

# “I want to appreciate the person that I am”: Transgender Communication Experiences across Gender Identities

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## INTRODUCTION

- Roughly 0.35% of the population, or approximately 133,000 people identify as transgender or non-binary in Canada<sup>1</sup>
- Speech-language pathology services are evolving from primary focus on voice to holistic gender-affirming care for all gender-diverse people<sup>2-4</sup>
- Communicative participation** = engaging in day-to-day communication including exchanging information and ideas, and maintaining interpersonal relationships<sup>5</sup>
- Purpose of Study:** to explore how transgender people describe and perceive communicative participation and whether there are similarities or differences in their experiences across gender identities

## METHODS

### Inclusion Criteria

- Transgender adults residing in Seattle, Washington
- English proficiency sufficient to participate in interview
- No history of communication disorder diagnosis

### Data Collection and Analysis

- In-person semi-structured interviews focused on participants' perceptions of communication difficulty in a variety of daily conversational situations and the availability of social support for communication needs
- Qualitative content analysis of the audio transcripts was conducted to derive themes that emerged from the data

### Demographic Data

- 14 participants (median age = 45.5 years)
- 50% assigned male at birth (AMAB), 50% assigned female at birth (AFAB)
- 79% White / Caucasian
- Median years since beginning transition = 4 years

## REFERENCES

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## RESULTS

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Communicative participation experiences were similar for transgender participants across gender identities, signaling the importance of participation-focused gender affirming care in speech-language pathology services for all gender diverse individuals.

### THEME 1: Comfort, safety, and authenticity are the main goals

Subthemes	Sample Quotations (Note: all gender descriptions were provided by the participants)
1.1 I'm capable, but I feel uncomfortable	"I'm trying to make it more comfortable for me to have these conversations, not that I can't have them." (51-year-old queer woman with trans experience AMAB)
1.2 Prioritizing safety above authenticity	"I just want to appreciate the person that I am, but I can't do that if I don't know if the person is going to be safe." (28-year-old transmasculine nonbinary AFAB)
1.3 A community of likeness vs. the outside world	"Do you feel like you can be who you are in this moment? If you have to continue to perform for the outside world, then that brings in that extra thinking that comes with it." (27-year-old genderqueer AFAB)

### THEME 2: The internal checklist

Subthemes	Sample Quotations (Note: all gender descriptions were provided by the participants)
2.1 My voice tools and mechanisms	"So I kind of forget the voice tools and all of those things that I've been trying to train myself on, and it's easy to revert back when things get fast moving." (59 year-old female AMAB)
2.2 Based on the person, I change accordingly	"The way I talk [is] based on different types of people I run into, and I change accordingly." (27-year-old transgender male AFAB)
2.3 Do I have to be loud to be heard?	"[If] I'm going to want to communicate with someone, I don't do it in a noisy place." (56-year-old female AMAB)
2.4 People like to slot you into a box	"The goal of [speech therapy] is to achieve some modifications that will make people react to me different, not that it will change how I will feel about how they react." (41-year-old trans-woman AMAB)

### THEME 3: The longer I exist, the more comfortable I become

Subthemes	Sample Quotations (Note: all gender descriptions were provided by the participants)
3.1 I used to be a lot more concerned about it	"It doesn't make that big of a difference what people think of me anymore. There was a time when I was much more sensitive. But at this point in the game--" (56-year-old female AMAB)
3.2 You gotta know the rules in order to break them	"So it's a choice about how I want to carry myself as man in the world. But you gotta know the [social gender] rules in order to break them." (59-year-old transgender man AFAB)
3.3 It's not always about communication	"No matter how I talk, they'll just be like, 'Oh that's a woman with a deep voice.' ... Right now, communication is not the biggest fish to fry in how people see me." (19-year-old nonbinary AFAB)

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