

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Working Definitions

The terms in this glossary are definitions published by Teaching Tolerance (a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center), Human Rights Campaign, GLSEN and Gender Wiki

Ally - A person who is not lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, questioning, intersex or asexual (LGBTQIA), but shows support for LGBTQIA people and promotes equality in a variety of ways.

Androgynous - Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Assigned sex - The sex/gender one is considered to be at birth based on a cursory examination of external genitalia.

Asexual - The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people. In its broadest sense, asexual describes individuals who are not sexually attracted to others or are not interested in sex. Those who identify as asexual may still be romantically attracted to others.

Bi-gendered - Describes individuals who identify as having both a “male” and “female” side to their personalities.

Bisexual - A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Because bisexual assumes a binary, male/female paradigm, many individuals now use the term pansexual.

Biphobia - Prejudice, fear or hatred directed toward bisexual people.

Birth sex/ biological sex - A specific set of genetic, chemical and anatomical characteristics that we are either born with or that develop as we mature. Types of birth/biological sex include female, male and intersex. Usually is the same as “assigned sex”.

Cisgender - A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Cisgender privilege - Unearned benefits and advantages that come with having a gender identity that is the same as the sex assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity - The assumption that cisgender identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of transgender people.

Closeted or In the Closet - A person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity. Hiding one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Coming out - The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay - Describes a person whose emotional, romantic and sexual attractions are primarily for individuals of the same sex and/or gender, typically in reference to men and boys, sometimes used as a general term for gay men and lesbians.

Gender - A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles – codified as feminine or masculine – that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the gender one is assigned at birth, and to develop, live and express a gender that feels truer and just to oneself.

Gender binary - A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is a restrictive and inaccurate way to view gender because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.

Gender dysphoria - Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term - which replaces Gender Identity Disorder - "is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

Gender expansive - Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

Gender expression - External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender fluid - A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

Genderism / gender binarism - the social system or cultural belief that gender is a binary: that is, that there are, or should be, only two genders—masculine and feminine—with the aspects of one's gender inherently linked to one's genetic sex, or sex assigned at birth.

Gender identity - One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming - A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer - Describes individuals who possess identities that fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary of male-female. Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Gender non-binary - An umbrella term for gender identities used by people whose gender is not exclusively male or female. Non-binary gender describes any gender identity which does not fit the male and female binary. Those with non-binary genders can feel that they:

- Have an androgynous (both masculine and feminine) gender identity, such as androgyne.
- Have an identity between male and female, such as intergender.
- Have a neutral or unrecognized gender identity, such as agender, neutrois, or most xenogenders.
- Have multiple gender identities, such as bigender or pangender.
- Have a gender identity which varies over time, known as genderfluid.
- Have a weak or partial connection to a gender identity, known as demigender.
- Are intersex and identify as intersex, know as amalgagender
- Have a culturally specific gender identity which exists only within their or their ancestor's culture.

Non-binary people may also identify as transgender and/or transsexual.

Gender transition - The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions. Transition may include some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments: informing one's family, friends and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; undergoing hormone therapy; and/or seeking surgical alteration (see *Sex Reassignment Surgery*).

Gender role - Clothing, characteristics, traits and behaviors culturally associated with masculinity and/or femininity.

Gender variant - A term that describes individuals who stray from socially accepted gender roles.

Heterosexism - The societal/cultural, institutional and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuals and subordinate and denigrate lesbians, gay men and bisexual/pansexual people. The critical element that differentiates heterosexism (or any other "ism") from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systematic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.

Heterosexual ally - Heterosexual people who confront heterosexism in themselves and others out of self-interest, a concern for the well-being of lesbians, gay men and bisexual/pansexual people, and a belief that heterosexism is a social injustice.

Heterosexual privilege - The benefits and advantages that heterosexuals receive in a heterosexist culture. Also, the benefits that lesbians, gay men, and bisexual/pansexual people receive as a result of claiming a heterosexual identity and denying a lesbian, gay, or bisexual/pansexual identity.

Intersex - Intersex people are born with physical sex markers (genitals, hormones, gonads or chromosomes) that are neither clearly male nor female.

Hijra - In the culture of South Asia, **hijras** (Hindi: हिजड़ा, Urdu: ہجڑا, Bengali: হিজড়া, Telugu: హిజ్రా) or *khusra* in Punjabi and *kojja* in Telugu are assigned male at birth people who adopt feminine gender identity, women's clothing and other feminine gender roles.

Homophobia - Literally, the fear of homosexuals and homosexuality; however, this term is generally applied to anyone who dislikes LGBTQIA people, who uses derogatory sexuality- or gender-based terms, or who feels that LGBTQIA people want “special rights” and not “equal rights.” Homophobic behavior can range from telling jokes about lesbians and gay men to verbal abuse and even acts of physical violence.

Lesbian - A woman or girl whose emotional, romantic and sexual attractions are primarily for other women or girls.

LGBTQIA - An acronym, which stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual”. Some prefer to list the acronym as TBLGQIA to place transpeople in a position of importance and to rectify the way trans has historically been omitted, devalued or excluded.

Living openly - A state in which LGBTQIA people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them. *Related:* **Out or Out of the Closet** - To be openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex.

Outing - Disclosing information about another’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity without that person’s consent. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexual - Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Pronouns - The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used. Examples include “she/her/hers,” “he/him/his,” “ze/hir/hirs,” and “they/them/theirs.” Some people prefer no pronouns at all.

Queer - A term that has been reclaimed by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities to describe people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Although still often an abusive epithet when used by bigoted heterosexuals, many queer-identified people have taken back the word to use it as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity.

Questioning - A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-gender loving - A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sexual orientation - An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Trans and gender-variant people may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during or after gender transition.

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) - A procedure that physically transforms the genitals using plastic surgery. SRS is a single surgical alteration and is only one small part of transition. Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, have SRS. While this procedure is often referred to as a *sex change operation* in popular culture, SRS is the preferred term.

Sexism - The societal/cultural, institutional and individual beliefs and practices that privilege men and subordinate and denigrate women.

Straight - Slang term for *heterosexual*.

Trans - An umbrella term that describes people who permanently or periodically dis-identify with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans-friendly - Describes organizations or institutions that are open, affirming and accepting of trans people and their social, political and cultural needs.

Transgender - An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transphobia - The irrational fear and hatred or discomfort with transgender people.

Two Spirit – A culturally distinct gender that describes Indigenous North Americans whose bodies simultaneously house both a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit.