Glossary of Terms - Transgender

**Sex**

*The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.*

**Gender Identity**

*A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below.) Unlike gender expression (see below) gender identity is not visible to others.*

**Gender Expression**

*External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.*

**Sexual Orientation**

*Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman.*

**Transgender (adj.)**

*An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including transgender. Some of those terms are defined below. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.*

**Transsexual (adj.)**

*An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike transgender, transsexual is* ***not*** *an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender. It is best to ask which term a person prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual woman or transsexual man.*

**Trans**

*Used as shorthand to mean transgender or transsexual - or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella. Because its meaning is not precise or widely understood, be careful when using it with audiences who may not understand what it means. Avoid unless used in a direct quote or in cases where you can clearly explain the term's meaning in the context of your story.*

**Cross-dresser**

*While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term cross-dresser is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with women. Those men typically identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. Replaces the term "transvestite".*

**Transition**

*Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person.* ***Avoid the phrase "sex change".***

**Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)**

*Also called Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS). Refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition (see transition above). Avoid the phrase "sex change operation." Do not refer to someone as being "pre-op" or "post-op." Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, undergo medical surgeries.* ***Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process.***

**Gender Identity Disorder (GID)**

*outdated, see Gender Dysphoria*

**Gender Dysphoria**

*In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) which replaced the outdated entry "Gender Identity Disorder" with Gender Dysphoria, and changed the criteria for diagnosis. The necessity of a psychiatric diagnosis remains controversial, as both psychiatric and medical authorities recommend individualized medical treatment through hormones and/or surgeries to treat gender dysphoria. Some transgender advocates believe the inclusion of Gender Dysphoria in the DSM is necessary in order to advocate for health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people.*

Transgender women are not cross-dressers or drag queens. Drag queens are men, typically gay men, who dress like women for the purpose of entertainment. Be aware of the differences between transgender women, cross-dressers, and drag queens. Use the term preferred by the person. Do not use the word "transvestite" at all, unless someone specifically self-identifies that way.

OTHER TERMS YOU MAY HEAR

You may hear the following terms when doing research on transgender issues or speaking to an interview subject. As they are not commonly known outside the LGBTQ community, they will require context and definition if used in mainstream media.

**Cisgender**

*A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of "trans-." A more widely understood way to describe people who are not transgender is simply to say non-transgender people.*

**Gender Non-Conforming**

*A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity.* ***Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming.*** *Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming.*

**Non-binary and/or genderqueer**

*Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender or transsexual and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.*

TRANSGENDER NAMES, PRONOUN USAGE & DESCRIPTIONS

In 2015, The Washington Post updated its style guide to include the singular they to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a nonbinary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun.

**Always use a transgender person's chosen name.**

*Many transgender people are able to obtain a legal name change from a court. However, some transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to legally change their name. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who uses a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).*

**Use the pronoun that matches the person's authentic gender.**

*A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or undergone surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender. If you are not certain which pronoun to use, ask the person, "What pronouns do you use?"*

**If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun they use, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person's appearance and gender expression or use the singular they.**

*For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are usually appropriate. Or it is also acceptable to use the singular they to describe someone when you don't wish to assign a gender. For example: "Every individual should be able to express their gender in a way that is comfortable for them."*

**Some people use the singular *they* to reflect their non-binary gender identity.**

*In 2015, The Washington Post updated its style guide to include the singular they to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression."*

**It is never appropriate to put quotation marks around either a transgender person's chosen name or the pronoun that reflects that person's gender identity."**

Terms to Avoid

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| **PROBLEMATIC** | **PREFERRED** |
| **"transgenders," "a transgender"**  *Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders."* | **"transgender people","a transgender person"**  *For example, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."* |
| **"transgendered"**  *The adjective transgender should never have an extraneous "-ed" tacked onto the end. An "-ed" suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. It also brings transgender into alignment with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer. You would not say that Elton John is "gayed" or Ellen DeGeneres is "lesbianed," therefore you would not say Chaz Bono is "transgendered."* | **"transgender"** |
| **"transgenderism"**  *This is not a term commonly used by transgender people. This is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanize transgender people and reduce who they are to "a condition."* | **"being transgender"**  *Refer to being transgender instead, or refer to the transgender community. You can also refer to the movement for transgender equality and acceptance.* |
| **"sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative**  *Referring to a "sex-change operation," or using terms such as "pre-operative" or "post-operative," inaccurately suggests that a person must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.* | **"transition"** |
| **"biologically male," "biologically female," "genetically male," "genetically female," "born a man," "born a woman"**  *Problematic phrases like those above are reductive and overly-simplify a very complex subject. As mentioned above, a person's sex is determined by a number of factors - not simply genetics - and a person's biology does not "trump" a person's gender identity. Finally, people are born babies: they are not "born a man" or "born a woman."* | **"assigned male at birth," "assigned female at birth" or "designated male at birth," "designated female at birth"** |
| **"passing" and "stealth"**  *While some transgender people may use these terms among themselves, it is not appropriate to repeat them in mainstream media unless it's in a direct quote. The terms refer to a transgender person's ability to go through daily life without others making an assumption that they are transgender. However, the terms themselves are problematic because "passing" implies "passing as something you're not," while "stealth" connotes deceit. When transgender people are living as their authentic selves, and are not perceived as transgender by others, that does not make them deceptive or misleading.* | **"visibly transgender," "not visibly transgender"** |

Defamatory Language

**Defamatory: "deceptive," "fooling," "pretending," "posing," "trap," or "masquerading"**

***Gender identity is an integral part of a person's identity. Do not characterize transgender people as "deceptive," as "fooling" or "trapping" others, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are inaccurate, defamatory and insulting. (See "passing" and "stealth" as problematic terms above.)***

**Defamatory: "tranny," "she-male," "he/she," "it," "shim"**

***These words dehumanize transgender people and should not be used in mainstream media. The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups: they should not be used except in a direct quote that reveals the bias of the person quoted. So that such words are not given credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, "The person used a derogatory word for a transgender person." Please note that while some transgender people may use "tranny" to describe themselves, others find it extremely offensive.***

**Defamatory: "bathroom bill"**

***A term created and used by far-right extremists to oppose nondiscrimination laws that protect transgender people. The term is geared to incite fear and panic at the thought of encountering transgender people in public restrooms. Simply refer to the nondiscrimination law/ ordinance instead. For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on nondiscrimination laws and bathrooms, please see*** [***"Debunking the 'Bathroom Bill' Myth – Accurate reporting on LGBT nondiscrimination: A guide for journalists."***](http://www.glaad.org/publications/debunking-the-bathroom-bill-myth)