might be attracted to people who identify as non-binary, agender, gender fluid, genderqueer, and women (both cisgender and transgender). People can also identify outside the gender binary (e.g., not just male or female) and be lesbian/gay. While this may seem confusing, the point is simply that gay and lesbian identities are and have always been inclusive of gender variance.

As you may know, the "L" comes first in the LGBTQIA2S+ acronym - however, this was not always the case. Before the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, the "G" actually came first (e.g., GLBT), and most public spaces were catered more toward gay men. During the 1980s and 90s, when gay men were being disproportionately affected by the AIDS epidemic, lesbians were at the forefront of care when others were too worried about being afflicted to help. Lesbians provided medical care, donated blood, and provided food and shelter for gay men suffering from AIDS when many

refused them care and/or respect. This care spurred camaraderie between gay and lesbian communities, which contributed to later feminist movements and led to the "L" in LGBTQIA2S+ coming first as a way to show respect and solidarity to the lesbian community.

LGBTQIA2S+ Letters: Bisexual/Pansexual

Bisexual Flag



Pansexual Flag



Bisexuality is an often-misunderstood identity under the LGBTQIA2S+ umbrella. While we often refer to bisexuality as "attraction to men and women," the definition has always been "attraction to 2 or more genders." In fact, bisexuality may not include both binary genders. It can vary from person to person - for example, one person's bisexuality may consist of men and nonbinary people, while another's may include all genders but men. This often gets confused with pansexuality, which is "attraction to all genders." This difference is most commonly understood because bisexual folks are not attracted to all genders and may have gender preferences, while pansexual people have no gender preference. Sexual identity labels often do not fit neatly into a box, and LGBTQIA2S+ people may choose what identity feels right for them based on their own understanding. These nuances may seem unnecessary, but it is often not important to understand the nuances of these identities to engage in allyship and advocacy!

Bisexual and pansexual people often face stress related to not feeling like they entirely "fit in" with gay/lesbian people or straight people. When a bisexual person is in a relationship that may "look" like a relationship between two straight people, especially when their partner is not a part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, they might feel that it is difficult to find a community that feels inclusive of them. In terms of sexual identities, bisexual people face some of the highest rates of discrimination and health disparities.

LGBTQIA2S+ Letters: Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identities

Transgender Flag



For many unfortunate reasons, transgender people have recently been in the political spotlight. What does identifying as transgender really mean? To put it simply - not identifying with the sex you were assigned at birth. Transgender can be both a specific identity and an umbrella term for other forms of gender diversity. For example, a person may identify specifically as a "transgender woman" or broadly as a "trans feminine person" - the latter often encompasses gender identities outside of the binary, like non-binary and genderfluid people. Trans people may "transition" in various ways, including a change of name, change of pronouns, variations in physical appearance (through dress, makeup, hairstyle), hormones, surgery, etc. However, **there is nothing specific that people have to do to "finish" their transition.** Additionally, aspects of people's transition may occur in what seems like a non-linear timeline - for example, someone may undergo "top" surgery before deciding if hormones are right for them.

In contrast, you may have heard the term "cisgender" to describe people who are not trans. The prefix "cis" comes from the Latin "same" or "on this side," - meaning that "cisgender" means those whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth.