

I placed an endnote here as an example of how you might choose to acknowledge that the assumptions we make about the language we use are too often taken for granted. In some cases, when a term is controversial, as well as relevant to how you are choosing to approach a topic, the note can help you demonstrate that you are sensitive to those controversies, as well as more precisely define your specific contribution as an author. In doing so, you are providing visible boundaries in cases where the boundaries of inclusivity are themselves at the epicenter of that controversy.

The endnote provides one example of how an author can choose to define and justify their use of a specific term when they feel compelled to do so. In this case, I felt compelled to define the boundaries of the term because I acknowledge the contentious political context around the term, meaning that there is no longer a cultural consensus about what/who the term includes or excludes. By providing an explanation, I acknowledge the politicized context involved, without arguing that my definition is more accurate or important than my readers' perspective. In this case, given that the document I am writing is not meant to persuade anyone that they should adopt my perspective and reject all others, I use the footnote approach to deliberately (but very briefly) position myself as an author who prioritizes self-identity over the more dominant/hegemonic perspective - one which acknowledges only the authority of biomedicine to define gender status, and renders all other options invisible. You, as both a reader of this document, as well as the author of your paper assignment, may operate from an entirely different perspective -- you need not agree with my use of the term, but you don't need to agree with it to continue reading the document, because my objective in this document is to describe the topic/theme of your assignment, as well as the core components of the paper that we expect to see. As your instructors, our goal is to encourage you to take the time to evaluate if/when a footnote like this is warranted. Be judicious, no matter what the term is, it may not be particularly relevant to your paper and unnecessarily distract your reader. You should be able to articulate why you feel compelled to define your use of a term within that particular document. It is fairly uncommon for an author to digress in this way - it is time-consuming and distracting to the reader. However, there is a place and a time where doing so is worth the extra time. In this case, I chose to do so primarily because I wanted the class to think outside the box and recognize the countless potential opportunities to select a more elusive and challenging topic than you may have otherwise. Just remember this very important thing - gender and sexuality are not the same thing. This paper is asking you to focus on sexual life and not gender identity. However, all sexualities are also gendered. So, by making your own definition of what counts as a "woman" is more inclusive, you might run across a topic/theme that involves the sexual lives of non-normative sexual minorities by doing so. But do not conflate gender and sexuality. One can be normative in terms of gender and non-normative in terms of sexuality, or vice-versa; they might also be normative in terms of both gender and sexuality, or non-normative in both gender and sexuality. You are not required to select any particular combination therein, but you do want an opportunity to show that you treat gender and sexuality as distinct (but also connected).