



Frequently Asked Questions About Transgender People

Transgender people come from every region of the United States and around the world, from every racial and ethnic background, and from every faith community. Transgender people are your classmates, your coworkers, your neighbors, and your friends. With approximately 1.4 million transgender adults in the United States—and millions more around the world—chances are that you've met a transgender person, even if you don't know it.

What does it mean to be transgender?

Transgender people are people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be at birth. "Trans" is often used as shorthand for transgender.

When we're born, a doctor usually says that we're male or female based on what our bodies look like. Most people who were labeled male at birth turn out to actually identify as men, and most people who were labeled female at birth grow up to be women. But some people's gender identity — their innate knowledge of who they are — is different from what was initially expected when they were born. Most of these people describe themselves as **transgender**.

Being transgender

means different things to different people. Like a lot of other aspects of who people are, like race or religion, there's no one way to be transgender, and no one way for transgender people to look or feel about themselves. The best way to understand what being transgender is like is to talk with transgender people and listen to their stories.

A **transgender woman** lives as a woman today, but was thought to be male when she was born. A **transgender man** lives as a man today, but was thought to be female when he was born. Some transgender people identify as neither male nor female, or as a combination of male and female. There are a variety of terms that people who aren't entirely male or entirely female use to describe their gender identity, like **non-binary or genderqueer**.

Everyone—transgender or not—has a gender identity. Most people never think about what their gender identity is because it matches their sex at birth.

How does someone know that they are transgender?

People can realize that they're transgender at any age. Some people can trace their awareness back to their earlier memories — they just knew. Others may need more time to realize that they are transgender. Some people may spend years feeling like they don't fit in without really understanding why, or may try to avoid thinking or talking about their gender out of fear, shame, or confusion. Trying to repress or change one's gender identity doesn't work; in fact, it can be very painful and damaging to one's emotional and mental health. As transgender people become more visible in the media and in community life across the country, more transgender people are able to name and understand their own experiences and may feel safer and more comfortable sharing it with others.

For many transgender people, recognizing who they are and deciding to start gender transition can take a lot of reflection. Transgender people risk social stigma, discrimination, and harassment when they tell other people who they really are. Parents, friends, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors may be

accepting—but they also might not be, and many transgender people fear that they will not be accepted by their loved ones and others in their life. Despite those risks, being open about one’s gender identity, and living a life that feels truly authentic, can be a life-affirming and even life-saving decision.

What's the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity?

Gender identity and sexual orientation are two different things. Gender identity refers to your internal knowledge of your own gender—for example, your knowledge that you’re a man, a woman, or another gender. Sexual orientation has to do with whom you’re attracted to. Like non-transgender people, transgender people can have any sexual orientation. For example, a transgender man (someone who lives as a man today) may be primarily attracted to other men (and identify as a gay man), may be primarily attracted to women (and identify as a straight man), or have any other sexual orientation.

What's the difference between being transgender and being intersex?

People sometimes confuse being transgender and being intersex. Intersex people have reproductive anatomy or genes that don’t fit typical definitions of male or female, which is often discovered at birth. Being transgender, meanwhile, has to do with your internal knowledge of your gender identity. A transgender person is usually born with a body and genes that match a typical male or female, but they know their gender identity to be different.

Some people think that determining who is male or female at birth is a simple matter of checking the baby’s external anatomy, but there’s actually a lot more to it. Every year, an estimated one in 2,000 babies are born with a set of characteristics that can’t easily be classified as "male" or "female." People whose bodies fall in the vast continuum between "male" and "female" are often known as **intersex** people. There are many different types of intersex conditions. For example, some people are born with XY chromosomes but have female genitals and secondary sex characteristics. Others might have XX chromosomes but no uterus, or might have external anatomy that doesn’t appear clearly male or female. To learn more about what it’s like to be intersex, check out [this video](#) or [click here](#).

While it’s possible to be both transgender and intersex, most transgender people aren’t intersex, and most intersex people aren’t transgender. For example, many intersex people with XY (typically male) chromosomes but typically female anatomy are declared female at birth, are raised as girls, and identify as girls; in fact, many of these girls and their families never even become aware that their chromosomes are different than expected until much later in life. However, some intersex people come to realize that the gender that they were raised as doesn’t fit their internal sense of who they are, and may make changes to their appearance or social role similar to what many transgender people undergo to start living as the gender that better matches who they are.

Thought exercise: your own gender

It can be difficult for people who are not transgender to imagine what being transgender feels like. Imagine what it would be like if everyone told you that the gender that you’ve always known yourself to be was wrong. What would you feel like if you woke up one day with a body that’s associated with a different gender? What would you do if everyone else—your doctors, your friends, your family—believed you’re a man and expected you to act like a man when you’re actually a woman, or believed you’re a woman even though you’ve always known you’re a man?

What is the difference between being transgender and being gender non-conforming?

Being gender non-conforming means not conforming to gender stereotypes. For example, someone's clothes, hairstyle, speech patterns, or hobbies might be considered more "feminine" or "masculine" than what's stereotypically associated with their gender.

Gender non-conforming people may or may not be transgender. For example, some women who were raised and identify as women present themselves in ways that might be considered masculine, like by having short hair or wearing stereotypically masculine clothes. The term "tomboy" refers to girls who are gender non-conforming, which often means they play rough sports, hang out with boys, and dress in more masculine clothing.

Similarly, transgender people may be gender non-conforming, or they might conform to gender stereotypes for the gender they live and identify as.

What does it mean to have a gender that's not male or female?

For more information

about what it's like to have a gender other than male or female or how you can support the non-binary people in your life, read NCTE's guide "[Understanding Non-Binary People](#)".

Most transgender people are men or women. But some people don't neatly fit into the categories of "man" or "woman" or "male" or "female." For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people's gender fluctuates over time.

People whose gender is not male or female may use many different terms to describe themselves. One term that some people use is **non-binary**, which is used because the gender binary refers to the two categories of male and female. Another term that people use is **genderqueer**. If you're not sure what term someone uses to describe their gender, you should ask them politely.

It's important to remember that if someone is transgender, it does not necessarily mean that they have a "third gender." Most transgender people do have a gender identity that is either male or female, and they should be treated like any other man or woman.

Why don't transgender people get counseling to accept the gender they were assigned at birth?

Counseling aimed at changing someone's gender identity, sometimes known as conversion therapy, doesn't work and can be extremely harmful. The belief that someone's gender identity can be changed through therapy runs counter to the overwhelming consensus in the medical community. Telling someone that a core part of who they are is wrong or delusional and forcing them to change it is dangerous, sometimes leading to lasting depression, substance abuse, self-hatred and even suicide. Because of this, a growing number of states have made it illegal for licensed therapists to try to change a young person's gender identity (laws apply to those under 18). However, many transgender people find it helpful to get counseling to help them decide when to tell the world they are transgender and deal with the repercussions of stigma and discrimination that comes afterward.

What does “gender transition” mean?

Transitioning is the time period during which a person begins to live according to their gender identity, rather than the gender they were thought to be at birth. While not all transgender people transition, a great many do at some point in their lives. Gender transition looks different for every person. Possible steps in a gender transition may or may not include changing your clothing, appearance, name, or the pronoun people use to refer to you (like “she,” “he,” or “they”). Some people are able to change their identification documents, like their driver’s license or passport, to reflect their gender. And some people undergo hormone therapy or other medical procedures to change their physical characteristics and make their body better reflect the gender they know themselves to be.

Transitioning can help

many transgender people lead healthy, fulfilling lives. No specific set of steps is necessary to “complete” a transition—it’s a matter of what is right for each person. All transgender people are entitled to the same dignity and respect, regardless of which legal or medical steps they have taken.

What are some of the official records transgender people may change when they're transitioning?

Some transgender people make or want to make legal changes as part of their transition, like by changing their name or updating the gender marker on their identity documents.

Not all transgender people need or want to change their identity documents, but for many, it's a critical step in their transition. For many transgender people, not having identity documents like driver's licenses or passports that match their gender means that they might not be able to do things that require an ID, like getting a job, enrolling in school, opening a bank account, or traveling. Some transgender people who use an ID that doesn't match their gender or their presentation face harassment, humiliation, and even violence.

Transgender people may need to change a number of documents in order to live according to their gender identity, such as their:

- Driver’s license
- Social Security card
- Passport
- Bank accounts and records
- Credit cards
- Paychecks and other job-related documents
- Leases
- Medical records
- Birth certificate
- Academic records

To find out

the requirements for updating a driver’s license or birth certificate in your state or territory, as well as get information on changing federal IDs and records, visit NCTE’s [ID Documents Center](#).

It's important to know that not all transgender people be able to make the changes they need to their IDs and other official documents. Unfortunately, these changes are often expensive, burdensome, and complicated, putting them out of reach for many people. For example, some states still require proof of surgery or a court order to change a gender marker. In many states, the process can be time-consuming and involve many steps, or cost hundreds of dollars. As a result, only one-fifth (21%) of transgender people who have transitioned have been able to update all of their IDs.

NCTE works to modernize all of these outdated requirements. States are increasingly adopting more accessible and straightforward policies for changing one's name and gender marker.

What medical treatments do some transgender people seek when transitioning?

Some, but not all, transgender people undergo medical treatments to make their bodies more congruent with their gender identity and help them live healthier lives.

While transition-related care is critical and even life-saving for many transgender people, not everyone needs medical care to transition or live a fulfilling life.

Different transgender people may need different types of transition-related care. People should make decisions about their care based on their individual needs. Medical procedures can include:

- hair growth or removal treatments
- hormone therapy
- various surgeries to make one's face, chest, and anatomy more in line with one's gender identity

While not everyone needs transition-related medical treatments, there is an overwhelming consensus in the medical community that they are medically necessary for many transgender people and should be covered by private and public insurance. Every major medical organization in the United States has affirmed that transition-related medical care is safe and effective, and that everyone who needs it should be able to access it. Unfortunately, this critical care is often denied by insurance companies, often in spite of state and federal laws.

What is gender dysphoria?

For some transgender people, the difference between the gender they are thought to be at birth and the gender they know themselves to be can lead to serious emotional distress that affects their health and everyday lives if not addressed. Gender dysphoria is the medical diagnosis for someone who experiences this distress.

Not all transgender people have gender dysphoria. On its own, being transgender is not considered a medical condition. Many transgender people do not experience serious anxiety or stress associated with the difference between their gender identity and their gender of birth, and so may not have gender dysphoria.

Gender dysphoria can often be relieved by expressing one's gender in a way that the person is comfortable with. That can include dressing and grooming in a way that reflects who one knows they are, using a different name or pronoun, and, for some, taking medical steps to physically change their body. All major medical organizations in the United States recognize that living according to one's gender identity is an effective, safe and medically necessary treatment for many people who have gender dysphoria.

It's important to remember that while being transgender is not in itself an illness, many transgender people need to deal with physical and mental health problems because of widespread discrimination and stigma. Many transgender people live in a society that tells them that their deeply held identity is wrong or deviant. Some transgender people have lost their families, their jobs, their homes, and their

support, and some experience harassment and even violence. Transgender children may experience rejection or even emotional or physical abuse at home, at school, or in their communities.

These kinds of experiences can be challenging for anyone, and for some people, it can lead to anxiety disorders, depression, and other mental health conditions. But these conditions are not *caused* by having a transgender identity: they're a result of the intolerance many transgender people have to deal with. Many transgender people – especially transgender people who are accepted and valued in their communities – are able to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

Why is transgender equality important?

Transgender people should be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else and be able to live, and be respected, according to their gender identity. But transgender people often face serious discrimination and mistreatment at work, school, and in their families and communities.

For example, transgender people are more likely to:

- Be fired or denied a job
- Face harassment and bullying at school
- Become homeless or live in extreme poverty
- Be evicted or denied housing or access to a shelter
- Be denied access to critical medical care
- Be incarcerated or targeted by law enforcement
- Face abuse and violence

For statistics about these types of discrimination, visit the [National Transgender Discrimination Survey](#) page.

Living without fear of discrimination and violence and being supported and affirmed in being who they are is critical for allowing transgender people to live healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives. In recent years, laws, policies and attitudes around the country have changed significantly, allowing more transgender people than ever to live fuller, safer, and healthier lives.

The transgender movement is part of a long tradition of social justice movements of people working together to claim their civil rights and better opportunities in this country. These challenges are connected. Discrimination that transgender people of color face is compounded by racism, and lower-income transgender people face economic challenges and classism. NCTE believes that progress towards transgender equality requires a social justice approach that fights all forms of discrimination.

Questionable Questions About Transgender Identity

Introduction

Many people—particularly those who have never met a transgender person—are naturally curious about what it’s like to be transgender. There may be unfamiliar terms, conflicting information, and uncertainty around what is and isn’t OK to ask.

Asking transgender people questions about their experiences can be a great way to learn more about what it means to be transgender. Some transgender people are open to answering just about anything, while others may not want to share intimate details about their lives, especially outside of personal conversations with close friends.



This guide is intended to help you decide whether or not a particular question is appropriate to ask a transgender person in your life. It also has answers to specific questions you may have, along with thoughts on why transgender people may be uncomfortable if you ask them those questions directly.

Let’s dive in!

“Should I Ask This Question?”

Because so many of us naturally learn by asking questions, we don’t always pause to consider whether or not a person wants to be asked a particular question. Asking personal and intimate questions of transgender people can make them feel like they’re being put on the spot, pressured to justify themselves, having their privacy invaded, or worse.

Here are a few things to think about before asking questions:

Why do I want to know this information?

Curiosity is important, and a legitimate reason to have questions. However, if you’re only asking because you’re curious, it may be a good idea to turn to Google or other resources on this very website, such as our [Video Introduction to Transgender People](#), our [Transgender Basics](#), and our [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#) for information.

Before you ask a transgender person a question, pause and think whether you’re treating them differently—and asking more personal or inappropriate questions—simply because they’re transgender.

On the other hand, sometimes we need information to respectfully interact with people. Names and pronouns are a great example of this type of information—knowing someone’s name and the pronouns they use (for example, she/her/hers, he/him/his, or they/their/theirs) allows you to call them what they ask to be called, and treat them with respect.

Would I feel comfortable if someone asked these questions of me?

Take a moment to put yourself in the shoes of the person being asked a question. For example, what surgeries they have or haven’t undergone or what their genitals look like can be very personal. How would you feel if someone asked to talk about your genitals, or share details about personal and intimate surgeries you’ve undergone? Even if you would be comfortable sharing that information, not everyone will feel the same way.

Would I ask this question of a non-transgender person in a similar situation?

If you just met someone at a coffee shop, you probably wouldn’t ask questions about what their genitals look like, what surgeries they have or haven’t undergone, or about intimate details of their childhood. Before you ask a transgender person similar questions, pause and think whether you’re treating them differently—and asking more personal or inappropriate questions—simply because they’re transgender.

Specific Questions

- Have you had “The Surgery?”
- What surgeries have you had?
- Are you planning to have surgery?
- What did your surgery cost?

Answering the Question:

First of all, there isn’t one transition-related surgery that transgender people may have. In fact, there are many different surgeries that transgender people may undergo. These include surgeries that:

- Change facial features (such as brow lifts and rhinoplasties)
- Reconstruct the chest, sometimes known as “top surgery” (such as mastectomies and augmentation mammoplasties)
- Remove internal sex organs (like a uterus or ovaries)
- Reconstruct external genitalia (surgically constructing a penis or a vagina)
- Make one’s voice more typically feminine

Transgender people can have all, some or none of these surgeries. Some people don’t need certain surgeries, or any surgeries, some can’t afford them, and some can’t have them because of other medical conditions.

Like with any other medical treatment, different surgeries costs different amounts. The [Affordable Care Act makes it illegal for insurance companies to automatically deny coverage for transition-related care](#), including surgeries, and more and more private insurance companies are covering transition-related costs. But many people still haven’t been able to get their insurance companies to cover the cost, and may not be able to afford these procedures on their own.

It’s important to remember that no surgeries “turn” someone into a man or a woman, and transgender people’s genders are no less real or worthy of respect if they haven’t had particular surgeries or other medical treatments.



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Why Pause Before Asking:

Like anyone else, transgender people may naturally feel uncomfortable sharing personal details about their medical history, so it's important to consider whether you really need this information before asking about it. And, when you ask about surgery, you are basically asking a person to describe their genitals to you, something typically out of bounds. You also wouldn't ask just anyone to disclose their personal medical history. (Again, simply being curious is not the same as needing to know!) Different surgeries can be interesting, so if you want more information you can look at the descriptions and videos of the many surgeries out there.

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- What does hormone therapy do?
 - How long have you been on hormones?
 - Are you planning to go on hormones?
 - What hormones do you take?

Answering the Question:

Many transgender people take hormones to bring their bodies more in line with their gender identity. Some transgender people take hormones that make their bodies more typically masculine—usually testosterone. Some take hormones that make their bodies more typically feminine, usually a combination of hormones that block testosterone and increase estrogen. Hormones have a variety of effects, many of which are similar to the effects teenagers experience during puberty.

For example, the effects of taking masculinizing hormones (testosterone) can include:

- Thicker facial and body hair
- A deeper voice
- Increased muscles
- Changes in fat distribution to a more masculine body type

The effects of taking feminizing hormones (estrogen) can include:

- Slower and more sparse facial and body hair growth
- Softer skin
- Breast growth
- Decreased muscles and body strength

Some of these changes are reversible and change back if someone stops taking hormones, and some are not reversible.

There are some things that hormones don't change: for example, taking estrogen or testosterone won't make someone taller or shorter. But hormones do affect many characteristics that people typically rely on when deciding who looks like a man or a woman: for example, a transgender man on hormone therapy might grow a beard and chest hair, and may live his life being seen by everyone as a man regardless of whether he has had any surgeries.

The effects of hormones vary for each person, just like how non-transgender people experience different physical changes while going through puberty. For example, some non-transgender boys grow facial hair early on, and their facial hair might be thicker or thinner depending on their genetics. Much the same way, transgender men who take testosterone might grow thick or sparse facial hair and might grow it quickly or slowly, depending on their genetics and other physical characteristics.

Someone's internal sense of gender is a core part of that person's identity that often forms at an early age. This is true whether or not that person is transgender. Likewise, transgender people exist around the world, in every society and culture.

Why Pause Before Asking: Like with surgeries, the hormones a transgender person does (or doesn't) take can be personal and private.

■ What are puberty blockers?

Answering the Question:

Some transgender people who haven't yet completed puberty may be prescribed puberty blockers, which delay physical effects related to puberty. Unlike hormone therapy, the effects of puberty blockers are reversible: if someone starts puberty blockers, the effects of puberty will kick in if they stop taking them.

Puberty can have many lasting effects on the body. For example, during puberty, testosterone can

cause teenagers to develop broader shoulders, a deeper voice, and more typically masculine facial features (like a prominent brow line and facial hair). Estrogen can cause a person to develop breasts and round hips. For transgender teenagers, these changes can be difficult and even traumatic. Some of these changes—such as the broadening of shoulders caused by testosterone—are permanent, while others can only be changed through a series of often expensive surgeries. For that reason, many doctors prescribe puberty blockers (also called inhibitors) for transgender young people to delay the effects of puberty. They are usually prescribed only after a long decision-making process that involves the transgender youth, the parents, and a therapist or a medical team.

Outside of transgender health, puberty blockers have been used for many years to treat young people with early onset puberty. They are known to be safe and effective.

■ Are children too young to know their gender?

Answering the Question:

For people who aren't transgender, the idea of children being transgender can be difficult to understand. How can someone that young, sometimes as young as two or three, really know?

While no one is sure what causes someone to be transgender, there is [widespread medical consensus](#) that our internal sense of gender is a core part of everyone's identity that can and does form at a young age for most people. Allowing a transgender child to express their true gender is not something taken lightly by parents, and is often done in conversation with doctors or therapists.

To put it more simply? No, children are not too young to know their true gender. Many children—whether they're transgender or not—instinctively know their gender identity.

Why Pause Before Asking:

Asking a parent about how they raise their child can feel invasive or confrontational for the parent. Similarly, asking someone else's child about their identity or deeply held sense of self can be confusing or uncomfortable for the child.



■ Are transgender people confused or going through a phase?

Answering the Question:

Someone's internal sense of gender is a core part of that person's identity that often forms at an early age. This is true whether or not that person is transgender. Likewise, transgender people exist around the world, in every society and culture. From this we know that being transgender is not simply confusion or a phase, but a deeply held part of a person's identity.

Why Pause Before Asking:

The experience and emotions of transitioning are personal and often private. In addition, this type of question can unintentionally sound like the person asking it is skeptical of the transgender person's true identity, or questioning who they are.

■ What was your birth name?

■ Can I see photos of you from before you transitioned?

Why Pause Before Asking:

Many transgender people are uncomfortable sharing personal details of their life from before they transitioned, including the name they were given at birth and photos or videos of what they looked like. This hesitation may come from memories of past harassment, hurtful comments, or physical violence. It may also come from feeling like they want to move away from those memories, and move forward as their true selves.

Some transgender people also feel that 'before' photos can detract from who they are today, and that seeing them may cause others to see them as less of their true gender. Similarly, some transgender people feel that these types of questions may suggest that they are somehow less than non-transgender people, or that the person asking the question is trying to dismiss or deny their true gender.

■ What bathrooms to trans people use?

■ What bathroom do you use?

Answering the Question:

Transgender people generally use the bathroom that matches the gender they live as. Transgender men--people who were thought to be female at birth, but know themselves to be male--generally use the men's room. Transgender women--people who were thought to be male at birth, but know themselves to be female--generally use the women's room. There's a good chance you've already used the same restroom as a transgender person without even realizing it.

Transgender people use the bathroom for the same reason as anyone else: to do their business and move on with their day.

Some trans people prefer to use single-user restrooms or gender-neutral restrooms when available,

as bathrooms can feel unsafe or uncomfortable for many transgender people. Likewise, sometimes transgender people need to make a case-by-case decision about their bathroom use based on safety or privacy.

For people who do not identify as male or female (who are sometimes referred to as “non-binary people”) using either the women’s and the men’s room might feel unsafe, because others may verbally harass them or even physically attack them. Non-binary people should be permitted to use the restroom that they believe they will be safest in. For more information on non-binary people, please visit this [page on non-binary identity](#).

Why Pause Before Asking:

Transgender people use the bathroom for the same reason as anyone else: to do their business and move on with their day. Questioning transgender people about bathrooms can make them feel uncomfortable or like they have to justify their identity and true self.

■ Do transgender people regret transitioning or change their minds?

■ Do you regret transitioning?

Answering the Question:

People do not transition on a whim, and almost all transgender people have thought deeply about their gender for a long time before transitioning. As such, it is extremely rare for transgender people to change their minds or regret transition. Those who do so are almost exclusively upset not at their transition, but about rejection by family, friends, and sometimes the inability to get a job, as discrimination against transgender people is still very widespread.

Why Pause Before Asking:

The experience and emotions of transitioning are personal and often private. In addition, this type of question can unintentionally sound like the person asking it is skeptical of the transgender person’s true identity.



■ How can you tell if someone is transgender?

■ Are you transgender?

Answering the Question:

The only way to tell for sure if someone is transgender is by having a conversation with them and them telling you. You usually cannot tell if someone is transgender from their appearance, their voice, or anything about their body. Many non-transgender people have physical features that might not conform to stereotypes about how men and women look: for example, some non-transgender women are taller and have broad shoulders, and some non-transgender men have a slight build and higher pitched voices. And many transgender people have an appearance that conforms to common stereotypes about how men and women look, and few people would guess that they're transgender unless they say so. According to transgender people who responded to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, about 21% say that no one ever knows they are transgender, and about 22% say that most or all of the time other people can tell (with the rest saying sometimes or occasionally).

Why Pause Before Asking:

Speculating about what someone's body parts looks like or examining ways they conform or don't conform to sex stereotypes can feel uncomfortable or intrusive to many people. For some people, asking if someone is transgender sounds like a comment about their appearance or bodily characteristics, which they may consider offensive regardless of whether they are transgender.

■ What's the difference between a transgender woman and a drag queen?

Answering the Question:

A transgender woman is someone who was born a boy, but deeply understands herself to be a woman. Transgender women may dress in ways that appear more feminine, but, like many non-transgender women, may not. Some transgender women love dresses and makeup, while others don't. Being transgender is not performance or acting as a character, it is a deeply held part of someone's identity.

“Drag” is a style of performance that exaggerates feminine or masculine characteristics as part of a performance or simply for fun. Someone's appearance will ‘in drag’ is a costume used to perform a character, rather than an expression of their true gender. Historically, drag has often been performed by men, often but not always gay men, who are not transgender. These men may call themselves drag queens.

Because of the challenges that transgender people—particularly transgender women—face when seeking employment, it is not uncommon to see transgender women performing in drag. Some transgender women who perform in drag have begun referring to themselves as showgirls, in part to distinguish themselves from non-transgender men who may also perform in drag. Calling a transgender woman a drag queen may be hurtful or insulting because it implies she is not actually a woman, and is simply playing a part or pretending to be a woman.

- Why do there seem to be more transgender people now?
- Is being transgender a new thing?

Answering the Question:

The experience of those whose deeply held sense of their gender does not match their body at birth has been documented for thousands of years across many cultures.

As transgender people in the United States gain visibility and acceptance, and as more transgender people are able to connect with each other and build strong communities—both online off—more and more transgender people feel safe being open about who they are. Until recently, many transgender people lived in shame and secrecy, didn't have the words to express how they felt, or didn't think that living according to their authentic gender was a real option. But that doesn't mean that there were fewer transgender people out there. Being transgender is not new, is not a fad, and is not going away.

- With whom do transgender people have sex?
- How do you have sex?

Answering the Question:

There is no one way transgender people have sex, just as there is no one way people who aren't transgender have sex. Just like with anyone else, no two transgender people will enjoy exactly the same thing, use their bodies in exactly the same way during sex, or have the exact same sexual desires. Likewise, some transgender people are comfortable having sex prior to transitioning, while some are not.

Transgender people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, straight, and every other sexual orientation.

Some people find language such as 'straight' or 'gay' to be confusing when discussing transgender people. It's helpful to remember that transgender men are men, and transgender women are women. So a gay transgender man is a man who is primarily attracted to other men, and was thought to be female when he was born. A straight transgender woman is a woman who is primarily attracted to men, and was thought to be male when she was born.

Why Pause Before Asking:

Take a moment to review the 'should I ask this question?' section of this guide. Are you personally hoping to have sex with this transgender person? And, does it seem like they are interested in you? If not, who they have sex with, or how they have sex, is probably none of your business.

- Are trans men just really masculine lesbians/trans women really feminine gay guys?
- Are you sure you're not just gay?

Answering the Question:

Transgender men are men, not masculine women. They might be straight and attracted to women, but they might not be. And transgender women are women, not feminine men, and they might or might not

be attracted to men. It's important to remember that transgender people can be gay (like transgender women who are attracted to other women, and transgender men who are attracted to other men), straight, or have any other sexual orientation.

Why Pause Before Asking:

Many transgender people are upset with this question because it implies that their “real” gender is the gender they were thought to be when they were born. It also makes assumptions about who they're attracted to.

■ My Question Wasn't Answered!

If you have a question about transgender people or transgender identity that wasn't answered on this page, first check out our pages [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#), [Understanding Transgender People: The Basics](#), and [Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally](#).

If you are still stumped, email NCTE's Community Storytelling Advocate, Rebecca Kling, at rkling@transequality.org and we may choose to include your question in a future update of this page.

