



From the PFLAG-Talk/TGS-PFLAG Virtual Library

A Primer by Transgender Nation

1.What does 'Transgendered' Mean? A 'transgendered' person is someone whose gender identity differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. Their gender identity differs from their physical sex as assigned at birth. Transgendered people are born this way and have no choice in who they are.

2.Who are Transgendered People? Transgendered persons include pre-operative and post-operative transsexuals; transgenderists (persons living full-time in a gender opposite their birth sex with no desire to pursue surgery); transvestites (preferred term: cross-dressers, those whose gender expression occasionally differs from their birth sex); "mannish" or "passing" women, whose gender expression is masculine and who are often assumed to be lesbians, though this is not necessarily the case. Transsexual and transgenderist persons can be female-to-male (transsexual or transgendered men) as well as male-to-female (transsexual or transgendered women).

3.Are Transgendered People Gay? Most transgendered persons identify themselves as heterosexual. Their intrinsic difference is their gender identity, not their sexual orientation: these are two different things altogether. However, transgendered people are perceived by most people as homosexuals, and thus are discriminated against in similar ways.

4.How are Transgendered People Discriminated Against? Like gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, transgendered people face employment and housing discrimination. They are also denied public accommodations and access to health care for their medical conditions. They are also potential targets for hate crimes: verbal harassment, hate mail, harassing telephone calls and acts of violence committed by the same persons who hate homosexuals and bisexuals. But unlike gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, transgendered people are much more likely to fall victim to discrimination and hate crimes, because most of them possess physical or behavioral characteristics that readily identify them as transgendered.

5. What about their Privacy? Like the majority of gay men, lesbians and bisexual people who keep their sexual orientations secret, the majority of transgendered persons also strongly desire to keep their transgendered states secret. Like gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, transgendered people are also vulnerable to their sexual minority status being revealed against their will, i.e., being "outed".

6. What are the Different Types of Transgendered Persons? The largest subgroup of transgendered persons are crossdressers who are mainly heterosexual men, although there are also women who crossdress. Apart from their occasional crossdressing, they lead lives that are quite ordinary in all other respects. Most crossdressers are married and many have children, so they have much to lose from their transgendered state being revealed. They also wish to remain in the sex they were born, unlike transsexuals.

7. What about the Transsexuals? Transsexual and transgenderist (non-operative transsexual) persons differ from cross-dressers in that they come to feel they can no longer continue to live their lives in the gender associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

8. Why do they feel that way? The overall psychological term is called gender dysphoria, an intense feeling of pain, anguish, and anxiety from the mis-assignment of a transgendered person's sex at birth. All transgendered people suffer from it, but the feeling becomes more acute for transsexuals and transgenderists, usually in the middle of their lives. These feelings lead many transgendered people into depression, anxiety, chemical dependencies, divorces and other family problems, even suicide. In order to seek relief from their gender dysphoria, transsexual and transgenderist persons transition, or to begin living their lives in their true genders, which are opposite their birth sexes. This means they literally must "out" themselves to their employers, their families, their friends, everyone.

9. Why is that necessary? Gender transition is impossible to hide, since gender is a pervasive facet of all aspects of one's life. Beyond being the only way of relieving some of the gender dysphoria they suffer, transition for transsexual persons also marks the beginning of the real life test. During this minimum one-year period, they must be able to demonstrate to their psychotherapists their ability to successfully live and work full-time in their true gender. This is an absolute prerequisite for sex reassignment surgery (SRS), the only known relief from the intense, physical gender dysphoria of transsexual people. The crucial importance of this trial period to a transsexual person is impossible to overstate: it is literally life or death. It is also when transsexual persons are most vulnerable to discrimination, harassment and violence.

Media Guide: Some Basic Guidelines When Covering Transgendered Individuals in Stories

1. Outing: Remember that any reporting of the transgendered status of any transgendered person without his or her expressed permission is outing that person, and has the equivalent potential for harming that person as does outing a gay man, lesbian or bisexual man or woman. Outing is Invasion of Privacy.

2. Full-time Living Status: If a transgendered person is living full-time in the gender opposite their birth sex (i.e. a "man" living as a woman or a "woman" living as a man) prior to or without sex reassignment surgery, that person should be referred to at all times with terms appropriate to their current gender.

Usage Tips: "Transgendered Woman" is appropriate for male-to-female persons. "Transgendered Man" is appropriate for female-to-male persons. "Transgendered Person" is appropriate for both types of the above.

3. Part-time Status: If a transgendered person is not living full-time, they may intend to do so the future. Do not assume that a cross-dressed person is a "transvestite", someone who engages in cross-dressing only occasionally.

Usage Tips: Instead of "transvestite", the preferred term is crossdresser. "Male Crossdresser" or "Female Crossdresser" are appropriate for these persons only if it is clear they do not live full-time nor intend to. (see #7).

4. Surgical Status: Generally speaking, if a male-to-female or a female-to-male transsexual has had sex reassignment surgery, the appropriate terms are "Transsexual Woman" or "Transsexual Man". However, almost all post-operative transsexuals are extremely sensitive about their transsexual status. This information should be considered confidential and should never be used in a story without their clearly given prior consent. (see #1)

5. Pronouns and Possessive Adjectives: To refer to transgendered persons using pronouns and possessive adjectives appropriate to their birth sex (i.e. "he" or "his" for male-to-female persons, "she" or "her" for female-to-male persons) is equivalent to calling a gay man "faggot" or a lesbian "dyke". It is extremely offensive.

Usage tip: At all times, use pronouns and possessive appropriate to a transgendered persons current gender status or gender expression.

6. Avoid Aspersion by Using Quotation Marks: Never put the appropriate pronouns or possessives in quotes. Never put the sexual orientations or genitalia of transgendered persons in quotes.

7. Self-Identification: Ask an individual transgendered person how they wish to be identified. We all like to describe ourselves differently, and some variance in terminology is to be expected. Self-identification is an important right. When in doubt, just ask.

These guidelines serve two purposes. Precise usage of the appropriate terms contained herein when covering transgendered persons will improve journalistic accuracy. In the interest of civility, correctly using the specific terminology while avoiding inflammatory and derogatory wording in media coverage of transgendered persons is both impartial and respectful. To do otherwise is to be insulting, injurious, and slanderous. To do otherwise is to intentionally show disrespect to transgendered human beings. That is called transphobia.

From [Jessica Xavier](#) (Transgendered Nation and Washington D.C. PFLAG). One of a series of handouts available through the PFLAG-Talk/TGS-PFLAG virtual library. <http://www.critpath.org/pflag-talk/>

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