

From PFLAG (Parents Family Friends of Lesbians and Gays):

The power of language to shape our perceptions of other people is immense. Precise use of terms in regards to gender and sexual orientation can have a significant impact on demystifying many of the misperceptions associated with these concepts. However, the vocabulary of both continues to evolve, and there is not universal agreement about the definitions of many terms. Here are some working definitions and examples of frequently used (and misused) terms as a starting point for dialogue and understanding.

**Affirmed gender:** The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like *new gender* or *chosen gender*, which imply that an individual's gender was not always their gender or that the gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

**Agender:** Refers to a person who does not identify with any gender.

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Whereas allies to the LGB community typically identify as straight, allies to the transgender community also come from the LGBTQ community. Transgender individuals who identify as straight can be allies to the LGB community as well.

**Androgynous:** Typically used to describe a person's appearances or clothing as having elements of both femininity and masculinity.

**Asexual:** Refers to an individual who does not experience romantic or sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors.

**Assigned sex:** The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

**Assigned gender:** The gender that is assigned to an infant at birth which is meant to correspond to the child's assigned sex.

**Assumed gender:** The gender others assume an individual to be based on the sex they are assigned at birth, as well as apparent gender markers such as physical build, voice, clothes, and hair.

**Biological sex:** Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, genes, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often confused or interchanged with gender, which involves personal identity and social factors, and is not determined by biological sex.

**Bisexual:** Refers to an individual who has the capacity for attraction—sexually, romantically, emotionally, or otherwise—to people with the same, and to people with a different, gender and/or gender identity as themselves. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal experience- or equal levels of attraction- with people across genders, nor any experience at all: it is merely attraction and self-identification that determine orientation. Bisexuality, as it is frequently used today, can act as an umbrella term that encapsulates many identities such as pansexual. Sometimes referred to as *bi* or *bi+*.

**Cisgender:** Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Closeted:** Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Coming out:** For most people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as *disclosing* by the transgender community. Individuals often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender/gender-expansive identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth or adults when they reveal to others their connection to an LGBTQ person or the community. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It's important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Gay:** The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term *gay* to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as man, woman, a mixture of both, or neither.

**Gender-affirming surgery (GAS):** Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older and often offensive term *sex change*. Also sometimes referred to as *sexual reassignment surgery* (or *SRS*), *genital reconstruction surgery*, or *medical transition*.

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to recognize is that an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity.

**Gender identity:** One's deeply held core sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

**Gender neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

**Gender nonconforming:** A term (considered by some to be outdated) used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly man or woman. More current terms include *gender expansive*, *differently gendered*, *gender creative*, *gender variant*, *genderqueer*, *nonbinary*, *agender*, *gender fluid*, *gender neutral*, *bigender*, *androgynous*, or *gender diverse*. PFLAG National uses the term gender expansive.

**Genderqueer:** Refers to individuals who identify as a combination of man and woman, neither man or woman, or both man and woman. Is sometimes used as an umbrella term in much the same way that the term '*queer*' is used, but only referring to gender, and thus should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as genderqueer.

**Gender socialization:** The process by which individual one is taught how they should behave as a boy or as a girl. Parents, teachers, peers, media, and books are some of the many agents of gender socialization.

**Gender spectrum:** The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

**Homophobia:** An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, *biphobia* is an aversion people who are bisexual, and *transphobia* is an aversion to people who are transgender. *Homophobic*, *biphobic*, and *transphobic* are the related adjectives. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as *anti-LGBTQ bias*.

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms, *gay*, *lesbian*, or *queer*.

**Intersex/differences of sexual development (DSD):** Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceeded to perform surgeries to ‘align’ their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children. Formerly the medical terms *hermaphrodite* and *pseudo-hermaphrodite* were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

**Latinx:** a gender-expansive term used to be more inclusive of all genders than the binary terms *Latino* or *Latina* permit, as these are terms of identity found in Spanish, a gendered language.

**Lesbian:** Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is sometimes stated as *LGBT* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), *GLBT* (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). The addition of the *Q* is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term *queer* focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition, which recognizes more fluid identities; and as a move towards greater inclusivity for gender expansive people. The *Q* can also stand for *questioning*, referring to those who are still exploring their own exuality and/or gender. Occasionally, the acronym is also stated as *LGBTQA* to include people who are asexual, *LGBTQI*, with the *I* representing intersex, or *LGBTQ+* or *LGBTQIA* to represent all of the above.

**Lifestyle:** A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ is a choice.

**Misgender:** To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

**Nonbinary:** Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman. It is an identity term which some use exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like *genderqueer*, *gender creative*, *gender nonconforming*, *gender diverse*, or *gender expansive*. Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may thus identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as *NB*.

**Out:** Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Sometimes, individuals are outed by others who they may have already come out to. Outing an LGBTQ person without their consent is disrespectful and potentially

dangerous for the LGBTQ individual. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term *disclose* (defined above).

**Pansexual:** Refers to a person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all genders and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determines the orientation. Often included under the umbrella of bisexuality.

**Preferred Gender Pronouns:** A preferred gender pronoun, or PGP—sometimes called *proper gender pronoun*—is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individuals use *they* and *their* as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Others use *ze* (sometimes spelled *zie*) and *hir* or the pronouns *xe* and *xer*.

**Queer:** A term used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, *queer* is still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQ community. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. “My cousin identifies as queer”).

**Questioning:** Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Same-Gender Loving:** A term sometimes used by some members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation (gay/bisexual) without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

**Sex:** Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include both primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes. Sex is often conflated or interchanged with gender, which is more social than biological, though there is some overlap.

**Sexual orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition. One’s sexual activity does not define one’s sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Transgender:** Often shortened to *trans*. A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Other terms commonly used are *female to male* (or *FTM*), *male to female* (or *MTF*), *assigned male at birth* (or *AMAB*), *assigned female at birth* (or *AFAB*), *genderqueer*, and *gender expansive*. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people with different histories and experiences are often included within the greater transgender community—such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.

**Transition:** A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

**Transsexual:** A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called *sex reassignment surgery* (SRS) (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.