

Definitions for LGBTIQA Related Terms

LGBTIQA+ communities use various terms, phrases, and words to discuss and/or identify LGBTIQA+ concepts. Definitions of these terms and phrases are constantly changing, often contested, and based upon personal preferences and social changes.

Agender—denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.

Ally—Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and cisgender privilege in themselves and others; who has concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; who believes that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are social justice issues.

Androgyny/Androgynous—Appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

Assigned Sex at Birth—The assignment of someone as male, female, or intersex based on anatomical, chromosomal, and hormonal characteristics.

Bigender—A person whose gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

Biological Sex—Historically used to discuss assigned sex at birth.

Biphobia—Culturally constructed aversion to people who identify as bisexual, omnisexual, or pansexual.

Bisexual—A term used to describe someone who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with someone regardless of that person's gender-identity. Omnisexual and Pansexual are analogous terms that are used by some to connote their recognition of the fluidity of gender or that there are more than two genders.

Butch—A person who identifies themselves or is identified by others as masculine by current cultural standards whether physically, mentally or emotionally. 'Butch' is sometimes used as a derogatory term but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

Cisgender—A preferred term to refer to someone whose gender identity matches their assigned gender at birth. It is contrasted to transgender when that term is used to refer to someone whose gender identity does NOT match their assigned gender at birth. The origin of the term is logically based on the Latin prefixes, in which "cis" ("on the same side") is the opposite of "trans" ("on the opposite side"). These terms find use in a range of subjects, including Geometric isomerism in chemistry.

Closet/Closeted—A term used to describe concealment of sexual orientation or gender identity. Sometimes, due to concerns about physical, emotional, or financial security people feel they must conceal their identities.

Coming Out—May refer to the process by which one accepts one's own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersex person (to 'come out' to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status with others (to 'come out')

to friends, family, etc.). This is a continual, life-long process for LGBTIQ+ identified individuals.

Drag—The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically.

Discrimination—Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

Family (In the Family)—Asking if someone is “in the family” or just “family” is a way of referencing or inquiring about someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Femme—Displaying stereotypically feminine-gender characteristics in terms of gender expression.

FTM/F2M—Abbreviation used to refer to female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

Gay—A term used to describe a male-identified person who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with another male-identified person. Often gay is used to describe both men and women who partner with the same-sex; this is not universally preferred. Personal preference usually determines how one would like to identify their sexuality.

Genderqueer—Term used to describe an identity that encompasses both male and female, neither male nor female, or beyond male and/or female. Gender non-binary or gender fluid are similar terms.

Gender Binary—A social classification that divides gender identity into masculine and feminine with expected gender roles, gender expressions, and characteristics for each one.

Gender Cues—What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture and historical time period.

Gender Dysphoria—A term coined by psychologists and medical doctors that refers to the state of discomfort felt by some transgender people caused by the incongruity between one's physical sex and one's gender identity.

Gender Expression—How someone expresses their gender through appearance, behavior, or mannerisms. A person’s gender expression may or may not be analogous to their gender identity.

Gender Identity—The gender an individual identifies as psychologically, regardless of what gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender Non-Conforming—A term used to describe a person who does not conform to the gender based expectations of society.

Heterosexism—Societal and institutional reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and norm; the assumption that everyone identifies as heterosexual.

Heterosexual—A term used to describe someone who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with only someone of a different gender than themselves.

Homosexual—Initially, introduced in the American Psychological Association (APA) to diagnosis someone who partners with the same-sex. Presently, not part of (APA) as a diagnosis and often *not preferred* to describe men and women who partner with the same-sex.

Homophobia—Culturally constructed aversion to people who are perceived as not being heterosexual. Stems from heterosexism.

Intersex—A general term used to refer to individuals born with, or who develop naturally in puberty, biological sex characteristics which are not typically male or female. See www.isna.org for more information on this topic.

Lesbian—A term used to describe a female-identified person who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with another female-identified person. Often lesbians are incorporated into the term gay; which may be used to describe both men and women who partner with same-sex. This is not universally preferred. Personal preference usually determines how one would like to identify their sexuality.

MTF/M2F—Abbreviation used to refer to male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

Out (someone)—To disclose someone else’s sexual orientation or gender identity without permission from that person. Also, used to describe how public (how “out”) someone is regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Oppression—The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over another and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Pansexual—A term used to describe someone who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with someone regardless of that person’s gender-identity or genitalia. Pansexual and Omnisexual are analogous terms that are used by some to connote recognition of the fluidity of gender or the reality of more than two genders.

Partner (significant other)—Gender-neutral and non-heterosexist method of describing someone’s “boyfriend/girlfriend”, or “husband/wife”; using partner or significant other is often preferred in LGBTIQ+ communities.

Polyamory—A term used to refer to the ethical philosophy and practice of having nonpossessive, honest, responsible loving and/or sexual relationships with multiple partners within parameters that are known and agreed upon by all people involved; can include: open relationships, polyfidelity, and relationships of different levels of commitment. For more information see <http://www.polyamorysociety.org/>

Queer—A term with varied meanings. In the mid-late 1900s this was a derogatory slang term for the LGBTQ community and currently is still used by some in this manner. In the early 1990s many individuals and organizations began to reclaim this term. Some people use it as an all-inclusive or umbrella term to refer to all people who identify as LGBTIQ+. This usage is not accepted by the entire community. Often used by people who wish to challenge norms of sexuality and/or gender expression as well as to defy identities and labeling of persons.

Rainbow (Flag)—Designed in 1978 for Gay Pride in San Francisco. Colors symbolize the diversity within the LGBTIQ+ population. The flag is now used to within LGBTIQ+ and Ally communities to celebrate diversity and pride.

Same Gender Loving—A term coined by activist Cleo Manago that is sometimes used by people who are Black to express an alternative sexual orientation. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture (sometimes abbreviated as SGL).

Sexual Orientation—Refers to a person's openness to or desire for emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and/or sexually intimate relationships with people of the same or different sex/gender or irrespective of sex/gender.

Stereotype—A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences.

Trans—A word/symbol that intentionally connotes broad inclusion of people who identify or experience their sex/gender in ways that do not conform to their assigned sex at birth; regardless of whether they identify specifically as transgender. This can include but is not limited to people who identify as transgender, transsexual, agender, bigender, Two Spirit, fluid, or multi-gender.

Transgender (TG)—A broad term that refers to people who experience their gender identity or express their gender in ways that do not conform to their assigned sex at birth. Transgender individuals may pursue hormone therapy and/or gender affirmation surgeries through a process called transitioning. A person who identifies as transgender may be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or asexual; they are not always a sexual minority. See <http://www.nctequality.org> for more information.

Transsexual (TS)—An older term for an individual who self-identifies and presents themselves as a gender different than their assigned sex at birth. Transsexual individuals may pursue hormone therapy and/or gender affirmation surgeries through a process called transitioning. A person who identifies as transsexual may be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or asexual; they are not always a sexual minority.

Transition—A term used to describe the process a person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with their gender identity or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression. Can include hormone therapy and/or various surgical procedures.

Trans Man—An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females; also referred to as 'trans guy(s)'

Trans Woman—An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transgender people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as men.

Ze, Hir, Hirs, Hirself —Gender non-specific pronouns sometimes preferred by individuals instead of pronouns that are gender specific. There are multiple versions of gender non-specific pronouns currently in use.

This terminology sheet was created by the staff of the UNC LGBTQ Center after consultation of multiple sources including websites, books, and definitions used at other university LGBTQ related centers (special recognition to LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside and The University of Georgia LGBT Resource Center).