

Common Trans “Definitions” and Terms

“Definition’ is perhaps too strong a word; if our gender is ambiguous, then so is the rest of our existence. These definitions are approximately correct, but they are soft around the edges.” –Diane Wilson

Ally- In its verb form, ally means to unite or to form a connection between. In the gender community, allies are all those wonderful folks who have attempted to educate themselves about gender issues, who work to reduce transphobia in themselves, families and communities and who try their best to support transpeople in the political, social and cultural arenas.

Androgyn- 1. A person whose biological sex is not readily apparent, whether owing to chance or choice (see ‘genderfuck’). 2. A person who is intermediate between the two traditional genders. 3. A person who rejects gender roles entirely.

Assigned Sex or Gender- The sex/gender one is assigned at birth, generally by a medical professional, based on a cursory examination of external genitalia.

Bi-Gender- An individual who feels that they have both a “male” and “female” side to their personalities.

Bio-Boy/Man- A person whose assigned sex is male. This term is used to differentiate transgendered men from cisgender men. Due to the infantilizing connotations of “boy,” some may prefer bio-man.

Bio-Girl/Woman- See Genetic Girl.

Bio-Queen- A person who identifies as a woman dressing as a “man” dressing as a “woman.” or a person who identifies as a woman performing drag queen.

Cisgender- A person whose gender identity is the same as the one they were assigned at birth. This term is preferable to “non-transgender” because it privileges neither experience of gender as more “normal” by making it the unmarked term. (Based on the definition provided on the Edmonia Lewis Center for Women and Transgender People’s website: <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/elc.html>).

Cross-Dresser- An individual who dresses in clothing that is culturally associated with members of the “other” sex. This gender non-conforming behavior should not be conflated with queer sexualities. Many cross-dressers are heterosexual and conduct their cross-dressing on a part-time basis. Cross-dressers cross-dress for a variety of reasons, including pleasure, a relief from stress and a desire to express “opposite” sex feelings to the larger society. Cross-dressing might also be termed gender non-conforming behavior. Cross-dressers may also be known as transvestites, but this term has fallen out of favor due to its psychiatric, clinical, and fetishistic connotations.

DIY- “Do it yourself” A movement among some TSs for bypassing the SOC guidelines and self administering hormones. Especially active on the internet.

Drag King- A person who identifies as a woman who dresses in “masculine” or man-designated clothing for pay, entertainment, and/or political purposes. A Drag King’s cross dressing is usually on a part time basis.

Drag Queen- A person who identifies as a man, sometimes gay identified, who wears “feminine” or woman-designated clothing. Many drag queens perform by singing, dancing or lip-synching, often for pay, entertainment, and/or political reasons. A Drag Queen’s cross-dressing is usually on a part time basis. Some may prefer the term Female Impersonator.

FTM- FTM is an acronym which stands for Female to Male. This term reflects the direction of a gender transition. This includes a broad range of experiences, from those who identify as men or male to those who identify as transsexual, transmen, female men, new men, or FTM. Some individuals prefer the term MTM (male-to-male) to underscore the fact that though they were biologically female, they never had a feminine gender identity.

Gatekeepers- Used by gender communities to refer to psychiatrists, psychologists and other (usually) non-trans clinicians and providers who can effectively block trans people from obtaining hormones, surgery or related services needed for their gender transition.

Gender- A complicated set of socio-cultural practices whereby human bodies are transformed into “men” and “women.” Gender refers to that which a society deems “masculine” or “feminine.” Gender identity refers an individual’s self-identification as man, woman, transgender or other identity categories. Many tomes have been written on gender, and there are countless definitions. But most contemporary definitions stress how gender is distinct from sex and socially and culturally constructed, as opposed to being a fixed, static, coherent essence.

Gender Bender- An individual who brazenly flaunts society's gender conventions by mixing elements of "masculinity" and "femininity." The gender bender is often an enigma to the uninitiated viewer, who struggles to comprehend sartorial codes which challenge gender bipolarity. Boy George, a popular culture icon, was often referred to as a "gender bender" by the press.

Gender Dysphoria- A term of the psychiatric establishment which refers to a radical incongruence between an individual's birth sex and their gender identity. A gender dysphoric feels an irrevocable disconnect between their physical bodies and their mental sense of gender. Many in the trans community find this term offensive or insulting as it often pathologizes transgendered individuals due to its association with the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual (DSM).

Gender Expression- The external behaviors and characteristics (i.e. dress, mannerisms, social interactions, speech patterns, etc.) that a person displays in order to indicate their gender identity. Gender expression may change over time and from day-to-day and may or may not conform with an individual's gender identity.

Gender Euphoria- A term coined by trans community members to refer to the happiness and joy of being openly and proudly living in your preferred gender role, and antidote to the pathologizing and bleak connotations of a gender dysphoria.

Genderfuck- Deliberately sending mixed messages about one's sex, usually through dress (e.g., wearing a skirt and a bear). This term or identity is often associated with contempt for gender binary standards, exhibited by the combining of extremes from male and female gender roles.

Gender Gifted- A term which refers to trans people and which calls attention to transgenderism as a gift which promotes diversity, challenges the status quo, and enriches both the trans individual and the society as a whole.

Gender Identity- Refers to an individual's innate sense of self as a man, woman, transgender or other gender category. Gender identity may change over time and may not accord to dichotomous gender categories or necessarily with one's sexual identity or gender expression. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender Non-conforming- A term often used to refer to the myriad of individuals who may not identify as transgender, but who still do not conform to traditional gender norms (may include, but is not limited to, bi-genders, gender benders, genderfuckers, genderqueers, men, women, and transgender individuals). May be used in tandem with other identities, such as gender non-conforming lesbian. Gender non-conforming is considered by some to be preferable to gender variant as it does not establish traditional gender roles as the normative standard from which individuals deviate.

Genderqueer- A term which refers to individuals or groups who queer or problematize the hegemonic notions of sex, gender and desire in a given society. Genderqueers possess identities which fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary. Genderqueer may also refer to people who identify as both transgendered AND queer, i.e. individuals who challenge both gender and sexuality regimes and see gender identity and sexual orientation as overlapping and interconnected.

Gender Outlaw- A term popularized by trans activists such as Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg, a gender outlaw refers to an individual who transgresses or violates the "law" of gender (i.e. one who challenges the rigidly enforced gender roles) in a transphobic, heterosexist and patriarchal society.

Gender Role- The clothing, characteristics, traits and behaviors of an individual which are culturally associated with masculinity and/or femininity.

Gender Variant- See gender non-conforming.

Genetic Girl (GG)- A person whose assigned sex is female. This term is used to differentiate transgendered women from cisgender women. Due to its infantilizing connotations, many prefer GW or Genetic Woman

Intersex- Individuals born with genitals that show characteristics of both sexes or differ from their genetic sex. Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling estimates that 1.7% of births are to intersexed infants. Many are surgically "corrected" in infancy. Some grow up to feel that they have been the victims of mutilation and abuse, or have had an essential part of themselves taken away without their consent. The Intersex Movement seeks to halt medically unnecessary pediatric surgeries and hormone treatments which attempts to normalize infants into the dominant "male" and "female" sex system. The term hermaphrodite has also been used to refer to intersex people, but it carries with it mythical, psychiatric, and clinical connotations, so most intersex people prefer not to use it.

MTF- MTF is an acronym which stands for Male to Female. This term reflects the direction of gender transition. This includes a broad range of experiences, from those who identify as women or female to those who identify as transsexual, transwomen, male women, new women, or as MTF as their gender identity. Some individuals prefer the term FTF (female-to-female) to underscore the fact that though they were biologically male, they never had a masculine gender identity.

Packing- Wearing a dildo, strap-on, or penile prosthesis.

Pass- Gendered passing refers to an individual's ability to be regarded by others in accordance with one's preferred gender role in a socio-cultural context. For instance, an individual whose assigned sex is male and who has a female sexual identity, identifies as a woman, and has a feminine gender expression may be able to pass as a woman to the people who surround her. Passing may refer to an individual's desire to be perceived as a member of a particular group or to unwanted assumptions about an individual's identity made by others. Not every transperson or gender non-conforming person is able to or desires to pass.

Read- To be read is to the opposite of passing. When a person is read someone is able to detect that you are transgender, i.e. your assigned birth sex does not match your sexual identity, gender identity, and/or expression.

Real Life Test- An assessment term which refers to the period of time when a transperson begins living "full time" in their preferred gender role to when they are considered "good" candidates (by psychologists, psychiatrists and others) for sex reassignment surgery.

Sex- Separate from gender, this term refers to the cluster of biological, chromosomal, and anatomical features associated with maleness and femaleness in the human body. Sexual dimorphism is often thought to be a concrete reality, whereas in reality the existence of intersex people points to multiplicity of sexes in the human population. 'Sex' is often used synonymously with 'gender' in this culture. Although the two terms are related, they should be defined separately to differentiate the biological ("sex") from the socio-cultural ("gender"). Some transpeople note that while sex is in your chromosomes and between your legs, gender is between your ears. Others argue that sex is also socially constructed—an assignment of identity placed on a body with no recognition of the wide variation in human genitalia upon which categorizations are based.

Sex Reassignment Surgery- The term given to an operation and procedure which physically transforms the genitals using plastic surgery, often called a sex change operation in popular culture. MTF SRS may include vaginoplasty and/or labioplasty while FTM SRS may include metoidioplasty, phalloplasty, and/or testicular implants. GRS (Gender reassignment Surgery) is coming to be the preferred term among many in the transgender community.

Sexuality- Sexuality is broad term which refers to a cluster of behaviors, practices and identities in the social world.

Sexual Identity- An individual's identity as male, female, intersex, or other identity category. Though sexual identities frequently correspond to an individual's assigned birth sex, this is not always the case. Nor does an individual's sexual identity necessarily conform to traditional sex/gender pairings (e.g. an individual might have been assigned female sex at birth, have a sexual identity of male, a gender identity of man, and have a feminine gender expression).

Sexual Orientation- This term refers to the gender(s) which a person is emotionally, physically, romantically and erotically attracted to. Examples of sexual orientation include homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, and asexual. Trans and gender variant people may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during or after gender transition.

SOFFA- An acronym that stands for Significant Others, Friends, Family and Allies. Used to indicate those persons involved in the gender community because of their supportive relationship to a trans person.

Standards of Care- (SOC, officially the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care). A series of guidelines for doctors and health professionals for deciding who qualifies to have hormones and surgery. Controversial within the transgender community because of the ways it limits bodily sovereignty on the basis of access to medical care.

Third Gender Pronouns- Any of the multiple sets of pronouns which create gendered space beyond the conventional he, him, and his and she, her, and hers. Some examples include ze, hir, and hirs; ey, em, eirs; ze, zir, and zirs. The pronouns an individual prefers do not necessarily conform with how they may identify (e.g. "he" does not necessarily indicate that an individual identifies as man). "They" may be used in situations where an individual's preferred pronouns are unknown. Third gender pronouns are sometimes referred to as gender neutral pronouns, but many within the community prefer the term third gender as they do not consider themselves to have neutral genders.

Trans- An umbrella term which refers to cross-dressers, transgenderists, transsexuals and others who permanently or periodically dis-identify with traditional gender roles or the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans is preferable to transgender for some in the community because it does not minimize the experiential specificities of transsexuals.

Transgender (TG)- A range of behaviors, expressions and identifications which challenge the pervasive bipolar gender system in a given culture. Transgender was originally a word coined to describe individuals who desired to change their gender expression without making hormonal or surgical changes to their bodies. While retaining its use as an identity descriptor for some, it has also evolved into an umbrella term including many categories or people who identify as transsexuals, cross-dressers, masculine-identifies females, feminine-identified males, two-spirit people, MtFs, FtMs, bearded women, transmen, transwomen, and other gender non-conforming people. Transgender people from every race, class, sexual orientation and ability.

Transition- The period of time in which a person begins to live in a gender role which is in accordance with their internal gender identity. This could include, for instance, the period of time when a person assigned “female” at birth who has a masculine gender identity begins to live “in role” by dressing as a man, taking testosterone therapy, or getting surgery.

Transphobia- Fear and hatred of all those individuals who transgress, violate or blur the dominant gender categories in a given society. Transphobic attitudes lead to massive discrimination, oppression and violence against the trans, drag, and intersex communities.

Transsexual (TS)- An individual who strongly dis-identifies with their birth sex and wishes to utilize hormones and/or sex reassignment surgery (or gender confirmation surgery) as a way to align their physical body with their internal gender identity. Some persons prefer the alternate spelling of transexual (one “s” instead of two). A TS can be MtF or FtM. They can also be pre-operative (“pre-op”), post-operative (“post-op”) or not intend to have an operation (“non-op”).

Two-Spirit- A Native American person who embodies both masculine and feminine genders; Native Americans who are queer or transgender may self-identify as two-spirit. Historically, different tribes have specific titles for different kinds of two-spirit people. For example, the Lakota tribe includes Wintke, the Navajo tribe refers to some individuals as nedleeh , and in the Cheyenne tribe some two-spirit people are known as Hee-man-eh.

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