

Transgender awareness

Being transgender

Jake Graf: I knew from a very early age that there was something wrong.

Rachel Reese: I think the defining moment when I realised I was different was when I was age 4.

Jake Graf: My mum tells the story that I was talking about 18 months, so I think probably about 2 years old I was telling her that I was a boy and I knew I was a boy.

Rachel Reese: We were dressing up in the Wendy house, in the infants' class and I just remember a little blue dress with a little frill on and wanting to put that dress on.

Narrator: The limited data available suggests that around 1% of people in Europe and the U.S. could be what's known as gender variant or gender non-conforming and this includes transgender people. A transgender person is someone whose gender identity differs from the one they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may identify as either male or female, known as binary gender identities, or they may feel that neither label fits them. The non-binary gender identity spectrum is extremely broad, including people who are:

- gender-fluid where their gender identity varies over time
- A-gender where they feel they have no gender
- and bi-gender where they have two separate gender identities which again can vary over time.

The terminology is changing fast; it is not always widely agreed. Trans-people often experience feelings of confusion and isolation growing up and can face a lack of understanding and support from their friends and family.

Jake Graf: When you're saying to someone over and over and over again, that this is the way I feel, this is the way I feel, this is the way I feel, and you're getting in trouble because you don't want to wear a dress on Christmas or a birthday or Easter.

Rachel Reese: I didn't really meet my first transgender person until I was in my 20s so, although I was cross-dressing in private, I felt very isolated and I thought for a very long time until my mid-20s that I was the only person doing it, so it felt like I had this really guilty secret.

Jake Graf: It's very, I guess, isolating to know that there's something wrong but not know what it is, and so for years I just felt like I was the only, the only trans-person in the world.

Narrator: Changing your physiological, or other gender attributes, is a personal process not a medical one.

Rachel Reese: I went into a sort of denial for quite a period of time and that caused me to be kind of depressed because I was trying to suppress it. I was in a very long-term relationship, I was earning good money when I first left Law School and I just felt that, you know, pretty well my life is good but 5% of it was wrong, and it was that 5% that really counted which was, you know, being true to my gender identity.

Jake Graf: When I was 7 years old, I was praying that I'd wake up and be a boy, I think from, you know, obviously as puberty kind of pounded towards me I prayed that things would stop and everything would kind of be put on hold, or that I can have an operation, or that something would change.

Narrator: Many binary trans-people never undergo gender-affirming surgery or hormone treatment but instead, simply opt to live in their preferred or affirmed gender.

Rachel Reese: Every journey is different. My journey was a binary journey, a male to female. I changed my birth certificate, had surgery, I take hormones, but not every trans-person does that. We now know with all the non-binary identities that some people won't change their birth certificate, some of them won't have surgical treatment or medical treatment.

Narrator: Making the decision to transition from male to female, or female to male can be a very difficult one.

Rachel Reese: It can be such an emotional and all-encompassing journey. I started my journey with 3 others, 2 of which committed suicide and one of which disappeared, which is really sad.

Jake Graf: I mean, I worried about actually going through it for about a year before transition because I was really concerned that I'd be alone for the rest of my life, I think that was the biggest thing. I've always had a lot of girlfriends and had no problems finding dates within the lesbian community and I thought - What sort of women or what sort of anyone is going to want a trans-person?

Narrator: Many worry about what their friends and family will think, how their employer and colleagues would react and how society will treat them.

Jake Graf: There's this huge concern that people won't know how to relate to you, you won't know how to relate to people.

Rachel Reese: I became very dark and very depressed and quite isolated, and I felt that, I just didn't feel I could go on living in that way.

Jake Graf: I think there's also another feeling that as soon as you have your first shot of testosterone or hormones that everything will magically change and obviously that's not the case. It took another 2 or 3 years before I settled and understood how my new role within society and how to engage with people and, you know, how to relate to people, which is a totally different way.

Rachel Reese: I started to think quite a lot about suicide and I actually thought about planning it in some way, and then when I woke up one morning I kind of had an epiphany about the whole thing, just thought - Well if I'm going to commit suicide, maybe I should just transition and just see what happens.