
LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms

These terms and definitions are evolving and can mean different things to different people. Use them as a starting point for discussion, and always ask individuals how they self-identify instead of assuming.

Ally: (N.) A person is not a direct member of a marginalized or oppressed group, but supports and fights for equality and inclusion on behalf of that group.

Androgynous: (Adj.) Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Aromantic: (Adj.) An umbrella term used to describe a person who does not experience romantic attraction. Can also include people who are demiromantic, i.e., a person who does not experience romantic attraction until a strong emotional or sexual connection is formed.

Asexual/Ace: (Adj.) An umbrella term used to describe a spectrum characterized by a total or partial absence of sexual attraction or interest in engaging in sexual activities with others. Can also include people who are demisexual, i.e., a person who does not engage in sexual activity until a strong emotional or romantic connection is formed.

Bisexual / Bi / Bi+: (Adj.) A person who has the potential to be physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Cisgender: (Adj.) Often shortened to 'cis,' cisgender describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Coming Out: (V.) The process of sharing how one might identify in terms of their romantic orientation, sexual orientation, or gender identity. To "out" someone else without that person's permission can be very damaging to that person socially, emotionally, physically, and/or professionally.

Drag: (N.) A performative art style that is open to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. While many think of drag artists as only being gay cisgender men, drag shows can include drag queens

or drag kings, and have always included transgender women, cisgender women, transgender men, nonbinary people, and other gender diverse people as performers.

Families of Choice: (N.) In contrast to 'families of origin,' chosen families encompass individuals who may not be related by blood or law. Many LGBTQ+ older adults have experienced exclusion, ostracization, or estrangement to their families of origin, and therefore seek out chosen families with their peers and allies.

Gay: (Adj.) A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to individuals of the same gender. Most commonly used to describe men who are attracted to men, but 'gay' is also used as an umbrella term to refer to the broader LGBTQ+ community.

Gender Expression: (N.) The way one expresses gender through physical characteristics, behaviors, and presentation (including dress, manner, and appearance). Gender expression is different from gender identity and may or may not fit societal expectations of what your gender "should" look/sound/dress/act like.

Gender Identity: (N.) A person's deeply held core sense of self in relation to gender (e.g. man, woman, nonbinary, etc). Your gender identity may not always align with your gender expression and/or your sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is part of the human condition, and all people have one.

Gender Expansive / Gender Non-Conforming: (Adj.) An umbrella term for those who do not follow gender stereotypes, or who expand ideas of gender expression or gender identity. Gender Expansive / Gender Non-Conforming is not the same as non-binary and can include cisgender people as well.

In the Closet: (Adj.) Someone who has not publically shared their sexual orientation or gender identity as an LGBTQ+ community member.

Intersex: (Adj.) A person with one or more innate sex characteristics (including genitals, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes) that fall outside of traditional conceptions of male or female bodies. Many intersex people are noticed as intersex at birth, while many are not noticed as intersex until later in life. Having an intersex trait is not the same as being transgender.

Lesbian: (Adj.) A woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women.

LGBTQQIP2SAA: (Adj.) Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous, and asexual. Commonly shortened to LGBTQ+, with the plus sign recognizing the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by LGBTQ+ members.

Nonbinary: (Adj.) An umbrella term used to describe a person who experiences their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the binary gender categories of man and woman. Many nonbinary people consider themselves part of the transgender community, while others do not. Some nonbinary people may also use words like agender, bigender, demigender, pangender, etc. to describe the specific way in which they are nonbinary.

Pansexual: (Adj.) A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions to any person, regardless of gender identity or expression. One of several terms under the Bi+ umbrella.

Polyamorous: (Adj.) A person who has the desire for more than one consenting intimate relationship at the same time.

Pronouns: (N.) The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/them, he/him, and she/her. Neopronouns are pronouns created to be specifically gender neutral, including xe/xem, ze/zir, and fae/faer.

Queer: (Adj.) The full spectrum of non-cisgender and/or non-straight identities and orientations, often used as an umbrella term to describe everyone in the LGBTQ+ community.

Questioning: (Adj.) Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. Questioning people can be of any age, so for many this may happen later in life.

Same-Gender Loving: (Adj.) A term most frequently used in communities of color that affirms one's attraction to someone of the same gender. Some individuals, especially older adults of color, prefer this term over terms like lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Sex Assigned at Birth: (N.) Infants are assigned a sex at birth, "male" or "female," based on the appearance of their external anatomy. However, the development of the human body's primary and secondary sexual characteristics is a complex process, and it is not strictly binary. (See: Intersex.)

Sexual Orientation: (N.) The sexual attraction toward other people or toward no people. While sexual activity involves the choices one makes regarding their behavior, one's sexual activity or sexual behavior does not define one's sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, and all people have one.

Transgender: (Adj.) A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures. A person can call themselves transgender the moment they realize that their gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transitioning: (V.) The process a person undertakes to bring their gender expression and/or body into alignment with their gender identity. This can include name changes, gender affirming surgery, hormone use, changes to clothing or appearance, changing sex markers on driver's license, voice training, and more. There is no single transition journey, as gender affirming care looks different for each individual.

Two-Spirit: (Adj.) A person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit. Used by some Indigenous and First Nations people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. In most tribes, they were considered neither men nor women; they occupied a distinct, alternative gender status.