

The authentic self, an exploration of gender in a broader social context.

Abstract:

In this article, the author attempts to understand the characteristics of individuation and the context behind what defines someone's gender expression. Research suggests that the factors are broad and dependent on the experience of the authentic self. This work supports the response to 'An alternative perspective: gender expression is a form of individuation and authentic self' by Karen Herdzik (2021).

This exploration draws evidence from literature and surveys, analyzing responses from a college demographic. The aim is to provide background information on the broad consensus of why people attempt to conform to societal norms. The author's motivation for this research is self-exploration, as a non-binary individual. Some have attempted to cite psychological distress as a driving factor for conformity (Withers, 2020). However, this paper attempts to draw evidence for Herdzik's definition of gender, which posits that it exists as a form of individuation. To provide a point of cross-examination, a literary analysis of how people see themselves will be conducted using gathered data. This will include a look into self-identified involuntary celibates or "incels", as described by Daly and Reed (2019), in order to show how different interpretations of gender exist in hegemonic structures. This exploration may reveal a new way to interpret gender.

METHODS

To gauge the complexity and diversity of perspectives, we chose to gather information through two surveys. We sent out both surveys to a college demographic and posted them online to broaden the respondent base. The first survey was titled "Gauging Support for Withers, R. (2020): Transgender Medicalization and the Attempt to Evade Psychological Distress." The questions were formulated based on the claims brought up in response to Withers or by Withers. We developed the questions around the Likert scale to enable numeric analysis. The Likert scale gauges the individual's reaction/ feeling towards a topic. It's important to note that these questions have come under scrutiny due to their insensitive/biased wording, which does not reflect the conclusion or methodology found in respect to Withers. The second survey was designed with more open interpretations in mind to understand how individuals define what gender is and isn't. It was titled "Gender Diversity in a Broader Context: What Does Gender Mean to You?" Both surveys will be analyzed quantitatively with statistical analysis in R, while being analyzed qualitatively and compared and contrasted with the literature. We will make a broad attempt to highlight trends and identify any problematic data gathered.

THE NULL HYPOTHESIS

Following current assumptions, the null hypothesis, would serve to equate the given thesis to a non-directional value, or a statement of equality, **which can be stated as “There isn't a significant relationship between psychological distress, and the framework of gender lies closer to a form of individuation and authentic self.” This article attempts to support that null hypothesis represented by H_0 , examining data gathered from a surveyed population.**

The current implications that Withers, R. (2020) could come off as insensitively labeling

authentic gender experience, which can be taken out of its intended context, potentially being weaponized targeting people of a diverse gender experience.

Regarding individuation

Supporting the claim that individuation is critical for the development of gender identities, as brought up by Karen Herdzyk (2021) built from Jung (1966), individuation is a lifelong process of integration. Referring to the conscious, and unconscious aspects of the psyche developing a sense of wholeness. Gender, in a social context, has typically been given the label of a “construct” While this label reflects the inherent nature of what gender is and is not. Definitions and labels serve the purpose of reducing ambiguity, but in defining one's own identity. These definitions have the potential to serve as a great hindrance. Referring to Withers, R. (2020) evidence is brought up that the pressure to conform to societal expectations, regarding appearance is a driving source of distress.

Transgender, and gender nonconforming individuals exist within the framework of individuation. The second survey question #3, gaged opinions from a largely younger population. Sixty percent supported the claim that, “ Gender is a representation of the authentic self, do you agree that people become what they identify with? Regardless of what sex they are assigned.” The traditional binary depiction of gender fails to properly represent lived experience. Respondents fell in either two camps. Either, the way they identified, including lived gender experience, existed as an integral part of themselves. Or, they haven't initiated much thought or care into their gender existing in indifference towards their gender identity. This supports the idea that gender can exist as a form of individuation. The unconscious component of the personality

could harbor desires of a more authentic form of gender expression. Having an existing internal interrogation of what truly affirms individuality, would support Karen Herdzik (2021).

Many claims that lie within the scope of the individual harbor non falsifiable qualities. Trends do exist, and the backing of these claims lie within the lived experience of the respondents. But one thing in particular stands out, differences. Nobody's definition will be the same, just like nobody's lived experience is the same. If we haven't understood the true nature of what constitutes identity, it's because definitions will differ, now apply this in terms of gender. Rigidity of definition exists for the sake of modern social cohesion. According to Withers (2020), individuals have used gender affirming care to evade psychological distress. This fails to highlight that transgender people go through the lived experience of medically transitioning. To strengthen their identity, while it depends on the individual. The desire is to become themselves. The means are secondary to this desire. Withers' argument would serve more validity in self proclaimed "transmaxxing" communities.

What Withers (2020) described in his work lies closer with the description of a "persona", as put by Jung (1966). Defined as the layer of interaction between the ego and the external world, like a mask worn at a masquerade party, it can hide the authentic self or manifest a sense of disconnect between oneself and authenticity that leads to "psychological distress", or senses of alienation, anxiety and depression. Individuals within the "transmaxxing" communities have adopted transgender identities as personas, with the expressed rationale to improve their lives, i.e escape psychological distress. Unfortunately, this doesn't serve as an authentic gender experience, hence it should not be referred to as such. It has the express effect of debasing authentic gender experience from transgender medicalization. Leading to articles like Withers (2020).

individuation and information seeking.

To be able to integrate the conscious, and unconscious aspects of the psyche, into a state of wholeness. It becomes imperative to seek information to understand oneself. Regarding Withers, R. (2020) the information seeking behaviors of transgender individuals, wasn't properly defined. Several information seeking models exist to bring light to the crucial process of awareness. The information seeking model that emulates this back/forth, non-linear fashion seen within Withers's evidence, would be the Kuhlthau ISP model, developed by Carol Kuhlthau in 1991. This will be used as the framework for understanding transgender information seeking behavior. There are six steps within Kuhlthau's model. First is initiation, then selection, exploration, formulation, collection and action.

The "trigger/initiation" for information seeking is largely dependent on the individual. According to (Huttunen, Hirvonen, & Kähkönen, 2020), triggers can be personal crises, legal barriers, social stigmas, or a gradual awakening. There is a lot of overlap with this and individuation, commonly cited causes for individuation according to Jung (1959). A mid-life crisis, a/n major life change(s), traumatic events, or a spiritual awakening all serve as potential causes of individuation. While some argue that traumatic events are equal in significance to psychological distress, there are important differences. Firstly, they are related but different. Traumatic events occur outside the range of normal human experience. But, psychological distress is characterized with negative life events, or circumstances. More crucially is the effect on the individual. Traumatic events can uncover previously unknown truths about the self. But not all traumatic events will cause self-realization. Supporting this line of thought trauma can serve as a trigger not a cause of individuation. According to Thornley et al. (2015) it is suggested

that traumatic events serve to reveal unknown aspects of oneself. Not only being a means of self-realization, referring to Jung (1959), but serving as a source that can build communal resilience in the face of adversity, following Thornley et al.

There are several important sources of information, regarding transgender individuals. According to (Huttunen, Hirvonen, & Kähkönen, 2020) friends, other transgender people, and the internet are crucial. Reliability or general accuracy on the information about the transgender experience isn't guaranteed. Misinformation exists in this space, bad actors can use this to invalidate authentic transgender experience. Serving as a barrier to the information seeking process of transgender individuals, supported by (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). While misinformation is a real barrier to information seeking. Self-diagnosis is an attempt to understand someone's emotions, feelings, or experiences. Supported by (Giles & Newbold, 2011), emphasizing not serving as a replacement for medical professionals, or traditional mental health advice.

After the triggering/initiation phase of the model, comes the selection phase of the model. According to (Kuhlthau, 2004), selection can be described as the process of formulating an understanding of what information exists. Then out of that information, what information is helpful to satisfy the information need. For the cause of individuation for transgender individuals, when these sources are labeled “misinformation,” without understanding why they've resonated with one's personal experiences/feelings it comes off as invalidating.

One major point made by Withers (2020), is self interested drug companies benefit financially from endocrinological treatment for transgender individuals. Leading to published research pushing said endocrinological treatment. It's important to understand the underlying interest behind research. But, it serves to invalidate authentic transgender experiences that have

benefited from endocrinological treatment. Wither's argument must exist with a multifaceted framework, showing the benefits of the endocrinological treatment. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), not all transgender individual(s) choose to undergo endocrinological treatment. It exists as one of several treatment options including, but not limited to: change in name, dress, behavior, pronoun usage to name a few (APA, 2020).

Incels

As described by Daly and Reed (2019), incels claim/retain a subordinate status within hegemonic masculinity. Looking at the broad trends observed in the respondent data, most respondents fall into two categories: those who reinforce their lived experience within a hegemonic framework, or those who have redefined the framework through their understanding of gender. Both men and women who exist within the incelosphere, as well as survey respondents, tend to have varying but dissimilar issues within a hegemonic conception of gender. Following the work of Daly and Reed, the concept of masculinity challenges is brought up, described as an inability to meet physical or relational shortcomings as a man within society.

Survey respondents have a similar, but unrelated perspective (N=14). When asked "What are your thoughts on conforming to society?" respondents show a desire to conform if it does not infringe on their individuality, while there's awareness that it exists as a requirement to participate within society as a whole. These shortcomings, whether internal or external in source, lead to desires to repair or leave the existing hegemonic framework that either incels or respondents find themselves in.

Regarding Withers (2020), the evidence of whether or not people transition to escape psychological distress, defined as issues stemming from sexual difficulties, social isolation, and unconscious homophobia. This evidence vaguely points out a trend of escapism when an individual sees that society has failed them. But this doesn't represent the individual, merely the persona they've acquired to deal with society.

In hegemonic structures, those who are aware of a perceived disadvantage tend to form groups that exist in clear opposition to whatever they believe is the cause of this distress. In Daly and Reed (2019), this is marked as the formation of an online Incel circle, which, in accordance with Daly and Reed, have moved to oppose current feminist rhetoric. This draws into light a community of incels that have adopted a transgender identity to improve their social/relationship standing. Self proclaimed “trans-maxers”, draw an incredibly similar rationale to “look-maxxers” as described by Daly and Reed. Altering their appearance to gain relationship/societal benefits. If anything this behavior would fall under Withers description of the causes that led to trans-medicalization. An important note, that this completely ignores the mention of an authentic gender experience. Which is an important consideration, because these trends can be weaponized to pushback against transgender people legally.

Data, for Survey #1

Survey #1: Gaging support for Withers, R. (2020). Transgender medicalization and the attempt to evade psychological distress

1. Being born a specific sex, it be man/woman/intersex. Gives inherent disadvantages/advantages, in society.
2. In an isolated environment, without societal influence. How would that affect your gender/ way you identify?
3. Gender is a representation of the authentic self, do you agree that people become what they identify with? Regardless of what sex they are assigned.

4. Do you blame your assigned sex, for the way society has treated you ?
5. I feel pressured to conform to society's gender definition, if i didn't it would cause me distress.
6. If someone's gender expression is dictated by the world around them. Then, it isn't their gender expression. But, an attempt to conform.
7. Do you agree that gender is subjective? Any objective analysis that is reliant on rigged definitions. Fails to properly understand gender.
8. At points of distress, I had wished that people saw my gender differently.
9. Have you ever used the "social privilege", of being born a specific sex. To influence the world/people around you.
10. Hypothetically If being a specific gender, gives you social advantages. Would you become that gender, regardless of your own internal desires.
11. If your gender fails to represent your authentic self. Would it be valid, would it even be you ?
12. Do you agree that transitioning could serve as an escape from social problems?
13. Defining my gender, for myself. Should serve as the first step of questioning its validity.
14. The cause of gender dysphoria isn't strictly relegated to people of transgender experience.
15. To truly know your gender, you must embark on a journey of self-individuation. Only then, can you be certain that your gender is valid.

Firstly, the average age for the survey is 22.57 meaning that the demographic of the sample catered to younger adults. The sex distribution of participants is skewed towards females (73.7 F/26.4M) , with a Z-Score of 0.47. Compared to an expected distribution of (50/50), the ratio regarding sex is skewed 68.08% towards people assigned female at birth. Which isn't overwhelmingly higher than the traditional '50%'. Hence there are other factors that influenced the sex distribution of this sample. For example, younger females are more aware of gender issues in society. Supported by Krefting, L. A., & Lobato, D. (2019), finding that the feminist identity plays a role in gender awareness, specifically in younger students.

Understanding the perspective of the respondents, proves crucial to the broader framework of the question at hand. Looking at the first question, “Being born a specific sex, it be man/woman/intersex. Gives inherent disadvantages/advantages, in society.” Isn't specifically supported by Withers, but both critique binary gender roles. Withers argues that the

medicalization of trans individuals serves to reinforce said binary gender roles. Overall, leading to discrimination of individuals that exist outside of said norms. Existing research suggests that, being born a specific sex may correspond with societal dis/advantages. Findings in Kamo, Y. (2018), “The effects of gender, race, and class on intergenerational mobility: A comparative study of the United States and Canada,” support that women, and people of color are less likely to experience upward mobility, to the same extent as their male counterparts. Knowing the demographic surveyed is primarily AFAB, with a 68.08 skew. It is safe to infer that the question has no correlation with the article by Withers, R.

(2020). The overall skew of the respondents, regarding the first question is negative, represented by *fig.1*. Mimicking the expected influence of a demographic that primarily follows a female experience.

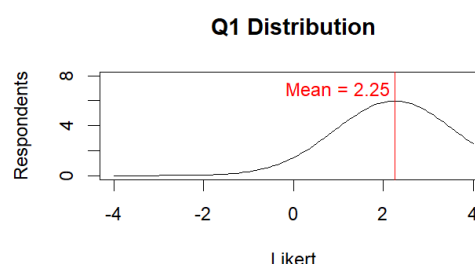


fig .1

The null hypothesis, or H_0 , for the second question is: "Isolated environments do not impact self-perception of gender," which is a statement of equality. For the narrative, it's based on assumptions from Withers (2020). Supporting the position that the media can impact gender perception, and understanding. Withers referred to the show "Butterfly," which follows the experience of Max/ine, a trans-identifying youth. The research hypothesis is the question itself, which asserts the position that there is influence. Looking briefly at the data dashboard, the majority of respondents 40% were neutral in the Likert scale, which was obtained via Google Forms. The 40% represents indifference towards the question. For the article's overarching goal, if the null hypothesis holds, it would serve to support the thesis. The α for this two-tailed test is

set to .10, chosen because the demographic surveyed is largely AFAB. According to Krefting, L. A., & Lobato, D. (2019), this demographic tends to be more aware of social problems.

It's important to note that, in an isolated environment, internal biases and behaviors still influence identity. But the assumed notion is that without societal limits, gender expression is more diverse.

Setting the hypothetical population mean to 3, which is an assumption based on an educated guess, it leaves us with a Z-test score of 1.6304. Whether we reject H_0 or not is dependent on our two-tailed tests. However, this Z-score of 1.6304 shows a weak correlation with the overall population. The significance level is α (.10), and the Z-score threshold is 1.645. We fail to reject the null hypothesis by a margin of 0.0146. For the question and the overarching thesis, it means that maybe, with a grain of salt, isolation does not impact one's perception of gender, but the correlation is weak and dependent on one's lived experience.

Data For Survey 2

Survey #2: Gender diversity in a broader context. What does gender mean to you ?

1. How would you describe your gender experience?
2. What factors might have influenced your gender expression.
3. What does gender mean to you ?
4. Without the world around you, how would you see your own gender expression ?
5. What are your thoughts on self exploration ?
6. What are your thoughts on conforming to society ?
7. What do you think is the most important factor to gender exploration ?
8. Do you believe that "gender is a social construct", if so, what in your life strengthened that belief ?
9. Do you believe there is misinformation about what gender is, if so, what is the goal ?
10. Do you believe people are unfairly treated because of their gender, if so, why ?
11. Gender serves to do what in society, what does it mean to have a gender ?
12. How important is diversity to you ?

13. If you questioned your gender. What led you to start asking yourself questions ?

The analysis of the most common terms in the second survey. Treating the words as numerical data, provided valuable insights into trends of societal influence. Keywords that appeared in responses for question #2, included "culture, what I was exposed to as a child, my friends, the music/TV I watched." These results suggest that our gender expression is a developmental characteristic of our lives, which can be understood in two ways: dynamically and statically.

Culture represents a societal imprint on the methodology we use to approach the world. Implying a dynamic evolution of how society expresses gender. Statically, gender expression represents the self-position in relation to gender. It is important to note that regardless of outward presentation, the inner representation of gender is a stronger representation of the self. This seems to be a reaction towards the existence of outward social stimuli. Acting as an attempt to represent the inner diversity/ self in relation to gender to the world around us.

Relating this back to individuation, it suggests that aspects of the persona have gendered characteristics. As defined by Jung (1959), the persona is differentiated from the authentic self. Relating this to Withers (2020), attempting to remediate psychological distress that exists in the persona. Isn't the same as psychological distress that exists within the self. This isn't referring to themes of transgender medicalization found within Withers, but a broader attempt at understanding the individuated self and the persona. Those who disregard the ideas of self for the installment of societal gain, i.e., "transmaxxers" or "look-maxxers," are, by the virtue of what the persona is and isn't, receding the nature of their authentic selves away from common perception.

Meaning their authentic self isn't represented or understood, by themselves or society. This statement is not mutually exclusive, it is dependent on the individual. The consensus of this, is that Withers, isn't a absolute characterization of a authentic transgender experience

The Compass of Validation and Conclusion

The driving force behind our validation concerning gender within a social context has the potential to provide a self-evident perspective, known as "The Compass of Validation," when understood through the lens of the self. This compass poses several questions about the internal and external drivers of validation, with the answers having crucial implications for one's sense of self. The most significant question is: "What is my source of validation? Is it external or internal?" If one's gender exists merely as an external construct, it is not a true representation of the self but rather a persona that embodies desires, either for social gain, as in the case of trans-maxxers, or as an escape from psychological distress (Withers, 2020).

However, if one's gender is validated internally, meaning that "The Compass of Validation" points inward and is not solely dependent on external factors but maintains a balance, endocrinological treatment can be used to confirm the self's internal definition. Trans medicalization is a form of expression that is not always tied to gender.

Framework for The Compass of Validation:

1. Identify current sources of validation.
2. Identify the constructs that reinforce the use of these sources.
3. Deconstruct previously held constructs with the aim of understanding them.
4. Attempt to objectively perceive desires.

5. Search for "uncomfortable truths," "suppressed beliefs," and "external causes of shame."
6. Once the individual has understood what these are, they must determine their root cause and accept internal validation before seeking it out.
7. Understand questions such as "what do I want?" and "why do I want it?"
8. Integrate the external world as affirmations of internal beliefs.

Our surrounding world attempts to define things as a compromise between their true meaning and the ability to be understood. External validation and labels are inherently limited, whereas the only limitation for internal validation is the individual themselves. For one to truly convey a belief and understand its meaning, validation must be balanced, receiving equal parts of external and internal validation. We live in the real world, and external beliefs and experiences should not be the source of our validation but rather confirmation and affirmation of who and what we are.

Issues arising from externally held beliefs are due to the validation being externally driven, created, and limited. An external compass of validation detracts from the self, as it can only discern direction; its balance leads itself to legibility. Compasses are not readable in the presence of a magnet, as they are influenced and fail to represent the proper direction of the self concerning identity or location.

There is a growing need to understand the subject of identity within the broader context of the self. It is crucial that more research be conducted. The limitations of this article lie within the scope of the survey; while the sample is not ideal in terms of representation, it still offers valuable insights. The nature of the self cannot be conveyed through conventional reasoning and lies closer to an experience than a list of facts within a paper. The charged nature of the topics covered represents an increasingly dichotomous view of gender, making productive conversation increasingly difficult.

This limitation hinders the momentum of information dissemination and leads to misinformation. It is essential to continue being critical, methodical, and sensitive when addressing the topic of gender, understanding and acknowledging the inherent diversity of perspectives. We may never fully comprehend what is, but we can move closer to understanding who we are.

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R code

```
my_data <- read.csv("C:/Users/Yaz/Desktop/file.csv")
na.omit(my_data)
mean(na.omit(my_data$Age))

# create a binary gender distribution (75% female, 25% male)
gender <- c(rep("female", 73.7), rep("male", 26.4))

# calculate the proportion of females in the distribution
prop_female <- sum(gender == "female") / length(gender)

# calculate the mean and standard deviation of the binary distribution
mean_dist <- mean(c(0,1))
sd_dist <- sqrt(mean_dist * (1 - mean_dist))

# calculate the z-score of the female proportion
z_score <- (prop_female - mean_dist) / sd_dist

# print the z-score
print(z_score)

mean(my_data$Being.born.a.specific.sex..it.be.man.woman.intersex..Gives.inherent.disadvantages.advantages..in.society.)
sd(my_data$Being.born.a.specific.sex..it.be.man.woman.intersex..Gives.inherent.disadvantages.advantages..in.society.)
# Define the mean and standard deviation
mu <- 2.25
sigma <- 1.332785

# Define the x-axis values
x <- seq(-4, 4, length.out = 100)

# Compute the density function
pdf <- dnorm(x, mean = mu, sd = sigma)

# Plot the normal distribution
plot(x, pdf*20, type = "l", xlab = "Likert", ylab = "Respondents",
     main = "Q1 Distribution", xlim = c(-4, 4), ylim = c(0, 8))

abline(v = mu, col = "red")
text(1, 7, "Mean = 2.25", col = "red")

mean(my_data$In.a.isolated.environment..without.societal.influence..How.would.that.affect.your.gender..way.you.identify..)
sd(my_data$In.a.isolated.environment..without.societal.influence..How.would.that.affect.your.gender..way.you.identify..)/sqrt(20)
```

```
my_data2 <- read.csv("C:/Users/Yaz/Desktop/file2.csv")
words<- na.omit(my_data2$What.factors.might.of.influenced.your.gender.expression.)
words <- words[nzchar(words)]
# Print out the words vector to see if there are any issues with the data
print(words)

freq_table <- table(words)
most_common_word <- names(freq_table)[which.max(freq_table)]
print(most_common_word)
```