

Terminology

Language is ever-changing and dynamic. Thus, certain definitions might vary based on different circumstances, such as but not limited to time, place, culture, and society, in this case the United States. More specifically, some of these words do not have proper translations into several different languages. For example, the term “gay” in Arabic translates to “faggot.” Keeping all of this in mind, please see the words offered below as working definitions, and continue learning.

ally: *n.* any person who works toward combating homophobia and heterosexism.

asexual: *n., adj.* one who has no significant (to oneself) sexual attraction to others, or who identifies as asexual. Asexuality is a spectrum and includes many people with varying levels of sexual attraction.

bisexual: *adj., n.* 1) attraction to people of your gender and people not of your gender. 2) attraction to people of two (or more) genders. 3) attraction to females/women and males/men.

butch: *n.* 1) masculine or macho dress and behavior, regardless of sex or gender. 2) Sub-identity of lesbian, gay male, or bisexual, based on masculine or macho dress and behavior. *Adj.* 3) masculine, applied to all genders, but most often applied to lesbians.

cisgender (gender normative): *adj.* people whose birth sex assignment and gender identity align (e.g. female-assigned and woman). Most people in the US assume everybody is cisgender, which may lead to cissexism, behavior granting preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforcing the superiority of cisgender people and thus making other genders invisible. Often abbreviated as *cis*.

closet: *n.* term used as slang for the state of not publicizing one's sexual identity, keeping it private, living an outwardly heterosexual life while identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or not being forthcoming about one's identity. At times, being in the closet also means not wanting to admit one's sexual identity to oneself.

come out: *v.* 1) internally, to come to terms with and accept the fact that you are LGBTQ. 2) externally, to stop hiding the fact that you are LGBT and live all aspects of your life openly, in the same way that most straight people do.

crossdress(er): *v., n.* To wear clothes, make-up, etc. regardless of the motivation, which are “appropriate” (according to society’s notions of such) for a gender other than that assigned at birth.

demiexual: *n., adj.* one who can experience sexual attraction toward someone only if a stable emotional bond has already been formed.

drag: *n.* clothing, hair, and other affectations of a style that’s not really your own, usually that considered “appropriate” for another gender. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity.

drag king: *n.* person who theatrically performs masculinity, often for entertainment purposes.

drag queen: *n.* person who theatrically performs femininity, often for entertainment purposes.

dyke: *n.* another term for lesbian, it has been reclaimed by both radical lesbians of the seventies, the younger activist women of the nineties, and some women today. For some queer people, however, this term still retains its negative connotations.

fag(got): *n.* derogatory term for a homosexual man. Historically the word for “a bundle of sticks bound together and used for fuel”, this term evolved from the ugly practice of burning homosexuals.

gay: *adj.* 1) one who has significant sexual or romantic attractions primarily to members of the same gender or sex, may be of any gender identity. However, lesbians and bisexuals often do not feel included by this term. 2) homosexual male. 3) of, relating to, or used by homosexuals, as in the *gay* rights movement, a *gay* bar.

gaydar: *n.* the supposed ability to distinguish homosexual and heterosexual people using indirect cues rather than specific information about sexual orientation.

gender: *n.* In the US, a socially constructed classification system ascribing feminine and masculine qualities to people, but which is not necessarily a binary continuum.

gender expression: *n.* how people externally communicate their gender identity to others through characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, mannerism, dress, speech patterns, etc. People in the US sometimes assign gender and/or sexual orientation based on gender expression expectations.

gender identity: *n.* a person’s internal sense of being female, male, both, something other, or in-between. It can be the same or different from one’s assigned birth sex and is not always visible.

gender neutral: *adj.* something not specified for gender specific use and/or appropriate for all genders.

genderqueer: *n.* a person who does not adhere to the concept of gender or gender binary.

heterosexism: *n.* the individual person, group, or institutional norms and behaviors that result from the assumption that all people are heterosexual. The system of oppression, which assumes that heterosexuality is inherently normal and superior, negates LBGT peoples’ lives and relationships.

heterosexual: *n.* someone who is primarily emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex. The term “straight” is often used instead of heterosexual.

homophobia: *n.* the fear and hatred of or the discomfort with people who love and sexually desire members of the same sex. Homophobic reactions often lead to intolerance, bigotry, and violence against anyone not acting within heterosexual norms. Because most LGBT people are raised in the same society as heterosexuals, they learn the same beliefs and stereotypes prevalent in the dominant society, leading to a phenomenon known as “internalized homophobia.”

homosexual: *n., adj.* the formal or clinical term that was coined in the field of psychology, sometimes meaning only “gay male,” but at times encompasses lesbians and occasionally bisexuals. The word is often associated with the proposition that same sex attractions are a mental disorder, and is therefore distasteful to some people.

intersex (Differences/Disorders of Sexual Development [DSD]): *adj.* a general term used to describe someone whose combination of chromosomes, hormones, and internal and external genitalia differs from the expected female or male patterns as defined by the medical establishment. Despite not usually being at risk medically, most intersex people are assigned a biological sex by families and/or doctors. Formerly known as hermaphrodite, which is now considered pejorative.

LGBT: *acronym* Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. At times, a Q will be added for 'Queer' and/or 'Questioning', an A for 'Ally', and/or a TS for 'Two Spirit'.

lesbian: *n.* a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually, affectionately, and relationally attracted to other women or who identifies as a member of the lesbian community.

lifestyle: *n.* term often used outside the LGBT community to describe living life as an LGBT person, i.e. the "gay lifestyle." Many people do not find this word particularly appropriate or positive because it seems to trivialize personal identity, as well as not make space for the large variety of lifestyles that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people live.

non-cisgender: *adj.* not cisgender. Also see *transgender* as they are sometimes used interchangeably.

nonbinary: *adj.* term used to describe individuals who are not men or women, or are both men and women, or who are something else entirely, or are some combination of these things, or some of these things some of the time. Nonbinary can be used both as an umbrella term and as an identity itself.

pansexual: *n.* individual who is fluid in sexual orientation and has the potential to be attracted to people of many gender identities or expressions.

partner: *n.* term used within the LGBT community to refer to a significant other, often in lieu of "husband" or "wife" when marriage is not a legal option.

queen: *n.* flamboyant gay man *or* any gay man.

queer: *n.* 1) umbrella term including anyone who feels outside of society's gender and/or sexual norms and is often used in place of the sexual and gender minority 'alphabet soup' (LGBTQQIAP, etc.). 2) a person who feels outside of societal norms in regard to gender or sexuality. Note that some people do not identify as *queer* especially because it was formally considered pejorative.

questioning: *adj., v.* term which may be used to describe someone who is unsure or undecided of their sexual orientation.

rainbow, rainbow flag: *n.* originally a symbol of the 1978 San Francisco Freedom Parade representing the diversity of the gay community. The rainbow and rainbow flag have been adopted as symbols of the entire queer movement.

sex (Anatomical/Biological): *n.* the physical structure of a person's reproductive organs used to assign sex at birth, including chromosomes, hormones, and internal and external genitalia. In the US it is usually female and male, but given the variation in the aforementioned categories, it should be seen as a spectrum rather than a binary (see *intersex*).

sexual orientation: *n.* to whom someone is attracted physically and/or emotionally.

straight: *adj.* term originating in the gay community describing heterosexuals and meaning “to enter the mainstream.”

trans/trans*: *adj.* abbreviation for transgender; often used to refer to the whole community.

transgender: *adj.* 1) umbrella term used to describe those whose identity and/or behavior transgresses stereotypical gender norms. 2) a person whose gender identity is different from their assigned birth sex.

transition: *n.* the processes which transgender people undergo to have their presentation align with their identity. There are three major areas of transition: 1) social (non-permanent changes in name, clothing, pronouns, etc.), 2) medical (use of medicine to promote gender-based body changes), and 3) surgical (physical addition or removal of gender-related traits).

transphobia: *n.* irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against transgender individuals.

transsexual: *n.* people who do not identify with their assigned birth sex and physically alter their bodies surgically or hormonally to be congruent with their gender identity. This process is sometimes known as medical transitioning.

unisex: *adj.* clothing, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. which are considered appropriate for all genders.

Sources

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Penn LGBT Center