



## CANELA



## STUDY GUIDE

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## **Canela**

Áyax Grandi, an architect from the city of Rosario, Argentina decided at the age of 48 to become Canela. This film takes us through Canela's journey as she struggles between being true to herself and conforming to societal norms. Fueled by this inner conflict, Canela embarks on a profound quest for self-discovery, seeking guidance from healthcare professionals, confiding in her children, and reconnecting with old friends. Along this path, Canela stumbles upon a surprising revelation about her desires.

## **About Argentina**

Argentina is a country in South America. It borders Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, and the Atlantic Ocean. It is the world's eighth-largest country and has a population of about 46 million people. A third of them live in its capital city, Buenos Aires. The majority of the population is of European and Mestizo (mixed European and Amerindian) ancestry. The country is a presidential representative democratic republic.<sup>1</sup>

## **Definition of Transgender**

Transgender is a term used for a person whose gender identity or expression is different to the one they were born with. Gender identity means a person's internal sense of being a female, a male, or another gender. Gender expression is the way they show that identity to other people and can include things like the way they dress or do their hair, or the way they act. Some transgender people do not identify as either exclusively male or female, but as a combination of both, or as something completely outside these two categories. These people often refer to themselves as nonbinary. Just like non-transgender people, transgender people have many different sexual orientations, such as gay, straight, lesbian, asexual, and bisexual.

Sex and gender are two different things. The American Psychological Association explains, "Sex is assigned at birth, refers to one's biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. These influence the ways that people act, interact, and feel about themselves."<sup>2</sup> The organization points out that biological sex characteristics are generally the same throughout different cultures, but gender aspects can differ significantly depending on the culture.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Argentina—Country Summary," The World Factbook, updated December 11, 2023. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/argentina/summaries/>

<sup>2</sup> American Psychological Association, "Understanding Transgender People, Gender Identity and Gender Expression," updated June 6, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/transgender-people-gender-identity-gender-expression>

## **Gender Transition**

Gender transition is the process of transitioning from the identity that a person was thought to have at birth, to their true gender identity. This process varies widely. It can include changing a person's name, pronoun (such as "he," "she," or "they"), appearance, and clothing. It can also include hormone therapy or surgery. The National Center for Transgender Equality stresses, "Gender transition looks different for every person." It says, "No specific set of steps is necessary to 'complete' a transition—it's a matter of what is right for each person."<sup>3</sup>

Hormone therapy involves taking hormones that help a person's body become more like that of the gender with which they identify. There are both masculinizing hormone therapy and feminizing hormone therapy. For feminizing therapy, patients typically take medicine that block male hormones, and also take female hormones, which can help them achieve a more feminine appearance, such as breasts, rounder hips, and reduced body hair.

Some transgender people also choose to have surgery in order to make their bodies look more like the gender identity that they have. There are many different types of surgery. For example, some people have surgery to their face or chest. There is also gender affirmation surgery, where doctors reconstruct the genitalia. For transgender people who choose to get vaginal reconstruction, recovery typically takes many weeks, and fully regaining all nerve feeling can take a year or more, or many not happen at all.

## **Transgender Rights in Argentina**

Argentina is widely seen as a world leader in transgender rights. In 2012 it passed the Gender Identity Law, which allows transgender people to change their names and the gender marker on their official identification. In contrast, many other countries impose requirements like divorce or medical treatments first. In some nations, being transgender is even criminalized. Argentina's laws also gives transgender people free access to transgender-related healthcare, under both public and private healthcare systems, including hormones and surgery.

In 2021, Argentina passed another law supporting the rights of transgender people. This law was intended to support access to employment, through tax benefits for employers, and a 1 percent quota for transgender employees in federal jobs. Following the passage of the 2021 law, one

Argentinian reporter explained that access to jobs has historically been a challenge for the transgender community there, and that it is hoped that the new law will change this. He says, "The general statistics that they said while they were debating the law is that as many as 90% of the trans population never had a formal job. A lot of trans people, especially trans women, are forced

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<sup>3</sup> National Center for Transgender Equality, "Frequently Asked Questions," no date.

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people>

to go into prostitution. And these sort of initiatives that will give them access to public sector jobs will be able to change their lives, and that's what everybody I talked to said.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite supportive laws such as these, transgender people in Argentina are often discriminated against. According to a World Bank blog post, this discrimination has even had a significant impact on how long transgender people live. The authors state, “Life expectancy in the Transgender community in Argentina is lower than 40 years old versus the 76 years national average.” It explains, “Stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion have all contributed to this disparity, limiting personal and professional growth opportunities.”<sup>5</sup> According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme, many transgender people in Argentina live in poverty, and a significant percentage of transgender women earn a living as sex workers.<sup>6</sup>

## Additional Resources

### Books

- Kike Arnal, *Revealing Selves: Transgender Portraits from Argentina*. New York: The New Press, 2018.
- Jami K. Taylor, *The Remarkable Rise of Transgender Rights*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.

### Online Sources

- American Psychological Association, “Understanding Transgender People, Gender Identity and Gender Expression,” updated June 6, 2023.  
<https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/transgender-people-gender-identity-gender-expression>
- Cleveland Clinic, “Gender Affirmation (Confirmation) or Sex Reassignment Surgery,” updated May 31, 2021.  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/21526-gender-affirmation-confirmation-or-sex-reassignment-surgery>
- Economist, “Argentina Passes an Affirmative-Action Law for Trans People,” July 31, 2021.  
<https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2021/07/31/argentina-passes-an-affirmative-action-law-for-trans-people>

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Politi, quoted in interview with Lulu Garcia-Navarro, “Argentina Goes Further to Protect LGBTQ Rights With New Law On Trans Employment,” NPR, August 8, 2021.  
<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/08/1025845759/argentina-goes-further-to-protect-lgbtq-rights-with-new-law-on-trans-employment>

<sup>5</sup> Mariano Ruiz, Dominik Koehler, Enrique Alasino, and Santiago Scialabba, “Empowering Transgender and Non-Binary Students Through Education,” World Bank Blogs, November 7, 2023.  
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/transgender-non-binary-students-argentina>

<sup>6</sup> Agustín Colque, Juana González Lobo, and Lucía Pavón, “Travesti-Transgender Population in Argentina: Situation in the Face of the Covid-19 Pandemic,” United Nations Development Programme, May 26, 2020.  
<https://www.undp.org/latin-america/blog/travesti-transgender-population-argentina-situation-face-covid-19-pandemic>

- National Center for Transgender Equality, “Understanding Transgender People: The Basics,” January 27, 2023.  
<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-transgender-people-the-basics>
- Francisco Fernández Romero, “Beyond Identity: Redistributive Transgender Rights in Argentina,” *Revista Harvard Review of Latin America*, November 22, 2023.  
<https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/beyond-identity-redistributive-transgender-rights-in-argentina/>
- United Nations, “The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons,” no date.  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/struggle-trans-and-gender-diverse-persons>

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