

# Some Transgender Definitions

"Definition" is perhaps too strong a word; if our gender is ambiguous, then so is the rest of our existence. These definitions are approximately correct, but they are soft around the edges, and they also reflect my personal feelings and opinions. Sorry, but that's the only kind of definitions you'll get from anyone!

## Transgendered (TG or T\*)

This is a blanket term for any person whose internal gender identity differs from physiological gender. I have occasionally heard this described as **bi-gendered**.

## Gender Community

The collective term for all people who are transgendered, and who are out enough to talk to each other. The term also includes friends, family members, and professionals in any field who are willing to assist and support transgendered people.

## Transsexual (TS)

This is a person who wants to change his or her physiological gender, and to live permanently in the new gender role. Transsexuals can be further divided into **pre-operative (pre-op)** and **post-operative (post-op)**. Estimates vary on the frequency of occurrence for transsexuals, but one in 10,000 is as good an estimate as any.

## Gender dysphoria

This is a clinical term for transgenderism, and it means "gender confusion." Within the community, it is sometimes stated as **gender euphoria** or **gender-gifted**. We're not confused; we just have more options. **Gender identity disorder** is the currently favored diagnostic terminology.

## M2F

Male to female, a direction of transition or cross-dressing.

## F2M

Female to male. This is typically seen only in reference to transsexuals, as most other transgendered behavior is socially tolerated in genetic females.

## Closet

Where transgendered people hide before coming out. This is also the place where we hang our favorite clothes.

## Transition

This is the process of changing gender role, and also the time period in which the change occurs. The time period starts, more or less, with the decision to change gender, and ends with surgery. The term is also used in the sense of an event, usually when a person begins working in the new gender role.

## Full-time

This describes a person who is cross-living "full-time" in an adopted gender role, professionally, socially, and privately. These usually do not change all at once; typically, private and social

living in the new role provides a practice period for the more critical--and risky--change in professional role. If this is done to satisfy a pre-requisite for surgery, it may also be called the **real-life test (RLT)**.

### **(Harry S. Benjamin) Standards of Care**

The document that outlines the medical and psychiatric standards for working with transsexuals. Major points include (1) three months of therapy before being recommended for hormones; (2) one year of hormone therapy before surgery; (3) one year of cross-living before surgery; and (4) two psychiatric or psychotherapist's evaluations recommending surgery, one of whom must be a psychiatrist, and one of whom must have had an extended therapeutic relationship with the client.

### **Hormones**

Estrogen and progesterone (female sex hormones) for the M2F transsexual, and testosterone (male sex hormone) for the F2M transsexual. This is a major topic on its own, but as a quick reference, there are a few points to mention. First, these are powerful drugs, and should only be used with medical supervision. This supervision is available for transsexuals who work within the framework of the Standards of Care. Major effects of hormones (breasts for M2F; lower voice, and facial and body hair for F2M) are not reversible. Significant side effects of long-term usage include sterility, and impotence for genetic males. Hormone therapy is necessary for transition, but starting hormones is a decision that must not be made lightly.

### **Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)**

The most common term for surgery which changes physiological gender. It is sometimes referred to as **corrective surgery**, **reconciliation surgery**, or simply **surgery**. F2M transsexuals have **top surgery** (double radical mastectomy) and **bottom surgery** (hysterectomy and reconstructive surgery).

### **Cosmetic surgery**

Any other surgery needed to enhance appearance in the new gender role. Frequent M2F choices include liposuction, rhinoplasty, trachea shave, and breast implants.

### **Woodwork**

The place where transsexuals disappear into, after surgery. After transition and surgery, most transsexuals want to get on with their lives, and they leave the gender community. This is not necessarily a trip back into the closet, as a post-operative transsexual no longer has a mismatch between physiological and mental gender. However, some M2F post-ops choose not to disclose their past. SRS for M2F transsexuals has been perfected to the point that most people, with the possible exception of gynecologists, cannot tell the difference between a post-op and a genetic female.

### **New woman**

A post-op M2F transsexual, legally certified to be a woman. After surgery, the doctor gives the new woman legal papers which can be used to change gender on documents such as birth certificates and drivers licenses. A post-op F2M transsexual, of course, is a **new man**.

### **Transgenderist (TG)**

This describes a person who is living full-time in a new gender role, but does not intend to have surgery. Yes, this double use of the term does get confusing!

## **Androgynous**

This describes a person who chooses to live on the borderline between male and female, instead of living full-time in a culturally-accepted gender role.

This is as good a place as any to mention that lifestyles among the transgendered can be very fluid. People move in either direction according to changing self-image, their degree of comfort with that image, and with other issues that may be unrelated to gender. In particular, movement that seems "backward" needs to be handled with care and compassion. I know of one transsexual who dropped out of transition and stopped taking hormones, after watching two close friends self-destruct when their transitions went badly.

## **Cross-dresser (CD)**

This is a person who enjoys dressing in clothes appropriate to the "opposite" gender. This is different from a transsexual who has not completed transition to the point of being full-time. Cross-dressers have little or no interest in changing gender. Most people who self-identify as cross-dressers are comfortable with this part-time status; however, many transsexuals go through a stage of being "only" a cross-dresser until they are ready to accept all the implications of being a transsexual.

As with transsexuals, estimates about the number of cross-dressers vary wildly. One percent of the population is probably a good midpoint, but I have seen estimates as high as five percent. Many more people have experimented with cross-dressing, but that is not the same as being a cross-dresser. The keys are repetition and incorporating cross-dressing into one's lifestyle, publicly or privately.

## **Transvestite (TV)**

This is basically the same as a cross-dresser. To some, however, it carries the connotation that the person cross-dresses for sexual stimulation. I consider this to be an emotionally loaded term, and prefer to avoid using it unless it is clearly appropriate. (**Transvestitic fetishism** is the diagnostic terminology for these people.)

## **Drag Queen**

A cross-dresser who dresses for more theatrical reasons, and who may also impersonate specific individuals. If you ever want to start an argument in the gender community, ask about the difference between cross-dressers, transvestites, and drag queens.

## **She-male**

A genetic male who has physical characteristics of both male and female. This differs from a **hermaphrodite** in that a she-male has these characteristics by choice (due to hormones), while a hermaphrodite has these characteristics from birth. The term accurately describes most M2F transsexuals during transition, but it is also used (with different implications) for a genetic male working as a show-girl, or otherwise exploiting her physiology.

I was once engaged in a conversation, via computer network, and explaining where I was in transition. The other person responded, "Oh. Tits and cock." It was a very effective conversation-stopper. Personally, I don't like to have the term "she-male" applied to me.

"She-male" is a loaded word; it is most often used by non-transgendered males seeking out M2F transsexuals. On the flip side, many she-males who work as escorts or prostitutes do so because it can sometimes be difficult for a transsexual in transition to find employment.

## **Gender-fuck**

Cross-dressing with contempt for any concern about passing; e.g., a male wearing a skirt, but with a beard and unshaved legs.

## **Genetic female (GF), genetic woman (GW), or genetic girl (GG)**

A non-transgendered female.

## **Genetic male (GM)**

A non-transgendered male.

## **Dressing**

The act of wearing the clothes, makeup, accessories, etc., of one's gender of choice--in short, being cross-dressed. M2F transgendered people also refer to this as being **en femme**.

## **Presentation**

The totality of one's appearance when dressing, including voice, behavior, appropriateness of clothing for the situation, etc.

## **In drag**

Wearing the clothes appropriate to one's gender of birth. When a transsexual has reached a point in transition where this becomes psychologically uncomfortable, or where the person is unsure about being able to pass in the gender of birth, it may be referred to as being **in drag**.

## **Tuck**

The technique of hiding male genitals so that they do not cause an embarrassing bulge under female clothing. A good tuck is effective in even the tightest of female clothes, such as leotards and bathing suits.

## **Passing**

The ability to be accepted as a member of one's gender of choice. Yes, choice can be a loaded word; none of us "chose" to be who we are, but we do choose how we deal with it. In that sense, it is appropriate for a transgendered person to choose whether to go out as male, female, or in between. We also have strong preferences about which gender we'd rather be, and which gender presentation we are more comfortable with. Depending on the situation, these may or may not be the same.

## **Getting read**

Being detected as a person who is cross-dressed. Occasionally, this is called **getting clocked**. No transgendered person likes to get read, but the reality is that passing requires extensive practice, and sometimes training, hormone therapy, electrolysis, and cosmetic surgery. Much of this practice must be done in public, where the transgendered person will get read when he or she makes mistakes. A person who is prepared to accept this fact will be much more comfortable in public. One transsexual I know simply starts out from her home with the assumption that everyone will read her, and that that's OK. Even for her, though, this attitude is easier said than felt.

Getting read can be the occasion for abuse. It happened to me several months ago at a mall in Greensboro. I was in a store looking at earrings, when I heard a voice shouting from the front of the store, "That's a dude, man; that's a dude!" I imagined a group of teenagers crowding the

small store entrance, none of them holding any goodwill toward me. I did not look at them, but I did glance at the shop clerk, who was looking at me. I waited until a couple of minutes until after the commotion died down, looking at jewelry in which I had absolutely no interest, then left the store.

Besides the potential for violence in that situation, I was deeply bothered that I'd been read from behind. I'm a large person, even as a male, and I was wearing a winter coat, so I expect that size had something to do with getting read. I may also have been overdressed, as I was on my way to a support group meeting. (Seriously, how many people wear a dress of any kind to the mall on Saturday night?) But hindsight is wonderful, isn't it? After that incident, I didn't dress again for two months. When I did dress again, it was very difficult for me, and I went only as far as my partner's apartment. Before I could go out again, I needed to know that I could still look feminine. And I wore the same dress in which I'd been read.

Early attempts at passing need to be carefully planned. It is best to avoid crowds; although it might seem easier to blend in, the reality is that a crowd offers more opportunities to get read. Children and teenagers are especially adept at reading cross-dressers, and may be more likely to have the poor manners to create a public embarrassment out of the incident. If one can manage it, a weekday afternoon at the mall, at a time when schools are in session, is an ideal time for early attempts at going out in public.

### **She, her, and hers**

The correct pronouns for referring to any M2F transgendered person. These are always appropriate when the person is presenting as female, and are usually the safe bet when discussion gender issues related to that person.

A post-operative transsexual, who is still married to the same woman she married as a male, tells of an incident in which her daughter called from another room for help with her homework. Before she could reply, her wife called back, "Don't bother Daddy; she's doing her nails."

### **He, him, and his**

The correct pronouns for referring to any F2M transsexual, or for a F2M cross-dresser who is presenting as male. The same rules of appropriate choice of pronouns applies as for M2F transgendered people.

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