



GENDER ALLIANCE
OF THE SOUTH SOUND



Diversity
Unity
Community



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OF THE SOUTH SOUND

TRANSGENDER PRIMER



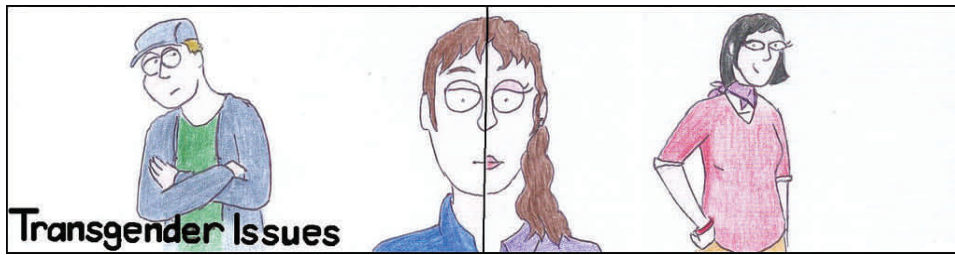
**An Introduction to Understanding
Transgender People in Your Community**

***Gender Alliance of the South Sound
supporters celebrating diversity and
marching at the Washington State capitol***



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What Is transgender?

Transgender describes a person whose internal sense of gender doesn't match the gender identity that society expects of them based on their genitals. Transgender is also used as a general term to describe the many different gender identities that exist, like: transsexuals, people that feel conflict or fluidity between internal gender identity and physical sex. Other words like: drag king, drag queen, crossdresser, shapeshifter, bi-gendered, gender queer, and androgyne are also used by some people to define themselves.

Isn't transgender just like being gay?

No. Transgender describes a person's internal sense of their own gender identity and sexual orientation describes a person's attraction to other people. Transgender people have many issues in common with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities like: coming out, access to non-judgmental health care, self-esteem, and violence, to name a few. But gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation.

How will I know know if I meet a transgender person?

You won't know until someone decides to tell you! There isn't a formula or test to determine gender identity. A person's sexual experiences don't define their gender identity. Neither does a child's personality, just because a boy likes to play with dolls or a girl like to climb trees doesn't make them transgender. Remember, transgender is about a person's inside feelings about their gender identity, not what they wear or what they liked to play with when they were kids.

Coming Out... Coming out to family, friends, co-workers, social networks and others can be one of the most traumatic experiences of all for TGs. Often there is devastating loss involved as even the most intimate family members can reject the transgender person, cutting off further contact, or, sometimes worse, intervening with unwanted and almost always futile efforts to "cure" the individual. After finding the courage (and/or desperation) to finally be truthful about their inner self, the loss of parents, children, spouse, friends, careers, church communities and more can throw the TG person into a spiral of depression and seeming hopelessness. The flip side of

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS INFORMATION

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation promotes fair, accurate, & inclusive media for LGBT people & events
www.glaad.org 323-933-2240 212-629-3322

Advocates for Informed Choice advocates on behalf of children with intersex conditions and differences of sex development
www.aiclegal.org

National Center for Transgender Equality social justice dedicated to advocating for the equality of transgender people
www.nctequality.org 202-903-0112

Lambda Legal works on litigation and public education on behalf of LGBT people and people with HIV/AIDS.
www.lambdalegal.org 212-809-8585

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, national progressive organization working for the civil rights of LGBT
www.nglft.org 202-639-6308

National Youth Advocacy Coalition, a social justice organization that advocates for and with young people.
www.nyacyouth.org 202-319-7596

Transgender Law Center provides legal services and advocacy, for the transgender community.
www.transgenderlawcenter.org 415-865-0176

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WASHINGTON STATE LAW

RCW 49.60 The right to be free from discrimination because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender identity or the presence of any disability. This right shall include, but not be limited to the following;

- (a) The right to obtain and hold employment;
- (b) The right to the full enjoyment of any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, or privileges of any place of public resort, accommodation, assemblage, or amusement;
- (c) The right to engage in real estate and (d) credit transactions and (e) insurance transactions or transactions with health maintenance organizations;
- (f) The right to engage in commerce free from any discriminatory boycotts or blacklists.

SHB 1444 - A safe and civil environment in school is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. The legislature finds that harassment, intimidation, or bullying, like their disruptive or violent behavior, disrupts both a student's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its students in a safe environment. Each school district shall adopt or amend if necessary a policy that prohibits the harassment, intimidation, or bullying of any student, school employee, or volunteer. It is the responsibility of each school district to share this policy with parents or guardians, students, volunteers, and school employees.

The **Washington State Human Rights Commission** enforces the Law Against Discrimination. The Commission works to prevent and eliminate discrimination by investigating civil rights complaints and providing education and training opportunities throughout the state.

Contact the **WSHRC** to file a complaint or find out more at:

www.hum.wa.gov or 800-233-3247

such loss is the often unexpected support the TG person frequently receives from certain family members, true friends and others, particularly within a new-found transgender "community" of friends and allies.

What can I do if someone comes out to me?

When someone shares personal information with you, it helps to listen first, to hear the person out and see what they may want or need from you before you offer advice or help. It's also important for you to educate yourself! Build your understanding of gender identity and look for opportunities to be an advocate or an ally to transpeople.

What's transphobia?

Transphobia is the fear of and discrimination against transgender people (and people thought to be transgender, regardless of their actual gender identity). Transphobia can lead to bias, and even violence, that can make coming out as transgender even harder.

Current studies say that more than 80% of transgender people have been physically assaulted based on their actual or perceived gender identity. Some transgender people report losing their job, being ignored by their families and losing friends when they share their gender identity. Transphobia hurts everyone, the transpeople who do not feel like they can share an important part of themselves and anyone who feels restricted by traditional sex role stereotypes.

Transpeople are People

too... Transpeople are people with hopes, dreams, careers, goals, partners, families, and children. As society builds an awareness and acceptance of the diversity of gender identities, transgender will become far less confusing and feared. Many societies throughout history have recognized and celebrated gender diversity. With increased understanding and education, this society can be a more inviting and comfortable place to express all the parts of an individual's sense of self.



Causality: The mechanisms which prompt an individual to have transgender feelings have been postulated for decades, but are only now being systematically explored. Recent research strongly suggests a bio/genetic underlying cause. In many studies some form of "brain chemistry" alteration is thought to occur en-utero which predisposes the individual to gender variant expressions. The fact that the transgender condition has been noted throughout human history, and in disparate cultures around the world would seem to deny a cultural cause. However, there are those who believe that parent-child relationships at an early age could influence such behavior.

Social Acceptance: Despite advances in civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights, modern culture-at-large is still largely antipathetic to gender identity non-conformity. "Trans rights" are perhaps the last frontier of society's pursuit of true freedom and equality for all citizens. Although historical evidence and all of the most modern research indicates that this condition is widespread (across all cultures), natural (biologically/genetically based) and has been around throughout human history, "changing sex" is a proposition that even many psychological and medical professionals (much less the general public) have difficulty coming to terms with. So society-at-large is hardly "OK" with the transgender phenomenon. Most trans persons are well aware of this, and struggle to feel "normal" within society. Guilt, shame, embarrassment, confusion, lack of self-confidence or self-esteem and other psychological constraints can conspire to render the trans person uncomfortable and vulnerable in gatherings and social environments. Friction between the trans person's need to seek an alternative gender identity and society's stiff resistance to such change can cause significant psychological and social difficulties for the trans person.

GASS and Support Groups... Today there are trans support groups in almost every major metropolitan area in the U.S., as well as around the world. These groups and organizations help bring TG folk together to meet face to face, and provide fellowship, education, activism and resources. In the Puget Sound area there are at least ten such groups. Tacoma's primary trans organization is the Gender Alliance of the South Sound, which also holds meetings in Olympia. These groups can be critical to the social and emotional balance of members and visitors. A friendly group can serve an important role by helping trans persons better understand and cope with the many issues they may encounter.

- **Have staff training.** Whether you know that you have a TG employee on staff or in class or not, it is important to have training on the issue. Some TG employees and students may not be "out" about their TG status and may have transitioned years before coming to the company or school. In addition, while most want to be supportive of transgender people, many will need some guidance on how to do so. Training are a much more effective way of creating a respectful environment than simply relying on written policies.

- **Respect confidentiality and privacy.** It is almost never necessary to disclose a person's TG status to clients or other co-workers. In addition, it is never appropriate to do so without permission from your TG co-worker or fellow student. It is also generally inappropriate to ask TG persons questions about their private medical history or treatment. If you do have information about the health care that someone has accessed as part of their transition, you should not freely share it with anyone else unless your TG fellow worker or student has given you permission to do so.

- **Help fellow students and co-workers** who are having trouble with another person's transition. It is vitally important that workers, students and managers assist and support one another in respecting a TG identity. When a TG person transitions on the job or at school, it can sometimes be difficult for people to remember to use the correct name and pronoun. If you hear someone using the wrong name or pronoun, talk to them about it. It is likely just an unintentional slip and they will appreciate the reminder. Similarly, if you hear people making inappropriate comments about a transgender person's appearance or medical history or the like, it is also helpful to intervene in a respectful and constructive way.

In most cases, co-workers and fellow students genuinely want to be accepting and supportive of TG persons and may simply not be fully aware of how to do so.



Working with Clients, Fellow Workers, and Students

Transgender clients are not fundamentally different than nontransgender clients. They have the same need for respect and good, caring service. Most often, the unique challenges they face originate from discomfort or disinterest on the part of others and may lead them to be wary about opening up to new people.

- **Be aware of assumptions** you are making about a person's gender. It is very common to assume that you know a person's gender or gender identity based on sex stereotypes. In most cases, you will "guess" correctly. However, some people's expression or identity is non-stereotypical or different than what you would assume or expect. Therefore, it is important to be open to someone's self-identity. If you are unsure, it is appropriate to ask how the person would like to be addressed.

- Make sure your office or school has TG friendly, meaningful and enforceable **non-discrimination policies**. It is important to have a general statement of non-discrimination that includes TG people. It is even more helpful to have specific guidelines explaining what nondiscrimination means in this context.

Your intake forms should account for a person having an AKA (Also Known As) and should encourage or allow people to identify their sex based on their current gender identity.

Your restrooms should be accessible to people based on their gender identity (as opposed to their birth sex or genital anatomy). Where possible, it is always a good idea to have a gender neutral option available. However, use of a gender-neutral bathroom should be optional for anyone who wishes to use it; a TG employee should not be forced to use a gender-neutral bathroom, and forcing the person to do so may be unlawful. In addition, your co-workers should be trained in basic TG cultural competency.

Co-Workers and Fellow Students: Transgender people are employed in every industry and profession throughout the country. As a community, however, TG people face enormous amounts of employment discrimination leading to high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Ensuring that your workplace and school is one in which everyone can fully participate is vital in order to help turn around these negative statistics and provide competent services to TG clients.

Some Terms Defined...

An interpretation that has come into broad usage defines transgender as an umbrella term encompassing all those who "transit" (cross over) the norms of gender identity or even presentation. This would include transsexuals, some intersexed persons, crossdressers, gender-queer, gendervariant, butch-dykes, femme boys, drag-queens and kings, (self-proclaimed) non-gender or multigender and many other subsets of gender non-conformity. People with fluid gender identities and people who do not wish to change their genital sex but feel it offers an incomplete definition of their gender identity may also identify as transgender. TG is becoming more understood and talked about. As that happens, definitions change and become more clear. The following are intended as a guide, knowing that they will change over time.



Gender Identity: A person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being either male, female, something other, or in between. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender Expression: An individual's characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

Transsexual: Someone who transitions from one gender to another. It includes persons who were identified as male at birth but whose gender identity is female, persons who were identified as female at birth but whose gender identity is male, and persons whose gender identity is neither wholly male nor female. Transition often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun when describing them. Transition may, but does not always, include necessary medical care like hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery.

Crossdresser: A person who sometimes wears clothing not traditionally associated with their gender. Nearly every human society throughout history has distinguished between male and female gender by the style, color, or type of clothing they wear and has had a set of norms, views, guidelines, or even laws defining what type of clothing is appropriate for each gender. Cross-dressing is a behavior which runs significantly counter to those norms and therefore can be seen as a type of transgender behavior. It does not, however, necessarily indicate transgender identity; a person who cross-dresses does not always identify as having a gender different from that assigned at birth.

Intersexed: A person who is born with chromosomal and/or physiological anomalies, and/or ambiguous genitalia. Many intersexed infants born with ambiguous genitalia are surgically “normalized” at the wishes of their anxious parents, a controversial procedure which later results in loss of sexual response in adulthood. The Intersex Society of North America has called this practice **Infant Genital Mutilation**. Some intersexed infants have even been sexually reassigned – without their consent – and later in life develop gender identity issues strikingly similar to those of transsexual people.

Gender Non-conforming: A person who is or is perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Gender non-conforming people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, TG, or queer.

Gender Queer: People who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as completely male or female. Gender Queer people may or may not identify as transgender.

Sexual Orientation: A person’s emotional and sexual attraction to other people based on the gender of the other person. A person may identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. It is important to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different things. Not all transgender folks identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. And not all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer people display gender non-conforming characteristics.



TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

TDOR is held in November each year to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred and prejudice. Although not every person represented during the worldwide Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgender, each was a victim of violence or neglect based on bias against transgender people. The list of nearly 500 names is read out loud at the memorial, but only records those deaths known to the transgender community. Countless more go unreported.



The TDOR was originally conceived to honor Rita Hester, whose murder in 1999 prompted a San Francisco candlelight vigil. Her murder, like most anti-transgender cases, has yet to be solved.

TDOR raises awareness of hate crimes against TG people. The event publicly mourns and honors the lives of transgender people who might otherwise be forgotten. Through the observance, we express love and respect for our tragically taken brothers and sisters. TDOR reminds non-transgender people that we are their sons, daughters, parents, friends and lovers, and gives our allies a chance to step forward with us and stand in vigil, commemorating those who have died from transphobia.

WE SHALL NOT FORGET THEM