



Transgender People and the Spectrum of Human Experience

Definitions

- **Gender Assignment:** Based on body parts, how the doctor defines the baby
- **Gender Identity:** Based on internal sense of who we are and it appears very early, even before we are verbal. Can be clear and solid by age 4. Can be fluid. And we cannot change it.
- **Gender Dysphoria:** A persistent distress with your sexual characteristics or assigned gender
- **Gender Expression:** How we express our gender in dress, movement, gestures, etc. May be mildly different from what others expect of us or it may be so bold as to be considered “gender variant.”
- **Sexual Orientation:** Who we love and are attracted to. Completely unrelated to and independent of gender identity.
- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity is contrary to their gender assignment
- **Flaunting:** How we describe behavior that makes us uncomfortable. Often used for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). Note that we don’t accuse athletes of flaunting their prowess, because as a society we admire it.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. When did you first realize that you were a girl or a boy?
2. What would you have done if your parents told you that you were wrong?

It would make you feel crazy, wouldn’t it? Then maybe even shameful, wrong, anxious, depressed and even suicidal...

Facts and Figures

- Trans people attempt suicide at *25 times* the rate of the general population.
- Within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) population, trans people account for 20% of the murder victims and 40% of the victims of police-initiated violence.
- 90% of trans kids report they do not feel safe at school.
- A trans person is murdered in the United States approximately every month. In 2010, a 16-month-old boy was beaten to death by his father, who was “trying to make him act like a boy instead of a little girl.”
- Lots of children are gender variant; lots of them grow up to be straight; lots more grow up to be gay; and some are transgender. If a cross-gender identity persists beyond the age of 10-13, it extremely likely to be permanent.
- Although they represent a tiny portion of the population, trans people reflect the same wide spectrum of interests, personalities, religious affiliations and sexual orientations as the entire population. Some are so shy they would be mortified if you knew their business; others are fully “out” and love attention.

Transitioning

Changing how we appear to others so that it matches our gender identity in one to three stages. Keep in mind, when transitioning, people may elect (or be forced by circumstances) to stop at or in any one of these stages.

1. **Social Transition:** presenting in the clothing, hair styles, etc. of the gender we identify as.
2. **Pharmaceutical:** Blocking hormones of our birth gender and replacing them with hormones of our gender identity.
3. **Surgical:** Surgically altering our bodies to conform to our gender identity; may or may not include “bottom surgery” or sexual realignment surgery (SRS). (Only about 1 in 20 trans people get “bottom surgery.” It is traumatic and expensive, often not covered by insurance. When they do get it, it is usually the *last* step in a long journey.)

Things to Consider: Next Steps

Now that you have a little better understanding, can you share that understanding? Here are some suggestions:

- Use the words: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Use them explicitly. They are not dirty words.
- Wear a button. Post the Human Rights Campaign equal sign sticker in your class, on your car, in your cubical, etc.
- Find famous LGBT people (be sure to include trans!) in your field and create a conversation about diversity. Read a book or watch a movie about these amazing people and their lives. Google or ask PFLAG for recommendations.
- Share this learning with your students, friends and family.
- Call PFLAG and ask us to make this presentation in your class, spiritual or social group.
- Correct slurs and misunderstandings when you hear them. Educate people if you hear them use disrespectful language. Tell them you know someone who is trans (for now you do). Explain that trans people did not ask for this journey and that their life is hard enough without ridicule. Remind them we would not ridicule any other medical condition. Insist on respect. “We don’t use disrespectful language in this school, office, family” is often sufficient.