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Britons and Gender Identity

Navigating Common Ground and Division



**More in
Common**

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ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

More in Common is an international initiative set up in 2017 to build societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarisation and social division. Our teams in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media, and government to connect people across lines of division.

More in Common

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METHODOLOGICAL INFORMATION

The polling cited in this report was carried out by Public First. Details of fieldwork and sample size below.

- More in Common–Public First, Fieldwork (17/11/2021 – 23/11/2021), N = 2,046
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The qualitative research in the report was carried out between February and April 2022. Participants were screened using the British Seven segmentation survey. Recruitment was carried out by the independent research recruitment agency (CRD) and moderated by More in Common's researchers.

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Foreword

The current debate about trans equality and its interaction with sex and gender-based rights is not an edifying one. On one extreme of the debate, a minority of activists are presenting trans people, or the idea of questioning one's gender identity, as a threat and seem to lack empathy for the struggles that many trans people face. On the other extreme, a minority of activists are denouncing legitimate concerns about the protection of hard-fought for sex-based rights and genuine fears about the erosion of women-only spaces as bigotry. All of this is made worse by an approach from some who are determined to make gender identity 'a wedge issue' and elements of the media who promote inflammatory click-bait stories that only serve to stoke heated debates online. Meanwhile, progress on areas where there is consensus and which would make the lives of trans people immeasurably better, is held up by an obsession, on the one hand, with gotcha-style questions, and an unwillingness to accept incremental improvements, on the other.

Why then, is More in Common interested in this debate? Our view is that if discussion of what is undoubtedly a complex and nuanced issue is driven by extreme voices and litigated on social media, it helps no one. We know that the tone and tenor of elite debates are often far removed from how the British public approach these issues, but there has been remarkably little real engagement with what the public think about issues of sex, gender identity and trans equality and why they think it. This report is an attempt to change that – to better understand how the public are reacting to a debate taking place across the broadsheets and social media, to explore where they stand on some of the issues involved, and, if possible, to find areas of consensus that could help us to move forward.

Many of our findings are reassuring. The public do not approach the issue of gender identity through a hyper-political lens. Instead, their common starting point is one of compassion. They understand that for many trans people life can be difficult and most think as a society we have a responsibility to make it less so. None of the people we spoke to, from across the ideological spectrum, saw the debate in terms of a battle over the definition of womanhood, or thought that trans people were a threat. Instead, they saw very practical issues needing practical solutions.

The public want to be accommodating to trans people. Most are happy to call someone by their preferred pronouns, but they don't want to be attacked for making innocent mistakes. They want schools to be supportive places for students questioning their gender identity and most think schools should talk about people who are trans – in an age-appropriate way – but they also want to make sure that proper safeguards are in place to ensure that young people do not make life-altering decisions without proper assessment and advice.

When the public talk about trans issues they tend to focus on trans women and single-sex spaces and, for that reason, the report gives greater prominence to some of the issues involved here. Here, the public reach for practical solutions. Many people are happy to see the emergence of more unisex facilities, particularly in workplaces (although they are less sure about their use in schools). Where they do have concerns, it is usually first and foremost about men making toilets unclean, rather than any objection to trans people. The public also distinguish between trans people who have gone through gender reassignment surgery or who have lived their lives in their preferred gender for a long time, and those who have not.

It is on the issue of sport that the public have the strongest views. Most of the public in focus groups and in polling say that they do not support trans women competing in women-only sporting events. For many the issue is a red line. This is not for any ideological or philosophical reason, but a simple instinct for fairness. The fact that men have physical advantages over women means that for very many people the inclusion of trans women in women-only sports is not fair and will lead to an uneven competition, and in some cases may not be safe. Participation in sports is also the area of the debate where people are most likely to express views stridently and are susceptible to becoming polarised on other issues around gender identity, which they might otherwise have been supportive on. That said, even on this more contentious issue, people strive for fairness and try and reach for solutions such as events trans people can compete in or mixed-sex competitions.

Above all, what emerges from our discussions with the public is the need to treat issues of gender identity and trans-inclusion on a case-by-case basis – recognising that different spaces and activities need different rules and that different people are on different stages of their journey. That can be tricky for institutions calling for clear guidance and frustrating for activists who believe in inclusion without exceptions. But the truth is, it reflects the very human nature of the issues involved which do not fit neatly into cookie-cutter rules and regulations.

As much as possible, this report attempts to faithfully report the different shades of public opinion on gender identity and rights rather than the perspectives of the authors, who themselves have different views about the issues involved.

That said, none of this is to imply that the rights of minority, marginalised, or under-represented groups should be decided by majority public opinion. Instead, our hope is that this report could be the basis for a better conversation about gender identity. That will inevitably involve recognising that we need to find a way to balance the experiences of a very small minority – who often go through real hardship and want to be able to live their lives freely – with those who are concerned that these changes do not, inadvertently or otherwise, undermine sex- and gender-based rights or women's safety.

The common ground starting points of the British public suggest a way to begin doing that.

Executive Summary

Over the past two years More in Common has polled more than 20,000 Britons, creating a unique segmentation of the British public that allows us to understand the values and core beliefs that drive public opinion in the UK. In the spring of 2022 we built on this broad understanding of Britons' values with targeted quantitative and qualitative research on gender identity, trans issues and sex- and gender-based rights. The key takeaways from these conversations are:

The public approach gender identity issues from shared a starting point of compassion rooted in their everyday lives. These starting points are radically different in tone and substance from the angry and divisive debates of social media.

- One in four Britons personally know someone who is transgender, rising to one in two among the Progressive Activist segment and Gen Z.¹ This is substantially lower than the three quarters who know a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person, but higher than might be expected given transgender people are estimated to make up less than 1 per cent of the population.²
- Britons are aware of the challenges trans people face and have thought about and reflected on the issues involved. However, few approach these topics from rigidly political, binary, or ideological lenses. Instead, they see a series of practical issues requiring practical solutions.
- Most people's instinct is 'live and let live' – they believe trans people should be respected, supported and given the space to make their own choices. They want respect, compromise and a give-and-take approach to underpin how we navigate gender identity issues.
- Britons recognise that trans people face discrimination and difficulty in their everyday lives and are proud that things have improved for trans people in recent years. They appreciate that coming to terms with being trans and the process of transitioning is difficult.
- Britons do not see trans issues as a major divide in our country today. Just 2 per cent of Britons put 'the debate about transgender people' as a top issue facing the country – the last in a list of 16 options. It is also, of the topics tested, the one people are most likely to say 'is in the news too much'.

Public opinion is informed by a desire to try and balance different interests – particularly of fairness and inclusion. That leads people to show greater support for trans-inclusion on some issues than others:

- On pronouns, most people are happy for trans people, or indeed anyone who wants to, to use their preferred pronouns (and would address them accordingly), but do not agree that they should be forced to display their own.
- Some have questions around children and gender identity – whereas most are happy for children to self-identify, they are concerned about children making potentially permanent changes to their body without fully understanding the consequences. In polling, Britons are more likely to say that the physical process of transition should take place during adulthood, although they are more divided on hormone

¹ In this report, Gen Z is 18-24, Millennial is 25-40, Gen X is 41-55, Baby Boomer is 56-74, and Silent Gen is 75+

² Government Equalities Office, *Trans People in the UK*, 2018, ISBN: 978-1-78655-673-8

blockers.³ At the same time, a majority think that schools should tell young people about trans people, but they are more likely to say that this is an issue that should be discussed in secondary school rather than primary school.

- The inclusion of trans athletes in elite single-sex sports is a red line for Britons. Three times as many oppose as support including trans women in women-only sport and this view is shared across every segment and key demographic sub-groups of the British public.
- This opposition is not driven by prejudice, definitional concerns, or questions over who counts as a woman – but is instead motivated by an instinct for fairness given biological males have different physical attributes to women. Even so, the public want to find ways for trans athletes to compete, reaching for suggestions such as dedicated competitions open to those who are trans.

The public reject one-size-fits-all approaches and search for solutions which balance different interests and competing concerns.

- The public believe that the extent to which someone has ‘transitioned’ matters. Clear majorities support trans women who have been through gender reassignment surgery using women’s bathrooms and changing rooms, but a majority also opposes trans women who haven’t been through gender reassignment doing the same. From discussions in focus groups, the public also believe there should be different approaches depending on how long a person has lived in their expressed gender.
- The public trust professionals (doctors, prison officers, teachers, and others) to navigate these challenges on their behalf and to develop the tailored solutions that provide the right outcomes in individual cases.

The existence of these shared starting points on gender identity issues does not mean there is room for complacency. The danger is that unless healthier and better debate can be created, the all-or-nothing approaches of highly engaged activists could bleed into the public consciousness and lead to wider polarisation that serves no one (or their cause) well.

From our research and experience individuals, organisations, and institutions dealing with totemic ‘culture war’ debates (like the elite debate on trans) generally take one of four paths:

- 1 Deciding actively and consciously to make things worse – usually for short term political gain or to motivate activist bases, by using divisive issues as a wedge.
- 2 Ignoring and avoiding the issues (in turn making the issue worse) and leaving the terms of the discussion to be framed in highly polarised and often unpleasant ways.
- 3 Making passionate, well-intentioned but un-strategic interventions which channel the concerns of activists, but which do not meet the public where they are – and often make things worse.
- 4 Recognising most Britons start from a position of good will and making considered, informed and strategic engagement to better navigate the debate and make progress.

³ In our poll questions we used the following definitions: hormone blockers temporarily but not permanently delay changes associated with puberty; cross-sex hormones are hormones given to permanently change someone’s physical appearance to be more consistent with their gender identity (e.g. facial hair or voice deepening); gender reassignment is the surgery by which a transgender person’s physical attributes are altered to match the gender they identify with (e.g. breast and genital surgery)

Inflaming debates (intentionally or unintentionally) or vacating the field of discussion lets down the public who want the space and time to grapple with nuanced issues. The notion that Britons fail to grasp the complexity of this issue is at best ignorant and, at worst, actively patronising. Britons are aware of the issues and want sensible, sound and tailored solutions to problems which are not abstract debates, but instead real issues that affect their friends, families and colleagues. The British public is not well served by noisy debates, inflammatory tweets or reductive questions.

The findings, insights and recommendations of this report aim to provide the tools for those involved to begin reframing their role in the gender identity debate. It is very deliberately rooted in the common ground starting points and expectations of the British people, in order to help advance the current debate.

1 The British Seven segments

In pursuit of a more evidence-based understanding of how we find common ground on polarising issues, More in Common launched the Britain's Choice project in 2020. This project centres its analysis of issues on the values, identity and worldview of Britons, captured in seven population segments through a methodology designed in partnership with data scientists, social psychologists and other experts. It integrates insights from five dimensions of social psychology that shape the way that people see the world and orient themselves towards society. This mapping has been carried out using multiple waves of quantitative and qualitative research, building on the approach used by More in Common in other major western democracies.

The 'British Seven' segments are often more useful in understanding people's views across a wide range of issues than standard ways of categorising people, such as their voting history, partisan identity or demographic characteristics such as age, income, social grade, race or gender. Understanding the specific 'wiring' of each of these groups 'upstream' allows us to better understand and predict how they will respond to different sets of issues 'downstream'. The British Seven in this report help provide fresh insights on public attitudes towards the issues of trans-inclusion, gender identity and sex-based rights.

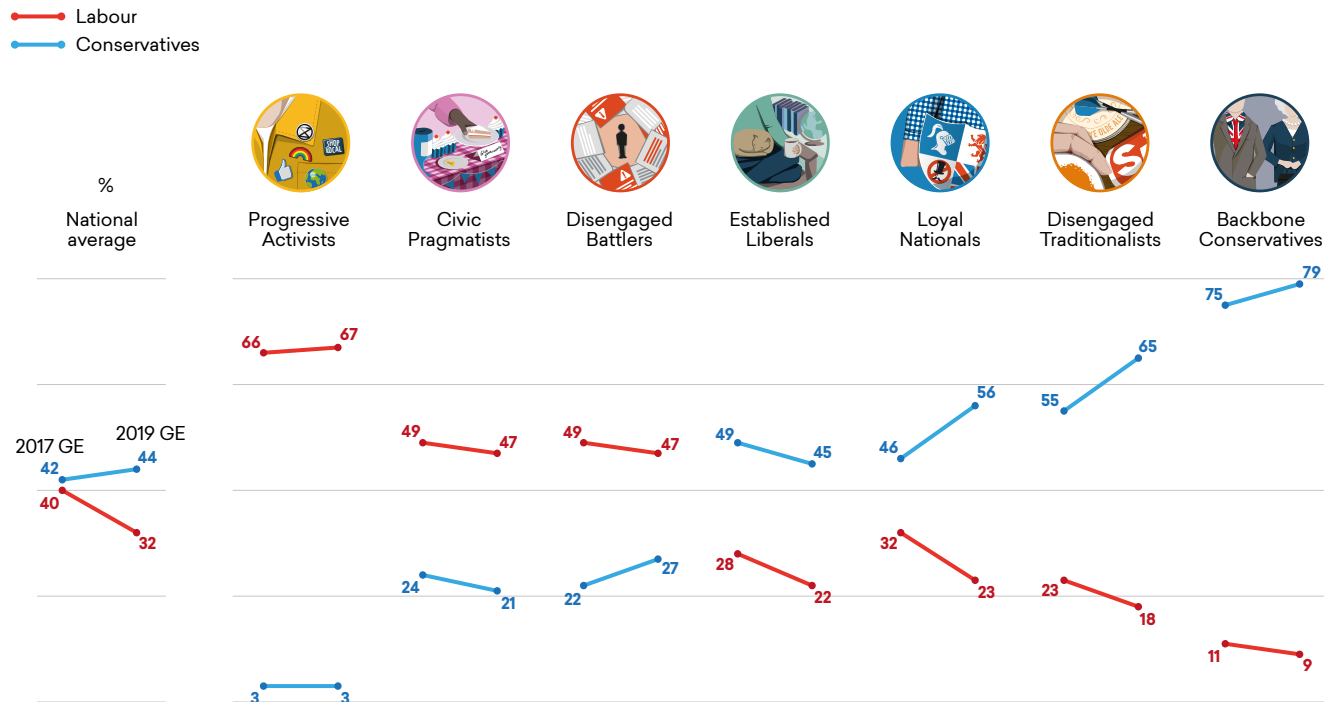
Figure 1 British Seven segments



Figure 2

British Seven segments and the General Election

How the segments changed their votes between 2017 and 2019



Question: How did you vote in the 2017 General Election? How did you vote in the 2019 General Election? (Did not vote excluded)
Source: More in Common, February 2020.

Key to understanding the values and core beliefs of Britons today is the absence of affective polarisation and ‘stacked identities’. Unlike a country such as the United States, where a person’s views on one issue very effectively predict their views on all others (e.g. an individual’s stance on gun ownership will correlate highly with their views on climate, racial justice and the economy), Britons diverge and converge in different formations depending on the issue at hand, in a way More in Common have previously described as being analogous to a ‘kaleidoscope’. The seven main groups in society cluster in different formations of agreement and disagreement across different issues – such as protecting the environment, fighting inequality or regulating immigration.

The Loyal National segment for example, are most likely to think political correctness is a problem and are among the most worried about asylum seekers crossing the channel, yet they are also highly concerned about inequality. The Established Liberals are among the least concerned about inequality, but are also the second-most likely to want to take in refugees. The Progressive Activists and Backbone Conservatives may disagree on most things, but they share the highest levels of engagement, and both see the world through a political lens. And although the two disengaged segments – Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists – are divided on their respective left and right-wing views, they are united by their lack of political engagement and prioritisation of day-to-day issues such as the cost of living.

This is a key dynamic of division and common ground in Britain. Coalitions of the segments can be constructed on most issues and this underpins the common ground starting points on many gender identity issues.

The values-driven viewpoints of the British Seven segments



Progressive Activists

A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality and wealth. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan and environmentally conscious.

Progressive Activists are often outliers on values – unlike other groups, they see the world through a lens of care and fairness and have much lower reliance on the moral foundations of purity, loyalty and authority. Compared to most other groups, Progressive Activists feel less threatened in the world and in their community. They consider that outcomes in life are more defined by social forces and less by personal responsibility. Although they are a higher-earning segment, many of them consider this to be down to their own good luck. They have the lowest authoritarian tendencies of any group.

Starting point on gender identity

Progressive Activists are more likely to see the debate on trans equality as a battle against injustice and are by far the group most likely to support full trans inclusion. However, there is also a significant minority of Progressive Activists who believe the real injustice is the erosion of sex-based rights. They are the only segment that is actively posting about the debate online.



Civic Pragmatists

A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal. Civic Pragmatists have a similar values foundation to the Progressive Activist group in prioritising care and fairness, but what sets them apart from activists (and some of the other segments) is their higher-than-average levels of threat perception.

Starting point on gender identity

Civic Pragmatists start from a position of kindness and compassion which means that their initial instincts will be to understand the challenges faced and struggles endured by trans people. They are turned off by the divisiveness and anger of the media and elite debate on gender identity.



Disengaged Battlers

A group that feels that they are just about keeping their heads above water and who blame the system for this unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked and socially liberal. They are a low-trust group (joint most likely to have not been vaccinated for Covid-19) and their broad sense that the system is broken drives their disengagement from their communities and the broader democratic system with which they see 'no point' in engaging.

Starting point on gender identity

Disengaged Battlers are much less likely to follow the gender identity debate or to spend much time thinking about it. They are however, in general, (unlike Disengaged Traditionalists) more likely to think that the concerns of minorities should be taken into consideration – even if this goes against the wishes of the majority.



Established Liberals

A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident and pro-market. They have low levels of authoritarianism and the lowest perception of threat of any segment – which is reflected in their broad support for diversity, multi-culturalism, and sense that their local community is neither dangerous nor neglected.

Starting point on gender identity

Established Liberals are more likely to be aware of the gender identity debate, and their optimistic outlook on life means that they are proud of the progress made on minority rights in recent decades – occasionally that outlook makes it difficult for them to relate to the struggles minority groups can face. They are more likely to be informed about the elite gender identity debate and more likely to have more developed views on its different issues.



Loyal Nationals

A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They feel the 'care' and 'fairness' moral foundations more strongly than other groups. Their key orientation is that of group identity – belonging to a group (and particularly their nation) is important to Loyal Nationals. This strong in-group identity shapes their equally strong feelings of being under threat from outsiders, which can drive their support for more authoritarian, populist leadership.

Starting point on gender identity

The strong moral foundations of care and fairness among Loyal Nationals lead them to think that trans people should be able to live their lives happily, but they also have strong views about the unfairness of trans women competing in women-only sports. An all-or-nothing approach which demands inclusion of all trans women in elite women-only sports will likely lead to a weakening of their broader desire to support trans people in other areas.



Disengaged Traditionalists

A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious and disconnected. They place a strong emphasis on personal responsibility, are very mindful of others' behaviour and rely much more on individual rather than systemic explanations for how people's lives turn out. When they think about social and political debates, they often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others' behaviour and observance of British social rules. They often have viewpoints on issues but tend to pay limited attention to current debates. Disengaged Traditionalists are similar to Loyal Nationals in their more authoritarian predisposition.

Starting point on gender identity

The key lens for Disengaged Traditionalists is that of order. They are less engaged in the gender identity debate than other segments but are likely to feel threatened by concepts like 'non-binary' which they consider to be messy and anarchic. On many issues, Disengaged Traditionalists are more likely to take a 'live and let live' approach as long as that does not affect the lives of others. More than any other segment, Disengaged Traditionalists' support for trans inclusion is more likely to be predicated on there being clear rules on when someone is considered to have transitioned (as opposed to something like self-ID) and having their practical concerns being addressed.



Backbone Conservatives

A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident and relatively engaged with politics. They want clear rules and strong leaders and rely heavily on individual explanations for how life turns out, with this shaping how they respond to questions about deprivation and discrimination in society.

Starting point on gender identity

Backbone Conservatives are the most likely to consider gender identity to be fixed and to think gender reassignment is unnatural. That said, while they disagree with some aspects of trans advocacy, they fundamentally believe that life should be lived as 'each to their own' as long as that does not require too many accommodations on their part as a result.

2 Shared starting points

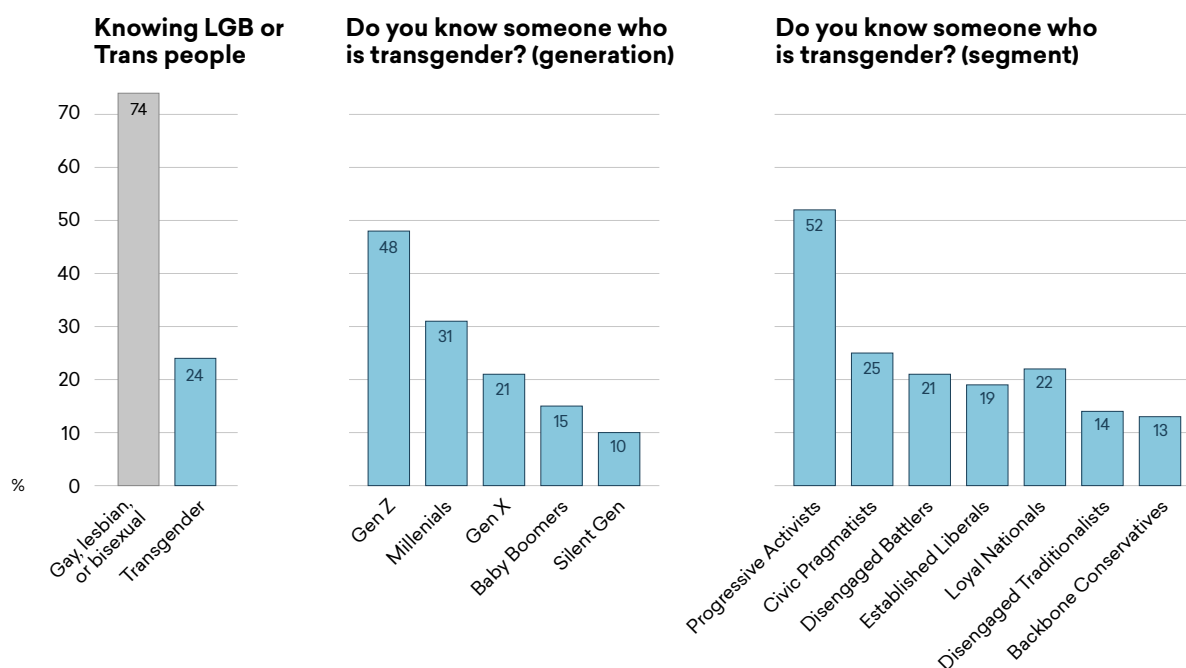
The British public approach issues around gender identity from shared and common starting points.

Many Britons know a transgender person. 24 per cent of Britons say they know someone who is transgender. While this is less than the three in four (74 per cent) who say they know someone who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, this is not surprising given that trans people make up a much smaller proportion of the population. There is a clear generational divide here, with younger people being far more likely to know someone who is transgender – including almost half of those in Gen Z. The same applies to the segments, where over half of Progressive Activists know a trans person, with much lower numbers recorded for other groups.

Figure 3

Do you know someone who is...?

Almost three quarters of Britons know someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, compared to less than a quarter who know someone who is transgender. This clearly breaks down by age – with almost half of Gen Z knowing someone who is transgender



Question 1: Do you know someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Question 2: Do you know someone who is transgender? [Gen Z = 18-24, Millennials = 25-40, Gen X = 41-55, Baby Boomers = 55-74, Silent Gen = 75+]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022



“Well, it's obviously I know through my son, he's got a friend who, when I first met him, he was a boy. And then when I met him again, he was a girl. He's a really nice person. In my youth, I would've found it quite a bit strange, but now I think we live in a time where it's just more acceptable, which is good.”

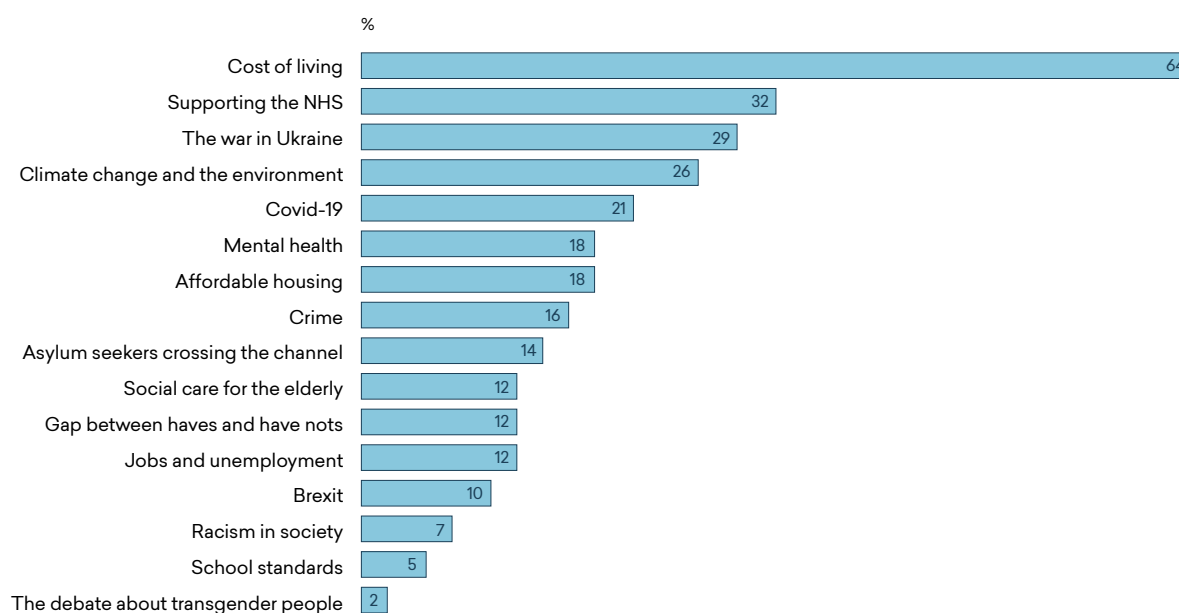
Lorraine, Loyal National, 60, Bury South

Very few people see debates about trans issues as a pressing issue: While there is a steady stream of stories about trans issues in the mainstream press, most people do not see the debate about trans issues or gender equality as one of the major issues affecting the country. In polling in April 2022 just 2 per cent of the public identified the debate about trans issues as one of the top issues facing the country, compared with 64 per cent who identified cost of living.

Figure 4

Top issues facing the country

Britons rank 'the debate about transgender people' as the least important issue facing the country today, from a list of sixteen options



Question: In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today? Select the top 3
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

But they are not ignorant about gender identity issues. While most people didn't consider the debate about gender identity to be a key issue, they were aware of and understood the issues involved. When asked in focus groups 'if I say the word trans or transgender, what does that mean to you?' all participants could answer. Participants' responses ranged from very developed answers to one participant who simply said, "They've gone from female to male".



"Somebody that wants to ... they are a girl on the outside, that obviously might feel like they're a boy on the inside and they want to change."

Vicky, Disengaged Battler, Long Eaton



"Someone who is, or is in the process of, or has, transitioned from the gender of their birth to a gender that they feel outwardly represents them."

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney

There is a strong sense of acceptance and compassion. ‘Live and let live’ was a common sentiment across all our conversations. People are quick to highlight how brave someone must be to transition, pointing to both the difficulties of the process and the stigma they face from doing so. This includes even the more socially conservative segments and those who are generally less sympathetic to progressive causes. This lack of any overt prejudice aligns with the findings from the 2019 British Social Attitudes survey, which found 82 per cent of Britons said they had no prejudice towards transgender people, compared to just 16 per cent who said they did.⁴



“From my point of view, let people get on with anything as long as you're not hurting anybody else.”

Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton



“They are who they are inside they know who they are, and what they want to be and that's fair enough.”

Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton



“I think it's amazingly brave. I don't know anyone personally, but somebody in our company who they work with, they know of an academic. I think is in his late-60s, early-70s, born a man, married, got kids. And now, yeah, he is transitioning into woman. And you just think, wow, how brave have you got to be, and how desperate? And I don't mean that in a derogatory way, but to do something like that so late in life. It's crazy, phenomenal really that someone can go through it, really. It's really brave.”

Ryan, Established Liberal, 42, Witney



“I think it's lovely that you can be what you want to be and be happy as who you want to be and who you feel you need to be.”

Angie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 52, Glasgow

“I personally don't know any trans person to be honest with you, but I know a few male gay and female gays, and they're just like people, no problem with them. If they're happy like that, they're happy. Whatever they do in their personal life that's their choice. And then everyone has a right to be happy in this world.”

Jasbir, Disengaged Traditionalist, 43, Cardiff

Similarly, **people acknowledge the progress the country has made** on gender identity issues, and many make favourable comparisons between Britain today and decades ago. This mirrors findings on sexual orientation in the British Social Attitudes Survey, where attitudes to same-sex relationships have drastically improved in recent years – the numbers saying same-sex relationships are ‘not at all wrong’ rising from 11 per cent in 1987, to 47 per cent in 2012 and 64 per cent in 2016⁵.

⁴ Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips M. and Rahim, N. (eds.) (2019), British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report, London: The National Centre for Social Research

⁵ Swales K., Attar Taylor E (eds.) (2019), British Social Attitudes: The 34th Report, London: The National Centre for Social Research



“Obviously this has been around for many, many, many, many years. I think the acceptance of things like this is long overdue. Long overdue. And it is becoming more and more accepted.”

Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton

“It's a lot more out there now. It's all on social media. It's just becoming the norm.”

Matt, Disengaged Traditionalist, 42, Long Eaton



“Transgenderism is nothing new, it's been going on for hundreds of years in other countries. Obviously, it's more prevalent now because people know about it and it is more mainstream.”

Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton



“I think it's easier these days for people to come out as what they want to and come out with these different labels and there is quite a lot of them to understand. At the moment, I've got a teenage daughter who brings up things that I've got to come to terms with. But yeah, I think it's lovely that you can be what you want to be and be happy as who you want to be and who you feel you need to be. I think the world's evolving more, but we are beginning to accept it more. But I worked with a trans person about 30 years ago and it was terrible what he had to go through.”

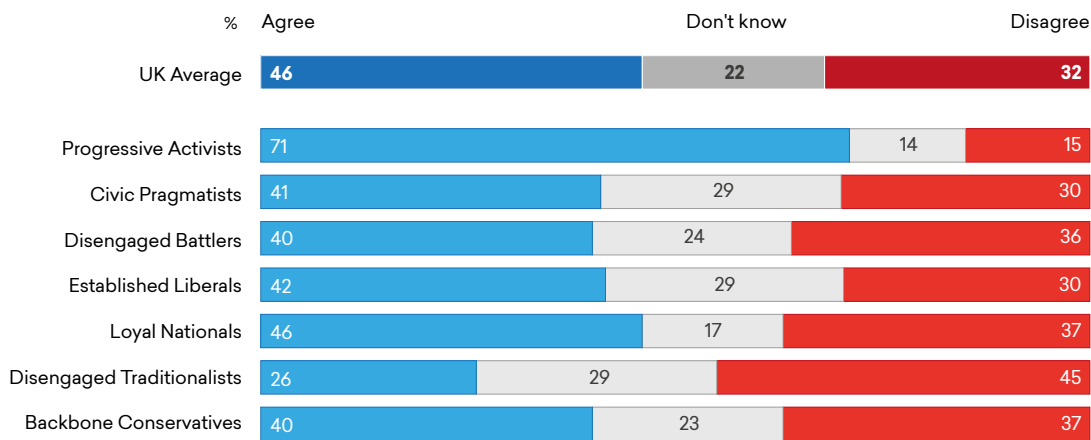
Angie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 52, Glasgow

Levels of agreement are consistent across groups. On the question of ‘is a trans man a man / is a trans woman a woman’ our polling finds that people are more likely to agree than not to agree with the proposition (46 percent to 32 percent). This picture is also broadly consistent across all demographic groups. Though levels of support for the proposition are higher among 2019 Labour voters compared with those who voted Conservative, and among women compared to men, it is also the case that in almost every demographic subgroup and every segment, bar Disengaged Traditionalists, more people agree than disagree. From our focus group conversations with Disengaged Traditionalists, it was clear that while many believe that we should take a ‘live and let live’ approach to trans people and respect their privacy, they see womanhood and manhood as matters of biology.

Figure 5

Is a trans man a man and a trans woman a woman?

More agree than disagree, with little variation by segment



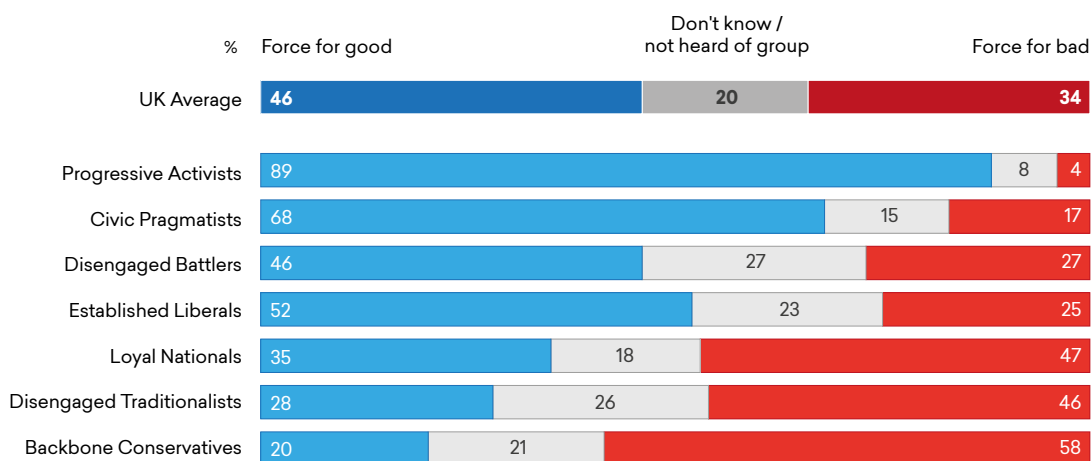
Question: To what extent do you agree with the following? A transgender man is a man. A transgender woman is a woman
(Questions asked separately, but results presented together, as differences between them negligible)
Source: More in Common, November 2021

This finding is somewhat counter-intuitive. Given the British Seven segmentation is rooted in values, we might expect more divergence across segments, but that is not the case. Other than the Disengaged Traditionalists (discussed above), and Progressive Activists who are much more likely to say that a trans man is a man and a trans woman a woman, all other segments are all close to the average.

Figure 6

Black Lives Matter: force for good or bad?

Despite a near identical top-line result, the segment breakdown is much starker, compared to the trans question



Question: Please consider the following list of political groups and movements. For each, please answer whether you have heard of them and whether you think they have, in general, been a force for good or bad in the last 12 months: Black Lives Matter
Source: More in Common, January 2021

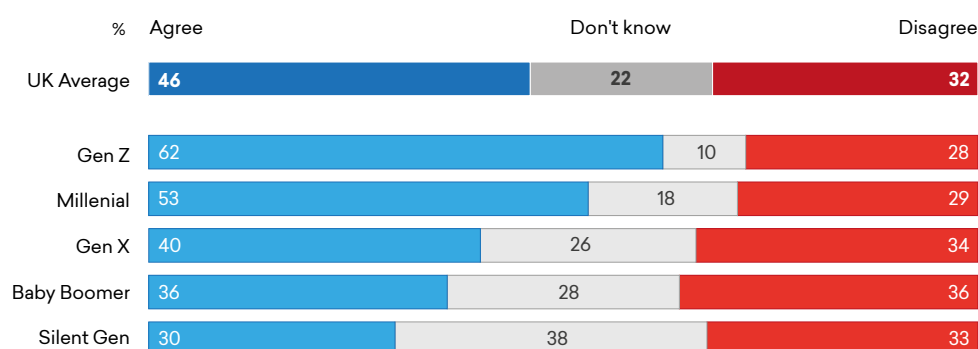
By comparison, the differences were greater across the segments when asked whether Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a force for good or bad (Support for BLM is often portrayed, along with gender identity, as being an archetypal ‘culture war’ issue). This points to the fact that **values-based divides are not as apparent when it comes to attitudes towards transgender people among the British public.** This is underscored by the fact that Loyal Nationals – a more socially Conservative segment that is also more likely to vote Conservative (and the segment that most closely matches red-wall voters) – have the second-highest levels of agreement that a trans man is a man and a trans woman is a woman.

Clearly, the question leaves room for respondents’ own interpretation of what it means to be a trans man and a trans woman. From focus group conversations, it is apparent that most people’s view is that a trans man/woman is someone who has lived in their expressed gender for a significant period or who has gone through gender reassignment surgery. For a smaller minority, being trans is more simply a matter of personal identity.

Figure 7

Is a trans man a man and a trans woman a woman?

Agreement is highest in the younger generations, ‘Don’t know’ increases with age



Question: To what extent do you agree with the following? A transgender man is a man. A transgender woman is a woman
(Questions asked separately, but results presented together, as differences between them negligible)
Source: More in Common, November 2021

Lower agreement tends to be driven by unfamiliarity rather than opposition.

At face value, it appears that age predicts people’s likelihood of agreeing that a trans man is a man and a trans woman is a woman. While 62 per cent of Gen Z agree, this drops to 53 per cent among Millennials, 40 per cent among Gen X and 36 per cent among the Baby Boomer generation. Digging deeper however, the decreasing agreement by age does not translate directly into increased opposition. While Gen Z are the least likely to say they disagree that a trans man is a man and a trans woman a woman, with just 28 per cent disagreeing, even among Baby Boomers opposition only reaches 36 per cent. Instead, there is a sharp increase in ‘don’t knows’ by age – at just 10 per cent for Gen Z and 28 per cent among Baby Boomers.

This suggests the starting point for consensus-building should be rooted in awareness-raising, rather than countering assumed hostility on gender identity issues. This finding is consistent with More in Common’s wider research on culture wars – which finds that where problems and flashpoints emerge, they are usually stoked by a lack of awareness and worries about the pace of change combined with frustration at being labelled as prejudiced for wanting to ask questions or making innocent mistakes with ‘the correct terms’.

However, despite being accepting, understanding gender identity issues and knowing transgender people, the public are not following the “gender identity debate” playing out on Twitter and in the broadsheets. In fact, many people share an ignorance of the shape and size of the elite debate. Many of the touchstones of the ‘debate’ in political and media discourse are totally absent from the way the public talk about these issues. In the dozens of focus groups conducted by More in Common over the past year, in only one instance was the issue of gender identity raised unprompted. For now, the entry point for the public is in the everyday (colleagues, friends or family who are trans), but there is a danger that if the elite debate continues its current trajectory, greater exposure to division and deliberately polarising framings will lead to greater hostility.

In three focus groups, participants were asked if they had heard J.K. Rowling’s interventions on the issue of gender identity⁶. In one group, every participant said that they had not. In another, with participants from the more politically engaged segments, some participants knew that she had made a comment that caused controversy but did not know what it was. In a third, which those with different starting points on gender identity, only two people – one from each segment – knew about her comments. In the same vein, none of the conversations mentioned the LGB Alliance, the Equalities Act, ‘sex-based rights,’ Mermaids, Stonewall, the EHRC or ‘TERFs’. The elite media discussion and Twitter spats should not be taken as representative of how ordinary people are approaching these issues.



“I’ve heard of it, but I don’t know the exact wording, what she has said or what’s caused all the outrage.”

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney



“I think someone said that if you don’t have a uterus, you’re not a woman, something like that. And I think J.K. Rowling agreed with it and then got cancelled by her cast. I don’t think she was opposed to transgenders or people being non-binary or gay, homosexual. I think she just stated what I would regard as a fact and the media crucified her.”

James, Backbone Conservative, 48, Witney

“I haven’t read anything she said per se, but a lot of people think that she’s an anti-trans person who hides behind feminism to make her anti-trans claims. That’s what I’ve heard from my friend who is very into these things.”

Daniel, Backbone Conservative, 20, Cardiff

That the stark ideological polarisation of the debate has not bled into public discourse is reflected in our polling. Just 26 per cent ‘strongly agree’ that a trans man is a man / trans woman is a woman, and 18 per cent ‘strongly disagree’, with majorities instead saying they ‘somewhat’ agree/disagree, or don’t know. This further highlights the importance of not speaking solely to extremes on either end of the debate which do not reflect the widely held perspectives of not seeing gender identity as all-or-nothing issues.

⁶ The author, J.K. Rowling, is one of the more high-profile commentators on gender identity issues. Her explanation of her involvement in the debate is available here: <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>

In fact, media debates are rarely a good arbiter of public sentiment. In general, **there is low trust in the media** among Britons. When asked how much trust people have in different professions, ‘news journalists’ are the least trusted group of the 17 listed (84 per cent say they do not trust them, compared to only 10 per cent who do). Similarly, when people are asked to rank how ‘warmly’ they feel towards different groups, ‘journalists and the media’ are the group people feel second least warmly about (after the unvaccinated). While the media play an important role in spotlighting important issues around gender identity, the clickbait driven dynamics of some elite and online debate should not be taken as a proxy for public opinion on the issue. Rather than taking cues from elite debates, people grapple with the issues on a personal and community level – how it affects them, their lives and the lives of their colleagues, family members and neighbours who are trans.



“I think obviously there'll be the people who are so against it, and they will push and push to get their views across so it can obviously get a lot of exposure that way. But then it does need the exposure so we can learn and be accepting.”

Claire, Disengaged Traditionalist, 38, Long Eaton



“I generally think you only ever hear about it from people that it bothers.”

Mel, Disengaged Battler, 30, Long Eaton



“I think social media is, as Joe's saying, it is a very fine line. If you say something mildly wrong, it can very quickly spiral out of proportions. Even if you put a word wrong sometimes.”

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney

This level of practical engagement, as opposed to support for abstract or ideological positions, is often poorly understood in media coverage. A recent column in The Times stated “*Do Britons favour trans rights? The truth is most people self-identify as ‘don’t knows’*” – argued that most people are ignorant of the important details of debates on trans rights and therefore seemingly tolerant public opinion should be treated with caution. But our research suggests something slightly different. People *are* aware of the difficult issues and choices around gender identity, but **most Britons do not view the world through the lens of politics – they are grounded in the everyday and think about change and progress in practical and concrete rather than symbolic ways.** In the same way that someone may have strong opinions on the government’s economic policies without understanding the details of the New Keynesian model, the British public can have and do have developed views on gender identity issues that are informed not by the arcane and polarised debates taking place online, but by how they encounter it in their everyday lives.

This everyday starting point informs how Britons discuss and wrestle with issues of gender identity. In all our conversations, the public’s instinct was to reach for solutions-orientated, common-sense, compassionate and fair responses to the different issues involved. Rather than arguing about toilets or sports, where people acknowledge there are different opinions and conflicting priorities, people ask instead why there cannot be more unisex toilets, or whether separate sporting competitions can be created for trans athletes – instead of arguing about who should or should not be in a particular room or who should or should not be competing in a particular event.

Perhaps most importantly, the public at large is not exercised about definitions of who and what constitutes a man or a woman. The current trend for some journalists to pose 'gotcha' style questions to leading politicians on whether women can have penises, bears no relationship to how ordinary people think about these issues. The public do not want or need strict definitions, because they know these are very individual issues, which are complicated, and which require common-sense solutions. Very often those solutions will have to be worked out on a case-by-case basis, rather than through a blanket rule. This can be frustrating for activists who take an 'equality without exception' view, but it is an approach that meets the public where they are and which better reflects the complex nature of an issue that involves different individuals, in different places and walks of life.



"Well, the colleges have gender-neutral toilets anyway, so it doesn't matter. And if you're in the toilet in a cubicle, you're in the toilet in a cubicle. Nobody's actually in the cubicle with you. For me, it's not an issue, but I understand other people do have issues with it."

Rebecca, Progressive Activist, 45, Manchester



[On gender self-ID] "I'd not even heard of it until you just said it really. I'd not even thought about it. But I suppose probably 99 out of a hundred people, it would be genuine. It's just the worry, which is the same in any case, is the one that plays it and does harm. But it's not fair to discriminate against them 99 people who are genuine, that's how they feel. So it's a hard ... I wouldn't want to make the decision."

Claire, Disengaged Traditionalist, 38, Long Eaton



"What about if they did something that was unisex? So say a man transitioned into a woman and she wanted to compete. Why not compete her in a unisex one? So there's a unisex sport where it's not like, no, you shouldn't be able to compete against a woman because you are a man, or not Paralympics, not putting it like a disability. But put it into a unisex competition."

Mel, Disengaged Battler, 30, Long Eaton



"So I just think, as I say, for years and years, men and women have been segregated in toilets and changing rooms and whatever, a male and female category for the best actor, best actress, I mean, for years and years it's been on. So I just don't see why they couldn't have trans groups. It's like LGBT, that's a big thing. I don't see why they couldn't even involve that kind of category and things now."

Debbie, Loyal National, 43, Glasgow

The debate on gender identity in the workplace



Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton

Natalie is a Disengaged Traditionalist; she is a teacher from Long Eaton in Derbyshire. She sees no problem in people identifying as a gender different to their birth sex if that's what they want to do and that's how they feel comfortable. She hasn't seen pronouns on people's email or on social media, but in her school when students are questioning their gender identity, teaching and support staff receive information on how the students would like to be addressed.

She thinks it is important to get the pronouns right so that students feel accepted and supported and are not offended – but admits it can be hard to avoid slipping up sometimes. She appreciates how difficult it must be for the students to come to terms with being trans and come out to people, so she thinks it is more important to get it right. She believes that acceptance of trans people has been long overdue.

When asked about trans women competing in women-only sports, she admits she finds it a bit of a 'minefield' because sometimes men can be stronger than women but reflects that the reverse can also be true. She thinks the way forward is a case-by-case basis and wonders if there is a way for changes in performance pre- and –post-transition to be compared and looked to see if they are fair. She thinks that trans people who haven't gone through gender reassignment surgery should be allowed to use single-sex spaces (like changing rooms) but also thinks especially in communal areas they should be considerate that "they've still got those bits" – especially if there are children around. She imagines that a better solution is for all changing rooms to have cubicle facilities where everyone can feel safe.



Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney

Mike is a Civic Pragmatist from Witney, Oxfordshire and works in a prison. He thinks good resources and support are put in place for prisoners who are transitioning – telling us that prisoners have the option to wear women's clothing and that at the point of sentencing they go through a board process to decide what prison they will be assigned to. He says they talk constructively about trans issues in work every day because some prisoners are trans – but the bits and pieces of the online discussion that he has come across are completely different and very divisive. He has heard that J.K. Rowling said something on the issue – but doesn't know exactly what she said or what has caused all the outrage.

He thinks it is great that we have a more 'live and let live' approach to trans people today and that acceptance has been normalised so now people are "out there, living their lives and being happy". He has seen pronouns on social media and thinks it is becoming the 'norm' and agrees that they should be – to give trans people the choice to identify how they wish.

He thinks sports is a really difficult issue to solve because there are biological differences, but thinks a way through is maybe a combined male-female category, given that the whole point of trans equality, he says, is about "breaking down the siloes" between male and female.

He thinks the arduous process of psychological tests, financial cost and surgery mean trans women have gone through a lot to transition and should have access to women's spaces and women's rights – at the same levels as those biologically born as women. But in practice, in places like changing rooms, he thinks most places are moving to unisex changing villages with cubicles rather than single-sex changing spaces.



Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton

Travis works for a big national retailer. He has had multiple transgender colleagues in his job – both those who have transitioned and those who were transitioning. He recognises how difficult it was for his colleagues to go through this transition and thinks there should be more tailored support for them – despite admitting that he has some trans-sceptical views, as do others, he says, for religious reasons.

In his work, people write their pronouns at the bottom of the email and now people put their pronouns on their name badges in shops as well. He thinks that people should be allowed to get on with it “as long as they are not hurting anyone else,” but has some concerns about the free speech implications of having to call someone a ‘he’ or a ‘she’ – he is more than happy to allow them to do what they want but does not want it forced on him too.

Travis is a bit worried about things he has read about in America coming over to the UK – particularly when it comes to trans women participating in women's sport. He thinks it is not fair that women who spend their whole life training to get to the top of their sport are then beaten by someone who has transitioned from being a man and smashes all records on their first go as a woman competitor. He is a bit sceptical of the media coverage on all this stuff which seems overly hostile – adding that “anything that's controversial sells so it's pushed to us more and more”.

3 How the British public navigate flashpoints on trans issues

While the public have a shared starting point on issues of gender identity, trans and sex and gender-based rights, one guided by compassion and a desire to accommodate, there are areas of disagreement. These differences are not centred on philosophical debates about what it means to be a man or a woman, but instead reflect very practical questions about how sex- and gender-based rights interact with issues of fairness and children's maturity.

Even on these more highly charged issues, the public start from the position of striving to find solutions which will balance different interests and competing concerns and which are appropriate for the particular case at hand. The public do not believe there are one-size-fits-all-solutions to issues relating to gender identity – and instead leave room for expert opinion (particularly of medical professionals and teachers) and common-sense solutions depending on the case and issue at hand.

Much of the elite debate on gender identity attempts to split the debates into a binary – people are either trans allies or trans opponents or either want to protect women's rights or denigrate them. But even on the most complex issues, most people's views do not fall squarely into one 'camp' or another.

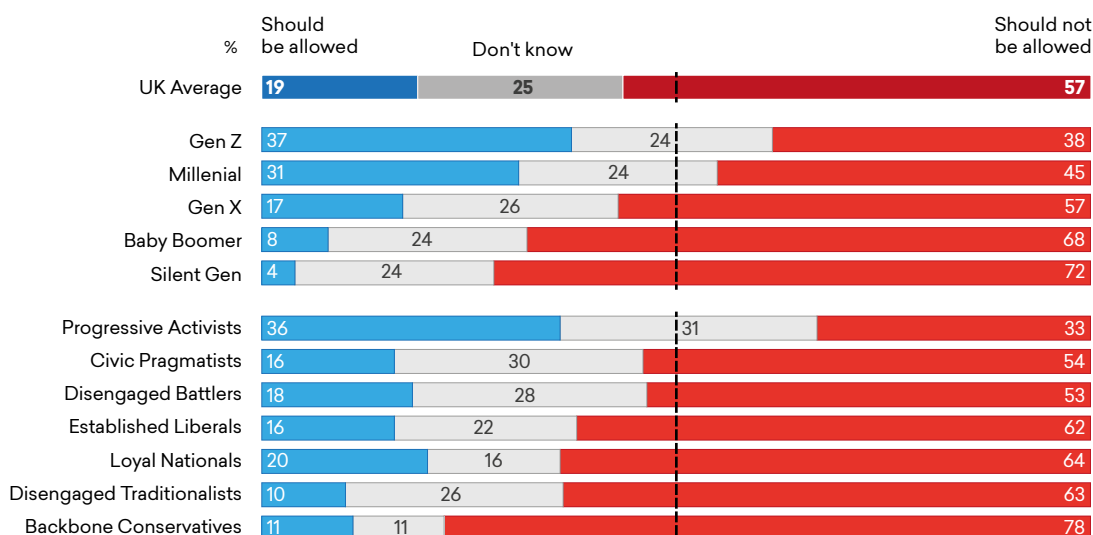
3.1 Trans athletes in sport

Britons do not believe that trans women should be able to compete in women-only sporting events. This is true even of many of those who are supportive of full 'inclusion' for trans people on every other measure. Only 19 per cent of Britons support trans athletes competing in women-only sporting events, compared to 57 per cent who do not. This is by far the highest level of opposition to trans inclusion of any question we asked and has increased by nine percentage points since 2018. This opposition extends even among groups who are otherwise the most supportive on trans issues – the only segment who agree more than disagree being the Progressive Activists, and even then, only narrowly.

Figure 8

Trans women in sport

Most Britons do not think that trans women should be able to participate in women-only sporting events





This has been borne out in conversations with Britons, with elite sporting competitions being the one concern that regularly comes up unprompted in our discussions around gender identity. Here the conversation is usually centred on elite sporting competitions rather than informal/voluntary events, which in any event can often be mixed sex.

The public's concern is not one of definitions. They are not interested in the exact details of what it means to technically be a man or a woman and how this then translates to sport. Instead, it is a basic question of fairness (and in contact sports, safety). They see the issue simply that trans women, who were born biologically male, have advantages which females do not possess from birth and that makes their participation unfair, undermining a level playing field. This focus on fairness and level playing fields also helps to explain why polling shows there is a markedly higher degree of opposition to trans women competing in women's sport as opposed to trans men competing in men's sport.⁷

While most Britons hold the view that trans women should not compete in elite women-only sports, they do not approach the issue from a position of malice. In conversations, most people recognise the difficulty of offering a person inclusion in some areas but stopping at sport. However, when it comes to balancing competing rights, excluding trans women from competitive women-only sports – at least at the elite/professional level – is ultimately seen as the fairest approach.



“No one’s saying they’re not female in sports. It’s just, they’re saying that they’re giving the other competitors a physical disadvantage. I don’t think it’s that they’re being categorised as a male. It’s just that physically they’d smash the shit out of the other side. It would be so unfair.”

Lara, Civic Pragmatist, 38, Witney



“People can pick and choose their gender nowadays, or what and do what they want and dress as they want. That's absolutely fine. But when it comes to competitive sport, just looking at her, you get a substantial advantage with her build or strength. So she shouldn't be competing against genetic females. I just don't think it's... I don't think it's right.”

Ian, Loyal National, 61, Glasgow



“It's a competition at the end of the day. I just don't think it's fair on the competitor.”

Dan, Disengaged Traditionalist, 33, Long Eaton



“It's definitely not fair on the women that have been training their whole life and have been at the top of their sport. And then to have somebody come in that has transitioned and then smashed every record out of the park on their first attempt. It's obviously weighted in their direction.”

Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton



"I'd say that I would consider myself quite liberal in terms of most things. Let people be who they want to be, and all of that. Probably sounds really hippy dippy, but just let everyone do their own thing, man. But when it comes to things like sports and stuff, I find that really difficult to know what the answer is and who has the right answer"

Ellie, Civic Pragmatist, 24, Wandsworth

Discussions around how and where trans athletes are allowed to compete has the potential to polarise the debate around transgender people more widely. The American swimmer Lia Thomas who is a trans woman – and the centre of some recent debates about sports participation – said in an interview: “There is no such thing as half-support, either you back me fully as a woman or you don't.” Her attitude is understandable – not least given what the sport means to her personally, and is a stance shared by many campaigners for trans equality. But presenting absolutist binaries on gender identity is much more likely to result in polarisation. The truth is most people – apart from those at the extremes – fall on a spectrum when it comes to their views on trans issues. Forcing people into arbitrary camps, particularly with sport as the dividing line, is likely to prove a real barrier for building consensus and tolerance.



“I think where I do have concerns is in things like sport. So if people want to identify as anything, that's up to them, and I'll respect that, won't treat them any differently. But my concern is that it filters down into sports. So my daughter, who's an athlete, she plays netball. She's an all-rounder. Is she going to be running against a man who has the physiology of a man, but he identifies as a woman?”

James, Backbone Conservative, 48, Witney

The polarising nature of the debate around sport was highlighted across our focus groups. Instead of introducing the discussion on gender identity by asking people what they thought and knew about people who were trans, in one group participants were first shown a video of Lia Thomas after she had just won the 500m freestyle at the NCAA women's swimming championship.

While participants had not seen news about Lia Thomas specifically, they were aware of similar discussions in other sports. What was striking was that when sport was used as the gateway into the discussion about trans, there was a notable shift in the tone and tenor of the discussion compared to others where trans athletes' participation in sports (particularly trans women athletes' participation in women-only sports) arose organically. In this case, people were much more likely to express strident views. The lesson here is that if people's sole exposure to gender identity issues comes from stories about women's sport – as opposed to everyday experiences – then there is likely to be a hardening of overall attitudes against trans equality.

Even here, where the public are least sympathetic to trans inclusion, a solutions mindset prevails – balancing arguments around fairness with compassion. People take no great relish in saying that trans women should not be able to compete in women-only events. In every focus group, people questioned if there could be other ways for trans athletes to keep competing – for instance having a separate or mixed category for trans athletes. People recognise that this might make trans people feel less accepted, and that there are practical issues around mixing sexes. But that does not detract from the fact that people's immediate reaction is to try and think of other ways that trans athletes can compete – something that is instructive of that general desire to be kind and let people live their lives.

This was true even in our more disengaged segments. Among these segments, several people who were not initially aware of the debates around trans people and sport, thought trans women's participation in women-only sports was unfair when it was explained to them for the first time, but then moved quickly to trying to think of creative solutions.



“The thing it should be, say, rather than being based on, let's say, the gender you are now presenting as, it should be based on, I'd say, the gender you were through your developmental stages. So let's say, because I was man, I had testosterone, therefore I have grown larger. Whereas obviously, if I'm in transition to a female now, I still have those physical attributes because I had the testosterone while I was growing.”

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney



“I think it's a bit of a minefield, isn't it, really. I understand that naturally sometimes men can be stronger than women. Obviously sometimes women can be stronger than men. But I think naturally men do tend to be stronger than women. But I think if that's the case, they should look at a holistic picture maybe of how they performed when they performed against men to how they now perform against women just to see if there's an imbalance.”

Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton



“I think it's really difficult though, isn't it? Because obviously, you've got biological differences and I get what you're saying about, obviously, men are genetically stronger than women and stuff like that. But then you've got the whole issue of, again, excluding people or breaking them down into groups. The whole point of transgender is that they're not siloed into male or female. And so again, it's that whole, does it then interfere with the whole inclusion of everybody in society and having respect for everybody? It is a really difficult one.”

Georgina, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Witney

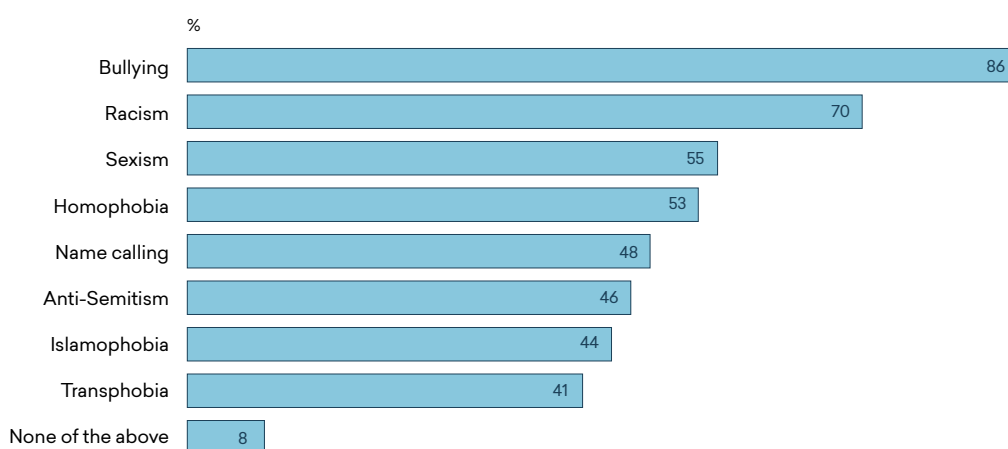
3.2 Children and young people

When it comes to trans adults, most Britons believe that they should be able to live their lives in the way they want to – and that if somebody wishes to identify as transgender, change the way they dress, adopt a different pronoun and/or go through surgery, they should be free and supported to do so and in a way that is not overly onerous. There is, however, less agreement about what this means for children and what the role of schools should be. And there are particular concerns about children engaging in processes (such as taking hormones or having surgery) before adulthood that may be irreversible.

Figure 9

School policies

Two fifths of Britons think schools should have a specific policy to tackle transphobia, while almost all think schools should have a policy to tackle bullying in general



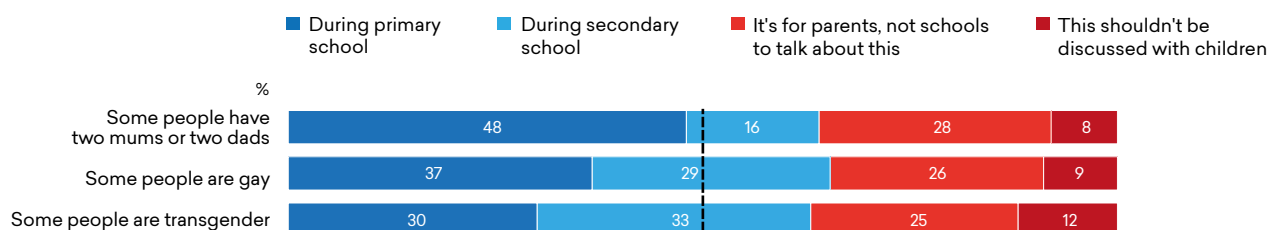
Question: Which of the following should schools have policies to tackle? Select all that apply
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

The overwhelming majority of Britons believe that schools should have policies to tackle bullying – but there is less agreement about whether there should be a specific policy to tackle transphobia, with only 41 per cent saying schools should have such a policy. From conversations with parents, this is not because they don't think transphobia should be tackled in schools – but rather that their belief that all forms of bullying should be tackled, rather than having to have specific policies for every type of bullying. That perspective also helps to explain the fact that the proportions saying schools should have policies to tackle islamophobia, anti-semitism, homophobia and sexism are lower than might be expected.

Figure 10

When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that...

A majority think schools – at least at secondary level – should tell children about these issues. Telling them 'some people are trans' gets slightly less support than 'some people are gay'

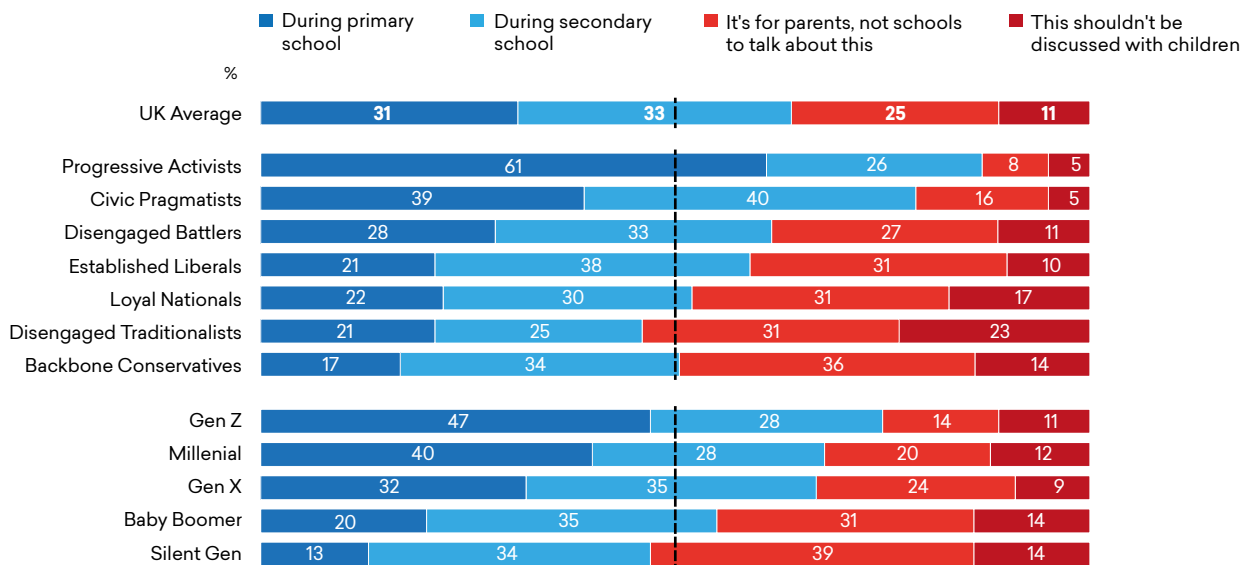


Question: When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that... ('don't knows' of 11, 11, and 12 per cent excluded)
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Figure 11

When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that some people are transgender

A majority think schools – at least at secondary level – should talk to children about trans people



Question: When is it appropriate for schools to tell children that...some people are transgender ('don't knows' of 12 per cent excluded)
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

There does not seem to be any appetite in the UK for any form of 'Don't Say Gay' Bill of the type being enacted in some states in the US. Fully 64 per cent of the public believe that young people should be told that some people have two mums or dads in school, with almost half believing that conversation should happen in primary school – an even greater proportion (66 per cent) believe that it's appropriate to tell students that some people are gay, although this group is more split about whether this is an issue for primary or secondary schools to be talking about.

When it comes to talking about the fact that some people are trans, again, almost two thirds agree that this is an issue appropriate to discuss in schools, although here they are more likely to say it is an issue to be discussed in secondary school. Among the segments Progressive Activists and Disengaged Traditionalists are the exception, with the former more likely to say transgender people should be discussed in primary school and the latter more likely to say it is not an issue that should be discussed in schools.

The role of schools was often raised in focus group conversations, where the public feel that schools have an important part to play in introducing children to people who might be different to them and their families, in an age-appropriate way. Occasionally, people expressed frustration that schools were making things worse by ducking these issues, leaving children more confused.



"There's a school where one of my friend's child goes, and they had somebody who was transitioning from I think male to female. Basically, the school said, when Matthew leaves after the holidays, he's coming back as Alex. Don't ask them any questions, because if you do, you'll be suspended. And it was all like, they weren't allowed to ask questions. So, then they've obviously got questions, because they're children. So rather than teaching them and educating them about it or having a class about it or something, they just said, don't ask any questions. Which I just think is wrong because it just makes it even more of an alien thing for people then."

Nigel, Loyal National, 49, Manchester

"That's changed a lot since I was in Catholic school, it never was like that before. We weren't allowed to know anything about gays. There was no gays, there were no lesbians, there were no bisexuals, there were no transgender people."

Ailish, Loyal National, 30, Bristol



"They should be talking about it. I teach my daughter, she's only six, and I've already explained to her about a man and a man can get married. I've even had the conversation of that. Not obviously into so much detail, because obviously she's still very young. But I've said that a man can sometimes feel that they're born inside ... Sorry. Yeah, a man would feel like they're like a woman born inside of a man's body, and they want to transition and live their life as a female. And that's their choice. And so I try and open her up to the idea of things like that. To be more accepting of it as she grows up."

Dave, Disengaged Traditionalist, 30, Bristol



Some people, however, have greater concerns around young people who start to identify as a different gender but who are thought to be going through a phase or succumbing to the 'latest fad' (prompted by the increased visibility of gender identity issues in recent years). Here, the concerns cluster around what decisions children should be allowed to take in order to start transitioning.



“No, one of the places that I used to work in, the wee boy would come in and he had long hair and he used to wear clips and he's here, that was mom's choice. Mom would put the clips in the hair and there was a big girl who used to say, she's my friend, you're saying, but that's a boy. And she was going, "Yes, it's a boy. But she's my friend." The children didn't know if it was a boy or it was a girl. But that wasn't the wee boy's choice. That was the parent's choice. And I think that's wrong because that's not an individual's choice, that's being pushed on that child.”

Tracey, Disengaged Traditionalist, 48, Glasgow



“They'll probably follow certain trends and then in a few years they might not feel like that anymore. So yeah, I think there should be some sort of age limit on it or something like that. But it's who kind of decides that? I don't know. It's quite an awkward subject really.”

Daniel, Progressive Activist, 29, Manchester



“When I first left the navy I retrained as a teacher. So I worked about six or seven years as a teacher teaching D and T. And I had a girl in my tutor group who changed twice. She wanted her name twice. So she wanted to be called a boy first. Then she went back to being an original girl, and then she wanted to be called a different boy's name. So I think that what I found basically is sometimes they follow the trend, because they think it makes them different...I was quite surprised how prevalent it is. I would say virtually there's one or two people in every class now...And I don't think they actually know, so I actually think there should be an age limit.”

Tony, Disengaged Traditionalist, 62, Bury

Most people were relaxed about a child choosing to identify as a gender different to the one they were assigned at birth. They recognise how difficult it must be for trans children and feel that it is important they are able to express themselves and be who they want to be.

Teachers explained how they tried to make sure children who were questioning their gender identity or who said they were trans felt comfortable in school. As with other issues, they felt that the specific approach depended on the child in question, their age and other children in the school – rather than a blanket approach, but their motivation always was to ensure they did the best thing they could for students in their classroom. No teacher we spoke to believed it was appropriate to refuse to call an older child by the pronouns they wanted to be called by, but recognised in other areas such as changing areas and sports different accommodations needed to be made.



“It is the person that has to decide it. I went to visit my dad in Scotland, he's ex-navy and his niece come around. And when she turned up, I had to ... He said, "No". She wants to be a lad. I went, "All right, fair enough." It's a bit of a tomboy, but when she walked through the door, I had a double take and I was like, "It's a lad." But she's walking with the hunchback, because she started developing and she was ashamed of them. So it was like, they're asking, "Well, can I do this? That's how I put a sports bra on and stuff like that. Hold it in to build the confidence." But it's up to them to decide. Nobody else. But she is a lad. Out and out lad, even though she's a girl. We can't decide for them. They decide themselves.”

Edward, Disengaged Traditionalist, 50, Bury

“We've got children in school that are going through things like that. And may not obviously have had the operation yet because they're too young. But like Mel said, they are who they are inside. They know who they are and what they want to be. And that's fair enough.”

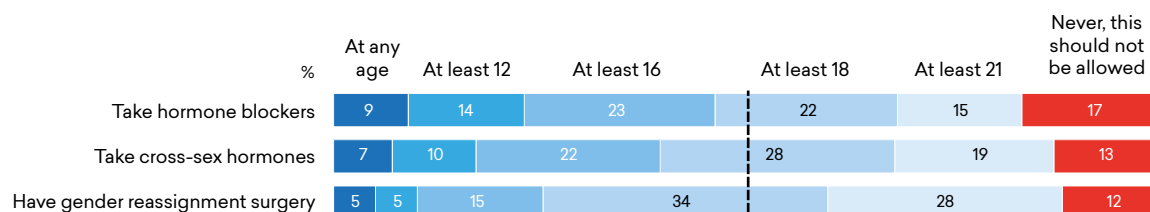
Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton

However young people taking physical steps towards transition (such as taking permanent cross-sex hormones) is more controversial, with opinion more divided. None of our focus groups brought up cases like Keira Bell, or other stories about the Tavistock clinic, and there was no sense among any of the people we spoke to that schools, campaigners or charities were pushing children to transition. However, there was an instinctive reaction against allowing a child to make irreversible decisions without proper and impartial medical assessment. In polling, the median age at which Britons think children should be able to take hormone blockers, cross-sex hormones, or have gender reassignment surgery, is 18. However, there are nuances. While almost half of the public are comfortable with the idea that someone should be able to take hormone blockers below the age of 18, they are much less likely to say the same about taking cross-sex hormones, and a significant minority believe that gender reassignment surgery should only be available to those aged 21 and over.

Figure 12

What age should someone be able to...?

A majority of Britons believe physical medical interventions towards transition should not start below the age of 18



Question: Hormone blockers temporarily but not permanently delay changes associated with puberty Cross-sex hormones are hormones given to permanently change someone's physical appearance to be more consistent with their gender identity (e.g. facial hair or voice deepening) Gender reassignment is the surgery by which a transgender person's physical attributes are altered to match the gender they identify with (e.g. breast and genital surgery) At what age should someone be able to... [Don't know scores of 25, 23, and 20 per cent excluded]

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022



"I think identifying is one thing and making big life decisions that affect your body, et cetera, are completely different. Lots of boys are going to wear dresses. Lots of girls are going to be what we used to call, or still do, tomboys. And that's been going around forever. But when things like surgery starts to be involved, then that's a completely different ball game and you're classed as a child for a reason. There's certain age limits, amongst other things, mental capacity, et cetera, that need to be taken on board."

Ryan, Established Liberal, 42, Witney



"When I was growing up, we had tomboys. You know what I mean? There was tomboys. And now they're women and they've got married with families, now I'm older.

Glen, Loyal National, 31, Guildford



"I think there should be a certain amount of years of psychological assessment definitely before any hormones or surgery is even considered. It's difficult because I've got a male friend who's born a male who's transitioned to a woman, but he didn't until a lot later on and he's got a male receding hairline. Well, she's a she now and the stubble where, through puberty, thick facial hair had grown through, and protruding eyebrows. Whereas, if she'd started hormones a lot younger, she wouldn't have such masculine features. And so that's devastating for her...if you can hit it around puberty and it is the right decision, then obviously they'll have a much more successful chance of being the person they want to be physically as well as emotionally. I think it's a really gray area."

Lara, Civic Pragmatist, 38, Witney

Following the Government's decision to pause plans for a ban on so-called 'conversion therapy' for trans people (and proceed, for the time being, with a Bill that would only ban gay conversion therapy) participants in one focus group discussed their views on the issue. Most were simply baffled that a practice such as conversion therapy could still exist and pointed to the mental health problems that trying to change someone's sexuality or gender identity would likely cause. This mirrors polling for YouGov, which found significant majorities in favour of banning both forms of conversion therapy based on sexuality or gender identity.



"You're just creating mental health issues. All you're doing is creating a, literally a mental health issue for somebody who, later on in life that is just going to manifest. There's just no two ways about it."

Debbie, Loyal National, 41, Bury

"Like going back 200 years, isn't it?"

Lisa, Loyal National, 53, Bury

"I've heard of some people that have actually gone through the transition at a younger age and through the NHS. And then there's been a few people, not saying a lot, that have actually decided that, that might have been the wrong decision for them, as well. So again, you've got to be diplomatic, but it's... I suppose you just don't know what people are going through."

Nathan, Loyal National, 39, Bury

Again, people strove for balance, making a distinction between counselling and support and conversion therapy. They felt it was important that if people who are questioning their gender identity wanted it, they should have access to professional support, but that support should be about helping them to explore and navigate their gender identity, rather than trying to force or 'convert' them to one path or another.

3.3 Single-sex spaces – changing rooms and toilets

Access to single-sex spaces is another area where Britons do not share one view – and where public discussion is more nuanced than elite debate. For some the issue evokes strong feelings and is occasionally raised unprompted in discussions about gender identity. But the debate is not just about whether trans women (and this discussion again is largely confined to trans women) can and cannot use female only spaces. But rather it depends on the individual and the stage of their transition – specifically whether they have had gender reassignment surgery or not (sometimes referred to as 'pre-op' or 'post-op').



“It’s not just chop it off, you know what I mean, or have the op, it is a massive deal to go through an operation like that...it’s a massive op, so obviously they know what they want, so they should be called what they want to be called.”

Dan, Disengaged Traditionalist, 33, Long Eaton

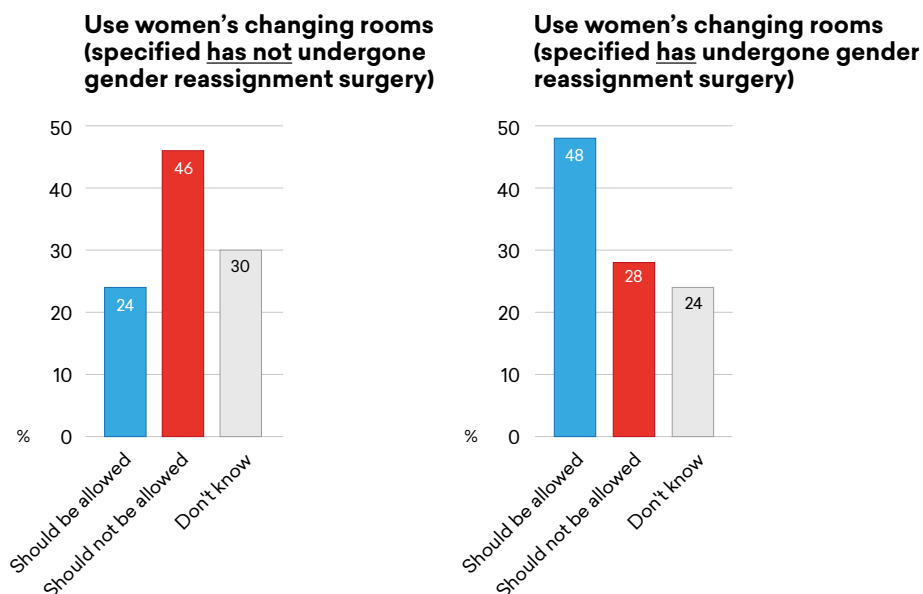
When it comes to those who have undergone gender reassignment surgery, most do not express concerns about trans people using facilities for their expressed gender – almost twice as many agree than disagree that they should be able to use women's toilets and changing rooms. Many people told us that it would be cruel to deny access to people who have gone through the lengthy reassignment process and procedures. Those who disagree that trans women who have undergone gender reassignment surgery should be able to use women-only spaces are a smaller minority, and their concerns tend to centre around whether post-operative trans women and trans men can truly pass for the gender they now identify as.



Figure 13

Has/has not undergone gender reassignment surgery: changing rooms

Support for trans women using women's changing rooms doubles, when it is specified that they have undergone gender reassignment surgery

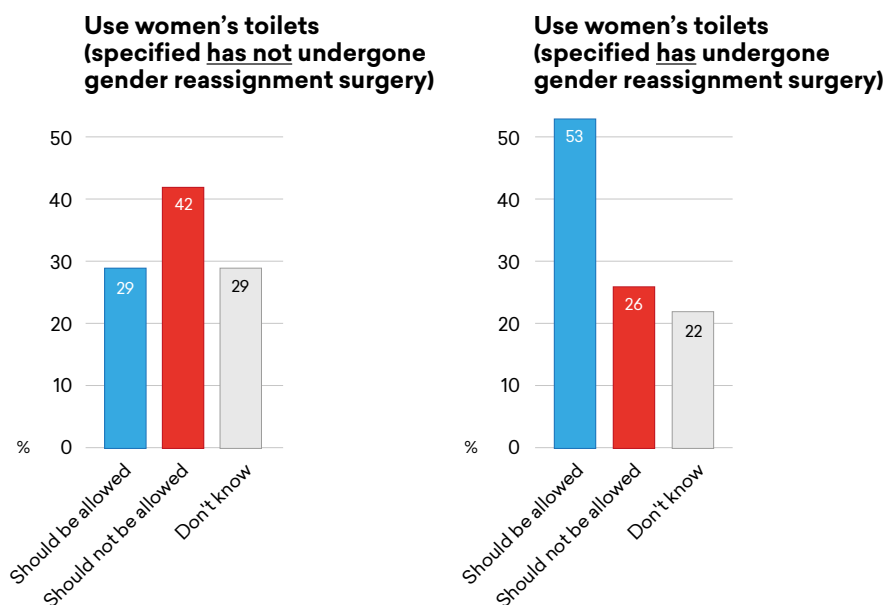


Question: Do you think a transgender woman who [has / has not] had gender reassignment surgery should or should not be allowed to... [split sample]
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

Figure 14

Has/has not undergone gender reassignment surgery: toilets

Specifying that a trans woman has undergone gender reassignment surgery leads to a 24-point increase in support for using women's toilets – the exact same pattern as is seen for changing rooms



Question: Do you think a transgender woman who [has / has not] had gender reassignment surgery should or should not be allowed to... [split sample]
Source: More in Common Public First April 2022



"I think if they're post-op, as you was saying, they've gone through psychological testing, they've gone through all the financial cost of being changed to the female... so you have to have all the surgeries. They've gone through every step of that way. Being post-op, I think there's very little difference in regards to women's spaces and women's rights, difference to, say, someone who was someone who was born biologically a woman, in my view."

Mike, Civic Pragmatist, 30, Witney

"Somebody who's gone through all of that, like we were just saying, has finally accepted who they are. They've built up their own identity. And surely, if you were then to then say that they couldn't use those female... Say a man had become a woman, and so you weren't allowed to use the female toilet, surely that would make them feel a little bit violated, even stripped of their identity, rather."

Georgina, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Witney



"Without sounding rude or disrespectful, you can still tell a trans person. You can. You can tell if a male transitions to a female and vice versa, I personally can. And the thing is, it's all right to say, 'But he thinks like a woman.' The fact is he's not a woman, regardless, and vice versa. She thinks like a man, but she's not a male. She male, but she's not male, and he's not female regardless. And that's anatomy. That's nothing to do with ignorance."

Debbie, Loyal National, 43, Glasgow

However, when it comes to those trans people who haven't undergone gender reassignment surgery there is greater opposition to then accessing these single-sex spaces. Support for allowing trans women to use female-only changing rooms or gendered toilets drops 24 percentage points (almost by half) when it is specified that they have not undergone gender reassignment surgery. This opposition does not extend to every sub-group. More Progressive Activists and Gen Z agree than disagree that trans women who haven't undergone gender reassignment surgery should be able to use women's changing rooms, joined by Millennials and Civic Pragmatists when it comes to women's toilets. But even in these more socially liberal groups there are significant minorities who oppose the idea.

Opposition to those who have not undergone gender reassignment surgery using women's bathrooms is not isolated to those who do not believe that trans women can be women. While the Loyal National segment are the second most likely to agree with that statement, they also have the second-highest level of opposition to trans women who haven't undergone gender reassignment surgery using single-sex spaces. This is indicative of the social psychology of the Loyal Nationals, who are a group that believes in fairness and equality, but are also the most activated by a sense of threat. When a process is seen as less rigorous, for instance by the notion of moving access to single-sex spaces to self-ID rather than a formal transition process, their threat perception is more likely to be activated.



"I did see an article about an incident where a pre-op male transitioning to female, pre-op, gone into female swimming changing rooms, and then there's a woman there with her daughter getting changed. A pre-pubescent daughter. And then there's this pre-op male transition with the penis out in front of them. So I don't know."

Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton



"I run a pub as well, We have gay and lesbians coming here and stuff like that. We've talked about this before and it's the lesbian women don't agree with it. And a lot of the straight women don't agree with it. A fellow's going in the toilet, if you know what I mean. I find it odd if a lady come in the gents toilets who want to identify as a gent."

Edward, Disengaged Traditionalist, 50, Bury



"A couple of days ago I was downtown with my wife and she was in a shop and she wanted to try this thing on...She came and said "Look, Ian, there's a guy in there." So I said, "What?" So I'm immediately grabbing an assistant saying, "There's a man in the ladies changing room." So she disappears off, comes back to me and said, "Oh no, that's a man who identifies as a woman." I said, "Look, he's not dressed as a woman, there's no reason at all for him to be in there. And he's ogling women that are getting changed in there." He said, "Well, sorry, I can't ask him to leave because he identifies as a woman and he's allowed."

Ian, Backbone Conservative, 70, Cardiff

However, this does not mean Britons do not recognise the challenges that trans women who haven't gone through gender reassignment surgery face, and recognise that some will be acutely conscious of their status and will not want to display it. In many cases, the public's concern is rooted in the idea that men may abuse access to same-sex spaces, rather than a feeling that there is a specific risk from trans people using single sex spaces.



"Even pre-op, it is usually money or the process that they're not quite there yet with the hormones and everything to be there. It's usually finances though, or waiting lists, but they're still identifying. Say it was a male going to a female, whether he had his penis or not, he's still female. And the last thing he's going to want to do, well, she's going to want to do, is get her willie out in public, or in a toilet. It's not that they're still identifying as a man, it's that they haven't got to the process either with hormones or waiting lists or finances to be able to get the operations done. So they're still female, whether they've got their penis or not."

Lara, Civic Pragmatist, 38, Witney



"The individual that went in pre-op should really then be considerate of the fact, all right, they may feel like they're woman but they've still got those bits. And if there are children and things about, then I guess it's just them being a bit more aware of their surroundings and a bit more conscious of who else might be in there. Not to say that they shouldn't use those changing facilities. But then all changing facilities have cubicles, don't they?"

Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton

In conversation, most Britons, even those who are opposed to trans people using single-sex spaces, look for common sense ways of handling issues around changing rooms and toilets that involve being aware of people and treating one another with respect. This is a further reminder of how different these

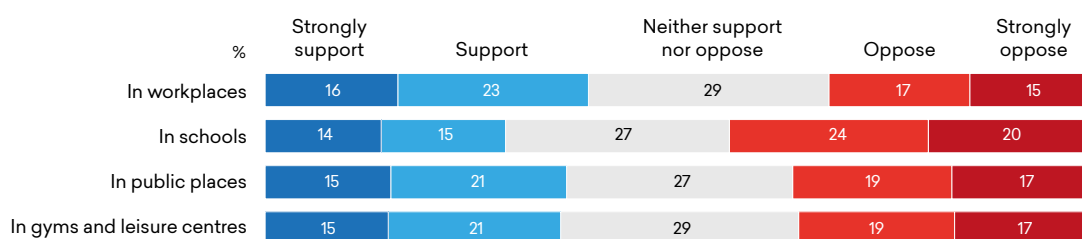
discussions are in real life compared to those that take place online and in the media. In almost every focus group people asked why there were not also now more unisex toilet options available, which seemed for many to be a practical solution to the issue of single-sex spaces.

In workplaces and public places, more people say they are supportive of introducing unisex toilets than not – but in schools and gyms and leisure centres, more people say they are opposed. There is also a sizeable proportion of the public who say they are ‘neither supportive nor opposed’ to the introduction of unisex toilets. Looked at that way, it is perhaps only in schools where there is more opposition to the use of unisex bathrooms than either support or apathy. Although it is worth stating that many schools have already introduced unisex toilets with cubicles backing on to corridors – for reasons entirely unrelated to gender identity and instead as part of an effort to stop bullying and bad behaviour.

Figure 15

Do you support or oppose increasing the availability of unisex toilets in the following locations...

Britons are more likely to support than oppose the introduction of more unisex toilets in workplaces and public spaces, but there is more opposition in schools and gyms



Question: One solution to people's usage of toilets is to have unisex toilets. Do you support or oppose increasing the availability of unisex toilets in the following locations

Source: More in Common Public First April 2022

People also do not primarily see these issues through a narrow lens of gender identity. Instead, discussion around access to single-sex spaces often leads to discussion about the fact most people do not like communal changing rooms per se. Similarly, the minority who are less comfortable with unisex bathrooms usually do not attribute this to worries about trans women/men, or even safety, but instead the fact that men tend to be less hygienic than women in communal toilets. Many of the men we spoke to didn't like the fact that venues still used communal urinal troughs. This suggests that there is an opportunity to think more widely about the public provision of more intimate spaces and whether there are opportunities to make them more comfortable for the public at large as well as making them more inclusive.



“I hate coming to changing rooms as it is, but you go in there and if you're going to come in a changing room and another female, regardless of whether it is you were born a female or you transitioned into a female, somebody in there watching you getting ready? No, I don't want. I would rather take the item home, try it on at home and then take it back. But I do think that having separate changing rooms would make a lot more people feel comfortable.”

Tracey, Disengaged Traditionalist, 48, Glasgow



“I think a whole kind of infrastructure in the country, or in the world really, of separating by genders probably needs to be looked at, even going to the swimming pool and things and changing rooms and so on. People probably just need their own space more, rather than peeing in a cattle trough with blokes doing... In a lot of service stations and stuff. I don’t know, it just probably seems a little bit weird in this current day and age. I don’t know.”

Ryan, Established Liberal, 42, Witney



“Respect is massive. If us, as a society, that aren’t transgender should have to respect their change and their way of life, then maybe they should be a little bit more considerate in that situation. And understand that there is a cubicle, just go in there. I mean, even me as a female, I wouldn’t want to, if there was other people in an open room, I wouldn’t just get changed. And that’s from female to female. Just have a bit of consideration that when there’s kids around and things like that.”

Mel, Disengaged Battler, 30, Long Eaton



“My old high school recently brought them in. The only people unhappy with it are the women because of the smell. That’s why they’re unhappy.”

Daniel, Backbone Conservative, 20 Cardiff

3.4

Pronouns

Discussions about pronouns have been one of the most visible elements of the media debate about gender identity. The trend towards displaying your preferred pronouns is a relatively recent development and from our conversations it is clear some people find it confusing.



“I know a lot of people who refer to themselves as we and they. And yeah, it’s quite difficult to get my head round because, obviously, I don’t refer to myself in that term. And when I say he, they’re like, “No, no, no, no, we or they.” It’s just like, okay. So it’s changing our mindsets for it. But I think if you want to be who you want to be...”

Georgina, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Witney



“I just struggle to understand that the pronouns why it’s an issue and I’ve never really spoken to anyone who would be able to explain that to me of why non-binary is a massive thing. I just see it as a language and that’s probably me being blasé about it as I get everything else for sexuality and stuff like that, but when it comes to non-binary, I just struggle with it.”

Mel, Disengaged Battler, 30, Long Eaton



But while people can find it confusing, most are happy to call people what they want to be called, even if they personally find it a bit odd. Again, people's starting point is one of 'live and let live', a desire not to cause offense, and a sense that calling someone their preferred pronouns does not hurt anyone. As one participant put it: "I don't care what people say at the end of their email because I don't read that far" – for most people, the use/display of pronouns is not an issue they get animated about.



"We have had a new app at work...and I had to put down what I am, if I'm a her or a him or anything, I had to select certain things. So I did find that quite strange for myself. But it's just new technology I think. It's just being politically correct."

Matt, Disengaged Traditionalist, 42, Long Eaton

"Sometimes it can be hard because if you've known somebody as a girl up to key stage four, up to year 10 or whatever, and then obviously they go through this and they then express that they want to be called the opposite sex or have their pronouns as they or them or whatever, it can be quite difficult. But it's just about becoming consciously aware of that person in your class. And this is what you now need to do so that you don't offend them. And also so that you make it accepted by the rest of the students as well. So it can be hard not to slip up and say he or him when they've gone to she or her. But obviously you try as much as possible to make sure you get it right."

Natalie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 40, Long Eaton



"I've seen it on some forms. Doesn't bother me too much to fill that in."

James, Backbone Conservative, 48, Witney



“My daughter tends to use it as them and she, which is another thing. It’s another thing that people maybe need to be educated a bit more about, especially myself because I don’t quite understand it all. I will not make a fuss about it. She can be called whatever she wants to be. She’s still a girl, she’s all girl, she doesn’t identify as anything else. But I’m thinking it’s like an age thing as well, I’m sure it’s like a trend and a fashion thing because they all seem to be bisexual or pansexual or I don’t know the names to it, but it seems to be that sort of age group. Because my friends, I’m in my thirties, I haven’t got any friends that, maybe one or two bisexual, but no, it seems to be much more common now with the younger ones. And they all seem to go by these pronouns. It’s a bit confusing, but I just go with the flow with that one.”

Rose, Loyal National, 37, Cardiff

Where tensions do emerge is around how people are treated if they mistakenly use the wrong pronouns or misgender someone. Most people react badly to being criticised for making what they consider to be ‘an honest mistake’ – not least given the use of different pronouns is, for many, a relatively new development. Most people believe that this is an issue on which people need to be patient and take the time to explain why pronouns are important to some people – rather than labelling those who make mistakes as bigots. This can translate into the belief that we are at risk of losing some of the fundamental building blocks of society – such as gender differences. In some cases, people will be more supportive of trans inclusion if it is framed within more familiar gender frameworks.



“I don’t want to call somebody they, them, it’s plural. You’re not changing the way I’ve been taught and the way I’ve been brought up. Yeah, I’m happy to refer to you as a he or a she, whatever you prefer, but I’m not going by they/them.”

Charlene, Loyal National, 35, Long Eaton

Many also do not believe that they should be forced to display their own pronouns if that is not what they want to do, suggesting that company-wide efforts to encourage people to display their pronouns should make clear that this is optional, as well as explaining why it might be helpful to others.



“If you’ve got a problem with it, you can just correct us. There’s no need to get super offended if we get something wrong. Everyone makes mistakes. I think it’s better just to help people learn rather than hating on people for no reason. Because it’s unproductive.”

Veronika, Loyal National, 18, Stoke



“But then it’s a bit around the free speech as well, or whether you have to conform to calling them, he or she, depends on your own beliefs, so I say let them do what they want, but don’t enforce anybody else to recognise.”

Travis, Disengaged Battler, 38, Long Eaton



“I understand it makes it a lot easier for some people and to feel comfortable for people to identify. I do not think you should have to declare who you are, what you identify as, and I do think some organizations expect the staff to do that, which is unfair. But I like it when I see it on other people’s signature, but I don’t feel the need to do it myself.”

Rebecca, Progressive Activist, 45, Manchester

Diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace

Diversity and inclusion training has an important role to play in helping Britons navigate gender identity issues and others in the workplace. Britain's workplaces have long been melting pots for people with a range of backgrounds and life experiences. As the case studies above highlight, many people think about cultural change and societal progress through the lens of the people they work with.

However, there is a degree of scepticism among the public about the effectiveness of current workplace diversity and inclusion training efforts. Some are worried that the training is overly simplistic and reduces efforts to build a more inclusive workplace culture to a half-day workshop and a series of tick-box exercises about what you are and aren't allowed to say. Others are worried that the training is set up in a way that shuts down debate and fails to create spaces for open discussions – with many of these people drawing the distinction between school-based diversity initiatives (which they view as successful) and workplace-based efforts (about which they showed more scepticism). Finally, some worry that too many workplace diversity and inclusion programmes embrace the latest popular progressive cause in an uncritical way, with those who don't immediately sign on labelled as prejudiced.



“I used to work for the NHS. It was relentless. The amount of money that was spent on diversity training. Raise awareness by all means, but entire departments, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds, regular training being told that I'm racist, I'm sexist. What I really didn't like was this culture where it's like a witch-finding culture that's being spread.”

Brenda, Civic Pragmatist, 42, Brighton



“They should do conscious bias training as well though, shouldn't they? Because that's the real problem, I think. Yeah, we've done some, I've been involved in a little bit myself, and at the end of the day it depends on how the individuals accept it. As you picked up on, Billie, a lot of people will feel like they're being picked on, made to feel as though them and their families and their grandparents, whatever, are all racist or all sexist, and it shouldn't be like that. Yeah. It's a difficult one.”

Paul, Established Liberal, 43, Brighton

“I think one of the things I enjoyed most about it was that it was triggering those thoughts again. And it triggered me to start thinking about it. But you need triggers, don't you?”

Jane, Established Liberal, 64, London

Britain of course has many fantastic DEI practitioners whose work does not fall into these categories and who show that, done well, DEI initiatives can create the space for people to ask the sorts of questions that will help them understand complex issues like gender identity. This will inevitably involve people making mistakes with terminology, but good DEI should be a safe space for people to be able to do so – rather than being a one-way session laying down a series of rules and diktats that often seem overly bureaucratic and driven by politically correct demands.

More in Common plans to do more work on how DEI can contribute to better workplace cohesion, better reflect the groups who feel their life experiences and challenges are left out of current approaches to DEI training, and how this can help build common ground across areas and issues in our society. However, there are several key insights from our conversations with the public and practitioners that can already be applied in diversity workplace schemes:

- Cultural DEI initiatives need to be ongoing processes, not tick-box exercises, initiatives should, where possible, be explained rather than mandated
- There should be no space for bigotry or harassment in any DEI training, but it should also be a safe space for people to ask questions and make mistakes
- These initiatives should not set groups against each other, but focus on building greater understanding and respect across groups
- Alongside important work focusing on the protected characteristics as laid out in the Equality Act, inclusion work should extend to diversity of thought and helping people appreciate better the perspectives of others

Underpinning all of that is basing DEI approaches on evidence and judging their success on how effectively they create a cross-organisational culture of respect, co-operation and inclusion within the workplace.

Recommendations

Many trans people feel increasingly threatened by the way that others talk about them and frustrated at the lack of progress on measures that will make their lives easier. Others who have genuine concerns about the implications of changing our approach to gender identity on women's rights feel belittled, ignored or that they are being labelled as bigots. And most of the public at large are bewildered by a highly charged debate which seems far removed from their everyday lives.

There is no doubt that this is an area which involves complex issues that require us to weigh up sometimes conflicting issues of fairness, inclusion and rights. There are also passionate, strongly held views across various sides of the debate, some of which are not easily reconciled. But as this report shows, it is also possible to overstate these divides and, even more importantly, to ignore the fact that for most of the public their starting points on these issues are not philosophical or binary. Instead, they are rooted in compassion, based on their very practical experiences in their everyday lives.

For that reason, this is an area where those engaged in the elite conversation would do well to learn from the approach the public take. The insights from the British Seven segments, their shared starting points on gender identity and how they navigate flashpoints, provide a basis for changing how we approach a debate marked by uncertainty, complexity and challenge. The recommendations below are based on those insights. They are intended for anyone, from policy makers to campaigners and the media, who is interested in helping to move this debate forward in a way that better serves the people it affects. Our goal is not to try and provide an answer to every one of these complex issues. Instead, we hope this contribution will help those genuinely interested in finding fair, common-ground solutions to these issues in ways that allow trans people to live their lives with dignity, while at the same time protecting women's identity and rights – and sustain public trust and confidence in how society navigates an issue of social change.

- 1 Emphasise the shared starting points that most Britons have on issues of gender identity:** Most Britons are practical, not political, when it comes to issues of gender identity. They do not have a world view that is either pro or anti trans. In fact, most people don't spend very much time thinking about these issues at all. But when they do, it is almost always in relation to people they know in their everyday lives, the trans colleague at work, the schoolmate of their child who wants to transition, or questions about how pronouns work. And their starting point is one of compassion, kindness and a willingness to, as much as possible, let people live their lives in the way they want.
- 2 Build upon areas of consensus:** The nature of public debate is to focus on areas of division rather than agreement, but that approach has turned the discussion about gender identity into a binary. The truth is that on a great many issues, from access to health care, to tackling discrimination, to calling people by the pronouns they want to be called, there is widespread public agreement. A coalition of the willing from across the spectrum of views should work together to highlight those areas where they do agree, as well as identifying where they do not. This would help lower the temperature of the debate and reduce the risk that the anger and divisiveness of the elite debate creates an even more hostile environment for trans people or those who hold gender-critical views.

- 3 Embrace a case-by-case approach:** Where universal consensus cannot easily be found, there is value in recognising the benefits of a case-by-case approach. The public do not see trans issues as a single piece of legislation, a single recommendation or a single policy battle. They see different issues around gender identity as distinct, erring on the side of full inclusion on some, and towards maintaining sex-based rules on the other. Those involved in public policy and activism instinctively recoil from case-by-case approaches, but the truth is this is an area where different approaches are right for different spaces, for different people and in different sports or competitions. Leaders of institutions such as schools, police forces and employers need to be empowered to make those decisions.
- 4 Magnify the experience of those who are finding ways through:** One of the most striking things about our conversations with the public was the extent to which, far from getting involved in debates about definitions, people are getting on with finding workable solutions and reasonable accommodations in their schools and workplaces. Not all of their solutions are perfect, but they come from a place of care. The nature of these questions means that often it will not be engaged activists who provide workable solutions, but those who deal in the practical reality of creating the spaces we use – such as construction specialists, sports scientists and gym owners. These are solutions that others could learn from and adapt to their own settings.
- 5 Acknowledge the progress that has been made:** There is a danger, given reporting on highly charged cases or perceived setbacks, that we ignore the fact that Britain remains one of the fairest and most inclusive countries in the world when it comes to gender identity. And Britons are proud of that fact. Clearly there is more that needs to be done, but portraying the UK as a hotbed of transphobia will only serve to alienate the public, most of whom come to the issue with genuine questions they would like answered.
- 6 Put elite sport in perspective:** There is no doubt that there is a public consensus against trans athletes' participation in single-sex elite sports – particularly trans women participating in women-only elite sports. That does not come from a position of prejudice or who should and should not call themselves a woman, but instead very real concerns about fairness and the need to protect women's sport. At the same time, it is worth reflecting that this is a debate which reflects a tiny minority of a small minority group. Most trans people are not elite sports players, nor do they want to be. Of course, there are real issues for those who do, which need to be worked through by sport governing bodies. For many trans people, sport will not be the number one priority but it certainly has the potential to polarise the wider debate among the public.
- 7 Create the space to have the discussion:** The current debate about trans equality and gender identity is making it increasingly hard, not just for good faith actors with different perspectives on these issues to come together, but also for a broader group of the public who have genuine questions to feel able to ask them. DEI training can be delivered in a way that suggests this is about a set of strictures that must be followed and that anyone who asks questions is prejudiced. That not only makes finding solutions difficult, but also risks creating resentment when people feel like they have not been able to have their say, worry about being called out for making genuine mistakes, or are not able to ask about things that confuse them. Diversity of opinion is also healthy and to be expected when it comes to discussing social change in open democracies.

- 8 Listen to those worried about the pace of change:** There is undoubtedly a segment of the public who find changes in the way we approach and talk about gender identity confusing and/or who believe that moving away from set notions of being a man or being a woman is eroding one of societies' building blocks. This is not to excuse those who go out of their way to express deliberately offensive views, but rather a recognition that some people will take longer to feel comfortable with change or worry about its scale. Finding a way to help this group express concerns, listening to them and providing reassurance about the scale of change is likely to reduce resentment.
- 9 Stop bad-faith actors setting the terms of discussion:** While most of those engaged in high profile debates about gender identity do so with sincere, deeply held views, it is clear there are others more animated by the heated, clickbait nature of the issue or the potential for creating a culture war wedge. This needs to be called out by good-faith participants on both sides of the debate – and for it to be made clear that they do not speak for most advocates for trans inclusion, or those with more gender-critical views. The issues around gender identity and sex-based rights will not be resolved through sensationalist headlines or social media pile-ons, but through calm discussion. Policy makers and activists should avoid spotlighting or feeling the need to react or respond to every intervention from the dominant and loud voices in the debate.
- 10 Remember this is about people:** One of the most depressing aspects of the current debate is the tendency to demonise those on the other side or to treat the issues involved as philosophical debating points rather than real issues affecting real people, trans or not. That some of the most vulnerable members of our community, who have different perspectives on these issues, are having to witness their lives or points of view being treated as ideological footballs is cruel and unnecessary. Instead, we should remember that, at its heart, this is a debate about different groups of real people who ultimately want to live their lives happily and freely.

Conclusion

Few Britons spend very much of their time thinking about issues of gender identity. When they do it is usually through a personal experience or interaction with someone who is trans, rather than through the latest salacious media story. The approach that they take is one rooted first and foremost in compassion, fairness and kindness.

While there is undoubtedly a very small minority who hold prejudiced views against people who are trans or who see virtue in exploiting concerns about the current debate, that was not the view of any of the Britons who we spoke to in our focus groups, nor does it reflect the results of our polling. Instead, Britons want, as much as possible, for trans people to be able to live their lives happily and support accommodations that try to make that possible. Those accommodations will be different in different circumstances, depending on the people involved, not least because transitioning is a process, not an event, and different situations call for different approaches.

Where there are areas where the public do not sign up to full trans inclusion, such as in sport, this is not generally rooted in prejudice, but rather a belief in fairness and fair play. On single-sex spaces, the public does not have a fixed view, but instead think the stage of the person's transition matters, and want to look for solutions that work for everyone. These solutions, however imperfect they may be, start from a position of care.

It is important to avoid entangling people's wider views on issues like single-sex spaces with their views about trans people. From our conversations with the public, it is clear most people do not like communal changing rooms, single-sex or not, and would rather be able to change in privacy. In a similar way, where people did have objections to unisex toilets, they tend to be based on complaints about men's hygiene and cleanliness rather than concerns about trans women. Understanding this, and perhaps using it as an opportunity to rethink how we approach intimate spaces in general, could be helpful as we work towards common ground, common sense solutions to different issues. Finding those solutions will involve more good will and good faith than we have seen from many of the elite participants in the debate about gender identity so far. Our hope is that the recommendations above can play a part in encouraging better conversation that gives people the space they need to express and understand each other's concerns, appreciate differences of opinion and to make progress on those issues where people do agree, rather than simply focusing on the trickier debates.

Doing so matters, because while the debate about gender identity undoubtedly racks up more column inches than public interest seems to warrant, how we handle issues like this is important – not just on gender identity specifically, but more broadly how we as a society navigate change. As this report shows, so called 'hot-button' issues are rarely as binary as they are presented. Instead by taking the time to explore what the public actually think and identifying the different values and priorities of different segments of the public, it is possible to find both more common ground and the start of a path forward. On too many issues, the artificially polarised nature of debates about change on social media and elsewhere leads to us being stuck in a rhetorical stalemate.

Instead, an approach which takes seriously different starting points and which listens to different segments of the public, rather than projecting opinions onto them, can help to push back on those who want to create 'us-versus-them' dynamics and instead provide the basis for a better conversation about change.

Methodology

The Britain's Choice project is informed by literature and research that emphasises the importance of values in predicting social and political behaviour. These studies have proved a valuable aid to social researchers, governments and community organisations in recent years. The goal of Britain's Choice and our subsequent work is combining the insights of social psychology with the explanatory power of cluster analysis, undertaken with a uniquely large national sample of the public.

In developing the British Seven Segments, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was deployed through surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. More in Common's internal research team worked with our research partners in YouGov and Public First on the design and fieldwork of the quantitative research. The data generated through an initial quantitative survey, with a nationally representative sample of 10,300 Britons, was then analysed to identify distinctive clusters (or segments) within the British population, based on their core beliefs. Seven waves of follow-up surveys have been conducted and carried out since 2020. Surveys have been conducted online by YouGov and Public First using representative samples of the adult population of Great Britain, recruited and weighted by gender, age, education and geographic region.

That allowed us, in collaboration with the data science team at YouGov, to develop the British Seven segments through a cluster analysis exercise. Cluster analysis allows us to identify patterns in people's responses that are not captured by doing more standard demographic and political analysis afforded by polling. In looking for these patterns in response to the questions, we focused on respondents' core beliefs and group identity, to group those with a similar psychological disposition together. Cluster analyses do not establish causal relationships, but rather identify meaningful associations and commonalities. The seven segments in this study were created through a k-means solution process based on variables related to the core beliefs listed above. No standard demographic or party identification questions were used to create the segments – and this sets More in Common's segmentation apart from almost any other similar study in the UK.

All of More in Common's UK quantitative and qualitative work is conducted through the lens of the British Seven segments – giving us a unique and robust analytical framework for analysis. More in Common has conducted well over a hundred focus groups in the past two years on which insights for this review are based. In spring 2022, More in Common convened a series of focus group discussions focusing on issues of sex and gender-based rights in Long Eaton, Witney, Cardiff, Glasgow, Bury and Manchester. We also ran a series of focus groups focused more generally on culture war topics – and where gender identity was discussed – in the summer of 2021 in Brighton, London, Manchester, Stoke and Blyth. Participants were recruited from across the British Seven segments by our independent recruitment partners from across areas in England, Scotland and Wales. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed and analysed by More in Common team members.

