

True or False

“Answer the statements with the following:” read the assessment my therapist handed me. “Always, Often, Sometimes, or Never true.” Self-assessments tend not to leave only “True” and “False” as options. Individuals know themselves to be complex and not easily encompassed in an answer lacking nuance. However, when individuals are brought together to form a society, then divided into opposing schools of thought, it becomes far easier for a “True/False”, “Us/Them” attitude to emerge. Despite people’s ability to see morality and environmental aspects that influence themselves, they often do not extend that nuanced perspective to others. It is tragically common for people to view the world through false dichotomies of allies and enemies or similar and foreign, without fluidity or third options.

True or False: Women support the “pro-choice” movement regarding abortion, as it is vital to maintaining their health and boldly autonomy. While pro-choice signs featured heavily in the Women’s March movement and many women, including celebrities, have used the hashtag #YouKnowMe on social media to speak frankly about their own abortions and the need for continued legal options, the above statement still proves not entirely true. In the wake of Alabama’s “heartbeat ban,” a ban on abortions that would set the legal cutoff too early for most women to even realize they are pregnant, I stumbled across an anti-abortion article authored by a woman. In the article, she attempted to use her female perspective to convince an audience of women that lack of access to abortions would actually benefit women, and that her readers should inform other women as such. Her article and several non-partisan news reports also mentioned a female Republican governor who had been essential in signing Alabama’s bill into law. To see these

notable exceptions in the face of an opposing group was eye opening. Though in majority, men still spearhead the restriction of reproductive freedoms (as every writer of the Alabama bill was a cisgender man) a more detailed approach led me to realize that the majority is not the only significant section of a group. The opposition was not one monster, but a haphazard collection of humans who happen to share a perspective which happens to oppose my own view. They do not advance their cause to spite or to harm me; they simply believe they are in the right, as I believe I am. Holding up a strawman of one's enemy is easy; it is harder to see the sea of human faces and keep fighting. Thus, many fall easily into the trap of imagining a purely evil, "False" enemy, contrasting with their own brave "Truth."

Similar versus foreign is another True/False dichotomy that often surfaces in the political sphere. President Donald Trump ran on a promise of barring immigrants from the country, stereotyping Mexicans specifically as "rapists" who were "bringing drugs" and "crime." While in office, Trump continued to fear monger about people from foreign countries, specifically those with darker skin, by instituting an executive order that was dubbed a "Muslim Ban." This order, entitled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," severely limited immigrants and refugees from several majority-Muslim countries, with the implication that anyone who wants to move to the US, but was born with dark skin or practices a different religion is inherently a terrorist. This fear is not limited to people who want to move to America; the deep-seated distrust of people who are different from one's self extends even to Native Americans, whose ancestors lived in America before the first white immigrants. Native Americans were forced out of their homes onto reservations, yet ironically many now face derogatory comments instructing them to "go back to where they came from." Trump exacerbated the fears of the foreign

unknown lying dormant in many Americans in order to paint himself as a savior, at the expense of the minorities he slandered. Despite the fact that statistically, American immigrant populations are less crime prone on average than non-immigrants, a feeling of safety with those similar to one's self and fear of unfamiliar cultures spurs a push by "True" Americans against the "False" ones, be they immigrants, refugees, or even citizens whose grandparents were citizens, but who happen to have darker skin.

As a transgender person, I have mused often about society's fixation on binaries and inability to accept other possibilities. Non-binary individuals, whose gender is not confined to strictly male or female, have been recorded across cultures from ancient to modern times, from Indian Hijras to Native American Two-Spirits. However, many still falsely believe that people identify as nonbinary simply to gain attention. Western society has built a rigid two-gender system, and despite our slowly progressing ideas of what women and men can be, many still cling to the basis of the system itself. People crave order, even when the rule does not match reality. Thus feminine men, masculine women, transgender people, nonbinary people, and anyone else who does not conform to the social order are routinely subjected to ostracization, verbal abuse, and even physical violence. Transgender people are far more likely than cisgender people to be victims of homicide or, due to a world that often rejects our very existence, suicide. The LGBT+ community is filled with people who have had to rethink the norms they had accepted, and thus outside-the-box thinkers, creative artists, and awe-inspiring, rule-defying fashion abounds. Yet our society thinks in binaries, and its "True/False" blinders can be fatal to those vibrant souls who do not fit.

Back on my therapist's comfortable couch, I am given increments. "True or False" cannot begin to describe the complexity of the human mind. People must release their false binaries and be open to fluidity to see the world in its colorful complexity, beyond the warped lens of "True or False."

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