

TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

Transgender Terminology & Usage

The following definitions are made courtesy of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). The definitions can be found in the Media Reference Guide, 8th edition.

See <http://www.glaad.org/mediaguide> at pages 8-11.

GENERAL TERMINOLOGY

Sex

The classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitals.

Gender Identity

One's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or a girl). For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Expression

External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through "masculine," "feminine" or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

Sexual Orientation

Describes an individual'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 or bisexual. For example, a man who transitions from male to female and is attracted to other women would be identified as a lesbian or a gay woman.

TRANSGENDER-SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Transgender

An umbrella term (adj.) for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (*transgender*, *transsexual*, *cross-dresser*, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Transsexual (also Transexual)

An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. While some transsexual people still prefer to use the term to describe themselves, many transgender people prefer the term *transgender* to *transsexual*. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

Transvestite

Derogatory see *Cross-Dressing*

Transition

Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step process; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, legal and medical adjustments: telling one's family, friends and/ or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more forms of surgery.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Refers to surgical alteration, and is only one small part of transition (*see Transition* above). Preferred term to "sex change operation." Not all transgender people choose to or can afford to have SRS. Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of SRS in the transition process.

Cross-Dressing

To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. **"Cross-dresser" should NOT be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex or who intends to do so in the future.** Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID)

A controversial DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-variant people. Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. Replaces the outdated term "gender dysphoria."

Intersex

Describing a person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations that make a person's sex ambiguous (e.g., Klinefelter Syndrome). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex infants a sex and perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice. The term *intersex* is **not** interchangeable with or a synonym for *transgender*.

PROBLEMATIC TERMS

Problematic: "transgenders," "a transgender"

Preferred: "transgender people," "a transgender person"

Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders." Instead say, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."

Problematic: "transgendered"

Preferred: "transgender"

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. For example, it is grammatically incorrect to turn *transgender* into a participle, as it is an adjective, not a verb, and only verbs can be used as participles by adding an "-ed" suffix.

Problematic: “sex change,” “pre-operative,” “post-operative”

Preferred: “transition”

Referring to a sex change operation, or using terms such as pre- or post-operative, inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.

DEFAMATORY TERMS

Defamatory: “deceptive,” “fooling,” “pretending,” “posing” or “masquerading”

Gender identity is an integral part of a person’s identity. Do not characterize transgender people as “deceptive,” as “fooling” other people, or as “pretending” to be, “posing” or “masquerading” as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are defamatory and insulting.

Defamatory: “she-male,” “he-she,” “it,” “trannie,” “tranny,” “gender-bender”

These words only serve to dehumanize transgender people and should not be used.

Defamatory: “bathroom bill”

A new term created and used by far-right extremists to oppose non-discrimination laws that protect transgender people. The term is geared to incite fear and panic at the thought of encountering transgender people in public restrooms. Use *non-discrimination law/ordinance* instead.

TRANSGENDER NAMES, PRONOUN USAGE & DESCRIPTIONS

Always use a transgender person’s chosen name. Often transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to change their name legally. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who lives by a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).

Whenever possible, ask transgender people which pronoun they would like you to use. A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or had some form of surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender.

If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun he or she prefers, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person’s appearance and gender expression. For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are appropriate.

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. The Associated Press Stylebook provides guidelines for journalists reporting on transgender people and issues. According to the AP Stylebook, reporters should “use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly” (see *AP, New York Times & Washington Post Style*).

When describing transgender people, please use the correct term or terms to describe their gender identity. For example, a person who is born male and transitions to become female is a *transgender woman*, whereas a person who is born female and transitions to become male is a *transgender man*.

Avoid pronoun confusion when examining the stories and backgrounds of transgender people prior to their transition. It is usually best to report on transgender people's stories from the present day instead of narrating them from some point or multiple points in the past, thus avoiding confusion and potentially disrespectful use of incorrect pronouns.

Selected Bibliography

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National Organizations

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| ▪ ABA Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity | www.new.abanet.org/sogi/Pages/default.aspx |
| ▪ ACLU's LGBT Rights Project | www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights |
| ▪ GLAD | www.glad.org |
| ▪ Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund | www.lambdalegal.org |
| ▪ National Center for Lesbian Rights | www.nclr.org |
| ▪ National Center for Transgender Equality | www.transequality.org |
| ▪ National LGBT Bar Association | www.lgbtbar.org |
| ▪ Trans-Academics | www.trans-academics.org/trans_studies |
| ▪ Transgender Law and Policy Institute | www.transgenderlaw.org |
| ▪ Transgender Law Center | www.transgenderlawcenter.org |
| ▪ Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund | www.transgenderlegal.org |

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