

Beyond the Binary: The Power of Language

**American Association of Colleges & Universities
Diversity, Learning & Inclusive Excellence
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Our Purposes

- **Review of recent, relevant research**
- **Address conventional thinking, and the consequences of such views**
- **Identify sources of our thinking**
- **Provide localized, fallible context**
- **Provide practical terms and definitions**

Where are we going...really

- **Review Related Literature - or lack thereof?**
- **Methods – but not a lot**
- **Toward a common language – is there one? Says who?**
- **So what? – LESS TALK, MORE ACTION!!!!**

Modes of Learning

- **Introspection / Personal Reflection**
- **Personal Stories / Non-Fiction Examples**
- **Research / Educational Programs / Training**
- **Dialogue / Discussion**
- **Action / Social Change / Activism**
- **Be the architect of your own education**

The program packet is provided to assist you in your learning

Participants – Yes that's You!

- **Question the ideas presented**
- **Offer examples and counter-examples**
- **Be willing to ask difficult questions**
- **Remember that the ideas presented cannot be generalized to account for all gender variant/different gendered people**

About us – Owning our lenses

Sue

- Cisgender
- Female
- European-American
- Queer
- Middle/Upper-Middle class
- Temporarily Able-Bodied
- Spiritual
- Other

Christian

- Cisgender
- Male
- European-American
- Queer
- Middle/Upper-Middle class
- Temporarily Able-Bodied

Limitations of Previous Research

- **Pathological**
- **One theoretical context or no context at all**
- **Lack of empirical research**
- **Small samples**

Current Research Context

- **Our approach in undertaking this research was that people who are gender variant are “natural” and “legitimate”**
- **Interdisciplinary Context – We draw from various theoretical contexts including:**
 - **Philosophy**
 - **Linguistics**
 - **Sociology**
 - **Education**
- **Mixed Method**
 - **Quantitative (Survey) & Qualitative (Interviews)**
 - **Online Survey (n= 3474)**
 - **Interviews (n=419)**

Confucious

If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything.

Feminist Critique of Gender

- **Sex and Gender are typically conflated (Jean Elhstain, as summarized by Tong, 1998)**
- **“Sex” and “gender” do not refer to the same characteristics (Jean Elhstain, as summarized by Tong, 1998)**
- **Illogical binaries are persistently reinforced through language (Wood, 1997)**
- **Language use passively and actively reinforces invented categories as if they are natural law (Cameron, 2005)**

Language

- **Our language references real things, experiences and people in the world (Buber, 1958)**
- **The language we use constructs the world in which we live (Sapir-Whorf, 1949)**
- **Thus, language has consequences (Hallie, 1981)**
- **Language can clarify or obscure the kinds of realities people experience within societal systems of institutionalized privilege and oppression (Hallie, 1981)**

Addressing binary thinking

- **Unexamined language not only expresses ideas and concepts, but actually shapes or diminishes critical thought (Jean Elhstain, as summarized by Tong, 1998; Wood, 1997)**
- **Our language's emphasis on polarity (good-bad, wrong-right, male-female), make it difficult for us to think of sex, gender, and gender expression as existing within a more inclusive dynamic of individual selves who are related, but unique.**
- **With regard to sex, gender and sexuality we need to think more broadly than in conventional binaries in order to make sense of the real world, otherwise our knowledge and resulting actions are faulty and potentially oppressive (Rankin & Matheis, submitted 2008).**

Our Approach – not a linear process

- **Use data that comes directly from people about whom we want to know more**
- **Apply a broad interdisciplinary theoretical context**
- **Use empirical data (numbers and voice)**
- **Analyze insufficient social constructs**
- **Offer various co-existing constructs definitions (at least for the time being)**

Causation, Correction and Curiosity

- **Some questions have consequences...**
 - **What causes this?**
 - **Why is someone transgender?**
 - **What do they do about their conditions?**
- **Be critical about what motives lie beneath these questions...**
 - **What causes this (difference, abnormality, deviance)?**
 - **Why is someone transgender (when they should be normal like me)?**
 - **What do they do about their conditions (in order to find a cure)?**

Key terms

SEX...

- **In our language, sex is one's bio-physiological make-up.**
- **It is a complex relationship of genetic, hormonal, morphological, chromosomal, gonadal, biochemical and anatomical determinants that impact the physiology of the body and sexual differentiation in the brain (Carroll & Wolpe, 1996; Ettner, 1999; Migeon, Wisniewski, & Gearhart, 2001; Money, 1993; Wilson & Reiner, 1999).**

GENDER...

- The “socially imposed division of the sexes...that transforms males and females into ‘men’ and ‘women’ (Ruben, 2003)

GENDER IDENTITY...

- Refers to a sense of one’s own gender as appropriate and consistent within the contexts of a larger dynamic of oneself. (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997).

GENDER EXPRESSION(s)/ROLE(s)...

- Refer to socialized aspects of gender. They are tied to one’s appearance, behavior, and personality (Shively & DeCecco, 1993).
- May or may not be a reflection of someone’s gender identity

Gender Dysphoria

GENDER DYSPHORIA...

A term adopted to some extent by many people who are transgender and/or gender variant to refer to those who have been assigned to one sex/gender (usually at birth on the basis of their perceived anatomy), but identify as belonging to another sex/gender, and/or does not conform with gender roles their respective society prescribes to them.

Cisgender & Cissexual

CISGENDER/CISSEXUAL...

- **Colloquial terms for people who are neither transgender, nor transsexual. Individuals for whom relationships between sex and gender are relatively consistent over the course of ones life.**
- **Can be viewed as analogous to someone identifying as “heterosexual” in relation to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.**
- **Adjective describing people who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and their gender of rearing.**

Genderism/Genderist → CISGENDERIST

GENDERISM/GENDERIST...

- **Refers to systemic privileging of a binary, two-gender system (Wilchins, 2002)**

CISGENDERIST...

- **Can be used somewhat interchangeably with “genderism” or “genderist” as it refers to the same binary sex and gender systems of unearned privileges and institutional inequalities associated with being cisgender (Rankin & Matheis, submitted 2008).**

Genderism/Genderist → CISGENDERIST

CISGENDERIST/CISGENDERISM...

- **Refers to institutionalized and acculturated systems of privileging binary, two-sex and two-gender classifications and related values.**
- **When applied to real persons genderism accounts for unearned privileges associated with being cisgender, such as the ease of filling out forms that refer solely to “males” and “females” with no apparent regard for people who are not included in those binary terms.**
- **These terms also refer to institutionalized inequities in social systems, as when most insurance companies arbitrarily deny claims for legitimate medical treatment of conditions directly and indirectly (or even suspected to be) related to transition.**
- **Arguably, there are no individuals or groups in our society who are left untouched by the powerful social norms ascribed to these kinds of binary systems.**

Speaking for themselves...

Voices

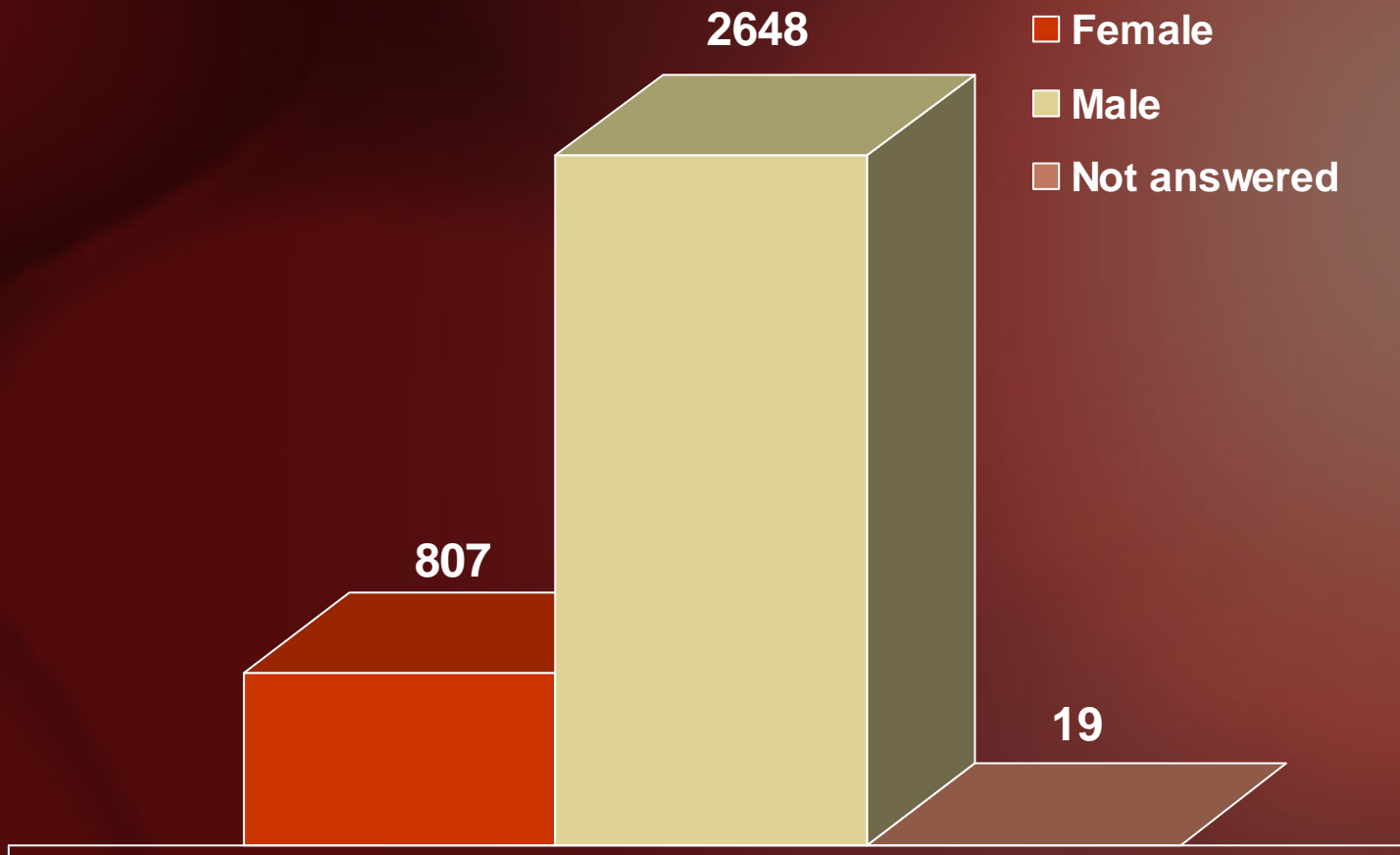
I describe myself as an androgyne or third gender. I identify as both/neither man/woman, or as "in between a transsexual and a crossdresser.

I used to identify as a dyke very strongly and still do, just in a different way. I was occupying a more female space, but now a more masculine space, but not really as male. I did and still do identify with the idea of genderqueer. I like it better than saying I am a man, which I don't really feel like I am, but I don't feel like a woman really either.

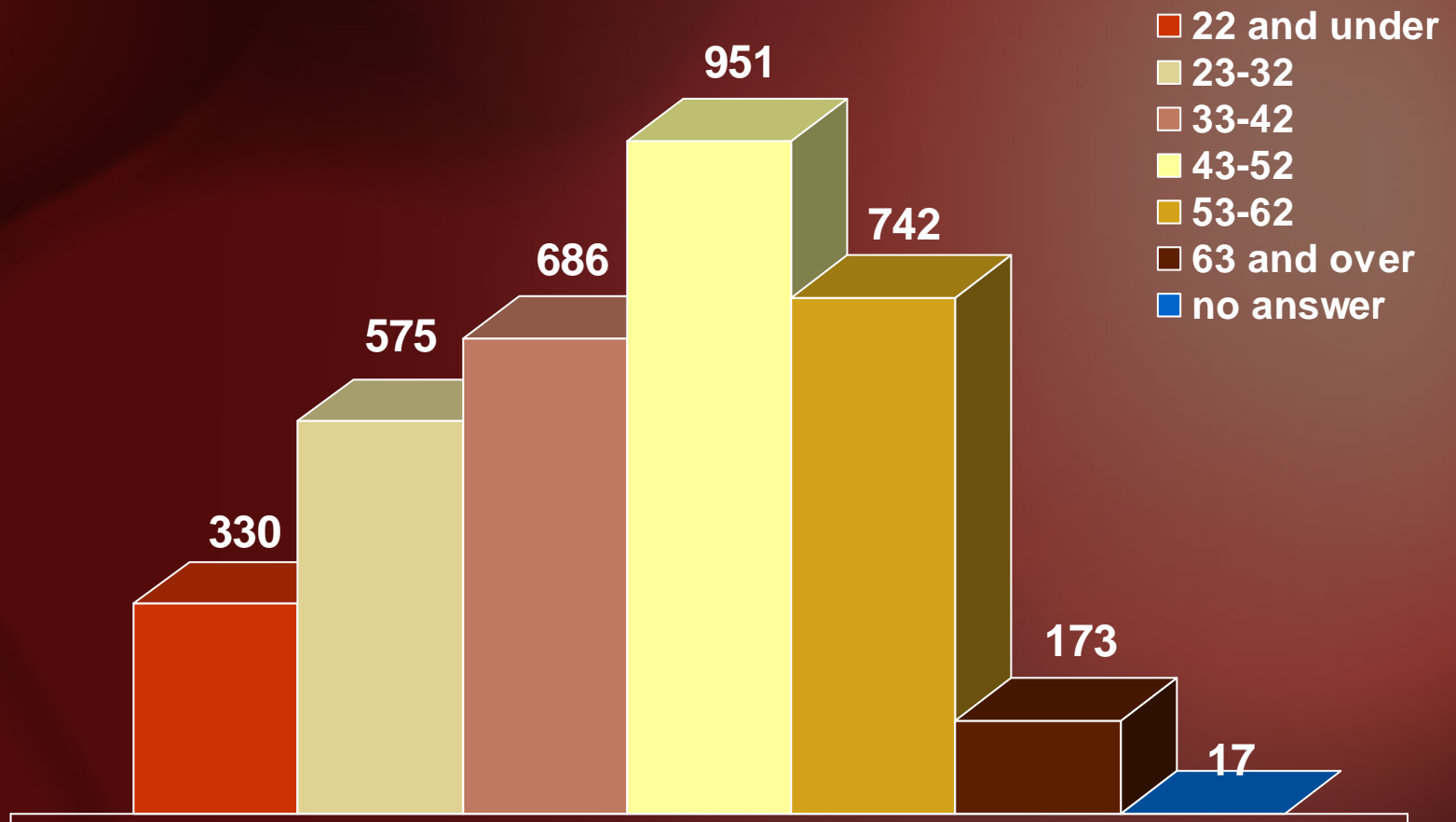
Limitations of Rankin/Beeymn Research

- **Self-selected population – therefore self-selection bias**
- **Unknown: those who chose not to participate**
- **Internet access - classist**
- **Reliance on people who had a visible presence in cyberspace**
- **Bias toward those who are “more out”**

Assigned Birth Sex (n)



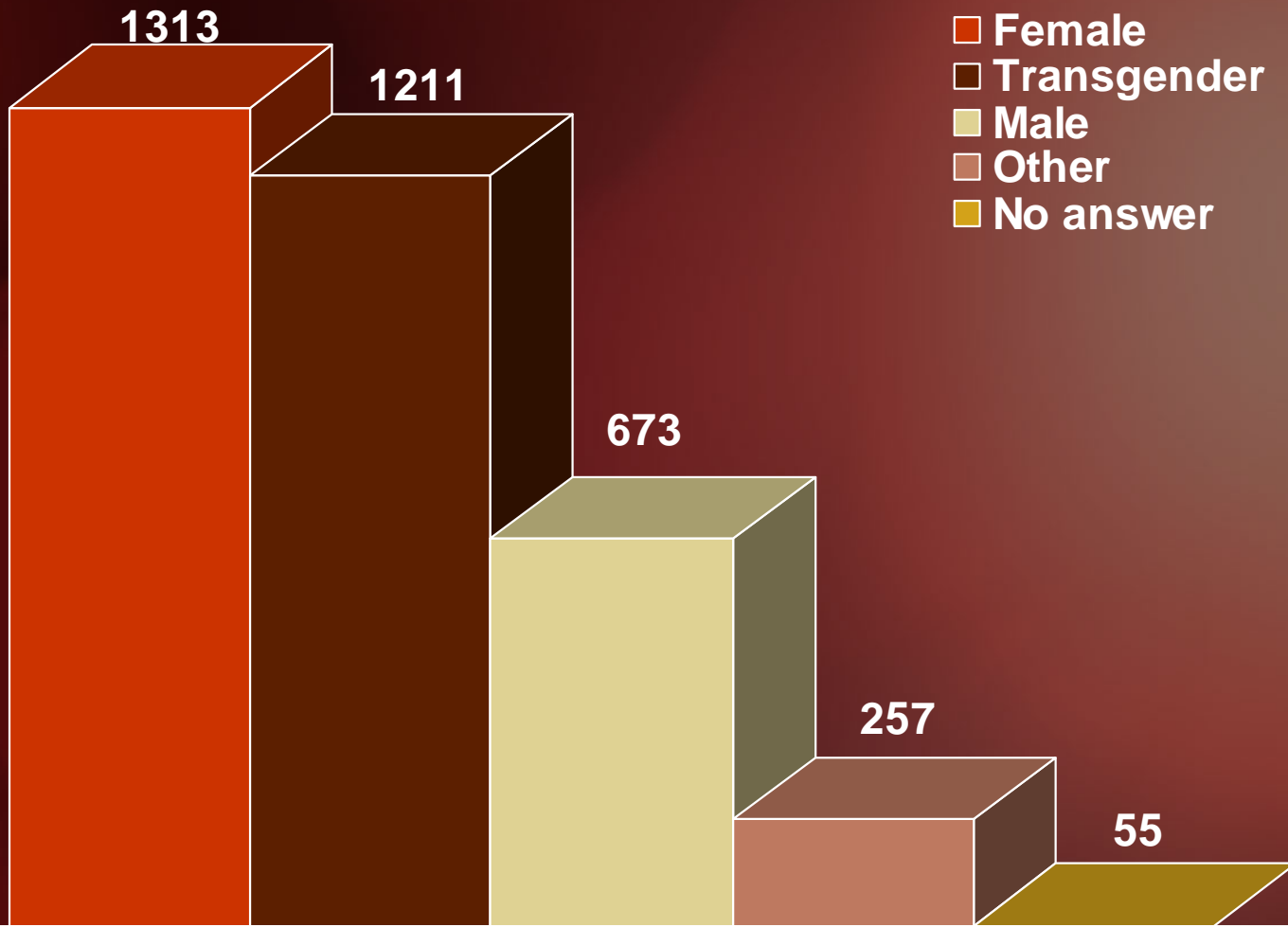
Age of Participants (n)



What is your Gender Identity?

- Woman**
- Man**
- Transgender (Please specify _____)**
- Other (Please specify _____)**

Gender Identity of Participants (n)



Transgender “Other” Responses

	22 and under (n)	23-32 (n)	33-42 (n)	43 and over (n)	Total (n)
Male to Female	24	39	62	73	198
Cross dresser	11	23	59	81	174
Female to Male	57	27	11	3	98
Genderqueer	53	6			59
Transvestite	3	8	12	11	34
Post-op [F2M (2); M2F (29); No gender (2)]	8	2	8	18	33
Trannyboy/Transguy/man	15	6	3	1	25
Androgenous/Androgyne	7	4	2	8	21
Non-op [F2M (5); M2F (3); TS (7);Transmale(1)]	2	3	4	7	16
A combination of both	3	1	4	6	14
Pre-op [F2M (2); M2F (6);No gender (1)]	2	2	3	2	9
Transwoman	1	2	1	3	7
Bi-gender				6	6
Intersex	1	2	2		5
Shemale	2	1		2	5
Transgendered	1	2	1	1	5
Two-spirit		2	2	1	5

Other “Other” Responses

	Total (n)
Gender Queer	41
Cross dresser	29
Androgynous/Androgyne	18
Not Sure/Unsure/Don't Know	11
Bi-gender	9
Both Female and Male	8
Queer	6
Questioning	5
Transsexual	5
Intersex	4
Confused	3
Neutral	3
Two-spirited	3
Un-Gendered	3
Intergender	2
She-Male	2
Transvestite	2
Transman	2

- *I went through the labels . . . tomboy in childhood, dyke in my life after divorce from a man, butch in middle-age, then trans as I became aware of it.*
- *I have identified with everything from male, cd, transgender in the old sense of the word, transsexual, to now a marginally female person that happens to be a transsexual. . . . Being a transsexual was not exactly a first choice. I tried other identities and all of them would have been preferable to being a transsexual. However, you can only deny the truth for so long.*

What is your Gender Expression?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender (Please specify _____)
- Other (Please specify _____)

Gender Expression

Gender Expression	Gender Identity			
	Woman	Man	Transgender	Other
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Female	72.4 (950)	13.4 (90)	23.8 (288)	19.1 (49)
Male	10.2 (134)	64.9 (437)	21.6 (262)	21.0 (54)
Transgender	12.2 (160)	14.7 (99)	47.1 (570)	7.4 (19)
Other	4.8 (63)	6.2 (42)	7.0 (85)	51.8 (133)

Most people have a hard time believing it at first...they can't imagine I was ever female... I think I live a pretty normal life. To be male is normal to me. To look a little different and have scars on my body is also normal for me.

In the 2nd grade, we had to write an essay. "I wish I was a _____." I instantly thought girl, but instantly knew this couldn't be expressed to my teacher or class, so I wrote dinosaur.

Pat first came out as a butch lesbian, as it was the “identity available” to him. It wasn’t until several decades later, when he was in his 60s, that he learned about FTMs and transitioned.

Gender roles suck. They're funny until you realize some people think you have to adhere to them.

I wanted to be a boy. In middle school I used to bind and pack, though I didn't have a language for the practice, or a community of resources, or even knowledge that other people like me existed, at the time.

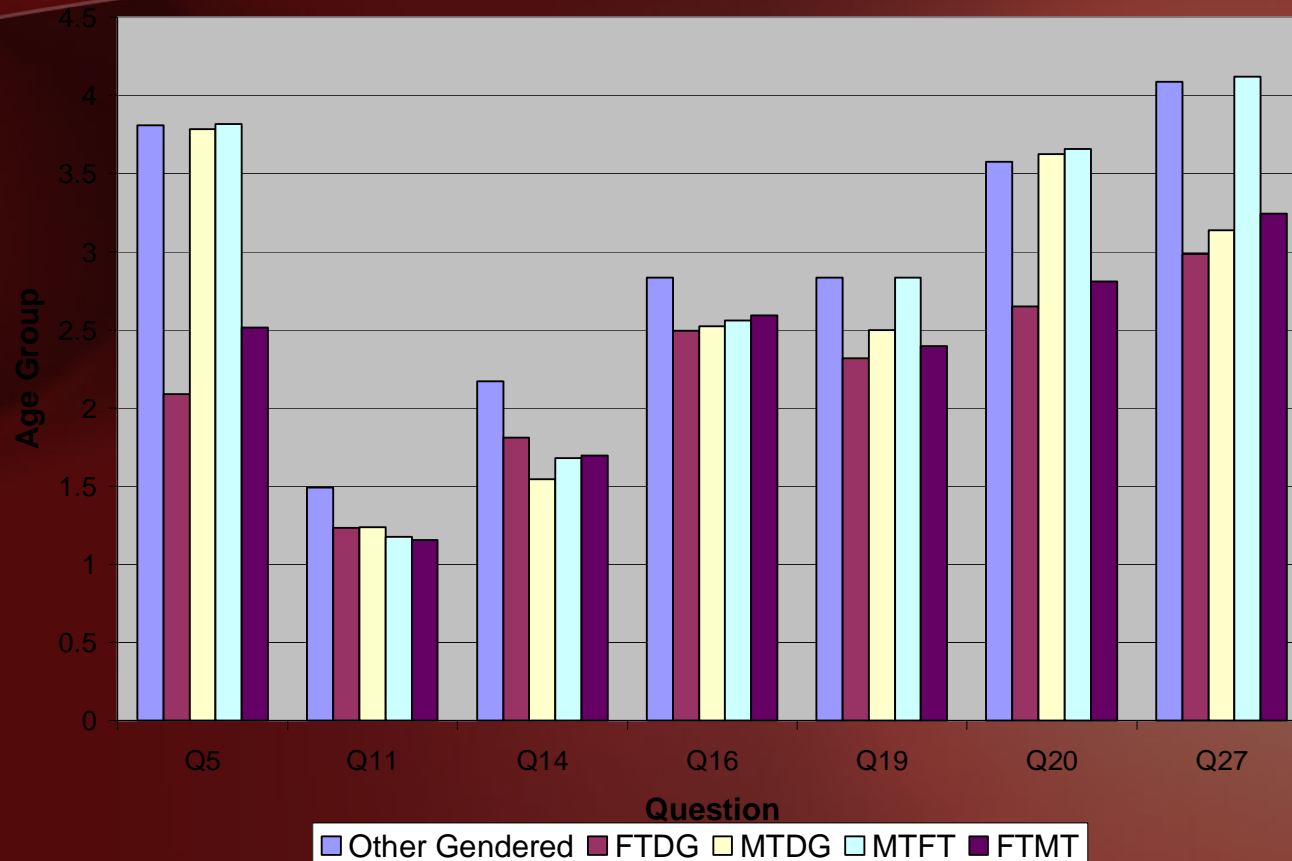
Throughout my life I have felt myself not quite identifying as a young boy, a cross dresser and as a transsexual. The changes came for me as a result of increased self-awareness and life experience. I never really fully felt like I fully "fit" into any of my prior identifications until now. I guess that's why I kept searching.

At about the age of 5, someone told me that there were only two genders and that I was a boy. I was crushed. I could not understand. How could I be a boy? I knew I was a girl or some other variation. I knew that there had to be more.

I have always dressed as non-gender specific as possible. I don't like anything too masculine or too feminine and try to hide my femaleness in clothing that is very straight-lined and ambiguous, in colors that are demur as to not attract undue attention to myself.

Honestly, I have lived for so long as a female that I do not even think about it. I truly forget that I was anything but a female for my entire life.

Response to Formative Questions



Question 5: What is your age?

Question 11: At about what age did you begin to feel "different" from others?

Question 14: At about what age did you begin to feel uncertain about your gender identity?

Question 16: At about what age did you begin to feel that you might be transgender?

Question 19: At about what age did you first understand that there were a group of people whose gender identity or expression did not coincide with their birth sex?

Question 20: At about what age did you first meet another transgender person?

Question 27: If you are open about being transgender to non-transgender people, at about what age did you first begin to disclose to others?

Implications for Higher Education

Beyond Policies, Bathrooms and Forms

- **Checking my own “stuff”**
- **Questions we should ask**
- **Understand relevant & salient issues**
- **Knowledge of health concerns**
- **Curriculum transformation**

Closing thoughts

- **By valuing Transgender and gender variant identities as healthy and positive, the place of higher education professionals becomes one of challenging socially discriminatory practices and replacing prejudicial attitudes with adaptive understandings of different gender experiences.**
- **Instead of pathologizing gender variant experiences as “gender identity disorder,” practitioners can be positive role models who support students in developing gender expressions that represent who they truly are.**

Closing Thoughts...

- **When we take-up critical perspectives on the world that we seek to create and sustain, we invest in how our world ought to be.**
- **Moving from language to action rests in our choices. Deciding what we ought to choose, and the kind of world we ought to create depends in part on adapting what we know, what we think we know and how we communicate.**
- **Our power as individuals, accentuated when we are in positions of leadership, comes with responsibilities to think critically.**

Closing thoughts...

With the careless turn of a simple phrase, we can devastate a person who would otherwise thrive. Yet, thankfully, with thoughtful attention to our language we can empower anyone, broadening our own world by sharing in theirs.

Closing thoughts...

*What **language** will you choose?*

*What **actions** will you take?*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1922

**“The limits of my language
mean the limits of my world”**

Thank You!

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Questions...?

