

Transgender-related Terminology

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Sex: Assigned at birth and determined usually by our external, physical bodies. Additional sex markers include our chromosomes and our internal and external reproductive organs. Some people also use sexed bodies to describe our physical sex. People often use male or female to express physical sex. As intersex children can attest, though, our biology is not always so binary or polarized. Sex and gender are often conflated. While sex and gender may be congruous for a majority of people, for some they are not.

Intersex/DSD children are born with chromosomal and/or reproductive differences. They may have an extra or missing chromosome, have some elements of both male and female reproductive systems (for example, one testicle and one ovary), or have genitals that do not appear clearly male or clearly female at birth.

Gender: An ascribed *social status* and set of expectations assigned at birth, which is congruent with the sex also assigned at birth

Gender Identity: An inner psychological sense of oneself as a man or a woman, both, neither, or something else. This term refers to the gender with which one identifies regardless of one's sex.

Gender Expression: The communication of gender through behaviors (e.g. our dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, etc) and appearance (e.g. clothing, hair, accessories, etc.) culturally associated with a particular gender. Societal definitions of gender influence these communications.

Gender Dysphoria: The term for the clinical symptoms of excessive discomfort, confusion, pain, and anguish from feeling an incongruity with the gender assigned to one at birth (Israel & Tarver, 1997; Lev, 2004). Gender dysphoric young people often suppress and hide these feelings from others. Not all transgender youth or adults experience gender dysphoria.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from expectations associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This term may include pre-operative transsexuals, post-operative transsexuals, non-operative transsexuals, cross-dressers, androgynous people, gender benders, drag kings, and drag queens. Their orientation may be heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, or asexual.

Crossdressers: Occasionally dress in clothing more common to another gender, for relaxation; catharsis; sexual pleasure; to express more feminine or masculine sides of themselves; and for any number of reasons. Many crossdressers report that they are not interested in transitioning to a different gender.

Transsexuals: People whose gender identity does not match expectations associated with the sex assigned to them at birth; may or may not opt to transition to another sex via medical treatments and may or may not live full time in the gender expression congruous with their identity.

Genderqueer: A term describing people who identify not as male or female, but as in-between or beyond the binary. Genderqueer youth are more likely to reject the idea that there are only two genders.

Hormonal Support: Some transsexual people may work with an endocrinologist or other physician to provide hormones that stimulate or promote the development of secondary sex characteristics, such as facial hair or breasts, that support their gender identity. Note that access to resources (insurance, availability of culturally competent health care providers, financial resources) may play a significant role in whether or not people are able to receive hormonal support. Some youth without access to health care use other means of access (friends, the Internet, the street).

Gender Identity Disorder: A strong, persistent desire to be the opposite sex, as well as a persistent discomfort about one's anatomical sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role corresponding to one's anatomical sex. Note that this is a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). Some people oppose classification of transgender identity as a disorder, while others recognize the advantages of having explicit standards of health care for transgender individuals.

Sexual Orientation: Defined by whom you are emotionally, romantically, and erotically *attracted to*, for the most part and over a period of time. It exists on a continuum of feelings and attractions, and is not necessarily congruent with behavior.

Heterosexual, Straight: People whose overall attraction is for members of a different gender. The term "metro-sexual," is sometimes used to describe heterosexual men who fit some gay male stereotypes.

Homosexual, Gay, Lesbian, Same Gender Loving; Two Spirit: People whose overall attraction is for members of the same gender. Same Gender Loving emerged in the late 1980's and may be used most often by People of Color; Two Spirit emerged from First People or Native Americans Traditions and has in various contexts been used to describe people who have same sex attractions and people who take on cross-gendered roles within the community.

Bisexual, Pansexual: People who are attracted to members of the same and other genders. Note that individuals may vary in the degree of attractions toward other or the same genders. Other terms which may be in use in your community might include: Not-Straight; Queer, Non-Labeling; Asexual (people who are not sexually attracted to others).

Questioning: Some individuals identify as questioning when they are unsure of where their primary attractions lie.

Heterosexism: The institutionalized assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is inherently superior to and preferable to homosexuality or bisexuality.

Homophobia-Biphobia-Transphobia: The irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, or discrimination against, homosexuals, bisexual, or transgender people and behavior.

Internalized Homophobia BiphobiaTransphobia: The experience of shame, aversion, or self-hatred in reaction to one's own attractions or gender identity.

The Down Low: Refers to closeted bisexual men who have sex with men without the knowledge of their female partners. The impact of racism regarding this concept is explored in a book by Keith Boykin (Boykin, Harris, 2005) titled: *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies and Denial in Black America*.

Womanist: This is a term introduced by author Alice Walker to describe women of color who are concerned about the oppression of other women. This term was introduced to embrace women of color who have—due to institutionalized racism—felt left out of the “feminist movement.”