

How Do 'Cisgenders' Fit Into the New Sexual Tolerance?

Last month, *USA Today* reported that Facebook is now recognizing 58 distinct gender options, with a 59th for "fill in the blank."

According to Facebook, "We recognize that some people face challenges sharing their true gender identity with others, and this setting gives people the ability to express themselves in an authentic way."

There is nothing "authentic" about defining oneself by a sexual or gender impulse inconsistent with who one is. But more on that later. For now, here are some thoughts on terms increasingly used in the public parlance but which merit a bit more than casual acceptance—both for the sake of linguistic integrity and for the sake of the troubled men and women and the social conditions about which they speak.

Transphobia: "Intense dislike of or prejudice against transsexual or transgender people" (Oxford English Dictionary). No one should be treated cruelly, in word or action, because he or she dresses or behaves in a manner commensurate with his or her opposite gender. Period.

On the other hand: People who believe men and women should only be allowed to enter restrooms or locker rooms designated for persons of their same biology or those who believe companies should have the right not to hire persons wearing opposite-sex attire are not prejudiced or phobic. They are responding naturally and intuitively to things that not only are visually jarring but internally dissonant. These responses are innate, inherent, natural.

Moreover, one's gender cannot be undone by cosmetic changes or even surgery: DNA is permanent. As my friend Russell Moore has

written, “We believe we can no more surgically alter our gospel than we can surgically alter our gender.”

Homophobia: “Dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people” (Oxford English Dictionary). So, unlike transphobia, the dislike doesn’t have to be “intense?”

There is no doubt some people bear hostility to homosexuals and cause deliberate pain to persons open about their same-sex attraction. That is regrettable and, for Christians, completely unacceptable. But the following beliefs do not represent such hostility:

- People who believe in marriage as the covenantal union of one man and one woman, for life.
- People who believe children thrive and mature most successfully with a mother and a father.
- People who believe that sexual intimacy is reserved for one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage.

Disagreement is not, by definition, evidence of fear or hatred, whether it deals with moral deliberations or things less profound (you’re a Yankees fan, I like the Mariners). Asserting a moral viewpoint that such has implications not only for personal behavior but law and culture is not necessarily hostile or a demonstration of bias.

For example, when in the civil rights movement the heirs of Lincoln proclaimed that human equality meant that people of color should be treated with legal justice and social dignity, their proclamation was informed substantially by religiously-based moral conviction. So are the claims of people of religious faith who argue that marriage is solely the union of one man and one woman. This is not irrational bias or hateful speech; these claims are grounded in 3,500 years of Judeo-Christian moral teaching and social understanding.

Cisgenders: According to sociologists Kristen Schilt (University of Chicago) and Laurel Westbrook (Grand Valley

State University), “cisgenders” are “individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their personal identity.” In other words, they are men who identify as men and women who identify as women.

In an article this past December, *TIME* magazine explained that the word “cisgender” “exists to serve as an equal to transgender.” The author, Katy Steinmetz, writes:

“Cisgender is a word that applies to the vast majority of people, describing a person who is not transgender. If a doctor announces, ‘It’s a girl!’ in the delivery room based on the child’s body and that baby grows up to identify as a woman, that person is cisgender. Similarly, a baby designated male in the delivery room who grows up to identify as a man is cisgender. This is the case for about 99% of the population, at least according to the best available statistics.”

Steinmetz goes on to note, “In general, there aren’t too many places outside of a dictionary or chemistry lab where one would likely see the prefix being used, but cisgender is seeing an uptick in use.”

Well, maybe. But it is saddening and quite forced that some are asking that the vast sphere of those who understand that their maleness or femaleness is determined by their biological sex—in which, as Steinmetz observes, “about 99 percent of the population” coheres—has to be defined in distinction to a tiny fraction of self-identified “transgendered” persons.

Heteronormative: “Denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation” (Oxford English Dictionary).

To say someone is abnormal is understood commonly as aspersive. Consequently, saying someone with same-sex attraction is “abnormal” can be perceived as unkind, even if

in the most literal sense of the term it is true (if the overwhelming percentage of a certain group—say, about 99 percent—is identifiable by the same characteristics, can they not be considered normative?).

However, it is indisputable that all but a small percentage of the persons in North America are heterosexual. As such, they compose the norm against which that small percentage is cast in relief. It is not pejorative, then, to assume the heterosexuality of most of one's fellows.

Recently, the editor of an LGBTQ blogsite wrote me that "Genitalia determines sex, not gender. Trans people should use facility of their gender; it's safest."

Trying to divorce biology from gender is akin to attempting to separate wings from a bird: That which defines its very being constitutes its essence.

Genitalia do indeed determine sex. And biology, morphology, neurology and other factors do as well, such that if someone is a biological male, he is a man, or if she is a biological female, she is a woman.

The editor who wrote me argues that apparently one's sincerely held beliefs about his or her gender determine whether or not he or she is a man or woman. This defies logic, of course; believing something sincerely does not make it so. And to claim a man is a woman, or vice versa, and insist such a claim be taken seriously in law and public conduct erodes the healthy, safe, natural functioning of society.

As far as my editor correspondent's apparent claim that it is safer for "trans people" to use public facilities commensurate with their self-asserted gender, (a) I wonder on what basis he asserts this and (b) if, in his world, other people matter.

That sounds harsher than I would like, but it's fair to ask: What about the men and women and children who

feel—understandably and naturally—offended, frightened or even traumatized by viewing opposite-gendered persons disrobe in front of them in locker rooms or use opposite-gender bathrooms? The reactions of dismay and even fear of the great majority of heterosexuals to such behavior are understandable, given that such behavior is evidence of an internal disorder within those who commit it. Their behavior runs counter to their identity; it is inauthentic at a most fundamental level, and thus jarring and disturbing to others who observe it, at the least.

And given a culture in which sexual assault is much too common, is it really surprising that women would be frightened by seeing men in their showers, even if those men profess a genuine internal alignment with their opposite gender?

Must some in the “transgendered community” simply demand that those opposing their agenda get over their native sense of shock or fear? Must all of culture bow before an insistence grounded in the abandonment of rationality?

The “laws of nature and of nature’s God” cannot be reversed by political pressure or popular will. Two plus two always equals four. The sun always rises in the east. Water always runs downhill. And men will always be men and women always will be women.

To make this latter claim is not homophobic or transphobic. It is not inherently hateful (and should never be used as a pretext for hate, either). It’s a matter of simple honesty we should not be afraid of speaking. To have, or inspire, such fear is to encourage **ratiophobia**—the fear of reason.

People struggling with same-sex attraction deserve the same compassion, respect, mercy and grace that Christ offers all sinners—to every person, in other words.

In sum:

Politically, Christians need to oppose efforts to change public law to accommodate those who wish to undo the undoable (human nature, biology, sexuality, etc.). Not to oppose initiatives to conform law and custom to sexual unrealities would be unloving both to the advocates of such (by enabling and encouraging them to believe and participate in falsehood and error) and the broader culture, including persons whose well-being or livelihoods are jeopardized by others who press for legal and social change involving religious intolerance and crass personal and public disruption.

But as the church of Jesus Christ, as His representatives, we must also be there for those same persons, ready with compassion and counsel and practical help. Opposing their political efforts does not mean either to hate or abandon them as beloved image-bearers of God.

For years, psychologist Dr. Jerry Leach struggled with feeling like a woman in a man's body. Through counseling and the transforming power of God's love, he overcame his gender identity disorder (GID). Describing his journey, he writes:

"I began the painful process of exposing my secret to trustworthy leaders of my church, as well as good friends. I fully expected their rejection. Instead, they reached out to me with overwhelming love, acceptance and compassion. This simple act of exposing my secrets defused much of the inner anguish and shame. Discarding my secret identity was one of the most painful things I've ever done. Many times, I didn't know if I could emotionally survive without cross-dressing. Eventually, however, I came to realize that casting off that false feminine persona was the best thing for my life. Today, as I gaze out the window of my office, my reflection in the window pane is different. It's no longer a stylishly-dressed woman, waiting for the receptionist's announcement. Now I see the man—the healthy man—God created me to be.

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