

ARE TRANSGENDER PEOPLE SINNING?

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ABSTRACT

While transgenderism in America may be confusing to Christians, they need not be afraid of this important emerging social issue. Instead they need to do their best to understand it. The first half of this paper will walk through some basics of transgenderism. The terminology in this field changes quickly but through humility and willingness to learn Christians can converse with people in the transgender community. Statistics indicate that while number of people in the transgender community is fairly low, it is growing. The means of diagnosing and treating gender dysphoria are varied and can be confusing for Christians. Gender formation theories work together even as they sometimes disagree about what makes some people transgender. From what we know it is clear that transgenderism is not unlike other difficulties from which people suffer in this world.

The second half of this paper will examine the issue in light of God's Word. When Christians consult God's Word they will find that God has a lot to say about gender. At creation God established a gender binary. God does not distinguish between sex and gender. He expects people to express their gender according to the sex he assigned to them at birth. God nowhere indicates that switching from one gender to another is either possible or appropriate.

Lastly, this paper will consider how Christians may wisely respond to transgender individuals. Christian lay people and pastors must make tough choices when dealing with transgender people, but their conversations should always be guided by understanding and compassion.

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Introduction

Now all at once tremendous scenes unfold;
Thunder'd the deeps, the smoky billows roll'd!
Tumultuous waves embroil the bellowing flood,
All trembling, deafen'd, and aghast we stood!
No more the vessel plough'd the dreadful wave,
Fear seized the mighty, and unnerved the brave;
Each dropp'd his oar; but swift from man to man
With looks serene I turn'd, and thus began:
'O friends! O often tried in adverse storms!
With ills familiar in more dreadful forms!¹

In book XII of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* the great champion Odysseus stands on the deck of his mighty ship. He should be celebrating his great escape from the sirens but something beneath the surface of the water catches his eye. What he sees terrifies him. Something down there is making a sound like thunder. The waves blacken and swell. The boat stops. The whole crew had heard about terrible sea beasts in this place. One by one the men realize they are sailing right over the top of a monster. Each one drops his oar, paralyzed with fear at what might be lurking in the depths.

What makes a sea monster scary? A sea monster could be strong. It could be fast. It could have long fangs or huge fins. It could have any number of scary traits, but there's no way to be sure. That's what scared Odysseus. How should he prepare? Which tools should he use? Where should he steer his ship? Is there even a monster down there? The scariest thing about a sea monster is not what you know about it. Just the opposite, the scariest thing is not knowing.

From time to time an issue stirs up the sea of opinions and assertions that make up American culture. Opinions swell. Blogs thunder emotionally charged posts. Politicians tiptoe around sensitive issues, careful not to say anything too polarizing. As Homer would say, "Now all at once tremendous scenes unfold."²

One of the latest tremendous scenes in American culture features transgender individuals. The popular opinion regarding transgender individuals in America has progressed from anomaly, through stages of curiosity and acceptance until recently when whole-hearted approval of

¹ Homer, tr. Theodore Alois Buckley *The Odyssey* (1951) [online book]; available from iBooks at <https://itun.es/us/NN3Kx.I>.

² *Ibid.*

transgender people is expected of every well informed and conscientious citizen. National Public Radio frequently broadcasts stories about transgender individuals.³ The American Psychiatric Association no longer considers transgender individuals to have a mental disorder.⁴ But perhaps the biggest evidence of transgenderism's prevalence came in the summer of 2015.

In June of 2015 Caitlyn Jenner was awarded the ESPN Arthur Ashe Courage Award.⁵ Caitlyn Jenner is a transgender woman, who was born William Bruce Jenner. Jenner became famous after winning the gold medal for the decathlon in the 1976 Olympic Games. She received the Arthur Ashe Award in June of 2015 after a nationally broadcast television interview with Diane Sawyer in which she came out as a transgender woman.⁶ Suddenly transgenderism was no fringe issue. Now many people who were able to keep transgender people out of mind were forced to think of at least one. Caitlyn Jenner has become the face of transgenderism in America.

Transgenderism has become an important topic also in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The WELS website Question and Answer page has received multiple questions regarding transgenderism.⁷ Multiple WELS pastors have transgender persons in their congregation. There are even some WELS lay leaders who struggle with transgenderism.

As recently as five years ago, transgenderism would not have been an issue to which many Christians gave serious thought. But "now all at once tremendous scenes unfold." Christians sometimes feel like Odysseus sailing over sea monsters, unsure of what they're facing. How should they prepare to talk about transgender people? Which Bible verses should they use? What should they tell their families? Is transgenderism even a sin? Just like a sea monster, the scariest thing about transgenderism is what is not known about it. Not knowing what to believe when radio reporters celebrate pro-transgender laws, that's scary. Not knowing

³ A search of the NPR website for stories which include the word "transgender" reveals 706 results. Access at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/search/index.php?searchinput=transgender>.

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, "Gender Dysphoria" [online informational bulletin] (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013, accessed November 21, 2015); available from <http://www.dsm5.org/documents/gender%20dysphoria%20fact%20sheet.pdf>; Internet.

⁵ "Jenner: Trans People Deserve Your Respect," ESPN.com, July 16, 2015, http://espn.go.com/espys/2015/story/_/id/13264599.

The Arthur Ashe Courage Award is presented annually by sports media company ESPN as a part of the ESPY Awards. The award is given to individuals whose contributions "transcend sports". Often these transcendent figures are also athletes who have been at the top of their sport.

⁶ Bruce Jenner Shares an Exclusive and Wide-Ranging Conversation with Diane Sawyer., accessed November 21, 2015, <http://abc.go.com/shows/2020/listing/2015-04/24-bruce-jenner-the-interview>.

⁷ <http://wels.net/faq/changing-ones-sex/>.

what to say when a cousin claims he's now a lady, that's scary. Not being sure whether transgenderism is a sin, that's scary.

One Christian pastor described the situation this way,

Transsexualism is a minefield. There are many different perspectives, each apparently reflecting a different background ideology. Even how you frame the issues and begin to ask questions about it can already show you what perspective you are coming from. Though transsexualism is still fairly rare, at least in its full-blown form, it has become an ideological battleground...If it is difficult to ensure a welcome for homosexuals in the pews, and acceptance of homosexual clergy, the problems with transsexualism are far greater.⁸

Ignorance is the source of much of the confusion and fear surrounding transgenderism. Therefore, the first step Christians can take to show love to transgender people is to understand their struggle. The first half of this paper will aim to help Christians understand transgenderism, to peer beneath the surface of the water and see what kind of monster we're dealing with, if this is even a monster.

If Christians peer below the surface and treat transgenderism like it is a scary sea monster, their efforts to share the gospel with transgender individuals will still likely be incomplete. This task also requires knowledge of Scripture and compassion. John the Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"(John 1:29).⁹ He did not say, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, *except for transgender people.*" Jesus has taken away their sins too. To treat such people like monsters would be the same sort of pharisaic attitude that rejected the tax collectors with whom Jesus ate. A proper understanding of the morality of transgenderism requires understanding of the issue and God's Word.

In order to take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel with transgender people, Christians must understand what people in the transgender community are dealing with. To help Christians overcome any fear of what they do not know about transgenderism, this paper will present some of the recent research about the topic. In order to help pastors and lay people share the gospel with transgender people, this paper will provide ways of responding to them with biblical authority and compassion.

⁸ James M. Childs, "Transsexualism: Some Theological and Ethical Perspectives," *Dialog* 48, no. 1 (2009): p. 31.

⁹ All Bible quotations in this paper are taken from NIV® Copyright 2011.

Even though “all at once tremendous scenes unfold,” Christians do not need to be afraid. Christians seeking to share the gospel with transgender individuals must address their struggle with understanding and compassion.

Understanding Transgenderism

The first half of this paper is a study of transgenderism itself in some detail. The purpose of this section is to help Christians sift out the truth from among the myths about transgenderism. This first half is not filled with practical insights for ministering to transgender people, but if Christians want to share the gospel with transgender people, understanding their struggle is an essential first step. Consider understanding the “price of admission” to the conversation about transgender people. Before you have the right to be heard, you had better know what you’re talking about. Understanding the terminology and statistics of transgenderism, how transgender people are diagnosed and treated, and how gender identity is formed is vital for understanding a transgender person’s struggle and addressing it with law and gospel. Showing compassion to transgender people is always the end game of all efforts to understand transgenderism.

What follows is not to be understood as a reflection of the author’s personal convictions or preferences regarding terminology. Rather, it is an attempt to convey accurate information about what is being discussed in the social science and medical fields as well as within the transgender community. The author will offer brief commentary from time to time to help Christians evaluate particularly confusing scientific theories.

Understand the Terminology

To understand the nature of transgenderism, Christians will need to know the terminology used in the transgender community. This is not an easy task. The language used to describe different types of transgender people is very specific and it changes frequently. The terms are fluid, but the struggle to understand the terminology is worth the effort. When a Christian has an opportunity to discuss law and gospel with a transgender person he will want to avoid putting his foot in his mouth. Knowing some terms and major distinctions will help him avoid causing offense before he has time to show compassion.

Two consistent principles will help Christians handle the fluid terminology. First, strive to use terms and definitions in the same way as the person with whom you are speaking. This will help to prevent miscommunication. Second, be willing to be corrected by the person with

whom you are speaking. The definition you are using for a certain term may be an accurate definition when and where you learned it, but it may have a different meaning in a different time, in a different context or in a conversation with a different person.

Below is a list of terms adapted from the National Center for Transgender Equality. Their website states that “terminology within the transgender community varies and has changed over time so we recognize the need to be sensitive to usage within particular communities.”¹⁰

Transgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. “Trans” is shorthand for “transgender.” (Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus “transgender people” is appropriate but “transgenders” is often viewed as disrespectful.)

Cisgender: A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is the same as those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth; the opposite of transgender.¹¹

Transgender Man: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a man (see also “FtM”).

Transgender Woman: A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman (see also “MtF”).

Gender Identity: An individual’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

Assigned Gender: The gender given to a person at his or her birth on the basis of the reproductive organs. This gender assignment can be reevaluated on the basis of chromosomal evidence after a test of the person’s DNA.

Gender Expression: How a person represents or expresses one’s gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

Gender Dysphoria: To be used in place of “Gender Identity Disorder.” Refers to the distress that comes when a person’s gender identity does not match their biological sex.

Transsexual: An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seeks to transition from male to female or female to male. Many do not prefer this term because it is thought to sound overly clinical. This term can

¹⁰ Christien Harden, “Cultural Competence In Treating Transgender Individuals,” accessed November 13, 2015, <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>.

¹¹ Julia Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, & Culture, Tenth Edition* (Boston MA: Wadsworth, 2013). p. 26.

also refer to individuals who have had surgery and/or hormonal treatments to make their bodies more closely match the sex with which they identify.¹²

Cross-dresser: A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender. The older term “transvestite” is considered derogatory by many in the United States.

Queer: A term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and often also transgender people. Some use queer as an alternative to “gay” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

Genderqueer: A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female.

Gender Non-conforming: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to his or her assigned gender.

Bi-gendered: One who has a significant gender identity that encompasses both genders, male and female. Some may feel that one side or the other is stronger, but both sides are there.

FtM¹³: A person who transitions from “female-to-male,” meaning a person who was assigned female at birth, but identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a “transgender man.”

MtF¹⁴: A person who transitions from “male-to-female,” meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a “transgender woman.”

Sex Reassignment Surgery: Surgical procedures that change one’s body to better reflect a person’s gender identity. This may include different procedures, including those sometimes also referred to as “top surgery” (breast augmentation or removal) or “bottom surgery” (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries. These surgeries are medically necessary for some people, however not all people want, need, or can have surgery as part of their transition. “Sex change surgery” is considered a derogatory term by many.

Sexual Orientation: A term describing a person’s attraction to members of the same sex and/or a different sex, usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or asexual.

Transition: The time when a person begins living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often includes changing one’s

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³ Also abbreviated with all capital letters, “FTM.”

¹⁴ Also abbreviated with all capital letters, “MTF.”

first name and dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking hormones, having surgery, or changing identity documents (e.g., driver's license, Social Security record) to reflect one's gender identity. Medical and legal steps are often difficult for people to afford.

Intersex: A term used for people who are born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that does not seem to fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex conditions are also known as differences of sex development (DSD).

Drag Queen: Used to refer to male performers who dress as women for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events. It is also sometimes used in a derogatory manner to refer to transgender women.

Drag King: Used to refer to female performers who dress as men for the purposes of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events.

One common confusion is between the terms “sex” and “gender.” To put it simply, sex is body parts and gender is identity. Sex and gender are inconsistent for transgender individuals. The way they identify does not match the body parts they have.

“Sex” refers to a person's sexual organs. People who have female sexual organs are of the female sex. People who have male sexual organs are of the male sex. Sex is parts.

“Gender” refers to a person's identity or behavior. People who identify themselves as females or behave like females are of the female gender regardless of what sexual organs they have. People who identify themselves as male or behave like males are of the male gender regardless of what sexual organs they have. Gender is identity.

“Sex” is a *biological designation* which refers to body parts. When a baby is born the doctors assign the baby with the male or female sex based on the sexual organs the baby is born with. Gender, on the other hand, is a *social designation* that is based on a person's self-concept or behavior.¹⁵

For these reasons Julia Wood, a professor of gender studies, says, “Gender is learned and is neither innate nor necessarily stable.”¹⁶ An illustration will help explain her point.

Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner is of the male sex because he has male body parts. His sex was assigned to him when he was born with male reproductive organs. But the way he behaves was not determined for him at his birth. When Julia Wood says that gender is learned and it is not innate she means that Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner learned how to act like a man after he was born. When she

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

says that gender is not stable she means that Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner is able make a decision to stop acting like a man and start acting like a woman.

It should be noted that these terms are fluid even within the professional literature. Some writers and speakers make a clear distinction between gender and sex like the distinctions made above. Other writers use the term “gender” when referring to biological “sex.” For instance when hospitals determine if a baby is male or female based on sexual organs, one would expect that the designation based on parts would be a “sex assignment.” But, no. This process is called “gender assignment.” The gender assigned to a baby at birth is also known as the baby’s natal gender.¹⁷

It should also be noted that neither sex nor gender are the same as sexual orientation. Gender identity is about how people see themselves. Sexual orientation is about how people see others. Sexual orientation refers to the type of person an individual is sexually and romantically attracted to. Individuals attracted to others of the same gender are homosexual. Individuals attracted to people of the opposite gender are heterosexual. Even though he was assigned a female gender at birth, a transgender male who is attracted to males is said to be homosexual. Even though he was assigned a female gender at birth, a transgender male who is attracted to females is properly said to be heterosexual. Most transsexuals are attracted to the same type or person after they transition as before they transition. Technically their orientation has changed, even though they have not begun to sexually prefer people of a different gender.

The terms “transgender” and “transsexual” often differ in meaning and usage. “Transgender” refers to people whose biologically assigned sex is different from the way they identify or behave— like a person with female parts who acts like a man.¹⁸ The term “transsexual” is used in various ways. It can refer specifically to individuals who have undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormonal treatments to make their sexual organs more closely match the gender with which they identify.¹⁹ It can also refer to individuals who have undergone “a social transition from male to female or female to male” whether or not that entails hormonal or surgical treatments.²⁰ In general “transgender” is used more commonly by people within the

¹⁷ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5)* (Arlington, Virginia: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), p. 451.

¹⁸ The term “transgender” can be used in many other ways. It is a general term for many kinds of sexual identity abnormalities. When contrasted against the term “transsexual,” “transgender” emphasizes the variety which exists in the area of gender identity confusion.

¹⁹ Wood, p. 27.

²⁰ *DSM-5*, p. 451.

transgender community because it is less specific and can include almost all types of gender confused individuals.²¹

The word “transgender” is also defined in different ways. The debate is over the prefix, “trans-.” Does “trans-” mean to go beyond like when something “transcends” our understanding or does it mean to go across like the “transcontinental” railroad spans North America? Within the transgender community the word refers to people who have moved *beyond* the gender binary of male and female. They assert that language is incapable of capturing their experiences as neither male nor female (or both male and female) because current language is constrained by the concepts of male and female. Those who think that transgender people transcend modern concept of gender think that they inhabit some sort of third gender which is not like male or female. Even though most transgender people conceive of themselves as going *beyond* gender in their minds, with their words they define themselves as going *across* genders. Their designations as male to female (MtF) or female to male (FtM) testify to this definition.

On the other hand, most medical professionals such as sex reassignment surgeons, psychologists, and medical researchers do not conceive of anything beyond male and female. This dualistic approach to gender is called “gender binary.” They define “transgender” as, moving *across* the genders from male to female or female to male. Some people conceive of a gender continuum in which a person could be partially one gender and partially the other, but they preserve the concept male and female at the ends of the spectrum. In the medical community nothing transcends that binary understanding of gender.²²

Author Commentary: While the Bible does not contain specific definition of gender, the Lord does comment about the nature of gender. When God created the human beings he specifically mentions making them according to a gender binary, male and female. “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Even after sin entered the world and stole the perfection from human beings, Jesus still upheld the teaching that humans are created according to a gender

²¹ Sometimes transgender people are classified into subtypes by placing them somewhere on a scale developed by Harry Benjamin in 1966. The scale rates transgender people from 1 to 6 in which 1 is an occasional cross-dresser and 6 is a post-operation transsexual. The Harry Benjamin scale is considered outdated and is no longer used by contemporary social scientists. It is still occasionally mentioned in non-professional resources. More information at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_scale.

²² Gunnar Lund, “Across and Beyond: The Semantics of Transgender Identity,” *Stance* (1943-1880) 5 (2012), http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/virtualpress/stance/2012_spring/2Lund.pdf.

binary. “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female?”’” (Matthew 19:4). The Bible doesn’t teach anything about a gender beyond the binary of male and female.²³ The second half of this paper will deal specifically with what the Bible says about gender.

In addition to the distinction between gender and sex and the distinction between transgender and transsexual, a third important distinction is the difference between “gender identity disorder” and “gender dysphoria.” Both terms refer to the psychological diagnosis for individuals whose gender is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. “Gender identity disorder” is an older term, and is no longer used for clinical diagnosis. It was used in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM-IV)*.²⁴ “Gender dysphoria” is a more recent term, and is found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5)*.

Many people were concerned with the term “gender identity disorder” because it referred to gender nonconformity as a “disorder.” The label “disorder” is thought to imply a moral or ethical judgment with which the *DSM-IV* was reaffirming the notion that it is wrong for a person to identify with a gender not assigned to him or her at birth. The authors of the *DSM-5* are not interested in providing a moral judgment. They just want to offer help for clinical diagnosis; therefore the term “gender identity disorder” was replaced by “gender dysphoria.”²⁵

The change from “gender identity disorder” to “gender dysphoria” was made in an attempt to avoid stigmatizing individuals who see and feel themselves to be a different gender than their assigned gender. The *DSM-5* editors no longer consider gender nonconformity to be a disordered way of thinking on a psychological level.²⁶ *DSM-5* says that “*Gender dysphoria* refers

²³ If there was ever anyone who should have transcended the gender binary, it would have been the God-man Jesus. Yet when Jesus came to earth he came as a male. The Bible only describes Jesus as a male, never as a female. He humbled himself in such a way as to conform to the natural world’s gender binary.

²⁴ The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is used by clinicians, researchers, psychologists, physicians and other mental health professionals to guide clinical practice, facilitate research and communicate an official nomenclature for psychopathology. It undergoes periodic revisions. The 4th edition was released in 1994. The 5th edition was released in 2013.

²⁵ Amber Ault and Stephanie Bruzuzy, “Removing Gender Identity Disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: A Call for Action,” *Social Work* 54, no. 2 (2009): 187.

This same argument was made regarding the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973.

²⁶ “Gender Dysphoria,” (American Psychiatric Publishing) accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.dsm5.org/documents/gender%20dysphoria%20fact%20sheet.pdf>.

to the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender."²⁷

Noting the change in terminology is not only important so that Christians do not use the wrong term while trying to understand transgender people. It also affects the way professional psychologists diagnose transgender people. Before 2013, a person diagnosed with "gender identity disorder" made that person eligible to receive treatment to help correct their disordered thinking. The goal of that treatment was often to get them to stop being transgender by changing their actions. Hopefully they would start behaving like the gender they were assigned at birth. After 2013 a person diagnosed with "gender dysphoria" will not be treated for disordered thinking. He or she will be treated for the distress that comes from society around them because of their gender nonconformity. The goal is no longer to help them stop being transgender. The goal is to help them become comfortable with their gender even if that means changing their bodies through surgery or hormone therapy. With this change in terminology transgenderism came to be classified as a normal way of thinking.

Author Commentary: Christians can use the terminology of professional psychologists and those inside the transgender community without wholeheartedly adopting all of their beliefs. If someone uses unfamiliar terms to describe a God-pleasing teaching then praise the Lord with them. If someone uses unfamiliar terms to disguise a teaching that contradicts God's word then correct them. The only way to know whether to praise or correct is to understand the terminology of transgenderism. The alternative to understanding is miscommunication.

The terminology of transgenderism can be tricky. The distinctions are subtle. The topics are sensitive. The meanings can be fluid. But Christians who want to witness to a transgender individual do not need to become masters of every term. They do need to be loving enough to start a conversation with a transgender person and humble enough to be corrected when they misunderstand or misspeak.

Understand the Statistics

The main reason for looking at some statistics about transgender people is to understand the reality of their existence in America. Before a Christian considers understanding transgender

²⁷ DSM-5, p. 541.

people or responding to them with compassion, he must understand that no matter how he feels about transgender people they are a significant portion of our culture.

In order to better grasp the significance of transgenderism in our culture, it will be helpful to understand some basic statistics about the prevalence of transgenderism. Measuring the transgender population statistically can be challenging. Definitions of who is or is not transgender may vary from person to person. Neither the U.S. Census Bureau nor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ask people in national surveys whether they identify themselves as transgender.

The most common estimate for the number of transgender individuals in America is based on a 2011 study by LGBT demographer Gary Gates. His study estimated that about 700,000 people in America could be considered transgender.²⁸ That is about 0.3% of American adults.²⁹ Other researchers suggest that between 0.5% and 2% of Americans have strong feelings of being transgender but only 0.1% to 0.5% actually take steps to transition from one gender to another in their social lives.³⁰

Children and adolescents can also experience gender dysphoria. Many children express some level of discomfort with their gender at some point in their childhood. Children as young as age two may express a desire to be of the other sex or may express unhappiness about their sex characteristics. Such children usually experience mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression at the same time as their gender dysphoria.³¹ Because these younger people are also going through other physical, psychological, and sexual changes there is much more fluidity in the outcomes. It is very possible that the child's discomfort with their assigned gender could be

²⁸ To put this number in perspective consider that if you walk the streets of an average American town your odds of meeting a transgender person are almost double your odds of meeting a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

²⁹ Gary J. Gates, "How Many People Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender?," 2011, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/09h684x2.pdf>.

Gary Gates' study measured transgenderism only in 18-64 year olds. It seems that transgenderism is less commonly identified in children, but due to increasingly liberal practices of diagnosis, the percentage of children diagnosed with gender dysphoria is likely to increase.

³⁰ Femke Olyslager and Lynn Conway, "On the Calculation of the Prevalence of Transsexualism," in World Professional Association for Transgender Health 20th International Symposium, Chicago, Illinois. Retrieved April, vol. 22, 2007, 2010, http://www.changelingaspects.com/PDF/Prevalence_of_Transsexualism.pdf.

³¹ Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis et al., "Demographic Characteristics, Social Competence, and Behavior Problems in Children with Gender Identity Disorder: A Cross-National, Cross-Clinic Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 31, no. 1 (February 2003): p. 41-53.

related to the other changes they are experiencing during the process of maturing, especially during puberty. Gender dysphoria in children is identified by a persistence of that discomfort.

In order for a child to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria they must exhibit a strong desire to be treated as the other gender and to be rid of one's sex characteristics. Anywhere from 2%-30% of males experience this persistence and anywhere from 12%-50% of females, but that diagnosis does not often continue into adulthood.³² Only 6-23% of children diagnosed with gender dysphoria before puberty continued to experience that dysphoria into adulthood.³³

The DSM-5 indicates that people assigned male at birth are twice as likely to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria as those assigned female at birth. In America there are more MtF transgender people than there are FtM transgender people.³⁴

Author Commentary: These numbers are the best estimates based on limited research, but based on these statistics a room full of one thousand American adults may contain 2-5 people who identify as transgender. Those 2-5 individuals are twice as likely to be MtF than to be FtM. You may also expect to find 5-20 other individuals who do not identify as transgender out loud but feel transgender and choose not to share those feelings. It may be true that these numbers would be smaller in a congregation of one thousand WELS Lutherans, but the communities in which WELS churches serve are likely to have at least some transgender people.

Consider the network of people with whom a WELS congregation has contact. If a congregation has 200 members, and if each member knows fifty people who are not members of the congregation, then that congregation has contact with 10,000 different people. The statistics reported in this paper would indicate that as many as fifty of those people have feelings of being transgender. How important it will be to understand their struggle and respond with compassion!

Understand the Treatments

There are two reasons for learning something about treatments and procedures for gender dysphoria. First, they are a big deal to transgender people. If a Christian hopes to show empathy to a transgender person, he will need to understand what kinds of decisions he is facing, even if

³² DSM-5, p. 454.

³³ P. T. Cohen-Kettenis, *Transgenderism and intersexuality in childhood and adolescence: Making choices*. (2003) as cited in E. Coleman, et al., "Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 13, no. 4 (August 2012): p. 172.

³⁴ DSM-5, p. 455.

he cannot relate to the idea that a single decision could change everything about his life irreversibly. Secondly, a transgender person may consider advice from a Christian friend. In such a case, a Christian will want to be aware of what advice, what permission, and what decisions are available to his friend.

People who experience gender dysphoria may choose to have some type of procedure to make their physical appearance match the gender with which they inwardly identify. Not all people who are transgender desire to put their bodies through a transition to appear different.³⁵ Before transgender individuals can undergo any appearance-changing procedure, the procedure must be recommended by a health provider such as a medical doctor or psychologist.³⁶ Most often these professionals require a thorough psychological evaluation. Those who do choose to transition are sometimes known as transsexuals.

The most influential document about the various procedures available to transgendered individuals is the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care (SOC).³⁷ The goal of the SOC is to help doctors assist transgender people find safe and effective ways to feel more comfortable with their gender identity. The SOC offers advice for treating children, adolescents, and adults.

Treating Children and Adolescents

When treating a child with gender dysphoria, mental health professionals are advised to focus on reducing the child's distress. Treatment that seeks to change the child's gender identity and expression is considered ineffectual and unethical.³⁸ That means that psychologists who abide by the SOC will not strive to help gender dysphoric children become comfortable with the gender assigned them at birth. At the same time, the SOC states that making a social transformation in early childhood may be unhealthy for some children and healthy for others. The SOC does not offer any recommendation for a child's social interaction at school or church

³⁵ Laura E. Kuper, Robin Nussbaum, and Brian Mustanski, "Exploring the Diversity of Gender and Sexual Orientation Identities in an Online Sample of Transgender Individuals," *Journal of Sex Research* 49, no. 2–3 (March 2012): p. 244–54.

³⁶ W. Bockting, et al., "Patient Satisfaction with Transgender Health Services," *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 30, no. 4 (July 2004): p. 279.

³⁷ E. Coleman, et al., "Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People, Version 7," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 13, no. 4 (August 2012): 165–232.

³⁸ SOC, p. 175.

but some health professionals may recommend the congregation, class, pastor or teacher treat the child according to their experienced gender rather than the gender assigned them at birth.³⁹

Physical interventions like hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery are not recommended for children before puberty.

When treating adolescents SOC recommends considering some physical interventions, but not before extensive exploration of psychological, family, and social approaches to treatment are also incorporated. These physical interventions are separated into three stages on the basis of their permanence: fully reversible, partially reversible, and irreversible.⁴⁰ Fully reversible interventions use drugs called gonadotropin-releasing hormone analogs to suppress estrogen or testosterone production and delay puberty and/or menses. This buys the patient some time before the puberty hormones begin to take effect. Partially reversible interventions use hormone therapy to masculinize or feminize the body. Some hormone interventions, such as the using estrogens to develop larger breasts in male-born adolescents, require reconstructive surgery to reverse the effect. Other changes, like using testosterone supplements to deepen the voice of female born adolescents, are not reversible at all. Irreversible interventions are surgical procedures which alter an adolescent's primary or secondary sexual characteristics.⁴¹ Genital surgery is never advised for minors or before the patient lives for 12 months expressing their desired sex. Surgery to remove breasts of female-born adolescents is allowed for minors only after one year of testosterone treatment.⁴² These stages of intervention are never to be used concurrently. Before a patient begins the next level of care, they are required to finish the previous one.

The SOC offers many ways of treating adults with gender dysphoria but the most notable are psychotherapy, hormone therapy to feminize or masculinize the body, and surgical treatments to change primary or secondary sex characteristics. In addition, transgender people may choose to deal with their dysphoria in alternative ways such as participating in support groups, receiving communication and voice training, laser hair removal or wearing clothes designed to help them

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ Wylie C. Hembree et al., "Endocrine Treatment of Transsexual Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 94, no. 9 (September 1, 2009): pp. 3132–54, doi:10.1210/jc.2009-0345.

⁴¹ Primary sexual characteristics are the sex organs with which a person is born— gonads and genitalia. Secondary sexual characteristics are characteristics which develop during puberty— breasts, body shape, height, and body hair.

⁴² SOC, 178.

simulate the sex traits of their experienced gender.⁴³ This care is highly individualized. Some transgendered people use neither psychotherapy nor hormones nor surgeries, some use just one or two, and some use all three. For this reason it is important not to make assumptions about what kind of care a transgender person has undergone.

When a mental health professionals treat an adult with gender dysphoria, SOC advises them to present the patient with various options for exploring gender roles to reduce the dysphoria.⁴⁴ After considering the various treatment options for gender dysphoria, mental health professionals are advised to help the patient prepare for possible psychotherapy, hormone therapy or surgery.⁴⁵ The final decision about how to treat gender dysphoria in adults is made by the patient.

Psychotherapy Treatments

The goal of psychotherapy treatment for gender dysphoria is to maximize a person's overall wellbeing and quality of life. Psychotherapy is not intended to change a person's gender identity, but to help them deal with their dysphoria.⁴⁶ This therapy may consist of individual, couple, family or group therapy and may continue during hormone therapy and after surgery. While it is highly recommended that patients undergo psychotherapy treatments before beginning hormonal and surgical treatments, it is not required.⁴⁷ Therapy may also be provided for the family of the patient, as the patient's dysphoria and potential transition will affect them as well.

Hormone Therapy

62% of transgender individuals have undergone some sort of hormone therapy. An additional 23% hope to have it in the future.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183.

⁴⁶ L Fraser, "Depth psychotherapy with transgender people." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 24 (2): p. 135. doi:10.1080/14681990903003878.

⁴⁷ SOC, p. 183.

⁴⁸ Wylie C. Hembree et al., "Endocrine Treatment of Transsexual Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 94, no. 9 (September 1, 2009): 3132-54, doi:10.1210/jc.2009-0345.

While a decision to begin hormone therapy is primarily the decision of the patient, the individual will not have access to pharmaceutical hormones without a written prescription. A patient may obtain a referral for hormone therapy from a mental health professional, but only a hormone-prescribing physician or surgeon can prescribe hormone treatment. Hormone therapy will only be prescribed to adults with persistent gender dysphoria who possess the capacity to make an informed decision, who consent to treatment and whose other mental health concerns are well controlled.⁴⁹

Once a patient has been referred for hormone therapy an FtM patient begins taking testosterone supplements. These are called masculinizing hormones and cause masculinizing changes. Masculinizing changes include deepening of the voice, clitoral enlargement, growth of facial and body hair, cessation in menses, atrophy of breast tissue and decreased body fat percentage.⁵⁰ MtF patient begins taking estrogen supplements. These are called feminizing hormones and cause feminizing changes. Feminizing changes include breast growth, decreased erectile function, decreased testicular size and increased body fat percentage.⁵¹

Hormonal supplements cause physical changes to the patient's body which makes their appearance more congruent with their gender identity. Masculinizing and feminizing changes generally occur over the course of two years but the timeline and effectiveness of the hormones varies.⁵² After a patient has achieved maximal changes from the hormones, they continue taking a reduced dose to maintain the changes they've experienced. The maintenance dosage is often adjusted based on the age of the patient. If the patient undergoes surgery to remove his or her gonads, which naturally produce hormones, the hormone supplement dose is reduced but it is almost never discontinued completely.⁵³

What is described above is the normal medical procedure for hormone therapy, but many transgender individuals pursue alternative sources for hormones. Because the cost of hormone therapy can be overwhelming and access to quality prescribing physicians can be limited, many transgender individuals obtain hormone supplements through non-medical sources such as a

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵⁰ Transsexual individuals can seek voice and communication specialists to train their voices and non-verbal communications to appear more like their experienced gender without the use of hormones. This training is usually provided by a trained speech-language pathologist or a speech therapist.

⁵¹ Hembree, et al.

⁵² SOC, p. 188.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

friend or relative, street dealers or strangers, an internet pharmacy, or herbal treatments.⁵⁴ These kinds of sources are much more dangerous than medical sources. Some studies indicate as many as 70% of transgender individuals pursue non-medical hormone sources, and others indicate as few as 20%.⁵⁵

Surgery

Genital surgery is often the last step in treating gender dysphoria, but genital surgery is not the only surgical option available to transgender people. Many transgender individuals are able to find comfort without surgery. Others use surgery to become more like the gender they experience rather than the gender they were assigned at birth. Surgeries can help them do this in profound ways like removing sex organs or in relatively small ways, like changing the shape of the nose. In these cases some studies have described gender reassignment surgery as “medically necessary to alleviate gender dysphoria.”⁵⁶

Decisions about surgery are primarily the patient’s decision, but mental health professionals are encouraged to prepare the patient psychologically and guide him or her through the decision process. The SOC provides criteria for surgical procedures on the primary sexual characteristics like genitalia. Even though the patient may desire surgery the SOC advises surgeons not to operate unless the patient has referrals from mental health professionals. For chest/breast surgery a patient needs one referral from a mental health professional. For genital surgery two independent referrals are required.⁵⁷ Mental health professionals are advised not to refer patients who experience clinically significant mental health complications.⁵⁸

Some surgeons have ethical reservations about conducting gender reassignment surgery. In ordinary surgical practice the goal is to remove harmful tissues, to restore disturbed functions, or to alter the patient’s body to improve their self-image. Most surgeons who object to gender

⁵⁴ Nooshin Khobzi Rotondi et al., “Nonprescribed Hormone Use and Self-Performed Surgeries: ‘Do-It-Yourself’ Transitions in Transgender Communities in Ontario, Canada,” *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 10 (2013): pp. 1830–36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1830.

⁵⁶ J. Joris Hage and Refaat B. Karim, “Ought GIDNOS Get Nought? Treatment Options for Nontranssexual Gender Dysphoria,” *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* 105, no. 3 (2000): 1222: as cited in SOC.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁸ Herman Vercauteren Jr. and Griet De Cuypere, “Eligibility and Readiness Criteria for Sex Reassignment Surgery: Recommendations for Revision of the WPATH Standards of Care,” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 11, no. 3 (2009): pp. 194–205, doi:10.1080/15532730903383781.

reassignment surgery do not think these goals are consistent with procedures done to treat gender dysphoria.⁵⁹

Once a transgender person has decided to undergo surgery and found a surgeon to do the procedure, he or she will meet with the surgeon to discuss the different surgical techniques available, the advantages and disadvantages of each technique, the limitations of the results and the risks involved. Surgeons are required by law to discuss these things with prospective patients. These discussions are also a very important step because all of these surgeries are considered irreversible.⁶⁰

Surgical procedures can be divided into the following three categories: breast/chest surgery also called “top surgery,” genital surgery also called “bottom surgery,” and other surgeries. All of these can correctly be called gender reassignment surgery, but most often the term refers to genital surgery. Transgender individuals considering surgery can choose to make use of one of these surgeries or a combination of them but recommendations from health professionals are required for top and bottom surgeries.

Breast/Chest (Top Surgery)

The appearance of a person’s chest is a secondary sex characteristic and it does not have ramifications for the legal definition of that person’s sex or gender. The appearance of a person’s chest does often have a profound impact on that person’s personal self-perception and gender dysphoria. Because breast/chest procedure is considered less severe than genital surgery but still irreversible, the SOC advises that it be should be considered with the same care as hormone therapy.⁶¹ Therefore the SOC says that breast/chest surgery requires one referral from a mental health professional. Mental health professionals and surgeons are advised to proceed with surgery only on adult patients with persistent documented gender dysphoria and the capacity to make an informed decision about their treatments.

For FtM patients, chest surgery consists of the removal of naturally growing breasts. This surgery is called a mastectomy or “male contouring” procedure.⁶² 43% of FtM transgender

⁵⁹ SOC, p. 199.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶² If there is a large amount of tissue the procedure will be a bilateral mastectomy which results in a large scar. If the amount of tissue to be removed is smaller the procedure can be a peri-areolar procedure in which the scarring is significantly less obvious.

people have undergone this surgery and 50% want to undergo it in the future.⁶³ In many ways this procedure is similar to a mastectomy performed to treat breast cancer. Many FtM patients choose to undergo only a mastectomy.⁶⁴

For MtF patients, breast surgery consists of an augmentation of their naturally growing chests. The surgeon usually inserts breast implants and occasionally injects fat around the implants in a technique called lipofilling. This surgery is sometimes called “mammoplasty” or “chest reconstruction,” and is the same as a breast augmentation performed on cisgender women for cosmetic reasons.⁶⁵ The SOC recommends that before having a breast augmentation surgery an MtF patient go through 12 months of hormone therapy in order to maximize breast growth. This is thought to obtain better aesthetic results.⁶⁶ 21% of MtF transgender individuals have had this augmentation and 53% would want to someday.⁶⁷

Genital Surgery (Bottom Surgery)

Surgery to alter or remove a person’s genitals is surgery on that person’s primary sex organ and is considered irreversible. For that reason, just like with top surgery, mental health professionals and surgeons are advised to proceed with surgery only on adult patients with persistent documented gender dysphoria and the capacity to make an informed decision about their treatments. Because bottom surgery will permanently affect the hormone levels produced by the patient’s body, they are required to experience temporary reversible estrogen or testosterone suppression before surgery. Therefore patients are required to undergo hormone therapy for one full year prior to surgery.⁶⁸ Patients are also required to live according to their experienced gender for one full year before surgery. This time allows them to experience a wide variety of life experiences and events such as family functions, holidays, vacations, and corporate worship before undergoing irreversible surgery.⁶⁹

FtM patients must undergo a variety of procedures to achieve a complete genital transformation. Some procedures remove female sex organs and are usually followed by the

⁶³ Jaime M. Grant et al., “Transgender Discrimination Survey,” accessed November 25, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/download/31122982/NTDS_Report.pdf. p. 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200, 201.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶⁷ Jaime M. Grant et al., p. 85.

⁶⁸ SOC, p. 202.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

suffix “-ectomy.” Other procedures construct male sex organs and are usually followed by the suffix “-plasty.” Complete transformations must be conducted in many stages over multiple operations.

Some FtM patients undergo procedures to remove female sex organs. They may have their uterus removed through a hysterectomy. These procedures are the same as hysterectomies for cisgender women. MtF patients may have their ovaries and fallopian tubes removed through a procedure called salpingo-oophorectomy. Cisgender women sometimes have their ovaries removed for medical reasons such as to prevent or treat ovarian cancer. FtM patients may have part or all of their vagina removed. This procedure is called vaginectomy, and is sometimes used in cisgender women to prevent or treat vaginal cancer.⁷⁰

FtM patients may undergo procedures to construct male sex organs. If a patient desires to have a phallus similar to a penis the new phallus is called a neophallus. Two options exist for creating a neophallus. The first option consists of lengthening the clitoris through hormone therapy, then surgically removing the tissue that connects it to the pubic bone to create an exposed neophallus from what was formerly the clitoris.⁷¹ This procedure is known as metoidioplasty. 4% of FtM transgender individuals have undergone metoidioplasty and 53% would want to someday.⁷² Metoidioplasty is much cheaper and simpler than the alternatives but it results in what is known as a microphallus which is only capable of a partial erection and usually does not usually allow for standing urination.⁷³ The second option involves using flesh from the patient’s arm or leg to reconstruct a neophallus.⁷⁴ This procedure is known as phalloplasty. 2% of FtM transgender individuals have undergone phalloplasty and 27% would want to someday.⁷⁵ Phalloplasty is a much more complicated surgery and much more expensive than metoidioplasty. Unlike metoidioplasty, phalloplasty does not allow for natural erectile function. Instead, phalloplasty patients may use an erectile prosthesis.⁷⁶ These phalloplasty

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 203.

⁷¹ S.v. Perovic and M.I. Djordjevic, “Metoidioplasty: A Variant of Phalloplasty in Female Transsexuals,” *BJU International* 92, no. 9 (December 2003): p. 981, doi:10.1111/j.1464-410X.2003.04524.x.

⁷² Jaime M. Grant et al., p. 85.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 983.

⁷⁴ Mamoon Rashid and Muhammad Sarmad Tamimy, “Phalloplasty: The Dream and the Reality,” *Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery* 46, no. 2 (May 2013): p. 283, doi:10.4103/0970-0358.118606.

⁷⁵ Jaime M. Grant et al., p. 85.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

procedures are similar to those performed on cisgendered men who have underdeveloped penises.

In addition to the procedures for constructing a phallus, FtM patients may also choose to have parts of their labia reconstructed to look like a scrotum in a procedure called scrotoplasty. An alternative to scrotoplasty is the placement of testicular prostheses.⁷⁷

Any type of genital surgery comes with significant risk of complication. The SOC offers this caution. “If the objectives of phalloplasty are a neophallus of good appearance, standing micturition, sexual sensation, and/or coital ability, patients should be clearly informed that there are several separate stages of surgery and frequent technical difficulties, which may require additional operations.”⁷⁸

MtF patients may undergo a variety of procedures to do just the opposite of the FtM procedures described above. For MtF patients, the “-ectomy” procedures remove male sex organs and the “-plasty” procedures construct female sex organs. Just like FtM patients, complete transformations must be conducted in many stages over multiple operations.

MtF patients may undergo procedures to remove male sex organs. They may have their testicles removed through a surgery called orchiectomy.⁷⁹ Orchiectomy is the surgical form of castration. 25% of MtF transsexuals have undergone orchiectomy and another 61% want to in the future.⁸⁰ Orchiectomy in transsexuals is different from that done to prevent or treat testicular cancer because in transsexuals the whole scrotum is removed. MtF patients may have their penis removed through a procedure called penectomy.⁸¹ Penectomy is sometimes performed on cisgender males for medical reasons such as cancer. Penectomy performed on MtF transsexuals differs from medical penectomy because medical penectomies remove only the parts of the penis that are necessary to preserve the health of the patient. Penectomy for transsexuals on the other hand preserves only glans penis which is usually used to construct a clitoris.⁸²

⁷⁷ SOC, p. 204.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Orchiectomy | Providence Oregon,” accessed October 14, 2015, <http://oregon.providence.org/our-services/o/orchiectomy/>.

⁸⁰ Jaime M. Grant et al., p. 85.

⁸¹ Harold Morgan Reed, “Aesthetic and Functional Male to Female Genital and Perineal Surgery: Feminizing Vaginoplasty,” *Seminars in Plastic Surgery* 25, no. 2 (May 2011): 163–74, doi:10.1055/s-0031-1281486.

⁸² “Penectomy,” About.com Health, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://menshealth.about.com/od/cancer/a/Penectomy.htm>.

MtF patients may undergo procedures to construct female sex organs. They may choose to have a vaginoplasty in which a vagina is constructed.⁸³ This new vagina is called a neovagina. The neovagina is most commonly constructed through a process in which the most of the flesh inside of the penis and scrotum is removed. After creating a cavity between two walls of muscle tissue, the remaining penile and scrotal skin is sewn together and pushed inside the cavity. Skin grafts from other parts of the body are used to cover any remaining flesh inside and around the neovagina. This technique is called penile inversion.⁸⁴ In penile inversion, MtF patients may also choose to use the glans penis to create a neoclitoris. This process is called clitoroplasty.⁸⁵ The process of labiaplasty consists of using skin from the scrotum to construct new labia on the outside of the neovagina. The object of all this construction is a combination of sexual sensation within the neovagina and the appearance of normalcy similar to the vagina of a cisgender woman.⁸⁶

What is described above is the normal medical procedure for gender reassignment surgery, but many transgender individuals who desire to undergo such a procedure do not follow through on that desire for various reasons. Some are discouraged by the criteria they must meet before undergoing surgery. Others are not referred for surgery on the basis of their mental health. Others simply can't afford to pay for the surgery. As a result some transgender individuals choose to perform gender reassignment surgery on themselves. The prevalence of this type of self-reassignment is not conclusive but some studies estimate that about 1% of transsexuals who seek gender reassignment surgery attempt it by their own hand.⁸⁷ This type of surgery is extremely dangerous and patients who attempt it are very rarely satisfied with the results.

While all gender reassignment surgeries are a significant undertaking by a transgender person, bottom surgeries are particularly personal. Alteration of the primary sex organs is the zenith of many transgender persons' transitions. Many transsexuals consider the completion of their bottom surgery to be the beginning of their "new" life.⁸⁸

⁸³ Jonathan C. Goddard et al., "Feminizing Genitoplasty in Adult Transsexuals: Early and Long-Term Surgical Results," *BJU International* 100, no. 3 (September 2007): p. 608, doi:10.1111/j.1464-410X.2007.07017.x.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 910.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 911.

⁸⁶ *COS*, p. 204.

⁸⁷ Nooshin Khobzi Rotondi, et al., p. 1835.

⁸⁸ *Vercruysse*, p. 200.

Author Commentary: This type of operation is on the mind of many transgender individuals both before and after their surgery. Having a basic understanding of what transgender people are considering and the process of their transformation is important. Knowing how drastic and traumatic these operations are will help Christians understand what these individuals are struggling with. Knowledge of the operations available to transgender people will help inform conversations about transgender people. Let our discussions be based on understanding rather than ignorance.

Other Surgeries

Occasionally transsexuals will undergo other surgeries besides top or bottom surgeries. The goal of these is always to help the patient achieve an appearance that looks more like the body of a person from their experienced gender. Like top surgery, these surgeries are done to alter secondary sex characteristics. They are, however, generally less noticeable than top surgery. For those reasons these surgeries do not require referral by mental health professionals. Because these surgeries are permanent changes, mental health professionals are encouraged to assist clients in making informed decisions about when to undergo these procedures.⁸⁹

FtM patients may undergo redistribution of fat to give them a more masculine figure. Removal of fat is called liposuction. Injection of fat is called lipofilling. They may receive pectoral implants which are designed to look like the male muscle structure. In very rare cases hormone therapy is ineffective for lowering a FtM patient's voice. In that case the patient may undergo voice surgery to deepen the voice.⁹⁰

MtF patients may undergo fat redistribution procedures to give them a more feminine appearance. In addition they may have some of the cartilage from their Adam's apple shaved off in a procedure called thyroid chondroplasty. Some MtF patients choose to have implants in their buttocks similar to the breast implants used in top surgery. This procedure is technically known as gluteal augmentation. They may also undergo hair reconstruction or any number of facial feminization surgeries including rhinoplasty or "a nose job," facial bone reduction, face-lift or a rejuvenation of the eyelid called blepharoplasty.⁹¹ These facial reconstruction surgeries are

⁸⁹ SOC, p. 204.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

similar to the plastic surgeries undergone by cisgender people for cosmetic reasons. Facial feminization procedures have been shown to improve transsexuals' quality of life in ways similar to bottom surgery.⁹² Just like for FtM patients, in rare cases hormone therapy is ineffective for causing a MtF patient's voice to raise in pitch. In that case the person may undergo voice modification surgery.

Patient Satisfaction

When researchers conduct surveys of post-operation transsexuals the results of their studies overwhelmingly indicate that the quality of their lives is greatly improved after their surgery.⁹³ Some people have been skeptical of the accuracy of this data and thought their data to be inconclusive.⁹⁴ But more recent studies have corroborated these positive results, saying that as high as 90% of transgender individuals are satisfied with the results of gender reassignment surgery at least one year after it is completed.⁹⁵ Even patients who develop severe surgical complications seldom regret having undergone surgery.⁹⁶ While it is true that the depression and suicide rate is higher in the transgender community in general, the rate in post-operation transsexuals is lower than that of the general transgender community.⁹⁷

Because of the overwhelming number of positive reviews given to gender reassignment surgery in peer reviewed surveys, it is difficult to dismiss the conclusion that in a vast majority of instances transsexuals are happier after they undergo gender reassignment surgery.

Cisgender people who are strongly opposed to the notion of transsexualism sometimes imply that most post-operation transsexuals feel regret over their decision to undergo sex reassignment surgery. It seems that these types of assertions are largely based on anecdotal evidence.⁹⁸ Because of the doubts that have been raised in peer reviewed critiques of transsexual

⁹² Tiffany A. Ainsworth and Jeffrey H. Spiegel, "Quality of Life of Individuals with and without Facial Feminization Surgery or Gender Reassignment Surgery," *Quality of Life Research* 19, no. 7 (September 2010): p.1019, doi:10.1007/s11136-010-9668-7.

⁹³ Anne A. Lawrence, "Factors Associated with Satisfaction or Regret Following Male-to-Female Sex Reassignment Surgery," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32, no. 4 (August 2003): p. 299–315.

⁹⁴ Ann Massey, "Gender Reassignment Surgery Arif.pdf" (ARIF), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-mds/haps/projects/ARIF/completed-requests.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Deenesh Khoosal, Punita Grover, and Timothy Terry, "Satisfaction with a Gender Realignment Service," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 26, no. 1 (February 2011): p. 72–83.

⁹⁶ Lawrence, p. 295.

⁹⁷ Nooshin Khobzi Rotondi et al., p. 1835.

⁹⁸ Many statistics which support these assertions are floating around on the internet. All of the statistics this author found were based on studies with questionable integrity. Other statistics come from outdated resources. For

satisfaction surveys, it is difficult to accept their conclusions without reservation. Practically, it is important not to make assumptions about a patient's satisfaction with gender reassignment surgery. The current statistics about the public in general are inconclusive.

It is important not to make assumptions about the kind of care a transgender person has undergone. The treatment of transgender people who pursue surgery is highly individualized.⁹⁹ Individuals face many choices about how to proceed and are often advised by health professionals. Their decision may also be influenced by access to quality care, financial restrictions, insurance coverage, guidance from friends, and his or her experience during a period of social transformation. When speaking with people who experience gender dysphoria do not make assumptions about which treatments they have chosen to pursue.

Author Commentary: One of the most remarkable things about treatment for transgender individuals is how much the decisions about procedures are focused on the patient and the patient's feelings. One assumption is that best way to care for transgender individuals is to do exactly what they want. Another assumption is that the best way to judge the success of a treatment is to ask the patient.

Understand Theories about the Cause of Transgenderism

Many transgender people wrestle with why they are transgender. As they seek out answers to their question, they will find many attempts at explanation. If a Christian is aware of some of the theories they may be better prepared to empathize with a transgender friend and minister to them with compassion.

A theory is a way to describe how something works. Gender formation theories strive to describe and explain how individuals get their gender. Remember that the transgender community distinguishes gender from sex. Sex is about what body parts people have. Gender is about peoples' identity, that is, how people think about themselves, how they present themselves to others and how they behave. Gender formation theories in general try to explain why people who behave like men do so and why people who behave like women do so. They are relevant to this study because they can help us to understand why a person who is assigned a male sex at

example, in their 1991 book *Abnormal Psychology*, G. T. Wilson, K. D. O'Leary & P. Nathan state that 7% of post operation transsexuals request a reversal surgery. Statistics to the contrary come from more recent sources, but the author of this paper was unable to find any reliable sources of data regarding regret in post-surgery transsexuals.⁹⁹ SOC, p. 200.

birth might identify and behave as a female later in life. For the purpose of this paper, the basic question we will seek to answer based on gender formation theories is this: “What makes a person transgender?”

It should be noted that the study of gender formation and development is not an exact science. Researchers who look into gender formation have not proven that gender is formed in exclusively one way or another. Therefore many theories exist and they often overlap. To study these different theories we will use the categories presented by Julia Wood in her book, *Gendered Lives: Communication Gender & Culture*. The topic of gender formation includes biological theories, interpersonal theories, cultural theories and critical theories.¹⁰⁰ Note that when social scientists talk about gender formation they are not saying that a person can choose whichever gender he or she would like. They are saying that even when a person’s sex is assigned at birth, the way they see themselves and the way they behave may be affected by many other factors.

These theories are not competing to become the one and only explanation of how gender develops, but they are complementing one another.¹⁰¹ Gender is not formed in a vacuum. It is formed in people’s lives. Think of your upbringing. You cannot separate your biological makeup from your social upbringing, because they were both affecting you at the same time. A person’s concept of gender is formed by many different factors working together at once to shape the way they think and act.

Biological Theories

Biological theories recognize the impact a person’s body has on his or her concept of gender. The body can influence gender through the X and Y chromosomes and through natural hormonal activity.¹⁰²

A chromosome is a little thread of protein and acid that exists inside living cells. It tells the cell how to grow and behave, much like a plan for the cell’s life and reproduction.

Chromosomal gender formation theories explain the influence of X and Y chromosomes in a

¹⁰⁰ Julia Wood, p. 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁰² Julia Wood does note that some researchers see difference in brain structure and development as a biological gender formation theory. The research in this field seems to be inconclusive. There are significant questions about whether a difference in gender causes brains to develop differently or a difference in brain structure causes genders to develop differently.

person's body. While it is true that chromosomes affect a person's gender in a secondary way, the primary impact of chromosomes is determining a person's sex. A woman's egg has only X chromosomes. A man's sperm may contain an X or a Y chromosome. When a sperm cell fertilizes an egg cell the sex of the resulting zygote is determined by the presence or absence of a Y chromosome. If the sperm that fertilizes the egg contains an X chromosome the new baby's sex chromosomes will be XX and the baby will develop as a female. If the sperm that fertilizes the egg contains a Y chromosome the baby's chromosomes will be XY and the baby will develop as a male.¹⁰³ The primary function of the Y chromosome is to determine if the baby will develop as a male or not. The X chromosome controls much more. It carries genes that influence intelligence, hereditary conditions and social function.¹⁰⁴

The most significant way the chromosomes affect sex development is how they affect a baby's ducts to develop into male or female sex organs.¹⁰⁵ Because the X chromosome controls so much more than just sex, the sex chromosomes may have influence on other traits which are sometimes considered gender specific, such as creative vs. logical thinking and the development of social skills. By determining a person's sex and influencing other gender specific traits, chromosomes have a significant impact on how an individual's gender develops.

But how does chromosomal theory help answer the question, "What makes a person transgender?" What is described above is what occurs during a normal egg fertilization, but there are ways in which a sperm can fertilize an egg which leave the baby with something other than XX or XY chromosome pairs. These people are called intersex. Intersex people are said to have a disorder of sexual development (DSD). About 1 in every 1,666 babies born has a chromosome makeup other than XX or XY. Some combinations include XXY, XYY, XXYY, XXX and XO.¹⁰⁶ These variations can be discovered through genetic testing by testing the DNA obtained in blood, hair or other cells. Each of these variations has different symptoms. Some of them affect the appearance of the genitals and others do not. An examination of the genitals is not necessarily sufficient for identifying intersex individuals. Not everyone agrees on what counts as

¹⁰³ "When Does a Baby Develop Gender?," LIVESTRONG.COM, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.livestrong.com/article/231357-when-does-a-baby-develop-gender/>.

¹⁰⁴ Natalie Angier, "For Motherly X Chromosome, Gender Is Only the Beginning," The New York Times, May 1, 2007, sec. Science, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/01/science/01angi.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Julia Wood, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Melanie Blackless et al., "How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis," American Journal of Human Biology 12, no. 2 (2000): 156.

intersex. But what we do know is that in 1 out of every 2000 live births the external evidence for a child's sex is so questionable that a specialist in child sex differentiation is called in.¹⁰⁷

Many people consider intersex individuals the same as transgender individuals.¹⁰⁸ Some claim that the occurrence of intersex births is cause to believe that there is no gender binary—that is, there is not just two genders. On the basis of this claim they assert that any person can be transgender since he or she is not bound by the categories of male and female. This ignores the fact that intersex births are considered genetic errors, and are not passed down hereditarily.

The DSM-5 does not allow for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria as a form of intersexuality. It says, “Overall, concurrent evidence is insufficient to label gender dysphoria without a disorder of sex development as a form of intersexuality.”¹⁰⁹ That means that a chromosomal disorder may cause gender dysphoria, but a gender dysphoria apart from an intersex syndrome is not caused by biology. In most circumstances, transgenderism is not a medical issue.

The chromosomal answer to the question, “What makes some people transgender?” is this: Some people are born with atypical sex chromosomes that cast medical doubt on their sex. These people may not feel comfortable with the sex assigned them at birth. Their dysphoria about their gender has a biological origin. But for transgender people who have regular XY or XX chromosomes, their transgenderism is not biological in nature. For example, a man born with XY sex chromosomes who is assigned male at birth is a man. If he is uncomfortable as a man that does not mean he is “a woman in a man's body.” It means he is a man in a man's body who wishes he was a woman. His dysphoria about his gender is not biological in nature; it is psychological.

Hormones are substances human bodies produce. They function like messengers, produced by glands in the body. They move along in the endocrine system to the body's development. Hormonal gender formation theories focus on how hormones affect a person's sexual development in the womb and after birth. Like chromosomal theories, hormonal theories

¹⁰⁷ C. S. W. Candice Metzler, “Working with LGBTQI Youth: Expanding Our Understanding of Gender and Sex Variance,” accessed November 21, 2015, http://www.troubledyouthconference.com/hand_outs/2015/Candice%20Metzler%20CSW,%20MSW%20-%20Working%20with%20LGBTQI%20Youth.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ Mohd. Shuhaimi Bin Haji Ishak and Sayed Sikandar Shah Haneef, “Sex Reassignment Technology: The Dilemma of Transsexuals in Islam and Christianity,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 2 (April 2014): p. 523, doi:10.1007/s10943-012-9656-z.

¹⁰⁹ DSM-5, p. 457.

have more to do with a person's biological sex, but because sex and gender are so closely related, hormones do affect gender development.

In a normal pregnancy a baby with a Y chromosome would be bathed in androgens. Androgens are hormones which ensure the development of male sex organs. Androgens are the messengers that tell sexual tissues to develop into a penis and testes. If the androgens are not there, the tissue will develop into a female vagina and ovaries.

After birth, hormones continue to influence a person's gender. Hormones are responsible for the development of most of the changes a person experiences during puberty.¹¹⁰

But how does hormonal theory help answer the question, "What makes a person transgender?" Again the answer is because of an occasional malfunction of biology. Sometimes something causes a hormonal malfunction and a baby with a Y chromosome is not exposed to androgens. That baby's male genitalia may not develop. Other times a baby with XX chromosomes is exposed to androgens. That baby may develop male genitalia even though its chromosomes indicate it should have female genitalia.¹¹¹

Some malfunctions occur after birth. Congenital adrenal hyperplasia is an example of a post-natal hormonal malfunction. In that case the adrenal glands, which produce masculinizing hormones, are overactive and can lead to a masculinization of tissues. A person with adrenal hyperplasia is genetically female, but over time she will begin to look more and more like a man. Other times a person with XY chromosomes is born with androgen insensitivity syndrome. In that case the parts of their body that are designed to receive the androgens and interpret their message fail. As a result the person's body develops like a female's body despite having the XY chromosome pair.¹¹² These cases occur about once every 13,000 births.¹¹³ In an even rarer condition known as "5-alpha reductase deficiency" a person with XY chromosomes is born and develops as a male until the time when his testes are supposed to produce androgens. The androgens his body produces are ineffective until puberty. The child will appear to be female and will usually be raised female until the androgens become effective. The person will experience a

¹¹⁰ Julia Wood, p. 21.

¹¹¹ L. Pinsky, R. Erickson, & R. Schimke (Eds.). *Genetic Disorders of Human Sexual Development*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹¹² Alice Dreger, "Sex Typing for Sport Alice Dreger.pdf" (Hastings Center Report, March 2010), p. 22.

¹¹³ Melanie Blackless, p. 156.

male puberty including growth of hair and muscle. The person's clitoris will even grow to resemble a penis.¹¹⁴

In the case of these rare biological malfunctions, a person is diagnosed with a DSD just like a person with a chromosomal disorder. Just like with chromosomal disorders a hormonal DSD is considered separately from gender dysphoria. While a hormonal DSD may affect a person's happiness, it is not the same as a fully biological male or female who experiences gender dysphoria. A recent paper from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod summarized the distinction by referencing the DSM-5.

There is insufficient evidence to suggest that gender dysphoria has a biological cause unless it is accompanied by sexual ambiguity of a physical nature. DSM-5 cites evidence that hormonal levels for natal males with sexual dysphoria are similar to those for the male population without sexual dysphoria. Hormonal levels for natal females with sexual dysphoria indicate a slightly higher, but statistically insignificant, level of testosterone than found in the average female population.

The hormonal answer to the question, “What makes some people transgender?” is this: Hormone levels and disorders can cause people to be born intersex. In that case, the person may feel uncomfortable with his or her gender.¹¹⁵ But intersex people are to be considered apart from transgender people because the cause of their dysphoria is not the same. Transgender people who are born male who have not been diagnosed with a hormonal DSD cannot legitimately claim that their gender dysphoria is caused by hormones or biology. Their gender dysphoria is psychological, not biological.

Biology has a significant influence on how human bodies develop. Chromosomes affect sexual development. Hormones influence the development process in the womb, through childhood, and especially during puberty. Because a person's sense of gender is closely tied to the appearance of their body, these biological theories do affect gender.¹¹⁶ But biology does not

¹¹⁴ Alice Dreger, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ DSM-5 notes that in the majority of cases intersex conditions do not lead to gender dysphoria. Most often intersex people experience some uncertainty about their gender, but do not develop a firm conviction that they are another gender. Most do not seek gender reassignment.

¹¹⁶ Gunter Heylens et al., “Gender Identity Disorder in Twins: A Review of the Case Report Literature,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 9, no. 3 (March 2012): 751–57, doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02567.x.

In this study 23 sets of twins were compared. In some of the sets only one was transgender. In other sets both were transgender. The study found that twins who share identical DNA were more likely to both be transgender than twins who had different DNA. On the basis of this test, the researchers asserted that even though they could not

absolutely determine a person's behavior, personality or choices. Therefore we will take a look at some other theories which contribute to an individual's concept of gender.

Interpersonal Theories

Interpersonal theories of gender formation stress the role that relationships play in forming someone's concept of their own gender. Psychodynamic theories focus on how family relationships inform a child's sense of gender identity. Social learning and cognitive theories focus on how role models inform a child's sense of gender identity.¹¹⁷

Psychodynamic theories of gender formation focus on how infants' relationships with their primary caregiver influences their sense of gender.¹¹⁸ Usually mothers function as primary caregivers for new babies. Since mothers and daughters are the same gender the mother often cares for the daughter and keeps her close. During this time the daughter begins to internalize some of the mother's nurturing and caring attitudes. Since mothers are more different from their sons than they are from their daughters, the sons are less likely to emulate their mother's caring attitudes. Instead young boys begin to develop their sense of identity not in how they are similar to their mothers, but in how they are different.

Therefore, as girls grow up, psychodynamic theory says that they will naturally find comfort and security in close relationships because their earliest experiences have influenced them to identify positively with those feelings.¹¹⁹ As boys grow up, they will naturally see close relationships as a threat to the independence by which they identify themselves. This difference in gender originates from a different relationship with the primary caregiver.

The psychodynamic answer to the question, "What makes some people transgender?" is this: Some individuals may be assigned a specific gender at birth, but during their formative years they may relate to their primary caregiver in a way that is similar to the other gender. The result would be a biological male who relates to others like a female or vice versa.

Author Commentary: So should a person who relates to others in a way that is atypical for his assigned gender be considered transgender? While the influence of the primary care-

prove how the genetics work, they think that being transgender is genetic and biological. Because of the small sample size and because no such genetic link has been proven, claims that gender identity confusion is genetically determined are still largely unfounded.

¹¹⁷ Julia Wood, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ Nancy J. Chodrow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹¹⁹ Ellyn Kaschak, *Engendered Lives: A New Psychology Of Women's Lives* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993) as cited in Julia Wood, *Gendered Lives*.

giver is undeniable, one wonders if the conclusion might be a stretch. Certainly our early years influence our personalities and our relationships, but that is different from defining a person's gender. To define gender roles so narrowly that a nurturing male is considered to be gender-confused seems ignorant of the variety of personality traits God has manifested in each gender.¹²⁰ Therefore, it is very unlikely that a person would be transgender on the basis of psychodynamic influences alone.

Social learning theories of gender formation focus on how young children learn to act according to gender stereotypes by responding to the social conditions they experience.¹²¹ These social influences are often made up of a mix of media, friends, siblings, and parents. According to the social learning theory, children develop their sense of gender according to a series of rewards and punishments offered by the social influences around them.¹²² If a mother laughs with her son about how he plays rough with his friends, the mother's laughter is interpreted as a reward and the son will perceive that boys are supposed to play rough. If the same mother is upset with her daughter for playing rough, the mother's anger is interpreted as a punishment and the daughter will perceive that girls are not supposed to play rough.

In the same way a child's peers offer rewards and punishments based on gender-specific behavior. If the child's friends find his or her behavior odd, the child is likely to assume that the behavior is not gender appropriate. If the child's friends join in, the child is likely to assume that this activity is appropriate for people of his or her gender. But the gender formation process is much more complex than just parents and friend groups. Individuals are raised among a mix of varied influences ranging from television to extended family, from siblings to teachers, from spiritual leaders to peers.¹²³ These various social groups all work together to inform a child's sense of gender.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Consider 1 Samuel 20 where David and Jonathan both embraced their maleness and found security in their close relationship.

¹²¹ Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory in Cultural Context," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 51, no. 2 (April 2002): p. 270.

¹²² Julia Wood, p. 48.

¹²³ Robin Banerjee and Vicki Lintern, "Boys will be Boys: The Effect of Social Evaluation Concerns on Gender-Typing," *Social Development* 9, no. 3 (2000): p. 387.

¹²⁴ Albert Bandura, p. 277.

According to the social learning theory of gender formation, children are essentially passive in the gender formation process. They just absorb whatever gender attributes they see encouraged around them.¹²⁵

The social learning answer to the question: “Why are some people transgender?” is this: A person’s sense of gender develops after his birth and even after he leaves his primary caregiver. If a person is born male and treated as a male by his primary caregiver, but then suddenly perceives that he is being rewarded for female gender-specific behaviors, or that he is being punished for male gender-specific behaviors, that person will experience confusion about which gender role he should fill, and may be transgender. Similar to psychodynamic influences on gender identity, it is unlikely that rewards and punishments alone would cause someone to be transgender, but considered along with other influences, social learning influences may contribute to a person being transgender.

A cognitive development theory of gender formation also focuses on how children actively pursue the influence of role models so that they can fit in better with the gender they perceive themselves to be.¹²⁶ According to cognitive development theory the gender formation process occurs in three steps. Early on, before a baby can speak, he or she begins to learn that there is a difference between boys and girls. Next, between the ages of 3 and 6, the child realizes he is usually referred to as a boy or a girl, and that this fact is not going to change. The child develops a sense of belonging in his own gender and makes broad evaluations about others based on their gender. A boy will assume that he will have more fun with playing with boys than with girls, etc. Third, the child begins learning how to fit in with the gender they identify with. Boys will find male role models and learn from them what it means to be a man. Girls do the same thing with women.¹²⁷

Cognitive development theories focus on the active role children play in learning about their gender and expressing themselves according to what they’ve learned. It can be difficult to show that children are actually making this active effort. Skeptics sometimes wonder if the child

¹²⁵ Julia Wood, p. 51.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹²⁷ Carol Lynn Martin and Diane Ruble, “Children’s Search for Gender Cues Cognitive Perspectives on Gender Development,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 67–70, doi:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00276.x.

is simply identifying with same-sex role models because of an innate sense of gender which is not learned.

The cognitive development theory answer to the question, “What makes some people transgender?” is this: A person’s sense of gender continues to develop well after he leaves the care of his primary caregiver. A baby could be born biologically male, treated as a male by his primary caregiver and raised in an environment which rewards him for male behavior. But that male child still plays an active role in developing his sense of gender. If at some point he seeks out and imitates a female role model, he may end up confused about his gender. As a result he could spend a large portion of his life attempting to fit in with a gender not assigned to him at his birth. In that case he could become transgender.

Cultural Theories

Cultural theories of gender formation don’t disagree with the biological theories or the interpersonal theories of gender formation. Rather, the cultural theories add a layer to the interpersonal theories. Cultural scholars say that all the things a baby learns from its primary caregiver, all the gender specific behaviors a child perceives from his role models, all the decisions a child makes to learn how to live according to their gender, they all take place inside of a cultural context.¹²⁸ The way in which an American and a Tahitian boy learn about manhood is the same, but the things they learn may be very different because they are growing up in different cultures. Cultural theories of gender formation basically say that cultures around the world and throughout history think that some things are manly and the things they find manly may be different from the things you and I find manly.

The list of things a certain culture finds manly or womanly are known as that culture’s gender roles. “A role is a set of expected behaviors and the values associated with them.”¹²⁹ Keep in mind that when social scientists talk about the roles of men and women in society they are not thinking of the roles of men and women which the Bible describes. Instead they are thinking of how men and women usually participate in a given culture whether that way is God-pleasing or not. The roles a man plays in American culture are typically to be assertive, to accept leadership positions, and to earn money. The roles a woman plays in American culture are to be

¹²⁸ Julia Wood, p. 53.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

“lady-like,” to accept positions that involve mostly communication, and to spend a lot of time with children.¹³⁰ Gender roles in other cultures (and how much value is attributed to these roles) may be different from the roles in 21st century America.

Cultural theory also stresses the communication of these roles to children as they develop their sense of gender. As adults communicate to children they consciously and unconsciously shape the children’s perception of gender roles by praising actions that conform to the roles and scolding actions that break the roles. In this way cultural theories are very closely related to social learning theories. The end result is children who understand how to be a man or how to be a woman based on which roles their culture tells them are appropriate for their gender.

Cultural theory answers the question, “Why are some people transgender?” this way: Because gender roles are different in various cultures, gender is socially constructed. Because gender roles could be interpreted differently in America, gender is arbitrary. Because Americans could hypothetically change the expectations of men and women by changing how we communicate gender roles to children, gender is variable. Cultural theory considers gender socially created, arbitrary, and variable. It is a logical conclusion to assume that if gender is not an essential part of a person’s sex, but is largely cultural, then it is possible for someone to be assigned as one sex, but then live out the cultural gender role of the other sex. That person would be considered transgender— even if only in his or her culture. For example, a baby born in America and assigned male at birth would be expected to fill normal male gender roles. If he enjoys being passive, spending time with children and cooking rather than making business decisions, he would be filling a different gender role than expected. To take it a step further, if he enjoys braiding hair and wearing dresses, he would be well outside of the gender role expected of him. If he is more comfortable in that gender role rather than the typical male gender role, he could be considered transgender.

Cultural theorists like to point to the variety of gender roles for men across the world. They may look at the man from the example in the last paragraph and see how that man fits the gender role of a man in a remote tribal African culture. In that culture he would be considered manly, but in American culture he is not. He can be biologically male and yet not act like a typical American man. Then he would be male and transgender.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56-59.

Author Commentary: A major flaw in that line of thinking is that the man in the example was not born in a remote African tribe and he was not raised according to their culture. He is American. Examining different cultural gender roles in an abstract setting like the example allows us to see a vast array of roles a man could possibly fill, but no person is born in an abstract setting. We are each born into a culture with its own gender roles. While it is true that other cultures may have different gender roles, the roles in other cultures are not communicated to individuals in America. It may be totally acceptable for a young man to wear a dress in a foreign culture, but if I do it here, people will assume I am breaking my gender role.

A man does not get to pick his own culture; he only gets to choose if he will fulfill the role expected of him in his culture. The man in our example is not living out the gender role of a male in an African tribe, he is breaking from the role of a male in America. His behavior is not filling a male role; it is departing from the male role as it exists in his culture.

Critical Theories

Critical theories focus on how a person's role in a culture is often classified by the social dynamics of that role. Some roles are the majority. Others are the minority. These theories seek to understand how powerful groups see their role in society differently from weaker groups. Sometimes critical theories include attempts at equalizing the power difference between two groups. For that reason critical theories of gender formation add a political element to gender formation theory that the others categories do not include. We'll look at standpoint theory and queer performative theory as examples of critical theories.

Standpoint theory starts by noting that societies are made up of subgroups that are organized into a social hierarchy in which some are more powerful and others are less powerful. It says that people interpret their experiences differently depending on which subgroup they identify with. For instance, G.W.F. Hegel noted that slaves and masters in 19th century America observed the same slavery, yet they had very different viewpoints on slavery.¹³¹ Neither the slave nor the master had "standpoint", until they understood the issue of slavery from the other group's point of view. If either one of them does understand the issue from both sides, he has a proper understanding of their roles and has achieved a "standpoint."

¹³¹ Julia Wood, p. 59.

More recent standpoint theorists claim that people in weaker groups are usually more adept at understanding people in powerful groups than the other way around. Those inside the powerful group are sometimes called insiders and those inside the weaker group are outsiders. Outsiders are forced to learn how insiders think and act because the culture as a whole runs according to the way insiders think. It is not true that insiders must understand outsiders. If they neglect to understand outsiders, they will be no worse off since the culture runs according to their way of thinking anyway. Therefore, some standpoint theorists claim that gender minorities, like homosexuals, intersex people, and transgender people usually understand gender roles better than heterosexuals and cisgender people. Naturally it is also easier for those gender minorities to gain a “standpoint” for viewing their culture.¹³² They say that it is possible for more powerful groups to achieve a standpoint but in order to do so they must work hard to see issues from the point of view of the minorities.¹³³

Standpoint theory does contradict some of the biological theories’ claims. Biological theorists claim that many gender traits are inherent in the genetic makeup of a person. Standpoint theorists claim that no matter what genetic makeup a person has, he can learn to understand and identify differently through learning about others and participating in their behavior.

Standpoint theory doesn’t really attempt answer to the question, “What makes some people transgender?” Rather, standpoint theory seeks to inform cisgender people that they cannot claim to have a definitive answer about what makes up gender until they understand the concept of gender from the perspective of a transgender person.

Queer performative theories assert that gender and sex are inaccurately defined by society as static, unchangeable truths. Society defines male according to a list of male attributes, and it defines female according to female attributes.¹³⁴ Queer performative theories says that not every person fits into those categories. As a result, these theorists are highly critical of gender categories. Queer performative theories also say that a given person can switch freely between

¹³² Lugones, Maria C., and Elizabeth V. Spelman. “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘the Woman’s Voice’.” In *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 6: p. 577. Elsevier, 1983. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0277539583900195>.

¹³³ Incidentally, helping cisgender Christians begin to achieve a standpoint regarding gender is one of the goals of this paper.

¹³⁴ To male and female, queer performative theorists would add the categories of homosexual and heterosexual, masculine and feminine, and other gender related categories.

two categories, or refuse to fit into any category. Those who do not fit into the gender categories established by society are referred to as “queer.”

In addition, queer performative theories state that gender is not something that a person has, it is something a person does or performs. You do gender when you decide what to wear. If you choose a suit and tie you are most likely performing male gender. If you choose a dress you are performing female gender. Queer performative theorists also see people performing gender in how they converse with one another, which daily chores they do or refuse to do, the way they walk and the way they settle arguments.¹³⁵ If an individual chooses to perform one gender in the morning and another gender later that day, or even at the same time, that individual is bucking societal categories of male and female, and the theorists would say that the individual does not “have” a gender. Instead that individual is “doing” multiple genders.¹³⁶

Queer performative theory sees queer gender performances as political challenges to the societally established categories. The aim of these queer behaviors is to move society past binary categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight, and normal/abnormal.

The queer performative answer to the question: “What makes some people transgender?” is this: Transgender people are performing (or partially performing) a gender that seems abnormal according to society’s pre-established categories. They may be performing that gender simply because they want to. They may be performing that gender because they want to make a political statement about the categories society has established. But the main reason they are performing that gender is because they can. With their choices and their actions they are able to behave according to a gender stereotype that is outside of what society expects of them. The fact that their performance makes others uncomfortable is a positive thing. It demands that people in “normal” categories re-evaluate their own perspective on gender. The end goal is to show people in normal categories that the queer person’s gender performance is not an inadequate performance. Rather the societal categories for gender are inadequate categories.

The queer performative theories show themselves in the way American culture defines gender and sex. Much of western culture has been influenced by existential philosophy which says that an idea is only true if it is true for you, emphasizing the subjectivity of truth. So society’s definitions gender and sex have begun to progress from objective truths which could be

¹³⁵ Julia Wood, p. 63.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

identified on the basis of chromosomes and body parts, to subjective truths which are ultimately decided by the individual. Queer performative theory is the latest step in the walk toward subjectivity, allowing a person to choose any behavior as his or her gender performance, including behaviors that are outside of any gender.¹³⁷ The result is a culture where people are encouraged to “live out their own truth,” meaning to live according to whatever gender role feels right to them, regardless of whether or not the person has been assigned that gender and regardless of whether or not that gender role even exists.

Author Commentary: The theories discussed above are the best answers biology and psychology can offer for how people develop their sense of gender on this earth. They still haven't been able to definitively answer the question, “What makes some people transgender?” Chromosomal theory can identify what makes a person intersex, but not transgender apart from that. Studies of transgender men reveal that most of them don't have any hormonal abnormalities.¹³⁸ If the only source of truth for life on earth was the consensus of society, then these gender formation theories would provide a huge benefit to the world by challenging society to reevaluate its concept of gender. It is certainly valuable for a society to evaluate its principles and definitions of things like gender and sexuality. These gender formation theories are essential to understanding what motivates transgender people.

But for Christians the consensus of society is not the source of truth for life on earth. The creator of this earth has given us his Word to guide us in life and to answer for us many questions that otherwise might puzzle us. God's Word has plenty to say about gender. Even if the very best answers that social science can provide about gender lead us to a “choose your own gender” conclusion, God's Word trumps them all. Like many other areas of life, what the Bible says about gender may not be the most popular answer to give to the scientists who research gender. The Bible may not even answer all of our questions about gender, but in the end God's Word provides sufficient trustworthy information about gender. It is this “theory of gender” that Christians can and must accept. God's truth about gender is essential for Christian ministering to transgender people.

¹³⁷ Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. Basic Books, 2000.

¹³⁸ I. Mohd. Shuhaimi, et al., p. 534.

Understand What the Bible Says About Gender

What has been written in this paper so far has been a report about the current understanding of gender according to the medical and social sciences. It included occasional evaluations in the form of author commentary paragraphs. The author does not agree with every thought expressed about transgenderism by those who study it.

What follows is the personal confession of the author, based on a few presuppositions. First, that the Bible is God's Word and as such it is infallible and the only completely authoritative guide for a Christian's faith and life.¹³⁹ Second, that all people are sinful by nature and are corrupt from the instant they come into existence.¹⁴⁰ Third, that the infallible Word of God is offensive to the sinful mind of a person.¹⁴¹ Fourth, that no sin is so great as to nullify the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross.¹⁴² Finally that God's love in Christ is for the entire world and personal benefits of this come to individual sinners through the gift of faith in Christ."¹⁴³ Knowing that the Holy Spirit wrote the words of the Bible, we can accept the Bible's concept of gender with joy even if it seems offensive to our natural minds.

Under these presuppositions we will investigate what the Bible says about gender by looking at the words the Bible uses to talk about gender and the passages of the Bible that discuss gender. Combining what we know about transgender people from the medical field and social sciences with what we know about gender from the Bible we will answer the question, "Are transgender people sinning?"

How The Bible Talks About Gender

The Bible uses many different words to talk about males and females. By looking at the individual words and the contexts in which they are used we can start to understand basic truths about males and females in the Bible. The following list of terms is not exhaustive but it contains some of the most frequently used and most important words the Bible uses for men and women.

¹³⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

¹⁴⁰ Psalm 51:5 "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

¹⁴¹ Romans 8:7 "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

¹⁴² John 1:29 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

¹⁴³ John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

With each word we will look at an example of its usage, the various ways it is used, and what it tells us about God’s definition of gender in the Bible.¹⁴⁴

Words for Males

אָדָם (’ādām)— as in Genesis 2:7. אָדָם is usually translated “man” or “mankind” and refers to the human race as a whole as it is distinct from animal species. אָדָם is divided into two subcategories, male and female (Genesis 1:27). This word shows us that for all the ways men and women are different, they are part of the same human race.

אִישׁ (’îš)— as in Genesis 2:24. אִישׁ is usually translated “man” or occasionally “husband,” and it seldom refers to a male or female person (Exodus 19:13.) More often it refers to an individual male (Genesis 2:24) and emphasizes male as distinct from female (Exodus 35:29.) An אִישׁ is most specifically the distinct and corresponding partner of a woman (Genesis 2:18.) Therefore it can often mean husband (Genesis 16:3.) This word shows us that men are distinct from women, sometimes considered opposite of women, and designed to marry women.

גִּבּוֹר (gē·bōr)— as in Deuteronomy 22:5. גִּבּוֹר is usually translated “man” and can refer to a male or female. Sometimes the gender of a גִּבּוֹר is ambiguous (Job 14:14.) Other times it completely excludes females and children (Deuteronomy 22:5) and implies that strength of body or spirit is characteristic of such males (Jeremiah 41:16.) This word shows us that men are different from women in the way they dress, the way they act and what is expected of them in times of danger.

מַח (mōḥ)— as in Deuteronomy 2:34. מַח is usually translated “man,” and refers to a men as a fighting group (Genesis 34:30) distinct from women and children (Deuteronomy 2:34.) מַח can also refer to a small group of men or women (Deuteronomy 26:5). This word shows us that God considers adult men and women to be in separate categories, with children sometimes designated as a third category.

זָכָר (zā·kār)— as in Genesis 1:27. זָכָר is usually translated “male,” “man” or “boy,” and can refer to a male of any age. What makes זָכָר distinct is that he is the opposite of a female. A

¹⁴⁴ The evaluations of many of these words in informed by the following books: *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. The publication information for these books is provided in the bibliography.

baby בֶּן is a son, not a daughter (Isaiah 66:7.) A בֶּן is able to be circumcised which means he has a penis (Genesis 17:12). He is able to engage in sexual intercourse with a woman (Numbers 31:17). He cannot get pregnant (Jeremiah 30:6). בֶּן are treated differently than women and children during warfare (Deuteronomy 20:13, 14.) This word shows us the attributes that are essentially male in the Old Testament. Males can be circumcised, they can have sex with women but they cannot have children, therefore the most distinguishing male attribute in the Old Testament was to have a penis instead of a vagina.

ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos)— as in Matthew 4:4. ἄνθρωπος can be translated “man” “people,” “humans,” “others” or “everyone” and can refer to people in general whether they be male or female (Mark 8:27) or to adult males in particular (Ephesians 5:31). It is roughly equivalent to the Hebrew אָדָם. When ἄνθρωπος means adult males they are eligible for marriage to a woman and capable of sexual relations with her (1 Corinthians 7:1,2). This word shows us that men and women are included in the same human race but at the same time males are distinct from females in their relationships and their sexual capacities.

ἄρσεν (arsēn)— as in Matthew 19:4. ἄρσεν is usually translated as “male” or “man” and refers to a male human (Matthew 19:4). ἄρσεν refers to the male sex as opposed to the female sex every time it is used in the New Testament. An ἄρσεν is always the opposite of a female (Galatians 3:28) and it is generally equivalent to the Hebrew word בֶּן. When an ἄρσεν has sexual relationships with a female it is considered natural but whenever he has sex with a male it is considered unnatural (Romans 1:27). This word shows us that the Old Testament concept of male and female being opposite yet supplementary genders is confirmed in the New Testament. Jesus himself confirms it in Mathew 19:4.

ἄνθρω (anēr)— as in Matthew 7:24. ἄνθρω is usually translated “man” or “husband,” and refers to an adult male in contrast to a female (Acts 8:3) or in contrast to a male child (1 Corinthians 13:11). When ἄνθρω is used in contrast to a female it can emphasize the distinct purposes and roles God has given to males and females on earth. The ἄνθρω is the head of every woman (γυνή) in the same way that Christ is the head of the man (1 Corinthians 11:3). An ἄνθρω is a leader. A woman (γυνή) is a helper. The ἄνθρω is also distinct in the way God commands him to love his wife (Ephesians 5:22-30). This passage shows us that not only are the males and

females distinct in their biology but God has also given them distinct roles within marriage and society.

εὐνοῦχος— as in Matthew 19:12. εὐνοῦχος is usually translated “eunuch” and refers to a castrated male (Acts 8:27), a male who by nature (without castration) is unable to sire children (Matthew 19:12b) or a celibate male who is able to sire children but abstains from sexual relations (Matthew 19:12c). Jesus is obviously aware of εὐνοῦχος who have been castrated by others, those who are naturally infertile and those who are abstinent. This passage shows us that Jesus was not unfamiliar with complications of gender or sexuality when he talked about gender.

Words for Females

יִשְׁאָה (‘iššâ)— as in Genesis 2:22. is usually translated “wife” or “woman,” and refers to a female as distinct from a male. An יִשְׁאָה is distinct in her role as the physical and spiritual counterpart to an אִישׁ (Genesis 2:18), but she is also distinct in her capabilities. An יִשְׁאָה is capable of marrying a man (Genesis 2:24), intercourse with a man (Deuteronomy 22:22), conceiving and giving birth to a child (Leviticus 12:2) and nursing a child (Exodus 2:7). Biologically it is her female reproductive system which distinguishes her. But she is also distinct in what God expects of her. She is expected to dress differently than a man (Deuteronomy 22:5). She is praised for graciousness (Proverbs 11:16), worth (Ruth 3:11) and strength of character (Proverbs 31:10) but above all for fulfilling her role as the man’s partner (Genesis 2:20). This word shows us many ways in which a woman is distinct from a man.

נְקֵבָה (n^oqē·bā(h))— as in Genesis 1:27. נְקֵבָה is usually translated “female,” “woman” or “girl,” and refers to females as complementary (Genesis 1:27) or opposite (Deuteronomy 4:16) to males. A נְקֵבָה is always the opposite of a זָכָר. A נְקֵבָה is distinct in that she menstruates (Leviticus 12:5). This word shows more biological and social distinctions between male and female. For all their similarities, males and females are not the same.

בְּתוּלָה (b^etû·lā(h))— as in Job 31:1. בְּתוּלָה is usually translated “virgin” or “young woman” and refers to a marriageable woman (Isaiah 62:5) and/or a woman who has not had sex with a man (Deuteronomy 22:15). This word shows us that young women were considered apart from young men (Lamentations 1:8), that young women were expected to be virgins on the night of their wedding, and that their virginity could be proven or disproven on the basis of their menstrual cycle or the sheets which were used on their wedding night (Deuteronomy 22:15).

γυνή (gynē)— as in Matthew 5:28. γυνή is usually translated “woman” or “wife” and refers to an adult female as distinct from an adult male (Acts 22:4). It can also refer to a wife (Ephesians 5:22). This word shows us that in the New Testament males and females were referred to separately. Distinguishing factors include that a γυνή marries a man or is eligible to marry a man and she is able to give birth (Luke 1:13).

θῆλυς (thēlys)— as in Matthew 19:4. θῆλυς is usually translated “female” or “woman” and refers to females as a supplemental category to males (Romans 1:26, 27). A θῆλυς is always the opposite of an ἄρσεν (Galatians 3:28). This is the word used to translate the Hebrew הֵקֵלָה in the Septuagint and when Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 (Matthew 19:4). This word shows us that the New Testament preserves the gender binary God put in place in Genesis 1:27.

Some Conclusions from Our Word Study

From looking at some of the words the Bible uses to describe gender we can learn four important truths about God’s concept of human gender.

First, it is clear from God’s description of creation in Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 that he created humans according to a gender binary.¹⁴⁵ Second, it is clear from God’s use of the words אָרִיס and הֵקֵלָה as well as ἄρσεν and θῆλυς that male and female are different from one another. Third, it is clear from the way God describes men and women that the primary way to distinguish between male and female is based on whether the reproductive system is male or female.¹⁴⁶ Those people who can be circumcised are male. Those who menstruate and carry children are female. Fourth, it is clear from the commands God gives to males and females that he wants them to perform the gender roles that correspond to the sex God assigned to them at birth.

One simple passage summarizes all that we learn from investigating various Bible words for gender. Genesis 5:2, “When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them ‘Mankind’ when they were

¹⁴⁵ You will recall that some people in the transgender community understand the word transgender to mean that some individuals go beyond the regular male or female gender designations. Most medical professionals contend that transgender may fall somewhere in between male and female but there is no other gender. God describes one human race with two genders, male and female. Humans may be confused about their own gender but God has not created any gender except that which he tells us in his Word.

¹⁴⁶ In addition to the presence of the male or female reproductive organs one could add the capacity of each to engage in sexual intercourse with the opposite gender and the ability of women to bear children.

created.” God made one human race called “mankind.” That means men and women have many similarities. Within mankind he created a gender binary. That means that men and women have different purposes, different biology, and different social roles to play. God put his blessing on mankind and its gender binary to show he did all this for the good of mankind.

The Bible does not only have individual words about gender. It also contains whole paragraphs that inform us about God’s concept of gender. By looking at these passages we can understand the way God himself talks about gender. The big question is, “What does God’s Word teach us about his concept of gender?”

One approach to answering that question is to look for specific passages that address transgenderism. This is not an easy task considering that the writers of the Bible didn’t know nearly as much about gender science, and didn’t have many gender formation theories. Very naturally then, the Bible does not explicitly answer many of the questions that modern gender scientists ask. More importantly, the purpose of the Bible is not to satisfy 21st century curiosities about transgenderism. It is written to show us our Savior, Jesus. Still, the Bible does mention people who were confused about their gender, even if their confusion was different from modern transgenderism.

The only passage in the Bible which identifies behavior similar to modern transgender activity is Deuteronomy 22:5. “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this.” Some commentators have questioned whether this passage really does have something to say about 21st century cross dressers. This passage comes from the set of laws God gave to Moses to govern all aspects of life for the Israelite people. One of the purposes of Mosaic law was to keep Israel separate from the pagan nations around them. Some Canaanite religious festivals in worship of the goddess Astarte featured men dressed as women and vice versa. The practice also involved homosexuality.

While this passage might sound like a blanket prohibition against cross-dressing of any kind, it was addressed to Old Testament Israelites specifically.¹⁴⁷ God gave it to the Israelites to make sure they recognized that they were distinct from the unbelieving nations around them. Christians need to be very careful when they use this verse when talking to a transgender person. The verse still informs us about how God wanted men and women to behave in Israelite culture. Rather than look at the distinctions God made between men and women in Old Testament laws,

¹⁴⁷ Mark Braun, *Deuteronomy* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), p. 197.

people would do well to give thought to the distinctions God made between man and women when he created them.

Another group of passages that talk about issues in the ballpark of transgender people are those passages which discuss eunuchs. In Bible times eunuchs were first a part of the worship life of Eastern religions. In some of the idolatrous religious worship rituals the priests were required to be castrated. These same oriental tribes used eunuchs to take care of the queens and households of the king. Their castration guaranteed that they would not fornicate with the royal women. As a result many eunuchs rose to prominent positions in the government.

Just before the time of Jesus the number of eunuchs in the Greek and Roman world was growing. Soon pagan temples filled with eunuchs. For Israelites in both the New and Old Testaments, eunuchs always brought with them the threat of idolatry.

Deuteronomy 23:1-2 says, “No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.” While this is certainly a harsh warning against emasculating procedures, the context is important. The word translated “assembly” here means a group of men who gather for war and worship.¹⁴⁸ God did not allow castrated men in his worship assembly. When the priests of Baal assembled for worship they would sometimes castrate themselves. In this verse God may be setting up another hedge against the idolatry that threatened Israel.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, after the eunuchs were castrated, Israelites still considered them male.¹⁵⁰ The purpose of modern feminizing surgery is very different from Old Testament castration. Christians should also be careful about using this passage with transgender people.

In the New Testament Jesus addresses the topic of eunuchs. In Matthew 19:12 he says, “There are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” Jesus identifies three different types of eunuchs, but none of them would be considered transgender by 21st century standards.

¹⁴⁸ Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁹ More than a thousand years later the prophet Isaiah, wrote “For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.” Isaiah 56:4, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Richard J. Wassersug, Emma McKenna, and Tucker Lieberman, “Eunuch as a Gender Identity after Castration,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, no. 3 (September 2012): 253–70, doi:10.1080/09589236.2012.681178.

The first type of eunuch was most likely not castrated at all. What made them less than masculine was their inability to reproduce. These types of eunuchs may have had disorders of sexual development or may have had other reproductive complications.

Jesus was well aware of the Old Testament prohibitions against castration, but castration at the time Jesus lived was different from how it was at the time when Deuteronomy was written. In Jesus' day Greek princes and nobles had recently begun castrating slaves whom they wanted to look after their households. Their version of castration was not as religious as it was in the Old Testament time period. Those kinds of slaves are the second type of eunuch Jesus identifies. They were not dissatisfied with their sex assignment. They were castrated by their masters against their will.¹⁵¹

The practice of castration was fairly new to Greek culture when Jesus lived. It had been learned from Eastern cultures, and was not widespread. Even when it was used it was rarely for religious purposes. When Jesus says that “some people choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God” he is certainly not talking about physical castration. This would have been a completely new concept for all of his hearers and because they knew the laws from Deuteronomy it would have been completely offensive and illogical. Instead Jesus is referring to people who have functional male reproductive parts, but choose not to use them at all. He is talking about celibacy.¹⁵²

Neither impotent men, nor castrated slaves nor celibate followers of Jesus have much in common with modern transgender women. None of them performs a feminizing surgery because he is unhappy with his maleness. Jesus considers them all to be males, regardless of their physical status. While Matthew 19:12 passage does talk about castration, it does not refer to the type of discontent with assigned sex that transgender people experience.

To imply that any of the passages listed above are written directly to modern transgender individuals requires a person to rip them out of their context and twist their meanings. The Bible was not written to answer every question the transgender community might ask of it. The Bible was written to communicate God's will for the lives of humans (including his will about our gender), and to tell us about Jesus who perfectly fulfilled God's will on behalf of the whole

¹⁵¹ Harris R. Laird, et al.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

world. Rather than cherry pick passages out of their context we can look for passages that describe God's will for human gender and sexuality.

The Bible may not directly address modern transgender people, but it has a lot to say about what makes men men and women women. That is really the issue at the heart of any discussion about transgenderism. Perhaps a better question than “What does God say about transgender people?” is “How does God see gender?” and “How does God expect males and females to act?” The Bible teaches us God's truth about gender.

All the gender formation theories we looked at earlier attempted to answer the question, “What makes a person male or female?” God's gender formation theory is not a just theory, it is the Holy Spirit's account of how genders were formed when people were first created. God's answer to the question “What makes a person male or female?” is first articulated in Genesis 1:27.

וַיְבָרֵא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָםׁ בְּצַלְמוֹׁ^a בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם׃

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Notice the subject of this sentence, God. God is the one who created mankind and assigned two sexes. The Hebrew word translated “created” is בָּרָא. The Bible only uses בָּרָא when God is the subject because it refers to something that only God can do. When God בָּרָא something it is new and extraordinary and it often sets the standard for how something operates in all the world.¹⁵³ It was God and God alone who assigned Adam the sex of male and Eve the sex of female.¹⁵⁴ When he did this he was not just creating two people. He was determining how the whole human race would function. Sex is not assigned by humans. Ever since creation we have noticed that men and women are different from one another. We recognize our God-assigned sex, but God is the one who determines it.

Notice also that God created only two genders. As we stated before, God created a gender binary with male on the one side and female on the other side. God never mentions anything beyond these two genders or anything in-between these two genders. The Bible simply states that

¹⁵³ Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee, Wis: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), p. 35.

¹⁵⁴ God is the creator of the concept of sex and gender itself. He could have created one gender or three or more, but he chose to create two. Recall how many times the beginning of this paper stated that medical professionals and social scientists found inconclusive results. We do not understand how gender and sexuality works. God does. He designed it. When we ask questions about gender and sexuality, we are wondering about things that God knows.

when God created the first humans as the prototype people, he assigned each of them a gender according to a binary system of male and female.

Soon after the account of God creating Adam and Eve comes the tragic story of their temptation and fall into sin. One might think that this corruption of nature could have rendered God's sex assigning defective. Sin certainly caused a lot of confusion about much of God's will for humans. But God's distinction between male and female and his authority to assign sexes did not end in the Garden of Eden. Thousands of years later, when Pharisees came to question Jesus about divorce, he grounded his answer about sexual morality in our created nature. Matthew records his answer in chapter 19:4.

ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ὅτι ὁ κτίσας ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς;

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female?’”

When Jesus sought an authoritative statement for sexual morality, he did not consult what others were saying, or what he thought— even though he certainly could have; he is God! Instead he quoted from the Creation account. Even after the fall into sin, the way God designed males and females at the beginning of time is the authoritative statement on human sexuality—including which sex each human is. Even after the fall into sin, God still assigns a sex to each human and he still assigns it according to a binary system, male and female.

Someone might believe that God assigned which sex each human is when he crafted humans in the garden of Eden but doubt that God still assigns genders to people who are born by a woman. Psalm 139:15-16 addresses that question.

לֹא-נִכְתָּד עַצְמִי מִמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי בְּסִתְּךָ רִקְמָתִי בְּתַחְתֵּי־אָרֶץ:
גְּלִמִי רָאָו עֵינֶיךָ וְעַל-סִפְרֶךָ כָּל־יְמֵי יִצְרוֹ וְלֹא אֶחָד בָּהֶם:

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

This passage dispels any doubt that God is active in the process of natural childbirth. There may be ways to scientifically explain what God does when he creates a child inside a mother's womb, but that doesn't mean that he isn't meticulously putting the child together with

the greatest care. Sometimes God even uses the word בָּרָא when referring to natural child birth because God creates children in their mothers' wombs. It is there that he assigns them a sex.¹⁵⁵

There certainly are times when sin destroys God's perfect design for human sexuality. Disorders of sexual development (DSD) which produce intersex babies are evidence of that destruction. But even in those cases, the blame does not fall on God. That is the result of sin which infests the world because Adam and Eve sinned. We have been following their lead ever since. All birth defects are not the result of God's errors. They are the result of sin.

When we ask "What is God's theory of gender formation?" The answer is this: At the beginning of the world God designed human beings to fall into two categories, male and female. Ever since then he has been assigning each baby as male or female, even though those babies develop through natural child birth.

Someone might wonder, "Can passages about creation really be the basis for a Christian perspective on gender formation?" The short answer is, "Yes." As we've seen from Matthew 19, that is how Jesus defended his theology of human sexuality. Paul does the same thing. When he teaches about marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, his foundational proof passage is from Genesis 2:24. When he discusses sexual morality for unmarried people in 1 Corinthians 6 and 7 he does so with the assumption that God put great care into the creation of human bodies and still dwells in them.¹⁵⁶

God does not seek to answer every question about sexuality. Passages from the Creation account do not specifically mention transgender people, but they do clearly show us God's will for human sexuality. They clear up some of the confusion that comes from considering all the different human theories of gender formation. There is some truth in the human theories, but God's Word cuts through their knots by telling us how he designed us. The truth is, God assigns each person's sex.

¹⁵⁵ In Ezekiel 21:30 (v. 35 in Hebrew) God refers to the Ammonites place of ancestry as their land where they were בָּרָא.

³⁵ הָשֵׁב אֶל-תַּעֲרָהּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-נִבְרָאתָ בָּאָרֶץ מִכְרוֹתֶיךָ אֲשַׁפֵּט אֹתְךָ:
Ezekiel 21:30 Return the sword to its scabbard. In the place where you were created, in the land of your ancestry, I will judge you.

¹⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

The claim that God assigns sex reflects the terminology and teachings of the Bible, but there are cases in which the black and white of God's gender binary for humanity becomes a bit gray. When a person is born with a DSD he or she is considered intersex. Some of these situations were discussed in the section regarding chromosomal and hormonal gender formation theories. In these cases a baby's biological development into a male or female is obscured by some biological malfunction.

Every baby will naturally develop into a female unless a sperm with a Y sex chromosome fertilizes the egg. If a Y chromosome is present it is supposed to trigger pre-natal androgenizing hormones which signal the baby to develop into a male. Sometimes DSDs are a malfunction of the Y chromosome, and sometimes they are a malfunction of the hormones.

It is generally thought that the presence of any Y chromosome is evidence that the baby should be develop as a male regardless of any other malfunctions. This is not always the case. For example, babies who are born with 5-alpha reductase deficiency have a Y chromosome which does not trigger functional androgenizing hormones until puberty. With no visible cause for concern during early childhood, the condition usually goes unnoticed until puberty. The child is raised as a female when suddenly testosterone floods her body and she begins to look, feel, and act like a boy.

In 5-alpha reductase deficiency and other DSD the sex God has assigned a person is not nearly as clear. This too is a result of sin. Sin has marred God's perfect human race in mind, body, and spirit. When sin attacks the body biological gender development, the sex God assigned to a person may not be readily obvious.

Cases of DSD are extremely rare. What's more, those who do have a DSD rarely identify as transgender. Even though they are confused about which gender they are, once they decide to live as one gender the majority of people with a DSD are content to retain that gender. The majority of people who identify as transgender do not have a DSD. The DSM-5 does not classify gender dysphoria as a DSD. If a person does have a DSD and gender dysphoria he is diagnosed differently than someone who does not have a DSD.¹⁵⁷

Because humans have limited knowledge, we cannot always discern which sex a person with a DSD has been assigned. In those cases special pastoral care is required. Such pastoral care is not the goal of this paper. This paper focuses on cases of gender dysphoria narrowly defined,

¹⁵⁷ DSM-5, p. 451.

that is, cases in which a member of one sex without a DSD is dissatisfied with the sex assigned them at birth and desires to transition to the other gender.

While cases of DSD do not fit the concept of gender dysphoria or the scope of his paper, individuals with DSD almost always experience some kind of anxiety over their gender. They will require a special level of pastoral care not fully expounded in these pages. The Missouri Synod's CTCR put it well. "The fundamental Christian perspective would be to encourage treatment of the condition in a way that allows the greatest possible fullness of service to Christ and others by the individual. This may well entail hormonal or surgical options that enable the person to deal most effectively with the biological sexual ambiguity which is present."¹⁵⁸

In the vast majority of cases it can be said with confidence that God assigns a person's sex. His Word also gives plenty of evidence for how to identify a man and distinguish him from a woman. The identification basically breaks down into four identifiers.

First, a male is equipped with the genitalia that correspond to a female's genitalia for sexual reproduction. (Genesis 1:28). Second, he provides the procreative semen for fertilization (Genesis 38:8-9). Third, he is able to bear the Old Testament distinctive sign of God's chosen people, penile circumcision (Genesis 17:10). Fourth, he looks like a male and/or is accepted by others as a male, often based on appearance (1 Samuel 17:42; Philippians 2:8).¹⁵⁹

The first two characteristics are about the man's role in procreation. The last two are about his appearance. Even when these categories were altered the person was still considered male (e.g., eunuchs). Even when some people were lacking one or two of the traits they were still considered male (Genesis 17:17, Mathew 19:12.) The past potential to procreate was considered valid evidence for masculinity. For instance, elderly men, babies, and eunuchs were all considered male. Even after a man mutilates his body to appear as a female, he is still considered male because that is how God assigned his sex at birth. In other words, if one possesses the chromosomal genetics of a male but wishes to live as a woman and undergoes treatments to change his appearance, that does not change the reality that he is still a man.

So far we have seen from the Creation account that God assigns sex. He also provides ways for us to distinguish a male from a female. But God's will for human sexuality goes even

¹⁵⁸ Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ These identifiers are taken from an anonymous WELS pastor's answer to a question about transgenderism submitted to www.wels.net. The answer has been archived. The author obtained the answer via email from another WELS pastor.

further. If you recall, social scientists often distinguish between sex and gender. Sex is what biological parts a person has, gender is how a person identifies and behaves. According to these definitions, God not only assigns a person's sex, he also commands someone's gender—that is, he commands certain behaviors based on the sex he assigns at birth. God's gender specific commands in the Bible are his directions for how to live your gender.

To say it another way, God does not separate gender from sex. Sex is God's gift of body parts, and gender is the way he expects you to behave in light of those gifts. The two are inseparably linked. God wants those he has assigned male at birth to act male and people he has assigned female at birth to act female. Some parts of acting male or female are for all people of all times. Some parts of acting male or female depend on the culture.

God expects males to act like males in their marriages, their sexual activities, and their social relationships. He expects that if a male marries, he will marry a woman (Genesis 2:24.) God condemns a male having sex with a male (1 Corinthians 6:9) but encourages a male to have sex with his female wife (1 Corinthians 7:3). God expects that a male will accept roles of headship and care for females (1 Corinthians 11:3). The opposite is true of females. If they marry, he expects them to marry men (Genesis 2:24), to have sex with only their male husbands (Romans 1:26), and to accept the role of helper (Genesis 2:20-21).

Some aspects of acting like a male or a female change depending on which culture they are a part of. Joseph's appearance as an Egyptian man was so different from that of a Hebrew man that he was unrecognizable (Genesis 42:8). Piercings were considered feminine beauty at some times (Song of Songs 1:10), but God nowhere commands all women to wear jewelry.

Behaving like a male or a female may look different across various cultures, yet it is usually obvious to people within that culture when someone acts outside of their anticipated gender role. The Lord's desire for males to act male and females to act female does not change. When God commanded men and women not to cross-dress in Deuteronomy 22:5 he was applying an eternal truth to a specific culture. Under normal circumstances wants all females to dress like females, but in Old Testament Israel he enforced that desire with a civil command.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ There could be an exception to this general rule in special cases. Some examples include a costume party or in a theatrical production where it is obvious that a person is dressing for a make-believe character, or a case which necessitates a disguise. The difference between these exceptions and the normal circumstances is that under such special circumstances the person is not altering his or her gender identity. A man dressed in a woman's costume still identifies as a male and under normal circumstances behaves like a male.

God expresses his will similarly in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 when he says,

But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.

The eternal truth is that God does not want anyone to despise the gender he has given them by failing to express the gender role associated with his or her biological sex. The men and women of Corinth could fulfill that wish in their culture by wearing or not wearing head coverings to worship.

The same rule applies in 21st century America. A Scottish man attending a formal banquet may wear a long, plaid, pleated skirt. Within his culture, in his specific setting, that kind of apparel is considered manly. He has not rejected his gender role. If an American man would wear the same to the office, he would be deviating from normal male behavior. When transgender people do that they are distorting God's gift of gender.

We have the ability to distort God's gift of sex and God's gift of gender. If a person has surgery to change their biological parts from male to female or vice versa he has rejected the sex God assigned to him. If he does not fulfill the social role God expects of him based on his assigned sex he is also rejecting the gender God assigned to him.

In addition, the social distortion of gender in American culture certainly exerts its influence on those who struggle with transgenderism. If one is led to believe that they should question their gender identity as soon as they do not fit a typical gender stereotype, it is not surprising to find so many people uncomfortable with their gender. To add to the confusion, people who are uncomfortable with their assigned gender are encouraged to explore another gender. A culture which places no stock in the way God designed the body is certainly an intimidating minefield of temptation for someone struggling with his or her gender identity.

Consider an example. A person, perhaps for reasons not easily identified, feels he is a woman trapped in a man's body. If he could change the way he feels, he would. Now imagine how his confusion is aggravated when some people around him dismiss his feelings while

insisting that he act according to a stereotype behavior pattern of society, while others affirm his feelings by insisting that he has every right and freedom to choose his gender and express it however he wishes. But no one points him to his wise and loving Creator and tries to equip him with coping skills to deal with his discomfort.

So this transgender person hears two stories about who he is. Some treat him as a man. Others affirm he can be or behave as a woman. So he looks to the world around him to help clarify the truth and reconcile him with his inner feelings. He knows how he is treated and he knows how he feels, but truthfully who is he? American culture offers him no Creator-centered guidance whatsoever. “There is no such thing as authoritative truth,” he hears. “You can do whatever you want, and there is nothing to tell you whether you are right or wrong.” The world around him has let him down in the most tragic of ways. So the man’s agony continues.

The reason for considering such an example is to make it clear that while the Bible does indicate that transgender people are not in line with God’s will, this may very well be a sin of weakness. That means that a transgender person, while acting contrary to God’s will, may not be doing so because he doesn’t care what God wants. He may be very confused about what God expects, and even more confused by what he hears from the people and culture around him. Sin is always sin, but a Christian would be wise to understand the swirl of pain and confusion which muddy the waters and make it hard for a transgender person’s conscience to discern what is right.

Here a measure of compassion goes a long way. While most of the voices in popular culture will advise such a struggler to disregard the way God knit them together, many voices in Christianity will resort to hammering such a struggler with God’s law. Neither is an adequate response to the struggle. If you do not struggle with your gender identity, imagine for a moment what it must be like to live between those voices! The challenge for Christians is to speak the clear truth about how God created humans and to do so with the tenderness and humility that can only come from seeing ourselves as fellow sinners who happen to have been spared this specific temptation. That perspective is sorely absent from the crowd of opinions about transgender people.

Hearing that God definitively assigned them a sex and expects them to live their gender accordingly might sound very offensive to a transgender person. That should not surprise us. But there is a good reason for such a person to be upset. With every gender formation theory we

asked how it would answer the question, “What makes some people transgender?” God’s view of gender has an answer to that too, and it starts in the Garden of Eden.

When Adam and Eve brought sin into the world they polluted God’s perfection. Work that always went right suddenly went wrong. A husband and wife who always looked out for one another suddenly threw one another under the bus when asked about their sin. Worst of all their minds were made hostile toward God. The devil had promised that if they sinned they would know good from evil. He kept his promise. Before they had only known what was good. Their minds were in perfect sync with God. But now there were two ways of thinking, one evil and one good.

Ever since that day people have been adding to the sin-pollution. By nature, all people are cursed to think according to the evil way. The Holy Spirit has given Christians new minds which do not sin. Because Christians also have their sinful mind always alongside their new mind, they can feel as though they are constantly torn between good and evil. But unbelievers don’t have a new mind. They don’t have a struggle against sin. For people who don’t believe in Jesus, evil thoughts and motivations always win. The natural way of thinking is so polluted that Romans 5:5-7 describes it this way, “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” Especially considering the encouragement, they receive from America’s culture of acceptance, it is not surprising that transgender people are hostile to God’s law.

Transgender people often claim that their behavior is not sinful because God’s Word says many inclusive things about transgender people. In Isaiah 56:4-5 God accepts eunuchs into his church. In Galatians 3:26-29 God says that gender is not a requisite for belonging to Christ. They are correct. These passages are sweet gospel. The gospel declares what is done for us because of God’s grace. That grace does extend to transgender people the way it extends to all sinners. But God’s gospel does not nullify his law. To cite passages of gospel comfort and claim that they remove any impetus for a sinner to modify his behavior is the very thing Paul warned against when he said, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” (Romans 6:1). Though the gospel declares that Jesus has done it all for us, that does not give us permission to

go on sinning or to ignore God's will. In the same way the gospel does not give transgender people permission to ignore God's will.

Every person on earth is born into this world with a mind hostile to God. This evil mind produces every person's sin in one way or another. Some love alcohol, some love money, others have a short temper or love to gossip. Whether those temptations are brought about by nature or by nurture may be debated, but in the final analysis these struggles are often not chosen. Often the temptations that are most natural to us result in sins of weakness, not sins of choice. The weak mindset that every person wrestles with makes some people transgender. Transgender feelings are not evidence that God originally meant someone to be a different gender.

At the same time, the struggle transgender people endure is in many ways similar to the struggle cisgender people feel against different temptations. Christians who have opportunities to minister to transgender people would do well to try to understand this point. Imagine for a moment that a friend is attempting to help you overcome a particular temptation that plagues you often. Rather than curb your sinful nature with the law and empower you with the gospel, this friend simply insists over and over that you ought to stop choosing to feel this temptation. How frustrating that would be! Whether transgender people are born into the struggle or whether it is thrust onto them through their environment, no sinner has earned the right to consider himself higher than another. Even as a transgender person gives into his temptations, every chance to bring him God's Word must be done as a poor sinner showing another poor sinner the forgiveness Jesus won for the both of them.

Are Transgender People Sinning?

It is God's will that people live out their gender roles according to the sex he assigned them at birth. To do otherwise is a sin against God. God never wants a person to switch from one gender to the other.

Because the term "transgender" can be used in a variety of ways, it is difficult to answer the question with a basic yes answer, but the simplest truth is that God never wants a person to switch from one gender to the other.

People born with a DSD may require some normalizing treatment to help them live their life according to the gender they most closely resemble. That surgery does not amount to transgender behavior and it is not a sinful switching from one gender to the other. More people may have a DSD than we realize. DSDs don't always show themselves to the outward eye and

they can occur in people with XX or XY chromosome structures. A person who looks like a male, and has XY chromosomes may still have a DSD. If there is any doubt about whether or not a person has a DSD it is best to have that person checked by a medical professional.¹⁶¹

As for people who do not have a DSD, meaning that they are born and develop biologically as a fully formed member of one gender, God assigned them a sex and a gender at their birth. When God assigned them their sex, he also commanded them to fulfill certain marital, sexual, and social roles. God doesn't want anyone to disobey those commands by switching from their assigned gender to the other gender. God wants them to live out their appropriate gender roles according to his commands for men and women in Scripture. Those people were also born into a culture. God wants them to live out their gender roles in a culturally relevant way which shows they do not despise their gender.

The distress these people feel about the gender God expects of them is not evidence of a DSD. The DSM says that transgender individuals cannot claim to have a DSD just because they experience gender dysphoria. People who are transgender without a DSD have the same chromosomes and hormone levels as cisgender people.¹⁶²

Therefore if a person whom God assigned as a male at birth claims that God approves of his transgender behavior because God really made him a woman, he is wrong both theologically and medically. He is not a woman born with a man's body. He is a man born with a man's body who is very uncomfortable being a man. Contrary to the way it is often promoted within the transgender community, Gender Dysphoria is a psychological condition and not a medical condition. It is not like physical defects which are medical in nature. All of the hormone treatments in the world, along with any gender-changing surgery, do not change the biological reality that a male is a male and a female is a female. It only changes how transgender people live and feel about themselves.

The truth is, God never wants a person to switch from one gender to the other. Except for the extremely rare exception of a DSD, yes, transgender people are sinning as long as they behave like transgender people.

¹⁶¹ Although, if the person's diagnosis is questionable it is most likely that they already share many sex-specific characteristics with one gender. In that case, they should remain with that more dominant gender.

¹⁶² DSM-5, p. 453.

But that is not the only truth. It is also true that our Savior spent time with the most vile and discriminated against people of his generation. It is also true that he came to seek those people and to save them. It is also true that, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick” (Luke 5:31). Jesus did not come to condemn those who struggle with sin, even sin that others found personally offensive. He came to befriend those people, to understand their struggle, to relate to them in every way—except without sin, to call them to repentance, and ultimately to carry their sin and guilt. On the cross he put an end to sin’s curse. Then Jesus sent out compassionate followers who could take his message of forgiveness and hope to a world of sinners.

Knowing that transgender people are sinning is entering a conversation with only half of the knowledge necessary. Before any Christian sets out to discuss sin with a transgender person, the difficult question he must ask himself is this: “Can I put aside my aversion to this person’s particular sin and see them as Jesus sees them?”

What are their sins?

Primarily they have rejected God’s will for them as revealed in their bodies. Secondly they have broken the commands God has given for their gender by refusing to do the things God requires of men and women. Thirdly they have misused God’s gift of sexuality.

Beneath all of this is a subtle idolatry of self. When a transgender person elevates his own idea of what gender he should be over the will of God he is siding with self over God. The medical and psychological care he is offered encourages this selfishness.

Of course the same idolatry lurks behind every temptation for cisgender people as well. What is greed, if it isn’t the elevation of personal desire above God’s will? The same can be said of lust, pride, worry, and coveting. While there are certainly some aspects of transgender sin which make them unique they are in no way worse than any sin committed by a cisgender person. What lies beneath is just as condemning.

Since cisgender Christians know what relief comes from hearing that Jesus died to take away the punishment for their idolatry, how can they not want to share such comfort with their transgender friends? There is certainly need to talk about the sin of transgender people, but this discussion must always be as an attempt to set them up for hearing the gospel. This is the height of compassionate caring for bruised sinners, that ministers of Christ are honest about sinful

behavior to the end that they might share the love of Jesus with sinners like them. The end goal will always be that the transgender person live forever with Jesus.

While a Christian talking with a transgender person will want to talk about sin and forgiveness, many other people in a transgender person's life will be working against such conversations. Almost all of the care available portrays gender as a subjective truth which is determined by the patient rather than an objective truth that is determined by God. All of this patient-centered psychology and pathology ignores the truth from Scripture that "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5) and also that "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 16:25). The result is a decision making process in which the patient's subjective feelings and comfort are more important than God's objective will for their life. Another result is an evaluation of medical procedures on the basis of the patient's feelings. An operation or hormone therapy plan is not considered successful unless it brings more happiness and less stress to a patient. Therefore, one of the biggest allies a Christian transgender individual has is access to Christian counseling. Christian mental health care and referrals take into account the biblical truth that the world is fallen and flawed.

The alternative to Christian counseling is secular counseling, much of which focuses on the subjective truth according to the counselee rather than the objective truth of the Bible. This encourages a transgender person to make a god out of himself. He not only considers his concept of gender better than God's but with every choice he makes to continue his transgender behavior, he looks to himself for peace and reconciliation. That is the only place an unbeliever can look for peace, though he looks in vain. But for a Christian person to ease his own stress by sinful means amounts to a throwing off of the Christian cross God has given him to bear on this earth. Sadly, if left unchecked the same attitude will result in the throwing off of the crown of glory God is preparing for him in heaven. Caring, compassionate love for transgender people will not stand idly by and watch a dear creation of God undergo such a loss. Love for a transgender person confronts sinful attitudes and behaviors, and vigilantly looks for opportunities to share the promise of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus.

What do fruits of repentance look like?

It may be tempting to require that a transgender person do all he can to reverse whatever physical changes he or she has made to the body. This is often extremely expensive, risky, and

unlikely to succeed. While attempts at reversing surgery or hormone treatments may be appropriate fruits of repentance, the potential for other fruits is vast. One possible option is that the person come out as a repentant former transgender person who lives with the consequences of whatever irreversible changes he or she has made to the body. Think of the witnessing opportunities for a person who has recovered from such a spiritual low.

One option that is not a viable fruit of repentance is for the person to continue to live out their new identity as a transgender person. As long as the person perpetuates their transgender behavior they are living in sin. It is just as ludicrous an idea to say that a cohabiting couple will show fruits of repentance by becoming more intimate. The changes a transgender person makes in their lifestyle does not negate the fact that God created them with their birth gender. Living out that identity glorifies God.

A Christian Response

The ultimate goal in responding to transgender individuals is to gain an opportunity to share with them the life-changing gospel of Jesus. Only Jesus offers true liberation. The two keys to responding to transgender people are understanding and compassion.

Understanding can only come through learning. It is essential that we understand transgender people if we want to communicate law and gospel to them. If we are completely ignorant of their struggle and temptations, then we are not fully prepared to witness to them. One of the goals of this paper has been to help the reader understand what transgender people go through and what the Bible says about transgenderism.

The etymological definition of the word compassion is that we “feel with” someone else. Can there be a more difficult topic about which to show compassion? Who can pretend to feel what transgender people feel? Yet we have the command of love from our Savior to “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). You can imagine what it would feel like for a transgender person to be ostracized and embarrassed. You can imagine what it would be like to have that feeling day after day your whole life. You can imagine how your Savior would respond. He would give everything to take that pain away. He has.

Both pastors and Christian friends and family can respond to transgender people with understanding and compassion.

Ideas for Compassionate Christian Friends and Family

Perhaps you will have the opportunity to talk with a transgender person or perhaps you already do. Maybe you barely know them or maybe you are their nearest friend. Every scenario in which you might talk to a transgender person will be different because every person is different. Here are a few ideas to help you make a compassionate response to a transgender person.

Acceptance vs. Approval:

One difficult line to tip-toe is the one between acceptance and approval. It is possible to accept someone without approving of their behavior, but it can be difficult. Perhaps an easier way to think about this concept is within the framework of friendship. While your first inclination may be to avoid this person and to cease your friendship, do the contrary. If you know a transgender person, be a friend to them. Most transgender people are used to being

shunned or gawked at, and many are in need of a good friend. Your friendship may be God's instrument in addressing this person's eternity. Don't forfeit the opportunity.

As their friend, do for them what friends do. Show love. Jesus' summary of the whole law of God is one word, "love." It is appropriate to show love to a transgender person, but recognize that they are made up of body and soul. The paramount concern for a Christian is the soul. It is not loving to affirm what makes them comfortable here on earth if you are encouraging them toward a very uncomfortable life in hell. The greatest love you can show them is to jealously guard their soul against the attacks of the devil and their own sinful flesh, even when that brings discomfort for both of you.

The sinful flesh only listens to the law. That means sometimes you must be ready to speak the law to your friend to warn them about the danger of their behavior. Do not be afraid to tell your friend that her sinful actions come from a mind that is hostile to God according to Romans 8. In that same vein, don't do anything that would make them more comfortable in their sin. For example, if your friend wants you to call them by a name that identifies them according to their new gender, you must be careful that you don't give the impression that their new identity is God-pleasing. Yet, if your refusal to call them by the name they prefer eliminates your opportunities to talk to them about their sin, you would be better off acknowledging her new name, and addressing the sin. As a general rule, do not encourage any behavior that allows them to make light of the deadly sin in which they are engaging.

The law has limits. It will never be able to win their heart to faith in Jesus. Only the gospel can create and strengthen faith in your friend's heart. You will have opportunities to share the gospel with your friend whenever you see them saddened by their sin and in need of comfort. Then do not be afraid to tell your friend the unconditional gospel that Jesus Christ has taken away every sin, even the ones we can never take back. In Christ the past is past. Christ's love is not dependent on whether you are male or female or how much you have obscured your maleness or your femaleness. Galatians 3 says that no matter what gender you are, if you belong to Christ you are an heir of his promise in heaven. In that same vein, let your light shine before your friend even in the little things you do. Do let your attitude and actions reflect the love of Jesus.

One way to keep an evangelical spirit while balancing acceptance and approval, law and gospel, is to remember two truths. First, you need Jesus every bit as much as your friend does.

Remembering this will help you avoid overwhelming their conscience with guilt. Second, they need God's law as much as you do. Think of how sneaky your mind is, always trying to think of a way to excuse your sin. Think of how appreciative you would be for someone who helped you avoid those sinful thoughts. Their sinful nature is just as powerful as yours. This will help you avoid mindlessly approving sinful actions they have.

Essentially your position will be, "I will keep being your friend, but I don't agree with your choices. I will be honest with you about how I feel, but I will always strive to show you love." Showing love includes striving to understand the pain transgender people experience and responding to their struggle with compassion.

Strategy:

It can be difficult to figure out how to build a relationship with someone so different from you. Generally, however, you might try not to focus on the issue of your friend's transgenderism. Instead focus on their relationship with God. Discuss your views about God and try to understand how they view their place in God's creation. Where do they extract their foundational values? This will help you know where you can start your conversation about the Bible.

As you discuss these things keep leading them more and more into God's Word. Ultimately a change of heart will only be prompted by God and his Word. If you only focus on the problem of transgenderism without any other religious conversations you will find yourself quickly getting side tracked into debating the right or wrongness of having sex change operations and neglect the soul altogether.

Patience:

As Jesus ministered to the sinners of society, the disliked, and the scorned, he did so with the ultimate goal of connecting them with God for eternity. That is not a quick and easy goal. It usually takes time for a person to understand what God's Word has to say to them.

We know that God would have all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). That is our desire too. We are willing to exercise great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:2) when we are working with people who wrestle with dangerous sins. We should also be willing to be patient in ministering to those whose sins we find particularly scandalous.

Law, Gospel, and Hope:

It will be important for you to build a relationship around more than just biblical topics, but in your spiritual conversations you will want to keep three essential categories: law, gospel, and hope.

If your friend is being defiantly unrepentant you must crush their sinful attitude with the law. An example of the law would be, “God made you a man. You are not a woman in a man’s body. Your discomfort about your gender is from your inborn sinful nature (Romans 8).”

If your friend is repentant and troubled by their sins you must soothe their heart with the gospel. An example of the gospel would be, “God’s grace is for all people. Your past sins do not disqualify you from going to heaven (Galatians 3).”

If your friend is struggling with the guilt of their sin or the consequences of their sin, they are suffering. Then you need to use the gospel and also some care. Even repentant people have lapses during which they retreat to their old sinful ways. Transgender people are no different. But if you see your friend fighting to do what is right, then take heart! Where there is struggle against the sinful nature there is faith. Continue to use law and gospel, but also offering hope. An example of hope would be, “Someday your body will be restored to a perfect form and there will be no more crying and no more sadness. These struggles here on this earth are nothing compared to the joy that is waiting for us in heaven (2 Corinthians 4).”

Consider a few practical tips.

- When you are with your friend, ask a lot of questions and listen seriously to their answers. The more you understand about their situation the better equipped you will be to offer appropriate law, gospel, and hope.
- At the same time, do not get so caught up in their sinful reasoning that you yourself are deceived. St. Paul warns against that when he says, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)
- Through your patience, listening, and friendship, earn the right to speak. It will be much easier to address your friend’s problems if they trust you before you even start speaking.
- If you are really disturbed or confused by something that happens in your relationship, bring it to a friend or your pastor. Combining a pastor’s theological insight with your understanding may prove to be an extremely potent mix for showing love to your friend.

Ideas for Compassionate Pastors

Being a pastor who works with a transgender person can be very tricky. Not only must you look out for the soul of the transgender person, but you also must be careful not to offend anyone in the congregation. As a general rule, the more privacy you can offer the transgender person the better. Allow them to be honest with you without involving a large number of the congregation's members.

Law and Gospel:

The use of law and gospel is, of course, paramount to working with your friend's soul. Your use of law and gospel with a transgender person should be the same as your use of law and gospel with others. For a few good passages consult the section above for friends and family members.

At Worship:

In the church's public gatherings do what you can to make a transgender person feel comfortable attending without disturbing your own members. Knowing your congregation will allow you to make a wise decision about how to proceed. Make an intentional decision about how welcoming you want to be and be able to explain why.

In your preaching and church documents, be scripturally accurate. The information about transgender people changes very quickly. Do not make unfounded assertions about transgender people. Instead, in your public speaking limit yourself to what you can confidently back up with Scripture.

If you have a few encounters with transgender people coming to your public gatherings you may need to educate your members as to what the Bible says about transgender individuals. The topic will most likely not come up as a part of other Bible study curricula. The topic of transgenderism does allow you to explore some deep areas of theology such as hermeneutics, Sixth Commandment issues, acceptance vs. approval, and social issues. It also dovetails nicely with a unit on homosexuality. If transgenderism is an issue on the minds of the congregation it will be worth your time to draft a short lesson or series regarding transgenderism.

Counseling:

If you have the opportunity to counsel a transgender person, as always, spend a lot of time listening. The things that trouble transgender people vary greatly from person to person.

Views on transgenderism vary from person to person as well. Before speaking make sure you understand what *this* person believes about gender identity and the Bible.

When you do have the chance to speak, spend the time personalizing God's law and gospel for them. The chances are pretty high that they struggle with some unique temptations which do not often make it into your Sunday sermons. Spend time in counseling specifically addressing this person's needs.

Also understand the limitations of your skill set and time. If you are not a professional psychotherapist or a mental health professional, do not attempt to offer those services. Your time will be much better spent if you cooperate with a mental health professional and provide input and evaluation based on the Bible. That is something the mental health specialist is most likely not trained to do.

Marriage:

If a transgender person in your congregation is married or pursuing marriage you will need to consider the ramifications of their sexual identity on their marriage. Remember that a biological male who was born a male is still a male in God's eyes after he makes physical changes to his body. A post-surgery MtF transsexual is still a male, and if he desires a marriage to a man, they would be entering into a homosexual marriage in which the transgender person is living in open rejection of God's design for his sexuality.

While it would involve some very serious complications, a person who was male at birth and then became female could conceivably repent and be married to a biological female. In such a case much pastoral guidance would be required. There are many different scenarios which could unfold, but the principle of the matter is that a transgender person does not nullify the gender God assigned them by changing their body. Keep in mind that the fruits of repentance are not necessarily limited to undoing permanent damage. There are other ways for a Christian transgender person to express their sorrow over sin and belief that they are forgiven.

One last practical tip: as with all confusing situations, be sure to include your brothers in ministry when discussing these things. Not only will they have good insights and advice, but they will appreciate receiving a report on such a controversial topic directly from you rather than through the grapevine.

Conclusion

“Now all at once tremendous scenes unfold;
Thunder'd the deeps, the smoky billows roll'd!
Tumultuous waves embroil the bellowing flood,
All trembling, deafen'd, and aghast we stood!
No more the vessel plough'd the dreadful wave,
Fear seized the mighty, and unnerved the brave;
Each dropp'd his oar; but swift from man to man
With looks serene I turn'd, and thus began:
'O friends! O often tried in adverse storms!
With ills familiar in more dreadful forms!’¹⁶³

In the Odyssey, Odysseus stood over a sea monster, terrified of what might pop out of the water. He was most afraid of what he did not understand. While it may seem that now all around tremendous scenes unfold in America regarding transgenderism, we need not be afraid of this important social issue.

For one, we know plenty about transgenderism. The terminology in this field changes quickly but through humility and willingness to learn we can converse with people in the transgender community. The statistics indicate that while overall numbers of transgender people are fairly low, they are growing. A few transgender people are bound to be in the circle of influence of most WELS congregations in the near future. The means of diagnosing and treating gender dysphoria are varied and can be confusing at times. While the medical and social science disciplines do not always agree about best practice, it is safe to say that transgender people have a lot to think about when they consider treatment. Gender formation theories work together even as they sometimes disagree about what makes some people transgender. Biological theories focus on chromosomes, hormones and brain structure. Interpersonal theories focus on the relationship people have with their families. Cultural theories focus on the relationship people have with their society. Critical theories focus on the hierarchy of small social groups inside of the larger culture. None of the theories provide a definitive answer for what makes some people transgender. For all that we don't know about transgenderism, there is plenty that we do know. From what we know it is clear that transgenderism is not so unlike other problems that plague us in this world. It is fueled by sin and can be deadly to those who are caught in its trap, but God's Word has answers for us.

¹⁶³ Homer.

What dispels our fear of transgenderism even more than the facts we know about it is that we have a clear Word of God regarding human sexuality and gender. When we consult God's Word we find that God has a lot to say about gender, even if he doesn't have much to say about transgenderism. An overview of the Greek and Hebrew words for men and women shows us that God created mankind according to a gender binary. An investigation of some passages about gender shows us that God himself assigned sex at Creation and he continues to do so today. He also provides common traits by which we can identify men and distinguish them from women. What's more, he expects men to live as males and women to live as females. As it turns out, God does not distinguish between sex and gender, but he commands that people of a certain birth sex perform their gender according to the sex they were assigned at birth.

In view of all this data from the medical field, the psychological field, and the Bible we can safely conclude that in cases where there is no disability of sexual development, transgender behavior is a violation of God's will for humans and as such it is a sin against God. God never wants someone to switch from one gender to the other.

With that truth in mind Christians who have a transgender friend or family member can make wise decisions about how to provide care and comfort for their friend while simultaneously looking after his or her soul. Pastors too can offer the objective truth of the law and the glorious hope of the gospel message that applies to all people, male, female, and those who have harmed their maleness or femaleness.

But the thing that removes fear more permanently and more beautifully than anything else is the simple truth that the Lord Jesus has always known about transgenderism. He died to earn forgiveness for all people who struggle with transgenderism. He is currently in charge of the world that wrestles with it. He will come someday soon to deliver us to the place where we will live in perfection, body and soul.

Whether you know anything about transgenderism or not, whether you think it is scary or not, whether you struggle with it or not, there is nothing to be afraid of.

Why should cross and trial grieve me?
Christ is near, with his cheer; never will he leave me.
Who can rob me of the heaven, that God's Son
For me won When his life was given?¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *Christian Worship* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), hymn 428, st.1.

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