Hello Alice!!!

I have read your Q&A files and I haven’t run across the problem that I have had. Here’s the scenario as follows: I am a twenty-two-year-old heterosexual male. I lived in a big city. I went out to find a girl to date with. I ran into this woman who was really very attractive, long hair, dressed very neatly, and had the body to go with it. So we chatted for a while and we ended up at her place. Well, everything seemed like all systems were go. We went into her bedroom and we took our clothes off in the dark. Then we got kind of hot and heavy, and I massaged her breasts and nipples and then reached down to finger her clitoris, only to find she did not have the stamp of a female but of a male. I immediately jumped out of the bed and turned on the light and saw that she was a he. He was a transvestite. Of course, I got the hell out of there.

Now, this was just the first time that had happened to me; this happened to me two other times and I was really out of my wits as to how I could have made such a mistake. I finally did find a girl through a church group and I confided to her and she showed me her female genitals and she was very female. My question is this. How can I find out if a girl is really a female? Do I have to ask every girl to show me her sex in order to be sure that she is female? I really don't know the answer to this situation. Please help...

— Really concerned and confused

Answer

Dear Really concerned and confused,

Talking about identity, specifically sexual orientation and gender expression, may make people feel like they’re walking on eggshells because they’re afraid of making the incorrect assumption, using outdated or incorrect terminology, or saying something that will hurt someone’s feelings. First, it may be helpful to explore a few definitions about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning (LGBT [2] or LGBTQ+ [3]) community to establish a common language:

- **Gender identity** is a person’s internal self-awareness of being a man or a woman, masculine or feminine, something in-between, or something other. A person’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender non-conforming** or **genderqueer** individuals consider their gender identity to be outside the traditional gender binary.
- **Transgender** is used as an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity or expression is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Intersex** is an umbrella term that describes people born with variations in sex characteristics. Some of these variations may be noted chromosomally, physically, or both. In some cases, people born as intersex may have surgery as infants to assign them a sex, which may or may not agree with their gender identity.
- **Cisgender** is a term that refers to a person whose assigned gender at birth matches their gender identity.

Keep in mind that not everyone will agree on these words and definitions, so it's best to use the term(s) (and *pronouns* [4]) that people use for themselves. Also, gender identity is separate from sexual orientation. For example, those who identify as transgender can be gay, straight, bisexual, or may not want to categorize their sexuality with a label.

It sounds like you were pretty upset at your discovery that your date’s anatomy didn’t match her outward presentation. It might seem unfair that she didn’t disclose that she’s not cisgender. As this person didn’t share their situation with you, there may be multiple possibilities. For example, she may identify as intersex, in which case she may have a different variation in her anatomy. Alternatively, she may identify as a trans woman. However, you may want to think about the circumstance from her perspective. Transgender folks face discrimination everywhere, and trying to explain her gender identity can be both tough and potentially unsafe on a first date. Additionally, it’s possible that the experience may have moved faster than she had planned, leaving little time to chat and get to know each other.

It may be uncomfortable but asking potential partners what their pronouns are is a great first step in building a relationship. It’s key to mention though, the idea of finding out if “a girl is really a female” is complex for a few reasons. Gender is a spectrum and some folks’ sex and gender may not align within the gender binary. What’s more, you can’t tell if someone is transgender simply by looking at them or their genitalia. If a person is transgender, their gender history is personal information and it’s up to them to share it with others, if they *choose* to do so.

You’ve shared that this has happened to you multiple times — did each encounter occur at the same location? It could be a possibility that you’re unintentionally frequenting LGBTQ+ spaces. If so, as someone who doesn’t identify with the LGBTQ+ community, it may be time to consider checking out some new places.

Really concerned and confused, your experiences can be a reminder that identities and experiences often don’t fit into simple binaries. It may be helpful to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community to be better prepared when navigating these conversations in the future. For more information about the LGBTQ+ community, check out the Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer and Questioning [5] section in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

*Alice!*  
Category: Relationships [6]
Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) [7]
Homophobia [8]

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