

Trans 101

“What does transgender mean?”

Transgender is a term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex the doctor marked on their birth certificate. Gender identity is a person's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or someone outside of that gender binary). For transgender people, the sex they were assigned at birth and their own internal gender identity do not match.

People in the transgender community may describe themselves using one (or more) of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, and genderqueer. Always use the term preferred by the individual.

Trying to change a person's gender identity is no more successful than trying to change a person's sexual orientation -- it doesn't work. So most transgender people seek to bring their bodies more into alignment with their gender identity.

Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctor to change their bodies. Some undergo surgeries as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and it's important to know that being transgender is not dependent upon medical procedures.

Transgender is an adjective and should never be used as a noun. For example, rather than saying "Max is a transgender," say "Max is a transgender person." And transgender never needs an "-ed" at the end.

“How is sexual orientation different from gender identity?”

We use the acronym LGBT to describe the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The first three letters (LGB) refer to sexual orientation. The "T" refers to gender identity.

Sexual orientation describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person (for example: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual), while gender identity describes a person's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or someone outside of that gender binary).

Simply put: sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to and fall in love with; gender identity is about your own sense of yourself.

Transgender people have a sexual orientation, just like everyone else. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman. A person who transitions from female to male and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a gay man.

Trans Terminology

Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is appropriate for non-transgender people to use. "Trans" is shorthand for "transgender." (Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus "transgender people" is appropriate but "transgenders" is often viewed as disrespectful.)

Cisgender: A term for people whose gender identity is congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth. Often shortened to "cis". A person who is not transgender is cisgender.

Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender Expression: How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

Intersex: A term used for people who are born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that does not seem to fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex conditions are also known as differences of sex development (DSD).

Transition: The time when a person begins to living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often includes changing one's first name and dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking hormones for **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**, having surgery, or changing identity documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security record) to reflect one's gender identity. Medical and legal steps are often difficult for people to afford.

Sources:

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq>

http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgenderterminology?gclid=CLjir_yiks8CFdRgQodww8Kpg

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“What terms should I use with transgender clients?”

Trans-related terminology has changed a lot through the years, and many terms still used by medical professionals today are considered offensive to many people within the community. Here's a helpful list of terms sorted into three categories: Green (widely accepted terms), yellow (terms that should only be used if the person in question explicitly identifies in this way), and red (terms that should be avoided whenever possible). When in doubt, ask how the person talks about their identity.

Transgender Man / Trans Man: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a man.

Transgender Woman / Trans Woman: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman.

Nonbinary: An umbrella term used for identities that fall outside of male or female.

Gender Nonconforming: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

Agender: A term for individuals who don't identify with any gender.

Bigender: A term for individuals who identify with two genders.

Two-Spirit: A contemporary term that refers to the historical and current First Nations people whose individual spirits were a blend of male and female spirits. This term has been reclaimed by some in Native American LGBT communities in order to honor their heritage and provide an alternative to the Western labels of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

Sex Confirmation Surgeries/Gender Affirming Surgeries: Surgical procedures that change one's body to better reflect a person's gender identity. This may include different procedures, including but not limited to surgical interventions. Surgery is commonly referred to as "top surgery" (breast augmentation or removal) or "bottom surgery" (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there are many different types of surgeries. These surgeries are medically necessary for some people; however not all people want, need, or can access surgery as part of their transition.

Transsexual: An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seeks to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical.

Cross-dresser: A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by another gender, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as another gender. The older term "transvestite" is considered derogatory by many in the United States. Often a derogatory term when used for trans people, this should be avoided.

Queer: A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and, often also transgender, people. Some use queer as an alternative to "gay" in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

Genderqueer: A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female or outside the gender binary.

Drag Queen/Drag King: Some transgender people may also be drag queens or drag kings, so these terms can be used people who perform drag. However, these terms have historically been used in a derogatory manner to describe transgender identities. Using these terms about transgender people who do not perform drag should be avoided.

Biologically Male/Female: These terms are often used to override and invalidate trans people's identities and reduce them to their sex assigned at birth, as well as often times being inaccurate depending on the transition history of the individual. This term should be avoided.

FTM: A person who transitions from "female-to-male," meaning a person who was assigned female at birth, but identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a "transgender man." This term is considered outdated and offensive by many and should be avoided.

MTF: A person who transitions from "male-to-female," meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a "transgender woman." This term is considered outdated and offensive by many and should be avoided.

Sex Change Surgery/Sex Reassignment Surgery: These terms are considered outdated and offensive to many trans people and should be avoided.

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Sources:

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq>
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