



LGBT+ Glossary

This glossary provides a working understanding of the terminology used in the Royal Society of Chemistry LGBT+ toolkit. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of terms used within or to describe the LGBT+ community.

The terms and definitions – particularly those referring directly to LGBT+ identities – continue to evolve over time and often mean different things to different groups and individuals.

We have included some pointers for generally appropriate usage, but the most important principle is to ask people how they want to be referred to and respect the terms they use to self-identify. We will review the glossary on a regular basis, to ensure it reflects developments in terms and usage over time.

ALLYSHIP

The action of actively working to support and advocate for/with a marginalised group that you are not personally a part of.

ASEXUAL/ACE

An orientation generally characterised by a lack of sexual attraction for any gender. There are many diverse ways of being asexual; people on the asexual spectrum who experience some level of sexual attraction may identify as **demisexual** or **grey-a/grey-ace**. Being asexual is not the same as being **aromantic**, an orientation involving a lack of romantic attraction for any gender, although some people identify as both asexual and aromantic and may self-describe as **ace-aro**.

BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

The belief or assumption that gender or aspects of gender are entirely determined by certain biological characteristics. This assumption is often harmful to trans and intersex people.

BISEXUAL/BI

Refers to a person who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of multiple genders.

BIPHOBIA

Systems, beliefs, or actions that exclude or oppress bi people. Bi people may also experience

homophobia, but biphobia can involve distinct prejudices and assumptions, such as the dismissal or invalidation of bisexuality and the mislabelling of bisexual individuals as either straight or gay/lesbian. **Bi-erasure** is a useful term to name a particular kind of biphobia which can arise from the harmful stereotype that bisexuality is a 'phase' and can manifest in the assumption that a person's sexual orientation is defined by the gender of their significant other at any given time.

CISGENDER/CIS

Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth; someone who is not trans. It is good practice to refer to non-trans people as cisgender/cis – rather than with terms like 'biological man/woman' – as it helps to normalise transness and avoid 'othering' trans people.

CLOSETED/(IN THE) CLOSET

Keeping secret a part of one's identity, usually related to one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

COMING OUT

The process of voluntarily sharing one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity with others. Coming out is often assumed to be a one-time action but, in fact, LGBT+ people often feel they have to come out repeatedly, every time they meet or disclose personal information to someone new.

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DEADNAMING

Calling someone by a previous name after they have changed their name. This term is often associated with trans people who have changed their name as part of their transition. Deadnaming can be harmful or can even 'out' trans people to others, so trans people's previous names should not be referred to, even in the past tense, unless they expressly say otherwise.

GAY

Refers to someone who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the same gender. Often specifically refers to a man who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other men, but can also apply more generally or be used as an umbrella term.

GENDER

Gender can refer to various concepts, including an individual's gender (see **gender identity**), and the social construct of gender which has traditionally been determined as a male/female gender binary.

GENDER EXPRESSION

How a person expresses their identity through visible features such as clothing, hairstyle and makeup, and behaviours. These elements are often societally coded in gendered terms as male/masculine, female/feminine, androgynous, or otherwise. A person's gender expression may be an outward presentation of their gender identity, but it can also be influenced by many other factors. It is usually subjectively interpreted according to expected societal norms, so individuals should not assume that they can accurately determine a person's gender identity based on their gender expression.

GENDER IDENTITY

A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see **non-binary**), which may or may not correspond to their sex assigned at birth.

GENDER-NEUTRAL

Refers to something that is not designated as belonging to a particular gender, such as facilities that any individual can use regardless of their gender (e.g. gender-neutral bathrooms), or language that does not carry male/female or masculine/feminine associations (e.g. they/them pronouns).

HETERONORMATIVITY

Attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate the harmful assumption that heterosexuality, predicated on the male/female gender binary, is the default or 'normal' mode of sexual orientation.

HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT

Refers to someone who is sexually and/or romantically attracted exclusively to the other binary gender, i.e. a man who is only attracted to women or vice versa.

HOMOPHOBIA

Systems, beliefs or actions that exclude or oppress lesbian, gay or bi people. Homophobia may be direct and based on an individual's prejudice against someone based on their sexuality, or it may be unintentional (such as inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes) or systemic/structural (such as unequal societal treatment based on sexuality). Unintentional or systemic forms of homophobia should not be considered any less harmful than direct forms.

INTERSECTIONALITY

A framework for understanding how multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with more than one marginalised identity. Intersectionality looks at how the overlapping vulnerabilities created by various forms of discrimination and disempowerment create specific challenges, which cannot be fully addressed by combatting different kinds of oppression separately. The term was coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to underline the specific intersection of misogyny and racism faced by Black women.

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INTERSEX

Refers to a person with natural variations in sex characteristics that don't fit the typical expectations for 'male' or 'female' bodies. There are many ways to be intersex, and variations may present in chromosomes, gonads, hormones, genitals, and other physical features. Intersex people often face non-consensual medical intervention as children to align them with what doctors consider a more 'normal' physical sex. Many more people are intersex than is typically assumed.

LGBT+

An acronym used to represent lesbian, gay, bi and trans, as well as other marginalised sexes, sexualities and genders. The '+' is intended to ensure that the community, and related inclusion and diversity work, is inclusive of those with marginalised orientations and identities who may not identify with the specific terms of lesbian, gay, bi or trans. Identities that the '+' speaks to include (but are not limited to) intersex, queer, questioning, asexual and pansexual.

LESBIAN

Refers to a woman who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other women. Some non-binary people may also self-identify as lesbian.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Brief and subtle behaviours that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages towards marginalised groups. Microaggressions are small-scale and often unintentional but can build up to create a hostile environment for LGBT+ people. Examples might include heteronormative assumptions, erasing or invalidating particular LGBT+ identities, or reinforcing stereotypes or generalisations about LGBT+ people.

MISGENDERING

The act of referring to someone as the wrong gender, often by using the wrong pronouns or gendered language that does not match their gender identity. Similar to 'deadnaming'.

MX

A gender-neutral title and an alternative to Mr/Mrs/Miss. Some non-binary individuals will prefer to be referred to using this title, while others may prefer other titles such as 'Misc' or 'Ind', or no title.

NON-BINARY

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is not, or not fully, described by the binary identities of 'man' and 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely. Some, but not all, non-binary people identify as trans.

OUTED/OUTING

To 'out' someone is to intentionally or unintentionally reveal their LGBT+ identity, usually against their will and to someone else who they had not yet come out to themselves. It's important to treat information about someone's LGBT+ status sensitively, unless you have explicit permission to share that information, in order to avoid outing them. This might include information about their partner(s), pronouns, or deadname.

PANSEXUAL/PAN

Refers to a person who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to others regardless of gender.

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PASSING

Refers to being perceived as a certain gender – and sometimes sexual orientation – based on appearance, behaviour, and gender expression. It's often used to denote when a trans person is regarded, at a glance, to be a cisgender man or cisgender woman. Some trans people may aim to pass as cisgender, but this is not true of all trans people. Whether or not someone passes as a certain gender is generally not appropriate to comment on, even as an intended compliment.

PRIVILEGE

A set of advantages afforded to particular groups, based on systems of unequal societal treatment. For example, non-LGBT+ people generally experience privilege related to having their sexual orientation and gender identity treated as the norm by society.

PRONOUNS

Words used to refer to people in conversation – for example, 'he', 'she' or 'they'. In many languages, including English, pronouns communicate information about the gender of the person being referred to. People should always be referred to with the pronouns they define for themselves as being aligned to their gender identity. It is good practice to ask what someone's pronouns are, and to state your own pronouns when you introduce yourself, rather than making assumptions which might be incorrect and harmful.

QUEER

Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT+ people to describe themselves. It is also sometimes used as an umbrella term for the LGBT+ community, particularly to denote the rejection of sexual and gender labels. However, some individuals still consider the term pejorative and it should not be used to describe any given person unless they explicitly self-identify that way.

QUESTIONING

The process of exploring one's own sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Society tends to assume heterosexual and cisgender identities to be the 'default' way of being. Many people therefore go through processes of questioning their individual relationships with sexuality and gender, and whether these assumed identities actually fit with their experiences. Questioning individuals may or may not eventually identify themselves under the LGBT+ umbrella.

SEX

A medically determined binary assigned to individuals at or before birth, usually on the basis of genitalia. Sex can refer to this birth assignment, or to a collection of gendered physical characteristics, such as chromosomes, gonads, and hormones. Trans people may refer to their 'sex assigned at birth' as distinct from their gender identity, using terms such as **AFAB** (assigned female at birth) and **AMAB** (assigned male at birth).

SEXUALITY/SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's sexual attraction, or lack thereof, to people of a particular gender or genders. 'Sexuality' or 'sexual orientation' are the correct terms, rather than 'sexual preference,' which can carry offensive implications.

TRANSGENDER/TRANS

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or not fully defined by, the sex they were assigned at birth. 'Trans' is an adjective, so 'transgender people' or 'trans people' are appropriate terminology. 'Transpeople', 'transgendered people', or 'transgenders' are all incorrect terms. 'Transsexual' is an older term that should generally only be used to describe those who explicitly self-identify that way.

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TRANS HISTORY

Refers to the experience of a person who was assigned a different sex at birth from the gender they identify and live as, and who thinks of this in terms of past experience rather than present – for example, by identifying as a ‘woman/man with a trans history’ rather than as a ‘trans woman/man’.

TRANSGENDER MAN

A man who is trans and was assigned female at birth. This may be shortened to trans man. Some trans men describe themselves as FTM, an abbreviation for ‘female-to-male’, but this term is considered outdated by some other trans men. FTM should not be used more generally or to describe any person unless they explicitly self-identify that way.

TRANSGENDER WOMAN

A woman who is trans and was assigned male at birth. This may be shortened to trans woman. Some trans women describe themselves as MTF, an abbreviation for ‘male-to-female’, but this term is considered outdated by some other trans women. MTF should not be used more generally or to describe any person unless they explicitly self-identify that way.

TRANSITIONING

The changes a trans person may make to their gender expression and to their legal and social life, in order to better align these with their gender identity. Each person’s transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning might also involve coming out to friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

TRANSMISOGYNY

The specific intersection of transphobia and misogyny faced by trans women and those with similar identities. The term was coined by Julia Serano to address the fact that much of the violence and prejudice generally termed ‘transphobia’ can be more specifically referred to as transmisogyny, as it is exclusively or primarily directed at or refers to trans women. It is worth being aware of this dynamic particularly in the present context of heightened transmisogyny in the UK. See also **transphobia**.

TRANSPHOBIA

Systems, beliefs or actions that exclude or oppress trans people. Transphobia may be direct and based on an individual’s prejudice against someone based on them being trans, or it may be unintentional (such as inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes), or systemic/structural (such as unequal societal treatment of trans people). Unintentional or systemic forms of transphobia should not be considered any less harmful than direct forms. See also **transmisogyny**.



Inclusive workplaces
benefit everyone.
Find our toolkit at
[rsc.li/lgbt-toolkit](https://www.rsc.li/lgbt-toolkit)