

More Light  on...

Transgender

Transgender and Spirituality

In ancient times individuals whose gender was different from the norm were recognized as special people. Often expressing the characteristics of both the masculine and the feminine, these individuals were respected as having keen insight into the deeper matters of life, and so were often given positions of great respect within their communities. The shamans of pre-historic South America were thought to have special insight and wisdom because of their different gender identity; characteristics shared more recently by the two-spirit people in Native North American communities. Modern Hijra, transgender people in India, are considered an essential part of Indian weddings, births, and funerals.

Modern gender-different individuals (who have been given the term “transgender”) have lost this status within the larger community. They are often treated with scorn and hate, even within the very faith communities from which they were reared. Not only does this deprive them of offering their considerable spiritual gifts to their communities, but also deprives their communities of the rich insight transgender can offer. More Light Presbyterians encourages the full inclusion of transgender individuals in the life and ministry of the Presbyterian Church, USA.

Becoming acquainted with the TG individual

- People with gender identity variations can be found in every socioeconomic group.
- Gender identity issues usually emerge before puberty for genetic males and throughout the life cycle for genetic females.
- Individuals with gender identity issues are no more likely to exhibit mental disorders (outside

of the gender identity "disorder") than the general population.

- Gender identity, whether normal or divergent, appears to be irreversibly fixed by the time the child begins school.
- There are no known "cures" for GID.
- Gender identity and sexual orientation are distinct but interrelated aspects of an individual's character (e.g., transsexuals are not necessarily gay though many people view them this way).
- Diverse gender identity is expressed across a wide spectrum of behaviors, including (but not limited to): cross-dressing, drag, transsexualism,

androgyny, bi-gender, transgenderism, third gender, she-male, etc. A transgender individual through a lifetime may express several of these identities.

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Primer of gender transition

Individuals desiring medical treatment to effect changes in physical gender expression (most

often transsexual or transgender individuals, but others as well) are often treated under standard medical guidelines. The most prevalent of these are the *Standards of Care of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association*.

Medical guidelines usually prescribe psychotherapy and/or some period of diagnostic cross living prior to administration of medical treatment, especially if that treatment is invasive or irreversible. This period of transition is challenging for both the transgender individual and her/his community.

Both the transgender individual and her/his family are under great stress during and immediately after gender transition and often seek professional help.

Who's Who? .. in the world of transgender

Transsexuals are individuals who have a gender identity (the sense of being a man or a woman) different from their anatomical sex. They often seek medical treatment to change their physical attributes to correspond with their gender identity. This treatment may include hormone therapy, electrolysis, and surgery. Psychotherapy and real life experience in the new gender role is required for most medical treatment.

Cross dressers wear clothing usually associated with the gender "opposite" to their anatomical sex. Cross-dressing may be part-time in the privacy of the person's own home, public, and even full-time. The difference is that cross dressers' gender identity remains the same as their anatomical sex. They usually do not seek medical treatment. Erotic pleasure is sometimes the motivation for cross-dressing, especially in younger people. Cross dressers can be attracted to either same-sex or opposite-sex partners, or both.

Intersexed (hermaphroditic) individuals are born with genitals that show characteristics of both sexes or are opposite to their genetic sex. Many are surgically "corrected" in infancy, and some grow up to feel like they have had an essential part of themselves taken away without their consent. Even worse, many surgeries in infancy remove or diminish later sexual sensation and enjoyment.

For additional information on these and the many other forms of transgender expression see:

Brown & Rounsley. *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism for Family, Friends, Co-workers, and Helping Professionals*. 1996, Jossey-Bass.

Etiquette of transgender

Transgender individuals are going to great trouble and often risk public scorn and private rejection to express themselves authentically. Always address and treat individuals in the manner in which they are expressing themselves. Use names and pronouns appropriate to the expressed (rather than the genetic or legal) gender. Give the same respect that you would expect for yourself.

Rest rooms are a particular obstacle for TG individuals. Where possible provide single-use restrooms or the option to use a single use rest room. The individual's need to use the restroom in public may lead to a situation where you would find yourself in the restroom with a transgendered individual. Should this be too disturbing to you please use the restroom at a later time, use a different restroom when available, or (as a last resort) quietly and respectfully ask the transgendered individual to use the restroom at a later time. Remember that the person is attempting to fulfill medical requirements for treatment.

Names and Pronoun Usage

In general, the appropriate pronoun is the one which best describes the way the individual is living his or her life. A cross-living male to female transsexual or transgenderist, for instance, should be referred to with feminine pronouns (she, her, hers) regardless of surgical status; masculine pronouns should likewise be used for female to male transsexuals or transgenderists.

Cross dressers and drag queens/ kings should be referred to with pronouns appropriate to the way they are dressed.

When writing about transgendered people quotation marks should never be used around names or pronouns.

Sexual Orientation is different than gender identity. It is the difference between who I am (gender identity) and who I am attracted to (sexual orientation). Transgendered people can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

For more information
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