



LGBTQIA+ Terminology and Definitions: Categories

The LGBTQIA+ community includes individuals who hold a spectrum of identities and orientations related to the individual's gender and sexuality or attraction to others. While not exhaustive, this list defines identities and terms in order to support individuals seeking to learn about the LGBTQIA+ community and affirming language. There are some identities and terms that relate to either gender or sexuality/attraction, and there are others that can be applicable to both gender and sexuality/attraction. Therefore, this list is separated into categories depending on the appropriate application/relation of each defined term.

Identities & Terms Applicable to Gender & Sexuality/Attraction

Umbrella Identities

- **Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.
- **Questioning:** A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Closeted & Out

- **Closeted:** An individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons, such as fear for one's safety, peer or family rejection, or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc.
- **Coming out:** The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexuality or gender identity; the process by which one shares one's sexuality or gender identity with others.
- **Outing:** Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

Identities & Terms Related to Gender

Sex vs. Gender Identity

- **Sex assigned at birth** (often referred to as "biological sex"): The sex (male, female, or intersex) that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.
- **Intersex:** Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of differences among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.
- **Gender identity:** One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Cisgender vs. Transgender

- **Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.



Gender Binary & Beyond

- **Gender binary:** A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.
- **Non-binary:** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside of these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender-fluid.

Common Non-Binary Gender Identities

- **Agender:** A person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either male or female, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender.
- **Bigender:** A person who fluctuates between traditionally “male” and “female” gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both male and female genders. Or, identifying with either a male or female gender, as well as a third, different gender.
- **Gender-fluid:** A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.
- **Genderqueer:** Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity or gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as “genderqueer” may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female, or as falling completely outside these categories.
- **Two-spirit:** An umbrella term traditionally within Native American communities to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both male and female genders.

Gender Expression

- **Gender expression:** External appearances of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.
- **Gender normative:** Someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society’s gender-based expectations.
- **Gender variant** – Someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society.
- **Gender non-conforming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do.
- **Gender-expansive:** A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.
- **Androgyny:** A gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity.

Name & Pronouns

- **Deadname** (noun): The name that a transgender person was given as birth and no longer uses upon transitioning.
- **Deadname** (verb): To speak of or address someone by their deadname.



- **Personal pronoun:** A pronoun (such as I, you, or they) that expresses a distinction of person. As one's pronouns are ultimately a reflection of their personal identity, the number and types of (neo)pronouns a person may use is limitless.
- **Neopronouns:** Pronouns besides the most commonly used in a particular language. Examples include xe/xir/xirs, ze/zir/zirs, and fae/faer/faers.
- **Misgender:** To identify the gender of a person incorrectly, as by using an incorrect label or pronoun.

Transitioning

- **Transitioning:** A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition (such as changing name and pronouns), medical transition (which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries), and legal transition (which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents). Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all, or none of these processes.
- **Binder:** An undergarment used to alter to reduce the appearance of one's breasts (worn similarly to how one wears a sports bra).
- **Passing:** Transgender people being accepted as, or able to "pass for," a member of their self-identified gender identity (regardless of sex assigned at birth) without being identified as trans.
- **Top surgery:** This term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

Identities & Terms Related to Sexuality/Attraction

Sexual Attraction

- **Sexual attraction:** A capacity that evokes the want to engage in physically intimate behavior (e.g., kissing, touching, intercourse), experiences in varying degrees (from little-to-none to intense). Often conflated with romantic attraction, emotional attraction, and/or spiritual attraction.
- **Sexual orientation:** The type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labels based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often confused with sexual preference, creating an illusion that one has a choice (or "preference") in who they are attracted to.
- **Sexual preference:** The types of sexual intercourse, stimulation, and gratification one likes to receive and participate in.

Other Attractions

- **Emotional attraction:** A capacity that evokes the want to engage in emotionally intimate behavior (e.g., sharing, confiding, trusting, inter-depending), experiences in varying degrees.
- **Romantic attraction:** A capacity that evokes the want to engage in romantic intimate behavior (e.g., dating, relationships, marriage), experienced in varying degrees.
- **Spiritual attraction:** A capacity that evokes the want to engage in intimate behavior based on one's experience with, interpretation of, or belief in the supernatural (e.g., religious teachings, messages from a deity), experienced in varying degrees.

Common Sexualities

- **Asexual:** Experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.
- **Bisexual:** A person who experiences attraction to some men and women; a person who experiences attraction to some people of their gender and another gender. Bisexual attraction does not need to be equally split.



- Demisexual: Little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic connection is formed with someone, often within a romantic relationship.
- Gay: Experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of the same gender. An umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole or as an individual identity for anyone who is not straight.
- Heterosexual/straight: Experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of a different gender.
- Lesbian: Women who are primarily attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other women.
- Pansexual: A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions.
- Polyamorous: Refers to the practice of, desire for, or orientation toward having ethical, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners).

-phobia, -ism, & -normativity Terms Related to Gender & Sexuality/Attraction

-phobia

- Biphobia: A range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express toward bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the LGBTQ community as well as straight society.
- Homophobia: An umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes that one may have toward LGBTQ people. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTQ.
- Transphobia: The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans people, the trans community, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society.

-ism

- Cissexism: Behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow better or more “right” than being transgender, and/or makes other genders invisible.
- Heterosexism: Behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more “right” than queerness, and/or makes other sexualities invisible.

-normativity

- Cisnormativity: The assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender individuals are superior to trans identities. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.
- Heteronormativity: The assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.

The above definitions were compiled from the Merriam-Webster dictionary and The Safe Zone Project, Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG, and GLAAD glossaries.