A Glossary of Helpful Terms*

*these terms are constantly evolving through academic discourse and are interpreted and defined differently by various scholars and disciplines. The definitions here are a helpful starting point and are open to interpretation and reframing.

**fluid:** in gender theory, the notion that identity and sexuality are not fixed categories.

“We have reached a point where theories of the relationship between gender and sexuality, acknowledging the fluidity, instability, and fragmentation of identities and a plurality of subject positions, are seeking to address how gender’s link to sexuality is not determinate or unidirectional, but complex, dynamic, contingent, fluid, and unstable.”

(Diane Richardson, “Patterned Fluidities: (Re) Imagining the Relationship between Gender and Sexuality,” *Sociology* 41, no. 3 (June 2007), 464.)

**gender:** is the social construction of sexuality, the ways in which society perceives us or in which we perceive ourselves.

- **gender binary:** the idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

- **gender identity:** subjective sense of oneself as “female” or “male” or homosexual, bisexual, or transgender.

- **gender presentation:** how a person dresses, looks, and acts; the presentation of one’s sense of gender through behavior and dress.

- **gender roles:** gendered behaviors considered appropriate by a given society or group.

“Two distinct aspects of the sex/gender system are in play. One is structured in gender identity, and tends to look for signs of femininity in men and masculinity in women. The other is structured in object-choice, and depends upon sexual and/or emotional commitment to another person of the same gender. To be sure, they are bound to become tangled together; nonetheless, they are analytically separate, and by no means necessarily either homologous or in a permanent relation.”


**identity:** the fact or characteristic of being.

Performance theorist Peggy Phelan writes: “Identity cannot, then, reside in the name you can say or the body you can see — your own or your mother’s. Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to another — which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the
other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always a loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being.”
(Peggy Phelan Unmarked: The Politics of Performance [London: Routledge, 1993], 13)

intersectionality: (as defined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989) The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity.

passing: the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own, which may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age, and/or disability status. Passing may result in privileges, rewards, or an increase in social acceptance, or be used to cope with a stigma.

“The term ‘passing’ suggests a type of instability, a ‘moving through,’ or the lack of a stable home or place. Passing was equated both with opportunity (access to white-collar employment, better neighborhoods) and with death (a forever severing from one’s family, friends, and communities). . . . Racial passing can be a type of self-imposed exile. Between the late eighteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, countless African Americans passed as white, leaving behind families, friends, and communities, often without any available avenue for return.”

performance art: a nontraditional art form often with political or topical themes that typically features a live presentation to an audience or onlookers (as on a street) and draws on such arts as acting, poetry, music, dance, or painting.

“Performance art is an art form combining elements of theatre, music, and the visual arts. It is usually carefully programmed and generally does not involve audience participation. The tradition of performance art can be traced back to the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, who often staged humorous or provocative events to promote their work or ideas. However, it was only in the later 1960s and particularly in the 1970s that performance art became recognized as a category of art in itself.”

performativity: A term popularized by Judith Butler in the context of the redefinition of gender as an action humans are compelled to perform by society, rather than a state of bodily condition or being in itself.

Butler argued that gender is socially constructed through acts that are performative in that they serve to define and maintain identities. Gender, according to Butler, is “a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . . [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely
that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”

**queer:** 1) an umbrella term to describe individuals who don’t identify as straight and/or cisgender. 2) a slur used to refer to someone who isn’t straight and/or cisgender. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, and how it is still used as a slur many communities, it is not embraced or used by all LGBTQ people. The term “queer” can often be used interchangeably with LGBTQ (e.g., “queer people” instead of “LGBTQ people”). 3) Theoretically, queer is used by multiple theorists to argue for “thinking about queerness as a way of being, doing and desiring differently as much as a specific marker of identity. To be queer, by this definition, is to resist the hegemonic logics that dictate what it means to be an acceptable, valued, heteronormative subject.” In other words, it is to “live life otherwise” making queerness the term for both the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and a way to describe “the reimagining, resisting and remaking of the world.” (From Bonnie Ruberg, *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, NYU Press, 2019. p. 7).

**sex:** the biological aspect of one’s identity

“Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female, especially those directly related to reproduction and erotic pleasure. Sex is distinct from gender, which refers to the culturally and socially produced distinctions between men and women, broadly organized by the terms masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, there is considerable debate about where, precisely, the line between natural and cultural tendencies lies—particularly surrounding questions of cognitive differences, sexual behavior, and maturation.” (“Sex,” in the *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Craig Calhoun [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002])

**sexuality:** biological, physiological, psychological and sociological aspects of human existence involving sexual experience and expression.

“The bodily, emotional, sociocultural, and intellectual aspects of one’s self which impact on, and articulate, one’s sexual identity and whom or what one desires as sexual partners. Some view sexuality as innate, i.e. one is born heterosexual or homosexual, for example, whilst others regard sexuality as fluid and as culturally determined. Sexuality encompasses many different forms, including asexuality.” (Gabriele Griffin, “Sexuality,” in the *Dictionary of Gender Studies* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017])

**stereotyping:** to ascribe simplistic and often incorrect ideas to others. Gender researchers have shown how gender stereotypes impact the lives of men and women negatively, prescribing traditional and constricting gender roles. Stereotyping often carries a pejorative meaning, and is therefore associated with prejudice.

“Stereotypes remain central to the examination of racial attitudes. Stereotypes come from socialized experiences and, unless educated differently, those preconceptions serve as the basis
for judgment of familiar and unfamiliar. Individuals often maintain stereotypes by accepting confirmatory information while disregarding contradictory evidence.”