

Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People

Frequently Asked Questions

What does *transgender* mean?

Transgender (sometimes *transgendered*) is a word used by many people whose self-experienced gender does not match the gender that they were assigned at birth. For example, a transgender person might be someone who identifies and lives as a woman but whose birth-assigned sex was male. Other transgender people identify as somewhere in between the societally recognized genders of man and woman, as neither, or as one gender at some times and another at other times. *Transgender* is the large category used to cover all of these experiences.

What does *gender non-conforming* mean?

Some people hold gender identities that are the same as their birth-assigned sex, but do not express their gender identity in ways that conform to societal and/or cultural expectations. Gender non-conforming is often used to describe these people.

What does *transsexual* mean?

Transsexual is usually used by someone who was assigned as male or female and identifies fully as and seeks transition to the other. Transsexual people might identify as male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM).

What does *trans** mean?

*Trans** is a relatively new general term used to refer to transgender and gender non-conforming people.

What does *cisgender* mean?

Cisgender describes a person whose birth-assigned sex and gender identity are the same. For example, a person whose birth-assigned sex is female and who holds a feminine gender identity is a cisgender person.

The terms *sex* and *gender identity* do not mean the same thing. *Sex* is a biological term used to describe a person's body and is defined by a person's chromosomes, hormones, brain sex, secondary sex characteristics, reproductive organs and genitalia. *Gender identity* is a cultural construct that refers to a person's internal sense of self.

What other identity words do transgender people use?

First, it is very important to let an individual person or group identify themselves with whatever words they choose and to let the person or persons define what those words mean for them. It is equally important to believe and respect that self-definition. The following definitions may or may not match with a specific individual's or group's own self-definition, but they offer a place to start. Here are some identity words used by communities as those communities have articulated their identities:

- *Transgender* itself is often used as a main self-label for gender. Typically, a person who uses the word *transgender* as a main label lives as FTM or MTF and may or may not identify as transsexual. It is important to note that some persons who identify as transsexual do not wish to call themselves transgender and may not consider themselves trans- at all.
- *Cross-dresser (CD)*: This refers to someone who spends some time as one gender and identifies and presents as another gender at other times. Typically this is a person assumed to be a male who dresses and identifies as a female at other times. These people have no desire to modify their bodies through hormonal or surgical intervention. However, many people who begin exploring their cross-dresser identity do so as a step in the process toward transition (see below for definition of transition).
- *Drag queen*: A drag queen is a person (typically male, but may be FTM, MTF, or female) who performs or entertains as stereotypically female, who may or may not identify this as a part of their gender identity.
- *Drag king*: A drag king is a person who performs or entertains as stereotypically male (typically female or FTM, although can be MTF or male).
- *Two spirit or terms from Native American or other cultures*: Different cultures define sexuality and gender in ways that don't follow the presumed American binary system. It is important to use the terms preferred by a person and seek to understand the cultural implications rather than using the terms you prefer.

- *Genderqueer*: This refers to someone who identifies between male and female, neither, or both. This fluidity may be in time (identifying as male sometimes, female other times, and neither other times) or may be complex but static (identifying as in the middle all the time). Genderqueer people may or may not appear gender-nonconformist at any given time. Most genderqueer people use descriptions to explain how they view their own gender. Some genderqueer people choose to use no pronouns for themselves or gender neutral pronouns (such as *Ze* [pronounced zee] for she or he and *Zir* [pronounced zeer] for her or his). Others may prefer the pronouns *they*, *them* and *their*, or ask that their name be used instead of pronouns.

Doesn't the Bible say that people shouldn't be transgender or cross-dress?

There is only one verse in the whole Bible that directly refers to anything that sounds like cross-dressing or transgender identity:

A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 22:5 (NRSV)

However, later in the same chapter it says: "You shall not wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together. You shall make tassels on the four corners of the cloak with which you cover yourself" (22:11-12). Deuteronomy 22 continues, with instructions that a woman whose hymen is broken before marriage is to be stoned to death.

Most Bible scholars today recognize these verses are part of the Old Testament codes of purity for ancient Israel. We don't follow them today because they don't match with the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament freedom from rules that lead us away from loving our neighbors. Many Christians don't follow the verses in the New Testament restricting the religious and social roles for women for the same reasons, as they lead to inequality and mistreatment, which seems to be against loving our neighbors.

Many scripture passages are particularly helpful in freeing us from gender oppression:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:25-29 (NRSV)

Clothed in Christ, no longer ultimately tied to being male or female, in our baptismal call we can all work together against sexism and homophobia as we are also called to work against economic injustice, racism, and all other oppressions.

How can Lutherans deal with God's law in these ways?

Like any reader of the Bible, we all must make interpretation decisions. Just by picking a version of the translated text, we are already making an interpretation decision. The many specific laws in the Bible may or may not be God's Law for us here today. Even the Bible has three versions of the Ten Commandments, so there must have been change over time and place to even this core set of God's Law. However, Lutherans do believe that God's Law for us is important in living our daily lives, based on the center of the Law:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.
Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31 (NRSV)

In interpreting how best to love our neighbor, we can ask that the Holy Spirit guide us, and follow the Gospel to decide about which laws to follow, as Martin Luther says:

All other laws are to be measured by faith and love. That is to say, all other laws are to be kept where their observance does not conflict with faith and love; but where they conflict with faith and love, they should be done away with entirely.

While those who oppose transgender behavior may do so in the name of love, it is never loving to disrespect someone, oppress someone, or ban someone from attending worship. It is God alone who judges us, and transgender people are sinners like everyone else. It is sin for us to judge those who identify in a way that promotes personal and relational health and healing. Identifying as transgender and transitioning can often lead to a more full relationship with others and with God. We can ask God to forgive us for oppressing transgender people and be assured of God's forgiveness of us. We can also ask God to help us to love all of our neighbors, relying on God's grace through the Holy Spirit.