



The 519's Equity Glossary of Terms

The 519 celebrates diversity, values principles of inclusion, and works within an anti-oppression social justice framework. As part of this work, we have compiled an introduction to language we currently use to affirm the identities and experiences of diverse LGBTQ people and to provide a basic understanding of language describing many forms of power, privilege and discrimination.

Being an ally involves listening for and using language that individuals and groups indicate are respectful. Some of these words are intended to raise awareness about how groups of people are valued and/or managed by society, and to unlearn our own assumptions and biases. This language is also about finding ways to describe and imagine freedom and equity for ourselves and others.

It is important to acknowledge the cultural lenses that shape this particular definitions list: an English-speaking, urban, Canadian community centre serving diverse populations. Language constantly evolves within LGBTQ communities, both locally and abroad, so please use this glossary as a guide. Individuals may use different words to describe themselves or use the terms in a slightly different way than they are described here. Differences may be seen across generations or regions.¹

Over-arching Anti-Oppression and Equity Terms

Accommodation: An adjustment made to policies, programs and practices to enable individuals to benefit from and participate in the provision of services equally and perform to the best of their ability. Accommodations are provided so that individuals are not disadvantaged on the basis of the prohibited grounds of discrimination identified in the Ontario Human Rights Code or other similar codes.

Ally: A person with particular privileges who is guided by oppressed communities and learns how best to fight oppressions, like able-ism, ageism, audism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, etc.

Anti-oppressive Practice: This work practice is based on empowerment and the belief that clients have the right to make their own choices. It actively challenges and confronts oppressions.

Barrier: A belief, policy, practice, object or environment that prevents or limits people's access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages available to other members of society.

Bias: An opinion formed without reasonable justification that limits a person's ability to make fair judgements.

Bullying: Causing fear, distress or harm to another person.

Colonization: The process of focusing on and devaluing people's differences in order to dominate and control them.

Culture: The shared patterns of learned behaviours, interactions and emotional understanding. It includes knowledge, values, belief, art, law, history, and customs.

Cultural Competence: A person's ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four components: (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview; (b) Attitude towards cultural differences; (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and (d) cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to better understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.²

Discrimination: Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups. Discrimination prevents or limits access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society. Discrimination may be evident at a systemic level or an individual level.

Dominant Group: A group that is considered the most powerful and privileged in a particular society and that has power and influence over others.

Duty to Accommodate: The legal obligation that employers, organizations, service providers and public institutions have under the Ontario Human Rights Code to take steps so that everyone can benefit from and take part in services equally.

Equity: The practice of ensuring that everyone has access to services, supports and opportunities and that they can achieve economic, political and social equality. Equity involves honouring and accommodating an individual's or groups' needs.

Harassment: A form of intimidation that may include unwelcome attention, jokes, threats, remarks, name-calling, touching, or other behaviour that is meant to insult or demean a person because of their identity when these comments are known – or reasonably known to be – offensive, inappropriate, intimidating and hostile.

Hate Crime: Criminal activity motivated by hate towards a specific group.

Human Rights: Rights that recognize the dignity and worth of every person and provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination.

Inclusion: An approach that aims to reach out to and include all people, honouring the diversity and uniqueness, talents, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities and ways of living of individuals and groups.

Internalized Oppression: When members of a marginalized group come to believe and accept they are inferior to a dominant group.

Intersectionality: When two or more oppressions overlap and create complex forms of discrimination.

“ _____”**ism:** A harmful belief that a certain group of people are superior to another group of people. Examples include: ageism, anti-semitism, audism, cis-sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, monosexism, racism, sexism, shadism, sizism...

Marginalization: Excluding whole groups of people from meaningful participation and confining them to the outer edges of society.

Oppression: The obvious and subtle ways dominant groups unjustly maintain status, privilege and power over others.

“ _____”**phobia:** A learned dislike, fear and/or hatred of a particular group of people. It is expressed through beliefs and tactics that devalue, demean and terrorize people. Examples include: biphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, xenophobia...

Power: One’s ability to influence or control people, events, processes or resources. We each have different levels of power in different situations depending on our personal combination of privileges and oppressions.

Prejudice: A negative opinion formed about a person without looking at all the facts.

Privilege: Unfair advantages given to some people, but not others, based on their identity or position in society. People are not always aware of the privileges they have until they learn that someone else does not have that same privilege. Examples include: cissexual privilege, heterosexual privilege, male privilege, white privilege

Social Determinants of Health: Things that are needed for people to avoid illness and to be physically, mentally and socially healthy (e.g. income, employment, housing, access to services).

Social Exclusion: One of the social determinants of health - it refers to the ways in which certain groups of people in society are pushed to the margins and not included (e.g. not hiring people with disabilities for jobs because they have disabilities).

Social Justice: A concept based on a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable. Social justice involves individuals who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward society as a whole.

Stereotype: An assumption or judgement made about a whole group of people based on the actions of a few individuals.

Stigma: Severe social disapproval with a person on the grounds of their particular circumstance, usually based on a person differing from social or cultural norms.

Tokenism: The practice of making only a symbolic effort towards limited involvement of underrepresented groups in order to give the false appearance of inclusivity.

Terms Related to Ability

Differently-abled: An umbrella term used to describe people with different physical, mental, emotional and cognitive abilities.

Disability: An actual or perceived limit that keeps people from participating fully in society. This term covers a range of conditions, some visible and others not. There can be physical, mental, learning, and visual disabilities.

Terms Related to “Race” and Culture

Aboriginal Peoples: An umbrella term for the original inhabitants of North America and their descendents. In Canada these include the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Anti-Racism: Beliefs, actions, policies and movements developed to challenge racism in all its forms.

Deaf: When a person has little or no hearing and relies on forms of visual communication like Sign language and lip-reading. The Deaf community does not view deafness as a disability.

Ethnicity: Membership in a group that may share a nationality, heritage, language, culture and/or religion.

Race: The unfair way some people group human beings based on culture, language, skin colour, and other physical characteristics. Modern biologists do not recognize “race” as a meaningful scientific category.

Two-spirit: A term based on interpretation of words used in different Aboriginal cultures to refer to a person having both a male and female spirit. It can include Anglo/North American ideas of both sexual orientation and gender identity (i.e., both a gay cisgender man and a trans-man could claim the identity of two-spirit man). It also includes significant spiritual and cultural layers.

Terms Related to Sexual Orientation, Sexuality and Queer Cultures

Asexual: A person who has no sexual attractions to others.

Bisexual: A person who may have romantic or sexual attractions to people of any gender or sex.

Gay: A person who has romantic and/or sexual attractions primarily to people of the same gender or sex.

Heterosexual: A person who has romantic or sexual attractions to people of another sex or gender.

Lesbian: A female identified person who has romantic or sexual attractions primarily to people of the same gender or sex.

MSM: A man who has sex with men.

Out: When a person lives openly as gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans.

Polyamory: The practice, state or ability of having more than one sexual loving relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.³

Pansexual: A person who has romantic or sexual attractions to people of any gender or sex.

Poz: An abbreviation referring to an HIV positive person.

Queer: An umbrella term used proudly by some people to defy gender or sexual restrictions. This is also one way some people identify themselves as members of the lesbian, gay, bi, and/or trans communities or cultures. The term is not reclaimed by everyone and may be hurtful for some.

Questioning: A person who isn't certain if s/he is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans and is still trying to figure out how to identify themselves.

Sex-positive: an attitude that embraces human sexuality

Sexual Orientation: The emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to another person(s). It can be fluid over time. The identity a person uses to describe their sexual orientation, ie, straight, may not reflect their sexual behaviours. (Sexual orientation is not to be confused with a person's gender identity.)

WSW: A woman who has sex with women.

Terms Related to Gender

Cisgender/Cissexual: A person who is not trans: whose gender identity, behaviours and appearance are in harmony with what their culture expects from a person with their external sex characteristics.

Crossdresser: Someone who occasionally dresses in the clothing of the "opposite" gender as part of their gender expression.

Drag King/Drag Queen: Someone who dresses up as the "opposite" gender for performance or fun.

Gender/Gender Identity: This is how we perceive our identity as male, female, both, or neither, regardless of our physical bodies. It is separate from "biological sex".

Gender Binary: This is the classification of sex and gender into two distinct and disconnected states of masculine and feminine. It describes a social boundary that discourages people from crossing or mixing gender roles.

Gender Expression: The demonstration of one's gender identity, often shown through clothing, behaviours, interests and/or chosen names.

Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming: An umbrella term used proudly by some people to defy gender restrictions and/or to deconstruct gender norms.

Gender Role: The oppressive culturally-specific expectations and restrictions that are placed on a person based on whether they are perceived as male or female.

Misogyny: The hatred of women and “feminine” characteristics.

Intersex: An umbrella term used to describe a person whose biological sex characteristics don’t fit traditional definitions of male or female.

Passing: This is the privilege given to a person who is believed to be a member of a dominant group (i.e., non-trans, cisgender, white, non-disabled). When a trans woman is passing, (i.e., believed to be a cisgender woman) she has an easier time accessing women’s services.

Sex (biological sex): A label we are given at birth to describe our physical bodies and reproductive capacity. Characteristics of the body used to determine biological sex may include genitals, gonads, hormones, chromosomes, and secondary sex characteristics.

Stealth: When a trans person is not “out” about being trans in their social circles (friends, employers, colleagues).

Trans: An umbrella term for a person whose gender identity does not match society’s expectations of someone with their physical sex characteristics.

Trans Man (FTM): A female-to-male trans person.

Trans Woman (MTF): A male-to-female trans person.

Transition: The process trans people go through to overcome physical, legal and social barriers so they can express their self-identified gender.

¹ Adapted from “Key Terms for Self-Advocacy, Understanding Our Connections with Others, and Being Allies. An Anti-Oppression Primer for Queer Parenting Programs at The 519 Church Street Community Centre. Toronto. Fall 2009.

Also adapted from “Promoting Equity and Inclusive Education in Schools: A Teacher’s Guide” by COPA. March 2010.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_competence#cite_ref-0 Wikipedia “Cultural Competence”. Retrieved August 29th 2011.

³ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=polyamory> The Urban Dictionary entry for “Polyamory”. Retrieved August 29 2011.