

HASSENFELD
**CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL**
AT NYU LANGONE

Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

The Role of Camp in Gender Identity Exploration

Jeremy A. Wernick, L.M.S.W.
jeremy.Wernick@nyulangone.org

Background about self

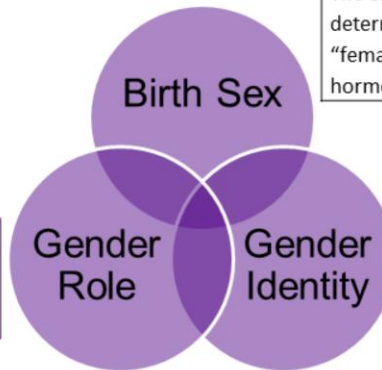


Overview

- What are the components of gender?
- How and when does gender develop?
- Why are gender affirming environments important?
- How can gender affirming camps impact resilience?
- Q&A

What are the components of gender?

A person's preferred expression of and comfort meeting cultural expectations for behaviors and attitudes based on one's gender



The biological sex characteristics that typically determine if a person is assigned "male" or "female" at birth (genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, etc.)

- How a person perceives and defines their gender in the context of societal expectations and their assigned sex.
- Comprised of preferred pronouns, gender expression, sense of comfort with assigned sex, etc.

3



Intersex: A person whose physical sex characteristics do not fit with typically expected male or female bodies (1.7% of the population)

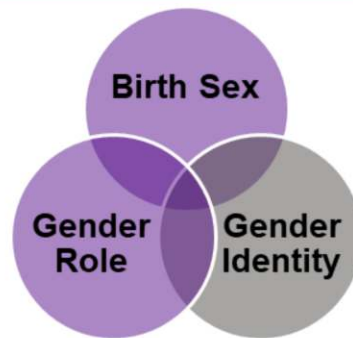
- 1-2% of the population has red hair

Gender role expression or presentation refers to a child's clothing, hair style, behavior (play, characters), and other *observable* indicators of gender preferences

Gender Identity

Genitals and outward appearance
do not always match.

Outward appears and inner feelings
do not always match.



**Identity does not equal
behavior**

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender
Design by Landyn Pan
Illustration by Anna Moore

Gender Identity
_____ Female / Woman / Girl
_____ Male / Man / Boy
_____ Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
_____ Feminine
_____ Masculine
_____ Other

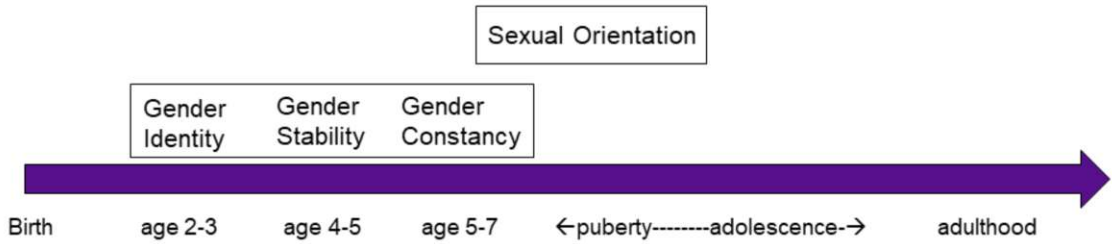
Sex Assigned at Birth
Female Male Other / Intersex

Physically Attracted to
_____ Women
_____ Men
_____ Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
_____ Women
_____ Men
_____ Other Gender(s)



How does gender develop?



Stages of Gender Development (Lawrence Kohlberg)

- **Ages 2-3:** gender identity develops during first few years of life
 - How a person feels in certain gender groups, attitudes about gender roles, comfort with role expectations, and physical characteristics
 - By age 3, children are aware of their birth sex and physical differences between males and female
 - **Statements of identity**
- **Ages 4-5:** develop understanding of *gender stability*
 - Awareness that their gender is stable over time (boys become men, girls become women)
- **Ages 6-7:** develop awareness of *gender constancy*
 - Understanding that everyone's birth sex remains the same across settings despite typical bodily changes (height, weight, hair, clothing, etc.)
 - **Gender role experimentation and discomfort**

Egan, S.K. & Perry, D.G. (2001) Gender identity: a multidimensional analysis with implications for psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(4), 451.
Kohlberg, L. (1966). A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex-role concepts and attitudes. In M. E.C. (Ed.), *The Development of Sex Differences* (pp. 82-73). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

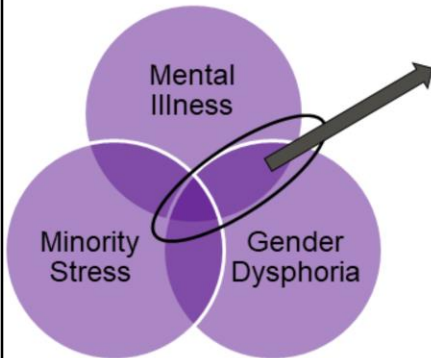
7



Gender identity development begins years before campers arrive!

Creating sensitive camp spaces must consider gender identity in the same way it considers other aspects of identity.

Why are gender affirming environments important?



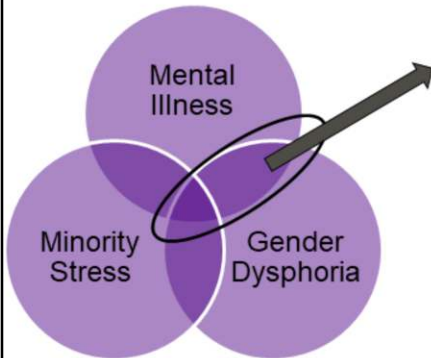
- Exposure to bullying, discrimination, poor access to healthcare, social exclusion, parental rejection, and violence ALL related to increased rates of psychopathology, substance use, sexual health risks, and poorer physical health outcomes
- Adolescents with gender dysphoria who...
 - ...report perceived acceptance from friends and family
 - ...are supported in the expression of their identity
 - ...have access to social and medical affirming services**...experience developmentally typical rates of mental health struggles.**

9



What do you know about minority stress theory?

Factors Impacting Mental Health



Perceived social and parental support is protective against risk factors for mental illness and are correlated with...

- Decreased anxiety
- Fewer symptoms of PTSD
- Greater overall life satisfaction
- Reduced suicidal ideation
- Fewer suicide attempts

What does this suggest for community building at camp?



Although little is known about the mechanism by which youth experiencing gender dysphoria benefit from environmental support, social support is one of the few risk factors feasible for targeted intervention

How can gender affirming camps impact resilience?

- Identity-affirming social support increases the rate of healthy coping mechanisms
- Advocating for the inclusion of all gender identities is associated with perceived belongingness and social connectedness
- Community spaces must acknowledge and counter systems of oppression working against gender expansive individuals
 - Programmatic policies, access to restrooms, promotional materials, language use, pronoun use etc
- All caretakers of children and adolescents must actively explore their own gender related attitudes, beliefs, and biases to create sensitive spaces

Signs of Gender Affirming Environments

- Policies respond to the needs of all genders by explicitly allowing for gender affirming participation at camp
 - Housing, registration paperwork, gendered activities, etc.
 - How else might policy create gender affirming spaces?
- People have access to resources that affirm their identities
 - Gender neutral bathrooms, registration paperwork, trained healthcare staff, etc.
 - What other resources should be available?
- Marketing for your camp explicitly acknowledge gender diversity
 - Use of flags and ribbons, making statements about inclusion, etc.
 - How else can we be explicit about our intent?

Signs of Gender Affirming Environments

- Language use in your community is sensitive to all genders
 - Modeling asking for pronouns, challenging gender-based discriminatory language, etc.
- Gender exploration is discussed and encouraged
 - Activities do not reinforce gender stereotypes, provide options for participation, etc.
- Community members at all levels actively counter systems of oppression
 - Camp culture supports self-advocacy and responds to concerns about identity



Questions and Discussion

Thank you!

Jeremy A. Wernick, LMSW
jeremy.wernick@nyumc.org

