Who is transgender?

Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans or TG) refers to individuals whose gender identity does not conform with what society has commonly associated with their biological sex. For example, an individual may be anatomically female (sex), and identify with and have a masculine gender expression. Yet, not all transgender people fit into a masculine/feminine binary. Instead, they may express multiple genders or express a unique gender that is neither completely masculine nor feminine. Transgender is also used as an umbrella term for a larger group of gender nonconforming people including transsexuals, cross dressers, genderqueers, and others. It is important to acknowledge that not everyone who appears to fit under this definition of transgender identifies as such.

How do gender and sex differ? (See GenEq’s Gender/Sex Info Sheet)

While gender and sex are commonly used interchangeably, they are different concepts. Sex is defined by an individual’s anatomy and chromosomes. Sex refers to whether someone is biologically male, female, or intersex (see GenEq’s Intersex Info Sheet). Gender, unlike sex, is not biological, but refers to specific traits (such as femininity and masculinity) that are often thought to correspond with a specific sex. Sex and gender are dependent on culture; they change over time (consider how femininity and masculinity have changed throughout the last 100 years).

Are transgender people “gay”?

The term “transgender” refers to an individual’s gender identity, whereas “gay” refers to their sexual orientation. Some transgender people are gay, but just like any other community, transgender people cover the entire spectrum of sexual orientation—straight, lesbian, gay, queer (see GenEq’s Sexual Orientation Info Sheet). There is no uniform sexual identity for transgender people because gender identity or sex do not determine sexual orientation. Transgender is often equated with being “gay” due to a common conflation of gender and sexuality. Transgender communities are also often linked with lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities due to similarities in the oppressions these groups face. Due to this overlap, these communities often work together on social justice activism.

What are some of the obstacles trans people face?

- Trans folks face obstacles on many fronts due to society’s strict enforcement of gender codes. Decisions on which restrooms, fitting rooms or locker rooms to use are often difficult for trans people who may feel forced to choose between “men’s” or “women’s” rooms and often face harassment or violence in both spaces.
- Similar to when someone “comes out” with their sexuality, transgender people often have to “come out” about the gender with which they identify. The coming out process can be traumatic; they may face rejection or lack of understanding from friends and family.
Medical needs specific to transgender people may not be covered by employment benefits or health insurance.

Trans people also face other forms of gender oppression which may include harassment or treatment with suspicion in public spaces (such as hospitals, schools, organized sports, etc.), and violence.

**How can I be respectful of transgender people?**

- It is important to avoid making assumptions about any person's gender and/or sex (not just trans people). When talking to someone, if you are unsure, inquire about which pronoun they would prefer used when referring to them (he/his, she/her, some trans people choose gender neutral terms such as ze/hir or zir).
- Invite trans people to talk to a group you are involved in or include trans issues in classes and activism.
- Try to avoid gender binaries—change restrooms in your area from “men’s” and “women’s” to “restroom.” Try to eliminate the M and F boxes on forms and applications that you use or create blank line that can be filled in. Look at other areas of your life that are split on gender lines and try to make them more inclusive.
- Educate yourself further on trans issues. Attend a Transgender workshop at the Gender Equity Resource Center, and read books on trans issues.

**Where can I find more information?**

Search out your local LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer) center and inquire about what they are working on regarding transgender issues in your area, ask them questions, and use their resources.

- **Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Programs and Services**
  Gender Equity Resource Center
  202 Cesar Chavez
  http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/geneq.asp

- **San Francisco LGBT Center**
  (415) 865-5555
  1800 Market Street
  www.sfccenter.org

- **Pacific Center (Berkeley)**
  (510) 548-8283
  2712 Telegraph Avenue
  www.pacificcenter.org

- **Lavender Youth Recreation and Info Center (LYRIC)**
  Changeling: Trans and Intersex group
  www.lyric.org
  (415) 703-6150

- **Gender Education and Advocacy**
  www.gender.org

- **FTM International**
  www.ftmi.org
  160 14th Street
  San Francisco, CA

- **Gender Outlaw**
  By Kate Bornstein

- **Transgender Warriors**
  By Leslie Feinberg

- **Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary**
  Edited by Joan Nestle, Riki Wilchins, and Clare Howell

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