

Adopting a global perspective, explore how being trans can be understood.

“Trans is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned.” (Stonewall.2019). Trans “ understood as an umbrella term encompassing those whose gender identity differs substantially from that ascribed to their biological sex, trans includes identities such as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, transitioned and some two-spirited people”. (Pyne, 2011). The term trans can also be referred to by the term, third gender, which Towle and Morgan states is a uniquely Western concept . (Towle & Morgan, 2002).The term third gender was believed to have been introduced in 1975, by M K Martin and Barbara Voorhies. (Towle & Morgan, 2002) . Herdt and Morgan article, which was full of ethnographic ammunition stated , “ that they were “born [not into the wrong body but] into the wrong culture”(Towle & Morgan, 2002). Towle & Morgan believe that the “ “ third” gender concept encourages Westerners to make poorly informed assumptions about the meaning and significance of gender dynamics in non - Western societies”. (Towle & Morgan, 2002).

We need to remember, that trans identities are extremely diverse and that trans people are able to choose and can identify in many different ways . It should also be noted that one’s sexual orientation does not reflect on one’s gender. Many people often assume that being trans is thinking and feeling and believing that you are the opposite sex, whilst this of course may be true for some, this is certainly not the case for all. An example of this could be that a trans individual may refer to themselves as non binary. It should also be noted that not all trans people will want or feel the need to fully transition or even embark on any transition at all, the choice should always be down totally to ,that of the individual. Whilst surgery may be part of the transition for some, others may change the pronouns they use ,to be known by and/ or their appearance.

The oppression that trans people around the world suffer from , differs according to their various position of race, class, gender and the area of the world they inhabit. However as familiar to many minority groups, the trans communities face exclusions on enormous proportions. This is perhaps no surprise, when we live in a world ruled by heterosexist patriarchy..Perhaps even the order of the letters of LGBT, itself shows the hierarchy within.

Around the world the terminology may be different, but gender variance have long existed and continue to thrive to this day.

Dating back to the Middle Ages, Transgender can be seen illustrated, through Art, literature and medicine. Examples of this can be seen in the story of “ The Life of Mary/Marinos” (Betancourt/Getty , 2019). This story found popularity across the whole of the medieval Christian world. “ this story gives us a typical narrative for a transgender ,monk, in which there is some form of family crisis; entry into a monastery; conflict ; accusation or outing of their birth assigned sex; and eventual resolution, usually after death”. (Betancourt/Getty, 2019) . Along with many other stories from this early Christian and medieval world , we need to accept that transgender is by no means some kind of modern phenomenon. “ a reality which, if we choose not to accept it, also denies the lives of transgender people today - then we must recognize that these saints and other related figures could have been people that did not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth”. (Betancourt/Getty, 2019).

In ancient Indian culture over millennia, the trans people have played an important part. The royal courtyards of the Mughal emperors gave imperatives roles to them and we can also

see trans people widely portrayed in famous Hindu religious scriptures . This fact becomes all the more relevant when we note that Hinduism is considered the oldest of all the religions of the world and it can be traced back as far as 5000 BC, with over 900 million people worldwide following this faith. They worship nearly 330 million gods and goddesses. (Agoramoorthy/Hsu,2015). One of these ,Shiva, has various appearances with one of these being Ardhanari, which is shown in the form as half man and half women. This manifestation of the two bodies split down the middle ,can still be seen in many Hindu temples today. Problems and discrimination of the trans communities along with the beginning of transphobia, only started to appear with the British colonialism (of the countries which now form part of what is known as the Commonwealth) which started in the eighteenth century, when the trans community started to be treated as a criminal element of their society . It was not until 2014 that the Indian Supreme Court made what was a landmark ruling and declared that all trans people must be given access to equal opportunities in society. This legislation has proved to have given very little support and help to the trans community, with them still forced to live on the fringes of modern day Indian society . If it had not been for Colonisation , life would have been very different. Most trans people in India come from poor families, even though trans people come from across a wide spectrum of economical backgrounds, maybe “ trans people who are from economically well - off families might be concerned about inheritance issues and losing out on financial support if they were to assert their gender openly” and “they become economically, socially, and politically disposed as a result of their trans identity”. (Semmalar,2014).

The trans communities is not only diverse, but there are many local terms of reference for them, these include hijra, kothi, mangalamukhi, mhirunangai, paiyyan, aravani, kinnar, shiv shaktis, thirunambis and bhaiyya.

Historically in India, trans women organise themselves into houses or gharanas, of which there are seven major ghaaranas spread across to whole of India and these carry out the role of a major support system for the hijra community. Agrawal stated that a “ “real Hijra”is a castrated individual and not “just” an effeminate or crossdressing male”. (Towle & Morgan, 2002).

In Kuwait (which was under British rule from 1899 until 1961) and Yemen (from which the British Empire did not withdraw from until 1967) trans people were traditionally recognised for many centuries. However due to the British rule, the existence of trans people was erased. Life for a trans person in these countries is extremely dangerous. Not only are they subjected to violence, often inflicted on them by the state, but “ trans women experience violence at the hand of the police and are then be put into male prisons , here they face sexual violence”. (Parsons/PinkNews,2021). Western society often point to Islam as being extreme, but it should be noted that before colonisation it was far more tolerant of all gender - diverse groups. “ but after colonisation there was a strict order : this is what a women should look like, this is what a man should look like and no one should cross the lines”. (Parsons/PinkNews, 2021)

In Africa pre colonisation ,again as in other areas, trans people where again seen as divine and were celebrated, but since British colonisation and the spread of fundamentalist Christian attitudes (in 1910 Christians made up approximately 9% of the population of sub Saharan Africa but by 2010 this figure had reached 63% (Buckle/Stonewall 2020), Africa too has become less tolerant and far more dangerous for trans and gender non - conforming people. “ What (Africa) practices now would be seen as Victorian patriarchy”. (Parsons/ PinkNews, 2021). “ many Africans now believe that an anti - gay attitude is one of their culture. So much so that former Zimbabwean President Mugabe labelled homosexuality as a “ white disease””.(Buckle/Stonewall,2020). Africa has gone from being one of the most

relaxed in their recorded history, with their attitude to gender fluidity , to becoming one of the most difficult continents to be LGBT in.

In 2009 Pakistan was one of the first countries to show progress ,in a country where homosexuality has been criminalised since 1860, finally they legally recognised the “third gender” and with this, they began the process to start to end the colonial legacy of transphobia. Still under the colonial- era British law, gay sex still remains illegal. More strides are being taken and in 2020 the Pakistan government agreed to extend free healthcare to all trans people.

In some cultures, including Native American cultures, transgender people (known also as “ two spirit “) were not only accepted but revered” and “ gender shifting and homosexuality were once accepted on what is now American land”. (Towle & Morgan, 2002), this differs from the Hijras, who whilst known well in India, they are yet to be even accepted and revered universally.

America does not have any comprehensive federal non - discrimination law, worryingly state legislatures across the whole country are debating and passing , “ legislation specifically designed to prohibit trans people from accessing public bathrooms that correspond with our gender identity, or creating exemptions based on religious beliefs that would allow discrimination against LGBTQ people”. (HRC Foundation, 2023). These state legislations will only facilitate growing violence and discrimination against the transgender community in America and further reaching. In a country that likes to see itself as progressive, these actions encourage backwards steps as opposed to forward thinking. Again we see that trans people live in poverty and the rates are higher, if you are a trans person of colour.

We see the issue of women’s shelters unwillingness to house trans women also in the united States, with only 30% of women’s shelters willing to house trans women. (HRC, 2023), yet figures in the united states show that “54% of trans people have experienced some form of intimate partner violence”. (HRC, 2023)

In 2014 only 25% of people in the United States supported trans rights, by 2019 this support had increased to 62%. (HRC, 2023). The implications for trans people in the United States are far reaching and effect nearly all aspects of everyday life. Research has shown “ 49% of trans adults, and 55% of trans adults of colour said they were unable to vote in at least one election in their life because of fear of or experiencing discrimination at the polls”.(HRC, 2023)

In Britain the Gender Recognition Act 2004 is in place, this act provides transexual people with legal recognition in their acquired gender, this however can only happen once the Gender Recognition Panel has issued a full gender recognition certificate. The individual must satisfy the panel that, “ has, or has had, gender dysphoria, has lived in the acquired gender throughout the proceeding two years, and intends to continue to live in the acquired gender until death”.(Gov.uk, 2023). The certificate also enables the individual to obtain a new birth certificate , which in turn could if required , enable them to marry another individual of the opposite gender. Whilst Britain is seen as far more accepting towards trans people, the trans community continues still however to receive transphobic abuse and violence.

Recently the writer J K Rowling has been drawn into and has seen as fuelling discriminatory attitudes towards trans people, with her views, seen by some as transphobic and has been accused of being TERTery (being a Trans - Exclusionary Radical Feminist). One of the

issues that Rowling has aired is the safety of sis women and the worry of abuse from trans women.

Rowling's view is that trans women are not women, but she sees them as men, she believes that men are going to use the idea of being able to change their gender, so they can access women spaces and abuse women. Are we really to believe that a man would go through months and months of counselling, re-alignment surgery and then change all their official documentation just to access women's spaces, if a man wanted to access these spaces then would he not just do that anyway, or perhaps seek employment which would enable this. We see issues around female prisons and the risk if trans women are allowed to serve sentences in them, due to the risk that they may abuse the sis women inmates, yet a sis male can easily become a prison guard in a female prison.

"Gender conforming men will take advantage of free ability to change one's gender in order to harass women" (J K Rowling only refers to sis women here and when she is talking about men, again she only means sis men.)

Rowling stated that "all I'm asking - all I want - is for similar empathy, similar understanding, to be extended to the many millions of women whose sole crime is wanting their concerns to be heard without receiving threats and abuse". (Rowling, 2020). The need to bring all aspects of the community together is vital and not to ignite more hate towards the trans community.

"It's also crucial for Western communities to broaden our understanding of trans identities at a global scale. This helps us to recognise and unlearn Eurocentric understanding of gender, to understand the long-lasting impacts of colonialism on citizens of post-colonial countries, and to challenge ongoing racial injustices worldwide. After all, trans and non-binary identities are not a new or unique to any one demographic." (Aplin/Stonewall, 2023) Simone de Beauvoir's statement "one is not born, but becomes a woman". (De Beauvoir, 1949), question the construction of gender identity. Others perhaps need to be more tolerant and respect individuals' choices, to become who or indeed what they choose and it is not for others to judge or impose their views on.

We still see many countries have historical injustice, with laws still in place against transgender people. "But no one is willing to see it as a holistic historical injustice and see that all countries of the commonwealth, this particular law is generated from Colonisation". (Parsons/PinkNews, 2021).

Trans people suffer from stigma, harassment, discrimination and violence, for being just who they are.

Trans people need more of a voice," it is important to encourage, rather than silence, people willing to engage in an important conversation. (Towle/Morgan, 2002). It is worth remembering, that you get more out of people when you listen, others have a voice as well. Why is it that people have to align to the narrative of the Eurocentric world. "We are ultimately invested in ensuring careful, responsible representation of individuals outside of our culture". (Towle/Morgan, 2002). Individuals living in a certain situation will have an understanding and need to be listened to, in order to progress, learn and move forward. Trans Day of Visibility takes place every year on March 31st, "it makes time to celebrate trans and non-binary people, and to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by the community worldwide". (Aplin/Stonewall, 2023.) This day highlights the issues and prejudices, that the trans community are faced with and gives them a crucial visibility. "Visibility allows communities to bloom, and for people with shared lived experiences to form bonds across borders". (Aplin/Stonewall, 2023). Further legal recognition and medical access, are just two points that need to be moved forward, to enable the trans community to have greater acceptance.

As previously shown there are many different ways of understanding the term trans. We need to understand that "Western binary gender systems are neither universal nor innate." (Towle/Morgan, 2002) which will give us an important start. Western society has pushed us over time, to feel the need to fit into a male or female role, giving very little movement for

any other role. Western cultures have been seen to have woven, “campaigns of hatred and bigotry” (Towle & Morgan, 2002) and “this has been imposed on colonised people all over the world”.(Towle & Morgan, 2002). We need to continue the work that is required ,to enable all to be treated fair and equal, with the need for others to show more understanding of someones ideas and beliefs, which even though these may differ from their own views and understanding, they are still as valid. You don’t have to be the product of what brought you up, you can make a different choice! You always have options and you need to remember, You are you and that means that you can be what you choose, the choice is yours. Finally many people in society need to remember and be aware ,that being trans is not a lifestyle choice ! Many , many trans people suffer violence, prejudice and discrimination, just for being them.

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