

# Gender Glossary



**Compiled by Qwo-Li Driskill**

Dragonfly Rising Press  
Organizers' Pamphlet Series #2



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Dragonfly Rising Press  
Three Fires (Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi) Territory  
East Lansing, MI 48826

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### **Dragonfly Rising Press Organizers' Pamphlet Series**

#1 *"What are you talking about? Why should I cut my dreads? What's wrong with a Mohawk?" Answers for White People on Appropriation, Hair and Anti-racist Struggle* by Colin Kennedy Donovan and Qwo-Li Driskill

#2 *Gender Glossary* by Qwo-Li Driskill



Dragonfly Rising Press

## Gender Glossary

*Editor's Note: This glossary is neither definitive nor complete. Language in Trans, Genderqueer, and gender non-conforming communities is constantly being developed and changed, and the understanding of some of these terms may shift depending on the person or community one is interacting with. This, however, may give you a clearer understanding of some of the language and concepts in current Trans, Genderqueer, and gender non-conforming movements. I am always looking to expand and update this glossary. If you have any suggestions, feel free to email them to me at [qwo-li@dragonflyrising.com](mailto:qwo-li@dragonflyrising.com).*

**Bio:** Biological. Refers to one's assigned gender at birth. Bio Woman, Bio Man, Bio Boy, Bio Girl.

**Butch:** Masculine qualities. A person who displays masculine qualities/characteristics or inhabits a masculine gender identity. A gender-identity label for those who express themselves in consciously masculine ways.

**Compulsory Heterosexuality:** Originally coined by Adrienne Rich in her groundbreaking essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," compulsory heterosexuality can be briefly defined as the concept that a **heterosexist** power structure forces people to assume heterosexual identities, desires, and relationships through coercion, violence, and lack of options. See also **heteropatriarchy**.

**Cross-Dresser:** Someone who dresses in the clothing opposite of the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Cisgender:** A term sometimes used—particularly within academic and online contexts—to describe those whose gender identity and expression correspond with the gender they were assigned at birth. The prefix *cis* (pronounced like "sis") is from Latin and means, "on the same side of." This term is meant to recenter discussions of power in order to describe the particular positions of privilege of those whose gender identities and expressions correspond with dominant societal expectations. *Cis* is also used as a prefix for other terms, such as *cisman*, and *ciswoman*.

**Drag King:** A female embodied person who dresses in men's clothing, often exaggerating masculine characteristics and gender roles, particularly for performance.

**Drag Queen:** A male embodied person who dresses in women's clothing, often exaggerating feminine characteristics and gender roles, particularly for performance.

**Femme or Fem:** Feminine qualities. A person who displays feminine qualities/characteristics or inhabits a feminine gender identity. A gender-identity label for those who express themselves in consciously feminine ways.

**Femmephobia:** The hatred and oppression of femininity and femme-identified people.

**FTM:** Female-to-male. Most often used for transsexual identities, but sometimes also used for gender expressions along a female-to-male gender spectrum.

**Gender:** Amy Sonnie defines gender as “Characteristics of masculinity and femininity learned or chosen. A person’s assigned sex does not always match their gender...and most people display traits of more than one gender” (240). Gender should not be confused with biological sex or sexuality.

**Gender Binary:** The idea that gender exists at two opposite, fixed poles of "male/female," "man/woman," and "masculine/feminine." See **gender regime**.

**Genderfuck:** Intentional crossing of gender cues/signals in order to disrupt rigid gender constructions and binaries.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** An umbrella term for those whose gender identities and/or gender expressions fall outside of the **gender binary**.

**Genderqueer:** Someone who “queers” gender. Someone who doesn’t identify as either a man or a woman, but a different gender entirely. Someone who identifies as both a man and a woman. Someone who creates **hir** own gender outside of the **gender binary**. Also, someone who identifies both their gender identity and sexuality as contrary to “acceptable” **heteropatriarchal** gender constructions, and uses this term as a way to show connections between their oppression as a Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Queer person with their oppression as a gender non-conforming person.

**\*Gender regime:** A gender regime dictates that there are only two genders and regulates what it means to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. The idea that males should be masculine and females should be feminine. A gender regime informs our understandings of our bodies, our “roles,” and the punishments that come with challenging these roles. A gender regime has built-in controls to keep us in our assigned roles, such as the threat of violence, ridicule, or rejection and the lack of models for anything different. A gender regime is policed and upheld by heterosexism and patriarchy.

**Heterosexism:** The belief, upheld by heteropatriarchy, that heterosexual desire is the only “natural” or “normal” sexuality and is superior to other sexual orientations, and therefore the perceived right to dominate Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans/Queer people. Also, the assumption that everyone is essentially heterosexual, and that other sexual orientations are simply a deviation from or replication of heterosexuality.

**Heteropatriarchy:** The system of heterosexual male domination. This term points to the relationships between **patriarchy** and **heterosexism**.

**Hir:** Pronounced “here.” A gender-neutral pronoun that is an alternative to “her” or “his.” See also **s/he** and **ze**.

**Internalized Homophobia:** The fear and hatred of internal feelings of emotional/spiritual/sexual desires toward someone of the same gender. Also, homophobic feelings from one Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans/Queer person toward others in the GLBTQ community.

**\*Intersexed:** Describes people born multisexed (born with some combination of male and female sex organs.) According to the Intersex Society of North America, "Anatomic sex differentiation occurs on a male/female continuum, and there are several dimensions." It is estimated that anywhere from 1 in 100 to 1 in 2000 infants is born intersexed, but the most common reaction by the medical establishment is to "fix" these babies immediately. Many consider "fixing" these babies mutilation.

*Editor's Note: While non-Intersex activists have tried to claim "Intersex" as a Transgender or gender-nonconforming experience, most Intersex activists and individuals are explicit about the importance of not conflating these identities. For more information, please read Emi Koyama's zines created for the Intersex Initiative: <http://eminism.org/store/zine-intersex.html>.*

**LGBTQQIA (and similar acronyms):** Many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) organizations have moved towards expanding acronyms in order to be inclusive of a wider range of identities and communities. "Q" usually represents "Queer," but can also represent "Questioning," "I" represents "Intersexed" and "A" represents "Allies."

*Editor's Note: While moves toward inclusive organizing is positive, many activists have questioned the usefulness of "tacking on" additional letters to acronyms without shifting political goals, organizational missions, and centers of power. For example, while both "B" and "T" are now commonly included along with "L" and "G" in many organizational titles, these additions are often only in name, and organizational structures and missions remain firmly "Gay" and/or "Lesbian." Similarly, some organizations are beginning to tack on "TS" to stand for **Two-Spirit** to their growing list of letters, without shifting organizational focuses toward the concerns of Indigenous people. Sadly, such moves are often tokenistic rather than inclusive or transformational.*

**MTF:** Male-to-female. Most often used for transsexual identities, but sometimes also used for gender expressions along a male-to-female gender spectrum.

**Misogyny:** The hatred of women.

**Monosexism:** The belief that love and attraction to one gender is superior to all other sexualities.

**Monosexual:** A person who is attracted to only one gender.

**Oppression:** The domination of one group of people over another, enforced and maintained by institutional power.

**Pansexual/ Omnisexual:** A person who is attracted to all genders. Some people are moving away from the term *Bisexual* to *Omnisexual* or *Pansexual* in order to disrupt the gender binary.

**Patriarchy:** Literally, “rule of the father.” The system of male domination.

**Privilege:** Special rights and access granted only to those in a ruling class (white people, men, temporarily able-bodied people, etc), bestowed simply because one is part of that group.

**Relative Privilege:** Privilege that may occur in specific locations/contexts/experiences. (Example: a **FTM** perceived as a **BioMan** may experience relative privilege walking down the street but experiences oppression in contexts where his gender identity is disclosed or exposed.)

**Sexism:** Institutionalized fear, hatred, and marginalization of women. (Sexism=Prejudice + Power).

**S/he:** Pronounced “see.” A gender-neutral pronoun that is an alternative to “she” or “he.” Also, **ze**.

**Tranny:** A Trans person. While embraced by some Trans people, other Trans communities and individuals may find the term offensive.

**Trans:** From transgender, transsexual, and transvestite. An umbrella term often used in transgender communities to demedicalize the words used for our identities.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender expression and gender identity fall outside constructed gender norms. Sometimes abbreviated as **TG**.

**Transman:** See **FTM**.

**\*Transphobia:** Hatred and/or discrimination against people who break or blur gender roles and sex characteristics. Transphobia is mandated by a gender regime that says we are either man or woman, masculine or feminine.

**\*Transsexual:** A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, so they take hormones or get sex reassignment surgery (SRS). There is an incredible range of reasons for taking this step. In many states after a period of time SRS recipients can legally change their name and other legal documents. Sometimes called **TS**.

**Transwoman:** See **MTF**.

**Transvestite:** A person who dresses in clothing opposite of their assigned gender. Usually used in reference to heterosexual males, though sometimes used in reference to Gay/Bi/Queer men and Lesbian/Bi/Queer women. Usually distinct from Drag King and Drag Queen. Sometimes abbreviated as **TV**.

**Two-Spirit:** A contemporary term in some First Nations/Native/Indigenous communities that refers to constructions of gender and sexuality within Indigenous traditions and communities of the "Americas." Created as an umbrella word in English by and for Native people and as an alternative to the offensive anthropological term "berdache," which has an original meaning of "boy kept for unnatural purposes." Please note that the use of the term Two-Spirit as an identity label for non-Native people is not only inaccurate, it is usually considered offensive.

**Ze:** Pronounced "zee." A gender-neutral pronoun that is an alternative to "she" or "he."

\*Definition taken from the book *Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology* edited by Amy Sonnie. Los Angeles: Alyson, 2000.

## Additional Resources

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Dragonfly Rising Press, 2008.  
Organizers' Pamphlet Series #2  
[www.dragonflyrising.com/organizers.php](http://www.dragonflyrising.com/organizers.php)