LGBTQI Terminology

A note about these definitions: Each of these definitions has been carefully researched and closely analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives for cultural sensitivity, common usage, and general appropriateness. We have done our best to represent the most popular uses of the terms listed; however, there may be some variation in definitions depending on location. Please note that each person who uses any or all of these terms does so in a unique way (especially terms that are used in the context of an identity label). If you do not understand the context in which a person is using one of these terms, it is always appropriate to ask. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation.

Agender – Person is internally ungender.

Ally – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others. A concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people, and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

Androgyne – Person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

Asexual – Person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation.

Bicurious – A curiosity about having sexual relations with a same gender/sex person.

Bigender - A person whose gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

Binding – The process of flattening one’s breasts to have a more masculine or flat appearing chest.

Biphobia - The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQI community, as well as in general society.

Bisexual – A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Bottom Surgery – Surgery on the genitals designed to create a body in harmony with a person’s preferred gender expression.

Butch – A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

Cisgender – A class of gender identities where an individual’s gender identity matches their biological sex and gender expression. This term is preferred over “gender-normative” because it does not reinforce the existence of a ‘normative’ gender expression.
Coming Out – May refer to the process by which one accepts one’s own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersex person (to “come out” to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status with others (to “come out” to friends, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for LGBTQI individuals.

Cross-dresser – Someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

Discrimination – Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.


FTM / F2M – A medical abbreviation for female-to-male gender confirming surgery.

Gay – 1) Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in same-sex behavior identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2) Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

Gender Binary – The idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (See also ‘Identity Sphere.’)

Gender Cues – What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

Gender Identity – A person’s sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

Gender Normative – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society. (Also referred to as ‘Genderstraight’.)

Gender Variant – A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transgender, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.).

Genderqueer – A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

Genderstraight - See ‘Gender Normative.’

Heteronormativity - The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality.
Heterosexism – Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power – that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.

Heterosexual Privilege – Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to non-heterosexual people.

Homophobia – The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuality or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

Homosexual – A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex. However, the term ‘gay’ is generally preferred.

Identity Sphere – The idea that gender identities and expressions do not fit on a linear scale, but rather on a sphere that allows room for all expression without weighting any one expression as better than another.

In the Closet – Refers to a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society.

Intergender – A person whose gender identity is between genders or a combination of genders.

Institutional Oppression – Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

Internalized Oppression – The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

Intersex Person - Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

Lesbian – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people.

LGBTQI – A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community.

Metrosexual - First used in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, who coined the term to refer to an urban, heterosexual male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. This term can be perceived as derogatory because it reinforces stereotypes that all gay men are fashion-conscious and materialistic.
MTF / M2F – A medical term for male-to-female gender confirming surgery.

Oppression – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Outing – Involuntary disclosure of one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

Packing – Wearing a phallic device on the groin and under clothing for any purposes including: (for someone without a biological penis) the validation or confirmation of one’s masculine gender identity, seduction, and/or sexual readiness (for one who likes to penetrate another during sexual intercourse).

Pangender – A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions.

Pansexual – A person who is sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions.

Passing – Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or race/ethnic identity or to be seen as heterosexual.

Prejudice – A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members.

Queer – 1. An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons, the radical sex communities, and others who are nonconforming to the normative definitions of sexuality. 2. This term is sometimes used as a sexual orientation label instead of ‘bisexual’ as a way of acknowledging that there are more than two genders to be attracted to, or as a way of stating a non-heterosexual orientation without having to state who they are attracted to. 3. A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur. For some people this is derogatory and for some it is not. Thus, it is typically best to use the terminology that the individual uses.

Same Gender Loving – A term sometimes used by members of the African-American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life. (Sometimes abbreviated as ‘SGL’.)

Sex - A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because usually subdivided into ‘male’ and ‘female’, this category does not recognize the existence of intersex bodies.

Sex Identity – How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.
Sexual Orientation – The desire for intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) – A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person’s “sex”. In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. Often times referred to as gender confirming surgery in the transgender community.

Sexuality – A person’s exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

Stealth – This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. (Also referred to as ‘going stealth’ or ‘living in stealth mode’.)

Stereotype – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. This are often negative, but can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact, however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

Straight – Another term for heterosexual.

Top Surgery - This term usually refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest, but may also refer to breast augmentation.

Trans - An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

Transactivism- The political and social movement to create equality for gender variant persons.

Transgender – is a term used to describe people whose gender identity and expression differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender (Trans) Community – A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

Transhate – The irrational hatred of those who are gender variant, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

Transition – This term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.
Transman or Man - An affirming identity label for a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man.

Transphobia – The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

Transgender – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth.

Transwoman or Woman - An affirming identity label for a person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman.

Two-Spirited – Native persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of male and female articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term ‘two-spirit’ is specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include ‘one-spirit’ and ‘wintke’.

Ze / Hir – Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some gender variant persons. Pronounced /zee/ and /here/ they replace “he”/”she” and “his”/”hers” respectively.

This terminology sheet was created by Eli R. Green (eli@trans-academics.org) and Eric N. Peterson at the LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside © 2003-2004, with additional input from www.wikipedia.org and many kind people who helped us create and revise these definitions. This sheet is always a work in progress so please be sure to check the Instructional Materials section of Trans-Academics.org for updated versions. Please feel free to alter, use or pass on as needed but be sure to give credit to the original creators. Any updates or corrections can be submitted to eli@trans-academics.org.

*The Office of Diversity and Inclusion has also made updates the original version for terminology used on campus, locally, and regionally.