

BINARY BASICS

 by John Meredith

SOME KEY LGBTQ+ TERMINOLOGY

PLEASE NOTE: Language (like gender) is fluid. These definitions were built off of multiple resources and community discussions, but they are not the end-all-be-all. People may use different terms and definitions in relation to themselves and their identity.

SEX — Biological characteristics, including chromosomes, internal and external sex organs, and hormonal activities. Sex is most often assigned at birth based solely on the baby's genitals.

Despite common misconceptions, even sex isn't binary. Examples of this may include people assigned female at birth with Y chromosomes, people assigned male at birth with a divided scrotum, or women with higher levels of testosterone than some men.

INTERSEX — An umbrella term for people whose biological characteristics don't fit their culture's typical definitions of male or female.

Intersex people make up an estimated 1.7% of the population, that's about equal to the number of people with red hair!¹

GENDER — A multi-dimensional interrelationship between a person, their body, their sense of identity, social constructs, and societal norms of behavior and presentation.

GENDER EXPRESSION — The ways we outwardly communicate our gender to others through things such as clothing, hairstyles, and mannerisms. Also referred to as gender presentation.

TRANSGENDER/TRANS — An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This does not necessitate any form of medical transition process. Trans(gender) is an adjective, someone cannot be "a trans" but they can be "a trans person".

Approximately 12% of American Millennials identify as transgender or gender non-conforming²

NON-BINARY — An umbrella term for people who experience gender outside or between the binary categories of man and woman. Depending on the person, this may or may not fall within the umbrella of transgender. Related terms may include genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, and Two-Spirit (a specific cultural role within some indigenous communities).

CISGENDER/CIS — A person who exclusively identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. Simply put, it's anyone who isn't trans or non-binary. This is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, or biological characteristics.

QUEER/LGBTQIA+ — Umbrella terms for people of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations. Unless a person has specified they prefer that term, be cautious when referring to someone as queer. "Queer" has a complex history as a reclaimed slur.

TRANSITION — A person's process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. This may include some or all of the following social, medical, and surgical elements: coming out to one's family, friends, or co-workers, using a new name or pronouns, changes in clothing or hairstyle, changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents, hormone blockers or hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and Gender-Affirming Surgeries. Transitioning is different for everyone, and does not require medical or surgical elements.

PRONOUNS — A substitute for noun or noun phrases (such as names) that are understood within the context they are used. Some gender pronouns include: they, him, her, himself, and ze. Pronouns are not necessarily indicative of a person's gender.

56% of people under the age of 20 know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns.²

DEAD NAMING — The act of calling a trans person by a name they no longer use—usually the name they were given at birth. This should *never* be done without explicit and specific permission from the person being named.

TERMS TO BE CAUTIOUS WITH

SEX CHANGE / PRE-OP / POST-OP — Terms regarding gender-affirming surgeries. Generally avoided due to oversimplifying transitioning as a before & after surgical process that is required to "fully" transition.

TRANSSEXUAL — An older term, usually specifying someone who has gone through hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgery. Transsexual should be used only if someone has expressed it as their preferred term.

CROSS-DRESSER — Someone who occasionally wears clothes and accessories associated with another sex. Cross-dressing is usually done for entertainment purposes, and is not done with the intention of permanently transitioning.

PASSING — The act of being perceived by others as cisgender (or another identity, such as straight- or white-passing). Avoid this term as it can imply a dishonesty/trickery or an unnecessary delineation between trans and cis people. A better term you could use, if needed, is cis-assumed.

1. <https://www.intersexequality.com/how-common-is-intersex-in-humans/>

2. <https://www.glaad.org/releases/accelerating-acceptance-glaad-study-reveals-twenty-percent-millennials-identify-lgbtq>