

Gender and Identity: Definition of Terms

Agender

A person who is internally ungendered or does not have a felt sense of gender identity.

Aggressive (Ag)

A term used to describe a female-bodied and identified person who prefers presenting as masculine. This term is most commonly used in urban communities of color.

Androgynous

A person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

Ally

Someone who advocates for and supports members of a community other than their own. Reaching across differences to achieve mutual goals.

Asexual

A person who is not sexually attracted to any gender.

Bias

Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bigender

A person whose gender identity is a combination of man and woman

Biphobia

The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are bisexual.

Bisexuality

Also bi. A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally. This used to be defined as a person who is attracted to both genders or both sexes, but since there are not only two sexes (see intersex and transsexual) and there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition is inaccurate.

Cisgender

A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender/sex based expectations of society (also referred to as "Gender-straight" or "Gender Normative")

Cisgenderism

Assuming every person to be cisgender therefore marginalizing those who identify as trans* in some form. It is also believing cisgender people to be superior, and holding people to traditional expectations based on gender, or punishing or excluding those who don't conform to traditional gender expectations.

Coming out

To recognize one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex identity, and to be open about it with oneself and with others.

Crossdresser

Someone who wears clothes associated with another gender part of the time. This term has replaced "transvestite," which is now considered outdated and offensive.

Discrimination

The act of showing partiality or prejudice; a prejudicial act.

Domestic Partner

One who lives with their beloved and/or is at least emotionally and financially connected in a supportive manner with another. Another word for spouse, lover, significant other, etc.

Dominant Culture

The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

Drag

The act of dressing in gendered clothing and adopting gendered behaviors as part of a performance, most often clothing and behaviors typically not associated with your gender identity. Drag Queens perform femininity theatrically. Drag Kings perform masculinity theatrically. Drag may be performed as a political comment on gender, as parody, or simply as entertainment. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity.

Family

Colloquial term used to identify other LGBTIQ community members. For example, an LGBTIQ person saying, "that person is family" often means that the person they are referring to is LGBTIQ as well.

Family of Choice

Persons or group of people an individual sees as significant in their life. It may include none, all, or some members of their family of origin. In addition, it may include individuals such as significant others, domestic partners, friends, and coworkers.

FTM/F2M

Abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

Gay

Men attracted to men. Colloquially used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTIQ people.

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. See "Gender Identity" and "Gender Expression" for more on gender.

Gender Conformity

When your gender identity, gender expression and sex "match" according to social norms. See "Gender Identity," "Sex" and "Gender Expression" for more on gender.

Gender Diverse

A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc) preferable to "gender variant" because it does not imply a standard normativity.

Gender Expression

The way in which a person expresses their gender identity through clothing, behavior, posture, mannerisms, speech patterns, activities and more.

Gender Fluid

A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations.

Genderfuck

The idea of playing with “gender cues” to purposely confuse “standard” or stereotypical gender expressions, usually through clothing

Gender Identity

An individual’s internal sense of gender, which may or may not be the same as one’s gender assigned at birth. Some gender identities are "woman," "transman" and "agender" but there are many more. Since gender identity is internal it isn’t necessarily visible to others. Additionally, gender identity is often conflated with sex, but they are separate concepts – please see GenEq’s Gender/Sex Infosheet for more on the difference between the two.

Gender Identity Disorder

The medical diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostics and Statistics Manual IV (DSM4) used to describe a person who experiences significant gender dysphoria (lack of identification with one’s sex and/or gender assigned at birth). It is anticipated that the DSM5 (released in 2013) will replace this diagnosis with "gender dysphoria."

Genderism

The system of belief that there are only two genders (men and women) and that gender is inherently tied to one’s sex assigned at birth. It holds cisgender people as superior to transgender people, and punishes or excludes those who don’t conform to society’s expectations of gender.

Gender-Neutral/Gender-Inclusive

Inclusive language to describe relationships (“spouse” and “partner” instead of “husband/boyfriend” and “wife/girlfriend”), spaces (gender-neutral/inclusive restrooms are for use by all genders), pronouns (“they” and “ze” are gender neutral/inclusive pronouns) among other things.

Gender Non-Conforming

A person who don't conform to society's expectations of gender expression based on the gender binary, expectations of masculinity and femininity, or how they should identify their gender.

Genderqueer

A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is usually related to or in reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. Some genderqueer people identify under the transgender umbrella while others do not.

Gender Role

How “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how males and females should behave, expecting people to have personality characteristics and/or act a certain way based on their biological sex.

Gender Variant

A synonym for "gender diverse" and "gender non-conforming"; “gender diverse” and “gender non-conforming” are preferred to “gender variant” because variance implies a standard normativity of gender

Hate Crime

Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.

Heterosexuality

Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to a sex other than your own. Commonly thought of as “attraction to the opposite sex” but since there are not only two sexes (see "Intersex" and "Transsexual"), this definition is inaccurate.

Heterosexism

Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual. It is also believing heterosexuality to be superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations.

Heterosexual Privilege

Benefits derived automatically by being (or being perceived as) heterosexual that are denied to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queers and all other non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

Homophobia

The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are homosexual or of homosexual feelings within one's self. This assumes that heterosexuality is superior.

Homosexuality

Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to the same sex.

Institutional Oppression

Arrangement of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media education, religion, economics, etc.

Internalized Oppression

The process by which an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

Intersex

Intersex is a set of medical conditions that feature congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system. That is, intersex people are born with "sex chromosomes," external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered "standard" for either male or female. The existence of intersexuals shows that there are not just two sexes and that our ways of thinking about sex (trying to force everyone to fit into either the male box or the female box) is socially constructed.

In the Closet

Keeping one's sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity a secret.

Invisible Minority

A group whose minority status is not always immediately visible, such as some disabled people and LGBTIQ people. This lack of visibility may make organizing for rights difficult.

It

A pronoun used to refer to a thing; the use of "it" as a pronoun for a person is extremely offensive in its complete dehumanization of the subject; for appropriate, gender neutral pronouns, see chart of gender neutral pronoun usage at the bottom of this page.

Lambda

The Gay Activist Alliance originally chose the lambda, the Greek letter "L", as a symbol in 1970. Organizers chose the letter "L" to signify liberation. The word has become a way of expressing the concept "lesbian and gay male" in a minimum of syllables and has been adopted by such organizations as Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Lesbian

A woman attracted to a woman.

LGBTIQ

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer.

Marginalized

Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

MSM

Men who engage in same-sex behavior, but who may not necessarily self-identify as gay or bisexual.

MTF/M2F

Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

On T

When a person takes the hormone testosterone.

Out (of the Closet)

Refers to varying degrees of being open about one's sexual orientation and/or sex identity or gender identity.

Non-Op

A trans-identified person whose identity does not involve receiving Sexual Reassignment Surgery/Sex Confirmation Surgery

Pangender

A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions

Pansexual

A person who is fluid in sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity.

Polyamory

Polyamory is the practice of having multiple open, honest love relationships.

Post-Op

A trans-identified person who has received Sexual Reassignment Surgery/Sex Confirmation Surgery.

Pre-Op

A trans-identified person who has not received Sexual Reassignment Surgery; implies that the person does intend to receive such surgical procedures

Queer

An umbrella term to refer to all LGBTIQ people

A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.

A simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders may identify as queer.

Many older LGBT people feel the word has been hatefully used against them for too long and are reluctant to embrace it.

Rainbow Flag

The Rainbow Freedom Flag was designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker to designate the great diversity of the LGBTIQ community. It has been recognized by the International Flag Makers Association as the official flag of the LGBTIQ civil rights movement.

Sex

A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Common terms are "male," "female" and "intersex."

Sex identity

The sex that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a sex.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)/Sex Confirmation Surgery

A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's sex to match their sex identity.

Sexual Minority

Refers to members of sexual orientations or who engage in sexual activities that are not part of the mainstream.

Refers to members of sex groups that do not fall into the majority categories of male or female, such as intersexuals and transsexuals.

Sexual Orientation

The deep-seated direction of one's sexual (erotic) attraction. It is on a continuum and not a set of absolute categories. Sometimes referred to as affection, orientation or sexuality. Sexual orientation evolves through a multistage developmental process, and may change over time. Asexuality is also a sexual orientation.

She-Male

An *offensive term* used to refer to MTF trans individuals by the sex/porn industries to objectify, exotify and eroticize the trans body

Stereotype

An exaggerated oversimplified belief about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

Straight

Person who is attracted to a gender other than their own. Commonly thought of as "attraction to the opposite gender," but since there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition is inaccurate.

Tranny

A derogatory term used to refer to a trans-identified person. Sometimes a term reclaimed by trans* people for empowerment.

Transgender

Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans or TG) people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. To understand this, one must understand the difference between biological sex, which is one's body (genitals, chromosomes, ect.), and social gender, which refers to levels of masculinity and femininity. Often, society conflates sex and gender, viewing them as the same thing. But, gender and sex are not the same thing. Transgender people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. For example, a female with a masculine gender identity or who identifies as a man.

An umbrella term for transsexuals, cross-dressers (transvestites), transgenderists, gender queers, and people who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man or as a woman. Transgender is not a sexual orientation; transgender people may have any sexual orientation. It is important to acknowledge that while some people may fit under this definition of transgender, they may not identify as such.

Transition

A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transgender people align their anatomy with their sex identity and/or their gender expression with their gender identity.

Transman

An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females; also referred to as "transguy(s)."

Transphobia

Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination.

Transsexual

Transsexual refers to a person who experiences a mismatch of the sex they were born as and the sex they identify as. A transsexual sometimes undergoes medical treatment to change his/her physical sex to match his/her sex identity through hormone treatments and/or surgically. Not all transsexuals can have or desire surgery.

Transvestite

Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). Cross-dresser is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women's clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identify as straight and often are married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.

Triangle

A symbol of remembrance. Gay men in the Nazi concentration camps were forced to wear the pink triangle as a designation of being homosexual. Women who did not conform to social roles, often believed to be lesbians, had to wear the black triangle. The triangles are worn today as symbols of freedom, reminding us to never forget.

Two-Spirit

American Indian/First Nations/Native American persons who have attributes of both men and women, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of men's and women's articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term "two-spirit" is usually considered to specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include "one-spirit" and "wintke."

Ze

Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of he/she.

Zir

Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of his/her.