

LGBTQ+ → TERMS TO KNOW

An abbreviation for the community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, plus any other sexual or gender minority. The acronym can vary in a number of ways and often includes "I" for intersex and "A" for asexual.

Note: The language used by and about the LGBTQ+ community is evolving and terms may change over time.

AFAB / AMAB

Short for *assigned female at birth* and *assigned male at birth*. This acronym is used to describe the sex a person is first assigned based on their physical characteristics, which may or may not be different from their inner sense of gender identity.

ALLY

A person who supports the LGBTQ+ community.

ASEXUAL

A term used to describe a person who does not feel sexual attraction to others, or who has limited sexual interest or desire for others. Often shortened to *ace*. This term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

BISEXUAL

A term used to describe a person who is emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted to people of the same and other genders or sexes. Often shortened to *bi*. This term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

CISGENDER

A term used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Often shortened to *cis*. This term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

CISNORMATIVITY

Cultural rules and expectations (including social, family, legal, and linguistic) that promote and assume the idea that everyone's gender identity is either woman/girl or man/boy and that it matches their biological sex; an assumption that all people are cisgender.¹

CISSEXISM/GENDERISM

Systems of oppression that value cisgender people and devalue trans and nonbinary people. At the core of these systems is the belief that all people are or should be cisgender; this belief is demonstrated through the discrimination, hatred, hostility, or disapproval of people who identify as, or are assumed to be, transgender or gender non-conforming.

COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET

The process of self-acceptance and disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity to others. People can disclose to none, some, or all of the people they know, often based on the perceived safety of their environment.

DISCLOSURE

The act or process of sharing one's sexual orientation or gender identity. In the workplace, this term is often used to refer to employees voluntarily [self-identifying](#) for the purposes of diversity and inclusion-related data collection. Disclosure policies, procedures, and laws vary across companies and countries and should be taken into account carefully.

GAY

A term used to describe a person who is emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted to people of the same gender or sex. This term is preferred over *homosexual*, which is outdated and clinical. Also, this term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

GENDER

The external, socially constructed rules, roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society imposes on people based on their identity as a woman, man, or other alternative. Traditional conceptions of gender truncate the vast diversity of gender into two mutually exclusive categories: woman and man.

GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

Any kind of medical, social, psychological, and behavioral care that supports and affirms a person's gender identity when it does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. For transgender youth, it can include calling a child by their chosen name, affirming their choice of clothing and hairstyles, puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and counseling. For adults, it can also include, but is not limited to, medications and surgery. Not every transgender person will wish to or have the financial resources for gender-affirming medical interventions. Employers can provide a range of healthcare benefits that facilitate access to gender-affirming care. See *transitioning*.²

GENDER EXPRESSION

How people communicate their gender through appearance, behavior, grooming, and dress.

GENDERFLUID

A term to describe people who move between two or more gender identities.

GENDER IDENTITY

People's inner sense of their gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING

A term to describe individuals whose gender expression subverts traditional gender norms, roles, or expectations. Also called *gender expansive*.

GENDERQUEER

See *nonbinary*.

GENDER ROLE

Rules assigned by society that define what behaviors, thoughts, feelings, relationships, clothing, occupations, etc., are considered appropriate and inappropriate for people based on their perceived gender.

HETERONORMATIVITY

Cultural rules and expectations (including social, family, legal, and linguistic) that promote a heterosexual standard of identity as the natural norm; an assumption that all people are straight.

HETEROSEXISM

A system of oppression that values straight people and devalues queer people. At the core of this system is the belief that all people are or should be heterosexual; this belief is demonstrated through the discrimination and hostility against and hatred and disapproval of people who identify as, or are assumed to be, part of the LGBTQ+ community.

HETEROSEXUAL

See *straight*.

HOMOPHOBIA

See *heterosexism*.

INTERSEX

A term used to describe people whose anatomy and physiology are neither typically male nor typically female at birth, often due to chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. This term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

LESBIAN

A woman who is emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted to other women.

LGBTQ+

An abbreviation for the community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, plus any other sexual or gender minority. The acronym can vary in a number of ways and often includes "I" for intersex and "A" for asexual.

NONBINARY

An umbrella term for a constellation of gender identities beyond the woman/man gender binary. Some of the identities under this umbrella include genderqueer, genderfluid, and nonbinary, specifically.

OUT EMPLOYEE

An employee who discloses their LGBTQ+ identity to a few, some, or all of their coworkers.

PRONOUNS

Linguistic part of speech used to refer to individuals (such as she/her, he/him). Nonbinary people may choose gender neutral pronouns such as “they,” “ze,” or “xe.” Companies may update organizational policies, procedures and/or HR systems to be inclusive of employees whose pronouns differ from the she/he binary.

QUEER

A broad term with numerous meanings. It is commonly used to describe sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heterosexual and cisgender norms. Historically it has been used pejoratively, but it has been reclaimed as an inclusive term for the LGBTQ+ community and to capture a more fluid sense of identity.

SEX

A person’s biological characteristics including the internal and external sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones that make up their anatomy and physiology; sex categories are female, male, and intersex.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

This term describes a person’s innate sense of who they are emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted to—people of the same gender or sex, different gender or sex, multiple genders or sexes, or some other variation.

STRAIGHT

A term used to describe a person who is emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted to people of a different gender or sex.

TRANSGENDER

A term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match expectations for their assigned sex at birth. This is an umbrella term that encompasses anyone who is not cisgender, from people who are genderfluid to people who receive gender-affirming care to better align their physical body with their gender identity. Often abbreviated to *trans*. This term should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

TRANSITIONING

The process a transgender person goes through to change their gender presentation and/or physical characteristics to better match their gender identity. Gender-affirming care during the transition process can include hormone therapy, puberty blockers, and surgery. Note that not everyone who identifies as transgender will undergo a transition, or chose to transition in the same ways.

TRANS MAN

A man who was assigned female at birth (AFAB). A related term is *FTM*, short for female-to-male.

TRANSPHOBIA

See *cissexism/genderism*.

TRANS WOMAN

A woman who was assigned male at birth (AMAB). A related term is *MTF*, short for male-to-female.

TWO-SPIRIT

A contemporary Native American/First Nations/Indigenous umbrella term for people within the community who embody spirits of multiple genders. The term encompasses a wide range of cultural, spiritual, gender, and sexual identities. Often, two-spirit people are honored members of the community who play an important role in spiritual gatherings. Individual tribes have their own terms in their own languages. This term is not synonymous with gay and it should not be used to refer to anyone who does not have Native American/First Nations/Indigenous heritage.³

HOW TO CITE THIS PRODUCT

LGBTQ+ terms to know. (2023). Catalyst.

* The following sources helped inform this product: [LGBTQIA resource center glossary](#). UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center.; [PFLAG national glossary of terms](#). PFLAG.

¹ [Terms, definitions & labels](#). Amherst College Queer Resource Center.

² Boyle, P. (2022, April 12). [What is gender-affirming care? Your questions answered](#). Association of American Medical Colleges; [Get the facts on gender-affirming care](#). (2023). Human Rights Campaign.

³ Naswood, E. & Jim, M. (2012, December). *Mending the rainbow: Working with the Native LGBT/two spirit community* [PowerPoint presentation]. The 13th National Indian Nations Conference; Williams, W. L. (2010, October 10). [The 'two-spirit' people of Indigenous North Americans](#). *The Guardian*.