

Trans Myths

MYTH: Trans people are confused about their gender

Some people mistakenly believe that gender is absolutely and irrefutably proven by genitalia and DNA. While genitalia and DNA might correctly identify biological sex, gender is much more complex. If there's a discrepancy between your brain and heart and your genitals, your brain and heart trump your genitals. The bottom line is that each person is the ultimate authority on their own gender identity.

MYTH: Trans is a new phenomenon

Although much of it was hidden and is lost, there is plenty of evidence of trans history going back thousands of years and across many cultures (see tghistory.org).

While it may seem that trans prevalence has increased in recent years, we don't actually know how many trans people there are now (or ever were). Estimates vary widely depending upon - among other things - the definitions used. Some factors that may affect the perception of increasing trans prevalence include: a) more trans people are out now, b) public awareness of gender diversity and trans realities is increasing, and c) there's a better understanding of the different ways of being trans outside of the gender binary.

MYTH: Trans people are almost all trans women

Historically, it was believed that the majority of trans people were trans women (Male-to-Female). This was partly because the numbers came from gender identity clinics, where clients were transsexual. Since trans women were more likely to surgically transition, for various reasons, than trans men, they were over-represented in the statistics. Recent information from more diverse sources suggests that there are more trans men than previously believed.

Almost equal numbers of trans men and trans women participated in the Canadian Trans Needs Assessment Survey (2013), along with those who identify outside of the gender binary.

MYTH: All trans people have had (or want to have) sex reassignment surgery

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is an array of optional procedures that differ between trans women and trans men and between individuals, depending on their circumstances and choices. A person can be trans without ever undergoing any procedures.

Not all trans people want to surgically transition, and those who want to often encounter barriers. There are many factors to consider in deciding if, when, and how to surgically transition, such as body image, sexuality, health, current relationships, future reproductive options, and economic circumstances.

Costs are often a significant barrier, as some provincial health plans don't cover SRS. Even among those that do, there are often qualifying criteria, waiting periods, resource shortages, and associated expenses that aren't covered.

In the Canadian Trans Needs Assessment Survey, 23% of respondents did not want SRS, 28% of respondents had undergone SRS, 9% were in progress, and 34% wanted to have SRS but hadn't yet.

MYTH: Gender identity and sexual orientation are the same thing

Because Trans is part of the LGBTQ umbrella, people sometimes assume it has something to do with sexual orientation. In fact, it's the only part of LGBTQ that isn't about sexual orientation. It's about gender identity, which is about what gender(s) you perceive yourself to fundamentally be (e.g. man, woman, both, or neither).

Sexual orientation may be a more complicated thing to label or explain when you're trans, especially when completing a survey. In the Canadian Trans Needs Assessment Survey, 32% of respondents identified as lesbian, gay or queer, compared to 18% straight, 18% bi, 18% pansexual, 5% asexual and 8% other or unsure. But in the comments, people added plenty of explanatory text, such as: "Others see it as straight. I have no adequate description for it." "Complicated." "Formerly lesbian. Now technically heterosexual." "No good term for MTF non-binary." "Unsure of this since transitioning." "Do not identify with any." "Straight. But seen as a gay woman because I am closeted." "Not sure what to put here." "Straight as a trans man but gay as my birth gender" "Queer, this is complicated though, as I identify as male and date women, so it's hard to say." "Asexualish. Uncertain." "Thought I was a gay man, but I am a straight trans woman."

So when a trans person discloses their sexual orientation, keep in mind that it might not be that straightforward. Different trans people may use language differently, or may use the same language differently at different times in their lives.

MYTH: Trans is all about sex or fetishism

"For decades, the general public, and especially the media, have had a lurid fascination with trans people's bodies and sexualities. From talk shows like Jerry Springer, to reality shows like There's Something About Miriam, novels like Myra Breckinridge, and the countless movies that portray trans women almost exclusively as either sex workers, sexual predators and sexual deviants. This hypersexualization of transgenderism predominantly targets trans women and others on the trans feminine spectrum - because in a world where women are routinely objectified, and where a woman's worth is often judged based on her sexual appeal, it is no surprise that many people presume that those of us who were assigned a male sex at birth, but who identify as women and/or dress in a feminine manner, must do so for primarily sexual reasons." Julia Serano

"Being a transsexual is not something we do in the privacy of our own bedrooms; it affects every aspect of our lives, from our driver's licenses to our work histories, from our birth certificates to our school transcripts to our parents' wills, and every relationship represented by those paper trails." Jamison Green

In the Canadian Trans Needs Assessment Survey, 34% of respondents indicated they weren't having any sex at all.

MYTH: Most trans people work in the sex trade

11% of respondents in the Canadian Trans Needs Assessment Survey had income from the informal or underground economy in the previous year, and sex work would have been a component of that 11%. (In comparison, 73% of respondents had employment income in the previous year, 21% had student loans or scholarships, and 11% had social assistance or disability income.)

is.gd/CASTrans

