



## Transgender Terminology

The power of language to shape our perceptions of other people is immense. Precise use of terms in regard to gender can have a significant impact on demystifying many of the misperceptions associated with these concepts. However, the vocabulary continues to evolve, and there is not universal agreement about the definitions of many terms. Nonetheless, here are some working definitions and examples of frequently used (and misused) terms which we offer as a starting point for dialogue and understanding.

**Ally**: A cisgender person who supports and celebrates transgender identities, challenges transphobic remarks and actions of others, and willingly explores these biases within themselves.

**Cisgender**: When one's sex, gender expression, and gender identities are all in alignment.

**FTM or Transman**: Person who is assigned female at birth but identifies as male and takes steps to correct the error.

**Gender-Affirming Surgery (GAS)**: Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term "sex change." Also sometimes referred to as sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), gender reassignment/realignment surgery (GRS), gender confirming surgery (GCS), or medical transition.

**Gender Dysphoria**: The word dysphoria means "a state of feeling unhappy or experiencing emotional or mental discomfort." Gender dysphoria occurs when there is a

“disconnect” on some level with some or all gendered aspects of a transgender person's body, or in response to social misgendering.

**Gender Expression:** The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions-or neither-through androgynous expressions. The important thing to recognize is that an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity.

**Gender Identity:** One's deeply held core sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to the sex assigned at birth based solely on genitalia and other visible physical sex characteristics. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old and reinforced in adolescence and further throughout the lifespan by society.

**Gender Marker:** Legal designation of sex (usually male or female) on official documents, such as government issued identification and birth certificates. Sometimes, called "sex marker".

**Gender Neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer).

**Gender Nonconforming:** A term (considered by some to be outdated) used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. More current terms include "gender expansive," "differently gendered," "gender creative," "gender variant (a term some believe to suggest abnormality and therefore do not suggest its use)," "genderqueer," "gender fluid," "gender neutral," "bigender," "androgynous," or "gender diverse.", and "gender expansive".

**Gender Spectrum:** The concept that gender exists beyond a simple "male/female" binary model, but instead exists on an infinite continuum that transcends the two. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

**Intersex/Differences of Sexual Development (DSD)**: Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. In the past, medical professionals commonly chose to assign a male or female gender to these individuals and proceeded to perform gender-affirming surgeries beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child was able to give informed consent. Formerly the medical terms "hermaphrodite" and "pseudo-hermaphrodite" were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children.

**MTF or Transwoman**: Person who is assigned male at birth but identifies as female and takes steps to correct the error.

**Misgender**: To refer to someone, especially a transgender person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

**"Passing"**: Integrating successfully in social settings as one's experienced gender without question or incident by others. Is seen by some as a negative term as it implies that one is "pretending" to be something they are not, or are, to some extent, "fooling people." Nonetheless, those who are not questioned about their gender identity generally have an advantage over those who are. Intervention at the onset of puberty can have a tremendously positive effect on a transgender person's ability to integrate and their quality of life.

**Physical transition**: When one has gender reassignment surgery.

**Preferred Pronoun(s)**: A preferred pronoun is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, which can create an issue for transgender and gender-nonconforming people, who may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, the most commonly used singular gender-neutral pronouns are "ze" (sometimes spelled "zie") and "hir." Some also use "they" and "their" as gender-neutral singular pronouns.

**Sex**: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a

person is male, female, or intersex. These include genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, genes, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often confused or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

**SOC- Standards of Care**: Health manual as set forth in the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) for Transgender people. Can be downloaded at WPATH.org.

**Social Transition**: When one dresses and identifies as the sex with which they identify.

**Stealth**: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase "maintaining privacy" is often used instead.

**Transgender**: Sometime shortened to "trans." A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned gender at birth. Other terms commonly used are "female to male" (FTM), "male to female" (MTF), and "genderqueer." Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people with different histories and experiences are often included within the greater transgender community—such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.

**Transition**: A term sometimes used to describe the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control.

**Transsexual**: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to

them) which refers to people who are transgender who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called gender reassignment surgery (GRS) (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

**WPATH.org**: World Professional Association of Transgender Health is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, interdisciplinary professional and educational organization devoted to transgender health. Their professional, supporting, and student members engage in clinical and academic research to develop evidence-based medicine and strive to promote a high quality of care for transsexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming individuals internationally.

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