Wikipedia and the Biographies of LGBTQ+ People
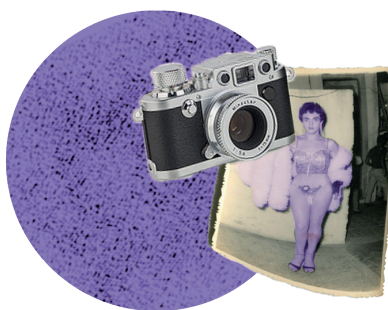
Insights and Tools for Writing on Transgender, Travesti and LGBQ+ People in the Free Encyclopedia

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With the collaboration of Victoria Stéfano[1]

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Cooperation Program - Wikimedia Argentina: Vic Sfriso

Collaboration and writing: Victoria Stéfano
Writing and editing: Vic Sfriso
Design: Gisela Curioni
English Translation: Natalia Barry
Note on "Travesti": An Millet
Note on historical English terms: Kit Heyam
English translation support: Art+Feminism and Wikimedia LGBT+ User Group

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Introduction

Wikipedia is a free encyclopedia, a polyglot and collaborative one, a project in which people contribute their time and knowledge from all over the world with the common goal of developing an accessible online encyclopedia. Written collaboratively by a community of volunteers, Wikipedia is meant to mirror society. As an encyclopedia and therefore a tertiary source reliant on previously published content on each topic, it offers a summary of the latter, written in language that is accessible for all kinds of readership.

In this sense, the way in which society builds knowledge is intertwined within Wikipedia, as well as the historical processes behind that construction. Therefore, to state that there is an invisibility of the experience of LGBTQ+ people in history is to state that this occurs within Wikipedia as well. Certain knowledge gaps are found there, one of them being a vacuum regarding concepts, histories and biographies of notable people in the LGBTQ+ community. Moreover, in 2021, the number of biographies written about people not categorized as cis[2] women or men on Wikipedia in Spanish was less than 1%.

The bridging of these gaps is not so simple, because contributing to Wikipedia requires citation of reliable published sources. Therefore, if academia, the press, and institutions in general do not strengthen knowledge on the LGBTQ+ community, neither can we on Wikipedia. In other words, we cannot build knowledge because we do not have any sources available to do so. However, as the LGBTQ+ community gradually gains presence and visibility in the public sphere, it also makes gains in the area of construction of knowledge. It is a cycle building on its own feedback. For this reason, we are gradually increasing sources that enable us to expand Wikipedia coverage on the history of the LGBTQ+ community, its concepts, and the lives of those who built that history. In this guide, we will discuss some key aspects that arise when it comes to writing about the lives of LGBTQ+ people from a human rights approach.

[2] The word "cis" is the abbreviated version of cisgender. It defines people whose gender identity (for e.g. man) is in congruence with the one assigned at birth.

This guide comes from Argentina, and it's focused on the Latin American context. Although we believe that it can be useful in other contexts as well, it's important to keep in mind that some debates and strategies are locally situated. When working on the English translation in collaboration with Vic Sfriso of Wikimedia Argentina, Natalia Barry, An Millet, Kit Heyam, Owen Blacker of Wikimedia LGBT+ User Group, and Sofia Stancioff and Kira Wisniewski of Art+Feminism, we thought it critical to the Latin American localization. So much of the Wikimedia movement is centered in English with a US or Western European context, but by preserving the Latin American localization in the English translation, we are reminded of how global and nuanced this movement is. Both the original Spanish version and this translated English version were designed by Argentinian designer, Gisela Curioni.

Writing about LGBTQ+ people on the free encyclopedia

The Wikimedian community writing on Wikipedia and collaborating with the encyclopedia's sister projects organize themselves around a set of agreements. The community's consensus-based agreements are underpinned by the Five Pillars, a set of guidelines defining the encyclopedia's character. The first of these five pillars reads:

Wikipedia is an encyclopedia which combines many features of general and specialized encyclopedias, almanacs, and gazetteers. **Wikipedia is not** a soapbox, an advertising platform, a vanity press, an experiment in anarchy or democracy, an indiscriminate collection of information, nor a web directory. It is not a dictionary, a newspaper, nor a collection of source documents, although some of its fellow Wikimedia projects are.[3]

Wikipedia's first pillar states that the project's goal is to build an encyclopedia; and although it may seem that all people know what an encyclopedia is, it is not always so simple to define, particularly in terms of what may constitute it or not. **What are the criteria the Wikimedian community uses to select which people, events, places, or concepts deserve an encyclopedic entry?**

[3] The illustration corresponds to the blue pillar at Wikipedia, available as public domain at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/BluePillar.png

Among the different criteria elaborated for the selection of encyclopedic content there is the concept of notability. For instance, for someone to have a biography on Wikipedia, this person must have gained some form of notability, either by their accomplishments or by reputation. However, how can notability be defined? What is relevant to whom? Who gets to decide what or who is relevant or notable? These questions, simple as they may seem, entail a multitude of considerations with which we confront ourselves when trying to bridge the gaps and reduce the biases of the encyclopedia. In order to define notability in practical terms, the community has agreed on certain criteria. One is the use of certain external sources, i.e. the fact that prior published information on the subject may exist, and is published by reliable sources. But that is not all. There are also a set of criteria to establish if a topic has notability and therefore worthy of publication in the free encyclopedia.

General notability guideline

A topic is *presumed* to be suitable for a stand-alone article or list when it has received *significant coverage* in *reliable sources* that *are independent of the subject*.

- **"Presumed"** means that significant coverage in reliable sources creates an assumption, not a guarantee, that a subject merits its own article. A more in-depth discussion might conclude that the topic actually should not have a stand-alone article—perhaps because it violates what Wikipedia is not, particularly the rule that Wikipedia is not an indiscriminate collection of information.[1]
- **"Significant coverage"** addresses the topic directly and in detail, so that no original research is needed to extract the content. Significant coverage is more than a trivial mention, but it does not need to be the main topic of the source material.
— The book-length history of IBM by Robert Sobel is plainly non-trivial coverage of IBM.
— Martin Walker's statement, in a newspaper article about Bill Clinton,[2] that "In high school, he was part of a jazz band called Three Blind Mice" is plainly a trivial mention of that band.

"Reliable" means that sources need editorial integrity to allow verifiable evaluation of notability, per the reliable source guideline. Sources may encompass published works in all forms and media, and in any language. Availability of secondary sources covering the subject is a good test for notability.

"Sources"[3] should be secondary sources, as those provide the most objective evidence of notability. There is no fixed number of sources required since sources vary in quality and depth of coverage, but multiple sources are generally expected.[4] Sources do not have to be available online or written in English. Multiple publications from the same author or organization are usually regarded as a single source for the purposes of establishing notability.

"Independent of the subject" excludes works produced by the article's subject or someone affiliated with it. For example, advertising, press releases, autobiographies, and the subject's website are not considered independent.[5]

If a topic does not meet these criteria but still has some verifiable facts, it might be useful to discuss it within another article.

To give an example: suppose we want to write an article on a writer and we need to rely on valid sources that refer to her — news, academic papers, books, or else. However, the availability of such material is no guarantee that she is a relevant writer. For a person to comply with the relevance criteria adequately, it is necessary that they account for a given background in their field, and an acknowledged one. If our writer has published only one book, and for that publication appeared in multiple media formats offering interviews, we will have a considerable number or sources available to write her biography but she might still not meet the relevance criteria because she has not yet gathered enough background as a writer to be welcomed into the encyclopedic world. Although this notability criterion seeks to strengthen the encyclopedia, by creating a hierarchy that allows the dismissal of certain information, it has some complexities we would like to reflect upon.

In the case of identities and communities that have been invisibilized throughout history, more often than not there are very few publications concerning significant people in such communities. In some cases, none.

We might find some news referring to a contribution by an LGBTQ+ activist, but we cannot reconstruct their full background as long as sources gathering their contributions are scarce or fail to visible their place in the history of this activism.

For instance, if we wanted to create Karina Urbina's biography on Wikipedia, it would be hard for us to track back any published information on the life of this Argentine transsexual activist. Karina Urbina was the founder of the organization called Transexuales por el Derecho a la Vida y a la Identidad (TransDeVI), "Trans-sexuals for the Right to Life and Identity," and she had a significant role in the public debates around the Gender Identity Law in Argentina, among other miles-tones in her activism. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find sources and references regarding her background as an activist. This is because at social level there exists —and persists— a silencing around certain lives and activisms, with little to nothing being written about them. And since Wikipedia requires reliable published sources to support articles, the lack of published works hinders the community of Wikimedians in the pursuit of giving a voice and presence to invisibilized people and communities.

Karina Urbina manifestando frente al Palacio de Tribunales. Fotografía para el Diario Crónica del 10 de septiembre de 1991, BNMM. Autor: Desconocido. Dominio Público.

Therefore, **what to do about the notability criterion and the existing knowledge gaps?** On the one hand, there is a tension between the developed criteria to define a topic or person as relevant and the biases with which history is narrated and knowledge is constructed. The proposal is to reflect on the tensions present across the notion of notability, which articulates itself around a given conception of what implies being renowned. It is significant to think of the ways in which social and epistemological biases give shape to the notions of relevance, notability and renown, and how this translates into biases in the criteria for producing encyclopedia entries. What happens to minorized communities and groups under this notion of notability? What acknowledgement could be possible for the trans community in a society that has historically been transphobic? In what ways can we incorporate in the free encyclopedia those voices which have been both historically and socially silenced? These questions hope to invite the Wikimedian community —and society in general— to reflect and ponder.

There are at least two ways in which to start bridging the gaps while respecting, at the same time, the encyclopedic notability criteria in existence, and the requirement of published information sources for the creation of biographies. In the first place, if we want to create a person's biography but there aren't yet enough valid sources to do so, we can mention the person in other articles and create a red link to indicate that biography does not yet exist in Wikipedia though it should. Thus, if later more publications appear that could be used as a source to create the biography, any Wikimedian could assume that task by using the red link. Secondly, we could assume it ourselves to create content on the person on whom we want to create the biography and publish it. For instance, we could interview people in the circle of the biographed person, or someone with an expertise on them, so as to fill the void of information in the Internet on them. The path is long but let us remember that the reason behind this is we are struggling to recover voices and experiences of people and communities who have a history of invisibility. It is an invitation to give voice to the LGBTQ+ community on the Internet, another arena where the struggle for rights takes place.

Information sources and references on LGBTQ+ people

When it comes to writing in Wikipedia on travestis, transgender, and LGBQ+ people, it is key to understand the way in which the information is supported, and how an entry will be given the verifiability and soundness enabling it to be part of the free encyclopedia. When writing on a topic or person, the first step is to look for information sources that will allow us to summarize in a way that will account for that topic or person's notability. In this sense, we are sure to encounter some difficulties when reconstructing the history of the LGBTQ+ community and its referents.

References and information verifiability

References are one of Wikipedia's key features. The reason behind this is they are the elements to sustain and verify the information presented in a given article. As we move forward reading its content, we will find some numbers (resembling a footnote) that indicate the information's primary source. At the end of each article, under the title "References", there will be a list of all the sources used to back up the information on the article.

As mentioned earlier, Wikipedia is a tertiary source. This means that nothing to be found there is original content but taken, instead, from other information sources and reelaborated by people who write there. Whomever may want to contribute a content will need to be able to account for where that content came from, which means that, when writing for Wikipedia, it is always necessary to quote a source. However, it is important to note that not every source can be used as a reliable information source within the encyclopedia. Sources have to count on information verification means, which guarantee that this information is trustworthy and truthful. Therefore, sources which can be used as reference in Wikipedia are:

- Published books, both online and paper formats.

- Academic publications and journals.

- Official websites.

- Newspaper articles, both online and paper formats.

It is important to note that Wikipedia does not consider any social media or private blogs as reliable information sources. In the case of social media, official accounts of an organism, foundation or institution can be considered an exception, but it is not allowed to resort to personal social media to validate information.

Some possible information sources

Even though there is a vacancy regarding the coverage and production of knowledge on the history of the travesti and LGBTQ+ community— its historical processes and milestones, its organizations, emblematic places and referents—, we do count on some reliable sources and other resources allowing us to carry out online research to find valid, verifiable references.

There are numerous initiatives for the recuperation of memory in the LGBTQ+ community. Some of them are institutional and some others are the product of a collaborative, activist praxis. The archives of the LGBTQ+ community are particularly valuable to obtain information that will allow for the reconstruction of the lives of trans, travesti and LGBQ+ people. But it is essential to consider that these are primary sources. That is, to write a Wikipedia entry, which has to be mainly supported by secondary sources, archives will be useful for the obtaining of images and references, but we will have to balance these with secondary sources. The following list provides some examples of archives that can be of great use when writing biographies:

Programa Sexo y Revolución del CeDInCI

(Argentina)

The program Sexo y Revolución belonging to CeDInCI or Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas, gathers a great deal of documentary material related to women movements, feminisms and activisms for sexual diversity in Argentina. This program seeks to visibilize documentary material and preserve the memory of these movements.

cedinci.org
sexo-y-revolucion

Archivo Sociedades en Movimiento

(Uruguay)

The archive Sociedades en Movimiento has a section devoted to the history of the movement towards sexual diversity in Uruguay, which spans from the 80s to the present.

asm.udelar.edu.uy

Lesbian Herstory Archives

(United States)

The Lesbian Herstory Archives, founded in 1974, have a long-dated background in the recovery of lesbian community history and its activism in the United States. Its digitalized resources facilitate the access to the compiled material.

lesbianherstory archives.org

Maricoteca

(Latin America)

Maricoteca is the project of an archive and digital repository compiling information and material on LGTBQ+ artists from Latin America. It gathers audio-visual material together with a short biography of each artist.

maricoteca.org

Archivo de la memoria trans

(Argentina)

The Archivo de la memoria trans (AMT) is a project which seeks to protect, construct and vindicate trans memory in Argentina. It gathers audiovisual materials — photographs, videos, and newspaper clippings. The collection, spanning from the early years of the 20th century to the 1990s, was compiled thanks to donations provided by survivors and their family and friends.

archivotrans.ar

The AMT material made available online is a gateway to get to know activists of the Argentine trans-tra-vesti community, and to track possible information sources. At the same time, AMT has a category in Wikimedia Commons, and inside it, some images can be found with which to illustrate articles for the free encyclopedia.

https://w.wiki/59r$

Grupo Dignidade

(Brasil)

The Grupo Dignidade is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, founded in 1992, which ensures the promotion of LGBTT+ citizenship. It houses the Centro de Documentación Prof. Dr. Luiz Mott, which makes available materials related to the LGBTT+ community.

grupodignidade.org.br

cedoc.grupodignidade.org.br

Archivo de Identidad Angolano

(Angola)

The Archivo de Identidad Angolano was founded by a group of feminist and LGBTT+ women from Angola. It is an intersectional project, whose mission is to raise awareness about gender and sexuality issues so that the LGBTT+ community has access to political spaces and rights.

www.arquivodeidentidadeangolano.com

There are also medias that are specialized in respectful forms of coverage of transgender and LGBTQ+ themes. Knowing them will allow us to access news and articles that may serve us as valid references to write about a person (or historical process or place) in Wikipedia. Some of them are:

Volcánicas

(Latin America)

Volcánicas is a feminist journalism magazine specially focused on the LGBTQ+ community and on women from Latin America and the Caribbean.

volcanicas.com

Agencia Presentes (Latin America)

Agencia Presentes is a feminist communication means from Latin America whose work is developed from a human rights perspective. They produce specialized coverage in LGBTQ+ matters, as well as indigenous women, and migrant women.

agenciapresentes.org

Alharaca (El Salvador)

Alharaca is a feminist communication means from El Salvador which, apart from covering current news, performs special thematic research and interviews. Among its lines of work, there are the realities and rights of LGBTQ+ people.

www.alharaca.sv

Periódicas (Argentina)

Periódicas is a self-managed, transfeminist communication means from Santa Fe, Argentina. It specializes in journalist coverage of LGBTQ+ and women matters.

periodicas.com.ar

Píkara (Spain)

Píkara Magazine carries out a form of engaged journalism with the LGBTQ+ community, and also women, both from feminist and human rights perspectives.

pikaramagazine.com

Agencia de noticias sobre diversidad sexual (Mexico)

The news-agency on sexual diversity (Agencia de noticias sobre diversidad sexual, or Anodis) is a portal comprising news, opinions, and analyses on newspaper reports on the Mexican LGBTQ+ community.

anodis.com/

Moléculas Malucas (Argentina)

Moléculas Malucas is a digital magazine that publishes articles related to the memory of the queer movement in Argentina and Latin America. It is a self-managed cultural project.

moleculasmalucas.com/

Revista Híbrida (Brasil)

Revista Híbrida is a digital magazine created for and by LGBTT+ people in a collaborative and autonomous way. Its objective is to offer a platform for the community, taking into account its own processes, realities and achievements.

revistahibrida.com.br

Dezanove (Portugal)

Dezanove (Nineteen) is a news portal that covers the LGBTT+ reality in Portugal, but also internationally. "Nineteen" refers to the article of the Declaration of Human Rights that establishes that every human being has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as to receive and transmit information and ideas by any means.

dezanove.pt

News and media articles, together with academic materials and books, are secondary sources. They enable us to create biographies. We can also resort to institutional websites, such as the following:

→ **Federación Argentina de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales y Trans**
(Argentina)

The Argentine Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Federation, or Federación Argentina LGBT (or FALGTB) is a federal organization that develops its work under a human rights approach. It watches over the fulfillment and guarantee of human rights for the LGBTQ+ community.

falgbt.org/

→ **Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gais, Trans, Bisexuales, Intersexuales y más**
(Spain)

The State Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual, Intersexual and more, or Federación Estatal LGTBI+ (or FELGTBI+) is a state-financed NGO from Spain that reunites different LGBTQ+ entities. It produces updated resources on LGBTQ+ matters, such as reports and research.

felgtb.org/

→ **International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association** (ILGA World)

ILGA World is a world federation devoted to defending the human rights of LGBTQ+ people. It supplies information and gathers resources on the LGBTQ+ conjuncture.

ilga.org/es

→ **Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual**
  (Chile)

The Movement for Homosexual Integration and Libera-
tion, or <u>Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homo-
sexual</u> (or Movilh) is an organization that defends the   movilh.cl
human rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Chile. They
carry out a consistent follow-up on current news on
the community.

→ **Asociación Brasileña de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales,
Travestis, Transexuales e Intersexuales**
  (Brasil)

The Brazilian Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,   abglt.org/
Travestis, Transsexual and Intersexual, or <u>Asociación
Brasileña de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales, Travestis,
Transexuales e Intersexuales</u> (or ABGLT) has been
working on defending the rights of the LGBTQ+
community since 1995. It features an archive and a
specialized library.

https://encuestas.
wikimedia.org.ar

If you are familiar with archives, communication
means, organizations or information portals on the
LGBTQ+ community worldwide, we invite you to
share these sources <u>on this form</u>, to construct a
collaborative resource-list with possible referen-
ces to write in Wikipedia.

Difficulties in accessing information sources on LGBTQ+ people

When writing on LGBTQ+ people on Wikipedia (though not exclusively) we may come across some difficulties which are the result of the history of invisibilization and silencing of this community. In the case of trans and travesti people, the problems are exacerbated, in such way that the creation of content on their lives calls for a commitment with the production of quality sources and references.

Orality and the shortage of graphic records

In many cases, the main source of information on the lives of LGBTQ+ people are oral records. This is especially so in cases where LGBTT+ people were relevant to society as activists for LGBTT+ rights. In other words, we know about the lives of transgender, travesti and LGBQ+ people from the accounts of people who know them (or knew them) and have shared experiences and activism with them. When it comes to LGBTT+ people who gained social relevance through their artistic production or professional activity, we are more likely to find information about their trajectories today, mainly in the case of lesbians, gays and bisexual people.

Although orality can be considered a useful source, it cannot be used as a reference to create biographies in Wikipedia. Orality itself presents certain difficulties. However, it is a knit-tight record intertwined in the fabric of memory. If we have access to an oral account on a person we want to biograph, we can turn that account into a testimonial of journalistic nature. We will thus be building a source that follows an order and is faithful, and it can be quoted as a reference in Wikipedia.

In addition, we may resort to other materials to strengthen the testimonials. The lives of transgender, travesti and LGB+ people tend to be stained by criminalization and as a consequence, unfortunately, we are likely to encounter some traces of these lives in police detention records under contraventional codes. Photographic or audiovisual materials, identity

cards, airplane tickets, letters, and theater, cabaret or nightclub brochures may also be of use. Despite the fact that these elements will not play a key role in the construction of the person's account, they may certainly strengthen and provide veracity to the oral record. In this sense, the alliance with journalists interested in reconstructing the background of LGBTQ+ people is key to open to the possibility of writing articles on activists and other personalities who have contributed widely to the conquer of civil rights for the community.

This is particularly significant when creating sources that will serve as bases for the biographies we want to write in Wikipedia, as well as when illustrating existing articles. When illustrating articles on the transgender, travesti and LGB+ community, the tendency is to find ourselves with a void when searching available images in the public domain or under open licenses. In response to this vacancy, for instance, we may resort to a portrait created by a visual-artist, i.e. someone who has decided to offer their work in the public domain or under open licenses. However, this is not always possible.

Photographic or audiovisual records: lacking or non existent

Most available photographs and videos of trans and travesti people are private documents belonging to the family or social circle of the biographed person, and owned by them. This can also happen when we are trying to write about a lesbian or gay activist who did not have media notoriety during their activism.

These materials may present some difficulties sometimes. For example, that the direct family, in case the biographed person be deceased, does not wish to spread any sort of information about them. This happens mostly in cases in which the family relationship largely consisted of discriminatory practices toward the sexual orientation and gender identity of the person on whom we research.

Another possible impediment is that records may have an emotional bond that affects our access to them, no matter how temporarily, for their reproduction. For instance, that there is a photograph of the biographed person owned by a friend or a colleague in activism, but it is too precious to be handed it out. In these cases, it is important to understand deeply and be aware of how to communicate that the photographs owned by friends and relatives are, in many cases, the only evidence of the existence of a renowned trans, travesti or LGB+ person.

There is also the chance that certain records belonging to wider social circles (such as activism groups, public records, newspaper archives, etc.) be handed out in due time, as opposed to the ones from the private sphere. Although in some cases its use and dissemination may be restricted by legislation on image rights[4]. For all these reasons, we would like to stress on the importance of having a visual record of the actions of the trans and travesti collective in particular, and of the LGB+ collective in general. Having images of protests, events, cultural actions, as well as photos of individuals[5] that we may use to write the biographies of transgender people is crucial to give presence to this collective in the encyclopedia.

Sensitive records, both photographic and audiovisual

When working with photographic and audiovisual records of trans people, it is important to consider that there are at least two problematic edges: the records prior to the person's transition, and the photographic records produced by the police.

In the case of audiovisual materials prior to the person's transition, it is worth considering that these may not represent the identity of the biographed person. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon the use of that image, and what effects it may have in the person's biography.

[4] To learn about the use of images, please refer to local legislation on the matter.

When it comes to images taken with persecutory aims, such as the ones by police photographic records, we find ourselves facing the same question: with what aim would we use an image of that kind? Oftentimes not just police records but also images in the press, both have a minorizing or criminalizing effect. There is a strong need to reflect upon the adequate use, whether necessary or not, of those images to illustrate a biography, to think whether this record is pertinent to the construction of the biographic account.

When speaking about the construction of a page, for instance around the issue of persecution to transgender people during the period of contraventional codes and police edicts penalizing prostitution and travestism, considering the use of images of transgender people in contexts of imprisonment can make sense. On the other hand, the same image in relation to an article on the definition of "travesti" or "transgender people", for instance, without any anchor or explicit reference to institutional violence, will just perpetuate the idea that transgender people only have narratives where violence is constituent.

LGBTQ+ people's biographies: tools and guidelines for their writing

When writing about LGBTQ+ people, it is particularly significant to rely on some conceptual tools. To learn to name and narrate LGBTQ+ lives is a restorative gesture towards a collective that has been historically silenced. That is, the differences in vital choices selected by the LGBTQ+ community have been

Page 23 [5] When portraying a person, it is important to follow a set of good practices to respect the consent of the person being portrayed. Ideally, it is recommended to ask the person if they want to have a photograph added in order to have their consent. This is particularly important if we are portraying a person who does not occupy a normative gender presentation. It is likely that we do not know if the person in question has a public and personal life under the political identity that they inhabit (for example, perhaps their family is unaware that they identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community).

erased, invisibilized or even worse, highlighted as incorrect, damaging, immoral, abnormal, pathological, and even criminal. It is important to bear in mind the history behind LGBTQ+ lives, and to pay a lot of attention not to repeat these discriminatory narratives, but much on the contrary, to recuperate and make visible the powerful force in these lives and experiences. To learn to write on LGBTQ+ lives is to learn to identify and appreciate differences.

When writing about LGBTQ+ people, we are contributing to the creation of narratives and accounts which recuperate the collective's memory. In order to construct accounts and biographies responsibly, it is necessary to start to disambiguate some concepts and gain theoretical clarity about what is at stake when talking about trans, travesti and LGBQ+ people.

Gender identity and sex-affective orientation

A basic question when it comes to writing about LGBTQ+ people is understanding what gender identity is, and learning to differentiate it from sex-affective orientation.

A person's gender identity is the internal experience they have individually in relation to their gender. This experience may correspond to their sex assigned at birth or not. For instance, if at birth, the hospital identified a baby as male in accordance to his sex, on his body, and that is the gender with which the person self-perceives at that moment, then the person is cisgender. However, if at birth the baby was identified and inscribed as male but at present that person does not feel identified with that gender, then the person is transgender. This is a brief definition of each category,

w.wiki/Q8H

w.wiki/3iTJ

w.wiki/3i5q

which can be made more complex when we understand we are currently living in a cisexual society, which classifies bodies and lives from a cisexist perspective.

The word "trans" is an abbreviation that serves as an umbrella term for transgender identities, transsexual, travesti, non-binary and gender-fluid, among others. There is also a view that hopes to break the notion of binarism, which sometimes works as a deeper assumption behind the categories of cis and trans, and resorts to the concepts of transmasculinity and transfemininity, or trans femininities and masculinities:

> **Transgender:** refers to people who have a gender identity other than the sex assigned when being born.
>
> **Transsexual:** some transgender people who opt for medical interventions to transition from one sex to another identify themselves as transsexual.
>
> **Travesti:** an identity construct within the spectrum of trans, based in Latin America, initially corresponding to a group of femininities who did not belong to what was socially perceived as women, and by extension became popular among other collectives.
>
> **Non-binary persons:** people who do not take part in the masculine/feminine gender binary and who therefore have a different gender from the socially interpreted as masculine or feminine.
>
> **Gender-fluid people:** refers to people who have a fluid experience of gender, that is, people who do not identify with one gender in particular but have a varying experience.

Sex-affective orientation, commonly known as [sexual orientation](#), is a concept that refers to the possibility of feeling affection and sexual desire towards one gender or more. The most traditional concept of sex-affective orientation classifies two possible orientations: heterosexuality (feeling affection and sexual desire towards people of the opposite sex to the one assigned at birth) and homosexuality (feeling affection and sexual desire towards people of the same sex as the one assigned at birth).

Nevertheless, this approach to affection and sexual desire does not describe the multitude of ways of feeling affection and desire, since it acknowledges only two types of orientation anchored in a biological perspective. Affection and sexual desire are nowadays thought as a wide spectrum, containing multiple possibilities that far from being static, are in a dynamic mutation and even combining among one another.

On the other hand, it is important to understand that sex-affective orientation has a history, and is rooted on the political sphere, within the so called Identity Politics. In the frame of an [identity politics](#) strategy, non-heterosexual and non-cis people carry out visibilization actions around their life experiences, and also to denounce their discrimination and stigmatization under sex-generalizing identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and travesti. The political dimension of sex-generalizing identities is part of a historical process in the struggle for LGBTQ+ community rights, and an answer to the signs of erasure, minorization and criminalization on the part of society.
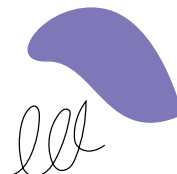
To name a few of the multitude of sex-affective orientations:

Lesbian: a sexual and affective orientation as much as a political identity. Fundamentally, it refers to cis and trans women and femininities who have sexual-affective ties with other femininities. Along different territories, "lesbian" has had different meanings. In Latin America, for example, "lesbian" is also considered a political identity as it has been in Anglophone territories at times.

Gay: is also a sexual and affective orientation that, in some territories, has become a political identity. In general, "gay" refers to men and cis and trans masculinities who have sexual and affective ties with other masculinities.

Bisexual: includes different ties within the sex-affec-

Some reflections on gay and lesbian sexual orientations and identities

Throughout the history of the gay and lesbian movement we find different ways of conceptualizing the personal and political experience of the homosexual community. Generally speaking, the LGBTQ+ movements in Latin America began with gay rights activism. Lesbians were involved in gay rights activism at different times in different territories, so lesbians' needs were prominent at different times in different places. As time went by and political alliances were built, the gay and lesbian movement became the LGBTQ+ movement.

Depending on the moment in the history of the LGBQT+ community we look at, we can identify different ways of thinking about and experiencing homosexuality and lesbianism. Although many of these coexist in the different decades of the recent political history of the LGBTQ+ community, there are moments in which certain ways of thinking about gay and lesbian existence gained prominence over others. For example, in the early days of the gay and lesbian movement in Argentina, the idea that being gay or lesbian was mainly a sexual orientation and described the fact of feeling sexual and affective attraction towards people of the same sex or gender was more prevalent. Then, as the LGBTQ+ movement built a political narrative, homosexuality and lesbianism began to be thought of as political identities, or as significant traits that make a political subject. In this sense, different ways of understanding what a lesbian is appeared, in specific territories and historical moments, in which, for example, "lesbian" is not only a sexual orientation but also a gender experience. That is, there are people who consider themselves lesbians, but not women. Something similar happens with gays who identify as queer: there are those who consider themselves queer, but not male. These types of crossovers weave affinities and closenesses with experiences of gender nonconformity, and also construct specific and situated political narratives. On the other hand, there is also a historical crossover between the trajectory of the women's movement and the lesbian movement that is still in force, where we find lesbian women who affirm their lesbianism as a sexual orientation and recognize a specific barrier when narrating their lives due to the invisibilization of the cultural, social and political contributions of women, overlapped with lesbian invisibilization.

While these articulations can be complex, it is better to avoid being overwhelmed by the differences, and instead be open to the possibility of listening to a community with a history of its own. ==And so we begin to ask ourselves how to write about LGBTQ+ lives== with an eye to some of the particularities of the history of the LGBTQ+ community. Currently, we do not find on Wikipedia clear and consistent criteria for how a person's sexual orientation should be represented in their biography. In some cases, individuals appear only categorized as, for example, "LGBT writers by country," but there is no mention of their sexual orientation in the body of the article. This is the case, for example, of Jaime Sáenz (Bolivia), Gabriela Cabezón Cámara (Argentina) and Caridad Bravo Adams (Mexico) in 2023. In the cases in which the artist's sexual orientation is mentioned in the article, it is usually because that person has experienced some specific visibility due to their sexual orientation (public statements or media scandals) or because they have produced work that deals with the queer experience. This is the case of Gabriela Mistral (Chile), Chavela Vargas (Mexico), María Galindo (Bolivia) and Cássia Eller (Brazil). It is less frequent that the sexual orientation of the biographical subject is mentioned in the introduction of the article and, in general, this occurs when it is someone who is notable for their LGBTQ+ activism, such as, for example, Erika Kokay (Brazil), Néstor Perlongher (Argentina), Pedro Lemebel (Chile) and David Aruquipa (Bolivia).

This leaves us with some questions about how to describe the sexual orientation of LGBTQ+ people who are notable for their contributions to art, science, literature, politics and activism, among others. **How should we describe the sexual orientation of people who lived their lives in other eras or who remained closeted? Where in a biography should it be located? Is it enough for it to remain part of the categorization of the articles or should it also be stated in the body of the articles? That is, what do we do with the sexual**

orientation of people who were not socially visible as gay, lesbian or bisexual? How do we include the sexual orientation of LGBTQ+ people who did not feature their sexual or gender in their artistic and literary works? What about queer orientations that were experienced only as part of private life? How do we narrate the gay and lesbian experience outside the context of conflict or media scandal?

Some insights around the travesti and trans identities in particular

The public debate around gender identity has a long story, and has traveled along various intricate paths of both theoretical and political relevance. For instance, in 2012, during the debates for the Argentine Identity Law (Ley de Identidad de Género), both activists and trans organizations focused on conceptual matters around self-perceived identities. In the process of putting identities into words, some possible taxonomies were quickly embraced and widespread. The notions of transsexual, travesti and transgender, supported by the Argentine Association ATTA (Asociación de Travestis, Transexuales y Transgéneros de Argentina) gave shape to the Argentine Identity Law, and signaled the populations to be considered recipients of this categorization. However, that debate is far from settled, and in any case, the questions remain: what did these concepts mean, and how were they coined?

w.wiki/5cmi

In the case of Latin America, probably the deepest-rooted word is "travesti". According to Dr. Honoris Causa and travesti activist Marlene Wayar (2018), this word has its origin in the process of Spanish conquest of the Americas. In fact, the vast scientific and epistolary production originated during colonial rule of our continent accounts for the existence of

identities constructed outside the Judeo-Christian binary vision brought by the conquerors: they were named "transvestite". With the advent of national states, in Argentina as well as in other countries, the state gradually found tools to continue stigmatizing and criminalizing people who escaped the social categories of man and woman, such as edicts and police codes penalizing the figure of "travestism" in Argentina.

Much later, and after 400 years of persecution, the very same Argentine travestis began to define their identity in dialogue with academia, considering notions of identity developed during the historical memory process that the country underwent after the last military dictatorship. Thus, certain activists like Lohana Berkins, started to elaborate a possible conception of what it is to be travesti. In the article Un itinerario político del travestismo (A Political Itinerary of Travestism, 2003), this author ponders, "Who are we, travestis? Are we men? Are we women? Are we travesti? What does this mean? [...] Within the scant binary choice between men and women, we began to use the feminine as a way to settle it in, and as a clear distancing from the masculine and its symbolization" (the translation is ours).

In her article, Berkins adds that to self-describe as travesti is not necessarily to pursue assimilation with socially accepted genders, such as male or female. She remarked, *"We, the travestis, thought that our only choice —if we didn't want to be men— was to be women. That is, we saw that to be male one had to be masculine, and by refusing to adopt masculine characteristics as our own, we thought of our only other existing option: to be feminine women".* Berkins also explained that nowadays the travesti identity is considered to be outside of binary gender, and this enables the construction of a gender identity of its own, a different one. Berkins concluded, *"In other words, travesti-ism constitutes a turn towards non-identitarianism".*

On the other hand, the travesti identity maintains a dialogue, with some ups and downs, with trans theory. The latter responds to a family of concepts from European origin and of English-speaking nations. The trans universe articulates itself around two main identities: transsexual and transgender. These identities have a theoretical rooting in some pathologizing medical assumptions which, during the mid-19th century, produced a wide collection of theoretical materials on scientific research about trans identities. From psychological, endocrine

and medical/surgical approaches, the goal was to provide a theoretical framework to the trans phenomenon, by elaborating a taxonomy of "stages" of this type of existence.

In this context, the English words "transvestite", "transgender" and "transsexual" became restorative tools to the "problem" presupposed by these bodies. The word "transvestite" was used to designate any person who would wear clothes contrary to their gender assigned at birth. "Transgender" was an umbrella term for all people who inhabited —and described themselves with— a gender and gender expression opposite to the one socially assigned, without having undergone gender-affirming surgeries. Finally, "transsexual" would be reserved to those people who actually opted for surgical interventions.

This conceptual framework, based on the view on trans people by the medical spheres of the United States and Europe, was at some point imported, without any form of critique, to the Latin American academy as it started to look into gender issues. These concepts started a dialogue, and a tension as well, with the geographic and political context of trans people in the different local realities.

To understand the historical exchanges between trans and travesti identities, let us refer to the recent legal recognition of "gender X" in Argentine ID, passed under **Presidential Decree No. 726/2021**. In the year 2021, after a process of debates on the limits of the Gender Identity Law, some organizations and activists advocating for the rights of non-binary people carried out an intense legal exchange with the National Registry of Persons. The result was the approval of the Decree expanding the scope of the Gender Identity Law as to include identities outside the male/female binary. In Argentina, this process revived questions and insights about travesti being an identity that does not fit into a binary reference.

Names and respect for self-perceived identity

One distinctive feature of travesti, trans and non-binary life experiences is the choice of a proper name, different from the one received at birth. The question on how to name trans people may be one of the first

we encounter when writing a biography. This becomes particularly problematic when the person in question had a public life with their previous name and later continued being a public figure after their transition.

In some countries, there are legislative frameworks that may be used as a reference to think about these matters. For instance, in the case of **Chile**, Law No. 21,120 has been in place since 2019, acknowledging and protecting the right to gender identity. **Uruguay** has a holistic law for trans people (Law No. 19,684), passed in 2018, which apart from protecting the right to gender identity, establishes some guidelines for wider public policies, such as employment quotas. In Latin America, there are several more countries with legislation to protect the right to gender identity: **Colombia (2015), Bolivia (2016), Ecuador (2016)**, and **Peru (2016)**. It is important to note that these gender identity laws state that every person has the right to redirect for their gender identity, and to be treated accordingly and that no surgical intervention or therapy or treatment is necessary to affirm a person's self-determined gender identity , in order for it to be considered valid and protected by law. **In Argentina, for instance, there is the Gender Identity Law No. 26,743** —*one of the first worldwide*— which marked a political horizon. In article 12, the Argentine law established some necessary guidelines to guarantee the right to humane treatment for travestis and trans people and affirmed that acknowledgement of gender identity does not require a formal change in registered name or gender, but merely the person's stating of that need.

These legislative frameworks are the result of many intense social debates in which the travesti and trans communities played key roles. In this sense, they are useful to us as a parameter to understand the basic points on how to write respectfully about the lives of trans people. Therefore, if the biographical subject is socially acknowledged under their chosen gender identity and name, it is respectful when writing about them to name them the way they choose. If, on the contrary, the subject had a public life prior to transition, it may be pertinent to use their former name for that part of their life. In this case, the recommendation is to include this information in the contents of the "Biography" section and not in the title or opening paragraph (also known as "the lede").

Another topic worth discussing around trans and travesti people's names is what to do when the person passed away before the approval of legal protections in their country, or if the country where they live directly does not have this type of legislation yet. In these cases, our recommendation is to respect (and make others respect) people's right to their self-determined gender identity, irrespective of whether or not this was recognized in law.

It may be the case that the person we are writing about has more than one chosen name, some or none of which are officially acknowledged. In some cases, travesti and trans people were known with more than one first name, which varied according to their circles and periods in life. This opens up a wide range of possibilities of naming that will need to be evaluated in relation to the historical context.

Gendered pronouns

Personal pronouns with which we name people bear gender markers: he/him, she/her, they/them and neopronouns such as xe/xem/xir. (Neopronouns are not currently accepted in the English Wikipedia, with a recommendation to use singular "they" instead). **The chosen pronoun for the biography of a trans, travesti or non-binary person should correlate with their gender identity.** This statement, simple as it may seem, does not usually occur in press articles covering trans and travesti lived experiences, nor in other bibliographical references.

In case there is uncertainty as to which pronouns to use, or if the sources available vary in pronoun usage, there are some strategies that we can try:

If the person being written about has passed away, we may try and reach out to people who knew them. This information may enable us to approach the person the way they identified, and then construct a respectful account of their life path.

If the person being written about is alive, we may try to get in contact with them, and enquire directly about the pronouns they use.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that information we may obtain in the form of oral records is not considered to be a valid reference for Wikipedia, therefore it cannot be cited in the article as a source. In this case, it is about the pronoun usage, so we will simply use the pronoun considered more appropriate, and we may insert a contribution on the talk page about our insights and the research process that led to this decision. That said a social media statement or mention in an interview about their pronoun use would be considered a valid reference in the English Wikipedia.

It is worth mentioning that currently several style guides are being adapted to respect gender perspectives and sexual diversity issues. This enables access to journalistic narratives with a more careful tone, written in compliance with the many guidelines gathered from legislations protecting the gender identities of trans people.

Neutral Pronouns and Inclusive Language

Nowadays, there is a linguistic debate around the use of neutral personal pronouns. That is, around the emergence and use of pronouns which do not have gender markers in otherwise gendered languages. This is the case for Spanish, where gender in language has a strong presence. This type of debate offers an excellent opportunity to reflect upon language, which is important because, regardless of any traditional usages, there are experiences and perspectives involved in the ways we name things and the views of the world that have been systematically invisibilized or minoritized by androcentricity,

leaving them at the margins of humanity's construction of knowledge.

The debate on the use of gender neutral language in Spanish and other languages where gender is very present (such as French, for instance) has not been settled yet, and the Wikipedian community takes part of the social discussion process as well. At the moment, it is not allowed to write entries using gender-neutral neopronouns such as xe/xem/xir in English, or "elle" in Spanish. However, to mark neutrality or non-binary gender in biographical writing, there are some other proposals which respond to the problem without producing a tension with the agreements around language norms, supported by linguistic standards.

In this sense, our goal is to write in a correct manner for normative grammatical criteria, but to avoid reproducing cis-sexist ways of naming and narrating. For instance:

→ We can try to build an article without using pronouns:

Gora is a non-binary person who is not interested in modifying any personal data in compliance with Decree 476/2021 that enables the Argentine Non-Binary population to access identity documents without a gender categorization.

Gora was born in Cádiz, Spain, on September, 27, 1985. Gora took elementary studies in this city, at Colegio La Compañía de María, and later a Bachelor in Arts as well. There was a later specialization in enamel on metal. Emigrating to Sevilla at the age of 25, and returning some years later, Gora's career path completes with a training in Social Integration.

→ We can use pronouns without gender markers or suppress them, if that will not alter the meaning of constructions:

-There are those who consider... instead of She/He who considers...

-In this process, youth from different countries... instead of In this process, the young men/women from different countries...

Criminalization and spectacularization of transgender and travesti persons

In general, journalistic accounts of travesti and trans people show a tendency to stigmatize and criminalize their life paths, when written before public debates on legislation protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in general, and travesti and trans people in particular —such as the debates around same-sex marriage, and legal protection for gender identity. Although this is still happening at present, it is true that there is more and more media coverage of LGBQ+, travesti and trans people, in respectful ways, as well as about life-paths of activists, artists and other public figures.

In Argentina, the LGBTQ+ community in general, and travesti and trans people in particular, have been traditionally associated, in journalistic discourse, with delinquency, disobedience, and social disorder. This pairing is not mere coincidence, and coincides with historical moments in which sexual diversity was penalized and persecuted by the Argentine State through such means as police edicts and codes. In addition, it is worth noting that due to this stigmatization a great deal of travestis and trans people managed to survive by making a living through sex work, which bears a strong social rejection that only deepens the stigma.

Apart from the assumption of criminality on travesti and trans lives, there is also a view which tends to the exoticization of these experiences, and an approach to their narratives in a spectacularizing manner. Sometimes,

this is expressed as an overexposure of the intimacy of trans people or a hypersexualization of trans bodies. We may also find narratives which infantilize travesti and trans people, associating their existence with some form of innocence or an incapacity to take care of themselves.

If we come across these materials, the recommendation is to analyze them and consider the information that is useful and construct true, reliable, facts. Our invitation is to reflect on the ways these logics are also present in the newspaper accounts of the last decades.

Conclussion

The insights and recommendations gathered here seek to offer tools for the writing of biographies of LGBTQ+ people on Wikipedia, but do not restrain themselves to this curious universe. Our starting point was that Wikipedia mirrors society, we therefore deem it necessary to incorporate an open perspective on sexual diversity, one that assigns value to the experiences of collectives that have been historically invisibilized, in what we understand as a restorative gesture. For this reason, the present material is an invitation to create Wikipedia content on trans, travesti and LGBQ+ people, but also to do so in the media and in academic production. To bridge the gender gap in Wikipedia, we need reliable, verifiable sources, so the invitation is to build knowledge and recover the voices and history of the LGBTQ+ collective.

In the case of the Wikimedian community it is significant to understand that the free, collaborative encyclopedia is one of the first information sources to which internauts resort to when approaching a topic for the first time or clarifying doubts. Thisgives the community a responsibility in what refers to the LGBTQ+ collective and

to other minorized experiences and identities. Wikipedia is a reference source, a possibility of finding a representation and a history that recovers the voice of trans, travesti and LGBQ+ people. This is significant for LGBTQ+ people but also for society in general. And while this struggle continues, the Internet and Wikipedia are digital territories where the struggle for human rights lingers on as well.

On the word "travesti": some considerations on the trajectory of travesti identity in Argentina and Latin America

By An Millet[6]

The Wikipedia and the biographies of LGBTQ+ people guide is a resource that can be useful for all of the language communities of the Wikimedia movement. As it was written in Latin America, specifically in Argentina, it makes use of concepts that are located in this region. With a view to possible translations into other languages, but also to encourage understanding among the different vocabularies that Spanish-speaking countries have, this appendix on the word "travesti" seeks to give context to the way in which travesti has become an identity claimed by the LGBTQ+ community.

Throughout this guide, the word travesti is used to refer to a fundamental part of the LGBTQ+ community. Although the origins of the term are associated with processes of colonization and medicalization, in Latin America there has been a reappropriation and conceptual resignification that make the term a synonym of struggle and resistance. This appendix aims to explain the political and conceptual path of the term for an English translation of the Wikipedia and the biographies of LGBTQ+ people guide since, as Marce Butierrez (Argentina) argues, *"travesti is a political category that makes sense here in Argentina and*

[6] *An Millet is a transmasculine lesbian activist for LGBTQ+ rights, social worker, mental health specialist and the author of "Cissexism and Health: tearing down invisible walls"*

in the southern region of Latin America", being difficult to understand for those located in the global north[7].

We find the first uses of the term travesti in the process of colonization of Latin America. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, this concept was taken by the medical field and given an exoticizing and medicalizing perspective. These uses permeated the social fabric and became popularly associated with shaming and humiliation. Thus, for many years, the term travesti was considered a derogatory word or an insult. This was the case until the 1990s when in Argentina, human rights collectives and activists began to emerge, naming themselves travestis to explain their own identity experience. This was a gesture of appropriation of the slur, a strategy well known to the LGBTQ+ collective. Over the years, this reconceptualized use of the term crossed borders and expanded to other countries in Latin America[8].

"Being travesti is the best thing that happened to me in my life", said Lohana Berkins (Argentina) on television. For Berkins, travestismo is revolutionary because it is an identity that breaks with the male-female binary and with the linearity between genitalia and gender identity: *"I do not feel that because I am made up and sitting like this I am a woman, no, and neither am I a man because of my genitalia".* These discourses, truly novel for their time, emerge as a statement that there are not solely two possible genders, and are fundamental for the proliferation of identities that are currently presented outside the gender binary.

In turn, the reappropriation of the term was a process that gave political weight to the travesti category, one which focused on the denunciation of social inequalities. Thus, the proposal of transvestism as a political identity expands beyond the limits of gender identity and proposes a class reading that functions as a denunciation of the conditions of precariousness to which the system has historically and systematica-

[7] *"¿Podemos hacer una ciencia travesti-trans?" | Marce Butierrez en Fuera de Margen #5 available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQ6oD6_hXGE&t=2s*
[8] *Berkins, Lohana (2003). Un itinerario político del travestismo. En Diana Maffía (compiladora), Sexualidades migrantes. Género y transgénero (pp. 127-137). Buenos Aires: Scarlett Press. Wayar, Marlene (2018). Travesti. Una teoría lo suficientemente buena. Buenos Aires: Editorial Muchas Nueces.*

lly pushed transvestites. Claudia Rodriguez (Chile) recalls: *"the concept of the travesti was very marginal, very related to delinquency. And it was certainly like that, it was like that because that is how a vicious cycle was created".* Along the same lines, Delfina Martinez (Uruguay) says: *"Today I feel like a travesti: my identity is travesti. Not because of what the Royal Spanish Academy says, but because of the [everyday] resignification of that word in the Río de la Plata: a person who has been marginalized, linked to the sex trade. That has to do with a lack of possibilities"*

Alternatively, the use of the word "trans" as an umbrella term to encompass a wide variety of identities functions as a political strategy of apparent unification of experiences. Above all, it is used in public debates, the media, official institutions, legislative spheres and international advocacy organizations. This use implies tensions within activism, either because some identities may feel invisible or because they disagree with this strategy. The travesti collective has managed to keep this tension visible and public. Both in colloquial use and in the production of official documents, in tools such as this guide, and even in legislative texts, reference is made to the "travesti-trans" collective, making it clear that travestis do not necessarily self-identify as within the trans umbrella term.

Nowadays we can find different variations of the term. Lohana Berkins, for example, is remembered with much love and recognition as a **"traviarch"** for the LGBTQ+ movement. Travesti are also affectionately referred to as **"travas"** and travesti girls as **"travitas"**. As illustrated in the above examples, these terms refer to femininities, but more recently the term **"travo"** has begun to be used by transmasculine people, which denotes the masculinization of "trava". Surely in the future we will find other forms that will continue to expand the infinite ways of being and naming ourselves.

Trans-related terminology in the English-speaking world: a historical guide

By Kit Heyam[9]

There is ultimately no neutral, transhistorical term in English for people who have lived and/or presented in ways perceived to be at odds with the gender they were assigned at birth. Even the words used in this sentence require critical reflection. The word 'gender' was not used to refer to male, female and related identities until the mid-twentieth century, previously simply meaning 'sort' (analogous to the word 'genre'). Before this point, the word 'sex' referred indiscriminately to both the nature of an individual's body and/or to the way they lived and presented; at no point has there been a consensus in the English-speaking world on any distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', despite attempts by some groups to reify or impose one. Moreover, since birth records in England, Wales and Scotland rarely recorded sex before the nineteenth century, the extent to which anyone was 'assigned' a sex at birth is contested among historians; some assumptions were made about sex on the basis of bodily characteristics, but (as this guide shows) these assumptions were shifted and disrupted by other factors including social role, sexual behaviour and dress. For most of history, there was no clear dividing line between the categories we now call **'trans', 'gay/lesbian', 'intersex', and 'gender-nonconforming/cross-dressing'** (see below for key considerations when using this term).

With all of this in mind, three key principles are recommended when writing and speaking about cases of historical gender nonconformity:

To preserve both ethical and historical standards, avoid describing historical individuals using terms they did not use to describe themselves. This principle should be applied neutrally – e.g. for an individual who was assigned male at birth but lived as female, and for whom no statements of self-identification

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[9] *Dr Kit Heyam is a writer and historian specialising in queer and trans history, as well as a heritage practitioner and trans awareness trainer. They are the author of The Reputation of Edward II, 1305-1697: A Literary Transformation of History (Amsterdam University Press, 2020) and Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender (Basic Books UK / Seal Press, 2022).*

survive, avoid both 'trans woman' and 'cross-dressing man'.

- Wherever possible, in the absence of statements of self-identification, **describe the behaviour of historical individuals** (e.g. 'gender nonconformity', 'living as a man') rather than the identity ('cross-dresser', 'disguised woman', 'trans man').

- For the purposes of clarity, and to accurately convey broad commonalty of experience, **modern identity terminology can be used to describe historical patterns** (e.g. 'Trans history' could refer to the history of people who have lived and/or presented in ways that differ from the sex/gender they were assigned at birth) but not to describe historical individuals. These historical patterns may overlap – e.g. an individual could be described as representing both 'trans history' and 'lesbian history'.

This guide refers to 'trans history' to describe the historical patterns it covers, and uses 'gender-nonconforming' to describe the behaviour of the people it discusses in language and concepts comprehensible to the contemporary reader.

Medieval/early modern

Medieval and early modern sources leave very little indication of how gender-nonconforming people described themselves. The little evidence that exists – mostly from legal records – suggests that rather than using new or specific terms, gender-nonconforming people used existing common terms and made it clear how they related to them. Fourteenth-century sex worker Eleanor Rykener, for example, is recorded as calling herself 'Eleanor', thus conveying a female identity through the connotations of that name; Thomas(ine)

Hall, a gender-nonconforming person who probably had intersex traits, described themself to a court as 'both man and woman'. [10]

There was often no consensus among the gender-conforming majority as to what factors (how someone lived, the nature of their body, their sexual behaviour, their dress, etc.) should have most weight when deciding how to refer to them, as demonstrated by the frequent use of mixtures of gendered pronouns to refer to one individual in written records. Nonconforming gendered and sexual behaviour were usually conflated, and referred to through moral judgments (e.g. 'unnatural') rather than through specific category terms; an individual's sexual behaviour could also change the way their gender was perceived, with a penetrative position understood as 'masculine' or 'mannish', and a penetrated position understood as 'feminine' or 'womanish'. There was also no clear distinction drawn between what we would now call intersex and trans people, and the word 'hermaphrodite' was used broadly to refer to intersex traits, gender-nonconforming social behaviour, gender-nonconforming sexual behaviour, and/or gender-nonconforming dress.

18th to 19th centuries

For the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth century, gender-nonconforming people still overwhelmingly used the existing words 'man' and 'woman' to refer to themselves, combined with the connotations of gendered names (e.g. a person who was assigned male at birth and known to neighbours by the name Seraphina)[11]. Likewise, sexual behaviour and intersex traits remained conflated with gender nonconformity in concepts and terminology (e.g. referring to an individual as of 'indeterminate sex' could

[10] M.W. Bychowski, 'The Transgender Turn: Eleanor Rykener Speaks Back', in Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern, ed. by Masha Raskolnikov, Greta LaFleur and Anna Klosowska (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), pp. 95-113 (pp. 108-109); Kit Heyam, Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender (London: Basic Books UK, 2022), p. 154.

describe their body, their dress, their sexual behaviour and/or how they lived) and written texts continued to mix pronouns when describing gender-noncon-forming people. However, **two significant new terms emerged by which the gender-conforming majority described them:**

‘Molly’ came to describe a subculture in which people assigned male at birth (AMAB) had sexual and romantic relationships with each other, and in which many lived as women, including the use of female names and dress. The term is etymologically linked to the Latin mollis, meaning ‘soft’, which had for centuries been used in Latin texts to connote sex between men and/or sensual indulgence associated stereotypically with femininity.[12] ‘Molly’ again connoted both sex between men and AMAB gender nonconformity, with no clear conceptual separation between the two. It is unclear whether it was used as a self-descriptor: journalist Ned Ward wrote of a group who ‘call themselves the Mollies’, but no evidence survives of a person definiti-vely using this term to describe themself.[13]

‘Female husband’ came to indicate a person assigned female at birth (AFAB) who lived as a man, and married another AFAB person who lived as a woman. People referred to as ‘female husbands’ in popular literature overwhelmingly described themselves simply as ‘men’, and again there is no evidence that anyone used this term as a self-descriptor.[14]

Page 45 [11] Rictor Norton (ed.), ‘Princess Seraphina, 1732’, Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook (2 January 1999, updated 31 January 2006), <http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/seraphin.htm>.
[12] See e.g. Kit Heyam, The Reputation of Edward II, 1305-1697: A Literary Transformation of History (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), p. 79.

The late nineteenth century ushered in a significant change in terminology with the concurrent deve-lopment of the field of sexology and the concept of 'inversion'. Probably first used in English by sexologist Havelock Ellis – but drawing on a concept develo-ped by German lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and other German-language sexologists, campaigners and theorists – the term 'invert' was coined to describe individuals who were attracted to people of the same sex/gender that they had been assigned at birth. However, it was understood as conceptually gendered, because this kind of sexual attraction was understood to be caused by gender inversion – e.g. an AMAB invert was unders-tood to be attracted to men *because* they had the soul, predisposition and/or desires of a woman. The term 'invert' thus perpetuated, indeed codified, the conflation of sexual orientation with gender identity. Some sexologists distinguished between 'degrees' of inversion, but most degrees were considered to invol-ve gender-nonconforming traits.

Ellis also coined the term 'Eonism' to describe indivi-duals who 'carry too far' 'identification with the admi-red object' (e.g. a 'normal' man might 'identify himself with the woman he loves', but an AMAB individual with Eonism would identify as a woman excessively). This term, derived from the name of eighteenth-century gender-nonconforming diplomat the Chevaliere d'Eon, did not achieve widespread popularity as a diagnostic criterion or as a self-descriptor.

The term 'transvestite' was used to indicate gendered disguise in some nineteenth-century sources, but was popularised by German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld

Page 46 [13] Rictor Norton (ed.), 'The Mollies Club, 1709-10', Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook (1 Dec. 1999, updated 16 June 2008), <http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/nedward.htm>.
Page 46 [14] Jen Manion, Female Husbands: A Trans History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

in his 1910 book *Die Transvestiten* (The Transvestites). In Hirschfeld's book, *'transvestite'* is an umbrella term covering a range of gender-nonconforming expressions and experiences/identities.

The term 'cross-dressing' is a literal English translation of the Latinate 'transvestite', and was used in English around the same time as Hirschfeld's coinage. In the same way as inversion, it was conflated with sexual attraction – e.g. the writer and activist Edward Carpenter described it as 'a general indication of, and a cognate phenomenon to, homosexuality'.[15] In early twentieth-century thought, then, 'cross-dressing' could denote a wide variety of reasons to wear clothing associated with a gender different from the one assigned at birth: disguise, theatricality, kink or fetish, signalling sexual orientation, or expressing gender identity. In a cultural context where sex and gender were increasingly being construed as binary, it made sense to use a term that suggested these clothing choices involved 'crossing' an entrenched divide. In relation to earlier periods and/or other cultural contexts, however, this is less appropriate, since it implies a binary understanding of gender and/or sex where none existed.

20th to 21st centuries

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed a proliferation of terms for different kinds of gender-nonconforming behaviour, experience and identity, as well as the teasing apart of many previously conflated concepts (including but not limited to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression). This section covers key umbrella terms and debates only.

[15] Edward Carpenter, 'On the connection between homosexuality and divination and the importance of the intermediate sexes generally in early civilisations', *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* 4 (1911), 219-243 (p. 228).

→ Since the late twentieth-century, the term 'cross-dressing' has increasingly been considered a sensationalised or stigmatised term by LGBTQ+ communities. Many trans communities today find it unhelpful as, given contemporary understandings of 'gender expression' as separate from 'gender identity', the term 'cross-dressing' implies that an individual's gender nonconformity is definitely solely motivated by disguise, and not by desire to express gender identity. This means that it is rarely neutral when used to describe a historical figure, as it encourages one particular interpretation.

→ The term 'transsexual' derives from the term 'transsexualismus', coined in 1923 by Hirschfeld to describe individuals whose gender identity differed from their sex/gender assigned at birth (an alternative to his earlier term 'transvestite', which he felt emphasised dress excessively). 'Transsexual' was imported to English by readers of Hirschfeld's work, and popularised by David Oliver Cauldwell in 1949. Cauldwell used it to indicate people who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth, and who sought medical transition[16]. The term 'transsexual' could initially be used as a noun or an adjective.

'Transsexual' has been used in some contexts to refer strictly to people who seek medical transition (as opposed to people who want to live as a particular gender without medical transition), but has also often been used less precisely – for example, the UK's Equality Act 2010 defines 'a transsexual person' as a person who 'is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex'[17]. In the late 20th and early 21st century, many trans people rejected it as connoting sexual motivations for transition

[16] David Oliver Cauldwell, 'Psychopathia Transexualis', Sexology: Sex Science Magazine 16 (1949), 274-280.
[17] UK Government, 'Equality Act 2010', Legislation.gov.uk
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/7>.

and/or as placing too much emphasis on the body. More recently, some trans people are again using it as a positive self-descriptor, for reasons including identification with trans history and the activism of older trans people (particularly trans women); its capacity to evoke the specific and varied experiences of trans people who transition medically; and the desire to reclaim and reappropriate previously derogatory terms.

The term 'transgender' was coined in the mid-twentieth century, and was initially popularised by those (such as American activist Virginia Prince) who used it to describe the choice to transition socially, but not medically. By the 1990s, however – particularly following the publication of Leslie Feinberg's 1992 *Transgender Liberation* – 'transgender' became the preferred umbrella term to describe anyone who identified with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth, regardless of their choices around transition.

Some (including Feinberg) have used 'transgender' to describe a range of gender-nonconforming expressions as well as identities. However, particularly as part of attempts to challenge narratives suggesting that trans people are simply 'in disguise' and that their identities are inauthentic, many 21st-century trans people have sought to define 'transgender' as referring only to people with gender identities different from the one they were assigned at birth, and *not* to people whose gender expression is nonconforming but whose gender identity is the sameas the one they were assigned at birth (such as drag artists, men who choose to wear dresses or makeup, or women who choose to wear masculine suits).

'Transgender' is often abbreviated to 'trans' in contemporary discourse, and is used strictly as an adjective rather than a noun. Many people use 'trans' as a self-descriptor along with another identity label – e.g. a 'trans man' is someone who identifies as trans and male. Trans people use the categories 'man' and 'woman' to refer to their current identity, not to the gender/sex they were assigned at birth – e.g. describing oneself as a trans man indicates that one was not assigned male at birth, but identifies as a man.

→ The term 'non-binary' is used as an umbrella term to describe anyone whose gender identity cannot be fully or accurately represented within a 'binary' (male/female) conceptualisation of gender. Non-binary people have coined a wide variety of terms to describe their specific experience of non-binary identity (e.g. 'genderfluid' describes a fluctuating gender, whereas 'agender' describes genderlessness).[18] Some non-binary activists have questioned whether the term is a useful umbrella term, arguing that it suggests that a 'binary' understanding of gender is the default and that words which don't refer to a binary (e.g. the earlier equivalent 'genderqueer') should be used instead. However, despite these objections, 'non-binary' has largely become a consensus term.

'Non-binary' is now largely considered a sub-category of 'transgender'. In the early 21st century, some writers and campaigners advocated the use of an asterisk after 'trans' ('trans*') to indicate that the term was being used to include non-binary people; however, this is now widely considered unnecessary and outdated.

[18] See e.g. Gender Wiki, <https://gender.fandom.com/wiki/Gender_Wiki>.

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