

Trans-Inclusive Language

What is the difference between the terms “trans women” vs. “transwomen” or similarly “trans men” vs. “transmen” or “trans people” vs. “transpeople”?

Quick answer: “trans women,” “trans men,” and “trans people” should always be used instead of “transwomen,” “transmen” and “transpeople.”

Why?

Quick answer: “trans women,” “trans men,” and “trans people” are respectful and inclusive terms that reinforce and respect trans people’s validity as women, men, and people.



Long answer:

Dismissive, Dehumanizing, and Othering

The terms “transwomen,” “transmen,” and “transpeople” **dehumanize** and **other** trans women, trans men, and trans people.

Combining the modifier/adjective of “trans” into a single word (such as “transpeople”) distances trans people from being recognized as people. In essence, it reinforces a perspective that trans people are not people.

In [The A-Z of Gender and Sexuality](#) (2019), the authors Morgan Lev and Edward Holleb note that “trans” should always be used as a modifier/adjective and never a noun (p. 274). For example, referring to a trans person as “a trans” is offensive and problematic harkening back to medical diagnoses of transvestic disorders (somewhat similar to the preference to use “gay/lesbian” instead of “homosexual” as seen in the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#) and elsewhere).

The authors Morgan Lev and Edward Holleb further note that “transwoman” is “an incorrect spelling of trans woman sometimes used deliberately to dehumanize and set trans women apart from cis women” (p. 293).

Similarly, in [Whipping Girl](#) (2007), Julia Serano reminds us to keep in mind that because the descriptor “trans” is an adjective, the formulations “transman” and “transwoman” are regarded as **dismissive** and **delegitimizing** (p. 29).

Grammatical Significance

Because “trans” is and should be used as a modifier/adjective, it follows that “trans” should be separate from the noun “trans” is describing. For example, “trans” can be an adjective that modifies the noun “woman” to describe a trans woman, or in other words, a woman who is trans.

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Thinking about a similar example, if you want to describe a woman who is tall, calling this person a “tall woman” would be grammatically correct while calling this person a “tallwoman” would not make grammatical sense.

Similarly, in [Whipping Girl](#) (2007), Julia Serano writes,

I prefer these terms [trans woman and trans man] over others [transwoman and transman] because they acknowledge the lived and self-identified gender of the trans person (i.e., woman or man), while adding the adjective ‘trans’ as a way to describe one particular aspect of that person’s life experience. In other words, ‘trans woman’ and ‘trans man’ function in a way similar to the phrases ‘Catholic woman’ or ‘Asian man’ (p. 29).

Ok so then why do people continue to still use offensive terms like “transwomen,” “transmen” and “transpeople”?

Answer #1: Some people are simply not aware of this important distinction.

This is reinforced by the fact that Microsoft Word, a word processing program that many use, does not autocorrect “transwomen” to “trans women” or “transmen” to “trans men” (though it does recognize “transpeople” as incorrect). In fact, Microsoft Word recognizes “transwomen” and “transmen” as correctly spelled (unless you change it on your own by altering your version of Microsoft Word’s dictionary by following the directions [here](#)). Sadly, Microsoft Word is reproducing transphobia every time it tells a writer that “transwomen” and “transmen” are “spelled correctly.”

Answer #2: Some people do not recognize trans women as women, trans men as men, or trans people as people. To display this, they deliberately and nefariously use the terms “transwomen,” “transmen” and “transpeople.” This includes TERFs, trans-exclusionary radical feminists, who are notoriously known for such arguments. (See [here](#) for an extended discussion).

Final Thoughts

If you weren’t aware of these important distinctions prior to reading this, don’t worry! This is a relatively new distinction in writing and though using the terms “transwomen,” “transmen” and “transpeople” is now outdated and offensive, past research in decades prior did use these terms (including work written by trans people). Today though, it is necessary to update our language with the terms “trans women,” “trans men,” and “trans people.”

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