

Redefining Gender

Affirming pronouns: The most respectful and accurate pronouns for a person, as defined by that person. They have also been called *preferred gender pronouns*, but that phrase has become outdated. To learn someone's affirming pronouns, ask: "What are your pronouns?"

Agender: Describes a person who does not identify as having a male or female gender identity or who identifies as not having a gender identity at all.

Androgynous: A combination of masculine and feminine traits or a nontraditional gender expression.

Bigender: A person who experiences gender identity as two genders at the same time or whose gender identity may vary between two genders. These may be masculine and feminine or can include nonbinary identities.

Cisgender (pronounced sis-gender): A person whose gender identity matches the sex the person was assigned at birth. (It is sometimes abbreviated as *cis*.)

Gender binary: The idea that gender is strictly an either-or option of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a range or variety of gender identities and expressions. The gender binary is considered to be limiting and a problem for those who do not fit into the either-or categories.

Gender conforming: A person whose gender expression is consistent with the cultural norms expected for that gender. According to these norms, boys and men should be masculine, and girls and women should be feminine. Not all cisgender people are gender conforming, and not all transgender people are gender nonconforming. (For example, a transgender woman may have a very feminine gender expression.)

Gender dysphoria: The formal diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (*DSM 5*), used by doctors to show that a person meets the diagnostic criteria to begin medical transition. Some in transgender communities disagree with the use of *gender dysphoria* because it suggests that being transgender is a mental illness rather than an identity. Since a formal diagnosis is usually required for medical treatment in the United States, it does allow access to medical care for people who wouldn't otherwise be eligible to receive it.

Gender expression: A person's outward gender presentation, usually made up of personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, voice, and body language. Gender expression is usually labeled as masculine, feminine, or nonbinary. It can be congruent with a person's gender identity or not.

Genderfluid: Someone whose gender identity or expression shifts between man/masculine and woman/feminine or falls somewhere in this range.

Gender identity: The gender with which a person identifies; a person's deep-seated, internal sense of who they are as a gendered being.

Gender marker: The label (male, female, or another) that appears on a person’s official records, such as a birth certificate or driver’s license. The gender marker on a transgender person’s documents is their sex assigned at birth unless they legally change it. Only some parts of the world allow that change.

Gender nonconforming: A person whose gender expression is inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender: boys or men who are not “masculine enough” or are feminine, girls or women who are not “feminine enough” or are masculine. Not all transgender people are gender nonconforming, and not all gender-nonconforming people identify as transgender. Cisgender people may also be gender nonconforming. Gender nonconformity is often wrongly confused with sexual orientation.

Genderqueer: Someone whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.

Intersex: A category that describes a person with a disorder of sexual development (DSD), which is a reproductive, genetic, genital, or hormonal makeup that results in a body that can’t easily be categorized as male or female. Intersex is frequently confused with transgender, but the two are completely distinct. A more common term, *hermaphrodite*, is outdated and offensive.

LGBTQ+: An acronym used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning individuals and communities. LGBTQ+ is not a synonym for *nonheterosexual*, since transgender is not a sexual orientation.

Medical transition: A long-term series of medical interventions that use hormone treatments and/or surgeries to change a person’s body to be more congruent with their gender identity. Medical transition is the approved medical treatment for gender dysphoria.

Nonbinary: A range of gender identities and expressions, which rejects the notion that gender is strictly an either-or option of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth. Words that people use to express their nonbinary gender identities include *agender*, *bigender*, *genderqueer*, *genderfluid*, and *pangender*.

Pronouns: Affirming pronouns are the most respectful and accurate pronouns for a person, as defined by that person. It’s best to ask which pronouns a person uses. In addition to the familiar *he*, *she*, and *they*, nongendered pronouns include *zie* and *per*.

Puberty suppression: A medical process that pauses the hormone changes that trigger puberty in children. The result is delayed development of secondary sex characteristics: breast growth, testicle enlargement, facial hair, body fat redistribution, voice changes. Suppression allows more time to make decisions about hormone treatment and can prevent transgender youths’ increased discomfort with puberty.

Queer: An umbrella term for a range of people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. It was used as a slur in the past, but some reclaim it as affirming. Others still consider it offensive.

Same-gender loving: A label sometimes used by members of the Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990s with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice. It’s a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture. (Sometimes abbreviated as SGL.)

Sex assigned at birth: The sex someone is labeled at birth, based on the appearance of the genitals.

Sexual orientation: A person’s feelings of sexual attraction toward other people. A person may be attracted to people of the same sex, of the opposite sex, of both sexes, or to people without reference to sex or gender. Some people do not experience sexual attraction and may identify as asexual. Sexual orientation is about attraction to other people (external), while gender identity is a deep-seated sense of self (internal).

Social transition: A transgender person’s process of creating a life that is congruent with their gender identity, which can include asking others to use a name, pronouns, and gender that is more congruent with their gender identity. It also may involve a person changing their gender expression to match their gender identity.

Transgender: Sometimes abbreviated as *trans*, this adjective is used to describe a person whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not “match”) the sex they were assigned at birth. *Transgender* now serves as an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities because it is the most widely used and recognized term.

Transgender men and boys: People who identify as male, but were assigned female at birth. Also sometimes referred to as *trans men*.

Transgender women and girls: People who identify as female, but were assigned male at birth. Also sometimes referred to as *trans women*.

Transsexual: This outdated term refers to a transgender person who has had hormone treatment and/or surgeries to change their body to be more aligned with their gender identity. It is still used as an identity label by some, but *transgender* has generally become the term of choice. (You should not use this term for people unless they use it for themselves first.)

Two spirit: A term used by Native and Indigenous peoples to indicate that they embody both a masculine and a feminine spirit. It is sometimes also used to describe Native people of diverse sexual orientations and has nuanced meanings in various Indigenous subcultures.

Adapted from E. R. Green and L. M. Maurer, 2015, *Teaching Transgender Toolkit: A Facilitator’s Guide to Increasing Knowledge, Decreasing Prejudice & Building Skills*. Ithaca, NY: Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes. Reprinted in National Geographic, “Gender Evolution,” January 2017.