

Glossary of Transgender Terms

Though sometimes connected and overlapping, the following categories of sexual and gender identity are often distinct and unique. It must be emphasized, that unanimity of opinion does not exist on either the definitions of these terms, or even on which terms are essential to include.

Biological (sometimes referred to as chromosomal) sex: This can be considered as our "packaging and is determined by our chromosomes (XX for females, XY for males); our hormones (estrogen and progesterone for females, testosterone for males); and our internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina for females, penis and testicles for males). About 4% of the population can be defined as "intersexuals born with biological aspects of both sexes to varying degrees. Therefore, in actuality, there are more than two sexes.

Core gender identity (or simply, gender identity): This is the individual,s innermost concept of self as "male or "female"what we perceive and call ourselves. Though the formation of gender identity is a complex process, it is thought that individuals develop this generally between the ages of 18 months and 3 years, though many current theories posit that this begins to be formed before birth. Most people develop a (core) gender identity aligning with their biological sex. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their biological sex.

Cross-dresser: Someone who on occasion wears what is currently considered the clothes of the other sex(es) to relieve gender discomfort. Cross-dressers may want to appear as "convincing as possible as their other selves. A large subset of this group are men who enjoy dressing as women, and have otherwise ordinary marriages with wives who are not transgendered. Many say this term is preferable to transvestite.

Cross-living: Living full-time in the preferred gender image, [other] than one,s assigned sex at birth, [sometimes] in preparation for a sex-change operation, [sometimes not].

FTM: (1) Female-To-Male [cross-dresser or transsexual]. (It is more [acceptable] to use the abbreviations rather than the complete phrase, except to explain it to someone who doesn't,t know what FTM stands for.) Also abbreviated as F2M, [or FtM]. FTM is also (2) the name of a group that is for FTM TS,s and TV,s.

Gender community: The [transgender] community of all cross-dressers, transsexuals, and gender benders, and anywhere they meet.

Gender dysphoria: Literally, it is being unhappy with the gender you are (physically anatomically, prior to changing anything). Full-blown gender syndrome is the same as transsexualism.

Gender role (sometimes called sex role): This is the set of socially-defined roles and behaviors assigned to females and males. This can vary from culture to culture. Our society recognizes basically two distinct gender roles. One is the masculine: having the qualities or characteristics attributed to males. The other is the feminine: having the qualities or characteristics attributed to females. (A third gender role, rarely, though possibly increasingly, condoned in our society, is androgyny combining assumed male (andro) and female (gyne) qualities.)

Gender presentation: The way one presents oneself to the world, as either male or female, or blended/androgynous.

In transition: In the process of [sexual] transition (see below).

Intersex (or intersexual): [Persons] born with the full or partial sex organs of [male and female], or with underdeveloped or ambiguous sex organs. About 4% of all births are intersex to some degree. (This word replaces the politically incorrect hermaphrodite.)

MTF: Male-To-Female, [cross-dresser or transsexuals]. (It is more [acceptable] to use the abbreviations rather than the complete phrase, except to explain it to someone who doesn't,t know what MTF stands for.) Also abbreviated as M2F, [or MtF].

Nonsurgical (or "non-op") transsexual: Transsexuals who seek sex reassignment through hormones and who cross-live, but stop just short of surgery. Some (1) have concerns about major surgery, which is not always successful. Others (2) have been unable to obtain the money necessary and have essentially given up on this final step (are "in limbo). Yet others (3) feel they are complete without surgery and are the same as definition 1 of transgender (see below). Others still (4) cannot have surgery due to special health problems.

Pass: [This] means to be in [one,s] preferred gender image, and to be able to do so convincingly.

Post-op: Transsexuals who have had sex-change operation(s), and now have the physical anatomy they desire.

Pre-op: Transsexuals who have not yet had their sex-change [reassignment] operation(s), but who are working towards it.

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS): Surgery(ies) done to bring a person's primary sexual characteristics into harmony with their gender identity. There are many kinds of affirming surgeries available; not all of them involve genitals.

Sexual (or erotic) orientation: This is determined by whom we are sexually (or erotically) attracted"our sexual/erotic drives, desires, fantasies. Categories of sexual orientation include homosexuals"gay, lesbian"attracted to some members of the same sex; bisexuals, attracted to some members of both sexes to varying degrees; heterosexuals, attracted to some members of the other sex; and asexuals, attracted to neither sex. Some sexuality researchers suggest that pederasts (adults sexually/erotically attracted to children) might be considered a separate sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is believed to be influenced by a variety of factors including genetics and hormones, as well as unknown environmental factors. Though the origins of sexual orientation are not completely understood, it is generally believed to be established during early childhood, usually before the age of five.

Sexual behavior: This is what we do sexually and with whom. Though we are not certain what influences determine a person,s primary sexual attractions (sexual orientation), our culture can heavily influence peoples, actions and sexual behaviors. For example, one may have a "homosexual orientation, but due to overriding condemnations against same-sex sexual expression, may "pass by having sex only with people of the other sex. Sexuality researcher Alfred C. Kinsey and his colleagues devised a seven-point scale to chart the full spectrum of human sexual behavior, with "0 representing those whose histories are exclusively heterosexual, and "6 for those who are exclusively homosexual in behavior. Others were placed along the scale depending on the percentage of heterosexual (other sex) or homosexual (same sex) sexual expression in relation to overall behavior. Kinsey,s findings and other studies also suggest that sexuality is indeed more fluid and complex than once believed.

Transgender (TG): Originally, this word meant (1) what are also known as full-time cross-dressers or nonsurgical transsexuals, people who live and work in the [other] (of their physical anatomical) [sex], continuously and for always. Now it also means (2) the group of all people who are inclined to cross the gender line, including transsexuals, cross-dressers, and gender benders together. This is the main way the word is used today, and is referred to as the "umbrella definition as it covers everyone. A few [people] use the word transgender as (3) a synonym for transsexual.

Transition: The process of changing sex, including hormones, cross-living (see above), and potentially surgeries. A practical minimum for this process is about two years, but usually it takes longer, sometimes much longer.

Transphobia/transphobic: The fear and hatred of cross-dressers, transsexuals, and gender benders and what they do [or are feared to do], and everything that results from this, from disrespect, to denial of rights and needs, to violence. Though some have defined this as an "irrational fear and hatred, in actuality, from the time most of us are young, people and institutions (parents/guardians, peers, teachers, clergy, the media, etc.) have taught us to conform to societal notions of "proper gender behavior, and to hold in contempt those who challenge or transgress these standards. Transphobia is indeed a form of oppression.

Transsexual (TS): A person whose sexual identification is entirely with the opposite sex of their birth

Transsexual female/woman: An MTF TS. The medical literature tends to use the extremely demeaning term male transsexual to mean the same thing. Note that one can usually tell the preferred form is in use when the gender word comes after the "T word.

Transsexual male/man: An FTM TS. The medical literature tends to use the extremely demeaning term female transsexual to mean the same thing. Note that one can usually tell the preferred form is in use when the gender word comes after the "T word.

Transvestite (TV): Same as cross-dresser (see above). Most [people] feel that cross-dresser is the preferred term.

Good Gender Etiquette

Pronouns

It is generally good etiquette to use gendered-pronouns and honorifics that reflect a person's presentation at the moment. That may mean that today they prefer "him," and tomorrow they might prefer "her."

When you are uncertain of a person's presentation, or if they are presenting in a particularly androgynous manner, try the following:

- Consider the name the person uses for themselves. This may or may not be helpful.
- Consider *using* the person's name, rather than a 3rd-person pronoun (e.g. "This is my new friend Tracy. Tracy wields a mean single-tail.")
- Listen to what pronouns others are using to refer to this person. Try going with convention.
- Straight-up ask the person what they would prefer. Some folks prefer to use non-gendered pronouns like "ze" and "hir."

Honorifics

Especially in pansexual/BDSM spaces, honorifics (e.g. Ma'am, Sir, girl, boy/boi, slutpuppy, etc...) can be important. Generally, it will be useful to use the same rules for general pronouns.

Common Decency, Well-Intentioned Communication

Don't ask someone about the shape/state of their genitalia when you first meet them. This information is no less privileged for a trans person than a cis person.

Don't ask: "Is that/are those real?"

Do ask the same kinds of things you'd ask any other person: ("What's your sign?" "Would you tell me the time, please?" or "Would you like to try needle-play tonight?")

If You're Going to Scene with a Person of Trans Experience (of any sort)

Negotiation is more important than ever! Some people are more/less comfortable with certain kinds of contact and certain kinds of exposure than others. Some people in a variety of states of physical transition or gender expression are cool with full nudity. Some are not. Many people prefer to leave certain body-parts covered. Some people have "no-fly zones" relating to areas of their body that they prefer not touched. Other folks are fine with non-conventional touching or having parts genitalia referred to using words termed for their target-gender (e.g. cock/clit/etc...).

Certain kinds of bondage can be helpful for some folks to feel more-comfortable/sexy in a scene. For example, rope can be effective in both maximizing and minimizing breast tissue.

Dating Matters

Please date more transpeople! Use the same principles you would apply for getting to know, and developing intimacy with, any other person. When engaging in sexual activity, it may be wise to avoid the gendered metaphors that apply to foreplay and stimulation. Or it may not. Communication is essential. Make no assumptions. Different trans-folks have vastly different sexual dynamics, orientations and libidos.

To quote a friend of mine who has been intimate with a number of m2f folks: *"Some people prefer that their bits be interacted with in accord with their gender identity, not based on whether they were born with a penis or with a vulva or with bits that are something else. The best way to find out is to ask. I've had sexual partners who are "women who happen to have a penis" and "women who were born with a penis and now have a vulva" and "women who happen to be transsexual, and don't want anything about their transsexualism to be discussed in the bedroom." I have experienced oral sex with women that I have called cunnilingus, oral sex with women that I've called fellatio, and oral sex with women that seems best to use a term like "going down on" or "giving oral to." Some people like their clits to be treated like penises, some do not. Some like the penis to be treated like a clit, and some do not. Just ask. Or ask for permission to explore and get feedback."*

Consider where your dating prospect is in their transition. If they have recently had some sort of gender-affirming medical procedure, note that parts of their body may, in fact, be quite new to them as well as you. If they have recently started on testosterone or estrogen therapy, consider that, in fact, this person is going through puberty... again. Their emotional state, and some of their sexual responses, may be more like those of a 14 year old boy or girl, despite their body's maturity. Remember what 14 felt like? If your dating prospect recently made a social transition, they may have concerns about their safety in certain vanilla-spaces, and especially gendered ones like bathrooms and changing rooms.

If your dating prospect transitioned a long time ago there may be absolutely nothing unique about their transsexual history that affects your relationship. Some people don't like to talk about the explicitly-gendered aspects of their past (e.g. the sorority house they were in, the football team they played linebacker for, etc...). Some people are ok talking about these things. It is generally good etiquette to *not* bring up these matters in public spaces... i.e. don't ask: "do you miss standing to pee?" to your date as she's in the stall beside you in the airport ladies room.

Avoid using a person's gender expression to make assumptions about their sexual orientation. Generally, common-practice is to use the gendered sexual-orientation terms that correspond with everyone's target-genders.

D/s with Transfolks

Exploring power exchange as a relationship style between a cisgender person and a transperson may present special challenges related to a privilege-gap, much in the same way that male-privilege may affect a heterosexual D/s relationship, or white-privilege may affect a multi-racial D/s relationship. This may be especially so, when the cisperson, the male person or the white person is the one who accepts control of the historically-unprivileged person. It might be helpful to your relationship to be cognizant of this additional factor, especially when navigating vanilla-spaces.

Avoid using a person's gender expression to make assumptions about their D/s orientation. Just like the rest of the population, kinky transfolks come in a rainbow of flavors.

Some Resources

International Foundation for Gender Education: <http://www.ifge.org/>

Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: http://www.hrc.org/issues/transgender/transgender_inclusion_workplace.htm

COLAGE resources for children of trans-parents: <http://www.colage.org/programs/trans/>

TYFA resources for parents of trans-kids: <http://www.imatyfa.org/>

Calpernia Addams' Bad Questions to Ask a Transsexual: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjqsB1huDxg>