

## Language Matters: LGBTQIA+

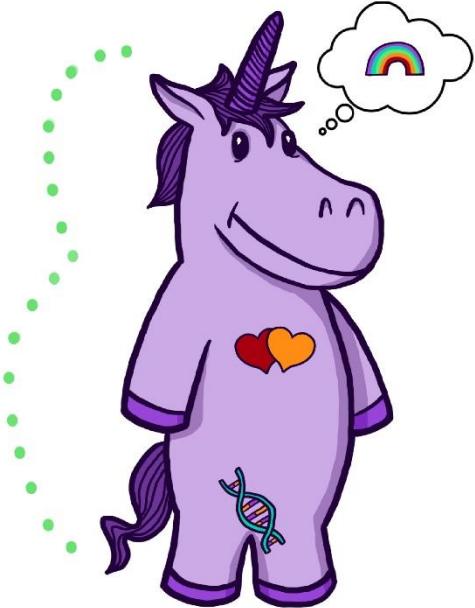
*Language is constantly evolving and is specific to the individual. These terms may become outdated. Best practice is to ask the individual what their preferred/chosen terms are.*

### Gender-Neutral Language: Instead of This → Use This

- Actress/Actor → Performer
- Anchorwoman/Anchorman → Anchor
- Aunt/Uncle → Pibling (your parent's and sibling)
- Boy/Girl → Child, kid
- Businessman/Businesswoman → Business person
- Chairman → Chair, Chairperson
- Coed → Student
- Congressman/Congress Woman → Member of Congress, legislator
- Councilman/Councilwoman → Councilperson
- Dear Mr./Mrs./Sir → Dear Mx., Dear [Professional Title], To Whom It May Concern
- Fireman → Firefighter
- Forefathers → Ancestors
- Freshman → First-year student
- Granddaughter/Grandson → Grandchild
- Husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend → Partner, significant other, spouse
- Kinsmen → Relatives
- Ladies and Gentlemen → Folks, folx, everyone, everybody
- Latino/Latina → Latinx
- Maiden name → Family name
- Mailman → Postal worker, letter carrier, mail worker
- Man/Woman → Person
- Mankind → Humankind
- Man-made → Synthetic
- Manpower → Workforce, personnel, workers, human resources, employees
- Man up → Toughen up
- Mother/Father → Parent
- Mr./Mrs./Miss → Mx
- Niece/Nephew → Nibling (combination of niece/nephew and sibling)
- Policeman → Police Officer
- Salesman/Saleswoman → Salesperson, sales representative
- Sister/Brother → Sibling
- Son/Daughter → Child
- Steward/Stewardess → Flight Attendant
- Waitress/Waiter → Server, wait staff
- You guys → You all, y'all

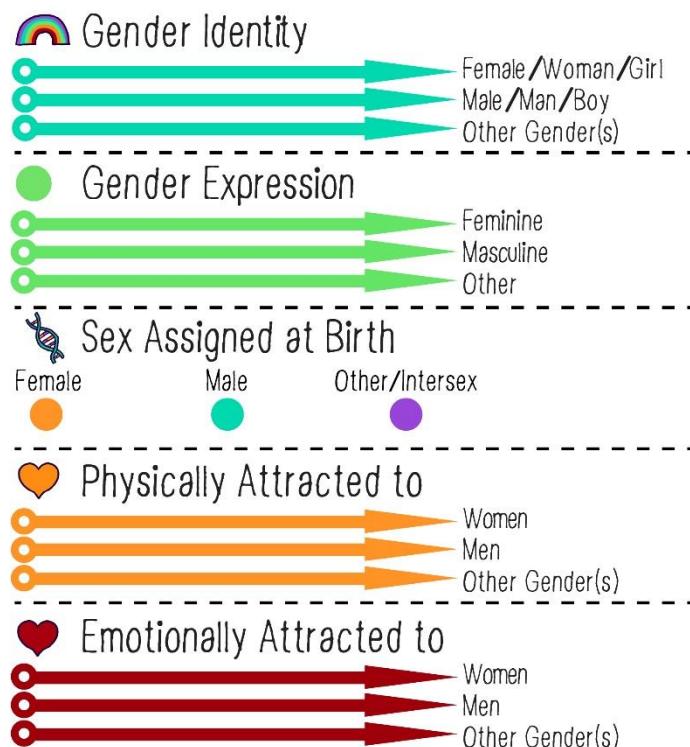
# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



## **Terminology**

### **Agender**

Describes a person who identifies as having no gender, or who does not experience gender as a primary identity component. It can be an umbrella term encompassing many different genders of people who commonly do not have a gender and/or have a gender that they describe as neutral.

### **AFAB and AMAB**

Acronyms meaning “assigned female/male at birth” (also designated female/male at birth or female/male assigned at birth). No one, whether cis or trans, gets to choose what sex they’re assigned at birth. This term is preferred to “biological male/female,” “male/female bodied,” “natal male/female,” and “born male/female” which are inaccurate.

### **Ally**

Someone who advocates and actively supports a community other than their own. Allies are not part of the communities they help. A person should not self-identify as an ally, but show that they are one through action.

### **Aromantic**

The lack of romantic attraction, and one identifying with this orientation. This may be used as an umbrella term for other emotional attractions, such as demiromantic. Aromantic people may still have intimate relationships.

### **Asexual**

The lack of sexual attraction, and one identifying with this orientation. A person who does not experience sexual attraction towards other people. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy. Asexual people may still engage in sexual activity.

### **Bicurious**

A term used to identify a person who is interested in exploring their attraction to people of a variety of genders. Many view this term as offensive, as it implies that sexual orientation is something that must be explored sexually and romantically before it can be determined. Additionally, many feel that this term invalidates bisexuality by implying that it is a questioning or exploratory phase, instead of a

valid sexual orientation. Similar to the term queer, use this term only when self-identifying or when quoting someone who self-identifies as bicurious.

### **Bigender**

Refers to those who identify as two genders. Can also identify as multigender (identifying as two or more genders). This term should not be confused with Two Spirit, which is specifically associated with Indigenous cultures.

### **Binary**

A system only encompassing two options. This term is also used as an adjective to describe the genders female/male or woman/man.

### **Bisexual**

An umbrella term for people who experience sexual and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender. Bisexual does not necessarily mean “attracted to men and women.”

### **Boi**

A term used within the queer communities of color to refer to sexual orientation, gender, and/or aesthetic among people usually assigned female at birth. Boi often designates queer women who present with masculinity (although, this depends on location and usage). This term originated in women of color communities in the 20th century.

### **Bottom Surgery**

Genital surgeries such as vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, or metoidioplasty.

### **Butch**

An identity or presentation related to masculinity. Butch can be an adjective (she's a butch woman), a verb (he went home to “butch up”), or a noun (they identify as a butch). Although commonly associated with masculine queer/lesbian women, it's used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

## **Chosen Family**

Also known as Found Family, people who support an LGBTQIA+ person, who are not biologically related, and who often fill the role of the biological family if an LGBTQIA+ person's family is not supportive of them.

## **Chosen Name**

The name an individual goes by and wants others to use in communication, even if it is different from the name assigned at birth. Chosen name is recommended over "preferred name."

## **Cisgender/Cis**

Adjective that means "identifies as their sex assigned at birth" derived from the Latin word meaning "on the same side." A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. Cisgender does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation. In discussions regarding trans issues, one would differentiate between women who are trans and women who aren't by saying trans women and cis women. Note that cisgender does not have an "ed" at the end.

## **Cissexism**

Systemic prejudice in the favor of cisgender people. Harmful belief that being non-trans is the only acceptable and "natural" form of gender.

## **Closeted**

Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. A closeted person may be referred to as being "in the closet." There are many degrees to being out/closeted; closeted individuals may be out to just themselves, close friends, or to their larger network, or not publically open about their status as LGBTQIA+ people.

## **Coming Out/Letting In**

For LGBTQIA+ people, coming out is the process of self-identifying and self-acceptance that entails the sharing of their identity with others. Letting in implies more of the individual's choice to disclose to others. Individuals often recognize a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender-expansive, or queer identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. here are many different degrees of being out, and coming out/letting in is a lifelong process.

Coming out/letting in can be an incredibly personal and transformative experience. It is critical to respect where each person is within their process of self-identification, and up to each person, individually, to decide if and when and to whom to let in or disclose.

### **Crossdressing or Cross-dressing**

The act of dressing and presenting as a different gender. One who considers this an integral part of their identity may identify as a crossdresser. “Transvestite” is often considered a pejorative term with the same meaning. Drag performers are crossdressing performers who take on stylized, exaggerated gender presentations (although not all drag performers identify as crossdressers). Crossdressing and drag are forms of gender expression and are not necessarily tied to erotic activity, nor are they indicative of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. This term should only be used by the consent of the person it describes.

### **Deadnaming**

Occurs when an individual, intentionally or not, refers to the name that a transgender or gender-diverse individual used at a different time in their life. Avoid this practice, as it can cause trauma, stress, embarrassment, and even danger. Some may prefer the terms birth name, given name, government name, or old name.

### **Demisexual**

A person who only feels sexual attraction to someone after they’ve formed a strong emotional bond with them.

### **Drag**

Exaggerated, theatrical, and/or performative presentation that usually plays with gender. Although most commonly used to refer to crossdressing performers (drag queens and drag kings), anyone of any gender can do any form of drag. Doing drag does not have anything to do with one’s sex assigned at birth, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

### **Dyadic**

Not intersex.

## **Femme**

An identity or presentation that leans towards femininity. Femme can be an adjective (he's a femme boy), a verb (she feels better when she "femmes up"), or a noun (they're a femme). Although commonly associated with feminine lesbian/queer women, it's used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

## **Gay**

Gay can have a few meanings. Broadly, it describes a person who is attracted to members of the same gender. Gay is also more commonly used to refer to men who are attracted to other men.

## **Gender-Affirming Care**

Encompasses a range of social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity when it conflicts with the gender they were assigned at birth.

## **Gender-Affirming Surgery; Genital Reassignment/Reconstruction Surgery; Vaginoplasty; Phalloplasty; Metoidioplasty**

Different surgeries related to genitalia. These are only one part of some trans people's transition. Only the minority of transgender people choose to and can afford to have genital surgery. The following terms are inaccurate, offensive, or outdated: sex change operation, gender reassignment/realignment surgery (gender is not changed due to surgery), gender confirmation/confirming surgery (genitalia do not confirm gender), and sex reassignment/realignment surgery (as it insinuates a single surgery is required to transition along with sex being an ambiguous term).

## **Gender Binary**

A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed "male and female," in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is oppressive to anyone who defies their sex assigned at birth, but particularly those who are gender-variant or do not fit neatly into one of the two standard categories.

## **Gender Diverse**

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity and expressions falls outside of the traditional gender binary structure.

## **Gender Dysphoria**

A sense of unease that a person may have because of the incongruence between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. It is also a diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

## **Gender Expansive**

An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people who expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond perceived or expected societal gender norms. Some gender expansive individuals identify as a mix of genders, some identify more binarily as a man or a woman, and some identify as no gender. Gender expansive people might feel that they exist among genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm. Sometimes gender expansive people use gender-neutral pronouns, but people can exist as any gender while using any pronouns. They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.

## **Gender Expression/Presentation**

The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine).

## **Gender Fluid**

Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed.

## **Gender Identity**

One's internal sense of one's own gender. It can correlate with sex assigned at birth or differ from it.

## **Gender Neutral**

Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles), spaces (like bathrooms), or other aspects of society (like colors or occupations). Gender neutral is not a term to describe people. A person who experiences no gender may be agender or neutrois.

## **Gender Non-conforming or GNC**

A term for those who do not follow gender stereotypes. Often an umbrella for non-binary gender. Though fairly uncommon, some people view the term as derogatory, so they may use other terms including gender expansive, differently gendered, gender creative, gender variant, genderqueer, non-binary, agender, genderfluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, or gender diverse. It is important to respect and use the terms people use for themselves, regardless of any prior associations or ideas about those terms.

## **Gender Role**

A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived gender.

## **Genderqueer**

An identity commonly used by people who do not identify or express their gender within the gender binary. Those who identify as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female, may see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Many genderqueer people are cisgender and identify with it as an aesthetic. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as trans or nonbinary.

## **Heteronormative/Heteronormativity**

Terms referring to the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society and furthers the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people. Heteronormativity can manifest as heterosexism.

## **Heterosexism**

Biased belief that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people. Reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

## **Heterosexual**

Often referred to as “straight.” This is a term to describe people who are attracted to someone with the other gender.

## **HRT**

Stands for hormone replacement therapy.

## **Intersectionality**

Coined by [Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw](#), this term refers to the overlap of social categorizations or identities such as race and ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability, geography, and class which exist in an individual or group of people that can contribute to discrimination or disadvantage.

## **Intersex**

Term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. There are many examples such as Klinefelter Syndrome, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. Parents and medical professionals usually coercively assign intersex infants a sex and have, in the past, been medically permitted to perform surgical operations to conform the infant's genitalia to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term intersex is **not** interchangeable with, or a synonym for transgender, (although some intersex people do identify as transgender).

## **Lesbian**

Refers to women who are primarily attracted to other women.

## **LGBTQIAPP2s+**

A collection of identities short for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, pansexual, polysexual, Two-Spirit (sometimes abbreviated to LGBT, LGBTQ+, or LGBTQIA+). Sometimes this acronym is replaced with “queer.” Note that “ally” is not included in this acronym.

## **Misgender**

To refer to someone using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect their gender. This may be unintentional and without ill intent or can be a maliciously employed expression of bias. Regardless of intent, misgendering has a harmful impact.

## **Monosexual/multisexual/non-monosexual**

Umbrella terms for orientations directed towards one gender (monosexual) or multiple genders (multisexual/non-monosexual).

### **Nonbinary (also non-binary, NB, or ENBY)**

Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a nonbinary person). Not all nonbinary people identify as trans and not all trans people identify as nonbinary. Some people may use abbreviations, such as “Enby,” as an alternative to using “NB” because it’s original meaning is “Non-Black People of Color (POC),” and was created by Black American women activists online to talk about racism and should not be appropriated by white non-binary people.

### **Omnisexual**

Often intermingled with pansexual, yet they are different. While both, omnisexual and pansexual people are attracted to other people of any gender identity, pansexual people are gender blind, while omnisexual people are not. Omnisexual people are aware of the gender of the person they are attracted to.

### **Outing**

Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Pansexual**

Often intermingled with omnisexual, yet they are different. Capable of being attracted to many/any gender(s). Pansexual is used more frequently as more people acknowledge that gender is not binary. Not considered or not aware of the gender of the person they are attracted to and considered to be gender blind.

### **Passing/Blending/Assimilating**

Being perceived by others as a particular identity/gender or cisgender regardless how the individual in question identifies, e.g. passing as straight, passing as a cis woman, passing as a youth. This term has become controversial as “passing” can imply that one is not genuinely what they are passing as.

### **Polyamorous**

A term used to describe people who have the desire for multiple consenting intimate relationships at the same time. Also referred to as “ethically non-monogamous,” “polya” or “polyam;” there is a movement away from shortening polyamorous to “poly” since poly already means Polynesian. Consent and transparency are key components of polyamorous relationships.

## **Polysexual**

Capable of being attracted to multiple gender(s).

## **Pronouns**

The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/them, he/him, and she/her. Neopronouns are pronouns created to be specifically gender-neutral including xe/xem, ze/zir and fae/faer. Pronouns are sometimes called Personal Gender Pronouns, or PGPs. For those who use pronouns--and not all people do--they are not preferred, they are essential.

## **QPOC**

Stands for queer person of color.

## **Queer**

Umbrella term for gender and sexual identities or presentations that do not fit the “dominant trans narrative.” There is a lot of overlap between queer and trans identities, but not all queer people are trans and not all trans people are queer. The word queer is still sometimes used as a hateful slur, so although it has mostly been reclaimed, be careful with its use.

## **Questioning**

Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. Questioning people can be of any age, so for many reasons, this may happen later in life. Questioning is a profoundly important process, and one that does not imply that someone is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.

## **Sex Assigned at Birth**

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex assigned at birth often based on physical anatomy at birth and/or karyotyping.

## **Sexual Orientation**

A person’s physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others. In Western cultures, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Trans people can be straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay, asexual,

pansexual, queer, etc. just like anyone else.

### **SOGIE**

Stands for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

### **Stealth**

To not be openly transgender in all or most social situations.

### **T**

Short for testosterone.

### **TGD**

Stands for transgender and gender-diverse.

### **Top Surgery**

Chest surgery such as double mastectomy, breast augmentation, or periareolar (keyhole) surgeries.

### **Transgender/Trans**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Note that transgender does not have an “ed” at the end.

### **Transition**

A person’s process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. Transition can include: coming out/letting in to one’s family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgery. It’s best not to assume how one transitions as it is different for everyone.

### **Transmisogny**

Originally coined by the author Julia Serano, this term recognizes the intersections of transphobia and misogyny and how they are often experienced as a unique form of oppression against trans women.

## **Transphobia**

Systemic violence against trans people, associated with attitudes such as fear, discomfort, distrust, or disdain. This word is used similarly to homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, etc.

## **Transsexual**

A deprecated term that is often considered pejorative similar to transgender in that it indicates a difference between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Transsexual often – though not always – implicates hormonal/surgical transition from one binary gender (male or female) to the other.

Unlike *transgender/trans*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. When speaking/writing about trans people, please avoid the word transsexual unless asked to use it by a transsexual person.

## **Trans woman/Trans man**

Trans woman generally describes someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman. This individual may or may not actively identify as trans. It is grammatically and definitionally correct to include a space between trans and woman. The same concept applies to trans men. Often it is good just to use woman or man. Sometimes trans women identify as male-to-female (also MTF, M2F, or trans feminine) and sometimes trans men identify as female-to-male (also FTM, F2M, or trans masculine). Please ask before identifying someone. Use the term and pronouns chosen by the individual.

## **Transvestite**

A person who dresses in clothes primarily associated with the binary opposite gender expression. Commonly considered outdated and derogatory, as it was previously believed that a transvestite person received sexual gratification from cross-dressing.

## **Two-Spirit**

An umbrella term referring to various Indigenous gender identities in North America. This term encompasses a wide variety of gender variance and can mean different things in each nation and to each individual who holds that identity. This identity is also culturally-specific, meaning that it belongs to Indigenous communities and should not be used by non-Indigenous people.