



MEDIA REFERENCE GUIDE

- DISCUSSING TRANS AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

This document provides a guideline for media, and outlines how to share information and stories about trans and gender-diverse people in an accurate and respectful way. It also provides examples of disrespectful and dehumanizing language that should be avoided.

APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE:

- DO use the term “trans” or “transgender” as an adjective, not a noun or a verb (for example: Shondra is a trans woman)
- DO properly define terms that your readership may not understand (see definitions section)
- DO use the term cisgender or cis to refer to non-trans identified people; everyone has a gender identity.
- DO reflect the language that someone uses to identify themselves
- DO use the appropriate name and pronouns at all times
- DO use affirming and inclusive language (for example: sex assigned at birth, gender identity)
- DO use and respect gender neutral pronouns such as they / them, and titles, if these are what someone uses. It is grammatically correct to use “they” as a singular pronoun.

INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE:

- DO NOT use language which is offensive or pathologizing to people who identify as trans (examples: sex change, tranny, pre-op, shemale, MTF, FTM, transgenderist, transgenderism, transvestite)
- DO NOT use phrases such as “born in the wrong body”, “was born a man”, “was born a woman”. If someone uses one of these terms to describe their own experience, then it’s fine, but it is otherwise inappropriate.
- DO NOT use pronouns and gendered descriptions that conflict with an individual’s experience of their gender identity - if you are unclear about someone’s gender identity, respectfully ask what pronouns they use
- DO NOT use “a transgender” or “a trans”
- DO NOT use “is transitioning” – you might want to use “transition”
- DO NOT use the term “full transition” - each person’s transition is a unique process
- DO NOT use “transgendered” – transgender or trans are the correct adjectives
- DO NOT use the terms “biologically male”, “biologically female” – if this information is specifically relevant to the story, use “sex assigned at birth”
- DO NOT use language like “Shondra was born a man” or “Shondra was born a male”
- DO NOT use the term SRS (sex reassignment surgery), or “sex-change surgery”, instead use “gender confirming surgery”



- DO NOT refer to trans people as “deceptive”, “pretending”, “posing”, or “masquerading” as the gender they are
- DO NOT imply or state that someone’s birth or legal name is their “real” name; someone’s name and gender identity should be respected in all aspects of their life and death
- DO NOT casually refer to someone by their birth or legal name when they have told you that they use a different name
- DO NOT use the term “preferred pronoun” or “preferred name”, since this can undermine a person’s identity
- DO NOT characterize trans people only as victims

MEDICALLY RELATED:

- DO NOT ask questions about someone’s body, genitals or medical history except if it is specifically relevant to your story
- DO NOT characterize trans people as having a mental disorder.
- DO NOT assume that all trans people experience any kind of body discomfort - just like cis people, trans people have varied relationships to their bodies
- DO NOT assume that transitioning is a linear process and every person has the same end point, goals or steps along the way

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- It is almost always inappropriate to use photos of someone from before they transitioned
- Gender identity and sexual orientation are separate and unrelated – do not make assumptions about one based on the other
- Trans people are as diverse as any other group of people – do not assume that one experience is representative of all
- People can be diagnosed with “gender dysphoria”, but not at all trans people feel that this diagnosis reflects their life experiences
- Sexism and misogyny have significant impacts on the lives of trans women - trans women have different experiences than trans men
- People who cross dress and/or who do drag do not necessarily identify as trans
- Trans people are experts on their own experience – be careful of letting other people speak for them



PRONOUNS, PUNCTUATION AND CONJUGATION

- **Concrete Nouns – Personal Names**

People have the right to name their gender and the right to be called by their chosen name. A chosen name is NOT an alias.

Always use the personal name used by the individual in an unqualified manner.

Correct: Jane is a trans woman from New York.

Incorrect: John (who prefers to be called Jane) is from New York .

- **Personal Pronouns – He, Him, She, Her, They, Them**

Always use the pronoun used by the individual. If you are unsure of someone's pronoun, ask them.

Correct: She is a trans woman and this is her life.

Incorrect: He (she) is a trans woman, "she" is a trans woman.

- **Possessive Pronouns – His, Hers, Their, Theirs**

Always use the possessive pronoun given to you by the individual, and do so in an unqualified manner. If you are unsure of someone's pronoun, ask them.

Correct: Max is a trans man and his hat is brown.

Incorrect: Max lost "his" hat.

- **Number Agreement and Neutral Pronouns – They, Them, Their**

The use of the singular 'they' is proper in cases where number or gender is indeterminate.

Furthermore, formal style has also shifted from "every dog has his day" to the generic, "every dog has their day".

As a result, many style guides are moving towards this neutral usage.

- **Pronoun Use - Conjugating Present vs. Past Tense**

As a general rule and to help avoid pronoun confusion when referring to the histories of trans people, it is best to use non-gendered language.

Thus, "As a boy growing up in London, Mary faced bullying." Should: "As a child growing up in London ..." If gendered language is necessary when referring to a trans person's past, it is proper to use the pronouns that correspond with their present gender identity and expression. The following are correct: "When she went to an all-boys school", and "when he was pregnant".

- **Punctuation Marks**

Beware of misuse of quotation marks, italicization, parentheses or other "qualifying" punctuation.

They undermine the identity of the people involved and are offensive.

Correct: Lisa Smith.

Incorrect: Jeff (AKA Lisa) Smith, Jeff/Lisa Smith, "Lisa" Smith.



DEFINITIONS

(Terms taken from The 519 LGBTQ Glossary and the Trans Pride Canada Style Guide, Ontario Human Rights Commission, GLAAD Media Reference Guide)

- **Bathroom Bill** (*n*): Defamatory term used by extremists to trivialize basic human rights legislation for trans people. DO NOT USE. This transphobic term falsely suggests that legislation will change laws regarding bathroom usage. In actuality gender identity legislation seeks to address discrimination against trans people in the areas of Healthcare, Education, Housing, Employment, Legal & Social Services. The correct way to refer to this legislation is to use “Gender Identity Bill”
- **Cisgender** (*adj*): Cis or cisgender are used as a prefixes for people whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex assigned to them at birth. (Cis meaning “in alignment with” or “on the same side”). The prefixes cis and trans work together as umbrella terms to classify all gender identities, so no identity is normalized. To be used as an adjective.
- **Cross-Dresser, Crossdresser** (*n*): Someone who generally identifies with their assigned sex but at times identifies with or personifies the “opposite” sex in their gender presentation and dress. Cross-dressing is not necessarily linked to erotic activity nor is it indicative of sexual orientation, or gender identity. Cross dressing is a form of gender expression.
- **Drag** (*n*): Performance art form that plays on gender stereotypes. NOT synonymous with “trans”.
- **Drag King, Drag Queen** (*n*): Performers who act out stereotypical gender roles. These are performance roles, not personal identities. A Drag King typically refers to a woman-identified person dressing and performing in a masculine role, and a Drag Queen typically refers to a man-identified person dressing and performing in a feminine role.
- **Gender** (*n*): The social classification of people as masculine and/or feminine. Whereas sex is an externally assigned classification, gender is something that becomes evident in a social context.
- **Gender Confirming Surgery/Surgeries** (*n*): Refers to surgical alteration of anatomy to affirm one’s gender identity. This is only one of many routes of transition. Whether for financial, medical or social reasons, many trans people do not opt for GCS. As a result, writers should avoid overemphasizing or sensationalizing the role of GCS in the transition process.
- **Gender-Diverse** (*adj.*) – For many years, “trans” has been used as an umbrella term to describe people with gender identities or presentations that differed from what was expected. More and more, “trans” is being replaced by “gender-diverse”, to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural limitations of “trans” as a word to describe all atypical gendered ways of being. At times we use gender-diverse in this guide in addition to “trans”, and include non-binary identities under that definition.
- **Gender Dysphoria** (*n*): Gender Dysphoria is similar to, but not the same as Gender Identity Disorder. Appearing in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual V (DSM-IV) it adds separate criteria for children, adolescents and adults. As with Gender Identity Disorder, any reference to a diagnosis should be avoided unless it is specifically mentioned or the subject is broached by a person being interviewed.
- **Gender Expression:** How a person publicly presents or expresses their gender. This includes behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, voice, name, and pronouns. Expression is independent of identity. For example, a trans man who is not safely out to family, might wear dresses to family events, or a trans woman who has not come out at work might wear a masculine suit to the office rather than the skirt they wear at home.



- **Gender Identity (n):** A person's internal and individual experience of gender. This is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere on the gender spectrum. This sense of self is separate from sex assigned at birth and is not related to sexual orientation. Gender identity is internal; it is not necessarily visible to others.
- **Gender Identity Legislation (n):** A widely accepted and neutral term to describe human rights legislation to eliminate discrimination against trans people in the areas of healthcare, education, housing, employment, legal and social services and human rights.
- **Gender Identity Disorder (GID) (n):** An obsolete diagnosis assigned to gender variant people based on classifications in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV) by the American Psychiatric Association. Because it labels people as "disordered", G.I.D. is considered offensive by many and should be avoided. Any reference to a diagnosis should be avoided unless it is specifically mentioned or the subject is broached by a person being interviewed.
- **Gender non-conforming/gender variant/genderqueer:** Individuals who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. They may identify and express themselves as "feminine men" or "masculine women," or as androgynous, outside of the categories "boy/man" and "girl/woman." People who are gender non-conforming may or may not identify as trans.
- **Hermaphrodite (n):** A defamatory and obsolete medical term for an intersex person. DO NOT USE.
- **Hermaphroditism (n):** A defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of intersex people. DO NOT USE.
- **Intersex (adj):** Refers to a person whose anatomical sex is outside the conventional classification of male or female. This may be due to genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations. Intersex is NOT synonymous with "trans".
- **Pre-operative, Post-operative, Non-operative, Castrated, Sterilized, etc. (adj):** These terms sensationalize and overemphasize the role that surgeries play in the lives of trans people. Surgical status should only be referred to (in extremely rare cases) when it is absolutely required in the context of the article. Casual discussion of one's genitalia is not appropriate for anyone.
- **Sex (n):** The medical classification of people as male, female or intersex. Sex characteristics include chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, and other aspects of the body.
- **Sex Assigned at Birth:** The medical classification of people at birth. This is usually assigned by a medical practitioner after a brief review of a newborn's genitalia.
- **Sex Change Operation (n):** An obsolete and defamatory term referring to Gender Affirmation Surgery. DO NOT USE.
- **Sex Reassignment Surgery (n):** An obsolete term for Gender Affirmation Surgery.
- **Sexual Orientation (n):** Sexual orientation describes a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Transgender people (just like cisgender people) may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, pansexual, bisexual, asexual, etc.
- **She-Male (n):** Defamatory term for trans women. DO NOT USE.
- **Tranny (n):** Defamatory and offensive term for a gender variant person. DO NOT USE.
- **Trans:** An umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man in society. "Trans" can mean transcending beyond, existing between, or crossing over the gender spectrum. It includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers, or gender non-conforming (gender variant or genderqueer).



- **Trans Man** (*n*): A person whose sex assigned at birth was female, but whose gender identity is a boy/man.
- **Trans Woman** (*n*): A person whose sex assigned at birth was male, but whose gender identity is a girl/woman.
- **Transgender** (*adj*): Refers to a person whose sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity.
- **Transgenderist** (*n*): Obsolete and defamatory term for a gender variant person. DO NOT USE.
- **Transition** (*n*) (*v*): Transition is a process that refers to a host of activities that people may pursue in order to affirm their gender identity. This may or may not include a change of name, pronouns, or physical changes from medication/ hormones or surgery, or a change in clothing, hair style, etc.
- **Transitioning** involves substantial personal, legal, financial, social and medical risks and should never be viewed as a precondition to validate a person's gender identity. It should be noted that transitioning is a process that may take a lifetime to complete. Therefore, using "before her/their transition", "after his/their transition", etc. is problematic.
- **Transphobia** (*n*): An irrational fear or hatred of trans people. This is often expressed in the form of harassment, violence, targeted misinformation, institutionalized discrimination or neglect, and murder.
- **Transsexual** (*adj*): A term derived from a medical diagnosis which pre-dates "Gender Identity Disorder". While this term is embraced by some gender variant people as an identity, it is also rejected by others and should therefore be used with informed caution. The key objections to this term are similar to those discussed in "Gender Identity Disorder" and "Disorders of Sexual Development", i.e. that this pathologizes something that is innate. Furthermore, there is a linguistic objection in that the embedded suffix "sexual" creates confusion. It falsely implies that trans issues are issues of sexuality and not of gender & sex. As always, use the terms preferred by the individuals, and do so in an unqualified manner.
- **Transsexualism** (*n*): Defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of gender variant people. DO NOT USE.
- **Transvestism** (*n*): Defamatory and obsolete medical diagnosis of cross-dressing. DO NOT USE.
- **Transvestite** (*n*): Defamatory and obsolete medical term for someone who cross-dresses. DO NOT USE.
- **Two-Spirit** (*adj*): a cultural and spiritual identity used by some First Nations peoples to describe having both masculine and feminine spirits. It can include people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex. For some, Two-Spirit describes a societal and spiritual role that people played within traditional societies, as mediators, keepers of certain ceremonies, transcending accepted roles of men and women, and filling a role as an established middle gender. It is important to note that this is an English language umbrella term that is used to refer to multiple identities that may have been captured by native languages prior to colonization. Some cultures had multiple recognized genders, which may have their own terms and meanings.



NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is the practice of The 519 and RHO not to use an asterisk in conjunction with the word trans (trans*) because this creates the expectation of a corresponding footnote. We use the term “trans” as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of identities that include but are not limited to gender non-conforming people, agender, bigender, genderless, genderqueer, genderfluid, trans women, trans men.

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Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2014) *.Policy on preventing discrimination because of gender identity and gender expression*.
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression>

The 519. (2015). Equity Glossary of Terms.

Trans Pride Canada. *Media Reference Guide - Best Practices*.
<http://www.transpride.ca/trans-media-reference.htm>

For more resources related to trans health and well being: www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/resources