

RAHUL PRASAD: Thank you Dee.

Now we have another video from the TEDxUofW team, talking a little bit more about what they've been up to during quarantine.

'WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO DURING QUARANTINE?' – TEDxUofW TEAM

MARY BONILLA: My quarantine has been really interesting. I guess I would say my quarantine so far has consisted of three major things: school, and like related schoolwork, youtube workout videos, and playing pokemon again. It's been fun.

EMELIA HUGHES: During quarantine I've been spending a lot of time with my cat, actually, who I think is very thankful about having me around alot more. And I've also kind of gotten into more of my hobbies like sewing actually and I made this sweater which is a really cool result of having more time on my hands. So yeah, that's what I've been doing.

ANDREW TANG: During quarantine I'm an avid producer so a lot of the times I've just been making alot of music, trying to share my musical experiences with as many people as I can, and then weaving my practice of design into it as well. Recently, I've been working on a project where I try to create music based on how I feel and then create a design experience around that.

JESSICA PRASETYO: During quarantine I've been spending a lot of time cooking, whether it's cookies or even bread, I've been spending a lot of time in the kitchen.

NINI TSENG: During the pandemic, since I am still in Taiwan, the situation isn't that critical so I can hang around outside with my mask on and do a lot of things. So, most of the time, I am chilling around with my friends and my family because it is hard to meet them up after I go to America. And also, I am doing part-time jobs to fulfill my life and I do learn a lot of things during my jobs.

JAKE JUNG: I've tried a little bit of cooking over quarantine. One thing that I recently made in fact was ramen, so that's one hobby that I've picked up during my time in quarantine.

SARAH SCHMITZ: In the past year, I have picked up and dropped a lot of different things like doing Chloe Ting challenges or embroidery. But the things that have stuck have been painting my things, collecting bucket hats, and going rock hunting, so yeah, I don't know.

RAHUL PRASAD: Thank you again to the TEDxUofW team for all of their work in putting on today's event.

Our eighth speaker, Aidan Key, is the director of Gender Diversity and the founder of TransFamilies.org. He has worked with schools across the nation and thousands of families from around the world over the past two decades. His work has earned him recognition as the Greater Seattle Business Association's Community Leader of the Year, one of Seattle Magazine's Most Influential People, and has also made appearances on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Larry King Live, and NPR's Fresh Air. Here today to talk about children and gender inclusion, please welcome Aidan Key.

'THE HEART OF THE MATTER' – AIDAN KEY

AIDAN KEY: No school guidance counselor, anywhere in the world, could have led me to the job I have today.

It wasn't – and still isn't – listed as a career possibility. I work with people who are encountering gender diverse children for the first time in their lives, and they have no idea what to do. These people are parents and grandparents wanting to love and support their child, but also folks trying to do a job - teachers and principals, health providers, coaches and cafeteria staff, those in foster care, family attorneys, and judges. Their job is to support a transgender child and they need help.

Did I just say transgender child? Do such children exist?

Yes, they do and, while lots of people struggle with that concept, these kids need our support. Can we agree that they should receive support for their gender identity and, if so, what the heck does that even look like? There are practicalities to consider: names, pronouns, bathrooms, and so on. But, first, let's start with a little context.

A few years back, I had the opportunity to speak with someone once considered a leading expert, whose research had deeply influenced our thinking about gender identity in children. He said to me, “Aidan, wouldn’t you agree that being trans offers a harder pathway in life?” Yes, I said. “Wouldn’t you agree that if we could make that path less hard for children, we should?” Again, I said yes. He went on to say, “Then why wouldn’t we do everything we could to change that child’s mind?”

Hmm, here is crux of the issue. His latter point is flawed. We once thought we could, and should, change a child to better fit into society. Children were expected to look and behave in gender-specific ways. If they didn’t, they were often dismissed, sometimes beaten or subjected to “reparative” therapy practices that punished them but didn’t, in fact, change them. We taught them to hide and feel shame, and that there is no place in this world for them.

Without support, we know that these children are at the highest risk for suicide, homelessness, or being victims of violence – For our children of color, this is dramatically increased--the ongoing harm is just too devastating to ignore.

Present day research offers us scientific validation for a neurobiological, and possible genetic foundation to gender identity. Studies show that, in utero, the part of the brain that correlates with gender is formed during a later trimester than the trimester in which the genitalia are formed. This is one possibility that explains why a child might have a different gender identity than what we typically expect.

One national study out of Princeton and UW is following the lives of supported trans children. Measures used to examine a child’s gender cognition are showing that they are not pretending or confused. They are who they say they are. Trans children are finding their voice. Their families and providers are listening. How do they fare when raised in an environment of support? Are they happy? Again, research shows that the answer is YES.

Rather than making efforts to change the child, what if we were to change the environment surrounding that child? Wouldn’t that make the path less harsh for these kids? Might they then thrive? Yes. Our hoped-for goal – that of improving the lives of trans children – can be accomplished.

The recommendations of professional entities like the APA and the American Academy of Pediatrics now validate the importance of an affirming approach. If

today's recommendations direct us to offer this support, why aren't we jumping in with both feet?

To better understand why we resist, we need to see what gets in the way of 1. supportive parenting practices; 2. gender inclusion in our schools; and 3. supportive health care practices. Why do we hesitate?

We need look no further than our past portrayals of adult trans people.

There are themes that linger within our collective mindset – especially those of us belonging to older generations. Some that I recall are:

Trans people are sexual deviants/or assumed to be hypersexual – Consider the film, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or the archaic diagnosis of transvestic fetishism found in our abnormal psychology textbooks.

Trans people are to trying to trick you! The themes of deception are pervasive throughout films like *The Crying Game*, *Some Like it Hot*, *Victor/Victoria*

Trans people are often at the center of a scandal, or someone to mock. Consider the Jerry Springer episode that ridicules a transsexual stripper or the nongendered Pat from SNL as the butt of the joke.

Trans people are Disgusting –think *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, when he realizes he has kissed a trans woman and has a subsequent, outrageous meltdown.

Xenophobia and Racism go hand in hand with gender – this shows up as a Western European vilification of gender diverse people from cultures—like the Hijra in India or the Two Spirit people of North America—where the intersection of cultural, racial, and gender differences were/still are framed as heathen, and in desperate need of Christian intervention.

And certainly, trans people are assumed to be mentally ill – though the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder is now defunct, the notion of severe mental illness is still present in dangerous characters as was seen in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Again, all of these ugly misrepresentations were of adult trans people. This allowed us to assume that being a trans person was a later-in-life choice that only a select few damaged individuals made.

While we move away from this harmful mindset, we have not yet fully formed positive life pathways to take their place. These holdovers from the past

influence our ability to help trans youth today. Parents, teachers and others who are in positions of guiding youth need guidance themselves. What hinders our willingness to move forward?

Uncertainty tops the list. Does the parent of a trans child know any other families like theirs? Most likely not. Do they get a best parenting practices book at their baby shower with a chapter on gender diverse children? No. Would a principal or teacher have received instruction during college on how address the needs of trans students? No. Do our family physicians learn how to provide care? No.

At the root of this uncertainty, we are simply afraid.

If you are a parent, you may fear judgement from others, not just strangers, but within your own family, amongst your friends, your church community, or even your own spouse.

That judgment from others takes second place next to the fear of what kind of life your child might have – one that is surely full of hardship, ostracism, violence... even death. No one wants that!

If you are a school principal, you may feel a little panic. I can't make all these changes for just one student when I have no idea how to explain it to all the other parents in our school.

As a health provider, you may fear recommending supportive steps simply because any step seems like ONE BIG STEP from which there is no turning back.

This widespread uncertainty results in a nebulous and dangerous waiting game as parent, provider, and society at-large insist that a child's gender identity must be proven once and for all. Without definitive proof, the fear is that, in supporting these changes, a child might make a horrible mistake, or go down a path to a disastrous life.

Some people, those who do not have a trans child in their lives, imagine scenarios in which even the youngest of children are seen as a potential threat. While it may be hard for them to articulate this perceived threat, they sure are feeling it.

These feelings inspire a lot of imagined dangers.

Now...In my work, I've heard a lot.

A trans girl is often accused of pretending to be a girl so she can watch naked girls in the locker room.

Some wonder whether trans girls are a threat to girls' teams? Will they dominate, robbing other girls of athletic opportunities? One track athlete in Conn thought so. She took legal action stating that there was no way she could compete against a young trans woman. Just days after filing suit, this same athlete upped her game to beat her trans competitor and win the state championship!

One parent called the police to file sexual assault charges against a 3rd grade trans girl. Her crime? She joined the other girls in a playful game of snapping each other's elastic waistbands.

A teacher worried that, if a trans boy were allowed access to the boys' locker room to change for P.E., he might be gang-raped.

There are even concerns along these lines...

Could it be that trans boys are really just young, easily influenced girls suffering under the patriarchy? If you can't fight the patriarchy, do you simply join it by becoming a boy? And what about trans girls? Are they patriarchy's attempt to infiltrate, dilute, and undermine the power of women?

You might think these kinds of scenarios come from certain kinds of people and not others.

That's not the case. These concerns show up regardless of political affiliation, regardless of religious beliefs, cultural or geographic differences. Some fears border on the irrational side, some don't. No matter what, I've found that respectfully addressing ALL concerns is what moves conversations forward.

Let's take two of the most common questions and see if we might find a new way of thinking about them.

What if this is a phase? Children go through phases. If it's a phase – let it be a phase. Do children benefit from receiving support while they move through a phase? Absolutely.

Will a child change their mind about their gender? A small percentage do. But let's also recognize that a supportive environment for exploration allows them to get to that place.

Isn't this supportive environment for exploration what childhood is all about anyway?

Up 'til now there was no visible representation of trans children and the language to describe their experience was largely nonexistent. While some tried to find their voice, most could not.

I know. I was one of those children. While I always had a clear sense of my gender as different, I had no way to give name or voice to it. When I was able to, I was nine. I'd gone to Sunday School in my Sunday best, well not my Sunday best, but the Sunday best that others expected of me. Usually, my mother didn't mind what I wore but, on days like Easter Sunday or Mother's Day, she insisted I wear the dress. She mostly understood the dread I felt at having to do so, but also knew the disapproval that would come from the church families. As a single, divorced mom in the 70s struggling to raise two kids, she didn't need more stigma heaped on our family. Our unspoken compromise was the jeans and t-shirt she allowed me to stash in the car for a quick post-sermon change.

I felt such shame...mortification, really. It still hard to describe these feelings. Logic tells me, "It's just a dress!" Viscerally, it's solid proof that the person I knew myself to be was not what others saw, and definitely not what anyone would want to hear about. As I stood in the corner of the foyer, I willed the wall to open up and swallow me. I watched a young couple, with two children, and for the first time really understood what was expected of me. Marriage, family. I thought, sure, that sounds good. That thought was overtaken by a wave of despair as I understood that I would be in the role of wife and mother, not the husband and father I knew I ought to be. The clarity I received that day put a name to it – I should have been born a boy. Even at the tender age of 9, I knew enough to not to talk about it – with anyone! I crushed those thoughts into a tight ball and shoved them down as far as I could. What I wanted, and who I knew myself to be, was straight up impossible!

Today, it's still possible for strangers to believe that I am somehow a bad-wrong-sick-disgusting-duplicious person because of those lingering themes from the past. They can't see me.

But, what about these children today?

Are they a danger to other children?

Are they repulsive humans that deserve to be mocked?

Are they pedophiles?

Their age and innocence make this a harder sell, doesn't it?

These are real trans kids that I know and love.

If we can't place our distress on these children, where do we direct it? - we direct it to those who offer support – the parents, their providers, anyone who advocates for these children. Some believe that these adults are the ones forcing or grooming these children to further their own sick agenda.

You're sending that child down a path towards mental illness!

You just wanted a daughter, so you made your son into one.

You should be locked up for child abuse!

God doesn't make mistakes!

Today, we are seeing significant efforts to prevent support, even to the point of retracting civil rights for trans people of any age. A simple request for a different pronoun or name has now morphed into a national debate. Year after year, legislation is introduced to strip existing rights using scare tactics that amplify unfounded dangers in restrooms and locker rooms.

Back to that job of mine. As I work with family by family, school by school, church by church, I've found that people are willing to consider a more expansive view of gender - one that, while not fully understood, has always existed. Instead of relying on narratives of the past, we can watch this film, *The Most Dangerous Year*, that tells the story of today's amazing children and the fight for their human rights.

What do teachers in Oklahoma, Alaska and North Dakota have in common with those in California and Massachusetts? They care about their students and want them to feel valued and included. Where do Christian, Mormon, and Muslim families see eye to eye? They love their kids and want what's best for them. As I engage and connect with others across the nation, a core shift occurs. Hearts open.

We don't have a crystal ball to predict the future, but we know where we've been.

We are recognizing that changing the world to include these kids is a new task, and that it is the right way to go. We are doing it in our schools, and - it - is - working. We don't actually need to know a child's eventual gender identity to know that a supportive environment will benefit them regardless of how they ultimately come to define their gender. We just need to make more room.

It's important to recognize that these supported children are not suffering like their elder predecessors – people like me for whom early support was spotty, or others for whom it was nonexistent.

Might the presence of transgender children simply provide everyone, trans or otherwise, the opportunity to be our fullest authentic selves - free of gender restrictions? What if this disruption of the gender status quo is actually a brilliant addition that serves to deepen the understanding of gender for everyone?