Transgender Identities

What does it mean to be Transgender?

Different cultures across time and around the world have conceptualized gender identity, gender expression differently. Currently transgender is a broad term that refers to people who experience their gender identity or express their gender in ways that do not conform to societal expectations based on the gender or sex they were assigned sex at birth.

The antonym to transgender is cisgender, which refers to people whose gender identity matches their assigned gender at birth. “Cisgender” does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation.

Anyone, whether transgender or cisgender, whose gender expression does not conform to societal expectations based on the sex (and assumed gender) they were assigned a birth might be considered gender non-conforming.

Learn More

- The Gender Unicorn [1] by Trans Student Educational Resources
- Understanding Gender [3] by Gender Spectrum

Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Expression

There are infinite ways to arrive at being transgender and of being transgender. People that identify as transgender are extremely diverse, and one trans-identified person cannot speak for all. People have intersecting identities related to race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion/spirituality, socioeconomic status, as well as other identities that are salient to them.

People of all gender identities can explore their gender identity and gender expression, at any point in their lives. Deciding to experiment with the social, physical, or even legal
aspects of your gender identity and expression can be difficult because of cissexism, transphobia, and minority stress. Finding or creating inclusive and affirming communities, social networks, media narratives, institutions, and services can help provide enough protection and resilience to safely explore.

Social Exploration and Transition

Trying out and changing your pronouns, name, title, and appearance are part of social transition.

Pronouns are improper nouns that we use to refer to people without using their names. In English, third person pronouns are usually gendered (e.g. he, she, ze, they). Use these resources to determine whether there are other pronouns that feel more accurate for your experience of gender.

Keep in mind that all pronouns can be used for any gender, that your pronouns can change as frequently as you need, and that you can use more than one set of pronouns.

Learn More

- Gender Pronouns chart [4] by Trans Student Educational Resources
- The Pronoun Dressing Room [7]
- Practice With Pronouns [8]

Physical Exploration and Transition

Trying out appearance modifications, whether through temporary, long-term, or permanent means to outwardly reflect one’s gender identity are part of physical transition. This includes medical and non-medical options.

Binding, packing, enhancing, and tucking are temporary, non-medical ways to explore gender expression.

Puberty blockers are usually the preferred option for adolescents to prevent unwanted changes to their physical appearance and vocal range. Hormone therapy is a longer-term, though mostly reversible way to alter one’s physical appearance and vocal range.

Surgical intervention and electrolysis are long-term, medical ways to outwardly reflect
one’s gender identity. There are dozens of gender-affirming medical interventions to achieve a variety of changes.

Many transsgender people decide to conform to societal expectations about gender expression, for instance:

- Nonbinary people who dress as expected for their assigned sex at birth and do not pursue social or medical transition
- Binary trans men and women who dress as expected for their gender and utilize many medical interventions

Learn More

- Peruse over 200 Gender Identities Compiled on the Gender Wikia [9]
- How to Explore Your Gender When You’re a Person Who Was Assigned Male at Birth [10] by Jayson Flores
- Ways To Play With Your Gender Expression [11] by Brooklyn and Ariel on Minus18

Finding Local Community

- Trans Talk Tuesday [12] Peer Support Group in Chapel Hill
- Monthly Queer Family Dinners with the LGBTQ Center of Carrboro [14]
- Trans Experience Discussion Group [15] in Durham
- Transgender Initiative [16] Discussion Group and Gender Socials in Raleigh
- Monthly Triangle Trans Lady Social [17] (for trans women and transfeminine people) in Durham and Raleigh
- Entre Nostotras [18] Trans Latinas Group in Durham

Source URL: https://lgbtq.unc.edu/resources/exploring-identities/transgender

Links
[1] https://www.transstudent.org/gender