

Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The following terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity are often associated with and provide a common, working language for ADL's educational anti-bias programs and resources. The definitions are written for older youth to adult reading levels, unless otherwise specified, and some include age-appropriate versions for younger ages.

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

A

ANTI-LGBTQ BIAS: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning (LGBTQ).

ANTI-TRANS BIAS: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are transgender and/or non-binary (identifying as neither a man nor a woman) based on the belief that cisgender (gender identity that corresponds with the sex one was assigned at birth) is the norm.

ASEXUAL: A person who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual, emotional).

B

BIOLOGICAL SEX: The biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. These are characteristics people are born with that do not usually change over the course of their lives. Although sex is typically defined as being male or female, in actuality, there are more than two sexes. About 1.7% of the population is intersex (see definition below).

BISEXUAL: A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people of more than one gender.

C

CISGENDER: A term for when someone's gender identity/expression matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

COMING OUT (OF THE CLOSET): To be “in the closet” means to not share a part of one’s identity. Some LGBTQ people choose to disclose that part of their identity in some situations (to be “out”) and not in others (to be “closeted”). To “come out” is to publicly declare one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process. In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity. In each new situation, a person must decide whether or not to come out.

D

DEAD NAME: Refers to a transgender person by the name they used before they transitioned.

F

FTM/MTF: **FTM** refers to a person who transitions from “female-to-male,” meaning a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a male. **MTF** refers to a person who transitions from “male-to-female,” meaning a person who was assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a female.

G

GAY: A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other people of the same gender. Can be used to refer to people of all genders, though it is used most commonly to refer to males. Some women and girls choose not to identify as gay, but as lesbian.

GENDER: The socially-defined “rules” and roles for men and women in a society. The attitudes, customs and values associated with gender are socially constructed; however, individuals develop their gender identities in two primary ways: through an innate sense of their own identity and through their life experiences and interactions with others. Dominant western society generally defines gender as a binary system—men and women—but many cultures define gender as more fluid and existing along a continuum.

GENDER BINARY: The idea that sex and gender are two distinct, opposite and disconnected categories—male and female.

GENDER EXPRESSION: Refers to how people communicate their gender to oneself and others through appearance, behavior, dress, etc.

GENDER IDENTITY: Relates to a person’s internal sense of their own gender. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING: A person who doesn’t adhere to societal pressures to conform to gender norms and roles.

GENDER ROLE: The set of roles and behaviors expected of people based on gender assigned at birth.

H

HETEROSEXISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and/or asexual, based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm.

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT: A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or romantically attracted to some members of another gender.

I

INTERSEX: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

L

LGBTQ: Acronym that groups lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning individuals into one group based on their common experience as targets of heterosexism and transphobia and their common, yet complex, struggle for sexual and gender freedom. This term is generally considered a more inclusive and affirming descriptor than the more limited "gay" or the outdated "homosexual."

LESBIAN: A woman who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other women.

N

NON-BINARY: People whose gender identity falls outside the "gender binary" or who don't identify as exclusively male or female.

P

PANSEXUAL: A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people, regardless of that person's gender identity or biological sex.

Q

QUEER: An umbrella term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Some use as an alternative to “LGBT” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many within the LGBT community have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

S

SEXISM: The marginalization and/or oppression of women, based on the belief in a natural order based on sex that privileges men.

- *Elementary school version:* Prejudice and/or discrimination based on a person’s sex. Example: Someone tells a joke or puts a person down because the person is male or female.

SEXUAL IDENTITY: Sexual identity labels include “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “bi,” “queer,” “questioning,” “heterosexual,” “straight,” and others. Sexual identity evolves through a developmental process that varies depending on the individual. Sexual behavior and identity (self-definition) can be chosen. Though some people claim their sexual orientation is also a choice, for others this does not seem to be the case.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Determined by one’s emotional, physical and/or romantic attractions. Categories of sexual orientation include, but are not limited to, **gay, lesbian** (attracted to some members of the same gender), **bisexual** (attracted to some members of more than one gender) and **heterosexual** (attracted to some members of another gender).

STRAIGHT ALLY: Any person outside the LGBTQ community who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ people.

T

TRANS*: An umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum.

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

- *Elementary school version:* A term for people whose gender identity differs from how they were assigned at birth (e.g., assigned girl or boy).

TRANSSEXUAL: An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seek to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical.

TRANSITION: The process when a person begins living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often may include changing one’s first name and

dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking hormones, having surgery or changing identity documents (e.g. driver's license) to reflect one's gender identity. Transitioning is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a period of time.

TWO-SPIRIT: A contemporary term that references historical multiple-gender traditions in many First Nations cultures. Many Native/First Nations people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming identify as Two-Spirit; in many Nations, being Two-Spirit carries both great respect and additional commitments and responsibilities to one's community.