I am Non-binary: Life Under the Transgender Umbrella

By: Tatyana Bellamy - Walker

On my twenty-second birthday, I gave myself a gift; gender therapy.

At the office of a nearly 40-year-old therapist in downtown Manhattan, I slouched into a couch cushion as I revealed for the first time that I’m transgender.

“What would you look like in a perfect world?” she asked while jotting notes.

“I’d want a happy trail and a small Adam's apple,” I said. “But I also want children. I’ll start T after I have children.”

It wasn’t until May that I sought professional help. I’ve been to a series of therapists over the last two years and all but one either misdiagnosed or questioned the validity of my gender identity. After the New York Times published a leaked memo from the Department of Health and Human Services, it became clear that many cisgender people (those who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth) are calling for the obliteration of the transgender community. The need for quality mental health care for the LGBTQ community is at an all-time high.

Many therapists aren’t sure how to handle a patient like me. I’m Afro-Latinx, pansexual and my gender identity is somewhere outside of the male/female binary. Several therapists question why I use so many labels to reclaim my body. When your people were colonized and enslaved for more than a century -- you learn early on that your body is not your own. I’ve learned to draw the lines for my own box, instead of putting a checkmark into one. My body is now my agency.

Some of my ex-therapists have asked why I want to transition as a non-binary person, while others said cisgender people wouldn’t find me attractive if I did. My non-binary identity is just as valid as a transgender man seeking hormone therapy. As transgender people, our narratives are diverse — which is why top-of-the-line mental health services are so important.

For most of my summer, I relied on friends and a free trans hotline to cope with my ongoing gender dysphoria. However, in July, my dysphoria spiked. Showers became a burden. Seeing parts that weren’t my own made me uncomfortable. I stayed up too late, watching YouTube marathons of transitioning timelines. I regularly asked Google why I wasn’t “normal. Why couldn’t I be happy as a woman?

In August I started seeing a new therapist. He quickly diagnosed me with Gender Identity Disorder, — an outdated diagnosis that was removed from the DSM-V five years ago. If as trans/non-binary people we are competent and knowledgeable, why aren’t our therapists? We are not your teachers, we are your clients.

Nearly six months later, I’ve started hormone replacement therapy. I am on what many doctors consider a low dosage of testosterone. As I’ve started recording my daily changes, I’ve learned for the first time what it's like for my body chemistry to align with how I see myself. There is no more fog or fear. I no longer have to pretend in order to seek the approval of my peers.

Transphobia, the belief that trans people are lesser than their cisgender counterparts is not only detrimental to binary trans people, but also to those who fall outside the gender lines. This forces many non-binary people like me to postpone our mental health care and suffer in secret. As I continue trudging through space as a gender fluid person, I want all our identities to be normalized — even in the discomfort of a trans-hating world.