

TRANS INCLUSION IN PRACTICE: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Providing inclusive care to trans communities is about more than just using the right words, but inclusive language is a big step in the right direction.

While the following definitions are useful for establishing common understanding and language around gender, gender identity, gender expression, and trans inclusion, it is of the utmost importance to allow individuals to define their own identities with the terms and definitions that make the most sense to them. Always trust the lived experience of those you serve – they know themselves best.



Transgender (Trans)

Your gender identity is different from the gender you were assigned at birth. This includes trans men, trans women, non-binary people, and others who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Trans is an umbrella term meant to describe a wide range and variety of identities and experiences.

Your gender identity matches the gender you were assigned at birth. Most people are cisgender.



Cisgender (Cis)



Non-binary

Your gender identity does not fit wholly or completely within the traditional binary of man or woman. This can include identifying with no gender whatsoever, as a combination of multiple genders, or identifying outside of the gender binary completely.

This refers to your personal sense of your own gender. We all have a gender identity, whether we are cis, trans or something else altogether.



Gender Identity



Gender Expression

Gender expression refers to how we express our gender to the world around us, such as being masculine, feminine, a combination of both, neither or something else altogether.

Assigned gender or sex at birth describes the label that you are given at birth, often based on specific sexual characteristics (i.e. genitalia). Most people are assigned male or female at birth. Assigned gender is often used to reinforce rigid gender norms on children and youth, through the expectation that all people assigned female at birth should be feminine, and all those assigned male should be masculine.



The gender binary is the idea that there are only two genders (men and women) and that every person is one of those two. The gender binary erases the wide variety of gender identities that are present in communities and cultures around the world.

Since 1990, the term “Two Spirit” has been used as a cultural term for Indigenous people who experience gender and/or sexual diversity, and sometimes hold diverse traditional, ceremonial or community roles. There are several other spellings of this term, including “2 Spirit.” “Two Spirit” is not the only Indigenous term for gender and sexual diversity, but is often used as an umbrella term to describe cultural gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (North America). Not all Indigenous LGBTQ+ people identify as Two Spirit. You should only call someone Two Spirit if they use that term to describe themselves. A Two Spirit person may or may not identify as part of the LGBTQ+ spectrum and community.



“Gender diverse” is an umbrella term used to describe all gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary of being a cis man or a cis woman. “Gender diverse” is increasingly used to describe the wide range of identities that fall outside of the settler colonial gender binary, including gendered identities and expressions from diverse cultures and communities around the world.

“Queer” is a reclaimed slur, meaning that it has historically and to this day been used to denigrate members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It has been reclaimed by many – but not all people – within the 2SLGBTQ+ community. “Queer” is now used as an umbrella term to describe diverse gender and sexual identities, and is often used as an alternative to the 2SLGBTQ+ acronym.





Sex

Sex describes our physical sexual anatomies and body parts. While sex is important in specific circumstances, such as while accessing reproductive or sexual health services, sex does not define who we are or how we identify. Our genders, rather than our sex, shape how the world perceives and treats us. For example, a woman (cis or trans) experiencing street harassment is not being harassed based on her sex, but on how her gender identity and expression are perceived by others.



Intersex

“Intersex” is an umbrella term used to describe differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy. There are many possible differences in genitalia, hormones, internal anatomy, or chromosomes within the Intersex umbrella. Intersex people may be born with these differences or develop them in childhood or adolescence. Being intersex is distinct from being trans. Some intersex people may identify themselves as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, while others may not.



Transphobia

Transphobia is discrimination against trans and gender-diverse people. Transphobia is a systemic issue, meaning that it is embedded in our social, political, and economic institutions, as well as throughout our communities and culture. Examples of transphobia include disproportionate rates of poverty and homelessness within trans communities, higher rates of street harassment, and the wide range of other detrimental experiences that trans people face.



Cisgender Privilege

“Cisgender privilege” is a term used to describe the ways in which cisgender people are granted social, political and economic benefits at the expense of trans and gender diverse people. Privilege is not a zero sum game, as many of us exist with both privilege and oppression. For example, a cisgender white woman experiences privilege based on her race, as a white person, and based on being cisgender, but still experiences oppression as a woman living in a sexist society. Holding relative privilege does not make you a bad person, but it does mean that we should be aware of the advantages we are given, and work to uplift those impacted by systemic oppression.



Misgendering and Deadnaming

“Misgendering” is a term used to describe the use of the incorrect pronouns or other gendered terms to refer to trans and gender-diverse people. “Deadnaming” refers to the use of a trans person’s birth name, or a previous name which they no longer use. Misgendering and deadnaming are both considered disrespectful and offensive denials of trans people’s expressed gender identities.