

Stories of trans* experiences

Nikki Hayden, 26, psychology student, London

Until I was about four or five I didn't know I wasn't a girl, to be honest with you. One of my earliest memories, about five years old, was being yelled at by a teacher for going to the toilet with the girls. About the same age I realised I was different to these other boys. At the age of nine I refused to have my hair cut. I didn't have it cut until I was 16, because having it cut was such a torment to me.

School was extremely difficult. I got bullied a lot. I was picked on for being too thin, for being feminine, for not liking football, for hanging round with girls, for having long hair. They mocked everything they could think of in terms of gender and sexuality.

I learned what trans meant through YouTube. I knew how I felt but I didn't know there was a term for it. I was basically just trying to Google what I felt. A lightbulb went off in my head and I thought, this explains all the issues I've had as long as I can remember.

On a day-to-day basis I don't tell people I'm transgender. The thing about trans people is, we feel very normal. It's the way we are, it's only when people say you're not normal that you feel that way.

I've always been extremely feminine, I always felt that way. I can't say that I ever felt like a boy, I just had to live as a boy for the first 16 years of my life.

Trans people are the same as everyone else, our ideals in life are to be happy, to be respected, to be comfortable. I've had people who have openly said to me that they've had prejudices around trans people but as soon as they've met me they've understood more – it's who I am and the way that I was born. There's no real difference between myself and people who are cisgender [non-transgender].

Keith Reynolds, 18, student, Surrey

A lot of people have it in their head that we wake up and decide to be trans. I want people to know that it's not a choice. Nothing has happened in my life to make me trans. I was born trans.

I told my mum when I was about 13. She was shocked and didn't really understand. Then six months later she told my dad and he was so angry. I love my dad but he was a very traditional person. There was a lot of tension. I couldn't wear men's clothing, or I couldn't wear men's deodorant – it would cause an argument.

It started to get better, but then Dad got cancer. He died a week before I turned 16. When he got sick we didn't talk about it anymore. I thought that once he had recovered we'd go back to talking about it, but he didn't recover.

After my dad died I found a book about transgender young people and I gave it to my mum. She read it and it was a complete change. She says her main thing and also my dad's main thing is they were worried about how it will affect me in life – will I be able to find a job, will I be able to find a partner. Well, those things have happened: I've found a partner, I have no trouble finding jobs.

I was referred to Tavistock [the clinic for children and adolescents] in May 2014. You're not allowed testosterone until you've been on hormone blockers for a year at Tavistock.

I'm desperate for hormones and surgery. My dysphoria makes me feel like I'm embarrassed for people to look at me. In my head I'm this weird thing that is ugly. I have to wear baggy clothes

to hide my hips, I have to think about how many layers I have to wear to hide my chest.

Jenny-Anne Bishop OBE, 70, retired sales manager, scientific instrumentation, Rhyl , Wales

I knew I was trans from about three or four years old. From a very early age I thought one day I'll wake up and my body will be like my sisters' and my parents would say: "Oh, we had a girl, not a boy as we thought."

When I went to university I learned about transsexuals and that some of them transitioned. I brought this up with my tutors and they said: "People like you don't do that." They said: "Just get married and it'll all go away." That was the perceived wisdom then – they told gay and lesbian people the same thing.

So I was persuaded that I should get married. Within three or four months I told my ex how I felt and initially she was very supportive. I used to go to a support group once a week; I'd have a weekend out once a month where I'd get dressed up and go clubbing with some other girls in Manchester. I had to travel a lot for work, which gave me opportunities to be myself. These coping strategies kept me going through about 30 years of marriage.

When they found out at work I'd regularly lose my job. It's happened five times, most recently after the equality legislation had been passed. One time, very early on, I was coming back from my support group at night. I got stopped by police at a routine roadblock . The officer asked if I was allowed to drive a company vehicle dressed like that and called my work to tell them I was dressed like a woman.

J Fernandez, 23, administrative assistant, London

The people you see in the media are usually one type of trans person. They're usually binary [identify as either female or male], they usually pass [as someone of that gender], they're usually white and they usually have this narrative that they've always known they're the "wrong gender". It makes other trans people scared to tell their stories.

Non-binary people are people who don't identify as male or female all the time. There are lots of subsections – you might be agender, gender fluid, bi-gender, a demi-girl or a demi-boy. You might not understand the nuances of the differences, but everyone is always making up new identities to match their experiences and that can only be a good thing. While it can be confusing, it's better than saying you can only be this thing and we won't talk about anything else.

I just identify as non-binary and don't put myself into any sub identity. Some days I like to be a woman and I'm also OK with identifying as being a guy. I'm pretty much nothing at the moment.