
Transgender is an umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity, characteristics, or expressions differ from most people of that person's gender. Transgender people can be heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, or even asexual. Some transgender individuals want to live their life as the opposite gender or have surgery to become the opposite gender. Many others do not want to do so. Three kinds of transgender people are cross-dressers, transsexuals, and androgynous people.

Most cross-dressers are men who like to wear women's clothing at times. Transsexuals are people who identify themselves so strongly as the opposite gender that they want to live as much as they can as the opposite gender. While cross-dressers change their clothes, transsexuals sometimes change their body by means of hormone therapy or *sexual reassignment surgery* to match how they feel. Androgynous people feel as though they are between male and female and feel that neither label fits.

Intersexual describes people who are born with anatomy that seems like the male anatomy in some ways and seems like the female anatomy in other ways.

Homophobia is a fear or hatred of people believed to be homosexual. The term is used broadly to describe any range of negative attitudes toward or about gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgender people. Homophobia may be shown in ways as mild as laughing at a gay joke or as severe and violent as gay bashing or murder. Like any other prejudice, homophobia is learned. Children are not born hating; they learn to hate and fear from messages they receive while growing up.

Recognizing One's Orientation

Adolescence is marked by a growing awareness of sexual orientation. Although most people are heterosexual, a significant number of people identify themselves as homosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Most people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual report feeling "different" at a young age even though they may not have had a name for that feeling. People can identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender at any point in their lives. Some people come out at a young age; others wait until they have been adults for many years. For many people, coming out is liberating and empowering and makes them feel whole, healthy, and complete. To identify oneself as gay or lesbian can be very difficult given that many people do not understand sexual minorities. Regardless of their sexual orientation, all students should use good judgment and wait to have intimate sexual activity until they are in a committed, permanent relationship.