

LGBTQ+

GLOSSARY

Selected Terms



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ASEXUAL | Often called "ace" for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction. Asexuality does not necessarily denote same-sex attraction or transgender identity.

ASSIGNED SEX | The sex (male, female or intersex) assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

BINARY SYSTEM | Something that contains two opposing parts; binary systems are often assumed despite the existence of a spectrum of possibilities. Gender (man/woman) and sex (male/female) are examples of binary systems often perpetuated by our culture.

BIPHOBIA | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

BISEXUAL | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

BUTCH | A complex political and social identity which can be utilized to describe a gender, sexuality, or gender presentation. Refers to a person who is masculine of center in identity, dress, attitude, and/or presentation. Other masculine of center identities include Stud (see Stud). Butch is often discussed in relation to femme (see Femme) but is independent from femme identity. Butch may only be utilized only by LGBTQ+ folks.

CHOSEN FAMILY | In LGBTQ+ communities it is common to find family units, not biologically related but, chosen by each other. These family units may fill the role of the biological family if an LGBTQ+ person's family is not supportive of them or may be created due to deep connection within the LGBTQ+ community based on shared lived experience that may not be similar to the experiences of the individual's biological family. Sometimes called Found Family.

CISGENDER | Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

CISSEXISM | A system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people whose gender and/or gender expression falls outside of normative social constructs. This system is founded on the belief that there are, and should be, only two genders—usually tied to assigned sex.

COMING OUT | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

DEADNAMING | Occurs when an individual, intentionally or not, refers to the name that a transgender or gender-expansive individual used at a different time in their life. Avoid this practice, as it can cause trauma, stress, embarrassment, and even danger. Some may prefer the terms birth name, given name, or old name.

DRAG | Drag | The theatrical performance of one or multiple genders (often including makeup, costume, dance, lip-syncing, and temporary body modifications). Performers who present in a feminine manner are called Drag Queens, while performers who present in a masculine manner are called Drag Kings. These performances often push traditional boundaries of gender presentation, calling into question societally defined gender roles.

FEMME | A complex political and social identity which can be utilized to describe a gender, sexuality, or gender presentation. Refers to a person who is feminine of center in identity, dress, attitude, and/or presentation. Femme is often discussed in relation to butch and stud (see Butch, see Stud) but is independent from those identities. Femme may only be utilized only by LGBT+ folks. (sometimes Fem)

GAY | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

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-CRITICAL

FEMINISM | A branch of radical and exclusionary feminism based in anti-trans rhetoric which, at its core, opposes the self-definition of trans people. Those subscribing to this harmful ideology are critical of gender identity (see Gender Identity) and the scientifically based concept of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. This belief maintains that a person's sex is distinct from their gender identity, and that sex is immutable. People with this belief (see TERFs) perpetuate the harmful notion that transgender people are only to be seen as the sex they were assigned—and gender they were assumed—at birth.

GENDER DYSPHORIA | Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

GENDER EXPRESSION | 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 who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

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 at birth.

GENDER

NON-CONFORMING | A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. Most people, at some point in their lives, may not conform to strict gender roles even if they do not identify as transgender.

GENDER ROLES | The social behaviors and expression that a culture expects from people based on their assigned sex (e.g., girls wear pink; boys don't cry; women care for home and child; men are more violent), despite a spectrum of various other possibilities.

HETERO-NORMATIVITY | Coined by social critic Michael Warner, the term refers to a societal assumption of certain norms: 1) that there are two distinct sexes; 2) that male and female functions and characteristics are distinctly different; and 3) that traits such as attraction and sexual behavior correspond to anatomy. Those who do not fit these norms—be it through same-sex attraction, a non-binary gender identity or nontraditional gender expression—are therefore seen as abnormal, and often marginalized or pressured to conform to norms as a result.

HETEROSEXISM | The assumption that sexuality between people of different sexes is normal, standard, superior or universal while other sexual orientations are substandard, inferior, abnormal, marginal or invalid.

HETEROSEXUAL | Used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also straight.

HETEROSEXUAL/CIS-GENDER PRIVILEGE | Refers to societal advantages that heterosexual people and cisgender people have solely because of their dominant identities. This can include things as simple as safely holding hands with a romantic partner in public or having safe access to public bathrooms. This can also include systemic privileges such as the right to legally donate blood, to adopt children without facing possible rejection because of your sexual orientation, or to play organized sports with others of the same gender identity.

HOMOPHOBIA | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY | Treatment which allows trans and non-binary people to medically transition or feel more at home in their bodies (see Transition). Those taking testosterone (masculinizing hormones) may grow more facial/body hair and notice their voices deepening. Those taking estrogen (feminizing hormones) may see some breast growth and decreased libido. Many intersex people take HRT to balance the naturally occurring levels of estrogen and testosterone in their bodies. Benefits of such therapy can include improved mental and physical wellness, and reduced anxiety and dysphoria, for those who experience it.

INTERSEX | Intersex is the current term used to refer to people who are biologically varied from the medically expected definitions of male and female. This can be through variations in hormones, chromosomes, internal or external genitalia, or any combination of any or all primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. While some intersex people are noticed as intersex at birth, many are not. As intersex is about biological sex, it is distinct from gender identity and sexual orientation. An intersex person can be of any gender identity and can also be of any sexual orientation and any romantic orientation. Formerly, the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudohermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

LESBIAN | A non-man who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other non-men. Women and non-binary people (but not men) may use this term to describe themselves.

LGBTQ+ | An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer" with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.

MISGENDER | To refer to someone in a way that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify, such as refusing to use a person's pronouns or name.

NON-BINARY | Non-binary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

OUTING | Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexual | 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 functionally the same definition as bisexual, some may choose the label pansexual instead.

PASSING | "Passing" refers to whether someone is perceived as female, male, or another gender. With gender, the act of presenting as cisgender, generally accomplished through conforming to gender roles. Passing, while desired by some, is not required for LGBT+ people to deserve respect and love. People may try to pass in anti-LGBT+ environments to ensure their safety. The presumption that all transgender seek to pass as cisgender is harmful. For many, gender identity and expression is not about conforming or being seen as non-transgender.

POLYAMOROUS | A term used to describe people who have the desire for multiple consenting intimate relationships at the same time to varying degrees at varying times. Also referred to as "ethically non-monogamous," "polya" or "polyam".

PRE-EXPOSURE PRO-PHYLAXIS (PREP)

| A prescription medication those at higher risk for HIV take to prevent getting HIV from sex or injection drug use. Though PrEP is highly effective in preventing HIV, it should not be taken in place of other HIV prevention measures, such practicing safe sex and not sharing drug-related injection equipment.

QUEER | Queer | A term people often use to express a spectrum 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 has been, and continues to be used, as a slur. Queer has been reclaimed by parts of the LGBTQ+ movement including Northern's student LGBT+ organization, Queers & Allies. Only use this term if someone who specifically identifies as such asks you to or to say the phrase 'The Queer Community'

QUESTIONING | A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

SAME-GENDER LOVING (SGL)

| An identity used to to express sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent Coined by Cleo Manago, this identity is only to be used by black LGBT+ folks.

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.

STUD | Stud | A term for a Black woman or non-binary person which can be utilized to describe a gender, sexuality, or gender presentation. Refers to a person who is masculine of center in identity, dress, attitude, and/or presentation. Also known as ag/aggressive. Other masculine of center identities include butch (see Butch). Stud is often discussed in relation to femme (see Femme) but is independent from femme identity. Stud may only be utilized only by Black and Afro-Latine LGBT+ women and non-binary people.

TERF | (pronounced "turf") Acronym for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. A person who excludes the rights of transgender people (trans women especially) from their advocacy for equal rights. TERF ideology is a specific form of transphobia. According to TERF ideology, trans women are excluded from womanhood and should accordingly be excluded from women-only spaces. This idea weaponises a reductive understanding of "biology" to argue that 'women' – or those assigned female at birth – all experience gendered oppression in the same way, which erases our diverse experiences of gender as it intersects with race, class, sexuality, disability, and many other structural factors. TERFs work aggressively to deny the existence and identity of transgender people which increases the very serious and very real oppression of trans women in particular.

TRANSGENDER | Transgender | An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

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

TRANSSEXUAL | Transsexual | An infrequently used term (considered by most to be outdated or offensive) which refers to people who use medical interventions such as hormone therapy and/or gender-affirming surgery as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa. Only use this term if someone who specifically identifies as such asks you to.

TWO SPIRIT | An umbrella term in Native culture to describe people who have both a male and female spirit within them. This encompasses many tribe-specific names, roles and traditions, such as the winkte of the Lakota and nadleeh of the Navajo people. This term often describes Native people who performed roles and gender expression associated with both men and women. This term should be used only in the context of Native culture.

*Adapted by Stefani Vargas from:
PFLAG National Glossary of Terms
Learning for Justice "The Acronym and Beyond"
HRC Glossary of Terms*

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