

KEY TERMS

Many of the following definitions are provided by the Human Rights Campaign, a non-profit committed to equity for the LGBTQ+ community, to describe current language related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. This is a limited list. For additional terms related to the LGBTQ+ community, please visit <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.

AGENDER:

Describes a person who does not have a gender.

ALLY:

A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies and those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

ANTI-BIAS ANTI-RACIST (ABAR):

A teaching methodology focused on identity, diversity, justice, and action. ABAR pedagogy helps students develop a strong sense of self-worth, empathize with others, learn the impact of unfairness, and take action when they observe, or experience injustice.

ASEXUAL:

Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

BIPOC:

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The term is meant to unite all People of Color while acknowledging that Black and Indigenous people face different and often more severe forms of racial oppression and cultural erasure due to systemic White supremacy and colonialism. It is a noun, and since it includes the word “people,” it would be redundant to say “BIPOC people.” It is pronounced “buy-pock” as opposed to saying each letter individually.

BISEXUAL/BI+:

A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender, sex, or gender identity.

CISGENDER:

A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

ETHNICITY:

A grouping of people who share a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, religion, or social treatment that is different from other groups of people.

GAY:

A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some members of the same gender.

GENDER DYSPHORIA:

A term that describes the clinically significant distress a person experiences when their assigned birth gender does not match their gender identity. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term—which replaces Gender Identity Disorder—"is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

GENDER EXPANSIVE:

A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

GENDER EXPRESSION:

The external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, that may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either feminine or masculine.

GENDER FLUID:

A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

GENDER QUEER:

Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

GENDER IDENTITY:

An internal, deeply felt sense of being female, male, a blend of both, or neither. Refers to how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. Can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING:

A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

INTERSEX:

Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

LGBTQ+:

An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer." The "+" represents additional gender identities and sexual orientations that include intersex, agender, and asexual, among many others.

LATINE:

Latine is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino and Latina. This term originated from LGBTQIA+, gender non-binary, and feminist communities in Spanish-speaking countries. Latine replaces the "a" and "o" with the gender-neutral Spanish letter "e". The letter "e" can be found in non-gendered Spanish nouns like "estudiante" (student).*

LATINX:

Latinx is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino and Latina. The origin of this term is not fully known, but it is believed that it was first used in the mid-2000s. The "x" does not imply a specific gender, which makes it inclusive of non-binary populations. Latinx is more popularly used in the United States among academic, LGBTQIA+, and non-binary communities. However, some reject this term because the letter "x" was imposed on indigenous languages during Spanish conquest.*

LESBIAN:

A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to women. This includes cis, trans, and other people who are women.

NON-BINARY:

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a woman or a man. They may identify as both, somewhere in between, or outside the categories of a woman and a man.

PANSEXUAL:

Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

PRONOUNS:

The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/ them, he/him, and she/her. Pronouns are sometimes called Personal Gender Pronouns, or PGPs. For those who use pronouns—and not all people do—they are not preferred, they are essential. For this reason, asking for a person's "preferred pronouns" is considered offensive. Instead, simply ask, "What are your pronouns?"

*For a more nuanced discussion of terminology used by Spanish speakers, please see: <https://cambio.missouri.edu/about/hispanic-latin-latinx-or-latine/>

QUEER:

A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. This term is often used interchangeably with "LGBTQ+."

QUESTIONING:

A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

RACE:

The grouping of humans based on shared physical qualities and/or culture into categories generally viewed as distinct by society; this also comprises one's racial identity. While often assumed to be a biological classification, racial categories do not have a scientific basis. However, the consequences of racial categorization are real, as the ideology of race has become embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture, and is used as a basis for discrimination and racial profiling. How one is racialized is a major determinant of one's socioeconomic status and life opportunities.

RACISM:

(1) The belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race; (2) a system of advantages and disadvantages based on one's physical and/or social qualities; and (3) having personal prejudice and bias against others based solely on their physical and/or social qualities. Racism is a historically rooted system of power hierarchies based on race. It is infused in our institutions, policies, and culture, and benefits white people, and hurts people of color.

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH:

The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people.

SYSTEMIC RACISM:

Institutional, legalized racial discrimination; rules, practices, and customs that negatively impact some races while benefiting others.

TRANSGENDER/TRANS:

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

TRANSITIONING:

A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.

TWO-SPIRIT:

A modern umbrella term used across the U.S. Native American and Canadian First Nations communities to describe Native people who fulfill a traditional third-gender or gender-variant ceremonial and social role in their cultures. Because being Two-Spirit also denotes one's spirituality, not all transgender or non-binary Indigenous people consider themselves to be Two-Spirit. It is not a term appropriate for a non-Native person to use for their own identity. It's an Indigenous term, thereby open solely to Indigenous community members.