

Neutrois Nonsense

an intimate exploration of identity and finding life
wisdom beyond the gender binary

5 Myths About Non-Binary Transition

March 6, 2014 · by micah · in Discussion, LGBT, Transgender, Transition.

1. You can't transition at all

Well... This is obviously untrue. I – and many others like me – are living proof.

But let's unpack it for a moment.

For me, being transgender is simply having a gender that does not match the one you were assigned at birth (which is most probably, always only, male or female, based on external genitals). The importance of this definitions lies in its ample leeway to identify outside of the binary, while honoring the shared experience of the internal transgression of gender. Once I realized that I did not have to “want to be a man” in order to be trans, I felt huge relief, and immediately settled down and got cozy with the label. Because for me, consciously identifying as transgender provided not just the gateway to invaluable resources, it also gifted me a community: a group of people I could see myself – my experiences, past, present, and possible futures – reflected in.

The second assumption behind this myth is trapping the concept of transition within a binary (<http://neutrois.me/2013/05/14/complete/>). As with the first, I at some point had to make this leap of knowledge. And to be honest, I've had to figure a lot of this out on my own, because non-binary transition is riddled with unanswered questions that are ultimately up to the individual to decide. Sometimes, the best answer I can give is “it depends” or “it's really up to you” or even “it sucks, you gotta deal with it.” But at least we're thinking about it, swapping stories, and figuring it out together.



(<http://media-cache-ec0.pinimg.com/736x/61/f2/a3/61f2a3ed0968d0184cc32ff7e8b58e28.jpg>)

I see the rise in visibility of genderqueer identities as a potential turning point that's just around the corner in the oh-so-near future. In some cases, it's only a matter of awareness; if people know where to look, they will more likely find.

2. You cannot medically transition

Untrue. (Of course all of these will be false, because they are myths, so I'll just stop saying it.)

WPATH released the 7th version of their Standards of Care in late 2011, and for the first time ever people with a non-binary gender were included. Sort of. The new guidelines are purposefully vague, mentioning "target gender" as opposed to "opposite gender," emphasizing individual needs over following a set of rules, thus setting up an extremely friendly framework for those people whose gender is not male or female and wish to pursue medical transition. So officially, you're covered.

Yet we all know something about having to go against the grain to be happy. Standards or guidelines should not stop you (<http://neutrois.me/2013/10/16/disclosing-a-genderqueer-identity-for-medical-transition/>) from seeking (and finding) what you need. For instance, I had top surgery before these updated WPATH Standards of Care were released, when hormones and "opposite gender" and "12 months of real life experience" were the "official" norm. I had surgery without a letter from a mental health professional (which by the way is still a requirement, even under the newest SOC). I had surgery without intentions of transitioning further. It's what I felt I had to do at that moment, so I pushed forth.

Often what makes us hesitate from taking steps towards transitioning are not external regulations. Does "not trans enough (<http://neutrois.me/2013/10/30/non-binary-not-trans-enough/>)" sound familiar? Whether it comes from outside peer pressure or from internal overreager analysis, we carry a kind of guilt that we are accessing services we don't "really need" because we're not "really trans" or whatever other "scare quote phrases" we mentally try to convince ourselves of.

As long as you are willing to put in the work, there is a chance you can get close to your ideal. Especially if you just focus on the few dozen people you encounter every day – those that account for upwards of 90% of your social interactions, those who are also willing to put in the work with you – it's possible to get to a place where you feel pretty darn good about yourself.

It'll probably never be perfect (<http://neutrois.me/2013/06/24/post-transition-dissonance/>), but nothing ever is. As much as I'd love it if random strangers stopped calling me ma'am, I'd like it a lot more if random strangers just said good morning, if they didn't give me the stink eye or push me around on the bus, and if they were just a little kinder overall. A big part of transitioning – as with everything in life – is learning to accept what is possible and what is not, coming to terms with the fact that we are all imperfect humans living imperfect lives. This is not to say that, if we push hard enough, the line between the impossible and reality can't shift, ever so slightly, ever so slowly, [forward \(https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=567587973337709&set=a.196865713743272.42938.105225179573993&type=1&stream_ref=10\)](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=567587973337709&set=a.196865713743272.42938.105225179573993&type=1&stream_ref=10).

4. You cannot legally transition

This one really depends; legal territory is as complex as the gender spectrum, so I won't get too much into it.

With less than a handful of exceptions worldwide, it is impossible at the present moment to change your legal gender to something other than M or F. However, it is *possible* to go from one to the other, even if you do not identify as either.

Remember that “legal gender” is a social construct: it is only as good as the document it's on. Each document has its own rules for how to change the legal gender on it, often requiring at least a generic medical letter (DMV or US Passport), or some sort of surgery (<http://neutrois.me/2012/11/08/legally-transgender/>) (Birth Certificates), or a specific set of surgeries (many countries), to possibly long and costly trial involving doctors and lawyers and judges ([hello Mexico \(http://neutrois.me/2013/12/30/2013-milestones/\)](http://neutrois.me/2013/12/30/2013-milestones/)). One thing is for sure: you'll end up doing lots of paperwork.

In the end, you simply have to ask yourself if it's a step worth taking when the outcome is still not ideal, and don't be afraid to answer “yes.”

5. Nobody will love you

Look, our bodies are all different. I am short, really really short. This means I was pretty bad at most competitive sports, given that my competitors had a foot or two advantage over me, literally. This also seriously hurt my chances at finding love, because imagine dating someone more than a foot taller than me? Awk-werd!

Seriously though. Genders – and gendered bodies – are considered to be a “legitimate” reason for liking or not liking someone by most. I mean, people usually eliminate half of the population just by declaring a preference towards **one** gender, popularly known as a sexual orientation. (Admittedly this is hard for me to understand.) Instead of gender, I can more easily relate to the myriad other criteria for why someone would or would not want to date/cuddle/bonk you, whether we’re talking about your body (too short), your mind (too analytical), your emotions (too stoic), your personality (too bossy), where you live (on the other side of the world), what music you like (jazzercise), or even stuff like whether you’re a cat person or a dog person (cute puppies only please). And given that delicate web of requirements, it’s clear that you are not going to find that magical connection with just *anyone*. So forget about gender and people’s preoccupation with it, and concentrate on finding people who like everything else about you. Above all, concentrate on loving yourself too.

Lastly, take a moment to consider that you – yet another ordinary person – have been able to come to these enlightening conclusions about the gender binary. Who’s to say some other random dude/dudette/dudelydoo won’t as well (<http://neutrois.me/2013/09/12/helping-yourself-as-a-partner-of-transgender-person/>)?

Tags: [genderqueer](#), [lgbt](#), [lgbtq](#), [non binary](#), [transgender](#)

38 responses to “5 Myths About Non-Binary Transition”

1. [creepylesbo](#) [March 6, 2014 at 9:33 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →
Thanks for this. I need to hear it all.
2. [janitorqueer](#) [March 6, 2014 at 9:49 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →
really concise and well organized!

Do you think we may see the opportunity to legally transition to something other than M or F in the United States within the next couple decades? I hope so! I’m gonna hold out for that! (Since I have to choose between the two, legally speaking, I find myself tipping very slightly toward F, and it sounds like you tipped slightly toward M.)

- [Plymouth Ansbergs](#) [March 6, 2014 at 10:50 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →
This thing! I really hope there are people out there working on getting this in the U.S. and I really wish I had the emotional fortitude to be one of them. I feel a little guilty sometimes that I don’t feel like I have the strength to be this kind of trendsetter (I waited 18 years wanting gender-neutral pronouns and only asked for them after I knew half a dozen other people who used them for example and I am still not “out” at work).

- *Anonymous* March 11, 2014 at 5:13 am · · [Reply](#) →

That would be a yes, I suggest signing and sharing this petition:

<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/legally-recognize-non-binary-genders/rD3frkgr>

- *micah* March 8, 2014 at 4:29 pm · · [Reply](#) →

Apart from individual outlier cases, I honestly don't think we'll get to see legal non-binary genders in the next few decades (or, not in our lifetime). But I am also known as a pessimist.

Primarily, it is difficult to implement, as it involves legal issues, paperwork, bureaucracy, politics (oh lordy) and a ton of institutions, all of which tend to move super slowly. Think about the current legal climate: in many US states, you still can't change your birth certificate to another binary gender! This issue was brought up at the conference I went to in Mexico, and "officials" wrote it off as pretty much impossible.

Then again, Facebook's introduction of custom genders sets a powerful precedent that a) this is important and valid enough to address, b) it is possible to address despite our current infrastructure/limitations. Maybe this will move faster than I can imagine...

- *Rowan* March 11, 2014 at 5:27 am · · [Reply](#) →

I'm not sure it is complicated. Marriage is one place it might be but same sex marriage potentially solves that. Combine that with legal gender not existing in most circumstances it's not hugely complicated in most places. Birth certificates are able to be changed in the vast majority of states though some require surgery.

Also big steps are being made – passports can have an X gender marker and some countries are already using this and more have movement towards it (in the UK we have a motion to parliament with 34 MPs signatures). Gender neutral titles are becoming more common (Mx is now excerpted by dozens of organisations in the UK including several government departments).

It's complicated is a defense many organisations use against any progressive action – doesn't make it true. Sure there are some complications like gender segregated situations like hospitals and prisons which are harder to solve but progress is being made gradually as it can't happen overnight but it is happening.

3. *Isabelle & Deborah* March 6, 2014 at 9:53 am · · [Reply](#) →

Wow, interesting!

Ganz liebe Grüße, die Girls von thecoolstory (www.thecoolstory.wordpress.com)

4. *Andrew Sass (@matokah)* March 6, 2014 at 10:26 am · · [Reply](#) →

Thanks for this.

I find myself quite often in a situation where I feel I need to justify why I, as someone very adamantly identified as non-binary, had top surgery and am currently pursuing lower surgery (phallo). I've had people tell me either 1) that just makes me male-identified/transgender/ftm

and/or 2) I'm making a horrible decision I'm going to regret if I'm not male-identified.

No one gets to tell me how I do or don't identify and what medical procedures will or won't make me more comfortable in my own body, and that's taken me a long time to really commit to believing in. In a similar vein, no one gets to tell me how I feel about my own gender identity based on medical decisions I make with respect to my physical anatomy. I am not 100% male-identified but feel very little by way of connection with a female gender identity. I feel just enough of "otherness" to find the term non-binary most comfortable for my own personal situation. To me, it doesn't matter if top surgery and phallo are traditionally transgender male-centric procedures. For me, they're non-binary procedures crucial to a successful transition into a body I recognize as more fully mine.

Likewise, I definitely relate to the "No one will love you" myth. First, I avoided transitioning entirely because, being attracted to men/male-identified people primarily, I didn't know trans people could identify as gay (as silly as that now sounds to even type out). That was a miserable experience for me. Then, I began transitioning and just assumed that would mean I'd be stuck alone but convinced I'd rather be myself and alone than someone else and attached to someone who didn't truly know me.

There are absolutely people out there who are open to relationships with non-binary individuals. My current boyfriend is one of them. And it's nice to see these concerns addressed more frequently now. It feels like there were hardly any resources online, even just a few years ago.

Thanks for a wonderful post.

- [micah March 8, 2014 at 4:37 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

It sounds duh-obvious to us now, but I also remember being completely baffled by the concept of how someone could be trans and gay. Indeed visibility of this is exponentially on the rise, but also, you and I already know where to look. I still wonder how you even figure out your gender in the first place with such a confounding variable... to me it seems like such a big leap to make on your own.

Glad to hear you are in a relationship where you can be yourself. For me, it comes down to: can I find someone who sees me as me? I cannot imagine being with someone who couldn't, gender and all other aspects of myself. I realize that can be a simplistic view, relationships have many layers.

5. [Jay March 6, 2014 at 10:27 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →

On the scale of binary-ness, I'm probably more binary than you are. But wonder about some of the same things. I have had people say "ma'am, I mean sir, I mean ma'am"!! Really if they don't know, why do they feel compelled to use such an honorific. Why not just say "excuse me, but can you help me" or whatever it might be. I love Asian restaurants because people don't seem to feel they need these to be polite.

- [urbanmythcafe March 6, 2014 at 12:22 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Many people feel compelled to assign a gender to everyone. "Sir ahhh Ma'am ahhh Sir ahhh Ma'am" is something I hear everyday. Fortunately, it usually amuses me.

6. Lesboi March 6, 2014 at 10:58 am · · Reply →

Thank you so much for this post. It was just what I needed to read today as I've been struggling a lot lately with trying to decide where I want my transition to take me and what outcomes I am aiming to achieve. The whole social side of transitioning is the part I wrestle with the most. I feel a need to live authentically and "be seen" as who I am but how do I do that without transitioning over entirely to male? And, then, I still wouldn't really "be seen" as who I truly am since I don't 100% identify with being male. It's so confusing and frustrating but it's nice to know that I'm not the only person grappling with these concepts and issues.

◦ micah March 8, 2014 at 4:41 pm · · Reply →

You are not alone in this!

It took me a while to reconcile the idea of "I'll never be seen 100% as me" vs "I'll never be seen as me by 100% of the people I meet." But this is true of everyone, nobody sees all parts of us, including our gender.

And... who really sees 100% of our gender, when we're still trying to figure it all out?

7. Pax March 6, 2014 at 11:28 am · · Reply →

Thanks for posting this. Just a note that I believe surgery is not (or no longer) required to get a California court order for changing your legal gender marker. The language from the current Petition For Change Of Name And Gender form (NC-200) requires "An affidavit or a declaration of a physician documenting the gender change through clinically appropriate treatment as provided under Health and Safety Code sections 103425 and 103430". I looked up those codes and they do mention surgery, but specifically in regards to changing a birth certificate, not getting a court order.

The Transgender Law Center has links to these forms and more information:

<http://transgenderlawcenter.org/issues/id>

On a personal note, in places where surgery **is** still required to change ID, I believe it would be discriminatory to allow top surgery to qualify for an FTM transition but then require genital surgery for an MTF transition. Breasts are not sex organs.

◦ micah March 8, 2014 at 4:43 pm · · Reply →

Yes, you're right! Sorry for the mistake.

It does sound unfair to require bottom surgery for MTF and only top for FTM, but that is the reality in some cases where the requirement is *some* surgery. (On the other hand, it is a reality that more MTF folks get bottom surgery than FTM folks.) In others they require explicit bottom surgery for everyone.

◦ ravinj March 10, 2014 at 10:47 pm · · Reply →

Many MtF people don't get top surgery because they don't need it once hormones kick in. I also find surgery requirements alarming as more young transitioned guys may not even need top surgery if they get blockers soon enough.

Thanks for the myth busting. I honestly don't know where I stand these days. Somewhere in the middle, moving toward M, but not discontent with all the F aspects of my life, with two kids who call me mom (or sometimes "Mr. Mom") and a straight cis male husband. I've decided figuring it out as I go is ok, in part thanks to your blog.

8. [*urbanmythcafe*](#) [March 6, 2014 at 12:18 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

This is very well stated. As more people transition, I think that many of the initial presumptions of what transition is are gradually being overthrown.

9. [*Jamie Ray*](#) [March 6, 2014 at 3:17 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Great post. Transitioning, or making any changes that are associated with it (name change, surgery, pronouns, labels, legal stuff, social stuff), puts a lot of pressure on relationships. A lot of (formerly lesbian) relationships fall apart because of it. This does lead to #5 the "no one will love me or want to be with me" feelings. It takes a lot of work for both partners to keep it together, and it is not always possible.

Donna and I still struggle over it, we have periods of relative calm and then boom – something sets it off and makes her question it all again. She is fearfully waiting for the other shoe to drop (i.e. full transition). Sometimes Donna feels duped, stupid, betrayed, and angry – but then she remembers I'm still me. I'm learning patience.

◦ [*micah*](#) [March 8, 2014 at 4:47 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Relationships have many layers, one being that in time both people may grow in different directions, yet you still have that closeness pulling you together. This is perhaps more evident in people who come out once they have been in a relationship for a while. It's harder still when sexuality comes into the picture, since it is so tied to gender/bodies.

10. [*Khai*](#) [March 6, 2014 at 5:33 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

I love this; thank you for the courage I need before I walk into the gender identity clinic next month! Saving this link so I can come back if I need to!

◦ [*micah*](#) [March 8, 2014 at 4:48 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Good luck!

11. [*danobanano*](#) [March 6, 2014 at 7:28 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Once again you have rocked my world, made me laugh (date, cuddle, bonk), made me think, deeply... What it would like to live inside your head for a day, and I doubt I would feel as small as you describe yourself. Your universe of understanding has a gravitational pull that makes me STOP, THINK and LISTEN to the narrative of my on journey, and for this alone, you are larger than life.

12. [*spansexual*](#) [March 7, 2014 at 4:40 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Reblogged this on [spansexual](#).

13. [*butchtastickyle* March 7, 2014 at 5:06 pm · · Reply →](#)
Awesome as always, Micah. Seems even though I knew these are myths, I still suffer residual belief in them. I get frustrated at what I believe are limitations, a seemingly endless list of what I cannot do. Reading this reminds me that usually when I have it in my head that I cannot do something, it's most often a limitation I'm imposing on myself and not truly something I cannot do.
- [*micah* March 8, 2014 at 4:50 pm · · Reply →](#)
I think this residual belief never goes away. The trick is to power through it at first, then keep squashing it until it becomes insignificant, or irrelevant. We can be our own worst enemy, but we can also prove ourselves wrong.
14. [*gamolsson* March 9, 2014 at 3:19 am · · Reply →](#)
So, I'm kind of new to thinking of myself as genderqueer, and I was hoping you could clear some things up? Are non-binary, genderqueer, and gender fluid terms that can be interchangeable? I would guess not quite, because someone's non-binary gender may not be fluid. Are these terms off limits if I don't experience any body dysphoria or have the desire to actually do any transitioning. (Well, except in my wardrobe.) I'm still comfortable with the pronouns I was assigned at birth, but the general idea of either binary gender neither fits nor appeals to me internally. Can someone who rejects gender restrictions, but feels fine with their body and pronouns (85% of the time) claim the identity of non-binary or gender queer? I know you were just saying there is no "not trans enough", but is there "too close to binary"? Can I ID as non-binary or genderqueer and NOT ID as trans?
- [*micah* March 9, 2014 at 3:29 pm · · Reply →](#)
Learning all these new terms can be confusing.
- Non-binary simply indicates a gender that is not man or woman. From there, you can get more specific as to what exactly is your gender: neutrois / agender, genderless, bi-gender, etc. Genderqueer is a wider umbrella term encompassing non-binary genders, as well as queer or non-normative expressions of gender, and can have politicized connotations.
- You should adopt the label or labels that best fits your identity at this moment, there is no "gender police" (ignore anyone that does) with a checklist of qualifications.
15. [*darahoffmanfox* March 10, 2014 at 9:20 am · · Reply →](#)
This was amazing, I am sharing it everywhere with everyone!
16. [*Charli* March 12, 2014 at 5:31 am · · Reply →](#)
It will be nice if the government just did away with needing to know one's sex or gender.
17. Pingback: [Mädchenmannschaft » Blog Archive » "Weißgewaschene" Reproduktionsrechte und Pionierinnen elektronischer Musik – Kurz Verlinkt](#)
18. [*Celada* March 12, 2014 at 4:54 pm · · Reply →](#)
I'm going to dispel your myth #2 "You cannot medically transition" in a very dramatic fashion.

Micah, at the exact moment that you posted this blog entry, Thursday March 6 at 9:00am (according to the timestamp at the top of the post) and accounting for the timezone difference between you and me, I was IN FACT in the operating room undergoing a medical (surgical) transition to neutrois. This was successful, by the way!

- [micah March 12, 2014 at 5:01 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →
Congrats! I hope it went well. I'd love to hear the details.

19. [Sam March 15, 2014 at 12:22 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →

I'm trying to imagine a new doctor in the future asking Egg (Rose) if she has completed a full year of living as a girl. "Yeah duh by the time I was 4 years old."

20. Pingback: [5 myths about non-binary transition | Gender Thing](#).

21. [Shokubutsujin March 31, 2014 at 8:48 am](#) · · [Reply](#) →

If you don't mind, I might redirect some of my friends to this. Explaining it to them is sometimes quite bothersome.

22. [MainelyButch August 6, 2014 at 8:01 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Reblogged this on [MainelyButch: Butch Lesbian Perspectives](#) and commented:

Reblogging this in support of all of my Trans friends, and as someone who blurs the line very heavily...I can so relate to most of this post, even though I don't fully identify as Trans, I don't identify in the binary either. Very well written article. The last part about "Nobody will Love You" I could have written the last part of that almost word for word, as I know the fear of my just disclosing my hiv status can scare some off. This part

"whether we're talking about your body (too short), your mind (too analytical), your emotions (too stoic), your personality (too bossy), where you live (on the other side of the world), what music you like (jazzercise), or even stuff like whether you're a cat person or a dog person (cute puppies only please). And given that delicate web of requirements, it's clear that you are not going to find that magical connection with just anyone. So forget about gender and people's preoccupation with it, and concentrate on finding people who like everything else about you. Above all, concentrate on loving yourself too." Really resonated with me. Enjoy the read.

23. [MainelyButch August 6, 2014 at 8:02 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Reblogged. Excellent piece. I thank you for bringing further base understanding to these issues. I blur the lines and don't identify on the binary at all...it's a thin line to walk, and glad I'm not walking it alone.

24. [freshwaterfrankie August 21, 2014 at 10:54 pm](#) · · [Reply](#) →

Your post was so helpful. I am struggling to define myself in the gender spectrum, and this post really make me feel better about the whole thing. I am so glad I found your blog!

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