

## Viewpoint: Why the effort to find a ‘biological basis’ for being transgender is misguided and unhelpful

The search for a biological cause of transness—also known as “biological essentialism”—may be well-intentioned, but it is a dangerous path that leaves little room for a real understanding of gender and gender identity.

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Biological essentialism, or belief in the claim that there is a biological basis for being transgender, does not equate to acceptance of transgender individuals. In 2017 researchers Bobby Ho-Hong Ching and Jason Teng Xu [exposed a group](#) of university students to three articles of varying support for the idea that gender differences have a biological basis and then evaluated the students’ degree of transgender prejudice. Those exposed to the article with the most bioessentialist view demonstrated increased prejudice toward transgender individuals.

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The other problem with the bioessentialist perspective is the support it lends to arguments that there is something broken or fixable about transgender individuals. One article published in 2018 in Clinical Psychopharmacology and Neuroscience claims that the [brain structure differences](#) found in transgender individuals arise from their chosen lifestyle and that “transgender individuals can be driven toward culturally contextualized behaviors ... and can be adapted to their original biological gender through trying to enjoy a natural sexual relationship.” This is a clear example of the biological essentialist perspective being used to argue for and justify a “cure”—in this case, what sounds like the equivalent of conversion therapy.

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