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A SHORT GUIDE FROM THE  
NORFOLK LGBT+ PROJECT

# A-Z OF GENDER & SEXUALITY TERMS

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# FOREWORD



Let me begin by saying first that I would much rather we hold each other accountable to how we act, rather than how we say something - that being said, it is important to bear in mind that how we refer to each other can have a significant psychological impact on a person and that LGBTQ+ individuals are statistically more likely to be suffering from poor mental health, often due to previous bad experiences, which negative interactions might cause them to relive.

Think about a term that makes you feel bad. How comfortable would you feel engaging with someone offering you support if they use it in relation to you?

We want to build interactions centred on trust. An individual who feels that aspects of their identity are not recognised by others may result in them feeling misunderstood, disrespected or at worst, unsafe.

It is important to note that the reason we might feel unsure about terminology is that language changes over time. Resources can sometimes therefore use language that was appropriate at their time of writing, but that might now be considered outdated. With this in mind, here is a list of terminology considered appropriate and respectful the time of writing (May 2020).

*Document author:* Joe Henson, LGBT+ Trainer

*Reference texts:* M.L.E. Holleb. 2019. A-Z

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Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER



The most important things to think about when it comes to referring to a persons identity are:

- 1. It is key that the person you engage with feels they are being taken seriously, respected and in a safe environment.**
- 2. Listen to how the individual identifies themselves.**
- 3. If you make a mistake, simply apologise, correct yourself and move on with the conversation.**
- 4. Bear in mind that although I am offering definitions here that we all interpret things differently, and that someones understanding of a term they use might not come from the same place as yours.**
- 5. Don't be afraid to listen and engage with differences of interpretation if the person you are working with seems comfortable to do so in order to come to an understanding of what that term means to the individual you are working with.**
- 6. If you feel confused, you can look online for verified resources to help you. You can always contact us if you need more support or explanation.**

## A- Z



**AGENDER:** An individual who does not identify with any gender, the feeling of having no gender at all.

**ASEXUAL:** An individual who has no/ low levels of sexual attraction to others and no/low levels of interest and desire for sexual partners.

**BINDING:** A technique applying compression to make breasts appear smaller or flatter.

**BISEXUAL:** An individual who is sexually and romantically attracted to two or more genders.

**CISGENDER:** Individuals whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. E.g. If you were assigned female at birth and identify as female, you are cisgender.

**CROSS-DRESSER:** An individual who enjoys wears clothing most typically associated with the 'opposite' gender to which they were assigned at birth. Almost always used referring to a man wearing 'women's clothing'. I put this in brackets because when a woman buys a suit, we do not refer to this as 'men's clothing'. Phrases such as 'women's clothing' reinforce what is considered 'normal' gendered behaviour. It is advised to follow someone else's lead in whether or not they refer to themselves as a cross-dresser.

**DEADNAMING:** Calling someone by their birth name after they have changed their name. This term is often associated with trans people who have changed their name as part of their transition. This experience can be upsetting to transitioning individuals as it may cause the person to feel as if they have not been respected as themselves.

**DEMISEXUAL:** Someone who does not experience sexual attraction to someone unless they first form a strong emotional bond to someone. Most commonly seen in but not confined to romantic relationships.

**FTM/ F2M:** Female - to - Male. An older term for someone assigned female at birth whose gender identity is male, in other terms, a transgender man - less used because it isn't reflective of the transgender experience - being one thing then another - rather many transgender men feel they were always male rather than were female - now- male.

**GAY:** Men who are attracted sexually and romantically to other men. Sometimes used as short hand for any same-sex attraction.

**GENDER DYSPHORIA:** The clinical diagnosis for someone who does not feel comfortable with the gender they are assigned at birth. Feelings of discomfort or distress inhabiting ones' body due to a mismatch in gender identity and sex assigned at birth.

**GENDER AFFIRMING SURGERIES:** A collective term for the numerous kinds of surgeries trans people can choose to undergo in order to change their physical appearance to better align with their gender identity. Also known as gender confirmation surgeries, previously called gender reassignment surgeries.

**GENDERFLUID:** A person whose identity moves around the gender spectrum. A person might identify sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman, and sometimes as somewhere in between, or as all of these at once.

**GENDERQUEER:** A gender nonconforming person who feels none of the categories on the gender spectrum fit them completely.

**HETEROSEXUAL:** A person who is sexually and romantically attracted to people of the opposite sex or gender.

**INTERSEX:** Someone whose chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs and/or genitals differ from the expected patterns for Male or Female.

**LESBIAN:** Women who are attracted sexually and romantically towards other women.

**MTF/M2F:** Male - to - Female. An older term for someone assigned male at birth whose gender identity is female, in other terms a transgender woman - less used because it isn't reflective of the transgender experience - being one thing then another - rather many transgender women feel they were always female rather than were male - now- female.

**MISGENDERING:** Using the wrong pronouns or other gendered terminology for someone, e.g. Mr instead of Miss, Sir instead of Ma'am.

**NON-BINARY:** A catch-all term for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and therefore stand outside of the gender binary.

**PANSEXUAL:** An individual who is sexually and romantically attracted to people of all gender identities/expressions.

**PASSING:** Being perceived as the gender identity you are presenting as. Also called 'blending'. This is a controversial term that the transgender community uses amongst itself.

**QUEER:** A term covering all non-heterosexual sexualities, and all non-cisgender gender identities.

**QUESTIONING:** An individual who is unsure about or is exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

**TRANS MAN:** Someone who is assigned female at birth but who identifies and lives as a man.

**TRANSMASCULINE:** Used in reference to trans people assigned male at birth who identify with masculinity more than femininity. This may include some non-binary individuals as well as some trans men. (Note: Masculinity is different from maleness, i.e being a man, whether cis or trans, and refers instead to behaviours and attributes associated with men).

**TRANS WOMAN:** Someone who is assigned male at birth but who identifies and lives as a woman.

**TRANSFEMININE:** Used in reference to trans people assigned male at birth who identify with femininity more than masculinity. This may include some non-binary individuals as well as some trans women. (Note: Femininity is different from femaleness, i.e being a woman, whether cis or trans, and refers instead to behaviours and attributes associated with women).

**TRANSITIONING:** The steps a trans person might undergo to live in the gender with which they identify. Some might choose to transition socially by informing friends and family. Some might change their name or gender expression. Some trans people follow a medical pathway and undergo HRT (hormone replacement therapy) or have surgery, but this is not the case for everyone.

**TRANSGENDER:** An umbrella term for all individuals whose gender identities do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

## TERMS TO AVOID



**HERMAPHRODITE:** Hermaphrodite is used specifically for organisms that have at least partial reproductive parts for both the male and female sexes. Although we do use this for animals, we no longer use it in relation to humans. It is not a polite term to use and likely to cause offense. Instead we would use the term intersex which covers a much wider range of human sex differences.

**SEX CHANGE:** There are a number of accepted ways to refer to gender reassignment surgeries or affirmation surgeries that are preferable to this. Sex change has fallen out of use for the same reason transsexual has- that is, it centres sex, not gender, and implies a simple before-and-after, whereas in reality transition is an individual process and it is unlikely two transitions will include the same steps, length of time, or personal feelings.

**SEXUAL PREFERENCE:** Sexual orientation is the term we use. The term 'sexual preference' is used instead of sexual orientation to imply it is a choice that can be avoided. This is used to reinforce the idea an individual can therefore be 'cured' of a particular preference.

**TRANSGENDERED:** Transgender is an adjective, not a verb, and therefore can't be 'done to' someone- i.e. We use Gay People, not Gayed people.

**TRANSSEXUAL:** This term is an older one used to describe transgender individuals who transition to live in the 'opposite' gender to the one they are assigned at birth. It is not a popular term anymore as it implies that the individual has undergone GRS, but is still used in clinical diagnosis. Some individuals will still happily use this term, but it is advised to follow the lead of the person you are interacting with and if in doubt stick to transgender.