

LGBTQIA Terms and Pronouns

Terms

Terminology is important. The words we use, and how we use them, can be very powerful. Knowing and understanding the meaning of the words we use improves communication and helps prevent misunderstandings. The following terms are not absolutely defined. Rather, they provide a starting point for conversations. As always, listening is the key to understanding.

This is a *partial* list of terms you may encounter. New language and terms emerge as our understanding of these topics changes and evolves.

Agender (also Non-gendered): Not identifying with any gender; the feeling of having no gender.

All-Gender: Descriptive phrase denoting inclusiveness of all gender expressions and identities.

All-Gender Pronouns: Any of the multiple sets of pronouns which create gendered space beyond the he-him-his/she-her-hers binary. Sometimes referred to as *gender-neutral* pronouns, or *third gender* pronouns, which many prefer as they do not consider themselves to have neutral genders. Examples: ze, hir, and hirs; ey, em, eirs; ze, zir, zirs; or singular they. See the Pronouns section below for more information and examples.

Androgyny: Displaying physical and social characteristics identified in this culture as both female and male to the degree that the person's outward appearance and mannerisms make it difficult to determine their biological sex.

Assigned Sex (at Birth): Also referred to as Designated Sex (at birth). The sex designation/label one is given at birth, generally by a medical or birthing professional, based on a cursory examination of external and/or physical sex characteristics such as genitalia and cultural concepts of male- and female-sexed bodies. Sex designation is used to label one's gender identity prior to self-identification.

Bigender: 1) To identify as both genders and/or to have a tendency to move between masculine and feminine gender-typed behavior depending on context; 2) Expressing a distinctly male persona and a distinctly female persona; 3) Two separate genders in one body

Cisgender: 1) Someone who identifies as the gender associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, your birth certificate says “female” and you identify as a woman. 2) A non-trans+ person

Cisgender Privilege: A set of unearned advantages that cisgender individuals possess solely due to being cisgender. For example, using public restrooms without fear of verbal or physical abuse or arrest; being able to find housing and/or employment without fear that one’s gender identity will be used as reason for denial of these opportunities; interacting with law enforcement without fear of unjust arrest on basis of gender identity/presumption that one is a sex worker, and should arrest occur, not fearing that one will be placed in solitary confinement under the guise of “safety,” or that one would be subjected to potential verbal or physical assault by detainees.

Cissexism: The assumption that all men and women are and were born male and female, or that transpeople are inferior

Closeted/In the Closet: The confining state of being secretive about one’s true sexual identity and/or sexual orientation. A person may feel compelled to be closeted in order to keep a job, housing situation, family/friends, or for their safety. Many LGBTQ individuals are “out” in some situations and “closeted” in others.

Come Out: Also “coming out of the closet” or “being out.” Refers to the process through which a person acknowledges, accepts, appreciates, and shares their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer identity/ies. Sharing this information with others is not a single event but instead a lifelong process.

Crossdressing: Wearing clothing not usually associated with one’s assigned birth sex. People may cross dress for a variety of reasons, including personal expression, sexual gratification, entertainment, or expressing one’s gender identity.

Discrimination: Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

Drag: (also Drag King, Drag Queen, Female/Male Impersonator) – wearing the clothing of another gender, often for entertainment purposes such as performances or social gatherings, and often with exaggerated cultural/stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as Drag Kings (female in drag) or Drag Queens (male in drag). Drag holds a significant place in LGBTQ history and community.

Family of Choice: Persons forming an individual's social, emotional, and practical support network and often fulfilling the functions of blood relations. Many LGBTQ people are rejected when their families learn of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or they may remain "closeted" to their biological relatives. In such cases, it is their partner/significant other and close friends who will be called on in time of illness or personal crisis. Asking if someone is "in the family" or just "family" is a way of referencing or inquiring about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Family of Origin: the biological family, or the family in which one was raised. These individuals may or may not be part of an LGBTQ person's support system.

Female-Bodied: 1) A term used to recognize a person who was designated or assigned female sex at birth; 2) A person who identifies themselves as having had or currently having a female body.

Fluid: A gender identity where a person 1) identifies as neither or both female and male; 2) Experiences a range of femaleness/woman-ness and maleness/man-ness, with a denoted movement or flow between genders; 3) Consistently experiences their gender identity outside of the gender binary. See also: Genderqueer

FTM/F2M: Female to Male. A term that refers to a person who identifies as a man and was assigned female at birth.

Gatekeepers (Gatekeeper System): 1) Term used by gender communities to refer to the medical and psychiatric system that controls trans+ people's access to transition-related resources and health care; 2) Refers to health providers (doctors, counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and related providers) who can effectively block or limit trans+ people's ability to obtain transition resources such as hormones, surgery, or related services needed to physical gender affirming transition.

Gender: A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. A social combination of identity, expression, and social elements related to masculinity and femininity. Includes gender identity (self-identification), gender expression (self-expression), social gender (social expectations), gender roles (socialized actions), and gender attribution (Social Perception). See Gender Identity and Gender Expression for more on gender.

Genderqueer: 1) An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is outside of, not included within, or beyond the binary of female and male/woman and man; 2) Gender non-conformity through expression, behavior, social roles, and/or identity. See also: Fluid, Non-binary

Gender Affirming Surgery: Surgical procedures that alter or change physical sex characteristics in order to better express a person's inner gender identity. May include removal of the breasts, augmentation of the chest, commonly known as "top surgery"; or alteration or reconstruction of genitals, commonly known as "bottom surgery." Also called Gender Confirming Surgery or Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). Preferred term to "sex change surgery."

Gender Bending: Deliberate blurring of expected binary gender characteristics.

Gender Binary: Recognizes only two genders and regulates behavior within narrowly defined masculine or feminine expectations. The idea that all males should identify as men and be masculine, and all females should identify as women and be feminine.

Gender Cues: Socially agreed upon traits used to identify the gender or sex of another person, i.e. hairstyle, clothing, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

Gender Dysphoria: A term coined by psychologists and medical doctors that refers to the state of discomfort felt by transsexual and some transgender people caused by the incongruity between one's physical, assigned sex and one's gender identity.

Gender Expression: The external presentation or appearance of a person's gender (e.g. dress, mannerisms, hair style, speech/voice, etc.) One's gender expression may differ from one's gender identity, and gender expression may change over time and from day to day.

GenderFuck: The idea of playing with gender cues to purposely confuse, mix, or combine a culture's standard or stereotypical gender expressions. See also: Gender Bending

Gender Identity: How an individual views themselves in terms of characteristics traditionally identified in this culture as masculine or feminine. Terms that describe gender identity include "man" and "woman," among others.

Gender Identity and Expression: The most common phrase used in law and policy addressing gender-based needs, often in reference to violence and/or discrimination; encompasses both the inner sense (gender identity) and outer appearance (gender expression).

Gender Non-conforming: 1) Gender expression or identity that is outside or beyond a specific culture or society's gender expectations; 2) A term used to refer to individuals or communities who may not identify as transgender, but who do not conform to traditional gender norms. May be used in tandem with other identities. See also Gender Variant.

Gender Neutral: Used to denote a unisex or all-gender inclusive space, language, etc. E.g. A gender neutral bathroom is a bathroom open to people of any gender identity and expression.

Gender Neutral/Gender-free Pronouns: Pronouns which do not associate a gender with the person or creature being discussed. The English language has no truly gender neutral third person pronoun available, and women especially have criticized this, as many writers use “he” when referring to a generic individual in the third person. In addition, the dichotomy of “he and she” in English does not leave room for other gender identities, a source of frustration to the transgender and genderqueer communities. People who are limited by languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality. Some examples are “hir” for “him/her” and “zie” for “he/she,” or “they” and “them” used as singular personal pronouns. See also: All Gender Pronouns, and the Pronouns section below.

Gender Roles: The socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on women (femininity) and men (masculinity).

Gender Variant: 1) People whose gender identity and/or expressions are different from the societal norms; 2) Broad term used to describe or denote people who are outside of beyond culturally expected or required identities or expressions.

Heteronormativity: Lifestyle norm that insists that people fall into distinct genders (male and female), and naturalizes heterosexual coupling as the norm.

Hormone Therapy (also Hormone Replacement Therapy, HRT, Hormonal Sex Reassignment): Administration of hormones to affect the development of secondary sex characteristics. HRT is a process, possibly lifelong, of using hormones to change the internal body chemistry. Androgens (testosterone) are used for transmen, and Estrogens are used for transwomen.

Intergender: A person whose gender identity is between genders or a combination of genders.

Internalized homophobia/biphobia/transphobia: Experience of shame, aversion, or self-hatred in reaction to one’s own gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This type of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia can be experienced by anyone regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. One form of internalized oppression is the acceptance of the myths and stereotypes applied to the oppressed group. It can result in depression, alienation, anxiety, and in extreme cases, suicide.

Intersex: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male; see www.isna.org for more information on this topic.

LGBTQPIA: A socio-political acronym for the community comprised of Lesbian, Gay men, Bisexuals, Transgender, Queer, Pansexual, Intersex, Asexual, and Ally individuals. The "Q" can also refer to individuals who may affiliate with the communities and are "questioning" some aspect of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Often seen as LGBT or LGBTQ.

Male-Bodied: 1) A term used to recognize a person who was designated or assigned male sex at birth; 2) A person who identifies themselves as having had or currently having a male body.

MTF/M2F (Male to Female): Used to identify a person who identifies as a woman and was assigned male birth.

Multigender: See Polygender

Non-binary: 1) Describes a gender identity that is neither female or male; 2) Gender identities that are outside of or beyond two traditional concepts of male or female. See also: Genderqueer, Fluid, Polygender.

Non-gendered: See Agender

Outing: Publicly revealing the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of an individual who has chosen to keep that information private.

Pangender: A person whose gender identity is comprised of gender identities and/or expressions.

Passing: Being taken for a member of the majority—white, straight, cisgender, or temporarily able-bodied, for example. Passing is often a safety measure for many individuals who may face physical, emotional, verbal, or other forms of harassment/abuse if there were identified as LGBTQ. It is important to remember that passing may or may not be intentional or the goal for many individuals. Also, the ability to pass can also be frustrating and isolating for some individuals who are not able to be easily identified as belonging to LGBTQ communities.

Polygender: Identifying as more than one gender or a combination of genders.

Queer: A term with varied meaning. In the mid-late 1900s this was a derogatory slang term for the LGBTQ communities and currently is still used by some in this manner. In

the early 1990s many individuals and organizations began to reclaim this term. Some people use it as an all-inclusive or umbrella term to refer to all people who identify as LGBTQ. This usage is not accepted by the entire community. Often used by people who wish to challenge norms of sexuality and/or gender expression as well as to defy identities and labeling of persons.

Sex: The biological (anatomical, hormonal, genetic) traits used to categorize someone as either male or female.

Sexual Identity: Refers to the aspect of identity related one's sexuality (sexual desires and practices), gender identity, biological sex, and/or the intersection thereof.

Sex Reassignment Surgery: See Gender Affirming Surgery

Single Gender: Descriptive of a person whose gender consists of one identity, usually either male/man or female/woman.

Social Gender: The construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture, denoted by norms and expectations on behavior and appearance. See also: Gender.

Stealth: 1) Describes the process of a trans* person interacting with others without disclosing their trans* identity or status; 2) Purposefully not disclosing trans* identity or status in order to aid in identity empowerment, promote privacy, or to increase personal safety.

Stonewall: A reference to The Stonewall Inn, a gay/drag bar in New York City, and the nights of violent protests following a police raid committed on June 28, 1969 for no other reason than it was a drag bar. Although not the nation's first gay rights demonstration, Stonewall is regarded as the birth of the modern gay rights movement and the role of transpeople, especially transpeople of color, has been widely disregarded.

Third-Gender: 1) A gender identity where a person is neither male/man nor female/woman, not androgynous; 2) Term used in cultures where it is recognized that there is another gender in addition to male/man and female/woman; 3) Term used to denote people who are not considered men or women for the purpose of social categorization or documentation; generally used for transgender and/or intersex people.

Third Gender Pronoun: See All Gender Pronouns

Transandrogyny: A gender expression that does not have a prominent masculine or feminine component

Transfeminine: 1) A spectrum of identities where female identity or femininity is prominent; 2) Descriptive of trans*female and/or MTF individuals; 3) A gender-variant gender expression that has a prominent feminine component.

Transgender: A term for people who challenge society's view of gender as fixed, unmoving, dichotomous, and inextricably linked to one's biological sex, and instead demonstrate that gender is more accurately viewed as a spectrum, rather than a polarized. Dichotomous construct. This is a broad term that encompasses genderqueer individuals, gender benders, cross-dressers, transsexuals (to name a few), and those who defy what society tells them is appropriate for their sex or gender. The sexual orientation of transpeople varies just as it varies across society.

Trans*/Trans+: An umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum. Trans (without the asterisk or plus sign) generally refers to transmen and transwomen, while the asterisk or plus sign indicates that it includes all non-cisgender gender identities, including: transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderfuck, agender, non-gendered, third gender, two-spirit, bigender, transman, and transwoman, amongst others.

Trans* Pathologization: The proves in which multiple institutions (medical, psychiatric, governmental) deem gender variance and trans* identities to be caused by mental illness and/or delusion, and that trans* populations are in need to continued professional intervention and guardianship in order to live happy, healthy lives.

Transitioning: The process of a transgender individual publicly changing their gender presentation in society. Transitioning often includes changes in name, clothing, and appearance and may include anatomical changes. Transitioning is sometimes conflated with sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) but SRS is only one step that someone who is transitioning may or may not choose to take. Whereas SRS is a surgical procedure, transitioning is more holistic and can encompass physical, psychological, social, and emotional changes. Some genderqueer and intersex people have little or no desire to undergo surgery to change their body but will transition in other ways.

Transman: A term used by masculine-identified members of the trans community who wish to identify as men while retaining a trans identity.

Transmasculine: 1) A spectrum of identities where male identity or masculinity is prominent; 2) Descriptive term representative of transmen or FTM individuals; 3) A gender-variant gender expression that has a prominent masculine component.

Transphobia: Hatred and/or discrimination against people who challenge society's view of gender as fixed, unchanging, dichotomous and inextricably linked to one's biological sex. Is prevalent in both straight and gay/lesbian communities.

Transsexual: Individuals whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity and who, through sex reassignment surgery and/or hormone treatments, seek to change their physical body to match their gender identity. The sexual orientation of transsexual individuals varies just as it varies across society.

Transwoman: A term used by feminine-identified members of the trans community who wish to identify as women while retaining a trans identity.

Two-Spirit(ed)/Twin Spirit: Native American concept present in some indigenous cultures across North America and parts of Central and South America. It is a term of reverence, traditionally referring to people who display both masculine and feminine sex or gender characteristics. English term that emerged in 1990 out of the third annual inter-tribal Native American/First Nations Gay/Lesbian American Conference in Winnipeg, describing Indigenous North Americans who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among many Native American and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups. The mixed gender roles encompassed by the term historically included wearing the clothing and performing the work associated with both men and women. The term two-spirit is sometimes considered specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe such as Wintke (Lakota), Hee-man-eh (Cheyenne), and Nedleeh (Navajo). Can also refer to Native American who are queer or transgender.

Pronouns

The dichotomy of "he and she" pronouns in English does not leave room for other gender identities, a source of frustration to the transgender and genderqueer communities. The English language has no truly gender neutral third person pronoun available, and women especially have criticized this, as many writers use "he" when referring to a generic individual in the third person.

It is important to use the correct pronouns a person prefers, out of respect, consideration, and support. If someone hasn't made it clear which pronouns they prefer, it is always OK to ask! Typically the most respectful way to ask this question is to avoid "Are you a he or a she?" and to instead ask "What pronouns do you use?" or "What are your preferred pronouns?"

Sometimes someone we know may let us know that they'd like others to use pronouns that are different than we are used to, and it can take a while to get in the habit of using the correct pronouns. Know that slipping up is OK—we're only human! In this situation, one might feel awkward or guilty, but it is important not to blame the person you're talking about or to. Instead, offer a quick correction and apology, and keep trying your best.

People who are limited by languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality. Below are some examples of commonly used gender-neutral pronouns (also known as all-gender pronouns, third gender pronouns, or gender-free pronouns). They are listed in the format of subject-object-possessive-reflexive (e.g. he-him-his-himself), with pronunciation guides in parentheses:

Subject (e.g. “he”)	Object (e.g. “him”)	Possessive (e.g. “his”)	Reflexive (e.g. “himself”)
They	Them	Their/Theirs	Themselves
Ze (pr. “zee”)	Hir (pr. “heer”)	Hir/Hirs	Hirself
Hir	Hir	Hir/Hirs	Hirself
Ey (pr. “eh”)	Em	Eir/Eirs	Emself

The Pronouns section is adapted from [Minus 18](#). Visit their site for more information, and to use their [interactive pronoun app](#).