

Appendix A: Glossary of terms

It is important to recognise and understand the difference between a person's sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (or LGBT) people are often talked about as one group, but there are important differences.

There are a wide variety of terms that people can use to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity, and the terms people use may change over time.

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense of their own gender, whether male, female, non-binary or something else.

Sex

Either of the two main categories (male and female) assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes used interchangeably with 'gender' to mean 'male' or 'female'.

Sexual Orientation

A person's emotional, romantic and or sexual attraction to another person.

Terms that some people may use to describe their identity

Sexual orientation

Bisexual

Refers to a person who has an emotional and/or sexual orientation towards people of more than one gender.

Gay

Refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality- some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women.

Homosexual

This might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used.

Gender identity

Cisgender

Refers to a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.

Non-binary

An umbrella term for a person who does not identify as male or female.

Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, cross dresser, non-binary, gender queer.

Transgender man

A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

Transgender woman

A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

Transsexual

Used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to homosexual) to refer to someone who transitioned to live in the 'opposite' gender to the one assigned at birth. This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or transgender.

Other terms

LGBT

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans.

Queer

In the past a derogatory term for LGBT individuals. The term has now been reclaimed by LGBT young people in particular who don't identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation, but is still viewed to be derogatory by some. 'Gender queer' (alongside non-binary) refers to someone who does not identify within the gender binary of 'male' or 'female'.

Questioning

The process of exploring your own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Coming out

When a person first tells someone/others about their identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans.

Gender dysphoria

Used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender reassignment

Another way of describing a person's transition. To undergo this usually means to undergo some sort of medical intervention, but it can also mean changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in your self-identified gender. It is a characteristic that is protected in the Equality Act 2010.

Gender Recognition Certificate

This enables trans people to be legally recognised as their self-identified gender and to be issued with a new birth certificate. Not all trans people will apply for a GRC and you have to be over 18 to apply. You do not need a GRC to change your gender at work or to legally change your gender on other documents such as your passport.

Gender Variant

Someone who does not conform to the gender roles and behaviours assigned to them at birth. This is usually used in relation to children or young people.

Outed

When a lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans person's sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent.

Pronoun

Words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation – for example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their.

Transitioning

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender they identify as. Each person's 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. It also might involve things like telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Intersex

A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Can identify as male, female, or non-binary.