

Transgender folk have self-identified as:

- Drag Queen:** Female-emulating male, usually campy, often (not always) gay.
- Butch:** Masculine-appearing person.
- Femme:** Feminine-appearing person.
- Drag King:** Male-emulating woman.
- Intersex:** Person born with mixed sexual physiology. Often 'assigned' at birth, such practice is coming under well-founded attack as a hurtful violation of a person's well-being.
- Transvestite:** Person who enjoys wearing clothes identified with the opposite gender, often but not always straight.
- Crossdresser:** Polite term for transvestite.
- Transgenderist:** Person living as gender opposite to anatomical sex, i.e. person with penis living as a woman. Sexual orientation varies.
- Androgyne:** Person appearing and identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.
- Transsexual:** Person whose sexual identity is opposite to their assignment at birth. Not all TS folk undergo 'sex reassignment surgery' (SRS), for various reasons, including personal preference. Sexual orientation varies.
- Transgender (TG) Community:** A loose association of gender transgressors. Recently awakened, this community is growing fast across social, economic, political, and philosophical divisions. It's central ethic is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual, identity and orientation.

A Community Besieged

Unfortunately, the TG community suffers from severe victimization. Society often reacts to gender transgression by trying to discourage the behavior, punishing the individual. Transgender folk are much more likely than others to commit suicide, to be murdered, to be fired from their job, to be beaten up, and to be hurt in many more ways, some as blatant as open ridicule, some as insidious as non-hiring.

Some people, simply because their gender expression differs from the norm, are subjected to the emotional trauma and physical suffering of barbaric "therapeutic" practices such as imprisonment and shock "therapy". While these are justified as "for the welfare of the individual", they are too often intended to comfort the individual's family, with little regard for the suffering of the individual. The level of trauma suffered by transgender folk is much higher than the norm, and is reflected in more difficult lives and greater incidence of depression and despair.

All of this is beginning to change, as people learn that there is no harm visited on either the individuals, their families, or their workplace by gender transgression. In fact, there are and have always been cultures where gender transgression is accepted as a natural part of the life of the culture.

The only harm that accompanies transgenderism is the same harm that is still too often visited on some folks by racism. In the case of transgender folk, the words for the feelings that cause people to hurt us are *fear of difference* and *transphobia*. The words for the feelings that end the suffering and heal this segment of our society are *compassion* and *tolerance*.

Suggested Reading:

- Leslie Feinberg: *Transgender Warriors* (Beacon, 1996)
Kate Bornstein: *Gender Outlaw* (Routledge, 1994)
Leslie Feinberg: *Stone Butch Blues* (Firebrand, 1993)

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WMBR, 88.1 FM (first on the dial)

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TRANS GENDER ISM



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TRANSGRESSING GENDER NORMS

A Transgender person is someone whose gender display at least sometimes runs contrary to what other people in the same culture would normally expect. Transgender folks come in several flavors:

FTM (female to male): born female but see themselves as partly to fully masculine.

MTF (male to female): born male but see themselves as partly to fully feminine.

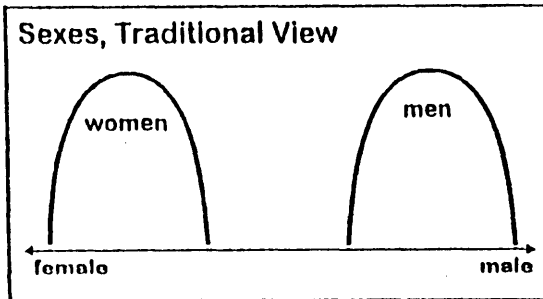
Intersexed: born with a combination of male and female physiology [hermaphrodite]. May accept as natural their mixed gender.

Gender variations are more common than most people suspect, because many people hide their true nature out of fear for their safety and security.

Many people who explore transgender behavior do not self-identify as transgender. Women wearing pants may not seem transgender today, but fifty years ago they were. Boys wearing "girl's clothes" may not call themselves "transgender", yet they enjoy playing in this way. Crossdressing is enjoyed by both males and females, but appears more pronounced in males because of an imbalance in norms of attire and attitude (we see little transgression when a woman wears a suit).

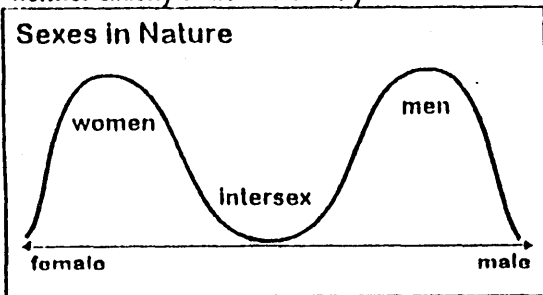
Sex vs. Gender

In order to understand the difference between someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and someone who is transgender, you need to know the difference between sex and gender. Simply put, sex is polarity of anatomy, gender is polarity of appearance and behavior. As one gains familiarity with transgenderism, these definitions quickly break down, but they serve as a good starting point.



Bipolarity

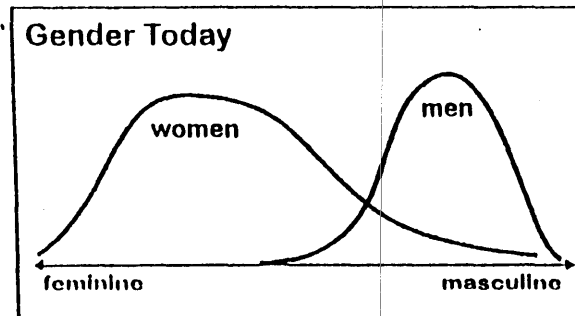
Most people think there are just two sexes, male and female. Such is not the case. People who are intersexed and some (not all) people who are transsexual constitute sexes which are neither exactly male nor exactly female.



Likewise, gender is not a simple case of "either/or". Gender is exhibited by countless signals, from articles of clothing to cosmetics, hairstyles, conversational styles, body language and much more. Though our culture tends to group characteristics into "masculine" and "feminine", many people find some amount of gender transgression exciting, so there is some crossover between the two categories. Ultimately, gender is a "mix and match" mode

of self-expression, and people within our culture are ever finding new ways to express their gender, with exciting subtleties and intriguing implications.

In general, it works best to think of all effects -- sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual identity, and any others -- as varying along a continuous spectrum of self-expression, rather than in just one of two or three ways.



Notice how, in this "Gender Today" graph, women's range of gender extends through man's range, but man's range does not include women's. Our gender "norms" are not symmetric. Women have won for themselves the right to a wide range of gender expression. Men have not made a corresponding effort. Most men live within a much narrower range of "acceptable" gender.

Sexual Orientation vs Gender/Sexual Identity

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual identity are independent of each other. A person may express any variation of each of these in any combination. To discourage the free expression of identity and orientation by an individual is to impose a damaging burden of conformity.

Sexual Orientation is which sex you find erotically attractive: opposite (hetero), same (homo), or both (bi).

Sexual Identity is how you see yourself physically: male, female, or in between. If someone is born female, but wishes to see their body as male in all respects, their sexual identity is male. It is rude to speak of such a person as female, since it denies their right to inhabit the social and physical role of their choosing. We call such a person a transsexual,

whether or not they have had any surgery. Many FTM transsexuals do not undergo genital surgery, because of often disappointing results and terribly expensive cost. As surgical technique improves, such people will be able to achieve more satisfying realizations of their dreams. However, since it is healthier for these people to live in accord with their wishes and heartfelt need, we call them men, though they may have a vagina where one would expect to find a penis.

The situation for MTF transsexuals is equivalent, except that the surgery produces a much more satisfying result, both cosmetically and functionally. Nonetheless, many transsexuals elect to not have the surgery, most often because of risk, pain, or cost. Those who retain male sexual functioning may refer to themselves as *transgenderists*, since it is only their gender which is changed. Those that disown all male sexual function (surgery or no) tend to identify as *transsexuals*, since they change their sexual function, and therefore their sexual identity.

Gender Identity is how you see yourself socially: man, woman, or a combination of both. One may have a penis but prefer to relate socially as a woman, or one may have a vagina but prefer to relate as a man. One might prefer to be fluid, relating sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman. Or one might not identify as either one, relating androgynously.

Definitions/terms

People tend to categorize themselves. This identification can be helpful in finding like-minded others for friendship, but it can be hurtful if imposed on an individual by others, well-intentioned or not. In relating to transgender folk, it is best to avoid pushing an individual to choose a category for themselves. Some folks prefer to explore the fringes of category, and a push for identification works against personal exploration and fulfillment.