

LGBTQ+ Definitions

Terms are always changing in the LGBTQ+ community. This list will be updated as often as possible to keep up with the rapid proliferation of queer and trans language.

Summary:

Cisgender/cis: term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.

Transgender/Trans: encompassing term of many gender identities of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Also see: [The Gender Unicorn](#).

Queer: A term for people of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. This term has a complicated history as a reclaimed slur.

Basic Terminology:

Cis(gender): Adjective that means “identifies as their sex assigned at birth” derived from the Latin word meaning “on the same side.” A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. “Cisgender” does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation. In discussions regarding trans issues, one would differentiate between women who are trans and women who aren’t by saying trans women and cis women. Cis is not a “fake” word and is not a slur. Note that cisgender does not have an “ed” at the end.

Gender Expression/Presentation: The physical manifestation of one’s gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine). Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are),

rather than their sex assigned at birth. Someone with a gender nonconforming gender expression may or may not be transgender.

Gender Identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s). *Everyone has a gender identity, including you.* For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity are not necessarily the same.

Sex Assigned At Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex assigned at birth often based on physical anatomy at birth and/or karyotyping.

Sexual Orientation: A person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others. In Western cultures, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Trans people can be straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, pansexual, queer, etc. just like anyone else. For example, a trans woman who is exclusively attracted to other women would often identify as lesbian.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Note that transgender does not have an "ed" at the end.

Transition: A person's process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. Transition can include: coming out to one's family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgery. It's best not to assume how one transitions as it is different for everyone.

Transsexual: A deprecated term that is often considered pejorative similar to transgender in that it indicates a difference between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Transsexual often – though not always – implicates hormonal/surgical transition from one binary gender (male or female) to the other. Unlike *transgender/trans*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. When speaking/writing about trans people, please avoid the word transsexual unless asked to use it by a transsexual person.

More Terminology:

Agender: An umbrella term encompassing many different genders of people who commonly do not have a gender and/or have a gender that they describe as neutral. Many agender people are trans. As a new and quickly-evolving term, it is best you ask how someone defines agender for themselves.

AFAB and AMAB: Acronyms meaning “assigned female/male at birth” (also designated female/male at birth or female/male assigned at birth). No one, whether cis or trans, gets to choose what sex they’re assigned at birth. This term is preferred to “biological male/female”, “male/female bodied”, “natal male/female”, and “born male/female”, which are defamatory and inaccurate.

Ally: Someone who advocates and supports a community other than their own. Allies are not part of the communities they help. A person should not self-identify as an ally but show that they are one through action.

Aromantic: The lack of romantic attraction, and one identifying with this orientation. This may be used as an umbrella term for other emotional attractions such as demiromantic.

Asexual: The lack of a sexual attraction, and one identifying with this orientation. This may be used as an umbrella term for other emotional attractions such as demisexual.

Bigender: Refers to those who identify as two genders. Can also identify as multigender (identifying as two or more genders). Do not confuse this term with Two-Spirit, which is specifically associated with Native American and First Nations cultures.

Binary: Used as an adjective to describe the genders female/male or woman/man. Since the binary genders are the only ones recognized by general society as being legitimate, they enjoy an (unfairly) privileged status.

Bisexuality: An umbrella term for people who experience sexual and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender (pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, etc).

Boi: A term used within the queer communities of color to refer to sexual orientation, gender, and/or aesthetic among people assigned female at birth. Boi often designates queer women who present with masculinity (although, this depends on location and usage). This term originated in women of color communities.

Bottom Surgery: Genital surgeries such as vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, or metoidioplasty.

Butch: An identity or presentation that leans towards masculinity. Butch can be an adjective (she's a butch woman), a verb (he went home to "butch up"), or a noun (they identify as a butch). Although commonly associated with masculine queer/lesbian women, it's used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

Cross-dressing (also crossdressing): The act of dressing and presenting as a different gender. One who considers this an integral part of their identity may identify as a cross-dresser. "Transvestite" is often considered a pejorative term with the same meaning. Drag performers are cross-dressing performers who take on stylized, exaggerated gender presentations (although not all drag performers identify as cross-dressers). Cross-dressing and drag are forms of gender expression and are not necessarily tied to erotic activity, nor are they indicative of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Do NOT use these terms to describe someone who has transitioned or intends to do so in the future.

Cissexism: Systemic prejudice in the favor of cisgender people.

Cissimilation: The expectation for and act of trans people, especially trans women, assimilating to cisgender (and often heteronormative) standards of appearance and performance.

Drag: Exaggerated, theatrical, and/or performative gender presentation. Although most commonly used to refer to cross-dressing performers (drag queens and drag kings), anyone of any gender can do any form of drag. Doing drag does not necessarily have anything to do with one's sex assigned at birth, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Dyadic: Not Intersex.

Equality: A state in which everyone is equal. This ignores difference in identity/community and history. [Read why we changed our name](#) from “equality” to “educational.”

Equity/Liberation/Justice: A state in which all marginalized communities are free. This differs greatly from equality. Read TSER director’s Eli Erlick’s [article on why equality hurts the transgender movement](#)

Femme: An identity or presentation that leans towards femininity. Femme can be an adjective (he’s a femme boy), a verb (she feels better when she “femmes up”), or a noun (they’re a femme). Although commonly associated with feminine lesbian/queer women, it’s used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

Gender Affirming Surgery; Genital Reassignment/Reconstruction Surgery; Vaginoplasty; Phalloplasty; Metoidioplasty: Refers to surgical alteration, and is only one part of some trans people’s transition (see “Transition” above). Only the minority of transgender people choose to and can afford to have genital surgery. The following terms are inaccurate, offensive, or outdated: sex change operation, gender reassignment/realignment surgery (gender is not changed due to surgery), gender confirmation/confirming surgery (genitalia do not confirm gender), and sex reassignment/realignment surgery (as it insinuates a single surgery is required to transition along with sex being an ambiguous term).

The Gender Binary: A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed “male and female”, in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is oppressive to anyone who defies their sex assigned at birth, but particularly those who are gender-variant or do not fit neatly into one of the two standard categories.

Gender Dysphoria: Anxiety and/or discomfort regarding one’s sex assigned at birth.

Gender Fluid: A changing or “fluid” gender identity.

Gender Identity Disorder / GID: A controversial DSM-III and DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-nonconforming people. Because it labels people as “disordered,” Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don’t conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense

psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. This term was replaced by the term “gender dysphoria” in the DSM-5.

Genderqueer: An identity commonly used by people who do not identify or express their gender within the gender binary. Those who identify as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female, may see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Many genderqueer people are cisgender and identify with it as an aesthetic. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as trans or nonbinary.

Heteronormative / Heteronormativity: These terms refer to the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society and furthers the marginalization of queer people.

Intersex: Describing a person with a less common combination of hormones, chromosomes, and anatomy that are used to assign sex at birth. There are many examples such as Klinefelter Syndrome, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. Parents and medical professionals usually coercively assign intersex infants a sex and have, in the past, been medically permitted to perform surgical operations to conform the infant’s genitalia to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term *intersex* is **not** interchangeable with or a synonym for *transgender* (although some intersex people do identify as transgender).

LGBTQQIAPP+: A collection of identities short for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, pansexual, polysexual (sometimes abbreviated to LGBT or LGBTQ+). Sometimes this acronym is replaced with “queer.” Note that “ally” is **not** included in this acronym.

Monosexual / Multisexual / Non-monosexual: Umbrella terms for orientations directed towards one gender (monosexual) or multiple genders (multisexual/non-monosexual).

Nonbinary (Also Non-Binary): Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a nonbinary person). Not all nonbinary people identify as trans and not all trans people identify as nonbinary. Sometimes (and increasingly), nonbinary can be used to describe the aesthetic/presentation/expression of a cisgender or transgender person.

Packing: Wearing a penile prosthesis.

Pansexual: Capable of being attracted to many/any gender(s). Sometimes the term omnisexual is used in the same manner. “Pansexual” is being used more and more frequently as more people acknowledge that gender is not binary. Sometimes, the identity fails to recognize that one cannot know individuals with every existing gender identity.

Passing/blending/assimilating: Being perceived by others as a particular identity/gender or cisgender regardless how the individual in question identifies, e.g. passing as straight, passing as a cis woman, passing as a youth. This term has become controversial as “passing” can imply that one is not genuinely what they are passing as.

Polysexual: Capable of being attracted to multiple gender(s).

Queer: General term for gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. There is a lot of overlap between queer and trans identities, but not all queer people are trans and not all trans people are queer. The word queer is still sometimes used as a hateful slur, so although it has mostly been reclaimed, be careful with its use.

Stealth: To not be openly transgender in all or almost all social situations.

T: Short for testosterone.

Top Surgery: Chest surgery such as double mastectomy, breast augmentation, or periareolar (keyhole) surgeries.

Trans: Prefix or adjective used as an abbreviation of transgender, derived from the Latin word meaning “across from” or “on the other side of.”

Trans*: An outdated term popularized in the early 2010’s that was used to signify an array of identities under the trans umbrella. However, it became problematized online due to improper usage. See our page on [the asterisk](#).

Transmisogyny: Originally coined by the author Julia Serano, this term designates the intersectionality of transphobia and misogyny and how they are often experienced as a form of oppression by trans women.

Transphobia: Systemic violence against trans people, associated with attitudes such as fear, discomfort, distrust, or disdain. This word is used similarly to homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, etc.

Trans Woman / Trans Man: Trans woman generally describes someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman. This individual may or may not actively identify as trans. It is grammatically and definitionally correct to include a space between trans and woman. The same concept applies to trans men. Often it is good just to use woman or man.

Sometimes trans women identify as male-to-female (also MTF, M2F, or trans feminine) and sometimes trans men identify as female-to-male (also FTM, F2M, or trans masculine). Please ask before identifying someone. Use the term and pronouns preferred by the individual.

Two Spirit: An umbrella term indexing various indigenous gender identities in North America.

<http://www.transstudent.org/definitions>