

Glossary

Terms used in connection with gender variance

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Terminology in the *transgender* field is varied and constantly shifting as understanding and perception of *gender variant* conditions improve. Concepts associated with “*normal*” gender expression associated with a binary man/woman paradigm are, themselves, questionable. In addition, in writing such a glossary of terms there is a risk of merely creating further stereotypes.

Affirmed gender

‘Affirmed’ gender may be used to describe the post-*transition gender role*. Sometimes it may be called the ‘new’ role. These terms are often preferred to the term ‘acquired’ gender. *Transsexual* people are not acquiring a new *gender identity*, but they are affirming their inner, and until transition, hidden, gender identity.

Gender Identity

Gender Identity describes the psychological identification of oneself as a boy/man or as a girl/woman. There is a presumption that this sense of identity will evolve along binary lines and be consistent with the sex appearance. Where this is the case, people may be described as cisgender.

Sex

Sex refers to the male/female biological development—the phenotype. In an infant, the sex is judged entirely on the genital appearance at birth. Other phenotypic factors such as karyotype (chromosomal configuration) are seldom tested unless a genital anomaly is present. There is a presumption that an apparently male infant will identify as a boy, and vice versa.

Gender Role

The gender role is the social role—the interaction with others which both gives expression to the inner gender identity and reinforces it. Despite the greater gender equality in modern Western culture in terms of: the subjects studied in school and at university; the choice of friends; work and domestic arrangements; dress and leisure pursuits, there is still a presumption of conformity with society’s ‘rules’ about what is appropriate for

a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, especially in terms of appearance. Too great a transgression often causes anxiety and discomfort in those who witness it.

Gender variance/ gender dysphoria / gender identity disorder

It is now understood that the innate gender identity, although powerfully influenced by the sex of the genitalia and the gender of rearing, is not determined by these factors. There is evidence that sex differentiation of the brain may be inconsistent with other sex characteristics, resulting in individuals dressing and/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms; these unusual gender expressions may be described as *gender variance*. Where conforming with these norms causes a persistent personal discomfort, this may be described as *gender dysphoria*. In many, this includes some level of disgust with the phenotype, since this contradicts the inner sense of gender identity. Gender dysphoria is not a popular term with those experiencing the condition since it has become associated with the **DSM-IV** 'clinical diagnosis' of gender identity disorder published by the American Psychiatric Association. Both these descriptions imply a diagnosis of 'pathology' and mental illness, whereas the more neutral term, *gender variance*, denotes that these departures from stereotypical gender experience and expression are part of a natural, albeit unusual, human development.

Transsexualism

When **gender variance** is experienced to the degree that medical intervention is necessary to facilitate a permanent transition to a **gender role** that accords with the **gender identity** thus alleviating the intense discomfort, it may be regarded as *transsexualism*. In the United Kingdom, those who are intending to undergo, undergoing or having undergone gender reassignment, under medical care are protected in law. Those who have changed their role permanently may obtain legal recognition of their new gender status in accordance with the **Gender Recognition Act**.

Gender Confirmation Treatment

Those **transitioning** permanently usually have gender confirmation treatment that includes hormone therapy and often surgery to bring the sex

characteristics of the body more in line with the gender identity. Such surgery is sometimes referred to as gender reassignment surgery.

Transgender

Transgenderism has had different meanings over time, and in different societies. Currently, it is used as an inclusive term describing all those whose gender expression falls outside the typical gender norms; for example, those who cross-dress intermittently for a variety of reasons including erotic factors (transvestism), as well as those who live continuously outside gender norms, sometimes with, and sometimes without, medical intervention. There is a growing acknowledgement that although there is a great deal of difference between say, a drag artist and a **transsexual** person, there are nonetheless areas in the **transgender** field where the distinctions are more blurred; for example, a person who cross dresses intermittently for some years, may later **transition** fully to the opposite role.

Transition

Transition is the term used to describe the point at which a permanent change of gender role is undertaken, in all spheres of life—in the family, at work, in leisure pursuits and in society generally. Some people make this change gradually, however, others emerge overnight.

Trans men and trans women

The expression *trans* is often used synonymously with transgender in its broadest sense. Sometimes its use is specific; for instance, those born with female phenotype but identifying as men may be referred to as *trans men*; and those born with male phenotype but identifying as women may be referred to as *trans women*. Where trans people have transitioned permanently many prefer to be regarded as men and women, without any reference to their former **gender role** or previous trans status.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation is a separate issue from **gender identity**. Trans people may be gay, straight, bisexual or, occasionally, asexual. Their sexual relationships may remain the same through the transition process, or they may change.

Gender Recognition Act (2004)

Under the **Gender Recognition Act**, trans people who experience severe **gender variance** described above, and have medical treatment for the condition, may apply to the **Gender Recognition Panel (GRP)** for a **Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)**. The GRC then entitles them to recognition of the gender stated on that certificate "for all purposes". Where the birth was originally registered in the UK, the GRC may be used to obtain a new birth certificate. Over **2,600 people** have now made successful applications for legal recognition of their new gender status to the Gender Recognition Panel (GRP). Those seeking a change of gender status must provide the GRP with evidence of a 'diagnosis' of persistent **gender dysphoria**, and must convince it of their intention to live in the new role for the rest of their lives. This is a paper exercise and does not require the applicant to appear in person. Details of medical treatment and relevant dates are required. Genital surgery is not a requirement, although where it has taken place, applicants must supply details.

The distinctions between those who qualify for GRCs and those who do not, are not necessarily medical. Trans individuals who are legally married, and do not wish to dissolve that marriage, are not permitted to have a GRC. An Interim GRC of 6 months duration may be obtained, but it confers no legal rights and serves only as a way of dissolving the marriage, whereupon it may be converted immediately to a full GRC.

The GRC gives trans people the right to marry someone of the opposite **sex**, and to have a civil partnership with someone of the same sex (**Civil Partnership Act, 2004**).