

Canada and the Culture Wars: On gender, more than half say a person is male or female, but one-third say that's 'too limiting'

Most would be accepting of child who wished to change gender identity, but hesitant on hormone therapy

September 19, 2023 – Gender expression is changing in Canada, and a chasm is forming in the ways in which this issue is viewed across different groups.

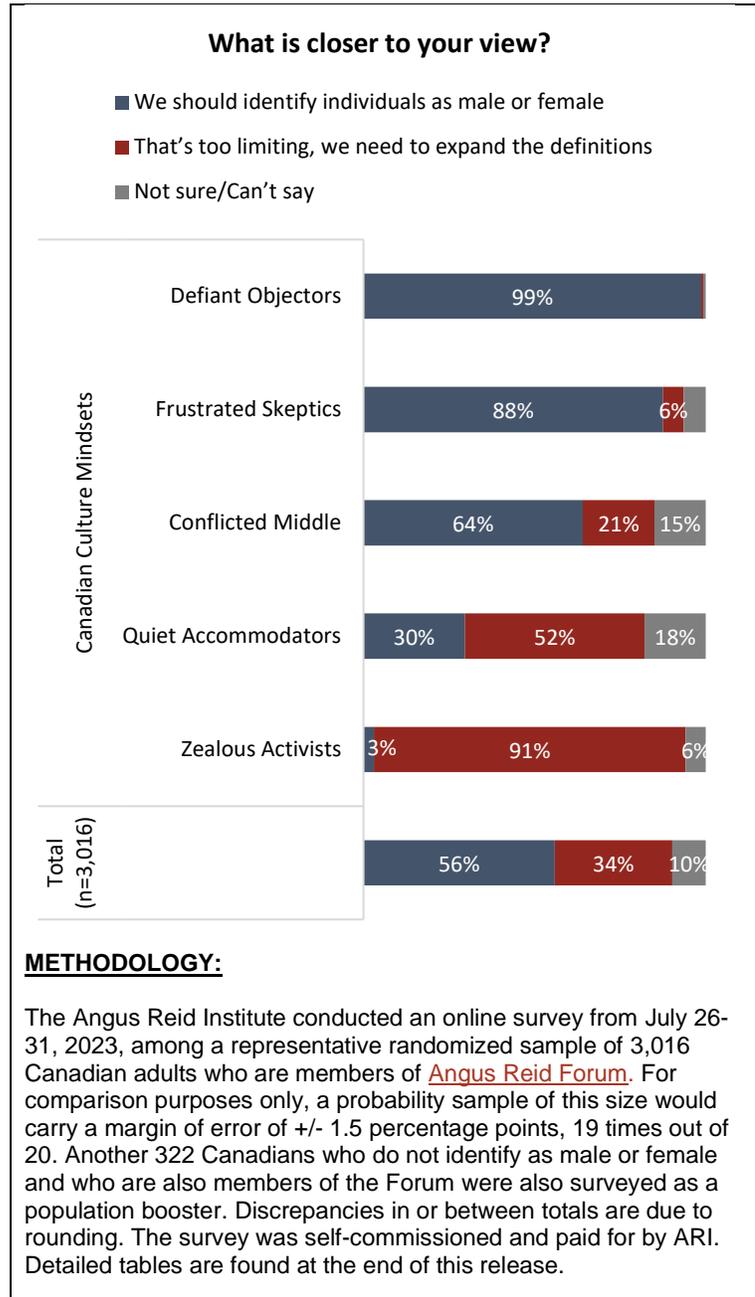
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute – the second in a series of reports on [Canada and the Culture Wars](#) – finds Canadians holding competing views of gender definition, womanhood, and transgender issues.

[Take the Canadian Culture Mindsets Quiz here](#)

Overall, more than half of Canadians (56%) say that they would define a person as either male or female. For one-in-three (34%), this is insufficient. Those who feel the gender binary is too limiting are more likely to be female (40% say this) than male (26%), or do not identify as male or female themselves (73%). Those on the other side of the discussion are much more likely to be men over the age of 34, for whom two-thirds say two genders is enough.

These divisions extend to deeper conversations of transgender issues. For instance, what is a woman? One-in-three (34%) say it's only those who were born biologically female, while others dispute that definition. One-in-three argue that anyone who wants to can identify as a woman (35%) and one-in-five (18%) say a woman is someone who has female genitals, whether they were born with them or they received gender affirmation surgery.

These issues vary greatly along the Angus Reid Institute's Culture Mindsets spectrum. If you'd like to see where you fit, [please click here to answer questions and learn](#) where you sit on the spectrum.



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When it comes to children, seven-in-ten (69%) say they would accept and accommodate their child's wish to change their gender identity, including three-in-five parents (61%) who have children younger than 18. That said, support for beginning a child on hormone therapy drops to one-in-five among both the general population and among that same group of parents. These responses vary slightly when different ages are presented for the child – eight, 12, and 16 years old – but majority opposition is consistent.

More Key Findings:

- Seven-in-ten Canadians say that transgender people in Canada face significant discrimination in their day-to-day lives. A further two-thirds (64%) say that increasing acceptance of trans people is a sign of social progress for Canada.
- That said, Canadians tend to feel there is a media fixation with transgender issues that give this subject “too much attention”. Three-in-five (60%) say this, an increase from 41 per cent who said the same in 2016.
- Asked if a trans girl should be allowed to play sports with other girls, Canadians offer three views. Three-in-ten say yes (31%), unreservedly, three-in-ten say no (30%) in the same way. For two-in-five (39%), it depends on the sport, with contact sports like wrestling and rugby a source of consternation.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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What's next?

Part One: Defining gender

Conversations about gender identity in Canada are [inarguably](#) more common in 2023 than they were a decade ago – but they're not new. The gender binary has been a subject of discussion and debate for centuries, if not millennia – from [ancient myths](#), to [Roman Emperors](#), to [Indigenous](#) cultures' recognition of two-spirit individuals. More recently, social media and political opportunism have, in many ways, amplified this dialogue. While society continues to struggle with the modern version of this discourse, many Canadians express more inclination for the male-female gender binary rather than something more complex or nuanced.

More than half say male or female; one-third say that's too limiting, others unsure

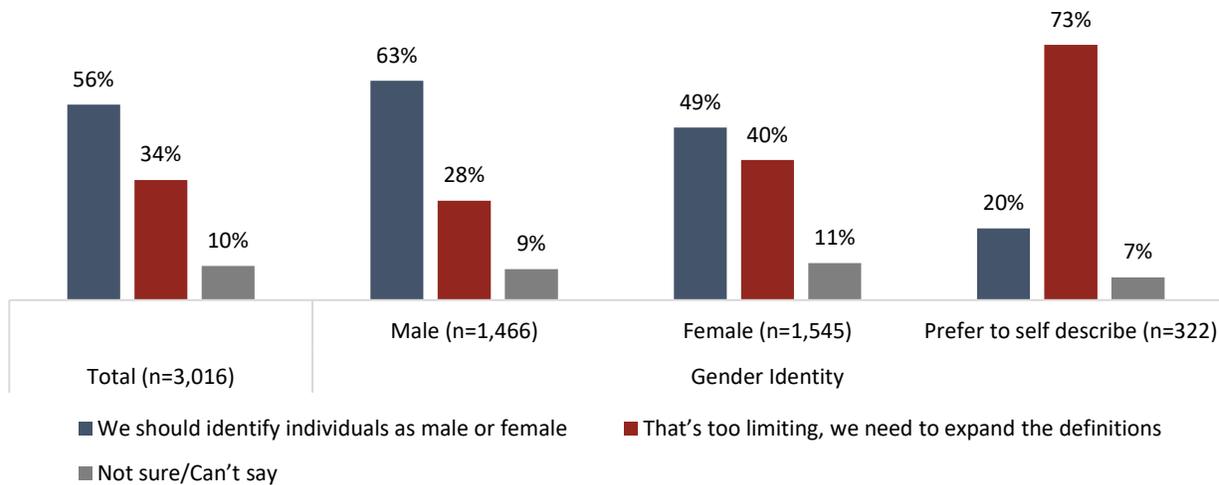
Canadians were asked whether society should define individuals as male or female or whether this is too limiting and should be expanded to include other identities on a non-binary spectrum. For more than half, (56%), the limited male and female option is preferred. This is a more common position for men, for whom twice as many say that a person should be male or female. Women are more divided, though lean slightly toward this binary, while those who do not identify as male or female in this survey are far more likely to say that the gender binary is too limiting.

Please note, the 'prefer to self describe group is a broad category that may include those who identify as non-binary, trans, genderfluid, genderqueer and many [other types of gender expression](#). In Canada, approximately [one in 300 people older than 15](#) identify as non-binary or transgender. For the purposes of this survey, those who choose an option other than male or female as their gender were oversampled in order to better share their views.

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What is closer to your view?



Canadian Culture Mindsets diverge widely

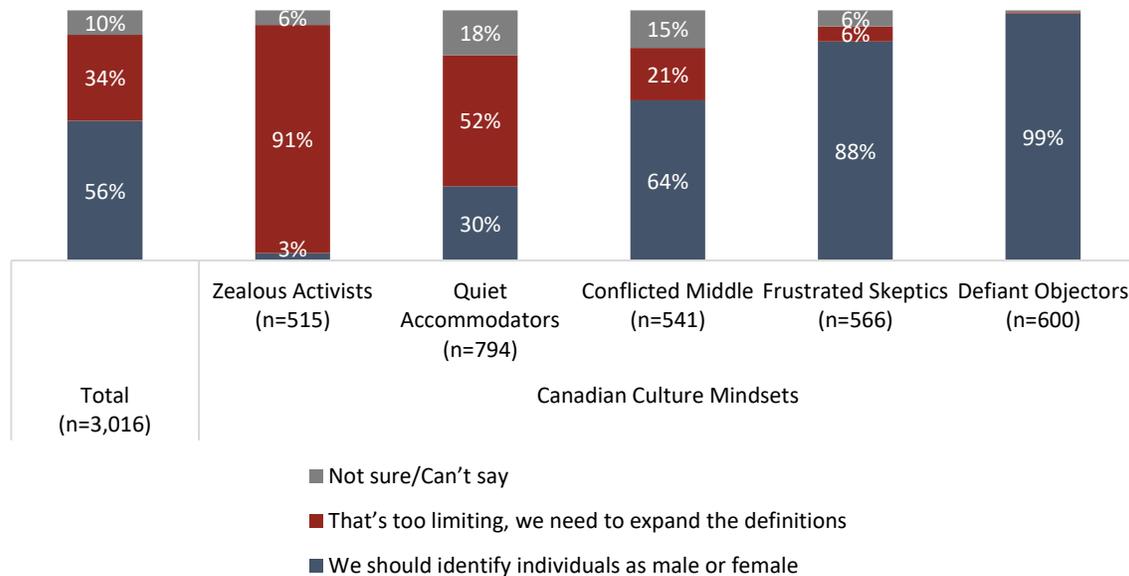
The Angus Reid Institute created five different Culture Mindset groups for this series of studies. For more information about how these groups were created [click here](#). To see where you score on this spectrum, click here to [take the quiz yourself](#).

One can see how polarized the two ends of these spectrum are on the issue of gender identify. Notable here are the Quiet Accommodators, a group who are less vocal about their views, but for whom the preferred approach on this issue would be to further open gender expression beyond male and female. Three of the five groups lean heavily toward a gender identity binary:

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What is closer to your view?

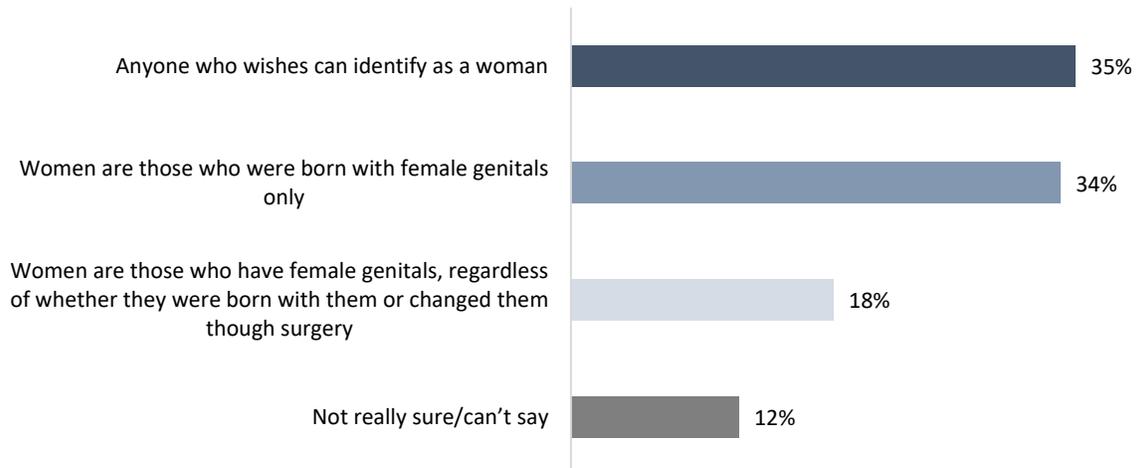


An additional layer to this discussion is the concept of manhood or womanhood more broadly – is it based on innate biology or adopted identity? For the purposes of this study, ARI focused on female identity, and perspectives on what is sufficient for Canadians to recognize someone as a woman.

Different perspectives on what a woman is

The two largest groups are those who say a woman is anyone who identifies this way (35%) or someone who was born with female genitals (34%). That said, another one-in-five (18%) say that if someone has changed their genitals through surgery to become a woman, that person is a woman in their eyes as well. A significant group of 12 per cent of Canadians are unsure how they would define this:

**Some people who identify as women were born with male genitals. In this case, do you personally feel that:
(All respondents, n=3,016)**



Young women occupy a unique space on these issues

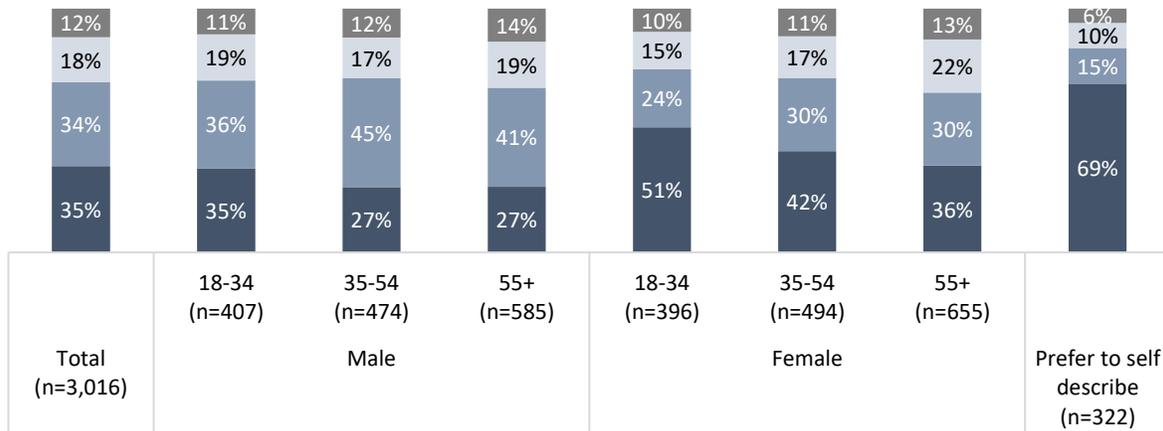
Younger women, those between the ages of 18 and 34, are more permissive or accepting of the idea that anyone who wishes to identify as a woman is in fact a woman. Half (51%) say this compared to 36 per cent of their peers older than 54. Notably, however, those older women are the most likely group to accept someone as a woman if they have had [gender-affirming, or sex-reassignment, surgery](#).

Those individuals who do not identify as strictly male or female are much more likely to say that if a person identifies as female, they are a woman – seven-in-ten (69%) say this. Men of all age groups are much less likely to say that anyone who wants can identify as female:

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Some people who identify as women were born with male genitals. In this case, do you personally feel that:



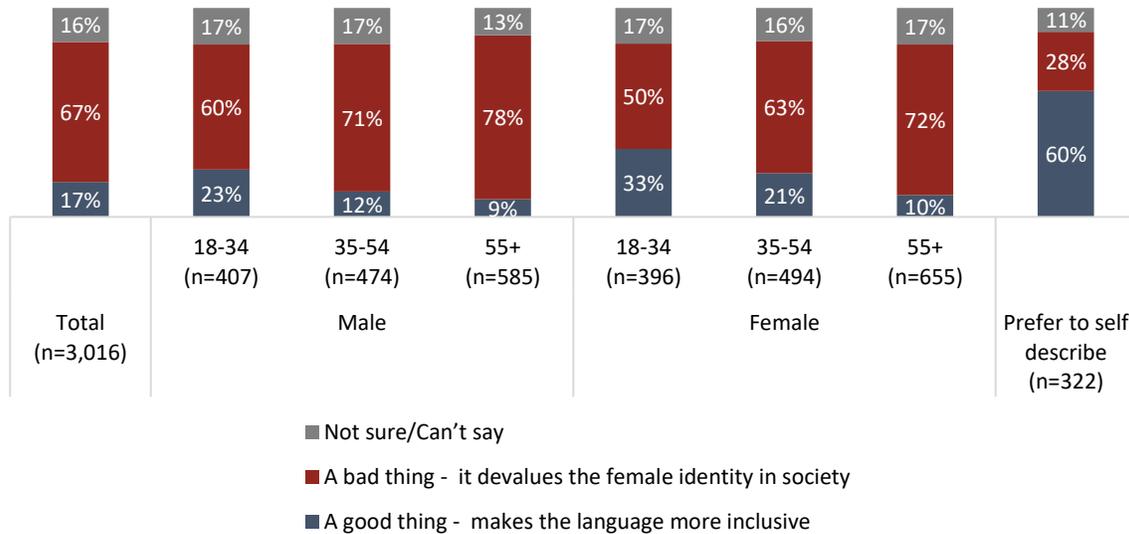
- Not really sure/can't say
- Women are those who have female genitals, regardless of whether they were born with/ changed through surgery
- Women are those who were born with female genitals only
- Anyone who wishes can identify as a woman

Gender-neutral language eschewed by two-thirds

[Part One](#) of ARI's series on Canada and the Culture Wars focused on language and the impact that changing expressions and expectations have on the cultural conversation. Gender, too, has been enveloped under this broad trend, as some advocates have argued that [gender-inclusive language](#) is a way to overcome some of the alienation trans people can face in their daily lives.

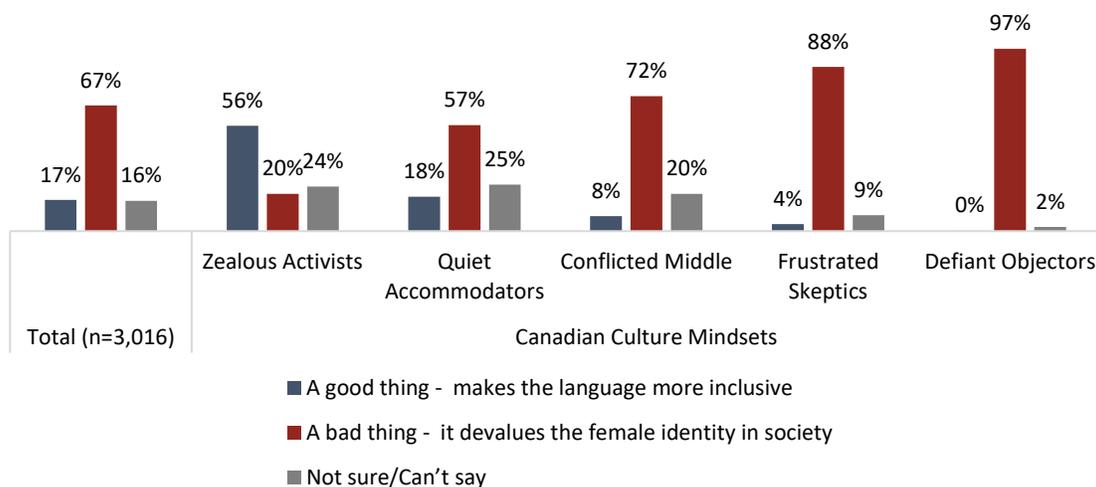
Some advocates have argued for using terms like "[pregnant person](#)" instead of pregnant woman, or in some cases "[people who menstruate](#)" instead of women. For these issues that focus specifically on female identity, motherhood, and birth, there is little appetite for gender-neutral language. These concepts are more supported among young women - where they rise to 33 per cent, twice the level noted by the general population (17%) - and among those who do not identify as male or female (60%):

How do you feel about the trend of using gender-neutral terms when talking about women, birth, and motherhood?



While the Zealous Activists are generally close to unanimous in support of progressive concepts in this study, they show less absolutism here than on other issues:

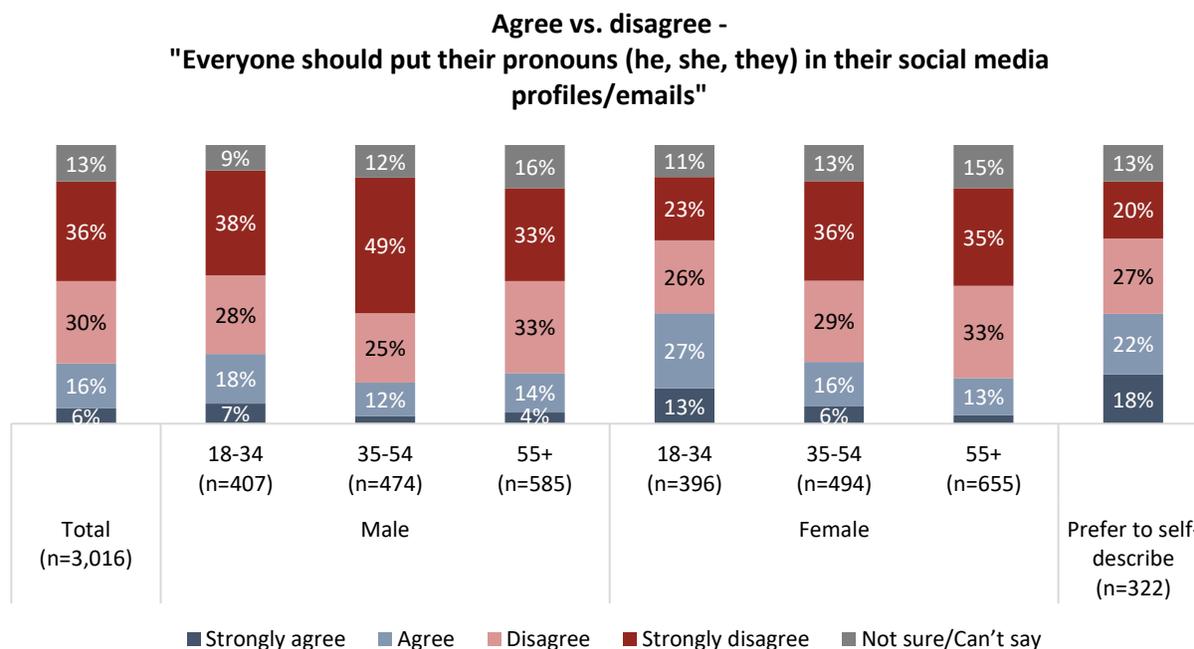
How do you feel about the trend of using gender neutral terms when talking about women, birth, and motherhood?



One-in-five support pronouns in emails/profiles

Another trend designed to accommodate people with diverse gender expressions is the practice of placing one's pronouns in social media profiles, in email signatures, and in other identifying spaces. This

is most likely to be supported by young women, for whom two-in-five say this, but is opposed by majorities in all other groups:



Part Two: Transgender issues

A note on methodology:

To ensure a baseline knowledge of the issues discussed in this survey, respondents were presented with the following definition:

The word “transgender” is an umbrella term that refers to people who identify as a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth (based on a doctor’s observation of their genitals). Transgender people may identify as men or women, or neither, or both.

Some transgender people choose to have surgery, so their genitals match their gender identity, but many do not.

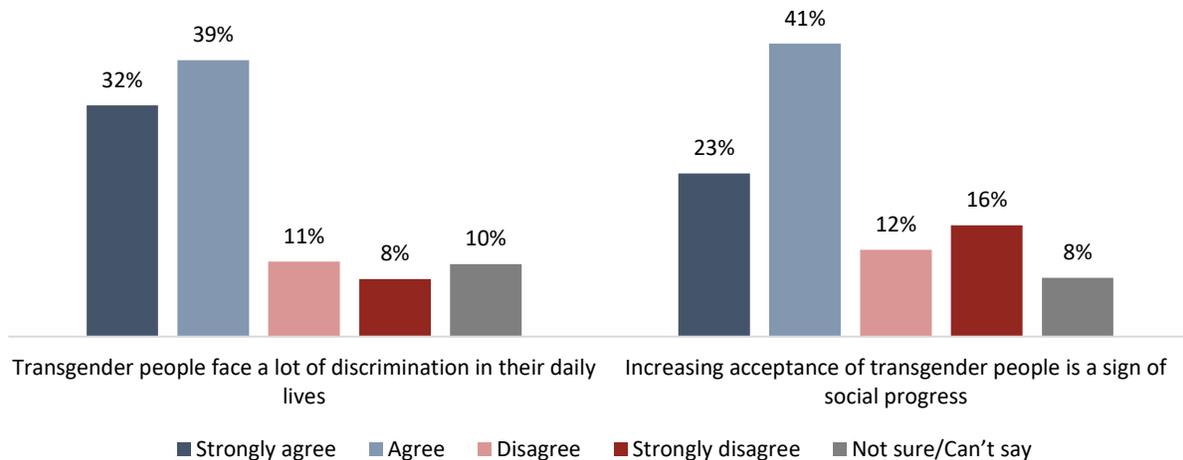
Widespread awareness of discrimination trans people face

Nearly a decade after Time Magazine declared transgender rights “[the next civil rights frontier](#)”, the struggle for acceptance in society continues for many trans people. [Protests against transgender people have contributed](#) to an [increase in anti-trans hate](#) crimes over the past year. Amid these incidents, the vast majority of Canadians feel that trans people face heavy discrimination (71%) and that better recognition of this would be a sign of social progress (64%):

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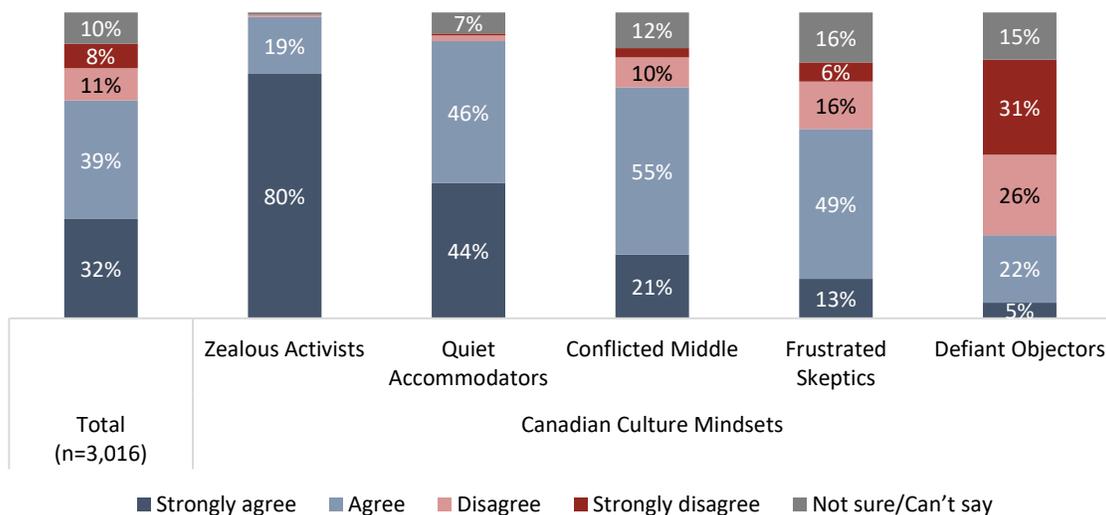
**Agree vs. disagree with each statement
(All respondents, n=3,016)**



Canadian Culture Mindsets show profound disagreement

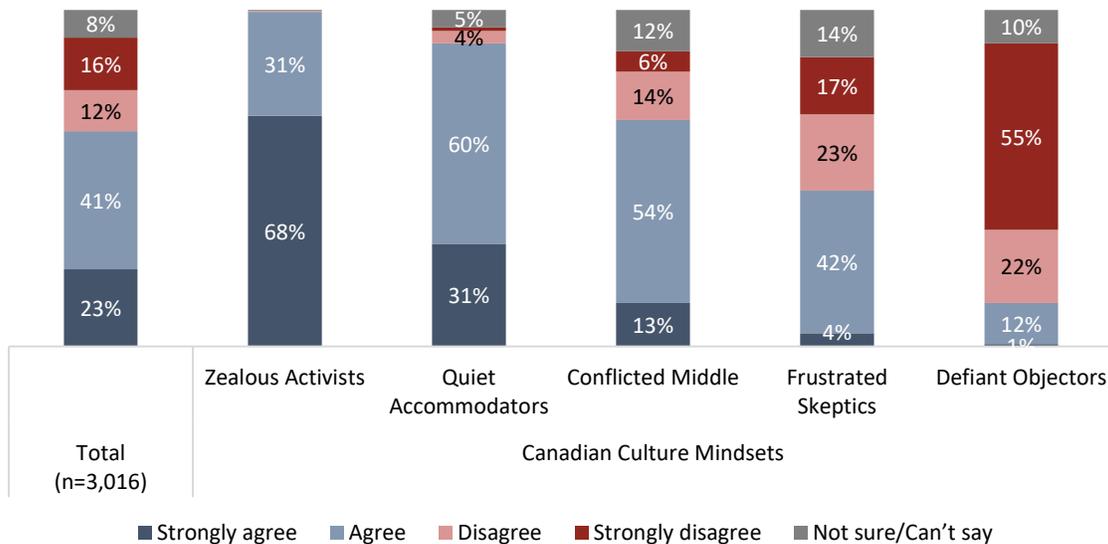
One group contests these statements to a much higher degree – the Defiant Objectors. Here, near three-in-five (57%) disagree that trans people face discrimination, a level well over double that of any other group:

**Agree v. disagree -
"Transgender people face a lot of discrimination in their daily lives"**



The Frustrated Skeptics are more likely to join the Defiant Objectors when it comes to disagreeing about the value of accepting transgender people, but even among this group, more say that acceptance is preferred (46% to 40%):

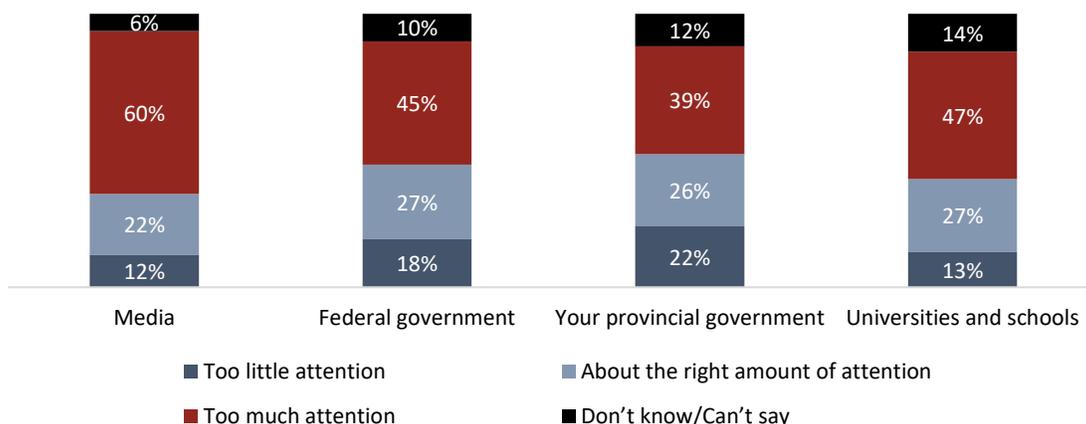
**Agree v. disagree -
"Increasing acceptance of transgender people is a sign of social progress"**



Canadians feel media is too fixated on these discussions

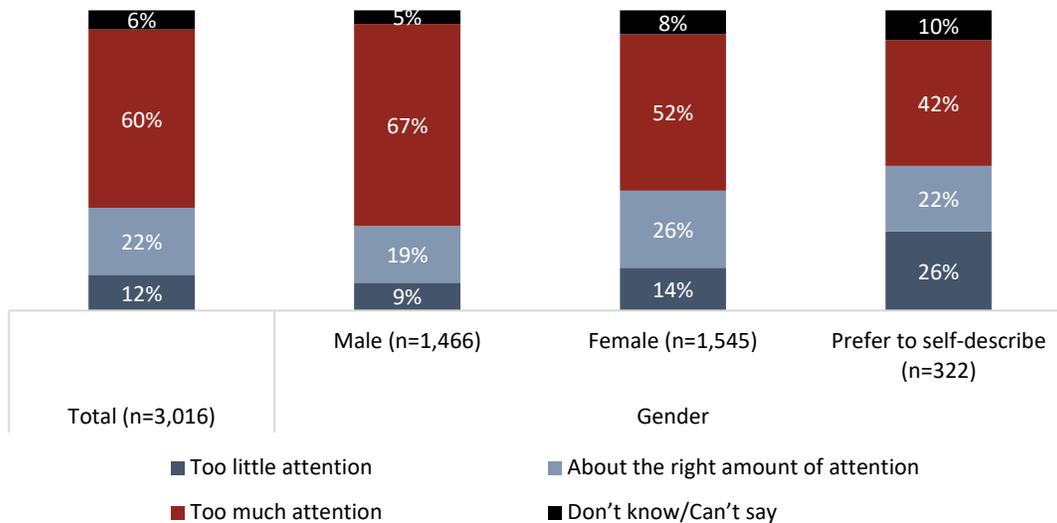
Acceptance is one thing most Canadians agree on, but the majority also feel that media are overly attentive to stories involving trans issues. Three-in-five say news media give too much attention (60%) to these issues, compared to 12 per cent who feel more attention is needed:

**Attention paid to transgender issues from each:
(All respondents, n=3,016)**



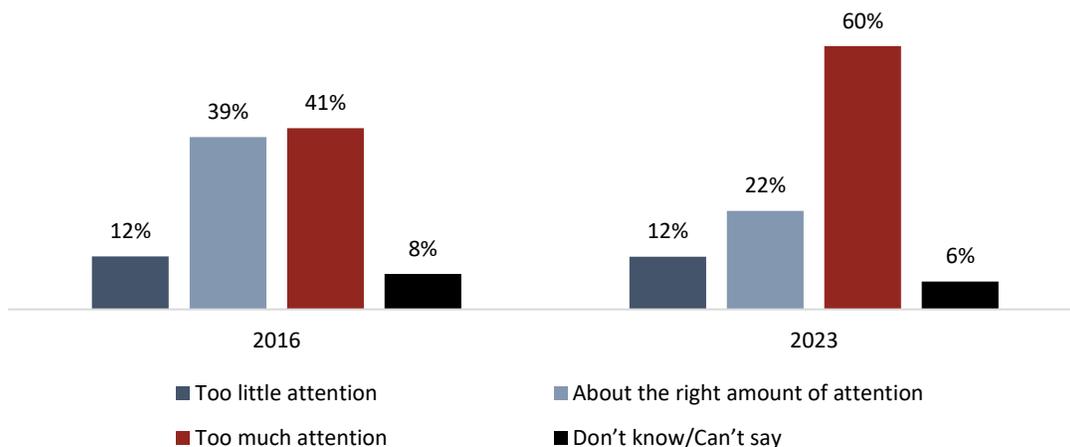
Men are by far the most likely group to say that trans issues receive too much media coverage, though a majority of women (52%) and two-in-five (42%) of those who do not identify as male or female agree:

Attention paid to transgender issues from Canadian news media:



Another datapoint helps to exemplify the change in the cultural conversation in recent years, compared to 2016, when ARI [first studied transgender issues](#), the percentage of Canadians saying the news media is giving too much attention to this issue has risen 19 points, or 50 per cent:

Attention paid to transgender issues from Canadian news media:



LGBTQ2+ causes and advertising

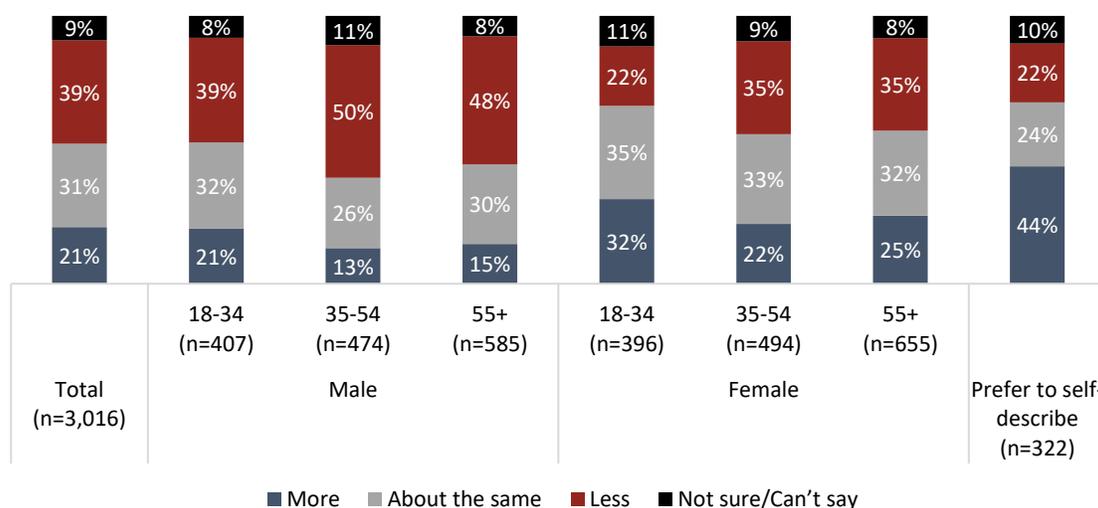
Many companies in Canada and the United States, including [Disney](#), [Walmart](#), [Starbucks](#), [Lululemon](#), the [major banks](#) and others, support Pride month and other LGBTQ2+ causes through the year. One-in-five Canadians say they would like to see more support for these types of causes, while 31 per cent say what they're seeing now is suitable. A large proportion of two-in-five, including half of men older than 34, say

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that there should be less of this. Many brands have faced increasing pushback in 2023 over their support, including [Bud Light](#), [the NHL](#), and [Target](#), which has caused some to weigh the costs and benefits of these campaigns:

When you think of companies advertising their support for LGBTQ2+ causes, would you like to see more or less of this:



Part Three: Children, hormones, and transitioning

An emerging area of medical care, both in Canada and the rest of the world, deals with gender affirmation. That is, if a child who was born as one gender wishes to transition to another and which types of treatments are available to that child. This can include hormone-blocking agents, gender-affirming hormones, and even transition-related surgeries including breast removal and genital removal and modification.

Medical authorities differ regarding at what age these procedures and treatments are available or should be available. Indeed, there are concerns about the [long-term physical effects](#) of treatments like puberty blockers, including impacts on bone density and physical or sexual development. Proponents of treatment point to the significant [reduction in depression and suicidal ideation](#) among those with access to this care.

Most would accept and accommodate their child who wished to change identity

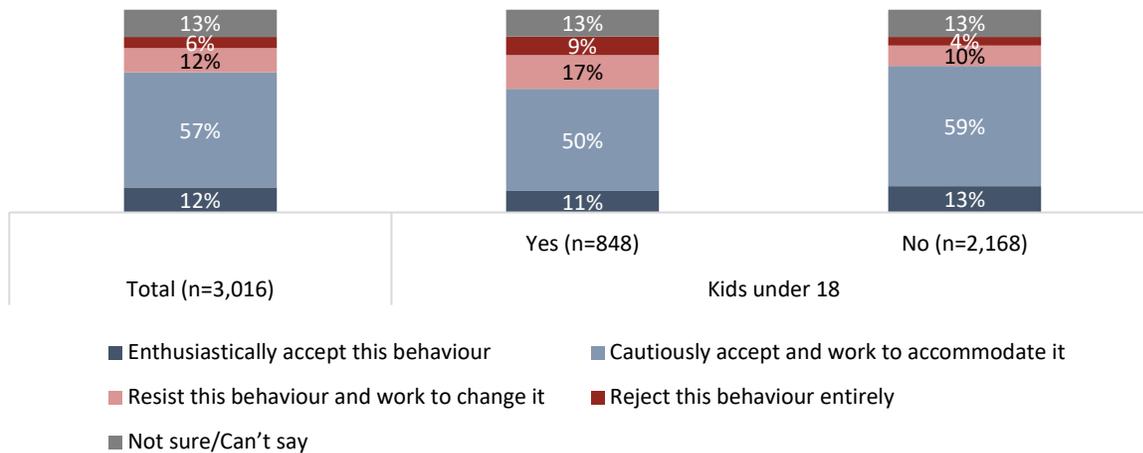
In exploring these issues, ARI first asked Canadians, if you had a child who was showing an affinity for a gender other than that of their birth, how would you respond to this? For most, acceptance, or at least accommodation is the approach taken. Indeed, seven-in-ten (69%) say that they would accept and work with their child to make this comfortable. Another 12 per cent say they would resist this behaviour, while one-in-11 would reject it (9%). Notably, those with children younger than 18 years of age are more likely to hold these resistant positions:

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Suppose you were the parent of a child who, for the last few years, has been behaving in a way that shows an affinity for a gender identity other than the one they were assigned at birth.

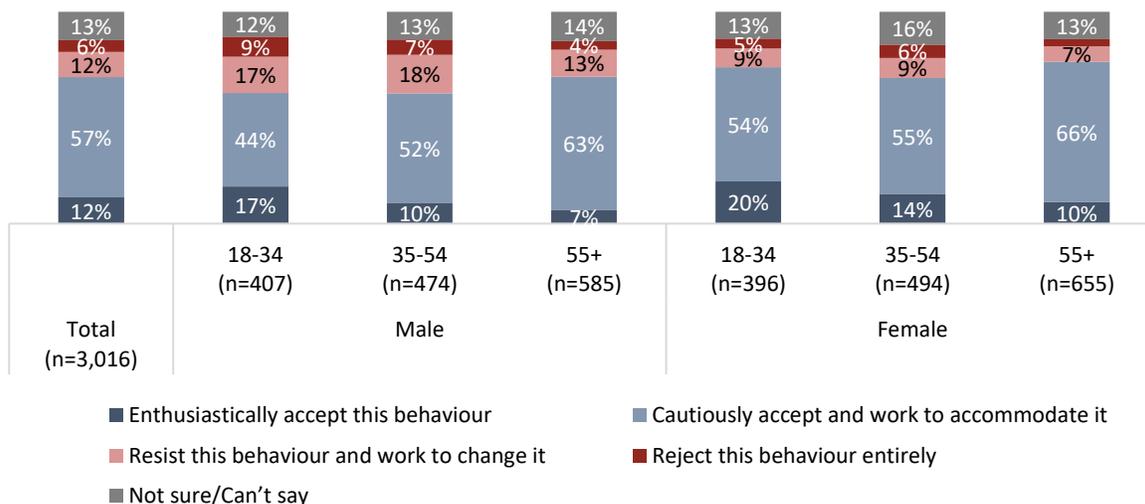
What do you think your reaction to this would be?



Enthusiastic acceptance rises among younger people, though notably, among men, 18- to 34-year-olds are both the most enthusiastically accepting and the most ardently resistant group:

Suppose you were the parent of a child who, for the last few years, has been behaving in a way that shows an affinity for a gender identity other than the one they were assigned at birth.

What do you think your reaction to this would be?



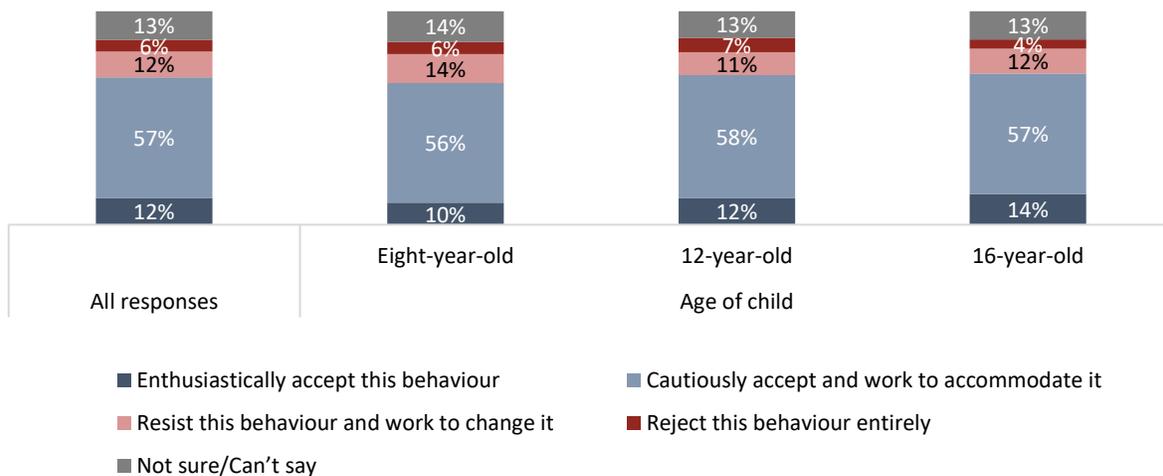
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On this issue, the age of the child expressing a desire to change their gender does not appear to heavily influence a person’s response. ARI split the sample of 3,016 Canadians into thirds, showing 1,000 people the ages eight, 12, and 16, for this question. Below are the results of that split, with little variation:

Suppose you were the parent of a child who, for the last few years, has been behaving in a way that shows an affinity for a gender identity other than the one they were assigned at birth.

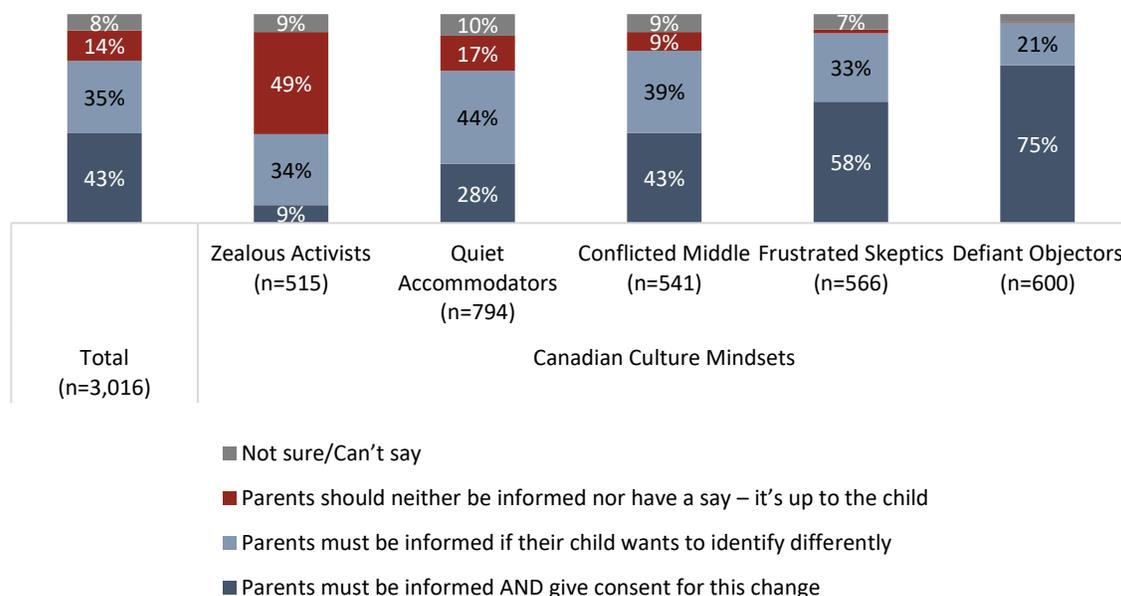
What do you think your reaction to this would be?



New Brunswick/Saskatchewan school pronoun policy

In late August, Saskatchewan joined New Brunswick in adopting a new gender and pronoun policy for schools, which would require parental consent for students who wish to change their preferred name or pronouns. While that issue has drawn considerable debate in recent weeks, most Canadians tend to agree that parents should be informed of their child’s decision. Whether or not they should have to consent to it, however, is another matter:

Which policy do you prefer?



What about hormone therapy?

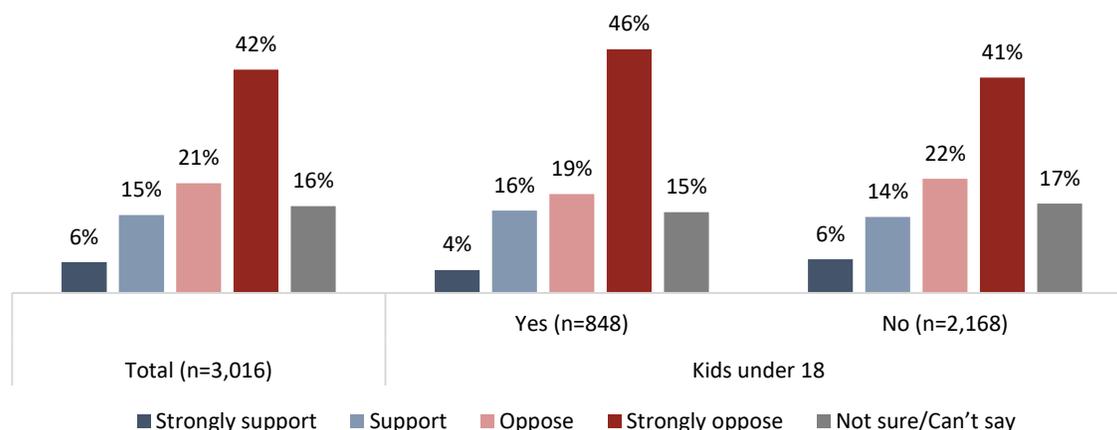
Acceptance is one aspect of this issue, but active treatment appears to be a separate consideration for many. It is important to note that the World Professional Association for Transgender Health suggests that hormone therapy may begin at [14 years of age](#). Further, the Canadian Paediatric Society states that hormone blockers should not be started before puberty, but that benefits can accrue if they are begun in the early stages of pubertal onset. Other doctors have noted that emotional maturity can often be as important as age in determining the right course of action and treatment. Recent [pushback from medical professionals in Europe](#), however, has many governments reviewing treatment guidance, with some doctors pausing prescribing these drugs completely.

For their part, Canadians are hesitant. Asked if they would allow their child to begin hormone therapy to affirm their chosen gender, just one-in-five Canadians (21%), and one-in-five parents of a minor (20%) say that they would support this. Note that three different ages were presented to respondents. For this graph they are combined, but this data is separated further down the report:

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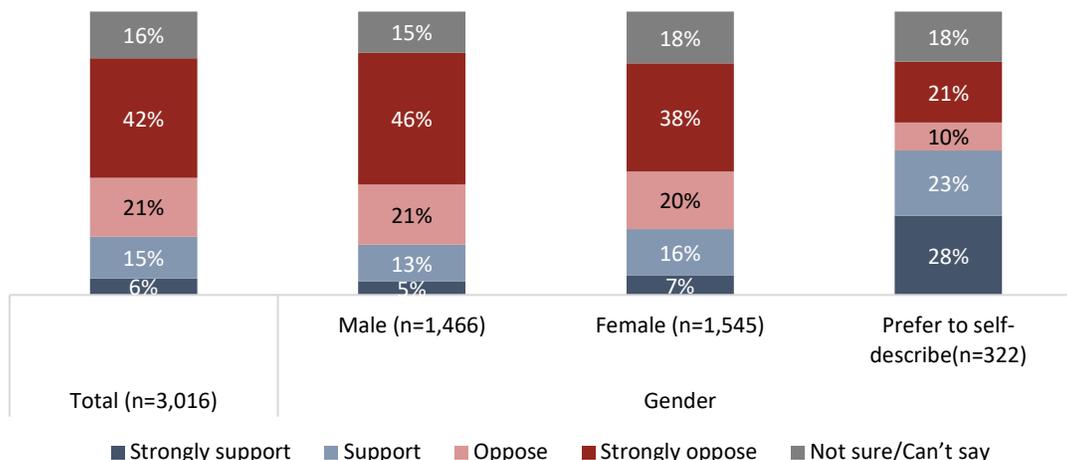
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**If an individual wanted to begin hormone therapy at age [8/12/16], would you support or oppose this?
(Responses to each age combined)**



Half of those individuals who do not identify as male or female say that they would support this, though importantly, that support level is 58 per cent for 12- and 16-year-olds, and 36 per cent for eight-year-olds ([see detailed tables](#)):

**If an individual wanted to begin hormone therapy at age [8/12/16], would you support or oppose this?
(Responses to each age combined)**



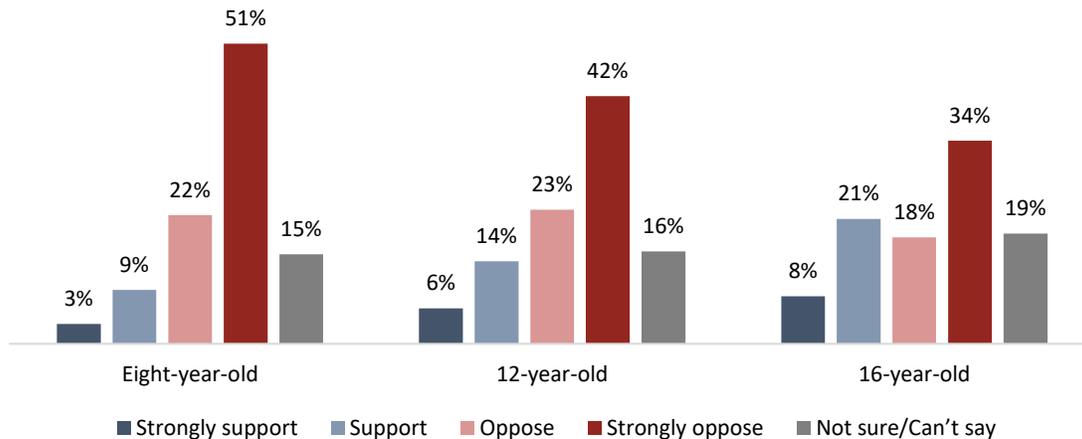
The younger the child, the greater the discomfort

As noted previously, age is a key factor in this decision for many Canadians. A majority oppose this at each of the three ages offered, but are more inclined to accept it once the child reaches 16, though still 53 per cent remain in opposition:

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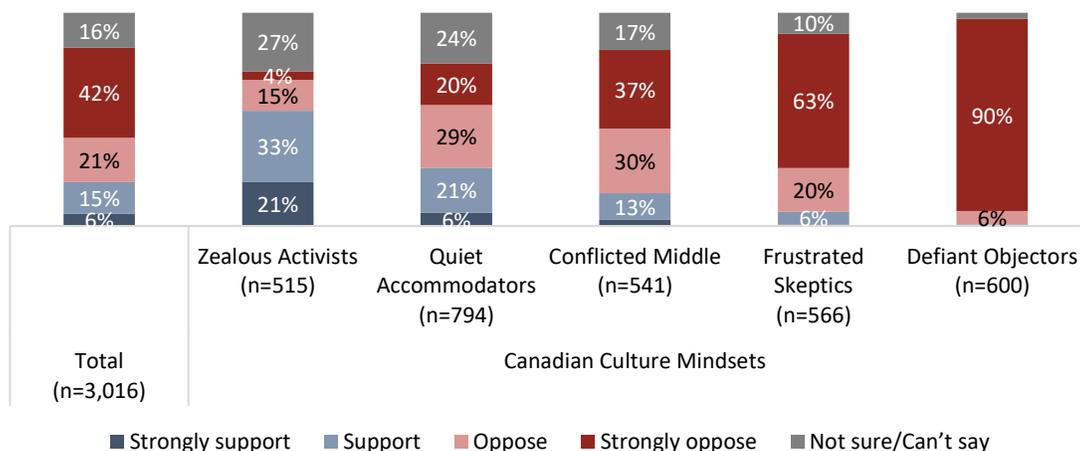
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**If an individual wanted to begin hormone therapy at age X, would you support or oppose this?
(Split sample)**



Hormone therapy is a controversial subject on the Canadian Culture Mindset spectrum. While a slight majority of Zealous Activists are in favour of this, the rest of the groups voice opposition:

**If an individual wanted to begin hormone therapy at age 8/12/16, would you support or oppose this?
(Responses to each age combined)**



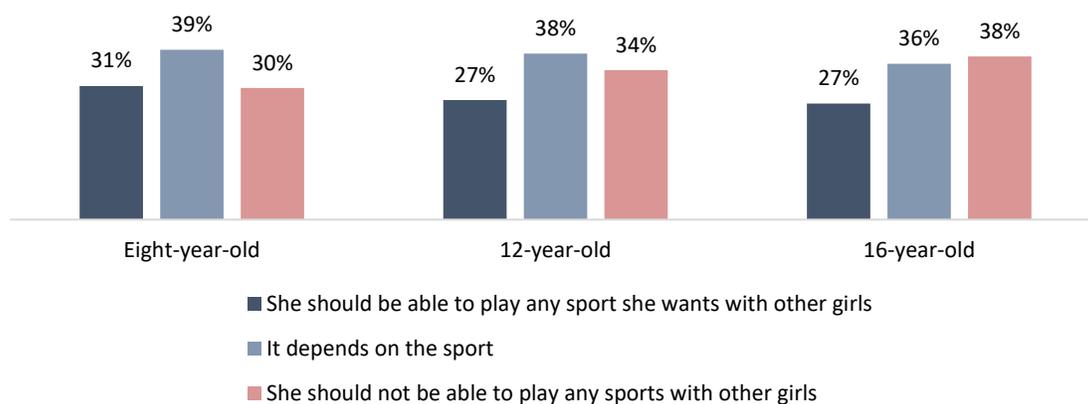
Trans kids and sports a confounding issue for many

One of the key figures in the growing cultural awareness of transgender issues was Caitlyn Jenner, a former track and field legend, who came out in 2015. In the unfolding years, sports and transgender rights have become a common pairing in debates. In August, the Republican-controlled House of

Representatives in the United States [passed a bill](#) that would ban transgender athletes at federally funded schools from competing in sports as a female if their biological sex assigned at birth is male. The legislation is unlikely to be implemented by the Democrat-controlled Senate, but it comes on the heels of [nearly two dozen states](#) passing similar bills.

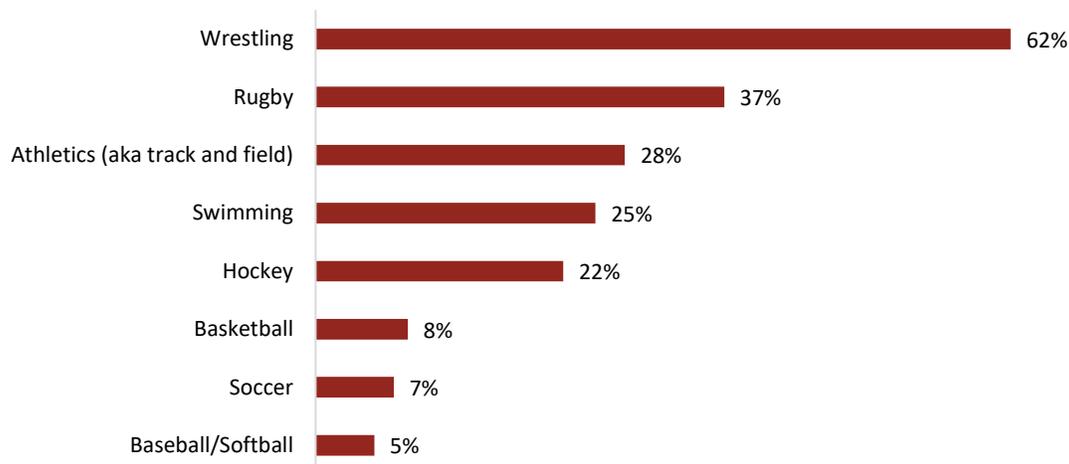
The debate, which hinges on the rights of a child to play with other athletes of their same-identifying gender versus the suggested physical advantages they may have if they were born male, is something that evidently divides Canadians. As seen in the graph below, Canadians hold divergent views on what is appropriate across different ages:

**Suppose an (eight-, 12-, 16-) year-old was born a boy but now identifies as a girl. They now want to play sports with other girls. Should the child be allowed to play whatever sport she wants in these all-girl leagues?
(Split sample)**



For those who say “it depends on the sport”, as to whether a trans girl should be allowed to play with girls, contact sports like wrestling and rugby are the most commonly identified as sources of opposition:

**Which sports would you not allow this child to play with other girls?
(All ages combined)**



What's next?

This report is the second part in a series on Canada and the Culture Wars. Over the coming weeks, the Angus Reid Institute will be releasing studies looking at other key issues and questions being debated in the culture wars.

These forthcoming studies will put a spotlight on:

Climate and the Economy – how should Canada move forward in energy development? Do Canadians support or oppose a wealth tax?

Colonialism and Indigenous Issues – addressing topics such as the legacy of Canada's colonial history and residential schools

Race and Ethnicity – including topics such as privilege, cultural appropriation, equity, discrimination and racism

While each report will examine how Canadians feel about the topic, ARI will also explore where we find common ground.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by Canadian Cultural Mindsets, [click here.](#)

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