



Transgender Terminology

Crossdressing

Wearing clothes not traditionally associated with one's own sex. Crossdressing is a form of gender expression and not necessarily linked to sexual orientation or erotic activity. Many crossdressers are heterosexual.

Gender

In everyday language as well as in the law, the terms "gender" and "sex" are used interchangeably. However, it is often important to distinguish between the two terms. Social scientists, for example, use the term "sex" to refer to a person's biological or anatomical identity as male or female, while reserving the term "gender" for the collection of characteristics that are culturally associated with women or men.

Gender Expression

Gender expression refers to all of the characteristics and behaviors that are traditionally defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions.

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to a person's internal, deeply felt sense of being either a man or a woman, or something other or in between. Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others.

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 Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered to be an outdated and offensive way of identifying gender variance. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't obey expected norms in terms of dress, play, or behavior. It is currently a required diagnosis within the medical establishment for a transsexual who would like to transition.

Intersexual

A person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many factors that contribute to sex, including internal sex organs, external sex organs, hormones, chromosomes, etc. Often these do not all align, making a person's sex ambiguous (examples include Klinefelter Syndrome and adrenal hyperplasia). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersexed infants a sex and perform surgical operations to make the infant's body conform to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersexed adults are speaking out against the practice, accusing doctors of genital mutilation, and more and more parents are choosing to postpone any decisions on surgery until the child is old enough to have a say.

Sex Reassignment Surgery

Refers to genital alteration and is only one small part of the process of transitioning. Not all transsexuals choose or can afford to have this surgery.

Transgender

An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences that do not conform to conventional ideas of what it is to be a man or a woman. This generally includes transsexuals, male and female crossdressers (sometimes referred to as “transvestites”), intersexed people and all people whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical (also known as gender-variant people).

Transitioning

The complex process of altering one’s sex so one can live more comfortably as the gender with which one identifies. Transition includes some or all of the following: changing one’s legal name and/or sex, hormone therapy, and surgical alteration of the genitals, face, or chest.

Transsexual

Most people who are born with female bodies also have an internal sense of being a woman, and most people who are born with male bodies identify as men. For a transsexual person, however, there is a conflict between one’s physical sex and one’s gender identity as a man or woman. Female-to-male (FTM) people are born with female bodies, but identify as men. Male-to-female (MTF) people are born with male bodies, but identify as women. Many, but not all, transsexual people undergo medical treatment to change their physical sex through hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgeries.

NOTE:

Transgender people should be referred to as the gender they use to describe themselves. It is always a good idea simply to ask, but if this is impossible, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person’s appearance and gender expression.

Gender identity is an integral part of a person’s identity. One of the most pervasive and hurtful misconceptions transgender people face is that they are “deceptive,” “pretending,” “posing,” or “masquerading” as a man or as a woman.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people can identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.