

CHAPTER 1

SO YOU'RE TRANS?

Chances are that the reason you're starting to read this book is because you're wondering if you're **trans** or not. Or that you've already figured out that you're trans and you need some more information. Or perhaps someone close to you might be trans. We're glad you decided that this book might be of help to you and we really hope it will be. It contains valuable information that we wish we'd had access to when growing up, and it's so amazing to be able to share this with you.

So, without further ado, let's try to figure out what being trans actually is and what that actually means. The trouble with providing definitions and ticking boxes is that it leads to oversimplification. There isn't a single definitive answer to the question of what it is to be trans, because there is no one way to be trans! There are so many trans people and they are so diverse that there isn't a universal experience that is more trans or truly trans. **Gender** is a complicated social construct, and trying to define it, or people within it, is quite hard! So let this be a guide – or an offering of possibilities – to what it might or might not mean to you. But just remember that ultimately it's *you* who defines who you are, whether that's

as a trans person or not. The short answer, though, is this:
Trans people are people who don't identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth.



Fox Fisher

The long answer is a bit more complicated. When we are born (and even before we are born) we are assigned a certain gender based on our **sex**. This means that when we're born, medical professionals take a look at our genitals (gross, we know!), classify us as male or female and assign us the gender 'boy' or 'girl' according to what they see down below. In most cases,

people are actually fine with this assignment (which means they're **cisgender**. In the case of trans people, it isn't quite as simple. It's a bit like you signed up for a French class, but when you get there everyone is speaking Spanish. Something just isn't the way it should be. So essentially, being trans means that you aren't actually the boy or the girl everyone seems to think you are. It means that your inner sense of self – your **gender identity** – is something different. Whether it's that you're actually a girl, or a boy, or **non binary** (people who aren't fully boys or girls), the main thing is that you're just not what most people seem to think you are. And that's pretty frustrating. In other words, it's pretty annoying that just about everyone around you got it wrong and now you've got to correct all of them. But don't worry, we'll give you some advice on how to go about this in the next chapter.

Being trans is pretty straightforward, right? You've known you are trans for as long as you can remember, you've always dressed up as the 'other gender', played with girls' toys or boys' toys as a kid and almost exclusively had playmates of the 'other gender'. Then you come out, take hormones, have surgery and, hey presto, you're done!

Okay...no, that's not exactly how it works. It's a lot more complicated than that. It takes time and effort and can actually be pretty hard sometimes. It doesn't really matter what toys you played with when you were younger or who your friends are, because being trans isn't really about your behaviour as a kid or who you hang out with. It's not about taking hormones or having certain surgeries, because different things work for different people and we're all different. It's about you, and you alone. It's about what you want, regardless of anything else. There isn't a 'right

way' to be trans. There isn't a universal recipe that we all just follow. Just because you did certain things or didn't do them, or want or don't want certain things, it doesn't make you any less or more trans. That's because trans people are all sorts of people, just like everyone else! What's most important is to be yourself, whoever that might be and whatever that means. Trans people have such a wide range of identities and expressions that you shouldn't be tied down to categories.

There isn't really a universal answer that we can give you that will tell you the ultimate truth of whether you're trans or not. It's not as easy as taking a quiz online that will decide your entire future (you *can* probably google some quizzes, but we're not guaranteeing their accuracy). You're the only one who can really know and you're the only one who has a say about it. No one can really tell you how you feel inside. It's something you've got to figure out and come to terms with. Just know that you're certainly not the only one and that there are so many of us out there willing to support you. If you're questioning your gender or think you might be trans, we recommend you reach out to a support group in your area and try to talk to people close to you if you feel safe to do so. There are also many trans people online on different social media platforms (such as Instagram, Tumblr and YouTube) who are telling their stories. Try checking some of them out and see if their experience resonates with you.

Our entire being is often limited by ideas of sex and gender. Trying to break away from the sex and gender that was assigned to us at birth can often be very difficult. If we're already losing you here, don't worry. We will start with a few basics in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

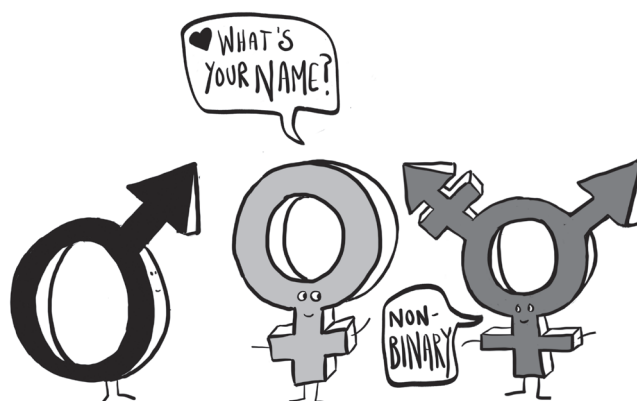
GENDER ROLES ARE DEAD

In this chapter we will look into the ideas, values and norms that are behind gender roles and gender in society today. While it is widely accepted (especially within Social Studies) that gender is a social construct, it doesn't mean that it has no effect in society and doesn't have very real consequences. In fact, gender is perhaps one of the most persistent and well-rooted social constructs in our society and affects almost every single part of it. Our entire social reality is based around gender and how people are treated in society. So in order to understand gender a little better, it's good to talk about the ideas that it stems from.

WHAT IS GENDER, REALLY?

If it were possible to explain gender in such a way that everyone could understand and agree, that'd be pretty awesome. But actually it's impossible. Gender is really a tangled web of so many different things. Gender isn't the same for everyone, and ideas about gender and gender roles change with time, between countries and between cultures.

There are so many different ideas about what gender is that it's impossible to find just one definition of what it actually is and the effects it has. So instead of offering a comprehensive guide to what gender is, let's talk about what gender *can* be.



Fox Fisher

In order to understand the concept of gender, it's important to understand the concept of *sex* (or **sex characteristics**) and the difference between the two concepts. Sex refers to our body, our parts and all the things that have to do with our sex characteristics. This means genitals, hormone production, chromosomes, reproductive organs and so on. Usually people are categorised as male, female or **intersex**. Male usually refers to those born with a penis, testicles and XY chromosomes. Female refers to those born with a vagina, ovaries, uterus and XX chromosomes. Intersex people are those who fall into neither of these categories – their sex characteristics somehow challenge these categories, whether that has to do with genitalia, chromosomes, reproductive organs or hormone production. There are over 40 different

variations, so despite people claiming that sex is very simple and clear cut, it's actually super diverse! What is important to note is that even though our sex characteristics are a physical fact, the categorisation of them is *not*. These categories are of course created by us humans and are used to simplify or categorise people based on certain physical attributes. While this can be useful in many respects, problems arise when we not only assign people a sex but a gender based on that sex. This is where the game gets complicated!

When we're born, we're assigned a sex based on our sex characteristics, and following on from that we are assigned a gender. This is where our troubles begin. People who are categorised as male get assigned as a 'boy' at birth and those categorised as female get assigned as a 'girl'. Girls are assigned a certain set of expectations, personality traits, hobbies, colours and status in society. However, a set of different expectations and attributes are assigned to boys. We all know this and experience it. Girls wear pink, boys wear blue. Girls get dolls, boys get cars. Women cook dinner, men work outside the home. Boys/men and girls/women are generally moulded into the opposite of one another. Men or boys generally have more access to power or a higher status in society. This doesn't mean women can't have power in society or that women are always oppressed by men – it just means that men have more opportunities for achieving success. There are of course so many other factors that come into play, such as your social class, ethnic background, sexuality, physical attributes and so on.

In short, gender is a complicated social construct based on society's expectations and assignments as well as our

own personal ideas and experiences of who we are within this gendered world. The more spiritual individuals among us would say that the soul or our inner sense of self isn't gendered. But in this world it is hard to navigate life without describing and expressing some sort of a gender, or lack of it.

Gender and ideas about gender identity vary so much between different cultures and throughout time that it's hard to imagine anyone actually believing it to be as simple as just men and women, with those categories entirely controlled by our sex characteristics. Assigning someone a social role based merely on their genitals seems like a gross over-simplification if there ever was one. We don't need to look very far for proof of just how fragile this idea is. There are cultures all around the world that have had very diverse ideas about gender and gender identity since the beginning of human civilisation, and in many cultures today we have societies with gender and gender identities spanning from two up to five or more.



Fox Fisher

When it comes to trans people, it's quite obvious that gender assignation in our society is flawed. While it does indeed work for the majority of people, it doesn't work for all of us. And that's why it's dangerous to try to force it upon everyone. When we try to pin a gender on someone else and tell them what they are or what they are not, we are enforcing the same ideology that divides men and women and creates inequality and discrimination based on gender. We are reducing people to the sum of their bodies and reproductive capacity, and using the same oppression that has primarily been used against women to enact laws, limitations and systematic discrimination on their freedom and their bodies.

Gender identity is how we experience our own gender and our own inner sense of self. It is the gender that we know ourselves to be, something that no one else can feel. We all have a gender identity, but when it matches up with the assignation process it's often hard to locate that sense of gender identity. For trans people this is often much easier as it's quite clear that our gender identity goes against the whole assignation process. When you somehow differ from a well-established norm or value in society, you usually notice that quite quickly. And other people notice it too: trans people and those who do not conform to gender roles or gender expectations often experience bullying, stigma and discrimination. A clear example of this is when someone who is perceived as male takes on feminine attributes of expression. Someone who is seen as a boy and wears a dress to school will usually cause some sort of a fuss.

This is because we as a society have assigned certain types of clothing to boys and girls, and anyone who crosses the line immediately gets noticed and even punished. In addition, trans people are not recognised and accepted as their gender because they challenge the idea that the sex and gender we were assigned at birth is an unbreakable truth.

But trans people are absolutely and completely real and their identity and experiences are too. Trans people deserve to be accepted and recognised for who they are, and anyone telling you differently is simply wrong and ignorant about the struggles and lives of trans people. There is no one way to explain why trans people feel the way that they feel – whether it has to do with social expectations, gender roles, genetics, our brain, our culture or whatever. But it sure is a reality – a reality that deserves to be respected.

As we further explore gender and sex in society, we are learning more and more that we don't really understand it at all. Gender and sex are very complicated concepts that have been established in our social reality. They are a complicated mix of culture, neurology, environmental factors and social expectations, and are limited by our understanding of our social reality and how it affects everything we do. So anyone claiming that they have all the answers to how all of this works must either have supernatural powers where they are unable to remove themselves from our social reality and see it completely objectively as a godly consciousness or – far more likely – they are just as clueless as the rest of us.

GENDER ROLES ARE NOT DEAD - BUT THEY SHOULD BE

While for most people this whole process of assignation seems to work fine, there are few people who can claim that everything that comes with it has always served them in a positive way. Both men and women are confined by certain stereotypical traits and expectations, and although it's not impossible, it can be very difficult to break out of the mould. For example, women still do the lion's share of housework and childcare; and when they work outside the home, they are frequently not seen as capable of pursuing careers in science, technology and engineering; instead, they are often steered towards the creative industries or the caring professions. Compared with men, women have more trouble being listened to and respected, and are more often the target of gender-based violence. Men are expected to be the breadwinners and take responsibility for their families; they are not expected to show strong emotions (other than anger) and are not considered capable of taking care of their children. These are just a few examples of things that often come up in the discussion about gender and the roles of women and men in society.

Gender in general has probably done more harm than good. Actually, it's not that gender is inherently bad – rather it's the expectations and the oppressive gender roles that we enforce upon people that cause grief. They create inequalities in society and make it harder for trans people to be who they are. In fact, they make it hard for just about