

# Gender & Sexuality Terminology

*Please note that each person who uses any of these terms does so in a unique way (especially terms that are used in the context of an identity label). If you do not understand the context in which a person is using one of these terms, it is always appropriate to ask. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation.*

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**Ace** – Someone who identifies as Asexual.

**Ag / Aggressive** – A term originating within communities of color to describe a masculine lesbian. Also known as ‘stud.’

**Agender** – A person without gender. An agender individual’s body does not necessarily correspond with their lack of gender identity. [**Related Terms:** neutrois, genderless, gender neutral]

**Ally** – **1.** Someone who confronts heterosexism, anti- LGBTQIA biases, heterosexual and cisgender privilege in themselves and others **2.** Has concern for the well being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, intersex, queer, and other similarly identified people **3.** Believes that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

**Androgyne** – A person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman. Some androgyne individuals may present in a gender neutral or androgynous way.

**Aromantic** – A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others.

**Asexual** – A person who does not experience sexual attraction. They may or may not experience emotional, physical, or romantic attraction. Asexuality differs from celibacy in that it is a sexual orientation, not a choice. People who are asexual may call themselves “ace.”

**Assigned at Birth** – This term illustrates that an individual’s sex (and subsequently gender in early life) was assigned without involving the person whose sex was being assigned. Commonly seen as “Female Assigned At Birth” (FAAB or AFAB) and “Male Assigned At Birth” (MAAB or AMAB).

**BDSM** – (Bondage, Discipline/Domination, Submission/Sadism, and Masochism) The terms ‘submission/sadism’ and ‘masochism’ refer to deriving pleasure from inflicting or receiving pain, often in a sexual context. The terms ‘bondage’ and ‘domination’ refer to playing with various power roles, in both sexual and social context. These practices are often misunderstood as abusive, but when practiced

in a safe, sane, and consensual manner can be a part of healthy sex life.

**[Related Terms:** Kink, Leather]

**Bear** – 1. Originating within a gay men’s subculture, someone who has facial/body hair and a larger body. 2. An umbrella term that is often defined as more of an attitude and a sense of comfort with natural masculinity and bodies.

**Bicurious** – A person showing some curiosity for a relationship or sexual activity with a person of a gender they do not usually engage with. **[Related terms:** heteroflexible, homoflexible]

**Bigender** – A person whose gender identity is a combination of man and woman. They may consciously or unconsciously change their gender-role behavior from masculine to feminine, or vice versa.

**Binding** – The process of flattening one’s breasts to have a more masculine or flat appearing chest.

**Biphobia** – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQIA community, as well as in general society.

**Bisexual** – A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to people of their own gender as well as other genders, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

**Boi (pronounced boy)** – 1. A person assigned female at birth who expresses or presents themselves in a culturally/stereotypically masculine, particularly boyish way. 2. One who enjoys being perceived as a young man and intentionally identifies with being a “boy” rather than a “man.”

**Bottom** – A person who is the receiving or penetrated partner during sexual activity.

**Bottom Surgery** – Surgery on the genitals designed to create a body in harmony with a person’s gender identity. **[Related Terms:** Gender Confirming Surgery, Sexual Reassignment Surgery]

**Brown Boi** – A masculine of center person of color.

**Butch** – 1. A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally 2. Sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

**Cisgender** – someone who feels comfortable with the gender identity assigned to them based on their sex assigned at birth.

**Cisgender Privilege** – The set of privileges conferred to people who are believed to be Cisgender. (**Examples:** having one’s personal pronouns correctly used, no harassment in public restrooms, no denial of expected access to health care, etc.)

**Cisnormativity** – The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cissexual, and that cisgender persons identities are more normal, valid, and worthy of respect than transgender people’s identities.

**Cissexism** – A pervasive and institutionalized system that “others” transgender people and treats their needs and identities as less important than those of cisgender people.

**Coming Out** – **1.** The process of accepts one’s own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersex person (to “come out” to oneself). **2.** The process of sharing one’s sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status with others (to “come out” to friends, etc.). **3.** A life-long process for individuals in the LGBTQIA community.

**Cross-dressing** – To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other gender. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression, is not necessarily tied to erotic activity, and is not indicative of sexual orientation.

**Demiromantic** – A person who does not experience romantic attraction unless they form a strong emotional connection with someone.

**Demisexual** – A person who does not experience sexual attraction unless they form a strong emotional connection with someone.

**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.

**Down Low** – Originating within communities of color, used to describe men who identify as heterosexual but who are sexually active with men. Many avoid sharing this information even if they are also sexually active with women. [**Related terms:** Men who sleep with men (MSM)]

**Drag** – The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically.

**Drag King** – A person who performs masculinity theatrically.

**Drag Queen** – A person who performs femininity theatrically.

**Dyke** – 1. Sometimes adopted affirmatively by lesbians (not necessarily masculine ones) to refer to themselves. 2. Derogatory term referring to (often masculine) lesbians.

**Fag** – 1. Derogatory term for a gay or effeminate man. 2. Derogatory term for any individual who does not match their assigned gender role. 3. Sometimes reclaimed by gay men as a self-identifier.

**Femme** – An individual of any assigned sex or gender identity who identifies with femininity as dictated by traditional gender roles.

**FTM** – Abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender person. This term reflects the direction of gender transition. Some prefer the term *MTM* (Male to Male) to underscore the fact that though they were assigned female at birth, they never identified as female. [**Related terms**: transgender man, trans man]

**Gay** – 1. Used in some cultural settings to represent men who are attracted to men in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in same gender sexual behavior identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution [**See**: Down Low]. 2. An umbrella term for sexual orientations that fall outside of straight/heterosexual.

**Gender** – A socially constructed system of classifications that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristic can change over time and vary between cultures.

**Gender** – A complex system of roles, expressions, identities, performances, and more that are given gendered meaning by a society and usually assigned to people based on the appearance of their sex characteristics at birth. How gender is embodied and defined varies from culture to culture and from person to person.

**Gender Binary** – The idea that there are only two genders – man or woman – and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. [**See also**: Identity Sphere]

**Gender Confirming Surgery** – Medical surgeries used to modify one's body to be more congruent with one's gender identity. Also known as 'Sex Reassignment Surgery,' especially within the medical community. In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender status.

**Gender Dysphoria** – Discomfort or distress caused by one's assigned sex and the desire to change the characteristics that are the source.

**Gender Expression** – How one presents oneself and one's gender to the world via dress, mannerisms, hairstyle, facial hair etc. This may or may not coincide with or indicate one's gender identity. Many utilize gender expression in an attempt to determine the gender/sex of another individual. However, a person's gender expression may not always match their gender identity.

**Gender Identity** – A person's sense of self as masculine, feminine, both, or neither regardless of external genitalia.

**Gender Non Conforming** – A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, butch, cross-dresser, etc.). Also known as 'Gender Variant.'

**Gender Normative** – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society.

**Gender Oppression** - The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege Cisgender and subordinate and disparage transgender or gender non conforming people.

**Genderqueer** – An individual whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Sometimes this includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. Genderqueer individuals may or may not pursue any physical changes, such as hormonal or surgical intervention, and may not identify as trans\*.

**Grey Ace** – Someone who identifies as part of the asexual community but does not identify as completely asexual. This differs from demisexuality in that being demisexual is a specific orientation and a gray ace is used as a catch all for any unspecified identity under the Ace umbrella.

**Heteronormativity** – The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality, bisexuality, and other sexual orientations.

**Heterosexual** – Men who experience sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to women, and vice versa. Also known as 'straight.'

**Heterosexism** – Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power – that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.

**Heterosexual Privilege** – Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual or being perceived as heterosexual that are denied to homosexual and bisexual people. Also, the benefits homosexual and bisexual people receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

**HIV-phobia** – The irrational fear or hatred of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

**Homophobia** – The irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as non-heterosexual, including the fear of being read as part of the “gay” community. Homophobic behavior can range from telling gay jokes, to verbal abuse, to acts of physical violence.

**Homoromantic** – Someone who has romantic feelings for members of the same sex or gender.

**Homosexual** – An out of date term for a person who is primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex. Many people view this term as offensive in that it is excessively clinical and sexualizes members of the LGBTQIA community.

**Identity Sphere** – The idea that gender identities and expressions do not fit on a linear scale, but rather on a sphere that allows room for all expression without weighting any one expression as better than another.

**In the Closet** – Refers to a homosexual, bisexual, trans person or intersex person who will not or cannot disclose their sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity to their friends, family, co-workers, or society. An intersex person may be closeted due to ignorance about their status since standard medical practice is to “correct,” whenever possible, intersex conditions early in childhood and to hide the medical history from the patient. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet.” For example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family.

**Institutional Oppression** – Arrangements 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 a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

**Intersex Person(s)** – Individual(s) born with the condition of having physical sex markers (genitals, hormones, gonads, or chromosomes) that are neither clearly male nor female. Intersex people are sometimes defined as having “ambiguous” genitalia.

**LAG** – "Lesbian After Graduation." Related to the usage of "LUG," primarily within some women's colleges. Used more as a short-hand in conversation among alums when they don't remember the person as having been a part of the lesbian community while they were students together, e.g., "she must be a LAG."

**Leather Community** – A community which encompasses those who are into leather, sado-masochism, bondage and domination, uniform, cowboys, rubber, and other fetishes. Although the leather community is often associated with the queer community, it is not a "gay-only" community.

**Lesbian** – Women who experience sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to other women.

**LGBTQIA** – A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual community. The acronym is used as an umbrella term when talking about non heterosexual and non-cisgender identities, and does not always reflect members of the community. Sometimes the “A” is used to reference Allies and the “Q” is used to reference Questioning people.

**Lipstick Lesbian** – Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way, depending on who is using it. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is seen as automatically passing for heterosexual.

**LUG** – Derogatory term standing for “Lesbian Until Graduation” mostly used/heard by those within some women’s colleges. Portrays the person as “selling out” for a post-graduation life of heterosexual privilege. Denies the possibility of a bisexual identity.

**Masculine of Center** – A term originating within communities of color describing people whose gender identity or expression falls towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum; includes a wide range of identities such as butch, stud, aggressive/AG, dom, macha, tomboi, trans masculine, etc.

**Monosexual** – Attracted to one gender. May be used for individuals who identify as straight, heterosexual, gay, lesbian, etc.

**MTF** – Abbreviation for a male-to-female transgender person. This term reflects the direction of gender transition. Some people prefer the term FTF (female to

female) to underscore the fact that though they were assigned male at birth, they never identified as male. [**Related terms:** transgender woman, trans woman]

**Nonmonosexual** – Attracted to more than one gender. May be used for individuals who identify as fluid, bisexual, pansexual, etc.

**Neutrois** – A person who identifies as being neither a man nor woman. This differs from androgyne, in that an androgyne sees themselves as a mix of two genders, while neutrois individual sees themselves as not having a gender. [**Similar terms:** genderless, agender, or non-gendered.]

**Oppression** – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Outing** – When someone discloses information about another's sexual orientation or gender identity without their knowledge and/or consent.

**Packing** – Wearing a phallic device on the groin and under clothing for any purposes including: (for someone without a biological penis) the validation or confirmation of one's masculine gender identity; seduction; and/or sexual readiness (for one who likes to penetrate another during sexual intercourse).

**Panromantic** – Someone who has romantic feelings for a person regardless of their sex or gender.

**Pansexual** – A person who has the potential to be attracted to all or many gender identities and expressions.

**Passing** – Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or to be seen as heterosexual.

**Polyamory** – Refers to having honest, non-monogamous relationships with multiple partners and can include: open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves multiple romantic relationships with sexual contact restricted to those), and sub-relationships (which denote distinguishing between a 'primary' relationship or relationships and various 'secondary' relationships).

**Prejudice** – A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a whole group of people and its individual members. Anyone can be prejudiced toward another individual or group.

**Queer** – **1.** An umbrella term which includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans\* people, intersex persons, radical sex communities, and many other sexually transgressive communities. **2.** This term is sometimes used as a sexual orientation label or gender identity label used to denote a non-heterosexual or



cisgender identity without have to define specifics. **3.** A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been reclaimed by some folks in the LGBTQIA community. Nevertheless, a sizable percentage of people to whom this term might apply still hold 'queer' to be a hateful insult, and its use by heterosexual people is often considered offensive.

**Questioning** – An individual who is unsure of and/or exploring their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

**Same Gender Loving (SGL)** – A term originating within communities of color used to express same gender attraction. Note that it is often used as an alternative to words that do not culturally affirm the history of people of African descent.

**Sex** – A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Because 'sex' is usually subdivided into 'male' and 'female' based on genitalia, this category does not recognize the existence of intersex bodies.

**Sexual Orientation** – The desire for intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender, another gender, or multiple genders.

**Sexuality** – Refers to a person's exploration of sexual behaviors, practices and identities in the social world.

**Stealth** – This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. Also referred to as 'going stealth' or 'living in stealth mode.'

**Stem** – A person whose gender expression falls somewhere between a stud and a femme. [**See also:** Femme and Stud]

**Stereotype** – A preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their individual differences. Some stereotypes can be positive. However, they can have a negative impact, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

**Stonewall Riots** – On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969, New York City Police attempted a routine raid on the Stonewall Inn, a working-class gay and lesbian bar in New York's Greenwich Village. Unexpectedly, the patrons resisted, and the incident escalated into a riot that continued for several days. Many people attribute this event as the catalyst for the American Gay Liberation Movement. It is often left out that the more frequent patrons of this bar were trans women, drag queens and butch lesbians.

**Straight** – Another term for heterosexual.

**Straight-Acting** – A term usually applied to gay men who readily pass as heterosexual. The term implies that there is a certain way that gay men should act that is significantly different from heterosexual men. Straight-acting gay men may be critiqued by members of the LGBTQIA community for seemingly accessing heterosexual privilege.

**Stud** – A term originating within communities of color to describe a masculine lesbian. Also known as ‘aggressive.’

**Switch** – A person who is both a ‘Top’ and a ‘Bottom;’ there may or may not be a preference for one or the other. Also known as ‘Versatile.’

**Top** – A person who is the giving or penetrating partner during sexual activity.

**Top Surgery** – This term usually refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest, but may also refer to breast augmentation.

**Trans\*** – An abbreviation that is used to refer to a transgender/gender queer/gender non-conforming person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the whole gender non-conforming community that might include (but is not limited to) transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderf\*ck, transsexual, agender, third gender, two-spirit, bigender, trans man, trans woman, gender non-conforming, masculine of center, and gender questioning.

**Transfeminine** – 1. A term used to describe those who were assigned male at birth, but identify as more female than male.. 2. Those who identify as transfeminine, as opposed to simply as MTF or a woman, trans or otherwise, often place themselves feminine of center. That is, they identify more closely with femaleness than maleness, and generally desire a physical appearance that reflects this identification, but do not identify as wholly female or as a woman. It should be noted that transfeminine is not a descriptor of gender expression but of identity. Transfeminine people do not necessarily have to be stereotypically feminine in their interests or even presentation.

**Transgender** – A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on sex or gender assigned at birth. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

**Transition** – This term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender variant person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more

congruent with the gender/sex with which they identify and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

**Transmasculine** – 1. A term used to describe those who were assigned female at birth, but identify as more male than female. 2. Those who identify as transmasculine, as opposed to simply as FTM or a man identify more closely with maleness than femaleness, and generally desire a physical appearance that reflects this identification, but do not identify as wholly male or as a man. It should be noted that transmasculine is not a descriptor of gender expression but of identity. Transmasculine people do not necessarily have to be stereotypically masculine in their interests or even presentation.

**Trans Man** – An identity label sometimes adopted by female to male trans people to signify that they are men while still affirming their transgender history.

**Trans Woman** – An identity label sometimes adopted by male to female trans people to signify that they are women while still affirming their transgender history.

**Transphobia** – The irrational hatred of those who are transgender or gender non-conforming, sometimes expressed through violent and sometimes deadly means.

**Transsexual** – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.

**Two-Spirit** – A Native American term for people who blend the masculine and the feminine. It is commonly used to describe individuals who historically crossed gender. It is often used by contemporary LGBTQIA Native American people to describe themselves.

**Versatile** – A person who is both a ‘Top’ and a ‘Bottom;’ there may or may not be a preference for one or the other. Also known as ‘Switch.’

**Ze / Hir** – Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral. Pronounced /zee/ and /here/, they replace “he”/”she” and “his”/”hers” respectively.

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This terminology sheet was originally created by Eli R. Green and Erica Peterson of the LGBT Resource Center at the University of California, Riverside © 2003-2004 and has been revised using resources from the following organizations: University of California, Riverside; MIT; University of California, Berkeley; George Washington University; California State University, San Marco; University of California, San Diego; Bowling Green State University; The Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), and Wikipedia. Updated August 2015 with the assistance of members of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals.