



Understanding Drag

Drag is a type of entertainment where people dress up and perform, often in highly stylized ways. The term originated as British theater slang in the 19th century and was used to describe women's clothing worn by men.

Today, many prominent drag artists are still people who identify as men and present themselves in exaggeratedly feminine ways as part of their performance, and are known as **drag queens**. While some drag queens live their lives as men outside of their drag personae, people of any gender can be drag queens. **Drag kings**, who wear men's clothing and perform stylized forms of masculinity, are less common, but do exist. Many drag kings are women, but people of any gender can be drag kings as well.

As part of their performance, many drag queens and kings have a separate drag persona in addition to the self they live as every day. This persona will of course look different, but may also have a different name and ask to be referred to by different gender pronouns.

This does not mean they are transgender. Just as actors do not keep being referred to by their characters' names after stepping offstage, drag performers do not necessarily keep the names or pronouns they use while performing. Drag performers are artists and entertainers, so being in drag is not an integral part of their identity in the same way that gender is.

On the other hand, when a transgender person comes out and asks people to use a different name and different gender pronouns to refer to them, it is not part of a performance. It is an important part of their identity, and can be a critical part of affirming their gender identity.

Don't assume that someone in drag is transgender, or vice versa. Just as the vast majority of the general population does not do drag, most transgender people also are not drag performers. It can be hurtful to refer to a transgender person's presentation as drag, because it suggests that their deeply held identity is just a show they are putting on—which is untrue.

Being respectful of a drag performer's gender is the same as being respectful of anyone else's gender. If you're not sure, for example, of which pronouns to use when referring to someone, just ask.

Like transgender people, drag performers can experience discrimination and harassment because of their gender expression. NCTE works to end violence against all people who face bias because of their gender presentation and/or identity.

To learn in more depth about what it means to be transgender, start at our one-page resource: [Understanding Transgender People: The Basics](#).