

Transgender: What is it?

Transgender is a term used to describe anyone who bends or challenges “traditional” gender roles: gay crossdressers, straight crossdressers, transsexuals, drag queens and kings, transgenderists, androgynes, and gender benders of all sorts. As gay men and lesbians transgress heterosexual norms by loving members of the same sex, transpeople transgress norms by wearing clothing not generally associated with their own sex and in some cases by modifying their bodies to be more like those of the “other” sex.

Transpeople have always been a part of the queer community— sometimes in fashion, and sometimes not, but always fabulous.

Who’s Who? What’s What?

Transsexuals are extremely unhappy in the gender to which they are assigned and change their gender roles and bodies in order to live as members of the “other” sex. Modern medical technology (synthesized sex hormones, electrolysis, plastic surgery) make this much easier than it was in the past. About 50% of transsexuals are male-to-female and 50% are female-to-male (FTM). Many have sex reassignment surgery, in which their genitals are modified. MTF transsexuals have been accused of being “froo-froo” (characitures of femininity), but in actuality their presentations range (as do those of nontranssexual women) from extreme butch to extreme femme.

Transgenderists live as members of the other sex, but without the extreme need or desire to modify their bodies shown by transsexuals. Some live as members of the other sex, while others stake out “third gender” status. Transgenderists may take hormones, but do not have genital sex reassignment surgery.

Crossdressers wear the clothing of the other sex on occasion, but do not desire to change their sex. They dress for personal reasons, which can range from a need to express their feminine or masculine side to a way to express themselves erotically.

Drag Kings and Drag Queens present larger than life images of men and women, exaggerating sexual stereotypes for entertainment or self-gratification.

Androgynes, Gender Blenders, and Gender Benders merge the characteristics of both sexes in ways subtle or shocking.

Gender Fuck is the deliberate flaunting of gender norms with a goal of shocking others.

Intersexed (hermaphroditic) persons are born with genitals which show characteristics of both sexes. Many have surgery in infancy, and many of those who do grow up feeling they have been robbed of an essential part of themselves.

Transpeople Can be Straight, Gay, Asexual, or Bisexual

Terms such as gay and straight make little sense when applied to transpeople. Is a post-op male-to-female transsexual paired with another woman a lesbian? What about a pre-op male-to-female paired with a man? Or an FTM transsexual paired with another FTM? Although not all transpeople identify as part of a larger queer community, many do, and certainly the general public and gay-negative politicians do not consider us heterosexual, no matter *who* we love.

Our Queer Issues

Almost all transpersons and intersexed persons grow up with a deep sense of internalized shame. We do not choose to be who we are any more than do gay men, lesbians, or bisexuals; in fact, many of us actively fight our true natures, desperately seeking to fit in gay and straight cultures. Our “coming out” process is parallel to that of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, and can result in loss of support of family, friends, and employment.

Discrimination against transpeople is extreme— even greater than for gay men and lesbians. We must fight to keep our jobs, whether as physicians, teachers, airline pilots, truck drivers, or cooks in restaurants. A disproportionate number of “gay bashings” are directed at transpeople, who by our very nature are the most visible members of the queer culture.

Laws which negatively impact gay men, lesbian, and bisexuals affect transpeople in the same manner. Our rights to marry, to hold jobs, and otherwise fully participate as citizens in American culture are as jeopardized as those of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. And yet without specific trans-inclusive language in bills like ENDA (The Employment Nondiscrimination Act), transpeople can be excluded from protection. For this reason, transpeople have become politically active in past years; after centuries of marginalization, we are fighting for our rights.

Inclusion

Throughout history, transpeople have been on the cutting edge of queerness. The Stonewall Rebellion, the 1969 event that led to the birth of the gay liberation movement, was all about queens and butches. Transpeople provide entertainment in the bars, raise a great deal of money at benefits, and provide the bulk of the fashion sense for the larger queer community.

Many gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons have significant transgender issues. Others, while not considering themselves transgendered in any sense, experiment with styles of dress, hairstyles, and clothing which seriously bend gender— sometimes to the point of being mistaken for members of the other sex, or to the point of experiencing the same discrimination faced by transpersons. And of course, many transpersons proudly identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Many G/L/B organizations— including various Pride organizations — have opened their ranks to transpeople by signifying inclusiveness in their names. Others have been reluctant to modify their names but are nonetheless accepting of transpeople. More and more gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are coming to realize that transpeople are not strange “others,” but just human beings struggling to live with dignity.

DISTRIBUTED BY:

AEGIS
P.O. Box 33724
Decatur, GA 30033-0724
(770) 939-2128 Business
(770) 939-0244 Help Line
(770) 939-1770 FAX
aegis@mindspring.com

AEGIS
American
Educational
Gender
Information
Service