



Between and Beyond: common questions about transgender identity

The Basics

Gender

Our culture tends to limit its understanding of gender to man and woman. OBGLTC believes there are more than two genders. OBGLTC uses the word “transgender” in its title as an umbrella term to describe the following people: crossdressers/transvestites, genderqueer, intersexuals, third gender, transsexuals, and any self-identified trans people. But even this is not necessarily completely accurate. Read on!

Sex and Gender

People are assigned a biological sex (Male, Female, Intersex)
People define their own gender (Man, Woman, Transgender)

Gender Identification and Sexual Orientation

Gender identification expresses how you identify your gender. Sexual orientation refers to whom you are sexually, affectionally, or romantically attracted. A trans person can be of any sexual orientation. These are often lumped together, despite being different, because of societal expectations around sex and gender. Women and men are expected to look and act a certain way and to be attracted to the “opposite” sex. Bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people do not always meet this expectation.

Gender identity refers to an individual’s sense of being a man or a woman.

Gender expression describes how people manifest feeling masculine or feminine through their appearance, behavior, or dress.

“Transgender” as an umbrella term

One meaning for transgender is an umbrella term covering people who identify as crossdressers, genderqueer/third gender/transgender, intersex, and transsexual.

Crossdresser

Crossdressers are people who like to wear clothing of the “opposite gender”. Most are men and most are heterosexual. The word “transvestite” is out of favor. There is no one reason why people crossdress, and asking the individual is the best way to find out. In general, straight men do it because it gives them a thrill of pleasure and sometimes this is limited to undergarments only. Gay and bisexual men do it for entertainment, fun, or to earn money. “DrAG” comes from “DRessed As a Girl” and “DrAB” from DRessed As a Boy.” Women have far more latitude in dress, but there are still women who intentionally crossdress.



Genderqueer/Third Gender/Transgender

Our belief is that there are more than two genders. People who feel between and/or beyond two genders often identify as “genderqueer” or “third gender” or “transgender.” Sometimes the use of pronouns is confusing for people and it is best to ask the individual their personal preference.

Intersex

“Intersex” is the term used now to describe an individual who was known before as a hermaphrodite, a term not preferred by most and technically incorrect. When a child is born intersex, usually the doctor and parents panic and rush to “correct” the “problem” via surgery, known as the “concealment method.” It is often wrong and difficult to undo. The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) recommends assigning a gender without surgery and using hormonal, genetic, and radiological tests. Medical procedures should be used to sustain good physical health. The child can later decide what gender makes the most sense for hir. Some groups do not include intersex as part of the transgender umbrella.

Transsexual

This is the most commonly thought of identity by non-trans people. A person’s mind and body disagree about who they are. There are both Male-to-Female transsexuals (MtF) and Female-to-Male (FtM). In order to transition, surgery, hormones, and two years of psychiatric care while living as the gender one will be are required. Some people cannot transition due to cost or previous medical conditions, and often transitioning for FtM transsexuals is difficult. People who have transitioned often no longer consider themselves to be transsexual and identify as their “new” gender.

How to be More Understanding and Welcoming of Transgender People

10 BASIC ACTIONS

1. Respect a person’s identity and self-label.
2. Create single stall bathrooms.
3. Say the words: Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender.
4. Do not use “-ed” at the end of “transgender”.
5. Make no assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation.
6. Do not assume a trans person is all-knowing and/or wants to speak about trans issues.
7. Do not assume a trans person can speak only about their trans identity, nor that it is or is not an issue at all.
8. Hand out “Between and Beyond” wherever possible and refer people to our web resource.
9. Use the word “children” instead of “boys and girls”, “people” instead of “women and men”.
10. Create/include a “Transgender” option, as well as a box for “Other” on forms where gender is requested. Also, ask for “gender”, not “sex”.

*For Advanced Actions, Resources, and an expanded version of this handout,
go to www.uua.org/bgl*