

SHARED MEANING OF TERMS

It is important to understand that language and terms are ever evolving and are only a reflection of the current state of understanding. The words used by a community are based on history, a desire to be seen and understood, and sometimes the reclamation of terms formerly used to oppress and marginalize. Acknowledging that not all LGBTQ+ community members use the same terms or adhere to the same meanings of each term, and acknowledging the importance of using terms communities use to name themselves, it can be helpful to give some general definitions to help orientate and familiarize the reader.

LGBTQ+ or LGBTQIA+

A commonly used acronym to describe members of the community. The plus sign is a recognition that the acronym falls short of including all the expressions of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

L = lesbian

G = gay

B = bisexual

T = trans

Q = queer

T = trans

I = intersex

A = Ally or Asexual

Queer

The term Queer has a long and painful history for many gender and sexual minorities, particularly gay men. For years, the term queer was used to denigrate and harass individuals and is illustrated in the common playground game of the 1970's and 80's "smear the queer." As with many terms of oppression and marginalization, the term queer has been reclaimed by many in the community to be an omnibus term describing individuals who hold a non-normative identity (i.e., not straight and/or not cisgender). Some people have also reclaimed the term as a celebration of not fitting into social norms; however, it is important to note that not all people who identify as LGBTQIA+ use "queer" to describe themselves.

Queer and Trans

It has been increasingly common to also see the community referred to as the queer and trans community. In this context these omnibus terms indicate that the community consists of two distinct and separate identities, sexual orientation and gender identity. Within each of these overarching identities there exists much variation. These broad terms allow for the ever-evolving terms associated with sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sex versus Gender

Unfortunately, all too often sex and gender are conflated in popular discourse. It is important to understand that one's biological sex, or sex assigned at birth is a wholly separate concept from one's gender and gender identity.

Sex assigned at birth. The label you are assigned at birth based on the genitals and chromosomes you have. Individuals are generally assigned either "male" or "female"

It is important to understand that even within the realm of biological sex important variations exist.

Intersex. an umbrella term for individuals whose genitals, gonads, and/or chromosomes do not fit the typical definitions of “male” or “female”

Gender. Socially constructed ideas about behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is ones’ personal sense of their own gender. This is a spectrum not defined by discrete boxes and for many individuals may change over the course of their life as ones’ understanding themselves evolves. Below are some common terms used to describe gender identity.

Transgender. An adjective to describe an individual whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their sex assigned at birth. This is an umbrella term that encompasses any number of ways in which an individual’s personal sense of their gender may differ than their assignment at birth.

Non-binary. Someone whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female. In recent years, some states have moved to recognize non-binary as additional gender option on legal documents (e.g., driver’s licenses)

Two-Spirit. An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity but this is not the only significance of the term. There are a variety of definitions and feelings about the term two spirit – and this term does not resonate for everyone. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous Native American. Although the term itself became more commonly used around 1990, two spirit people have existed for centuries.

Cisgender. An adjective describing someone whose gender identity is in accordance with their sex assigned at birth. This term is often used to highlight the privilege of people who are not transgender.

Gender Expression

A term used to describe how one expresses their gender identity through outwardly observable characteristics such as behavior, dress, and mannerisms. Gender expression is a spectrum with feminine and masculine at the polar ends and androgynous as the center point.

Gender conforming. Someone whose gender expression conforms to the norms of those who identify with a particular gender. For example, if an individual identifies as a cisgender man and wears a suit.

Gender non-conforming (GNC). Someone whose behavior or appearance does not conform to gender expectations. For example, if an individual identifies as a cisgender woman and wears a suit. It should be noted that what is characterized as non-conforming varies considerably across cultures and historically. For example, within the contemporary “American culture”, gender conforming expectations are stronger and options for expression more limited, for those who identify as “male” than those who identify as “female.” It is also important to remember that GNC (gender non-conforming) is also a variation of gender identity.

Sexual Attraction

This is also sometimes referred to as physical attraction. In the broadest sense sexual attraction is attraction that is based on sexual arousal or sexual desire

Allosexual. An adjective that describes individuals who experience sexual desire for other individuals.

Demisexual. Individuals who experience sexual attraction only after an emotional connection occurs. Individuals who identify as demisexual may not experience arousal based solely on sexual desire

Asexual. This term describes an individual who does not experience sexual or physical attractions.

Importantly it should be stated, that Asexual individuals often desire and experience fulfilling romantic relationships that are absent the sexual desire or attraction.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a term that broadly describes who an individual is sexually and/or romantically attracted to. It is important to state that sexual and romantic attraction are distinctive types of attraction and individuals may possess the desire for romantic relationships without sexual desire. The definitions below attempt to encompass this complexity of sexual orientation but we recognize that there exists far more variation in sexual and romantic attraction than are captured with definitions.

Bisexual. A person who is sexually and romantically attracted to two genders

Pansexual. An individual who is sexually and romantically attracted to all genders, sexes, and gender identities. Said another way, pansexual individuals are attracted to the person irrespective of all aspects of sex and gender.

Lesbian. A woman is attracted (sexually and romantically) to women.

Gay. Although this term is used by both those who identify as male and female, it generally is understood to mean men who are attracted (sexually and romantically) to men.

Straight. An individual who is attracted to the opposite sexed individuals.

Phobias and Prejudices

Although the term phobia is generally understood to mean an extreme and irrational fear of something, in terms of phobias related to the LGBTQ+ community the meaning is a bit different. As directed toward

the LGBTQ+ community, phobias indicate fear but it also relates to prejudice and a propensity to discriminate and mistreat members of the community.

Homophobia. A dislike or prejudice against people who are not heterosexual

Transphobia. A dislike or prejudice against people who are not cisgender.

Heterosexism. The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression, which reinforces realities of silence and erasure. (lgbtqia resource center glossary, uc davis)

Heteronormativity. Attitudes and behaviors that incorrectly assume gender is binary, and that people should and will align with conventional ideas around, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual or romantic attraction.

Cissexism. Is the belief that there are, and should be, only two genders & that one's gender or most aspects of it, are inevitably tied to assigned sex. This is the systematic marginalization of transgender and gender non-conforming/non-binary people. (lgbtqia resource center glossary, uc davis)

Transmisogyny. A dislike or prejudice towards transwomen or transfeminine people that may not be experienced by cisgender women or transmasculine people. This form of prejudice is at the intersection of transphobia and misogyny (prejudice or discrimination against women). Transmisogyny has shown to have deadly consequences by the disproportionate rates of violence that trans women experience.

Misgendering. Attributing a gender to someone that is incorrect/does not align with their gender identity. Can occur when using pronouns, gendered language (ie “Hey guys” or “Hey ladies”), or assigning genders to people without knowing how they identify