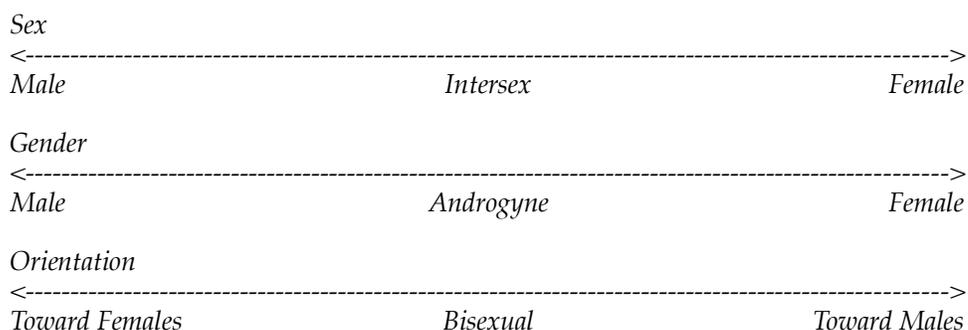


## The Basic Elements

There are three basic, *completely independent* components of human sexuality: sex, gender, and orientation. It is important to understand these concepts first before you can understand transgenderedness. It can be helpful to construct a graph, like the one below:



In most of the population, these three components line up. In homosexuals, orientation is opposite to sex and gender. In transgendered people, however, the three components may be all over the place. This graph is not an accurate representation of sexuality, which lies completely outside of binaries such as those above, but it can be a useful tool to begin understanding it.

**Sex** is completely *biological*, relating to the *physical body*. Sex itself has many components: genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes. Of all the elements of sex, only chromosomes cannot be changed. There are two poles of sex, *male* and *female*. Sex is sometimes in-between these poles: it is possible to have a tiny penis, a vagina with a long clitoris, a sex hormone imbalance, or even uncommon chromosome patterns such as XO (only one X by itself), XXX, XXY, XYY, etc. These are called *intersex conditions*.

**Gender** is completely *psychological*, relating to the *mind*. Gender also has many components: the gender you are legally assigned to, the gender you identify as, and the gender you are presenting. Gender is a lot more abstract than sex: there are the poles of *male* and *female* and the places in-between, but there are also genders completely outside of male and female. The gender one presents has the two poles of *masculine* and *feminine*. Gender *overrides* sex: someone whose body is male but who identifies as female *is a woman*, and vice versa. **Gender is what matters.**

**Orientation** is *who someone is attracted to*. Orientation can be stated unambiguously, as in *toward males* or *toward females*, or in relation to sex or gender, as in *homosexual* or *heterosexual*, *gay* or *straight*. Orientation terms should be used relative to gender, not sex, since gender is what's relevant: a *lesbian transsexual* has or had a male body, identifies as female, is attracted to other females, and is technically *homosexual*. Orientation can be general, as in *men*, or specific, as in *tall, butch women with red hair*.

## General Terms

There are a few terms that define sex, gender, and orientation in one fell swoop, or can apply to all three:

*Straight* means someone whose sex, gender, and orientation all match up and are at either one extreme or the other. Straight is also an orientation term; to reduce confusion, this meaning of straight is often called *heteronormative*.

*Queer* is an umbrella term covering anyone who isn't heteronormative. Any one or more of sex, gender, and orientation is either not at one of the extremes or not aligned with the others. Queer was formerly an offensive term, but has been reclaimed by newer generations as a positive term; older generations, however, may still find it offensive.

*Questioning* means anyone who is unsure of their sex, gender, or orientation.

*Ally* means anyone, heteronormative or not, who supports queer and questioning people.

## Sex Terms

Sex is often simpler than gender or orientation, but can still become complicated. These terms refer strictly to physical anatomy, and not gender or orientation.

*Genetic female, genetic girl (GG), genetic woman, natal woman, or female-born* refers to anyone whose genetics, in other words chromosomes, are female, or XX.

*Genetic male or male-born* refers to anyone whose genetics are male, or XY.

*Female-bodied* refers to anyone who currently has female hormones and genitalia, whether or not they were born that way.

*Male-bodied* refers to anyone who currently has male hormones and genitalia, whether or not they were born that way.

*Intersex* is any condition under which the body is neither strictly male nor strictly female. This may be caused by ambiguous genitalia (neither a perfect vagina and clitoris nor a perfect penis and testes), a hormone imbalance (too much or too little of testosterone or estrogen), or an uncommon set of chromosomes (XO [a single X], XXX, XXY, XYY, XXXX, XXXY, XXYY, XYYY, or XXXXX). (It is not possible to have Y by itself without any X, or more than five chromosomes. It is also possible to have XY but with *androgen insensitivity syndrome*, which makes the body insensitive to testosterone and therefore develop completely female, albeit infertile.)

*Hermaphrodite* is an older term for intersex which is now considered **offensive**.

*Shemale* refers to a woman with a penis. It is a derogatory term directed toward pre-op male-to-females. The term originated in pornography and is considered **offensive**.

*Transition* is the process of changing from one sex to another. There are several steps involved:

- The *real life test (RLT)*, which involves dressing and presenting as the opposite sex.
- *Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)*, which involves replacing the current sex hormones (testosterone or estrogen/progesterone) with those of the opposite sex. Before this step, someone is *pre-HRT*. After this step, they're *post-HRT*. Hormones will give, but cannot take: testosterone will lower the voice, make the clitoris longer, and make hair grow, but will not reduce breast size; estrogen will cause breast development, but will not make the voice higher or make hair stop growing. Both hormones will cause fat to be redistributed, making the body look more masculine (for testosterone) or feminine (for estrogen).
- *Laser hair removal (LHR)* and/or *electrolysis*, which kills the hair follicles in the face or other parts of the body to prevent hair from growing. This could be done by either male-to-females or female-to-males for various reasons.
- *Facial feminization surgery (FFS)*, which makes the face look more feminine. (Generally only done by male-to-females.)
- *Voice training*, which makes the voice sound more masculine or feminine. This is more important for male-to-females than female-to-males, since testosterone will naturally make the voice lower but estrogen will not make it higher.
- A *mastectomy*, which removes the breasts.
- A *hysterectomy*, which removes the uterus and often the ovaries.
- An *orchiectomy*, which removes the testes, usually only done if SRS is not an option.
- *Sex reassignment surgery (SRS)*, *gender reassignment surgery (GRS)* (can be an offensive term, since gender is not what's being changed), or *genital reconstruction surgery (GRS)*, all terms for what is widely referred to as a sex-change operation. In male-to-females, the penis is inverted (turned inside-out) to form a vagina, a *vaginoplasty*. In female-to-males, a penis is constructed and attached to the body, a *phalloplasty*, and/or the clitoris is freed from the labia minora, a *metoidoplasty*. Before this step, someone is *pre-op*. After this step, they're *post-op*. If someone cannot or will not have this done (because of expense, health concerns, personal preference, or whatever), they're *non-op*. This is often the very last step, and it often takes years to get there.

Before any of these steps are taken, someone is *pre-transition* or *pre-everything*.

Transition can be taken as far or as not far as one wants, and one can choose to take some steps and not others. Transition by itself will not make a person happy; that has to happen on the inside as well as the outside.

## Gender Terms

These terms refer primarily to a person's gender, and not their sex. **This is what matters.**

*Cisgender (CG)* refers to someone whose sex and gender match the gender they've been assigned. In other words, someone who is not transgendered.

*Trans* as a word by itself is an all-inclusive, all-encompassing term including every single kind of *transperson* listed below, and many more not listed. This is also known as the *trans umbrella*.

*Transgender (TG)* has both a general and a specific meaning. Generally, a transgendered person is one who feels that *their biological sex is an inaccurate or incomplete description of themselves* or one who *transcends the social stereotypes of gender*. Specifically, transgender means one's sex does not correspond to their gender, whatever that may be.

*Transsexual (TS)* refers to someone whose sex is *directly "opposite"* to their gender; in other words, their body is male but their gender is female, or their body is female but their gender is male. This is not the same thing as transgender, since *different* (what transgender means) and *opposite* (what transsexual means) are not necessarily the same. Black and white, for example, are both different and opposite. Black and red, however, are different but not opposite. As we will see, gender is not black and white. Transsexuality is **not** an extreme form of homosexuality, since gender and orientation are independent, and transsexuals may have any orientation.

*Transsexual*, with one *s*, is an alternate spelling of transsexual, but since it originated in pornography it is sometimes seen as **offensive**.

*Male-to-female (MTF or M2F)* refers to anyone who is genetically male, but who identifies as female. They may be at any point in transition.

*Female-to-male (FTM or F2M)* refers to anyone who is genetically female, but who identifies as male. They may be at any point in transition.

*Transsexual woman* or *transwoman* *always* refers to a male-to-female.

*Transsexual man* or *transman* *always* refers to a female-to-male.

*Tranny* is a slang word for transsexual (or sometimes transgender) used among transgendered people. Outside of that community, however, it is considered **offensive**.

*Genderqueer (GQ)* refers to anyone whose gender is something other than male or female (something in-between, something else entirely, or some combination of several genders).

*Male-to-X (MTX or MTWTF)* refers to anyone who is genetically male, but who identifies as something else entirely.

*Female-to-X (FTX or FTWTF)* refers to anyone who is genetically female, but who identifies as something else entirely.

*Androgyne* refers to someone whose gender is *between* male and female, and blends both of them together.

*Bigender* refers to someone whose gender is *both* male *and* female.

*Third* and *fourth* are other genders that lie completely outside the concepts of male and female. They are entirely different genders.

*Agender* refers to someone who has *no gender at all*.

*Gender fluid* (or just *fluid*) refers to someone who can actually *change* their gender to some extent.

*Crossdresser (CD)* refers to someone who wears clothes associated with the “opposite” gender as a necessary part of being happy. Notice that crossdressing is in relation to gender, not sex; a male-born transsexual in a dress would not be a crossdresser, as she would be wearing the clothes appropriate for her gender.

*Transvestite (TV)* refers to someone who wears clothes associated with the “opposite” gender for the purposes of sexual satisfaction. This is completely different from a crossdresser. This term is generally considered **offensive**.

*Drag queen* (or just *queen*) refers to a male (in gender) who wears clothes associated with the female gender for the entertainment of others.

*Drag king* refers to a female (in gender) who wears clothes associated with the male gender for the entertainment of others.

*Butch* refers to a somewhat masculine presentation.

*Femme* refers to a somewhat feminine presentation.

*Androgynous* refers to someone presenting as between male and female. Androgynous refers to how someone *presents*, while androgyne refers to how someone *identifies*.

*Genderfuck* refers to someone presenting a clashing mixture of both overly masculine and overly feminine elements, such as someone with a long beard and a skirt.

## Orientation Terms

Orientation refers to who someone is attracted to. It is not connected to sex or gender in any way, other than in that most people are attracted to the “opposite” sex and gender.

*Straight* means someone attracted to the “opposite” gender: a male attracted to females or a female attracted to males. A male-to-female transsexual attracted to men or a female-to-male transsexual attracted to women is straight, since gender is what’s relevant. For genderqueer people, this term is practically meaningless, since their gender is not male or female. Since straight is also a more general term, the synonym *heterosexual* may be used to avoid confusion.

*Breeder* is a slang term for a heteronormative person intended to be **offensive**.

*Gay* means someone attracted to the same gender: a male attracted to males or a female attracted to females. A male-to-female transsexual attracted to women or a female-to-male transsexual attracted to men is gay, since gender is what’s relevant. For genderqueer people, this term is also practically meaningless, since it was born from the male/female dichotomy. A synonym for gay is *homosexual*.

*Fag* or *faggot* is a slang term for a gay male. It is sometimes used jokingly within the gay community, but outside of that community is considered **offensive**.

*Lesbian* means a female attracted to other females. A male-to-female transsexual attracted to women is a lesbian, since gender is what’s relevant.

*Dyke* is a slang term for a butch lesbian. Like fag, it is sometimes used jokingly within the gay community, but outside of that community is considered **offensive**.

*Chapstick lesbian* is term for an androgynous or butch lesbian. It generally carries no offensive connotations.

*Lipstick lesbian* is a counterpart to chapstick lesbian, meaning a femme lesbian.

*Bisexual* means someone attracted to both men and women.

*Pansexual* means someone attracted to people of any gender at all.

*Heteroflexible* means someone attracted mostly to those of the “opposite” gender, but who may occasionally develop relationships with those of the same gender.

*Homoflexible* means someone attracted mostly to those of the same gender, but who may occasionally develop relationships with those of the “opposite” gender.

*Polyamorous* means being open to, desiring, or having more than two people in a mutual, loving relationship. Everybody involved must approve of the polyamorous relationship.

*Polygamy* means someone married or otherwise spiritually united with more than one person in a relationship. It is not necessarily loving and mutual, since not everybody involved necessarily agrees with it; therefore, it is not the same thing as a polyamorous relationship. It usually refers to a man in a relationship with many women. Many polyamorous people avoid this term because of its negative connotations.

*Polyfidelity* means a type of polyamorous relationship characterized by strong internal commitments. Some use it as a less stigmatized word for polygamy, while others use it more specifically to refer to a relationship where new members can only be added with the active consent of all those who are already involved.

*Polygynous* refers to a relationship with more than one woman.

*Polyandrous* refers to a relationship with more than one man.

*Asexual* means someone not attracted to anyone.

*Trisexual* means someone who will try anything once. This was originally a joke term, but some may claim it as part of their identity.

*Fag hag* refers to a woman who either is attracted to or just hangs out with gay men.

*Mesbian* can refer to a man who either is attracted to or just hangs out with lesbian women, or to a feminine male who still identifies as straight and cisgendered.

*Admirer*, *trannychaser*, and *chaser* are all terms for someone who is attracted to transgendered people. *Admirer* usually carries a good connotation, of someone who admires transpeople for being themselves. *Chaser* usually carries a negative connotation, of someone who preys on transpeople and will likely bring them harm. *Trannychaser* usually carries neither a positive nor a negative connotation.

## **Pronouns**

This is a source of confusion for many people unfamiliar with transgendered people. It shouldn't be, though, as long as you keep in mind that **gender is what really matters**.

**Rule #1: The simplest way to find out which pronoun to use is to ask.** If someone tells you to use a certain pronoun, always use that pronoun.

**Rule #2: Unless told otherwise, use the pronoun of their gender.** MTFs should be referred to with female pronouns, FTMs should be referred to with male

pronouns. If you're unsure of the gender with which they identify, go with the gender they're presenting.

English officially has four third-person pronouns:

*He, him, his, his, himself* — the male pronoun.

*She, her, her, hers, herself* — the female pronoun.

*They, them, their, theirs, themselves* — usually the plural third-person pronoun, but becoming more acceptable as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun. Some people may use this as the pronoun of their choice, although it does sound awkward in reference to a definite person.

*It, it, its, its, itself* — the only gender-neutral, exclusively singular, third-person pronoun in standard English. Some people use the it pronoun to refer to themselves, but many people find it **offensive**.

There are, however, many *gender neutral pronouns (GNPs)* that have been created that are not a part of standard English. Many transgendered people prefer the use of these pronouns over *it* and *they* and convoluted solutions such as *he or she, he/she, s/he*, etc. Not all of them do, however, and some may even find them offensive. The simplest way to find out which pronoun to use is to ask.

*E, em, eir, eirs, eirself* — called the Spivak pronouns.

*Ey, em, eir, eirs, emself* — modified Spivak pronouns, formed by just taking the *th* off the plural third-person pronoun.

*Sie, hir, hir, hirs, hirself* — called the sie and hir pronouns. Pronounced *see* and *hear* by most people.

*Ze, hir, hir, hirs, hirself* — a cross between the sie and hir and ze pronouns, used by Kate Bornstein.

*Ze, zem, zes, zes, zemself* — called the ze pronouns.

*Zie, zim, zir, zirs, zirself* — called the zie pronouns.

*Ve, ver, vis, vis, verself* — called the ve pronouns.

*Xe, xem, xyr, xyrs, xemself* — called the xe pronouns.

*Thon, thon, thons, thons, thonsel* — called the thon pronouns.

*\*e, h\*, h\*, h\*s, h\*self* — called the splat pronouns, used online in MUDs.

*S/he, him/er, his/er, his/ers, his/erself*— the usual convoluted solution proposed by those who fear change in the English language.

*Soe, soen, soer, soers, soenself*— some proposed androgyne pronouns.

*Le, lem, les, lems, lemself*— pronouns borrowed from French.

## Pop!

After all these definitions, you may feel you have a good grasp on what these words mean. Unfortunately, the bubble is about to burst. Sexuality is infinitely more complex than any glossary, dictionary, or encyclopedia could ever be. None of these terms have any concrete definition, and it is often debated what exactly the words mean. For example, some people who are by these definitions transsexual believe you are transsexual only before transition, and some believe you aren't transsexual until after transition. Transsexual is by these definitions a subset of transgender, but some transsexuals don't identify as transgendered. Eventually you must realize that the only thing you can rely on is that *if you believe you are something, you are*.

## Credits

This guide was compiled by Ginny Rebecca B\*, a Cal Poly student, in November of 2006, with the assistance of several members of the transgendered community who reviewed the document and provided clarifications. The information contained within is derived from several web sites, some of which are listed below:

- <http://community.nbtsc.org/~ftmichael/trans101.html> — Trans 101
- <http://www.antijen.org/> — The Antijen Pages
- <http://www.transproud.com/> — TransProud
- <http://www.sexuality.org/1/transgen/> — Transgenderism Archive
- <http://transwoman.tripod.com/> — Second Type Woman
- <http://www.shesnotthere.co.uk/> — She's Not There
- <http://androgyne.0catch.com/> — Androgyne Online
- <http://www.marcibowers.com/> — Marci L. Bowers, M.D.
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_transgender-related\\_topics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_transgender-related_topics) — Wikipedia's collection of transgender-related articles

I greatly recommend two books by Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* and *My Gender Workbook*, which also provided some of the inspiration for this guide.

If you really want to get a feel for the full diversity of human sexuality, you only need to take one peek here: <http://kreativekorp.com/miscpages/gender/gender.pl>

This document originated from <http://kreativekorp.com/miscpages/gender/SGO.pdf>