




Navigating LGBT+
Diversity and Inclusion

Glossary of Terms





The following definitions have been assembled with reference to multiple glossaries including those from: Egale Canada (our main source), The Safe Zone Project, USA Today, Human Rights Campaign and Everyday Feminism.

As our culture evolves, so too will our language. Please use this as a guide for understanding the complexities of the LGBT+ community of the moment.

Agender:	Someone who doesn't identify as any particular gender.
All-Access Washroom:	A washroom that is accessible for all, regardless of gender, physical ability, family status or otherwise. This term is preferable to gender-neutral or all-gender washroom as it is more inclusive of various identities.
Ally:	A person who does not identify as LGBT+ and who uses their privilege to support people who identify as LGBT+ and to promote equality.
Asexual:	A person who experiences no sexual attraction to other people.
Attraction:	Attraction is a feeling of liking someone. It can be on a combination of levels or on a single level such as sexual, romantic and/or intellectual fondness.
Binary:	The socially-constructed concept of dividing sex or gender into only two categories: male or female.
Bisexual:	Previously understood as a person who experiences attraction to both men and women. Increasingly, this is now used to express attraction to both their own sex and/or gender, as well as to people of a different sex and/or gender. The second definition is intended to be inclusive of people who are trans and non-binary.
Biphobia:	In its most blatant form, this is the fear or hatred of bisexuals and bisexuality. But biphobia can be much more subtle. It is a source of discrimination against bisexuals. Biphobia is based on negative bisexual stereotypes and bisexual erasure.
Cisgender:	A person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person was assigned at birth. As defined by Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, "cisgender" is a label for "individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their personal identity." You may also hear the term "gender-normative," however, unlike "cisgender," this term suggests that there is a single, agreed-upon system of gender norms.
Cisnormativity:	A cultural and societal bias, often unconscious, that privileges cisgender identities and gender norms. It ignores or underrepresents trans identities and/or gender diversity by assuming that all people are cisgender and will express their gender in a way that aligns with perceived gender norms.
Cissexism:	A form of oppression (like other forms of oppression, i.e. racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, ageism, etc.) that targets people who are transgender. Cissexism includes the belief in the superiority of those who are cisgender and inferiority of those who are transgender, as well as assigning rights and privileges to people who are cisgender that are denied to people who are transgender.

Cissexism is revealed through: personal behaviours (exclusion, verbal and physical harassment); institutional policies (discrimination in jobs, housing, health care, lack of human rights protection); and cultural norms (lack of images – or lack of positive images – of people who are transgender in the media, in courses, or as role models).

- Coming Out:** The process of becoming aware of one’s sexual orientation. Sometimes referred to as “coming out of the closet,” this generally includes accepting your sexual orientation, possibly acting on it and telling others about it, and/or no longer keeping it hidden from others. “Coming out” is not a single event or transformation, but an ongoing process unique to each individual. (Please see “In the Closet” and “Out.”)
- Deadnaming:** The action of calling a person who is transgender by the name or pronouns they used before transitioning.
- Drag King/Drag Queen:** People, some who are straight and/or cisgender, who perform either masculinity or femininity as a form of art. Performing drag reveals nothing about a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Gay:** A person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to someone of the same sex and/or gender. Gay can include both male-identified individuals and female-identified individuals or refer to male-identified individuals only.
- Gender Identity:** A person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is their sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or something entirely different. A person’s gender identity may be the same as, or different from, their sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is fundamentally different from a person’s sexual orientation.
- Gender Expansive:** An umbrella term used to refer to people, often times youth, who don’t identify with traditional gender roles.
- Gender Expression:** The manner in which a person represents or expresses gender – through behaviour, hairstyles, activities, clothing, jewelry, voice, mannerisms, chosen name and pronoun, etc. The ways in which gender is expressed are culturally-specific and may change over time. Because money provides access to many gender signifiers, children and people living on fixed incomes may not be able to express their gender as they wish.
- Gender Fluid:** A person who does not identify with a single, fixed gender.
A person whose gender identity may shift over time.
- Gender Non-Conforming:** A person who does not conform to traditional expectations of their gender.
- Gender Normative:** A person whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society’s gender-based expectations.

- Gender Role:** All of the qualities and behaviours society stereotypically expects of an individual based on gender. For example, men are expected to carry things, provide for the family and move furniture; women are expected to care for children, take notes and handle food arrangements.
- Genderqueer and Intergender:** A person whose gender identity and/or expression may not correspond with social and cultural gender expectations. Individuals who identify this way may move between genders, identify with multiple genders or reject the gender binary or gender altogether.
- Heteronormative:** The term “heteronormative” is used to describe a culture or belief system which assumes that heterosexuality is the default or norm. Heteronormativity can take a number of forms, and it is often very subtle and pervasive. One of the most obvious impacts of heteronormativity is the marginalization of people who do not fit within heterosexual norms, such as people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and other sexual minorities, and people who do not identify with commonly-held ideas about sexuality and gender. Many activists in a variety of social groups have worked to combat heteronormative behaviour.
- Heterosexism:** Heterosexism is a form of oppression (like other forms of oppression, i.e. racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, ageism, etc.) that targets people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual minorities. Heterosexism includes the belief in the superiority of heterosexuality and inferiority of other sexual orientations, as well as assigning rights and privileges to heterosexuals that are denied to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minorities. Heterosexism is revealed through: personal behaviours (telling “queer jokes,” anti-gay graffiti, verbal and physical harassment); institutional policies (discrimination in jobs, housing, immigration, etc. with no civil rights protection); and cultural norms (no positive images of gays, lesbians, or bisexuals and other sexual minorities in the media, in courses or as role models).
- Heterosexuality:** Emotional and/or physical attraction to persons of a different sex and/or gender.
- Homophobia:** In its most blatant form, this is the fear and/or hatred of people who identify as gay or lesbian, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence. Anyone who is or is assumed to be gay or lesbian or who experiences attraction to multiple sexes and/or genders can be the target of homophobia. Homophobia can also appear more subtly as an attitude, feeling or aversion toward gay men and lesbians or toward homosexuality in general.
- Homosexuality:** The emotional and/or physical attraction to persons of the same sex or gender, sometimes referred to as “same sex attraction.”

Inclusion:	The act of making everyone feel welcome and allowing them to be their true self. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged and valued for who they are and for their contributions to organizational and societal goals.
Indigiqueer:	See “Two Spirit.”
Intersectionality:	The understanding of how a person’s overlapping identities – race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. – impact their experiences and how they are perceived, as well as the way they experience oppression and discrimination. The intersections of identities can mean that a person or group experiences multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously – for example: ableism, racism, sexism and homophobia. The effects of multiple forms of discrimination are exponential and not cumulative.
Intersex:	<p>A general term used to describe a variety of conditions in which a person is born with external genitalia, gonads, chromosomes and/or hormones that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female. For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside. Or a person may be born with genitals that seem to be in-between the expected male and female types — for example, a girl may be born with a noticeably large clitoris, or without a vaginal opening, or a boy may be born with a notably small penis, or with a scrotum that is divided so that its form is more like labia.</p> <p>A person may also be born with mosaic genetics, so that some of their cells have XX chromosomes and some of them have XY. Typically, people who are intersex are assigned male or female at birth. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not. Some choose to identify as intersex. Some individuals will understand themselves to be intersex as an identity while other individuals will understand themselves as female or male with intersex as a condition. Intersex characteristics occur in one out of every 1,500 to 2,000 births.</p> <p>Intersex refers to a set of biological possibilities that a person may be born with and not gender identity. “Normalizing procedures” are often done on infants whose intersex condition is visible. These procedures have been made illegal in some countries but not yet in Canada. Some people who have had these procedures done on them grow up to feel that they have been the victims of mutilation and abuse or have had an essential part of themselves taken away without their consent. The intersex “movement” seeks to halt medically unnecessary pediatric surgeries and hormone treatments which attempt to normalize infants into the dominant “male” and “female” sex system. The term “hermaphrodite” has been used in the past to refer to intersex people; it carries historic negative connotations, so most intersex people prefer not to use it.</p>

In the Closet or Closeted:	Being secretive or hidden about one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. (Please see “Coming Out,” “Gender Identity,” “Sexual Orientation” and “Out.”)
LGBT+:	An acronym to identify Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and other sexual and gender minorities. There are other acronyms in use including GLBT, LGBTQ (the Q for Queer and Questioning), LGBTQ+ and LGBT2Q with the “2” representing Two Spirit. There are longer variations that include the letters captured by the +, including LGBTTIQQ2SA, which references ten communities: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Two Spirit and Allies and 2SLGBTQI+ with the “2S” for Two Spirit at the front of the acronym in recognition that Indigenous Peoples were on this land first. When using the acronym to refer to LGBT+ communities, please note the plural, as there are many communities captured within the acronym.
Lesbian:	A female-identified person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to female-identified people.
Non-Binary:	Someone who doesn’t identify exclusively as female or male.
Metrosexual:	A man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender-normative. The term is not associated with the LGBT+ community specifically and indicates nothing about a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.
Misgender:	Referring to someone by a gendered word (i.e. pronoun or title) that does not match that person’s own gender identity. This can be done out loud or silently in one’s mind.
Out:	Being open about one’s LGBT+ identity.
Passing/To Pass:	A term sometimes used to refer to the person who is LGBT+ being perceived as heterosexual or cisgender. This term is most commonly used in relation to people who are trans. People who “pass” may experience less homophobia, biphobia, queer phobia/transphobia and discrimination. Some people who are LGBT+ consider “passing” to be very important for them, while others feel that choosing not to pass is an act of rejecting heterosexism, cissexism and ciscentricism. “Passing” is a contested term since it may connote “a passing grade” or “passing something illegitimate off,” or it may imply external pressure to strive toward being “read” a certain way.
Pansexual:	A person who experiences attraction to people of diverse sexes and/or genders. The term pansexual reflects a desire to recognize the potential for attraction to many sexes and/or genders and to challenge the sex/gender binary.

Pride:	A feeling or expression of strength and unity among LGBT+ communities. The term has been embraced in contrast to feelings of shame, unworthiness and internalized homophobia.
Privilege:	A set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.
Queer:	Historically a derogatory term, “queer” was used to insult people who identified as LGBT+ or who were perceived to be. Although still used as a slur by some in some parts of the world, the term has been reclaimed by some members of LGBT+ communities, particularly youth. In its reclaimed form, it can be used as a symbol of pride and affirmation of difference and diversity or as a means of challenging rigid identity categories.
Queerphobia:	An umbrella term that includes homophobia, biphobia and transphobia – please see each of those terms for their own definitions.
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 (particularly African Americans) prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.
Sex:	The biological classification of people as male, female or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth based on visual assessment of external genitalia. In addition to external genitalia, other sex markers include hormones, chromosomes and gonads. Inclusion here of the recognized category of “intersex,” frequently overlooked in discussions of sex, serves as a reminder that even at the level of biology, sex is not a binary system. “Sex” is often used synonymously with “gender” in this culture. Although the two terms are related, they should be defined separately to differentiate the biological (“sex”) from the socio-cultural (“gender”). Some individuals will say that “sex” is in your chromosomes and between your legs, and gender is between your ears to differentiate the terms.
Sex Assigned at Birth:	The biological classification of people as male, female or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth based on visual assessment of external genitalia. In addition to external genitalia, other sex markers include hormones, chromosomes and gonads. Inclusion here of the recognized category of “intersex,” frequently overlooked in discussions of sex, serves as a reminder that even at the level of biology, sex is not a binary system.

Sexual Orientation:	A term to describe human attraction. Attraction is a feeling of liking someone. It can be on a combination of levels or on a single level such as sexual, romantic and/or intellectual. Examples of sexual orientation include asexual, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual and same-sex attraction. Sexual orientation is different from gender identity. For example, people who identify as trans or genderqueer may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during or after transition.
Trans:	Often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions including transgender and transsexual, and can also refer to terms like genderqueer, agender, bigender, Two Spirit, etc. Some people may identify with these or other specific terms, but not with the term trans. Similarly, some people may identify as trans, but not with other terms under the trans umbrella.
Trans Identified:	A term that takes into consideration how an individual wishes to identify. After an individual transitions, they may identify as male, female, trans male, trans female, queer, etc.
Transitioning:	The process of making social, legal and/or medical changes to be more congruent with one's gender.
Transgender:	Refers to a person who does not identify, either fully or in part, with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender people come from every race, class, sexual orientation and ability.
Two Spirit:	Some Indigenous People (i.e. First Nations, Métis or Inuit) choose to identify as Two Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as LGBT+. Prior to European colonization, Two Spirit people were respected members of their communities and were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives. Two Spirit persons were often the visionaries, healers and medicine people in their communities. The term Two Spirit affirms the interrelatedness of all aspects of identity – including gender, sexuality, community, culture and spirituality. It is an English term used to stand in for the many words in Indigenous languages. Indigiqueer is another term that is gaining popularity.
Transphobia:	Fear and hatred of all those individuals who transgress, violate or blur the dominant gender categories in a given society. Transphobic attitudes lead to discrimination, violence and oppression against the trans, drag and intersex communities.



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