

Gender diversity – terms and definitions

Umbrella terms

NB: The following umbrella terms are adjectives not nouns, i.e never say “a transgender”

Trans or transgender (never “transgendered”) – someone who experiences incongruence with the gender they were assigned at birth. The term transgender was popularised in the 1990s by non-binary person Leslie Feinberg, and it includes all non-binary people, including those who don’t transition (though not all non-binary people call themselves trans.)

Trans+ – a term designed to include anyone who might not use the word trans, but fits under the trans/gender divergent umbrella, e.g. people from other cultures with different words for their identity. At one point trans* (with an asterisk) was popular as an umbrella term but it has fallen out of favour and is considered unhelpful by many.

Transsexual – a medically transitioning trans person (many consider the word outdated, even offensive)

Non-binary or genderqueer – somebody whose gender, either wholly or partly, falls outside of being exclusively a man or exclusively a woman.

- Different terms/ ways of being non-binary are: agender (not having a gender), bigender (having two or more genders), gender fluid (gender changes over time, timescales can vary), third gender (a gender other than man or woman, however this term has a problematic history), neutrois (neutral gender), androgyne (ambiguous or blended gender), enby (shorthand for non-binary), non-binary butch, non-binary femme (see later explanations of butch/femme), non-binary man, non-binary woman, demigirl/boy (a person who somewhat identifies as a man or woman and somewhat falls outside the binary)

Gender divergent/diversity – a term to cover the rich variety of diverse genders and non-genders without labelling them.

Other terms

AFAB/AMAB (assigned female/male at birth) – the gender category a person was given when they were born. Avoids problematic terms like “biological male” or “female bodied”.

- This is not an identity, so avoid saying things like “they are an AFAB trans person”.
- Shortening this to assigned female/male makes the term more inclusive of intersex people assigned “indeterminate” at birth but later given a legal gender.

Cis or cisgender – the opposite of trans or transgender, someone who feels congruent with the gender they were assigned. Using this term avoids problematic ways of describing non-trans people in relation to trans people. Cis/trans comes from Latin, meaning same side/other side.

Butch/femme – used within the LGBT+ community to describe people who present in typically masculine or feminine ways. Not the same as being trans. E.g. a woman, can be butch (masculine presenting) while identifying 100% as a woman. Butch/femme can also be descriptions of someone’s gender identity (or part of it).

Crossdresser – somebody who wears clothing that falls outside of what’s expected for their gender. Some are trans, some not. “Transvestite” is also used but decreasing in popularity/offensive to some, crossdresser is also a controversial term to some.

Drag queen/king – currently, someone who dresses as the opposite sex for performance purposes. Historically the line between drag and trans was more complicated. Some drag artists are trans, but *doing* drag doesn't necessarily make you trans.

Gender identity – a person's core experience of themselves in relation to sex/gender. However, it is better to say, "she is a woman" not "she identifies as a woman", "their gender is neutrois" not "their gender identity is neutrois". NB: agender people don't have a gender or gender identity.

Gender incongruence/dysphoria – The World Health Organisation now uses "incongruence" to describe trans people's experience of the misalignment of their gender from that assigned to them. Dysphoria, the opposite of euphoria, describes "clinically significant distress" now understood to be mainly caused by society's treatment of trans people rather than their being trans, and is falling out of use. Saying someone experiences incongruence rather than dysphoria does not mean their struggle is less, it is simply a language choice intended not to pathologise.

Gender recognition certificate (GRC) – allows trans men/women to change birth certificate/registry documents only. Other documents including passport can be changed without a GRC. Many trans people don't have one as it is complex, expensive and not available to non-binary people. Never ask for a GRC as that breaches a person's data protection rights.

Intersex – a person whose reproductive biology does not conform to simplistic binary ideas of male and female (this can be hormonal, chromosomal, or anatomical – e.g. ambiguous genitalia, XXY or XO chromosomes, androgen insensitivity. Some intersex children are still subject to non-consensual "normalising" medical and surgical interventions. Intersex people are not under the trans umbrella, but intersex people are more likely to also be trans or gender divergent.

Personal pronouns – (e.g. he/she/they/xie) – the pronoun others should use when talking about a person. if in doubt ask; not everyone's appearance conforms to their gender, however it is best to habitually ask *everyone* to indicate their pronouns than single trans people out. Don't use they/them for trans people who go by he or she unless they indicate this is okay.

Transition – the process of developing congruence with your gender. May or may not involve surgery, hormone replacement therapy, and changes to assist being correctly identified through clothes, speech, etc.

- Unhelpful transition terms: "sex change", "used to be a man" "born in the wrong body" "female to male" "FTM/MTF". These tell an inaccurate (for most) story. Transition and healthcare do not "create" a person's identity, they just make them more comfortable and congruent.

Trans woman/ trans man (never "transwoman/transman") – a trans woman is someone assigned male at birth who identifies as/lives as a woman, and vice versa.

Two Spirit – only Indigenous Americans may use this identity, which is not directly synonymous with trans. Many cultures have ways of conceptualising gender diversity which do not neatly map onto English language concepts. Colonisation stigmatised/erased much of this gender diversity.

Please note: terminology shifts and evolves; some trans people will use words now seen as incorrect or even offensive, words mean different things to different individuals – there is no single, unified trans story