

**Amnesty International Global Human Rights Conference
October 2002
(Part of the Sydney 2002 Gay Games conference programme)**

**Understanding Sex and Gender Diversity
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(SAGE) Australia**

Sex and gender diverse people are those who do not fit into the category of the average stereotypical male or female. I say average rather than normal because for all intents and purposes normality is a statistical average, but the phrase normal often carries with it a view of normalcy as the proper thing to be.

Separating out physical sex from gender performance also helps us to understand more fully the kind of human diversity that can occur. Some people are born with primary sex characteristics that mean they may have atypical genitalia that does not resemble a typical penis or vagina. There are also people whose gonads do not match their external genitalia and people who have secondary sex characteristics which mean that their appearance may be more masculine or feminine than a person who has the same reproductive ability as them. Some biological males can pass in society as females and some biological females may also pass as males.

When I refer to gender performance I am talking about the social presentation that an individual gives to the rest of society. Your sense of gender is how much male or female you put into acting out the person you are. It is also the mixing of the feminine and masculine or for some people the absence of those elements in their gender identity.

Although sexuality has a great bearing on person’s identity as a whole, their sex and gender performance is generally a deeper core identity and is not necessarily influenced by their sexuality. It is often a mistake to think that a person’s gender identity is necessarily primarily influenced by their sexuality, although it can be. You must generally first have a comfortable sense of your body and be able to express a congruent gender identity in order to assess how you can perform your sexuality.

The sex and gender diverse include any human being who does not comply to the average male or female interpretation of masculinity or femininity – for example an intersexed person who was born with both male and female sex characteristics or absence of both; transsexuals who were born appearing to be one sex but believe they are or feel compelled to live as another sex; the transgendered person who changes their body and external appearance to represent another biological sex and gender identity but identify with their original genitalia; the third gendered person who identifies as being neither male nor female but a third sex and gender; the androgynous individual who wishes to live and be accepted as both male and female sexed and gendered, the sinandrogynous who wishes to have neither sex nor gender identification but instead identifies as neuter; the victim of genital mutilation who after involuntary circumcision, castration or forced

genital surgery cannot function to their own physical satisfaction; and those who through illness have lost or taken on feminine and masculine characteristics.

None of us are purely male or female, as we all have masculine and feminine characteristics both on a physical and mental level. Up to 2 percent of the population may have some form of intersex manifestation as either overt physical differences or diverse genetic coding. Our gender performances are specifically culturally and sub-culturally based because what is accepted as either masculine or feminine in one culture may not translate into another culture's perspectives.

In many cultures having both male and female attributes has been prized throughout history like the shaman in Native American culture and the androgynous god-like figures of the east. In other cultures, deviation from the perceived norm has been demonised and interpreted as antisocial and criminal behaviour.

Prejudice against sex and gender diverse people exists in every society including gay, lesbian and bisexual subgroups. Some lesbians try to victimise and exclude women who did not have female on their birth certificates or who may have certain physical characteristics that do not display overt femininity. In many lesbian groups even the average biological female can be victimised and excluded for being too butch or too femme.

Men with female on their birth certificates can often be refused entrance to gay male places. The presence or absence of a vagina or penis is not necessarily a qualification of manhood or womanhood, but simply a contribution towards general masculine or feminine traits. "No Tranny Boys Here" is a policy of some nightclubs and gay male groups.

All over the world sex and gender diverse people are being legally and socially disadvantaged, discriminated against, excommunicated from their religions, attacked, beaten up, raped, sexually assaulted, murdered both in public and covertly, denied access to education, work, professional memberships, healthcare and social spaces. They often do not have recourse in law, are unable to afford legal representation, suffer persecution when complaining or the law simply does not work for them.

Sex and gender diverse people are often unable to change their birth certificates when at a later time in their life they discover that they do not transpire to be the sex or gender they may have been assigned at birth. They are also often denied the right to marry, to parent a child or collect pensions in many countries all because of their sex and gender status.

A major problem has arisen for many sex and gender diverse people who have failed to gain access to mainstream society because it often locks them into the poverty trap. Many end up in the sex industry and are criminalised and denigrated for simply trying to make a living. Sex and gender diverse people are also prone to high suicide and drug use rates and many, when involved in the latter, become more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Pushing people who express a desire to realign their sex and gender identity into psychiatrists' models is an abusive absurdity. Holding them ransom to decisions made by authoritative clinicians on their behalf is disempowering and detrimental to their future well-being. The ethics committee of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, the world academic body of experts on gender dysphoria, is currently refusing to support a motion to stop clinicians making people wait unreasonable periods for psychological and medical help in defining their sex and gender identity.

Allowing medical doctors to make decisions about what sex a child should be and then operating on them to create alternative sex organs that comply with so-called normality is nothing less than common assault. Only the person themselves should make decisions about their physical future if their sex is not immediately recognisable at birth.

The caring professions, as well as being of great assistance to sex and gender diverse people in defining their identity, are also responsible for a profound amount of abuse against them. The medical model often ignores a person's philosophical right to self-definition as it did when labelling Aborigines, black Africans and women as being less mentally capable than white people.

My own story is that within the past five years my colleagues in psychotherapy discriminated me against when I publicly came out in England as a transsexual woman in 1997. Although born with male on my birth certificate I transitioned to living as a female when I was in my mid teenage years. I thought after having lived as a woman for 30 years and been successful in my profession that I was safe to come out in public, despite having experienced much prejudice during my life.

The results of the discrimination ruined my practice in London Harley Street, and my partner and I were forced to sell our home. Although I won England's largest sex discrimination case brought by a transsexual in the UK, I lost the battle for the toll on my life of fighting that case, which led to further discrimination against me that made it impossible for me for me to practise and live in England.

Now living in Australia and carrying out my lawful business as a psychotherapist I am being harassed by the Medical Board of New South Wales to stop referring people to undergo sex and gender realignment treatment. The prejudice that we, the sex and gender diverse, experience, I can tell you, seems to never end, nor alas will it ever end, for we will always be subjected to the subjugation of the majority.

The use of the words 'transgendered' or 'queer' to cover the range of sex and gender identities is also very damaging to the movement to unite the different diverse groups. Many people born with intersex conditions do not consider themselves to be other than the average male or female who may have a medical condition that unfortunately can also at times legally disadvantage them. Many intersex groups become hostile when other groups try to label them with these terms and they do not believe that they are appropriate labels for them. The same happens with transsexuals and other groups who do not see themselves as fitting into these labels and they also become hostile and afraid of being

singled out, identified and labeled as an alien kind of human being called transgendered when they believe that to all intents and purposes, they are in fact just ordinary people. Although certainly we are of the sex and gender diverse community together under one banner in order to increase political pressure for change.

Some grave mistakes have been made over the past three decades in trying to free sex and gender diverse people from oppression. The attempt to tie transsexualism, transgenderism and androgynous behaviour into the medical model has only added to pathologising sex and gender diversity. It seeks to excuse people's diversity as a physical deformity. It is an indisputable fact that people can be intersex by genetics, genitalia, gonads, hormonal influences, brain difference or even illness, but we must also leave people freedom to choose their own sex and gender performance as a matter of human rights. There is no right or wrong about sex and gender presentation - simply variance.

Every human being deserves the right to live their sex and gender identity as they see fit. No other person has the right to interfere with that person's sense of physical, mental, social, spiritual sex or gender well-being. Sex and gender need to be self-determining, allowing people to go about the business of their life in freedom, without the interference of the state or religion.

It would be naive to say that much of these problems could be solved purely by education alone, but that would not be realistic. The reality is that there are many people in the world who are malicious, overcompensated and just plain nasty; and in order to protect sex and gender diverse people, who are often vulnerable, the strong arm of the anti-discrimination law must be put in place and used with repetition.

Education, education and education is, however, undoubtedly the way forward so that we teach our children from when they are very small that there are many kinds of flowers in the garden and each has a right to sunlight. Political campaigning for change in order to attain equal rights for all sex and gender diverse people is also necessary to create legal statutes that will be relied on to set standards of justice. Since sex and gender people will always be a minority, it is important for those who can be the eagle eyes of equality to stand at their posts of vigilance and be the guardians for sex and gender freedom for all.

At Sex and Gender Education Australia (SAGE) we have taken it upon ourselves to go out into the political arena and lobby members of parliament to work towards changing Australian laws so that there can be sex and gender equality for everyone. The important thing to remember, though, is that in small numbers we stand alone and only by affiliation and world co-ordination amongst support groups and members of the sex and gender diverse communities can we have enough lobbying and educational power to make real and lasting changes. The most important lesson we must all learn is to work together towards our common goal, affiliate our organisations and pool our resources, so that many small voices become a real presence in raising consciousness.

Amnesty International members can help by alerting the sex and gender communities worldwide about abuse that is happening in their country. They can also help by

including self-help groups and campaigns for sex and gender freedom into their Amnesty International core operations. Because AI is such a widely known and respected organisation on the world stage, the weight it can lend and the light it can shine onto injustice is very powerful, but only if its members understand the issues involved.

Only by sex and gender diverse people coming out of the closet and contributing towards their own fight for equality can the rest of the world see that is just another part of the human equation to be sex and gender variant. Diversity and variance needs to turn into pride in the sex and gender diverse communities in order for these people themselves to become strong enough in order to demand their own human and civil rights.

Dr Tracie O’Keefe DCH is a clinical hypnotherapist, psychotherapist, counsellor and educator in private practice in Sydney, Australia. She is an expert in the field of sex and gender identity, having run a clinic at the London Medical Centre in the UK for many years. She is the co-author of *Trans-X-U-All: The Naked Difference* (Extraordinary People Press 1997), the author of *Sex, Gender & Sexuality: 21st Century Transformations* (Extraordinary People Press 1998) and co-editor of *Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity* (to be published 2003 by Jossey Bass). She has had many papers on sex and gender identity published and has lectured throughout the world. Tracie is also professor of sex, gender and sexuality with Calamus International University.

This paper was given on behalf of SAGE Australia and as an organisation we encourage other sex and gender organisations nationally and worldwide to contact us to affiliate with us in order to fight for sex and gender freedom.

A copy of the paper can be found on the SAGE website at www.sage-australia.org