

Terminology

The following terms and definitions were comprised from various online sources including HRC and GLSEN, our team at Project Support, and reviewed and approved by youth.

Ally

A term used to describe someone who actively supports members and/or movements of the LGBTQ+ community. This term can include straight cisgender individuals as well as members of the community. (e.g., gay, cisgender men supporting trans individuals or a cisgender straight female advocating for LGBTQ+ rights). The term ally is typically designated by a member of the LGBTQ+ community to someone they perceive as an ally, rather than being a self-prescribed label.

Aromantic

Someone whose attraction to others is sexual but not romantic.

Asexual

Someone who has a romantic attraction to others but does not have a sexual attraction. This definition, however, does not limit asexual individuals from engaging in sexual behaviors.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally and physically attracted to two sexes or genders. While some people use the terms “bisexuality” and “pansexuality” interchangeably, others value their different definitions.

Cisgender

Someone whose gender aligns with the sex assigned or assumed at birth.

Coming Out

The process in which a person voluntarily discloses to others that they are not straight and/or cisgender.

Demisexual

A person whose sexual and romantic attraction is determined by their emotional bond with another person. Some may have little sexual attraction while others may have more.

Gay

A man (person whose sense of self is male) who is attracted both physically and sexually to other men. Other LGBTQ+ community members use this label to self-identify their sexual orientation as well (e.g., lesbians and bisexuals).

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.

Gender Dysphoria

Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned or presumed birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. Not all gender diverse individuals experience dysphoria. This term can be viewed as pathologizing the trans community, while others view it as a validating depiction of their lived experience.

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 learning about one's gender expression and/or gender identity.

Gender Expression

External appearance 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-fluid

A person whose sense of gender-self does not have a single fixed gender, but spans a range of gender expression.

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 or different from their sex assigned/assumed at birth.

Genderqueer

Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of 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.

Gender Non-Conforming or Non-Binary

Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to the cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to being a woman or man.

Homo-, trans-, bi-, -phobia

Homo-, trans-, and bi-phobia refers to prejudice, discrimination, or violence against LGBTQ+ people on the basis of their sexuality or gender. Homo-, trans-, and bi-phobia serves as a function of one's feelings of hostility, disgust, or fear of the LGBTQ+ community. These feelings are often held by those less familiar with the LGBTQ+ community and can be held by members of the LGBTQ+ community directed both outwards and inwards.

Heterosexism

Stereotypes and assumptions aimed at oppressing, marginalizing, or disempowering the LGBTQ+ community. Heterosexism serves to maintain a system of power that privileges straight, cisgender people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender. Heterosexism can be both overt (e.g., denying right to marry, play in sports, or use bathrooms), or covert (e.g., avoiding attending movies that feature gay people or storylines about them).

Intersectionality

A term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to describe the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between multiple marginalized identities and allows us to analyze social problems more fully, shape more effective interventions, and promote more inclusive advocacy amongst communities.

Intersex

Individuals 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.

Lesbian

A woman (or anyone whose sense of self is female) who is attracted both physically and sexually to other women. Some women use the term gay to express this.

Misgendering

Attributing a gender to someone by using pronouns that do not align with their inner sense of self. This can occur when using pronouns, gendered language (i.e. “Hello ladies!” “Hey guys”), or assigning genders to people without knowing how they identify (i.e. “Well, since we’re all women in this room, we understand...”).

Outing

The act of revealing someone’s membership in the LGBTQ+ community without their explicit consent or permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexual, Omnisexual

Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. While some individuals use pansexual or omnisexual interchangeably with bisexual, they also have distinct definitions that differ from each other.

Queer

A term people often use to express a range 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

Anyone thinking about their sexuality and gender outside of being heteronormative.

Same-gender loving or Same-gender lovin'

A term coined by activist Cleo Manago which refers to individuals of the same gender who have love, attraction, and/or romantic feelings towards someone of the same gender expression. This term is most often used within the Black community.

Sex

Refers to female or male and is assigned or presumed at birth based on presenting anatomy, typically ascribed by a doctor.

Sexual orientation

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

Transgender or Trans

Someone whose sex presumed at birth is different than their inner sense of self. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

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, gender-affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may undergo some, all or none of these processes.

Two-Spirit

An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two-Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity but this is not the only significance of the term. There are a variety of definitions and feelings about the term two-spirit – and this term does not resonate for everyone. Two-Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous Native American. Although the term itself became more commonly used around 1990, two-spirit people have existed for centuries.

Womxn

Some womxn spell the word with an "x" as a form of empowerment to move away from the "men" in the "traditional" spelling of women.