TRANS 101: A BASIC INTRODUCTION TO

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

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**TERMINOLOGY**

**Sex Assigned at Birth (SAAB):** the sex classification people receive at birth,

typically based on external reproductive anatomy. In the United States, this can be

either male or female.

**Biological Sex:** a person’s chromosomal makeup, genitalia and reproductive

anatomy, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics (such as facial hair

and breasts).

**Gender Identity:** a deeply held, internal sense of one’s gender.

**Gender Expression:** how a person communicates their gender to the world

(including hairstyle, clothing, and personality characteristics).

**Gender Dysphoria:** emotional distress associated with the incongruence between

a person’s gender identity and their sex assigned at birth and/or between a

person’s gender identity and their biological sex

**Transgender**: an umbrella term, sometimes abbreviated as “trans,” which

indicates that a person has a gender identity that is different from their sex

assigned at birth.

o Being transgender has nothing to do with sexuality or sexual orientation,

which are related to whom a person is attracted to. Transgender people

may be attracted to women, men, and/or genderqueer/non-binaryidentified

folks; they may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer, etc.

o Transgender is an adjective, not a noun, so you could say “transgender

person,” but it would be improper to say “a transgender” or

“transgenders.”

o Transgender isn’t a verb, so a person cannot transgender or be

“transgendered.” An appropriate verb for this is *transition* (see below).

**Transgender woman:** a woman who has a female gender identity and was male

assigned at birth (MAAB). Sometimes people use the term male-to-female (MTF)

to refer to transgender women, but this is less accurate and less affirming of their

gender identity.

**Transgender man:** a man who has a male gender identity and was female

assigned at birth (FAAB). Sometimes people use the term female-to-male (FTM)

to refer to transgender men, but this is less accurate and less affirming of their

gender identity.

**Cisgender**: an adjective describing a person whose gender identity matches their

sex assigned at birth (e.g., Barrack Obama is a cisgender man).

**Genderqueer**: an adjective describing a person whose gender identity is neither

male/man nor female/woman.

**Non-binary**: an adjective describing a gender identity that is neither male/man

nor female/woman.

**Intersex**: a person whose natal biological sex characteristics do not align with

male or female characteristics. This typically due to chromosomes that are neither

XX nor XY (e.g., XXY).

**Pronouns**: the words we use in place of people’s names when referring to them.

In English, these are typically gender-specific: he/him/his for men and boys and

she/her/hers for women and girls. There are also gender-neutral pronouns,

including they/them/theirs and ze/hir/hirs. Using the pronouns a person uses for

themself is an important way of affirming their gender identity.

**Gender transition**: the process a transgender person undertakes to align their

gender expression and/or biological sex with their gender identity. This can be

social, in which a person may change their name or pronouns or change their

gender expression to be more masculine, more feminine, or more androgynous;

medical, in which a person uses physical interventions, such as hormone

replacement therapy (HRT) and/or surgery to alter biological sex and secondary

sex characteristics; or it can involve in both. Many transgender people undergo

social and medical gender transitions, but not everyone has the ability or desire to

do so.

**Transsexual**: an outdated term historically used to refer to a person who had a

binary gender identity that differed from their sex assigned at birth and who

sought surgical intervention as part of their gender transition. Unless a person

identifies themselves as transsexual rather than transgender, this term should not

be used.

**Cross-dresser:** a term used to refer to someone who alters their gender

expression in order to present as a gender different from their assigned sex at

birth, but maintains a gender identity that matches their sex assigned at birth. This

can include individuals who cross-dress for performative purposes, such as drag

queens and drag kings. Transvestite is an outdated term historically used to

describe people who cross-dress.

**Gender binary**: the gender classification system we have in Western culture that

provides only two, discrete gender options (man and woman), which are

associated with specific gender expressions: masculine and feminine,

respectively. Typically the gender binary is further enforced by a *cisnormative*

assumption that gender is predetermined by a binary biological sex and matches

sex assigned at birth. In other words, in our gender binary system, it is assumed

that a person is either a man or a woman, and if they are a man, they have male

biological sex characteristics, were male assigned at birth, and are masculine; if

they are a woman, it is assumed they have female biological sex characteristics,

were female assigned at birth, and are feminine.

**Gender diversity**: A term that highlights the natural diversity of biological sex,

gender identity, and gender expression across the population. Gender diversity

manifests in not only the variance of where people fall along spectra of biology,

identity, and expression, but also in the variety of combinations of each construct

(e.g., there are masculine/butch trans men, feminine/femme cisgender men,

masculine/butch trans women, feminine genderqueer people, etc., etc.). Gender

diversity runs counter to the gender binary system.