



Trans Teens

Edgardo Menvielle, MD
Gender and Sexuality Development Program

emenviel@cnmc.org

American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry
Boston, March 28, 2008

Psychiatrist Need to Be Involved



- **Harm reduction**
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Run away, asked to leave homelessness
 - Sex trade
- **Legitimate existential problem** that affects the youth and loved ones
- **Becoming more common**
- **Satisfaction** of being a helpful resource to a group of patients for whom there are little resources

Definitions



- **Sex** (as in male and female) is a biological concept
 - Sex is inferred from the external genitalia of the fetus/newborn
- **Gender** (as in “boy/man” and “girl/woman”) is a social concept
 - Gender is assigned based on the perceived sex and the child is raised accordingly

Definitions



- **Gender identity** refers to one's sense of maleness or femaleness (how we want to be perceived by others)
- **Gender role/expression** how we are perceived by others, in terms of gender (what we project out, the signals we give)

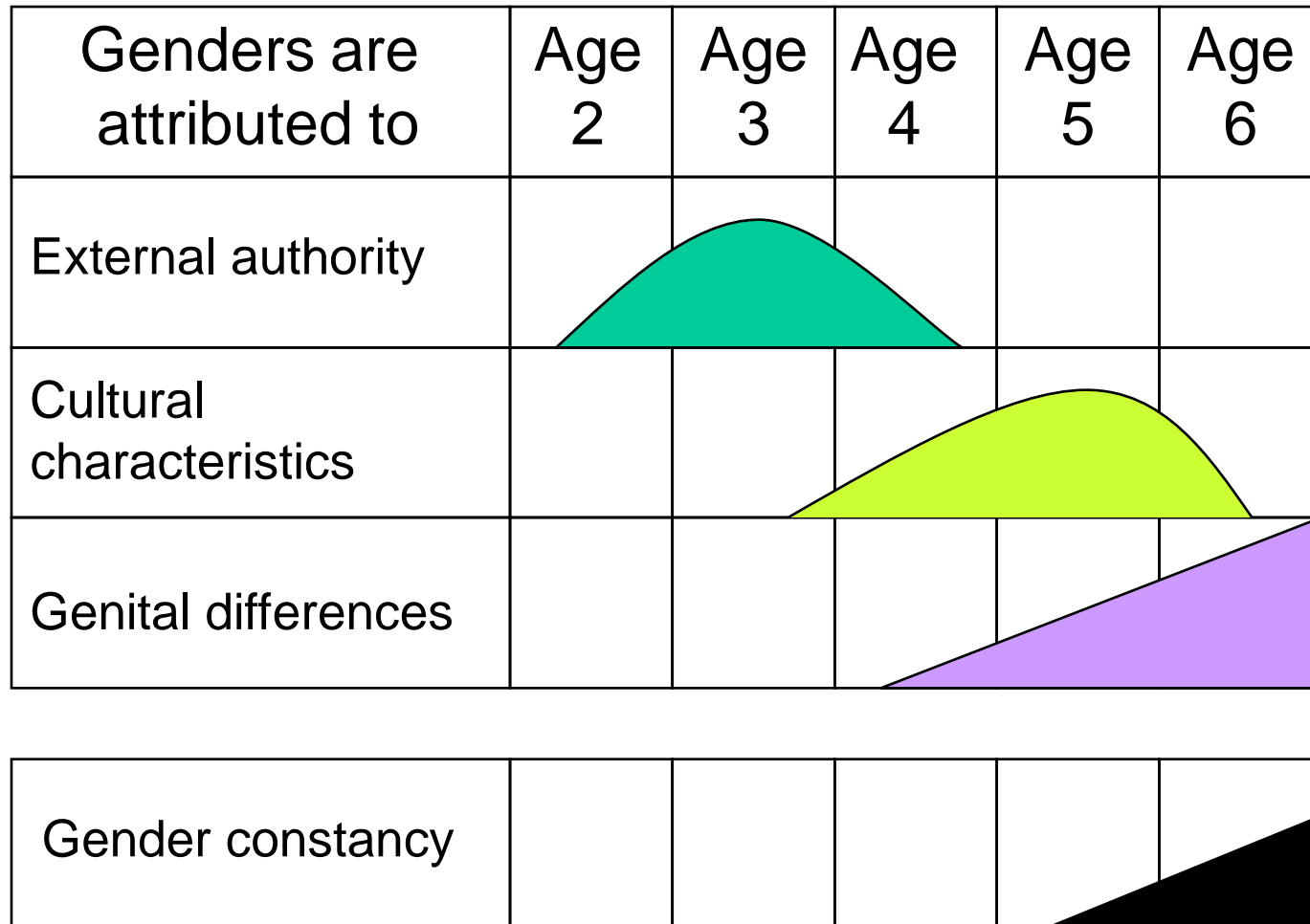
Children's Understanding of Gender



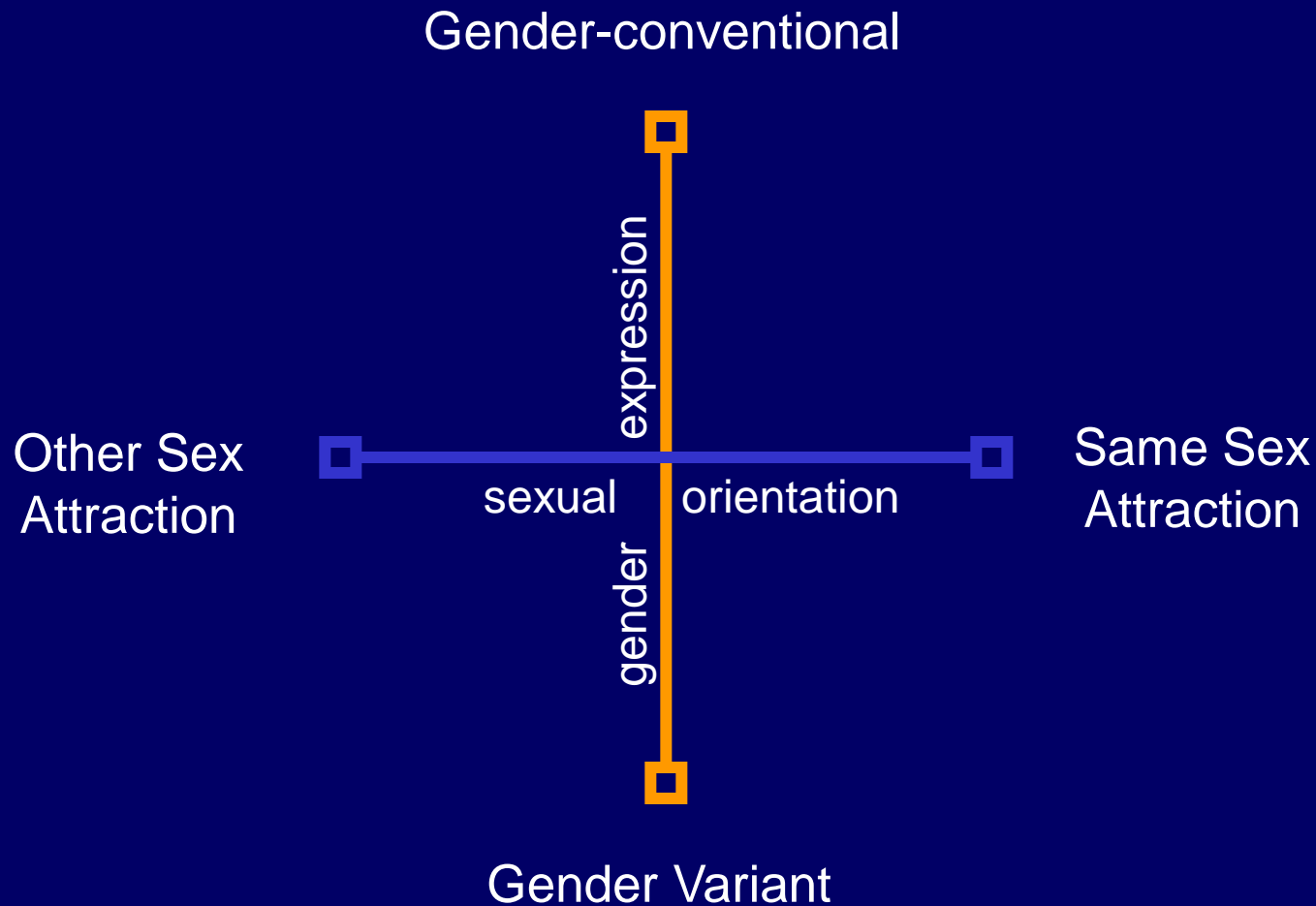
Correctly identify own gender and the gender of parents & siblings

- 2 y.o. 25%
- 3 y.o. 85%
- 4 y.o. 100%

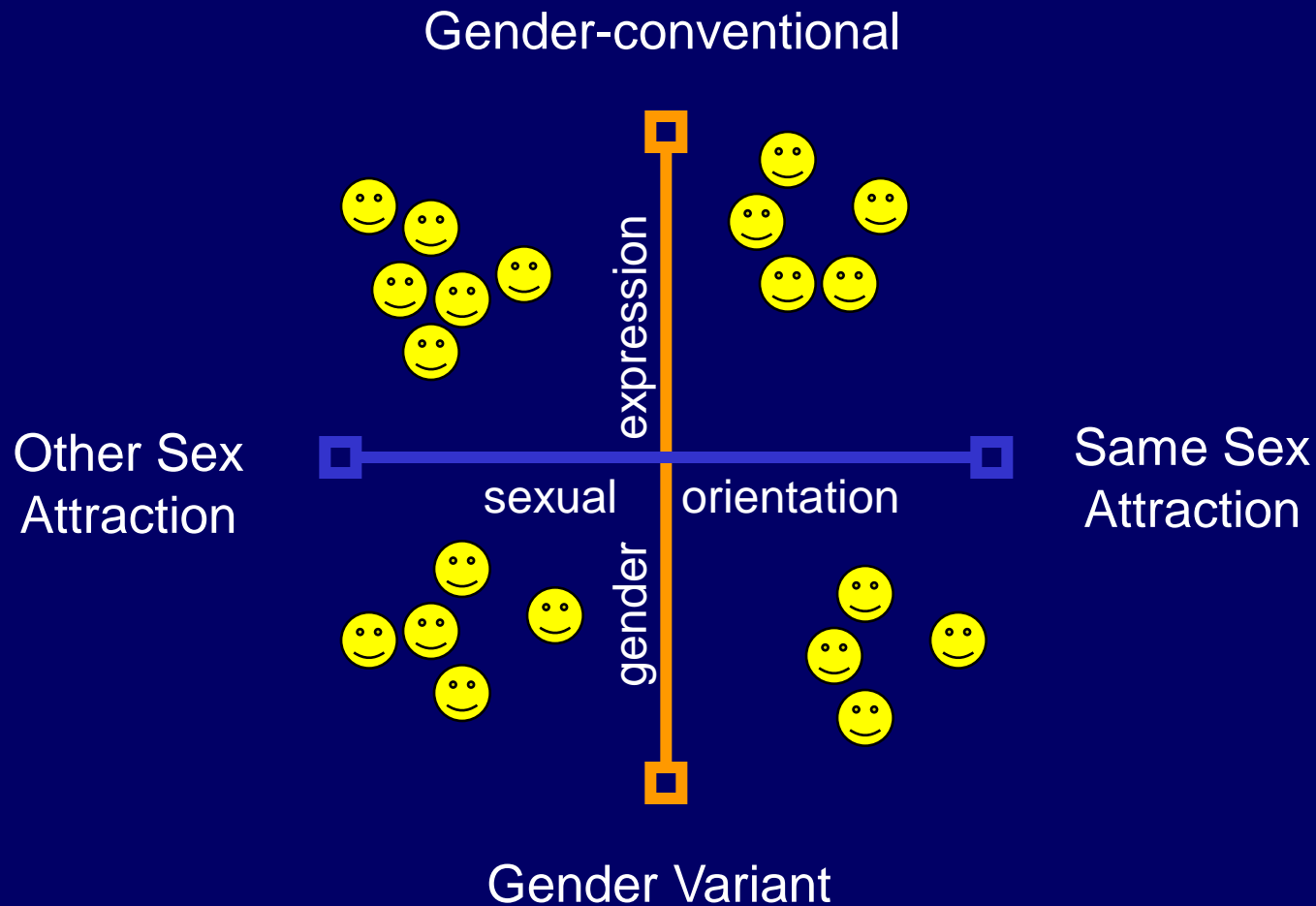
Cognitive Development



Sexual Orientation and Gender



Sexual Orientation and Gender



Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



- Gender and sexual orientation are *experienced* as separate dimensions
- Transgender as non transgender people can be attracted to persons of same (their declared) or different gender
- The terminology used by the Trans community bases the sexual orientation on *declared gender*

Transgender



- A person who rejects their birth-assigned gender and wishes not to live in it
- May seek to live socially as a person of the other gender
- May seek to change his or her body so that it conforms with declared gender
 - Through the effect of androgens or estrogens
 - Through surgery
 - Top surgery for FTM
 - Bottom surgery for FTM and MTF

Transgender



- Gender Dysphoria:
 - Distress and sense of inappropriateness associated with gender of birth
- Key element of Gender Identity Disorder (DSM)

Transgender



- **Gender identity can be experienced as:**
 - Consistent, unchanging part of oneself more or less impervious to the circumstances
 - Fluid, evolving over time or changing with the circumstances
- **Some people:**
 - Relate perfectly well to the binary man / woman and seek to live as a man or woman
 - Others reject the binary and do not identify as neither or as both

Transgender



- Some positive terminology:
 - Transgender, transexual, MTF, FTM, Gender Variant
 - Transition
 - Sex reassignment surgery (SRS)
 - Intersex
- Some Negative terminology
 - Sex change
 - Transvestite
 - Hermaphrodite

Age of Onset



- Early childhood
- Adolescence
- Adulthood
- Old age
- Some people feel:
 - Transgender all their lives from day one
 - People can become aware at any stage in life
 - A history of pre-pubertal gender variance is not always present
 - For some people their gender variant expression is episodic and are referred to as crossdressers

Fetal Sex Differentiation



- Brain differentiation controlled by androgens but occurs in the second and third trimester (genitals in the first trimester)
- Androgens may play an “organizing effect” in fetal development (different from “activating effect” in puberty)
- This organizing effect may play a role in affinity to a gender versus the other

Androgen Organizing Effects



- Sex-related patterns of play in lab animals reversed by manipulating the hormones during critical period at birth
- Girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (in-utero exposure to testosterone) play more like boys
- Presenting/lordosis in F can be changed into mounting by neonatal castration/androgens

Brain Structures



- Size difference of the bed nucleus of the Hippocampus ($F < M$)
- In Male to Female Trans = F

Transition



- The “coming out”, or “coming home”
- Pre-transition
 - Initial awareness and struggle
 - Coming out to self
 - Exploration
 - Coming out to others
- Transition
 - Social, Medical, Surgical
- Post transition

Social Transition



- **Coming out to oneself as transgender**
 - How did it come about?
 - Moment of revelation
 - Long term history
 - What does transgender mean for this person?
 - Transgender (social gender reassignment)
 - Transsexual (seeking anatomical sex reassignment)
 - Importance attached physical appearance, to being perceived without question as a member of the declared gender
- Benjamin Standards: 1 year living in declared gender

Medical/Surgical Transition



- Cross-sex hormones – Puberty Suppression
- Male to female surgical and cosmetic procedures
 - Neo-vagina, breast implants, cosmetic facial surgery, Adam's apple reduction, hair removal
- Female to male surgical and cosmetic procedures
 - Mastectomy
 - Phalloplasty
- Surgery is not the ultimate goal for some and should not be taken as evidence of not being a “true” TG

Assessment/Intervention



- **How do they experience their sexuality?**
 - Sexual attraction
 - Teen may delay sexual activity because of discomfort with natal sexed body
- **Coming out to trusted and loved ones as transgender**
 - Has the teen spoken with parents?
 - What is the parents' reaction?
 - Has the teen spoken with siblings?
 - Has the teen confided with any trusted adults? (teachers, counselors)

Assessment/Intervention



- **Connecting to one's gender supportive community in some way**
 - Support groups for teens and for parents: PFLAG, DC Children's
 - The Internet: online groups e.g. Trans Youth Family Allies (TYFA), Transfamily.org

Assessment/Intervention



- **Acquiring information in order to make informed choices about how to express one's gender identity**
 - Appropriate Books (mostly based on adults). e.g., Arlene Istar Lev's *Transgender Emergence* (2004)
 - PFLAG Brochures: e.g., *Our Trans Children* (parents); *Be Yourself* (youth)
 - Planned Parenthood: *Providing Transgender Inclusive Health Care Services* (2006)

Assessment/Intervention



- **Exploring and discovering one's gender identity through living in the declared gender, reflection, talking within therapy, talking with peers and one's trusted loved ones**
 - School: main social site in which transition occurs
 - Same school
 - Change schools
 - Transition to MS or to HS
 - Helping exploration in a safe manner
 - Choices about stealth (semi-stealth), open

Gender Transition: Parents



- **Parents**

- May go through a “grief” reaction: e.g. shock, denial, bargaining, acceptance, etc.
- Example: “How could you do this to us?”; “How can you be so selfish?”; “How could you know?”
- May experience guilt (e.g., “How could I have not known”)
- Fear of a hard life
- Parents have to go through their own “coming out”
- Finding meaning (e.g., “Made me a better person”)
- Parents need to become advocates

Gender Transition



- **Supporting transition in school and legally**
 - School issues:
 - Name and pronouns
 - Bathroom and locker room accommodations
 - Staff training, consultation with staff
 - Legal name change
 - Usually does not require therapist's letter

As Providers We Need



- Sensitivity
- Language
- Knowledge
- Personal comfort
- Consultation



Thank you!

Edgardo Menvielle, MD

emenviel@cnmc.org