

## **What Does Transgender Mean?**

Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people who do not fit into traditional gender categories, including transsexuals, transvestites or cross-dressers, gender queers, two-spirit, intersexuals (formerly called hermaphrodites), and sometimes even people who identify as butch or femme. A transgendered person is someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. Gender Identity is one's internal sense of being male or female, and for most people, there is no conflict between gender identity and their physical sex. However, transgendered people question and explore their gender identity.

Although transgendered people have been part of every culture and society in recorded human history, they have only recently become the focus of medical science. Many medical researchers now believe that transgenderism is rooted in complex biological factors that are fixed at birth. This research confirms what transgendered people know and experience on a much more personal basis, that being transgendered is not a choice nor a "lifestyle."

People who are transgender face discrimination in their jobs, churches, and schools, as well as judgment from their friends, families and coworkers. Unlike many who are members of minorities related to sexual orientation, a transgender person may not be able to choose who they come out to. Their physical appearance may automatically "out" them.

People who are transgender have issues similar and dissimilar to the lesbian and gay rights movement. Both gays and transgender people have issues related to coming out, relationships, community, identity, family, friends, etc. Both groups of people may be subject to discrimination on the basis of gender identity. For this reason, the transgender movement belongs as a distinct part of the LGB movement. Frequently, homophobic discrimination occurs because of the way a gay person presents his or her gender. Similarly, a transgender person is often discriminated against because they are perceived to be gay.

Certainly there are some different issues facing the transgender community than those facing the LGB community, just as there are different issues between lesbians, gays, and bisexual people. Presenting a united front against those who do not support our lives and experiences widens our political viability, and will lead to increased civil rights for all involved.

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of transphobia in the LGB community, and similarly there is a great deal of homophobia in the transgender community, just as there is both homophobia and transphobia in non-LGB/non-Transgender crowds. Most of this is simply due to ignorance.

### **What do I do if someone I know is transgender?**

Accept them. They are the same person you have always known.

Respect the identity they claim.

Try to use the same pronoun and name they use to identify themselves.

Know that the transgender people have high rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse, and relationship difficulties because of lack of acceptance within society. Your acceptance will help combat these problems.

Know that transgender people are remarkably strong and creative individuals, which they must be to be able to live in a disapproving society. Educate yourselves and others. Do not rely solely on information created by non-transgender people. Advocate for them in your lives and everyday experiences. Be an ally!

### **Who are transgender people?**

Trans persons include pre-operative and post-operative transsexuals who generally feel that they were born into the wrong physical sex; persons living full time in a different gender with no desire to pursue genital surgery; and crossdressers (once called transvestites - those whose gender expression often varies from their birth sex). They also can be "passing" (masculine-appearing) women or "effeminate" men who are often assumed to be homosexual, although this is not necessarily the case. There are also many intersexed persons born with ambiguous genitalia who later identify as transgendered. These persons were surgically assigned a sex (usually female) as infants, and later developed a gender identity different from the sex assigned.

It's important to note that the term transgendered describes several distinct but related groups of people, many of whom use a variety of other terms to self-identify. For example, many transsexuals see themselves as a separate group, and do not want to be included under the umbrella term transgendered. Many post-operative transsexuals no longer consider themselves to be transsexual. Some non-operative transsexuals identify themselves as transgender. Genderqueer refers to a gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Genderqueer often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

Despite this variation in terminology, most trans people will agree that their self-identification is an important personal right.

### **Who are crossdressers?**

Crossdressers are the largest group of transgendered persons. Although most crossdressers are heterosexual men, there are also gay and bisexual men, as well as lesbians, bisexual and straight women, who crossdress. Most male crossdressers are married and many have children. The vast majority live in secrecy about their transgendered status. Unlike transsexuals, they do not wish to change their physical sex.

### **Who are intersexed people?**

Intersex people are born with chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Those

with unusual genitalia are often subjected to surgical "normalization" procedures from infancy to adolescence, which usually results in loss of sexual response in adulthood. The Intersexed Society of North America has labeled this practice Infant Genital Mutilation. Some intersexed infants have even been sexually reassigned - without their consent - and later in life develop gender identity issues strikingly similar to those of transsexual people.

### **What causes transsexualism?**

No one really knows, but there are many theories. It may be caused by the bathing of a fetus by opposite birth sex hormones while in utero, or perhaps by some spontaneous genetic mutation, which is also one of the theories of the origin of homosexuality. Transsexual persons include female-to-male (FTM) transmen as well as the more familiar male-to female (MTF) transwomen. Due to the intensity of their gender dysphoria, they come to feel they can no longer continue living in the gender associated with their physical (birth) sex.

### **What is gender dysphoria?**

Gender dysphoria is the overall psychological term used to describe the feelings of pain, anguish, and anxiety that arise from the mismatch between a trans person's physical sex and gender identity, and from parental and societal pressure to conform to gender norms. Almost all transgendered people suffer from gender dysphoria in varying degrees. Some transsexual persons discover at an early age that they are unable to live in the gender of their birth sex, but the majority struggle to conform, in spite of intense suffering, until their adult years. To seek relief, transsexual persons enter gender transition.

### **Is transgenderism a disability?**

Unlike sexual orientation, transgenderism — technically "gender identity disorder" (GID) — is still deemed a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association. Medical professionals tend to believe that transgenderism is a medical and mental health condition that may require treatment rather than labeling it a mental illness.

There is disagreement among some transgender leaders about attempts to remove GID from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Some want it removed because they feel it stigmatizes transgender people and provides a pretext for discrimination against them. They also believe it may cause harm to children when parents seek treatment for a child although the child may merely be expressing gender variance. Some transgender people believe it is not the condition but society's rigid approach to sex and gender that are problematic. Others want GID to remain because a GID diagnosis in some states could qualify as a disability, for which medical coverage could be available and to which disability discrimination provisions could apply.

### **What is gender transition?**

Gender transition is the period during which transsexual persons begin changing their appearances and bodies to match their internal gender identity. Because gender is so visible, transsexuals in transition MUST "out" themselves to their employers, their families, and their friends - literally everyone in their lives. While in transition, they are

very vulnerable to discrimination and in dire need of support from family and friends. Hormonal therapy can take several months to many years to effect the physical changes in secondary sexual characteristics that will produce a passable appearance, and some may never pass completely.

### **What is the Real Life Test?**

For transsexual persons seeking Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS), the Real Life Test (also called the Real-Life Experience) is a one-year minimum period during which they must be able to demonstrate to their psychotherapists their ability to live and work full-time successfully in their congruent gender. The Real Life Test is a prerequisite for sex reassignment surgery under the Standards of Care.

### **What are the Standards of Care?**

The Standards of Care are a set of guidelines formulated and recently revised by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Inc. under which many transsexual persons obtain hormonal and surgical sex reassignment. While the Standards of Care minimize the chance of someone making a mistake, they have been criticized as a "gatekeeper" system. In general, a complete gender transition includes a period of psychotherapy to confirm one's true gender, the beginning of lifelong hormonal therapy, the Real Life Test, and finally, if desired, sex reassignment surgery.

### **What is sex reassignment surgery (SRS)?**

SRS is the permanent surgical refashioning of sexual anatomy to resemble that of the appropriate sex. For MTF transsexuals, SRS involves the conversion of penile and scrotal tissue into female genitalia. For FTM transsexuals, it may be limited to just top surgery (breast removal) and sometimes hysterectomy. While many transmen become satisfied with their new male anatomy, most opt out of genital surgeries for a variety of reasons, including the expense and dissatisfaction with the results. Many MTF trans people also undergo additional cosmetic procedures, including electrolysis to remove facial and body hair, breast augmentation, Adams Apple reduction, hair transplantation, liposuction and many types of facial surgeries.

### **What is the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation?**

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. Sexual orientation is someone's sexual attraction to others who may be of the opposite sex, the same sex, or either sex. Like other people, transgendered people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Generally speaking, their gender identity - not their physical sex status - determines their sexual orientation.

### **What is Gender Identity Disorder (GID)?**

GID is a psychological classification found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association. Although GID is the only diagnosis under which trans people may receive treatment, and therefore necessary, it also is controversial. GID has been used inappropriately and harmfully by some psychotherapists to treat gender variant youth. Moreover, many if not most trans people also believe they do not have a mental disorder.

## **Transgender Terminology**

**Transsexuals:** people who pursue gender reassignment through the use of hormones, surgery, and/or changes of identity, to live as a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth.

**Crossdressers (preferred over transvestite):** people who wear clothes and assume the identity of a gender other than that assigned to them at birth. Usually crossdressing is not done on a full time basis. Crossdressing is done for a number of personal reasons: to lend a sense of completeness to one's Identity, to express a feminine/masculine side of personality, to express oneself erotically, etc.

**Intersexed (preferred over hermaphrodite):** people who are born with genitals of both sexes (ranging in degree); often an infant who is born intersexed will be surgically altered to represent one gender. Unfortunately, this is done before the child has had a chance to express which gender he or she is or would choose to be. To learn more about Intersexuality, go to the [Intersex Society of North America website](#).

**Multi-gendered (or sometimes bi-gendered, genderqueer, third gender, etc.):** those who reject the over-simplicity of a polarized, two-gender system: often believe that there is a multiplicity of genders which are fluid in expression.

## **Intersex Issues**

The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) is a peer support, education, and advocacy group founded and operated by and for intersexuals: individuals born with anatomy or physiology which differs from cultural ideals of male and female. Please access <http://www.isna.org/> for further information.

## **Credits**

Adapted from a booklet by Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)'s Transgender Network (<http://pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html>) and from the UCLA LGBT Campus Resource Center ([www.lgbt.ucla.edu/](http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu/)).