

Gender Diversity – Common Terms

Caution: Not everyone agrees with the definitions shown below.

FOUR INDEPENDENT CONTINUUMS

Sex: A continuum of biological sex comprised of the reproductive organs, genitalia, secondary sex characteristics, hormone levels, genes and chromosomes.

Male Intersex Female

Gender identity: The inherent sense of being a man or a woman or neither or both. Research indicates that gender identity develops very early in gestation in the brain, probably due to genes, and is independent of the body's sex.

Man Bigender Woman

Gender expression: How a person presents their gender. Gender “norms” are the socially accepted/expected roles and ways of dressing, acting, talking, behaving, moving, etc. for men versus women. These expected “norms” vary widely over time, place and culture.

Masculine Androgynous Feminine

Sexual Orientation: The direction of one's sexuality, usually (but not always) in reference to the sex or gender of the persons the individual finds attractive.

Heterosexual Bisexual Homosexual

MORE TERMS TO CONSIDER

Cross Dressing – Wearing clothing typically associated with another gender. Reasons for cross dressing vary widely (e.g. comfort, style, as performance, challenging norms, emotional satisfaction, arousal, fetish, etc).

FTM or MTF (Female-to-Male or Male-to-Female) – Having a gender identity (the inherent sense of being man or woman) that is “opposite” the gender assigned at birth.

Gender Identity – The inherent sense or experience of being a man or a woman (or neither or both) that is independent of the body's sex or the gender assigned at birth.

Genderqueer – Transcending binary gender assumptions. Identifying as other than exclusively man or woman.

Intersex – Being born with genitalia, reproductive anatomy, secondary sex characteristics and/or sex chromosomes that are not exclusively male or female.

Transgender – At least 2 independent concepts are indicated by this term:
1. Having a gender identity that doesn't match the gender/sex assigned at birth.
2. Expressing gender in non-conventional ways, or in ways that don't match socially accepted norms or expectations.

Transition – transitioning with medical and/or legal interventions from the sex assigned at birth to the “opposite” sex. Medical transition typically involves hormone therapy and may (or may not) include one or more surgical procedures.

EXPANDED DESCRIPTION OF TRANSGENDER

Transgender is a broad "umbrella" term that includes at least two distinct independent concepts.

1. Having a gender identity (inherent sense of one's gender) that doesn't match the gender/sex assigned at birth.

This definition of transgender includes (but is not necessarily limited to) ...

- Those who identify as transsexual
- Those who do not identify as transsexual
- Those who transition medically and/or legally to the fullest extent possible
- Those who utilize some but not all medical and/or legal options for transition
- Those who never utilize medical interventions
- Those who have no desire to transition
- Those who do not identify as the "opposite sex"
- Those who live full time as the gender they feel internally
- Those who live part time as the gender they feel internally
- Those who never live as the gender they feel internally
- Those who see gender as a binary system (either/or man or woman)
- Those who do not see gender as a binary system (for example, seeing gender as a gradual continuum or as social construct)
- Those who prefer a term other than transgender (options include but are not limited to: trans, transman or transwomen, genderqueer, bigender, FTM or MTF, transsexual)

2. Expressing gender in ways that don't match socially accepted/expected norms.

This definition includes (but is not necessarily limited to) ...

- Those who present their gender in non-conventional ways
- Those who identify as transgender and whose gender identity DOES match the gender assigned at birth
- Those who cross dress (as entertainment or profession, for fun, as a political statement or protest, as a sexual fetish or erotic play, as an emotional release, etc). Gender identity may (or may not) match the gender assigned at birth.

NOTE: Transgender does not tell us anything about sexual orientation.

- People who identify as transgender have the same diversity of sexual orientation as the general population. In other words, transgender individuals can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer.
- Many transgender people who are straight do not identify as belonging to the gay community and might not see themselves as part of the larger GLBTQI community.
- Some straight transgender people feel they aren't included by (or are actively excluded by) members of the gay community and sometimes by the broader GLBTQI community.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is gender dysphoria?

A: This is the term used in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders when a person's gender identity (inherent sense of being man or woman) is different than the gender assigned at birth. Many people don't like the term "gender dysphoria" because it treats a medical problem as if it were a mental problem.

Q: Huh?

A: Right! This can be very confusing. Let's face it, most people who are born with a male body also "feel" male, and most people born with a female body also "feel" female. In other words, their gender identity matches their birth sex. On the other hand, for some people, gender identity does NOT match the sex assigned at birth. You may know someone who was born with a female body who has the inherent sense or experience of being a boy or man. Or you may know someone born with a male body who has the inherent sense of being a girl or woman.

Q: What causes a person's gender identity to be different than their birth sex?

A: No one knows for certain. Many years ago, it was thought that hormonal changes during pregnancy affected gender identity, but this theory has come under question. According to scientific studies in 1995 and 2000 and 2002, gender identity develops very early in the brain of a fetus based on genes that are independent of the X and Y sex chromosomes.

Q: Do people transition to escape the stigma of being gay or lesbian?

A: No. People transition to align their bodies with their brains. These individuals are as diverse as the general population, with sexual orientations that are straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, etc.

Q: I know someone who is transitioning – what do I call him/her?

A: Whatever he or she has indicated. It may take some time to get used to a new name and pronoun switch. Just do your best, and that's all anyone can ask of you. If you slip up, fix it and move on. After a while, it gets easier. You can also help support the person who is transitioning by gently reminding others to use the person's name and appropriate pronoun.

Q: Can't she just live as a masculine woman? (or Can't he just live as a feminine man?)

A: Probably not. Living as a woman (masculine or not) can be extremely painful and debilitating for someone who has the deep inherent sense of being a man. And living as a man (feminine or not) can be painful and debilitating for someone who has the inherent sense of being a woman.

It's likely that most masculine women identify as women (and feminine men as men). Outward appearances (how people walk, talk, dress, and behave) are described as masculine, androgynous or feminine based on local cultural "norms" for what is expected and socially acceptable. When you change location, time, culture, etc, the "norms" also change. For example, what is seen as feminine in the United States today (long hair, lacy clothes, perfume, make up and high heels) was considered very masculine for powerful men in Europe a few hundred years ago.

Comparison of L, G, B, and T

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual	Transgender
Non-straight sexual orientation	"T" does not tell us sexual orientation. People who identify with the "T" can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.
No longer stigmatized as a mental illness	"Gender Dysphoria" is listed as a mental illness in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. More accurately, this is a physical / medical problem, not a mental one.
No medical intervention associated with identifying as L, G or B	For those whose path include transition (aligning the body to match gender identity), medical interventions are expensive and not typically covered by insurance policies
Coming out as L, G or B does not involve changing official identification documents or legal status with government agencies, educational institutions, work etc.	For those whose path includes transition: Legal and administrative proceedings are necessary to change one's name and gender marker on identification documents and in records held by DMV, Social Security, Dept of State (Passport office), County Records (birth certificate), employers, schools, medical providers, insurance carriers, banks, credit card agencies, Selective Service (draft notification), professional licensing agencies, etc.
Access to medical insurance and health care not affected when one identifies as L, G, or B	Access to medical insurance and health care coverage routinely denied to many transgender people
Studies indicate this population has much higher than average disposable income	Studies indicate this population is disproportionately vulnerable to poverty due to employment discrimination.

RESOURCES

LOCAL SUPPORT -----

FTM Sonoma County (FTMsc) – informal network, monthly support meetings, social gatherings and online discussion group for people who identify anywhere on the transmasculine continuum (assigned “female” at birth who don’t identify as such) and those they love. We can also provide a contact for a local MTF group.

- **FTMsc email address:** FTMSonomaCounty@yahoo.com
- **FTMsc Geocities page:** www.geocities.com/ftmsonomacounty
- **FTMsc MySpace page:** www.myspace.com/ftmsc

SHORT LIST OF WEB LINKS -----

FTM Resource Guide – www.ftmguide.org

Transgender Law Center (California) – www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Human Rights Campaign – www.hrc.org

WPATH - World Professional Association for Transgender Health (formerly Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association) – www.wpath.org

American Psychological Assoc. – www.apa.org/topics/transgender.html

SHORT LIST OF BOOKS -----

True Selves, by Mildred Brown (A therapist’s perspective)

Trans Forming Families, Mary Boenke, editor (Family members tell their own stories about transgender loved ones)

How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States, by Joanne Meyerowitz (Indiana State Univ.

history professor’s introduction to how ideas about sex and gender have evolved)

Becoming a Visible Man, by Jamison Green (Green relates his insights into what it means to change from female to male)

She’s Not There: A life in two genders, by Jennifer Boylan (Boylan tells her own story of her passage from male to female)

SHORT LIST OF MOVIES -----

TransGeneration – Eight-episode documentary focused on a year in the lives of four transitioning college students.

Ma Vie En Rose (My Life in Pink) – the story a little girl born in a little boy's body.

Normal – the story of a husband’s transition to female after 25 years of marriage (with Jessica Lange and Tom Wilkinson)

Transamerica – an MTF (Felicity Huffman) awaiting sex reassignment surgery learns she has a wayward teenage son whom she bails out of jail. Together they take a road trip across the country.

Southern Comfort – documentary of the final year in the life of a 52-year-old FTM in Georgia dying of ovarian cancer that doctors refused to treat.