

# Transgender Identity

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## **Introduction**

The conversation on the lives and livelihood of transgender people is one that has become highly polarized. The argument on whether trans people have the right to exist in the identity they identify with. In today's current climate, we are witnessing a more aggressive and inhumane crack-down in Gender Identity policing, criminalizing the right to express oneself as who one feels they are. The rights and treatment of all people should be a concern to all; no matter who you are or where you come from, as human beings we are entitled to basic human rights. The oppression of trans rights and expression is the oppression of rights for everyone. Understanding what it means to be transgender is the key step in accepting trans people in our society. To be "Transgender" is to identify with a Gender Identity or behavior that does not typically represent the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender Identity on the other hand refers to one's internal sense of self and whether one appeal to male, female, or another gender.

This study will initially break down the difference between gender and sex and will discuss how these differences may manifest in creating a "trans" identity. Transgender people and their experiences in society will be discussed. This study is aimed to help further the knowledge of transgender and the science behind gender and sex.

## **Gender**

Gender is a highly complex issue, that can have different meanings across different groups of people, and or societies. The first step needed to understand what gender means is to understand the different components that go into it. These components include gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation (Chang, A. R., & Wildman, S. M.

(2017). Gender is often seen as a binary system, consisting only of male and female, however, as mentioned above there is more to this. Using this binary way of thinking, gender is often seen as sex and sex as gender, however, this isn't the case. Gender is a socially constructed identity that places humans into behavioral categories where certain norms and expectations are expected to be followed. This very binary view of gender doesn't offer a space for transgender people, as trans people don't identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, but rather with the identity that was crafted by their gender expression and sexual orientation. Understanding Gender is a complex topic that requires the acknowledgment of different aspects is a fundamental step in understanding it as a whole. Gender is not a set-in-stone law that isn't subject to change. The way we perceive Gender has always been in motion and what society deems as acceptable is constantly changing. Gender is more than the genitalia you were born with, but rather an identity that is curated by many different factors on a personal level.

## **Sex**

Sex is described as the most binary concept, simply male or female solely based on the chromosomes and genitalia presented, which is based on biology. It's believed that when humans are born they are placed into a binary system of chromosomes, where XX chromosomes are viewed as female and those with XY as male. However the belief that this is a binary system is false, as even chromosomes don't simply conform to being only XX and XY, as 1 in 1666 births results in neither XX nor XY (Chang & Wildman, 2017). In a case where a person's chromosomes are neither XY nor XX, what should that person identify as? This again shows the complexity behind both sex and gender and the impact of other factors on gender identity. Another example is intersex people, who are people who are born with external and internal

genitalia that are neither male nor female. If sex is grounded in the biology of humans where nothing is strictly binary then our definitions should reflect this and also not be strictly binary. Understanding what sex is is to understand that there is no real form or standard of what sex is or should be, regardless of the biological definition. The biological definition of sex changes and is different across platforms and resources, which just shows the lack of standard and that there is not one set standard. Sex is constantly changing and what we view to be sex should be distant and known to be different from gender. An easy way to think about it is to view sex as the first impression that a human brings into the world when born. As we know first impressions can often be wrong, gender on the other hand is the true manifestation of one's self-identity. Sex helps to identify the gender of the body at first, and gender identity can either support the sex or oppose it as gender identity is the “sex” of the brain.

### **Trans-people In Society**

The debate over sex and gender is one that is fought to legitimize a binary way of thinking about both topics. This way of thinking has harmful effects on transgender people throughout society, as the government tries to regulate and legally determine what it means to be a man and woman and there is no room for anything in between. The act of policing a system as a binary that isn't truly binary is injustice, and those who are suffering are trans people. In the United States, transgender people lack the legal protection to live healthy, dignified, and happy life (Adam, 2020). Due to the different systems that are denied to trans people, they often fall victim to different violent crimes and acts. Studies show that between thirty and fifty percent of transgender people experience domestic and partner violence compared with twelve percent of cis-gendered people, people who identify as the gender they were assigned at sex (Adam, 2020).

Trans people are also starting to see a steady rise in hate crimes against them, with 31 hate crimes reported in 2013, to the 137 hate crimes reported in 2017 (Adams, 2020). There are now more recent laws popping up across the country preventing Trans-people from receiving gender-affirming care.

### **Gender Affirming Care**

Gender Affirming care is health care that is sought to align the person more to their desired gender. This care can range from hormone therapy, which may include a person who identifies as a male to taking testosterone shots that would stimulate the growth of more “masculine” presenting features such as thicker facial hair. Another type of gender-affirming care is gender reassignment surgery which is the surgical procedure of changing one genitalia to match that of their gender identity. The importance of gender-affirming care is that it greatly impacts the mental health of transgender people. The process of living trapped in one's body is a feeling that is incomprehensible for a cis-gendered person (a person who identifies as the sex they were assigned). LGBTQ+ people experience anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation at much higher rates than that of cisgender people. According to the Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 54% of transgender or nonbinary youth have strongly considered suicide, and 29% have tried to actually commit (Matouk & Wald, 2022). There is no doubt that gender-affirming care is extremely important and that it saves lives. O'Handley & Courtice (2022) break down the experiences of transgender people during the Covid-19 pandemic where they were not able to receive certain gender-affirming care, such as hormone therapy, scheduled surgery, or even a simple haircut. For instance, “For this participant and others, the delay of gender-affirming healthcare was not merely an inconvenience but could be

considered ‘a life or death situation’... Indeed, access to timely gender-affirming care has been associated with reductions in suicide attempts and ideation (Almazan & Keuroghilan, 2021, as in O’Handley, B., & Courtice, E. L. 2022). Understanding that gender-affirming care isn’t a pseudoscience is an important step to saving the lives of trans youth and transgender people in general. The study and evidence presented above showed just how severe these mental effects can have on transgender people, however, O’Handley & Courtice (2022), focused on this during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the reality of today’s current climate is that governments are actively legislating against trans people, preventing their basic right to healthcare, and gaining access to gender-affirming care. These laws preventing gender-affirming care are causing extreme mental discourse in both youth and adults throughout this country actively taking lives away through suicide.

## **Conclusion**

In order to understand transgender people and non-binary people, we must have a desire to understand aspects of their life and existence. It would be impossible to understand all aspects as there is still so much we don’t know about. However it is fundamental in being able to respect the existence of transgender people as human beings and not a scientific anomaly, because they are simply a part of nature. The rights of trans-people are under attack and are being stripped more and more every year. The education and research is needed to understand the trans-mind and to allow society to view them as normal.

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