

Other; please specify

By: Kyle Mehlberger @KMehlberger

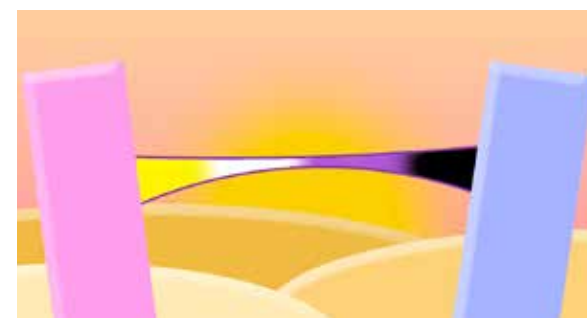
Our world is a place filled with

vast categories. Categories people toss others into with little regard for nuance, nuance which wriggles into the ornate sense that is one's self. One of the most prominent of these societal pillars is that of gender. People tend to see gender as two obelisks -- pink and blue -- with nothing between them. This idea however has been struck with more criticism as of late, with the higher prominence and acceptance of people who occupy neither of those obelisks; people who identify as non-binary. Non-binary people are a subset of transgender individuals -- who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth -- but in their case identify with neither of gender role. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the National Center of Transgender Equality, 35% of 38,000 respondents identified as gender non-conforming. It's surely a new concept, a challenge to basic ideas society grounded itself in for so long, but ideas that have shown their flaws.

Non-binary identities usually faces the same quippy slogans from opposition, one of the most simplistic of them being "There are only two genders." It's something said a lot, the crowning response to anything related to this topic, but it's a response that's really not good. It broadcasts a misunderstanding of what's being felt by non-binary people, along with a misunderstanding of what separates the ideas of

gender identity and biological sex. The concepts of "gender" and "biological sex" are now understood as different things; "gender" being an umbrella term denoting an array of identities not necessarily complying to the ideas of male and female, while "biological sex" denotes the concept of male and female from a medical perspective. Non-binary people aren't taking out the latter, but are seeing to it that their gender matches how they feel. Expecting every human being to define their niche sense of who they are to male and female is a reductive way of viewing how people should act. It isn't that much of an ordeal to "allow" people to express these identities either.

Most non-binary people don't use the traditional pronouns "she/her" and "he/him", most express their non-conformity through the use of gender neutral pronouns like "they/them". When others refuse to use these pronouns, they aren't refusing to do a massive amount of work. Non-binary people are just asking to be accepted as who they are, with little work being needed from others in order to validate this identity in society. They aren't asking everyone to bow down to them as the "GRAND GENDER CHANGELOR", nor are the ramifications from actually accepting these people at all noticeable. Some say they are feeding into the delusions of these people, that their identity is just a crazy modern concept that should be quelled. This line of reasoning is fruitful in general misunderstanding, as non-binary people aren't being horrendously harmed by their acceptance. The reason for the perceived harm brought on by the identity they hold is mainly because of that exclu-



Non-Binary people bridge the divide between the stereotypical default of male and female.

sion they are receiving. It's like punching someone, only to say their broken nose is the result of themselves.

Non-binary people are people just like anyone else. They deserve at least the minimum amount of respect in their journey to truly actualize the person they are inside. If that for the most part entails others to use pronouns that they might not be used to using, or used to using for singular people, then that doesn't seem like a whole lot. It may be hard at first, but the end result is the acceptance of others in their journey to exist in the gap between the two obelisks, bridging the divide between them and becoming true to themselves in their process.

Testing our limits

By: Mila Van Weelden @milavanweelden

When most think of spring, they think of warm weather, flowers, and blue skies. For high school students, something much more dreary and exhausting also comes to mind.

Iowa's statewide assessment, or more commonly known as ISASP, is an annual test for all students in grades three through eleven. Students get tested in math, reading, writing, and for sophomores, science. State testing, in most cases, uses one week of school for each student to complete all sections of the test. It can take anywhere from one to two and a half hours each day for all students to finish. A common question among high schoolers is: "What does this do for us?" The truth? Very little.

The overall purpose of the test is so people know teachers are doing their job. If teachers are doing their job, that opens more doors for funding, etc... But is that worth it? To start, we are in a pandemic! In a year full of uncertainty, unease, and stress all around us, why did we put what little mental energy we had left into something that barely

affects us students? It is hard enough for some students to complete regular school work, but adding something mentally and physically exhausting on top of it? The fact that some students are experiencing trauma this year is indisputable, and forcing them to complete hours of testing every day for a week most likely just exacerbated their struggles.

There is also the fact that for a lot of first and second quarter, we were hybrid. Instruction was inconsistent from the beginning. There was no way for students to fully learn and understand the material from teachers. Because of this, most test scores won't accurately represent how the teachers are teaching, because some factors were simply out of their control. Hybrid also cut down our school time immensely, so was it truly the best idea to shorten all of the precious class time we had each day for a week?

The cost of this test is also a huge issue. According to an article by Penn State, studies show states spend 1.7 billion dollars a year on state testing. Instead of using that money towards crucial things such as healthcare, helping the homeless, or genuinely helping schools in general, this money

is spent on destroying children's mental health.

State testing in a year of horror is atrocious, but they aren't that amazing in a normal year either. In a room full of 100 students, five of them could be artists, three of them could be singers, and nine of them could be journalists. Not every student is going to excel in every subject. It's nearly impossible. State testing doesn't ask which graphite pencil people should use for a drawing, even though future artists most likely know that answer. They don't ask future professional dancers if someone should be in first position or second, although most could tell you in their sleep. Even though students know they won't be future mathematicians, the stress of doing well is still put on their shoulders.

Students' mental health should matter more than test scores. Whether you are in third grade or eleventh, that statement is



Many students experience anxiety and stress while taking online tests.

true. State testing costs an arm and a leg, it destroys the mental health of students, and the sole fact that we are in a pandemic should be enough reason to not have had the test. Next time when making such a decision, people should take these facts into consideration before putting students' into a week of terror.