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Gender, Sex and Sexual Orientation Guidelines 2023

Gender refers to internal and social identity and often corresponds with but is not synonymous with sex. Experts say *gender* is a spectrum, not a *binary* structure consisting of only males and females, that can vary by society and change over time.

Sex refers to biological characteristics, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive anatomy, which can also vary or change in understanding over time, or be medically and legally altered.

Since not all people fall under one of two categories for sex or *gender* — as in the cases of *nonbinary* and *intersex* people — avoid references to *both*, *either* or *opposite sexes* or *genders*. Relatedly, not all people use gendered pronouns such as *his* or *hers*. Such pronouns are often an example of *gender expression*, but they do not always align with typical or stereotypical expectations of gender and are not certain indicators of someone's *gender identity*.

Language around gender is ever-evolving. Newsrooms and organizations outside the AP may need to make decisions, based on timing, necessity and audience, on terms that differ from or are not covered by the AP's specific recommendations.

More details and key terms:

gender A social construct encompassing a person's behaviors, intrinsic identity and appearance. Gender often corresponds with but is not synonymous with sex. A person's sex and gender are usually assigned at birth by parents or attendants and can turn out to be inaccurate. Experts say gender is a spectrum, not a binary structure consisting of only men and women, that can vary among societies and can change over time. See **gender expression; gender identity; sex; transgender**.

gender identity A person's sense of feeling male, female, neither or some combination of both. Often just *gender* will suffice: *She spent a lot*

of time explaining her gender may work just as well as *She spent a lot of time explaining her gender identity*. Examples of gender identities include *man* or *boy*; *woman* or *girl*; *nonbinary*; *bigender*; *agender*; *gender-fluid*; *genderqueer*; and combinations of identities, such as *nonbinary woman*. See **gender**; **gender**

expression; **LGBTQ+**; **nonbinary**; **pronouns**; **transgender**.

gender expression How people outwardly convey their gender, intentionally or not, such as through fashion choices, mannerisms or pronouns. Gender stereotypes can lead others to incorrectly perceive *someone's gender* or *sexual orientation*. See **gender identity**; **gender-nonconforming**; **pronouns**.

gender-fluid, gender-fluidity Refers to a gender identity or expression that changes over time. Include the hyphen.

gender-nonconforming (adj.) *Gender-nonconforming* is acceptable in broad references to describe people whose identities or expressions do not follow gender norms. The term *gender-expansive* is similar but carries a connotation of flexibility and exploration of one's gender identity. Both terms may include but are not synonymous with *transgender*. Avoid dated terminology such as *gender-bending* or *tomboy*.

genderqueer (adj.) An identity describing people whose gender expression does not follow norms; use only if the person or group identifies as such. Not synonymous with *nonbinary*.

nonbinary (adj.) Describes people who don't identify as strictly *male* or *female*; can include *agender* (having no gender), *gender-fluid* (an identity that fluctuates) or a combination of male and female. Not synonymous with *transgender*, though some *nonbinary* people are also *transgender*. See **gender expression**; **gender identity**; **pronouns**.

pronouns See the separate **pronouns** entry.

transgender (adj.) Describes people whose gender does not match the one usually associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Identify people as *transgender* only when relevant, and use the name by which they live publicly. Unless it is central to the story, avoid mention of a person's *gender transition* or *gender-affirmation surgery* in news coverage, which can be intrusive and insensitive.

Avoid references to a transgender person being born a boy or girl, or phrasing like *birth gender*. *Sex* (or *gender*) *assigned at birth* is the accurate terminology. The shorthand *trans* is acceptable on second reference and in headlines.

A person who is assigned female at birth and transitions to align with their identity as a boy or man is a *transgender boy* or *transgender man*, and a person who is assigned male at birth and transitions to align with their identity as a girl or woman is a *transgender girl* or *woman*.

Avoid the one-word compounds *transman* and *transwoman*. Instead, when relevant, say *transgender man* or *transgender woman*. In subsequent references, *trans man* or *trans woman* are acceptable.

Do not use as a noun, such as referring to someone as *a transgender*, or use the term *transgendered*. Do not use the terms *transgendered* or *transgenderism*.

Not synonymous with terms like *cross-dresser* or *drag queen*. Do not use the outdated term *transsexual* unless a source specifically asks to be identified as such.

Avoid derogatory terms such as *tranny*. Follow guidelines for **obscenities, profanities, vulgarities** as appropriate.

Refer to a transgender person's previous name, also called a *deadname*, only in the rare instance it is relevant to the story.

See **biological; deadnaming; gender-affirming care; transition, gender transition**.

cisgender Describes people whose *gender identity* matches the sex they were assigned at birth; that is, not *transgender*. Explain if necessary. Do not use terms like *normal* to describe people who are not *transgender*. Not synonymous with *heterosexual*, which refers to *sexual orientation*. See **transgender**.

deadnaming The practice, widely considered insensitive, offensive or damaging, of referring to transgender people who have changed their name by the name they used before their transition. Use a person's previous name or pre-transition image only if required to understand the news or if requested by the person.

The issue of *deadnaming* often arises when public figures announce a gender transition. In these and other cases, generally use the *deadname* only once and not in the opening paragraph, with future coverage using only the new name.

Deadnaming a transgender person, even posthumously in obituaries or other coverage, is often considered disrespectful to the deceased, their survivors and any transgender people.

In the AP, use of a transgender person's previous name must be approved by managers.

When naming suspects or victims in stories about crimes or accidents, be cognizant that authorities or family members may be ignorant of or be disregarding the person's wishes; when possible, take into account information given by the person or by current friends or others who may have better information about how the person lived and identified. See **transgender**.

transition (n., v.), **gender transition** The legal, medical or social processes some transgender or nonbinary people undergo to match their *gender identity*. Examples can include a formal or informal change to names or pronouns, makeup and hairstyles, hormone therapy, or

gender-affirmation surgery. Mention or describe it only when relevant. See **gender-affirming care**; **transgender**.

gender dysphoria Use this term, not *gender identity disorder*, for the distress felt when someone's *gender expression* does not match their *gender identity*. It is also a medical diagnosis often required for people to undergo *gender-affirmation* procedures.

gender-affirming care Refers to a swath of mental and medical treatments (such as counseling, hormones or surgery) that help bring a person's gender expression (such as voice, appearance or anatomy) in line with their *gender identity*. It can be but is not necessarily part of a *gender transition*. Such care is not limited to transgender people; it can also serve cisgender, nonbinary or intersex people.

If surgery is involved, *gender-affirming* or *gender-affirmation surgery*. Do not use abbreviations such as *GAS*, *GCS* or *SRS* unless in quotations, and introduce the full term before the quote. Do not use the outdated term *sex change*, and avoid describing someone as *pre-op* or *post-op*. *Gender-affirming care* is the phrasing used by leading medical groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Other common phrasing, such as *gender-confirming care* and *gender-confirmation* or *sex-reassignment surgery*, are acceptable in quotations and in proper names. Phrasing like *transgender health care* and *gender-transition surgery* is acceptable when the context is confined to transgender people or a gender transition, respectively, but *gender-affirming care* is best in broader references or when the scope or context is unclear.

Refer to a person's *gender-affirming surgery* only when relevant. See **transition**, **gender transition**, **gender expression**, **gender identity**.

transsexual Some people who have undergone *gender-affirmation* procedures refer to themselves as *transsexual*; use the term only if a person requests it. See **gender-affirming care**.

biological A word often best confined to medical or scientific contexts, especially in stories or passages about gender. While sex is a biological feature, terms like *biological male*, *man*, *female* or *woman* are sometimes used by opponents of transgender rights to portray sex as more simplistic than scientists assert, and to downplay the significance of *gender* and how it differs from *sex*.

hormones Avoid references to *male* or *female hormones*. All humans have varying levels of sex hormones, including testosterone and estrogen. Hormone replacement therapy may be an element of a person's *gender transition*. See **transition, gender transition**.

cross-dresser Use this term instead of the outdated *transvestite* for someone who wears clothing associated with a different gender, and only when the subject identifies as such. Not synonymous with *drag performer* or *transgender*.

drag performer, drag queen, drag king Entertainers who dress and act as a different gender. *Drag queens* act as women; *drag kings* act as men. *Male impersonator* and *female impersonator* are also acceptable. Not synonymous with *cross-dresser* or *transgender*.

sex Refers to biological and physiological characteristics, including but not limited to chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. A person's sex is usually assigned at birth by parents or attendants, sometimes inaccurately. Sex often corresponds with but is not synonymous with *gender*, which is a social construct.

See **gender; hormones; biological**.

female, male In general, *female* and *male* are adjectives that can describe people of any age and are used only rarely as nouns, such

as for a range of ages or an unknown age. *The study included males ages 10-21. She is the first female governor of North Carolina.*

Woman, women, man and men are usually reserved for use as a noun to describe adults, while *girl, girls, boy and boys* are typically used as a noun for people under age 18.

Be aware of nuances and pitfalls in the use of *female* and *woman/women*.

Since *female* primarily describes sex, not gender, some people object to its use as a descriptor for women because it can be seen as emphasizing biology and reproductive capacity over *gender identity*. It can also sometimes carry misogynistic tones that may vary in severity by race, class and other factors.

For this reason, *woman* or *women* is increasingly common as an adjective. But its use as such can often be awkward, especially if the words *man* or *men* would not be used adjectivally in a parallel sense. For instance: *He is the only man construction worker on the otherwise all-woman crew* is awkward, and *He is the only male construction worker on the all otherwise all-woman crew* is not parallel. Options for being both sensitive and eloquent include *He is the only man on the otherwise all-woman construction crew*. See **boy, girl; gender-neutral language**.

intersex Describes people born with genitalia, chromosomes or reproductive organs that don't fit typical definitions for males or females. Do not use the outdated term *hermaphrodite*. Do not conflate with *transgender* or *nonbinary*.

sexual orientation Not *sexual preference*. Examples include *lesbian* (women attracted to women), *gay* (men attracted to men), *bisexual* (attraction to men and women), *pansexual* (attraction regardless of gender), *asexual* (people who don't experience sexual attraction), and *straight* or *heterosexual* (women attracted to men, and

vice versa). Mention a person's *sexual orientation* only when relevant to the subject matter, and do so only if the information is verified.

Avoid references to a *gay* or *alternative lifestyle*. Avoid *homosexual* to describe people, though *homosexuality* is acceptable as a noun for the concept of same-sex attraction. *Gays* is acceptable as a plural noun when necessary, but use the singular *gay* only as an adjective, not as a noun. *Lesbian* is acceptable as an adjective or as a noun in singular or plural form.

Avoid salacious terminology and unnecessary modifiers in phrasing like *gay lovers* or *lesbian kiss*; instead use neutral terms like *couple* or *kiss*.

Transgender is not a sexual orientation. Like anyone, transgender people can have any sexual orientation.

See **asexual**; **bisexual**; **LGBTQ+**.

LGBTQ+ (adj.) Acceptable in all references for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning, plus other sexual and gender minorities*. Fewer or additional letters can be used to be more inclusive or in quotations and names of organizations and events, such as *LGBT* or *LGBTQIA*. *I* stands for *intersex*, and *A* typically stands for *asexual* (a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction). Use of *LGBTQ+* is best used as a collective adjective: *Walters joined the LGBTQ+ business association*. Avoid using *LGBTQ+* to describe individuals, and don't default to *LGBTQ+* if discussing a more specific population: *a bisexual advocacy group, a transgender health program*. Follow guidelines for **obscenities, profanities, vulgarities** as appropriate. See **sexual orientation; gender identity**.

queer Many LGBTQ+ people now use the word *queer* as a point of empowerment to refer to a sexual orientation or gender identity.

The term sometimes is used as a synonym for *LGBTQ+*. However, because of its origins as a slur, *queer* is not universally accepted

among LGBTQ+ people, and its use tends to be more prevalent among younger generations. Use caution when it isn't being used to describe the way an individual identifies, in the names of organizations or in a direct quote. When it is meant as a slur, follow guidelines for **obscenities, profanities, vulgarities**. See **LGBTQ+**.

asexual Describes people who don't experience sexual attraction, though they may feel other types of attraction, such as romantic or aesthetic. Not synonymous with and does not assume celibacy. A person's asexuality can be constant or change over time. See **sexual orientation**.

bisexual (n. and adj.) Describes people attracted to men and women. The shortened form *bi* is acceptable in quotations. See **sexual orientation**.

conversion therapy The scientifically discredited practice of using therapy to "convert" LGBTQ+ people to heterosexuality or traditional gender expectations. Either refer to it as *so-called conversion therapy* or put quotation marks around it. Do not do both. *Gay conversion therapy* should take no hyphen. Always include the disclaimer that it is discredited. See **so called, so-called**.

homophobia, homophobic Acceptable in broad references or in quotations to the concept of fear or hatred of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. *The governor denounced homophobia*. In individual cases, be specific about observable actions; avoid descriptions or language that assume motives. *The leaflets contained an anti-gay slur. The voters opposed same-sex marriage*. Related terms include *biphobia* (fear or hatred of bisexuals) and *transphobia* (fear or hatred of transgender people).

openly, out The terms *out* and *openly* can imply that to identify as LGBTQ+ is inherently shameful, so use them only when relevant: *Xiong is the group's first openly gay president* (which would

allow for the possibility that previous presidents were gay but not out) or *Xiong, who came out at age 29, wishes he had done so sooner.*

Do not use terms like *avowed* or *admitted*.

Don't assume that because news figures address their *sexual orientation* or *gender transition* publicly, it qualifies as *coming out*; public figures may consider themselves *out* even if they haven't previously addressed their identity or orientation publicly.

Outing or *outed* is usually used when someone's identity or orientation is revealed against their knowledge or will.

same-sex marriage The preferred term over *gay marriage*, because it is more inclusive and because the laws generally don't address sexual orientation. Where legal, *same-sex marriages* do not differ from other marriages, so the term should be used only when relevant and needed to distinguish from marriages of other couples.

sexual identity People's awareness of themselves in a sexual sense. It incorporates a person's *sex, gender identity, gender expression* and *sexual orientation*. See **SOGI**.

SOGI Increasingly popular shorthand for the concept of *sexual orientation and gender identity*. Avoid using the acronym unless necessary, as in a quote or name of an organization, and explain the term if used. See **sexual identity**.

For a partial list of print and online resources used by the Stylebook team, see the **Bibliography**.