



Common Transgender Definitions and Terms

The power of language to shape our perceptions of other people is immense. Precise use of terms in regards to gender can have a significant impact on demystifying many of the misperceptions associated with gender. Language is constantly changing. While these definitions are not comprehensive, they offer a basic understanding that allows for further dialogue and exploration.

Ally: any person who actively supports LGBTQA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Asexual) individuals and causes, and speaks out in support of justice for LGBTQA communities.

Cisgender/ Gender Normative: Refers to people whose sex assignment at birth corresponds to their gender identity and expression.

FTM: female-to-male. Indicates a transgender individual who was originally assigned the sex of female at birth, but has claimed a male identity through clothing, surgery, hormones, and/or attitude changes.

Gender: Gender refers to that which a society deems “masculine” or “feminine.” Gender is socially constructed and does not necessarily the same as an individual’s biological sex.

Gender Dysphoria: The American Psychiatric Association defines it as “persistent discomfort about one’s assigned sex or a sense of belonging to the other sex...[and]...a desire to be...of the other sex.” It is important to note that not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria.

Gender Expression: Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way as people assign gender to others based on their appearance, mannerisms, and other gendered characteristics. Gender expression should not be viewed as an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender identity: one’s innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither. This conviction is not contingent on the individual’s biological sex. (If you were alone in a room, how would you see yourself?)

Gender Role: Refers to the sets of activities, thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviors traditionally considered normal for men or women within a culture.

Genderqueer: a rejection of the male/female gender binary in favor of a more fluid, nontraditional identity.

Gender Variant/ Gender Non-Conforming: Displaying gender traits that are not normatively associated with their biological sex. "Feminine" behavior or appearance in a male is gender-variant as is "masculine" behavior or appearance a female. Gender-variant behavior is culturally specific.

Intersex: having hormones, chromosomes, and/or primary sex characteristics, including genitalia and/or internal sex organs, that are different from what is typically considered to be biologically male or female. This term is not the same as the term "hermaphrodite," which is an antiquated and offensive term to intersex folks and their allies.

MTF: male-to-female. Indicates a transgender individual who was originally assigned the sex of male at birth, but has claimed a female identity through clothing, surgery, hormones, and/or attitude changes.

Queer: not heterosexual. Originally used with negative connotations, but is currently being reclaimed by many within the LGBTQA community. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term for many non-heterosexual identities.

Sex (Anatomical/ Biological): separate from gender, the physical structure of one's reproductive organs that is used to assign sex at birth. Biological sex is determined by chromosomes (XX for female, XY for males); hormones (estrogen/progesterone for females, testosterone for males); and internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina for females, penis and testicles for males). Given the potential variation in all of these, biological sex must be seen as a spectrum or range of possibilities rather than a binary set of two options.

Sexual orientation: Separate from gender identity, this term refers to how one identifies regarding the people to whom one is sexually or romantically attracted. Orientation is not dependent on physical experience, but rather on feelings and attractions.

Transgender: used both as an umbrella term and as an identity. Broadly, it refers to those who do not identify with or are uncomfortable with their assigned gender and gender roles. As an identity, the term refers to anyone who transgresses traditional sex and gender boxes.

Transition: The process by which a transgender individual strives to have physical presentation more closely align with identity. Transition can occur in three ways: social transition through nonpermanent changes in clothing, hairstyle, name and/or pronouns; medical transition through the use of medicines such as hormone "blockers" or cross hormones to promote gender-based body changes; and/or surgical transition in which an individual's body is modified

through the addition or removal of gender-related physical traits.

Transsexual: Individuals who do not identify with their birth-assigned sex and physically alter their bodies surgically and/or hormonally. This physical transition is a complicated, multi-step process that may take years and may include, but is not limited to, sex reassignment surgery.