

Christin Milloy, Canada

Wednesday • 2014.02.26

The Top 19 Questions People Always Ask a Trans* Person

By Christin Scarlett Milloy

There are other Trans* FAQs out there, but none of them really address the true interests of the general public—at least based on these questions which I get asked on a semi-regular basis.

So, as a public service, I do hereby present this list which fairly captures the essence of the *many* uncomfortable conversations I have suffered through with journalists, talk-show hosts, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and yes, *complete strangers*.

Take heed! And please, feel free to share this resource all up and down the Internet so that it might confer upon people the knowledge they so desperately seek about Trans* people... and perhaps rescue some of us from the painfully awkward service of being reduced to mere objects of novel curiosity!

What is “Cis?” Why do Trans* people say that I’m a “Cis” person?

Cis is an abbreviation [which means](#) “cisgender” or “cissexual.” In simple terms, it means “not Trans*.” The word itself dates [at least as far back](#) as 1914, and was invented [by a cis man](#). It’s pronounced like “sis” as in “sister.”

Why does there need to be a specific word for this? Well, in the absence of knowing (or accepting) a word like “cis,” cis people have a tendency to refer to themselves, in contrast with Trans* people, using words like “normal,” “natural,” “genetic,” or “biological.”

But you see, Trans* people are also normal, natural, genetic, and biological. So to have those words used in a context which sets them at odds with being Trans* is highly stigmatizing and not really very nice at all. “Cis” being the word for “not trans” works in the same way that “straight” is a word meaning “not gay” (although that is an oversimplified example, because there are many types of sexual orientation besides straight and gay).

You may rest assured that being referred to as cis does not (in and of itself) constitute being insulted, and you’re not being accused of anything which you would deny the definition of... there just happens to be a word for *not being us*; a word which doesn’t stigmatize, objectify, or degrade what it means to be us.

I have met cis people who were frustrated, even offended, that this term has been

applied to them. Some of the same people also tend to [falsely claim the word is a recent creation, and wrongly ascribe its invention to Trans* people](#). Some go as far as to [deny that cis privilege exists](#) when [clearly](#) it [does](#). [Really](#).

Have you had the sex-change operation?

That's a very personal question; maybe you didn't realize just how invasive it is to ask about this. I would suggest that it would be best that you refrain from asking this to future Trans* people you meet... As a Trans* person, I will decide when to tell you about these private medical experiences if I feel it becomes necessary or appropriate to share it with you.

What is your real name?

It's the name I already told you.

No I mean the name you were born with.

Ah. You're asking about my Birth Name. This is another item of private information which can be a very touchy subject for some people, so it's really best if you restrain your curiosity about it. Your Trans* friend will bring it up on their own if they feel it is something they want to share.

Well what's your legal name then?

It's either the name I already gave you, or it's a potentially touchy subject (as explained above).

What is your preferred pronoun?

Ah! Well done, thank you for asking this. In my case, it is usually "she/her/her," although I don't mind being called by various non-gendered pronouns you may have heard of, such as "they/them/their" and "ze/zem/hir." My personal favorite non-gendered pronoun is "ey/em/eir."

Other Trans* people might give a different answer than me though, so don't be shy about asking them!

Remember, it is very important after asking this that you then follow by respecting what they tell you by actually using their preferred pronoun properly. If you make a mistake, just correct yourself (or be graceful if someone else does) and apologize for the slip.

I have another friend who's Trans*. He's a girl now, but his name used to be—

I'm going to have to stop you right there.

It's good that you stayed friends with your friend while they went through their transition, and it's true that, as a result, you do know some personal details about their previous identity. But you see, your friend hasn't given consent for you to be sharing that information around, and I really don't need to know what their old name was. You should keep that information secret.

You might also want to double check with your friend about their preferred pronouns...

So you have a "Gender Identity?"

Yes, and so do you: you got yours at birth when the doctor declared what they decided you were, and you've been comfortable with it ever since. The only difference is that I had to change mine, because it turned out my birth doctor didn't know me as well as he thought he did.

Come to think of it, a lot of guys seem to think that accessing genitals is the epitome of knowing someone, but I digress.

Why do feminists hate Trans* women?

They don't. At least, not all of them do. In fact, it is only [a small fringe group](#) of cis-only TERFs (Trans*-Exclusionary Radical Feminists) who hate on Trans* women, while [bizarrely failing to realize](#) that by hating Trans* women, they [are in fact hating women](#). In my opinion, TERFs are only feminists in the same way that Westboro Baptist Church (whose website is [GodHatesFags.com](#)) is technically still a church.

I want to note here that not all Radical Feminists are TERFs. Also, critically important to note, [real feminists reject the TERF ideology](#).

The basic idea behind TERF is that because I was born with a penis and falsely assigned a male gender identity without my consent, and therefore grew up with male privilege, that I am therefore still a man and somehow retain male privilege and am therefore not really a woman. Which is ironically [a dick argument](#).

I don't deny that I benefited from male privilege before I transitioned. That's part of my life experience and I own it and acknowledge it.

I stopped benefiting from that privilege when I transitioned; now I deal with the same general misogyny as cis women do, as well as transphobic oppression to boot. I think it must be a very nice world these TERFs get to live in where they have the privilege to erase my identity and ignore the type of oppression that I and other Trans* people experience daily (which these jerks contribute to).

Are you on HRT? What hormones and medications do you take?

Is there a particular reason you feel you need to know this about the person you are

asking? Is it going to change the way you think or feel about them? Because it shouldn't.

If you're curious about the effects of HRT in general, [look it up online](#). If you're curious about the medical regimen of a *particular* Trans* person you know, consider carefully whether it's really any of your business before you ask about it.

Do you have tits? / Do you still have tits?

Blocked and reported.

Do your sexual organs work properly? Like, for sex and stuff.

Whenever I am asked a question like this, I begin to suspect that the person asking may be a little overly focussed on the physiological aspects of the Trans* experience. In response, I would make a couple of points...

1. Most Trans* people would agree with the statement that our Trans* experience is very profoundly about who we are, how we feel, and how we identify. For many of us, it is comparatively much less so about the actual physical changes our bodies undergo (and for *some* Trans* people, physical change is not important at all). When people, and the media, focus so obsessively on our bodies, it is objectifying and it erases all of the other much more important aspects of our experience. Please be aware of this.

2. I would like you to imagine that you are having a conversation with *someone who is not Trans**... Another cis person, like yourself. If *they* asked *you* questions about your sex organs in a casual conversation, would that strike you as weird, a little bit rude, and inappropriate? Okay. *It strikes us as kind of rude too*, actually. We are a lot like *cis* people when it comes to expecting and deserving some common respect. Just something to keep in mind.

Do you have sex? Who do you have sex with? What kind of sex do you have?

Trans* people have a normal range of sexual experience, and a wide variety of interests and interest levels. It is also important to understand that Trans* is not a sexual orientation. Just like cis people, Trans* people come in a variety of sexual orientations ([including asexual](#)).

Some people do fetishize Trans* people specifically for our bodies or experiences, in a way that is intensely disrespectful and often disregards our core gender identities. The nature of their fetishized attraction, and their behaviour, says much more about them than it does about us. We call those people "chasers" (which is derogatory; it's short for "tranny chasers"). They are the reason why there is so much objectifying pornography out there exploiting Trans* people. They and their communities and their porn also spread harmful and inaccurate stereotypes about us.

Dating can be pretty dicey, not only because Trans* people are far more likely to suffer

violence, but also because our dating pool is significantly reduced by all of the people who won't give us the time of day because they think we're gross... or who want our bodies, but don't care for us or respect us as people. Loneliness aside though, we are just as likely to be leading (or not leading) a normal and satisfying sex life as any other person.

So they, like, cut up the penis and turn it inside out and stuff!?

Yeah, again, as a Trans* person, I don't necessarily want to discuss this topic... so if I don't bring it up on my own, perhaps you should go ahead and Google it for yourself if it happens to be something you find interesting for some reason.

Is "Tranny" a bad word?

Yes, it is a slur, and considered highly offensive. Please say "Trans* Person" (the asterisk is silent) unless the person you are describing has given you some more specific words to use when describing their identity.

But they use the word Tranny in porn titles...

Yes, they do, don't they. I've also seen porn titles use the word "bitch," "fag," and the "N" word... The moral of the story is that porn is not a very good source for learning appropriately respectful vocabulary (or for learning good sexual technique, just FYI).

Did you know car mechanics use the word Tranny as a nickname for a car's transmission?

Yeah, that's got nothing to do with me or with Trans* people (so far as I know), but still, I kind of wish they'd stop doing that because even though it's just an unfortunate linguistic coincidence, it can be very unintentionally upsetting to hear it.

(Bonus Question) Hey so what's with the asterisk in Trans*?

Oh, I'm doing a whole article on that one. Stay tuned.

So... You have a self identity, just like everyone does, except yours doesn't fit within the world view of "penis = male" and "vagina = female?"

Yep! Sounds like you've got it. The only thing I would add is a reminder that some people are non-binary (so, neither "M" nor "F" fit their identity).

I don't believe you; God doesn't make mistakes.

Well, perhaps God made us this way *on purpose* in order to teach you about *acceptance*...

After all, wouldn't the world be a better place if we all loved our neighbours, judged not, and did unto others as we would have them do unto us? I think I read that in a book somewhere.

<http://chrismilloy.ca/2014/02/the-top-19-questions-people-always-ask-a-trans-person/>