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SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
**TO DECONSTRUCT  
MYTHS**  
ABOUT **TRANS PARENT FAMILIES**



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## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO DECONSTRUCT MYTHS ABOUT TRANS PARENT FAMILIES

The term trans is an umbrella term that includes anyone whose gender does not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth. This term may or may not include trans men and women, non-binary persons, queer persons, gender fluid persons, etc., depending on their own self-identification. A trans parent family includes at least one trans parent. In recent years, the trans community has gained more and more visibility by addressing the social inequalities that affect them. With this recognition, more and more trans parent families are emerging in our society. Despite legal and societal progress, however, these families still face many difficulties related to prejudice and lack of information.

The purpose here is to explore six myths about trans parent families and to deconstruct them based on data collected in a number of studies conducted in recent years. The research data presented below were obtained from several articles published in recognized scientific journals.

- MYTH#1** Trans people don't have children.
- MYTH#2** Children in trans parent families can be confused about their gender identity and conventional gender roles.
- MYTH#3** Children of trans parents will themselves become either trans or homosexual.
- MYTH#4** Children of trans parents are more likely to develop social, emotional, behavioural and developmental problems than other children.
- MYTH#5** Trans people cannot be good parents.
- MYTH#6** There is no scientific research on trans parent families.



# MYTH #1



## Trans people don't have children.

### Reality

Five recent major surveys<sup>1</sup> in Ontario, the United States and various European countries have reported that between 27% and 44% of trans people have children. Social norms are constantly changing and the acceptance of trans people is increasing. As a result, trans people who already have children feel more comfortable coming out, while young trans people can now dream of having a family one day.

Three factors impact the experience of having children: **the age of the trans person, when the person begins their transition process and the gender assigned at birth.**

Data from one study<sup>2</sup> indicate that more than 80% of trans people aged 55 and over are parents. Data from a Canadian survey<sup>3</sup> of 57 trans parents revealed that 70% of the 90 children in the sample were born before the parent's transition.

In recent years, trans people are beginning their transition process at a much younger age than the previous generation.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore likely that more trans people who have already made their transition will seek to become parents in the coming decades. In a French study,<sup>5</sup> 45% of trans youth aged 16 to 26 reported that they want to have children eventually.

Those who wish to start a family after their transition (post-transition parents), can become parents in a variety of ways:

- An **adoption process** can be initiated by a trans individual or a couple in which at least one of the partners is trans. According to one study,<sup>6</sup> 75% of trans women reported wanting children through adoption or foster care.
- Future parents can use **medically assisted reproductive technologies.**<sup>7</sup>
- Pregnancy can result from **sexual intercourse** in the case of trans people who have not surgically altered their reproductive organs. According to one study,<sup>8</sup> 58% of trans men reported wanting to have children through sexual intercourse or insemination.
- Becoming a parent could involve **parenting a partner's children.**

# MYTH #1



Rainbow Health Ontario has reviewed the reproductive options available to trans people wishing to be biological parents.<sup>9</sup> Trans women have the option of freezing sperm, ideally before the start of feminizing hormone therapy, as these treatments can create irreversible infertility quite quickly. A trans woman whose partner can carry a child will be able to use the stored sperm to inseminate their partner. They may also use the services of another person to carry their child. For trans men who can become pregnant, a temporary cessation of masculinizing hormones could allow them to be fertile again. The results of a study<sup>10</sup> showed that 80% of trans men who stopped taking testosterone began menstruating again within 6 months. While the impacts of long-term testosterone use on ovarian function are not fully known, trans men have successfully conceived and carried children after suspending their testosterone use.<sup>11</sup>

## The legal framework for trans parents

In 2013, the Québec legislature adopted the *Act to amend the Civil Code with respect to civil status, succession and the publication of rights*.<sup>12</sup> This law amends, among other things, section 71 of the *Civil Code of Québec* so that trans people can change the sex designation on their birth certificate and other identity documents without first having undergone medical treatment and surgery. This law came into force in 2015.

For years, however, as was the case for lesbians in the 1980s, trans people always lost custody of their children in litigation cases. Eventually, in 2015, a Montréal woman became the first trans Quebecer to obtain shared custody of her child in court. The Superior Court determined that the woman – a health professional who began her transition eight years ago – could assume custody of her 9-year-old child. Superior Court Judge Pierre Nollet made his decision based on expert reports and granted both parents the same parenting capacity.

Furthermore, in 2016 the National Assembly unanimously adopted Bill 103: *An Act to strengthen the fight against transphobia and improve the situation of transgender minors in particular*. This law amends section 10 of the *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of "gender identity or expression." This has the effect of providing explicit protection to trans people. Under the Charter amendment, a parent cannot be deemed unfit to care for their child because of their gender identity.

Finally, in 2017, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* was amended to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and expression. This Act applies more specifically to federal departments and agencies, banks, post offices, prisons, customs and the Canadian Armed Forces.

# MYTH #2

**Children in trans parent families  
can be confused about their gender identity  
and conventional gender roles.**

## Reality

This preconceived idea is based on psychoanalytical theories that state that the presence of a (non-transgender) father and mother is necessary to ensure normal development in children, primarily in terms of their psychosexual development and the construction of their gender identity. However, research<sup>13</sup> on the issue indicates that children of trans parents are no more likely than other children to be confused about their gender identity or gender roles, or to identify as trans or non-heterosexual. In these studies, different measures are used to assess the degree of children's compliance with gender norms. For example, these studies look at the children's favourite games, toys and clothing, the composition of their group of friends, role-playing, and what kind of work they would like to do when they grow up. All of the children raised by at least one trans parent reported a preference for activities and interests traditionally associated with their gender. Furthermore, none of the children appeared to exhibit behaviours that could be associated with gender dysphoria.



# MYTH #3

**Children of trans parents  
will themselves become either  
trans or homosexual.**

## Reality

It is often assumed that having a trans parent will cause children to become trans or develop a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. In fact, there is no consensus in the scientific literature to explain the "origins" or "causes" of trans identity or non-heterosexual orientations. Instead of looking for origins or causes, it is better to consider trans identities or non-heterosexual orientations as simply human variations.

This myth denies the fact that the vast majority of trans and non-heterosexual people come from families with heterosexual and cisgender (non-trans) parents. Children do not inherit their parents' sexual orientation and gender identity. Studies indicate that children of trans parents are no more likely than children of heterosexual and cisgender parents to identify as trans or gay, lesbian or bisexual. All of the adolescent and adult children of trans parents interviewed in one study<sup>14</sup> identified as the gender assigned to them at birth and also as heterosexual.

# MYTH #4

**Children of trans parents are more likely to develop social, emotional, behavioural and developmental problems than other children.**

## Reality

A team of psychiatrists and psychologists working in a French fertility clinic followed the evolution of children from trans parent families in a longitudinal study.<sup>15</sup> All these children were born with the help of medically assisted procreation by sperm donation. Their families were composed of cisgender (non-transgender) women who had carried the children and trans men who were not biologically related to the children. This study concluded that the children had no difficulties in areas such as attachment, sleep and nutrition, and that they had no developmental delays. They also adapted well to kindergarten and elementary school.

For children who witnessed their parent's transition, other studies have shown that the majority of them experienced no decline in their academic performance during the transition period.<sup>16</sup> They are no more likely than children in the general population to suffer from psychological adjustment problems. If the children suffered from psychopathologies, the symptoms were present even before the beginning of the parent's transition in most cases.<sup>17</sup> These results are consistent with other studies<sup>18</sup> that indicate that children of trans parents are no more likely than other children to experience social, emotional, psychological and behavioural difficulties.

However, family conflicts can be triggered as a result of a parent's coming out and transition, and can lead to adjustment difficulties for the child.<sup>19</sup> Some spouses may feel so angry that they demand immediate separation or divorce and withdrawal of custody of the children. Among trans parents who experienced a marital breakdown as a result of their coming out, 29% reported that, because they identified as trans,<sup>20</sup> their ex-partner limited or cut their ties with the children. In addition, 10% of the parents in a Québec-Ontario study<sup>21</sup> lost legal custody of their children.

# MYTH #4



In some cases, parental alienation may occur as a result of the parent's coming out or transition. Parental alienation often results in the creation of an alliance between the cisgender (non-trans) parent and the child. This parent denigrates the trans parent in an exaggerated manner and without justification, which can have a significant impact on the child's reaction to and acceptance of their trans parent. A Québec study notes that it is not the parent's coming out or transition that can be problematic and lead to difficulties for the child, but rather the troubled relations between the parents and the parental alienation of a child from their parent.<sup>22</sup>

Another reluctance expressed about the well-being of children in trans parent families concerns the reaction of the child's peers and the fear that the child will be stigmatized because they have a so-called "non-traditional" family structure.<sup>23</sup> Prejudice about trans parenthood is so persistent and socially entrenched that the majority of trans parents have considered the possible negative impacts of their coming out and transition on their children. Some trans parents in Québec were so worried that they preferred to delay their coming out and transition because they thought it was the best way to ensure their children's well-being.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some American studies indicate that children of trans parents are no more bullied than other children, as there are many very different reasons for teasing in childhood and adolescence.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, children often have to explain their parent's gender identity and may experience transphobia.<sup>26</sup> They must learn to navigate a transphobic, homophobic and heteronormative world. In order to avoid indiscreet questions and negative comments, Québec children of trans parents have adopted strategies such as avoiding discussing their parent's trans identity or avoiding disclosing this aspect of their family, except with trusted individuals or friends.<sup>27</sup>



# MYTH #5

## Trans people cannot be good parents.

### Reality

Trans parents and their families live in a social context where their parenting skills are constantly under scrutiny and must be proven to people. Clearly, an individual's parenting skills do not vanish during a transition. Studies show that the main factors that influence children's happiness and development are the quality of a child's relationship with the parent(s), the quality of the relationship between the parents or other adults, and economic factors. People who were good parents before their transition will continue to be good parents. However, a parent's transition is not without consequences for a child. A wide range of emotions can come up, including feelings of sadness and shame. Despite this, a Québec study<sup>28</sup> showed that parents making a transition are well placed to support their children during this period. In addition, for the vast majority of parents interviewed, their transition seemed to have positive effects on their parenting.

Positive impacts of transitioning on parenting:

- The majority of parents described a sense of well-being after starting their transition process, particularly when taking hormones, which for some had a liberating effect. As they saw their appearance and body change, many felt more at peace with themselves since they could finally express their true gender identity.
- Some parents reported noticing an improvement in their mood after starting their transition process. They felt happier, more cheerful, more peaceful and more patient. Feeling happier and more comfortable encouraged them to become more involved in the relationship with their children and to engage in family activities that might previously have made them uncomfortable.

# MYTH #5

Positive impacts of transitioning on parenting (continued):

- Some parents felt that they grew closer to their children. This closeness could be the unconditional love their children showed them during the coming out or an improvement in their relationship with their children a few weeks or months after the coming out.
- Disclosure of the parent's gender identity can encourage other family members to open up as well. Once the trans parent comes out, they are more open with others, which can lead to more authentic and honest relationships.

Coming out as a trans parent is not easy. The reactions of those who know the person can be cruelly transphobic. By living their lives openly, trans parents can be incredible role models of courage and perseverance for their children.



# MYTH #6

**There is no scientific research on trans parent families.**

**Reality**

Although a growing number of studies have been conducted with the trans community, there is still a lot of work to be done. So far, research indicates that the parental capacities of trans people are the same as those of non-transgender people and that their children's level of well-being is equivalent to that of other children. Future research on trans parenting could therefore focus more on the experiences of trans parent families in public institutions.





# CONCLUSION

## + ENDNOTES

Comparing studies on trans parent families with families composed of cisgender and heterosexual parents provides no evidence that trans parents are less able to raise children. Moreover, there is no indication that these children will develop differently from others. Myths are based on negative prejudices and greatly affect trans people and their families. Regardless of gender identity, trans and cisgender (non-trans) parents are equally capable of providing a warm home that promotes the optimal development of children.

### Endnotes

- 1 Bauer *et al.*, 2010; Giami, 2014; Grant, Mottet et Tanis, 2011; Whittle *et al.*, 2008; Motmans *et al.*, 2009.
- 2 Giami, 2014.
- 3 Petit, Julien, Chamberland et Beaulieu-Prévost, 2013.
- 4 De Sutter, 2001; Zucker et Lawrence, 2009.
- 5 Homosexualités et socialisme (HES) et Mouvements d’Affirmation des jeunes Gais, Lesbiennes, Bi et Trans (MAG jeunes LGBT), 2009.
- 6 Tornello et Bos, 2017.
- 7 Condat *et al.*, 2018; Charter, Ussher, Perz et Robinson, 2018.
- 8 Tornello et Bos, 2017.
- 9 Rainbow Health Ontario, 2012.
- 10 Light, Obedin-Maliver, Sevelius et Kerns, 2014.
- 11 Ellis, Wojnar et Pettinato, 2015; Mitu, 2016; Obedin-Maliver et Makadon, 2016.
- 12 Éditeur officiel du Québec, 2013.
- 13 Green, 1978, 1998; Freedman *et al.*, 2002; Chiland *et al.*, 2013.
- 14 Green, 1978, 1998; Chiland *et al.*, 2013.
- 15 Chiland *et al.*, 2013.
- 16 White et Ettner, 2007.
- 17 White et Ettner, 2007.
- 18 Green, 1978, 1998; White et Ettner, 2004, 2007; Chiland *et al.*, 2013.
- 19 White et Ettner, 2004, 2007.
- 20 Grant *et al.*, 2011.
- 21 Petit *et al.*, 2013.
- 22 Petit, Julien et Chamberland, 2018.
- 23 Petit, 2018.
- 24 Petit, 2018.
- 25 Green, 1998.
- 26 Church *et al.*, 2014.
- 27 Petit, 2018; Pyne, 2012.
- 28 Petit *et al.*, 2018.

**Scientific Research  
to Deconstruct Myths about  
Trans Parent Families**

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