LGBTQIA+ Vocabulary

Becoming familiar with terms used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+) is a form of support and allyship. A few things to keep in mind: (1) Definitions vary across communities; not all sexual and gender minorities will agree with all of these definitions, so defer to the terms used by the individual to describe themselves; (2) There are many terms not included on this list; we tried to keep the list as relevant as possible; (3) Terms and definitions change frequently; we will try to update this list to keep up with changing language. Thank you!

Agender (adjective) – Describes a person who identifies as having no gender, or who does not experience gender as a primary identity component.

Androgyny/Androgynous (noun, adjective) – A gender expression characterized by having elements of both masculinity and femininity.

Aromantic (adjective) – Describes a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others, and/or lacks interest in forming romantic relationships.

Asexual (adjective) – Describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Some asexual people still engage in romantic relationships but other do not.

Assigned female at birth/Assigned male at birth (noun) – Refers to the sex that is assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant’s anatomical and other biological characteristics. Commonly abbreviated as AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth).

Bigender (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity is a combination of two genders.

Binding (verb) – The process of tightly wrapping one’s chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts. This is achieved through use of constrictive materials such as cloth strips, bandages, or specially designed undergarments, called binders.
Biphobia (noun) – Fear, marginalization, discrimination, and hatred of bisexual people, or those who are perceived as bisexual. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be biphobic.

Biromantic (adjective) – A romantic orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and romantically (but not sexually) interested in both people of one’s own gender and of different gender(s). Often used by those who also identify as asexual.

Bisexual (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, and physically attracted both to people of one’s own gender and of different gender(s). Some people define bisexuality as someone attracted to both men and women, but the first definition is preferred. Some people define bisexuality as attraction to all genders. See pansexual.

Bottom surgery (noun) – Slang term for gender-affirming genital surgery.

Cisgender (adjective) – A person whose gender identity is consistent with their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender comes from the Latin prefix cis, meaning “on the same side of.”

Coming out (verb) – The process of identifying and accepting one’s own sexual orientation or gender identity (coming out to oneself), and the process of sharing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity with others (friends, family, etc.).

Closeted/In the closet (adjective) – An individual who is not open to themselves and/or others about their (queer) sexual orientation and/or (trans) gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons, such as fear for one’s safety, family/community rejection, or loss of housing, job, etc.

Demiromantic (adjective): A romantic orientation that describes a person with little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong emotional bond is formed with someone. Often used by those who also identify as asexual.

Demisexual (adjective): A sexual orientation describing a person with little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong emotional connection is formed with someone, often within a romantic relationship.
Differences of Sex Development (DSD) (noun) – See intersex.

Drag (noun) – The theatrical performance of a gender. Performers are typically called Drag Kings and Drag Queens. Many drag performers are cisgender, but some identify as transgender.

Gay (adjective) – A sexual orientation describing people who are primarily emotionally, romantically, and physically attracted to people of the same gender as themselves. Commonly used to describe men who are attracted to men and can also describe women attracted to women.

Gender-affirming surgery (GAS) (noun) – Surgeries to modify a person’s body to be more aligned with that person’s gender identity. Types of GAS include chest and genital surgeries, facial feminization, body sculpting, and hair removal.

Gender-affirming chest surgery (noun) – Surgeries to remove and/or construct a person’s chest to be more aligned with that person’s gender identity. Also referred to as top surgery.

Gender-affirming genital surgeries (noun) – Surgeries that help align a person’s genitals and/or internal reproductive organs with that person’s gender identity. Also called bottom surgery.

Gender binary (noun) – The social construct that there are only two sexes (male and female) with two corresponding genders (man and woman), and that a person must strictly fit into one category or the other based on sex assigned at birth.

Gender dysphoria (noun) – Distress experienced by some people whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis for people whose distress is clinically significant and impairs social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The degree and severity of gender dysphoria is highly variable among transgender people.

Gender expression (noun) – The way a person communicates their gender to the world through mannerisms, clothing, speech, behavior, etc. Gender expression varies depending on culture, context, and historical period.
Gender identity (noun) – A person’s inner sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don’t align with traditional conceptions of gender.

Gender non-conforming (adjective) – A gender descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender expression or identity by the standards of a culture. May be used to describe both transgender people and cisgender people who do not have a culturally traditional gender expression.

Gender role (noun) – A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are considered acceptable, appropriate, and/or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived gender. These roles change with time, culture, context, and interpersonal relationships.

Genderfluid or gender fluid (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is genderfluid may feel more aligned with a certain gender some of the time and other genders at other times, and sometimes no gender at all.

Genderqueer or gender queer (adjective) – A gender identity that describes someone who doesn’t identify with conventional gender identities, roles, expression and/or expectations. May be used by a person who identifies with both masculinity and femininity and/or androgyny.

Heteronormativity (noun) – The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, or that only heterosexuality is “normal.” Also refers to societal pressure for everyone to look and act in a stereotypically heterosexual way. Heteronormativity can manifest as heterosexism, the biased belief that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

Heteroromantic (adjective) – A romantic orientation that describes a person who is primarily emotionally and romantically (but not sexually) interested in people of a different gender than themselves, usually whichever is considered the “opposite” gender. Often used by those who also identify as asexual.
**Heterosexual** (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes someone who is primarily emotionally, romantically, and physically attracted to members of a different gender than their own, usually whichever is considered the “opposite” gender. Also referred to as straight.

**Homoromantic** (adjective) – A romantic orientation describing people who are primarily emotionally and romantically (but not sexually) interested in people of the same gender as themselves. Often used by those who also identify as asexual.

**Homophobia** (noun) – fear, marginalization, discrimination, and hatred of lesbian and gay people, or those who are perceived as lesbian or gay. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be homophobic.

**Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)** (noun) – Feminizing or masculinizing hormone treatment to align secondary sex characteristics with gender identity. Also called gender-affirming hormone therapy. Masculinizing HRT involves taking testosterone. Feminizing HRT typically involves taking estrogen, anti-androgens, and sometimes progesterone.

**Intersex** (adjective) – Describes a group of congenital conditions in which the reproductive organs, genitals, and/or other sexual anatomy do not develop according to traditional expectations for females or males. Intersex can also be used as an identity term for someone with one of these conditions. The medical community sometimes uses the term differences of sex development (DSD) to describe intersex conditions; however, the term intersex is recommended in all other settings.

**Lesbian** (adjective, noun) – A sexual orientation that describes a woman who is primarily emotionally, romantically, and physically attracted to other women.

**Men who have sex with men (MSM)** (noun) – A category often used in public health research and programs to describe men who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. May be used to refer to all men who are gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and same-gender loving.

**Misgender** (verb) – To refer to a person by a pronoun or other gendered term (e.g., Ms./Mr., ladies/gentlemen, sir/ma’am) that incorrectly refers to that person’s gender identity.
Mx. (noun) – Pronounced like “mix.” A gender-neutral honorific. Often by those who identify outside the gender binary or for other reasons do not want to use gendered honorifics (e.g., Mr., Ms., Mrs.)

Name Used/Chosen Name (noun) – The name a person goes by and wants others to use in personal communication, even if it is different from the name on that person’s identification documents (e.g., birth certificate, driver’s license, and passport). Chosen name is recommended over preferred name.

Non-binary (noun, adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity falls outside of the traditional gender binary structure of girl/woman and boy/man. Also used an umbrella term for anyone who does not identify as exclusively a man or exclusively a woman. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or enby.

Outing (verb) – Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Open relationship (noun) – Describes a relationship between two partners who consensually agree to non-monogamy (i.e., intimacy outside the primary partnership).

Panromantic (adjective) – A romantic orientation that describes a person who is romantically and emotionally (but not sexually) interested in people of all gender identities, or whose attractions are not related to other people’s gender. Often used by those who also identify as asexual.

Pansexual (adjective) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, and physically attracted to people of all gender identities, or whose attractions are not related to other people’s gender.

Polyamorous (noun) – A sexual and/or romantic relationship comprising more than two people. Polyamorous can also describe a person in a polyamorous relationship. Sometimes abbreviated as poly.

Pronouns (noun) – Pronouns are the words people should use to refer to you when not using your name. Examples of pronouns are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/their.

QTPOC (noun) – An acronym that stands for queer and trans people of color.
Queer (adjective) – Applies to all people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Although queer was historically used as a slur, it has been reclaimed by many as a term of resistance and empowerment. Nonetheless, some still find the term offensive.

Questioning (adjective) – Describes a person who is unsure about or is exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Romantic orientation (noun) – the type of romantic attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others (e.g., dating, relationships, marriage), often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Often used in the asexual community.

Same gender loving (SGL) (adjective) – An alternative to the labels of gay and lesbian. SGL is more commonly used in Black communities.

Same-sex attracted (SSA) (noun) – Describes the experience of a person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the same sex or gender but does not necessarily engage in same-sex sexual behavior. Used most by people who live in religious communities that are not accepting of LGBTQIA+ identities. People who use SSA as an identity term may not feel comfortable with terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Sex assigned at birth (noun) – The sex (male or female) assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant’s anatomical and other biological characteristics. Sometimes referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, or sex; however, sex assigned at birth is the recommended term.

Sexual orientation (noun) – the type of sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to.

Stealth (adjective) – A transgender person, typically a trans man or trans woman, who is not out as trans and is perceived by others as cisgender. May be referred to as passing.
Straight (noun) – See heterosexual.

Top surgery (noun) – Slang term for gender-affirming chest surgery.

Transition/Transitioning (verb) – The process of making social, legal, and/or medical changes to better recognize, accept, and express one’s gender identity. Social changes can include changing one’s pronouns, name, clothing, and hairstyle. Legal changes can include changing one’s name, sex designation, and gender markers on legal documents. Medical changes can include receiving gender affirming hormones and/or surgeries. Also called gender affirmation.

Transgender (adjective) – Describes a person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not align based on traditional expectations. Includes trans women, trans men, and people who identify outside of the gender binary. Sometimes abbreviated as trans. The term transgender comes from the Latin prefix *trans*, meaning “across from” or “beyond.”

Trans man/transgender man (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is boy/man who was assigned female at birth. Some will simply use man.

Transmasculine (adjective) – Describes a person who was assigned female at birth and identifies with masculinity to a greater extent than with femininity.

Trans woman/transgender woman (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is girl/woman who was assigned male at birth. Some will simply use woman.

Transfeminine (adjective) – Describes a person who was assigned male at birth and identifies with femininity to a greater extent than with masculinity.

Transphobia (noun) – Fear, marginalization, discrimination, and hatred of transgender people, or those perceived as transgender, and/or gender non-conformity. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be transphobic.
**Transsexual** (adjective) – A term sometimes used in medical literature and by some transgender people to describe those who have gone through (or want to go through) the process of medical gender affirmation treatments (i.e., gender-affirming hormones and surgeries). This term is considered outdated by many and should only be used if the individual in reference identifies as such.

**Tucking** (noun) – The process of concealing one’s penis and testes with tape, tights, or specially designed undergarments called gaffes.

**Two-Spirit** (adjective) – Describes a person who embodies both a masculine and a feminine spirit. This is a culture-specific term used among some Native American, American Indian, and First Nations people.

**Women who have sex with women (WSW)** (noun) – Category often used in public health research and programs to describe women who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. May be used to refer to all women who are lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or same-gender loving.