

Working with transgender, non-binary and gender questioning clients: Building a gender-affirming practice – Laura Scarrone Bonhomme

Sex, Gender and Gender Identity

- What makes a man or a woman is.....Men have penises...

We may hear people say 'Trans man can't be a man as they lack a penis', or a trans man may say that they don't feel like a man as they don't have a penis. But what happens if a cyst gender man loses their genitals in accident, do they continue to be a man. Women have wombs, but many are not born with them due to genetic conditions.

BUT

Men have moustaches, but women in Latin America can.

Men have low pitched voices, but they vary and there is no specific line/measure.

Women wear dresses, but if a man of cyst gender wears one they don't automatically become a woman.

- What is sex?

XY chromosomes is male, XX is woman.

XY – creates a male reproductive system, high testosterone levels and brain differences from prolonged influence of hormones. Some differences are based on genetics and some on societal norms.

XX – creates a female reproductive system, different brain differences, high oestrogen and low testosterone.

- When were you first pronounced a boy or girl?

Normally it is from a midwife examining the genitals of baby in the uterus: up to 1cm (small) is seen as clitoris, but if 2cm or beyond they are pronounced a boy. But not everyone falls in clear male or female categories.

Immediately there are expectations placed on you based as being a boy or a girl.

If it's a boy you would be expected to.... Avoidance of femineity, self-reliance through mechanical skills, toughness, dominance, importance of sex, restrictive emotionality depending on generations etc (traditional masculine ideology, McDermott, Levant, Hammer, 2018).

If it's a girl you would be expected to.... Thinness, modesty, nice in relationships, care for children, romantic relationship, sexual fidelity, invest in appearance (Conformity to feminine norms inventory, mahalik et al, 2005).

Q. These expectations are also put on a baby, what presents do you take to a baby shower for each gender?

What do you ask children – 'are there any girls you like at school?' – immediately this is directing them one way, creating a **cisnormativity** (everyone assigned female will feel

female and vice versa) and **heteronormativity** (everyone assigned female will be attracted to the opposite sex, not including pansexual, bisexual etc)– not considering intersex.

Terms:

- In gender diversity you have 'gender diverse' or 'gender expansive'.
- Two categories of 'transgender' – binary view or 'transexual' – this term is used, but with a stigma attached so avoid using it. If a client defines themselves as this, clarify if they like this term and say normally we use transgender but what would you like.
- 'Non-binary', 'genderqueer', and 'gender non-conforming' - meaning they do not fully or only partially identify as male or female, or don't identify at all in terms of gender.

Autism and Gender Diversity

- High rate of autism and gender diversity, why?
- 0.83% of the general population are diagnosed with ASD (Autism spectrum disorders) (Vos et al, 2017).
- Out of 189 people, 11.1% reported a diagnosis of ASD in a gender diversity clinic (Evans et al, 2019)
- Between 5.5% and 26% of ASD & Gender Diversity co-occurrence (Pasterski et al, 2014; Kaltiala-Heino et al, 2015)

Theories behind these high correlations:

- Autism traits are positively associated with **elevated foetal testosterone levels** (Auyeng et al, 2009), and is also linked with the expression of masculine traits in individuals assigned female at birth
- Kristensen and Broom (2015) and Walsh et al (2018) suggest that the **ephemeral nature of societal gender restrictions** and the lesser concern for restrictive social norms means more people are able to follow their own instincts and not limit self to what society says is correct.
- Linked to interoception to a person's sense of self (Demasio, 2003; Craig, 2010) – individuals who are neural diverse are very sensitive to sounds, textures etc, this hypersensitivity may make them more likely to feel incongruence.
- Scarrone, 2019 suggests individuals who have ASC may have **higher interoceptive sensitivity**.

Transition Journey

- Not everyone that is gender-diverse decides to transition – children etc.
- NHS waiting lists are at least 3 years long but there is a bio-psycho-social transition. Often 8 assessments – assessment, therapy, speech & language therapy, hair removal, hormone suitability, HRT (asked if male or female so causes distress), double mastectomy, bottom surgery – NHS cover the cost.

Steps to living authentically:

- Coming out to people
- Changing name

- Coming to terms with one's identity
- Change of social role and presentation
- Accessing interventions

Non-permanent interventions

What can you do to feminise/masculinise yourself?

Masculinising: binder of breasts– check they use the term correctly, can they breathe and make sure it's not scarring. STP packer or strap on (some allow you to pee with them on and others are for appearance, but uncomfortable and people worry if it will fall off), make up to accentuate facial and bodily hair.

Feminising: tucking penis and testicles away to avoid a bump in clothes. However, this is uncomfortable. Can have a prosthetic vagina or vulva and prosthetic breasts.

Hormone Replacement therapy

For becoming more male - Go through puberty so have acne, hormonal, more hair etc, muscles bulk, higher sexual drive, more irritable (so hard for people with ASD where they struggle with their emotions). Can introduce mood diaries and safety plan, change in smell, hair loss, clitoral enlargement

For becoming more female – body fat redistribution, stop erection, less hair by removal, breast increase, softer skin, lower libido unless they want to explore body as in self-love, allowed to publicly cry/roller-coaster of emotions.

Surgical Interventions

Masculinising:

Double mastectomy and male chest reconstruction/neutral chest – not have nipples

Metoidioplasty – clitoral side increase and shape to get small penis

Phalloplasty – have erections and urinate

Facial masculinisation surgery – jaw implant

Feminising:

Breast augmentation surgery

Vulvoplasty – do not have vaginal cavity that allows penetration but has a clitoris so gets sensations that way

Vaginoplasty – have vaginal cavity

Facial feminisation surgery – remove forehead and jaw parts

Voice surgery – feminine voice but can be squeaky so it is not advised

Top Tips

- Data protection act is extra strong for gender recognition act - legal offence to disclose without the clients consent. Always ask the client “should I put as part of the referral about you being gender diverse?” If yes then “how much?” Never disclose without consent as it can put them at risk of violence.

- Explore the meaning and expectations clients have about disclosing their gender identity to family. Do we need a safety plan – call friend to be there? What will be a satisfactory result? A client may have questioned their identity for years, but it will be first news to their family so there is a need to manage expectations i.e maybe you can expect them to hear and not necessarily get your name right immediately.
- Explore what will the medium be for disclosing and use a mentalisation model – eg. “I would like to talk to you for the next half an hour about identity, you may be shocked, please just listen and don’t say anything and you can ask questions after”. Avoid saying about surgery too soon, not in the first conversation as this could be too much. Can say if you want to test clothing on Tuesdays when home alone or during dinner etc – negotiate the terms of your living space to avoid conflicts from change.

Questions to reflect upon?

Q. What is said about LGBTQ+ in your culture, religion or spiritual beliefs?

Eg. Wrong, damaged, fashionable, promiscuous, confused, difference is good, attention seeking, touched by the devil, sinful

Imagine hearing this in background of life or told directly in church etc

Q. What are your concerns when working with LGBTQ1+?

Eg. Mistakes, wrong language, at risk, unconscious prejudice, lack of knowledge, too affirmative, patronising due to privilege as you may be a cis person, ask what words mean that you don’t know.

Where to find support:

Children and young people:

- Gendered intelligence – summer camps, group support
- Mermaids – Clapham junction
- Chrysalis
- Free2B Alliance

Adults:

- Stonewall
- Families Together London – support to parents of LGBTQ1+

Services offering therapy free or low charge:

- London friend
- Clinic Q
- Elop
- Spectra
- Pink therapy as many practitioners in those communities

LGBTQ1+ Foundation – 0345 330 30 30 – domestic violence refuge etc

Films:

Disclosure on Netflix – portrayal of trans in film

Pray Away Netflix

Hating Peter Tatchell on Netflix – broadly speaks of rights and political movements

It's a Sin – queer backgrounds and HIV crisis

Fantastic Woman – sad but important and based in Chile

Our baby a modern miracle – BBC 4 – couple who are trans and having a baby

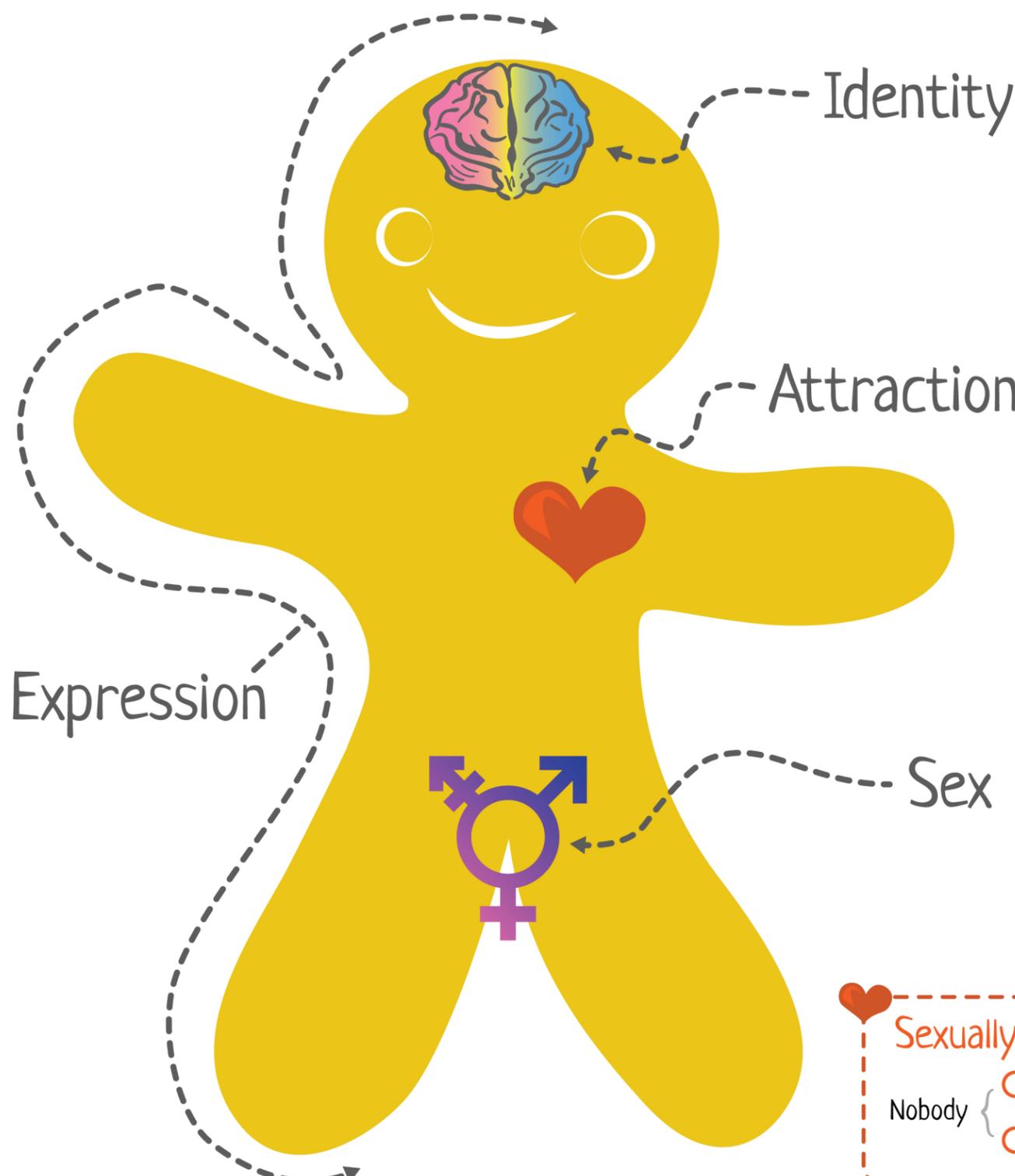
Seahorse – trans man who has a child

Book – Michael Beattie on counselling skills for working with gender diversity.

The Genderbread Person v3.3

by it's pronounced **METRO**sexual.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.



Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity; combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread. 4 (of infinite) possible plot and label combos

Gender Identity

Indicates a lack of what's on the right.

Woman-ness

Man-ness

How you, in your head, define your gender, based on how much you align (or don't align) with what you understand to be the options for gender.

Labels: "woman", "man", "two-spirit", "genderqueer"

Gender Expression

Feminine

Masculine

The ways you present gender, through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

Labels: "butch", "femme", "androgynous", "gender neutral"

Biological Sex

Female-ness

Male-ness

The physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Labels: "male", "female", "intersex", "MtF Female"

Sexually Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

Romantically Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

In each grouping, circle all that apply to you and plot a point, depicting the aspects of gender toward which you experience attraction.