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Transgender Terminology

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Language is important and words have meanings. Shared understanding of definitions of words is what enables us to communicate. Transgender terminology re-defines words according to a set of beliefs: here we explain terminology which is often obtuse and confusing to understand.

Our policy

On this site we use the correct terminology so that it is clear whether we are talking about boys or girls, males or females, as this is key to understanding. The change in meaning of these words is not something we support or want to reinforce. To use transgender terminology is to support an ideology we don't believe in. But we are also sensitive to the fact that we are often writing about vulnerable children and young people; while we would not use 'he' to refer to a girl or 'she' to refer to a boy, we may try to avoid pronouns altogether or find ways round it, so that we don't alienate people who would otherwise use the site. The language is constantly changing and we avoid new terminology which is overtly promoting an ideological position: for example 'gender reassignment' is increasingly referred to as 'gender confirmation' and 'cross-sex hormones' as 'gender affirming hormones.' We reject these new terms. It is a fine line to tread and we do our best to retain accuracy in language whilst being sensitive to the feelings of young people.

We'll start with the correct definitions of sex and gender.

Sex (or biological sex)

Biological sex is a binary: there are two sexes, male and female. Males are born with male sex organs (penis and testes) and male reproductive capacity (sperm production). Females are born with female sex and reproductive organs (vagina, uterus), develop secondary sex characteristics (breasts) at puberty and have female reproductive functions (menstruation, gestating a fetus, giving birth). Note: functionality is irrelevant, ie. a man who is unable to produce sperm or a woman who is unable to gestate a fetus does not change the biological fact of their maleness or femaleness. A person's sex is a biological fact with recognised characteristics and it cannot be changed. A male cannot become a female and a female cannot become a male; no matter how many hormones or how much surgery they have, the changes are cosmetic only. Words denoting sex are 'male' and 'female.'

Intersex

Intersex people are those who are born with one of various congenital abnormalities known collectively as disorders or differences of sexual development (DSD). In very rare cases a newborn's genitalia is difficult to classify as either male or female at birth. A DSD or intersex condition does not change a person's sex, which is still either male or female. There are female DSD conditions (eg Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) and Turner Syndrome) and male DSD conditions (eg Klinefelter Syndrome). For a comprehensive list of intersex conditions, [see this post](#). A person with a DSD is not a third sex, nor on a 'spectrum.' Intersex is unrelated to transgender and should not be conflated as the issues are very different.

Gender

'Gender' is recognised as a social construct. It is a subjective, abstract idea, ie. people have different opinions on the word's meaning; it cannot be defined by a recognisable set of fixed characteristics. The word is commonly used to denote characteristics of personality, role and preferences which are attached to one sex or the other, eg. men are logical, women are emotional; men are dominant, women are submissive. These characteristics have no basis in biological reality, ie. they are not fixed innate qualities of the sexes: both males and females are born with equal potential to be either emotional or logical, or both, or neither. Although there are differences in male and female brains, they are far more similar than different and no personality characteristic is unique to only one sex or the other. The feminist understanding of 'gender' is as a hierarchy which places men as the dominant sex and women as subordinate. Words denoting gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine.'

Gender Stereotyping

Gender or sex-role stereotyping is assuming that 'men are like this' and 'women are like that' as unchangeable and natural fact, eg. men are active, macho and natural-born leaders, women are passive, feminine and naturally suited to lower-paid work and caretaking etc.

Gender non-conforming. Transgender organisations also use **gender variant** or **gender questioning**. As transgender organisations conflate the terms 'sex' and 'gender' these terms suggest that a child may be confused about which sex they are. We avoid these terms, as children who defy gender stereotypes for their sex are normal, they don't need any new labels which suggest that they may fall under the transgender umbrella.

Transgender

This word is hard to clarify: the most common definition is a person 'whose gender identity does not match the sex/gender they were assigned at birth' but it is also used as an umbrella term to include all 'gender identities,' cross-dressers and transvestites. The definition of the term presupposes that biological sex is randomly decided by someone but that 'gender identity' is innate, so that 'gender identity' overrides biology in determining whether you are male or female.

Cisgender

People who were born women and 'identify as' women ('cis woman') and men who were born men and 'identify as' men ('cis men'). We don't use this term as it suggests identification with sex stereotypes; the word 'cis' has come to be synonymous with 'conforming.' It is also used as an insult ("cis scum"). The term suggests that men and women are gender identities, not biological sexes; describing someone as 'cisgender' imposes a gender identity on them which they may not feel, or they may find insulting. The words 'man' and 'woman' don't need qualifiers.

Gender dysphoria

The distress experienced by inhabiting a sexed body which feels alien; the feeling that your body is 'wrong' and that you are, or should be, the opposite sex.

Body dysmorphia

Body dysmorphia is a different thing, not related to transgender. It denotes the state of being dissatisfied with the body to the extent that you 'see' faults which don't exist in reality (eg. an anorexic who sees her body as 'fat').

Assigned a gender at birth

This is interchanged with 'assigned a sex at birth.' Neither is accurate. At birth, a midwife or doctor simply correctly classifies a newborn into one or other biological sex group. (Specific 'gender characteristics' are then assumed by society and applied to people with different sexed bodies).

AFAB

Assigned female at birth.

AMAB

Assigned male at birth.

Gender identity

The belief or inner feeling that you are a boy or a girl, man or woman, which is independent of both socialisation and biological sex. There is no scientific basis for the belief that all human beings possess this innate pre-social sense of being male or female.

Transsexual

'Transsexual' describes a person who experiences gender dysphoria (previously called 'sex dysphoria) to the extent that hormones and surgery may seem like the only viable option to alleviate the distress of the feeling of inhabiting the wrong sexed body. The term has been described as old-fashioned, although transsexuals understandably object to this view.

AGP

Autogynephilia, the erotic love of oneself as a woman. This is the most common reason for men to transition later in life, typically after a lifetime of cross-dressing, a 'macho' career, marriage and the fathering of children. These men are heterosexual, and transition for very different reasons to the much smaller group of homosexual men who were typically very 'feminine' as young boys.

MtF and FtM

MtF means Male to Female (Trans woman) and FtM means Female to Male (Trans man). We don't use these terms as it is impossible for a biological male to become female and vice versa.

MtT and FtT

MtT means Male to Trans and FtT means Female to Trans. These are alternative terms used for the reason above.

Trans woman or transwoman

A male who identifies as a woman.

Trans man or transman

A female who identifies as a man.

Trans-identified male (TiM) and trans-identified female (TiF)

Alternative terms which prioritise the sex of the person to avoid confusion.