

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# So You Wanna Have a Sex-Change?

## A Solid 'Starting-Off' Point for those Interested in Such Pursuits

This is the first part of five extracted from a website "So You Wanna ..."  
Article appeared in Polare magazine: November 2004 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**T**here are men and there are women. There are men who want to become women and women who want to become men. There are also people who are still wearing acid-washed jeans, but we're not gonna talk about them. They're freaky.

*Any of the people belonging to any of the categories above, or any other category, may choose in their life to change genders to better suit their psychological and emotional selves.*

We know we might piss a few off here, but we need to make it clear that this article focuses on the male-to-female sex-change, because it's much more common than the alternative (female-to-male). But the resources with which

we'll provide you are generally helpful, no matter what your situation may be. Hey, at least we're addressing the general subject, so no complaining, okay?

Also, note that this "S.Y.W." is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to changing genders; rather, this is a solid "starting off" point for those interested in such pursuits. We'll do our best to dispel some common myths, outline your options, and show you how to deal with the emotional side of this life-altering decision. We expect cold beer in return. The colder the better. To get you started, there are certain terms with which you should familiarize yourself if you want to be a hip and happenin' gender-savvy individual:

First off (whoops ... maybe we shouldn't say that in this "S.Y.W."), when you hear talk of people who are "transgender," you can assume that this refers to a fairly broad category of people who live outside the gender "norms" into which they were born. They do not conform to the ways that many people believe men or women should behave as appropriate to their genders. Note that the transgender community does not include homosexuality in and of itself; that's because gay people do not necessarily have any issues with their own gender identification. However, homosexuality may be coupled with any of the transgender categorizations below. People who are transgender can usually be broken down into one (or more) of several categories:

### Cross-Dressers:

Previously known as "transvestites," this group of individuals is content with their birth gender, but choose to dress up as and use the mannerisms of the opposite gender. Cross-dressers clothe themselves in the clothing of the opposite gender not for the purpose of entertaining others (as drag performers do), but because they feel more comfortable dressed as such. Note that cross-dressers are not necessarily gay, nor do they necessarily want to undergo sexual reassignment; it is purely a choice they make about how to dress.

### Drag Performers:

Drag performers, the male half of which is sometimes referred to as "drag queens," are individuals who dress up as and use the mannerisms of the opposite sex for the purpose of entertaining an audience. Think RuPaul. Some drag performers identify themselves as transgendered, and some do not.

### Transsexuals:

This group of individuals were born into one gender but identify emotionally and psychologically with the other. The medical term often used to describe this situation is "gender dysphoria." The complexities of this state are numerous, and people in different stages of their "coming-out as a transsexual" process may refer to themselves in very different ways. Male transsexuals may choose to use hormones, have surgery, or do neither in order to live as women. The point is, these are people who feel that they were born in the wrong body and will often do anything they can to remedy it.

### Intersexed:

An intersexed person is someone who was born with ambiguous genitalia, so doctors assigned him/her a specific gender at birth. Sometimes this assignment doesn't correlate with the biological XX or XY gender. These children are socialized as a certain gender, but as they grow older, they might not necessarily identify as they were assigned and would want to switch to the opposite gender.

## Gender-blenders, androgynes, etc.:

This group is made up of people who identify as transgender but do not fit themselves into any other category that we list above. They may wish not to constrain themselves to these gender categories and will live with aspects of both male and female genders. It's the mush pot.

Again, we must remind you that people who identify as transgender may date men, women, both, other transgendered people, or no one at all. Sexual orientation and gender identity are two very distinct concepts that are not necessarily linked together. We hope that it is becoming obvious that this whole "gender" business is not as simple as it may appear. There are no clear labels or definitions into which everyone fits. By the way, if you're not sure about the difference between "sex" and "gender," think of it this way: "sex" refers to your biological identification to being male or female (you either are XY or XX); "gender" refers to the social institutions that we think of as enforcing "maleness" and "femaleness" - it's the stuff that isn't biological.

Any of the people belonging to any of the categories above, or any other category, may choose in their life to change genders to better suit their psychological and emotional selves. The most common category to do this is that of transsexuals. Male to female transsexuals feel that they are really women on the inside — that some kind of "cosmic mistake" has been made. Some transsexuals may feel content with their inner identity and have no need to alter their physical selves. Others, however, may desire a look that better goes along with who they feel they are and desire "the proper equipment" to feel whole.

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.