

What is Transgender? This is a broader term to include people whose appearance and behavior do not conform to the gender which they were born. Transgendered people may or may not take steps to live as a different gender.

Transsexual - This term refers to people who are undergoing or have undergone gender transition. This is when a person is born one gender but identifies (psychologically and emotionally) as the other gender. Transsexuals (TS) frequently report they feel trapped in the wrong body. They suffer from gender dysphoria.

- › Transsexualism is not about sex, sexual behavior or sexual orientation. It's about gender or gender identity.
- › Transsexualism is something a person is born with. It is not contagious.

Gender Dysphoria - This refers to the emotional anguish, dissatisfaction, and discomfort that transsexuals experience about their gender.

- › In a majority of cases, gender dysphoria is recognized by the time the person begins grade school.
- › Young transsexuals find that their natural behaviors are not accepted by those around them. This means they must suppress their natural tendencies and try hard to conform and fit in.
- › Eventually the conflict reaches a point that it interferes with daily living.

What causes this? This is not known for sure.

- › Some theorists describe transsexuality as a birth defect. A disturbed interaction between the brain and sex hormones of the developing fetus.
- › Some theorists believe that the mother's physical and mental health during pregnancy could effect the unborn child's gender identity.

History of Transexuality

Transgendered people have always existed throughout history. Incidents are recorded in Greek and Roman history.

In 1919 Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Institute for Sexology in Berlin, Germany. This is the first clinic to serve transgender people on a regular basis.

In 1923 the term transsexual was introduced.

The first attempt of sex reassignment was in Germany in 1930.

In 1952 the first U.S. transsexual story was told. Christine Jorgensen an American GI named George Jorgensen traveled to Denmark to have a sex change operation. Christine then returned to the US to be a model and author.

Frequently Asked Questions

Wouldn't therapy help? Psychiatrists have tried for years to "cure" transsexualism. Over the years many transsexuals have undergone all kinds of mental health treatment: psychoanalysis, hypnosis, aversion therapy and shock therapy. This has produced little if any change in their internal feelings.

I still don't understand why a person would want to change their gender? Transsexuals seek to change their body because there is not an effective way to alter the mind to match the body. Transsexuals suffer from gender dysphoria. The gender dysphoria can be extreme and it's not uncommon for transsexuals to turn to suicide or self-mutilation. Some transsexuals may cross-dress but for the majority, this alone is not enough and they turn to hormone treatment and sometimes, sex reassignment surgery.

Does this mean they are homosexual? No. Transsexuality is about a person's sense of their gender. Homosexuality concerns sexual orientation.

What about using the bathroom? People in transition are aware of the discomfort that others feel and try to work out the best accommodations for everyone involved.

Wouldn't a religious person choose prayer and faith to heal? Many transgender people pray their whole life for a cure one way or another. Finally they have to accept that there is none.

Some Terms:

Transphobia - is a hatred or fear of transsexuals.

Transvestite - heterosexual man who sometimes dresses in women's clothing.

Real-life test (RLT) - required period of cross-living before sex reassignment surgery.

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) - surgery that changes external genitalia from one sex to those of another.

Intersex - conditions in which genitalia are not clearly male or female. This includes hermaphrodites and persons with XXY chromosomes.

Male-to-female (MTF); transsexual woman - transsexual who was assigned male sex at birth.

Female-to-male (FTM); transsexual man - transsexual who was assigned female sex at birth.

What is Transitioning? This is the process of going from living as one gender to living as the other.

How am I to act around this person?

Transgenders/Transsexuals are people and they are no less deserving of respect than anyone else. If you are not comfortable or find them strange and frightening, put your discomfort on hold for awhile and see if it doesn't disappear over time.

How can I support a person in transition?

- > Let the person know you're supportive.
- > Use the person's new name and appropriate gender pronouns. This may not be easy at first and you may slip, but eventually it'll become a habit.
- > Try to maintain the relationship you previously had with this person.
- > Learn more about this topic before you make judgements.
- > Never use the word "it" when referring to someone who is transsexual.
- > Don't take part in the rumor/gossip mill.

Where can I find out more?

You can contact the following offices for advice:

- > Affirmative Programs Office 487-3310
- > Tech Counseling Services 487-2538
- > Keweenaw Pride
<http://pride.students.mtu.edu/>
- > Safe Place <http://safeplace.mtu.edu/>

Books available from the Affirmative Programs Office:

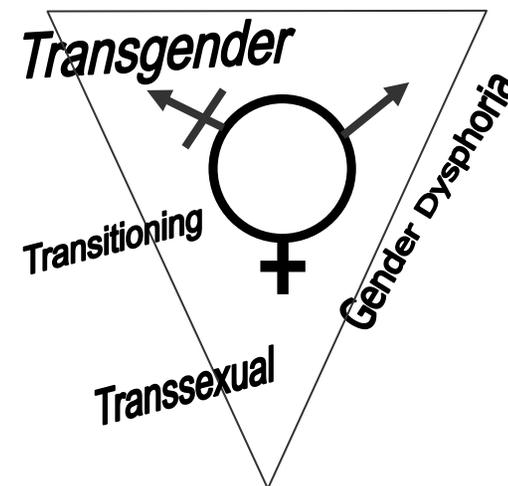
- > [True Selves - Understanding Transsexualism](#)
- > [She's Not There - A Life in Two Genders](#)
- > [Beyond Tolerance - Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual on Campus](#)

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