



AUTISM, GENDER & SEXUALITY IDENTITY ACROSS CONTEXTS

- ▶ **What to Expect from this talk:**
- ▶ **overview of Autism**
- ▶ **gender identity in general and what we know so far in relation to autism + current issues in different contexts.**

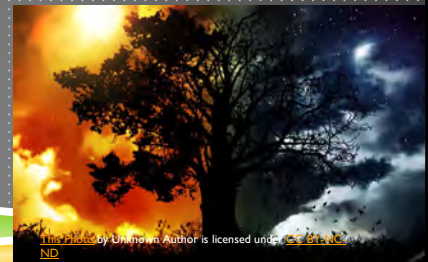
WHO AM I?

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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GENDER AND SEXUALITY ARE DIFFERENT

- ▶ Physical attributes of the body alone do not make up one's gender or sexuality
- ▶ Autism is a spectrum
- ▶ Gender and sexuality: also a spectrum

UNDERSTANDING
YOUR OWN
SEXUALITY
AND GENDER

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....

AUTISM & ATTENTION

AUTISTIC FEMALES & AUTISTIC MALES?

- ▶ Being female and autistic is poorly understood, but is autism really 'rare' in females? Historically, autism has been associated with traditionally masculine features and stereotypes of behaviour, with some believing autism only occurred in males (e.g. Kanner, 1943)



AUTISM AND GENDER

- ▶ Females differ in expression of their gender, e.g. **physical presentation**, **communicative style** and **behaviour**. Varying between **being ultra-feminine** to almost resenting any hint of stereotypical femininity, e.g. tomboys, even if you have **XX** chromosomes.
- ▶ Until recently however, the idea of females having a different profile of autism characteristics **received very little attention** (McPartland, et al 2013).



GENDER IN AUTISM

- ▶ Autism impacts communication, yet many females appear to be communicating well : **good eye contact** and so on, discrepancy's likely put down to **bad manners**, lacking in discipline, being **strong willed** or **extremely shy**. However, the very names we give to these behaviours should **give us a hint that something is different** for this **person**.

FEMALE & AUTISM

- ▶ 1 '**...She's too social** to be autistic' because she has friends or wants to have friends so she can't be autistic - **MYTH**
- ▶ 2. **She looks at me** when I speak to her so she isn't autistic **MYTH**. Girls may have good eye contact
- ▶ 3. **Girls follow the rules** – less likely to act out due to need to please others (**Often True**).
- ▶ 4. **Girls will mimic others** so they blend in but, their difficulties are often overlooked because of this (**Often True**).
- ▶ 5. **Girls may find communicating feelings unavailable to them** and may become mute within **the classroom** **TRUE**.

FEMALE & AUTISM

- ▶ 6. Girls may **not want** to be in the spotlight **want the spotlight** on them **TRUE**.
- ▶ 7. Girls may love technology, horses, animals, and friends **TRUE**.
- ▶ 8. Girls may **live their lives through others** and find personal autonomy allusive **TRUE**.
- ▶ 9. Girls **live with severe anxiety** (Often True).
- ▶ 10. Girls often **have performance issues** and won't settle for less than perfect (**Often True**).
- ▶ 11. Girls may need to twirl or spin. They may pick at their fingers, scrunch up toes or face or have to twitch, all seemingly involuntary (**Often True**).
- ▶ 12. **Strictly follow Cues** **Often True**

FEMALES & GENDER

- ▶ 13. **difficulty processing lots of information** at once. May need to do one thing at a time (Often True, **unless connected by interest**).
- ▶ 14. Girls **need consistency, structure and continuity** (Usually True).
- ▶ 15. Girls exhibit **rigid behaviour's** and **resist change** **TRUE**.
- ▶ 16. **Routine is very important**, if it changes need to have this **visually explained** or written down **TRUE**.
- ▶ 17. Girls find **body language** and **facial expressions difficult to read** **TRUE**.
- ▶ 18. **Difficulty to understand jokes or make jokes that others don't understand** **TRUE**.

FEMALES & GENDER

- ▶ 19. LOTS and LOTS of questions about life are often repeated and answers may fail to make sense (**Often True**).
- ▶ 20. Difficulty with moving on and letting negatives go, fixating on things (**Often True**).

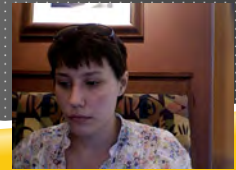


ALLISTIC OR AUTISTIC?

- ▶ None of us are great at accepting difference.
- ▶ But, allistic (non-autistic) individuals **may notice more of the bigger social picture**
- ▶ In autism we may notice less of the bigger picture, **but more detail**.
- ▶ In autism gender & sexuality more fluid. This maybe one reason for **statistics** on autism & **Gender Dysphoria?**

IN AUTISM

- ▶ 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.**



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 autism, we need to recognise individual gender and individual sexuality.
- ▶ Neither of these are set in stone.
- ▶ We only have two words in English – male and female to represent gender.
- ▶ **But reality is quite different.**

GENDER DYSPHORIA

- ▶ 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 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>

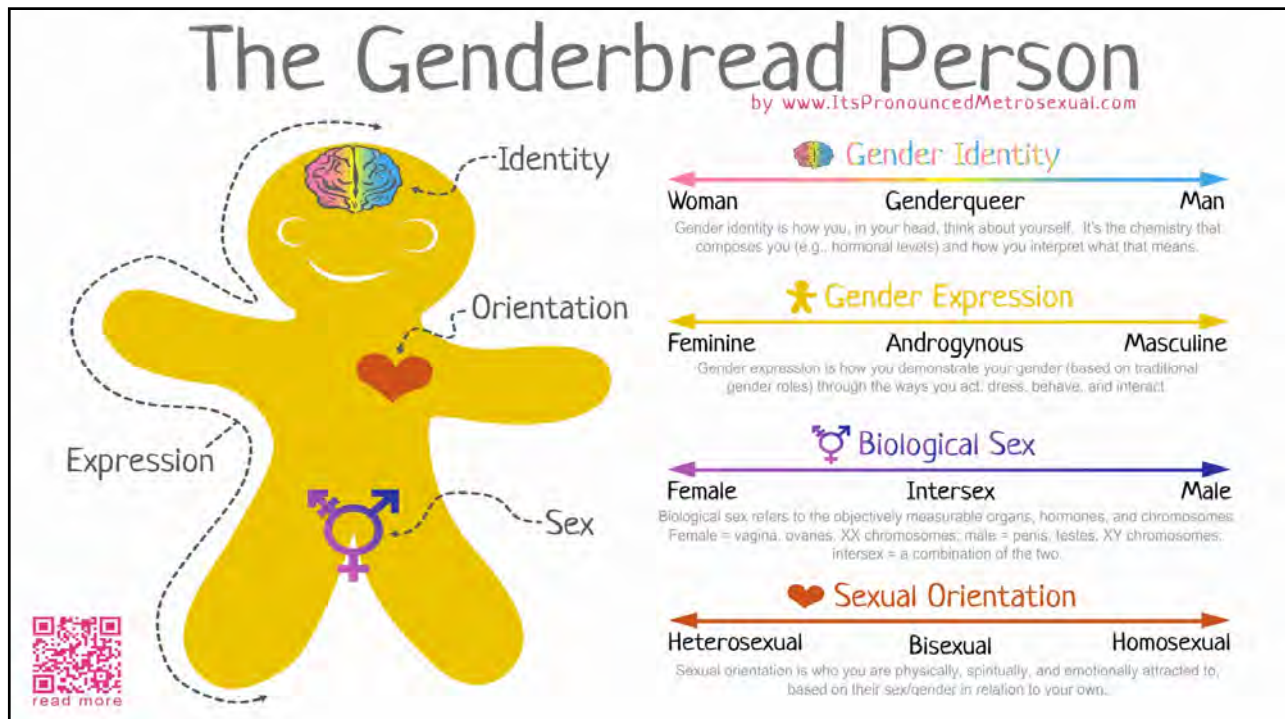


AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS ARE SEXUAL TOO

- ▶ If we don't walk with our autistic young people as they set out to discover who they are, the big Porn industries may become their default sexuality educator.
- ▶ We must have conversations with our autistic young people and not wait for that 'magic' moment.
- ▶ For more on autism and 'starting that conversation' see: <http://www.notthenorm.com>

GD INCIDENCE IN AS

- ▶ 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 and be prepared **with the right support.**



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!**

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!**

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- ▶ 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_YWI7wuf164XQwu2pg
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/user/FinnTheInfinncible/videos>
- ▶ [WWW.wennlawson.com](http://www.wennlawson.com)

AUSTRALIA'S TRANS GENDERED PRE-TEENS

▶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=baIDLK9G2fl

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

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

