

# TRANSGENDER VOICE AND COMMUNICATION THERAPY

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## GENDER IDENTITY (WHAT IT IS AND ISN'T)

The Gender Unicorn **TSER**

- Gender Identity: Female/Male/Both/Neither/Other Gender(s)
- Gender Expression/Presentation: Female/Male/Neither/Other
- Sex Assigned at Birth: Female/Male/Other/None
- Sexually Attracted To: Woman/Men/Other Gender(s)
- Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To: Woman/Men/Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to: [www.transgender.org/gender](http://www.transgender.org/gender)  
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## TERMINOLOGY

FROM: [HTTP://WWW.TRANSEQUALITY.ORG/ISSUES/RESOURCES/TRANSGENDER-TERMINOLOGY](http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology)

- Terms related to Gender Identity
  - Transgender
    - A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
      - Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use.
      - "Trans" is shorthand for "transgender."
      - (Note: Transgender should be used as an adjective, not a noun, thus "transgender people" is appropriate but "transgenders" is often viewed as disrespectful.)

## TERMINOLOGY

- Terms related to Gender Identity
  - AMAB/AFAB:** Assigned Male/Female at Birth
  - True Gender:** The true gender is the gender that matches the person's identity. Genitalia is only one indicator of gender. Most of the time, the sexual anatomy will correspond predictably with the true gender. Sometimes, it does not.
  - Transgender Man:** A term for a transgender individual who identifies as a man (previously referred to as "FTM").
  - Transgender Woman:** A term for a transgender individual who identifies as a woman (previously referred to as "MTF").
  - Cisgender Person:** A term for a person whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth

## TERMINOLOGY

- Terms related to Gender Identity
  - Queer:** A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and, often also transgender, people. Some use queer as an alternative to "gay" in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.
  - Genderqueer:** A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female (also, Gender Nonbinary, Gender Fluid)
  - Gender Non-conforming:** A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.
  - Dead Name:** The person's name associated with the gender assigned at birth.
    - Used by transgender persons who have changed their name to one that matches their true gender.
    - "Dead Naming" may psychologically harm a trans person.

## TERMINOLOGY

- Related to Biological Sex (Gender Assigned at Birth)
  - Intersex:** A person who has sexual anatomy associated with both males and females.
    - According to Fausto-Sterling (2000) the condition of intersex occurs in 1.7% of the population (making it as common as having red hair).
- Related to Sexual Orientation
  - Sexual Orientation:** Innate Attraction (sexually and/or romantically). Sexual orientation should not be assumed based on behaviors, interests, gender expression, or relationships. Just because a man is married to woman, does not mean that he is straight.
  - Gay:** A man who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men (exclusively/predominantly).
  - Lesbian:** A woman who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women (exclusively/predominantly).
  - Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to more than one gender. Note: sexual orientation refers to innate attraction, not relationships. Bisexuals are still bisexual even when they are in long-term, monogamous homosexual relationships or monogamous heterosexual relationships.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION THERAPY IN THE TRANSITIONING PROCESS

- Transgender men (Assigned Female at Birth; AFAB)
  - Hormone therapy increases the mass of the vocal folds, so the voice often matches the outward appearance.
  - Some transgender men cannot take or choose not to take hormones
  - May want help with paralinguistic or linguistic features (style, intonation, articulatory focus, etc.)
- Transgender women (Assigned Male at Birth; AMAB)
  - Hormone therapy does not decrease the mass of the vocal folds, creating a mismatch between the voice and outward appearance
- Voice therapy can improve the psycho-social well-being and may reduce gender dysphoria, suicide, depression, anxiety, improve employability, and social acceptance.

## IMPORTANCE OF TRAINED SLPs IN THIS AREA

- Transgender population is a growing area of need for SLPs
- The Transgender community in many states have a list of providers of trans-affirming care
- The transgender community needs SLPs knowledgeable in trans affirming care for **all** areas of practice, not just voice feminization therapy.
  - Example: People diagnosed with autism are 7.76 times more likely to be trans than the general population (Janssen, et al., 2016).
  - Example: Trans individuals may be parents of children on SLP caseloads.
  - Example: Trans individuals need SLPs if they have strokes, cancer, traumatic brain injuries, etc. SLPs must be trained in trans affirming care for patients when they are most vulnerable.

## TRANSGENDER LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION (TLC) GROUP AT THE UA LITTLE ROCK/UAMS SPEECH AND HEARING CLINIC

- One hour of individual therapy
  - Graduate student clinician
  - Work on individual goals developed between the clinician and the client
- One hour of group therapy
  - Led by a graduate student in the School of Social Work at UA Little Rock
  - Communication goals are targeted during group
  - Clinicians are active participants in the group
  - Example topics of discussion
    - How to deal with stress/micro aggressions/gender dysphoria
    - What do trans people wish that healthcare workers understood about being trans
    - How to be an ally
    - What is the hardest thing you've ever done?

## TYPICAL GOALS

- Vocal Hygiene
  - Maximize vocal health
    - Vocal warm-ups
    - Water intake
    - Breath Support
    - Relaxation

## TYPICAL GOALS

- Raising Pitch (visual feedback)
  - 107-129 Hz = Cis men
  - 155-187 Hz = Trans women recognized as female
  - 189-224 = Cis women

## TYPICAL GOALS (INDIVIDUAL THERAPY) CONT'D

- Journaling
  - Successes and challenges
- Resonance
  - Forward (nasal) resonance
- Increased intonation (pitch swings)
- Vowel prolongation
- Tag questions ("That's wonderful, isn't it?")
- Body language, proxemics, gestures, etc.

## TYPICAL TOPICS (GROUP THERAPY)

- How to deal with stress/micro aggressions/gender dysphoria
- What do trans people wish that healthcare workers understood about being trans
- How to be an ally
- What is the hardest thing you've ever done?
- The Drama Triangle (Perpetrator, Victim, and Rescuer)
- Gender-Trends and Vocabulary
- Portrayal of Trans People in Film/Media
- What does it mean to be "feminine"? "Masculine"? "Androgynous"?

## OUTCOMES

- Significantly increased scores in Voice Satisfaction
- Increased vocal pitch
- Increased use of feminine vocal characteristics
  - Intonation range
  - Prolonged vowels
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Forward focused articulation
- Increased identification of voice as female by unfamiliar listeners

## OUTCOMES

- Quote:
- I really didn't have any great expectations when I came in for the first time. I am equally sure after meeting me and your team's initial assessment of my voice - you honestly didn't either. I am completely blown away with the progress I initially made in just the first two short months, and at a larger scale, over the last full year of therapy. I know this therapy and working with the team is really the most amazing thing that I have ever done in my life. You have helped me complete one of the last barriers to transition that I had before me. I can never possibly thank all of you enough for the profound impact that you have made in my life. We will forever be friends."

## RESOURCES

- New York Speech and Voice Lab: Christie Block
  - <https://www.speechvoicelab.com/transgender-voice-training/>
- Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide
  - Richard Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Jack Pickering
- Girl Talk: The Transgender Guide for Voice and Feminization
  - Lynette Nisbet
- Facebook Group: Gender Spectrum Voice and Communication
- The Transsexual Voice Questionnaire (TVQ)
  - <http://www.shelaghclavies.com/questionnaire/questionnaire.html>
- Sonetta App from Mintleaf Software (iOS only)
  - <http://mintleafsoftware.com/news/sonetta-voice-monitor-released-in-app-store.html>
- Voice Analyst App from Speech Tools Limited
  - <https://speechtools.co/voice-analyst>
- Reimbursement Issues
  - <https://www.asha.org/Practice/reimbursement/Reimbursement-of-Voice-Therapy-services-for-transgender-People.htm>

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