

LGBTQIAP+ ETIQUETTE GUIDE and GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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Sex, gender, and sexuality can be complicated subjects, and are deeply personal. Sex is comprised of our primary and secondary sex characteristics, anatomy, and chromosomes, and is separate from gender identity or expression. Gender identity can be described as an innermost understanding of self, and gender expression is how we embody or communicate who we are to the world. Sexual orientation is who we choose to be close with, and how. Sex does not always inform gender, and gender does not always inform sexuality. None of these categories exists solely on a continuum of male to female, or masculine to feminine, and people have non-binary genders and sexualities, as well as intersex, agender, and asexual identities.

People with sex, gender, or sexuality identities that dominant society regards as “normative,” i.e. male or female, cisgender, or heterosexual, may have not actively thought much about how they define or claim their identities, because they have not had to. Many people whose identities are marginalized by society experience erasure and invisibility because they are seen as non-normative.

This glossary of terms related to sex, gender, and sexuality is neither exhaustive nor absolute. Language and concepts of identity are constantly evolving, and often differ amongst intersections of race, class, age, etc. Many of these terms, as well as the communities that use them are White-centered. Everyone has a right to self-define their identities and have access to validating terminology that others will use to respect who they are.

If thinking about sex, gender, or sexuality is new to you, it might feel overwhelming. This glossary can be a place to begin to learn more about sex, gender, and sexuality identities and terminology. Educating ourselves is a way to take some of the burden off queer or “LGBTQIAP+” individuals, and/or to explore and expand our understanding of our own identities. Remember that it’s safest to not assume, and best practice to ask respectfully and believe people if they share about who they are. Please also remember that in most circumstances, people are not required to share with you how they identify, and folks have a right to keep their sex, sexuality and gender identities to themselves if they choose to.

Agender : (adj) someone who does not have a particular gender.

Ally : (noun) a non-LGBTQIAP+ or queer identified person, often one who identifies as heterosexual/straight and/or cisgender, who supports and advocates for the LGBTQIAP+ community and against homophobia and transphobia. Remember that being an ally to people within LGBTQIAP+ communities requires a commitment to using one's privilege or access to advocate for safety and inclusion for LGBTQIAP+ people. LGBTQIAP+ can also be allies for others within their shared communities, as we all have different positions of privilege and access. The "A" in LGBTQIAP+ is generally for Asexual/Aromantic, not Ally, since allies to LGBTQIAP+ people are not part of the LGBTQIAP+ community by virtue of being an advocate for its members. There may, however, be communities built of allies, who support one another in advocating for the queer community.

Androgyny : (noun) a gender expression that has both masculine and feminine elements; can be fluid or more static. **Androgyne** (noun) : non-binary gender identity that is a combination or flux between or in relation to masculine and feminine.

Androsexual : (adj) a sexual orientation of someone who is attracted to men, males, and/or masculinity.

Aromantic : (adj) describes someone who experiences little to no romantic attraction or connection in relationships. Commonly called "a-ro" within the aromantic community.

Asexual : (adj) describes someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction/connection in relationships. May or may not engage in sexual acts. Commonly called "ace" within the asexual community. There are many **types of attraction**: romantic, sexual, physical/sensual, emotional, aesthetic, platonic. Some identities fall between asexual and sexual, like demisexual and graysexual (see definitions).

Bigender (Trigender, Polygender, Pangender) : (adj) a person who is two, three, more, or all genders, respectively.

Binary (gender binary, etc.) : (noun) the way of thinking about sex, gender, or sexuality that consists of two options: female/male, woman/man, gay/straight. The existence of non-binary identities throughout human history suggests that the Gender Binary is a false dichotomy which does not account for the many genders and sexes that exist.

Biological Sex or Sex Assigned at Birth : (noun) a medical term assigned at birth based on a person's chromosomes, hormones, gonads, internal organs and genitalia. It is predominately assigned as male or female, even if those assignments are an approximation that will not necessarily not correlate to a person's gender development. **AFAB** or **AMAB** (adj) (pronounced Ay-Fab or Ay-Mab) is an abbreviated way to reference "Assigned Female (or Male) at Birth." Do not use someone's sex assignment as a descriptor for who they are, as it may be disrespectful to someone's identity, if their identity does not align with how they were assigned at birth.

Intersex: (adj) describes people who are born with sex characteristics that do not conform to an initial assessment of "male" or "female." Sometimes people are given an intersex sex assignment at birth, while other intersex people do not identify their correct sex until later in life. Intersex individuals used to be referred to as "hermaphrodites," which is now considered to be an outdated and derogatory term. Over 2% of all people are born intersex. Humans have 88+ primary and secondary sex characteristics, and many more people would fall into the category of intersex if they had their chromosomes tested. Some intersex people identify as transgender, while some identify as cisgender.

Biphobia : (noun) negative feelings toward bisexual people. Biphobic can describe someone who harbors or expresses these negative feelings.

Bisexual : (adj) describes a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to genders both like and unlike their own. The attraction can be split equally or lean one or many ways, depending on the person. Those who experience romantic attraction in this way may identify as **Biromantic**.

Butch : (noun, adj) a gender expression or identity related to alternative/queer masculinities. “Butch” can sometimes be used as a derogatory term toward lesbians, unless a person claims the identity for themselves. “Butch” can be claimed by people of all gender identities as a way to refer to presentation/expression, identity, and relationship or sexual dynamic.

Cisgender : (noun) a person whose gender identity is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity : (noun) the misconception that everyone is cisgender. This misconception contributes greatly to the erasure and oppression of transgender people.

Closeted : (adj) a term that refers to an individual who has not been open about their queer/ LGBTQIAP+ identity, either with themselves or others. “**Coming out** of the closet” is a deeply personal disclosure of someone’s identity/ies. Not all people are able to safely “come out,” due to their environments or to lack of resources. Others are not given the choice to come out on their own terms, due to their appearance and expression, or due to other people disclosing their identity without their consent. Coming out is a process that can happen multiple times, with different groups of people or with different identities. Sometimes it means being public with friends, family, strangers etc. about one’s identities, while others may come out of the closet to only some people.

Consent : (noun) permission for something to happen, or agreement to do something. Consent for sexual or relational experiences must be active and freely given. A mere absence of a “no” is not consent. An enthusiastic “yes” can be communicated in multiple ways, and consent can be withdrawn at any point, for any reason. Communication and “checking in” using questions like “do you want ____?” is the best way to maintain consent in a relationship or encounter.

Constellation : (noun) the structure of a polyamorous relationship(s) (see polyamorous relationships).

Cross-dresser : (noun) an outdated term to describe someone who “wears clothing typically assigned to the ‘opposite’ gender”; this is a derogatory slur like **transvestite** that can negate the validity of transgender people. Crossdressing is also sometimes used by cisgender people to describe the act of men wearing clothing that is typically considered to be women’s clothing or vice versa.

Demisexual : (noun) the sexual orientation of someone who only feels sexual attraction/desire toward someone with whom they feel emotionally intimate.

Drag King : (noun) someone, not a cisgender man, who dresses in masculine drag and personifies masculine gender stereotypes or expression in performance for entertainment.

Drag Queen : (noun) someone, not a cisgender woman, who dresses in feminine drag and personifies feminine gender stereotypes or expression in performance for entertainment.

Dyke : (noun) an identity typically of a lesbian who expresses a form of queer masculinity. The term can be derogatory unless a person claims the identity for themselves.

Dysphoria : (noun) a state of unease or dissatisfaction. **Gender dysphoria** is a term used to describe the distress and discomfort that occurs when one's emotional and psychological gender identity does not align with the gender they were assigned at birth, and are sometimes continually assigned socially. **Body dysphoria** (different than *dysmorphia*), is when this discomfort applies to one's body. A person does not have to experience body dysphoria in order to be trans, and body dysphoria is not experienced in the same way for every trans person. Many non-binary and genderqueer people experience body dysphoria. Body dysphoria is not "fixed" by adopting a better attitude or embracing self-love/acceptance of one's body. It can be alleviated for some through packing, binding, tucking, padding, removing facial hair, applying makeup, and/or undergoing surgeries or hormone therapy.

Faggot : (noun) a derogatory slur used to insult someone who one perceives to be gay or queer. Sometimes shortened to "fag." This word is sometimes reclaimed and used jovially and as a term of empowerment by gay or queer people.

Feminine presenting; masculine presenting : (adj) terms that describe expressing one's gender as more feminine or more masculine; not confined to or determined by one's biological sex. Do not label someone as feminine or masculine presenting unless these are words that they use for themselves.

Femme : (noun, adj) an identity that usually encompasses a queer femininity. This term is typically used by trans or cis feminine-expressing queer people.

Fluidity : (adj) a term referring to an "ever-changing" gender or sexuality. For example, a person may move between identifying or expressing as more masculine or more feminine, or experience fluidity in who they are attracted to and/or how.

Folx : (noun) Using gender inclusive speech is imperative to being welcoming of people of all genders in our day to day lives. "Folks" is a way to refer to a group of people without gendering them (i.e. using "guys/girls," "ladies and gentlemen," etc.). "You all/y'all," "everyone," "guests," "participants," "people," etc. are other non-gendered terms that reference groups. "Folx" with an x is typically used to reference people who are queer, trans, or gender expansive and to denote a politicized identity. Other uses of an x for this purpose are: **Latinx** ("La-teen-ex"), Chicax, Xicanx, and Filipinx. **Mx.** ("mix" or "mux") is a non-gendered honorific like "Ms." or "Mr." The "X" is also beginning to be used as a gender marker option on legal IDs for people whose sex is neither male nor female and/or whose gender is neither man nor woman.

FtM/F2M; MtF/M2F : (adj) an abbreviation for trans men (female-to-male) and trans women (male-to-female). A binary transgender person who has transitioned or is transitioning. There are no requirements, medical, physical, or otherwise, for a person to have "completed" a transition or to identify as MTF or FTM.

Gay : (adj) the sexual orientation of a person who is attracted to people of the same gender as them. Sometimes used as an umbrella term for different queer identities. Originally used to refer specifically to homosexual men.

Gender expansive : (adj) used to describe people that identify or express themselves in ways that broaden the culturally defined behavior or expression associated with a particular gender assignment.

Gender expression : (noun) how a person communicates their gender using clothing, accessories, mannerisms, makeup, hairstyle, tone of voice, etc. Remember that you do not know someone's identity based on assumptions you may make about their appearance.

Genderfluid : (adj) a gender identity for someone whose gender changes between two or more genders; is not fixed. Sometimes a person will identify more as one or two genders than another; there are not rules for how genderfluid people's experiences of gender mix or don't.

Gender identity : (noun) a person's innermost sense or feeling of their gender. How one thinks of or knows oneself in the context of their gender. Cisgender gender identities are typically woman or man, and transgender gender identities are typically woman, man, bi/pangender, nonbinary, genderfluid, queer/genderqueer, or two-spirit, etc.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) : (adj) a broad term to describe expressing gender in a way that doesn't conform to traditional gender norms. i.e. a boy who wears lipstick. Different than transgender or nonbinary, this term is not designed to describe an identity, and encompasses expressions of cisgender people as well.

Graysexual (gray-A, gray-ace) : (noun) the sexual orientation of someone who identifies in the gray area between asexuality and sexuality. Graysexual people might not regularly experience sexual attraction, but do sometimes. They might also experience sexual attraction, but a low sex drive.

Normative : (adj) establishing, relating to, or deriving from a standard or norm, especially of behavior. A normative gender, sexual, or relationship identity or expression is one that is seen as acceptable and granted more access by dominant societal standpoints and structures.

Heteronormativity is the assumption that all people are heterosexual, or that men should be masculine and attracted to women, and women should be feminine and attracted to men. It includes many standards or behavior and expectations about lifestyle, relationships, and gender expression. **Cisnormativity** is the assumption that all people are cisgender. Other oppressive and normative structures that impact LGBTQIAP+ communities include: **White Supremacy/ Racism, Ableism, Xenophobia, Classism, Patriarchy**, etc.

Genderqueer : (adj, noun) a nonbinary (see definition) gender identity of a person who has a queer gender identity. Can resemble genderfluid, agender, or nonbinary identities, but does not always, and is usually uniquely self-defined or undefinable. Not all genderqueer people identify as transgender.

Heterosexism : (noun) the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, or prejudice against sexualities that are not heterosexual/straight, reinforcing that there is something wrong with people who are not heterosexual.

Homophobia : (noun) encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality, or toward people who are identified or perceived as being LGBTQIAP+. Includes discrimination, contempt, prejudice, aversion, hatred, antipathy, irrational fear, critical or hostile behavior, and violence, and often originates in restrictive religious beliefs and institutions.

Transphobia is similar but specifically targets transgender people, and results in many barriers to access for basic care and rights.

Homosexual : (adj) a person who is attracted to people of the same gender as them (vs. **heterosexual/straight**: women who are attracted to men, and men who are attracted to women). Sometimes used derogatorily. "Lesbian" and "Gay" are homosexual sexual orientations.

Intersectionality : (noun) a term coined by American professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the oppression/discrimination resulting from an individual's overlapping social identities. Latoya Peterson¹ describes intersectionality as “a framework for understanding how a variety of oppressions can intersect.” This term is often *misused* as a label, i.e. “intersectional feminist”, which divorces this term from its roots of requiring one take action to respond to intersections of identity and oppression. A person, movement, or community is not inherently “intersectional” at all times. It may be *diverse*, like the LGBTQIAP+ communities are, however, and necessitate that its members examine the impact of centering some identities over others... ex. White people “white-washing” language and identities to fit White-centered ideals or expectations, or people with ability privilege not considering the needs or experiences of people with oppressed ability identities within a group, or otherwise not considering or understanding how multiple identities inform our experiences and actions.

Intersex : (noun) [see “Biological Sex”]

Lesbian : (noun) typically a (cis- or trans-) woman who is primarily attracted to other women.

LGBTQIAP+ : (noun) acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual/aromantic, pansexual communities. The plus sign represents other queer identities not included in the acronym. Often shortened to “LGBT”, this umbrella term is sometimes used interchangeably with “queer”, though each can have different meanings and impacts on inclusivity of diversity for different communities. It is important to note that each letter represents a different identity, and often differing communities, and a single person is not “LGBT.”

MSM and WSW : (noun) acronym for “men who have sex with men”, and “women who have sex with women.”

Nonbinary (nb) : (adj) a gender identity of someone whose gender is neither woman nor man and/or is a combination of the two and/or is something else entirely that falls outside of these categories. Is sometimes used as an umbrella term for nonbinary gender identities like genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, pangender, etc. Not all nonbinary people identify as transgender, though many do. There are as many valid ways to be nonbinary as there are nonbinary people.

Nonbinary singular pronouns (see **pronouns**) include they/their/them, xe/xem/xyr, ne/nim/nir, ze/hir/hirs, and ey/em/eir. Some nonbinary people's pronouns are she/her/her and/or he/his/him.

Pansexual : (adj) a sexual orientation of someone who is attracted to people of all gender identities and expressions.

Passing : (verb) a term used to describe a transgender person who “passes” as a cisgender person. i.e. a trans man who is commonly perceived as a cis man. Not all trans people want to pass, or are able to pass, or “pass” as their correct gender (i.e. a nonbinary transmasculine person who “passes” as a cis man). Passing can be a privilege that affords some trans people more safety from the threat of violence in some situations. It can also create an experience of having to decide whether or not to “reveal” that one is transgender, which can also be a risk to one's safety.

Polyamory/polyamorous : (noun, adj) the practice of a non-monogamous relationship(s); a non-monogamous **relationship orientation**. There is no one structure for this. People who are

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/21/how-intersectionality-lost-its-punch/?utm_term=.7533761b8487

polyamorous may have several partners, one primary partner, secondary partners, a triad relationship, etc. Polyamory (different than *polygamy*), often consists of healthy, thriving, consensual relationships. Not all polyamorous relationships are queer, or involve queer people. Unlike “mono” in monogamy, “poly” means multiple, and also applies to the gender identity **polygender** (someone who has multiple genders) and the sexual orientation **polysexual** (experiencing attraction to multiple but potentially not all genders).

Pronouns : using people’s correct pronouns is a crucial way of respecting their gender identity. An example of using the singular “they” pronoun is: “That person left **their** wallet at the restaurant. We should call **them** to see if **they** can pick it up.” An example of using the singular “xe” pronoun is: “That person left **xyr** wallet. We should call **xem** to see if **xe** can pick it up.”

Questioning : (verb, adj) a person who is exploring and figuring out their sexuality and/or gender identity. People can be questioning different aspects of their identity for any amount of time. There is sometimes a pressure to choose or “stick with” a specific identity in order to be considered “queer enough,” but it is entirely valid to be questioning and discovering.

Queer : (noun, adj, verb) this word holds many different meanings for different people. It is often used as an umbrella term to encompass non-normative experiences, expressions, or identities of gender or sexual orientation. “Queer” has been reclaimed by many people, and for some it still holds a hurtful, derogatory association. For some, “queer” represents more than a gender or sexual orientation. It can be an orientation to thought, relationships, work, systems, and more. Some use “queer” as a definition for the indefinable, a placeholder word for the liminal experiences of queer people.

Same Gender Loving (SGL) : (adj) a sexual orientation identity term created in the '90s for African American use by activist Cleo Manago, to affirm homosexual and bisexual people who are Black, in response to the identity labels “Gay” and “Lesbian” that were/are often linked with White people. **All Gender Loving (AGL)** is a sexual orientation identity typically used by bisexual/pansexual Black people.

Sexual Orientation : (noun) a person’s sexual identity in relation to the gender(s) to which they are (or are not) attracted or interested; the fact of being asexual, pansexual, polysexual, bisexual, homosexual/gay/lesbian, heterosexual/straight, skoliosexual, etc.

Gender Affirmation or Confirmation Surgery (aka Sex Reassignment Surgery or SRS) : (noun) refers to one or multiple surgeries a person may receive to help them feel more comfortable and/or correct in their body. Like not all trans people experience body dysphoria, and not all trans people want or are able to undergo surgery or take hormones. Similarly, not all trans people feel they were born “in the wrong body.” Some surgeries include phalloplasty, vaginoplasty, top surgery (double mastectomy, breast reduction or breast augmentation), and facial feminization surgery (FFS). These are personal decisions and processes. It is disrespectful and invasive to ask trans or gender non-conforming people whom you do not know if they have had or are planning to have surgeries or take hormones. Surgeries have no bearing on the validity of a person’s trans identity.

Skoliosexual : (adj) a sexual orientation for someone who is attracted to non-binary and/or non-cis people. It does not generally describe an attraction to specific genitalia or birth assignments.

Stud : (noun) another word to refer to a ‘butch’ lesbian, originally used primarily within the African American and Latinx communities.

Transitioning : (verb) the process a transgender person may go through to affirm or more congruently express their gender identity. This means something different for every person;

some choose to have surgery, hormone therapy, change their names and/or pronouns, or none of the above. A social transition may also include a change in one's gender expression. A legal transition may include updating one's identity documents. There are many systematic and financial barriers to social, legal, and medical transitions for transgender people.

Transgender : (noun) a person whose gender identity is different than the gender they were assigned at birth.

Transsexual : (noun) a person whose gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. For some this term is considered out of date and/or offensive. It typically refers specifically to transgender people who have had surgery and hormone therapy.

Two-Spirit : (noun) a gender, sexual, and/or spiritual identity ideally used exclusively by some First Nations people who have both masculine and feminine spirits. The term was proposed by Albert McLeod in the '90s, as a translation of the Anishinaabemowin term *niizh manidoowag*, meaning "two spirits." For some, two-spiritedness is more than an identity; it is a traditional role that some First Nations people embody in many aspects of their lives.