# Audio file

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# Transcript

Welcome to this is probably a really weird question.

The podcast where a medical doctor.

And a doctor of history talk about sex history and the not at all weird questions we hear from patients, students and colleagues about our bodies and our sexuality.

I'm doctor Ronni Hayon and I'm professor Rebecca Davis.

And today's question is?

How do I know if I'm trans?

Welcome back to this is probably a really weird question with your hosts.

I'm Rebecca Davis.

I'm Ronni Hayon.

So this week question Ronni, is something that you hear in your office as a family physician who has a lot of LGBTIQ and trans patients?

So tell me a little bit.

When folks ask you this, and sort of.

How those conversations go.

Right.

Well, first of all, I want to tell you that in preparation for recording this podcast, I Googled.

This because this is.

Let's be frank, like people Google all sorts of stuff before they come to the doctor's office.

And Googling it was fascinating.

A lot of hilarity ensued, because what came up in my Google search was a lot of quick quizzes.

And like I.

Well, I can't remember what those are called where you get like a how to.

With each like.

Instructables an Instructable manual about how to decide if you're trans, or how to figure out if you're trans which.

Is just, you know?

Was it, was it like, was it like you are 40?

3% like was it?

How did did they give you a result?

The end.

You know, I didn't take the.

Quizzes, because I found them to be a.

Little bit offensive.

But the I did really appreciate the the Instructables that had the very poorly drawn graphics for each step.

But in any event, yeah, I get this question a lot and you know oftentimes when people ask.

There not weird questions at all.

It's not, uh, the question that's actually being asked is different, right.

So the question that oftentimes is really at the heart of how do I know if I'm trans?

Is people looking for?

Validation or support or safety, right, oftentimes.

I am the first person that people broach it with.

Sometimes people have talked to friends or family members or loved ones, but not always and and it's really really normal for trans and non binary people to go through a period of really questioning.

Their gender and what it really means to.

To be trans or nonbinary before they really come to a place where they are comfortable to talk about.

What they need and what their goals are and things like that.

Oftentimes folks are just asking am I trans enough to really to get the care that I need or to invest the time and energy and vulnerability that it requires to live authentically so.

I'm wondering when folks come in.

And ask you know, Doctor Haiyan.

How do I know if I'm trans and you're then super sensitized to thinking about OK, there's a lot behind this question.

What do you say?

How do you?

Start the conversation going.

You know, oftentimes I ask a question in return, which maybe is a little bit annoying, but my.

I don't have an answer for that, right?

So oftentimes what I'll say is.

Oh, what an interesting question.

What have you been thinking about lately that brought that question up for you?

And sometimes people will say, oh, I don't know, I was just watching.

This thing on this documentary on Netflix and I was wondering about it or and?

To somebody who's not.

Genderqueer at all.

And they're just like, how does somebody else know that they are trans?

As opposed to how how do I know if I am trans and and so I'll make some space for them too.

So to think about out loud what's been bringing this topic up to the floor for them, right?

And and.

Really normalize that for people, right?

I I once saw somebody on social media tweet something like.

Cisgender people don't spend a ton of time wondering if they're trans and really parsing out their gender identities.

So if you're spending a bunch of time wondering if you're trans, you probably.

And you know, I think that that may be true for a certain percentage of the population, but especially with younger folks coming up, gender.

Diversity and gender creativity is just part of the fabric of their experience.

So you hear this question then from patients of many different ages, many different places in their in their lives, yes.

And you know one person that.

I really want to give a shout out to is Dara Hoffman Fox, who is a gender therapist.

And they have a very rich material amount of material online where they have videos and blog posts and things like that.

But what they suggest folks do is if you're presenting yourself with this question, how do I know?

If I'm trans, you can think about the sex that you were assigned at birth and how comfortable you are identifying as that sex.

And so if there's some discomfort there, then that's a sign that it's a time to embark on a quest to learn more.

And they call it a quest, which I think is lovely because I think the word journey is just, you know, played out and tired.

But but it's a quest to learn more about who you are and how to live authentically.

Awesome. That's terrific.

So I'm wondering from a historical perspective, I'm always curious about your historical expertise.

Do we know who the first person was to ask that question?

And my am I trans?

How do I know if?

I'm trans, so we do not.

So there is, but we know lots of other stuff, which is I think the way that history professors most infuriate their students by the answer is just like that, but so the word transgender.

Is coined in the 20th century. It's really popularized in the 1990s. So someone would ask, but someone could ask any other variety of that question, right?

Am I and and and?

The answer is it goes as far back as there have been people as far as we can.

Well, there are, there is gender diversity.

And one of the things I find most exciting learning about this is how many people from hundreds of years ago had extreme confidence about their gender nonconformity about their gender expansive identity.

Right?

So we we can.

Imagine a past where people were less privileged or had less ability to be open or out.

And that's true.

Of many times in the past, but it's not.

The case that.

People hid in the shadows or that people didn't find ways to be their authentic selves in many different times and places.

So one of my favorite examples so in the same year that we declared independence.

From Britain, a person died and came back to life as the public universal friend.

Oh my.

And the public universal friend was already a spiritual leader.

We made the public universal friend.

And wait, wait, wait.

That's their name, hydell.

It works.

That that is their full on name, right?

And they had a prior name.

And I've I'm.

Sitting here in discomfort about naming what the prior name was because there's such a.

For historians, there's this tension around there is a history to people that talks as they move through gender, but there's also a real desire to not deadname people, to not.

So I'm not going to do that, but they did have a.

They had another name which was a more traditional 1st and.

Last name.

They had always.

Once they had, you know, enough adulthood to make choice.

Is clothes themselves in garments associated with male dress and garments associated with female dress, and this person had or was already sort of a spiritual leader?

There were a lot of.

There's sort of always a lot.

Of religious revivals going on in.

Early America sort of like a a ongoing process and.

The converse seems like there's a religious revival.

Public interest.

Going on in America right now.

Yeah, yeah, that's a whole other better for work.

That's a whole.

Separate, yeah.

That works.

So anyway, so the public universal friend comes back and they announced to their delighted followers who were very concerned that they had died, right.

So now they've been raised.

And they are genderless, and so followers are sort of delighted because they see it as further evidence of the divinity of the public universal friend, right?

They they sort of claim that this was that God is genderless, and so now they're sort of.

A representation of the divine on Earth is fulfilled through their genderless, and so other people really freak out.

And it's in similar ways that we can see other people discomfort sometimes.

What do you mean you're.

You know there.

Isn't there a binary?

Isn't it just one or the other?

That that sort of happens then, too, and it's seen as very threatening to the way most Protestant religion in the United States was organized, with very clearly delineated roles for men and for women within the church.

So here's this genderless person, really messy gumming up.

The works right really.

Representing a challenge to all.

Of that and loves everything about.

That, yeah.

So the public universal friend was unopposed.

Majestic was completely out in the open and had a community of people who supported and dork them.

Like literally sort of adored like in a sort of worshipping way.

So that's one example and one of my favorites, and I'm going to link in our show notes this amazing article by scholar Scott Larson, who writes about public universal friend.

In a wonderful way.

Can I tell you that there's something so poignant about that for me?

Because what I I hear a lot from patients is that either as children or even as older, older adults they oftentimes with like.

Pray, pray to.

God, at night, please.

When I wake up in the morning, you know, let me be a girl or let me.

Be a boy, right?

It's just so poignant that this person kind of like went to sleep and woke up their authentic self.

Right.

It's so beautiful.

Another story that I find really helpful for thinking about you know, who was the first person to call themselves?

Transgender and there is a guy out in the western part of the United States named Alan Heart, and he had medical training.

And he was.

He knew that he was a man.

And he.

Gathered up research.

This is right around the turn of the 20th century.

And he goes to his physician.

And says here's here's.

All the information here's who I am.

Here's my health history.

If you want to take, you know, do a psychiatric evaluation, whatever, fine.

I am a man.

And here.

Are the various procedures that I want you to perform.

This is how I want you to treat me so that I can live authentically as a man.

And the physicians notes on this are really eye opening because the physician misgender zahlen heart repeatedly.

He talks about how.

How you know in his in his childhood?

That he was, you know, a tomboy who liked boys games and so on.

What Alan has been telling this physician is yeah, so my entire life I have known that I was a guy.

So come on, let's speed it.

Up just just do like.

Here's the info.

And the physician does it.

I love it.

And and then he goes.

On and lives his best life.

So there are absolutely people who knew with complete certainty that they were.

A different gender than what they've been assigned at birth, and whether genderless or moving through one gender to a different gender in the course.

Of their lives.

Uhm, absolutely. And it's really tragic. And I mean, this is earnestly when people talk about trans identity as something that's just been invented in the last 20-30 years, that's that's 100% not true. The language we have around it has changed dramatically and continues to change.

Right.

But the reality that there are people who have 100% certainty known this about themselves, it's right there in the historical record for anybody to see, right?

And you know.

People have been transgender far longer than we've called ourselves transgender, right?

Like, yes.

Being trans is part of the human condition.

Transit nonbinary folks have been here forever.

And and your story, your story about him having to educate his physician is also, but you're.

Just like breaking my heart today, Rebecca, it's it's also incredibly poignant because this is still.

Still happening, right? And there was a really great study that came out in 2015, I think it's the it's the US transgender survey, and it's available online for free. And it was, to date, the largest survey of trans and nonbinary.

People in the United States and it looked at all kinds of health outcomes right, including homelessness and joblessness and poverty and HIV, and access to health care and access to gender affirming care.

And one of the.

Number one reasons that patients avoid health care is because they have to educate their clinicians about it.

And it's crappy, right?

And it feels really bad.

And oftentimes when I'm teaching other clinicians about trans health, clinicians can get a little bit defensive about it and say.

How am I supposed to know?

How am I supposed to know how to take care of a trans person?

Like I never learned that well, you also.

Didn't come out of.

The womb knowing how to treat diabetes, right.

You just. You.

Learn about it the same way you.

Learn about everything else.

Everybody gets all their panties.

All in a bundle bundle.

About it because it feels stressful and new.

But it's still, it's still happening and it's exhausting.

You know, I feel like there are so many things in general right in life that just saps our energy and our joy, and I think the amount of energy that goes into.

Like girding your loins.

To go into the doctors office and like here, I have to come in with this.

Like, she fills papers and studies, and I've researched the hell out of medication regimens, 'cause you're just not going to know what to do.

So I'm going to have to tell you how to take care of me.

And I do want.

To put a plug in here for the US Trans survey.

They're doing the newest.

Version is in 2022 which is right now.

So you can go to their website.

I will.

We can include the link in our show notes, but you can pledge to take.

The survey yourself.

If you are trans or nonbinary, you can also pledge to share it with folks in your life who might want to take the survey, and you can be a part.

Of this bleeding.

Edge of research for.

For health inequities for trans and non binary folks in the United States.

So I have one other big question though.

Bring it.

What about when someone is questioning or pretty sure that they are trans, but there are people in their lives, whether parents or partners, who doubt it?

Or who think that it's a phase? There's this whole conversation around quote UN quote detransitioning, which is a thing that happens so.

Do you see that in your practice and if you do?

How does it play?

Out what do you?

Do a man all that like?

All the time and I will say this is just my own.

This is my own perspective as an outside observer, but I would say in my own experience this idea of detransitioning or the experience of detransitioning.

Is usually from external pressure, right?

So I certainly have patients who have.

Gone through some sort of gender affirming care and then decided to stop or, you know, go back.

I'm making our listeners can't see this, but I'm making huge, like airquotes go back to to their previous gender.

And sometimes it's 'cause.

It's freaking hard, man.

Like it is.

It is hard to be strong in your identity in the face of tremendous pressure and bigotry.

That be and I would say the other place I really, I see it a lot is in parents of young people and and I don't want to get into the landscape of what's happening right now.

For young trans and nonbinary folks, suffice it.

To say that.

More bills have been introduced in the last one to two years, then have been introduced.

Ever in the history of our legislatures trying to make people identities illegal and the care that they deserve illegal, understandably, parents are frightened and they want to take care of their kids.

So when a parent asks that question, I think it's really important to acknowledge that the majority of the time, and I will say not always, but most majority of the time, it's coming from a place of love.

And it's coming from a place of wanting to.

Right.

Take really good care of your.

And so I'll say that out loud.

In front of.

The child right 'cause.

A lot of times the young kid is like sitting there, slouched in their chair, like eyes rolling on their phone or whatever.

And I so I want to say out loud but.

I it's so important that you're here and that you're asking these questions because.

One of the.

Other things we really that has been shown over and over over again for young trans and nonbinary folks is that parental support is incredibly important.

It is protective.

From all sorts of stuff that you maybe don't.

Expect right? Like.

Homelessness, which maybe is self-explanatory. Homelessness, but it's also protective against HIV and smoking and alcohol use.

So parental support is one of the most important things for young trans and nonbinary people, so that that fear of.

What if they change their mind is really normal and so I try to normalize that and normalize it also coming from internally for folks 'cause, it can feel overwhelming so.

Basically, if I if it seems like this urge or this concern about Detransitioning is external, we try to interrogate that a little bit together.

I am also not.

A therapist and so.

I feel like I have to do a lot of mental health care in family medicine.

That's just part of the gig.

But in general, having a therapist who is.

Trained specifically in gender affirming care can be invaluable for both the person who is affirming their gender and also for the people that.

Love them, right?

So you know if it's internally motivated, right?

If this is.

Somebody is innate sense of their gender evolution goal.

I am here for it and I am here to support you.

And if you want to stop medications, we'll stop medications if you want to.

If there's anything else that you.

Want to do? I want.

To be there, to be.

Sometimes people change their minds and shift their thinking about things all the time, right?

Like the way that people self identify in terms of their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their political leanings, like we grow and change and that's normal.

Certainly there's always a risk that any decision we make could cause regret, but there's also.

Chance that it won't, right?

There's also a chance that the decisions you make are going to cause joy and not regret.

And then you know similar to my public service announcement in the last episode, the other the the public service stuff that I want to make in this episode is about relative therapy or conversion therapy, so.

You know, for those who don't know, relative therapy or conversion therapy is a specific type of either talk therapy or physical abuse that is aimed at.

Changing somebody's gender identity or sexual orientation.

It it doesn't work.

And not only does it not work, it's harmful.

So if you have someone in your life who is thinking about sending a loved one to get some conversion therapy, please feel very comfortable saying very strongly, don't do that.

It's going to, it's not going to work and it's.

Going to hurt this person that you love.

Yeah, I I when I was a grad student, I sat in on an undergraduate seminar on the history of gay and lesbian psychology, and the professor was wonderful.

You know, he sort of paused in the middle of something and looked around the room.

These side for me, these mostly much younger faces and said, oh, and if you're ever in a physician or therapist's office and they offer to you, if you know as a service that you could go do relative therapy, run, don't walk out of that office and never go back. Truth, he's like.

Are about to be harmed by that provider.

Get out.

Excellent advice.

I was like I was so grateful to him for.

Speaking so forcefully about it, and I've tried to do that with my own students too.

When I talk about this, you know, it really starts in the 70s.

We can do a whole other.

Episode about it and and it's just incredibly harmful.

So thank you for making that PSA.

Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo.

Public service announcement.

We have so much more to.

Talk about Oh my God, so.

Much more, so let's wrap things up here.

Thank you.

To our listeners.

Please continue to check our website for show notes and we'll have more announcements there of things to come.

We're getting merch put together and we will look forward to talking to you again.

Soon. Thanks, Rebecca. Thanks, Ronni.

You've been listening to this is probably a really weird question, which is created, hosted and produced by Rebecca Davis and Ronni Hyeon.

You can.

Learn more about us, read our show notes and find links to resources on our website, www.reallyweirdquestion.com.

Follow us on Twitter at a really weird pod, Rebecca tweets at history Davis and Ronni at Doctor Awkward, MD.

Send us your really weird, not really questions by emailing us at reallyweirdquestion@gmail.com.

Nora Carlson is our website guru and social manager.

Nick Finnegan is our sound engineer.

Mark Russell Baker composed and recorded.

Our incredible theme music.

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Thank you for listening and keep on asking those questions.