

Queer/Trans FAQ

This document is meant to serve as an informational guide for anyone unfamiliar with information about the LGBTQ+ community. The first two pages consist of definitions. The actual Frequently Asked Questions begin on Page 3.

- ***Why should I know about all this new stuff?***
 - None of this stuff is *actually* new; it just wasn't talked about in the mainstream. Being queer, trans, or any other listed or unlisted identity here has existed for centuries, across multiple cultures. The reason it is being talked about in the mainstream is because people are fighting the idea that it is unnatural to be queer or trans, and fighting back against the hatred they have faced due to homophobia and transphobia. Both homophobia and transphobia are deadly and have led to the deaths of many. Education is important for stopping more harm and violence.

- ***What does "LGBTQ+" mean?***
 - **L - Lesbian**: a lesbian is a person who is not a man that is attracted to women.
 - **G - Gay**: when applied to men, generally describes a person who is not a woman who is attracted to men.
 - Gay as an umbrella term: "gay" is also used as a general label for anyone who is not straight; is often used casually and is not a clear marker of sexuality.
 - **B - Bisexual (bi)**: someone who is attracted to people, regardless of gender. Bisexual people may have preferences based on the gender of the person they are attracted to (i.e. short hair on women, long beards on men).
 - **T - Transgender (trans)**: a person who does *not* identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. If you were assigned female at birth, but now identify as a man, you would be considered transgender.

- **Q - Queer**: a general label (much like gay as an umbrella term) that applies to anyone who does not identify as a label that is considered “normal,” like cisgender* or heterosexual.
- **+ - Other identities included in the LGBTQ community**: some of the other commonly known identities included under the LGBTQ+ umbrella include pansexual, intersex, and asexual. If you see “LGBTQIA”, the “I” and “A” stand for intersex and asexual.
 - **Pansexual (pan)**: very similar to bisexuality, a pansexual is a person who is attracted to someone regardless of gender. Unlike bisexual people, they have *no* preferences that align with gender.
 - **Intersex**: Intersex people are people whose sex is indeterminate at birth. The baby may have a uterus, a penis, and testicles, for example. Oftentimes, surgeries are performed on these babies to make their gender align with whatever gender parents or doctors want. These surgeries often are complicated, as gender/sex are also informed by things like hormones. Intersexuality is about as common as having red hair.
 - **Asexual (ace)**: an asexual person is a person who experiences no sexual attraction. Unlike people who choose to be celibate, they are not just choosing not to have sex; they simply do not experience the desire to have it.
- ***Other terms to know***
 - ***Cisgender (cis)**: a cisgender person is someone who *does* identify with the gender they are assigned at birth. If you were assigned female at birth, and identify as a woman, you would be considered cisgender.
 - **AFAB**: an acronym that means “assigned female at birth.”
 - **AMAB**: an acronym that means “assigned male at birth.”
 - **Non-binary**: a person who does not identify as a man *or* a woman. Literally meaning “*not binary*,” non-binary is *not* a third gender. It is meant to signify feeling like you exist *outside* of the socially understood gender binary (only two genders); it is *not* just having a gender in between

“man” and “woman.” Non-binary people can be considered transgender, since they do not identify with their assigned-at-birth gender.

- **Genderfluid**: A person who experiences gender in more than one way. They do not feel they are *only* a man or *only* a woman. They typically use multiple sets of pronouns, such as she/he/they. (More information in “sex and gender” and “pronouns” sections.)
- **Aromantic** (aro): an aromantic person is someone who does not experience romantic attraction. Aromantic people may or may not be asexual, and vice versa. Aromantic people do not ascribe to the narrative that they will “die alone” without a romantic partner. They simply prioritize other types of relationships, such as ones with family and friends.
- **Polyamorous** (poly): Polyamorous people enjoy relationships with multiple people at once. Polyamorous relationships are often complicated and require lots of communication. Polyamory and polygamy are not the same, though they are similar. An example of polygamy might be a man having multiple wives. An example of polyamory might be three women all dating each other at the same time. Polyamory does not have to include all parties having relationships with one another.

- ***Why all these different terms?***

- There are many reasons that people might choose to use different terms to describe themselves. Oftentimes, it can be relieving to have language for something you know is true about yourself. Generally speaking, these terms are only necessary to exist because modern Western society says that being cisgender, heterosexual, and monogamous is “normal.”

- ***What is the difference between sex and gender?***

- Generally speaking, sex is something that is considered medical and scientific. Sex is defined by things like chromosomes, labels such as “female” and “male”, and sex organs. Gender is thought of to be more

social. For instance, the way you wear your hair (long or short), whether or not you wear dresses, and generally how you present yourself is how people attempt to determine your gender.

- *Both sex and gender are socially constructed.* You can think of something like time as a “social construct.” Time is a very abstract idea, and is made “real” by things like clocks and watches, and the sunrise and sunset. But if we leave Earth, the way that time works changes.

Gender and sex are very similar. As demonstrated by intersexuality, sex can very easily be indeterminate. However, sex and gender are made “real” by labels like “woman” and “man”, by assigning chromosomes to labels of “female” and “male”, or by saying that dresses are for girls and suits are for boys.

We know that these things are socially constructed because of the ways they change over time. As recently as the early 1900s, dresses were for both girls and boys; heels were invented for men; forks (yes, the eating utensil) were thought to be “effeminate” when they were first introduced.

- ***Why all this talk about pronouns?***

- Pronouns are something everyone has used for their whole lives, whether they were aware of it or not. Pronouns are a common part of sentence structure in every language and determine how you refer to someone. Some common pronouns are: I, me, we, us, he, she, and they.

People talk about using different pronouns because they want to emphasize changing the way people refer to them. If you identify as a man, you will likely want to be referred to with he, him, and his. The shorthand of this would be “I use he/him/his pronouns” as a way of indicating how people should refer to you.

He, him, his (associated with men); and she, her, hers (associated with women) are gendered pronouns. They, them, and theirs are not.

They/them/theirs can be used singular or plural. People typically use they/them/theirs when they do not know someone's gender or if someone has indicated for them to do so. Despite arguments of it being improper to use they, them, and theirs singularly, this argument is most often made by people who do not realize that they often use they, them, and theirs for a single person. This use is grammatically correct and goes back hundreds of years to Old English.

- ***Outdated terms and phrases not to use****

- Tranny, transsexual, transvestite: these are inappropriate, rude, and/or outdated terms used to refer to transgender people.
- Fag, faggot: these are homophobic slurs often used to refer to transwomen and gay men
- Dyke: homophobic slur typically used to refer to lesbians (and bisexual women)
- Gender reassignment surgery: this term is just generally inaccurate; many people who have gender-related surgeries are doing it to make their bodies feel like home, rather than to “reassign” who or what they are.
- FtM (female to male)
- MtF (male to female)
 - These terms are not necessarily wrong, but are becoming outdated. This is because they emphasize the idea that what you were born as is your “true” gender, but you have transitioned to something else. As I have noted, both gender and sex are constructed, and so this language makes it seem like sex (male and female) are what you *really* are but you want your gender (how you present) to be something else.

*These terms are typically okay to use if used by the minority group, as it is an act of reclamation. If you exist firmly outside of these groups, it is disrespectful to use these words.

- ***Inappropriate language to use***

- Trapped in the wrong body: the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative is a phrase that was used to describe trans people’s experience. This kind of language makes it seem like the only important parts of someone’s body are their genitals. This aligns with the use of “gender affirming” rather than “gender reassignment.”
- “The surgery”: many trans people will get asked if they have had “the surgery.” Along with this being generally unclear (because there are many surgeries you can get to change your appearance), it is extremely invasive. If you are a cisgender person, you do not have the right to know information about anyone’s body if it does not affect you. If you would not ask this question to a cisgender person, don’t ask it to a trans person.

- ***But I thought “queer” was a slur?***

- Although previously used negatively, “queer” is a reclaimed slur that has been reclaimed over many decades. There is some discourse over whether or not people should use it, but generally speaking it is fine to use. If someone asks you not to use it for them though, don’t.

- ***I got someone’s pronouns wrong. What do I do?***

- Simply correct yourself and move on. Most of the time, people will understand that others make mistakes and will not be angry. Being misgendered (being referred to with the wrong gender or pronouns) can be frustrating for trans people, but they will likely not be mad. What not to do: emphasize the mistake (keep referring to how you used the wrong pronouns), make it about yourself (talk about how hard it is for you to remember), or place the burden on the trans person to correct you.

- ***How do I know what pronouns to use if I'm not sure?***
 - Just ask. “What are your pronouns?” or “what pronouns do you use?” are common ways to ask.

- ***Why do people use multiple pronouns?***
 - Because one set of pronouns may not encapsulate their experience. For instance, he/him pronouns are associated with men and masculinity; however, if you express yourself femininely or both femininely and masculinely, you might want use both he/him and she/her (he/she) or he/him, she/her, and they/them (he/she/they).

- ***How do I get used to using new pronouns for someone?***
 - Be committed and caring. It is easier to use the correct terms for someone if you care that you get it right and are committed to doing so. You are raised to put people into two categories based on a lot of combined gendered factors. It will be a lot of work, but you will have to work undo certain gendered associations that you have with that person. It is more helpful to think of them as just a person, rather than thinking about all the things that make you think of them as a “man” or a “woman.”

Let me know if you have any other questions! I have answers. Feel free to do research on any of these topics, but be sure to use multiple references and not just one.