

I think I might be transgender...

How do I find out more and meet others like me?

When you are first exploring your feelings about gender identity, it may be helpful to read books and/or magazines and newsletters written by trans people.

Excellent sources of information can be found on the internet. Numerous trans discussion groups are accessible online, along with a variety of personal stories, web logs, and information-based pages written by trans people on the World Wide Web.

If you are ready to talk with someone directly, you may wish to call a GLBT hotline that can assist you in talking about your feelings and direct you to local organizations for support and/or social activities.

If you wish to speak with a counselor or therapist, it may be wise to first call a hotline or check with a local or online organization to find the name of a trans-friendly therapist in your area.

RESOURCES AT MIT

Trans Issues Group

<http://web.mit.edu/trans>

trans-info@mit.edu

HELP LINES

Fenway Community Health Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and

Transgender Helpline

617-267-9001

Toll-free 888-340-4528

Peer Listening Line

617-267-2535

Toll-free 800-399-PEER

Anonymous and confidential
resource for information,
referrals, and support.

The Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

888-THE-GLNH
(888-843-4564)

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT)

Youth Support Line

800-850-8078

RESOURCES

Internet

www.tgforum.com

E-zine, forum, community

www.ftmi.org

FTM International

www.susans.org

Susan's Place Transgender Resources

www.transproud.com

For transgender youth

www.isna.org

Intersex Society of North America

www.transfamily.org

For parents, partners, children, & supportive others

www.pflag.org

Support group for families & friends of GLBT people

Books

Boenke, Mary, ed., *Trans Forming Families: Real Stories of Transgendered Loved Ones*. Walter Trook Publishing, 1999.

Bornstein, Kate, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. Routledge, 1994.

Boylan, Jennifer Finney, *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*. Doubleday/Broadway, 2003.

Brown, Mildred and Rounseley, Chloe Ann, *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism for Family, Friends, Coworkers and Helping Professionals*. Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Cameron, Loren, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*. Cleis Press, 1996.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. Basic Books, 2000.

Feinberg, Leslie, *Stone Butch Blues*. Firebrand Books, 1993.

Green, Jamison, *Becoming a Visible Man*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

Just Evelyn, *Mom, I Need To Be A Girl*. Walter Trook Publishing, 1998. (www.justevlyn.com)

Scholinski, Daphne, *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*. Riverhead Books, 1998.

What does it mean to be Transgender?

An Introduction...

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What does 'transgender' mean?

Broadly speaking, transgender people are individuals whose **gender expression** and/or **gender identity** differs from conventional expectations based on their physical **sex**. (Words listed in **boldface** are described on the next page.)

The word “**transgender**,” or “**trans**,” is an umbrella term which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including: **transsexuals**, **FTMs**, **MTFs**, **cross-dressers**, **drag queens**, **drag kings**, **two-spirits**, **gender queers**, and many more.

Is being transgender the same as being gay or lesbian?

Like all other people, transgender people can be gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, or anything in between. How each person defines and experiences their own sexuality is a highly individual process. Sexual orientation should not be assumed about anyone, transgender or otherwise!

What is the cause of transgenderism?

There are many theories about how gender identities are formed, including ideas based on biological processes as well as those based on upbringing and developmental psychology. But the truth is that no one really knows what causes us to feel the way we do about our genders.

What is known is that different types of cross-gender and gender different behaviors and identities have been observed cross-culturally and throughout history. In some cultures, people who transgress gender boundaries have been accepted without stigma as respected community members. The use of the term “transgender,” however, is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Whatever the cause, gender variant and intersex people can simply be thought of as a part of the vast complexity and diversity that is produced by nature.

SOME USEFUL TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

Sex

The common, but imperfect, sorting of people as “male” or “female.” Sorting people by sex typically begins at birth, when (usually) a baby is declared to be either a boy or a girl. The determination of sex as “male” or “female” is almost always based on physical anatomy—the genitals—of the child. For those people whose physical sex is not easily categorized as male or female, see “**intersex**,” below.

Intersex

At least one in every 2,000 children is born with a sexual anatomy that is difficult to label as male or female (see www.isna.org for more specific statistics). Still other children are born with genitals that look like most boys’ or girls’ genitals, but have internal reproductive organs usually associated with the other sex. In other words, nature doesn’t always produce individuals with strictly “male” or “female” bodies.

Many intersexed infants and children are subjected to numerous genital surgeries and hormone treatments in order to conform their bodies to the standard of either “male” or “female.” There is a growing movement to prevent such surgeries in children.

Gender

A collection of traits, behaviors, and characteristics that are culturally associated with maleness or femaleness. Traits considered masculine or feminine can differ from culture to culture or in different historical periods.

Examples of feminine and masculine cultural associations include: the association of “gentleness” or the color pink with the female sex, or the associations of “strength” or the color blue with the male sex.

Gender Identity

A person’s internal self-awareness of being either male or female, masculine or feminine, or something in-between.

Gender Expression

The external behaviors and characteristics (i.e., dress, mannerisms, social interactions, speech patterns, etc.) that a person displays in order to indicate their gender identity. Gender expression is how someone presents their gender to the world.

Everyone has a *gender identity* and a *gender expression*.

Most people experience their *gender identity* as conforming to their physical sex. That is, most people who are born with female bodies also have a female gender identity (i.e., an internal sense that “I am a woman”), and most people who are born with male bodies have a male gender identity (i.e., an internal sense that “I am a man”).

Some individuals experience their gender identity as not conforming to their physical sex (i.e., a person who is born female but does not have the internal sense that they are a woman, or a person who is born male who does not have the internal sense that they are a man). These individuals may be described as “transgender.”

Transsexual

A person whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned to at birth. Many transsexuals seek to alter their bodies through hormones and surgery.

FTM and MTF

Abbreviations for “female to male” and “male to female” transgender or transsexual persons, respectively.

Cross-dresser

A person who enjoys dressing in clothes of the opposite sex; this may or may not also include a degree of exploration into gender identity.

Drag Queens and Drag Kings

A person who performs femininity or masculinity theatrically.

Two-Spirit

A term that refers to transgender traditions of some Native American cultures; such traditions varied among groups.

Gender Queer

A gender-variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.