

Queer Terminology

- from A to Q

Ally: A heterosexual and/or cisgender and/or cissexual person who supports and celebrates queer identities, interrupts and challenges queer-phobic and heterosexist remarks and actions of others, and willingly explores these biases within themselves. **Coming Out:** Or, 'coming out of the closet,' is the process of becoming aware of one's queer sexual orientation, one's 2-spirit or trans* identity, accepting it, and telling others about it. This is an ongoing process that may not include everybody in all aspects of one's life. 'Coming out' usually occurs in stages and is a non-linear process. An individual may be 'out' in only some situations or to certain family members or associates and not others. Some may never 'come out' to anyone beside themselves. **Gender Binary:** The view that there are only two totally distinct, opposite and static genders (masculine and feminine) to identify with and express. While many societies view gender through this lens and consider this binary system to be universal, a number of societies recognise more than two genders. Across all societies there are also many folk who experience gender fluidly, identifying with different genders at different times. **Homophobia:** Fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviour. There are many levels and forms of homophobia, including cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia. Many forms of homophobia are related to how restrictive binary gender roles are (see 'oppositional sexism'). An example of this might be a lesbian who is harassed with homophobic language for being perceived to be masculine. Many of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including health and income disparities, stem from homophobia and heterosexism. See also biphobia, lesbophobia, transphobia and LGBT-phobia. **LGBT:** Acronym used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people, interchangeable with GLBT, LGTB, etc. Additional letters are sometimes added to this acronym, such as LGBTIQQ2S to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning and 2 Spirit folk. Making fun of the length

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This glossary was developed by QMUNITY staff and volunteers as a suggested guide for inclusive language regarding queer and trans* issues. Queer terminology is fluid and evolving; the appropriateness, meaning and impact of this language continually changes over time. We also acknowledge that power, privilege and oppression exist in the context of space and time and may be experienced differently by individuals.

If you would like more information about, or to suggest changes to this glossary, please contact QMUNITY at education@qmunity.ca - we welcome your comments!

It is important to highlight that the individual is always the expert on how they identify and on what language they consider respectful and inclusive of themselves. Always work to avoid making assumptions about people's identities!

QMUNITY

BC'S QUEER RESOURCE CENTRE

A

Ally: A heterosexual and/or cisgender and/or cissexual person who supports and celebrates queer identities, interrupts and challenges queer-phobic and heterosexist remarks and actions of others, and willingly explores these biases within themselves.

Androgyne: A person identifying and/or expressing gender outside of the gender binary. Other terms used include gender variant, genderqueer, and gender non-conformist.

Asexual: Someone who does not experience sexual desire for people of any gender. Some asexual people desire romantic relationships, while others do not. Asexuality can be considered a spectrum, with some asexual people experiencing desire for varying types of intimacy. This desire may fluctuate over time. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate refraining from sexual activity. Asexual people experience high levels of invisibility and trivialization.

B

Biphobia: Fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against bisexuals and bisexual behaviour. Biphobia exerts a powerful, negative force on the lives of bisexual people. Some examples of biphobia in action are disparaging jokes, verbal abuse or acts of violence targeted at bisexual people, or the dismissal of bisexuality as an inferior, invalid or irrelevant expression of sexuality. Bisexual people often face biphobia and discrimination in both queer and non-queer communities.

Bisexual: An individual who is attracted to, and may form sexual and romantic relationships with women and men. A bisexual person may feel equally attracted to each gender, or may experience stronger attractions to one gender while still having feelings for another; this ratio of attraction may vary over time. Bisexuality, like homosexuality and heterosexuality, may be either a period in the process of self-discovery, or a stable, long-term identity. It is not necessary for somebody to have or have had sex with both men and women to identify as bisexual.

Butch: ‘Butch’ is a word that some queer people use to describe gender expression and/or social and relationship roles that are perceived by many as being masculine.

C

Ciscentrism: A system of attitudes, bias and discrimination in favour of cisgender identities that marginalizes and renders invisible trans* people and treats their needs and identities as less important than those of cisgender people.

Cisgender: Identifying with the same gender that one was assigned at birth. A gender identity that society considers to match the biological sex assigned at birth. The prefix cis- means “on this side of” or “not across from.” A term used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not trans*.

Cissexism: The belief that cisgender and cissexual people represent the ‘norm’ and so are superior to trans* folk. This results in a systemic oppression that privileges cisgender and cissexual folk over transgender and trans* folk.

Cissexual: Identifying with the same biological sex that one was assigned at birth.

Coming Out: Or, 'coming out of the closet,' is the process of becoming aware of one's queer sexual orientation, one's 2-Spirit or trans* identity, accepting it, and telling others about it. This is an ongoing process that may not include everybody in all aspects of one's life. 'Coming out' usually occurs in stages and is a non-linear process. An individual may be 'out' in only some situations or to certain family members or associates and not others. Some may never 'come out' to anyone beside themselves.

Cross-dresser: Refers to people who wear clothing traditionally associated with a different gender to that which with they identify with. Some prefer to cross-dress privately, while others cross-dress publicly all or part of the time. Cross-dressers may or may not have a gender identity related to the clothing they are wearing. Some cross-dressers identify trans* while others do not. 'Cross-dresser' has generally replaced the term 'transvestite' (see below for definition).

D

Drag: Refers to people who dress in a showy or flamboyant way that exaggerates gendered stereotypes, often for entertainment purposes. 'Drag' is a term that is often associated with gay/lesbian communities and is often replaced with 'Drag King' and 'Drag Queen.' Some people who perform professionally outside gay/lesbian communities prefer the term 'male/female impersonator.'

Dyke: A lesbian. This term can be used as an insult, or reclaimed by lesbians as a positive term.

F

Fag, faggot: A gay man. This term can be used as an insult, or reclaimed by gay men as a positive term. Derived from the word faggot (literally “small bundle of sticks”), an allusion to the Inquisition-era practice of burning people at the stake for suspected homosexual practices.

Female-to-Male Spectrum (FTM): Generally used to refer to anyone assigned female at birth, but who identifies or expresses their gender as male all or part of the time. Some people prefer the term ‘transitioning to male’, as this does not imply that they were once female-identified.

Femme: A term that some queer people use to describe gender expression and/or social and relationship roles that are perceived by many as being feminine.

G

Gay: A person who is mostly attracted to those of the same gender; often used to refer to men only.

Gender: The social construction of concepts such as masculinity and femininity in a specific culture in time. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone’s gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender). Fundamentally different from the sex one is assigned at birth.

Gender Attribution / Gender Perception: The process of making assumptions about another person’s gender, based on factors such as choice of dress, voice modulation, body shape, etc.

A related term is 'reading,' which refers to the process where factors such as someone's body shape, voice, gender expression, etc. are used to make assumptions about that someone's gender identity, sex assigned at birth, or sexual orientation. Making assumptions is a major cause of exclusion and disrespect towards others.

Gender Binary: The view that there are only two totally distinct, opposite and static genders (masculine and feminine) to identify with and express. While many societies view gender through this lens and consider this binary system to be universal, a number of societies recognise more than two genders. Across all societies there are also many folk who experience gender fluidly, identifying with different genders at different times.

Gender Expression: How one outwardly manifests gender; for example, through name and pronoun choice, style of dress, voice modulation, etc. How one expresses gender might not necessarily reflect one's actual gender identity.

Gender Identity: One's internal and psychological sense of oneself as male, female, both, in between, or neither. People who question their gender identity may feel unsure of their gender or believe they are not of the same gender as their physical body. Gender non-conforming, gender variant, or genderqueer are some terms sometimes used to describe people who don't feel they fit into the categories of male or female. 'Bi-gender' and 'pan-gender' are some terms that refer to people who identify with more than one gender. Often bi-gender and pan-gender people will spend some time presenting in one gender and some time in the other. Some people choose to present androgynously in a conscious attempt to challenge and expand traditional gender roles even though they might not question their gender identity.

Gender Non-Conforming: This term refers to people who do not conform to society's expectations for their gender roles or gender expression. Some people prefer the term 'gender-variant' among other terms.

Gender Policing: The imposition or enforcement of normative gender expressions on an individual who is perceived as not adequately performing, through appearance or behaviour, the gender that was assigned to them at birth. Gender policing can be done by peers, family, media, educators, institutions and others. Gender policing may occur through ridicule, trivialization, exclusion or harassment of, or violence towards, gender non-conforming folk. It may also occur through social messages that privilege cisgender expression and gender roles.

Gender Roles: The socially constructed and culturally specific behaviours such as communication styles, careers, family roles, and more, imposed on people based on their biological sex assigned at birth. It is important to note that gender interpretations and expectations vary widely among cultures and often change over time. It is important to note that some cultures have more than two gender roles.

Genderqueer: A term under the trans* umbrella which refers to people who identify outside of the male-female binary. Genderqueer people may experience erasure if they are perceived as cisgender. Genderqueer people who are perceived as genderqueer are often subjected to gender policing. Related but not interchangeable terms include 'gender outlaw', 'gender variant', 'gender non-conformist', 'third gender', 'bigender', and 'pangender'.

Heteroflexible and Homoflexible: A term used by some to identify that they are primarily attracted to one gender but open to possible attractions or relationships with people of other genders.

Heteronormative: Refers to social roles and social structures that reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is the presumed norm and is superior to other sexual orientations.

Heterosexism: A system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. This includes the assumption that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual and that heterosexuality is inherently superior to homosexuality or bisexuality. Heterosexism also refers to organizational discrimination against non-heterosexuals or against behaviours not stereotypically heterosexual. One example of this might be a girl who is told that when she grows up she will have a husband and not presented with any other options to consider.

Heterosexual: A person who primarily feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the 'opposite' gender; also sometimes referred to as 'straight'.

Homophobia: Fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviour. There are many levels and forms of homophobia, including cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia. Many forms of homophobia are related to how restrictive binary gender roles are (see 'oppositional sexism'). An example of this might be a lesbian who is harassed with homophobic language for being perceived to be masculine. Many of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including health and income disparities, stem from homophobia and heterosexism. See also biphobia, lesbophobia, transphobia and LGBT-phobia.

Homosexual: A person who is mostly attracted to people of their own gender. Because this term has been widely used negatively and/or in a cold and clinical way, most homosexuals prefer the terms 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'queer'.

Inclusive Language: The use of gender non-specific language (e.g. 'partner' instead of 'husband', or 'they' or 'ze' instead of 'she') to avoid assumptions around gender identity and sexual orientation, and to enhance the accessibility of information and services. Educational, social service, and health professionals are especially encouraged to use inclusive language until advised otherwise by the person they are talking to or about.

Internalized Homophobia: The experience of shame, guilt, or self-hatred in reaction to one's own feelings of sexual attraction for a person of the same gender.

Intersex: Intersex people may have: external genitalia which do not closely resemble typical male or female genitalia, or which have the appearance of both male and female genitalia; the genitalia of one sex and the secondary sex characteristics of another sex; or a chromosomal make-up that is neither XX or XY but may be a combination of both. 'Intersex' has replaced the term 'hermaphrodite', which is widely considered to be out-dated, inaccurate and offensive. An intersex person may or may not identify as part of the trans* community, however the terms 'intersex', 'transsexual' and 'trans*' are distinct and should not be used interchangeably.

L

LGBT: Acronym used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people, interchangeable with GLBT, LGTB, etc. Additional letters are sometimes added to this acronym, such as LGBTIQQ2S to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning and 2 Spirit folk. Making fun of the length of this acronym can have a trivializing or erasing effect on the group that longer acronyms seek to actively include.

LGBT-phobia: A term used to include all forms of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia; queerphobia is also used.

Lesbian: A woman who is primarily romantically and sexually attracted to women. The term originates from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos which was home to Sappho, a poet, teacher, and a woman who loved other women. Although not as common, sometimes the term 'gay woman' is used instead.

Lesbophobia: Fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against lesbians or lesbian behaviour. This can take place from outside of the queer community, but may also be a product of stereotyping, internalized queerphobia, or misogyny within the queer community. An example of this may be a gay man who believes that all lesbians are aggressive.

M

Male-to-Female Spectrum (MTF): Generally used to refer to anyone assigned male at birth but who identifies or expresses their gender as a female all or part of the time. Some people prefer the term 'transitioning to female', as this does not imply that they were once male-identified.

Metrosexual: Often mistakenly thought to refer to a sexual orientation, this term is in fact a mix of the words ‘heterosexual’ and ‘metropolitan’. It refers to a well-groomed style popular with non-queer men that was previously stereotypically associated with queer men.



Oppositional Sexism: The belief that masculinity and femininity are rigid, mutually exclusive, categories. Also the idea that men should not display any behaviours or characteristics commonly associated with women, and vice versa.

Outing someone: Accidentally or intentionally publicly revealing another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without their permission. This can cause social, physical, emotional, or economic danger for the person being ‘outed.’ Outing someone can sometimes be done as an act of hate.



Pangender: Refers to people who identify and/or express the many shades of gender. Multi-gender and omni-gender are other terms that may be used.

Panphobia: The fear and dislike of pansexuality. Panphobia exerts a powerful, negative force on the lives of pansexual people. Some examples of panphobia in action are disparaging jokes, verbal abuse, acts of violence targeted at pansexual people, or the dismissal of pansexuality as an inferior, invalid or irrelevant expression of sexuality. Pansexual people often face panphobia and discrimination in both queer and non-queer discourse. (This word also has a different and separate meaning: an irrational fear of everything.)

Pansexual: An individual who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with men, women, and people who identify outside the gender binary. Omnisexual is another term that can be used.

Passing/To Pass: A term sometimes used to refer to the state of an LGBT person not being visibly recognizable as LGBT. This term is most commonly used in relation to trans* people. People who 'pass' may experience less queer-phobia and discrimination. Some LGBT people 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 towards being 'read' a certain way (See: Gender attribution).

Patriarchy: Patriarchy refers to a social system where the bulk of power, authority, and control in society is held by men. This assigns greater importance to male identities and issues than to people of other gender identities.

Privilege: Refers to the social, economic and political advantages or rights held by people from dominant groups on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc. For example, men often experience privilege that people of other genders do not have.

Q

QPOC: An acronym for Queer People Of Colour. Another term used is QTPOC (Queer, Transgender, and Intersex People of Colour). Queer people of colour often experience intersecting oppressions on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation and other factors.

Queer: A term becoming more widely used among LGBT communities because of its inclusiveness. 'Queer' can be used to refer to the range of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people and provides a convenient shorthand for 'LGBT'. It is important to note that this is a reclaimed term that was once and is still used as a hate term and thus some people feel uncomfortable with it. Not all trans* people see trans* identities as being part of the term 'queer'.

Queerphobia: A term used to include all forms of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia. The term 'LGBT-phobia' is also used and may more clearly express the idea of transphobia.

Questioning: A term sometimes used by those in the process of exploring personal issues of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as choosing not to identify with any other label.

R

Rainbow Flag/Colours: A symbol of queer presence, welcome, and pride which represents the diversity of queer communities.

Reclaimed Language: Language that has traditionally been used to hurt and degrade a community but which community members have reclaimed and used as their own. Reclaimed language can be extremely important as a way of taking the negative power out of a word, claiming space, and empowering oneself. However, reclaimed language is also tricky and, depending on the context and the speaker, can be hurtful and dangerous. Some examples are 'dyke', 'fag', 'homo', 'queen', and 'queer'. Although these terms can be used in a positive way by those reclaiming them, it is still offensive to hear them used by others whose intent is to hurt.

Although many LGBT people have reclaimed these terms, there are still other LGBT people who consider any usage of these terms offensive, particularly by people who do not personally identify with those terms.

S

Sex: Refers to the biological characteristics chosen to assign humans as male, female or intersex. It is determined by characteristics such as sexual and reproductive anatomy and genetic make-up.

Sexual orientation: Refers to a person's deep-seated feelings of sexual and romantic attraction. These attractions may be mostly towards people of the same gender (lesbian, gay), another gender (heterosexual), men and women (bisexual), or people of all genders (pansexual). Many people become aware of these feelings during adolescence or even earlier, while some do not realize or acknowledge their attractions (especially same-sex attractions) until much later in life. Many people experience sexual orientation fluidly, and feel attraction or degrees of attraction to different genders at different points in their lives. Sexual orientation is defined by feelings of attraction rather than behaviour.

Sexual preference: Refers to whomever one prefers to have sexual and romantic relationships with (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual, etc.). It is sometimes used interchangeably with 'sexual orientation', but is considered by many to be inaccurate because the word 'preference' implies choice.

Traditional Sexism: The belief that male gender identities and masculine gender expressions are superior to female and/or feminine ones.

Transfeminine: This term may describe people who identify as trans*, and who identify their gender expression as feminine.

Transgender (Trans, Trans*): Transgender, frequently abbreviated to 'trans' or 'trans*' (the asterisk is intended to actively include non-binary and/or non-static gender identities such as genderqueer and genderfluid) is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned biological birth sex. Some of the many people who may or may not identify as transgender, trans, or trans* include people on the male-to-female or female-to-male spectrums, people who identify and/or express their gender outside of the male/female binary, people whose gender identity and/or expression is fluid, people who explore gender for pleasure or performance, and many more. Identifying as transgender, trans, or trans* is something that can only be decided by an individual for themselves and does not depend on criteria such as surgery or hormone treatment status.

Transition: Refers to the process during which trans* people may change their gender expression and/or bodies to reflect their gender identity or sexual identity. Transition may involve a change in physical appearance (hairstyle, clothing), behaviour (mannerisms, voice, gender roles), and/or identification (name, pronoun, legal details). It may be accompanied by changes to the body such as the use of hormones to change secondary sex characteristics (e.g. breasts, facial hair).

Trans Man: This term describes someone who identifies as trans* and whose gender identity is male.

Transmasculine: This term describes people who identify as trans* and who identify their gender expression as masculine.

Trans-misogyny: Transphobia directed at trans* women and transfeminine folk that reinforces male power and privilege.

Transphobia: The fear and dislike of, and discrimination against, trans* people. Transphobia can take the form of disparaging jokes, rejection, exclusion, denial of services, employment discrimination, name-calling and violence.

Transsexual: A person whose sexual identity has moved from male to female or female to male. A transsexual person may change elements of their body through surgery or hormone treatment, but many transsexual people do not make any changes other than their sexual identity. Many folk feel that the word transsexual has medical overtones or is used inaccurately and so prefer the terms 'transgender', 'trans', or 'trans*'.

Transvestite: A medical term that was historically used to label cross dressing as a mental illness. This term is outdated, problematic, and generally considered offensive. A more inclusive and respectful term currently used is 'cross dresser'.

Trans Woman: This term may describe someone who identifies as trans* and whose gender identity is female.

Two-Spirit (2-Spirit): A term used by some North American Aboriginal societies to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and sexual orientations. Dual-gendered, or 'two-spirited,' people have been and are viewed differently in different First Nations communities. Sometimes they have been seen without stigma and were considered seers, child-carers, warriors, mediators, or emissaries from the creator and treated with deference and respect, or even considered sacred, but other times this has not been the case.

As one of the devastating effects of colonisation and profound changes in North American Aboriginal societies, many Two-Spirit folk have lost these community roles and this has had far-reaching impacts on their well-being.

Z

Ze / Hir: Gender-inclusive pronouns used to avoid relying on a gender binary-based linguistic system, or making assumptions about other people's gender. An example of these terms being used in a sentence is 'Ze talked to hir partner about pronouns'. Some people instead choose to use plural pronouns such as 'They' and 'Their', or similar options. An example of this would be 'They talked to their partner about pronouns'. Some use plural pronouns because they are more widely understood and able to be fluently used by most people. Others, such as omni-gender folk, feel that plural pronouns are most representative of their having more than one gender.

QMUNITY is BC's Queer Resource Centre – the hub for lesbian, gay, bi, trans* and queer community programs, training and advocacy. Our services include:

- Free counselling
- Youth drop-ins
- Programming for older adults
- Queer Competency Trainings for workplaces and groups
- Out On the Shelves library
- Social and support groups
- Community events

...and much more!

To find out more about QMUNITY's services, or make a donation to sustain our work, please visit [**www.qmunity.ca**](http://www.qmunity.ca)

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Privilege: Refers to the social, economic and political advantages or rights held by people from dominant groups on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc. For example, men often experience privilege that people of other genders do not have. **Queer:** A term becoming more widely used among LGBT communities because of its inclusiveness. 'Queer' can be used to refer to the range of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people and provides a convenient shorthand for 'LGBT'. It is important to note that this is a reclaimed term that was once and is still used as a hate term and thus some people feel uncomfortable with it. Not all trans* people see trans* identities as being part of the term 'queer'. **Questioning:** A term sometimes used by those in the process of exploring personal issues of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as choosing not to identify with any other label. **Rainbow Flag/Colours:** A symbol of queer presence, welcome, and pride which represents the diversity of queer communities. **Sexual preference:** Refers to whomever one prefers to have sexual and romantic relationships with (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual). It is sometimes used interchangeably with 'sexual orientation', but is considered by many to be inaccurate because the word 'preference' implies choice. **Traditional Sexism:** The belief that male gender identities and masculine gender expressions are superior to female and/or feminine ones. **Two-Spirit (2-Spirit):** A term used by some North American Aboriginal societies to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and sexual orientations. Dual-gendered, or 'two-spirited,' people have been and are viewed differently in different First Nation communities. Sometimes they have been seen without stigma and were considered seers, child-carers, warriors, mediators, or

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