

Transgender Identity Terms and Labels

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- Transgender Identity Terms and Labels

There are a lot of ways that transgender people can describe their identities. Understanding the words and labels people use encourages respect and understanding.

Why are there so many different words?

Maybe you haven't given much thought to gender as a concept. Your behavior, appearance, dress, and genitals "match" how you feel about yourself and how everyone around you treats you. You might be wondering, "Why are there so many different ways to describe a person's gender?"

People's thoughts and feelings about their gender can be complex. Having a variety of words and labels to describe the various ways you might think about your gender helps you communicate who you are.

How do I refer to someone who is transgender?

Respect the words people use to describe themselves. Transgender people use many different terms to describe their experiences, and not all terms fit all people. It's important to ask people what language

they want you to use. It's okay to ask someone for their preferred name and pronouns. Always use the name and pronouns they tell you.

If trans people aren't sure which identity labels fit them best, give them the time to figure it out for themselves. The terms or language a person prefers may change over time, and that's totally normal and okay.

What if I offend a transgender person by using the wrong name or pronoun or identity label?

Approaching transgender people with respect, awareness, and a desire to learn about gender is an important step in making sure you don't hurt anyone's feelings. Most people want to treat others with respect. But sometimes even someone with good intentions can still cause pain, embarrassment, or offense. Such moments are an opportunity to listen to a transgender person's concerns, learn more about gender identities and language, and work to improve how you use language that may be inaccurate or offensive.

Common Gender Identity Terms

Cisgender

Those who identify as the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a baby born with a vulva is categorized a girl. If she also sees herself as a girl throughout her life, she is considered cisgender.

Cross-Dresser (sometimes shortened to CD)

A person — typically a cisgender man — who sometimes wears feminine clothing in order to have fun, entertain, gain emotional satisfaction, for sexual enjoyment, or to make a political statement about gender roles.

Drag King

A female performer who exaggerates male behaviors and dress for the purposes of entertainment at bars, clubs, or events. Some drag kings might identify as transgender.

Drag Queen

A male performer who exaggerates female behaviors and dress for the purposes of entertainment at bars, clubs, or events. Some drag queens might identify as transgender.

Gender Dysphoria

A diagnosis, often used by psychologists and doctors, to describe the distress, unhappiness, and anxiety that transgender people may feel about the mismatch between their bodies and their gender identity. A person may be formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria in order to receive medical treatment to help them transition.

Psychologists used to call this “gender identity disorder.” However, the mismatch between a person’s body and gender identity isn’t in itself [a mental illness](#) (but it can cause emotional distress), so the term was changed to reflect that.

Gender Fluidity

A sense that one’s gender identity or expression is not set in stone, and that it can change over time or even from day to day. For some people, gender fluid is a gender identity. A gender fluid person may feel male on some days, female on others, both male and female, or neither. A gender fluid person might also identify as genderqueer.

Gender nonconforming

When a person’s gender expression doesn’t fit inside traditional male or female categories (sometimes called the gender binary).

Gender non-binary

When a person’s gender identity doesn’t fit inside traditional male or female categories (sometimes called the gender binary).

Genderqueer

A term for people who don’t identify as a man or a woman or whose identity lies outside the traditional gender binary of male and

female. Some people use genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and non-binary interchangeably, but others don't. Genderqueer has a political history, so many use the term to identify their gender as non-normative in some way. For example, someone could identify as both cisgender female and genderqueer.

Intersex

A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. Sometimes an intersex person is assigned a female or male sex at birth through surgery, if external genitals are not obviously male or female. Intersex babies are always assigned a legal sex, but sometimes when they grow up, their gender doesn't match the sex selected for them. Some intersex people are transgender, but intersex does not necessarily mean transgender.

Transgender (sometimes shortened to Trans or Trans*)

A general term used to describe someone whose gender identity is different than the sex assigned at birth. Some people put an asterisk on the end of trans* to expand the word to include all people with nonconforming gender identities and expressions.

Transgender Man (Trans Man)

A person whose sex assigned at birth was female but whose gender identity is male. These identities can also refer to someone who was surgically assigned female at birth, in the case of [intersex](#) people, but whose gender identity is male. Many trans men identify simply as men.

Transgender Woman (Trans Woman)

A person whose sex assigned at birth was male but whose gender identity is female. These identities can also refer to someone who was surgically assigned male at birth, in the case of [intersex](#) people, but whose gender identity is female. Many trans women identify simply as women.

Outdated, inaccurate, or offensive Gender Identity Terms

Although some people may use the following terms to describe their own gender, most of the labels below range from out-of-date to offensive.

Gender Identity Disorder (or GID)

The preferred term is gender dysphoria.

Hermaphrodite

The preferred term is intersex.

Pre-operative, post-operative (also pre-op or post-op)

A set of terms to describe a transgender person who has had or not had sex reassignment surgeries. Focusing on whether someone has had surgery can be considered invasive or a violation of someone's privacy. Also many transgender people don't want (or don't have access to) surgeries that would change their body. Lastly, there are a variety of other ways transgender people transition besides sex reassignment surgery.

Sex Change Operation

Preferred terms are Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) or gender affirming surgery.

Shemale

An offensive term for a transgender woman, especially one who has had medical treatment for her breasts, but still has a penis. This term may be used by sex-workers or within the porn industry.

Tranny (sometimes referred to as The T-word)

While some transgender people use the word tranny to describe their gender, most find it highly offensive — a derogatory slur.

Transgendered

Adding -ed to the end of transgender isn't grammatically correct. You

wouldn't say that someone is gayed, womaned, or Latinoed. Similarly you wouldn't call someone transgendered.

Transsexual

An older term for people whose gender identities don't match the sex that was assigned at birth and who desire and/or seek to transition to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identities. Some people find this term offensive, others do not. Only refer to someone as transsexual if they tell you that's how they identify.