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The Language of Non-normative Sexuality and Genders

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Language about non-normative sexuality and genders

Asexuality

Sexual orientation characterized by a lack (or partial lack) of sexual attraction to others
(Coined by David Jay in 2001)



Intersex

A person born as neither, both, or an indeterminate mix of male and female



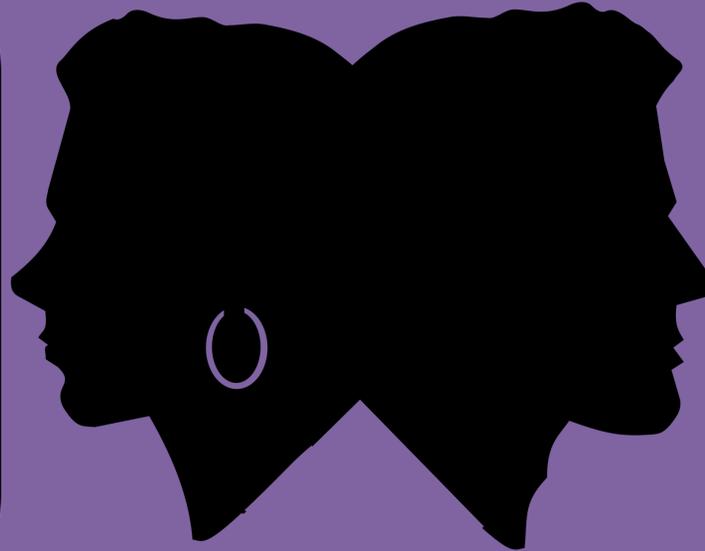
Transgender

A person who does not identify with the sex/gender assigned to them at birth



What does it mean to be “non-normative”?

- ❖ Not adhering to standard cultural expectations (“norms”)
- ❖ **Heteronormativity**: people are naturally one of two genders (male or female) and heterosexual (attracted to the opposite gender)
- ❖ **Compulsory heterosexuality** and **binary gender roles** sustain and enforce heteronormativity



Main Points

- ❖ Non-normative genders and sexualities are pathologized and erased because they challenge cultural norms
- ❖ Language used in the medical community influences and reflects societal perceptions of non-normative identities
- ❖ Lack of cultural representation renders non-normative identities invisible

➤ **Approx. 1% of the population is asexual**

➤ **Pathologization**

- Conflation of sexual attraction and sex drive
- Assumed to result from hormonal imbalance or past trauma
- Associated with physical and mental disability
 - Personality disorders (i.e. schizophrenia, social anxiety), Neurodevelopmental disorders (i.e. autism spectrum)
- Asexuality in the DSM
 - IV: *lack of sexual attraction* symptom for HSDD (Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder)
 - V: *lack of attraction + distress* symptoms for HSDD and FSIAD (Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder)
 - “self-identification as asexual” precludes diagnosis unless distress indicated

➤ **Dehumanization**

- 2013 study: asexuals viewed as “less human” and “more deficient” than other sexual minorities (incl. homosexual, bisexual, and sapiosexual)
- Sexual desire perceived as key component of humanness

➤ **Infantilization**

- Sex viewed as central to adulthood → disinterest in sex denotes immaturity
- “Late bloomer” mentality
 - Avg. age of first sexual attraction = 10 years old
 - Avg. age of asexual self-ID = 17 years old
 - AVEN 2014 census: range of ages 13-77 self-ID as asexual

➤ **Conflation of gender and sexuality → De-gendering of asexuality**

- Loss of virginity = “becoming a man/woman”
- Being a man means having sex with women, and vice versa
- AVEN 2014 census: 26% of asexuals self-gender as something other than male or female

➤ **Estimated that 1 in 100 babies are intersex In comparison- redheads are about 1-2% of the population**

- May be physical, chromosomal or hormonal
- Also may not be present at birth- 1in 66 girls have late onset adrenal hyperplasia (clitoral growth in childhood or adolescence)

➤ **Most are declared intersex based on appearance of genitals- anything more than 3/8 in for a girl and less than 1in for a boy is considered abnormal**

- If genitalia is ambiguous, classification depends on tests and doctors
 - Urologists tend towards boys and endocrinologists tend towards girls

➤ **Surgeries are usually done shortly after birth**

- Removes the choice from the patients themselves
- Avg. of 3-5 surgeries required, sometimes as many as 22 over a lifetime
- Surgeries are mostly cosmetic in nature- can't change someone's biology w/o lifelong treatment

➤ **NO surgery option is rarely talked about**

- 1 in 10 parents looked for information outside medical setting

➤ **Due to the nature of intersex, patients often have medical issues throughout their life and are often kept in the dark about their being intersex until well into adulthood**

➤ **The secrecy and childhood surgeries are even further damaging when intersex individual doesn't identify with gender they were assigned**

➤ **Transgender vs. Transsexual**

- Transgender is anyone that doesn't identify with their ASAB
- ASAB= Assigned Sex/Gender At Birth
 - In western society we have mapped genders onto sex, so the assigned sex at birth decides the gender assigned at birth
- Transsexual is an older term, specifically someone who has undergone sex-reassignment surgery
- There is no single, homogenous ‘transgender community’

➤ **Forced to pathologize themselves to receive treatment**

- Specific narratives about their bodies, identities to ‘prove’ to gatekeeping therapists and doctors that they need treatment
 - Could be as complicated as surgery and hormone treatment or as simple as legally changing their names and genders
- Gender Dysphoria, previously Gender Identity Disorder, required to receive treatment
 - Many find that due to intolerance, even with medical diagnoses, they are unable to change their legal names or genders
 - An example of the kind of intolerance trans peoples face is the current situation in North Carolina

➤ **‘Real’/‘Biological’ vs. Trans**

- When distinguishing between trans and non-trans peoples, using ‘real’ or ‘biological’ implies that trans men and women are not truly, biologically men or women.
- How the term ‘cis’ or ‘cissexual’ was coined
 - ‘Cis’ refers to people that identify with their ASAB