



Gender Dysphoria

A workbook for difficult days

www.lgbtqproject.org.uk

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What is Gender Dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is the term we use to describe discomfort or distress at the differences between our gender identities and the sex we were assigned at birth. It can be described as feeling distance between your lived experience in your body and how you want to be seen by others.

You do not have to be ‘transitioning’ to experience gender dysphoria, although it is most commonly felt by transgender or gender-questioning individuals. Gender dysphoria is not considered to be a mental illness, although, like sexuality, it used to be treated as such. However, it is still regarded and used as a clinical diagnosis in the treatment of transgender patients undergoing transition.

Dysphoria is simply a different lived experience some of us go through in relationship to our bodies.

Gender Dysphoria can be alleviated and managed like any other bodily experience. It is frustrating to have to manage ourselves, but there is a lot of support out there and resources we can use, to make sure we are safely looking after ourselves.

Content written by
Joe Henson, originally
created for Pride in
Progress, art workshops
for LGBTQ+ Youth.

Why do we feel like this?

There are a number of theories currently being considered about why we feel this way about our bodies, including cognitive developmental theory, gender schema theory and the social learning theory.

The problem with all these ideas is that, despite sounding complicated, they are far too simple.

People like straightforward stories, but it is hard to make boxes to fit people when, in reality, we are all incredibly complicated and unique. We fill multiple roles, at different points in our lives, with different groups of people. Gender Dysphoria is hard to find an actual origin story for because we are all so diverse.

The answer is probably a messy combination of social, biological, cultural, and developmental factors... the simplest answer is...nobody knows exactly (but we are trying to find out!)

However, the same can be said for things like depression and anxiety, of which there are multiple origin theories. The most important thing to remember is that this is a real, lived experience for a lot of people, and sometimes understanding the cause is not as important as respecting and treating the issue.

Not 'something new'

Gender diversity is not anything new. Transgender people have a long and complicated history and the reason it is less visible is because the language we use to describe gender variance has changed a lot in the past 100 years or so.

In fact, a lot of our history is tied up with other LGBTQ+ identities. Being transgender, or the idea of 'inversion' as it used to be called here in the UK by early sexologists in the 1800s, was viewed as the main reason for homosexuality for a long time: 'the soul of one sex in the body of another'.

We didn't have anything like the term 'transsexual' until it was first used in the early 1900's by Magnus Hirschfeld and later came to be used in England in 1949 by David Caudwell. It was only in the 1980's that the term 'transgender' began to become common when referring to a community.

In fact, a lot of icons who we see as gay or lesbian for example may in fact have felt gender-variant, but the language we have now of being 'transgender' did not exist back then.

Gender-diverse people have always existed and will always exist.

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Not alone

There is the Chevalier D'Eon (1728-1810), a spy who lived and identified as female for most of her life and Alan L Hart, (1890-1962), a transgender physician, radiologist, and writer, who pioneered tuberculosis research. There is Silvia Riviera (1951-2002) and Marsha P Johnson (1945-1992), civil rights activists of the Stonewall riots and Willmer Broadnax (1916-1992), a talented gospel singer who lived as male without anyone knowing his assigned sex at birth until he passed away. Non binary gender diversity can be found in literature, art and mythology too, throughout the ages.

If we look beyond our current ideas of gender, we can see that other cultures often have much more visible transgender communities and histories. Some gender nonconforming communities in other cultures include the Hijra of India, Two-Spirit identities in indigenous North American communities, the Acault in Myanmar and the Kathoey of Thailand. These identities are not the same as our transgender history, because each persons' idea of gender is shaped by their background and culture. They do, however, serve to show that our binary system of male and female is not the worldwide standard for ideas about gender.

Combating Gender Dysphoria

Do not ignore the basics

Have you managed to shower/stay hydrated/eaten enough food? If so, well done! If not – try and do these as a basic checklist plus any other maintenance tasks you feel are important to your wellbeing.

Spend time curating one outfit that you feel good about your gender in

Pick the clothes you feel most confident in. Make it your go-to gender dysphoria outfit. Any time it flares up, put on this outfit for the whole day, so however bad you feel, you can have confidence in the safety of how you feel in those clothes.

Remember that you are more than your body

Your mind has so much else going on and so many other positive qualities that do not reside in your body. Are you a kind person, a talented person, a good friend, a trustworthy confidant? Try and think about these great things about yourself as well.

Exercise

It is one of those things that helps you take control of your body. You can reshape aspects of your body though exercise, and you can learn to appreciate the amazing capacity it has to function, if nothing else.

Try to locate and keep track of what sets off your dysphoria

Is it being around certain people? Certain situations? Does the activity you have just been doing contribute? Make a note of when and why it most frequently appears, or if constant, when it is at its least bearable. Lists are good for noticing what might be making it worse.

**Remember that
you are more
than your body.**



Find forms of self-expression you find validating

Art, gaming, writing, talking to friends who are supportive. When and where do you feel most validated in your gender?

Rely on your community

Let those close to you in your support network know when you need extra support. Do not assume people will 'just know' what to do either- sometimes they are willing to help but do not know how. You can let them know how their company or online support would be best directed, whether in distraction, reassurance or talking directly about your dysphoria. If you want to widen your network for support search online for services and to see if there are any groups around for other communities you enjoy being part of in terms of games, sports and other interests.

Reassess how you see yourself

Check what sort of content you are consuming. What standards are you comparing yourself to? What sort of bodies are you seeing represented? Can you change that, so you are following more people with similar experiences to you? Find inspiring individuals. Remember you can tailor your online influences to meet your own needs, and do not be afraid to do so.

Distraction

Can you be doing something else now? Try to pick something that involves as little interaction with your body as possible and that you can focus on. Do not pick boring tasks, only ones you know you can get involved in.

Create something

You do not have to come up with a masterpiece, but small acts of creation when you feel stuck are great at refocusing your brain towards seeing yourself as a vehicle of change. Make a meal or bake a cake, draw, paint, doodle, write poems or your feelings or letters to people you know.

Make a safe space

Try and avoid the spaces you know will upset you, or if you have to be there, try to create a sensible escape plan or safe place to wind-down afterwards. Notice what spaces you feel most comfortable in and those that have positive influences on your mood.

Change is possible

Dysphoria feels like it has no end and that things will never change. Sometimes it is good to be able to remind yourself that they do, and things like diaries, selfies (even a private, un-shared album) can serve as hopeful reminders of this. Small physical and aesthetic changes for extreme bouts of dysphoria can provide good boosts, things like exercise, a new haircut, new clothing or style alterations can help you see yourself differently too.

Write some time off

It is ok to know you might not feel great for the next few hours or even the rest of the day. Try to plan around this and not despise it. Embrace the fact this might be an off day and try to do something you will find comforting. If you feel you are too busy to take time out, and that is adding to your distress, remember that if you try to push on, you might take twice as long at getting tasks done when you are not functioning at your best, so it makes sense to take time out and then tackle your tasks once you have refocused.

Counselling

If you are finding it unmanageable or need extra support for other life areas, you can find a therapist who has worked with varied gender experiences. This can be expensive, but low-cost and free sessions can be available. If you are not getting on with your therapist, they are the wrong therapist for you. Therapy is a working relationship and only works if both of you agree and are comfortable with the work you are doing together.

Look up our counselling service on page 17 to see if it is right for you.

Gender workbook

List some words that come to mind when you think about your gender:

What does being a man/woman/intersex/non-binary person mean to you?

What positive words do you want to be associated with?

Get some extra help

Techniques to conceal parts of our bodies we have difficult feelings about can be useful, if right for you. Binding, packing, padding and tucking can all be used to help ease discomfort. Make sure you do this safely! Remember binders need breaks and that certain tapes are not skin-friendly.

Remember you are not alone

As it is so personal it's easy to forget that there are so many people who feel the impact of gender dysphoria living amazing lives.

Keep an eye on self-destructive behaviours

The urge to self-destruct due to high levels of dysphoria is not uncommon. It is possible to fall into bad habits in a variety of ways including substance abuse and escapism, reckless behaviours and putting yourself in harms' way. Do not pile guilt and self-recriminations on yourself if you do, reach out to your support network and try some other things on this list – if you find the urges are overwhelming and persistent, speak to your GP, a trusted professional you know, or anyone in your support network you feel can help with getting a more in-depth emergency plan in place.

Self-care is a word that has been growing in prominence in online support platforms but looking after yourself is more than just giving yourself a treat when you are struggling. It is about making time for yourself, asserting your identity in the spaces you feel safe to do so and investing in your self-worth long-term. It is hygiene and exercise and finding enjoyment in things.

Be your own best friend

Your friend is feeling bad gender dysphoria. What advice do you give them? Reassure yourself as if you would someone you love.

Write down only the positive things.

[illegible]

If you do not like how the story ends, try to rewrite it. Use the same structure but give it a different ending. Rewrite it until you are happy with it as many times as you want. This process helps you rewrite the stories you tell yourself that are unchangeable about your body.

List all the best things about you, in your opinion. If you are not sure what to write, ask other people for their suggestions.

How many of the best things about you were image related?
More or less than you thought?

Now list – What brings you hope? Who or what inspires you?

Make a list of all your favourite things that keep you going: friends, icons, pets, social media pages, activities, hobbies. These are your resources to remind you that you are more than your body.



Be you,
belong.

LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing support in Norfolk and Waveney.

Our dedicated health and wellbeing service provides support, education and information for LGBTQ+ individuals, families, schools and organisations across the region.

Through personalised and compassionate care delivered by those with genuine lived experience, we strive to reduce social isolation and inspire positive change.

Our services include:

1:1 support and counselling

Drop in groups

School partnerships

Awareness training

Trans and Gender Diverse Support Services

www.lgbtqproject.org.uk

LGBTQ+
PROJECT

Get in touch:

Phone: 01603 219299

Email: info@lgbtqproject.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1129770

All age Trans and Gender Diverse Support Service

We provide confidential support to trans and gender diverse people of all ages. Our services empower those exploring their gender identity by providing a safe space to ask questions, increasing their sense of resilience, and helping to manage gender dysphoria. We work alongside trans and gender diverse people at every stage of their journey. Whether you're a young person navigating your path or an adult seeking guidance, understanding and connection, we're here for you.

Our aim is to improve the emotional and mental health of children, young people and adults across various gender identities and expressions.

We offer the following services:

- One to one support and guidance around medical and socially transitioning, name change, gender dysphoria, mental health and wellbeing.
- Access to our low-cost counselling service with 12 sessions available.
- Trans support groups for all age groups, provide a safe, affirming space where everyone can thrive.
- Free inhouse produced resources.

“My support worker was great! They listened and helped me through a lot of difficulties which I was worried about sharing at first, but they made me feel relaxed and reassured me that my feelings were valid”.



BYTS Youth groups provides facilitated support and social opportunities for young LGBTQ+ people living in Norfolk & Waveney. The aim of these youth groups is to create a space where you can hang out with other LGBTQ+ young people and make some new friends and join in the activities – all in a safe and respectful environment.

Age: 13 – 18yrs

When: Fortnightly groups.

Time: Times vary from 4pm – 6pm

or 5:30pm – 7:30pm.

Where: To find out if BYTS is in your area, email us at info@lgbtqproject.org.uk or visit our website and the What's On section.

www.lgbtqproject.org.uk



A drop in group for individuals aged 13 – 18 who identify as trans, gender diverse or gender non-conforming. Providing opportunities to meet and make new friends and join in the activities – all in a safe and respectful environment.

Age: 13 – 18yrs

When: Fortnightly

Time: 10am – 12noon

Where: Norwich

www.lgbtqproject.org.uk





LGBTQ+ **PROJECT**

Supporting Norfolk and Waveney

www.lgbtqproject.org.uk

10 Cathedral Street, Norwich, Norfolk, NR1 1LX

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