



## ***Definitions and Terminology: A Word About Words***

from NCAA's "NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes"

Language has immense power to shape our perceptions of other people. Using accurate language can help to overcome many of the misperceptions associated with gender and transgender people. Although the vocabulary related to transgender people continues to evolve, here are some working definitions and examples of frequently used (and misused) terms.

**Biological/Anatomical Sex** — The physical characteristics typically used to assign a person's gender at birth, such as chromosomes, hormones, internal and external genitalia and reproductive organs. Given the potential variation in all of these, biological sex must be seen as a spectrum or range of possibilities rather than a binary set of two options.

**Gender** — The complex relationship between physical traits and one's internal sense of self as male, female, both or neither as well as one's outward presentations and behaviors related to that perception. Biological sex and gender are different; gender is not inherently connected to one's physical anatomy.

**Gender Identity** — One's inner concept of self as male or female or both or neither. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the gender assigned at birth. Most people become conscious of their gender identity between the ages 18 months and 3 years. Most people have a gender identity that matches their assigned gender at birth. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their assigned gender. Some of these individuals choose to live socially as the other gender and may also hormonally and/or surgically change their bodies to more fully express their gender identity. All people have gender identity, not just transgender people.

**Gender Expression** — Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way as people assign gender to others based on their appearance, mannerisms, and other gendered characteristics. Many transgender people seek to make their external appearance—their gender expression—congruent with their internal gender identity through clothing, pronouns, names, and, in some cases, hormones and surgical procedures. All people have gender expression, not just transgender people.

**Transgender** — Sometimes used as an 'umbrella term' to describe anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. More narrowly defined, it refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth gender. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (attraction to people of a specific gender.) Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

**Sexual Orientation** — Term that refers to being romantically or sexually attracted to people of a specific gender. Our sexual orientation and our gender identity are separate, distinct parts of our overall identity. Although a child may not yet be aware of their sexual orientation, they usually have a strong sense of their gender identity.

**Genderqueer** — This term represents a blurring of the lines around gender identity and sexual orientation. Genderqueer individuals typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and sexual orientation. This term is typically assigned an adult identifier and not used in reference to preadolescent children.

**Gender Nonconforming/Gender variant** — Refers to individuals whose behaviors and/or interests fall outside what is considered typical for their assigned gender at birth. Someone who identifies as “gender nonconforming” is not necessarily transgender. To the contrary, many people who are not transgender do not conform to gender stereotypes in their appearance, clothing, physical characteristics, interests, or activities.

**Gender Fluidity** — Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day. Gender fluid individuals do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of girls or boys.

**Intersex** — An estimated one in 2,000 babies is born with an “intersex” condition or Disorders of Sex Development (DSD). People with intersex conditions (DSD) are born with physically mixed or atypical bodies with respect to sexual characteristics, i.e. chromosomes, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia. These characteristics may not be visible and individuals may not be aware of the condition. Having an intersex condition does not necessarily affect a person’s gender identity.

**FTM (female-to-Male)/Affirmed male/transboy** — A child or adult who was assigned to the female gender at birth but has a male gender identity.

**MTF (Male-to-female)/Affirmed female/transgirl** — A child or adult who was assigned to the male gender at birth but has a female gender identity.

**Transition** — The process by which a transgender individual lives consistently with his or her gender identity, and which may (but does not necessarily) include changing the person’s body through hormones and/ or surgical procedures. Transition can occur in three ways: social transition through changes in clothing, hairstyle, name and/or pronouns; hormonal transition through the use of medicines such as hormone “blockers” or cross hormones to promote gender-based body changes; and/or surgical transition in which an individual’s body is modified through the addition or removal of gender-related physical traits. Based on current medical knowledge and practice, genital reconstructive surgery is not required in order to transition. Most transgender people in the United States do not have genital reconstructive surgery.

**Transsexual** — An individual whose gender identity does not match the person’s sex at birth. This individual usually desires to physically alter their bodies surgically and/or hormonally. This physical transition is a complicated, multi-step process that may take years and may include, but is not limited to, cross-gender hormone therapy and a variety of surgical procedures. The precise treatments required vary from person to person.

**Transphobia** — Fear or hatred of transgender people. Transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination.