



This partial list of terms provides basic information to support further discussion and reading. Language is constantly changing; we encourage you to continue researching. Please note all terms should be chosen by a person for themselves.

Allyship: The practice of self educating about heterosexism and cisgenderism, educating others, and actively supporting LGBTQA+ individuals and causes. Allyship is practiced both by cisgender and straight people who support and advocate for the rights of LGBTQA+ people and by LGBTQA+ people who advocate across communities. While the term “ally” implies a complete identity, “allyship” is an ongoing process.

Asexual: A term people may use to describe their experience of little to no sexual attraction to people of any gender. Asexuality is a sexual orientation, and is not the same as celibacy or abstinence. There is a great diversity in how members of the asexual community experience sexual and romantic attraction, desire, arousal, and relationships.

Assigned Sex: The sex a person is socially considered to be at birth, often based on interpretation of a person’s external genitalia.

Bisexual: A term people may use to describe their potential to be romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender; an umbrella term that may include people who identify as not monosexual, for example, as multisexual, omnisexual, pansexual, and/or queer.

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex assigned to them at birth.

Cisgenderism: The system of oppression that reinforces the belief in only two, biologically based genders, thereby negating, punishing, and excluding all transgender and genderqueer people.

Coming out: Coming to terms with one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Can also mean stating openly that one is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or asexual. The term is usually used by members of the LGBTQA+ community, and heterosexual and cisgender people can experience a similar process of coming to terms with their identity as an ally.

Gay: A term people may use to describe their identity as a man whose romantic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions are to men. This term is also sometimes claimed by lesbians and bisexual people.

Gender & Gender-Inclusive Pronouns: A pronoun is a part of speech that takes the place of other nouns. Gender pronouns indicate gender, for example, she/her/hers, he/him/his. Common gender-inclusive pronouns include they/them/theirs and ze/hir/hirs (pronounced “zee”, “here”, and “heres”). When we use pronouns like she or he to identify a person before we ask, we are making an assumption about that person’s gender that might be different from their identity. We can avoid misgendering people by asking which pronouns they use or using gender-inclusive pronouns.

Gender Expression: Is how you express your gender through how you dress, walk, talk, and the language you use for yourself. You can show your femininity, masculinity, androgyny, femme or butch identities, or all or none of these. Your gender expression is not dependent on your gender identity.

Gender Identity: Your innermost sense of yourself as a woman or a man or both or neither with identities including agender, genderqueer, Two-Spirit, and gender fluid. Your gender identity is not dependent on your anatomy.





Genderqueer: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity is neither woman nor man and is between, beyond, or a combination of genders. A rejection of the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes, and the gender binary system.

Heterosexism: The system of oppression that reinforces the belief in the inherent superiority of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships, thereby negating, punishing, and excluding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and asexual people and their relationships.

Heterosexual: A woman or a man whose romantic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions are to people whose gender identity is different from their own and within the gender binary.

Heterosexual Privilege: The societal assumption and norm that all people are heterosexual. The basic rights and social privileges that a heterosexual person automatically receives, that are systematically denied to LGB+ people simply because of their sexual orientation.

Homophobia: Negative feelings, attitudes, actions, or behaviors towards anyone who is (or is perceived to be) LGB+. Sometimes also includes transphobia. Internalized homophobia is a fear of lesbian, gay, or bisexual attraction within oneself and can lead to repression. Institutionalized homophobia refers to homophobic laws, policies, and positions taken by social and governmental institutions.

Homosexual/Homosexuality: Medical terms describing a person who is attracted to, or attraction to, people whose gender identity is the same as their own. Used by some LGBTQA+ people to describe themselves. Can be derogatory and/or othering.

Intersex: A broad term that describes people medically labelled outside of “typical” sex categories. There are many varieties of intersex expression.

Lesbian: A term people may use to describe their identity as a woman whose romantic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions are to women.

LGBTQA+: The acronym for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, & Allies.” The acronym is often expanded to variations of LGBTQIA to inclusively represent identities which include intersex and questioning people.

Queer: An umbrella term used to refer to all LGBTQA+ people and a self-ascribed term used to describe a person whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity is not confined by heterosexual norms or binary gender. Historically a derogatory term now reclaimed by many in LGBTA+ communities.

Romantic Orientation: How one thinks of oneself in terms of to whom one is romantically attracted. Orientation is not dependent on physical experience, but rather on a person’s feelings and attractions. A relationship is romantic when people involved say it is. People describe their romantic orientation using a wide variety of terms including, but not limited to, aromantic, heteroromantic, panromantic, and demiromantic.

Sexual Orientation: How one thinks of oneself in terms of to whom one is sexually attracted. Orientation is not dependent on physical experience, but rather on a person’s feelings and attractions, which can be experienced differently, and to different extents. People describe their sexual orientation using a wide variety of terms including, but not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, asexual, and heterosexual.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. People who identify as transgender may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms including genderqueer, nonbinary, and transgender. Transgender people may claim/affirm their gender identity through hormones and/or surgery; transgender people may claim/affirm their gender identity without hormones and/or surgery. Transgender identity is not dependent on surgery. Transgender identity is not a sexual orientation.

Adapted from Carleton College GSC, GLAAD, and UC Berkeley GenderEquity Resource Center.

