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Myth #1: Transgender people are confused or tricking others

By German Lopez | @germanlopez | german.lopez@vox.com | Updated Nov 14, 2018, 4:08pm EST

Part of **Transgender people: 10 common myths**

The most pervasive myth about transgender people — and the one myth that underpins much of the discrimination they face — is that they're somehow confused or actively misleading others by identifying with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth.

This misconception is “baffling to a lot of trans people,” Mara Keisling, a trans woman and executive director of the **National**

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Center for Transgender Equality, said. “We realize we’re among the few people who are really approaching things with full integrity and full transparency. We’re saying, ‘This is who I really am.’”

To understand why this is wrong, it’s first important to understand the concepts of gender identity and expression. Gender identity is someone’s personal identification as a man, woman, or a gender outside of societal norms. Gender expression refers to characteristics and behaviors a person identifies with that can be viewed as masculine, feminine, a mix of both, or neither.

The vast majority of Americans are cisgender, meaning they identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Perhaps because of this — and because people who are not cisgender have been visible in the mainstream media only relatively recently — there’s an exposure gap for many Americans. For them, it can be difficult to understand how, for instance, a person born with a vagina and raised as a woman might identify as a man.



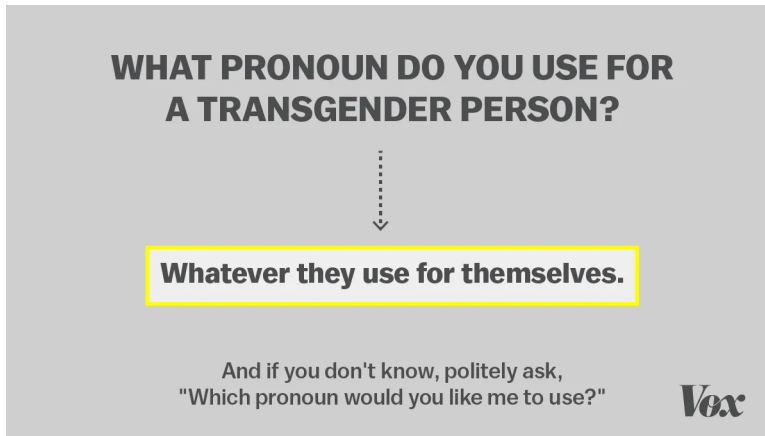
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Lily Carollo, a trans writer, said she helps cisgender people expand their views on gender identity through a **thought exercise** that, if successful, conveys the feeling of being identified by others as the wrong gender. She begins by asking people if a huge sum of money would get them to physically transition to the opposite gender. Most people say no, she said, because they'd rather continue presenting themselves as the gender they were born as and identify with. "If you go into why they're answering no, they'll usually say that it wouldn't feel right," Carollo said. "That's what you lock into. Take that sense and imagine if you had been born in the opposite body."

Studies also support the concept of gender identity. Researchers at Boston University School of Medicine conducted a **review** of the current studies. They concluded that the

available data suggests there's a biological link to a person's gender identity, indicating that trans people are essentially assigned genders at birth that don't match their inherent, biologically set identity.

This evidence suggests that trans people aren't trying to trick anyone or confused. They're simply trying to be the people they've long felt they are.

If trans people were confused, one would expect a lot of regret among people who medically transition. But the research doesn't show this happening: As Brynn Tannehill, director of advocacy at the LGBTQ group SPARTA, wrote in the **Huffington Post**, multiple studies show almost no trans people — at most 1 or 2 percent — report regret after they medically transition.

Despite the evidence, most trans advocates will almost always mention this myth — of trans people being confused or tricking others — as the biggest problem trans people face. "It's creating a phobia," said Angelica Ross, CEO of TransTech Social, a company that actively trains and hires trans people to provide them with job opportunities.

So this myth is a problem not just because trans people's testimonies and available

scientific evidence show it's wrong, but because it also feeds into some of the discrimination trans people face.

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