



A glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms

Part 1: Terms related to sex

Sex

'Sex' refers to the biological makeup of a person, based on external or internal body parts, hormones, sex chromosomes, etc.

Sex characteristics

'Sex characteristics' refer to an individual's physical sexual/reproductive features that are formed on the basis of their sex. This includes genitalia (vagina/uterus or penis/testicles etc.), sex chromosomes (XX, XY, XXY, XYY, XO, etc.), dominant sex hormones present in their body (estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, etc.), and secondary sexual features (breasts, facial hair, deep voice, etc.), among others. Sex characteristics may influence a person's gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or sexuality, but are not the cause of it.

Intersex

Intersex persons have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies. These can include external or internal reproductive parts, chromosome patterns, and/or hormonal patterns. Being an intersex person can make one vulnerable to stigma, discrimination, and harm.

Note: It's wrong to assume that all intersex persons are transgender. Intersex persons also have diverse intersections of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. Like any individual, intersex persons are the only ones who can determine their gender identity, sexuality, and sexual orientation.

Another note: Several intersex children are forced into surgical procedures by doctors and parents/guardians, to make their bodies conform to a binary sex. This is unethical

and should be called out in stories. These enforced and non-consensual surgeries can also eventually result in trauma, health conditions, and other complications.

Part 2:

Terms related to gender

Gender

Gender is how society perceives people, based on the norms, behaviours, and roles associated with the sex assigned at birth.

For instance, a person who is assigned male at birth is expected to grow up to be a 'man' and be powerful and assertive; a person assigned female at birth is expected to grow up to be a 'woman' and to be sweet and nurturing. It is a social construct, and what each gender is expected to do changes from society to society, and over time.

Gender identity

'Gender identity' refers to how an individual defines their own gender. It depends on a person's deeply felt internal experience of gender. It need not correspond to the sex assigned to the person at birth, and the expectations that society has from this assigned sex or associated gender. Gender identity is self-determined - that is, every individual has the right to determine their gender identity, and this right is theirs alone. There is no 'medical test' for gender identity.

For instance, if an individual is a transgender man, or a transgender woman, or a non-binary person, they are the only one who can decide what their gender is.

Gender expression

Gender expression is how a person expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearances such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, and voice.

A person's chosen name and pronouns are also common ways of expressing gender.

Gender expression does not automatically correspond to one's gender identity.

For instance, a woman may dress in pants and shirts and have short hair - generally related by society to a 'man's gender expression.

Another example: A person assigned male at birth who wears a saree isn't automatically a transgender woman. They may still identify as a man, or as non-binary, or with any other gender identity.

Gender non-conforming person

Gender non-conforming persons (adults or children) are those who do not conform to either of the binary gender definitions of male or female, as well as those whose gender expression may differ from standard gender norms.

In some instances, individuals are perceived as gender non-conforming by other people because of their gender expression. However, these individuals may not perceive themselves as gender non-conforming.

Gender expression and gender non-conformity are clearly related to individual and social perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Transgender person

A transgender person is someone whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. People assigned male or female at birth, and intersex persons, can be transgender.

A person is transgender whether or not such a person has undergone gender affirmation procedures such as hormone therapy or surgery. This is reaffirmed in the NALSA vs Union of India verdict by the Supreme Court of India in 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Note: Do not use the term 'transgenders' or 'a transgender', i.e., do not use the word as a noun. The word 'transgender' has to be used as an adjective. The correct usage is transgender person, trans person, transgender woman, trans woman, transgender man, trans man, etc. depending on the context.

Do not use the term 'third gender' to describe a transgender person - unless they specifically request that usage. Gender identities are not stacked in a hierarchy.

Trans woman or transgender woman

'Transgender woman' refers to a person who was assigned male at birth, but whose gender identity is that of a woman. 'Transgender woman' can be shortened to 'trans woman' (two words).

Trans man or transgender man

'Transgender man' refers to a person who was assigned female at birth, but whose gender identity is that of a man. 'Transgender man' can be shortened to 'trans man' (two words).

Gender non-binary person

'Non-binary' refers to a gender identity that doesn't subscribe to the woman-man binary. A 'non-binary' person is someone who does not identify as a man or a woman.

Gender dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is the psychological distress that results from an incompatibility between a person's self-perceived gender identity, and the gender they are associated with by society based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

All trans persons may not experience gender dysphoria. Many may experience gender dysphoria from childhood, while others may experience it later in life - such as after puberty.

Gender incongruence

Gender incongruence is a marked and persistent incongruence between the gender felt or experienced by a person, and the gender associated by society with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender affirmation procedures

Gender affirmation procedures help an individual affirm their gender identity. These include social procedures (wearing clothes perceived to be closer to the gender of choice, attempting to 'live as the gender'), medical procedures (surgery, hormone therapy, laser therapy), and legal procedures (changing their name and gender in official documents).

Gender affirmation surgery

Gender affirmation surgery is surgery of external sex characteristics that help an individual affirm their gender identity, or 'look how they feel on the inside.' It is recommended to use this term instead of 'sex reassignment surgery' (SRS), which was used in the past.

Deadname

A deadname is the name that was given to a transgender person by their family, and one by which they were once identified. However, the transgender individual may no longer use that name.

This is the name a transgender person has 'left behind' or 'killed'. Usually, deadname refers to the name they were given by their parents/guardians.

Note: While reporting, do not ask for a person's 'old name' or 'original name' or deadname. It is not an important detail that society needs to know, and mentioning a person's deadname in a story is disrespectful. Similarly, descriptions like 'the man became a woman' or 'the woman became a man' should be avoided. You must stick to the name they give you in all published reports.

Gender fluidity/ Gender-fluid person

'Gender fluidity' refers to a person's experience of not having a fixed gender. A gender-fluid person may identify with all genders, multiple genders, or two genders (bigender). (See also: 'Gender non-binary person')

Cisgender

A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity conforms with the gender corresponding to the sex assigned at birth. A person who is not transgender or non-binary is cisgender.

Part 3:

Terms related to sexuality

Sexuality

‘Sexuality’ refers to a person’s behaviours, desires, identity, and attitudes related to sex and physical intimacy with others.

Sexual orientation

‘Sexual orientation’ refers to the person(s) and/or gender(s) an individual is attracted to - physically, emotionally, and/or romantically. For instance, ‘heterosexual’ orientation refers typically to attraction between a man and a woman. ‘Homosexual’ orientation refers to attraction between two men or two women.

Just like a cisgender woman can be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual (straight, bi, or lesbian), a transgender woman, too, can be heterosexual, homosexual, or any of a wide variety of sexual orientations.

Note: ‘Sexual orientation’ is different from ‘gender identity’.

Heterosexuality/ Heterosexual

‘Heterosexuality’ typically refers to the sexual attraction between men and women. A ‘heterosexual man’ or ‘straight man’ is a man who is attracted to women. A ‘heterosexual woman’ or ‘straight woman’ refers to a woman who is attracted to men. ‘Heteroromantic’ is a term that refers to romantic/emotional attraction, and not just sexual attraction. This applies to cisgender and transgender persons.

Homosexuality/ Homosexual

‘Homosexuality’ refers to sexual attraction to a person of the same gender as oneself. A homosexual man or a gay man is a man who is attracted to men; a homosexual woman or lesbian is a woman who is attracted to women.

Homoromantic

A homoromantic person is someone who feels romantic/ emotional attraction to persons of the same gender as them. This applies to cisgender and transgender persons.

Bisexuality/ Bisexual

‘Bisexuality’ refers to attraction towards persons of one’s own gender, and persons of another gender. In the past, bisexuality has been defined as attraction to men and women. But as our understanding of gender and gender identity evolves beyond the man/woman binary, the definition of bisexuality is also evolving. ‘Bisexuality’ need not imply an equal degree of attraction to both genders - just significant attraction to both.

Pansexuality/ Pansexual

‘Pansexuality’ refers to attraction towards persons of multiple genders/all genders, or attraction irrespective of gender. A pansexual person feels attraction towards persons of all genders or multiple genders. However, ‘pansexuality’ need not imply equal attraction to all genders.

Asexual/ Aromantic (Aro-Ace)

An asexual person is someone who does not feel sexual attraction towards anyone. An aromantic person is someone who does not feel romantic/ emotional attraction towards anyone.

Note: A person can be both asexual and aromantic at the same time; or they can feel only sexual attraction, or only romantic attraction, and not the other.

For example, a person can be asexual, but at the same time feel romantic attraction towards persons of the same gender, or vice versa.

Another note: While reporting about an aro-ace person or talking to them for a story, even if their sexuality is relevant to the story, do not question it or try to look for reasons behind it. Do not ask questions like “Did you turn asexual because of a bad sexual experience?” Also, do not ask intrusive questions about their romantic/intimate relationships. As a rule of thumb, if you think a question about an intimate relationship is too intrusive to ask a heterosexual person, then that applies to aro-ace persons as well.

Romantic orientation

‘Romantic orientation’ refers to an individual’s romantic/ emotional attraction, independent of their sexual attraction. People can be ‘homoromantic’, ‘heteroromantic’, ‘panromantic’, ‘aromantic’, etc. A person’s romantic orientation need not correspond to their sexual orientation.

For instance, a person who is pansexual - that is, someone who is sexually attracted to people of all genders - can be homoromantic, which means they want to have romantic/emotional relationships only with persons of their own gender.

Part 4: Umbrella/ Collective terms

Queer

'Queer' is an umbrella term used to refer to diverse sex characteristics, genders, and sexualities that are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. It is a 'reclaimed' word - the word was used as a slur for people who did not align with societal assumptions of gender and sexuality in the past. However, the LGBTQIA+ community has now claimed ownership of the term and uses it to describe themselves.

Note: As much as possible, journalists who are not queer must avoid using the term in their work, unless identifying a queer individual or quoting them.

LGBTIQA+/ LGBTQIA+

LGBTIQA+/ LGBTQIA+ is a term used to collectively refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual people, and people of other non-cisgender identities and non-heterosexual orientations. The term is sometimes shortened to LGBT, or LGBTQ, or LGBTQ+ as well.

Part 5: Other terms used by LGBTQIA+ communities

Coming out

'Coming out' refers to the process of disclosing one's LGBTQIA+ identity to others. Usually, LGBTQIA+/ queer persons come out multiple times throughout their lives in different interactions with different people. That is, it's not a one-time event.

Note: There is criticism and discourse around the fact that LGBTQIA+ persons have to come out at all - because the assumption in society is that everyone is, or ought to be, cisgender, and straight. While working on stories about a person coming out or mentioning 'coming out' in a story, please do so with an understanding that this should not have to be the norm for queer persons.

Ally

An ally is a person or organisation supportive of the rights of LGBTIQA+ persons and communities, and uses their privilege/position in society to promote LGBTQIA+ rights, communities, and causes.

Note: An 'ally' should ideally be identified by the LGBTQIA+ community/communities based on their actions. Self-declaration of allyship does not mean much if the person's actions and words end up hurting the communities they claim to support. Take the self-declaration of allyship by cisgender and heterosexual persons with a pinch of salt, and while reporting, try to confirm with LGBTQIA+ communities whether this person is actually seen as an ally by the communities in question.

Queer Pride parade/ Rainbow Pride parade

'Queer Pride parades' or 'Rainbow Pride parades' or 'LGBTQIA+ Pride parades' are events celebrating LGBTIQA+/ queer culture and asserting self-respect in these identities. These events are often used as a method for visibility for queer groups, as well as platforms to raise demands for the rights of queer communities.

Conversion therapy, SOGIE change efforts

'Conversion therapy' or SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression) change efforts are practices that aim to 'change' or 'convert' people from queer to heterosexual, from trans to cisgender, or gender non-conforming to gender conforming. Some of these attempts stem from superstitions and religion-based beliefs.

These are unethical, illegal, and unscientific efforts that have been banned and declared as professional misconduct by the National Medical Commission (NMC) based on a directive from the Madras High Court.