Transgender Terminology

Gender Expression
External representation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through "masculine" or "feminine" behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

Gender Identity
One's personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or girl.) For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID)
A controversial DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-variant people. Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't obey expected norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. Replaces the outdated term "gender dysphoria."

Sex
The classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs and genitals.

Transgender
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, intersex people, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people can be female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser, FTM or MTF) preferred by the transgender person. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

Transphobia
The fear and hatred of or the discomfort with people who identify or may be perceived to be transgender respectively. Transphobic reactions often lead to intolerance, bigotry and violence against anyone not perceived to match gender norms. Transphobia is NOT homophobia, yet they do have a connection. Stereotypes of the Lesbian and Gay community are often based on gender expressions and/or roles within a binary gender system in a monosexual (hetero, gay, lesbian) paradigm (ie, gay men as effeminate, lesbians as masculine, etc). Since trans identified folks transgress a binary gender system, they may be more susceptible to homophobic actions

Transition
The complex process of altering one's sex. Transition includes some or all of the following: changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents, hormone therapy, and possibly some form of chest and/or genital alteration.

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) (also, gender reassignment surgery)
Refers to genital alteration, and is only one small part of transition (see transition below). Not all transsexuals choose or can afford to have SRS. Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the importance of SRS. Preferred term to sex change operation.

Ze/Hir
Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some gender variant persons. Pronounced *zee* and *here*, they replace “he/she” and “him/her”, “his/hers” respectively.

All terms on this sheet were derived from definitions found at www.nyu.edu/lgbt, www.glaad.org, www.trans-academics.org, and from my own experience of collectively defining terms in trainings and community discussions.

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The Transgender Umbrella

The following terms/identities are an incomplete list of those that fall under the transgender umbrella. Note that though "intersex" is listed here, many intersex people do not identify as transgender.

Androgyne
A person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

Bigendered
A person whose gender identity is a combination of male/man and female/woman.

Cross-dresser
A person who wears clothes traditionally associated with people of another sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. ("Cross-dresser" should NOT be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex, or who intends to do so in the future.) While cross-dressing is a form of gender expression, it is not necessarily tied to sexual orientation or erotic activity. Most cross-dressers are heterosexual.

Drag queen/king
Drag is the performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. Drag queens perform femininity theatrically, and drag kings perform masculinity theatrically. (Usually we understand drag performers to be theatrical cross-dressers. This is not necessarily the case.)

FTM
Literally "female-to-male," a person assigned female sex and feminine gender at birth who is either transitioning into a male identity and/or body, or who identifies as an FTM transperson, transman, or transsexual.

Gender normative
A person who conforms to gender-based expectations of society.

Gender Variant
A person who does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (including transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.)

Genderqueer
A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders, in terms of expression and/or identity.

Intersex
A person born either with indeterminable genitalia and/or reproductive organs, and/or a variant chromosomal make up. Interesex people used to be called "hermaphrodites" (a word from a combination of Hermes and Aphrodite—man and woman), but this term is historically associated with physical abnormality and is no longer accepted in the intersex community. **Intersex people may or may not identify as members of the transgender community.*

MTF
Literally "male-to-female," a person assigned male sex and masculine gender at birth who is either transitioning into a female identity and/or body, or who identifies as an MTF transperson, transwoman, or transsexual.

Transexual/transsexual
A person whose intent is to live as a gender other than that assigned at birth. Most transsexuals engage in some process of altering either primary or secondary sexual characteristics, through hormone treatment or surgery or both. Some transsexuals live full time in their chosen gender without any alteration to physiology (from *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book*, by Felice Newman).

Two Spirit
American Indian persons who have attributes of both genders, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). The term "two-spirit" is usually considered to be specific to the Zuni tribe.