

theday.co.uk/backlash-grows-over-man-is-a-man-speech-4



Courting controversy: Sunak's position has become popular in right wing politics.

Is gender a social construct? In a speech last week, Britain's leader said that people "can't.. be any sex they want to be". Activists say his words are dangerous. Now it has sparked a conversation on the difference between sex and gender identity.

What's happening?

"A man is a man and a woman is a woman." People clapped as British leader Rishi Sunak spoke at a meeting for the **Conservative Party**.

There was a very different response from **transgender** rights **activists**. They worry that his words might lead to more **hate crimes** against transgender people.

Find out more

This debate centres around a key question: is gender based on biology or is it a social construct that can be changed?

The idea that gender is a social construct means that the world around us, rather than just biology, shape gender roles and identities. This includes the behaviours and roles that we think of as being linked to being a woman or a man.

Some argue that differences in behaviour between men and women are due to biology, including hormones such as **testosterone** and **oestrogen**.

On the other hand, some argue that society takes biological differences and turns them into strict ideas about how men and women behave. These ideas about gender may not be true in many cases. And people with **gender dysphoria** experience deep unhappiness because their gender identity does not match the sex they were labelled at birth.

Throughout history and across different cultures, gender roles have gone through huge changes. For instance, high heel shoes were once worn by both men and women, and the colour pink was once linked to boys and blue to girls.

Some **experts** suggest that children learn from a young age how to “do” gender — and that toys, media and adverts then reinforce these ideas.

Is gender a social construct?

Some say

Yes! Gender roles and ideas about gender can be very different in different places. This shows that gender is based on the societies we live in.

Others think

No! Biology is still very important. The hormones testosterone and oestrogen are a major factor.

Some people say

“The struggle isn’t just about being straight or gay or transgender – it’s a human struggle. That’s always really been my kind of starting point: If you’re out there and you’re odd, come over to my house.”

Boy George (1961 –), English singer and songwriter

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What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - How do you feel about Rishi Sunak’s words?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - How do other countries tackle this issue?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure about this story.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine you are in the audience for the British prime minister’s speech. Think of a question to ask him.

5. Express

What do others believe? - Is your gender important to you? Discuss in groups.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Do you think people should be allowed to say what they think, even if it is something lots of people disagree with? Write down your answer. Why is this important?

Glossary

Conservative party - A British political party. Members are known as Tories.

Transgender - Someone whose gender identity (what they feel inside) does not match the gender identity they were assigned at birth (based on their biology).

Activists - People who campaign for social or political change. Greta Thunberg sailed to New York for a meeting instead of flying.

Hate crimes - A crime that is motivated by who the victim is, for example prejudice towards their race, sexuality, religion or other characteristics.

Testosterone - The hormone that causes people to develop male sexual characteristics. Women also produce some testosterone.

Oestrogen - Female sex hormones. After the menopause, these can increase the risk of cancer.

Gender dysphoria - Feelings of discomfort or stress a person feels due to a mismatch between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth.

Experts - Someone who knows a lot about a particular subject.