



Transgender: Bruce Jenner's Journey to Caitlyn Jenner



Richard Levine/Alamy

Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, June 2015.

The transition of Olympic gold medal winner Bruce Jenner to the transgender woman Caitlyn Jenner became public in 2015. In remarkable self-revealing television and magazine interviews that year, Jenner described his long-term struggle to come to terms with gender dysphoria. For millions of Americans, this was an amazing story about someone they admired, but whose personal struggle with gender identity had never been evident.

As a boy, Jenner excelled at athletics. He was good at sports and people liked him. And no one questions the masculinity of a male sports star. He continued sports in college and was part of the U.S. Olympic Team in the 1972 Olympics in Munich, helping to place himself on the path leading to his gold medal 4 years later. Jenner became widely known in 1976, when he won the gold medal in the grueling decathlon competition at the Summer Olympics in Montreal. His tremendous achievement gave him instant fame, and his image was placed on the front of Wheaties cereal boxes. His life seemed perfect. Jenner was quickly offered a job as a television broadcaster. He gave speeches across the country in the following years and was the face of a number of advertising campaigns. To many, Jenner seemed to be living the American dream.

However, there was a private Bruce Jenner who had a secret. Going back to when Bruce was around

10 years of age, he would sneak into his mother's or sister's closet. He would put on a dress or other feminine items of clothing and walk around dressed this way. He was both fascinated and scared that someone would find out.

Internally, Bruce Jenner had other types of feelings. He told his first wife that he always wanted to be a woman. He had fantasies of what this would mean. At this time, he had a strong sexual appetite exclusively for women. During his life, he has had three wives and four children. The relationships ended as he told his partners more about his internal feelings.

A few years ago, when Jenner was in his mid-60s and his children were all grown up and in careers of their own, Bruce decided it was time to embrace the female gender identity and, with the help of psychological therapy and hormones, transform into Caitlyn. Jenner had taken hormones previously but had discontinued their use. This time, as Caitlyn, Jenner continued with the hormones and had plastic surgery to feminize the face. By late 2015, with increasing confidence, Jenner publicly embraced her new identity. As with about 75% of all transgender women, Caitlyn was not having genital surgery. Within the transgender community, it is not a person's genitalia that determine gender. In fact, health professionals suggest that if genital surgery is conducted, it should be delayed until at least a year after transitioning.

On July 15, 2015, Caitlyn was awarded the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPY Awards in Los Angeles.

Thought Question: What factors influence how a society understands gender dysphoria?

The *Vanity Fair* article on Caitlyn Jenner from 2015 can be found at <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>