

Definitions for Discussing and Understanding Trans Experiences

These definitions are not set in stone. They have changed and will continue to change over time.

Sex: The assignment and classification of people into a binary category as male or female based on imprecise perceptions of their physical anatomy. Sex is not fixed or immutable, and no single criterion (e.g. genitals, chromosomes, secondary sex characteristics, hormones, fertility, etc.) definitively describes one's bodily shape or configuration, so such a classification is arbitrary and irrelevant outside specific medical contexts where a single aspect of anatomy is important. A binary classification for sex is inaccurate as evidenced by intersex people whose anatomy and/or physiology does not fit the culturally accepted categories. Sex does not determine one's gender.

Intersex: Describes a person whose sex characteristics (e.g. anatomy, chromosomes) are ambiguous in the context of the male/female binary. A person may never know they have intersex anatomy, or not until they reach puberty and their body changes differently than expected, or until they find themselves infertile as an adult. For intersex infants born with ambiguous external genitalia, parents and medical professionals typically assign them a sex and perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults are speaking out against having had to undergo potentially harmful medical procedures to which they did not consent. Being intersex does not necessarily imply anything regarding one's gender, orientation, or trans status.

Gender Identity: An individual's own internal and personal sense of gender, whether it be a woman, a man, a combination of both, neither, another, none at all, etc. For transgender individuals their gender identity does not match with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender Expression: The external manifestation of an individual's gender through clothing, hairstyle, body characteristics, mannerisms, voice, and other features. Terms to describe it may include masculine, feminine, butch, femme, tomboyish, androgynous, etc.

Gender Dysphoria: Clinical term referring to the various symptoms of unease and anxiety regarding one's assigned gender/sex or the way others interact with one's perceived gender.

Gender Binary: A system of understanding gender as having only two categories: man and woman, where no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is arbitrary, inaccurate, and oppressive.

Transgender: umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex or gender they were assigned at birth, and for those whose gender expression differs from what is culturally expected of them. It can include identities such as transgender woman, transgender man, genderqueer, etc. however not all people with those identities might use the term transgender. The term transgender does not indicate sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.

Transsexual: Similar to transgender, it indicates a conflict between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth, but with implications of physical/hormonal/surgical transition from one binary societal gender role to the other. The term has started to fall out of favor due to its narrowness and problematic use as an objectifying term within the porn industry.

Trans: Prefix or adjective used as a simultaneous abbreviation of either transgender or transsexual, derived from the Latin word meaning across from or on the other side of. Because it avoids the political connotations of both those terms, many consider trans to be the most inclusive and useful umbrella term, as there are transgender people who do not identify as transsexual, and transsexual people who do not identify as transgender. Some non-binary and other gender non-conforming individuals use **trans*** (with the asterisk, pronounced tran-star or just trans) to indicate that they're definitely not cisgender, but not necessarily a trans woman/man either. However this is falling out of favor.

Cisgender: Term used to describe individuals whose gender identity does not differ from the sex assigned to them at birth (pronounced sis.) Not trans, it is derived from the Latin word for being on the same side (as opposed to across from). Cis is not a slur, and is not intended to "label" anyone; consider trans and cis neutral descriptors analogous to homo and hetero, a pair of Greek-derived prefixes used in discussing sexuality.

Non-Binary: Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is non-binary). Non-binary identities do fall under the umbrella of trans* identities, but not all trans people are non-binary and not all non-binary people identify as trans.

Genderqueer: A non-binary gender identity. Those who identify as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female, may see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Not all genderqueer people identify as trans.

More identities that can fall under the genderqueer or non-binary umbrella:

Agender: Describes a person who has no internal sense of gender identity. Another term is genderless.

Neutrois: Describes a person who has a null or neutral gender.

Androgyne: Describes a person who presents and/or identifies as androgynous – as neither a man nor woman, neutral, or mixing masculinity and femininity.

Bigender: Describes a person who has two distinct gender identities. The two genders may exist for the person at the same time or alternate at different times. The latter is a form of genderfluid identity. The two genders of a bigender person can be binary: woman and man, or a different pair of any genders.

Stud: Describes someone assigned female at birth who prefers presenting as masculine. This term is most commonly used in urban communities of color, particularly African-American and/or Latin@. Similar to Aggressive (Ag). These terms can refer to people who identify as women, or those who don't.

Two-spirit: American Indian/First Nations/Native American people who have attributes of both men and women, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of men's and women's articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term "two-spirit" is usually considered to be specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include "one-spirit" and "wintke." It is also used as an umbrella term for LGBT and all gender-non-conforming people.

Genderfluid: A person whose gender identification and/or presentation shifts between two or more genders, which may include binary and/or non-binary genders. For example they could be both a boy and a girl one day, and then genderless the next.

ambigender. As defined by Baaphomett, "Experiencing two genders simultaneously and without fluidity or shifting." This word has also been defined as like being ambidextrous, only with gender. It has also been defined as a synonym for bigender, which see.

blurgender. See *genderfuzz*.

collgender. Coined by anonymous in 2014. Having "too many simultaneous genders to describe each one."^[2]

conflictgender. Coined by anonymous. "A gender that involves the conflict between two or more genders that you can't place a name to as the genders fluctuate constantly and you may not always feel a certain gender on some days but it's definitely there."

cosmicgender. Coined by dragon-friker. "A gender so vast and complex that you are only able to process a small bit of it at a time. Like viewing the night sky through a telescope you cannot hope to see all of it at once however you may gain more knowledge about parts of it the longer you focus on one part. May contain any number of sub genders within it that may present themselves to you. It is infinite in its possibility. Name from the vast reaches of space filled with things we cannot begin to imagine."

crystagender. Coined by anonymous. "When your gender randomly changes, and you often feel broken or fractured between multiple different genders. For example, on one day, you might feel like you're 110% agender, but on the next you're broken into demigirl&nanOboy, androgynous, etc. Whether you feel like you switch between these genders throughout the time period, or feel like all at once, is up to the person."

deliciagender. From Latin *delicia* "favorite," coined by twerkingobserver. "To have multiple genders, but preferring how one fits over others. Could be used as deliciagender, or deliciaboy/girl/nonbinary."

duragender. From Latin *dura* "long-lasting," coined by genderlost. "A subcategory of polygender (genderfluid, bigender, trigender, etc) with an identifiable, long lasting gender that is more prominent than the other genders experienced. Ex: duragirl, duraboy, duranonbinary, etc."

demiflux. Coined by aflutteringlaney. "A term for polygender/bigender individuals to describe when one of their genders is 'static' and the other ranges in intensity and presence."

demigender (from demi "half" + "gender") is an umbrella term for nonbinary gender identities that have a partial connection to a certain gender. This includes the partly female identity demigirl, and the partly male identity demiboy. There are other partial genders using the "demi-" prefix for the same reasons. demigender is also an identity within itself, for people who feel connection to the concept of gender rather than certain genders. Being a demigender "is not dependent on how much (as in percentage) someone identifies as one gender; it solely depends on if a person identifies as partially. For some, they may identify with two or more genders while others may not."

domgender. Coined by: space-gem + agendertouka with special thanks to bigender-why-gender. "Domgender- when you are multiple genders (like polygender) but 1 of those genders is dominant."

fissgender. Coined by curiosityismysin. "A gender experience that is in some way split, similar to bigender or demigenders."

gemelgender. "Old French - related to "twin", "two connected", "one made to be two". Having two genders which are equally primary or having a fluid gender which was once one but is currently two, split, separated, or twain."

gendercluster. Coined by: aetherkinbirb "a gender that is a cluster of multiple sub genders which may overlap sometimes"

gendersea. Coined by anonymous. "Like gendervoid, but related to the ocean. Your gender is a vast sea of caverns and depths yet to be discovered. Free for all to use but made with otherkin related to the ocean or sea creatures in mind."

genderfuzz. Coined by lolzmelmel. "Having multiple genders that are fuzzy and blurred together, making it impossible to identify each one individually or separate one from the rest. Alternative names: blurgender (not to be confused with genderblur)"

genderfractal. *See genderspiral.*

genderspiral. Coined by anonymous. "A gender that seems to spiral downward into more genders when you try to figure it out." Syn. genderswirl, genderfractal

genderswirl. *See genderspiral.*

gendervex. *See gyaragender.*

gyaragender. Coined by bigender-why-gender. "Having multiple genders but not understanding any of them. Gyaragirl/Gyarafeminine - having multiple genders with feminine qualities that you don't understand. Gyaraboy/Gyaramasculine - having multiple genders with masculine qualities that you don't understand."

libragender. Coined by libragender "gender that is mostly agender, but has a strong connection to a different gender; a scale, where one side is agender and one side is male/female. The agender outweighs the male/female, but male/female is still there"

ogligender. Coined by anonymous. You have three to five genders, inclusive. Note that if a person has three genders, they can also call themselves tri-gender, which see.

pangender is an identity with a wide multiplicity of genders that can tend to the infinite (ONLY includes genders of one's culture. This applies to all other nonbinary genders, because one cannot identify with gender(s) outside their culture).

polygender is an identity with several gender identities, particularly four or more of them. This can mean at different times, or at the same time.

trigender is an identity with three gender identities. This word can mean all three at once, or moving between three genders. Note that if a person has three to five genders, inclusive, they can also call themselves ogligender, which see.

Intergender: a gender identity that is in the middle between female and male, and may be a mix. Some intersex people advocate that this term only be used by people who are intersex, and that intersex people need words for gender identities that correlate only with intersex bodies.

Gender Non-Conforming: Can describe gender identity or gender expression of people who do not follow normative expectations or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transition: The process of coming out and/or changing gender to align with a person's internal sense of self. This may be a long or never-ending process for some, and for others may have completion and signal the end of transgender status. It may include any of the following: acknowledging gender identity to oneself, disclosing a different gender identity at home, workplace, or in public, changing clothes or appearance including wigs, using different names and pronouns, changing legal identity documentation when possible, wearing prosthetics or compression garments, undergoing electrolysis or laser hair removal, taking hormones, undergoing one or more surgeries on the face, chest, genitals, and other places on the body, or any other act that indicates to self or others that one's gender is different. Not all trans people want to or can transition, that does not make someone less trans. Some aspects of transitioning can be legally impossible or prohibitively expensive (legal name and gender changes, surgeries, access to hormones, purchasing prosthetics, wigs, etc.)

Cissexism: Bias in favor of cis people over trans people, or beliefs that cis people are inherently superior to trans people by means of being more real, natural, etc.

Binarism: bias in favor of binary-conforming people (both cis and trans) over non-binary identified people, or beliefs that binary people are superior to those who are non-binary.

Passing: Being perceived by others as a particular identity, gender, age, race, etc., regardless of how the individual in question identifies, e.g. passing as straight, passing as a woman, passing as a youth. There is often privilege associated with passing, especially as a binary gender. The term **being passed** indicates that the individual's true identity is being erased or ignored, or that they are not trying to pass.

Cisnormative: behavior or identities that subscribe to or perpetuate gender, gender roles and expression that replicate cisgender, binary conventions and behaviors as desirable.

PGPs: Stands for Preferred Gender Pronouns. In grammar these are called third-person pronouns and are used to replace a person's name in a sentence when speaking about them. E.g. he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, ze/hir/hirs, ey/em/eirs, co/cos, etc. Frequently used as part of group introductions along with names. Many people, both trans and cis, do not consider their pronouns to be a preference, but rather the only respectful manner of reference besides their name. Pronouns imply gender, but are not necessarily indicative of a person's gender identity.

Mispronoun: To use the incorrect third person pronoun for a person. This may be done on purpose or by mistake, although often the impact is the same regardless of intention: for many trans people it is very hurtful, invalidating, humiliating, and can create significant danger because it may out someone's trans status.

Misgender: To refer to someone's gender incorrectly or indicate through language or behavior a disregard for a person's stated gender. Misgendering may be done by mispronouncing someone, using the wrong name, using gendered language that doesn't match the person's gender, interacting with a

person the way you would typically behave towards someone of a different gender (e.g. hugging someone differently), etc.

Terminology to Avoid

Please try to avoid these terms and usages unless someone identifies with them and asks for them.

Problematic: tranny, she-male, he-she, it, trap, hermaphrodite, T-girl, boi

Preferred: do not use these at all

These are all derogatory. Tranny is a slur that has been used for decades to degrade feminine spectrum trans people; although many trans people have reclaimed it, it is still a hurtful slur to many others. She-male, etc. are degrading terms commonly used in pornography. Although T-girl and boi are somewhat common identities, many trans people feel they imply they are not "real" women and men, and are diminutives; best used only by those within the community who identify as such.

Problematic: real, bio, genetic, natural, born-male/female

Preferred: cis or cisgender

Trans people are not fake, artificial, or unnatural. Their genetics have the same effect on them that cis people's do, and they're born to be who they are just as much as cis people are. Cis is also preferable to non-trans, which would unfairly create a labeled group and an unlabeled one.

Problematic: sex change, pre-op, post-op, non-op, female/male-bodied

Preferred: do not reduce trans people to their body parts

Body parts are not the defining trait of one's identity. If you do need to talk about surgical options or techniques, be as medical and specific as possible, e.g. "Erin underwent vaginoplasty in July 2009." Be tactful and aware when asking trans people about their medical history. It's usually none of your business.

Problematic: MtF, FtM, transgenders, a transgender, a transsexual, a trans

Preferred: trans people, transgender people, trans women, trans men

The acronyms MtF and FtM are still very common, but their use is being phased out because they make it sound like someone is stuck in transition forever and define trans people by their birth assignments. Trans and its variations are adjectives, not nouns. Using them as nouns strips trans people of their identities and objectifies them. You wouldn't say "Erin is an MtF," you'd say "Erin is a woman."

Problematic: transwoman, transman, trans-woman, trans-man

Preferred: trans woman, trans man

The one-word transwoman or hyphenated trans-woman imply that trans women are a "third gender," distinct from woman. By including the space, trans is just an adjective modifying a particular type of woman, just like Asian woman or young woman or liberal woman.

Problematic: "between the ears" versus "between the legs"

Preferred: gender is who you are, sex is how medical doctors classify your anatomy

Gender is no more a "social construct" than sex is, just as sex is no more "real" than gender. If anything, one's gender identity that arises from self-awareness and a lifetime of social development is far more "real" than any judgment based on what that person's body was shaped like when they were an infant.

Adapted by Liat Wexler from <http://www.erinhoudini.com/transgender-glossary.html>, <https://lgbt.ucsd.edu/education/terminology.html>, and <http://nonbinary.org/> with Wesley Paláu.