

SEXUAL & GENDER DIVERSITY GLOSSARY of TERMS

Glossary Provided by Human Rights Campaign US (updated by Keith Murray)

Many people refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity or expression because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable. 2S & LGBTQIA+ people use a variety of terms to identify themselves, not all of which are included in this glossary. Always listen for and respect a person's self-identified terminology, many may be uncomfortable with terms you may think apply to them.

2SLGBTQIA+ | An acronym for “two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual/agender.” The “+” indicates other minority or marginalized sexual and gender labels that may not be covered the acronym, ie. BDSM & Kink communities, Demisexual etc. In a North American context, and in the spirit of reconciliation, the 2S is prioritized as Two-Spirit people are members of the first peoples of Turtle Island, you can use the acronym as listed, or write “2S & LGBTQIA+” is a distinct category, see **Two-Spirit**. In an international context you would not include 2S and use at a minimum “LGBTQ” or “LGBTQIA+”.

Agender | Agender is defined as not having a gender. Some agender people describe it as having a “lack of gender,” while others describe themselves as being gender neutral. People may use the following words: genderless, genderfree, genderblank, neutrois. Agender people fall under the “nonbinary” umbrella and the “transgender” umbrella.

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

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.

Biphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Coming Out | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gender binary | A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender dysphoria | Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

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 | External appearance, performance and presentation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

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

Gender identity | One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same 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. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do.

Genderqueer | 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 man and woman, neither man nor woman or as falling completely outside these categories.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

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.

Indigiqueer | A term used by some Two-Spirit individuals who identify as members of the gender and sexually diverse community, and who are indigenous (see **Two-Spirit**). This term is not specific to Turtle Island (North America) and can be used by indigenous LGBTQIA+ identified people internationally.

Lesbian | A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Cisgender and Transgender Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Non-binary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Outing | Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

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.

Queer | A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ movement.

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

Same-gender loving | A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sex(es) vs Gender(s)

Sex refers to the spectrum of different biological and physiological characteristics of males, females, and intersex, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity, and the spectrum of identity of women, men, non-binary, two-spirit, and other gender diverse people – such as norms, roles and relationships. These two are often conflated in our culture, yet are distinct categories. It is quite common to see in a survey, or registration form asking for “Gender,” checkbox options of “male” or “female” given, which are in fact potential answers to the question of Sex, and incorrect for category of Gender.

Sex characteristics | Include primary sex characteristics (eg, inner and outer genitalia and/or the chromosomal and hormonal structure) and secondary sex characteristics (eg, muscle mass, hair distribution, breast development, and stature).

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. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

SOGIE & SOGIESC | sexual orientation (SO), gender identity (GI), gender expression (GE) and sex characteristics (SC). This acronym is used increasingly in research and policy to refer to LGBTQIA+ peoples, and issues pertaining to marginalized sexually and gender diverse people.

SOGIECE / Conversion Therapy | SOGIECE: Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression change efforts, or “Reparative Therapy” or “Conversion Therapy” refers to a broad set of treatments, practices, services, or sustained efforts that aim to repress, discourage, or change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour. This does not include a practice, treatment, or service that relates to a person’s social, medical, or legal gender transition; or to a person’s non-judgmental exploration and acceptance of their identity or development. SOGIECE can occur in religious forms of exorcisms, pastoral care, spirituality groups, and youth programs, etc. and in secular forms: private therapeutic practices, online courses, etc. SOGIECE can also be self-performed, resultant of external social pressures. Numerous American, Canadian and International Human Rights Organizations and Psychological Associations condemn these practices.¹ Research shows that SOGIECE is ineffective,² and results in harm including increased risk of anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, social withdrawal and isolation, homelessness, substance abuse, and suicidality. SOGIECE is internationally recognized as a form of torture.³

Transgender | 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. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

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 | (or Two Spirit) Two-Spirit is a term coined by Indigenous lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or non-heterosexual (LGBTQ+) leaders at the Third Annual Intertribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg in 1990.⁴ Two-Spirit is a community organizing strategy or tool and a way to describe one’s self. It is a way to organize the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island who embody diverse sexualities, gender identities, roles and/or expressions.⁵ Two-Spirit is meant to facilitate Indigenous Peoples’ connections with Nation-specific expressions and roles of gender and sexual diversity. It is a way for Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with their traditional languages, ways and cultures within a pre-Colonial setting. Two-Spirit is a term by and for indigenous people of Turtle Island who also have specific words and terms within their traditional languages. However, due to acts of cultural erasure enacted by colonial violence, not every indigenous person may have access or awareness of the language, terms or concepts within their contexts.

¹ http://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/National_Orgs_Letter_in_Support_of_Legislative_Efforts_to_End_Conversion_Therapy.pdf
<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-gender-identity-change-efforts.pdf>
<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/53>

² <https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-whether-conversion-therapy-can-alter-sexual-orientation-without-causing-harm/>

³ <https://irct.org/media-and-resources/latest-news/article/1027>

⁴ Thomas, W. (1997). Navajo Cultural Constructions of Gender and Sexuality. In *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. University of Illinois Press.

⁵ Pruden, H. (2019). Two-Spirit Conversations and Work: Subtle and at the Same Time Radically Different. In *Transgender: A Reference Handbook* (pp. 134–136). ABC-CLIO Greenwood.