

Transgender (or “trans” for short) refers to a gender modality where a person’s gender is different than the gender they were assigned at birth. If a person’s gender is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth, they can be described as **cisgender**.

While many people assume that to be transgender means that a person chooses to undergo a physical transition, it’s important to keep in mind that not all trans people choose to transition.

Both cisgender and transgender are adjectives, and should never be used as nouns.

Some trans people may identify as a man or a woman, and some trans people might identify outside of the gender binary. They might refer to themselves as non-binary.


(We have another pamphlet about non-binary identities!)




trans flag



CHECK US OUT ONLINE

 @northernmosaicnetwork

 Northern Mosaic Network

www.northernmosaic.net

TALK TO US

Northern Mosaic Network

867-444-7295

admin@northernmosaic.net

VISIT US

Suite 213 - 5112 52nd Street

Yellowknife, NT

X1A 1T6

SEND US MAIL

PO Box 1751, STN Main

Yellowknife, NT

X1A 2P3

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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



Developed by Jacq Brasseur, with support from Catherine Currie following consultation with 2SLGBTQIPA+ Northerners in 2021/2022.



NORTHERN
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all about **TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES**

COMPONENTS OF GENDER & SEX

The **World Health Organization** defines gender as “the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other.”¹

As we can see from this definition, gender is vast and complex. We can more readily understand this vastness if we recognize each individual component of gender that different sociologists and theorists have proposed. Here are just some:

Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of their own gender category. This includes words like “man”, “woman”, or “non-binary”.

Gender expression refers to how a person chooses to express their gender through clothes, behaviours, mannerisms or more. This includes words like “feminine”, “masculine”, or “androgynous”.

Gender modality refers to the relationship a person has to the gender they were assigned at birth.²

Gender attribution refers to the ways that gendered categories are attributed to a person externally.³

These components of gender are separate from biological sex. **Biological sex** refers to the category that a person is assigned at birth based on their genitals and physical sexual characteristics.

(To learn more about biological sex, check out our All About Intersex Identities pamphlet!)

¹ World Health Organization. (n.d.) Gender and Health. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

² Ashley, F. (2022). ‘Trans’ is my gender modality: A modest terminological proposal. In Laura Erickson-Schroth (Ed.), *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* (2nd ed.) Oxford University Press.

³ Kessler, S., & MacKenna, W. (1978). *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. The University of Chicago Press.

TRANS FAQs

What is the difference between transsexual and transgender?

Transsexual is an older term that was first coined in 1950 by David Oliver Cauldwell who translated similar German terms coined by Magnus Hirschfeld. This term fell out of use over the next few decades, but some trans people still use it to refer to themselves.

Today, it’s more appropriate to use the term “transgender” as some trans people explain that “transsexual” has a sexualized connotation, when really, being trans relates to one’s gender instead of their sexuality.

How does a person know that they’re trans?

Trans people know that they’re trans because they have a deep feeling internally that the gender category they’ve been assigned doesn’t fit with their heart.

Some trans people experience what’s called “gender dysphoria”, which is a mental health diagnosis that recognizes the intense physiological distress a person feels when they are not perceived as the gender they identify as internally.

What is “misgendering”?

Misgendering refers to the process where a person refers to another person with incorrect gendered language. When a person is referred to using the wrong gendered name or terms, or the wrong gendered pronouns, this is an act of misgendering.

How do I know what pronouns to use for somebody?

It’s important not to make assumptions. The best way to learn somebody’s pronouns is by asking them. You can simply ask: “What are your pronouns?”

AM I TRANS?

The important thing to remember is that you don’t have to use certain words to describe yourself just because that’s the “box” that you fit into. That being said, here are some things that might apply to you if you’re part of the trans community:

- you feel like you weren’t supposed to be born with the biological sex that you were assigned
- you get really anxious or frustrated when people refer to you as the gender you were assigned at birth
- you don’t feel like you’re a man or a woman

If you are a trans person in the NWT looking for support or community, reach out to us.

TRANSPHOBIA & CISSEXISM

Transphobia refers to fear, hatred, mistreatment of, or negative attitude towards people who are transgender, because of their gender modality.

Cissexism refers to the systemic ways in which cisgender (non-trans) are considered the standard, and that transgender people are limited to participating fully in society or systems.

Transphobia and cissexism can include a wide range of behaviours from accidentally misgendering somebody, to refusing trans people from accessing spaces like bathrooms, to actively calling for or committing violence against trans people.

One great way to challenge transphobia and cissexism is to use affirming, inclusive language.

If you are looking to learn more about trans identity, transitioning, transphobia or cissexism, talk to us about our workshops!