



Terminology - LGBTQ*

Terms, concepts and abbreviations are frequently encountered in day-to-day life, academia, and throughout the research process. Just like populations, individuals and their identities, there is a rich diversity in terminology. Here we try to answer some frequently asked questions by sharing how we have been dealing with some queries regarding terminology.

What is Gender Identity?

Gender Identity refers to how an individual person experiences their gender. This may or may not correspond with the sex/gender assigned to them at birth. People are assigned a sex at birth based on physical characteristics. Gender identity can change over time.

- **“Transgender”** is often used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **“Non-binary”** is often used to describe people who do not exclusively identify as a man or a woman.
- **“Cisgender”** is often used to describe people whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

What is Sexual Orientation?

Sexual Orientation is used to describe the romantic or sexual attraction of people as well as related feelings of identity. Often conceptualised as an overarching term with three components:

- **“Sexual Attraction”** usually refers to whether and how someone is sexually attracted to others and, if so, to which genders (or sex).
- **“Sexual Behaviour”** indicates whether and with whom people are romantically involved or have sex with.
- **“Sexual Identity”** refers to how people identify themselves. Common identities are lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual.

These concepts are closely connected and often “overlap” but the components can combine in a large variety of ways. The concepts are sometimes used interchangeably and without specification in research and data collection. Curious about how to distinguish or choose the

right measurement for your research? We recommend taking a look at [Salomaa & Matsick 2019](#).

Why do we keep adding letters? Or why do some use LGB, while others use LGBTQIA*?

Some people like to generally include more letters in their abbreviations to be inclusive of previously overlooked identities. Others argue that a longer abbreviation might imply that your research includes people who are not part of the analysis. For example, some might find it more appropriate to use the abbreviation LGB rather than LGBTQ*, when addressing only Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people in their research to not imply a focus on gender diversity. Some questions to ask yourself when choosing an abbreviation can be: *Who is my audience, what terms are they familiar with? What identities are included in my data? What identities are addressed in my reviewed literature?*

Are there any other umbrella terms? What about Queer? Trans? Or Sexual and Gender Minorities?

Umbrella terms can be tricky and using them in your research is generally a balancing act. Ask yourself: *How broad can I be? How precise do I need to be?*

- “**Queer**” may be considered as a specific identity, but can also be used to more generally talk about the “non-heterosexual” and/or “non-cisgender” population, essentially comprising people who identify beyond traditional gender categories and heteronormative social norms. Some prefer the term “genderqueer” when specifically talking about gender diversity. Others are more cautious with these terms as the reclamation of the concepts (originally derogatory) may not be universally recognised and could therefore be considered offensive in some contexts. You can find more information with [ILGA-Europe](#) or [APA](#).
- “**Trans**” or “**Transgender**” are gender identities and also often used interchangeably as umbrella terms for gender-diverse people. Some non-binary people identify as trans, while others do not (see [Bercovich Szulmajster 2025](#) or [Darwin 2020](#)), other terminologies can therefore also be used, like “Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming” (TGNC) or Trans*/Non-Binary. More information can also be found in the [tgeu](#) or [ILGA-Europe](#) glossaries.
- “**Sexual and/or Gender Minorities**” have been, and continue to be, commonly used by several scholars and organizations (e.g. [APA](#)). Some argue it is simply used to indicate a “statistical minority” while others consider the terms “minority” as re-marginalising. A suggested reading regarding this topic is “*The language of “sexual minorities” and the politics of identity: a position paper*” ([Petchesky, 2009](#); for [Sexuality Policy Watch](#)). One could also consider using gender/sexual diversity.



Many LGBTQ* related concepts are only framed with “homosexuality” or “heterosexuality”, like “homophobia” and “heteronormativity”, how do these relate to the larger variety of identities?

- **“Heteronormativity”** is commonly known and used, while some prefer to use the broader term **“cis-heteronormativity”**. One might argue that both concepts are rooted in the same overarching societal construct, but the latter draws explicit focus to gender norms. They are sometimes used interchangeably and some find a strict distinction unnecessary. While “heteronormativity” is often used in ways that implicitly include “cis-normativity” as well, the reverse is not always true.
- **“Homophobia”** has been used as a general term for stigma directed towards non-heterosexuals and sometimes towards gender-diverse people (the term “phobia” can be misleading as it suggests a *fear of* non-heterosexuals. See [Logan 1996](#)). Although some perceive homophobia as separate from concepts like **“biphobia”** and **“transphobia”** it is still frequently used as an overarching term. Biphobia/transphobia, or other specific terms, might be useful when referring to those identities in particular.
- **“Homophobia”** is often used in the context of **“Internalized homophobia”** and commonly discussed regarding *Minority Stress theory*. Although alternative definitions have been proposed for concepts such as biphobia there is no widely established term (see [Vonlanthen & Roy-Charland 2025](#)). Some scholars use the term **“internalised stigma”** as an overarching concept that can encompass the various forms of internalised prejudice.

When would I then use distinct and specific terms?

Ultimately there is no one-size-fits-all approach, but a good starting point could be to consider who the subjects of your research are, and what term best represents their experiences. Sometimes it can be important to use the specific term for the specific population as they may refer to unique forms of bias that each population faces. For example, using the terms “biprejudice” or “binegativity” (rather than “homonegativity”) to capture the “double erasure” for bisexual identities (see [McCole & Andersson 2025](#)).

With all the focus on identity, why do some researchers still use “sex” when investigating LGBTQ* topics?

Terminology like “Same-sex”, “Different Sex”, “Opposite Sex”, “Mixed Sex” are most commonly used when referring to couples, specifically their composition. These terms may therefore be considered as descriptions of partnership types rather than a reflection of the sexual identities of the people involved. For instance, labels like “lesbian couple” when



referring to two women in a relationship can be less accurate in these cases: what if one, or both, partners identify as bisexual? By focusing on the partnership composition, precision and respect to individual identities is maintained. Both “women/men in a same-sex/gender couple” and “female/male same-sex/gender couple” can be found in the literature to refer to couples composed of two women or two men (see [Boertien et al. 2024](#); [Caprinali & Vitali 2023](#)). Some opt for “mixed gender/sex” when partners have different sexes or genders as the use of “opposite sex” assumes a binary in gender (see [APA](#)). Otherwise surveys and datasets more often collect information on “sex” without specifying what this exactly refers to. To stick with the terminology the respondents were asked about “same-sex” couples is often used instead of “same-gender” couples, unless the question explicitly refers to gender.



Useful Literature

Below are some selected academic articles that address different terms. Interested in more literature? More can be found on the **syllabus** page!

Abbreviations and Umbrella Terms

Papers discussing the historical evolution of identity labels and evidence-based recommendations for using inclusive acronyms in academic settings.

- Cooper, K. M., ... Brownell, S. E. (2020). **Fourteen recommendations to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals in academic biology.** *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 19(3), ar37. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-04-0062>
- Petchesky, R. P. (2009). *The language of “sexual minorities” and the politics of identity: A position paper.* Sexuality Policy Watch.
- Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., & Fish, J. N. (2023). **Expanding notions of LGBTQ+.** *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49, 281–296. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-030320-032256>

Gender Diversity: Beyond the Binary

Explore the multidimensional nature of gender, specifically focusing on the intersection of non-binary and transgender identities.

- Bercovich Szulmajster, S. (2025). **Categorizing gender beyond the binary: Inequalities in education from a multidimensional gender perspective.** *Genus*, 81(29). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-025-00271-2>
- Darwin, H. (2020). **Challenging the cisgender/transgender binary: Nonbinary people and the transgender label.** *Gender & Society*, 34(3), 357–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220912256>

Measuring Sexual Orientation and Partnerships

About the measurement and distinction between sexual identity and partnership-based inferences in data. Also exploring the “other” category.

- Kühne, S., Kroh, M., & Richter, D. (2019). **Comparing Self-Reported and Partnership-Inferred Sexual Orientation in Household Surveys.** *Journal of Official Statistics*, 35(4), 777-805. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jos-2019-0033>
- Salomaa, A. C. & Matsick, J. L. (2019). **Carving sexuality at its joints: Defining sexual orientation in research and clinical practice.** *Psychological Assessment*, 31(2), 167–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000656>

Stigma and Identity Erasure

This section addresses the psychological impacts of minority stress and the specific systemic erasures faced by marginalized groups, with a particular focus on the bisexual experience.



- Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2023). **Minority stress theory: Application, critique, and continued relevance.** *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 51, 101579. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2023.101579>
 - McCole, A. R., & Anderson, J. R. (2025). **“Not queer enough”: A systematic review of the literature exploring experiences of bi-erasure.** *Journal of Bisexuality*, 25(3), 1–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2025.2498333>
 - Vonlanthen, C., & Roy-Charland, A. (2025). **Biphobia: A systematic literature review.** *Journal of Bisexuality*. (Advance online publication). <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000400>
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Online Resources (external)

ILGA-Europe (non-academic)

ILGA-Europe is an independent, international umbrella organisation representing 54 countries across Europe and Central Asia. As part of the global [ILGA](#) network, it offers a continually updated glossary of key terms.

<https://www.ilga-europe.org/about-us/who-we-are/glossary>

Stonewall (non-academic)

Stonewall is a UK-based human rights charity dedicated to advancing equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer+. It also provides a glossary of LGBTQ+ terms and inclusive definitions.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/list-lgbtq-terms>

Trans Right and Wellbeing in Europe and Central Asia (non-academic)

[tgeu](#) is a trans-led nonprofit organisation promoting the rights and wellbeing of trans people across Europe and Central Asia. It offers a community-informed, inclusive guide for journalists, editors & content creators, which includes a glossary.

<https://tgeu.org/trans-media-guide-for-journalists-and-editors/>

American Psychology Association (APA)

The American Psychology Association (APA) offers guidelines for using bias-free, inclusive language including specific recommendations related to [Gender](#) and [Sexual Orientation](#).

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>

