

Glossary of Terms Related to Sex and Gender

Gay: a man whose primary social, political and affectional/romantic connections are with other men. Some men who identify as gay may be attracted to or have relationships with women; for these men, "gay" is more about their cultural affiliation than about an exclusive attraction. "Gay" was once commonly used as an umbrella term for all GLBT people; that is less true today than it was 30 years ago, but is not unheard-of.

Lesbian: a woman whose primary social, political and affectional/romantic connections are with other women. Some women who identify as lesbians may be attracted to or have relationships with men; for these women, "lesbian" is more about their cultural affiliation than about an exclusive attraction.

Bisexual: a person who has social, political and affectional/romantic connections with people of more than one gender, or connections based on attributes other than gender. Bisexuals may identify primarily with a gay or lesbian community, a bisexual community, or a heterosexual community.

Heterosexual: a person whose primary social, political and affectional/romantic connections are with people of the "opposite" sex. Some people who identify as heterosexual may be attracted to or have relationships with people of the "same" sex; for these people, a heterosexual identity may be more about their cultural affiliation than about an exclusive attraction.

Queer: an umbrella term for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual individuals, preferred by some people because it is a once-pejorative word reclaimed with pride and/or because, unlike "GLBT," it does not seem to present a static/finalized list of group membership.

The following terms all apply to gender identity, which is distinct from sexual orientation. A transgender person may describe their sexual orientation as heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian—or queer, or another term of their choosing. Please keep in mind that it is not necessary to memorize the often-shifting distinctions between "flavors" of transgender to be generally conversant in the issues. These terms are presented mainly as an illustration of the rich variety of ways that a person might live outside the conventional rules of gender.

Transgender: a broad umbrella term for persons who have a gender identity not traditionally associated with their biological sex. Some transgender persons may wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception; others do not have such a desire.

Transsexual: a person whose gender identity is other than their biological sex; transsexuals often wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception. Most people who identify as transsexual seek to alter their bodies through some combination of hormone therapy, surgery or other means. (see Transition/Transcend/Transgress, below)

Transition (noun; see 'transition' used as a verb, below): In the parlance of transgender issues, the "transition" is the time period during which an individual shifts from expressing one gender to another in their personal life and/or workplace. Most transsexuals can name a discrete period in their past, present or future that they identify as their transition period. This may be relatively sudden or abrupt, or may take place over a period of months or years. The transition period does not necessarily coincide with the timing of hormone therapy or surgery; an individual may start using a new name and new pronouns long before or long after any medical intervention takes place, or indeed in the absence of any medical intervention whatsoever over the course of their life.

Crossdresser: a person who dresses in the clothing of the "opposite" biological sex. Formerly known as transvestites (a term which has fallen out of favor and usage because of its negative connotations) crossdressers generally prefer to be addressed and treated as a person of whatever gender they are presenting at a given time. Some individuals crossdress more or less full-time; others only "dress" on occasion.

Drag: dressing in the clothing of the "opposite" biological sex, or in a manner different from how one habitually dresses (i.e., corporate drag, military drag, cheerleader drag). Drag is usually theatrical and highly stylized, and presents a stereotyped image. Individuals who dress in drag may or may not be crossdressers or bigenderists.

Female or Male Impersonator: persons who crossdress as performance art and/or as stage personalities. They may also consider themselves "drag performers." They may or may not consider themselves to be crossdressers or bigenderists.

Bigenderist: a person who develops and expresses a distinctly male persona and a distinctly female persona. A bigenderist might, for example, work as a woman and socialize as a man. Bigendered individuals may or may not consider themselves drag performers or crossdressers.

Genderqueer: a person who does not identify with their assigned sex *or* the "other" conventionally recognized sex, and who cultivates a certain degree of ambiguity in their gender expression. A person who identifies as genderqueer may or may not choose to alter their bodies or their identity documents.

Intersexed: a person with any one of a variety of congenital (developed *in utero*) anomalies of the reproductive and sexual system—i.e., sex chromosomes, external genitalia and/or internal reproductive organs that are not considered "standard" for either male or female. Intersexuals were formerly known as hermaphrodites, a term which perpetuates both stigma about the condition and the misperception that all intersexuals have both a penis and a vagina.

In understanding the spectrum of transgender experience/expression, it is often helpful to think of these three variations on "trans-ness" that an individual might identify with or act on. A person might stay in one "mode" indefinitely, might change from one to another over time, or might choose one mode in the work setting, another among family and a third among friends.

Transition—(a) to pass from one state, stage, subject, or place to another. (b) to move, develop, or evolve from one form, stage or style to another. Someone in this mode might describe themselves with the familiar phrase "a man trapped in a woman's body," or its converse.

These individuals might think of themselves as men or women first, transgender second . . . or not at all. They're probably more likely to identify as transsexual than transgender.

→ CHANGE GENDER.

Transgress—to act in disregard of laws and rules [of gender]; "break a law;" offend, infract, go against, breach, break.

Someone in this mode might be a Radical Faerie in a beard, short skirt and combat boots, or a similar expression that presents highly coded and highly conflicting gender cues. Another possibility is someone whose expression/presentation is not necessarily visually conflicting, but whose political/social/discourse goes out of its way to break rules about gender. They would probably identify themselves as "transgressively gendered," or transgendered.

→ VIOLATE RULES OF GENDER.

Transcend—(a) to rise above or go beyond the limits of. (b) to triumph over the negative or restrictive aspects of. (c) to be prior to, beyond, and above (the universe or material existence).

Someone in this mode might use the recently coined non-gendered pronouns "zie" [he/she] and "hir" [her/his] (terms used most commonly on the internet), and/or might choose a new name or style of dress that avoids presenting gender cues of any kind wherever possible.

→ RISE ABOVE OR OVERCOME GENDER.