

## GENDER IDENTITY TERMS

The experiences of gender variant people have been so invisible in our society, we often find ourselves lacking the words to even discuss the most basic components of gender variant lives. The following is a list of terms that have arisen from the transgender community to help share experiences and explain them to others. Even within the trans community there is still debate about what each term means precisely and some regional variation, but the following should provide a beginning vocabulary to discuss transgender, transexual, and gender variant issues.

**Gender:** a system of classification describing attributes commonly associated with maleness or femaleness. Masculine characteristics are typically associated with persons who have male bodies; feminine characteristics are typically associated with persons who have female bodies. The exact characteristics are culturally defined and therefore variable across cultures or across time.

**Gender Identity:** A person's view of their own gender, which includes aspects of a person's appearance, expression, or behavior. A person's gender identity may or may not conform to the conventional expectations for their assigned sex at birth.

**Sexual Orientation:** the romantic and sexual attraction a person feels to a particular gender or genders (gay, lesbian, heterosexual, or bisexual).

**Gender Expression:** the external presentation or appearance of a person's gender, such as dress, mannerisms, hair style, and speech. A person's gender expression may differ from one's gender identity.

**Perceived Gender:** what another person assumes one's gender is in a given interaction. Some people's gender expression is commonly misinterpreted or confused and is different from their identity/expression.

**Transgender:** a generally accepted umbrella term describing anyone who exhibits characteristics of a gender that does not match one's apparent or actual physical sex. The term can include people who are transsexual, crossdressers, drag kings and queens, some two-spirit people, and anyone who breaks gender boundaries, regardless of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Sometimes the abbreviated word "**trans**" is used.

**Gender Variant:** someone whose combination of legal sex, birth sex, gender identity, gender expression, and perceived gender do not line up according to societal expectations. The term "**genderqueer**" is similar, though "gender variant" is preferred by those not comfortable using the word "queer".

**Transsexual:** a medical term applied to those transgender people who feel such incongruity between their body and their gender that they seek medical assistance in transforming their body to address the incongruity, regardless of sexual orientation.

**Crossdresser:** a person who is compelled to or enjoys wearing the clothing of the opposite sex on an occasional basis. Crossdressers are often heterosexual men. This behavior is often carried out in isolation, but many social clubs offer emotional support for crossdressers and their partners and may host events that

provide an opportunity for people to socialize while experiencing the role of the opposite sex. The term "transvestite" has also been used, but is sometimes considered offensive.

**Drag Queen and Drag King:** one who crossdresses, usually for performance/entertainment. This term is used more frequently in lesbian-gay-bisexual communities.

**Two-Spirit:** A term used by some members of Native American and First Nations communities to describe someone with both male and female spirit. This can involve someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, both, or other factors -- not everyone who is two-spirit identifies as being "trans." The use of two-spirit by non-First Nations people is often considered offensive.

**Transgenderist:** a person who lives full time in the gender of his or her choice (different from the body type) without desiring gender reassignment surgery. Some transgenderists consider themselves to be "non-operative" transsexuals. Transgenderists may or may not choose to take hormones to permanently alter their appearance.

**Intersex:** an individual whose biological and/or genetic traits at birth do not correspond with conventional concepts of male/female anatomy. Most people choose to refer to themselves as intersex rather than hermaphrodites, and the use of the term hermaphrodite by non-intersex people is often considered offensive. While some intersex people are also transgender, intersex people as a group have a unique set of needs and struggles.

**Transition:** the process of changing one's presentation and/or expression to align with one's gender identity. Some of these changes include manner of dress, name change, pronoun change, hormonal modifications, or surgery. Transition varies greatly across the transgender community, both in what people choose to change and when certain changes feel most comfortable.

**Standards of Care:** a set of guidelines formulated by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association to determine when and how transpeople may obtain hormones and sex reassignment, involving a period of psychotherapy, "the Real Life Test," and, if desired, hormones and/or surgery. Only recently have The Standards of Care been rewritten with advice and counsel from actual trans persons.

**Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):** the process of taking hormones to achieve the secondary sex characteristics of the desired sex.

**Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS):** surgery for the purpose of having a body more consistent with one's gender identity. SRS may be quite costly, and not everyone who desires SRS has equal access. Also known as Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS).