

# Watch your language!

Tips for the media regarding transgendered persons

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## Who's Who?

**Transsexuals** are extremely unhappy in the gender to which they are assigned and change their gender roles and bodies in order to live as members of the "other" sex. Modern medical technology (synthesized sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery) make this much easier than it was in the past. About 50% of transsexuals are male-to-female and 50% are female-to-male (FTM). Many have sex reassignment surgery, in which their genitals are modified. Transsexuals identify completely as members of their new gender.

**Transgenderists** live as members of the other sex, but without the extreme need or desire to modify their bodies shown by transsexuals. Some live as members of the other sex, while others stake out "third gender" status. Transgenderists may take hormones, but do not have genital sex reassignment surgery.

**Crossdressers** wear the clothing of the other sex on occasion, but do not desire to change their sex. They dress for personal reasons, which can range from a need to express their feminine or masculine side to a way to express themselves erotically.

**Drag Kings and Drag Queens** present larger than life images of men and women, exaggerating sexual stereotypes for entertainment or self-gratification.

**Androgynes, Gender Blenders, and Gender Benders** merge the characteristics of both sexes in ways subtle or shocking.

**Gender Fuck** is the deliberate flaunting of gender norms with a goal of shocking others.

**Intersexed (hermaphroditic)** persons are born with genitals which show characteristics of both sexes. Many have surgery in infancy, and many of those who do grow up feeling they have been robbed of an essential part of themselves.

**Transpeople/Transgendered People** are group nouns used to describe transgendered and transsexual people.

**The Transgender Community** is the term for the organized community of transpeople.

## Names and Pronoun Usage

Appropriate usage of names and pronouns is very important in media coverage of transgendered people. Unfortunately, it often becomes a power struggle, with pronouns linked to the gender of birth in disregard of the appearance and life situation of the individual.

Regardless of whether there has been a court-ordered name change, the preferred name of an individual should be used.

In general, the appropriate pronoun is the one which best describes the way the individual is living his or her life. A cross-living male-to-female transsexual or transgenderist, for instance, should be referred to with feminine pronouns (she, her, hers), regardless of surgical status; masculine pronouns should be used for FTM transsexuals.

Crossdressers and drag queens/kings should be referred to with pronouns appropriate to the way they are dressed, with the fact of their actual gender status made clear in context: "Although a man, Christopher, five days a week, weekends are for Christine, who spends her time shopping and visiting friends."

When describing the past of a transsexual or transgenderist, it is appropriate to give the original name and use pronouns which describe the way he or she was living at that time; thus, "Brad moved to Atlanta and found a job as a woman. In her new job, Brenda flourished."

**Quotation marks should *never* be used around names or pronouns.**

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