

# Queering Our Vocabulary:

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All definitions are provided as a general framework. Individuals decide for themselves whether these terms or other terms apply to their identities and may define similar words in different ways.

**Ally:** A heterosexual or cisgender person who cares about LGBTQ issues and works to challenge sexuality and gender related oppressions.

**Assigned Sex:** The physiological and anatomical characteristics of maleness and femaleness with which a person is born or that develop with physical maturity. These markers including internal and external reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, and body shape. Infants are usually assigned to a sex category (usually male or female) at birth on the basis of such characteristics (primarily the appearance of the external genitals) (Bornstein, 1994, 1998). We therefore use assigned sex to refer to the sex designation that appears on birth certificates and other legal documents. See also intersex.

**Butch:** A queer person whose gender presentation includes attributes more commonly associated with masculinity than femininity; an intentional performance of masculinity.

**Cisgender:** A person whose assigned sex aligns with their gender identity, i.e. a male/man, a female/woman. Someone who is not transgender.

**Cross-dressing:** A person who occasionally enjoys dressing in clothes typically associated with another gender. The words transvestite and transvestism have been used in the past to describe this activity or interest, but are now widely considered offensive.

**Femme:** A queer person whose gender presentation includes attributes commonly associated with femininity. An intentional performance of femininity.

**Gender Identity:** An identity usually conflated with assigned sex in a binary system that presumes one can only be a man or woman. However, gender exists on a spectrum of identities. A person's own understanding of themselves including gender nonbinary, man, woman, gender nonconforming and many others.

**Gender Expression:** People's behaviors that convey something about their gender, or that others interpret as meaning something about their gender. How we walk, talk, dress, and the language we use for ourselves (e.g. names and pronouns) are all aspects of gender expression. One must remember that a person's expression of their gender should not be assumed, nor should assumptions be made about their gender identity.

**Gender Identity Dysphoria:** A psychiatric/medical diagnosis included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMIV) to describe when a person assigned one gender identifies as a different gender, or

does not conform with the gender roles associated with their assigned sex. Note, many view the inclusion of GID in the DSMIV as offensive and an unnecessary barrier to receiving access to trans-related healthcare.

**Gender Nonconfirming:** Captures a variety of identities and the identity has permeable boundaries; One that does not identify as a man or a woman; characterized by the desire or tendency to challenge gender roles and presentation and/or to disrupt gender expectations. This is an identity that must be claimed as one's own; it should not be imposed upon people.

**Intersex:** A group of medical diagnoses describing a person whose anatomy or physiology differs from cultural ideals of male and female, in terms of external genitalia, internal genitalia, and/or hormone production levels. Intersex individuals are typically assigned as "male" or "female" at birth, and often undergo surgery on their genitals in infancy to force a more culturally acceptable gendered appearance. The intersex movement has challenged the ethics of infant genital surgeries that are not medically necessary, pointing out that many intersex people who undergo such surgery in infancy later report feeling a sense of loss of an essential aspect of themselves. About 2–4% of all births are intersex to some degree. This is sometimes not evident until puberty. For more information regarding intersexuality, contact the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), via their Web site [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org).

**Queer:** An umbrella identity term taken by people who do not conform to heterosexual and/or gender binary norms; a reclaimed derogatory slur taken as a political term to unite people who are marginalized because of their non-conformity to dominant gender identities and/or heterosexuality.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term that may include people whose assigned sex at birth does not correlate to their gender identity. For instance, a person assigned female at birth who identifies as man, a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman, or a person who was assigned male or female at birth who identifies as neither a man nor a woman. A person must self identify as transgender in order for this term to be used.

**Transphobia:** The fear, intolerance, or hatred of atypical gender expression or identity, or of people embodying or expressing an atypical gender identity.

## References

Bornstein, K. (1994). *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us*. New York: Vintage Books.

Bornstein, K. (1998). *My gender workbook: How to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely*. New York : Routledge.

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