

LGBTQ Vocabulary

The terms listed below and all identities can be expansive or strict within their definitions. It is important to remember that it is highly dependent on the person's identity or intersecting identities and lived experiences that give it meaning. Empathy is the most important in order to understand and acknowledge one's identity or identities.

General Terminology:

Ally: describes a straight or cisgender person who supports queer communities and actively confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and cisgender privilege in themselves and in others

Coming Out: the process of recognizing and accepting one's sexuality or gender identity; may also refer to the process of sharing one's own identity with others

GSA: abbreviation for Gender and Sexuality Alliance; group that empowers youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools

Heteronormativity: cultural or personal assumptions that everyone is heterosexual, marginalizing queer individuals and resulting in heterosexism

Heterosexism: negatively biased attitudes and behaviors against people who are not heterosexual, perpetuated by heteronormativity, and prioritizing heterosexual norms

Outing: when someone publicly reveals another person's sexual orientation or gender identity, usually without the person's consent and often before they are ready to come out

Pride Flag: the rainbow pride flag created in 1978 by artist Gilbert Baker serves as a symbol for diversity within the LGBTQ+ community, with each line of color having an additional literal meaning. The flag is often used by businesses and organizations to establish them as safe spaces for everyone in the community. For additional information on the thirteen individual pride flags, please see the Our Family Coalition Pride Flag Guide

Below is a list of 12 additional commonly recognized pride flags:

Bisexual pride, Philadelphia's People of Color Inclusive pride, Pansexual pride, Lesbian pride, Asexual pride, Intersex pride, Transgender pride, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Gender, Non-Binary pride, Progress pride

Queer: an umbrella term for people who fall outside the gender and sexuality "norms"; historically a negative term, it has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ community; although some still consider it derogatory

Ze/ Xe/ Hir: additional pronouns sometimes used by the Transgender and Non-Binary communities

Gender Spectrum Terminology:

Agender: describes a person whose gender identity does not correlate with conventional gender categories

Cisgender: describes a person who identifies with their gender assigned at birth

Gender: complex relationship between physical traits and one's internal sense of self as male or female, both, or neither, as well as one's outward presentation and behaviors that exist within a spectrum

Gender Assignment: gender assigned at birth based on physical anatomy; if infant is born with a vulva and vagina they are typically assigned female (girl) and if infant is born with penis and testicals, they are typically assigned male (boy) by parents and doctors

Gender Binary: the system in which society divides people into two distinct genders (male and female) and their associated roles, identities, and characteristics; a social construct that does not adequately describe the full spectrum of gender experiences

Gender Dysphoria: a term used within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to explain clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify

Gender Expression: a person's gender related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the persons aligned set at birth; gender expression refers to the external characteristics that are socially defined as masculine and feminine, including clothing, hairstyles, activities, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions

Gender Identity: a person's genuine, internal, deeply rooted identification as man, woman, both, or neither; all people have a gender identity, not just transgender people

Gender Non-Conforming/ Gender Variant: appearance or other characteristics that differ from those stereotypically associated with being masculine or feminine; this term can be used to describe people whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations about how boys and girls are "suppose to" look or act. Also referred to as gender expansive or gender transcendent.

Genderqueer: gender identities that fall along the gender spectrum or outside the gender binary; a person may identify as both a man and a woman, as neither, or beyond genders; sometimes used as an umbrella term for gender non-conforming/variant identities

Gender Transition: the process that some transgender and gender non-conforming people undergo to match their gender identity with their outward appearance. This may include clothing, hairstyles, changing names and/or pronouns to fit their gender identity, and healthcare needs such as hormones and surgeries.

Intersex: a person who is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that is not considered typical for a male or female

Non-Binary: a term used by the community of people whose gender identity exists outside of the gender binary of male/female; for example, sometimes accompanied by the usage of the pronoun they/them pronouns, the honorific of Mx. instead of Mrs. or Mr.

Transgender: describes a person whose gender identity is different from what is generally considered typical for their sex assigned at birth

Sexual Orientation Terminology:

Aromantic: describes a person who can but tends not to have romantic attraction to other people

Asexual: describes a person who is generally not sexually attracted to any person regardless of gender

Bisexual: (historically) used to describe a person who can be sexually attracted to both men and women

Demisexual: used to describe a person who generally only feels sexual attraction to another person after developing an emotional bond with that person

Gay: often used to describe men who are generally sexually attracted to other men; sometimes used by women who are sexually attracted to other women, or as an umbrella term to describe same-sex relationships

Heterosexual: clinical term for straight; describes a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to members of the other binary gender different from their own (men who are attracted to women and women who are attracted to men)

Homosexual: outdated clinical term used to describe a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to members of the same gender; may be considered derogatory or pathologizing

Lesbian: describes a woman who can be generally sexually attracted to other women or solely attracted to women

Pansexual: someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people of any gender

Questioning: uncertainty and exploration of one's sexuality and/or gender identity

Sexuality: how people experience and express themselves as sexual beings

Sexual Orientation: a person's romantic or sexual attraction to people of the other and/or same gender; common terms used to describe sexual orientation include, but are not limited to, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual; sexual orientation and gender identity are different