

PRIDE

In presenting this vocabulary list, it is worth mentioning that definitions are historically constructed and change over time and space. This is particularly evident in vocabularies of sexuality and gender, which have expanded at an extraordinarily fast pace since the nineteenth century. Many of the words below are ones that students, faculty and staff currently use to describe themselves and their place in society—their relationships, identities, practices, communities, as well as the bias and discrimination they experience. This list will continue to evolve, and as such, when in doubt, it is useful to ask questions in service to respect.

Ally – This term describes an individual with social or economic privilege who engages in practices that challenge and transform ideas, values, and behaviors that afford others less privilege. To be a good LGBTIQ ally means that a person is engaged in an ongoing process to (1) understand their own privilege and its effects (2) listen to and learn from those who are most affected by homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, homonormativity, and heterosexism (3) work in solidarity with those most affected by injustice (4) and, foster climates of respect, appreciation, and equity for diverse genders, sexualities, communities, cultures, and histories.

Androgynous – A term used as both a self-description and a means to describe those whose outward appearance, mannerisms, expressions, and/or identifications combine masculine and feminine traits in a way that produces an ambiguity. Because androgyny calls the two-gender system (masculine and feminine) into question, androgynous individuals have been both exoticized and subject to discrimination.

Asexual – A term used as both a self-description and a means to describe those who do not experience sexual attraction and/or lack interest in sex. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an enduring or continuing orientation toward sexuality. Some asexual people experience arousal and attraction, but unlike sexual people they do not desire to act on the feeling with another person. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community, as each asexual person experiences relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Most people have been asexual for their entire lives and rarely become sexual or vice versa. A small minority of individuals thinks of themselves as asexual for a brief period of time.

Bicurious – A curiosity about having sexual relations with a same gender/sex person.

Binary Gender System – A social system in which all people are classified into either one of two categories: male or female. This system is premised on the idea that intersex and transgender people do not exist or that they need to be fixed in order to fit into a binary system. In the United States, the binary gender system is maintained in ordinary ways such as male/female bathrooms, male/female dormitory room assignments, and identification forms.

Biological Sex – A scientific term used to classify bodies by an aggregate of sex chromosomes (XX; XY; XXY; XXY/XY; XXXY; XXX; XO); sex hormonal systems (estrogen/progesterone, testosterone, androgen sensitivity); gonads (ovaries, testes, one each, combination); internal and external genitalia (many variations); and, secondary sex characteristics (hair, breast, and Adam’s apple growth at puberty). It is estimated that 1 in 100 babies differ from standard definitions of male or female and approximately 1 in 1000 babies is subject to surgery to “normalize” genital appearance to either male or female.

Biphobia – A term used to describe the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals. Biphobia can be seen within LGBTQ communities, as well as in mainstream society and is characterized by such sentiments as “Bisexuals are just going through a phase.” Those who mischaracterize bisexuals as in “a phase” believe that people can only be heterosexual or homosexual.

Bisexual – A term used as both a self-description and a means to describe those who classify themselves as possessing significant sexual/romantic attraction to individuals who are attracted to two genders, though not necessarily equally or simultaneously. This does not necessarily mean just men and women. As more people acknowledge that there are more than two sexes (male/female), the term pansexual has come into use to identify those who are attracted to people regardless of gender, though not necessarily equally or simultaneously.

Cisgender or Cis-Person – “Trans” means “across” or “on the opposite side of,” whereas “cis” means “on the same side of.” Someone who was assigned one sex at birth, but comes to identify and live as a member of another sex, is called “transsexual” (because they are said to have crossed from one sex to another). Someone who lives and identifies as the same sex that they were assigned at birth is called a “cissexual.” Most of the population is cis and they receive certain rights and privileges that trans people do not. There is a wide range of cis identities, some traditional and some not traditional.

Closet – A term developed in the post-war period to describe the small amount of space that LGBTQ people could occupy in society. Beginning in the 1930s, a nationwide campaign began to remove LGBT people from the public sphere. Gay-identified people, who had previously conceptualized gay culture as a “Gay World,” increasingly described it as a closet that they were forced to inhabit. In the 1960s, “coming out of the closet” became a rallying cry for those in the LGBT civil rights movement.

Coming Out – A term used to describe the act of leaving the “closet” and disclosing one’s sexual or gender identity, orientation, preference, or variance. Coming out is often an ongoing process that begins with one’s self, close friends and family, and then wider society. Many people have to come out on a regular basis because of the heteronormative presumption that all people are heterosexual unless they say otherwise. Coming out often entails a fear of rejection. As such, regardless of the reaction, it is often experienced as a risky and trying process. Not all people feel safe to disclose their gender or sexuality due to the risk of discrimination they will face.

Discrimination – Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

Down Low - See ‘In the Closet.’ Also referred to as ‘D/L.’

Drag – This term describes the wearing of clothing associated with one gender by an individual of another gender, often with exaggerated characteristics. Individuals who perform in drag are referred to as Drag Kings and Drag Queens.

Dyke – Originally a derogatory slur to describe masculine women, this term was re-appropriated by working-class women (though not exclusively) to describe their sexual orientation toward other women; it is distinct from the word lesbian in that it connotes a defiance and resistance to middle-class norms of respectability. The term is still used to degrade women.

Fag or Faggot – A slur commonly used today by young people, particularly males, to humiliate, degrade or otherwise harass other boys and men by attacking their masculinity. The victim may or may not be perceived as actually gay. While the slur is used to degrade gay males, it is often used as a means to police the gender of all males—attacking those who act too feminine. It is also used as a form of sexism; when a male fails at something or appears weak, the slur functions to associate failure/weakness with femininity or gayness. Masculinity is re-associated with strength and success. Some gay men have re-appropriated the term to diffuse, affirm and resist norms of respectability.

FTM – “Female-to-Male”. This is an acronym for the term “female-to-male” and is used to describe transgender individuals who were assigned the sex of female at birth, but express masculine gender identities through aesthetic, surgical, social, and/or behavioral changes. Not all transgender masculine people identify as FTM because not all people conceptualize their gender as a transition from one binary sex to another. Some understand themselves to be transgender, neither male nor female, some combination of both, or a third or alternative gender, such as genderqueer or trans.

Femme – This term describes a gender identity, historically embraced by lesbian or queer-identified women, who identify, stylize and/or express themselves in a feminine manner. Femme identities, communities and cultures emerged from the shared social experiences of lesbian and queer women whose gendered interactions with society were distinctive from both hetero-feminine and masculine women.

Gay – A term used mostly in reference to men who have significant sexual and/or romantic attraction and relationships with men and only men. At times gay is used to refer to all people, regardless of gender, who have primary sexual/romantic attractions to people of their same gender.

Gender – Whereas sex (M or F) is a term to classify people biologically (often based on physical anatomy, reproductive capabilities, chromosomes, etc.), gender is the social meanings, obligations, and expectations ascribed (by one’s self or society) to sexed bodies. Any given society, in any particular moment, has a variable number of genders that are considered appropriate. Children often come to embody the gender that society assigns to their sex. In Western societies, babies have traditionally been sexed as either male or female (gender binary) and have correspondingly been socialized and obligated to fulfill masculine and feminine roles. Though Western societies increasingly recognize gender variation as an ordinary feature of being human, many children are still expected to adopt a heteronormative gender.

Gender Binary – The idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (See also ‘Identity Sphere.’)

(Mis)Gendering – A term used to describe the process by which people categorize other people’s gender, based on perceived morphology, without regard to how the other person self-identifies. These misperceptions can cause the mis-gendered person to feel distress, anxiety, depression, and invisible. To avoid misgendering someone who is androgynous, genderqueer, or trans, simply ask what pronouns they prefer.

Gender-Confirming Surgery – A term used to describe the surgery that trans* identified individuals undergo to modify their body to better fit their identity.

Gender Expression – A term used to describe how a person embodies and/or presents their gender. Most people have complex gender expressions that do not fall neatly into masculine, feminine or transgender. Over the course of a day, for instance, one may embody a more or less feminine gender depending on a variety of social factors. A woman, for instance, may identify as androgynous or gender non-conforming but feel obligated to express herself as highly feminine on the occasion of a wedding. Her gender expression shifts depending on time and place.

Gender Cues – What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

Gender Identity – A term used to describe the gender that an individual identifies with, which may or may not align with their prescribed physical sex. It is a person's sense of their own gender.

Gender Non-Conforming – A term used to describe people who do not conform to the traditional gender binary of male and female. One may identify as male, female, or trans* and also as gender non-conforming.

Gender Normative – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society. (Also referred to as 'Gender Straight'.)

Gender Oppression - The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege cisgender (gender-typical people) and subordinate and disparage transgender or gender variant people. Also known as "genderism."

Genderqueer – This term describes a gender identity that is embraced by people whose genders are unconventional or non-normative. A genderqueer identity often emerges from a political resistance to the gender binary system and is generally, but not always, embraced by people of younger generations.

Gender-Variant – This term describes people who by chance or choice do not conform to gender norms associated with their assigned sex.

Hermaphrodite—An **OUT-OF-DATE** and **OFFENSIVE** term for an intersexed person. (See 'Intersexed Person'.)

Heteronormative – This concept describes actions, institutions, ideologies, and systems that assume heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation. As such heteronormative ideas and behaviors deem other sexual identities and practices as less normal, valuable and/or healthy; certain sex is deemed good (reproductive, monogamous, married, male female sex) and other sex is deemed bad (gay, lesbian, transgender, polysexuality, pansexuality, etc.). Heteronormativity not only places expectations, demands and constraints on the sexual subject to act in specific ways, it stigmatizes, pathologizes, criminalizes and marginalizes other forms of sexualities. .

Heterosexual – A term that came into common usage during the mid-twentieth century to describe men who have emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions and relationships with women—exclusively; the term also describes women who have emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions and relationships with men—exclusively.

Heterosexual Privilege – This term describes the social, political, and economic advantages and privileges afforded to people who engage in heterosexual practices and relationships. For example, through the institution of marriage, heterosexuals are afforded economic and political advantages and rights that others are not.

HIV-phobia – The irrational fear or hatred of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Homophobia – A term initially used to describe the fear and hatred of, or the discomfort around, those who identify as gay, lesbian, homosexual, or queer. While the term has been extended to include bisexual and transgender people two new terms emerged, biphobia and transphobia, to describe the specific character of hatred of bisexual and transgender communities. These terms are often used interchangeably to describe discriminatory bias, harassment and violence.

Homosexual – A term that came into common usage in the mid-twentieth century to describe (1) men who have emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions and relationships with men—exclusively (2) and, women who have emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions and relationships with women—exclusively. Given its use in pathologizing and criminalizing same- sex relations, many prefer the terms “gay” or “lesbian” to describe their identities.

Hormone Therapy – A medical term used to describe the use of testosterone or estrogen/progesterone/anti-androgens by trans* and/or gender nonconforming individuals. Hormone therapy stimulates the development of secondary sex characteristics. Many trans* people choose not to undergo hormone therapy or surgical procedures.

In the Closet – Refers to a homosexual, bisexual, transperson or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to “correct,” whenever possible, intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical history from the patient. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”; for example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family.

Also known as ‘Downlow’ or ‘D/L.’

Internalized Homophobia – A term used to describe an LGBTQ person who has adopted degrading societal stereotypes about LGBTQ people, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual or gender identity; it also causes a disdain for LGBTQ people who do not assimilate into heterosexual gender norms.

Intersexed Person – Formerly described by scientist as hermaphrodites, intersex is the preferred term used by intersexed people to describe their biological sex, whose combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns, either male or female. It is estimated that 1 in 100 babies differ from standard definitions of male or female and approximately 1 in 1000 babies is subject to surgery to “normalize” genital appearance to either male or female. Intersex people are increasingly speaking out against these normalizing surgeries and report that there are no known cases of individuals who feel that their lives were made better as a result of medical body modifications.

Lesbian – A term used to describe women who have significant sexual and/or romantic attraction and relationships with women—exclusively. People variously self identify as women loving women, dyke, and queer. Because gender is distinctive from sexual desire, lesbians may also have gender identities such as butch, soft butch, stone butch, femme, and high femme.

LGBTQ+ – LGBTQ+ is an acronym for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Etc...” and is sometimes referred to as the “alphabet soup” because the number of genders and sexualities represented in the acronym have grown over time.

MTF – “Male-to-Female”. This is an acronym for the term “male-to-female” and is used to describe transgender individuals who were assigned the sex of male at birth, but express feminine gender identities through aesthetic, surgical, social, and/or behavioral changes. Not all transgender feminine people identify as MTF because not all people conceptualize their gender as a transition from one binary sex to another. Some understand themselves to be transgender, neither male nor female, some combination of both, or a third or alternative gender, such as genderqueer or trans.

Neutrois - Refers to a gender identity that is neutral or null. Neutrois people may also describe themselves variously as genderless, neither male nor female, and agender. Neutrois people may be assigned either male or female at birth.

Non-Binary - Can be an identity as well as an umbrella term that refers to any gender that is not exclusively male or female. A similar term is genderqueer. Some common non-binary gender identities include: agender, bigender, genderfluid, androgyne and neutrois.

Oppression – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Outing – A term used to describe the act of exposing someone, without their consent, as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or questioning; in essence “outing” them from the closet. It is considered disrespectful and potentially harmful to “out” someone has not given their consent to do so.

Pansexual – A term used as both a self-description and a means to describe those who classify themselves as possessing significant sexual/romantic attraction to individuals regardless of their sex or gender, though not necessarily equally or simultaneously. Pansexuality is premised on the idea that there are more than two biological sexes and gender expressions and includes trans* and intersexed people into its scope.

Passing – A term first used to describe the experience of light-skinned African Americans who were perceived as white, the term is now also used to describe the experience of trans* people who are perceived as cisgender. The experience of passing is complicated, affording certain privileges while creating other forms of stress, isolation, and invisibility. Thus, while a trans* person might feel relief when passing (as they can avoid overt experiences of transphobia), they may also feel that the full range of their experiences are hidden.

Polysexual – A term used to describe someone who has an enduring or continuing orientation toward sexual encounters and/or intimate relationships that include more than two people. Polyqueer sexualities are sexual encounters/interactions or intimate relationships that, through plurality, challenge heteronormativity..

Queer – Originally a derogatory slur, this term has been reclaimed since the 1980s, primarily among middle-class European Americans in activist, artistic, and scholarly communities, as an umbrella word to encompass all people who diverge from hetero- and homonormative genders and sexualities. Because of its original derogatory nature as well as the theory it has come to embody, it has remained a controversial term in LGBTIQ communities.

Questioning – This term describes people who are curious about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and do not feel that they fit neatly into any one classification system.

Sexual Identity – This is a term to describe the identification groups of people have with other members of society based on various dimensions of their sexual and social lives, such as desires, feelings, practices, fantasies, relationships, expectations, roles, belief systems, etc. In our current society, young people may identify as “asexual,” “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “bi,” “queer,” “questioning,” “heterosexual,” “straight,” “polysexual,” “pansexual,” “polyamorous”. Depending on the individual, sexual identity evolves in a variety of ways and may transform over time.

Same Gender Loving – A term sometimes used by members of the African American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life. (Sometimes abbreviated as ‘SGL’.)

Sex - A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because usually subdivided into ‘male’ and ‘female’, this category does not recognize the existence of intersexed bodies.

Sex Identity – How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond, or neither.

Sexual Orientation – This concept describes the idea that people have an intrinsic and enduring or continuing attraction to people of a particular gender and/or sex. While some feel that sexual orientation is primarily genetic or biological, others argue that biology and desire is shaped by social, cultural and political norms, expectations, and obligations—making orientation and identity also historical.

Sexuality – A person’s exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

Stealth – This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. (Also referred to as ‘going stealth’ or ‘living in stealth mode’.)

Stereotype – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Though often negative, can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact, however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

Straight – Another term for heterosexual.

Trans - An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

Transgender – Transgender or trans* is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender/Trans* is often mistakenly understood to mean “transsexual.” The following identities may fall under the transgender umbrella: transgender, transsexual, FTF, FTM, crossdresser, butch, fairy, stud, bulldagger, gender nonconforming, and gender queer.

Transgender (Trans) Community – A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

Trans-hate – The irrational hatred of those who are gender variant, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

Transition – A term used to describe the process by which a transgender and/or gender nonconforming person begins to embody their gender identity, which often diverges from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transition can, but does not necessarily include, coming out, changing gender expression, beginning hormone therapy, using gender pronouns different from ones used before, having gender confirming surgery, etc. Transition does not have any required steps or any particular order; it is unique to the individual.

Transman—An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females. Also referred to as ‘transguy(s).’

Transphobia – This term describes the irrational fear and hatred of people who are gender non- conforming.

Transwoman- An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males.

Two-Spirit – An umbrella term applied to Indigenous North Americans who embody one of many traditional mixed gender roles found among Native American and Canadian First Nation cultures. Two-spirited persons do not fit neatly into Western transgender categories. It is a term of reverence, traditionally referring to people who display both masculine and feminine characteristics who are thought to have higher spiritual powers. As such they may play significant roles in society as healers or leaders.

Ze/zir - Pronouns used when a person’s gender is unknown, and one wishes to avoid assuming their gender or when someone identifies as neither male nor female in gender, making he and she (and also either/or terms like s/he or (s)he) inappropriate and potentially hurtful.

“Ze is a writer and wrote that book zirself. Those ideas are zirs. I like both zir and zir ideas.” Pronunciation: Please note that “ze” is usually pronounced with a long “e” and that “hir” and its forms are usually pronounced like the English word “here.”