

Gender Identity Definitions

Adapted by Dena R. Samuels, PhD

www.denasamuels.com

Cisgender – when an individual’s body matches their personal sense of being a specific gender; when gender identity matches gender expression; an unearned benefit/privilege for those who do not identify as transgender.

Cross Dresser – used instead of transvestite. An individual who regularly or occasionally wears the clothing socially assigned to a different gender.

Drag – wearing the clothing that is socially assigned to a different gender.

FTM – Female-to-Male transgender person; may have had Sexual Affirmation Surgery (see below) or not; someone who used to present as a Female and now presents as a Male.

Gender Identity – A person’s internal, personal sense of being a specific gender. For a person who identifies as transgender, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity may not match.

Gender Benders – anyone crossing the gender line that does not care about fitting in socially assigned categories; emphasis is on gender ambiguity and challenging traditional gender norms/concepts/appearance.

Gender Expression - The physical presentation of self as a gendered person through culturally identified symbols and markers. A person whose gender identity and/or gender markers blur society’s socially constructed gender norms may identify as “genderqueer,” “gender fluid,” or “gender nonconforming.”

Gender Queer/Gender Non-Binary/Gender Nonconforming/Gender Fluid – an identity and/or gender expression that challenges the gender binary of male and female.

Hermaphrodite – no longer used and can be considered offensive. An individual who was born Intersex (see below).

Intersex – A person who was born with ambiguous genitalia: full or partial sex organs of both anatomical genders or with ambiguous sex organs.

MTF – Male-to-Female transgender person; may have had Sexual Affirmation Surgery (see below) or not; someone who used to present as a Male and now presents as a Female.

Passing – to be convincing in your preferred gender image/expression.

Pronouns – the use of inappropriate pronouns for transgender individuals can be considered offensive.

Some general guidelines:

- When in doubt, ask which pronoun is preferred
- A person who identifies (presents) as a certain gender should be referred to as that gender.
- When writing about a transgender person, never use quotation marks around the pronoun referring to that person.

SAS/SRS – Sexual Affirmation Surgery/Sexual Reassignment Surgery: Surgery is only one small part of transition and takes a full year of psychological therapy and living as the preferred gender before it will be approved. Surgery can consist of top surgery, bottom surgery, facial reconstruction, among others; not all Transgender individuals (see below) elect to engage in surgery. Most surgeries are not covered by insurance and are extremely expensive. It is considered disrespectful to ask an individual who identifies as transgender whether or how much surgery they have had.

Sex-change operation – no longer used and can be considered offensive. See SAS (above) as the preferred language for surgery.

Sexual Orientation – which sex(es) an individual is attracted to physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually. Examples are: lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, heterosexual, among others. A transgender individual may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. One's gender identity does not necessarily correlate with their sexual orientation.

Transgender – a broad term that includes: gender non-binary/non-conforming people, cross dressers, gender benders, MTF, FTM, those who may or may not have had any SAS, etc. In other words, transgender refers to anyone whose gender identity is different from that which is assigned at birth.

Some guidelines:

- Transgender is not a noun or a verb; it is an *adjective*.
- For example, say “a transgender person sees...” rather than: “a transgender sees...” or “a transgendered person sees...”
- Identifying as a transgender individual represents a person's gender identity, not their sexual orientation. Sexual orientation represents to whom one is attracted. Transgender individuals may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.

Transvestite – no longer used; see Intersex

Sources: Holling J. Smith-Borne; www.bodieslikeours.org; Jessica Pettitt, I am... Safe Zone; Mateo Medina, Hampshire College; Abby L. Ferber; Kerianne Smith.