National Center for TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

TRANSGENDER TERMINOLOGY

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Terminology within the transgender community varies and has changed over time so we recognize the need to be sensitive to usage within particular communities. These terms are taken from joint publications with The Task Force.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including but not limited to transsexuals, cross-dressers, androgynous people, genderqueers, and gender non-conforming people. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. "Trans" is shorthand for "transgender."

Transgender Man: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a man (see also "FTM").

Transgender Woman: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman (see also "MTF").

Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender Expression: How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

Transsexual: A term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth. Often transsexual people alter or wish to alter their bodies through hormones or surgery in order to make it match their gender identity.

Cross-dresser: A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender.

Transvestite: A term for a cross-dresser that is considered derogatory by many.

Queer: A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and, often also transgender, people. Some use queer as an alternative to "gay" in an effort to be more inclusive, since the term does not convey a sense of gender. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

Genderqueer: A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female.

Gender Non-conforming: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

Bi-gendered: One who has a significant gender identity that encompasses both genders, male and female. Some may feel that one side or the other is stronger, but both sides are there.

Two-Spirit*: A contemporary term that references historical multiple-gender traditions in many First Nations cultures. Many Native/First Nations people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming identify as Two-Spirit; in many Nations, being Two-Spirit carries both great respect and additional commitments and responsibilities to one's community.

FTM: A person who transitions from "female-to-male," meaning a person who was assigned female at birth, but identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a "transgender man."

MTF: A person who transitions from "male-to-female," meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a "transgender woman."

Passing: A term used by transgender people to mean that they are seen as the gender with which they self-identify. For example, a transgender man (born female) who most people see as a man.

Sex Reassignment Surgery: Surgical procedures that change one's body to make it conform to a person's gender identity. This may include "top surgery" (breast augmentation or removal) or "bottom surgery" (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries. "Sex change surgery" is considered a derogatory term by many.

Sexual Orientation: A term describing a person's attraction to members of the same sex or different sex. Usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.

Transition: The period during which a person begins to live as their new gender. Transitioning may include changing one's name, taking hormones, having surgery, or changing legal documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security record, birth certificate) to reflect their new gender.

Intersex: A term used for people who are born with external genitalia, chromosomes, or internal reproductive systems that are not traditionally associated with either a "standard" male or female.

Drag Queen: generally used to accurately refer to men who dress as women (often celebrity women) for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events. It is also used as slang, sometimes in a derogatory manner, to refer to all transgender women.

Drag King: used to refer to women who dress as men for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events.

**The definition of "two-spirit" is from the Task Force's First Nations/Indigenous/Two-Spirit Collective.*