

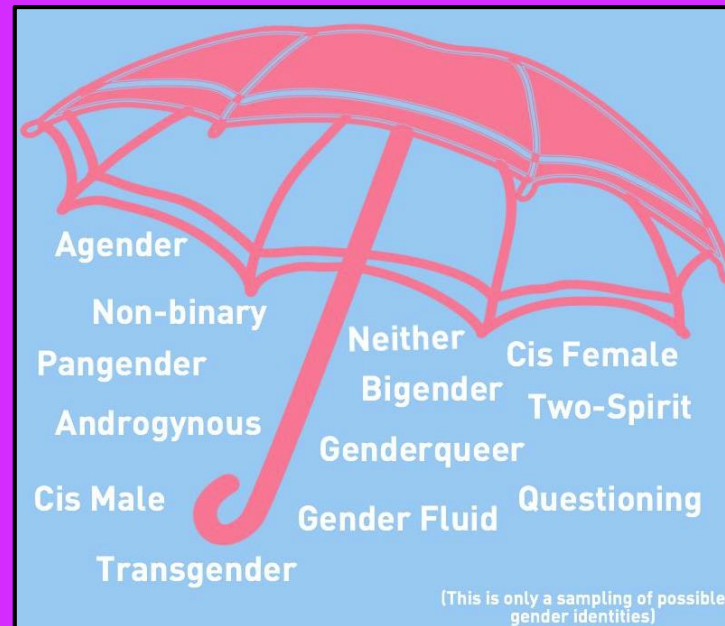
Is Gender a Choice?

Introduction

Gender is a broad topic; however, the focus of the presentation will only be looking at the question is gender a choice? The argument of gender is commonly viewed as a debate of biology vs psychology.

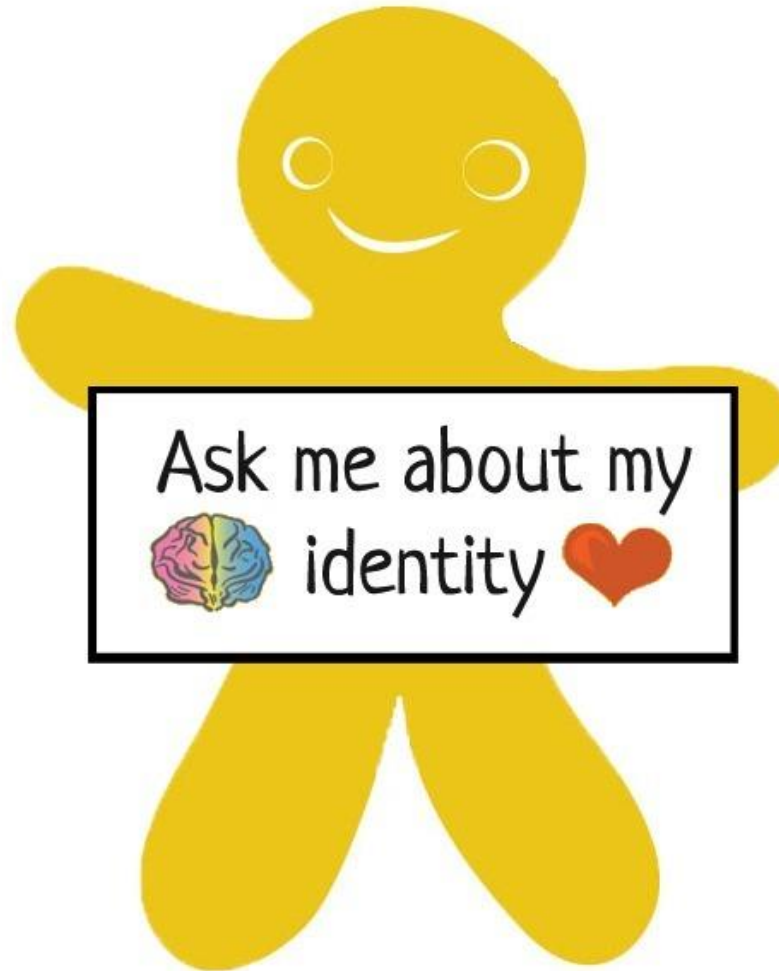
Gender Dysphoria and Gender

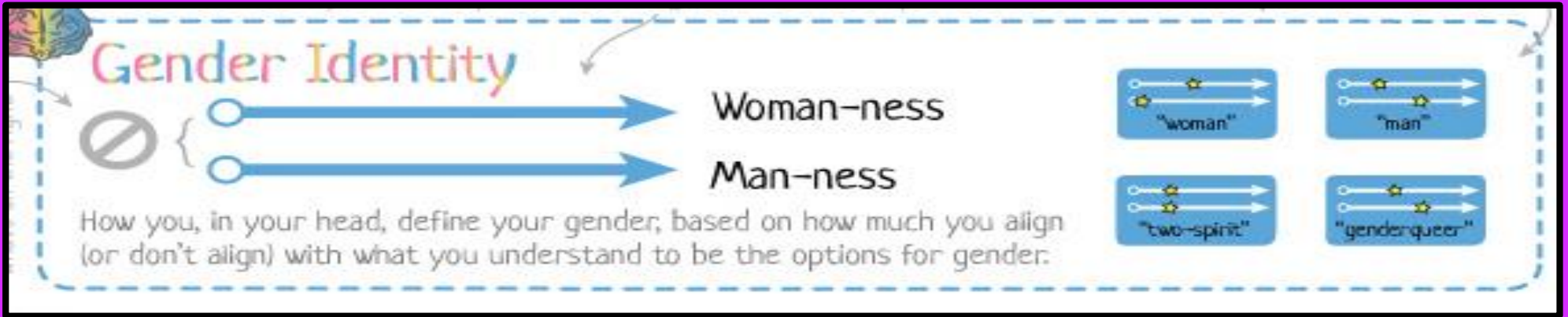
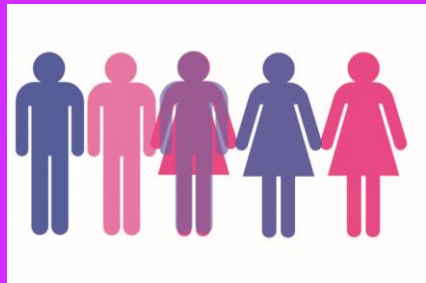
On average it has been suggested that five times more men are diagnosed with gender dysphoria than women. People with gender dysphoria can experience many different psychological symptoms such as anxiety, discomfort and sometimes hatred towards their own body, because they know their gender identity is different from what was assigned to them at birth. (Blunden & Dale, 2009). Gender identity and biological sex is usually the same for most people known as the term cis-gender, however it is not the case for everyone (nhs.uk, 2019) Gender dysphoria is known as a complex condition and some of the gender terms that are used to explain gender are transsexualism, transvestism and genderqueer, which is a umbrella term used to describe different gender identities (nhs.uk, 2019).



The Genderbread Person, revised

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Gender isn't binary. Gender's not even a spectrum or a continuum. Gender is a complex concept of n-dimensions that varies wildly from person to person. The only way to understand a person's gender is to ask them.





PSYCHOLOGY

Compared to the cis-gender youth, the gender minority youth have poorer health outcomes in Western societies as they feel they do not have a choice in expressing their gender identity as it does not comply with conforming to social norms. (Steinke, Root-Bowman, Estabrook, Levine & Kantor, 2016)

Through a qualitative interview, a 19-year-old transgender woman expressed her feelings as...“It really hurts to go through this, all of this and not have anyone to talk to about it, not have anybody who understands, and not to see yourself, to be invisible and to be erased and to be silenced, and so on...” (Transgender women, 19) (Steinke et al, 2016).

However, it has been suggested that supporting Transgender and nonconforming gender is often challenging as assessment and treatments are complex and controversial, and practitioners only have minimal understandings of the science underlying the phenomenology (Edwards-Leeper & Leibowitz, 2016).

Over the past 5 years the NHS has seen a 240% increase in the referral of gender dysphoria with roughly 7500 adults waiting for a first appointment (Torjesen, 2018).

There has been a controversy surrounding gender identity where transgender activists claim gender identity is innate and unchanging, while denying any assumptions of biology, suggesting that individuals have the right to be who they want to be, and able to express themselves formed by their inner gender identity (Anderson, 2018).

Why accept gender identity as a reality? Does this account for people who are able-bodied and identify as disabled or people who identify as animals, trans-racial or trans species? If a person's sex is inner 'gender identity', how come age, species and race are not determined by individuals inner self identity? (Anderson, 2018)

Expression/society

From a young age children start shaping and developing their identities through gender socialization. Parents provide toys to their children that deliver some of the earliest gender-based messages as children are usually encouraged to play with toys associated with their gender such as dolls and trucks (Boel & Woods, 2018).

As can be seen gender conformity starts very young through gender socialization. Science has classified people into two categories which are male and female, however if a person does not fit into either category, they could face numerous difficulties in society (Callahan, 2009).

Individuals are forced to deal with many issues that make society such as policies having the right to refuse changes on birth certificates, drivers licenses, several schools and occupations have specific gendered dress codes, having the right to marry, the right to adopt children, and coping with rejection from family and friends (Dietert & Dentice, 2009).

Transgenders and gender non-conforming human rights are increasing in western societies, for example in March 2016, North Carolina passed a legislation permitting students to use gender specific toilets that align with their 'gender identity' not the gender that was assigned to them by their birth sex (Powell, Shapiro, & Stein, 2016).

It's important to consider that every individual has the right to flourish in their communities, no matter if they identify as cis gender, transgender or gender non-conforming, every person has the freedom to learn, get along with others and also connect with others in the workplace, home and in any public setting while having the sense of survival and security (Torjesen, 2018).



Biology

Schools have taught students from a young age that chromosomes XX and YX determine a baby's sex, XX is the biological sex for a girl and XY is the biological sex for a boy (Nationaldemographic.com,2019).

Researchers suggest people who identify as transgender may have a certain type of brain that does not align with their gender assigned at birth, however it may align with the gender they identify as, it has been suggested that the size of the hypothalamus and the gray matter is different in different genders (Manning,Fink,& Trivers, 2018.,Svedholm-Häkkinen, Ojala, & Lindeman, 2018).

Dr. Paul McHugh, the university Distinguished Service Professor of Psychiatry school of medicine suggests that transgendered men do not become women, they become feminized men, while transgender women do not become men they become masculine females, changing appearances does not change biology. (Anderson, 2018).

The term biological sex is no longer accepted as part of society as it is suggested to be harmful towards trans people, the term that is now considered appropriate is assigned at birth, as it provides a better and more accurate description of gender (Anderson, 2018). A real world example; Laverne Cox was the 'first out trans person' to be featured on the front cover of a magazine, however the magazine was criticized for using a simplistic and out of date understanding of biology and failure to acknowledged that biological sex is something that is assigned at birth, not something individuals are born with (Anderson,2018).



Conclusion

To conclude whether gender is a choice, literature has suggested that individuals do have the right to express their gender identity, however there are limitations to those choices for example health care and the lack of resources available, discrimination for not conforming to social gender norms and being targets for victimization for example being harassed, physically assaulted and verbally abused.

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