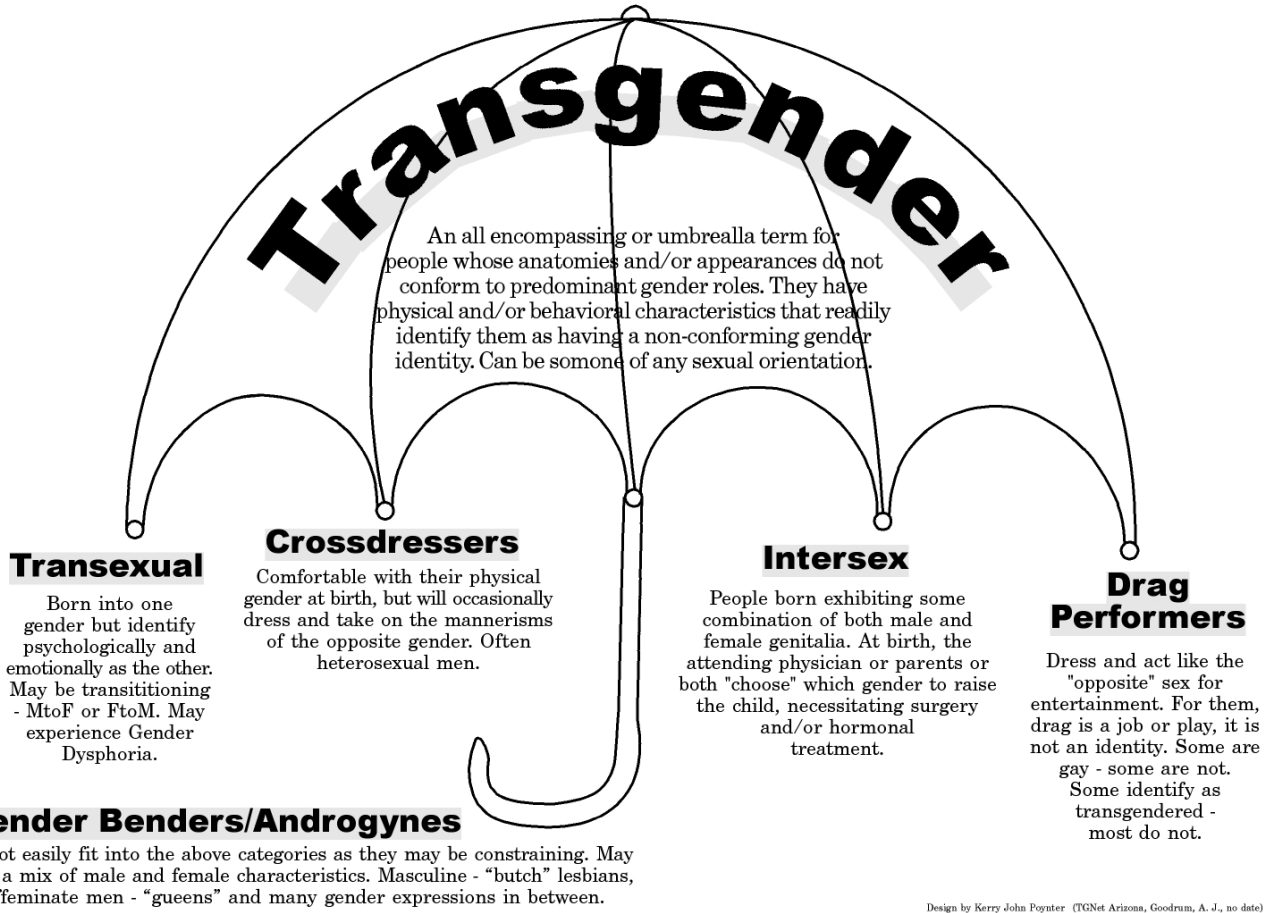


The Transgender Umbrella



Gender Identity refers to a person's actual or perceived sex, and includes a person's identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth. People who are *transgendered* (TG or Trans) are people whose anatomies and/or appearances do not conform to those considered appropriate for culturally predominant gender roles. They have physical and/or behavioral characteristics that readily identify them as having a non-conforming gender identity. 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 were born into one gender but identify psychologically and emotionally as the other. 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 that a chemical imbalance occurs 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. Addressing a person the way they prefer to be addressed is a way of demonstrating respect and valuing their perspective.

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 (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 Western culture accepts the idea of a woman wearing pants but not a man wearing a skirt. Most crossdressers are heterosexual men.

Drag Performers include people like Ru Paul, 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.

Gender blenders, bi-gendered, 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 and Sexual Orientation: What's the Difference?

There is a great deal of unnecessary confusion about this. To put it simply, Gender Identity is who you are; Sexual Orientation refers to whom you love or have sex with. Some view them as two completely separate concepts. For others, the two are intricately entwined. Either way, what is most important to remember is that a certain gender identity does not necessarily mean a certain sexual orientation. A person who is TG may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight. Additionally, there are MTF's (Male to Female) who identify as lesbian and FTM's (Female to Male) who identify as gay men

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