



Transgender Vocabulary

Sources: The Guardian, Gender Dictionary, the Safezone Project (2015), 2016 LGBTQ Equality VCP

Note from the Safezone Project:

“[W]e think it is important to own that this list is neither comprehensive nor inviolable. With identity terms, trust the person who is using the term and their definition of it, above any dictionary. We don’t claim ownership of these definitions, they are part of the cultural commons, curated by us, but created by the many emails, online discussions, and in-person chats, we have had over the years. We will continue to hone and adjust this language with the goal of creating definitions resonate with at least 51 out of 100 people who use the words. We will continue to change the language as the culture changes its meaning.”

Basic Vocabulary

Binary – (*noun*) (1) the idea that there are only two genders — male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or. (2) Of or pertaining to someone who identifies with one of the binary genders (man or woman). For example, there are both binary (man, woman) and non-binary (genderqueer, agender, gender-fluid) identities. *See also nonbinary.*

Cisgender or Cis – (*adj*; pronounced “siss-jendur”) frequently shortened to cis; a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., a cisman is man and male assigned at birth, a ciswoman is a woman and female assigned at birth). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not trans, they are cisgender.

- “Cis” is a latin prefix that means “on the same side [as]” or “on this side [of]”

Gender Expression – (*noun*) the external display of one’s gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally measured on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as “gender presentation.”

Gender Identity – (*noun*) the gender a person knows they are internally and how they label themselves. Common identity labels include male, female, genderqueer, non-binary, and more.

- Considered to be one aspect of sex. When gender identity conflicts with other sex characteristics, such as chromosomes or genitalia, a person’s internal gender identity replaces their sex assigned at birth.

Nonbinary - (*noun*) (1) refers to any gender that is not exclusively male or female. A similar term is genderqueer. (2) Also is a way of thinking that sexuality, gender, and gender expression exist on a continuous spectrum as opposed to an either/or dichotomy.

Transgender or Trans – (*adj*) (1) Umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. (2) A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth.

- A trans man is a man assigned female at birth. A trans woman is a woman assigned male at birth.
- Trans does not indicate sexual attraction or sexual orientation. Transgender men attracted exclusively to men are gay; trans men attracted exclusively to women are straight. Transgender women attracted exclusively to women are lesbian; trans women attracted exclusively to men are straight. Trans (wo)men can also be bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or queer. Non-binary people, because 'gay' and 'straight' are ill-suited to describe people who do not identify as men or women, often use terms such as gynophilic/gynosexual if attracted to women, androphilic/androsexual if attracted to men, or bisexual/pansexual/asexual/queer.

Sex – (*noun*) a vague term used to refer to a number of characteristics traditionally associated with males and females, including, but not limited to: gender identity, sex chromosomes, genitalia (internal and external), endocrine system, and secondary sex characteristics.

- Often seen as a binary but as there are many combinations of chromosomes, hormones, and primary/secondary sex characteristics, it's more accurate to view this as a nonbinary spectrum (which is more inclusive of intersex people)

Additional common terms

Androgyny/ous – (*adj*; pronounced “an-jrah-jun-ee”) (1) a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; (2) occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy

Bigender – (*adj*) a person who fluctuates between traditionally “woman” and “man” gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender)

FAAB or MAAB or AFAB or AMAB – (*noun*) Female Assigned at Birth (FAAB) or Male Assigned at Birth (MAAB). This is generally used to denote what sex, male or female, was put on someone's birth certificate. This is preferred to biological sex or born as male/female.

FtM or MtF – Female to Male (FtM) refers to someone who is transitioning or has transitioned from female to male, while Male to Female (MtF) refers to someone who is transitioning or has transitioned from male to female. Someone who identifies as FtM generally uses male pronouns and someone who identifies as MtF generally uses female pronouns.

- These are terms that are generally 'in group' terms, which should not be used except in the special circumstance that someone asks to be so identified. The proper terms are "trans man" and "trans women." FtM still has some currency among trans men, but MtF is all but extinct.

Gender dysphoria – (*noun*) a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there's a mismatch conflict between their gender identity and their current gender expression, hormonal levels, and/or body. It is sometimes referred to as gender identity disorder (GID), gender incongruence, or transgenderism; all three of these terms are outdated and should not be used.

- Note that not all trans people experience gender dysphoria, that gender dysphoria is not a prerequisite for transitioning, and that being transgender is not a disorder, disease, or illness!

Gender Fluid – (*adj*) gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of male and female. A person who is gender fluid may feel like a mix of genders at times, more male at times, and/or more female at times.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) – (*adj*) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, does not align in a predicted fashion with the normative gender-based expectations present in society.

Gender Normative / Gender Straight – (*adj*) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with the normative gender-based expectations present in society.

Genderqueer – (*adj*) a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid). Genderqueer people may think of themselves as one or more of the following, and they may define these terms differently:

- may combine aspects of male, female, and other identities (bigender, pangender);
- may not have a gender or identify with a gender (genderless, agender);
- may move between genders (genderfluid);
- may identify as third gender or other-gendered (includes those who do not place a name to their gender having an overlap of, or blurred lines between, gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation).

Gender Variant– (*adj*) someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to the normative gender-based expectations present in society (e.g. transgender, intersex, genderqueer, etc.).

Intersex – (*adj*) someone whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals differs from the expected patterns of male or female. In the medical care of infants the initial is DSD (“Differing/Disorders of Sex Development”). Formerly known by the outdated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite" (or hermaphroditic), which should no longer be used.

- Often seen as a problematic condition when babies or young children are identified as intersex, it was for a long term considered an “emergency” and something that doctors moved to “fix” right away in a newborn child. There has been increasing advocacy and awareness brought to this issue and many individuals advocate that intersex individuals should be allowed to remain intersex past infancy and to not treat the condition as an issue or medical emergency.

Pansexual – (*adj*) a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Sometimes shortened to "pan."

Passing – (*verb*) (1) a term for trans people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender/sex identity (regardless of birth sex) without being identified as trans. (2) An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

- Passing is a controversial term because it often is focusing on the person who is observing or interacting with the individual who is “passing” and puts the power/authority in observer rather than giving agency to the individual.
- While some people are looking to “pass” or perhaps more accurately be accepted for the identity that they feel most aligns with who they are “passing” is not always a positive experience.
- Some individuals experience a sense of erasure or a feeling of being invisible to their own community when they are perceived to be part of the dominant group.

Transition(ing) – (*noun & verb*) this term is primarily used to refer to the process a trans person undergoes when changing their outward appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

Terms to avoid that create microaggressions

- Born a girl, born a boy, biologically male, biologically female
- Biological sex is considered deeply problematic and should **never** be used. It has become a weaponized term used politically against the trans community, and is inherently incoherent when discussing transgender people. In general, when an individual uses this, they **mean** to say, "sex/gender assigned at birth."
- Trans with an asterisk (*) was once used to indicate that the term was an inclusive umbrella for many genders, but the asterisk has since been discarded as at best unnecessary and at worst stigmatizing and should no longer be used.

