

Very Infrequently Asked Questions

... about being transgender.

Author: Bea Groves-McDaniel

Date: 17/12/23

Filename: /home/bea/Documents/DNE/Events & Courses/trans2023/viaq.odt

Commit: 47

What do you mean 'transgender'? There is no such thing as a transgender person. It's just a recent fad invented by men who have clothes fetishes, to excuse their behaviour.

Transgender people have been around in history for thousands of years, and throughout all human cultures. The evidence is clear, and very strong. Consider the '**Hijra**' people, found in societies throughout India. Or the so-called '**Two-Spirit**' people of the Plains Indians in North America. Or the '**Kathoey**' of Thailand. Or the '**Khanith**' of Arabic nations (known since at least the 7th century). The Nuba and Igbo peoples of Africa both recognise a 'third gender' of people who are born in one sex but live in variant roles. The list covers nearly every ethnic group and type. In addition there are individuals who's names are known to history. Probably the most famous is the **Chevalier d'Eon** (1728 – 1810), who was a French double-agent, swords-woman, and duellist. Born male, she lived much of her existence in female role, whilst successfully, soldiering her way across Europe in swashbuckling style.

We have been here a long time, often hiding in plain sight. We are **NOT** a recent invention. And no one would ever put up with the constraints and prejudices voiced by majority cisgender populations against us, just to be a fetishistic exhibitionist.

The label cisgender is a slur against women.

Cisgender simply means 'not transgender'. That's all. Nothing else. It is used to describe those women who's lives do not have a differentiation between their sex and their assigned gender role.

Sex is the same as Gender

Colloquially we use the words sex and gender almost interchangeably. But though this may be satisfactory for the majority population, it is somewhat inaccurate. To be more precise, sex is the category of **biology** you were born with, which in most cases is **Male or Female**. Gender, however, is one's nominated category of **role in society** (e.g., a Man or a Woman). These are very broad categories, of course, and there are subsets known to modern society, for example intersex people (whose biology is not clearly male or female), or Gender Fluid folk (who eschew the binary man-woman division).

What is very important is to recognise that for some people, their gender consciousness is at odds with their biology. No one know precisely why this occurs, but occur it does. These are the individuals we currently refer to as **transgender people**.

How do you know you are a 'woman'? What's your proof? You have a male body. You're just deluding yourself.

Let me ask you an illustrative question in return: How do you know that you are right-handed, or left-handed? The rational answer is that you don't 'know'. You just **'are'**. No one ever chooses their handedness. Or for that matter their sexuality. Or their instinctive bodily likes and dislikes. Or, fundamentally, the shape of their nose or ears.

There are aspects of the human condition that simply happen to us because of our genes and birth development. They are outside of our control. We can cope with them via re-learning, or via body modification. But when we are born we have no volitional control over how these matters occur to us. Our parents/carers do their best to introduce us to the social mores we will encounter as we grow, and make assumptions about us according to their current parental knowledge. But occasionally these judgements turn out to be wrong.

To summarise: transgender people are born with parameters of sex and gender that they don't choose. We then cope as best we can as we grow up. But we do not 'know' we are female or male. We just 'are'. We do not have to prove it, as it is just a condition of our existence. The same as it is for you.

Don't you think transgender male-to-female people are erasing women?

The struggle of transwomen for protective rights, and an established sense of respect within society, has no impact on women's rights. Rights are not divisible. If we (as transwomen) gain protection against abuse and discrimination, then that protection (in principle) extends to all women. Everywhere.

Additionally, there has been a historic 'gatekeeping' of gender identity over the centuries, created via hegemonic social rules, and more recently by legalities that decide who can legitimately use the words 'woman' or 'man' to describe themselves. Such legal processes have been coordinated by majority society (without consulting minorities), and have caused much abuse of transgender people as we try to gain acceptance. We are second-class people because we have to jump through legal hoops that are excessively stressful and punishing in order to gain a natural sense of safety and respect that every other human being has from birth.

Recent long-overdue attempts to revise the law towards a more humane self-identity has resulted in resistance from those in powerful positions. Especially those on the conservative end of feminism, who have the most to lose in terms of their political influence. This has led to a horrifying backlash of abuse against transwomen in particular, spread by the reactionary media.

No transwoman ever says the word 'woman' in relation to herself without the proviso of recognising her past and her biology. Such things are painfully evident to us. We cope with the paradoxes of male biology and female life through learning and coping strategies. Therefore it is clear to me that transgender women primarily seek to carve out a niche for themselves within the highly diverse domain of social womanhood. This does not mean that we claim to be 'women' in the highly conventionalised sense. We are women of our own type. Our own 'brand'. Our own self-created destiny.

As such, we clearly add value to the broad spectrum of female experience. We cannot, and do not 'erase it'.

It's true: transgender women are a threat to the safety of female-only spaces!

Firstly, it is untrue to assume that lowering the barriers of self-identity within the legal system will encourage dangerous cisgender men to disguise themselves as women in order to access female-only spaces. If this were the case, there would have been evidence of it in the past. Nothing has ever stopped abusers from dressing as women to do so. But no such evidence of such instances is available, or is ever presented in argument.

Secondly, the crime statistics around transgender women show that we are more sinned against than sinning. At the time of writing (2023), the total number of identified transpeople in British prisons for all crimes is **230**. That is of a total prison population of **94,000** people (**0.2%**). The total number of imprisoned transwomen (again, for all crimes) is **43**. Now consider that **18%** of the prison population are incarcerated for sex-related offences, and that these are almost all cisgender men. One comes to the unavoidable logical conclusion that the main danger to women and girls (of all types) is male cisgender individuals. Not transwomen.

The accusation that transwomen are a danger comes from a refusal to take our gender status seriously. We become characterised as 'men-in-frocks', because it is a useful tool of social division. It satisfies existent prejudicial stereotypes, and massages the image of more bigoted members of society who are in positions of influence. Hence social panic takes over. The backwash of all this is that transwomen suffer because of non-evidential threats, rumours, unsubstantiated anecdotes, and exaggerated fears.

You're just a bloke in a frock. You can't escape your natural biology.

I don't think any sensible transgender woman has ever claimed that she has a biology the same as a natal-born (or cisgender) woman. That would be factually untrue, mores the pity.

But the reason for making the above statement is hardly ever to draw our attention to facts about ourselves. It is used as a stick to beat us because of our inadequacies in not being part of the 'natural' cisgender club (that some revisionist feminists wish to define, gate-keep, and hence dominate).

Be that as it may, gender acceptance and inclusion hardly ever depends on biology in modern human societies. We see each other as 'men' or 'women' via our conventional presentation (clothes, hair, posture, speech, traditional roles, etc.). In fact, the only times where biology has a major bearing on identity is in categories of **medicine** and **sexual activity**. Your lover or GP may know all about your body, but not your co-workers, friends, or acquaintances. They may assume things about you, but assumption is not fact, and can very easily be embarrassingly wrong. Hence, the matter of who we are (in terms of the generalised gender categories) is predominantly a performative matter. We become what we are through our constructive social interactions.

This is not to deny the importance of bodily structure in women's lives. This is clear. It has a very strong influence on how women are perceived (and hence treated) within all human societies. The assumption that all women have a womb, ovaries, a vagina, etc, is central to the demands of social performativity. It sets up the conditions of gender inequity that has dominated societies across the world. In addition, it creates the revolutionary response of modern feminism, broadly summarised by Simone de Beauvoir in 1948: **"Women are not born, they are made"** (from her book 'The Second Sex'). This principle has been a fundamental liberative force for change in modern feminist politics.

But, ironically, de Beauvoir's principle applies even more strongly to transwomen. If women are existentially free to make of themselves what they will, how much more does this apply to transgender women, born male and seeking to restructure their lives within the broad female domain? We build-ourselves-anew out of the rubble of our former selves, struggling against the strictures of our biology. Just as every woman does.

Do you think a woman can ever have a penis?

This little red-herring is often asked as a 'gotcha' to politicians and pundits. It has the same logical form as another familiar trick question: *When did you stop beating your wife?* As such, ANY answer leads one into either dissembling, or being guilty of lack of common sense. Such questions are usually not worth answering.

But if I was fain to reply I'd happily say: **Yes**. A woman can have a penis.

Not all people (categorised as male or female) naturally fit into the structural model that is used to label us at birth. Nature loves difference. Hence there are people born with a wide variety of genital variations that are rare, but not so rare that they do not act as 'exceptions that prove the rule'.

Intersex people do exist. Current statistics show that around 1.7% of the human population are born with an intersex condition. Some of these are disabling. Some are not. Some are visible as genital ambiguities. Others operate invisibly at the chromosomal level. But that 1.7% amounts to 136 million people around the world. A number that's more than twice the size of the population of the UK. Of all intersex people, around half are routinely designated as women, even if their biology may not conventionally 'fit' the label.

So, can a woman have a penis? Short answer is, if they're intersex, then yes.

BGMCD