

MAVEN Tipsheet: Definitions for Gender and Sexual Orientation

Adapted from: <https://www.glsen.org/> and <https://www.glaad.org/>

Terms Regarding Gender and Sex

Cisgender or Cis - Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth, based on traditional expectations (e.g., a person assigned female sex at birth whose gender identity is woman/female).

Intersex – An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. While some people can have an intersex condition and identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated. (“Hermaphrodite” is the outdated term which is considered offensive.)

Non-binary – An umbrella term used by some people who experience their gender identity as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary.

Transgender, Trans, or being of Transgender Experience – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not align based on traditional expectations. Transgender can also describe people whose gender identities do not exist within a gender binary structure; e.g., people who are non-binary or gender fluid, though not all of these individuals identify as transgender.

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Terms Regarding Sexual Orientation

Asexual – Describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. A person can additionally be aromantic, meaning they do not experience romantic attraction.

Bisexual - Describes a person who is physically, romantically, and/ or emotionally attracted to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. Some define bisexuality as an attraction to all genders.

Gay – Describes a person who is primarily physically, romantically, and/ or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. While often used to describe men who are primarily attracted to men, it can also describe women who are attracted to women. (Homosexual is the outdated clinical term which is sometimes considered offensive.)

Heterosexual/straight – Describes women who are primarily physically, romantically, and/ or emotionally attracted to men, and men who are primarily romantically and sexually attracted to women.

Lesbian – Describes a woman who is primarily physically, romantically, and/ or emotionally attracted to other women.

LGBTQIA+ – An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others. May be shortened to LGBT, LGBTQ+, etc.

Pansexual – Describes a person who is physically, romantically, and/ or emotionally attracted to people of all gender identities, or whose attractions are not related to other people's gender.

Queer – An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. Typically, for those who identify as queer, the terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don't apply to them. Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression. Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community. When Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it typically means queer and, less often, questioning.