Myths and Realities of Trans-identified Persons
(Adapted from UBCs Positive Space Information)

Trans-identified people are all the same.

Trans-identified is an umbrella term used to describe anyone who is gender different; someone with an innate identification as the opposite gender; or even someone born of one gender, but having either a casual affinity for clothing and/or affectations of the opposite gender (cross dressers).

Trans-identified persons can range from transsexuals (both male-to-female and also female-to-male) to cross dressers to female/male impersonators (drag queens/kings) to gender queer people who don’t feel they fit or choose not to fit one of the two categories in the gender binary (man or woman) and the social expectations that these two roles imply.

All trans-identified people are transsexual.

Some trans-identified persons are transsexual and may undergo sex reassignment surgery, take hormones or other behavioural and physiological changes to change their sex. However, many trans-identified persons do not want to undergo sex reassignment or cannot due to lack of access to resources.

Some cross dressers identify as transgender and they are content to dress in clothing usually considered to be appropriate for the “opposite” gender and have no desire to change their biological sex.

All trans-identified people are really just homosexual.

Gender is separate from sexual orientation. Some trans persons identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and others identify as heterosexual. If someone who is trans is attracted to persons of the same sex and then undergo sex reassignment surgery, then they could be considered heterosexual if their attraction stays the same. Some people’s attractions change after going through a transition. Though there is no real connection with gender and sexual desire, attraction and orientation.

All transsexuals change their sexuality on hormones.

Some transsexual persons take hormones and some do not. Sexual orientation can be fluid in trans-identified persons as well as persons whose gender matches their sex. Attractions/orientations may change for some people during or after a transition, others remain attracted to the same gender to which they were attracted before the transition.

Trans persons are prone to sexual perversion or pedophilia.

This is an unsubstantiated and misinformed belief, used to discredit trans persons, and similar myths exist about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and intersex persons. Society often views
someone who is different or exotic as a potential threat and thus, suspect. It is always based on lack of, or very limited exposure to individuals who identify as part of this community.

**All trans-identified people are like the ones on Jerry Springer.**

The only real transpersons on such talk shows are the most sensational, over-the-top folks they can find. It draws the ratings. Such shows have also gone so far as to hire actors to play ‘trans’ characters. The average transperson, just like the average gender-conforming person, is too mundane to appear on such a show.

**It isn’t worth the trouble to hire or retain trans-identified employees.**

Diversity in the workplace is always important, in fact invaluable. The more different points-of-view that you have in your company or organization, the better prepared you will be to meet the needs and demands of the diverse population who use your products, or services. Having more diversity in your workplace will cause you to become more aware of the negative effects of different types of oppression. Once you are aware you can start to take measure to prevent different forms of discrimination and harassment. That’s good for business and for our society.

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Trans people have existed in every culture from the beginning of time. The term “trans” crosses all racial, ethnic, social and class boundaries. In its general sense, it refers to anyone whose behaviour or identity falls outside of stereotypical expectations for their gender or sex

Most all of us have some level of characteristics that are stereotypical of the other gender. The trans individual experiences it to a much greater degree. Their personal characteristics, appearance and behaviours differ significantly from typical expectations about how women and men are “supposed” to be. For people in the process of trying to understand what is happening to them, getting information about trans people can be very important. There are books and movies that they can access, as well as other trans people with whom they can talk.

Some of the issues that trans persons face include:
(adapted from Alexander John Goodrum, Gender Identity 101: A Transgender Primer.)

- Job, service and housing discrimination. Even when legal protections for gay men, bisexuals and lesbians exist, they generally do not cover trans people because very few communities explicitly state “gender identity” or “gender expression” in their protection ordinances. The Ontario Human Rights Code does not explicitly include gender identity as a ground of prohibited discrimination but it is assumed that issues around gender identity are considered under the ground of “sex”. Gender Identity has been “written in” as a prohibited ground in the George Brown College Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

- Transphobic violence and hatred is not rare. Violence against trans persons can be particularly brutal. On average one trans person is murdered in the US every month. For example, in 1997, in Washington D.C. a pre-operative transsexual woman named Tyra
Hunter was fatally injured in an auto accident. Paramedics at first refused to treat her after they discovered she had male genitalia, laughing and mocking as she lay dying. In December, 1993, a female-to-male (FTM) named Brandon Teena was raped by two men who discovered that he was born female. Brandon reported the rape to the local sheriff who refused to investigate, dismissing him with the derisive comment “What are you, anyway?” Later, the same two men whom the sheriff refused to arrest for the rape murdered Brandon and two of his friends. Brandon’s story was later made into the movie *Boys Don’t Cry*.

- Prejudice against trans individuals is pervasive. There is a long-held view by medical providers and researchers, as well as the public at large, that being trans is pathological. This, in itself, constitutes one of the most significant barriers to care. As a result of this labeling, trans individuals have underutilized health and social services. A survey of trans men and women in San Francisco reported that many in the population are chronically underserved with regard to basic medical and psychological support services. Few resources exist that address their specific needs or provide necessary consumer education and regular medical follow-up (Asian AIDS Project, 1995; San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 1994).

- Social and economic marginalization frequently accompanies the trans experience. Rejected by family and community, with reduced educational and employment opportunities because of the harassment faced in both settings, trans women and men are commonly subjected to discrimination, homelessness, unemployment and poverty. Many are unable to afford basic medical and mental health services. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of these individuals are people of colour, HIV-positive, and/or youth, thereby increasing the likelihood they are socially and medically undeserved (Israel & Tarver, 1997).

- As with the general population, trans persons of colour are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and face disproportionately higher rates of victimization, unemployment, substance abuse, HIV infection, prostitution and other difficulties. Trans persons of colour also report a loss of community identity when their gender identity becomes known. In African American, Asian, Pacific Islander or Latin American contexts, for example, heterosexual males and females commonly stereotype gay males and lesbians as no longer part of their ethnic community because they assume that all people of colour are or should be heterosexual. This ostracism carries over to trans individuals (Israel & Tarver, 1997).

- Fear and unnecessary worry over daily activities that gender conforming persons take for granted. For example, “which bathroom do I use when I am out in public,” “how will others react when they see me in there,” “will I be harassed or beaten for using the ‘wrong’ (according to them) bathroom,” “can I ‘hold it’ all day until I can get home and use my bathroom in privacy and peace,” “what option do I check on these forms with forced-choice gender options (M or F),” “will the person receiving the form believe me or question me,” “what if I don’t identify as M or F, what do I check,” “will I get kicked out of my all female club if I come out as a transman,” “will I be subject to violence if I come out,” “will my friends, family, spouse, children, employers, coworkers, students, etc., accept me?”