

LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms

Cisgender

Term describing people whose sex, assigned to them at birth by a physician (based on their genitals), matches their gender identity.

Gender

Gender is a social construct, and one of the factors that determine a person's position in society. In the West, the idea has long prevailed that there are only two genders, masculine and feminine: the so-called gender binary. Certain expectations and roles are associated with this polar opposition of two genders. Nowadays, however, more and more people in the West are questioning this gender binary (see: Gender norm) in favour of a gender spectrum.

Gender expression

The way one expresses or presents oneself to the outside world. This involves not only clothing and make-up, but also one's posture, mannerisms, way of moving and way of speaking. A person's gender identity does not have to match their gender expression.

Gender identity

Gender identity is the inner sense of gender that people experience. There are various binary and non-binary gender identities, including masculine and feminine, but also variations of both or neither: bigender, gender-fluid, non-binary (see: Non-binary), etc. A person's gender identity is not necessarily fixed – it can change over time.

Gender-inclusive

Efforts to be gender-inclusive are aimed at including all biological genders, gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and anyone who doesn't fit into the classic gender binary.

Gender norm

Gender norms are the social conventions and expectations that a society attaches to a certain gender or gender identity. Currently, gender norms in the West are binary. A strict dichotomy is assumed between men and women, and the two groups are expected to behave in two different and clearly defined ways.

Heteronormative ideology

The social assumption that heterosexuality is the standard, preferred, 'normal' sexual orientation, and that everyone should follow the unwritten social rules and expectations of this norm.

Legal gender

One's legal or official gender is one's gender as registered by the government and displayed on identity cards and driving licences, for instance. This is usually the sex as assigned at birth. In some countries it can be changed later, while in other countries it can never be changed.

LGBTQ+

This is an acronym to describe diversity in terms of gender, sex, and sexuality. L = lesbian, G = gay, B = bi+, T = trans(gender), Q = queer or questioning. The plus sign that is sometimes used after acronyms refers to all persons and groups that fall outside the (cis)gender and heterosexual norm, but are not covered by one of the letters of the acronym.

Misgendering

The act of attributing to a person, whether intentionally or not, a gender that does not correctly reflect their gender identity.

Non-binary

A non-binary person is someone who doesn't identify with either category of the gender binary (masculine/feminine) and feels more comfortable with a different, non-binary gender identity. Non-binary individuals may combine masculine and feminine identity traits, they may feel both masculine and feminine, or neither masculine nor feminine, or they may place themselves outside these boxes altogether.

Non-binary is an umbrella term, as there are various gender identities that fall outside the scope of the strict gender binary: one can be genderqueer, gender-fluid, gender-nonconforming, agender, bigender, etc.

Pronouns

Personal pronouns are words that refer to a person. Traditionally, women are referred to with the set of pronouns she/her/hers, and men with he/him/his. In English, it's also easy to refer to someone whose gender is unknown using they/them/their.

The latter set of pronouns is also often used by non-binary persons to refer to themselves. Others may prefer neopronouns such as ze/hir/hir (pronounced zee, here, here), ze/zir/zir, etc. Unfortunately, in other languages, it is often much more difficult to refer to individuals in a gender-neutral way, as adjectives and even verbs can have masculine and feminine forms. In Dutch, the most frequently used set of gender-neutral pronouns, die/hen/hun, is slowly gaining acceptance, but there are people who prefer other variants too.

Sex

A person's sex is determined at birth. Based on the appearance of the newborn's genitals, the sex is recorded on the birth certificate (see: Legal gender) as either M (male) or F (female). The Western gender binary is based on 'the two sexes', male and female, each with well-defined and distinct sexual characteristics. These two groups are only a part of the broader gender spectrum, as much more body variation exists.

Sexual/romantic orientation

Orientation is about one's attraction to other people, i.e. which people one feels sexually or romantically attracted to.

Trans person or transgender person

A transgender person is someone whose sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity. For example, if you were assigned the female sex at birth, but you don't feel like a woman, then you're transgender. If your assigned sex and your inner sense of gender do match, then you're cisgender.

Transgender is an umbrella term for trans women, trans men, people who identify as non-binary or queer, and anyone who can relate to the term.

Unconscious bias

Learned stereotypes and prejudices that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, universal and able to influence behaviour.