

Glossary of Terms

Below we have compiled a list of terms related to both the LGBTQIA community. Many of the terms and definitions below are constantly evolving, changing and often mean different things to different people. They are provided below as a starting point for discussion and understanding. When in doubt, it's best to respectfully ask people how they identify, and always honor their desired self-identifications.

Borrowed with permission from the UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center & other community resources.
Edited by the UCSF LGBT Resource Center.

Ally: A person who confronts heterosexism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others out of concern for the well being of LGBTQIA people.

Asexuality: Generally characterized by not feeling sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity.

Biphobia: fear or hatred of people who are bisexual, pansexual, or omnisexual.

Bisexual: A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender.

Coming Out: Refers to voluntarily making public one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Cisgender: The prefix cis- means "on this side of" or "not across." A term used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not transgender.

Cross Dresser: A word to describe a person who dresses, at least partially, as a member of a gender other than their assigned sex; carries no implications of sexual orientation.

Drag King: A person (often a woman) who appears as a man. Generally in reference to an act or performance. This has no implications regarding gender identity.

Drag Queen: A person (often a man) who appears as a woman. Generally in reference to an act or performance. This has no implications regarding gender identity.

Fluid(ity): generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that is a fluctuating mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, gay and straight); *not to be confused with "transitioning"*

Gay: A sexual orientation toward people of the same gender.

Gender: A social construct used to classify a person as a man, woman, or some other identity. Fundamentally different from the sex one is assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: How one expresses oneself, in terms of dress, mannerisms and/or behaviors that society characterizes as "masculine" or "feminine."

GenderQueer: A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm for their assigned sex, is beyond genders, or is some combination of them.

Heterosexism: The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression, which reinforces realities of silence and invisibility.

Heterosexuality: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of a gender other than their own.

Homophobia: The irrational hatred and fear of LGBTQIA people. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Homosexual/Homosexuality: An outdated term to describe a sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.

Internalized homophobia: The fear and self-hate of one's own LGBTQIA identity, that occurs for many individuals who have learned negative ideas about LGBT people throughout childhood. One form of internalized oppression is the acceptance of the myths and stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

Intersex: People who, without medical intervention, develop primary or secondary sex characteristics that do not fit "neatly" into society's definitions of male or female. Many visibly intersex people are mutilated in infancy and early childhood by doctors to make the individual's sex characteristics conform to society's idea of what normal bodies should look like. Intersex people are relatively common, although society's denial of their existence has allowed very little room for intersex issues to be discussed publicly.

Lesbian: A woman whose primary sexual orientation is toward people of the same gender.

LGBT: Abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. An umbrella term used to refer to the community as a whole.

Pansexual/Omnisexual: Terms used to describe people who have romantic, sexual or affectional desire for people of all genders and sexes.

Queer: This can include, but is not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and asexual people. This term has different meanings to different people. Some still find it offensive, while others reclaim it to encompass the broader sense of history of the gay rights movement. Can also be used as an umbrella term like LGBT, as in "the queer community." Recently it has also become a specific sexual identity (rather than an umbrella term) that invests itself in ambiguity to be more inclusive and avoid assumptions about an individual's sexual desires or practices.

QPOC: Stands for queer person of color

Sex: a categorization based on the appearance of the genitalia at birth.

Sexuality: The components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices, etc.

Sexual Orientation: An enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction. Sexual orientation is fluid. Asexuality is also considered a sexual orientation (See above definition of asexuality)

Trans*: An umbrella term that is used to include folks who identify as transgender and transsexual as well as other identities where a person does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Trans-man: a person who was assigned a female sex at birth, but identifies as a man. Also referred to as FTM (female-to-male).

Trans-woman: a person who was assigned a male sex at birth, but identifies as a woman. Also referred to as MTF (male-to-female).

Transphobia: The fear or hatred of transgender people or people who do not meet society's gender role expectations.

Transgender: Used most often as an umbrella term, some commonly held definitions: 1. Someone whose gender identity or expression does not fit (dominant-group social constructs of) assigned birth sex and gender. 2. A gender outside of the man/woman binary. 3. Having no gender or multiple genders.

Transsexual: A person who lives full-time in a gender different than their assigned birth sex and gender. Some pursue hormones and/or surgery while others do not. Sometimes used to specifically refer to trans people pursuing gender or sex confirmation.

Transvestite: This is an outdated and problematic term due to its historical use as a diagnosis for medical/mental health disorders. Cross Dresser has replaced transvestite, see above definition.

Two-Spirit: a term traditionally used by Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders.