

TRANS TERMINOLOGY

Gender Expression/Presentation: The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine). Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity, including you. For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity are not necessarily the same.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex assigned at birth often based on physical anatomy at birth.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people who do not identify or conform to the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Note that transgender does not have an "ed" at the end.

Transition: A person's process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. Transition can include: coming out to one's family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgery. It's best not to assume how one transitions as it is different for everyone.

Transsexual: A depreciated term (often considered pejorative) similar to transgender in that it indicates a difference between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth, with implications of hormonal/surgical transition from one binary gender (male or female) to the other. Unlike transgender/trans, transsexual is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. When speaking/writing about trans people, please avoid the word transsexual unless asked to use it by a transsexual person.

Cis(gender): Prefix or adjective that means "identifies as their sex assigned at birth" derived from the Latin word "cis" meaning "on the same side." A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. In discussions regarding trans issues, one would differentiate between women who are trans and women who aren't by saying trans women and cis women. Cis is not a "fake" word and is not a slur.

More Terminology:

Bigender: Refers to those who identify as two genders. Can also identify as multigender (identifying as two or more genders). Do not confuse this term with Two-Spirit, which is specifically associated with Indigenous cultures.

Butch: An identity or presentation that leans towards masculinity. Butch can be an adjective (she's a butch woman), a verb (he went home to "butch up"), or a noun (they identify as a butch). Although commonly associated with masculine queer/lesbian women, it's used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

Cross-dressing (also crossdressing): The act of dressing and presenting as a different gender. One who considers this an integral part of their identity may identify as a cross-dresser. "Transvestite" is often considered a pejorative term with the same meaning. Drag performers are cross-dressing performers who take on stylized, exaggerated gender presentations (although not all drag performers identify as cross-dressers). Cross-dressing and drag are forms of gender expression and are not necessarily tied to erotic activity, nor are they indicative of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Do NOT use these terms to describe someone who is transgender, has transitioned or intends to do so in the future.

Cissimilation: The expectation for and act of trans people assimilating to cisgender (and often non-queer) standards of beauty, appearance and performance.

Drag: Exaggerated, theatrical, and/or performative gender presentation. Although most commonly used to refer to cross-dressing performers (drag queens and drag kings), anyone of any gender can do any form of drag. Doing drag does not necessarily have anything to do with one's sex assigned at birth, gender identity, or orientation.

Femme: An identity or presentation that leans towards femininity. Femme can be an adjective (he's a femme boy), a verb (she feels better when she "femmes up"), or a noun (they're a femme). Although commonly associated with feminine lesbian/queer women, it's used by many to describe a distinct gender identity and/or expression, and does not necessarily imply that one also identifies as a woman or not.

Gender Affirming Surgery: Genital Reassignment/Reconstruction Surgery; Vaginoplasty; Phalloplasty; Metoidioplasty: Refers to surgical alteration, and is only one part of some trans people's transition (see Transition above). Only the minority of transgender people choose to or can afford to have genital surgery. The following terms are inaccurate, offensive, or outdated: sex change operation, gender reassignment/realignment surgery (gender is not changed due to surgery), and sex reassignment/realignment surgery (as it insinuates a single surgery is required to transition and sex is an ambiguous term).

The Gender Binary: A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed "male and female", in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is oppressive to anyone who defies their sex assigned at birth, but particularly those who are gender-variant or do not fit neatly into one of the two standard categories.

Gender Dysphoria: Anxiety and/or discomfort regarding one's sex assigned at birth.

Gender Fluid: A changing or "fluid" gender identity.

Gender Identity Disorder / GID: A controversial DSM-III and DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-nonconforming people. Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. This term was replaced by the term "gender dysphoria" in the DSM-V.

Genderqueer: An identity commonly used by people who do not identify within the gender binary. Those who identify as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female, may see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as trans.

Heteronormative / Heteronormativity: These terms refer to the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions, society at large, and furthers the marginalization of queer people.

Intersex: Describing a person with a less common combination of hormones, chromosomes, and anatomy that are used to assign sex at birth. Parents and medical professionals usually coercively assign intersex infants a binary sex and have, in the past, been medically permitted to perform surgical operations to conform the infant's genitalia to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term intersex is not interchangeable with or a synonym for transgender (although some intersex people do identify as transgender).

Nonbinary (Also Non-Binary): Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a nonbinary person). Many nonbinary people identify as trans but not all trans people identify as nonbinary.

Passing/blending/assimilating: Being perceived by others as a particular identity/ gender or cis regardless of how the individual in question identifies, e.g. passing as straight, passing as a woman, passing as a youth. This term has become controversial as "passing" implies that one is not genuinely what they are passing as.

Trans/Trans*: Prefix or adjective used as an abbreviation of transgender, derived from the Latin word meaning "across from" or "on the other side of." Many consider trans/trans* to be the most inclusive and useful umbrella term. The asterisk after trans* is used to signify an array of identities under the trans* umbrella.

Transmisogyny: Originally coined by the author Julia Serano, this term designates the intersectionality of transphobia and misogyny and how they are often experienced as a form of oppression by trans women.

Transphobia: Irrational fear, discomfort, distrust, or disdain directed towards trans people or trans concepts. This word is used similarly to homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, etc.

Trans Woman / Trans Man: Trans woman generally describes someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman. Trans man generally describes someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a man. These individuals may or may not actively identify as trans. It is grammatically correct to include a space between trans and woman/man. Often it is good just to use woman or man. Sometimes trans women identify as male-to-female (also MTF or M2F) and sometimes trans men identify as female-to-male (also FTM, F2M, or trans masculine). Please ask before identifying someone. Use the term and pronouns indicated by the individual.

Trans Feminine: Someone prescribed to be masculine but leans towards feminine gender expression. Not necessarily the same as trans woman

Trans Masculine: Someone prescribed to be feminine but leans towards masculine gender expression. Not necessarily the same as trans man