



TRANS 101

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*Rainbow Heights Club staff are available to train the staff of agencies within New York City, free of charge, in how to be culturally competent and effective with LGBT people in recovery.
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Transgender 101

Transgender Terminology

Cisgender: A person who is gender-typical or non-transgender.

Crossdresser: A person who, regardless of motivation, wears clothes, makeup, etc. that are considered by the culture to be appropriate for another gender but not one's own (preferred term to "transvestite").

Drag or In Drag: Wearing clothes considered appropriate for someone of another gender.

Drag King and Drag Queen: A FTM crossdresser (typically a lesbian) and a MTF crossdresser (typically a gay man), respectively, who employ gender-marked clothing, makeup, and mannerisms for their own and other people's appreciation or for entertainment purposes.

En Femme: A term in the male crossdressing community for expressing a more "feminine" personality and displaying more "feminine" gender behavior while crossdressing.

FTM: A female-to-male transsexual, a transsexual man, a transman, a transguy, or a man with a trans past—individuals assigned female at birth who identify as male. Some transmen reject being seen as "FTM," arguing that they have always been male and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may call themselves "MTM"). Other transmen feel that "FTM" and similar language reinforces an either/or gender system.

Gender: The social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone's gender), gender expression (how someone presents their gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their gender).

Gender Expression: How one chooses to express one's gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body characteristics, etc.

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 Identity Disorder (GID): The classification for transsexuality in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th Edition, Text Revision, 2001). Most transsexuals strongly object to being considered mentally ill, arguing that it is a completely inaccurate diagnosis and serves to dehumanize and pathologize them. However, some transsexuals in countries such as Canada and Holland support GID being recognized as a mental disorder, because it enables them to have their gender reassignment

surgeries covered by government health insurance (gender reassignment surgeries are rarely covered in the U.S.).

Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS): Surgical procedures that change one's body to conform to one's gender identity. These procedures may include "top surgery" (breast augmentation or removal) and "bottom surgery" (altering genitals). For female-to-male transsexuals, GRS involves a bilateral mastectomy (chest reconstruction), panhysterectomy (removal of the ovaries and uterus), and sometimes a phalloplasty (construction of a penis) and scrotoplasty (formation of a scrotum) or a metoidioplasty (restructuring the clitoris). For male-to-female transsexuals, GRS consists of optional surgical breast implants and vaginoplasty (construction of a vagina). Additional surgeries might include a trachea shave (reducing the size of the Adam's apple), bone restructuring to feminize facial features, and hair transplants. Sometimes GRS is referred to as "gender confirming surgery," to recognize that one's gender does not change—it is only being made visible to others.

Gender Variant or Gender Non-Conforming: Alternative terms for transgender, meaning one who varies from traditional "masculine" and "feminine" gender roles.

Genderqueer: A term used by individuals, mostly transgender youth, who identify as neither female nor male, as both, or as somewhere in between. Genderqueers may transition partly, completely, or not all, and may dress and present exclusively as one gender, vary their presentation, or present androgynously. The one commonality between genderqueers is that they understand themselves in ways that challenge binary constructions of gender.

Hir or Zir: A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of "her" and "him."

Intersex: A person who is born with "sex chromosomes," external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that is not considered "standard" for either male or female (preferred term to "hermaphrodite"). About one in 2,000 children, or five children per day in the United States, are born visibly intersex.

MTF: A male-to-female transsexual, a transsexual woman, a transwoman, a transgirl, or a woman with a trans past—individuals assigned male at birth who identify as female. Some transwomen reject being seen as "MTF," arguing that they have always been female and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may call themselves "FTF"). Other transwomen feel that "MTF" and similar language reinforces an either/or gender system.

Second Self: A term in the male crossdressing community for an individual's alternative gender preference. Male crossdressers express their second self through wearing "feminine" clothing and expressing "feminine" characteristics.

Sie or Ze: A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of "she" and "he."

Trannyfag: A transgender community term for a transman who is attracted to biological men and/or other transmen.

Trans or Transgender: Most commonly used as an umbrella term for someone whose self-identification or expression challenges traditional notions of “male” and “female.” Transgender people include transsexuals, crossdressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueers, and others who cross traditional gender categories.

Transitioning: The period during which a person begins to live as their new gender. It may include changing one’s name, taking hormones, having surgery, and altering legal documents.

Transdyke: A transgender community term for a transwoman who is attracted to biological women and/or other transwomen.

Transphobia: The fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as transgender.

Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is different from their assigned gender at birth. Transsexuals often undergo hormone treatments and gender reassignment surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity, but not all desire or are able to do so.

Two Spirit: A Native American/First Nation term for people who blend the masculine and the feminine. It is commonly used to describe biological women who took on the roles and/or dress of men and biological men who took on the roles and/or dress of women in the past (preferred term to “berdache”). The term is also often used by contemporary LGBT Native American and First Nation people to describe themselves.

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Frequently Asked Questions About Transgender

1. What Does “Transgender” Mean? A “transgender” person is someone whose self-identity and/or expression violates or transgresses traditional notions of “male” and “female.” Their gender identity and/or expression differs from their gender as assigned at birth.

2. Who Are Transgender People? Transgender people include female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs or transsexual men), male-to-female transsexuals (MTFs or transsexual women), crossdressers (the term preferred to “transvestites”), drag queens and kings, and individuals who adopt a range of genderqueer identities and labels.

3. What Does Genderqueer Mean? A relatively new term, “genderqueer” is used by many trans youth who do not identify as either male or female and who often seek to blur gender lines.

4. *How Are Transsexuals Different from Crossdressers?* Transsexuals feel that their gender identity does not coincide with the gender they were assigned at birth. They may undergo hormone treatments and gender confirmation surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity, but not all desire or can afford to do so. Although crossdressers wear clothes that are considered by society to be inappropriate for their gender, they do not want to change their birth gender and generally do not alter their bodies through hormones or surgeries.

5. *What About Drag Kings and Queens?* Crossdressing was common among women and men who sought same-sex relationships in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and often thousands of people attended the annual drag balls held in cities like New York, Chicago, and New Orleans. While drag was a largely accepted practice in same-sex sexual communities, the opposite was true in the dominant, heterosexual society. Not surprisingly then, the first support groups for crossdressers consisted of heterosexual men, and some organizations even sought to exclude gay and bisexual men. Thus a clear split developed between drag queens and kings—lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals who crossdressed—and heterosexual crossdressers. Beyond these separate histories, another difference between the two groups is that drag kings and queens are often very open about their crossdressing and may perform crossdressed. Crossdressers are rarely public about their crossdressing and may even hide it from their lovers or spouses.

6. *Are Transgender People Gay?* Being transgender is about gender identity and expression, not sexuality—these are different, though not entirely unrelated, concepts. For example, transgender people are often perceived by society as lesbian or gay, and thus are discriminated against in similar ways.

7. *How Are Transgender People Discriminated Against?* Like gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, transgender people face discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations and services. They are also potential targets for hate crimes and incidents: verbal harassment, threatening telephone calls and emails, and acts of violence committed by the same people who hate lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. Trans people, though, are much more likely to fall victim to discrimination and hate crimes than non-transgender LGB individuals, because they often possess physical or behavioral characteristics that readily identify them as transgender. They are also often denied health care, including access to hormones and gender confirmation surgeries.

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How Might the Needs of Transgender People Differ from the Needs of Non-Transgender LGB People?

- They may identify as heterosexual, so may not be dealing with sexual identity issues (they will likely be seen by society as lesbian or gay, though, because of the common stereotype or because of appearances. Take, for example, someone who identifies as female but who looks

male and who is dating a biological man. She will see this as a heterosexual relationship or maybe a transsexual relationship, but most people will see two men together and perceive it as a gay relationship).

- They may experience more verbal and physical attacks than most LGB people if they are cross dressed or otherwise visibly gender variant. After all, most LGB harassment stems from the perceived violation of gender norms.
- They are generally less accepted in society than LGB people, in large part because of ignorance. There is little understanding of transgender lives; they are not visible in popular culture (beyond the stereotypical images of drag queens) and almost no research has been done on their experiences.
- They also often experience a lack of acceptance from the LGB community, which uses transpeople as entertainers, but frequently doesn't want to see them otherwise.
- As a result of the lack of acceptance in the dominant culture and LGB society, they often lack a community and don't have role models or many positive images. Consequently, transpeople, especially trans youth, may feel more isolated and more marginalized than non-trans LGB people.
- Trans students may want to remain closeted because of the legitimate fear of how they will be treated by their professors, employers, and in their field.
- If transitioning, they will need access to medical care and mental health care. But the medical profession often fails to support them because of ignorance and a traditional, psychoanalytical understanding of transsexuality.
- If transitioning, they will need to change their identification and all records and documents.
- While butch lesbians and other masculine-appearing women are harassed in women's restrooms, transsexual women are especially vulnerable to attack and embarrassment when they try to use the public bathroom appropriate for their gender.



TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

Sylvia River Law Project

<http://www.srlp.org/index.php?sec=08&page=resourceguide>

FTM International: www.ftmi.org

Gender Crash: www.gendercrash.com

Gender Education and Advocacy: www.gender.org

International Foundation for Gender Education: www.ifge.org

National Center for Transgender Equality: www.nctequality.org

PFLAG Transgender Net: <http://pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html>

Partners of Transgender People (Live Journal):
http://community.livejournal.com/partners_of_tg

Remembering Our Dead: www.gender.org/remember/index.html

Renaissance Transgender Association: www.ren.org

Southern Belle Society: www.southernbellesociety.com

Trans-Academics.org: www.Trans-Academics.org

Transfamily: www.transfamily.org

TransGenderCare: www.transgendercare.com

Trans-Health: www.trans-health.com

Transgender Law and Policy Institute: www.transgenderlaw.org

Transsensual Femme: www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Cafe/6603/home2.html

Trans*topia: www.youthresource.com

URNotAlone: <http://urnotalone.com>

Walk For Me Wednesdays (drag ball culture): www.walk4mewednesdays.com

*Books and Articles soon to be added