

**A View from the Trans* Bridge:
New Understandings of Gender for
Everyone**

*Reunion 2019: Michelle Dayna Allison LMFT,
Class of 1964*

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness

Some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,

Who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,

Still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,

Meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,

Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Some questions Michelle Allison frequently ponders:

- Do we really know what we mean by ‘sex’ and ‘gender’?
- Is ‘sex’ completely biological and ‘gender’ a purely social construction?
- How is ‘gender politics’ shaping our social cohesion? What are the prospects for America to become whole?
- Is there an ‘essential’ nature or even a set of traits defining female and a male so that we can generalize?
- Are feminists right about the corrosive impact of ‘patriarchy’?
- How are men faring emotionally? Does psychotherapy have anything useful to offer men? ? Is ‘male fragility’ a valid or useful notion?
- Having experienced both genders, what have I personally learned about our gendered lives that is clinically relevant?

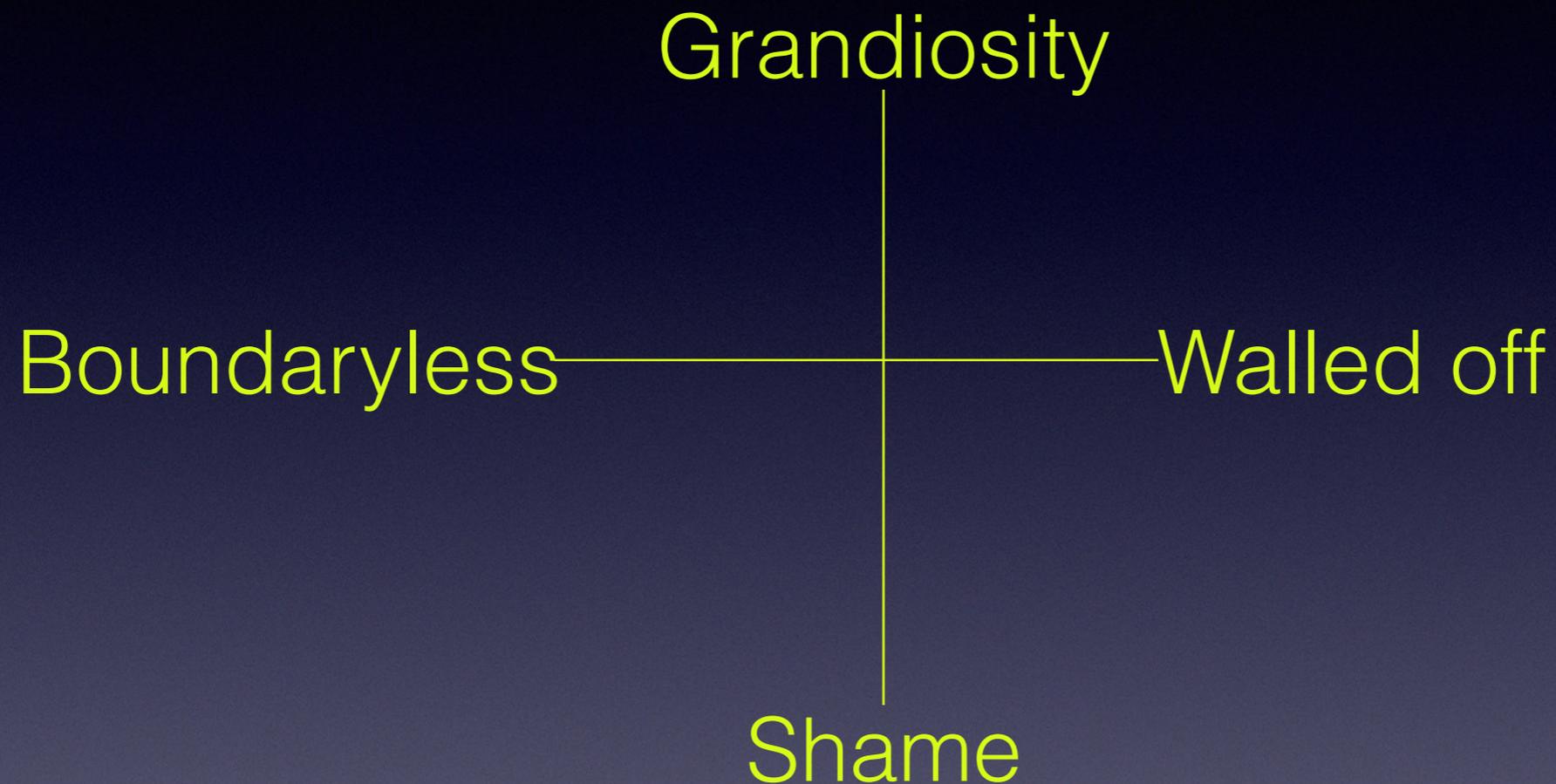
Constructs That Will Be 'Banded About' Today

- Cisgender: refers to people whose sex assigned at birth is aligned with their gender identity : 'Cis' for short.
- Transgender: persons whose experienced gender is at variance from the gender assigned at birth: 'Trans' is my preference
- Gender non-conforming, non-binary, 'gender queer': persons whose gender identity does not align with either female or male
- Queer: describes a person whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity is not cisgender
- Gender Role/Expression: social behaviors, mannerisms, interests, and styles of dress: social presentation, perhaps 'performance'
- Intersectionality: describes the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalized identities.
- Privilege: unearned sources of social status, power, and institutionalized advantage experienced by individuals by virtue of their culturally valued and dominant social identities

Unmarked versus Marked Traits

- Groups who are dominant or the majority are typically viewed as 'unmarked' -- i.e., their existence and perspectives are taken for granted, and deemed an unquestionable norm.
- Minority and marginalized groups become 'marked' in comparison -- they seem remarkable and tend to stand out, garnering undue attention and scrutiny; they are also likely to be viewed as inherently questionable, suspicious, alien, exotic, abnormal, artificial, or deceptive.
- People who are 'marked' are generally viewed as having '*something*' that unmarked people do not have, and this '*something*' is subsequently subjected to all sorts of comments, questions, critiques, debates, and double-binds that the unmarked person escapes.
- Unmarked/marked distinction plays a role in all -isms, where it provides the unmarked group with countless privileges that they are typically unaware of (due to their unmarked, and therefore seemingly invisible, nature).

An unrealistic sense of superiority, a sustained view of oneself as superior to others that causes one to view others with disdain or as inferior due to a variety of personal characteristics



An unpleasant, self conscious emotion: typically associated with a negative evaluation of the self; feelings of distress, exposure, mistrust, powerlessness and worthlessness

Racism: an implicit ideology rationalizing racial hierarchies:

- whites are the norm or standard for humans
- people of color are a deviation from that norm

White Fragility: a reflexive, largely unconscious response produced/sustained by continual social and material advantages of whiteness.

When white fragility is triggered, emotional disequilibrium occurs
Anger toward the trigger leads white people to these responses:

- shutting down, exiting or tuning out
- indulging in emotional incapacitation: guilt or hurt feelings
- describing their experience as abusive, traumatic or violent

Typical 'nice' white responses to conversations about race :

- I'm a good person with good intentions, therefore I can't be racist
- You're playing the race card
- I'm being misunderstood
- I'm not feeling safe (meaning not feeling comfortable)
- The tone of this conversation is wrong (too personally challenging)
- There needs to be trust for feedback to occur (I need you to trust I am not a racist before I can work on my racism)

The Psychology of Racism and White Fragility

The Central Tasks for White People:

Develop Racial Stamina:

Grapple with how racist ideology and socialization shapes our responses when we are challenged about racism.

Overcome our reluctance to acknowledge our racial advantage

Stop seeing ourselves as individuals who are exempt from the forces of racial socialization and implicit bias

Give up the binary that 'good'=non-racist, while 'bad'=racist

Don't use 'Color Blind' and 'Color Celebrate' narratives to take race off the table: a racist free upbringing is not possible

Don't claim that challenging racist behavior is more problematic than racist behavior itself

An Expression of Emotional Accountability

- There is no face to save and the game is up. I know I have blindspots and unconscious investments in the status quo.
- I did not set this system up, but it does unfairly benefit me. I do use it to my advantage, and I am responsible for interrupting it.
- I need to work hard to change my role in the system, but I can't do it alone. Therefore, I am grateful when others help me.
- Feedback from others is the key to recognize and repair our inevitable and often unaware collusion. How, when and where you give me feedback is irrelevant.
- It is feedback I want and feedback I need. Understanding is that is hard for you to give, I will take it in any way I can get it.
- From my position of social, cultural and institutional power, I am perfectly safe and I can handle it. If I cannot handle it, *it's on me* to build up my ***** emotional stamina.

Thank you

APA (2018): Guidelines for Treatment of Men and Boys

defines 'Traditional' Masculinity'

“... as emotional stoicism, homophobia, not showing vulnerability, self-reliance and competitiveness” which leads to the disproportion of males involved in “aggression and violence as a means to resolve interpersonal conflict” as well as “substance abuse, incarceration, and early mortality.”

Cost of maintaining male power and privilege:

- Restricts men's ability to function adaptively
- Men commit 90% of the homicides in the US
- Represent 77% of homicide victims
- 3.5% more likely to die of suicide than women
- Life span is 4.9 years shorter than women
- Substance abuse rates three times higher than women
- Negative emotional reactions to unemployment, divorce
- Reluctance to seek self care: preventive medical, mental health

A Feminist Critique of: “...imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”

Both males and females are socialized into this system. Men are not the enemy.

Underlying principles of patriarchy: domination, separation and control. Values '[self-control](#)' and frowns on 'emotionality'

Patriarchy socializes men to deny feelings, dooming them to emotional numbness.

Social power is awarded to conformity to masculine norms, while aberrant gendered behavior is punished through gender policing.

The desire for power precludes the formation of loving, healthy relationships. To know love we must let go of the will to dominate.

Any time a male dares to transgress patriarchal boundaries in order to love, the lives of women and children are changed for the better.

Feminist Masculinity

A revolutionary act of visionary feminism is to restore masculinity as an ethical biological category divorced from the dominator model.

If the desire for power remains paramount, loving, healthy relationships cannot exist.

When culture is based on the dominator model, not only will it be violent, but it will frame all relationships as power struggles.

Men need new models for self assertion that do not require the construction of the 'other' as the enemy.

Rather than assuming that men are born with a will to aggress, this new culture would assume men are born with the will to 'connect'.

Strength is needs to be redefined: it is no longer 'power over' but the capacity to be responsible for self and to others .

Men become more real through the act of connecting with others.

Commonplace, but problematic definitions of sex and gender

Sex: referring to biological (typically genetic/chromosomal) aspects of being male or female: ‘nature’

Gender: the psychological, social, and cultural experiences and characteristics of males and females: ‘social construction’

H.R. 2796:(2017) prohibits the words *sex* or *gender* from being interpreted to mean *gender identity*; requires *man* or *woman* to be interpreted to refer exclusively to a person's genetic sex.

HHS—official Federal policy as of 5-24-19 proposes a uniform definition of gender as determined “on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science, objective and administrable.”

Proposed definition defines sex as either male or female, based on immutable biological traits; unchangeable, determined by the genitals that a person is born with.

The Biological Basis of Sex and Gender

- Sex is purely biological; gender is purely a social construction: NO!
- Sex is a collection of sexually dimorphic traits that are variable
- Even chromosomes are variable: there are thirty-five recognized variations of developmental sex disorders (intersex), some of which have anomalous chromosomes and complex gene functioning
- Trans people can, and do change their sexual traits through cross gender hormones and gender affirming surgeries
- ‘Female’ and ‘male’ are umbrella terms describing groupings of people who generally share many of the same traits, but with considerable variability and exceptions
- Sex differentiation (body and genitalia) happens earlier; gender identity occurs later, in the second half of pregnancy
- The brain is sexual and variable: transgender people have brain structures midway between cis male and cis female brains
- Gender identity has a neural dimension and exists on a spectrum

*ICD 10: HA60—Gender Incongruence of Adolescence or Adulthood
or DSM 5: F64.1: Gender Dysphoria*

A marked and persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex:

- 1) a strong dislike or discomfort with the one's primary or secondary sex characteristics due to their incongruity with the experienced gender*
- 2) a strong desire to be rid of some or all of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics due to their incongruity with the experienced gender*
- 3) a strong desire to have the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the experienced gender*

The individual experiences a strong desire to be treated (to live and be accepted) as a person of the experienced gender. The gender incongruence has been continuously present for several months. The diagnosis cannot be assigned prior to the onset of puberty.

Impact of Cross Gender Hormone Treatment: HRT

Feminizing : estrogen

Decreased muscle mass/
strength

Body fat redistribution

Softening of the skin

Breast growth

Body/facial hair: thinning/
slowed growth

Male pattern baldness:
arrested, but no regrowth

Male sexuality suppression:
erectile function, sperm
production, decreased libido

Masculinizing: testosterone “T”

Facial/body hair growth

Scalp hair loss

Deepened voice

Increased muscle mass/strength

Body fat redistribution

Cessation of menses

Clitoral enlargement

Vaginal atrophy

1964
(21)



2012
(70)



2019
(77)

Reactions to, and Descriptions of Transgender Persons

Not a 'real' woman or man

Freak, weirdo, fag, tranny, shemale (largely in the porn industry)

Confused, abnormal, emotionally/mentally unstable

Unwitting pawn/recruit of the transgender cabal (typically teens)

Attention seeking, exhibitionistic, narcissistic

Selfish, reckless, naive

Impersonator, fake, deceptive, "a trap"

Fetishistic (autogynephilia), perverted

Promiscuous in general or 'just want to have sex with guys/girls'

Transgender is not a 'real' gender

'Gender' is a fiction; only the male/female sexual binary is 'real'

Unnatural

UnGodly, Satanic

Have an agenda (and probably not a very nice one)

Playing the identity card

Engaging in identity politics

Engaging in special pleading (acting like a snowflake)

Influenced by 'social contagion': Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria

Misgendering: 'dead' name, pronouns, form of address (sir, madam)

Three Models of Intimate Partner Relations

Unconscious relationship: our choice of partners is driven by the desire to resolve the unfinished business of our childhoods

Adult attachment: replicate as an adult the intimate experience of parent and child. Goal is *secure attachment*: knowing that your partner will be there for you emotionally when you need them

Self expressive: marriage as a means of sublime self fulfillment. In the last generation women have changed, and men, by and large, have not.

Women now seek intimacy: sexually, intellectually, and above all- emotionally.

For women, giving in and backing off do not work. For men, appeasement and hoping it will just go away also will not work.

Golden Rule of relationship empowerment: “What can I give you to help me get what I want?”

Most reliable predictor of long term marital success: wives clearly communicating their needs and husbands altering their behavior to meet those needs

Psychological Patriarchy

Defines the relationship between two different sets of human qualities: results in the halving of the self

‘Masculine’: achievement, strength, dominance, logic, aggression, antidependence, goal orientation, insensitivity

‘Feminine’: weakness, emotion, yielding, dependence, process orientation, oversensitivity

A ‘power over’ relationship model’ as distinct from ‘being with’
A version of ‘zero sum game’ thinking

Raised to be competitive performers, not intimate partners

Use negative coping mechanisms: lashing out, withdrawal or violence, risky health behaviors such as substance use, tobacco

The hubris of viewing ourselves as above our surroundings rather than a part of them.

The Primary Obstacle to Change: Male Fragility

- What part of your identity have you chosen and what part has been given to you? Will you seek a more authentic version of you?
- Questioning of male privilege seems to men like a terrifying loss of core identity: driving force is not misogyny but 'male fragility.'
- Underlying fear of rejection, inadequacy and not knowing what the experience of their female partner really is?
- Address the flight from shame into grandiosity. Acknowledge how lashing out, withdrawal, avoidance are used to manage difficult emotions: shame, depression, anxiety, fear, disappointment.
- Actively challenge your feelings of being victimized; resist the temptation to move to a one up/better than position.
- Develop distress tolerance: this is a more robust idea of 'strength'
- With increasing emotional resilience, seek intimate connection through the cultivation of a loving and generous heart.
- Focus on graciously giving your partner the gifts of kindness, emotional support, compassion and sexual pleasure