



Queer Terminology

Please note that language is continually changing and it is important to use the term that the individual self-identifies with. This is by no means and exhaustive list of terminology used in the queer community.

ALLY

Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexual privilege in themselves and others out of a concern for the well-being of LGBTQ people and believe that heterosexism is a social injustice.

AMBIGUOUS GENITALIA

Many intersex activists contest the use of this phrase to describe their bodies because the ambiguity is with the society's definition of male and female rather than their bodies.

ANDROGYNE

Person appearing and identifying as neither male nor female, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

BIPHOBIA

The fear, hatred, or intolerance of bisexual people.

BISEXUAL

An individual who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to men and women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference of one gender over others.

BUTCH

A masculine-appearing person, usually a female. A culturally specific term fitting U.S. hegemonic masculinity.

CISGENDER

A person whose gender identity is in line with their biological sex. The use of this term (or "cis") is used to de-stigmatize the difference between transgender and non-transgender people instead of using terms such as "normal" "natural" or "biological".

CISGENDER PRIVILEGE

The benefits and advantages attributed to not having to be aware of one's gender identity, and the issues that face those whose gender identity does not conform to their assigned birth sex.

CLOSETED, OR IN THE CLOSET

Hiding one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

CROSS-DRESSER

A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender.

DRAG KING

Used to refer to women who dress as men for the purpose of entertaining others, usually at bars, clubs, and events.

DYKE

A barrier constructed to control or confine water. Also, slang, sometimes offensive (depending on who's using it) word for lesbian.

FAGGOT

A bundle of sticks or wrought iron. Faggots were used in Europe, when many independent women, herbalists, healers, "heretics", and sexual non-conformists were condemned as "witches". Also, an offensive term for someone who is (or perceived to be) attracted to the same sex.

FEMME

A feminine-appearing person. A culturally specific term fitting U.S. hegemonic masculinity.

GAY

A term used to describe a man who is sexually and emotionally attracted to the same sex. This term is sometimes used to refer to women as well. Not all men who engage in "homosexual behavior" identify as gay, and as such, this label should be used with caution.

LGBT

An acronym which stands for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender." Other versions may add "Q" for Queer or Questioning, "I" for intersex, and/or "A" for allies. Some may prefer to list the acronym as TBLG to place Trans people in a position of importance and to rectify the way trans has historically been omitted, devalued, or excluded.

GENDER

A combination of gender identity, gender expression, and gender roles that describes characteristics of masculinity and femininity to people. These characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

A 2013 revision for the outdated *Gender Identity Disorder*.

A term of psychiatric establishment which refers to a radical incongruence between an individual's birth sex and their gender identity. A "gender dysphoric" feels an irrevocable disconnect between their physical bodies and their mental sense of gender. Many in the Trans community find this term offensive or insulting as it often pathologizes the transgender individuals due to its association with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

GENDER IDENTITY

Refers to an individual's innate sense of self as a man, woman, gender non-conforming, or other gender category. Gender identity may change over time and may not accord to dichotomous gender categories.

GENDER QUEER

A person who does not conform to the traditional sex-gender binary and displays both masculine and feminine characteristics in self-presentation. A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female, between genders, or beyond genders.

GENDER VARIANT

A term that refers to individuals who are not a part of the socially-accepted gender roles in a given culture. May be used in tandem with other groups, such as gender-variant gay men and lesbians.

HERMAPHRODITE

An old medical term describing intersex people. Many intersex activists reject this word due to the stigmatization arising from its mythical roots and the abuse that medical professionals inflicted on them under this label. Some intersex people use this word as a "pride word" like "queer" and "dyke," but non-intersex people should avoid this term.

HETEROSEXISM

The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to other sexualities. Often used as a mean of oppressing those who do not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender.

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT

A term used to describe a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to the opposite sex.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE

The benefits and advantages that heterosexual identity and denying a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity.

HOMOPHOBIA

The fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as lesbians or gay men, including the fear of being seen as lesbians or gay yourself. Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbians and gay men, to verbal abuse, to acts of physical violence.

HOMOSEXUAL

An outdated clinical term once considered a mental disorder in the Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), and was removed in 1973. A term once used to describe a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to the same sex.

INSTITUTIONAL OPPRESSION

Arrangements of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics, etc.

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes and attitudes applied to the oppressed group.

INTERSEX

A term used for people who are born with external genitalia, chromosomes, or internal reproductive systems that are not traditionally associated with either "standard" male or female physiologies. Previously called hermaphrodites. It is not automatically a trans identity, although some intersex individuals may identify as trans.

LESBIAN

A term used to describe a woman who is sexually and emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex. It was popular during the 70s and used widely by radical feminists who were political lesbians. Not all women identify with this term and prefer "gay" or "queer" instead.

MSM

Men who have sex with men. A descriptive term about behavior that does not impose an identity with the word "lesbian" and prefer "gay" or "queer" instead.

OPPRESSION

The systematic exploitation of one social group by another for its own benefit. It involves institutional control, ideological domination, and the declaration of the dominant group's culture on the oppressed. Oppression = Prejudice + Power (the "isms").

OUT OR "OUT OF THE CLOSET"

To be open about one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

OUTING

When someone discloses information about another's sexual orientation or gender identity without their knowledge and/or consent.

PANSEXUAL

A person who is attracted to all or many gender expressions. The concept of pansexuality deliberately rejects the gender binary as pansexual people are open to relationships with people who do not identify as strictly men or women.

PASSING

Passing generally refers to the effort made by members of subordinated groups to be accepted as members of dominant groups, e.g. light skinned black people being perceived as white, cisgender gay men being perceived as heterosexual, or transgender individuals being perceived as the gender they were assigned at birth.

PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUN (PGP)

The pronoun that a person feels most comfortable using for themselves (e.g. he, she, they).

QUEER

Queer is a term which has been reclaimed by members of the LGBTQ community to refer to people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Queer might be broadly defined as resistance to regimes of the "normal". Although still often an abusive epithet when used by bigoted heterosexuals, many queer-identified people have taken back the word to use it as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity.

SEX

Separate from gender, this term refers to the cluster of biological and chromosomal features associated with maleness and femaleness in the human body, found at birth and developed during puberty. Sexual dimorphism is often thought to be a concrete reality, whereas in reality the existence of Intersex point to a multiplicity of sexes in the human population. Sex is often used synonymously with gender in this culture. Although the two terms are related, they should be defined separately to differentiate the biological ("sex") from the socio-cultural ("gender").

SEXUALITY

An imprecise word which is often used in tandem with other social categories, as in: race, gender, and sexuality. Sexuality is a broad term which refers to a cluster of behaviors, practices, and identities in the social world.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

This term refers to the gender(s) to which a person is emotionally, physically, romantically, and erotically attracted to. Examples of sexual orientation include homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, and asexual. Trans and gender-variant people may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during, or after gender transition.

STRAIGHT-ACTING

Someone who goes to great lengths to hide their same-sex attraction and who will usually be very invested in appearing traditionally "masculine" or "feminine". They may even go so far as to vilify "feminine" men or "masculine" women. This latter behavior is an example of internalized oppression which is then expressed as sexual prejudice.

TRANSGENDER (TRANS)

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This term can include a vast array of differing identity categories such as transsexual, bi-gender, and a myriad of other identities.

TRANSPHOBIA

The irrational fear and hatred of all those individuals who transgress, violate or blur the dominant gender categories in a given society. Transphobic attitudes lead to massive discrimination, violence and oppression against the Trans and Intersex communities.

TRANSEXUAL (TS)

An individual who strongly dis-identifies with their birth sex and wishes to utilize medical technologies (hormones, gender confirmation surgery, and other forms of plastic surgery) as a way to align their physical body with their gender identity. Some persons prefer the alternate spelling of transsexual (one "S" instead of two). A TS can be M to F or F to M. He or she can also be pre-op, post-op, or non-op.

TRANVESTITE

A term for cross-dresser that is considered derogatory by many.

WSW

Women who have sex with women. A descriptive term about behavior that does not impose an identity on a person.