
LGBTQ+ Terminology



The terms that different communities use to describe their identities is constantly changing. Additionally, there is no consensus among any given group on which terms are preferred. As aspiring allies, it's important for us to try and keep up to date on current usage of terminology but also remember that every individual has a right to decide which terms feel best for them. This is not an exhaustive list of terms. Please let GSAFE know if you feel we are missing any.

Ally: Any person who actively supports the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning) community and speaks out against discrimination and injustice.

Asexual: This term describes a person who does not experience physical or sexual attraction to other people. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, with some people experiencing emotional or romantic attraction and varying levels of physical attraction.

Bisexual: This term typically describes a person who experiences romantic and physical attraction to men and women. Since the prefix “bi-” means “two”, it can also describe a person who experiences attraction towards two distinct genders.

Cisgender: This term describes a person who identifies with the sex that they were assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender (or “cis”) woman is someone who was declared to be female at birth and still identifies with that label.

Demisexual: This term describes a person who typically does not experience physical or sexual attraction to another until an emotional or romantic bond has been formed. Some people consider demisexuality to be on the spectrum of asexuality, as it describes how a person is attracted to others and to what degree, but does not describe to whom they are attracted.

Gay: This term describes a person whose primary experience of attraction is towards people of the same gender.

Gender: Gender describes the set of societal ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine. Gender is different from biological sex. It is socially constructed, varies from culture to culture, and changes over time.

Gender identity: This term describes a person's innermost feelings and self-concept of being a man, a woman, neither, or a blend of different genders. A person's gender identity is separate from and is not determined by the sex they were assigned at birth.

Intersex: This term describes a person who is born with a combination of hormones, chromosomes, or genitalia (internal or external) that falls outside of what is typically classified as biologically male or female. There are many different ways to be born intersex, and being intersex is simply a normal part of biological diversity.

Lesbian: This term describes a woman whose primary experience of attraction is towards other women.

Pansexual: This term describes a person who experiences attraction towards people of all or many genders, recognizing that gender exists on a spectrum.

Queer: The word "queer" has many meanings. In the LGBTQ+ community, it is typically used to describe a person who is not straight, or as an umbrella term for the LGBTQ+ community. Some people use it to describe their own sexual orientation, or to describe their gender, as in the word "genderqueer." Queer is still used by some as a derogatory term, so it should not be used to describe a person unless they have stated that that is the term they prefer.

Questioning: This term describes a person who is unsure of their sexual orientation or gender.

Sex (biological/anatomical): Different from gender, this term describes the combination of chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia (both internal and external) that is used to classify a person as male, female, or intersex, typically at the time of birth. Given the many variations in sex characteristics that exist, biological sex should not be considered as binary.

Sexual orientation: This term describes a person's experience of being attracted (physically and emotionally) to people of a similar/same gender, different gender(s), many genders, or to no one. Words like gay, lesbian, asexual, queer, bisexual, pansexual, and straight all describe sexual orientations, which are separate from a person's gender identity.

Straight: This term describes a person whose primary experience of attraction is towards people of a different gender.

Transgender: This term is used both as an umbrella term and as an identity. Broadly, this term describes a person who does not identify with the sex they were declared to be at birth. The word "transgender" refers to a person's gender identity, and is separate from their sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people can also be straight, gay, pansexual, asexual, etc.