

## Gender & Sexuality – Terms & Concepts

### A few notes about these definitions:

Each of these definitions has been carefully researched and closely analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives for inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity, common usage, and general appropriateness. We have done our best to represent the most popular uses of the terms listed; however there may be some variation in definitions depending on location and personal preference/use. Please note that each person who uses any or all of these terms does so in a unique way (especially terms that are used in the context of an identity label). Asking people for further information and/or clarification about the way in which they use the terms is encouraged. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation.

**Ag / Aggressive** – 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.

**Agendered** – Person is internally ungendered, or has no internal sense of gender identity.

**Ally** – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

**Androgynous** – Person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

**Asexual** – Person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation. This can be short-term or long-term.

**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. (Sometimes referred to as ‘leather.’)

**Bear:** The most common definition of a ‘bear’ is a man who has facial/body hair, and a cuddly body. However, the word ‘bear’ means many things to different people, even within the bear movement. Many men who do not have one or all of these characteristics define themselves as bears, making the term a very loose

one. 'Bear' is often defined as more of an attitude and a sense of comfort with natural masculinity and bodies.

**Berdache** - A generic term used to refer to a third gender person (woman-living-man). The term 'berdache' is generally rejected as inappropriate and offensive by Native Peoples because it is a term that was assigned by European settlers to differently gendered Native Peoples. Appropriate terms vary by tribe and include: 'one-spirit', 'two-spirit', and 'wintke.'

**Bicurious** – A curiosity about having sexual relations with a same gender/sex person.

**Bigendered** - A person whose gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

**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 LGBTQI community, as well as in general society.

**Bisexual** – A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

**Bottom** - A person who is said to take a more submissive role during sexual interactions. Sometimes referred to as 'pasivo' in Latin American cultures. Also known as 'Catcher.' (See also 'Top'.)

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

**Catcher** – See 'Bottom.' This term may be considered offensive by some people.

**Cisgender** – Some who is not trans or gender diverse. This term is preferable to "natal," or "biological" because it does not focus on a person's body.

**Coming Out** – May refer to the process by which one accepts one's own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersexed person (to "come out" to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersexed status with others (to "come out" to friends, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed individuals.

**Cross-dresser** – Someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

**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.

**Disorder of Sex Development (DSD)** – The collective name for the medical disorders otherwise referred to as intersex.

**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** – Derogatory term referring to a masculine lesbian. Sometimes adopted affirmatively by lesbians (not necessarily masculine ones) to refer to themselves.

**Fag** – Derogatory term referring to someone perceived as non-heteronormative.

**Fag Hag** – A term primarily used to describe women who prefer the social company of gay men. While this term is claimed in an affirmative manner by some, it is largely regarded as derogatory.

**Femme** – Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.

**Femme Queen** – A term used to describe someone who is male bodied, but identifies as and expresses feminine gender. Primarily used in urban communities, particularly in communities of color and the New York City ballroom communities.

**FTM / F2M** – A common abbreviation for female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

**Gay** – 1. Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2. Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

**Gender** – One’s expressions of masculinity, femininity or androgyny in words, persons, organisms, or characteristics.

**Gender Binary** – The idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (See also ‘Identity Sphere.’)

**Gender Cues** – What human beings use to attempt to tell the gender/sex of another person. Examples include hairstyle, gait, vocal inflection, body shape, facial hair, etc. Cues vary by culture.

**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** – A person’s choice and/or manipulation of ‘gender cues.’ Gender expression may or may not be congruent with or influenced by a person’s biological sex.

**Gender Identity** – A person’s sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

**Gender Normative** – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender

**Gender Variant** – A synonym for gender diverse. ‘Gender diverse’ is preferred to ‘gender variant’ because variance implies a standard normativity of gender.

**Genderfuck** – The idea of playing with ‘gender cues’ to purposely confuse “standard” or stereotypical gender expressions, usually through clothing.

**Genderqueer** – A gender diverse person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, 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.

**Genderstraight**—See ‘Gender Normative.’

**Getting / Being Read** – How a person’s gender is perceived by a casual observer, based on gender cues / expression. (e.g. a butch woman being perceived as a man). Sometimes refers to a transperson being perceived as transgender, another gender than what they wish or chose to be perceived or as their biological sex.

**GRS** - See ‘Sexual Reassignment Surgery.’

**Hankie Code** - A system that uses colored handkerchiefs and placement to symbolize preferences in sexual behavior and practices. Used primarily in the gay male leather community, this system is designed to help quickly locate potential sex partners with compatible interests.

**Hermaphrodite**—An out-of-date and offensive term for an intersexed person. (See 'Intersexed Person'.)

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

**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 that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals 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 or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

**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, transperson 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. Also known as ‘Downlow’ or ‘D/L.’

**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.

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

**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.

**Intersexed Person**—Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

**Leather:** See 'BDSM'.

**Lesbian** – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups, including African-Americans, embrace the term 'lesbian' as an identity label.

**Lesbian Baiting** - The heterosexist notion that any woman who prefers the company of woman, or who does not have a male partner, is a lesbian.

**LGBTTSQI** – A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer/questioning, intersex and allied community. Sometimes written as LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA.

**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.

**Male Lesbian**—A male-bodied person who identifies as a lesbian. This differs from a heterosexual male in that a male lesbian is primarily attracted to other lesbian, bisexual or queer identified people. May sometimes identify as gender diverse, or as a female/woman. (See 'Lesbian.')

**Metrosexual** - First used in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, who coined the term to refer to an urban, heterosexual male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle. This term can be perceived as derogatory because it reinforces stereotypes that all gay men are fashion-conscious and materialistic.

**MSM** – Men who have Sex with Men.

**MTF / M2F** – A common abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

**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.

**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).

**Pangendered** – A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions.

**Pansexual** – A person who is sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions.

**Person of Trans Experience** – A positive way of referring to a transperson.

**Polyamorous** – Refers to having honest, usually non-possessive, 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.

**Queer** – **1.** An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively- heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons, the radical sex communities, and many other sexually transgressive (underworld) explorers. **2.** This term is sometimes used as a sexual orientation label instead of 'bisexual' as a way of acknowledging that there are more than two genders to be attracted to, or as a way of stating a non-heterosexual orientation without having to state who they are attracted to. **3.** A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group, who use it as a term of defiant pride. 'Queer' is an example of a word undergoing this process. For decades 'queer' was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1980s the term began to be used by gay and lesbian activists as a term of self-identification. Eventually, it came to be used as an umbrella term that included gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Nevertheless, a sizable

percentage of people to whom this term might apply still hold 'queer' to be a hateful insult, and its use by heterosexuals is often considered offensive. Similarly, other reclaimed words are usually offensive to the in-group when used by outsiders, so extreme caution must be taken concerning their use when one is not a member of the group.

**Same Gender Loving** – A term sometimes used by members of the African-American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990's with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture in life. (Sometimes abbreviated as 'SGL'.)

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

**Sexual Identity** – How a person chooses to label their sexual orientation. Labels do not always “match” the sexual orientations.

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

**Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS)** – A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's “sex”. In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. Sometimes called Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS).

**Sexuality** – A person's exploration of sexual acts, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, and desire.

**She-Male** – A generally offensive term used to refer to transwomen.

**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. Though often negative, can also be complimentary. Even positive stereotypes can have a

negative impact, however, simply because they involve broad generalizations that ignore individual realities.

**Stone Butch / Femme / Queer** – A person who may or may not desire sexual penetration and/or contact with the genitals or breasts. (See also 'Butch' and 'Femme').

**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 are often looked down upon in the LGBTQ community for seemingly accessing heterosexual privilege.

**Stud** — An African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian. Also known as 'butch' or '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 said to take a more dominant role during sexual interactions. May also be known as 'Pitcher.'

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

**Tranny** – An generally offensive term to refer to a transperson.

**Tranny Chaser** - A term primarily used to describe people who prefer or actively seek transpeople for sexual or romantic relations. While this term is claimed in an affirmative manner by some, it is largely regarded as derogatory.

**Trans** - An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender diverse person. This use allows a person to state a gender diverse identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender diverse community as a whole.

**Trans-activism**- The political and social movement to create equality for gender diverse persons.

**Transandrogyny** – A gender diverse gender expression that does not have a prominent masculine or feminine component.

**Transfeminine** – A gender-variant gender expression that has a prominent feminine component.

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

**Transgendered (Trans) Community** – A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

**Transhate** – The irrational hatred of those who are gender diverse, usually expressed through violent and often deadly means.

**Transition** – This term is primarily used to refer to the process a gender diverse person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

**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).’

**Transmasculine** - A gender-variant gender expression that has a prominent masculine component.

**Transphobia** – The irrational fear of those who are gender diverse and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**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.

**Transvestite** – Someone who dresses in clothing generally identified with the opposite gender/sex. While the terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘transvestite’ have been used synonymously, they are in fact signify two different groups. The majority of transvestites are heterosexual males who derive pleasure from dressing in “women’s clothing”. (The preferred term is ‘cross-dresser,’ but the term ‘transvestite’ is still used in a positive sense in England.)

**Transwoman**-- An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males.

**Two-Spirited** – Native persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of male and female 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’.

**Versatile** – See ‘switch.’

**WSW** – Women who have Sex with Women.

**YMSM** - Young Men who have Sex with Men.

**YWSW** – Young Women who have Sex with Women.

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

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This terminology sheet was created by Eli R. Green ([www.EliR.Green.com](http://www.EliR.Green.com)) and Eric N. Peterson at the LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside ® in 2003 with additional input from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) and many kind people who helped us create and revise these definitions. Eli continues to maintain and update this sheet regularly. Please be sure to check the Educational Materials section of [www.Trans-Academics.org](http://www.Trans-Academics.org) for updated versions. Please feel free to alter, use or pass on as needed but be sure to give credit to the original creators. Thank you.