

Should Christians Call Bruce Jenner Caitlyn?

Bruce Jenner now calls himself “Caitlyn” and appears in a photo on the cover Vanity Fair. Here are some obvious but under-reported facts about him:

His biology remains unchanged.

His neurology remains unchanged.

His musculature remains unchanged.

His genetic composition remains unchanged.

His dorsal aspect remains unchanged.

His reproductive system remains unchanged.

As with all men, he sees differently and hears differently than a woman. He lacks a woman’s capacity for endurance and her ability to remember better than a man.

Bruce Jenner processes oxygen differently than a woman. Given that his endocrine glands secrete more sebum and collagen than a woman’s, his skin will always be less absorbent than a woman’s.

He is more likely to get tuberculosis, cardiovascular disease, and cancer than a woman, and less likely to suffer from blindness or osteoporosis.

Mr. Jenner even deals with tension differently than a woman. According to 2010 report by the American Psychological Association, “Men and women report different reactions to stress, both physically and mentally. They attempt to manage stress in very different ways and also perceive their ability to do so – and the things that stand in their way – in markedly different ways.”

Every one of the foregoing facts is quantified in reputable scientific journals, copiously.

I write none of this to deride Mr. Jenner. Rather, I mourn for him. Human sexuality is a gift, bestowed by the choice of a loving God who creates us male and female (Gen. 1:27, 5:2). Rejection of that gift is morally wrong but also a personal tragedy and a wounding of good social order. As Britain's Evangelical Alliance wrote in a 2000 position paper on transsexuality, "Authentic changes from a person's given sex is not possible and an ongoing transsexual lifestyle is incompatible with God's will as revealed in Scripture and in creation."

Some studies have noted differences in brain functioning for persons asserting a transgendered identity—biological men whose brains function somewhat more like those of women. Yet numerous other studies have shown how brain plasticity allows for the "re-wiring" of the brain such that dissonance is substantially moderated. In other words, the mind can be trained to run in different courses, ones more aligned with both one's physiology and productive of greater emotional well-being.

Additionally, sex-reassignment surgery does not address the fundamental psychological issues underlying transgenderism. A major academic study of "324 sex-reassigned persons (191 male-to-females, 133 female-to-males) in Sweden, 1973–2003," found the following:

Persons with transsexualism, after sex reassignment, have considerably higher risks for mortality, suicidal behaviour, and psychiatric morbidity than the general population. Our findings suggest that sex reassignment, although alleviating gender dysphoria, may not suffice as treatment for transsexualism, and should inspire improved psychiatric and somatic care after sex reassignment for this patient group.

In other words, underlying issues are not resolved from what historically has been considered mutilative surgery.

Finally, while some differences between genders are influenced by nurture and culture, such influences are modest, at best. No one had to instruct my sons to be rough-and-tumble boys who liked to play aggressive games, and my daughter gravitated naturally toward traditional feminine toys like dolls and “Littlest Pet Shop” animals. They were drawn to these things upon sight, not instruction. So it is with all but a small fraction of children.

Should Christians call Mr. Jenner by his now-preferred name, “Caitlyn”? Refusing to use his preferred name seems impolite, but not to call him Bruce would seem a concession to something painfully false.

One thing is certain: Christians quick to disparage Mr. Jenner should be reminded of their own fallenness, sin that motivated God’s eternal Son to die for them. But we should also remember that Mr. Jenner does not need celebratory photo-shoots. He needs compassion and counsel, as do all who wrestle with confusion over their sexual identity—compassion and counsel that lead them to embrace being the man or woman God intended them to be.

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