

TRANSGENDER ISSUES: *The power of feeling and thinking.*

By Fr. Dave Heney

Some people feel that they are not in the right body and want to physically change to the opposite sex. Others feel neither male or female and so create their own identity and insist you use it about them too. How can you make sense of all these issues and still show respect for those with this experience? Here are some questions and responses that can help.

What is Sexual Identity?

This is a biological term that indicates either male or female reproductive capability. Females can bear children and males can fertilize female eggs for pregnancy. Reproduction occurs this way for almost all animals on earth. *Every single cell in your body has chromosomes that show only male or female Sex Identity.* While there are rare exceptions, they are, by scientific definition, abnormalities of just the same two male and female Sex Identities which are *discovered*, and not just *assigned* by someone else at your birth.

What is Gender Identity?

Gender is the *behavioral expression* of male and female Sex Identity, and varies widely in different cultures. Men and women exhibit distinct behaviors in many ways but especially, in all cultures, for courtship purposes, and to permanently mate for reproduction and to create a stable family.

Evolutionary science and our Catholic faith both affirm that the success of our human species is precisely this long-lasting parental system that passes on care, learning, and wisdom to the next generation in a stable family environment.

What is a man or woman?

A combination of stable and changeable features make us who we are as men and women.

Physically: Men and women are biologically and chromosomally *binary*; oriented to procreate.

Psychologically: Male and female ways of thinking and feeling certainly differ, yet both are oriented to cooperate for healthy and secure family welfare in a loving and stable relationship.

Culturally: Changing social roles and customs can affect male and female behavior. Abnormal hormonal changes can affect experience too, leading to a wide variety of gender expression, with masculine behaving females and feminine behaving males. *Yet looking or acting like a male or female does not make you either one.* Sex Identity remains biologically and chromosomally male or female from birth, and oriented to procreation .

What are Social Constructs?

These are features of your life that are set or “*constructed*” by your personal preferences or cultural norms. Yet some features can never change simply by your thinking or feeling.

Height, weight, ethnicity, age, race, Sex Identity, and innate talents cannot change by your wishes no matter how deeply felt. You cannot just *declare* yourself a tall, obese, young, black, great NBA basketball player! Similarly, a chromosomal male cannot just *declare* he will bear children.

The powers of thinking and feeling have real objective limits. Some talents can certainly change, usually from genetic predisposition and frequent practice of skills, but never just by saying so.

What is Gender Dysphoria?

Some feel that the Sex Identity of their body does not match their feelings, which can cause real psychological distress. They may seek relief by just behaving *stereotypically* as the opposite sex or even changing their body with hormones and irreversible surgeries to match their body image feelings. Gender Dysphoria can be long lasting but is often temporary and short term, especially for young children and teenagers.

Does God “*Make me this way?*”

God is the *secondary* cause of who you are. Your parents genetic history, and your upbringing, are the *primary* biological and environmental cause of your life and later development. God is certainly the source of your soul and unique identity as a person, but your immediate origin comes from the mixing of genes from your parents, their long and complex ancestry, and your homelife as well.

What is the right treatment?

A conflict of mind and body is serious. Anorexia is also a real and sometimes fatal false Body Image Dysphoria. Anorexics feel fat despite their thin body and starve themselves to match that false body image. Doctors wisely treat their mind first and not deny their body of food! They don't just agree with patients that they are fat! Therefore, we must never change Gender Dysphoria patient's normal body parts to fit a false body image.

Good medical practice treats the mind first and not the body. Of course, parents must never allow these irreversible interventions on children who are too young to form mature judgments.

What about discrimination?

Some people see this issue as a new civil rights cause. Several new federal and state laws expand the 1964 Civil Rights Act to add those who identify opposite of their biological birth sex. Here are some issues and responses.

Open access: Areas reserved for men or women, such as restrooms, school locker rooms, and sports teams would be open to anyone simply *claiming* male or female identity. A chromosomal male identifying as a female *should not* access any women's restroom, locker room, and sports team.

We do not ignore physical differences between varsity and junior varsity teams or weight classes in sports. We should also not ignore the physical differences between men and women in sports. Requiring hormone therapy actually affirms those differences, but no amount of drugs can bring men and women to physical equality in sports.

Autonomy: *My body, my choice*, is a common freedom idea today. But we do not exercise true freedom by denying obvious biological truths.

Pronouns: While it's always polite to address people as they like, it must not be mandated by law. *Compelled speech*, or forcing people to say things, is unconstitutional, immoral ...*and even impolite!* Medical records especially need true biological sex data for appropriate male/female treatments.

Churches: The Supreme Court has often ruled that the First Amendment ensures the church's right to conduct activities in accord with its faith. These new laws fortunately do not affect churches at all.

What about family members?

Their sense of Gender Dysphoria always deserves your compassion and respect, but should never lead to quick and irreversible surgeries based on subjective feelings, especially for children who may be too young to place their feelings in a mature context. This is the time to seek good medical, psychological, and especially spiritual insights to treat the mind, body, and soul, and orient all to wise choices based on biological truths and the lasting happiness that comes from our faith.

What is good mental health?

Mental health is simply opening your eyes and seeing the truth of things ...and not just your preferences. *“The truth will set you free” (John 8: 32).* Sex Identity is clearly biological and binary. *“Male and female God created them.” (Gen. 1:27)* While gender expression can greatly vary within a wide normal range, the true underlying biology remains binary: only male and female Sex Identity. The truth is that there is no such physical reality as transitioning to the opposite biological sex.

Some people say there is no objective truth and that all truth is relative and based only on your thinking and feeling. Ironically, those who say *there is no objective truth* have just said something they believe to be ...objectively true!

While we always compassionately treat Gender Dysphoria, no feeling, thinking, or surgery can ever change the scientific biological truth that we are born with only male or female Sex Identity, and remain so for life.

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