

# NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

The Anglo-American analytical distinction between sex, gender and sexuality (or sexual orientation) has been contested beyond the Western context, and as this book shows, non-Western labels for effeminate bottoms – often used as ‘street language’ – regularly conflate all three and look for symmetries and asymmetries between them (Murray, 1996, p. 165). In this book, *sex* refers specifically to genetic sex as male or female; *gender* refers, here at least, to the growth, development and presentation of mixes of *masculinity*, *femininity* and *effeminacy*, which may be socially or culturally conditioned, but nevertheless arises or is built around individual constitutions that are embodied (see Chapter 2).<sup>1</sup> *Sexuality* refers to the growth, development and presentation of sexual desire towards others (and/or towards oneself). *Effeminate Belonging* explores how bottoms attempt to negotiate these different facets of themselves and understand the relationships between them, with implications for marginalisation and belonging.

With difficulty, therefore, the use of the terms *male* and *men* in this book, especially in relation to effeminate bottoms, is descriptive of their phenotypical sex and generally has little bearing on their sense of gender expression. As I will show, in some non-Western cultures, effeminate bottoms are excluded, and willingly exclude themselves, from the category of men: they are ‘not-men’, as Don Kulick has called them (1998; Stief, 2017). Even the queens of 20th-century Britain distinguished themselves from the men they sought as sexual partners; the queens were male, but not necessarily perceived as *men* (Baker, 2020; Houlbrook, 2005).

However, it’s also the case that even in cultures containing ‘not-men’, effeminate bottoms are often considered a type of man and not usually a kind of woman or third, intermediary sex, even though they are gender nonconforming (Murray, 1995, p. 12). Fernández-Alemany and Murray have said of Honduran society:

*At the level of natal/biological sex, there is a consensus that homosexuals [effeminate bottoms] are males, not women trapped*

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1 I discuss the terms *effeminacy* and *gender nonconforming* in detail in Chapter 1.

*in male bodies or a third sex. It is in this sense of biological sex that these hombres refer to homosexuals of incomplete masculinity as 'hombres'. (2002, p. 112)*

The same kind of consensus is at work in contemporary online media discourses of the *boiwife* and *pussyboy*: they are males who on one level are men, but on another level are not men, depending on the context (see Chapter 5).

I aim to try to respect these contextual nuances, noting that some fem bottoms shy away from claiming affinity with the typical man of their culture while also recognising that they are still part of the male sex and may, in certain contexts, consider themselves and be considered by others as men and able to access certain male privileges associated with their culture. This approach also has implications for the wider theme of belonging, as Chapter 2 explores, with regard to the often-fraught connection between appearing as a man, but feeling disconnected from this and identifying more with women in one's culture – a phenomenon also shared by some heterosexual males, of course.

It's for this reason that this book does not explicitly discuss trans identities in any great depth. Nearly all the narratives exploring effeminacy and bottom identities I discuss position these two facets as an experience associated with cisgender males who identify as male, albeit with some shying away from calling themselves men, unless used only to describe their phenotypical sex. Part of the rationale for conceptualising effeminate belonging is that, for some males at least, effeminacy decidedly belongs as a phenomenon within the cisgender male experience: such males are gender nonconforming but also paradoxically sex normative (see also Thomas, 2017, for a discussion of trans in relation to 'sissy' identities). In the future, however, attention to trans bottom identities and practice is needed to give a more comprehensive picture of the contemporary 'bottom landscape'.

Meanwhile, I refer to *LGBTQ+*, *LGBTQ+ community* and *LGBTQ+-identified people* as pertaining to membership or identification with a recognisably Western construct rather than a self-evident sexual or gender identity that can easily be applied to non-Western settings. Finally, my use of the term 'passive' (i.e. 'sexually passive') to refer to males who bottom or identify as a bottom is not intended to capitulate to normative notions of bottoms who always 'bend over and take it' and are barely responsive. I use the term, without repetitive quotation marks, to denote historical or cross-cultural labels while also recognising that Romance language translations of *bottom* are linguistically closer to *passive* than they are to *bottom*.