

AUTISMY & GENDER DYSPHORIA



Dr. Wenn B Lawson PhD CPsychol

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS PRESENTATION



A discussion on
AS, gender & gender dysphoria

WHO AM I?

When looking out upon the world
I see as any might,
The things I notice, boy or girl
Are captured within my sight.



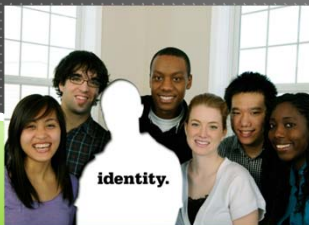
WHO AM I?

When looking out upon the world
I feel as any might
My heart can hurt, ache or break
My senses heightened, set or curled
I live through day and night.



WHO AM I?

- ▶ But, as you look in upon my world
- ▶ Your head might judge, your eyes not see,
- ▶ The true reality that makes up me.

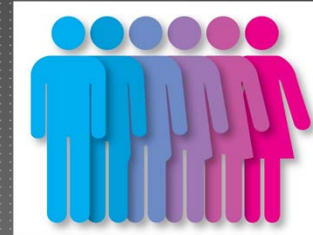


WHO AM I?

Flesh and bone of body image
May not make the man
The clothes I wear, may cause a stare,
My choices may confuse.
But what if she is not I am?
What if he is not a man?

WHO AM I?

This binary world imposed
Is set by those who propose,
Male and female is set in time
When reality says there's not one line.



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AUTISM

► Autism is not one thing. There are 'the autisms'; autism is a spectrum.

It means:

Being single minded: focussed on things of interest to the individual.

Separating issues, therefore, social, public, private **etc. can be difficult....**



AS

- ▶ In autism we may not notice other, or be aware of public and private as 'different'.
- ▶ Not notice when some behaviours are encouraged or discouraged
- ▶ Our attention might be elsewhere **focussed.**



NEUROLOGICALLY TYPICAL (NT) OR THE AUTISM SPECTRUM (AS)?

- ▶ None of us are great at accepting difference.
- ▶ But, NT's may notice more of the big picture
- ▶ In autism we may notice less of the bigger picture
- ▶ In autism gender & sexuality more fluid. This maybe one reason for **statistics** on autism & Gender Dysphoria?

GENDER

- ▶ One's internal sense of gender identity may be different to one's sexual orientation
- ▶ gender dysphoria is biological and caused by the development of gender identity before birth.
- ▶ The condition is not a mental illness.
- ▶ Your biological sex is determined by chromosomes.
- ▶ **BUT**, the biological sex (as determined physically by the reproductive organs and genitals) could be male, while the gender identity (as determined by the brain) **could be female & vice versa.**

GENDER AWARENESS & CONCEPTS?

- ▶ gender is often not well understood. prejudices/belief systems tell us that the body dictates the gender
- ▶ Need to be 'in tune' with the individual
- ▶ That means – observing, putting aside one's own agenda, and working 'with' the **individual.**



RECOGNISING SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- ▶ Just like with recognising AS, we need to recognise individual gender and sexuality.
- ▶ Because gender is also a spectrum, it is not black and white
- ▶ We only have two words in English – male and female to represent gender.
- ▶ **But reality is quite different.**

GENDER DYSPHORIA: DSM 5

- ▶ For a person to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria, there must be a marked difference between the individual's expressed/experienced gender and the gender others would assign him or her, and it must continue for at least six months. In children, the desire to be of the other gender must be present and verbalized. This condition causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- ▶ Gender dysphoria is manifested in a variety of ways, including strong desires to be treated as the other gender or to be rid of one's sex characteristics, or a **strong conviction that one has feelings and reactions typical of the other gender.**

GENDER DYSPHORIA

- ▶ Therefore, gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. Biological sex is assigned at birth, depending on the appearance of the genitals.
- ▶ www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/Pages/Introduction.aspx

GD, IN THE MIND OR IN THE BRAIN: PSYCHOLOGY V BIOLOGY

- ▶ Findings from neuroimaging studies focusing on brain structure suggest that the brain phenotypes of trans women (MtF) and trans men (FtM) differ in various ways from control men and women with feminine, masculine, demasculinized and defeminized features:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26766406>

GD AND MENTAL HEALTH

- ▶ Over 40% of trans individuals living with GD attempt suicide (see:
- ▶ http://www.getconnected.org.uk/get_help/gender_and_sexual_identity/transvestites_and_transsexuals?gclid=CLyrzbTEqMUCFYgfwwodQI4ALQ
- ▶ <http://www.translifeline.org/>
- ▶ **Autism & GD:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIFSeq9LxnQ>

ASC & GD DEBATE

- ▶ <http://www.alternet.org/personal-health/what-my-female-born-transgender-autistic-brother-can-teach-you-about-how-we>
- ▶ Some debate the studies actually show a reasonably strong link to AS & Gender dysphoria. Most studies exhibit Low Power.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-red-light-district/201411/link-between-autism-and-gender-dysphoria>

GD INCIDENCE IN AS

- ▶ But, the studies to date show GD is more likely to impact autistic individuals than those in the non-autistic population:
- ▶ J Autism Dev Disord. 2018 Feb 9. doi: 10.1007/s10803-018-3480-6
- ▶ Therefore, we need to understand what this might mean for this population and be prepared **with the right support.**

SPECIAL INTEREST; OCD, BEING SINGLE MINDED?

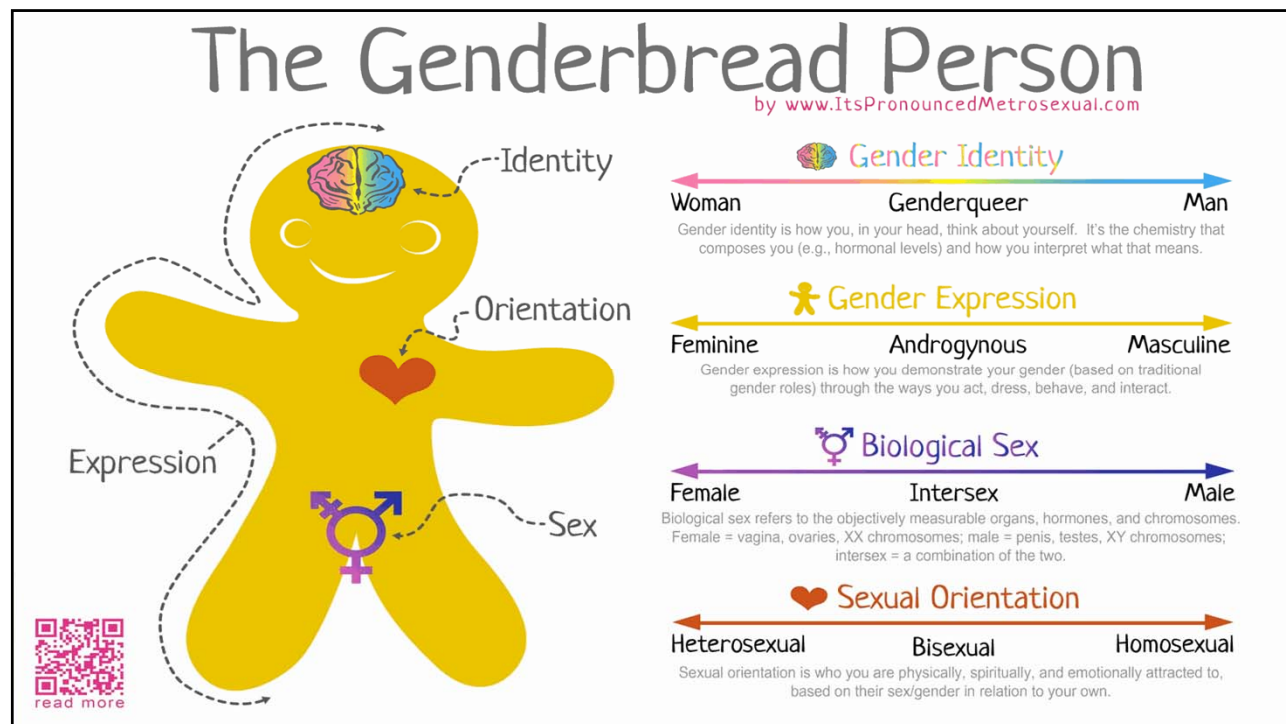
- ▶ A Boy who loves soft material and plays only with girls says 'I like soft things, I play with dolls with long hair, & I play with girls, I must be a girl'.
- ▶ Another says: I love dresses and drawing... girls wear dresses, I must be a girl.
- ▶ Actually, the above single minded thinking is related more to autism than to gender ID.

DREW SAYS:

- ▶ “I’ve recently been making exciting and very daunting discoveries about my gender. As a result, I currently identify as “30% ‘George Clooney’ and 70% ‘Georgina Clueless’”. I’m frantically researching all the posh names for where I’m at and I’m guessing that I’m non-binary / genderqueer with a degree of gender fluidity. Essentially, I live on Planet Drew, which has an erratic rotation around the Gender System. We’re currently quite close to Venus. I’m an adult fan of Lego, a sci-fi geek, Doctor Who fan and the occasional gamer. I’ve also discovered that I can ‘do’ **liquid eyeliner, which is nice!**

GENDER & AN INTERSEXED BRAIN?

- ▶ Ones internal sense of gender identity may be different to one’s sexual orientation
- ▶ gender dysphoria is biological and caused by the development of gender identity before birth.
- ▶ The condition is not a mental illness.
- ▶ Your biological sex is determined by chromosomes.
- ▶ **BUT**, the biological sex (as determined physically by the reproductive organs and genitals) could be male, while the gender identity (as determined by the brain) **could be female & vice versa.**



GENDER DYSPHORIA

- ▶ **Gender dysphoria is not diagnosed if the symptoms co-occur with a physical or intersex condition (mixed chromosomes and/or genitalia).**
- ▶ **Gender dysphoria is not the same as only liking to dress in opposite sex clothing. There is so much more to it!**

GENDER DYSPHORIA

- ▶ Brain body discrepancy
- ▶ Observations
- ▶ Research
- ▶ General conversations
- ▶ Gut feeling
- ▶ **Letting go of prejudice**

SPECIAL INTEREST IN AS?

- ▶ **Is there an apparent obsession with wishing they were a girl or a boy opposite to their physical features?**
- ▶ **Is this story they give a life story not just an obsession?**
- ▶ **Much harder to tell in AS than in typical development due to single minded disposition**

OBSERVATION

- ▶ Looking for separate interest that is gender biased is a clue
- ▶ Wishing they were a girl, dressing in girls clothes, wanting dolly, pram etc. as opposed to just wanting to wear dresses, stroke soft material.. Etc.
- ▶ **Parents need to watch for the clues but also make informed connections.**

AUTISM EDUCATION MEANS 'US' TOO

- ▶ We can work hard to understand the autism spectrum
- ▶ We can work hard to assist our kids build social skills and propriety
- ▶ We can work hard to develop appropriate values, knowledge and beliefs
- ▶ We must also check for any unwanted baggage that is clouding our thinking and preventing us from seeing.
- ▶ **Once we see the baggage we can deal with it**

CONCLUSION

- ▶ Typical gender and typical sexuality – there is no such thing!
- ▶ Learning to 'let go of prejudice' and note an individual's disposition is critical
- ▶ Teenage years, depression, suicide, mental illness often linked to gender and sexuality issues
- ▶ **Being** aware – prevention is better than **cure!**

WWW.WENNLAWSON.COM

- ▶ My home page has info on the autism spectrum, but also links to resources.
- ▶ Sharing our own stories with each other gives perspective on issues of gender & sexuality.
- ▶ Perhaps things we thought were taboo were really our own fears?
- ▶ We only accept others in as far as we first **accept ourselves.**

SOME RESOURCES

- ▶ <http://www.news-medical.net/health/Causes-of-Gender-Dysphoria.aspx>
- ▶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/04/gender-dysphoria-dsm-5_n_3385287.html
- ▶ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Gender-dysphoria/Pages/Causes.aspx>
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEXL908cqAw>
- ▶ <https://plus.google.com/117441729018847156617/posts>
- ▶ <http://www.ps3youtube.com/user/ElectricDade>

SOME RESOURCES

- ▶ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbb-X_YWl7wuf164XQwu2pg
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/user/FinnTheInfinncible/videos>
- ▶ [WWW.wennlawson.com](http://www.wennlawson.com)

► Autistic female thought her difficulties were due to being trans:

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDdzl7nXqTs>

