



Transgender Media 101

A simple guide for journalists and reporters; we discuss words and phrases to avoid, alternatives to use instead, how to avoid misreporting the gender of a source, and some basic definitions for understanding minority genders.

Avoid

1. using the person's birth name or past pronouns to talk about the past
2. saying the person was 'born a man' or 'born a woman'
3. transgenderism
4. transgendered
5. pre-op or post op
6. sex change, 'the surgery', sex reassignment surgery or anything with 'reassignment'
7. he/she
8. all slurs
9. gender identity disorder

Alternatives to try instead

1. narrate from the present and use their current name and pronouns to discuss the past, for example 'when **Jenny** was a child, everyone thought **she** was a boy' rather than 'when **John** was a boy, **he** knew **he** was different...'
2. say they were assigned male or assigned female at birth
3. transgender
4. transgender
5. it's not generally respectful to discuss someone's genitals, but if it is relevant to the story – such as a story about hospital waiting times, see 6.
6. genital reconstruction surgery
7. ask for the pronoun of the person in question and use that pronoun
8. use respectful and humanising language
9. gender dysphoria is the new diagnosis, or simply 'transgender'

General reporting

Sometimes a journalist may not know that a source is transgender, and may make an assumption about their gender based on their name, voice, or appearance.

If editors require their reporters to ask every source for their gender pronouns in the same way they would confirm the spelling of a name or a correct job title, it will improve the accuracy of their journalism, as well as helping to create a culture of respecting trans people.



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Having a policy to check pronouns would also make it safer for trans people to engage with media, meaning that a diversity of trans voices could be heard more often.

Definitions

A few basic definitions can go a long way – we have a great glossary you can view or download from our website, but here are a few staples.

Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is culturally typically associated with the gender/sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms or may simply use *transgender*. Some of those terms are defined below.

Some people who fit this definition may not consider themselves to be *under the transgender umbrella* or *transgender*. Use the descriptive term preferred by the individual.

Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to change their bodies. Some undergo surgeries as well. But not all transgender people can or will want to take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon medical procedures.

The term *transgender* is not indicative of sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.

Transsexual

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have changed or seek to change their bodies – this can involve hormone replacement therapy (HRT), genital reconstruction surgery (GRS), top surgery (removal of breasts), permanent facial and other hair removal, and/or other medical treatments.

In some circles, the term has started to fall out of favour due to its perceived focus on medical transition, however, those who prefer transsexual often see it as an important distinction due to the definitive experience of incongruity/dissonance/dysphoria with one's body, which is often the cause of specific medical needs.

Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is **not** an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as *transsexual* and many transsexual people do not identify as *transgender*. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: for example transsexual woman or transsexual man.

Trans Woman

Trans woman refers to a woman who was assigned male at birth.

She may or may not be identified by others as trans, and may or may not identify herself as trans. It is grammatically and definitionally correct to include a space between *trans* and *woman*.

Trans Man

Trans man refers to a man who was assigned female at birth.

He may or may not be identified by others as trans, and may or may not identify himself as trans.



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It is grammatically and definitionally correct to include a space between *trans* and *man*.

Takataapui

Takataapui refers to Maori who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender.

It is used both as a primary gender identity (similar to transgender or transsexual), as a primary sexual orientation (similar to Lesbian, gay, bi, or pansexual), and as an umbrella term for all non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender Maori people (similar to 'Rainbow Community').

A takataapui person may fit the definitions or behaviours of a lesbian, pansexual, transgender, gay, intersex, bisexual, asexual, or any other identity, but may or may not identify with western concepts or English words for these.

Intersex

Describes a person whose natal physical sex characteristics (e.g. anatomy, chromosomes) are ambiguous in the context of the male/female sex binary. A person may not know they have intersex anatomy until they reach puberty and their body changes differently than expected, or until they find themselves infertile as an adult.

When an intersex infant is born with ambiguous external genitalia, parents and medical professionals typically assign them a binary sex and perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment.

This practice is oppressive and is increasingly recognised as unethical and abusive; as intersex adults are speaking out against having been made to undergo potentially harmful medical procedures which they did not consent to.

Being intersex does not necessarily imply anything regarding one's gender, orientation, or trans status.

Our Glossary is available here

<https://genderminorities.com/database/glossary-transgender/>

Other links

<http://www.rainbowtimesmass.com/1stop-misgendering-us-trans-activist-demands-media-use-correct-pronouns-for-trans-people/>

<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/using-correct-pronouns-is-basic-journalistic-accuracy-require-reporters-to-confirm-sources-pronouns>