

Frequently Used Terminology Referring to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and Race and Ethnicity in the United States

The following is a list of definitions of some frequently used terminology referring to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and Race and Ethnicity in the United States in 2022.

Different groups of people sometimes use different terminology and terminology may differ depending on context. Terminology has also changed significantly over time and continues to evolve. Sometimes, strong preferences and disagreements exist over terminology and its implications. We intend no offense to anyone who uses different terminology from that listed below.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Terminology

Sexual Orientation – Nature of a person’s sexual and affectional attractions to other people.

Gay – Sexual and affectional attraction to people of the same sex (e.g., men who are attracted to men, and women who are attracted to women). Sometimes especially refers to men who are attracted to men or a part of the term “gay man.”

Lesbian -- Referring to a woman who is sexually and affectionally attracted to other women.

Straight or Heterosexual – Sexual and affectional attraction to people of a different sex (e.g., men who are attracted to women, and women who are attracted to men).

Bisexual -- Sexual and affectional attraction to both women and men.

Pansexual -- Sexual and affectional attraction to people of any gender or who do not use gender constructions, including people who identify or describe themselves as “gender non-binary” or “gender non-conforming.” (See definitions of those terms below).

Asexual – Lack of sexual attraction for other people.

Gender Identity – A person’s psychological sense of their gender.

Transgender – Referring to people whose sex assigned at birth (i.e., the sex assigned by a physician at birth, usually based on external genitalia) does not align with their gender identity. Transgender people may or may not have had surgery to help themselves transition physically to their true gender identity.

Trans – Shortened version of the term Transgender.

FTM or Transman – A transgender person whose gender assigned at birth was female and who transitions to their true gender identity which is male.

MTF or Transwoman – A transgender person whose gender assigned at birth was male and who transitions to their true gender identity which is female.

Cisgender -- Referring to people whose sex assigned at birth (i.e., the sex assigned by a physician at birth, usually based on external genitalia) aligns with their gender identity.

Gender Non-binary, Gender Nonconforming, X-Gender, Genderqueer – Terms referring to people whose gender identity falls outside of the gender binary of male and female and/or reject definitions and labels of gender identity.

Intersex – Refers to people who naturally have biological traits, such as hormonal levels or genitalia, that are a mix of male and female.

Two-Spirit – A modern umbrella term referring to Native Americans who have a mix of male and female spirits with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity. Some Native American communities consider Two-Spirit people to belong to an additional gender, not male nor female. Refraining from imposing modern Western-based concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity on Native American understandings of Two-Spirit people is very important.

Questioning – referring to people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTQ+ -- Abbreviation encompassing terms including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (see definition below), Questioning and additional related identities. There are many alternative abbreviations, including LGBT, LGBTIQ, and LGBTA.

Queer – Umbrella term referring to wide spectrum of experiences regarding sexual orientation, gender identities, or sexuality that are not in the majority. The term is often used similarly to LGBTQ+, but can also refer more broadly to encompass additional experiences of sexuality and/or rejection of any labels and constructions of sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. Historically, the term “queer” was a derogatory slur for gay people, and some people today consider it hurtful and offensive, sometimes depending on context. In recent years, the term queer has been reclaimed as a positive term by many LGBTQ+ people and communities to encompass the vast diversity of experience included in the abbreviation LGBTQ+ with a single word. Non-LGBTQ+ people should exercise care in using the word.

Ally – People who identify as both cisgender and straight, and believe in social and legal equality for LGBTQ+ people.

Coming Out -- The process in which a person first acknowledges, then accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity, and begins to share that with others.

Outing -- Exposing a person’s LGBTQ+ sexual orientation or gender identity to other people without the person’s permission. Outing someone can have very serious negative repercussions on the person.

Homophobia – Fear, hatred, dislike, or discomfort with people to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual.

Transphobia – Fear, hatred, dislike, disbelief, or discomfort with people who are transgender or gender nonconforming.

SOGI – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Race/Ethnicity Terminology:

Native American – Americans whose ancestry derives from indigenous people of the Americas before the arrival of Europeans, including “American Indians,” who inhabited the mainland of what is now the United States, and indigenous Alaskans and Hawaiians.

Latinx – Gender-inclusive term that applies to all people regardless of gender whose ancestry is from Latin America. Latinx people can be of any race or color. In the U.S., Latinx people are primarily a mix of Spanish and Native American ancestry. The term Hispanic, referring to people of Spanish culture or ancestry, is sometimes used interchangeably with Latinx although the terms are not identical because not all Latinx people have Spanish ancestry.

Latino – Refers to Latinx people who identify as male. Sometimes the word is used to refer to all people whose ancestry is from Latin America.

Latina – Refers to Latinx people who identify as female.

African American – Americans whose ancestry is of Black African descent. The term primarily refers to descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the U.S. by White Europeans, and to other Black people born in the U.S. Some Black immigrants to the U.S. may also refer to themselves as African American.

Asian American – Americans whose ancestry is of East, Southeast, and South Asian descent.

Asian Pacific Islander or API -- Americans whose ancestry is of East, Southeast, and South Asian descent or whose ancestry derives from indigenous people of Pacific Islands, such as Hawaii, Samoa, and Guam.