

Embracing Inclusive Language: Harmful Phrasing and Terminology To Avoid

Language is ever evolving, as we discover or create new ways to describe ourselves and our communities. Due to the pervasive nature of transphobia, there are a wide variety of terms and concepts that have historically been used to malign and denigrate trans people. Simultaneously, there are numerous terms and phrases that, while still used by some trans people, are not considered appropriate for general use. Always respect the terms individual trans people use to describe themselves. Here are some examples of harmful or outdated terminology, and more inclusive alternatives.

Transgendered : This term inaccurately conveys that being trans is something that happens to someone or is otherwise acquired somehow, rather than being one aspect of an individual's identity. Instead, use "trans" or "transgender."

Transgenderism : This term is unnecessarily medical in nature. "Transgenderism" is often used by opponents of trans rights to argue that transness is a dangerous or harmful social contagion or mental health issue.

Transvestite : Historically, this term has been a slur used to attack, denigrate or mock trans and gender diverse people. Alternatively, try using "trans" or "gender diverse."

Male-to-Female (MTF) // Female-to-Male (FTM) : While some trans people continue to use these terms - and have every right to do so - MTF and FTM are not in alignment with best practices for talking about or to trans people, as they unnecessarily focus on an individual's assigned gender rather than on their true gender identity. Instead, use terms like "trans woman", "trans man" or "nonbinary person."

"Amanda used to be Jacob" : Disclosing an individual's previous name, or deadname, is considered offensive and harmful by most trans people. It is best to avoid utilizing a trans person's previous name unless absolutely necessary. In some cases, you may need to use an individual's legal name for the purpose of protecting their safety (for example, if they are

not 'out' to everyone) or for the purpose of documentation, if legal name information must be collected.

“What’s your real name?” : Trans peoples’ chosen names are our real names, and questions about previous names are considered invasive. Questions about trans people’s “real names” perpetuate the idea that trans people are being deceptive or dishonest by living as their true and authentic selves.

“This is my trans friend, Caleb” : Trans people are not defined by our trans identity. Being trans is just one of many aspects of our identities and is not relevant in most conversations. Introducing us as trans is harmful because it instantly discloses our trans identity in spaces where we may not be safe.

“Have you had the surgery” : Trans people have a right to privacy about our bodies, including any medical procedures we may have participated in. Trans people are often barraged with inappropriate and unnecessary questions about our bodies and medical histories. Questions about medical procedures are only relevant under specific healthcare-related contexts and should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

“You don’ t look trans” : There is no one way to “look trans.” Trans people express their genders with as much variety and diversity as everyone else. Being trans is not fundamentally about how we look, but about who we are.

“Biologically Male/Female” : These terms are unnecessarily rooted in sexual characteristics. Trans people’s bodies are whatever gender they say they are. A trans woman has a woman’s body, and is indeed biologically female. Referring to a specific set of sexual characteristics as inherently male or female can be considered a form of misgendering by some trans people. Rooting trans people’s identities in our assigned gender is harmful and conveys the notion that we’re operating under false pretenses by ‘obscuring’ our true gender/sex.

“Born in the wrong body” : While this narrative resonates with some trans people, it should not be used to describe trans people at large, as it fixates inappropriately on trans people’s bodies and presumes that being trans causes emotional suffering due to one’s body. Not all trans people experience discomfort with their physical anatomy, and not all trans people access medical procedures to alter or adjust their physical anatomies.

“Preferred Pronouns” : While this terminology is a step in the right direction, pronouns are in fact obligatory, rather than preferred. The use of the term “preferred” inaccurately conveys that using our correct pronouns is optional. “Gender pronouns,” “personal pronouns” or simply “pronouns” are all viable alternatives.