Outside the Binary: Diagnostic Grey Areas in Gender Dysphoria

Kristina Alton, M.D., Devin Greene, M.D.
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN

Contact: kristina.alton@vumc.org

Background - History

Medical conceptualizations of what we would now consider gender dysphoria or transgender identity first appeared in the 19th century with the proliferation of the natural sciences.

Psychiatric diagnostic references to transgender experiences first appeared in the DSM II and definitions have evolved with each edition.

DSM-III – classified in section on Psychosexual Disorders
- Transsexualism
- Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood (GIDC)
- Transvestic
- Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder
- Gender Dysphoria (sexual orientation specifier removed)

DSM-IV (TR) – classified in section on Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders
- Gender Identity Disorder (sexual orientation specifier) D5V – Gender Dysphoria in distinct section
- Gender Dysphoria (sexual orientation specifier removed)

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care recommends patient considering medical or surgical interventions for gender affirming care be evaluated for mental health concerns, and current standard practice typically includes 1-2 mental health professionals to attest to a diagnosis of gender dysphoria prior to intervention.