

An LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Glossary

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The current cultural landscape leans toward a broad inclusiveness of gender and sexual identity, resulting in a greater emphasis on understanding the terminology that individuals use to define and express themselves in the way that feels most authentic to them.

We have created this glossary as a resource to help companies and individuals gain fluency in the ever-evolving language relevant to the LGBTQIA+ community.

The terms in this glossary reflect our understanding as of January 2022. Our understanding of the terms and concepts presented here are not set in stone; it continues to evolve over time and to be guided by ongoing experience.

The definitions of these terms do not reflect or correspond to any legal definitions of these terms as used in any local, state or federal legislation. They are presented here solely in an educational context and in the spirit of encouraging an ongoing commitment to educating others toward a more respectful and inclusive future.

This document is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to serve as a resource to readers to aid in understanding and furthering the conversation on evolving ideas surrounding identity and self-expression.

LGBTQIA+. This is an acronym that stands for the “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and allies, plus” community. This acronym may sometimes take more abbreviated forms or more expansive forms. The “plus” is meant to indicate inclusion, whether or not a specific identity is included in the acronym.

Lesbian. Lesbian refers to a woman who is primarily romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay. Gay can refer to a man who is primarily romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men. It can also refer to anyone whose primary romantic and/or sexual attraction is to a person who is the same gender as themselves.

Bisexual. Bisexual refers to a person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to both women and men.

Pansexual. Pansexual refers to a person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people regardless of gender. While the prefix “bi” in “bisexual” refers to the binary gender schema including only women and men, the prefix “pan” in “pansexual” refers inclusively to all genders.

Queer. Queer is an umbrella term sometimes used by people who do not fall into a “normative” sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e., they are not stereotypically heterosexual or cisgender). It is sometimes used because a person rejects a more “conventional” categorization (like “LGBT”). It may also refer to a person’s political identity, in addition to sexual orientation or gender identity. Because “queer” has sometimes been used pejoratively in the past, not all people are comfortable self-describing (or being described) as queer. Alternatively, some people perceive taking back ownership of the word to be empowering. Because of its history, it is particularly important

not to apply this term to someone unless you know they self-identify as queer.

Intersex. Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations that are present in human beings. Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of “male” or “female” bodies. Some intersex traits may be visible at various times during a person’s life; some may not.

Ally. An ally is a person who does not themselves identify as LGBTQIA+ but strives toward and advocates for increased equality, equity, and justice for LGBTQIA+ people in social, political, professional, and/or legal realms.

Sex. A person’s sex assigned or presumed at birth is typically based on a visual inspection of an infant’s body characteristics. A person’s sex assigned or presumed at birth may or may not be the same as that person’s gender identity. Female, male, and intersex are examples of sexes.

Gender. Gender defines expectations for and attaches meaning to femininity and masculinity regarding how someone dresses, grooms, speaks, behaves, and more.

Gender Identity. Gender identity refers to a person’s deeply held sense of self or sense of being a man/boy, a woman/girl, or non-binary. Gender identity exists on a spectrum or continuum (i.e., it is not merely a binary of “man/boy or woman/girl”). Everyone has a gender identity.

Sexual Orientation. Sexual orientation refers to the gender of a person’s romantic and/or sexual attraction to others with reference to their own gender. Sexual orientation exists on a spectrum or continuum. Everyone has a sexual orientation.

Cisgender. Cisgender refers to a person whose sex assigned at birth is the same as their gender identity. For example, we’d refer to a person who was assigned or presumed female at birth and who identifies as a woman/girl as cisgender.

Transgender. Transgender refers to a person whose sex assigned at birth is not the same as their gender identity. For example, a person who was assigned or presumed female at birth but who identifies as a man/boy would be described as transgender.

Non-Binary. Non-binary refers to a person whose gender identity and/or expression does not exist simply as a fixed, binary “man/boy” or “woman/girl.”

Gender Expression. Gender expression refers to the way that a person may choose to externally project or present their gender. Gender expression can take a wide variety of forms, including choices in clothing, speech, mannerisms, grooming, and more.

Gender Non-Conforming. Gender non-conforming refers to a person who does not align with society’s expectations of gender roles some way or ways. People of any gender identity can be gender non-conforming.

Transition. Transition refers to a process that some transgender people choose to undergo to live truly according to their gender identity. The decision of whether (and how) to transition is a very personal choice. A person’s transition can, but does not necessarily need to, involve medical, social, professional, and other components.

Grammar and Inclusive, Respectful Language

As a matter of fundamental respect, it is important to always use inclusive, respectful, and people-centered language that acknowledges the validity of someone's identity. For example, the word "transgender" is an adjective (i.e., a person is transgender; they are not "a transgender" or "transgendered," which are disfavored, harmful terms).

This includes using someone's correct pronouns and asking for someone's correct pronouns instead of simply assuming what they are. It also includes referring to someone by their correct name. "Deadnaming," or the act of referring to a transgender person who has changed their name to reflect their identity by their name at birth, is disrespectful and can be harmful.

Disfavored Terminology

Some terminology is disfavored because it is outdated, harmful, or both. Examples of some terms to avoid include:

- **"Sexual Preference."** The term "sexual preference" is a term that seeks to pathologize the sexuality of people who are not heterosexual. It is outdated and should be avoided. Instead, use "sexual orientation."
- **"Ideology."** The term "ideology," when used in connection with a person's LGBTQIA+ identity, is frequently used in a pejorative sense to pathologize or to suggest that a person's identity is somehow invalid.
- **"Biological" Sex.** The term "biological sex" is sometimes used to imply that science or medicine supports the idea that sex or gender exist only in a strict binary (e.g., strictly "male/man/boy" or "female/woman/girl"). In fact, leading medical, psychological, and scientific organizations have confirmed that neither sex nor gender exists in a strict binary. This term is typically used to invalidate the identities of transgender, non-binary, and intersex people; as such it is harmful and should be avoided.
- **Transsexual.** The term "transsexual" is an older term that refers to a transgender person who typically undergoes a transition including medical treatment. It has sometimes been used pejoratively in the past, and therefore the term "transgender" (considered an umbrella term encompassing transsexual) is commonly preferred. While some people do self-identify as transsexual, because of its history, it is particularly important not to apply this term to someone unless you know they self-identify as transsexual.

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