

**THE WORLD IS
DIVIDED BY A
GENDER WAR
FABRICATED
TO KEEP US AT
LOGGERHEADS.
GENDER IS
A MYTH. IT
DOES NOT
REALLY EXIST.**

1. THE PROBLEM OF GENDER

GENDER IS A MYTH - LANA P

In the turbulence of the 1960s, both the women's and gay liberation movements identified the gender role system as the root cause of their oppression. They concentrated their criticism on the traditional stereotype of male gender and its historical associations with dominance over others, and the physical expression of power.

The work of radical lesbian feminists of the period had a particular clarity. Lesbian feminists could engage with masculinity in the absence of men. Open to them was a rich panoply of lesbian identity expressions including the masculinity associated with 'butch' and 'dyke' lesbians. They were entirely free of the need for men and consequently free-thinking enough to see that the traditional male gender role oppressed women, gay men, and, ironically, any man who did not conform to the gender role ideal, i.e. any man who did not wish to dominate the world by controlling resources and/or other human beings.

The terms 'gender' and 'sex' are often used synonymously which can lead to confusion. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'sex' as the biological differences between people (differences in the anatomy of the reproductive system, for example). By contrast, 'gender' can refer to someone's internal, personal sense

of being male, female, both or neither (gender identity) and it also refers to the socially constructed roles considered appropriate for a man or a woman in any given society (gender role). Gender can be regarded as a performed exaggeration of the relatively small differences between the sexes (of 48 chromosomes only one is different in men and women). The idea that gender is binary, allowing only the two possible options of 'male' or 'female' is an arbitrary construction. We divide ourselves along these lines, exaggerate the apparent differences on both sides and then assert that this division is 'natural' and 'normal'. But when we look more closely at the natural world we see examples of single species with more than two sexes (harvester ants of the genus *Pogonomyrmex*, for example), and we also see both 'male' and 'female' sexes in the same individual (the mangrove killifish or mangrove rivulus). The gender role system is a cultural construct that creates artificial imbalances of power. And it gives rise to an ecosphere in which racism and homophobia are also possible.

Because we have all lived with the binary gender role system since first memory, it is difficult, or disorientating, to imagine a world without it. For some people, there is also an element of comfort in the certainty of 'knowing where you stand'. But even the dubious benefit of that certainty comes at enormous

cost. Traditional gender roles exaggerate the strength and power of men over all others. In the gender role system, the stereotype of male gender stands as the supreme gender construct. Anything that is not male is less.

TODAY FEMME PRESENTING PEOPLE ARE OFTEN
CONSIDERED BENEATH MASCULINE PEOPLE REGARDLESS
OF GENDER IDENTITY - ANTONIA BELCHER

Women are automatically less. Effeminate men are automatically less. Worse still, to be an effeminate man is to undermine the construct of male gender itself from the inside, as it were. Effeminate men are violently rejected more often than not. The vehemence of that rejection indicates a flimsiness at the foundation of the male gender construct. If the male gender role is so 'tough' and dominant why does it appear to be so easily threatened by the gentility of 'sissy boys'?

When Quentin Crisp was beaten in the street because of his henna-red hair and beautiful makeup, he responded to his attackers by observing, 'I seem to have offended you gentlemen in some way.'

The illegitimate holders of power are always easily offended. They are always vulnerable because they are forever aware, at the deepest level, of the precariousness of their position. This is why despots have to be despotic and tyrants, tyrannical. Power must be exerted because,

like muscle, you must ‘use it or lose it’. The illegitimate holders of power cannot afford to relax and enjoy the benefits of their position because they know it is only a matter of time before that position is justifiably undermined. Sooner or later, someone will appear to seize back illegitimately gained power. Sooner has become now. And we are the people - the feminists, the transgendered, the lesbians and gays, and the straight men who have simply had enough - who are here to say: the game is up.

2. GENDER THINK-IN

The activism of the 1960s eventually led to greater social and sexual equality including the availability of oral contraception on the NHS to all women, and the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales with the passing of The Sexual Offences Act 1967. These were important liberalising first steps, but the oppression of the gender role system still remained intact and largely unchallenged.

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, I invited 200 senior leaders in business, culture and policy to a Gender Think-In, designed to re-examine the phenomenon of gender oppression. The event was supported by the team at Lloyd's, the world's oldest insurance market, and held at the iconic Lloyd's building in the City of London. This think-in followed the pattern of the think-ins convened by the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s. Think-ins of the 70s encouraged everyone to understand the nature of their oppression including ways in which they were the agency of their own self-oppression. The think-ins were aimed at consciousness raising, helping LGBT+ people understand their place in the world, the forces that shaped their oppression and how they might respond imaginatively with new protest forms. At the Gender Think-In, I outlined an alternative approach to the problem of gender intended to benefit the majority

of people regardless of their gender expression or sexual orientation. I called this alternative approach 'gender tender'. In my imagination 'gender tender' meant that society would regard gender as something intensely personal and private. It would be unthinkable to make demands on anyone to explain or defend their gender presentation and it would be illegal to require anyone to conform to any gender stereotype. Social pressure would act in reverse making sacrosanct the individual's right to declare no gender at all - if they so chose - rather than being required to fit into a strict binary system as is currently the case. This approach of first suspending all judgement was suggested to me by the experience of many transgender people. In the early days of transgender experience, some trans people felt the strong desire to be able to 'pass' for their expressed gender - they wanted to be recognised for who they truly are, and they wanted to be fully accepted without caveats of any kind. But equally, there are many accounts of trans people who suffered for being unable - or unwilling - to conform to binary concepts of gender. Those people were physically assaulted or murdered, at worst. At best, they were subjected to hostile comments like, 'What is that? What are you supposed to be?'

Mikki Nicholson, a young British trans woman became the national Scrabble champion in 2010. She

won the competition with the word ‘obeisant’ which means ‘deferential respect’. Ironically, in her own daily life in Carlisle, she experienced the polar opposite of deferential respect. She was verbally abused in the street because of the way she looked. She felt her life would be better if she were able to move to Newcastle and when that proved impossible for her, she took her own life by stepping in front of a train. A close friend described her as someone who was fiercely intelligent and often felt at odds with the world because of her intelligence and her gender expression. In the verbal hostility often encountered by trans people - ‘what are you? what are you supposed to be?’ - we hear the tacit societal agreement that it is a requirement to ‘be’ something. A judgement must be made. To confound or to non-declare is to challenge society itself. But in a gender tender world, there would be no tacit agreement about the need to declare. In a gender tender world, there would be the opposite imperative to ‘butt out’ of other people’s dialogues with themselves about their own gender identity until they were ready, and wished, to have the discussion. The privacy around gender would create a safe space for self-development. It would be unthinkable for a group to make any demands on an individual in relation to their gender. It would be unthinkable for any group to ridicule difference,

demand explanations, or imply the desirability of conformity (or non-conformity, for that matter).

GENDER TENDERNESS WOULD HELP PEOPLE GO WITH
THE FLOW - JONATHAN FRYER

Gender expression would be a fluid work-in-progress and might evolve over the course of a person's lifetime. It would be entirely acceptable - and common - to change one's mind. Changing your mind means you are critically engaged with the relationship you have with yourself and the world around you. By changing your mind, you are simply expressing your dynamism as an evolving being.

FLEXIBILITY AND FLUIDITY - THE ABILITY TO BE WHO
YOU ARE IN EACH MOMENT, DAY, PHASE, AND THIS CAN BE
DYNAMIC; NO NEED TO COMMIT TO A LABEL - ZOE BURDO

Just as it is unthinkable (and illegal) to ask a woman at a job interview if she intends to have children, so it would be unthinkable (and illegal) to ask someone to 'clarify' their identity choices. That said, it's important to stress that open discussion about gender expression would always be possible provided the discussion was instigated by the individual on their own terms.

The suspension of judgement about anyone's gender presentation stands at the heart of the gender tender idea. At present, this non-judgement seems particularly problematic for society. For example, in the

case of babies born intersex (that is, with ambiguous or both sets of genitalia) there is a rush to assign gender to the baby and perform surgery to confirm that gender as soon as possible after birth. It is unbearable for parents to present to the world a happy and healthy ‘It’. They cannot live with the indeterminate nature of their child’s sex, even though this would most likely be in the best interests of the child.

HUMANS LOVE TO CODIFY. WE ALL DO, BUT THERE REALLY IS NO NEED TO DEMARCATÉ DIFFERENCE - ANON

Why are we so concerned with the labelling of gender? Human beings are essentially primates whose special talent is pattern-spotting and placing things in rank order. If we acknowledge it is in our nature to seek patterns and place things in rank order, then a non-pattern-conforming child becomes a challenge to our own central identity. We must locate patterns, and assign different elements into the pattern or something is wrong. Something outside the pattern is literally difficult for human beings to comprehend.

Something outside the pattern also challenges our ability to locate and manage patterns. In effect it undermines the illusion that we can control the world. When surgeons comment on the subject of intersex babies, it is very easy to hear the powerful desire to make the child pattern compliant: ‘The finding of ambiguous

genitalia in the newborn is a social and medical emergency' and 'after stillbirth, genital abnormality is the most serious problem with a baby, as it threatens the whole fabric of the personality and life of the person.' The idea that indeterminate gender affects 'the whole fabric of the personality and life of the person' is only true when there is a dominant binary gender system for the person to be at odds with. The statement is self-serving rather than self-evident.

Recently we have seen bold, strong (and lucky) individuals take on the gender role system and win. They have been able to create an important space of exception for themselves and thrive in all their originality. They have proven that it is the binary system that is broken, not the people who do not conform to its requirements. We live in deranged societies. I have often observed that the greatest harms endured by humanity are usually self-inflicted as a consequence of arbitrary systems of thought. It is not the 'fabric of the personality' that should be regarded as being in danger, but the fabric of the deranged gender role system that oppresses us all.

In 1996 I had lunch with Quentin Crisp in New York. This whip-smart effeminate man had managed, ultimately, to encounter the world on his own terms. We met at an unremarkable diner on the Lower East Side.

The staff looked as capable of murder as waiting tables. When I arrived I was literally looked up and down to ensure I was 'alright' to meet Mr Crisp. I was then taken to a table to wait for Quentin to arrive. During the course of lunch, the staff would approach the table at intervals, not as part of the service I realised, but to check on Quentin's well-being. Had Quentin been unhappy with the conversation - or me - I have no doubt I would have been ejected from the diner without further discussion.

To a degree, Quentin had been able to create for himself something of my idea of a gender tender future. Through force of being, he had managed to create around himself a bubble where he was understood as exceptional, as outside the binary gender system, and so finally beyond its control. But this position had been achieved at immense personal cost. At the time of our meeting there had been a good deal of controversy in LGBT+ circles because Quentin had said he would rather not have lived as a gay man if other options had been available to him. He had suggested he would have preferred gender confirmation surgery (had it been possible at that time) and then he would have lived happily as a woman in Harrogate, proprietress of a knitting shop. I asked him if this had been reported accurately. He replied that it had been unbearably

difficult to live as an effeminate gay man in the mid Twentieth Century and yes, had it been possible to conform in some way, he would have done so simply for the sake of the peace-of-mind most of us are able to take for granted.

Quentin's story emphasises the crushing effect the gender role system has on people who cannot conform easily. It also demonstrates how the system requires us all to live statically. What if our choices about personal expression could be more freely made and what if those choices could, themselves, flex over time? The idea that we are one thing our whole lives is laughable. How do we develop and deepen ourselves if we do not allow ourselves to change?

An intersex baby cannot yet make choices about its own identity. A baby is not yet self-aware or able to communicate. Allowing intersex children to grow up in a space of as yet undefined gender would allow their bodies and their psyches to suggest the best course of action for them once they have grown into self-determining individuals. Surgery on babies, however well meant, always denies the possibility of consent. And the denial of consent is always morally problematic. There are examples of intersex babies assigned a gender at birth, confirmed by surgery, which transpires to be at odds with the individual's ultimate sense of gender. The

wrong decision was made because the one person able to make the correct decision was not part of the decision-making process. Suppose we were able to create the freer space of suspended judgement suggested by my gender tender future. Perhaps the question from family and friends, is it a boy or a girl? could be answered in a new idiom, ‘our baby seems girlish just now’ or ‘our baby seems boyish for now’. The implication being that it is too soon to decide a child’s ultimate gender fate, and it is for the child to decide rather than society. It is the exclusive right of the individual to assume or eschew labels.

It’s true that this places a burden of responsibility on the individual. But the burden will be placed equally on all individuals. The number and variety of available role models will increase dramatically as more and more people self-identify rather than having to conform to the current gender role system. The increase in personal responsibility will be matched by an increase in vibrantly and richly lived examples to follow, and varied and plural sources of information and support. Merely asking the question, is it a boy or a girl? illustrates the gender role system’s overwhelming power to oppress. Even the most liberal-minded amongst us has to concede that knowing a baby is male or female changes our relationship with it. The introduction of gender

creates a pre-designed set of assumptions. In the current gender role system, being gendered 'male' produces instant advantage, and being gendered 'female' creates instant disadvantage, a variety of second class citizenship that will apply to varying degrees for the rest of a woman's life. Why do the majority of women appear simply to put up with this form of second class citizenship? Are women, in general, unaware of their oppression? Does the system work well enough for the majority who have been raised by the gender role system 'not to make a fuss' and to 'be a good girl'? In the binary system, a woman still has access to power through association with her father, boyfriend, husband. Is this a reason for the majority of women's apparent reticence to protest?

What oppresses us also has the power to shape our desires. The archetype of the all-powerful, dominating yet protective alpha male has been sold by the patriarchy as the ultimate haven for women. Ideas of protection and domination can be very appealing because they offer all the advantages of power with none of the associated responsibility. But wherever power is not, vulnerability inevitably creeps in. Perhaps women have lived with the threat of the withdrawal of this protection, or with the threat of physical punishment, for millennia. Have they been taught by the system to

be afraid of the consequences of asserting themselves? Many women have spoken to me of a specific difficulty with, or fear of, self-assertion.

It is a truism that the women's movement has never been a mass movement. Suffrage was secured for all women by a small vanguard of activists predominantly from the middle and upper classes. The cost of participation was higher for working-class women who often received longer prison sentences and harsher treatment because of their lack of status. The education and social position of many leading suffragettes made them the least vulnerable of women in the gender role system and so the most likely, and able, to act.

To free all women, requires a radical rethinking of the way gender is conceived and the way the gender role system operates. And the best place to begin is at the beginning. Suppose we let our babies grow up in a free zone of indeterminate labelling and allowed them the right to learn, prefer, choose and adopt the unique identity that served them best? Suppose we allowed our children to grow into themselves without a framework of expectations pre-erected around them, without the obligation to explain themselves at any time, and where discussions were initiated exclusively by the self-determining individual rather than the conformity-demanding group. Suppose we allowed our

children the space to experiment, and the latitude to develop their ideas and change their minds. And suppose we extended that same courtesy to all adults at whatever stage of their development.

3. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The Gender Think-In was designed to explore the gender role system as it is currently experienced. Participants were first invited to share their gender identity as they perceived it, whether or not they identified with the prevailing binary gender system. They were given the option to self-identify as ‘female’, ‘male’, or any variety of non-conforming labels including no label at all. I was interested in this self-labelling in order to understand how well the gender role system currently works for different groups of people given their self-identification. I wanted to understand how well the constructs of gender ‘fit’ with people’s actual lived experience.

The Gender Think-In generated 104 completed, viable ballot papers and the conclusions that follow draw on the patterns of thought and feeling contributed in those papers. Quotations in this pamphlet are also drawn from those ballot papers and I would like to thank everyone who shared their views. Ballot papers were first sorted into three groups: those completed by participants who self-identified as ‘female’; those completed by people who self-identified as ‘male’; and those by people who self-identified as ‘non-conforming’ in some way.

All participants were asked to score out of 10 the extent to which they felt ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’

(regardless of their self-declared gender identity). The 'female' group declared an average masculinity level of 42.1% and an average femininity level of 57.9%. This gives a 'femininity margin' of 15.8%

The 'male' group declared an average femininity level of 40.9%, an average masculinity level of 59.1%, and a consequent 'masculinity margin' of 18.2%.

Masculinity is emphasised by both groups. The group identifying as 'female' declares a higher masculinity level than the corresponding femininity level declared by the 'male' group. The masculinity margin in the 'male' group is consequently higher than the corresponding femininity margin in the 'female' group.

It can be argued that this is an inevitable outcome of the binary gender system where power is held predominantly on the 'male' side of the binary. It follows that all biases (including unconscious ones) are driven by the desire to 'move towards advantage/power'. If someone identifies as 'male', there is the incentive to identify as being as 'male' as possible, since this is where power, position and acceptance lie. If someone identifies as 'female', there is an equal and opposite incentive to 'play down' the degree of femininity and 'play up' (however unconsciously) the amount of inner masculinity because that is where power, position and acceptance lie in the current gender role system. If these

assumptions are correct, the gender role system interferes at a deep level with the way women regard themselves. It causes them, consciously or unconsciously, to devalue their own femininity.

By way of contrast, the non-conforming group declared a masculinity level of 40.3% and a femininity level of 59.7%. This gives a femininity margin of 19.4% which, significantly, is the highest of all margins declared. It stands to reason that self-identifying as non-conforming is a declaration of independence from the gender role system. Logically and by extension, it is also a declaration of freedom from the system's inherent devaluation of femininity, and this freedom could account for the higher femininity margin. One criticism of the gender tender future was that it would be 'biased towards the feminine'. This comment came from a contributor self-identifying as 'male' and at first I thought it was primarily concerned with the preservation of privilege/power. However on further consideration, and taking into account the whole picture of gender power play, I came to regard the comment as uncannily accurate and prescient.

To declare oneself as non-confirming is to say one feels outside the binary system, and, by extension, outside of the system that places male gender in the position of greatest power. To be non-conforming, then,

is essentially a revolutionary act, not only in its rejection of the binary gender role system but in its freer and greater commitment to the value of femininity. Declaring a high level of femininity flies in the face of the current gender-based power system. It has to be either an admission of weakness or a declaration of an alternative form of strength. As such, it questions the true identity of power, and declines to acknowledge that the ‘male’ side of the binary is where power inevitably lies.

So perhaps (with apologies to Karl Marx) there really is a spectre haunting Europe. I believe this spectre to be a particular quality best described as ‘pan-femininity’. As the term suggests, pan-femininity is neither gender- nor sexuality- specific. It is a non-conforming insistence on the essential value of feminity. Pan-femininity threatens the status quo of current power structures precisely because it is decoupled from gender, sex and sexual orientation, and creates new possibilities of self-expression and being.

The expression of pan-femininity and the assertion of its importance are obscenities in a patriarchal system. The perversity of this truth is confirmed when scenes of rape on TV generate few complaints but the realistic depiction of childbirth and bloody newborns causes revulsion and outrage.

It has been said before that all gender is performance. If your gender identity closely follows one or other of the binary gender norms, then it follows that it is relatively easy to perform that gender role throughout your life. That said, it's also important to acknowledge the significant quotidian energy needed to disguise even the smallest variations from the gender norm. For the majority of people, some form of self-oppression must occur on a daily basis.

The Gender Think-In asked participants to score their sense of their own gender typicality. The assumption behind this question was that people self-identifying as 'male' would choose, if anything, to emphasise their 'masculinity typicality' since this typicality is where power and acceptance are located. On the contrary, the 'male' group produced a typicality score of 42.4%. The 'female' group declared a typicality score of 44.9% and the non-conforming group acknowledged its inherent lack of typicality with the lowest score of all at 40.3%.

Critically, all three typicality scores were below 50%. If each binary gender label 'less than half fits' the wearer, then it follows that the greater part of the individual is consistently at odds with the label in some way. This 'greater part' must therefore be self-oppressing, to a lesser or greater extent, in order to give

the illusion of gender label compliance. The findings of the Gender Think-In support the view already expressed in other studies that some form of self-suppression applies to the vast majority of people. In short, the majority of people are adapting themselves in order to fit into the gender role system. The pretence is long practised from childhood. In all likelihood, the majority of people are no longer aware that they are pretending at all. At one point or another, it appears we are all laughing at jokes we don't really find funny, brushing off behaviour we find offensive, and performing acts of conformity, small or large.

Wouldn't that energy be better used for inner development and expression? To self-oppress requires energy resources, inner dialogue, and self-analysis that could be better used to more creative ends. This is undoubtedly true but whilst that energy is being expended in conforming, it is not being used to challenge the status quo or imagine new ways of growing and being. It could be in the interests of one group to keep the majority occupied by the effort to conform. At the moment the gender system works very well for that coterie of men wielding the lion's share of the world's power and wealth. The siting of power at the 'male' end of the binary system secures their position. It excludes from the club anyone who cannot

conform to the traditional stereotype of maleness - that conquering, imposing, oppressing paradigm of masculinity first identified by the women's movement and gay liberationists. It expressly excludes women and effeminate men, and marginalises those men who cannot perform the traditional male gender role convincingly (regardless of their sexual orientation). So it is time, not just for the feminists and gay liberationists to take a stand, but for every man who has ever been made to feel not 'tough' enough, 'ruthless' enough, 'focused' enough, 'aggressive' enough. These are not the natural and primary characteristics of masculinity.

THE GENDER TENDER FUTURE COULD MEAN NO
DONALD TRUMP-ESQUE TYPE MEN! POSSIBLY
LESS WAR! - MARTIN JOYCE

Masculinity can also be experienced as fraternal, loving, tender, protective, constructive and nurturing. Masculinity can be experienced as contemplative, self-determining and strong enough to stand up to systems of oppression, not simply by visiting more oppression on the oppressor but by working with strength, restraint and wisdom towards the freedom of all.

The old stereotype of male gender is an invention, performed successfully by the very few for whom the gender role system secures power whilst oppressing all other possible contenders for that power.

4. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Participants at the Gender Think-In were asked to enter imaginatively into the gender tender future anticipating its main three advantages and its main three disadvantages.

The first thing to note is that there was a marked and significant ‘skew’ in the ideas contributed. One ‘disadvantage’ was cited again and again by the group self-identifying as ‘female’:

DISCRIMINATION BASED ON OTHER CRITERIA WILL
EMERGE - ROMA

WOULD THERE CONTINUE TO BE DISCRIMINATION/
JUDGEMENT AROUND SOMEONE'S GENDER
EXPRESSION? - ANTONIA BELCHER

HUMAN BEINGS ARE TRIBE FORMERS, WE WOULD PROBABLY
FIND ANOTHER WAY TO DISCRIMINATE - JANET FIELDING

PEOPLE FIND A WAY TO DIVIDE THEMSELVES, IF IT'S NOT
GENDER IT WILL BE SOMETHING ELSE - SARAH HENDERSON

WHO WILL BE THE NEW DOMINANT GROUP (I.E. HUMAN
NATURE IS SUCH THAT WE ALWAYS TRY TO DIVIDE
OURSELVES INTO GROUPS)? - ANON

WOULD GENDER BE REPLACED BY AN ALTERNATIVE
MARKER OF ‘STRENGTH’ AND ‘POWER’; WOULD IT BE
REPLACED BY ANOTHER EXCUSE FOR THOSE IN POWER TO
REMAIN IN POWER? - ZOE BURDO

These references to the enduring and mutable nature of discrimination are entirely absent from the

‘male’ and ‘non-conforming’ groups. It seems reasonable to infer a connection between self-identifying as ‘female’ and the view that discrimination is an inevitable and inherent part of human nature. These references suggest there is a ‘tiredness’ or ‘resignedness’ amongst the group self-identifying as ‘female’; there is the belief that however hard one fights for equality, there is always another mode of oppression waiting to be employed by the holders of power.

The ‘male’ identifying group may be insulated from this line of thinking simply because its members will not have experienced longstanding and sustained discrimination on the grounds of gender identity. One could argue that the group self-identifying as ‘non-conforming’ has declared the belief that discrimination can ultimately be overcome simply by virtue of self-identifying as non-conforming. But for the female-identifying group the situation is subtly and consistently different. For women discrimination has been an entrenched aspect of their history. Women continue to be disadvantaged by the gender role system even in relatively enlightened societies. According to research conducted in 20 countries and reported by the International Trade Union Confederation in 2009, Women earn, on average, 22.4% less than men. Perhaps if discrimination has always been part of your lived

experience, it is difficult - or impossible - to imagine its absence. Perhaps discrimination can come to be accepted as an inevitability, as something inherent to the experience of being female-identifying. This belief may not even be consciously held by the majority but it still means women may be unwittingly complicit in their own discrimination. The gender tender future is dependent on women's ability to see this complicity for what it is, and to refute it. It is an essential pre-requirement for the gender tender future that women are able to believe a non-discriminatory environment is possible. If 52% of the world's population cannot believe in freedom from discrimination, then what hope is there for the actual minorities?

Apart from this anomaly, a spectrum of advantages and disadvantages was proposed, evenly spread amongst the three groups. This spectrum has been analysed and the most frequently occurring patterns of thought have been identified.

The main three advantages of a gender tender future identified by the Gender Think-In are:

1. GREATER FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
2. REDUCTION OF PREJUDICE
3. GREATER EQUALITY

These advantages encompass fundamental and immeasurably significant human rights. The right to

express oneself freely, the right to live free from the deleterious effects of prejudice, the right to equality of opportunity and equality before the law. Anything that moves humanity closer to securing these rights for all seems worthy of serious consideration. The challenges of bringing into being a gender tender world seem well worth confronting.

I ENJOY BEING ME AND I THINK THAT MY GENDER IS PART OF WHO I AM. HOWEVER I'D HAPPILY GIVE GENDER TENDERNESS A GO! SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE IN THE WORLD! - MARTIN JOYCE

It is also important to note that these advantages have universal bearing on the freedom, safety and fulfilment of all human beings regardless of gender or sexual orientation. They are important factors in social and economic success and the realisation of these benefits for all implies a fairer society.

The main three disadvantages of a gender tender future identified by the Gender Think-In are:

1. CONFUSION ABOUT HOW TO EXPRESS ONESELF APPROPRIATELY
2. LACK OF CLARITY WHERE GENDER IS MEDICALLY SIGNIFICANT
3. CONFUSING SIGNALS RELATING TO SEXUAL ATTRACTION

These disadvantages are, by contrast, primarily practical rather than ideological and in that sense they operate on a smaller scale.

The medical question becomes significant in the case of a medical need or emergency. This disadvantage, as cited, appears to overplay the significance of gender in those situations which is not surprising given that the current gender role system overplays the significance of gender in general. Contemporary trans narratives have included the slogan, ‘some chicks have dicks’. This refers to individuals who present as female to the world but don’t feel the need necessarily to alter their genitals. For these people their gender identity and sexual and social identities are different and potentially various. From the medical point of view, the significant issue should be the presenting problem. An unwell penis or vagina is just that regardless of the gender identity of its owner. The assumption that effective healthcare and sexual healthcare are gender-dependent may well be erroneous. A focus on sexual health disregarding gender may actually be preferable. Better healthcare outcomes may result where gender ‘norms’ are not relied on for diagnosis or treatment. The specific needs of the individual must always outweigh all other considerations, and decoupling sexual health from gender assumptions could well promote better person-centric medicine.

The remaining disadvantages are essentially expressions of fear of social embarrassment. Compared

with the loftiness of the main advantages, perhaps a little social awkwardness or initial confusion is a price worth paying.

When it comes to ‘confusion about how to express oneself appropriately’, this need not keep anyone awake at night. In the gender tender future, you can simply carry on as before. There is no requirement to change unless someone wishes to change. In fact, the whole point is the removal of the requirement to conform to any predetermined standard or paradigm. One oppression does not justify another.

PRESSURE OF NONCONFORMITY IS AS BIG A RISK AS
CONFORMITY ITSELF - MARK PATTENDEN

In the absence of strict gender role definitions, it becomes less clear what ‘expressing oneself appropriately’ means. But by the same token, the ‘rules’ that define the ‘right expression’ are fewer so it is far more difficult to get gender expression ‘wrong’. However, you cannot know until you know, as the truism goes. Until you have experienced the transition from constraint to freedom, it is very difficult to imagine the absence of constraint and the vibrant possibilities of freedom.

As with any change, it is always a matter of time before people become acclimatised. In the gender tender future, some individuals will explore their new freedoms

and very soon express new varieties of being. Gradually a far greater range of gender expressions will appear in daily life. The people around us are likely to be more individual in their expressions of self. Their embodiment of the new possibilities will provide a greater variety of role models, opening further possibilities and so the gender tender evolution goes on.

DATING WOULD BE VERY CONFUSING - IT'S HARD ENOUGH
AS IT IS! - MARTIN JOYCE

Undoubtedly, the current binary gender system makes dating more clearly structured. The system does not flex, individuals must. The either-or-ness of the binary system removes doubt about who is supposed to be attracted to who, in spite of the fact that Kinsey identified the immense plurality and fluidity of our gender and sexual identities almost a century ago.

The key words here are 'who is supposed to be attracted to who'. Only certain attractions and combinations are currently sanctioned as 'normal'. The binary system shores up an idea that we are mostly alike. It requires people to shape their own desires in the image of the system. If you are a straight 'male' then you are bound to be sexually attracted to 'females'. If there is any variation whatsoever, it is a contravention of the code. It must mean that you are not 'normal'. It might

mean that you will be labelled LGBT+ and you will suddenly be placed in a minority group. You are not allowed to be variable. You cannot feel attraction for this or that person based on the sum total of their attributes. Your attractions must be 'gender label appropriate'. You are not allowed to stray from the clear requirements of the system or there will be a price to pay.

A gender tender future will raise challenging questions about the nature of our own desires and in all likelihood expose their variety and variability. And this can be frightening to anyone who fears non conformity.

SOMETIMES ITS NICE TO BE A GENDER AND GIVE IN
TO EXPECTATIONS - HELEN

MAYBE SOME OF US LIKE HAVING LABELS/
GENDER - ELAINE TICKLE

The current gender system perpetuates an illusion of uniformity where there is no biological basis for that uniformity. Kinsey's research demonstrated that a large proportion of any population is naturally a little bit 'butch' or 'sissy', 'gay' or 'bi' or 'lesbian' sometimes.

The actual idea of 'confusing signals relating to sexual attraction' is of course ludicrous. You will know by the responses of your own mind and body. What could be clearer and simpler than that? But the gender role system fetishises those responses in the interests of

sustaining the illusion of similarity and conformity. This particular disadvantage of the gender tender future would be more accurately described as ‘confusion regarding what kind of sexual attraction is permissible’. What if any consenting sexual attraction were permissible? Take away the control of the system and the idea of the unbridledness of people’s sexual responses is a fearful thing for many people.

CONFUSION AROUND SEXUAL ADVANCES - DAVID

What if you discover in this gender tender world of many, fluid and changeable gender expressions that you are sexually interested in the ‘wrong’ person? How do you navigate these undefined or over defined territories? And what do your sexual attractions turn you into? Perhaps they make you simply yourself. Perhaps they mean you are natural and un-self-censored in your responses to the possibilities of sexual expression. Perhaps it all means nothing other than you are feeling and living and being yourself. (The idea that you can feel and live and be someone other than yourself is mythological and exhausting.) But in the context of the current binary gender role system, being yourself may have drastic consequences. It may mean you ‘cross over’ into a minority group. It may affect your ability to earn money, progress in your career, hold public office, be socially included, and so on. In some places in the world

it would also endanger your life. And all because the particular curve of a buttock, a certain stride, a sense of humour, or a smile aroused an (arbitrarily) unsanctioned desire in you. I think for these reasons alone, it is appropriate to call for a radical lessening of the power of the gender role system. It is appropriate to highlight its facility to harm, confuse, destroy and socially exclude. It may provide comfort for some, but it destroys others. The mild comforts it offers are far outweighed by the severity of the cruelties it inflicts. That said, I do not believe there is an innate evil in people which acts through the gender role system. I believe it is the shadow of the system that falls across human experience, and it is the threatening nature of the system itself that produces intolerance.

In truth, we are all equally brutalised by the system, regardless of how it may look on the surface. The system itself is deranged. Once the system loses its power, we are free at last to love who we love. Fancy who we fancy. There is no need to worry about 'what it means'. Beyond the gender role system, it has no meaning. It is nothing other than love or desire freely and authentically expressed.

YOU'D HAVE TO ALWAYS ASK IF SOMEONE MIGHT
FANCY YOU - A WHOLE NEW UNCERTAINTY ABOUT 'NOT
MY TYPE' - ANON

It's true there will be the risks of near-misses, mistaken desires and painful rejections. But even the rejections would be based on authenticity of feeling rather than obedience to a system. 'You're just not my thing..' has no judgement in it other than the judgement of the immediacy of feeling. In that sense, though it is no less disappointing, it is not part of a wider and crueller system of control. 'Relax, nothing's under control' is one of my favourite maxims. It speaks to a joyous, outward looking freedom; a lightness of touch and of being. Who can say who fancies who and why? The gender system, whilst seeking to control us can provide no guarantees of anything. Relax. In a gender tender future nothing is under control. You are free to work it out for yourself.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

We can only ever see the view from where we're standing. Change is difficult because it implies a change of viewpoint and what happens if we like the look of things less once we have altered our position? Sartre famously declared, 'Man is condemned to be free.' Many of the disadvantages voiced about the gender tender future are simply reflections of the current dominance of the gender role system. What do we do without the certainty of the system? How do we present ourselves without its guidelines? How do we enact being free when we have never been free before? The falling away of the binary system would not actually require any one individual to do anything differently at all. There would be no compulsory breaking down of rules and no compulsory requirement to conform to a different set of norms. Removing the requirement to conform per se is really the whole point. If every one of us had grown up in the absence of the binary system, we would have no sense of the certainty it confers and no concomitant sense of loss.

The Gender Think-In suggests that the vast majority of people are paying some kind of price in exchange for the apparent certainties of the system. That price is paid in the currency of creative energy used to self-censor and self-modify rather than to create. ('Greater creativity' was repeatedly identified as one of

the advantages of the gender tender future.) The current gender role system effectively codifies power so that it rests with a small elite who conform easily to the system (and whose ancestors probably brought the system into being) and who now exploit the system to sustain positions of power regardless of merit.

The findings of the Gender Think-In are not inherently anti-male or anti-heterosexual. Nothing in these recommendations suggests that maleness itself is at fault, only the traditional stereotype of male gender is called into question. Nor are these recommendations intended to imply that less common expressions of gender or sexuality are preferable.

THERE SHOULD BE NO MANDATORY NEGATION OF
HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE'S NORMAL SOCIETAL
IDENTITY - ANDREW HANCOCK

Rather, the findings of the Gender Think-In are explicitly anti-imbalance. A system that favours one group consistently over all others is distorting and unjust. It is the system that is called into question and its relationship with maleness rather than maleness itself.

The first requirement of a gender tender future is to make sustained and steady progress towards the viability of living gender neutrally. By this I mean making progress towards a state where it is possible to

express one's gender in ways that are beyond the confines of the current binary gender system, and where that expression incurs no cost to the individual.

At present, the possibility of living gender neutrally in everyday life is, to all intents and purposes, non-existent. The binary gender role system is everywhere, informs everything, shapes our behaviours and perceptions. The binary gender role system rules our lives, often without our being conscious of the control it is exerting.

Realising the possibility of living gender neutrally counters this blanket dominance. Making it possible for people to live happily, securely and successfully beyond the binary gender system creates a new possibility for balance. Living gender neutrally can be as simple as preferring not to be labelled as any gender at all, even though one's general appearance and behaviour may be nothing out of the ordinary. Living gender neutrally can be about eschewing labels and categories and asserting one's independence and one's right to self-define. Living gender neutrally can also imply certain changes in one's personal presentation, for example, wearing clothing that is neither expressly 'female' or 'male'. Living gender neutrally can involve a preference for pronouns that are non gendered. For example, being referred to using 'they' and 'their', or using the gender

neutral pronouns, ‘ze’ and ‘zir’. The Gender Think-In highlighted concerns about the flexibility and role of language:

WHAT ABOUT PRONOUNS? HAVE TO SOLVE THAT - ANON

MIGHT HAVE TO THINK OF NEW UNISEX NAMES TO GIVE
AT BIRTH - JOE KESSLER

I DON'T WANT TO DESCRIBE SOMEBODY AS 'THEY' OR 'IT'
BUT THAT WILL CHANGE IN TIME - JENNY DEYONG

We happily call people by the names they claim for themselves - whether that's Mark, Rachel, Rainbow or River. We rarely, if ever, struggle to call someone by their own name. Why shouldn't the same be true for gender neutral names or pronouns? Already, a new social etiquette is emerging where an individual will declare the pronouns they would prefer used, often with a phrase like, my pronouns are ‘they’ and ‘their’ or ‘ze’ and ‘zir’. By living gender neutrally, I also mean having the space to express one's gender in ways that directly transgress the limits of the binary gender system, if that becomes something someone wishes to do. There is no reason on earth why makeup is a ‘feminine’ thing as is evident in other cultures where it is ‘males’ who wear makeup and ‘females’ who go unadorned. (For example, young Wodaabe men, nomads of the Sahel region of Africa, wear elaborate make-up and feathers, and

perform dances and songs to impress young women who, in turn, judge their beauty, skills and desirability as potential husbands.)

Making progress towards the viability of living gender neutrally does not imply a requirement for it. The constraining power of the binary gender role system is broken down as the viability of living gender neutrally is built up. But the poles of the binary are not lost. They simply become part of a range of possibilities rather than being the only two. The breakdown of the system's constraining power benefits everyone equally regardless of whether someone chooses to continue to conform broadly to one or other of the original binary gender roles. The important word here is 'chooses'. The viability of living gender neutrally puts everyone in a free position to choose rather than to comply.

WE MIGHT START TO LOOK LIKE EACH OTHER
E.G. SIMILAR HAIRSTYLES, MAKEUP, CLOTHING AND
THEREFORE WORRY LESS ABOUT IMPRESSING EACH
OTHER SEXUALLY - CATHY MADOC JONES

The viability of gender neutrality destroys the either-or-ness of the binary system once and for all. Even those people who conform to the binary system by choice are freer where neutrality is a possibility. What works about the binary system for someone today, might not work for them so well in the future as they change,

develop and grow, and the viability of neutrality means there is always somewhere else to go, some other territory to occupy, an alternative to explore. Establishing the viability of gender neutrality is the first job of work to be done.

The binary gender role system is the single greatest and most successful system of oppression in the world. It oppresses women (more than half the world's population), LGBT+ people, and all men who do not naturally conform to the traditional concept of male gender as aggressive and domineering.

Breaking down the binary gender role system must be the first priority of all modernisers and liberalisers because it is the first step we must take before all other equalities become possible. Whilst a focus on 'gender balance' in business and public life is laudable, it is an attempt to manage the surface effects without engaging properly with the underlying root cause of the problem - the ruthless either-or-ness of the binary gender role system. Confronting the supremacy of the gender role system head on is the only way to realise any meaningful form of social progress.

Private business is uniquely placed to improve the lives of the people it employs. Private business can move swiftly and make bold, forward-looking decisions. It's true to say that the business of business is not altruism.

But supporting the viability of gender neutrality, requires no acts of altruism. Opening the possibility for gender neutrality removes the requirement for an organisation's employees to conform to the binary gender role system. Energy that was previously expended by employees to conceal their variance from the gender role stereotypes can now be used in their daily working lives. They can be more present, more authentic, more energised and more able to make a significant contribution to the fortunes of the corporation that has freed them from gender role constraints.

Organisations employing large numbers of people can improve the lives of all simply by making policy changes that reduce the requirement for conformity by supporting the viability of living gender neutrally. Organisations that operate in the interests of their members, like Trade Unions, and employee-owned businesses can take similar steps. Some charitable organisations will find it relatively easy to move in this direction where their charitable objects are sympathetic to the principles of equality and freedom of thought and being. The country's education system should be able to play a vital role in establishing, from the earliest age, the principle of freedom of gender expression beyond the binary gender role system. Unfortunately, like the

National Health Service, education is a political football kicked between the other binaries of 'right' and 'left'. Government at all levels is pulled now this way, now that, between the opposing ideologies of left and right, and so it is from private enterprise and inherently human-centric organisations that the first pathfinding changes are most likely to come. (There is an irony here that leaders in government are the people least likely to lead in this area.)

That said, if it can be proven to be viable to live gender neutrally at work, then it must also be possible, by extension, to do the same in society at large. If it is possible to live happily, securely and successfully in a gender neutral way in just one workplace in one city in one country, it proves that it is possible per se. We have only to believe in the possibility - because we have seen it demonstrated if only in one small corner of the world - to be able to build outwards until we have realised the possibility in its entirety.

Progressive organisations will audit those instances where the binary gender system 'chafes' at its people creating arbitrary strictures and limiting choices. The results of these audits will shape plans for reform. Progressive organisations will implement counter policies promoting the viability of living gender neutrally in order to provide 'breathing space' or 'elbow

room' beyond the binary gender role system. Progressive organisations will coach their senior leaders in understanding the oppressive nature of the binary gender role system. Leaders will be encouraged and equipped to support the gender tender alternative. Management will be trained to appreciate gender beyond the binary system and engage in discussions about gender neutrality receptively and confidently.

Progressive organisations will strive for administrative sensitivity and flexibility making it possible for every employee to have a relationship with the possibility of gender neutrality. At its simplest this means configuring administrative forms to make space for gender neutrality. It means making it possible to self-identify as 'other' or as 'non-labelled' or with a label of one's own choice. Data systems will be configured to accommodate gender neutrality and people in administrative functions will be trained to engage with the subject appropriately.

Progressive organisations will establish gender neutral bathrooms in all their places of business in addition to traditional facilities designated 'Men's' and 'Women's'. By monitoring usage over time, organisations will be able to increase the provision of the most used facilities. If more and more people are drawn to the gender neutral option, provision of this

facility can be increased. Progressive organisations will provide gender neutral uniforms for their employees in addition to uniforms designated ‘Men’s’ and ‘Women’s’.

Progressive organisations will implement strict policies of non judgement, zero tolerance of inappropriate language or behaviour, zero tolerance of bullying of any kind and however motivated. They will modify existing dress codes to accommodate the viability of gender neutrality. So, for example, it will no longer be appropriate to require men to wear ties, or to prohibit women from wearing trousers. Equally it would be inappropriate to prohibit men from wearing skirts or makeup, if they so wish.

Progressive organisations will seek to provide more options, and greater flexibility in gender expression, gradually loosening the structures around gender rather than demolishing them. Progressive organisations will monitor the choices made by the whole group as those choices evolve in freedom. The decisions taken by the group will be allowed to inform ongoing policy. The gender tender system will follow the people rather than requiring the people to follow the system. These changes will make organisations more friendly to a greater array of people with diverse personal expressions. This friendliness will allow people’s best and most authentic selves to be expressed in freedom and safety.

Consequently, progressive organisations of the type described above will be more attractive to a greater diversity of people and the consequent diversity of those organisations (together with the strength that implies) will be assured organically. I do not believe the future is served by pursuing diversity as an end. I believe the goal is to create organisations that are friendly to the greatest number, ie. organisations that are genuinely interested in the differences between people, personal expressions of difference, and the richness, in every sense, that this difference creates.

These organisations promote the viability of living gender neutrally, and work to ensure the physical and emotional security of all people associated with them. They understand that the viability of gender neutrality represents a foundation on which all other freedoms can be built. Their aim is nothing more or less than this friendliness.

As progress is made towards the viability of gender neutrality, the binary gender role system will inevitably lose power. There is no need to reform or abolish the system since it is a system that does not actually work that well for the majority of people. Once there are viable alternatives, the shortcomings of the old system will become more and more apparent. Once people are free to choose, they will choose to express a diverse range

of gender expressions and nuances both within and beyond the binary. Gradually and naturally, the binary gender role system will become less and less relevant. Concurrently, where power lies, and how power is held, will become less rigidly defined. The diversification of identity will lead to a diversification of power distribution. Merit will become more important than compliance to the gender identity associated with power. Ultimately, as the gender role system declines, so will the structures of oppression originally identified by the activists of the 1960s.

THE FALLING AWAY OF TERRORS THAT ARE ARTIFICIALLY
CREATED BY THE PRECONCEIVED GULF OF DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE SEXES DURING FORMATIVE OR LATER
YEARS - ANDREW HANCOCK

The results of the Gender Think-In suggest that groups which are non-conforming to the binary gender role system share a deep sense of ‘pan-femininity’ (femininity decoupled from gender, sex or sexual orientation). I believe this ‘pan-femininity’ will show itself as an essential characteristic of modernity. As the binary system falls away, the idea that a certain expression of ‘maleness’ defines power will also fall into disuse because it has become simply and demonstrably untrue. Different leaders will emerge, of all genders, informed by their ‘pan-femininity’. What began with

establishing the viability of gender neutrality will end in a revolution of pan-femininity or ‘femininity beyond gender’. I predict that a ‘pan-feminine’ rise of emotional intelligence will gradually reshape the corporation, government and society.

It will lead to an eventual recasting of capitalism itself because those organisations with superior emotional intelligence will be significantly more adept at anticipating and meeting the needs of customers. These apparently simple first steps of working towards the viability of living gender neutrally will have ultimately seismic consequences. The nature of power itself will change as will the holders and users of that power. This is why the gender tender future will be vigorously resisted in certain quarters.