

Definitions

Please remember that language and meanings often change and words about identity may mean different things to different people. This list is not all-inclusive and should be used as a guide for discussion purposes. For more detailed information, please refer to the original sources listed below and in the reference section of your materials.

Ally: A person who advocates and supports a member of another community. In the context of the LGBTQ community, ally often refers to non-LGBTQ people who advocate and support people who identify as LGBTQ. Ally may also refer to someone who reaches across differences to achieve common goals. ^{1&2}

Biological Sex: A medical term referring to the chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex. Also known as *sex, physical sex, anatomical sex, or sex assigned at birth*. ³

Bisexual: A term to refer to a person who is physically, romantically, emotionally and/or relationally attracted to people of their gender and another gender, though not necessarily simultaneously or equally. ^{1&3}

Cisgender: Person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender and assigned at birth sexual societal norms. ²

Cisnormativity/Cisgenderism: Assumption by individuals or institutions that everyone is cisgender and that cisgender identities are superior. Leads to marginalization and invisibility of non-cisgender identities. ³

Gay: Describes a person who is attracted romantically, erotically, spiritually, and/or emotionally to a person of the same sex. Gay is most often used to men who are attracted to other men, but it may also be used for women, or to refer to the queer community as a whole. Gay should only be used when someone self-identifies as gay. ^{1,2,&3}

Gender Identity: An internal perception of one's own gender, which may or may not match the sex assigned at birth. Common gender identity labels include, but are not

limited to, man, woman, genderqueer, and trans. Gender identity is distinct and separate from sexual orientation. ^{1,2,&3}

Gender Pronouns: Traditionally includes she, her, he and him. **Ze** /zee/ is a gender neutral pronoun for he/she. **Zir** and **Hir** /here/ are neutral pronouns for his and her. Use the gender pronoun(s) that each person uses to self-identify. Some people use **They/Their** as a neutral singular pronoun. **Hirself** /hereself/ is a gender neutral word for herself and himself. *It* should never be used to refer to a person as it always refers to things. If you do not know, ask sensitively rather than assuming. ^{1,2,&3}

Genderqueer: A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, or is somewhere in between on the gender spectrum, or who does not identify as having a gender. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as transgender. Sometimes referred to as gender fluid. ²

Gender Role: Set of socially defined roles and behaviors assigned to females and males. Gender roles vary from culture to culture and change over time. ¹

Heterosexuality: Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to a sex other than your own. Commonly referred to as an attraction to the opposite sex (straight), but the definition is expanding to acknowledge that there are more than two sexes. ^{2&3}

Heterosexual Privilege: Advantages that come with being or being perceived as heterosexual in this society and culture such as legal marriage and the benefits that come along with it. ^{1&2}

Homosexuality: Term for sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to the same sex. Considered to be outdated, derogatory, and stigmatizing due to past use as a category of mental illness. Preference is often given to using gay or lesbian language. ^{1,2,&3}

In The Closet: Keeping one's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or sex identity a secret. ²

Intersex: term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differ from the binary male or female. ³

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted romantically, erotically, spiritually, and/or emotionally to a woman. ^{1,2,&3}

Non-binary: An adjective to describe a person who does not identify exclusively as male or female. Non-binary people may identify as being both, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. Many may identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary may be an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid. ⁵

Out: Being open about one's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or sex identity; there are varying levels of being out (for example, one may be open only to close friends, to family, or to everyone). ²

Outing: Involuntary disclosure of another's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or sex identity, sometimes based on rumor or speculation, without that person's consent. ^{1&3}

Pansexual: A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions; often shortened to pan. ³

Queer: Umbrella term for all LGBTQ people. May be used as a political statement as well as to identify sexual orientation to break binary social classifications. Many older LGBT people have experienced queer as derogatory, but there are many people who choose to self-identify as queer. Respect each person's individual preference. ^{2&3}

Questioning: Can refer to an individual or a time when an individual is unsure about or exploring their own sexual identity and/or gender identity. ³

Sexual Identity: Label people adopt to signify to others who they are as a sexual being, particularly regarding sexual orientation. Labels include bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, and more. Also known as sexual orientation identity. ⁴

Sexual Orientation: Type of sexual, romantic, emotional, or spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on gender relationship; often confused with sexual preference, sexual orientation is not a set of absolute categories and may evolve over time. ^{1,2,&3}

Trans*: Umbrella term for a range of identities that do not fit within socially defined gender norms. A Trans* person may have any sexual orientation. ³

Transgender: A person living as a member of a gender that is different than what was assigned at birth based on anatomical sex. Includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers, or otherwise gender non-conforming. Identities may include trans man or female to male, trans woman or male to female, genderqueer, bi-gender, androgynous, or gender variant. ^{1&3}

Transsexual: A person who experiences a mismatch between their assigned at birth gender and their sexual identity. A transsexual will usually live as a different gender from the one assigned at birth. While some transsexuals undergo medical treatment to alter their physical sex to match their sexual identity, not all transsexuals can have or even want surgery. ^{1&2}

Transvestite: Outdated term for a person who regularly or occasionally dresses as binary opposite gender expression; the more acceptable term is **cross-dresser**. A transvestite should not be confused with a transsexual. ^{1,2,&3}

Two-spirit: Traditionally Native American term to recognize individuals with qualities or roles of both genders. ²

¹ Definition adapted from "Caring for LGBTQ Children and Youth: A Guide for Child Welfare Providers," © 2017 Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Used with permission, pp. 5-8.

² Definition adapted from "Definition of Terms," by Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement, retrieved 07/12/2017.

³ Definition adapted from "Comprehensive List of LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Definitions," by It's Pronounced Metrosexual, retrieved 7/12/2017.

⁴ Definition adapted from "What Is "Sexual Identity"? Is It The Same As Sexual Orientation?," by Eric Grollman, PhD of Kinsey Confidential, 9/28/2010, retrieved 07/13/2017.

⁵ Definition adapted from Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Glossary. Retrieved on 4/5/2022.