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Key Terms: A Guide for Understanding LGBTQ+ Identities

LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term used to describe people who may identify as: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, or Queer, and the "+" represents the many other identities that can fall under the LGBTQ Umbrella that might not fit into one of the categories listed. More details about what each of these terms mean is included below!

What is "Coming Out"?

Coming out is when a person decides to reveal an important part of who they are with someone in their life. For many LGBTQ+ people, this involves sharing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In our society, it is usually assumed that someone is heterosexual (or straight) or cisgender (see definitions below), therefore, LGBTQ+ people usually have to tell those around them how they identify, or "come out."

A crash course on LGBTQ+ Identities

The LGBTQ+ Acronym includes many different identities that usually fall into two categories: **Sexual Orientation** and **Gender Identity**.

Sexual Orientation is a person's romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to other people. No one else can determine what another person's sexual orientation is, and you can't tell someone's sexual identity by looking at them. Some examples of sexual identities include, but are not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, pansexual and asexual. Below are some definitions for various sexual identities. Remember, however, that these terms are frequently changing, and it is up to the individual to decide what their identity means to them.

- ❖ **Lesbian:** A self-identified woman who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- ❖ **Gay:** A person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of their same gender. Gay often refers to a self-identified man who is romantically, emotionally, and/or physically attracted to other men.
- ❖ **Bisexual:** A person who has the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to more than one gender. A bisexual orientation speaks to the potential for, but not requirement of, involvement with more than one gender. This is different from being attracted to only men or only women.
- ❖ **Pansexual:** A person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people, regardless of their gender identity.
- ❖ **Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual and/or emotional). Asexual people may also identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, heterosexual, or many more sexual orientations.



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Gender Identity is how an individual identifies based on their internal understanding of their gender. Gender identities may include male or man, female or woman, agender, androgynous, transgender, genderqueer, and many others, or a combination of these. It is important to remember that gender identity is *different* from sexual orientation. Everyone has both a sexual orientation *and* a gender identity. Below are some definitions for various gender identities. Remember, however, that like sexual identities, these terms are frequently changing, and it is up to the individual who identifies that way to decide what their identity means to them.

- ❖ **Cisgender:** Refers to a person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- ❖ **Genderqueer:** Commonly used to describe a person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.
- ❖ **Non-binary:** A continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions that is outside of the binary gender categories of man and woman.
- ❖ **Sex Assigned at Birth:** The sex that the medical community labels a person when they are born, typically based on their external genitalia. Examples of sexes assigned at birth are male, female, and intersex.
- ❖ **Transgender:** Refers to a person whose gender identity is not aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities.

The following terms can apply to sexual identity or gender identity:

- ❖ **Queer:** While often used as a neutral or even a reclaimed, positive term among many LGBTQ+ people today, "queer" was historically used as a derogatory slur. An umbrella term used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression for individuals who do not conform to dominant societal norms.
- ❖ **Questioning** means that someone is unsure of, or questioning, their gender or sexual identity. They might come to identify with another LGBTQ+ identity later in life, or they may not. It's developmentally appropriate for young people to be questioning their identities, so remember that it's important to remind young people that you support the LGBTQ+ community, even if they haven't told you they identify as LGBTQ+.

Additional Resources:

For additional information about coming out, see [The Trevor Project's Coming Out Handbook](#) for young people.

The definitions included here are adapted from the [National Sex Education Standards \(2nd Edition\) Glossary](#).