

Everything
you always
wanted to know
—ABOUT—
Transgender*
people

**but were afraid to ask*



Vlaanderen
is gelijke kansen

COLOPHON

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Introduction

“Is it a boy or a girl?”

It’s always the first question we are dying to ask when a baby is born and straight away the tone is set for a strict m/f division. Men and women, what they are, how they are allowed to behave, how they live their lives – it all seems to be set in stone from the cradle onwards.

We know better, of course. These gender norms are so strictly defined they are sure to become painful when your sex assigned at birth does not correspond with your felt gender identity. Girls who seem a bit masculine or boys who wear make-up now and again are often treated or considered strange. Gender mechanisms do influence everybody to great extent – especially transgender people. People who do not comply with gender expectations will have to deal with resistance and will (therefore) often feel less good about themselves. That is not only very uncomfortable, it can also lead to discrimination and sometimes even violence.

Since 2009 transgender people receive specific attention in the Flemish equal opportunities policy. One of the accomplishments is the creation of the Transgender Infopoint, a central focal point for all who have questions about all sorts of transgender issues. Other realizations are the research into violence against transgender people and the publication of a brochure about transgender people at work. Since September 1st 2012 it is also possible to adjust diplomas and certificates after an official name change.

This brochure is a very important instrument. It can pave the way for our society to develop into a place where there is room for people to experience a range of feelings about their gender, rather than having to choose between just two narrow boxes. It tries not only to create clarity in these very complex gender and transgender issues but also to give hands-on information and to break down taboos.



We want to get rid of all clichés: not all transsexuals want a complete gender transition, not all transvestites are per se homosexual and not all girls who prefer to dress up as a knight rather than a princess will want to become boys later on in life.

Let’s hope this brochure will help us in better understanding each other, and allow us to get along with an awful lot less uncertainty and clumsiness, and that we, in one fell swoop, give some thought to what femininity and masculinity actually mean and what implications they have.

Pascal Smet
Flemish Minister for Equal Opportunities



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under the spotlight

FROM GENDER ...

EXPECTATIONS Our society holds quite a few expectations based on our gender assigned at birth. When you are born a girl, you are expected to feel like one. Your clothes, behaviour, posture and even how you speak are required to fit those expectations and you are of course expected to choose a boy as your partner.

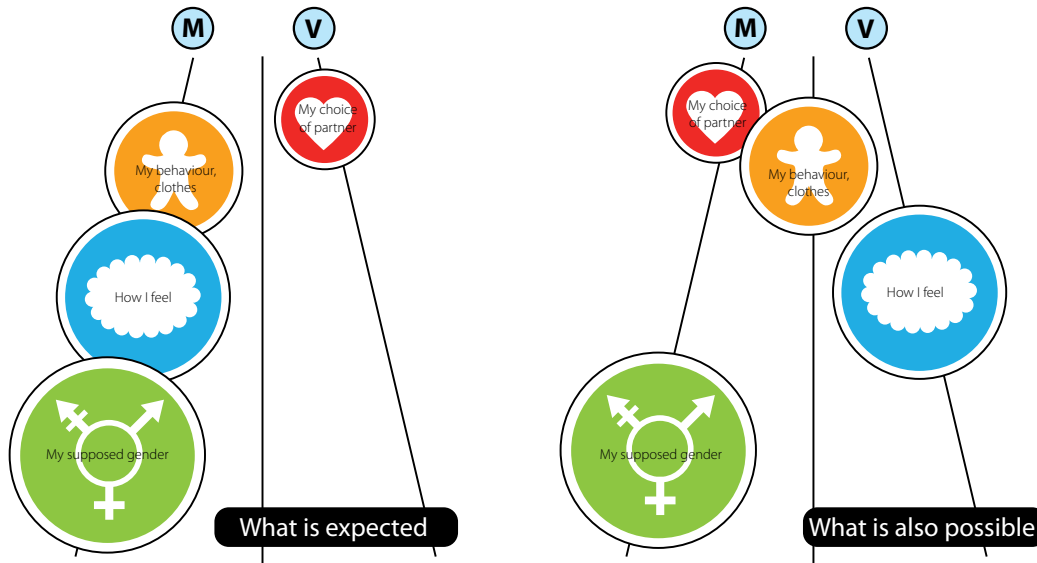
Even strangers are very quickly classified as either 'man' or 'woman', while we predict or judge their appearance, behaviour and feelings based on our assumptions.

The reality however is much more complex. How masculine or feminine you feel or appear, how masculine or feminine you behave and whether you choose a boy or a girl as your partner, those things do not always correspond.



MORE INFORMATION:

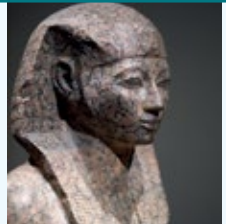
rosadoc.be/joomla/index.php/kwesties/gender
transgenderinfo.be/m/identiteit/sekse-en-gender/



timeline

1479-1458
BC

Hatshepsut is one of the few female pharaohs. She reigned for about 22 years and has not only been pictured as a woman but also as a man, with a beard.



VARIOUS ASPECTS As we nowadays understand that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' cover much more than just the biological sex of a person, a much broader conceptual framework has been developed. Unfortunately not everybody uses the same terminology which can cause confusion. In this brochure, following terms have following meaning:

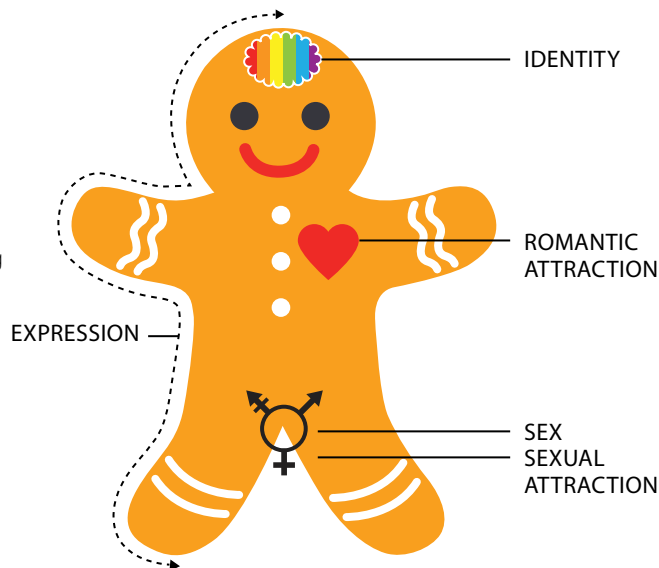
Sex • The physical aspect of masculinity and femininity. Usually we differentiate between women (with XX chromosomes) and men (with XY chromosomes) by their typical genital characteristics and reproductive organs. There are however other possibilities due to a different chromosomal makeup (XXY, XYY) or uncertain sexual characteristics. When your sex is not obviously masculine or feminine, we are dealing with **intersexuality**.

Gender • The social, cultural and psychological interpretation of femininity and masculinity.

Gender role • Those social roles imposed by your environment on your gender, based on your biological sex. Girls are for example traditionally expected to take up a caring role, do the household chores, ensure procreation and choose professions in the health care sector whereas boys are expected to show more 'macho' behaviour, the urge to compete and a need to assert themselves.

Gender identity • Your innermost feelings. Do you identify as a boy, a girl, both or neither? For most people these feelings correspond with their biological sex.

Gender expression • The extent to which you express yourself either in a masculine or feminine way. This has to do with choice of clothing (skirt, hoodie, ...), language, mannerisms, make-up, hair-do, use of perfume, dealing with emotions and other expressions. Gender expression relates therefore definitely to cultural references. What's considered very masculine in one culture for example can seem very feminine in another. Only very few people express themselves solely masculine or feminine.



Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, also known as Elagabalus, was as good as certain transvestite. Some claim Antoninus also had gender reassignment surgery, making her the only Roman empress.



Sexual orientation or preference • Whom you fancy, fall in love with, have sex with.... We mainly refer to heterosexual/straight (preference for the other sex), gay or lesbian (preference for your own sex) or bisexual (preference for men and women). As this division is the result of a too simplistic subdivision of gender, nowadays other words pop up as well, such as pansexual (preference not based on sex, and therefore aimed at all possible genders). This classification is not unambiguous either. What you desire, what arouses you, what you do and how you refer to yourself can differ enormously. You can refer to yourself heterosexual and still fantasise about gay sex.

Gender norms • The expectations linked to your gender by your culture. These gender norms will expect a different gender identity, gender expression, gender role and partner choice depending on whether you are considered to be a man or a woman. People will try – consciously or not – to comply with these expectations, which can lead to internal conflicts when you feel differently or you would like to express yourself differently.

TWO CHOICES? • Traditionally in our culture, we see two possibilities: man or woman. This is what we call a 'binary' view on man or gender binary. Not everybody recognises themselves in this binary view and that's why some propose to leave this man-woman division completely behind.



timeline

Felicity Huffman as 'Sabrina 'Bree' Osbourne' in Transamerica (2005)

1412-1431

Joan of Arc played a decisive part in the Hundred Year War between England and France. She was convicted to die on the bonfire. She wore men's clothes, presumably to break through social hierarchy. .



... TO TRANSGENDER

WHAT IS TRANSGENDER? • Transgender persons have a gender identity which is different to the gender assigned at birth and who wish to portray their gender identity in a different way to the gender assigned at birth. It is a umbrella term covering a wide range of **gender variance**. It covers - among others - transvestites, transsexuals, genderqueer people. It does not mean someone has a problem or a disorder. When the gender identity does correspond with the biological sex, we talk about **cisgender**: for example, you will feel a man in a man's body.



1551-1589

Queen **Christina of Sweden** was more than likely bisexual and maybe even transgender. After resigning from the throne Cristina always wore men's clothes and wanted to be called earl Dohna. The earl was played by Greta Garbo in the 1933 movie Queen Christina.



MANY SIZES AND SHAPES • The group of transgender persons covers a wide range of people. People who dress differently from what society expects – either more masculine or more feminine - or people who feel a man in a woman's body or the other way round or people who sometimes feel like a man and at other times like a woman or who do not recognise themselves in this binary division. Some would like to change their body, others want permission to dress differently and still others would like to be recognised as a third gender.

THREE MAIN CATEGORIES • Usually there are three main categories within this group: transvestites, genderqueer people and transsexuals. But not everybody agrees with this categorisation or with these names. Some will even find them offensive.

Transvestite • Regularly or sporadically wears clothing culturally associated with the other gender. That person's gender expression differs therefore from their sex assigned at birth.

Genderqueer • Feels a conflict between their felt gender identity and the sex assigned at birth. Feels either more masculine or feminine or at times male and at other times female or just does not want to comply with the man-woman division.

Transsexual • Feels a conflict between their felt gender identity and the sex assigned at birth and would like to have this to a greater or lesser extent adjusted by using hormones and/or surgery.

ARE TRANSGENDER PEOPLE LESBIAN, GAY OR BISEXUAL? ? • The lines between sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are often blurred. Many people are convinced for example that all transvestites are gay, or transsexuals are definitely heterosexual or that transvestites will 'eventually evolve towards transsexuality'. It is not that simple.

However, saying there is absolutely no correlation is probably taking things too far as well. There seem to be quite a few lesbian trans women and a conspicuous lack of gay trans men. (see box)

NUMBERS

73% 73% of all trans men (p 13.) say they are attracted to women.
About **5%** say to be attracted to men.
All other trans men are attracted to both.

33% of all trans women (p. 13) say they are attracted to men.
Nearly **26%** are attracted to women.
All other **41%** fancies both.



MORE INFORMATION:

About lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the brochure "Everything you always wanted to know about LGBT's"

timeline

1728-1810

Chevalier d'Éon, secret agent, lived the first 49 years of her life as a man and the other 33 as a woman. Even though she was a natal male, she used to do her spying as a woman and in 1777 the King granted her wish to be officially acknowledged as a woman.



TRANSVESTISM

WHAT IS A TRANSVESTITE? • Transvestism is assuming a gender expression completely opposite to the person's sex. A man will wear women's clothing and a feminine hair-do or even a wig, whereas women will wear men's clothing and often even fake facial hair. They will also try to express themselves as someone from the opposite sex in mannerisms, use of language and posture. Transvestism is a difficult issue in our culture. It is clouded by such a huge taboo that we mainly know it from fancy dress parties, carnival or on stage as show transvestism. Most transvestites will dress up secretly or when with close friends.

WHY? • In the olden days girls used to dress up as men in order to benefit from all perks related to the male gender role. As a man you used to have more privileges and you were allowed to join the army. Think of **Joan of Arc** for example.

Some transvestites dress up because it gives them the opportunity to show a side of themselves that does not fit their expected gender expression. Sometimes a transvestite really does feel like a man in a woman's body or the other way round, but that is definitely not always the case.

Some transvestites get sexually aroused by wearing the opposite sex's clothing. Other transvestites will dress up as part of a game, at a pride or because of its show element.

WORD SOUP • Several words cover the term transvestism. For example:

Transvestism: In Flanders we usually use the words 'transvestism' and 'transvestite'. They come from the Latin words 'trans' (change) en 'vesta' (clothing).

Drag: which mainly covers show transvestism. Men in women's clothing are called **drag queens**, and women in men's clothing are called **drag kings**.

HOW FREQUENT IS IT? • The number of transvestites is difficult to assess because many of them dress up secretly but some seem to think there are between 40,000 and 200,000 male, adult transvestites in Belgium. (we have no numbers on female transvestites)

FAMOUS TRANSVESTITES: **Maarten/Maartje 't Hart** (writer), **Divine** (actress), **Guido Belcanto** (singer)



Glenn Close in *Albert Nobbs* (2011)

1804-1876

Amandine Dupin is an unknown woman, but her male alter ego **George Sand** is a legend. After divorcing her husband, with whom she had two children, Amandine became famous as the Parisian writer George, who dressed as a man and had relationships with composers like Liszt and Chopin.



GENDERQUEER

WHAT IS A GENDERQUEER PERSON? • Some people live in a zone in-between men and women. They combine both male and female characteristics and see themselves as both man and woman or neither and usually they do not wish to be limited by binary expectations. Some also wish to have their body partially adjusted with cross-sex hormones and/or surgery. Their biological sex's characteristics are a hurdle in their journey of cross-gender expression.

WOORDENSOEP • Genderqueer individuals – or people who can be described as such – refer to themselves in different ways. There are therefore quite a few words that only diverge in the details. We'll name but a few:
Androgynous: characteristic of people who are seen/want to be seen as both man and woman by society.
Third gender: this term rejects the man/woman binary division. A genderqueer individual is neither a man nor a woman nor something in-between but a fully-fledged third gender.

HOW FREQUENT IS IT? • We only have very few data available. Some people seem to think that the number of currently known genderqueer individuals is but the tip of the iceberg. The description is still relatively unknown causing searching genderqueer individuals to often try and fit in with better known groups as transvestites or transsexuals. Neither did there used to be any openness should they have wished to partially adjust their body (breast enlargement or amputation for example). This led to situations where they had to remain either completely unfulfilled or to choose for a strictly speaking unnecessary complete gender reassignment.

THE INTERMEDIATE STAGE? • Some say that 'genderqueer individuals' are 'delayed transsexuals'. This period of being a genderqueer individual is thus seen as a long transition period between a male and female appearance. This point of view clearly does not do justice to the genderqueer individuals' individuality. Although many genderqueer individuals do indeed evolve into transsexuality, it is definitely not a prerequisite.

ACCEPTANCE AND SELF-IMAGE • Genderqueer people move in-between masculinity and femininity which causes a lot of resistance. They often feel forced to choose between being either 'man' or 'woman'. That is why some will constantly switch between both gender roles whereas they would much rather prefer to combine both aspects in one role.

timeline

1910

Magnus Hirschfeld was the first person to describe the word 'transvestite' as a person who wears clothing of the opposite sex. He showed that transvestism occurs among people across all genders and sexual orientations.



RELATIONSHIPS • Their partners often have problems dealing with it as well: if their partner is man nor woman, how 'do they have to' refer to themselves? Are they gay or straight? Some partners do manage to accept the fact that their partner is genderqueer and to include that in their relationship. This will of course reassure the genderqueer person they are supported, enabling them to become more self-assured.

FAMOUS GENDERQUEER PEOPLE: There are barely any role models. The model **Andrej Pejic** could possibly be considered to be one, but he does not refer to himself as such.



Andrej Pejic

TRANSSEXUALITY

WHAT IS A TRANSSEXUAL PERSON? • Some people have a gender identity completely opposite to their sex assigned at birth. Women feel like men or the other way round and they want to adjust their gender expression and often also their body to these feelings. Not every transsexual though wants to have their body fully or partially adjusted.

WORD SOUP • Again we find a lot of resistance against this particular word, also among transsexuals. Their argument is that transsexuality as such has nothing to do with sexuality or sexual feelings but with gender identity. However, transsexuality is the best-known term and many subscribe to this description. Other terms you might find:

Trans man: a person born a woman but with a male gender identity.

Trans woman: a person born a man, but with a female gender identity.

Post-op, pre-op: prefixes indicating whether a transsexual person has had gender reassignment surgery (post-op) or not (pre-op). The argument against these terms is that they seem to insinuate that every transsexual individual should have surgery.

HOW FREQUENT IS IT? • According to the data, transsexuality is a pretty rare phenomenon although estimates differ wildly. Between 1993 and 2012, 631 people officially changed the gender marker on their birth certificate in Belgium but presumably this number is a lot higher because it does not include transsexual persons who aren't complying with the legal provisions. The Gender Team at Ghent's University Hospital reports an exponential increase in registrations because there is currently much more attention paid to transsexuality in the media.



CAUSES OF TRANSEXUALITY • The causes for transsexuality are still not clear. A few possible explanations have been proposed, but they have not yet been proven. Some claim it's the result of a certain brain development, while others think that the roots of transsexuality are linked to the identity development during a person's early years where relationships, environment and personal experiences all play a part. It makes sense to think that several factors simultaneously cause not only the creation but also the continuation of transsexual feelings.

EVOLUTION OF TRANSEXUAL FEELINGS

Childhood • From a very young age on, children can feel as if they want to be the other gender. This, however, does not necessarily point at transsexuality.

Puberty • Most children who have these feelings will feel no or only slight tension between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth once passed puberty.

For some however this tension will never calm down and only increases at the start of puberty, when their bodies start developing. That is the time when a body really becomes either masculine or feminine due to the hormones. Transgender people then often feel desperate and would like for those bodily changes to either stop or be reversed. This desperation can lead to suicidal feelings. People feeling trapped in their own body. This is what we call **gender dysphoria**.

Some people manage to overcome that particular conflict, others keep struggling with it - because they fear a lack of understanding or because they think that out of their male body no acceptable female body can be made or the other way round - and a third category of people decides to look for help.

Older age • Young transsexuals who have tried to suppress their internal conflict will have to deal with it again later in life. Others understand only at a later age that the confusion with which they struggled at a younger age was in fact a conflict between their gender identity and biological sex. They mostly realise this after reading about other transsexual people in the papers or magazines or after seeing a film dealing with this particular issue

FAMOUS TRANSEXUAL PEOPLE • **Chaz Bono** (son of Cher), **Lana Wachowski** (with her brother director of for example The Matrix), **Maxim Februari** (philosopher, columnist), **Fran Bambust** (writer), **Dana International** (singer)



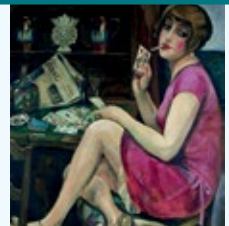
Fran Bambust

© Jeroen Vanmeste

timeline

1930

First gender reassignment surgery done on the artist Lili Elbe under Hirschfeld's supervision.



IF SOMEBODY CLOSE TO YOU IS TRANSGENDER

IMPACT When somebody comes out as a transgender person, it is not only a big step for said person but it also has an impact on people close to them. It is therefore important that everybody has all the right information about transgender issues and has all their questions answered.

PARTNERS OF TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS As the partner of a transgender person you might have and get a lot of questions. Existing relationships come under pressure because all of a sudden you have to review your own expectations and your partner's image. But even in case of new relationships you can expect some questions. "So, what are you then? Are you gay, lesbian, bisexual? Or is it transgender people whom you fancy?"

You might be completely at ease with those kind of inquiries, but if you're not, do not feel guilty, but talk about it. Contact the Transgender Infopoint (www.transgenderinfo.be).

OULDERS VAN TRANSGENDER PEOPLE As a parent you want the best for your child. This is not to say that it can't be difficult sometimes as a parent to deal with your child's gender variance. What do you do if your environment reacts negatively? Thankfully since a few years even parents with (very young) children can consult the Gender Team Children's Group in Ghent. (see box).

Is my child transgender?

YOUNG AND DIFFERENT • Our identity development commences in the first years of our lives and really never ends. From a very young age on we start identifying with our gender. Usually this happens in accordance with expectations but in some cases people see themselves differently from what their biological sex predicts: their gender identity differs then from their biological sex.

It is very possible that even a young child shows gender-nonconforming behaviour. It does not necessarily mean we are dealing with gender dysphoria. This diagnosis is only made when the child suffers from those feelings. Chances are these feelings simply fade out as the child grows older.



Ma vie en Rose (1997)

1969

Riots in New York when the gay bar **The Stonewall Inn** was evacuated by the Metropolitan Police. After years of violence and bullying by the police, the patrons, mainly transvestites, decided to fight back.



NUMBERS

When a little boy feels like a girl and prefers to wear skirts, it does not necessarily remain so.

80%

of all children reported with the Ghent Gender Team do seem to find peace with their gender at a later age, but 75% of them do turn out to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.

ADVICE IS NEEDED • “It will pass” is a very clumsy answer. First of all life happens now, you are having questions now and you want to help your child now. Are they unhappy? Should you refer to him or her as ‘her’ or ‘him’ from now on? Do you want it to pass? Don’t you want to accept your child just as it is? You would like to give in to their right to experiment and self-discovery (see p.16) but what to do at school? And what if you do not allow them to express themselves in the other gender, are you traumatising them? And what if, on the other hand, you are too positive, aren’t you confirming it and pushing them too much in the direction of surgery? That is fine in the end but maybe not what you would most strive for, or do you? Do not leave your questions unanswered, **ask for help**. The Ghent Gender Team Children’s Group is there to assist and guide you

A FEW TIPS

- What you can do in any case:
 - Support your child and confirm your unconditional love
 - Question your own reactions. Do you struggle with certain gender expectations yourself?
 - Openly discuss any bullying your child might encounter.
 - Help your child in building protective strategies such as prepared answers to comments from other children.
 - Give your child examples of famous, successful people who did not comply with gender stereotypes - Madonna, Antony and the Johnsons for example...
 - Talk to your child’s teacher if you think others laugh at them or if they are the victim of bullying.
 - Relax, keep your sense of humour, and keep loving them

timeline

1979

The **Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association** was established. It is a worldwide professional organisation providing transgender care.



Your child is in the midst of a journey of self-discovery by choosing toys, clothing and friends. Open yourself to this journey and enjoy it.

THE CHILDREN'S TEAM IN ACTION • The children's team won't just give you a list of dos and don'ts. The team will talk to you, the parents, and to your children. They will do tests, find out what your child wants and how it deals with hurdles and of course they will guide you during the process. This should calm the situation down as you're not facing it alone anymore.

They will also help you to deal with all expectations, wishes, with compromises about where and when dressing up is possible and where it is not. They will also advise you as to how to deal with your environment and, if need be, the Children's Group will contact the school and teacher in order to get them involved. The team will consider all your questions.



Tomboy (2011)

UNPREDICTABLE • In the meantime your child keeps the right to experiment and the freedom to change their opinion. As we have said already: your identity keeps on changing. The team shall thus not immediately be able to predict how this will all end but everything will become more clear along the way and you, i.e. parents and children, might have to make some decisions about the future as well.

PUBERTY ON HOLD • When your child indeed seems to suffer from gender dysphoria and can be helped by way of a transition, your child will receive **puberty blockers**. At least if discovered timely, if the child was guided for a long enough time, if the team gives its unanimous agreement and the parent's consent as well. These blockers will temporarily block the genital hormones delaying therefore periods and breast growth for example with girls and growth of facial hair with boys. If your youngster eventually chooses to take cross-sex hormones (and in a later stage considers surgery) or to have their body made more masculine or feminine in any other way, at least those effects will not have to be corrected. If the youngster chooses to stop taking these blockers, the body will develop from where it left off.

Children's team, Paediatrics Departement
University Hospital, Ghent
1K5 Pediatrie
De Pintelaan 185, 9000 Ghent
T +32 9 332 24 29

What if I am transgender?

SELF-DISCOVERY

CONFUSION REIGNS • Some have a clear answer to this question. They realise from a very young age on they belong to the opposite gender. For most people however it is a confusing issue.

If as a boy you are fascinated by a girl, it might not be fully clear whether you're in love or just jealous of her body and clothes. And if she also has a boyfriend who kisses her, you could be forgiven for thinking your jealousy is caused by the kissing and you want to kiss that boy too. And when you realise it makes you happy as a boy to wear girl's clothing or as a girl to have short hair like a boy or to play rough games, does that really mean anything?

COMPELLING EXPECTATIONS • In our culture we tend to quickly label any expressions, behaviour or feelings that deviate from what is expected. 'ADHD-person', 'light autistic', 'highly intelligent', 'highly sensitive' and... 'transgender' are just a few examples of such 'labels'. Although these labels might be liberating because they give you the freedom to behave differently, at the same time, however, they can be very limiting because they are linked to a whole new set of expectations. When you are labelled as a **trans child** or **gender child** from a young age on, it might be clear that at age 11 you will start cross-gender hormone treatment and that you'll have gender surgery at 18. But aren't these choices equally influenced by certain expectations?

DISCOVERY THROUGH EXPERIMENT • Everybody, young and old, has the right to experiment, the right to transcend expectations, such as gender expectations for example. Allow yourself for as long as possible to try and avoid labels and long-standing expectations. Discover in full openness what it is you want before choosing a certain trajectory because some choices, such as operations, are irreversible.

DISCOVERY THROUGH RECOGNITION • Not everybody however gets the chance to experiment. Many do it in secret and stick to thought experiments, as in: what would it be like if I... Such thought experiments can be fed with stories, real or not. You can watch movies and documentaries and read biographies, novels, articles and testimonies. Maybe you'll recognise yourself, maybe not, or only partially.

timeline

1993

The transgender youngster **Brandon Teena** was raped and murdered in Nebraska. The film "Boys Don't Cry" is based on his life story.



COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET



OUT OF THE CLOSET? • 'Coming out of the closet', 'coming out' or revealing yourself openly as transgender, often consists of two parts: 'talking about it' and 'showing it'.

Talk about it: You talk about your feelings, about how you see yourself, about your questions and possible answers. In fact, you're asking for **understanding** and **support**. The 'understanding' part can be quite difficult but since more and more transgender people – mainly transsexuals – appear in our media, it has gotten a lot easier these days. It usually happens in stages: first you tell your best friends, maybe later your parents and the rest of the family and later still other people.

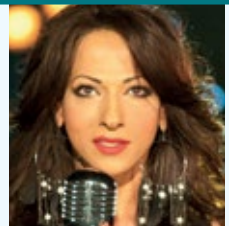
Show it: To come out as transgender often has a physical aspect. You change your appearance, you change your name and you request to use that **name** from that moment onwards and to be referred to as 'he', 'she' or 'zhij' (zie/hir). For some people this is quite confronting because it is a huge step from the idea into reality. People who have known you for a long time might struggle to adjust their image of you. It seems that for most the hardest part is to address you with your new name and the

desired gender appropriation. You could ask people to call you by your new name and appropriation without having any physical changes but you'll find that to be very confusing for those around you. Do not get too angry too quickly with people who call on you differently: what is crystal clear to you, might be very confusing to them.

THE QUESTIONING LOOK • When you have eventually given yourself a new identity with a new name and possibly a more masculine or feminine appearance, you will often be recognised as 'transgender'. You might prefer it that way or maybe you don't like it at all. You can opt to explain and to discuss your 'transgender identity'. You might get tired after a while of always having to explain and just hope that people can accept you the way you are without any explanation. However, as long as there are no prominent transgender people in our society, transgender individuals will remain remarkable people who evoke questions. You can always choose not to answer them.

1998

The Israeli singer **Dana International** (stage name of Sharon Cohen, born Yaron Cohen) won the Eurovision song contest with the song Diva.



STEALTH • Some transgender people don't stand out. They live invisibly in that new gender role. In transgender-jargon we call this 'stealth'. This obviously only works if you can make that new role work, what we call being 'passable' (see below). You will probably want to delete all references to your past, maybe you move house and you cut ties with people from your past. But even then, there will be moments where you'll have to decide whether to talk about your transgender past. This is a tricky situation because after you've told people you will often be looked at differently. Some will suddenly consider you to be 'less of a man' or 'less of a woman'. Others might even end the relationship you have. There is the recent case where a man sued the woman he had been married to for years when he discovered she was a trans woman. This is why many prefer to keep it a secret although it's not always an easy thing to do. As a trans man or trans woman you are infertile in your new appearance and your genitals might not always work in the way others expect them to. On top of that there is always the risk of getting 'outed', as somebody from your past could show up, or you if have to present your old official papers. Especially when you have not had gender reassignment surgery, the following questions can be even more pressing: When do you tell your partner? During one of the first dates or just before you sleep together? Some 'stealth' transgender people choose to only tell a few close friends about their transgender identity. Some only come out once to all those around them and hope that will be the end of it. Others will prefer to keep it a secret.

REMAIN IN THE CLOSET • So, it's possible to be closeted before as well as after your transition, and you might prefer to keep it that way. In the first scenario you might be struggling with your feelings or because you fear rejection from your family, friends or colleagues. In the second scenario this fear of rejection certainly also plays a part and you probably prefer not to be reminded of your past.

HOW BEST TO TELL? • There is no 'best way', unfortunately. You can talk it over with a health care professional or with people who share your experience. Think about how you want to do it, how to assess all risks, when would be the best time and how to look beyond that one moment.

Formal style • You call for a meeting, indicating a specific time and place. You start by saying that "there is something I need to tell you" after which you say you do not see yourself as woman or man. Do not expect immediate fireworks and champagne. Give the other time to get used to the idea and to ask questions.

You could also write a letter or e-mail. In this scenario you're in a position to re-read your text several times and dictate its rhythm. Moreover, this way the people you address have a bit of thinking time before they react. It is a bit impersonal however, they cannot look you in the eyes making it sometimes easier for them to react negatively.

timeline

1999

The **Transgender Day of Remembrance** was established by Gwendolyn Ann Smith, an American transgender activist in order to remember the murder of trans woman Rita Hester in Massachusetts. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is now held every year on November 20th in honour of all the victims of transphobic murder.



The dropping hints-style • You can also 'drop hints', i.e. drop subtle hints about your choice of clothing, the differences between men and women, a movie or book you highly rate of which others know it deals with transgender issues. Or you can leave magazines behind. You then wait until others ask you – after umpteen hints – whether you are a transgender person and at that moment you can tell them. Even if they do not ask the question directly, you have the advantage it catches them less by surprise.

The diplomat • Maybe you do not fancy the confrontation at all but you know someone you're close to who could act as the go-between. Maybe the health care professional wants to take on that role. You can choose to ask this diplomat to come along to a formal conversation or to let them have that conversation when you're not around.

“DADDY BECOMES MUMMY” • It is very difficult to predict how your child will react to your coming out. There has been next to no research done in terms of how their development is influenced by their parents coming out. Every child will react differently to the situation and will adapt differently to any changes within the family. One thing however is true for all children: it is a unique happening in their lives. The people closest to them (father, mother, sisters, brothers, grandparents) are experiencing it at the same time as them and it is just as brand new to them. A few tips:

- Talk it through with your partner. Make sure you're on the same wavelength.
- Avoid shock effect or discovery by chance.
- Pay attention to the child's age and adapt what you're about to tell them to what they can handle. Be clear about everything, also about what it will mean for your family, your relationship and how you will be addressed as.
- Also immediately inform the wider circle of people around you.
- Give your children time to process and accept everything. The relationship with their peers and social support are very important to a child.

COMING-OUT AT SCHOOL • Are you still in school and you would like to express yourself in your new role there as well? Talk about it with your parents and your counsellor at the Children's Gender Team. They will most definitely contact teachers and school management and provide them with information and educational material.



MORE INFORMATION:

2010 Genderdysphoria and school: : information for guiding pupils suffering from gender dysphoria.

• www.genderindeblender.be

• www.transgenderinfo.be

Vladimir Luxuria, pseudonym of Wladimiro Guadagno, became the first openly transsexual member of Italian parliament. Her election caused riots and insults from conservative parties.



Discrimination against transsexual employees is illegal

The European Union protects transsexual people from discrimination in employment. In 1992, a transsexual woman was fired after she had a gender reassignment operation. She took her employer to court. In 1996, the European Court of Justice ruled that this was a case of discrimination on the grounds of sex as she was dismissed because of her gender identity.

With reference to this case, the European Union included gender reassignment in the 2006 Gender Recast Directive confirming that transsexual employees are protected from discrimination.



European law is clear
What about the law in your country?

ILGA EUROPE
www.ilga-europe.org

Your parents can help as well by:

Consulting with the school and teachers and informing them. You can refer them for example to the 'Transgender Infopoint' (www.transgenderinfo.be) and 'Gender in de blender' (www.genderindeblender.be);

Lay down the coming out trajectory with your teachers, parents and the Children's Gender Team.

TRANSGENDER AT WORK • To come out at work is not a given. Transgender people often seem to suffer more from annoying behaviour by colleagues than others. There seems to be more understanding for transsexual people considering surgery or who have had surgery, while transvestites and transgender people do not seem to encounter those same levels of sympathy. Especially when you're a natal male transitioning into a woman, male colleagues seem to have problems accepting that particular transition.

A few tips:

- Inform your manager and refer them for example to Transgender Infopoint (www.transgenderinfo.be).
- Do not confront them with a fait accompli, but decide together when and where to take which steps, when you will assume a new name, what toilets to use and how to communicate with colleagues. Mutual respect and dialogue offer the best chance for a smooth coming out at work.

MORE INFORMATION:

- Transgenders op de werkvloer – see www.gelijkekansen.be ("Transgender people at work")
- Rutgers Nisso Group, 2010 Transgender people and work, an investigation into the transgender people's work situation in the Netherlands and Flanders

timeline

2008

Launch of the youngsters' website **genderindeblender.be**, a project organised by the province of Flemish Brabant supported by the Flemish government in cooperation with LGBT civil society organisations.



SEXUALITY AND FERTILITY

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN BED

How transgender people experience sexuality depends on quite a few aspects:

HORMONES - Testosterone greatly influences libido. When a trans man receives testosterone or a trans woman blocks testosterone, it will seriously influence their sex life. Trans men report higher libido whereas 25% of all trans women report a very low sexual desire.

GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY - After surgery the libido of many trans women is said to be on the up again. This could be explained by the fact they feel better about themselves and they have more self-confidence. Trans men also report higher sexual arousal after surgery. Surgery techniques have developed in such a way that a satisfying sex life is definitely possible

THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEIR BODIES - Many transgender people struggle with their body and some even hate their biological gender. That explains why they do not really fancy sex. This often improves when they adjust their bodies using for example cross-sex hormones and/or surgery.

TRANSGENDERISM AS STIMULATION - Some transgender people get aroused simply by dressing up or being treated in their desired gender role and hope to incorporate it in their sex life.

FERTILITY - If you take hormones for a long time or have surgery, infertility is often the result. Consider this carefully before proceeding with your transition, even though you have no wish to have children at the time. The desire for children could surface later in life and it pays to be prepared. Adults for example can have either sperm or ova frozen for later use.

2008

Thomas Beatie becomes known as the 'pregnant man'. Legally speaking he was a man at the time. He had kept his reproductive organs in order to be able to have children.



ADAPT YOUR APPEARANCE



M Butterfly (1993)

NOT EVERYBODY TRANSITIONS FROM MAN TO WOMAN OR THE OTHER WAY ROUND • When we talk about transgender people, the word **'transition'** comes up just as quickly. This word does not imply that every transgender person transitions from man to woman or the other way round. Reality shows much more nuances. Some may wish for a more feminine body but without totally eliminating all masculinity from it.

SELF-DETERMINATION • Who knows, maybe you want to accentuate both typically male (such as facial hair) as well as typically female traits (breasts for example)? It is important to know you are not making life easier on yourself within society but only you can tell if outing yourself extensively outweighs possible disapproving glances. That is the core of self-determination: to be armed with all possible information and insight, to be supported by experienced experts, and to choose yourself.

PASSABLE • Many trans men and women strive to be passable: they want to be recognised in their desired gender and not their biological sex. They do not want 'to get caught out'. That is why they will make their appearance either more masculine or more feminine by restricting as much as possible all signals belonging to their old gender and by reinforcing those belonging to their desired gender. This can range from adjusting their hair-do and clothing to adjusting their bodily characteristics but also their mannerisms, use of voice and other small details. Research has indicated that appearances are the main factor in whether or not you're passable. If your looks are alright, your voice does not have to be perfect, whereas a perfect voice does not help if your body keeps sending out signals related to your old gender.

timeline

2009

Chaz Bono, son of Cher and Sonny, announces he has started a gender transition.





Calamity Jane (1953)

BECOME MORE MASCULINE

You can become more masculine in many ways. You can adapt your body in several ways but you can also introduce adjustments in your posture, your clothing and so on. Some changes are made out of a personal necessity and others because you want to create a specific response from those around you. One person will for example want the uterus removed, although no-one can see it, whereas somebody else will just want to be addressed as a 'man' and will therefore try to radiate masculinity using external signals.

Attention: this is not a checklist of what you 'must do' or 'must have done'. What is necessary for one person might be completely irrelevant for somebody else.

ACCESSORIES • If you want to hide your breasts or make them less visible, you can tie them down. Some will use ordinary tape but specially designed **vests** are more appropriate and less painful. A penis on the other hand can be faked with **pants stuffing** or **penis prothesis**. With some pants stuffing you can even pee standing up. During sex you can use **strap-ons**.

HORMONES • Hormones have a much more drastic effect. The male hormone **testosterone** will give you an irreversibly lower voice even only after a few months. The fat distribution in your body will become more masculine, your breasts will reduce in size and become less firm, your skin will become tougher and greasier and you might even get acne. Your menstrual cycle will stop completely you're your libido will increase and your clitoris will grow slightly. Your muscle mass will increase and you will get facial hair as well as more hair everywhere else on your body. Some will even suffer from a

2011

Anna Grodzka became the first openly transsexual Polish member of parliament.



receding hairline. These effects however do not appear always to the same extent and at the same rate. Always call in the help of an endocrinologist. They can assist you with regards to correct and safe hormonal treatment and will check for unwanted side-effects. Self-medication or the purchase of hormones on-line is strongly advised against.

SURGERY • If necessary, you can also opt for one or more operations. You can for example have your breasts removed. Some will have their uterus, cervix, ovary and oviduct removed during that same procedure. It is obvious that if you choose to go down that road, you can no longer have children nor will you produce any more hormones. You will therefore have to be medically managed for the rest of your life. You could also choose to have your genitals adapted. The plastic surgeon can construct male looking genitals out of your vagina and labia, changing your clitoris into a micro-penis. The surgeon can also use bits of skin from your lower arm or your thigh to make a larger penis. At a later stage it is possible to incorporate an erection prosthesis in the penis and silicone testicles into the scrotum.

CLOTHING AND HAIR-DO • By choosing another hair-do and wearing masculine clothes, you will quickly create an impressive effect. You need to experiment but ask assistance from someone you can trust and whom you allow to give remarks. Not every shirt, suit and tie combination oozes masculinity.

USE OF LANGUAGE AND VOICE AND BODY LANGUAGE • The way you talk, walk, sit or react is also part of whether you are perceived as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Usually this happens unconsciously. Spending years being a woman among woman, a girl among girls, does leave it marks in use of voice and vocabulary, mannerisms, way of sighing, raising your eyes etc. Allow yourself the time to pick up on more masculine nuances and exercise with friends, observe and experiment.



MORE INFORMATION:

www.transgenderinfo.be

Transgenderzorg! Guy T'sjoen e.a., Uitgeverij Acco, 2013

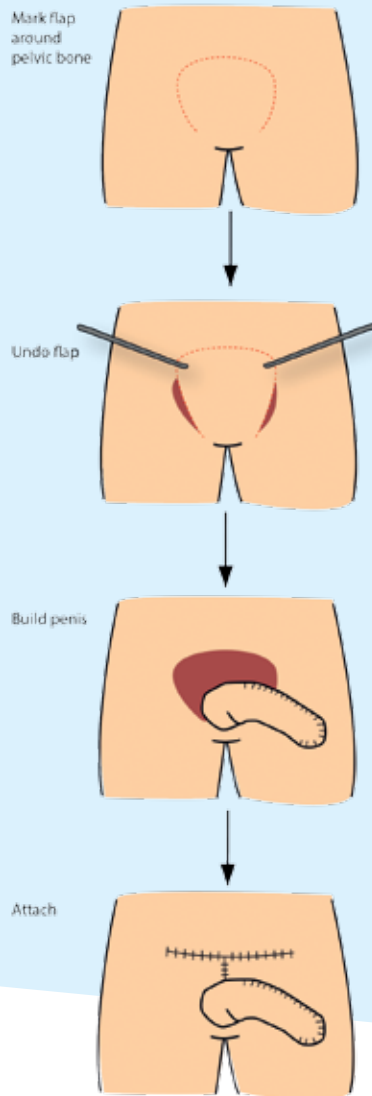
timeline

2012

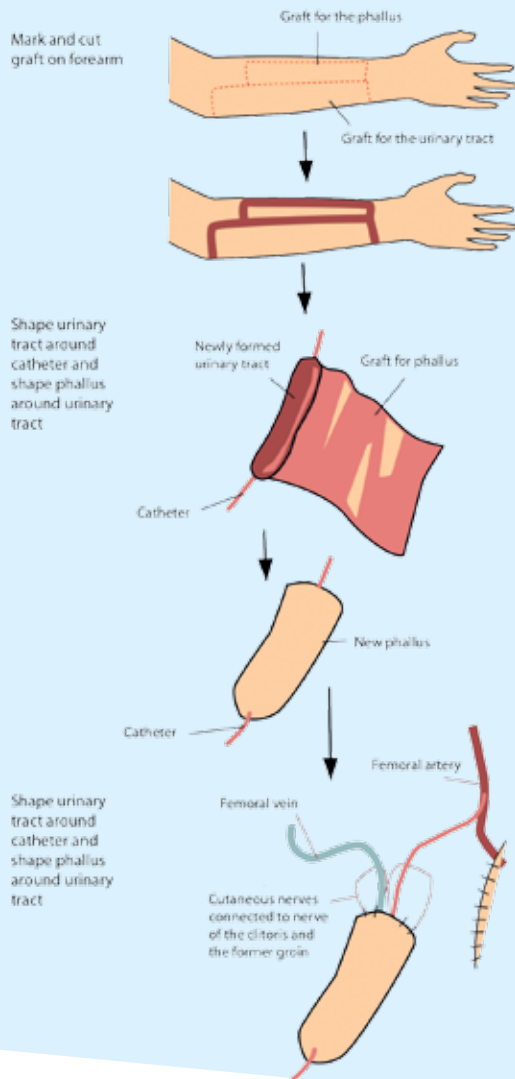
The Argentinian Senate ratified the gender identity law. According to this law you can declare your gender identity without having to undergo surgery or hormonal treatment. Your gender identity will simply be adjusted on your ID. In 2012 this law was the most progressive law in the world.



Phalloplasty with pubic area flap



Phalloplasty with graft from the arm



2013

Chelsea Manning, born Bradley Manning, declares to want to live as a woman the day after her conviction for leaking secret government information to WikiLeaks. Her coming out created commotion about the rights of transgender people in American prisons.



BECOME MORE FEMININE

If you want to look more feminine, you can do that through small, subtle changes, such as an adjustment in your clothes or posture but maybe you want to introduce more drastic changes in your appearance. Below we list a few possibilities. This list is more than likely not exhaustive nor is it a guideline. There is nothing you must do. Some are happy with new clothes, others want drastic surgery.

CLOTHING AND HAIR-DO • Long hair in a nice cut and a more frivolous blouse will quickly give you a feminine appearance. You do not necessarily have to reach for dresses, skirts or pumps. A well-chosen T-shirt and pair of trousers can already give your appearance a feminine touch.

ACCESSORIES • Female curves can be simulated using special **thigh pads** and **breast prothesis** although **pre-shaped bras** are widely available in supermarkets and they can sometimes do wonders. There are also **corrective pants** available which can help to camouflage your penis. The lack of long hair can be compensated by using **wigs, hair pieces** or **extensions**. Wigs are available in different price ranges and for every particular hair-do. Experiment at first with cheap pieces which you let a barber work on. Look for a style that suits you before ordering a more expensive wig.

HORMONES • Through hormonal treatment you can either inhibit the creation of the male hormone **testosterone**, or administer the female hormone **oestrogen**. Your endocrinologist will usually prescribe both in the form of tablets, ointments or Band-Aids after which the drastic effects will very quickly come into effect. Muscle mass diminishes, bodily hair is reduced, breasts will develop, you will stop losing hair, libido will diminish and maybe you will be tired



Breakfast on Pluto (2005)



Laurence Anyways (2012)

quicker or more emotional. Long-time use of hormones can also make you infertile, so talk it through with a psychologist, psychiatrist or endocrinologist because this process can be irreversible... If you wish to do so, you can decide to have sperm frozen for later use.

Should you choose to have gender reassignment surgery, you probably won't need to take any more testosterone blockers because its main source – your testicles – will be removed. Your endocrinologist will however prescribe you oestrogens for the rest of your life and you best remain under supervision to check for unwanted side-effects. This is why we strongly advise against self-medication or online purchase of hormones.

Hormones won't however remove all masculine traits. Your voice will not change, your lost hair will not grow back and your facial hair growth will only slightly diminish.

HAIR REMOVAL • Facial hair is a bit of a problem if you fancy a feminine face. Smooth **shaving** and covering up with foundation will only help for so long, as the beard shadow will be visible again a few hours later.

Waxing is a possibility on arms and legs, but is not advisable on your face because it can cause injuries.

Laser treatment can help in reducing facial hair growth, sometimes up to 20% or even 50% Blond hairs are much more difficult to remove but **electric epilation** can help you there.

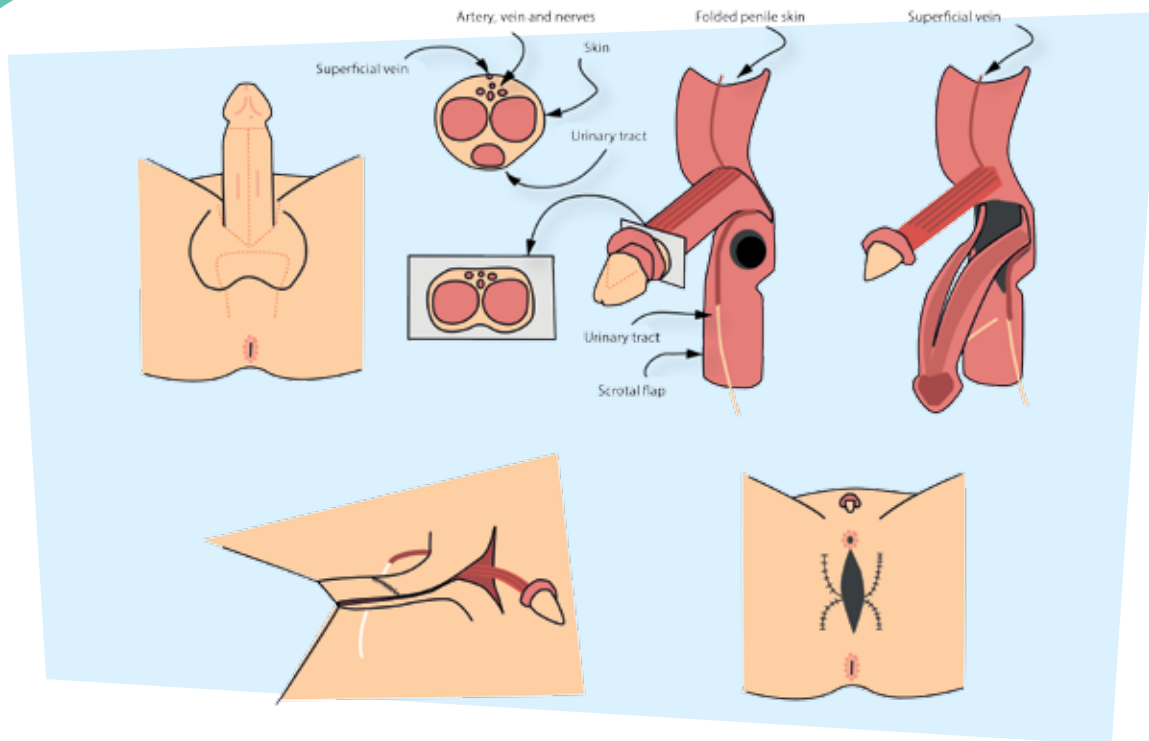
FFS or **facial feminisation surgery** • The longer your body has been making testosterone, the more masculine your body and face have become and those effects cannot always be camouflaged with make-up. Men will often have a wider nose, a bone ridge above their eyes, broader cheeks, an Adam's apple and a stronger chin. These traits will not disappear with hormones but can be adjusted surgically. Your surgeon will suggest skin, muscle and connective tissue adjustments or even adjustments to the skeleton itself.

GENITAL SURGERY • Through surgery a vagina can be constructed. The surgeon will use your penis, scrotum and helmet to create labia, a vagina and a clitoris.

Your urinary tract will be shortened so you can still pee without a problem and your nerve endings will remain intact so you can still get sexually aroused.

In order to introduce the vagina, the surgeon will have to create an opening. There is a risk however it will close up and that is why as a trans woman you will regularly have to have that opening widened, i.e.

dilated.



BREAST ENHANCEMENT • Hormonal treatment will result in breasts, but they will probably be small and for some people that will not be enough to convincingly radiate femininity. BREAST IMPLANTS can remedy that. Although these breasts will be a bit further apart than with biological women, trans women are generally speaking very happy with the result.

USE OF LANGUAGE AND VOICE • Your voice can be a dead give-away because a masculine voice is usually lower. Hormonal treatment does not rectify this but you can do exercises to learn to talk at a higher pitch, a bit softer and a bit more melodic. You can do this on your own, by imitating voices, but you could also consult speech therapist. Moreover, they can give you some language tips since you can sound more feminine by simply using other words or turns of phrase. Should speech therapy not work, or you find it too hard to always consciously be dealing with your voice, surgery is also a possibility.



Tomboy (2011)



Todo sobre mi madre (1999)

POSTURE AND BODY LANGUAGE • Your posture is another way to tell if you're a man or woman. If you sit down with your legs wide open, if you walk with determined steps and with your elbows facing outwards, you will often be perceived as a man. A more feminine posture does therefore also entail adjusting your body language. Observe and imitate. Experiment and see what you're most comfortable with.

Posture and body language can, combined with clothing, also help to hide your physique since the latter cannot be adjusted. A broad chest, narrower pelvis, bigger feet and hands remain an obstruction undermining many trans women's passability.



MORE INFORMATION:
www.transgenderinfo.be

ACKNOWLEDGED AS M/F

BINARY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT • As a transgender person you not only want to be identified as but also acknowledged as a person belonging to the desired gender. Practically speaking such acknowledgement is very limited. Our language and culture only offers two options: 'woman' or 'man', with their appropriate pronouns 'he', 'she', 'him', 'her', 'his',

For some this recognition in the gender they are experiencing will therefore always be somewhat skewed because they do not feel comfortable being categorised in one of these two labels.

HE/SHE • Whether you're referred to as a 'woman' or a 'man' depends on how you look at it. Not everybody uses the same points of reference and that can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

legal he/she – Administratively speaking every person becomes either a 'he' or 'she' depending on their biological sex, as ascertained by other people. Authorities do not leave any room for intersexual persons whose sex is not clear. Your sex assigned at birth is registered on your birth certificate and can also be deducted from your national registry number.

social he/she - People will obviously not have a look down your pants before they recognise you as a 'man' or a 'woman'. They make an unconscious, lightning-fast decision based on the signals you're sending out. Some of those relate to your physique, but many to your gender expression: clothing, hair-do, use of voice, body language and your name. Again, there is no term for people who send out mixed signals. These often make people feel uncomfortable, while they will secretly or directly ask 'whether you're a man or a woman'.

personal he/she/'zie&hir' - This is the 'gender you're living in', your gender identity. Most transgender people want to be addressed according to their gender identity. For transgender people this personal gender experience can often be ambiguous and deviate from the binary division. You can refer to yourself as "zie" or "hir" or 'genderqueer' or 'it' or different still depending on your creativity. This lack of cultural anchor makes it difficult to express yourself, which makes you feel misunderstood in too narrow a culture.

PREGNANT MAN • Because people interpret 'man' and 'woman' differently, confusion can reign. For someone who defines a 'man' as someone who produces sperm, it is a miracle when that person seems to be pregnant. For someone who considers it to be an appropriate name for their gender expression or identity, there is absolutely no problem.



REQUESTS FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT • Because people around you as well as the authorities use different points of view to denominate you, you often don't feel acknowledged as a transgender person. That request for acknowledgement however is not the same for all transgender people, leading to confusion, even within the transgender community.

	PERSONAL	SOCIAL	ADMINISTRATION
TRANSVESTITE	In men's clothes you feel male, in women's clothes, female.	You hope for recognition according to your expression and your consciously radiated signals and not according to your physique as it is more difficult to hide.	A recognised gender passport indicating your alter ego would come in handy. It saves you the trouble having to explain it every single time.
GENDERQUEER	Not binary. Difficult to translate. You identify with both genders or neither of them.	You want the freedom to not having to choose, or to switch as you see fit and to just be accepted this way. Some sort of gender neutral terminology would certainly help.	You want to get rid of this man or woman label and you would like to see this denomination restricted as much as possible. Without any extra requirements, you want to choose for yourself what suits you best, with a possible third option added to it. In short, a very rarely queried and extended acknowledgement of your gender identity . Often you will also want a new name , that restricts you less in your expression.
TRANSSEXUAL	You clearly feel man or woman, although it is opposite to your biological sex.	You hope for recognition according to your expression and your consciously radiated signals and not according to your physique as it is more difficult to hide.	You want a recognition of your gender identity and an appropriate name , preferably without any requirements.

SOCIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OR GENDER-CLICK • Gender encloses all expectations and prejudices people have based on what is perceived as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. It influences your life from beginning to end. Once you recognise the workings of gender mechanisms, you can fight them, and make the life choices you want, regardless of your gender. That is what we call the 'gender-click'. Transgender people aren't the only people that would benefit from such a 'gender-click'. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals and women's organisations are also questioning these gender-related expectations. No doubt many men would also welcome having to comply with less strict gender stereotyped expectations.



MORE INFORMATION: www.genderklik.be

GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUNS AND NAMES • Within the Dutch-speaking region there are only a limited number of proposals. Sometimes you see the word 'zhij' but that is no real solution. Apart from 'man' and 'woman', 'transgender' is mooted but that in itself causes confusion since it is also the general term covering 'transsexuals' as well, who specifically want to be acknowledged as men or women and not as transgender. Sweden has been experimenting with new pronouns. They've introduced 'hen' in their dictionaries, next to 'han' (he) and 'hon' (she).

GENDER PASSPORT OR TRANS-ID • Some transgender organisations already offer such passports to transgender people showing both male and female form and indicating your official name and your chosen name. Such a passport comes in handy in case of confusion around your identity, for example during police checks, at the post office or at customs.

Unfortunately, this gender passport doesn't have any legal value.

NAME CHANGE • Most transgender people will choose a new first name after a while because it fits their gender expression better. In Belgium you can have your first name changed based on the **Law on transexuality**. The law however, does impose some requirements. You need an endocrinologist and psychiatrist's declaration, stating:

- You are **continuously and irreversibly internally convinced** you belong to the sex opposite the one stated on your birth certificate;
- You are undergoing **cross-sex hormonal treatment** to make your body more masculine or feminine;
- Your new first name is essential to adopt your **new gender role**.

This declaration must be sent to the Ministry of Justice. A few months later you will receive a Ministerial Decision that you can take to the Registrar who will adjust your birth certificate and who will give you a new identity card. This document will also give you the right to new diploma's or other study certificates. You can go straight to your old school, centre for adult education or institute for higher education that you attended. You could also make your demand through the contact point at the Flemish Ministry for Education.



As described above, such name change is bespoke only for transgender people who receive such a declaration and who want hormone treatment. Some transvestites and transgender people can therefore not yet use this law.

ANOTHER GENDER APPROPRIATION • The administrative appropriation of your sex assigned at birth – the M/F on your birth certificate – can lead to annoying situations. On all official documents you will still be addressed as ‘Sir’, whereas you prefer to be addressed as ‘Madam’ or the other way round. Moreover, it’s also tedious when for example you need to show your ID-card, which clearly states you are a woman, while you’re dressed as a man, or the other way round.

Although the **law on transsexuality** allows you to change the M or F, its point of view remains to recognise a gender. In order to have that appropriation changed, or so the law says, you must also adjust your sex, in other words, your body. You can only have your gender appropriation changed when you file with your registrar a declaration by your surgeon and psychiatrist stating that:

- You are **continuously and irreversibly internally convinced** you belong to the gender opposite the one stated on your birth certificate;
- You have had **gender reassignment surgery** which adapted your body to the gender you want to live in full-time, if that was medically speaking possible and responsible;
- You are **no longer physically capable to have children** according to your previous gender.

If you are still under-age you will also need to be legally assisted by one of your parents or your guardian. Your new gender will then be included on your birth certificate. A few months later you will receive a new ID with a new national registry number. That number indicates your gender: the three numbers after the date of birth form an even number for women and an odd one for men. After that process you can also have your diploma and other documents adjusted.

TOWARDS A GENDER APPROPRIATION • For the time being, the law does not recognise gender identity, only gender. The Law on Transsexuality is therefore not available to genderqueer persons, transvestites or transsexuals who do not want to adjust their body. The **sterilisation requirement** excludes anyone who does not wish to be sterilised from those rights.



Transgender organisations therefore request the recognition of gender identity instead of gender, without any additional requirements. What requirements would your identity have to comply with? Only you know how you feel.



In-between open arms and closed fists

TO BE DIFFERENT IS CONFUSING

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE • Some people need help to sort out their dilemmas. 'What is happening to me?', you may ask yourself. Maybe you even think you're crazy. Or maybe that feeling of your body not corresponding with your identity can become so powerful you become deeply unhappy or maybe even suicidal. We then talk about **gender dysphoria** ('dysphoria' being the opposite of 'euphoria'). If you have those feelings for way too long, they can add to your psychological problems and we strongly advise to look for professional help.

DO NOT KEEP IT TO YOURSELF • We notice that natal men wait longer than natal women to look for help. Maybe in our macho world it is more difficult to admit as a 'man' you feel more like a 'woman' than the other way round. The fear of rejection by family, friends and work colleagues does seem to be the most important reason why people wait up to ten years before asking for help with their transgender questions. Thankfully, the young transgender generation does seem to find the way to assistance a lot quicker, thanks to the internet and attention given by the media and educational system.

GUIDELINES • In Belgium all health care professionals comply with the 'Standards of Care 7'. These standards are guidelines and indications in terms of assisting transsexuals, transgender people and gender non-conforming people. They have been composed by the WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health) <http://www.wpath.org/>



MORE INFORMATION:

www.transgenderinfo.be/l/zorgaanbod/

Struggling with thoughts of suicide?

Don't hesitate to call for help.



DE ZELFMOORDLIJN
02 649 95 55

COUNSELLING DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

1. COUNSELLING AND THERAPY

A psychologist or psychiatrist will examine how best to help you. Some require a whole series of consultations in order to untangle their feelings, others already know which path to follow. The psychologist or psychiatrist will also help you to assess all possible consequences of your choice. Some choices will for example entail giving up on the chance of ever having children.

Trans women have the possibility to freeze sperm cells but for trans men there are at the moment no conclusive solutions for storing their non-fertilised ova. Learning how to cope with the loss of fertility is, like for all people, not always easy.

During this stage most people still live in their biological gender in terms of appearance and social behaviour.

“Do I need to see a psychiatrist? • I’m not crazy, am I?” • The fact that you’re seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist does not mean at all you’re crazy or unbalanced. They are simply specialists who will assist you with their experience, knowledge and insights in order to bring your questions into focus. Most psychiatrists use a diagnosis manual, the DSM. This manual treated transgender issues under the header of ‘gender identity disorder’ in its previous issues, but since many considered this to be stigmatising, it has been replaced with the more neutral term of ‘gender dysphoria’ in the more recent editions.



Main pitfalls: Impatience and sky-high expectations. No transition solves all problems and what can take too long for you is already too quick for other people. Try and understand those around you.

2. THE SOCIAL ROLE-REVERSAL AND HORMONAL TREATMENT

When it is becoming blatantly obvious your gender questions are not based on any disorders or other problems, and you feel strong enough and sufficiently supported, you get the chance to live like you imagined it. This is referred to as the **real life experience** (RLE). You will start the search for your new identity as a man, woman or genderqueer person. You will probably experiment with your name, use of your voice, posture, clothing as well as with a few physical characteristics, such as your hair-do (*see also ‘becoming more masculine – becoming more feminine’*).



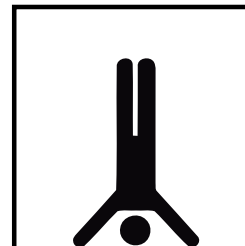
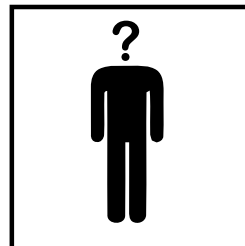
It might be helpful to take **hormones** in order to lead the life you want to lead. Hormonal treatment should be done under the supervision of an endocrinologist (a hormone specialist). Xenobiotic hormones can have drastic effects on your body. Not only does your appearance change, they can also make you infertile. Moreover, the hormonal treatment will surely influence your mental state. This stage can feel like a second puberty causing all sorts of mood swings, but at last one in the right direction.

Main pitfall: A painful confrontation with reality.

Socially speaking – Girls and boys in their puberty are often corrected in their choice of clothing and behaviour by their peers. Transgender people usually don't allow this and might go to extremely lengths when it comes to experimenting. They may rather aggressively claim their new identity because of uncertainty or fear but they're also running the risk of becoming isolated.



Personally speaking - If you are a bit older already, you will also be confronted with your body's limits. It has been moulded for years by your body's own hormones. You will not transition into a strong, young guy or a young, beautiful girl.



3. SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Some people consider surgery to be the icing on the cake. You might want drastic surgical procedures, others just want to adjust an annoying detail here and there. Other still have no need for any adjustments at all. Talk it through with experienced health care specialists but decide for yourself, calmly and fully aware that most surgical interventions are irreversible.

Under the headers 'Become more masculine – Become more feminine' you can find what your surgical options are.



Main pitfall: Overrated physical changes. Some people have unrealistic expectations towards surgery. You might expect the ultimate body, hope that all psychological problems will be resolved and that you will be able to immediately take that place in society you've always dreamed of. But be aware that you will also have to take the time to adjust to this new reality.

4. LAND IN REALITY

Once you've made all these alterations in your life, you need to learn how to deal with this new 'me'. You need to get to know and to accept your new body and new role, as well as their new limits and possibilities.

You will probably want to leave the transitional period behind you and wish to no longer be 'trans' at all. Those feelings could have consequences in terms of the way you deal with people who know your past all too well or with other transgender people. Maybe you'll move house and want a new life where your new 'me' will get all the space it needs to develop itself

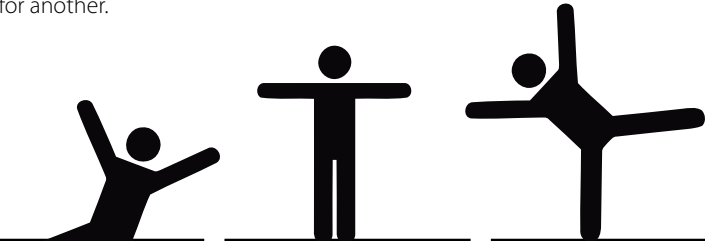


Main pitfall: Clinging to stereotypical gender roles. In your eagerness to become a 'good man' or 'woman', you may not allow yourself any room for experiments anymore. Be free. Do not exchange one prison for another.



MORE INFORMATION:

'Transgenderzorg' Guy T'sjoen,
Publishing house Acco, 2013



READING MATERIAL

BOOKS AND FILMS

GENERAL TRANSGENDER



'Breakfast on Pluto'
(Neil Jordan, 2005)
- film based on the
book of the same title

YOUNG TRANSGENDER PEOPLE



Honden doen niet aan ballet (Kemp, 2010) -
children's book

- **Ma vie en rose** (Alain Berliner, 1997) - fiction film
- **Genderkinderen - geboren in het verkeerde lichaam** (de Visser, 2012) - non-fiction
- **Tomboy** (Céline Sciamma, 2011) - fictionfilm
- **Jongensdroom** (Minkman, 2007) - youth novel

TRANSEXUAL



Laurence Anyways (2012)

- **Laurence Anyways** (Dolan, 2012) - fiction film
- **I am a woman now** (Van Erp, 2011) - documentary
- **Transamerica** (Tucker, 2005) - fiction film
- **Beautiful boxer** (Uekrongtham, 2004) - fiction film
- **Boys don't cry** (Peirce, 1999) - fiction film
- **Meisje van Mars** (Woltz, 2011) - children's book/ biography
- **De maakbare man** (Februari, 2013) - articles
- **I am your man** (Brandenburg, 2010) - novel

TRANSEVESTITE

(in film often as comedy or excuse –
f.e.. Mrs. Doubtfire, Tootsie, Mulan...)

- **The adventures of Priscilla, queen of the desert** (Elliott, 1994) - fiction film, mainly drag
- **Just like a woman** (Monger, 1992) - fiction film



More books, films and documentaries are on
www.genderindeblender.be/info.htm

TO EXCLUDE IS EXCLUDED

WHAT IS TRANSPHOBIA? • Transgender people are very often confronted with resistance, just because they don't conform to gender expectations and gender standards. Some people even experience hatred, fear and loathing towards transgender people. Transphobia can take on many forms: from discrimination to violence. It can happen anywhere: in public places, such as in the street, on the bus or in the media, at school or at work but also at home, within the family or in your relationship.

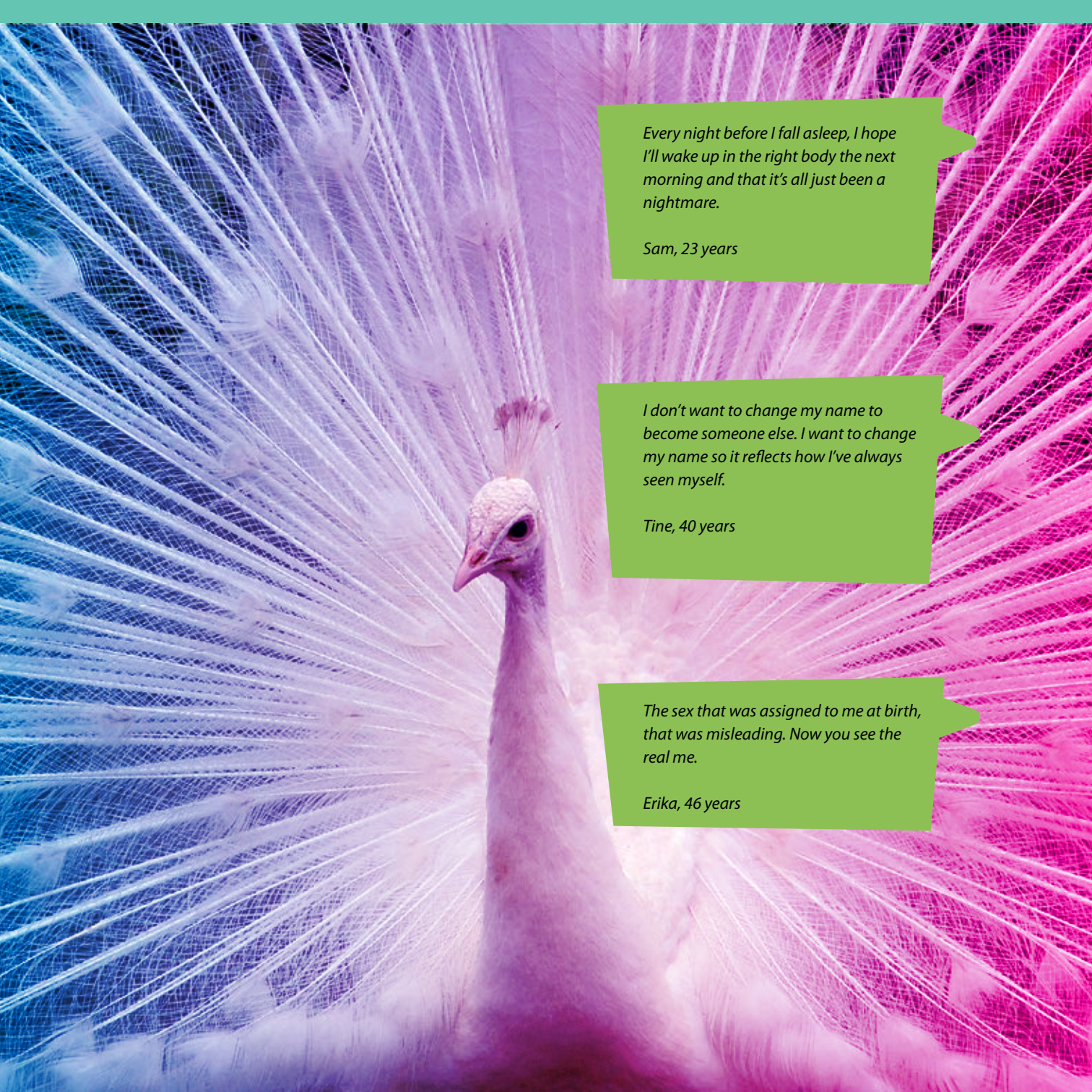
STONES OR FLOWERS • Transphobia seems to be mostly aimed at transgender people who do not exactly live within their specific 'man' or 'woman' boxes. Transgender people who don't stand out experience a lot less problems in their daily lives than those who do. It is because of exactly that reason that trans women are more often confronted with bullying than trans men.

Moreover, transgender people who are lucky enough to be very passable are often praised. Although this is brilliant for those passable transgender people, it corroborates the idea that you only deserve praise when you look like a 'real man' or 'real woman'. Transgender people who cannot or who do not want to comply with this binary ideal, might feel left in the lurch and rejected by media attention praising only handsome, pretty and passable transgender people.

TRANSPHOBIA OR HOMOPHOBIA? • Some people will argue that LGB's face more transphobia than HOMOPHOBIA: resistance against 'feminine' gays or 'butch' lesbians has sometimes more to do with their gender transcending appearance or non-conforming behaviour rather than with their sexuality as such. Vice-versa, transgender people are often victim of gay bashing because their attackers assume that people who transcend gender expectations 'must be homosexual'.

A T-MINEFIELD • Transgenderism is still relatively unknown in our society. This makes it very easy to catch people using 'transphobic language' even though they might not have the intention or give the impression to be transphobic. A genderqueer person for example can ask to be addressed as 'zhij' (he/she), while a transsexual can interpret this as transphobic. Some transvestites don't have any problem with their male and female name used indiscriminately, whereas other transgender people might consider this to be 'not done'.

You can avoid such problems by simply asking how someone would like to be addressed. Avoid in any case turns of phrase like 'refurbished man/woman' or 'real man/woman/name' and refrain from 'bursting' transgender people's bubble or outing them.



Every night before I fall asleep, I hope I'll wake up in the right body the next morning and that it's all just been a nightmare.

Sam, 23 years

I don't want to change my name to become someone else. I want to change my name so it reflects how I've always seen myself.

Tine, 40 years

The sex that was assigned to me at birth, that was misleading. Now you see the real me.

Erika, 46 years

Laurence Anyways (2012)



NOT WANTED • As a transgender person you can be confronted with discrimination. You could miss out on professional opportunities because an employer does not like the way you express yourself. It could happen that as a trans woman you are not allowed to attend certain events because 'you're not a real woman'. But it could also involve bullying, constant remarks at work, hostile chat online etc. The definition of discrimination is that you are denied something for reasons that do not matter at all.

GENDER LAW • Discrimination based on sex, gender identity and gender expression is forbidden by law in Belgium. Before the legislation was adapted in 2014, the so-called gender law only protected transgender people 'who are planning, are undergoing or have already undergone gender reassignment surgery' as they were protected under the ban of discrimination based on sex. In 2014, as a result of the 'interfederal action plan against homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence' (see below), the law was amended to include the discriminatory grounds gender identity and gender expression.

ARE YOU THE VICTIM OF DISCRIMINATION OR BULLYING?

Do not suffer in silence, do not take the insults in silence. Repeated discrimination and bullying can lead to depression. Maybe you end up censoring yourself and afraid to go to certain venues.

Contact the Holebifoon (holebifoon.be) to talk about it or officially report it. You can also contact the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (see below).

GATHER PROOF • When you report a case of discrimination, you will be asked for proof. It is advisable therefore to keep hold of e-mails, letters, texts or graffiti on your wall. Ask witnesses whether they would be prepared to testify. Do not rip up hateful letters. Do not erase messages from your answering machine left by a stalker. If real estate agents leave you a voicemail saying you and your partner are not considered for this rental property because you're not a 'traditional couple', do not erase that message. Should someone attack you and you need medical attention, ask for a medical certificate and take pictures of your injuries.

TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN FLANDERS

citation from research commissioned by the Flemish government, by Joz Motmans at the Policy Research Centre on Equality Policies

HOW?	WHAT IS IT?	HOW MANY TRANSGENDER PEOPLE SUFFER FROM IT?
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	Hitting, pushing, shoving...	27%
VERBAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE	Insults, swear words, laugh at, denigrate, discredit, intimidate, bully, humiliate, hurt, unwelcome outing, forbid outing or experiencing your gender identity....	79%
MATERIAL VIOLENCE	Damage or destroy property, clothing, spray graffiti on walls or cars	18%
SEXUAL VIOLENCE	Inappropriate touching, stroking, rape...	32%

REPORT VIOLENCE AT

- Police station in the area where the facts took place (call 101)
- Call meld-it 0800 12 800 – a discrimination hotline (press 1 after choice of language for discrimination because of sex)
- The Holebifoon 0800 99 533 – the Holebifoon also gives tips for a smooth report with police.
- The Institute for Equality between Women and Men (igvm-iefh.belgium.be)

20 November is the worldwide remembrance day for victims of transphobic violence. In 2012 at least 265 transgender people were killed because of their transgenderism.



BROCHURE FOR POLICE AND HOTLINES • The department for diversity and equal opportunities of the province of Flemish Brabant issued the brochure “Transphobic violence and discrimination of transgender people”. This brochure is aimed at police-services and the discrimination focal points and everyone who deals with complaints of (alleged) transphobic discrimination or violence.



MORE INFORMATION: www.vlaamsbrabant.be/transfoob-geweld

TOWARDS A TRANS-POSITIVE WORLD • In 2013, Belgian authorities launched two action plans against transphobic and homophobic discrimination and violence. Legal protection for example against discrimination was extended to all transgender people and police will be better trained in terms of these issues. The action plans can be found in the cavaría website library (www.cavaria.be/mediatheek).
 • Internationally, the fight against transphobia is also high on the agenda. There is for example the research project “Transrespect versus Transphobia worldwide” by Transgender Europe, which among others monitors transphobic violence. (<http://www.transrespect-transphobia.org/>).

STRONGER TOGETHER

MINORITY IDENTITY • Transgender people belong to a minority, but are not given a ‘minority identity’. As transgender people have barely any role models available or fellow-sufferers in their close circle, you could feel like it’s you against the world. You feel (sometimes unduly) like you’re treated differently. Your minority group is linked to certain prejudices that you would rather not be associated with. You get the feeling that your ‘being different’ is stigmatising and that you are losing out on opportunities for exactly that reason. These prejudices can make you feel uncertain. Moreover, some transgender people will even interiorise those negative feelings that society has towards transgender people. We call this mixture ‘minority stress’, which is a healthy feeding ground for self-loathing and suicidal feelings. Support from your partner, family, friends and other transgender people is therefore extra important.

TALKING HELPS • There are several transgender organisations and forums in Flanders where you can exchange experiences and tips, take part in activities or where you can just drop by for a nice chat. More info on www.cavaria.be/transgender and www.transgenderinfo.be/m/zorg/zelfhulpgroepen.



MEER INFORMATIE: cavaria.be/transgender en transgenderinfo.be/m/zorg/zelfhulpgroepen

Explore further

ORGANISATIONS

ÇAVARIA

inspires, stimulates and supports all organizations and individuals who stand up for a broad view on sexuality, gender expression and gender identity. It sticks up for the rights of all LGBTs in all aspects of daily life and strives to secure their well-being. Çavaria manages the Holebifoon, ZiZo-online.be and publishes ZiZo Magazine and countless other brochures and supports Belgian Pride.

Kammerstraat 22, 9000 Gent
09-223 69 29
info@cavaria.be
www.cavaria.be

WEL JONG NIET HETERO

is the national youngsters' movement for and by LGBTs in Flanders and Brussels.

Kammerstraat 22, 9000 Gent
09-335 41 87
info@weljongniethetero.be
www.weljongniethetero.be

GELIJKE KANSEN IN VLAANDEREN

(Equal Opportunities in Flanders)

is responsible for the Flemish equal opportunities policy. It prepares, executes, evaluates and coordinates that policy. It gathers knowledge, finances research, organises campaigns, awards grants, creates a legal framework and develops indicators to measure the progress of the policies. On the other hand it also coordinates the initiatives taken by other Flemish departments and agencies

Boudewijnlaan 30, 1000 Brussel
02-553 51 38
gelijkekansen@vlaanderen.be
www.gelijkekansen.be



PINK HOUSES

These so-called 'pink houses' are provincial or regional umbrella organisations which act as meeting places for LGBT organisations and individuals. You can find their contact details on www.cavaria.be/verenigingen.

TRANSGENDER INFOPUNT

The TIP provides information and advice on the phone (0800-96 316) and via its website www.transgenderinfo.be. Open to all, no matter if you're in a medical trajectory, even if you're not transgender yourself.



WEBSITES

cavaria.be/transgender

An updated list of all transgender organisations can be found on www.cavaria.be/verenigingen/per-doelgroep, under the header "Transgenders".

zizo-online.be

The çavaria news website, with particular attention to LGBTs.

genderindeblender.be

Site full of information for youngsters with an educational programme for schools in Flanders issued by the department of diversity and equal opportunities of the Province of Flemish Brabant, supported by Gelijke Kansen Vlaanderen.

cavaria.be/agenda

An overview of events for LGBT people in Flanders and Brussels. Made possible by CultuurNet Vlaanderen

Sometimes, deep down you feel different.

