

Transsexuals are generally thought to have a condition called gender dysphoria (also called Gender Identity Disorder). Those who are born physically male but are emotionally and psychologically female are called Male to Female or MTF's. Those who are born female but are emotionally and psychologically male are called Female to Male or FTM's. There is some disagreement as to whether gender dysphoria is a physical condition, a psychological condition, or both. Some scientists believe that gender dysphoria occurs when the developing fetus is in the womb and a chemical imbalance occurs during their development that affects sexual difference.

The primary way transsexuals differ from other TG people is that in almost all cases, they seek to modify their bodies through hormones, SRS (Sexual Reassignment Surgery) or both. This process (which may take several months or many years) is called Transition, where transsexuals will make major life changes in order to bring their physical appearance in line with their gender identity. Some of those changes include changing their name and gender designation on legal documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and social security records. However it is achieved, the ultimate goal of transition is to enable the transsexual to live completely as the gender with which they identify.

It is extremely important to remember that male to female transsexuals are women, just as female to male transsexuals are men and should be referred to and treated as such.

### Intersexed (IS)

Intersexed people were born exhibiting some combination of both male and female genitalia (usually determined by the doctor to be either a clitoris that is "too large" or a penis that is "too small.") As one can imagine, such a diagnosis is entirely subjective. At birth, the attending physician or parents or both "choose" which gender to raise the child,

necessitating surgery and/or hormonal treatment that must be continued throughout the child's life. Many intersexed people, now adults, are advocating for an end to the way intersexed children are seen as "damaged goods" needing to be fixed.

### Crossdressers (CD or TV)

Crossdressers (previously known as transvestites) identify as, and are completely comfortable with, their physical gender at birth, but will occasionally dress and take on the mannerisms of the opposite gender. Of course, crossdressing is more onerous on men, since our culture accepts the idea of a woman wearing pants, but not a man wearing a skirt. Most crossdressers are heterosexual men. The term transvestite is now considered offensive and should not be used because it is associated with negative images of sexual fetishism.

### Drag Performers

Drag Performers include people like RuPaul, or Elvis Herselvis (a well known lesbian Elvis impersonator). Drag performers are precisely that - performers. They dress and act like the "opposite" sex for the entertainment of an audience. For them, drag is a job - not an identity. Some are gay - some are not. Some identify as transgendered - most do not. It is important to be aware of the fact that some people, including many drag performers themselves, do not consider drag performers to be members of the transgendered community.

### Other TG People

Gender blenders, bi-gendered, genderqueer, androgynes and others - Not all transgendered people fit neatly into the above categories. For some, such characterizations of gender and gender identity are more constraining than liberating. Gender blenders may or may not identify as one or the other in a binary gender system (i.e. either/or, male/female) and many times will assume a mixture of male and female dress and characteristics, combining elements of both.

### *Gender Identity vs Sexual Orientation*

There is a great deal of unnecessary confusion about this. To put it simply, Gender Identity is who you are, while Sexual Orientation refers to whom you love or have sex with. They are two completely separate concepts. A person who is TG may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight.

### *How Do I Deal With a TG Person?*

It is extremely important to refer to a TG person by the pronoun appropriate to their presented gender. In other words, if someone identifies as female, then refer to them as she; if they identify as male, refer to them as he. If you are not sure, ASK them what they want. Once you know, be as consistent as possible. It's okay if you forget or slip up once in a while. Nevertheless, it is very important to make the effort.

While public discussion about transgenderism and transsexuality is a relatively recent phenomenon, most TG people, particularly transsexuals have dealt with their gender issues for many years - many times at great personal and professional cost. It is important to trust that their decision to present themselves in a gender different from their birth gender is not one made lightly or without due consideration.

Do NOT "out" someone (tell others that they are TG) without his or her permission. Also, do not assume that everyone knows. Some TG people "pass" very well and the only way someone would know would be if they were told. The decision to tell someone about their gender issues should be left to the TG person themselves.

### *The Issues TG People Face*

- Of the fifty states, only Minnesota, Rhode Island, New Mexico, and California explicitly protect TG people from job and housing discrimination.
- Even when legal protections for gay men and

lesbians exist, they do generally not cover TG people because very few communities explicitly state "gender identity" or "gender expression" in their protection ordinances.

- Violence against TG people can be particularly brutal. In 1997, in Washington D.C a pre-operative transsexual woman named Tyra Hunter was fatally injured in an auto accident. Paramedics at first refused to treat her after they discovered she had male genitalia, laughing and mocking her as she lay dying. In December 1993, an FTM named Brandon Teena was raped by two men who discovered he was born female. Brandon reported the rape to the local sheriff who refused to investigate, dismissing him with the derisive comment "What are you, anyway?" Later, the same two men whom the sheriff refused to arrest for the rape murdered Brandon and two of his friends. In October 2002 in the San Francisco Bay Area, a Newark youth named Gwen Araujo was brutally murdered at a party by 4 male friends after they found out she was born male. Her body was buried over a hundred miles away in the foothills of the Sierras. For more information about the ultimate cost of anti-TG violence, please visit the "Remembering Our Dead" project at [www.gender.org/remember](http://www.gender.org/remember), an online memorial to those TG men and women whose lives have been brutally cut short.
- Most insurance companies, employee health plans, and HMOs specifically exempt coverage for sex reassignment surgery, hormones, counseling, and electrolysis. This decision, according to the insurance companies, is based on their designation of Sexual Reassignment Surgery or SRS as purely cosmetic - like a chin tuck or an eyelid lift - and therefore, not medically necessary. Today, this decision stands in spite of the fact that the medical necessity of SRS for transsexuals is well documented by the leading medical professionals in the field. Thus, most transsexuals must cover the entire expense of hormone treatment and SRS out of their own pocket (the cost of surgery can run anywhere from \$3,500 to well over \$100,000, depending upon the procedure).

- TG youth living on the streets are more likely than other youth to engage in prostitution or consensual sex with a variety of partners without using safe sex techniques.
  - TG people, unable to access or afford appropriate treatment for their transition, often must bypass traditional medical care and inject "black-market" hormones or steroids obtained off the street or across the border in Mexico, putting them significantly at-risk for severe health problems.
  - TG people with children are often denied custodial or visitation rights in divorce settlements.
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### **Recommended Reading**

- True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism - For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals. Mildred L. Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley (1996). Jossey-Bass Publishing, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104-1342.
  - Transgender Care: Recommended Guidelines. Practical Information and Personal Accounts. Gianna E. Israel and Donald E. Tarve! II. M.D (1997). Temple University Press. Temple University Press. University Services 083-42. (215) 204-8787.
  - Physician's Guide to Transgendered Medicine Dr. Sheila Kirk. MD - (1996). Together Lifeworks. PO Box 93, Watertown MA. 02272- 0093
  - Transsexual Workers: An Employer's Guide. Janis Walworth, MS - (1998). Center for Gender Sanity, PO Box 453427. Westchester, CA 90045
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### **For Additional Information**

Contact:  
TGSF - TransGender San Francisco  
P.O. Box 426486 - San Francisco, CA 94142-6486  
Hotline: (415) 564-3246 Website: [www.tgsf.org](http://www.tgsf.org)

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# *Transgender?*

## *The Concept of Gender*

Most people think gender is fixed and immutable and that everyone is either a man or a woman, male or female. Yet, gender and gender identity are far more complex than merely the description of a person's genitalia. Gender identity is determined by many factors, the most important of which is considered by some to be psychological, even spiritual, rather than physical. As transgendered people "come out of the closet" of rigid gender roles and identities, both the general public and professionals within the health care and social service professions find themselves lacking even a basic understanding of transgenderism, transsexuality and gender identity.

## *The Transgender Community*

The term Transgender (or TG) refers to people whose appearance and behavior do not conform to the cultural "norm" for the gender into which they were born. In other words, TG people, to varying degrees, "transgress" cultural norms as to what a man or a woman "should be."

Of course, not all people who transgress cultural norms in regards to gender are, or should be, considered TG as we are discussing here. In that case, that would include a woman who works as a pipe fitter or a male nurse. However, when transgender is used in the case of a "sexual minority", we are generally referring to one of the following five categories:

### **Transsexuals (TS)**

Transsexuals were born as one gender but identify psychologically and emotionally as the other.