SEX AND GENDER 101: THE GLOSSARY

AGENDER*

A specific gender identity label, typically defined as not identifying with any gender.

AROMANTIC*

Sometimes shortened to "aro," an identity label that refers to someone who does not feel romantic attraction. Some aromantic individuals feel sexual attraction, while others do not. Ex: aromantic and heterosexual vs aromantic and asexual.

ASEXUAL*

Sometimes shortened to "ace," an identity label that refers to someone who does not feel sexual attraction. Some asexual people do enjoy engaging in sex acts, while others do not. "Asexual" describes the lack of sexual attraction, not what behaviors someone does or does not participate in. "Asexual" also works as an umbrella term for ace-spectrum identities like "demisexual" or "gray ace."
Some asexual individuals feel romantic attraction, while others do not. Ex: asexual and homoromantic vs asexual and aromantic.

ASSIGNED GENDER AT BIRTH

This is sometimes interchanged with the phrase "assigned sex at birth," and refers to the gender that someone is categorized as when born. Ex: a baby is born, the doctor sees that they have a penis, informs the parents, "it's a boy!" and marks the sex as "male" on the birth certificate. This child would be assigned male at birth (AMAB). "Male" and "female" are technically terms that refer to sex, but are frequently used to refer to gender, which complicates definitions.

ASSIGNED SEX AT BIRTH

This is sometimes interchanged with the phrase "assigned gender at birth," and refers to what sex an infant is categorized as, often based solely on external anatomy. Because of the prevalence of a sex binary, most individuals are either assigned female at birth (AFAB) or assigned male at birth (AMAB) though some places have added "intersex" as an option.

BINARY

A system of two options. American society uses both a sex binary (male/female) and a gender binary (man/woman). There are many examples, both of individuals and societies, that exist outside of either or both binaries.

CISGENDER

Often shortened to "cis," this word describes someone who identifies with the same gender they were assigned at birth.

GENDER

An internal element of identity, parts of which are culturally and/or socially influenced. Examples include woman, nonbinary, Kinnar/Hijra, man, etc.

GENDER EXPRESSION

How someone outwardly shows their gender, such as through clothing, hair styles, makeup, etc. Please note that ideas of how to express gender are both culturally bound and individually determined.

GENDER POLICING

The practice of trying to control, critique, or make decisions around another person's gender. This is often based around the idea that someone is expressing their gender "incorrectly."

GENDERQUEER*

This is a specific gender identity that by design does not have a singular, concrete definition. While all label definitions can vary among individuals, "genderqueer" evades definition on purpose. People who use this label often fall under the nonbinary umbrella, though there are binary trans individuals who use this label as well.

INTERSEX

Someone who does not fit into the neat male/female binary. There are many ways that an individual can be considered intersex, ranging from natural variations in genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes from what has been arbitrarily labelled as "typical." This is a normal part of human variation.
Most intersex folks consider "hermaphrodite" to be a slur, but it should be noted that some have made the choice to reclaim this word. Always respect the individual's choice regarding what language honors them.

NONBINARY*

Both a specific gender identity label and an umbrella term. Whether specific or general, this word refers to anyone whose gender is somewhere outside of a strict gender binary. Not all nonbinary people consider themselves to be transgender, but the definition of transgender used here does include nonbinary people.

ORIENTATION

Commonly refers to sexual orientation or sexuality. This is who someone is sexually attracted to. Ex: lesbian, bisexual, gay, pansexual, asexual, straight, etc.
This can also refer to romantic orientation, which is who someone is romantically attracted to. While many people have a sexual and romantic orientation that are in line with each other, it is not always the case. Ex: homoromantic, aromantic, biromantic, heteroromantic, etc.

OUT

Refers to whether an individual is open with their gender or sexual orientation. Because our society is hetero- and cisnormative, it is typically only LGBTQ+ individuals who need to "come out" to have their identity seen. Individuals may be out in some contexts of their lives and not others, such as out to friends but not to family.
It is important to note that being "out" as a member of the LGBTQ+ community can be very dangerous, and is a personal decision for an LGBTQ+ person to make.

SEX

Refers to physical characteristics such as genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, body hair distribution, vocal pitch, etc. Many societies use a strict sex binary of "male" and "female," which has been found to be an oversimplification of human variation. There are up to 16 different combinations of sex chromosomes in humans!

TRANSGENDER

Often shortened to "trans," this word describes someone whose gender is different than the one they were assigned at birth.

THEY/THEM

A very common gender neutral pronoun set. Contrary to popular misconception, this pronoun set is grammatically correct when referring to an individual person. Ex: "I saw them at the store. They looked great with their new haircut!"

TWO SPIRIT*

This is an identity label specific to Indigenous peoples across what is now called North America. Prior to violent European colonization, it was common for nations across this swath of land to accept and embrace a wide array of gender identities and sexual orientations. "Two Spirit" can refer to gender or sexuality depending on the specific nation and individual.

ZE/ZIR

One example of many neopronoun sets, usually recognized as being gender neutral. Ex: "Ze adopted the cutest dog last week. I saw zir at the store yesterday and ze could not stop showing me pictures."

*definitions will vary based on the person using it