

64 Terms That Describe Gender Identity and Expression

 [healthline.com/health/different-genders](https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders)

Medically reviewed by [Janet Brito, Ph.D., LCSW, CST](#) — Written by Mere Abrams, LCSW on December 20, 2019



Why does it matter?

Language and labels are important parts of understanding your gender and knowing how to be affirming and supportive of other people's genders — but they can also be confusing.

There are so many gender terms out there, many of which overlap. Some also have definitions that shift over time or across different sources of information.

Thanks to the internet, we have more access to information, education, and visual representations of diverse genders — but comprehensive and inclusive resources about gender as a concept and this aspect of identity are still lacking.

Here, we attempt to bridge this gap by breaking down what many of these terms mean and how to use them.

Having language that helps demonstrate the many ways people experience, express, or identify their gender allows us to more clearly see and understand the entire gender spectrum — including and beyond the traditional binary gender categories of man and woman.

Terms A to D

AFAB

Acronym meaning “assigned female at birth.”

Agender

Someone who doesn't identify with the idea or experience of having a gender.

Aliagender

A nonbinary gender identity that doesn't fit into existing gender schemas or constructs.

AMAB

Acronym meaning “assigned male at birth.”

Androgyne

Someone who has a gender presentation or identity that’s gender neutral, androgynous, or has both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Aporagender

Both an umbrella term and nonbinary gender identity that describes the experience of having a specific gender that’s different from male, female, or any combination of the two.

Bigender

This term describes someone who identifies with two distinct genders.

Bigender indicates the *number* of gender identities someone has.

It doesn’t indicate which genders someone identifies with or the level of identification they have with a particular gender (such as 50% male, 50% demigirl).

Binarism

Generally, binarism refers to the gender systems and schemas that are based on the existence of two opposing parts, such as male/female, man/woman, or masculine/feminine.

More specifically, binarism is a type of sexism that erases ethnic or culture-specific nonbinary gender roles and identities.

Body dysphoria

Body dysphoria is different from body dysphoric disorder.

It refers to a specific type of gender dysphoria that manifests as distress or discomfort with aspects of the body.

This may include anatomy, shape, size, chromosomes, secondary sex characteristics, or internal reproductive structures.

Boi

A term, primarily used in LGBTQIA+ communities, that typically describes someone who has a presentation, sexuality, or gender that’s considered “boyish.”

Butch

Primarily used in LGBTQIA+ communities, this term typically describes someone with a presentation, sexuality, or gender that's considered masculine.

Butch doesn't necessarily indicate the other terms that someone might use to describe their presentation, sexuality, or gender.

Cisgender

A term used to describe people who exclusively identify with their sex or gender assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity

The assumption that a person identifies with the sex or gender they were assigned at birth, or that having a cisgender gender identity is the norm.

Cissexism

A form of oppression that discriminates against those who aren't cisgender.

Demiboy

This nonbinary gender identity describes someone who partially identifies as a boy, man, or masculine.

The term demiboy tells us about someone's gender identity, but doesn't convey any information about the sex or gender assigned to someone at birth.

A demiboy can identify as cisgender or trans.

Demigender

This umbrella term typically includes nonbinary gender identities and uses the prefix "demi-" to indicate the experience of having a partial identification or connection to a particular gender.

This may include:

- demigirl
- demiboy
- demienby
- demitrans

Demigirl

This nonbinary gender identity describes someone who partially identifies as a girl, woman, womxn, or feminine.

The term demigirl tells us about someone's gender identity, but doesn't convey any information about the sex or gender assigned to someone at birth.

A demigirl can also identify as cisgender or trans.

Dyadic

This describes people who have sex characteristics — such as chromosomes, hormones, internal organs, or anatomy — that can be easily categorized into the binary sex framework of male or female.

Dyadic conveys information about someone's sex characteristics but doesn't indicate anything about their gender.

Terms E to H

Feminine-of-center

This describes people who identify their gender as feminine or femme.

Some feminine-of-center people also identify with the word woman, but others don't.

The term feminine-of-center tells you about someone's gender identity, but doesn't convey any information about the sex or gender assigned to them at birth.

Feminine-presenting

This describes people who have a gender expression or presentation that they or others categorize as feminine.

Feminine-presenting is a term that captures the part of someone's gender that's shown externally, either through aspects of their style, appearance, physical traits, mannerisms, or body language.

This term doesn't necessarily indicate anything about the way someone identifies their gender or the gender or sex assigned to them at birth.

Femme

This is a label for a gender identity or expression that describes someone with a gender that is or leans towards feminine.

Some femmes also identify as women, while many others don't.

Femme indicates the way someone experiences or expresses their gender, and doesn't provide any information about the gender or sex assigned to them at birth.

Female-to-male (FTM)

This term and acronym is most commonly used to refer to trans males, trans men, and some transmasculine people who were assigned female at birth.

It's important to only use this term if someone prefers to be referred to this way, as some trans males, trans men, and transmasculine people use terms that don't include or indicate the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender apathetic

This term describes someone who doesn't strongly identify with any gender or with any gender labels.

Some gender apathetic people also use terms that indicate their relationship with the sex or gender assigned to them at birth — such as cis apathetic or trans apathetic — while others don't.

Generally, people who are gender apathetic display an attitude of flexibility, openness, and “not caring” about how gender identity or presentation is perceived and labeled by others.

Gender binary

Also known as gender binarism, this term refers to gender classification systems — whether cultural, legal, structural, or social — that organize gender or sex into two mutually exclusive categories such as male/female, man/woman, or masculine/feminine.

Gender dysphoria

This is both a medical diagnosis and informal term used to communicate challenging feelings or distress people experience in relation to gender.

The medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria refers to a conflict between someone's assigned sex (as male, female, or intersex) and the gender with which they identify.

When used informally, gender dysphoria describes interactions, assumptions, physical traits, or body parts that don't feel affirming or inclusive of someone's expressed or experienced gender.

Gender expression

Gender expression is the way someone expresses gender through behavior, mannerisms, interests, physical characteristics, or appearance.

It's often, but not always, described using terms such as masculine, feminine, neutral, androgynous, conforming, or nonconforming.

The words used to describe someone's gender expression are dependent upon social or cultural norms and stereotypes and may change over time.

Gender identity

This is the way someone experiences gender internally as part of their core sense of self.

Gender identity can't be assumed based on appearance, anatomy, social norms, or stereotypes.

Gender identity isn't determined by assigned gender or sex, and often develops or changes over time.

Gender-neutral pronouns

These pronouns aren't stereotypically or culturally categorized as male or female, masculine or feminine, or for men or women.

Gender-neutral pronouns are used by both cisgender and transgender individuals as a way to affirm and convey important information about who they are and how they want to be referred to.

Examples include:

- they/them/theirs
- ze/hir/hirs
- ze/zir/zirs
- xe/xem/xyrs

Gender nonconforming

This term is used to describe people with a gender expression or presentation that's different from cultural or social stereotypes associated with the person's perceived or assigned gender or sex.

Gender nonconforming isn't a gender identity, though some people do self-identify using this term.

It doesn't convey any information about the way someone experiences gender internally.

More accurately, gender nonconforming is a term used to describe physical traits in relation to socially and culturally defined gender categories.

People of any gender — cis, trans, or nonbinary — can be gender nonconforming.

Gender normative

A term used to describe gender traits or identities that are perceived to fall within social norms and expectations.

Gender presentation

Similar to gender expression, gender presentation refers to the way someone uses behavior, mannerisms, interests, physical characteristics, or appearance to convey or present a particular gender externally.

Gender questioning

A person who's questioning one or multiple aspects of their gender, such as their gender identity or expression.

Gender roles

The interests, behaviors, and mannerisms that a society or culture assigns to a particular gender or to the things expected of a person based on their assigned, perceived, or actual gender.

Gender roles change over time and across cultures.

Gender variant

Similar to gender nonconforming, gender variant is an umbrella term used to describe people with a gender identity, expression, or presentation that's different from the perceived social norm or dominant group.

Some people dislike this term because of its potential to perpetuate misinformation and negative stigma about noncisgender gender identities and nonconforming presentation being less normal or naturally occurring.

Genderfluid

This label is used to describe gender identity or expression.

It involves the experience of moving between genders or having a gender that changes over a particular period of time. For example, from moment to moment, day to day, month to month, year to year, or decade to decade.

Genderfuck

Similar to the term gender bender, genderfuck involves the act of combating or dismantling the gender binary and stereotypes through a gender identity, expression, or presentation that challenges existing norms and expectations in a given cultural context.

Genderqueer

This nonbinary gender identity and term describes someone with a gender that can't be categorized as exclusively male or female, or exclusively masculine or feminine.

People who identify as genderqueer experience and express gender many different ways. This can include neither, both, or a combination of male, female, or nonbinary genders.

Graygender

A gender term that describes someone who experiences ambivalence about gender identity or expression, and doesn't fully identify with a binary gender that's exclusively male or female.

Terms I to P

Intergender

A nonbinary gender identity that describes the experience of having a gender that falls somewhere in between female and male or is a mix of both male and female.

Intersex

An umbrella term that describes people who have sex characteristics — such as chromosomes, internal organs, hormones, or anatomy — that can't be easily categorized into the binary sex framework of male or female.

Intersex conveys information about someone's sex characteristics but doesn't indicate anything about their gender identity.

Masculine-of-center

This term describes people who identify their gender as masculine or masc.

Some masculine-of-center people also identify with the word man, but many others don't.

The term masculine-of-center tells you about someone's gender identity, but doesn't convey any information about the sex or gender assigned to them at birth.

Masculine-presenting

This term describes people who have a gender expression or presentation that they or others categorize as masculine.

Masculine-presenting captures the part of someone's gender that's shown externally, either through aspects of their style, appearance, physical traits, mannerisms, or body language.

This term doesn't necessarily indicate anything about the way someone identifies their gender or the gender or sex assigned to them.

Maverique

This nonbinary gender identity emphasizes the inner experience of gender.

It describes those who experience gender or have a core gender identity that's independent of existing categories and definitions of gender, such as male or female, man or woman, masculine or feminine, and androgynous or neutral.

Misgender

The act of referring to someone using a gender pronoun or gendered language that's incorrect, inaccurate, or not inclusive of the person's actual gender identity.

Male-to-female (MTF)

This term and acronym is most commonly used to refer to trans females, trans women, and some transfeminine people who were assigned male at birth.

It's important to only use this term if someone prefers to be referred to this way, as some trans females, trans women, and some transfeminine people prefer to use terms that don't include or overtly indicate the sex they were assigned at birth.

Multi-gender

This umbrella term is used to describe people who experience more than one gender identity.

Other gender labels that fall under the multi-gender umbrella include:

- bigender
- trigender
- pangender
- polygender

In some cases, "genderfluid" may also fall under this umbrella.

Neutrois

This nonbinary identity and umbrella term is used to describe people who have a gender that isn't exclusively male or female.

Neutrois can be a broader term encompassing other gender identities, such as nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, or genderless.

Nonbinary

Also referred to as enby, this is a gender identity and umbrella term for gender identities that can't be exclusively categorized as male or female.

Individuals who identify as nonbinary can experience gender a variety of ways, including a combination of male and female, neither male nor female, or something else altogether.

Some nonbinary individuals identify as trans, while many others don't.

Whether a nonbinary person also identifies as trans is often dependent on the extent to which that person identifies, even partially, with the sex or gender assigned to them at birth.

Novigender

A gender identity used by people who experience having a gender that can't be described using existing language due to its complex and unique nature.

Pangender

A nonbinary gender identity that describes people who experience all or many gender identities on the gender spectrum simultaneously or over time.

Polygender

This gender identity term describes the experience of having multiple gender identities, simultaneously or over time.

This term indicates the number of gender identities someone experiences, but doesn't necessarily indicate which genders are included in the given person's polygender identity.

Terms Q to Z

Sex

The classification of a person as male, female, or intersex based on the existing system of organizing human bodies and biologies.

This system is based on chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

Sex assigned at birth

This refers to the act of assigning or designating a particular sex to a person based on their chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

This is often done by medical professionals during pregnancy or immediately after childbirth.

The sex a person is assigned at birth doesn't determine or indicate anything about their authentic gender experience or identity.

Social dysphoria

A specific type of gender dysphoria that manifests as distress and discomfort that results from way society or other people perceive, label, refer to, or interact with someone's gender or body.

Soft butch

Both a gender identity and term used to describe the nonconforming gender expression of someone who has some masculine or butch traits, but doesn't fully fit the stereotypes associated with masculine or butch cisgender lesbians.

Stone butch

Both a gender identity and term used to describe the nonconforming gender expression of someone who embodies traits associated with female butchness or stereotypes associated with traditional masculinity.

Third gender

Originating in non-Western and native cultures, third gender is a gender category that includes people who have a gender that can't be exclusively categorized as male or female, or is different from male or female.

Transfeminine

A gender identity label that conveys the experience of having a feminine gender identity that's different from the gender or sex that was assigned at birth.

Transgender or trans

Both an umbrella term including many gender identities and a specific gender identity that describes those with a gender identity that's different from the sex assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex).

Transmasculine

A gender identity label that conveys the experience of having a masculine gender identity that's different than the gender or sex that was assigned at birth.

Transitioning

The act of making physical, social, medical, surgical, interpersonal, or personal changes that help to affirm gender or address gender dysphoria.

Transsexual

Falling under the transgender umbrella, transsexual is a word that was medically and historically used to indicate a difference between one's gender identity (i.e., the internal experience of gender) and sex assigned at birth (as male, female, or intersex).

Transsexual is often (though not always) used to communicate that one's experience of gender involves a medical diagnosis or medical changes — such as hormones or surgery — that help alter anatomy and appearance to feel more congruent with gender identity.

Due to a fraught history, the word transsexual can be contentious and shouldn't be used unless someone specifically asks to be referred to this way.

Trigender

This gender identity describes the experience of having three gender identities, simultaneously or over time.

This term indicates the number of gender identities someone experiences, but doesn't necessarily indicate which genders are included in a given person's trigender identity.

Two-spirit

This umbrella term was created by native communities to bring traditional indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality into Western and contemporary native education and literature.

Each First Nation tribe has its own understanding and meaning of what it means to be two-spirit, so this term can have many definitions.

Two-spirit generally refers to a gender role believed to be a common, acknowledged, accepted, and praised gender classification among most First Nation communities, dating back centuries.

The bottom line

It's amazing that gender — something many of us thought was a very simple concept — is actually so personal, nuanced, and complex. For that reason, it's totally OK if this list is a lot to digest!

Just remember: Gender is an essential part of health and well-being for everyone.

Becoming familiar with language that helps you to talk about this part of identity and society is a great way to care for yourself and be an ally to others.

Mere Abrams is a researcher, writer, educator, consultant, and licensed clinical social worker who reaches a worldwide audience through public speaking, publications, social media (@meretheir), and gender therapy and support services practice onlinegendercare.com. Mere uses their personal experience and diverse professional background to support individuals exploring gender and help institutions, organizations, and businesses to increase gender literacy and identify opportunities to demonstrate gender inclusion in products, services, programs, projects, and content.