

Who Are Transgender People?

Transgender Basics for Victim Service Providers

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HOW MANY
TRANSGENDER/GENDER
NON-CONFORMING
PEOPLE ARE THERE?



The prevalence of transgender people can only be estimated, since large-scale research rarely asks individuals about their gender identity or gender history. Multiple researchers estimate that between 0.5 and 3.0 percent of the population is transgender.^{1,2}

There have always been transgender people, although they have had different names and different social statuses at different times and in different cultures. Currently, in our culture, transgender people have become more prominent in the public eye (for example, in politics and in entertainment) and transgender people have been able to be more out and open about being transgender/gender non-conforming. Possibly as a result of this cultural shift and increased visibility, transgender people are subject to high levels discrimination and violence. Therefore, victim service providers are certain to work with one or more transgender survivors.

In American society, most people believe humans are either male or female. Most people also believe that sex and gender are unchangeable, determined from birth by anatomy (genitals) and biology (chromosomes). If a person has an aligning set of primary sex characteristics (penis, vagina, etc.) and secondary sex characteristics (facial and body hair, breasts, musculature, body shape/curves) they are deemed female, and if they have other characteristics they are classified as male.

Similarly, some transgender individuals strongly identify as male or female and take steps to medically, legally, and socially transition from one gender to another. Post-transition they may no longer identify as transgender and may not discuss their pre-transition gender.

Other people –transgender and non-transgender – believe there are more than two genders and that gender is not determined solely by anatomy. Some cultures have words that encompass “third” or multiple genders, in addition to “male” and “female.” Unfortunately, English is not one of those languages. Just like many other minority populations, the transgender community has developed a lexicon of hundreds of terms that include many unique identities and experiences. Transgender vocabulary is also quickly evolving, with some terms no longer being used as often, and others becoming more popular. One overarching term that is frequently used for people who do not fit comfortably within the stereotypical binary (male/female) gender roles is “gender non-conforming.”

Every person has a gender identity and one or more gender expressions. All of us constantly perceive others' genders and have our own perceived by others – these terms don't just apply to transgender/gender non-conforming people.

¹ Conway, L. How Frequently Does Transsexualism Occur? Web-published document, 2002. Available at <http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Tsprevalence.html> Retrieved on May 1, 2012.

² Winter, S, and Conway, L. “How many trans* people are there? A 2011 update incorporating new data.” Web-published document, 2011. Available at <http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper-how-many-trans-people-are-there.htm> Retrieved on May 1, 2012.



WHAT DOES GENDER MEAN ANYWAY?

Gender Identity

An individual's inner sense of their own gender, of being male, female, something in between, a combination of genders, another gender, or no gender.

Gender Expression

How a person expresses their gender through clothing and accessories, grooming, speech, body language, social interactions and other behaviors.

Gender Perception

How a person's gender is perceived by others. External perceptions of an individual's gender may or may not align with that person's gender identity or intended gender expression.

Terms and definitions

Many people feel more comfortable when they have a list of terms and accompanying definitions. In fact, many people believe that knowing exactly what a set of terms means is a critical component of being "culturally competent." FORGE does not believe this approach is effective in helping providers work with transgender/gender non-conforming people for two primary reasons: 1. there is a lack of consensus on what each term means; and 2. transgender individuals are sometimes told they aren't really what they say they are, because the provider's definition isn't the same as the transgender person's. The broad definitions offered below are working definitions of four common terms that will help provide some a framework prior to more in-depth discussion you may have with your clients.

TRANSGENDER

An umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of people whose gender identity or expression may not match the sex they were assigned at birth. FORGE often uses "transgender" (and "gender non-conforming", see below) as terms that are fully inclusive of hundreds of gender identities, histories, experiences, and expressions.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING

Gender non-conforming can include anyone who does not adhere to traditional binary (male/female) gender roles or gender expression. Many people who identify with the term gender non-conforming may also feel comfortable with the term transgender. It's important to note that while the term gender non-conforming is relatively new, the same phenomena has been called by different words at different times and places.

QUESTIONING

Questioning is a term that can refer to either an identity or a process of introspection whereby a person explores their gender identity. It's important to note that this process can happen at any age – not just in youth – and/or it may happen multiple times throughout a person's life.

SOFFA

SOFFA stands for Significant Others, Friends, Family, and Allies. Everyone has a SOFFA circle. In this context, SOFFA refers to individuals who have a personal connection with someone whose gender identity or expression transcends societal norms. FORGE includes SOFFAs under the transgender umbrella. SOFFAs may experience some of the same challenges, questions, discrimination, and violence that transgender people face. The ratio of trans people to SOFFAs is approximately 1:30.

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals span all communities, and come from all socioeconomic classes, races, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, dis/ability statuses, ages, political affiliations, religions, and family structures.