

Gender Identity 101

Gender identity and transgender are different from sexual orientation as in lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. Sexual orientation or sexual identity is about who you are naturally attracted to. Gender identity is about how you identify as male, female, or somewhere in between. Transgender people have a way of expressing themselves, describing their gender, or gender identity (knowing that you are a boy or girl) that doesn't always fit society's rules that boys are boys and girls are girls.

What is Gender?

People have different experiences of gender. For some, being male or female is something they don't think about, it's automatic, while others feel pressure to measure up to what's expected of them as male or female. Many people feel that "male" or "female" are labels that don't work for them and may want to change the gender they've been living in during their life so far.

What is Transgender?

Transgender or Trans: The word "transgender" is an umbrella term that describes those who have a gender that's different from the sex assigned at birth: male, female, or intersex. Transgender people may identify as male, female, or they may feel that neither label fits them. Sometimes, those who are transgender use the abbreviated term "trans" to convey the idea that the sex they were assigned at birth doesn't fully and accurately reflect their core sense of self or internal experience of gender.

The word transgender can also be used in conjunction with other labels to indicate the gender or sex someone knows themselves to be. For example, someone can identify as a transgender man, a transgender woman, or a transgender nonbinary person.

Nonbinary, NB, or Enby: An umbrella term that describes those who have a gender that can't be exclusively categorized as male or female.

Some transgender people change their appearance, body, name, or legal gender marker to convey and affirm their internal experience of gender. Others don't feel the need to make these changes to express and validate this aspect of who they are. Either way is OK.

Transition: In order to express their chosen gender, transgender people may transition, or change, from living as the gender they were given at birth. They may change their names, pronouns, or style of dress. Some transgender people also choose a medical transition, with the help of medical specialists, who will prescribe hormones and/or surgery.

Transsexual: Historically and medically, the term transsexual was used to indicate a difference between one's gender identity (their internal experience of gender) and sex assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex). More specifically, the term is often (though not always) used to communicate that one's experience of gender involves medical changes, such as hormones or surgery that help alter their anatomy and appearance to more closely align with their gender identity.

Similar to the word transgender, the meaning of the word transsexual can vary from person to person, culture to culture, and across history.

Gender Identity: a person's internal feelings, and the labels they use, such as male, female, or transgender.

Is Gender a Box?

In our society, there are lots of stereotypes of how boys and girls are supposed to be. Many people act like boys and girls are opposite to each other – completely separate and different. Some people say that boys are supposed to like sports. Girls can be expected to like pink and have long hair. Girls and boys can be encouraged to go into certain types of jobs and not others. Lots of us find ways to step outside these gender boxes, by wearing different clothes, liking different music, or doing a job that's outside the norm. Transgender people are also dealing with these gender boxes. Some people feel like they don't fit at all into the male or the female box, they might call themselves nonbinary. Some other people want society to be open when they completely change to the 'opposite' gender (trans man, trans woman).

Gender as a Social Construct

Gender, like race, is a social construction, whereas sex is biological, based on genitalia. When we talk about gender identity we are talking about how people identify on the spectrum from female to male. Gender identity is unique to each one of us. Let's take a look at how this might show up in life. Here are some examples of gender identities:

Cisgender - denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex.

Transgender - denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of the male or female gender.

Genderfluid - A gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is Genderfluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders but may feel more boy some days, and more girl other days.

Non-binary or Genderqueer - a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.

Agender - a term that can be literally translated as 'without gender'. It can be seen either as a non-binary gender identity or as a statement of not having a gender identity.

Trans* - An umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum.

Gender role - The behaviors, traits, thoughts, and dress expected by a culture of members of a particular sex.

Common Gender Acronyms

FtM, F2M, F-M - A person assigned female at birth but whose gender identity is male.

MtF, M2F, M-F - A person assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female.

AFAB - Assigned female at birth

AMAB - Assigned male at birth

CD - Crossdresser - A person who dresses in a way associated with their opposite sex at birth.

GNC - Gender Non-Conforming

GD - Gender Dysphoria. A form of intense emotional distress where someone is unhappy with living in the role of their assigned gender.

HRT - Hormone replacement therapy

T* - an overall abbreviation for transgender

T [noun] - any testosterone regimen.

T-Friendly - a group or person which accepts transgender people.

T-Girl - a transgender female. There are mixed feelings regarding the use of this term.

TG - transgender

TS - transsexual

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