

LGBTQ+ Community Terms

A note on definitions: Many of the terms relating to identity are specific to dominant North American culture, and to this time in history. They may evolve or mean something different to different people. It is always best to ask people what they mean by a term when they use it to describe themselves. Additionally, there are many more identity terms than can be listed here.

Assigned sex: the sex (e.g. “male” or “female”) that is noted on an individual's birth certificate issued at birth. This is also referred to as sex assigned at birth, birth sex, and/or sex recorded at birth. Some individuals may opt to change the sex assigned to them on their birth certificate to better reflect their gender identity.

Bisexual: a person who identifies as having an emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or relational attraction to people of their same or different gender.

Cisgender: a term used for someone whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth, i.e. who is not transgender or gender-nonconforming.

Coming out: the process of self-disclosing one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to themselves and others. Coming out is often a lifelong process, as there may be many different instances a person may choose to come out. It is important that an individual be given the autonomy to choose if they want to come out, how they will come out, and when they will come out, as this choice is often influenced by a sense of safety and/or acceptance.

Gay: most commonly, a man who self-identifies as having an emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or relational attraction to other men. This term is preferable to “homosexual,” which has clinical overtones that some find offensive. The term gay is sometimes used by women who prefer it to the term lesbian, or as an overarching term to refer to a broad array of sexual orientation identities other than heterosexual.

Gender identity: a person's internal and individual experience of gender, whether that be a man, woman, both, neither, or an identity entirely different. Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.

Gender expression: how a person publicly represents or expresses their gender identity to others. Every person has a gender identity, and makes choices on how they express this identity with how they speak or act, wear their hair, dress, and otherwise present themselves to the world. A person's gender expression may be different from the gender norms that are generally associated with that person's sex assigned at birth.

Gender binary: the idea that there are only two sexes/genders (male and female, or masculine and feminine) and that they are distinct, opposite forms of each other.

Gender-neutral: a term that describes something, many times a space (like a bathroom) or a thing (such as clothing), that is not segregated by sex or gender.

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Genderqueer: a term for people who identify outside the confines of the binary definition of gender (male/female). Genderqueer people may consider themselves to be two or more genders, without a gender, a third gender, and/or fluid.

Homophobia: fear, hatred or discriminatory response to a person who is or is perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.

Intersex: label used to describe a person whose combination of chromosomes, hormones, and primary and secondary sex characteristics differs from one of the two expected patterns of male or female. This term replaces "hermaphrodite," which is considered highly offensive.

Latinx: a person of Latin American origin or descent. This term is used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to the masculine Latino or feminine Latina.

Lesbian: a woman who self-identifies as having an emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or relational attraction to other women.

Medical transition: a process that utilizes hormonal treatments and/or affirming surgical interventions to bring a person's body into alliance with that person's gender identity. Not all transgender people desire to transition medically, due to various medical, social, financial, and/or safety reasons.

Nonbinary: an umbrella term for gender identities that are neither male nor female, and may be used by people who reject this binary construct altogether. A nonbinary gender marker on an ID might be represented by an X or an N.

Pansexual: a person who has an emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or relational attraction to other people generally, rather than people of a specific sex or gender.

Preferred gender pronouns: the way people refer to themselves and how they prefer to be addressed in terms of gender. If you are unsure of what pronoun a person may use, it is best to ask rather than assuming. Some common preferred gender pronouns are: she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs (used in the singular), and ze/hir/hirs.

Queer: an umbrella term that includes anyone who wants to identify as queer and who feels outside the societal norms in regards to gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual/romantic behaviors. The term may also serve as a political statement that advocates breaking gender and sexual binaries. This was formerly used as a derogatory term, and is still considered offensive by some, but has been reclaimed in recent decades.

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Questioning: a term used to describe a person who is exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and does not necessarily self-identify as LGBTQ. Not all people who question their identities may come out and/or identify as LGBTQ.

Sexual orientation: refers to a person's emotional, sexual, spiritual, and/or relational attraction towards other people of the same or different gender. Some common sexual orientations include lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, pansexual, and asexual. There are many other terms that people may use to identify their sexual orientation.

Social transition: the process of disclosing oneself as transgender to friends, family, co-workers, and/or classmates. This often includes asking that others use a name, pronoun, or gender that reflects that person's gender identity. Additionally, this person may begin to use facilities such as bathrooms, locker rooms, or dormitories associated with their gender identity.

Transgender: an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from that traditionally associated with the assigned sex at birth. A transgender person may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, pansexual, or something else.

Transgender man: a man who was assigned female at birth. The term female-to-male is sometimes used as a self-identification, but should be generally avoided as it can be interpreted as not respecting the validity of someone's gender identity. A "transgender man," or simply "man," is generally the preferable way to refer to such an individual.

Transgender woman: a woman who was assigned male at birth. The term male-to-female is sometimes used as self-identification, but should be generally avoided as it can be interpreted as not respecting the validity of someone's gender identity. A "transgender woman," or simply "woman," is generally the preferable way to refer to such an individual.

Transphobia: fear, hatred, or discriminatory response to a person who is or is perceived to be transgender or gender-nonconforming.

Two spirit: an umbrella term referring to certain gender identities found in North American indigenous communities. Historically, it often referred to birth-assigned men who took on roles and dress customary for women, and designated a third gender.

