

# TRANS\* 101

A resource from the Williams College  
Gender and Sexuality Resource Center

Trans\* people have always been with us. Recently there have been many more trans\* people in the news and we are seeing more young people who feel comfortable “coming-out” as trans\*.

A person’s *gender identity* is how someone identifies their own gender — a person’s inner sense of ‘being’ male or female. Most people, but not all, have a gender identity of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ which is also consistent with their assigned sex at birth (*cisgender*). There are some people who feel their assigned sex at birth is not consistent with their own gender identity (*transgender*).

A person’s *gender expression* refers to how a person expresses their gender identity, or the cues people use to identify another person’s gender. This can include clothing, mannerisms, makeup, behavior, speech patterns, and more. There are some people whose gender expression does not conform to traditional gender stereotypes about how men and women should look and act.

Trans\* people can have all sexual orientations. Gender identity is about who one is. Sexual orientation is about who one is attracted to. Because of this, there are trans\* people who identify as straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay and queer.

Dr. Genny Beemyn explains that “Many transgender youth today[...], do not feel that they need to transition entirely or at all in order to be "real" men or "real" women. Challenging the assumption that one's genitalia is the defining aspect of one's gender, they may take hormones, but not have any surgeries, or they may have a breast augmentation or reduction procedure, but not genital surgeries. Trans men, especially, often forgo "bottom" surgeries, because many are able to be seen as male only from taking hormones, and because of the tremendous cost of phalloplasty and what they see as less than adequate surgical results. Other trans youth refuse to present or characterize themselves as either male or female. Often referring to themselves as *genderqueer*, they seek to blur gender boundaries by, among other means, presenting an androgynous appearance or wearing both "male" and "female" clothing.”

Respect everyone's self-identification. Some people use the traditional pronouns he/him/his and she/her/hers even if the pronouns do not match what people traditionally think of as male and female. Some people choose to use alternative pronouns of ze/hir/hirs or the word ‘they’ all the time. Use language and behavior that is appropriate to their gender self-identification. If you don't know what pronouns or gender-labels someone uses (and there's no mutual friend around to clue you in), just ask the person. Politely. And respectfully. For example: "What pronouns do you use?"

You do NOT have the right to know any medical or anatomical information about anyone else's body, unless they decide to share it with you. This means: don't ask about their genitals, their surgeries, the effects of their hormones, etc. This is private!

## **Trans\* people in Athletics**

Trans\* people engage in all types of sport and there is often confusion about what teams they can participate on. In September 2011, the NCAA adopted a policy in regards to transgender athletes.

According to the NCAA, “A trans male (female to male) student-athlete who has received a medical exception for treatment with testosterone for gender transition may compete on a men’s team but is no longer eligible to compete on a women’s team without changing the team status to a mixed team. A mixed team is eligible only for men’s championships.” For trans women, “A trans female (male to female) student-athlete being treated with testosterone suppression medication for gender transition may continue to compete on a men’s team but may not compete on a women’s team without changing it to a mixed team status until completing one calendar year of documented testosterone-suppression treatment.”