

# Glossary of Terms

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IS UNDENIABLE.



PINK TRIANGLE  
COMMITTEE  
**CUPEBC**



*Please note that not all terms listed within this glossary require these specific notations. As well, this collection of words is by no means comprehensive.*

*There are many more words out there that represent the vast diversity of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.*

*For many, it is a living and evolving language.*

*CUPE BC acknowledges that the province of British Columbia is located on the homelands of 203 distinct Indigenous nations and cultures; with more than 30 different languages and close to 60 unique dialects spoken in the province.*

*We ask all CUPE members to reflect, acknowledge and honour in their own way the First Nation land on which they live, work and play.*

# Introduction

The power of language is undeniable.

Regardless of whether it is signed, spoken, or written, language allows us to express ourselves and learn from others. Change is the only true constant in life, and this includes language. The changing nature of language helps us better understand our world, and improves our ability to communicate our perspectives with each other.

Within the 2SLGBTQ+ community people use particular words or labels to express who they are. These labels can help everyone understand each other's individuality, and how they wish to identify. Some of these terms are used universally by 2SLGBTQ+ people, while others relate specifically to gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexual orientation.

**Gender Expression (GE)** – The external manifestations of gender, expressed through such things as names, pronouns, clothing, haircuts, behaviour, voice, body characteristics, and more.

**Gender Identity (GI)** – One's internal, deeply held sense of gender. Some people identify completely with the gender they were assigned at birth (usually male or female), while others may identify with only a part of that gender, or not at all. Some people identify with another gender entirely. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

**Sex (S)** – At birth, infants are commonly assigned a sex. This is usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy and is often confused with gender. However, a person's sex is a combination of bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. As a result, there are many more sexes than just the binary male and female, just as there are many more genders than just male and female.

**Sexual Orientation (SO)** – The desire one has for emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationships with others based on their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sex. Many people choose to label their sexual orientation, while others do not.



## **2 Spirit/2-Spirit/Two Spirit/Two-Spirit: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

Two-spirit refers to another gender role present in over 130 First Nations across North America, one that had a proper, valued, and even sacred place within Indigenous societies as: hunters, fishers, gatherers, child-bearers, community protectors, name-givers, healers, medicine people, care givers, ceremonialists, fierce warriors, strategists, et cetera. This acceptance was rooted in the spiritual teaching that say all life is sacred, with many two-spirit individuals taking on roles assigned to both men and women.

Two-spirit was coined in Winnipeg in 1990 at the Third Annual Inter-Tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference by consensus. The intention was to address “the problem of naming” by making the many gender and sexual terms that fall under the two-spirit umbrella legible across Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Additionally, the term two-spirit was proposed to replace the anthropological term, berdache, coming from the Anishinaabe experience of colonialism in the 1600s. Jesuit Priests negatively recorded what they perceived to be crossdressing among the Anishinaabe and used the label, berdache, meaning “kept boy”, to describe two-spirit Indigenous people.

Two-spirit people may also use terms from their Indigenous language to describe same-sex attraction or gender variance. Many Indigenous languages are verb-focused and describe what people do rather than how they identify. Important to know is that being two-spirit is not necessarily synonymous with identifying as gender nonconforming, queer, trans\*, et cetera.

Not all Indigenous folks who are LGBTQIA+ identify as two-spirit. That is usually self-determined or is something that is determined by family or communities as it is also considered a spiritual or cultural role within the community. Please note that two-spirit is not a term for non-Indigenous LGBTQ+ people to use to express themselves.





### **2SLGBTQ+: (GE, GI, S, SO) Adjective**

The acronym for "Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans", and Queer/Questioning". The plus sign represents the fact that many communities choose to expand the acronym to include other identities. For example, only recently has "2S" been included and placed at the front of the acronym, and sometimes you see the inclusion of "IA" at the end for "Intersex and Asexual".

### **AFAB & AMAB: (S) Adjective**

Acronyms meaning "assigned female/male at birth", also "designated female/male at birth", or "female/male assigned at birth". No one, whether cis or trans\*, gets to choose what sex they're assigned at birth. (NOTE: This term is preferred to "biological male/female", "male/female bodied", "natural male/female", and "born male/female" which are inaccurate.)

### **Affirmed Gender: (GE, GI) Noun**

The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like "new gender" or "chosen gender", which imply that an individual's gender was not always their gender or that the gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

### **Ally: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

Someone who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, and 2SLGBTQ+ social movements; advocates on behalf of others; and challenges fear and discrimination in all its forms.

### **Asexual/Ace: (SO) Adjective**

An individual who indicates a lack of sexual attraction; the lack of interest in and desire for sex; and/or the lack of a sexual orientation. While typically lacking in sexual desire, asexual people may engage in emotional, intimate, and/or romantic relationships. Each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently and may still identify with a specific sexual orientation.

**Binary: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

The idea that gender has only two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms, as in the gender binary of only male and female genders. As a rejection of this idea, many people embrace the concept of a non-binary gender identity (see Gender Nonconforming).

**BIPOC: Acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour**

The acronym stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. It is meant to acknowledge the specific histories of Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islanders (API), and Indigenous people within North America without collapsing them into a homogenous category of people of colour. This same acronym may also be spelled IBPOC due to recent movements to place Indigenous Peoples first in acronym's order.

**Bisexual/Bi: (SO) Adjective**

Someone whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic and/or affectional attraction is to men and women as well as to those of a different gender (for example, a woman who is attracted to both women and men). Some people use the word bisexual as an umbrella term to describe individuals that are attracted to more than one gender. In this way, the term is closely related to pansexual, or omnisexual, meaning someone who is attracted to people of any gender identity.



### **Cisgender: (GI) Adjective**

From a Latin-derived prefix meaning “on the same side,” as opposed to trans\* — which means “across” or “on the opposite side of.” A person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

### **Coming Out: (GE, GI, S, SO) Term**

Coming out is a process of understanding, accepting, and valuing one's sexual or gender identity. Coming out includes both exploring and sharing one's identity, and it is a very personal process that happens in various ways and occurs at different ages for different people. Coming out is a continuous, sometimes lifelong process. Coming out is not mandatory and should not be imposed on people. Some people openly identify as 2SLGBTQ+ in their private, public, and/or professional lives and may also identify as “out”. Some people who are trans\* prefer to use the term “disclose”.

### **Cross Dresser/Cross-Dresser/Crossdresser: (GE) Noun**

A person who enjoys dressing in clothes typically associated with the other of the two socially sanctioned genders.

### **Drag: (GE, GI) Noun**

Originally used in Shakespeare's Globe Theater, when only men were deemed culturally acceptable to act and thus would have to be “dressed as a girl, DRAG,”. Now used to describe the action of dressing in clothes associated with a gender other than one's own, i.e. Drag Kings and Queens, usually playfully or for performance.





### **Gay: (SO) Adjective, Noun**

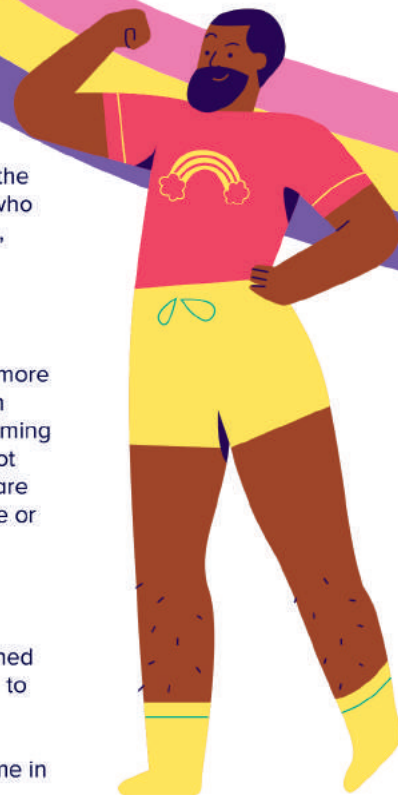
Someone whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic and/or affectional attractions are to people of the same gender. This is often used as an umbrella term but is used more specifically to describe men who are attracted to men. Avoid using the term “homosexual”. Because of the clinical history of the word, many feel that the term suggests that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered.

### **Gender Affirmation Surgery: (GE) Noun**

Medical procedures that some individuals elect to undergo to change their physical appearance to more closely resemble how they view their gender identity. This may also be called genital reconstruction surgery, or medical transition. Avoid saying inaccurate phrases such as “gender confirmation/conforming surgery” as genitalia do not confirm gender, or “gender reassignment surgery” because gender is not changed due to surgery. “Pre- or post-operative,” “sex change/reassignment/realignment surgery,” are also inaccurate. It is also advisable to avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing trans\* people or the process of transition.

### **Gender Dysphoria: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

A terms from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) that describes the distress that arises from an incongruence between an individual's gender identity and the sex assigned at birth. Gender nonconformity is not the same thing as gender dysphoria and does not always lead to dysphoria or distress. The distress can manifest in many ways, including varying levels of body dysphoria, and general discomfort living as the assigned sex and/or gender. The response to these feelings is unique for each person. Some people may privately cross-dress, others live part or full-time in another gender, and some people pursue sexual reassignment surgery or other physical changes. People with gender dysphoria commonly identify as transgender.





## **Gender Nonconforming: (GE, GI) Adjective**

Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to the cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to the male and female gender binary.

This can be an umbrella term for many identities including, but certainly not limited to:

**Agender/Neutrois/Gender Neutral/Genderless** – someone who has little or no personal connection with gender.

**Bigender** – someone who identifies with both male and female genders, or even a third gender.

**Genderfluid** – someone whose gender identity and/or expression varies over time.

**Genderqueer/Third Gender** – someone whose gender identity and/or expression falls between or outside of male and female.

**Intergender** – someone whose identity is between genders and/or a combination of gender identities and expressions.

**Nonbinary** – someone who identifies as neither man nor woman or a combination of both. Can be used to describe the aesthetic/presentation/expression of a cisgender or transgender person.

**Pangender** – someone whose identity is comprised of all or many gender identities and expressions.



**Intersectionality: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

The idea that people who find themselves at the crossroads of multiple identities (for example, in terms of race, gender, or sexuality) experience discrimination in a way uniquely different from those who with whom they may only share one or some identities in common. For example, Black women will experience racism differently than Black men and sexism differently than white women, and the way they experience racism and sexism is informed by their unique intersectional identities.

**Intersex: (S) Adjective**

Someone who, due to a variety of factors, has reproductive or sexual anatomy that differs from cultural ideals of male and female, in terms of external genitalia, internal genitalia, and/or hormone production levels. Intersex individuals are typically assigned as “male” or “female” at birth, and often undergo surgery on their genitals in infancy to force a more culturally acceptable gendered appearance. The intersex movement has challenged the ethics of infant genital surgeries that are not medically necessary, pointing out that many intersex people who undergo such surgery in infancy later report feeling a sense of loss of an essential aspect of themselves. About two to four percent of all births are intersex to some degree. This is sometimes not evident until puberty.

**Lesbian: (SO) Adjective, Noun**

Women whose enduring physical, sexual, romantic and/or affectional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians prefer to identify as gay women.

**MTF & FTM: (GE, GI) Noun**

Terms used to indicate the direction of a trans\* person's transition and/or identification, as in “Male-to-Female” or “Male-toward-Female” trans\* person, or “Female-to-Male” or “Female-toward-Male” trans\* person.



**Oppression: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

"We use [this term] rather than discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry to emphasize the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. The term oppression encapsulates the fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that shade most aspects of life in our society... Woven together through time and reinforced in the present, these patterns provide an example of the pervasiveness of oppression" (Bell, 2010, RDSJ2).

**Pansexual/Pan: (SO) Adjective**

A sexual orientation, characterized by enduring physical, sexual, romantic and/or affectional attraction towards people without regard for their gender identity or biological sex. Pansexuality encompasses all kinds of sexuality, not limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice. Pansexual is being used more as people acknowledge that gender is not a binary. It is the attraction and self-identification that determines the orientation.





**Polyamory: (SO) Noun**

The practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved.

**Pink Triangle: Noun**

This image dates back to Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, where it began as one of the Nazi concentration camp badges, distinguishing those imprisoned because they had been identified by authorities as gay men. In the 1970s, it was revived as a symbol protesting homophobia and has since been adopted by the larger 2SLGBTQ+ community as a popular symbol of the 2SLGBTQ+ rights movement.

**Pride: (GE, GI, S, SO) Noun**

The celebration of 2SLGBTQ+ identities and of the global 2SLGBTQ+ community's resistance against oppression and violence. Pride events are celebrated in many countries around the world, usually during the month of June to commemorate the Stonewall Riots that began in New York City in June 1969, a pivotal moment in the modern 2SLGBTQ+ movement.

**Privilege: Noun**

A "system of advantage" that gives people from more powerful social groups access to resources and opportunities that are denied to others (and usually gained at their expense) simply because of the groups they belong to.

**Queer: (GE, GI, S, SO) Adjective**

An inclusive umbrella identity for anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. A reclaimed derogatory slur taken as a political term to unite people who are marginalized because of their non-conformity to dominant gender identities and/or heterosexuality. The term is valued by many 2SLGBTQ+ people for its defiance and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer, i.e. "My cousin is queer".



**Questioning: (GI, GE, SO) Noun, verb**

A time in many people's lives when they question or experiment with their gender expression, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. This experience is unique to everyone; for some, it can last a lifetime or be repeated many times over the course of a lifetime.

**Trans\*: (GE, GI) Adjective**

This abbreviation began to be more inclusive/concise in reference to the myriad number of identities that could be referenced by using the term. The asterisk is used to imply that trans\* encompasses transgender, transsexual, and other transitional identities and began as a blog or web movement that continues to grow into other parts of non-virtual life. You may find individuals use the following terms: trans\* man, transgender man, transsexual man, trans\* woman, transgender woman, or transsexual woman.

**Transgender: (GI) Adjective**

Someone whose gender identity differs from the one that was assigned to them at birth. Many transgender people identify as either male or female, while others may see transgender as an umbrella term and identify as gender nonconforming or queer. How transgender people choose to express their gender is individualistic, as is their transition. Using transgender as a noun, as in "a transgender," or with an extraneous -ed on the end, as in "transgendered".



**Transition: (GE) Noun**

The process – social, legal, and/or medical – one goes through to change and affirm gender expression to more closely resemble gender identity. This can include using a different name and pronouns, dressing differently, changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents, hormone therapy, or gender affirmation surgery. Some trans\* people may choose not to make these changes or may only make a few. The self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

**Transsexual: (GI) Adjective**

Someone who has undergone, or wishes to undergo, gender affirmation surgery. This is an older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities, and many transgender people do not identify as transsexual for that reason. Accordingly, this is a term of self-identification, and should not be imposed on people.

**Ze/Hir: (GE/GI) Pronoun**

"Ze" and "Hir" are like he, she, him, her, his and hers. English-speakers have been experimenting with newly coined non-gendered pronouns for about 200 years. Such pronouns have been used in trans\* communities for at least 15 years. There are several sets in use, of which ze/hir seems to be the most popular.





## Sources:

\*This list was compiled from the sources listed here to deliver a comprehensive reference. Terms were combined to provide more expansive definitions which included additional context and explanation.

- Tribal Institute, 2009. Walking in Two Worlds: Understanding the Two-Spirit & LGBTQ Community. Available at <http://www.tribal-institute.org/2014/INCTwo-SpiritBooklet.pdf>
- Rainbow Resource Centre, 2014. Two Spirit People of the First Nations. Available at [www.rainbowresourcecentre.org/files/16-08-Two-Spirit.pdf](http://www.rainbowresourcecentre.org/files/16-08-Two-Spirit.pdf)
- Them, 2018. What Does “Two-Spirit” Mean? Video available at <https://youtu.be/A4lBibGzUnE>
- It Gets Better Project, 2022. LGBTQ+ Glossary. Available at [www.itgetsbetter.org/glossary/](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/glossary/)
- Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program, 2022. Gender Inclusive and Non-Sexist Language Guidelines and Resources. University of Pittsburgh, available at <https://wstudies.pitt.edu/resources/faculty-resources/gender-inclusive-non-sexist-language-guidelines-and-resources>
- Trans Student Educational Resources, 2022. Definitions. Available at <https://transstudent.org/definitions/>
- PFLAG, 2022. National Glossary of Terms. Available at <https://pflag.org/glossary>





PINK TRIANGLE  
COMMITTEE  
**CUPEBC**