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# What Does It Mean To Be Heteroflexible?

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY RENELL MEDRANO.

We use *a lot* of different words to describe people in the LGBTQ+ community. So many, in fact, that the whole acronym (LGBTQQIP2SAA...) has been nicknamed "alphabet soup." But not every sexual orientation label gets the same respect from everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. Some labels, like "heteroflexible," are often criticized as frivolous or less valid than others.

Even people who identify as heteroflexible sometimes feel that they don't count as queer. In a video with YouTube personality Ash Hardell, British YouTuber Hannah Witton explained her personal definition of "heteroflexible" as "not entirely straight." Essentially, someone who's heteroflexible is sexually and/or romantically interested in genders different from their own a majority of the time. But, they're open to having a sexual and/or romantic relationship with genders like their own.

That makes heteroflexible people a pretty clear part of the LGBTQ+ community, which includes anyone who isn't both straight and cisgender. But, in the video, Witton says that she only identifies as heteroflexible when she's around straight people. She wouldn't claim that identity in queer spaces.

"It's about not wanting to steal the thunder," she says.

What Witton is voicing is the idea that people like her, who are sexually fluid but seem straight to most people, aren't truly part of the LGBTQ+ community. Those are tricky feelings, rooted in internalized biphobia. Bi+ people often hear from both straight and lesbian or gay people that their identities aren't real. They're told to "pick a side," or they hear assumptions that they'll eventually become either straight or gay. Sometimes, they come across people who choose not to date them simply because they're bisexual. Those messages can get inside someone's head and make them feel as if they aren't "gay enough" to count as LGBTQ+.

Yet, the criticism of "heteroflexible" is more complicated, because even some bisexual people don't like the word. Charlie Williams at Affinity Magazine argues that using heteroflexible instead of bisexual "gives off an unsettling vibe about being bi, as if it's too big and complex for the average person to comprehend." Choosing to call yourself "heteroflexible" instead of

"bisexual" implies that being bisexual is bad and invalidates bisexuality, Williams says. Yet, there are many words that someone chooses to use rather than (or in conjunction with) bisexual. People [identify as queer, pansexual, fluid, polysexual, and many other words](#) that mean they're attracted to more than one gender. Those labels aren't erasing bisexuality, so why is heteroflexible?

When it comes down to it, "heteroflexible" is just a word, and it's not up to anyone to tell someone they can't identify that way. "To argue over which word is the best and to disrespect other people's choice of label is not a productive use of our time," says [Robyn Ochs](#), bisexual activist and editor of [Bi Women Quarterly](#). "Our time would be much better spent working together to hold space for all non-binary sexualities."

She understands why these arguments happen, though. It's because LGBTQ+ people have experienced pain and disrespect due to our identities and we've had our sexualities erased. That can make us sensitive about defending our labels. But, "heteroflexible" doesn't necessarily threaten other LGBTQ+ sexualities. Ochs says to think of it as if she were wearing a blue shirt. One person might call it turquoise, one might call it cerulean, and one might simply call it blue. "I don't care what you call it, as long as you like my shirt," she says.

Like having many different shades of the same color, "heteroflexible" is just another way to say "not straight." So, Ochs suggests we stop worrying so much about which words people choose to label themselves, and work together to support everyone in the LGBTQ+ community.

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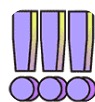
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