GENERAL TRANS* INFORMATION

GENERAL DEFINITIONS (GETTING STARTED)

Gender: The social construction of male and female 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 or ‘read’ someone’s gender),
- and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender).

Sex: The biological definition, based on anatomy, physical characteristics, and chromosomal make-up. Trans community members will frequently refer to the sex as “assigned at birth” or “biological male” or, shortened, “bio female”.

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 elsewhere in the spectrum of gender. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Sexual Orientation: It’s important to note that one’s sexuality, or sexual orientation, refers to gender(s) of people one is attracted to. Gender identity, alternatively, references one’s self. To whom one is attracted is not necessarily connected to or influenced by one’s own gender identity.

Spectrum Theory: Most transgender educators and activists operate under the assumption that gender is not a binary system of male and female. Instead, it is advocated that a spectrum of gender identity exists, thus allowing for a larger opportunity for individualized identifications. This is similar to the sexual orientation spectrum theory made famous by Kinsey, who asserted that a spectrum of sexual orientations exist between merely straight or gay.

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.

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

Gender-neutral Spaces: Usually referencing bathrooms, locker rooms, or housing situations, gender-neutral spaces refers to the desire in the trans community to “de-gender” spaces, thus creating neutral spaces where one doesn’t have to conform to a binary gender. They are also safe spaces for transgender people and others who move in between gender boundaries.

Gender-neutral Pronouns:
- Hir: (here) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “her” and “him.”
- Sie or Ze: (see or zee) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “she” and “he.”
- Ve: (vee) A non-gender specific pronoun used instead of “she” and “he.”

Cisgender: Similar to a lesbian or gay reference toward the “straight” or “hetero” world, cisgender is used rarely but refers to non-transgender individuals.
IDENTITIES & TERMS UNDER THE TRANSGENDER UMBRELLA

Genderqueer: A term used by individuals, especially transgender youth, who do not identify as either male or female and who often seek to blur gender lines. Among the dozens of more specific “genderqueer” terms are transboi, boydyke, third gendered, bi-gendered, multi-gendered, andro, androgyne, gender bender, gender f*cker, gender variant, gender non-conforming.

Androgyne: An androgyne is a person who does not fit cleanly into the typical masculine and feminine gender roles of their society. Many androgyynes identify as being mentally "between" male and female, or as entirely genderless. The former may also use the term bigender or ambigender, the latter non-gendered or agender. They may experience mental swings between genders, sometimes referred to as being gender fluid.

Intersex: “Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For more information please visit the web site for the Intersex Society of North America. Many people who are intersex do not identify as transgender, but some do. This is the preferred term to “hermaphrodite”, which is used medically but in social circles it is considered pejorative.

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. This is the preferred term to “transvestite”, which is considered archaic and pejorative.

Drag King: A biological woman, typically a lesbian, who crossdresses as masculine, who employs gender-marked clothing, makeup, and mannerisms for their own and other people’s appreciation, or for entertainment purposes.

Drag Queen: A biological man, typically gay, who crossdresses as feminine, who employs gender-marked clothing, makeup, and mannerisms for their own and other people’s appreciation, or for entertainment purposes.

Two-Spirit: This term for third gender people is mainly used among Native American and Canadian First Nations tribes. It usually implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body. It is also used by some contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex Native Americans to describe themselves.

Transgender or Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is different from their assigned gender at birth. Transsexual is a clinical term that refers to an individual who undergoes hormone treatments and gender reassignment surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity. It’s important to note that not all transgender people desire to undertake hormonal therapy or surgery (nor are all transsexuals always financially able to do so).

Reading and/or Passing: “Reading” is the term that describes what happens when someone looks at another and perceives them as a particular gender. This can be negative if a person is “read” as trans and they are attempting to pass. “Passing” occurs when the gender identity that the person identifies as is the one that is read by others.

FTM: A female-to-male transsexual, a transsexual man, a transman, or a transguy—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.
MTF: A male-to-female transsexual, a transsexual woman, a transwoman, or a transgrrrl—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.

**Transsexual-Specific Terminology**

**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). The ‘diagnosis’ is sometimes called Gender Dysphoria. 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.).

**Transitioning:** The period during which a transgender person begins to express their gender identity. It may include changing one’s name, taking hormones, having surgery, altering legal documents, and/or passing.

**Hormones:** Trans people interested in taking hormones should consult with a qualified medical professional who can track their progress and health. Generally speaking, individuals who are assigned female at birth would inject testosterone, and individuals who are assigned male at birth would take estrogen in pill form. Usually, testosterone increases growth of body hair in typical male places (face, back, chest, arms), deepens the voice, enlarges the clitoris, ceases menstruation, and masculinizes the face and hips. Usually, estrogen cancels out the testosterone in the body and increases the growth of breasts.

**Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS):** Surgical procedures that change one’s body to conform to one’s gender identity. 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. These procedures may include “top surgery” (breast augmentation or removal) and “bottom surgery” (altering genitals or internal organs).

For female-to-male transsexuals, GRS could involve:
- bilateral mastectomy (chest reconstruction),
- oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries)
- panhysterectomy (removal of the ovaries and uterus),
Less common surgeries include:
- phalloplasty (construction of a penis)
- scrotoplasty (formation of a scrotum)
- or metoidioplasty (restructuring the clitoris).

For male-to-female transsexuals, GRS could involve:
- optional surgical breast implants
- and vaginoplasty (construction of a vagina).

Additional surgeries and procedures might include:
- tracheal shave (reducing the size of the Adam’s apple),
- bone restructuring to feminize facial features,
- hair removal from face,
- and hair transplants for the top of the head.

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