Sexual Orientation

The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual (straight) orientations. Avoid the offensive term "sexual preference," which is used to suggest that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is voluntary and therefore "curable." People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all.

Gay

The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., *gay man*, *gay people*). Sometimes *lesbian* (n. or adj.) is the preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as "homosexuals" an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

Lesbian

A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women. Avoid identifying lesbians as "homosexuals," a derogatory term *(see Offensive Terms to Avoid)*.

Bisexual, Bi

A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetime. Bisexual people need not have had specific sexual experiences to be bisexual; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual. Do not use a hyphen in the word "bisexual," and only capitalize bisexual when used at the beginning of a sentence.

Transgender, Transsexual

(see page 10)

Queer

An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g. queer person, queer woman). Typically, for those who identify as queer, the terms *lesbian*, *gay*, and *bisexual* are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don't apply to them. Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below). Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community. When Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it typically means queer and, less often, questioning.

LGBTQ

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. Sometimes, when the Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it can also mean questioning. LGBT and/or GLBT are also often used. The term "gay community" should be avoided, as it does not accurately reflect the diversity of the community. Rather, LGBTQ community is preferred.

Intersex

An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD.) Avoid the outdated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite." While some people can have an intersex condition and also identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated. (For more information, visit interactyouth.org.)

Asexual

An adjective used to describe people who do not experience sexual attraction (e.g., asexual person). A person can also be aromantic, meaning they do not experience romantic attraction. (For more information, visit asexuality.org.)

Heterosexual

An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also *straight*.

"Queer" was once considered a pejorative term, but has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves. However, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community.

Homosexual

(see Offensive Terms to Avoid) Outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive. The Associated Press, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* restrict usage of the term.

Homophobia

Fear of people attracted to the same sex. *Intolerance*, *bias*, or *prejudice* is usually a more accurate description of antipathy toward LGBTQ people.

Biphobia

Fear of bisexuals, often based on stereotypes, including inaccurate associations with infidelity, promiscuity, and transmission of sexually transmitted infections. *Intolerance*, *bias*, or *prejudice* is usually a more accurate description of antipathy toward bisexual people.

Coming Out

A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge a LGBTQ identity first to themselves and then they may reveal it to others. Publicly sharing one's identity may or may not be part of coming out.

Out

A person who self-identifies as LGBTQ in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. For example: *Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico*. Preferred to *openly gay*.

Openly Gay

Describes people who self-identify as gay in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. Also *openly lesbian*, *openly bisexual*, *openly transgender*, *openly queer*. While accurate and commonly used, the phrase still implies a confessional aspect to publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity. See *out* above.

Closeted

Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation. Better to simply refer to someone as "not out" about being LGBTQ. Some individuals may be out to some people in their life, but not out to others due to fear of rejection, harassment, violence, losing one's job, or other concerns.

Outing

The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumor and/or speculation) or revealing another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBTQ community.

Lifestyle

(see Offensive Terms to Avoid) Inaccurate term used by anti-LGBTQ extremists to denigrate LGBTQ people. As there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one LGBTQ lifestyle.

Marriage

In June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that every American has the constitutional right to marry the person they love. When reporting on marriage for same-sex couples, preferred terminology includes marriage equality and marriage for same-sex couples. Note, the terms "gay marriage" and "same-sex marriage" should be avoided, as they can suggest marriage for same-sex couples is somehow different than other marriages.

Civil Union

Historically used in the U.S. to describe state-based relationship recognition for same-sex couples that offered some or all of the state (though none of the federal) rights, protections, and responsibilities of marriage. While many Western countries (including the United States) have now legalized marriage for same-sex couples, others only legally recognize same-sex relationships through civil unions.

Domestic Partnership

Civil/legal recognition of a committed relationship between two people that sometimes extends limited protections to them.

Sodomy Laws

Historically used to selectively persecute gay people, the state laws often referred to as "sodomy laws" were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). "Sodomy" should never be used to describe same-sex relationships or sexual orientation.

"Out" is preferred to "openly gay." Though both terms are accurate and commonly used, "openly gay" still implies a confessional aspect to publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

OFFENSIVE	PREFERRED
"homosexual" (n. or adj.) Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-LGBTQ extremists to suggest that people attracted to the same sex are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please avoid using "homosexual" except in direct quotes. Please also avoid using "homosexual" as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word "gay." The Associated Press, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* restrict use of the term "homosexual" (see *AP*, *Reuters*, & *New York Times Style*).	**"gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people"** Please use *gay*, *lesbian*, or when appropriate *bisexual* or *queer* to describe people attracted to members of the same sex.
"homosexual relations/relationship," "homosexual couple," "homosexual sex," etc. Identifying a same-sex couple as "a homosexual couple," characterizing their relationship as "a homosexual relationship," or identifying their intimacy as "homosexual sex" is extremely offensive and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by anti-LGBTQ extremists to denigrate LGBTQ people, couples, and relationships.	**"relationship," "couple" (or, if necessary, "gay/lesbian/same-sex couple"), "sex," etc.** As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion, or relationship gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer unless you would call the same activity, emotion, or relationship "straight" if engaged in by someone of another orientation. In most cases, your readers, viewers, or listeners will be able to discern people's sexes and/or orientations through the names of the parties involved, your depictions of their relationships, and your use of pronouns.
"sexual preference" The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being attracted to the same sex is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured."	**"sexual orientation" or "orientation"** Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and queer people, as well as straight men and women *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).*
"gay lifestyle," "homosexual lifestyle," or "transgender lifestyle" There is no single LGBTQ lifestyle. LGBTQ people are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrases "gay lifestyle," "homosexual lifestyle," and "transgender lifestyle" are used to denigrate LGBTQ people suggesting that their sexual orientation and/or gender identity *(see Transgender Glossary of Terms)* is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured" *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style).*	**"LGBTQ people and their lives"**

"admitted homosexual" or "avowed homosexual" Dated terms used to describe those who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. The words "admitted" or "avowed" suggest that being attracted to the same sex is somehow shameful or inherently secretive.	**"out gay man," "out lesbian," or "out queer person"** You may also simply describe the person as being out, for example: "Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico." Avoid the use of the word "homosexual" in any case *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style)*.
"gay agenda" or "homosexual agenda" Notions of a so-called "homosexual agenda" are rhetorical inventions of anti-LGBTQ extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity for LGBTQ people as sinister *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style)*.	**Accurate descriptions of the issues (e.g., "inclusion in existing nondiscrimination laws," "securing equal employment protections")** LGBTQ people are motivated by the same hopes, concerns, and desires as other everyday Americans. They seek to be able to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love. Their commitment to equality and acceptance is one they share with many allies and advocates who are not LGBTQ.
"special rights" Anti-LGBTQ extremists frequently characterize equal protection of the law for LGBTQ people as "special rights" to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive nondiscrimination laws *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style)*. As such, the term should be avoided.	**"equal rights" or "equal protection"**

! Defamatory language

"fag," "faggot," "dyke," "homo," "sodomite," and similar epithets

The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups: they should not be used except in a direct quote that reveals the bias of the person quoted. So that such words are not given credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, "The person used a derogatory word for a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer person."

"deviant," "disordered," "dysfunctional," "diseased," "perverted," "destructive" and similar descriptions

The notion that being LGBTQ is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Today, words such as "deviant," "diseased" and "disordered" often are used to portray LGBTQ people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society. Words such as these should be avoided in stories about the LGBTQ community. If they must be used, they should be quoted directly in a way that clearly reveals the bias of the person being quoted.

Associating LGBTQ people with pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest

Being LGBTQ is neither synonymous with, nor indicative of, any tendency toward pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest. Such claims, innuendoes and associations often are used to insinuate that LGBTQ people pose a threat to society, to families, and to children in particular. Such assertions and insinuations are defamatory and should be avoided, except in direct quotes that clearly reveal the bias of the person quoted.

Sex
The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

Gender Identity
A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below.) Unlike gender expression (see below) gender identity is not visible to others.

Gender Expression
External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

Sexual Orientation
Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman.

Transgender (adj.)
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including *transgender*. Some of those terms are defined below. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.

Transsexual (adj.)
An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is **not** an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word *transgender*. It is best to ask which term a person prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual woman or transsexual man.

Trans
Used as shorthand to mean *transgender* or *transsexual* - or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella. Because its meaning is not precise or widely understood, be careful when using it with audiences who may not understand what it means. Avoid unless used in a direct quote or in cases where you can clearly explain the term's meaning in the context of your story.

Transgender man
People who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as a man may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans man. (Note: *trans man*, not "transman.") Some may also use FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male. Some may prefer to simply be called *men*, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers.

Transgender woman
People who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as a woman may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans woman. (Note: *trans woman*, not "transwoman.") Some may also use MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female. Some may prefer to simply be called *female*, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers.

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on transgender people, please see "In Focus: Covering the Transgender Community" and visit glaad.org/transgender.

Cross-dresser

While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term *cross-dresser* is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with women. Those men typically identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. *Replaces the term "transvestite."*

Transition

Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. **Avoid the phrase "sex change."**

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Also called Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS). Refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition (see transition above). Avoid the phrase "sex change operation." Do not refer to someone as being "pre-op" or "post-op." Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, undergo medical surgeries. **Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process.**

Gender Identity Disorder (GID)

outdated, see Gender Dysphoria

Gender Dysphoria

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) which replaced the outdated entry "Gender Identity Disorder" with *Gender Dysphoria*, and changed the criteria for diagnosis. The necessity of a psychiatric diagnosis remains controversial, as both psychiatric and medical authorities recommend individualized medical treatment through hormones and/or surgeries to treat gender dysphoria. Some transgender advocates believe the inclusion of Gender Dysphoria in the DSM is necessary in order to advocate for health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people.

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Transgender women are not cross-dressers or drag queens. Drag queens are men, typically gay men, who dress like women for the purpose of entertainment. Be aware of the differences between transgender women, cross-dressers, and drag queens. Use the term preferred by the person. Do not use the word "transvestite" at all, unless someone specifically self-identifies that way.

Other terms you may hear

You may hear the following terms when doing research on transgender issues or speaking to an interview subject. As they are not commonly known outside the LGBTQ community, they will likely require context and definition if used in mainstream media.

Cisgender

A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of "trans-." A more widely understood way to describe people who are not transgender is simply to say *non-transgender people.*

Gender Non-Conforming

A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. **Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming.** Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming.

Non-binary and/or genderqueer

Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.

Always use a transgender person's chosen name.

Many transgender people are able to obtain a legal name change from a court. However, some transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to legally change their name. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who uses a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).

Use the pronoun that matches the person's authentic gender.

A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or undergone surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender. If you are not certain which pronoun to use, ask the person, "What pronouns do you use?"

If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun they use, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person's appearance and gender expression or use the singular *they*.

For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are usually appropriate. Or it is also acceptable to use the singular *they* to describe someone when you don't wish to assign a gender. For example: "Every individual should be able to express their gender in a way that is comfortable for them."

Some people use the singular *they* to reflect their non-binary gender identity.

In 2015, *The Washington Post* updated its style guide to include the singular *they* to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression."

It is never appropriate to put quotation marks around either a transgender person's name or the pronoun that reflects that person's gender identity.

The Associated Press Stylebook provides guidelines for journalists reporting on transgender people and issues.

According to the AP Stylebook, reporters should "use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly." *(see AP, Reuters, & New York Times Style)*

When describing transgender people, please use the correct term or terms to describe their gender identity.

For example, a person who was assigned male at birth and transitions to live as a woman is a *transgender woman*, whereas a person who was assigned female at birth and transitions to live as a man is a *transgender man*. If someone prefers a different term, use it along with an explanation of what that term means to them.

Avoid pronoun confusion when examining the stories and backgrounds of transgender people prior to their transition.

Ideally, a story will not use pronouns associated with a person's birth sex when referring to the person's life prior to transition. Try to write transgender people's stories from the present day, instead of narrating them from some point in the past, thus avoiding confusion and potentially disrespectful use of incorrect pronouns. For example, "Prior to her transition, Caitlyn Jenner won the gold medal in the men's decathlon at the Summer Olympics held in Montreal in 1976."

In 2015, The Washington Post *updated its style guide to include the singular* they *to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun.*

PROBLEMATIC	PREFERRED
"transgenders," "a transgender" *Transgender* should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders."	**"transgender people," "a transgender person"** For example, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."
"transgendered" The adjective *transgender* should never have an extraneous "-ed" tacked onto the end. An "-ed" suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. It also brings transgender into alignment with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer. You would not say that Elton John is "gayed" or Ellen DeGeneres is "lesbianed," therefore you would not say Chaz Bono is "transgendered."	**"transgender"**
"transgenderism" This is not a term commonly used by transgender people. This is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanize transgender people and reduce who they are to "a condition."	**"being transgender"** Refer to *being transgender* instead, or refer to *the transgender community*. You can also refer to *the movement for transgender equality and acceptance*.
"sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative" Referring to a "sex-change operation," or using terms such as "pre-operative" or "post-operative," inaccurately suggests that a person must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.	**"transition"**

"biologically male," "biologically female," "genetically male," "genetically female," "born a man," "born a woman"

Problematic phrases like those above are reductive and overly-simplify a very complex subject. As mentioned above, a person's sex is determined by a number of factors - not simply genetics - and a person's biology does not "trump" a person's gender identity. Finally, people are born babies: they are not "born a man" or "born a woman."

"assigned male at birth," "assigned female at birth" or "designated male at birth," "designated female at birth"

"passing" and "stealth"

While some transgender people may use these terms among themselves, it is not appropriate to repeat them in mainstream media unless it's in a direct quote. The terms refer to a transgender person's ability to go through daily life without others making an assumption that they are transgender. However, the terms themselves are problematic because "passing" implies "passing as something you're not," while "stealth" connotes deceit. When transgender people are living as their authentic selves, and are not perceived as transgender by others, that does not make them deceptive or misleading.

"visibly transgender," "not visibly transgender"

❗ Defamatory language

"deceptive," "fooling," "pretending," "posing," "trap," or "masquerading"

Gender identity is an integral part of a person's identity. Do not characterize transgender people as "deceptive," as "fooling" or "trapping" others, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are inaccurate, defamatory and insulting. (See "passing" and "stealth" as problematic terms above.)

"tranny," "she-male," "he/she," "it," "shim"

These words dehumanize transgender people and should not be used in mainstream media. The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups: they should not be used except in a direct quote that reveals the bias of the person quoted. So that such words are not given credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, "The person used a derogatory word for a transgender person." Please note that while some transgender people may use "tranny" to describe themselves, others find it extremely offensive.

"bathroom bill"

A term created and used by far-right extremists to oppose nondiscrimination laws that protect transgender people. The term is geared to incite fear and panic at the thought of encountering transgender people in public restrooms. Simply refer to the nondiscrimination law/ordinance instead. For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on nondiscrimination laws and bathrooms, please see ["Debunking the 'Bathroom Bill' Myth – Accurate reporting on LGBT nondiscrimination: A guide for journalists."](#)