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Gender Identity and the Impact on the Mental Health Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents' mental health has been at the forefront of counseling for many years. As adolescents endure the physical and hormonal changes that occur during the formative years from 10-19, many feel confused and uncomfortable in their bodies. Throughout the decades, adolescents, specifically girls, searched for a way to ease the feelings experienced during that time. As a result, many issues have been prevalent among adolescent girls, such as eating disorders, cutting, suicidal ideations, sexual activity, and gender dysphoria.

Utilizing studies completed by mental health professionals, this thesis seeks to identify the impact this acceptance and freedom to choose one's gender has had on the mental health of adolescents. At the core of this and every issue listed is the issue of identity. Identity rooted in the biblical worldview can provide the stability adolescents need to navigate the challenges faced during that developmental time. This paper includes definitions of gender, as well as explores current theories on gender dysphoria from both the secular and biblical viewpoint. The analysis of the therapeutic approaches proposes that a return to the biblical view of gender would be in the best interest of adolescent girls and support their mental health. The study concludes with a proposal for future research and recommendations for counselors working with adolescents who have gender dysphoria.

INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

This thesis explores the mental health implications of allowing adolescent girls to choose their gender based on their mental connection with their physical body. Research has shown increased mental health concerns and risk-taking behavior among adolescent girls who express gender fluidity. This thesis proposes that the secular-influenced view of mental health is detrimental to the development of adolescent girls. Instead, a biblical worldview provides a more developmentally appropriate approach to the development of adolescent girls. Through the biblical view adolescent girls can learn their identity as God intended it to be and from that foundation they can tackle the emotional challenges faced during adolescence.

Chapter 1 seeks to identify the gender identity crisis among adolescent girls. Chapter 2 explores identity from a biblical lens; as well as describes the biblical view of gender and how God created men and women uniquely different. Chapter 3 provides definitions of terms that are currently accepted in therapeutic and social circles and is included for clarity and understanding of the content discussed in this thesis. Chapter 4 explores the history of gender dysphoria and the statistics of those diagnosed with this condition. It also provides definitions of terms that will be used throughout the paper. Chapter 5 provides two approaches to treating gender dysphoria in adolescents, the secular approach and the biblical approach. Chapter 6 describes the biblical approach and how it is the most effective and appropriate approach to use with adolescents dealing with gender dysphoria. Chapter 7 proposes possible future research and concluding thoughts on the topic.

CHAPTER 1 - GENDER IDENTITY CRISIS

Introduction & Summary

Our current culture in the United States celebrates acceptance. Susan Wells describes the danger of this acceptance of popular thoughts and ideas as destructive and dangerous.

Have you heard the saying that someone is so open-minded that his brains fall out? How true! For years I was open to every thought and suggestion that entered my mind. Unfortunately, certain thoughts became reality in my life, even though they were lies. The reason I fell prey to these lies was because I didn't know the truth of God's Word. This produced a pattern of destructive, or ill thinking that kept me in a DIS-EASED. I'm warning you, soldier. do not be so open-minded that your brains fall out!¹

Wells describes the challenges faced when subscribing to the worldly belief system in her book *Report Back to Base*. While she does not specifically address gender fluidity, she does highlight the dangers of being too open minded to worldly wisdom that one lives in a state of dis-ease. This quote epitomizes the counter perspective to the current system of acceptance and compels one to reconsider what having an open mind truly means.

The most recent push in American culture is acceptance of gender fluidity. Allowing adolescents to determine their physical gender has gained momentum in recent years and has become a societal norm. Adolescents have been given autonomy by educational and medical professionals to define their gender based upon how well they identify with a specific gender. This autonomy is negatively impacting the mental health of children.² Gender identity measures

¹ Susan Wells, *Report Back to Central Base* (n.p., USA: XULON Press, 2010), 156.

² Abigail Shrier, "Gender Ideology Run Amok," *Imprimis*, July 28, 2021, <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/gender-ideology-run-amok/>.

the relation between physical gender and how one connects with those corresponding traits.³ The expression of masculinity and femininity is often guided by cultural norms.⁴ These norms of expression change with the everchanging culture. One such example of this expression is the uniform of a Roman soldier. At one point a Roman soldier wearing his uniform in public would have been seen as an example of authority and status.⁵ In today's Western culture, wearing this same uniform would signify one was on their way to a costume party, or a Halloween event. Children may exhibit traits from either gender during development. However, if a child identifies with more traits from the opposite sex that does not mean that it is in the best interest of that child to change genders physically. In fact, a study completed in 2021 showed that 62% of females that medically transition end up medically detransitioning later in life.⁶

According to research America is on the verge of a mental health crisis. Adolescents have fewer physical injuries and experience less emotional duress than those of the previous generations. Parents provide more structure and support as adolescents navigate the world around them, while at the same time allowing more freedom with technology and identity. As a result of this support and structure adolescents experience more difficulty when faced with adversity, especially in terms of managing the hormonal and physical changes experienced during puberty. This difficulty results in adolescents experiencing anxiety and depression at

³ Kenneth J. Zucker, Janet N. Mitchell, Susan J. Bradley, Jan Tkachuk, James M. Cantor, and Sara M. Allin, "The Recalled Childhood Gender Identity/Gender Role Questionnaire: Psychometric Properties," *Sex Roles* 54, no. 7-8 (2006): 470.

⁴ Casey Scheibling, "Why Can't Boys Be #LikeAGirl?": Sticky Essentialism and Ambivalent (De)Gendering in Fathers' Online Accounts of Children's Gender and Sexuality," *Sex Roles*. 86, no. 5-6 (2022): 3.

⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 40.

⁶ Elie Vandebussche, "Detransition-Related Needs and Support: A Cross-Sectional Online Survey," *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 9 (2021): 1606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1919479>.

greater levels. In an effort to ease the anxiety and stress, adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviors and in recent years have begun exploring gender fluidity.⁷

Case Study

A case study involving a twelve-year-old girl is relevant to explore this tension felt among adolescents identifying as transgender. This student will be named Madison for the sake of anonymity to protect her rights as a minor. Madison was a quiet girl for most of her elementary school years and battled anxiety. Her parents took her for an evaluation with a psychiatrist, in which she was diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety. Madison often expressed herself through drawings and her choice of clothing. She drew many pictures of death and destruction, including war and her school being attacked or bombed.

Madison began working with her school counselors after a particularly disturbing drawing of a young intruder shooting her principal. Madison described this picture as something terrible that could happen and brushed it off as nothing significant and it was not something she was planning to do. This incident prompted her parents to bring her to the psychiatrist. Madison began a medication regimen and seemed to be less anxious. The drawings tapered off and were no longer violent. Years later, Madison came to school and told her teacher that she no longer wanted to be called Madison; she wanted to be called George. At this time, Madison was 15 and had not previously expressed discomfort with her gender, so this shocked her parents and teachers.

Madison's story is not unique, but also not the same as others who have identified with the opposite gender. As the issue of gender fluidity is explored, it is important that the mental duress these adolescents are experiencing is not forgotten. Many of these adolescents have

⁷ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 19.

battled depression and anxiety for many years before making the decision to change their gender. The issue of gender fluidity cannot be explored in isolation but in conjunction with other mental health concerns. These mental health concerns are real and are plaguing many adolescents.

Abigail Shrier compiled many stories of the gender crisis plaguing many young girls in her book titled *Irreversible Damage*. This book details the journey of numerous girls as they battled depression and anxiety, but ultimately went down the road of transitioning. The home lives of the girls interviewed varied from a loving and emotionally stable environment to a tumultuous and chaotic one. Some of the girls had two heterosexual parents, while others had single parents or homosexual parents. Shrier's findings did not indicate that the home life had a significant impact on the decision the girls made, in fact the parents interviewed were all in agreement that they were confused and shocked by their daughter's decision to transition. Many of the parents interviewed consented to their daughter's transition due to the fear of losing their daughters entirely as a result of suicide. Often the girls would state that they feel such discomfort in their body and they are so depressed that they want to commit suicide. This fear compels parents to take action and support their daughter in whatever way possible.⁸ If nothing else, the findings in this book highlight the mental health concerns that adolescent girls are experiencing. These stories make it abundantly clear that there are real concerns that need to be explored and addressed by mental health professionals in order to provide the best mental health services for adolescent girls.

⁸ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 19.

Mental Health Statistics

According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control), suicide and depression are major concerns noted in a study conducted in 2018-2019. This study surveyed roughly 13,000 students ranging in age from 14-17 years old. Of the adolescents surveyed 75% participated.⁹ The statistics are:

- 15.1% had a major depressive episode;
- 36.7% had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness;
- 4.1% had a substance use disorder;
- 1.6% had an alcohol use disorder;
- 3.2% had an illicit drug use disorder;
- 18.8% seriously considered attempting suicide;
- 15.7% made a suicide plan;
- 8.9% attempted suicide;
- 2.5% made a suicide attempt requiring medical treatment.¹⁰

A similar study was conducted in 2008 of the same age group of adolescents by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration).

- 8.1% had at least one depressive episode;
- 5.4% had a major depressive episode;
- 36.7% had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness;
- 13.8% seriously considered attempting suicide;
- 10.9% made a suicide plan;¹¹
- 6.9% attempted suicide;¹²

The statistics show an increase of 7% in a depressive episode, a 5% increase in considering attempting suicide, 5% increase in making a suicide plan and a 2% increase in attempting

⁹ Rebecca H. Bitsko et al., “Mental Health Surveillance among Children — United States, 2013–2019,” *MMWR Supplements* 71, no. 2 (2022): 1. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7102a1>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders among Youth,” Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders Among Youth | Youth.gov, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/prevalence-mental-health-disorders-among-youth>.

suicide. These statistics should prompt mental health professionals to evaluate if current practices are effective, as the statistics show an increase in mental health concerns and not a decrease. This information brings back the relevance of the quote cited on page six and begs the question: have we as a society become so open-minded that we are doing more harm than good?

Conclusion

These statistics are alarming and worth noting. Many adolescents are dealing with mental health concerns from anxiety, depression and suicidal ideations. It is important to note these concerns and to use them to determine the best course of action for treatment. However, the best course of action is currently debated in therapeutic circles. The mental health crisis is rising and the strategies therapists are using to combat this crisis need to be re-evaluated as the baseline metrics for this crisis are increasing, not decreasing.. There are two approaches that will be explored in the following chapters: a biblical approach that involves affirming and challenging one's feelings, while presenting the biblical view on gender, and a secular approach to this crisis which involves affirming and validating one's feelings, while presenting the cultural view on gender. How the two approaches differ, the strategies used, and the resulting outcomes will be explored to determine which approach is more appropriate when working with adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria.

CHAPTER 2 - BIBLICAL VIEW OF IDENTITY AND GENDER

Introduction

The Bible describes sex as fixed and determined by God. The words gender and sex are not separate; rather, they can be used interchangeably. The biblical worldview teaches that regardless of how one feels about their gender, it is fixed and unchanging. God created males and females with specific purposes and roles. According to scripture, there are only two genders, and these two genders are clearly defined by the physical anatomy of an individual. Therefore, one cannot be non-binary according to scripture. Males and females are created to be complementary to each other for the purpose of procreation and furthering the kingdom of God.

Identity

At the heart of the gender identity crisis is identity. The secular worldview of identity is fluid and determined by emotions and feelings, while the biblical view is finite and based in biblical understanding. God uniquely created each person, and no two people are alike. Each person was created with intentionality and distinction. Millions of cells are uniquely programmed to make each individual who they are, and no two are alike.¹³ The uniqueness of humanity culminates in being image-bearers of God. Nothing else in creation has this privilege. Humans are more than their assigned gender, interests, careers, or anything else that can be found to exist in the realm of the earth, all humanity is God's creation.¹⁴

¹³ Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick, *Defined: Who God Says You Are* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 33. Accessed November 28, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 33.

¹⁴ Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 7. Accessed November 29, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Identity is rooted in community. Despite the current trend to establish identity within oneself, identity is still rooted in the institutions formulated from the surrounding community. In essence it is still a communal construct to find identity from within oneself. Human beings must belong to feel validated. People are designed to live in community, and this community shapes consciousness.¹⁵ God's ultimate design for humanity was to be in community together as it was in the garden. When disobedience separated God from His creation, He never stopped the pursuit to be in community with humanity. In Exodus chapter 40 it is written how God wanted to reside with His people. At this time there was still separation between creation and Creator, but God's desire to close the gap is evidenced in the instruction given to Moses on how to construct a location that could house the presence of God. This dwelling was only temporary as God had already devised a plan to restore humanity to Himself and have eternal community. This plan was made complete in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Through the sacrifice of a perfect one, the imperfect could be restored to the Creator God. All fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), which is why the sacrifice of Jesus is available to cover all.

When identity is rooted in Jesus one can understand their worth. There is no striving to achieve or be accepted. In Jesus each and every person has been counted worthy and enough (Romans 5:8). There is only one thing in all creation that was created in the image of God and that is humanity. In Genesis chapter 1:26 it is written, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" Once sin entered the world, humanity was separated from God. In God's infinite

¹⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 40.

mercy he does not leave humanity separated forever, rather He sends Jesus to make restitution by placing faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ (Romans 3:23-26; 5:9-10).

Creation

The Old Testament teaches that God created males and females in His image. In the book of Genesis, chapters 1-2, God created males and females distinct from each other but in His image. Genesis chapter 1:26-28 teaches,

Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

In chapter 2:18 of the book of Genesis, it is written,

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

We also read in the book of Genesis 5:2 that “He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.” The book of Malachi 2:15 teaches, “Has not the one God made you? You belong to Him in body and spirit.”

It is difficult to comprehend the depth of what it means to be made in the image of God. The fall separated mankind from the Creator. When Eve was tempted in the garden to eat the fruit so she could be like God (Genesis 3:5) she was blinded to the fact that she was already like God. She forfeited her authority and identity by believing that she needed something to make her more like God.

Gender Roles

There are numerous examples of the role of women throughout scripture. In both the Old and New Testaments, God highlights the beauty in the design of a woman. The stories of Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth are some of the women whose stories are depicted in the Old Testament. These women embody the definition of what it means to be a woman in the most difficult situations. From being childless to a widow, the lives of these women were not easy by any means, yet they modeled what it looks like to trust God and embrace their womanhood. The New Testament also provides scriptural references for the design God has for women and how this design can be lived out daily. Women like Mary Magdalene, Joana, Susanna (Luke 8:1-3) and Lydia (Acts 16:11-15), and Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2) are just a few of these notable women. The stories of these women describe their tenacity and their uniquely beautiful role in their ability to bring forth life into the earth. Only a woman's body was created to host a living being because her body was uniquely created for that role.

The New Testament includes many scriptures on the issue of gender as well as the roles of both males and females. God was intentional in how He created men and women, and He gave each specific roles. The purpose of these roles is so the two can complement each other and support each other. There is no better illustration of this complementary pairing than in the

teachings on marriage. A wife provides comfort and reproach for her husband and is often the most powerful influence in her husband's life.¹⁶ New Testament scripture aligns with the Old Testament teaching and provides further guidelines for what this coupling should look like.

God designed women to be the mothers and nurturers of the next generation. In Proverbs 31 a picture of a godly woman is painted. In this chapter of Proverbs King Lemuel reflects on the teachings of his mother. She teaches him what the characteristics of a woman's worth. She describes this woman as lacking nothing and her husband trusts her completely. This woman brings good to her husband through the work that she does and the effort she puts forth in caring for her family. As a result of her intentionality her family does not fear when trouble comes. She spends her days caring for the needy. She is integrous and strong, and does not give way to idleness. Her speech reflects wisdom, and she provides faithful instruction. Her children call her blessed and her husband does also. Her husband should reward her and allow her good works to bring her praise in the city gate. This description from Proverbs describes the exemplary woman.

The many women listed above provide examples throughout scripture of strength and fortitude. One other example of note is a woman named Jael, the wife of Heber. This woman's story is told in the book of Judges chapter four. There was a war between the sons of Israel and the Canaanites. When the leader of the Canaanites fled the battle, he took shelter in Jael's tent. She welcomed him in and offered him milk to drink, and then when he fell asleep she killed him by driving a tent peg into his temple. Through her cunning bravery she ended the war with this act.

¹⁶ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Helper by Design God's Perfect Plan for Women in Marriage* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 35.

In the book of Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus teaches, “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.’” Jesus not only teaches the design for humanity from creation but also the purpose of the marriage union. In 1 Timothy 2:13-15, it is written, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” According to these scriptures, gender is not determined by societal norms but by the Creator. When approaching gender and sexuality from a biblical worldview, it is evident through these scriptures that God uniquely designed males and females.

When choosing to live in a way that contradicts the design and will of the Father, one is determined to be the god of their life. In Romans, it is written in 1:26-31,

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

This scripture describes what happens when one chooses to be the god of their life. Ultimately the choice is not sexuality as much as it is pride. Pride is anything that rebels against God’s standard and it is something that is challenging for all humanity. God is a god of order, and He creates with purpose and design. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, “Nevertheless, in the

Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” Also found in 1 Corinthians 14:33, it is written that God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people. Titus 2:3-5 provides further insight into the character of a godly woman,

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

The beauty of God’s design for women is carefully woven into scripture throughout the Old and New Testaments. These scriptures were not only to communicate the design of a woman, but also how she should be honored and treated, both in marriage and in society.

Conclusion

When reading the scriptures on the design for males and females it is clear that order was established from the beginning. The issue of gender reaches far beyond simply identifying with one’s anatomy, but to surrender the authority of God as creator. Not only did God create male and females differently, but He gave each one very unique roles and responsibilities. This order was never meant to feel constricting, rather comforting from the protection that this understanding can bring to relationships. When one has a clear grasp on what is expected of them one can flourish in that role.

CHAPTER 3 - DEFINITIONS

Introduction

Throughout the years, the terminology used to identify one's gender and sexuality has evolved and changed as mental health professionals and the media have given more information and attention to those experiencing gender dysphoria. The purpose of defining current terms is to allow for a baseline in communication. When discussing concerns related to the topic of gender fluidity, it is essential to begin with the same foundation of terms and meanings. Various sources were used to compile this list as different mental health professionals focus on the many different facets of gender fluidity. Pulling from one source limits the scope of terms used to adequately describe the issue at hand. The following is a list of terms that are most widely accepted, though some terms were omitted as they were not pertinent to the thesis.

Definitions of Terms

- Transgender - a group of people that is at odds with their biological, birth gender.¹⁷
- Transsexualism - adopting the role of the opposite sex genetically assigned at birth.¹⁸
- Gender-queer - a person who does not align with conventional binary gender identities.¹⁹
- Gender dysphoria - is a "term used by psychologists to describe the level of distress that often comes with the incongruence one might experience between their biological sex

¹⁷ Lynda Johnston, "Gender and Sexuality I: Genderqueer Geographies?" *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 5 (2016): 668.

¹⁸ Roger J. Levesque, *Transsexualism. Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, Vol. 5 (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), 3013.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and their internal sense of who they are (e.g. their gender identity).”

- Intersex - someone who is born with some atypical features in their sexual anatomy and/or sex chromosomes.”
- Non-binary - “gender identities are identities other than male or female. These identities include gender-queer, gender-fluid, pangender, and gender nonconforming. These terms are used by people who do not identify as exclusively male or female, or who reject a gender binary altogether.”
- Sex - “biological sex, which is constituted by one’s system of reproduction, chromosomes (men have a Y chromosome while women do not), genitalia, and endocrine systems (i.e. hormones) which comprise the secondary sex characteristics such as body hair, bone structure, and muscle density.”
- Gender - previously was synonymous with sex, now is used to define the preferred gender type one chooses.
- Transgender - is the internal conflict some people experience between their biological sex and their gender identity, creating a sense of feeling trapped in one’s skin.²⁰
- Gender Identity Disorder - a diagnosis or treatment for seemingly healthy children that are expressing their authentic gender identity.²¹
- Medically detransition - the process of reversing the medical aspects of one’s transition.²²

²⁰Preston Sprinkle, “A Biblical Conversation about Transgender Identity,” *The Center for Faith Sexuality and Gender*, no. 12 (April 5, 2020), https://doi.org/https://www.centerforfaith.com/sites/default/files/cfsg_pastoral_papers_12.pdf.

²¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Assoc., 2000), 451.

²² Elie Vandebussche, “Detransition-Related Needs and Support: A Cross-Sectional Online Survey,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 9 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1919479>

- Cisgender - is someone who identifies with the sex designated at birth.²³

Secular View Of Gender

The many terms listed above have been used by counselors and psychologists to label gender and the various issues that one can experience with relation to gender. Secular views of gender usually include the societal roles of a specific sex. Gender identity is how one relates to their given sex. The construction of gender identity begins at birth or in the womb as parents begin to impart societal gender norms. Gender is considered a construct of societal and political norms.²⁴ Therefore transsexualism is when one does not conform to the sex one was born with and how that sex aligns with societal norms. One can also be gender-queer or non-binary in which they do not align with either gender roles.

These terms are used interchangeably among adolescents as well as medical professionals. However, among adolescents there are many more acceptable terms, especially because the very terminology can feel limiting and constricting for those experiencing gender fluidity. According to a recent article in the Washington Post titled *A Guide to the Words We Use in Our Gender Coverage* the following terms are also accepted by the public, in conjunction with those listed above.

- Sexual Orientation - the attraction one has for another person, this can be connected to gender or separate, but it is innate.
- Pansexual - one forms romantic relationships with anyone of any gender.

²³ “Sex and Gender: Meanings, Definition, Identity, and Expression,” *Medical News Today*, (MediLexicon International), accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363#gender>.

²⁴ Simona Giordano, *Children with Gender Identity Disorder: A Clinical, Ethical, and Legal Analysis* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012). Accessed August 12, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

- Asexual/Ace/Demisexual - one experiences sexual attraction only after forming an emotional connection.
- Out - one who has gone public with their sexuality or gender.
- Queer - one fits into any one of the above terms.²⁵

Diane Ehrensaft, a professional in the field of gender, proposes that gender is complex, and children should be allowed to navigate this complexity freely without the limitations of society or parents. She indicates that stress and anxiety increase in children who do not have the freedom to express their gender as it is felt.²⁶ In fact she cites that actual harm is done when children are stifled in their expression.

With that said, it is my view, after reviewing the existing data, that significant harm is done to children when adults attempt to adjust the children's gender expression and self-affirmed identities to match the gender listed on their birth certificates and from which the children show signs of transgression. Traditionally, mental health professionals have engaged in treatment approaches aimed at shaping a child to accept his or her assigned gender and adapt to the gender expressions appropriate to that assignment. True gender therapy is an alternative, or might I say opposing clinical model operating from the premise that gender is not a binary category, as our dominant cultural and theoretical canons assert, but it is rather a complicated three-dimensional web. Each individual will spin his or her own unique gender web, from threads of nature, nurture and culture. Like fingerprints, no two gender webs will be exactly alike.²⁷

This quote embodies the current view on gender in many counseling offices and medical facilities. The view of gender as being fixed by sex is seen as restricting and detrimental to the mental health of adolescents.

²⁵ Anne Brannigan, "A Guide to the Words We Use in Our Gender Coverage," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2022.

²⁶ Diane Ehrensaft, "From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59 no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.653303>.

²⁷ Ibid

Gender Dysphoria

The first time the term trans-sexual was used to identify individuals dealing with gender dysphoria was in the 1940's by American psychologist, David Cauldwell. This term remained the only term used until the 1980's when the term 'transgenderist' was used to identify those that do not identify as either male or female.²⁸ In 1994 the DSM - IV changed the term transgenderist to transsexualism to identify both adults and adolescents dealing with gender identity disorder.²⁹

The current DSM - V lists the following criteria for one experiencing gender dysphoria:

- A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics).
- A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one's experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics).
- A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender.
- A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender).
- A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender).
- A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender).³⁰

In order to receive a diagnosis of gender dysphoria one must meet two of the criteria listed above and have experienced those symptoms for 6 months or more.³¹ Prior to the publication of the

²⁸ Diane Ehrensaft, "From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.653303>.

²⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 493.

³⁰ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2017), 451.

³¹ Ibid.

DSM-V signs of gender dysphoria must have been present before the age four. With the updated DSM-V one can experience symptoms later in life and receive the diagnosis. Gender dysphoria is a reality for 0.01% of the population and the majority of this percentage are male.³² Though this statistic reveals that only a small portion of the population would be clinically diagnosed with gender dysphoria, that does not negate the real emotion many are feeling at this time. A study completed in 2018 at an urban high school found that 9.2% of students identified as transgender.³³ It is difficult to determine which statistic accurately represents this population. If the first is true, then the second statistic must be indicative of something else, possibly longing for love and acceptance. If the second is true, then the baseline metric for clinical diagnosis should be reevaluated. Either way, the clinical analysis and the student self-identification are misaligned.

Conclusion

The secular view of gender purports that sex does not dictate gender and is therefore fluid, whereas the biblical view of gender proposes that sex and gender are interchangeable and fixed. The secular view claims that it is detrimental to adolescents' mental health by forcing them to fit into the gender determined by their sex. The terms listed in this chapter provide insight into the perplexities of this issue. In an attempt to clarify the issue of transgender through the

³² Abigail Shrier, "Gender Ideology Run Amok." *Imprimis*, July 28, 2021. <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/gender-ideology-run-amok/>.

³³ Kacie M. Kidd et al., "Prevalence of Gender-Diverse Youth in an Urban School District," *Pediatrics* 147, no. 6, January 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-049823>.

identification of terms, it has become more confusing and complex. The ever-changing definitions and terminology only add to the predicament.

In contrast, the biblical perspective claims that finding one's gender in the Creator's design is the most beneficial for development (Colossians 2:7). With both views being so different, it is difficult to determine which is correct. In Proverbs 18:17, it is written, "The first to plead his case seems right until another comes and examines him." With the claim that it is detrimental to adolescents' mental health to force them into a fixed and finite gender based on their sex, one would expect the alternative claim to see the mental health statistics decrease. However, as noted in chapter one, the statistics report increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations. While it sounds logical to support adolescents on their journey through development by allowing them to explore their gender identity, it may be that it is more harmful than beneficial.

CHAPTER 4 - HISTORY OF GENDER RELATIONS

Introduction & Summary

Gender relations have evolved throughout American culture since the early 1900s. The twentieth century ushered in rights for many minority groups including those that identify with the LGBTQ community. The history of how these rights came was a result of violence and discrimination, however this culminated in acceptance and the beginning of legal rights for these individuals. In the 1970's legal action and violence were at an all-time high as police arrested openly gay men and women, and at times killed them on the spot. The police pursued members of the LGBTQ community in a manner that was reminiscent of witch hunts in the early seventeenth century.³⁴

Hermaphrodite

By definition a hermaphrodite was known as one who is born with both male and female sexual organs. This definition originated from Greek mythology. This myth claims that the water-nymph Salmacis watched Hermaphroditus bathing in a pool and saw how beautiful he was. She then prayed that she would never be separated from him, and the gods then united them in one body. In recent years this term has been phased out and the term intersex is now used to describe one with both sexual organs.³⁵

The current view on gender can be traced back to the damage done when physicians assigned the incorrect gender at birth to those born without physical sex, hermaphrodites, or

³⁴ Timothy Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States," *The Journal of American History*, no.1 (Bloomington, Ind., 2015), 61.

³⁵ Jane Seymour, "Historical Keyword: Hermaphrodite," *The Lancet* 377, no. 9765 (2011): 547.
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/historical-keyword-hermaphrodite/docview/856797300/se-2>.

intersex.³⁶ One's sex identification was so interwoven into the fabric of society it determined legal rights as well as career opportunities.³⁷ One of the most compelling and tragic stories is of Herculine Barbin. Though this story takes place in the 19th century its implications for how gender and sexuality are currently viewed have spanned the centuries.

Herculine Barbin was born in France in 1838, and was assigned female sex at birth.³⁸ She was raised as a girl and became a teacher.³⁹ Early in her development she realized she was different from her female classmates.⁴⁰ She was attracted to women throughout her development and ultimately in her twenties succumbed to both emotional and physical pain due to her changing body, and was thus subject to a medical examination.⁴¹ Once the medical examination was completed the doctors forced her to declare her true sexuality as male due to the presence of the male anatomy that developed later in her life.⁴² With this declaration Herculine underwent a total upheaval in her life.⁴³ Barbin chronicles the journey through her sex reassignment in her

³⁶ Geertje Mak, *Doubling Sex Inscriptions, Bodies and Selves in Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite Case Historie*, (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2012), 10.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Nathaniel Wing, *Between Genders Narrating Difference in Early French Modernism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Spector, Scott, Puff, Helmut, and Herzog, Dagmar, eds., *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 171.

⁴¹ Nathaniel Wing, *Between Genders Narrating Difference in Early French Modernism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 20.

⁴² Spector, Scott, Puff, Helmut, and Herzog, Dagmar, eds., *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 172.

⁴³ Ibid.

memoirs that were later published by Michael Foucault.⁴⁴ In Barbin's memoirs the extreme mental duress he experienced is tragically articulated. He writes:

Lord. Lord! The cup of my sorrows is it not empty, then?... Can my isolation be more complete? Can my abandonment be more painful? Oh! Pity, my God! I tell you this, I, whom you have trod beneath your feet - that I dominate you with the full height of my immaterial, virginal nature, with my long sufferings.⁴⁵

The intense suffering Barbin experienced culminated in his suicide at the age of 30.⁴⁶

Michael Foucault, a professor and researcher who lived from 1926-1984, uses Barbin's writings to highlight the damage that can be done by forcing someone to conform to the societal norms of sex and gender. Foucault not only advocated for those that were homosexual or transgender during his lifetime, he also lived as a homosexual until his death from AIDS in 1984.⁴⁷ Having lived as a homosexual at a time when this lifestyle was not widely accepted gave him first-hand knowledge of the struggles both homosexuals and transgender individuals faced during that time. Foucault is credited with challenging the way medical and mental health professionals view the development of an individual's sexual identity. He argued that there is a population control system in place to manage society as a whole. Through this management system there are a series of subtle and overt expectations that are imparted on individuals through various paths. These paths include school, media, parents, church, etc. Foucault claims that through these paths a subtle power over life is created in which individuals are subjected to

⁴⁴ Spector, Scott, Puff, Helmut, and Herzog, Dagmar, eds., *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 172.

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Wing, *Between Genders Narrating Difference in Early French Modernism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 88.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid.

interventions and regulatory controls that ultimately manage the population.⁴⁸ Foucault focuses on sexuality specifically in his book *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. He chronicles the move from sex being accepted and embraced prior to the 17th century to the more reserved and conservative approach that became widely accepted during the Victorian era.⁴⁹ Foucault purports that this shift in stifling sexual expression has caused damage in the development of children as well as the oppression of adults.⁵⁰ His aim was to highlight the injustice done to those that were born intersex and provide support to this population of people.⁵¹ Support in and of itself is a good thing to pursue, the trajectory of the support ultimately determines if that support is beneficial or harmful to the individual or community in the long run. The evidence of his writings correlates to the shift of how Western culture as a whole views sexuality, desiring to support a community that was discriminated against. This desire is good, but the practicality of support determines whether or not it is truly helpful.

Current Legislation on Gender Norms for Schools

Schools have also adapted legislation to protect the rights and liberties of students that identify as transgender or non-binary.⁵² The following is an excerpt from the Virginia

⁴⁸ Robin Bunton and Petersen Alan, eds. *Foucault, Health and Medicine* (Florence, SC: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 113. Accessed September 5, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 38.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Robin Bunton and Petersen Alan, eds. *Foucault, Health and Medicine* (Florence, SC: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 113. Accessed September 5, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵² As of April 2022 many other districts have adopted similar policies. Other school districts that have adopted similar policies include: New York, New Jersey, Maine, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, Idaho.

Department of Education, in which guidelines and policies for supporting these students are put in place:

For many people, their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. For others, their gender identity does not necessarily correspond to the sex assigned at birth, where the gender identity may be one in a range such as transgender, nonbinary, or gender-expansive. Gender identity is considered an innate characteristic that most children declare by age five to six (Lamb & Lerner, 2015). In 2020, the American Psychological Association (APA) and National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) declared in a resolution that “all persons, including children and adolescents who are diverse in their sexuality and gender identities, expression, and/or presentation, have the inherent human right to equal opportunity and a physically and psychologically safe environment within all institutions.” The American Academy of Pediatrics (2018) also acknowledged that, “variations in gender identity and expression are normal aspects of human diversity.

School divisions are encouraged to develop comprehensive policies, regulations, guidance and implementation plans to minimize social stigmatization for such students and maximize opportunities for social integration so that all students have an equal opportunity to attend school, be engaged, and achieve academic success. This process should be informed by the needs of students, and the strongest policies are developed when they include student participation. A recent study found that inclusive policies that focus on sexual orientation and gender identity were associated with more supportive school environments for LGBTQ+ youth and had a direct association with less truancy. While the terminology *transgender* is used throughout this document, it should be interpreted to include gender-expansive, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming individuals who do not identify on the cisgender binary.⁵³

The student’s privacy is addressed in the following section:

Many transgender students undergo the process of gender transition to confirm and live as the gender consistent with their gender identity. School divisions are encouraged to communicate openly, albeit confidentially, with students and families regarding the student’s gender identity to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to determine a student’s needs and address any privacy concerns and associated risks to the student’s well-being. Protecting transgender students’ privacy is critical to ensuring that they are treated consistent with their gender identity and minimizing the risk of harm to the students.

Regarding student privacy within the school community, a student’s gender identity may be public or private, and the degree to which others are aware of the student’s gender identity will influence plans to support the student. Given the potential for discrimination,

⁵³ Rebecca Askew et al., “*Model Policies for the Treatment of Transgender Students in Virginia's Public Schools*,” *Model Policies for the Treatment of Transgender Students in Virginia's Public Schools* § (2021): 9.

sharing this information could expose a student to harassment and abuse from peers or adults within the school community. School staff should discuss with the student about how they prefer information about their gender identity to be shared. Some students may wish the information to remain private while others may prefer that the gender identity is shared or even discussed in class. If the student is in a setting where they have been known by their assigned sex at birth, options for privacy may be limited. In some situations, the student's move to a new school setting (e.g., starting middle school, transferring to a different school) affords the opportunity to confirm their gender identity with more privacy. Regardless of the circumstances, the school should support the student's need for privacy and safety and not disclose a student's gender identity to other students or other parents. Additionally, school staff should treat a student's gender identity as being particularly sensitive information that should not be shared even internally among school personnel except to those with a legitimate educational interest or need to know. When a student publicly shares their gender identity, schools should work proactively to set clear boundaries about being gender inclusive and respond to negative reactions from the school community should they arise. Refer to additional discussions in the Other Considerations section regarding the process for school personnel when a student or parent informs the school about the student's gender identity.⁵⁴

When the parents of a student are not supportive of the transition, the school is advised to determine the best course of action for the student. This course of action may be in alignment with the parent's wishes, or it may be in line with the student's wishes, but there does not have to be parental consent for the student to change their gender, pronoun, or name.⁵⁵ The current guidelines differ greatly from those in place during the time of Herculine Barbin. The question remains whether or not such extreme changes are warranted and beneficial for the mental health of adolescents dealing with confusion of their birth assigned gender.

Hate Crimes

Despite the push from Foucault and other activists many intersex and homosexual people continued to face intense persecution throughout the twentieth century. A hate crime is an act of

⁵⁴ Rebecca Askew et al., "*Model Policies for the Treatment of Transgender Students in Virginia's Public Schools*," *Model Policies for the Treatment of Transgender Students in Virginia's Public Schools* § (2021): 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

violence against a specific group of people based on their gender, race, religious belief, sexual preference, etc.⁵⁶ There are many social and cultural constructs that have influenced hate crimes and prejudices against homosexuals and transgender individuals. Same-sex marriage has only recently been legally embraced and rights for transgender individuals have grown exponentially in the last ten years. As Foucault claimed, the societal norm was one that supported the heterosexual, single-gender lifestyle. Therefore, when individuals lived a lifestyle contrary to this societal norm they faced persecution and violence. Those that experienced this trauma were twice as likely to experience increased levels of anxiety and depression as a result of the hate crime, as opposed to those who were victims of other forms of crime. Some of these victims went on to become activists to combat the violence and champion a change in legislation.⁵⁷

One particular case that made history and significantly impacted homosexual and transgender legislation involved Matthew Shepard. As a result of this horrific hate crime new legislation was enacted and an increase in acceptance has been pushed. In 1998 Matthew Shepard was the victim of one of the most gruesome hate crimes.⁵⁸ Shepard was a 21-year-old college student who revealed his homosexual identity to two men claiming to also be gay.⁵⁹ Roughly 18 hours later Shepard was found beaten and burned and later died in a hospital.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁶ Khushminder Chahal, *Supporting Victims of Hate Crime a Practitioner Guide* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2017), 3.

⁵⁷ James G. Bell and Barbara Perry, "Outside Looking in: The Community Impacts of Anti-Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Hate Crime," *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 1 (2015): 98.

⁵⁸ Robert J Cramer, Andre Kehn, Charlotte R Pennington, Hayley J Wechsler, John W Clark, and Jacklyn Nagle, "An Examination of Sexual Orientation- and Transgender-Based Hate Crimes in the Post-Matthew Shepard Era," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*. 19, no. 3, (2013): 355.

⁵⁹ Monique Noelle, "The Ripple Effect of the Matthew Shepard Murder: Impact on the Assumptive Worlds of Members of the Targeted Group: PROD," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 1, (09, 2002), 27-50. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ripple-effect-matthew-shepard-murder-impact-on/docview/214760586/se-2>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

heinous crime was the catalyst for new laws that were proposed and passed to protect these individuals' rights and freedoms.⁶¹ Despite the changes to legislation, homosexuals and transgender individuals remain one of the most targeted groups of people for prejudice and hate crimes.⁶²

Conclusion

The stories of Herculine Barbin and Matthew Shepard are some of many that incited outrage among the homosexual and intersex community. These stories fueled the activists and pulled on the heartstrings of the general public. As acceptance of homosexuality and gender fluidity grew, new approaches to working with this population of people were developed. Many fought for acceptance and understanding to support this marginalized community. Psychologists and mental health professionals have put forth the view that gender and sexual identity are an essential element to the development of human identity.⁶³ In schools today acceptance is expected as evidenced by the policies currently in place. However, this acceptance has shifted from accepting differences in one another to rejecting those that have differing opinions, especially when it comes to acceptance of the LGBTQ community. It appears as if the pendulum has swung from total rejection to absolute acceptance. Such forced acceptance is detrimental to the mental health of all students and should not be enforced through policy.

⁶¹Robert J Cramer, Andre Kehn, Charlotte R Pennington, Hayley J Wechsler, John W Clark, and Jacklyn Nagle, "An Examination of Sexual Orientation- and Transgender-Based Hate Crimes in the Post-Matthew Shepard Era," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 19, no. 3, (2013): 355.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Susan K. Egan and David G. Perry, "Gender Identity: A Multidimensional Analysis with Implications for Psychosocial Adjustment," *Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 4, (2001): 451. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.4.451>.

CHAPTER 5 - OPPOSING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT OPTIONS

Introduction

There are varying approaches to working with adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria. The secular view purports supporting adolescents in their feelings, while the biblical framework suggests challenging the feelings and working to get to the root of the distress. The secular approach validates the feelings and encourages one to live as one feels. The biblical approach teaches that feelings are indicators of a problem, not directors of one's life. Both approaches view the adolescent through the lens of love and attempt to provide the best care for the adolescent.

Secular Strategies To Gender Dysphoria

Milton Diamond writes, "One is sex and one does gender; that sex typically, but not always, represents what is between one's legs, while gender represents what is between one's ears."⁶⁴ With this premise in mind secular counselors and psychologists approach adolescents with support for one's felt gender. Exploration of one's self is essential to discovering one's true gender.

One particular approach to facilitating this discovery is through True Gender Self Therapy (TGST).⁶⁵ The goal of this particular therapy is "to build gender resilience and explore his or her authentic gender identity while acknowledging social constraints that may work against its full expression."⁶⁶ The therapist will work with either parent or child to provide tools

⁶⁴ Milton Diamond. "Sex and Gender Are Different: Sexual Identity and Gender Identity Are Different," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 7, no. 3, (2002): 323.

⁶⁵ Diane Ehrensaft. "From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 3, (2012): 339.

⁶⁶ Ibid

for the child to be able to maintain a positive self-identity especially in situations where that identity may be challenged. The therapist will also work with the community in which the adolescent lives in order to foster acceptance among neighbors and peers so the adolescent feels free to express their true gender self without giving thought to how that expression will be received. The main goal of this therapy is to encourage the development of the adolescent's true gender self.⁶⁷

Prior to beginning this form of therapy an adolescent must undergo psychological testing to determine if it is appropriate. The testing will be able to determine if this is true gender nonconforming or the result of some other psychological condition. Parent consultation is also part of the intake process to determine true gender dysphoria. There have been cases in which true gender dysphoria was not the cause of the adolescent's transformation, but other psychological conditions that were revealed through the evaluation process. It is also the discretion of the therapist to determine if there is an underlying cause for the sudden transition or if it is truly gender dysphoria. The system is flawed and there are cases in which adolescents have expressed gender dysphoria from an early age, but it was merely a ploy to receive the diagnosis and move into gender therapy which can involve medical intervention. Once diagnosed therapy can be weekly at first, then move to bi-weekly, and then monthly from there. The therapist can remain a consultant in the lives of the adolescent for as long as the adolescent chooses.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Diane Ehrensaft. "From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 3, (2012): 340.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

One example in which true gender self-therapy was successful in helping the child discover their true gender is found in a case study about a boy named Brady (real names were not revealed to protect the identity of the adolescent). Brady was in preschool at the time he began experiencing gender non-conforming behaviors.⁶⁹ His parents sought out help from a therapist and had many consultations before putting Brady in individual therapy. Brady was four years old at the time he began experiencing gender non-conforming behaviors. He described himself as half boy and half girl, with his boy anatomy at the bottom and his girl attributes at the top. Through the support of the therapist and the TGST approach Brady was able to successfully transition to a girl, named Sophie. In fact, Sophie explained that her mom fed Brady to their dog and the dog ate Brady, but Brady was dead when he was eaten.

In the case of Brady, the TGST approach was successful in helping Brady become the girl with which he identified. Brady did fit the criteria for a child that would be diagnosed with gender dysphoria as this condition began in early childhood. Brady was encouraged to embrace his true self, which was a girl and to ultimately make the decision to embrace his feminine self completely. In many cases parents are told that if they do not affirm their child's chosen gender that child is more likely to commit suicide.⁷⁰ This fear often pushes parents to support their child even if they do not agree with their chosen gender.⁷¹

Puberty suppression is also an option for adolescents that are diagnosed with gender dysphoria. This is a hormonal therapy in which the adolescent takes prescription hormone

⁶⁹ Diane Ehrensaft. "From Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Identity Creativity: True Gender Self Child Therapy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 3, (2012): 340.

⁷⁰ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 21.

⁷¹ Ibid.

blockers to inhibit puberty and any physical changes associated with puberty.⁷² Another therapeutic option is gender-affirming hormone treatment. This form of therapy is also medicinal, as with the puberty suppression approach, and allows the body to develop sex characteristics in line with the chosen sex and gender. Gender-affirming surgery is a surgical intervention that removes sex traits associated with the undesired gender and can add sex traits of the chosen gender. This intervention is not typically done until age 18 or older.⁷³

Biblical Approach to Gender Dysphoria

A biblical approach to working with those battling gender dysphoria or gender non-conformity is known as Christian psychology. This approach is grounded in love through biblical and historical theology.⁷⁴ Christian psychology uses scripture as the foundation because it is the inspired Word of God and deals directly with human relations. The Bible is a trusted and reliable source that provides guidance when dealing with many modern-day issues including gender dysphoria.⁷⁵ The Bible is clear that grace was made available to all of humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11 teaches “For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.” It is written in Ephesians 2:8-9, “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” The grace of God is available to all and is given freely. This approach can be used with both believers and non-believers. For the believer the approach begins with truth, for the non-believer the approach begins with salvation.

⁷² Laura L. Kimberly et al., “Ethical Issues in Gender-Affirming Care for Youth,” *Pediatrics* 142, no. 6, (January 2018), 69. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-1537>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Siang-Yang Tan, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 201), 295. Accessed November 8, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The approach with love and grace must be accompanied with truth. First Corinthians 5:7-8 teaches, “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.” All are called to receive the grace of God and cast off all wickedness. Wickedness is anything that one claims is truth that does not line up with the truth set forth by the word of God. As Christians, it is important to understand that the individuals battling gender dysphoria and gender nonconformity are truly battling mental illness and cannot be expected to just change. Paul describes this in his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 12:7-10,

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to [a]buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Mental illness is real, and many individuals face this harsh reality every day. However, emotions do not dictate truth. When Paul writes that he prayed his affliction would be taken away, he is expressing the same duress that many individuals express when it comes to the issue of gender nonconformity, including Herculine Barbin. The goal of the Christian counselor is not focus on fixing the problem, rather teaching the individual to rely on God in their weakness.

Gender is fixed despite recent medical advances and cultural norms. Gender is defined by DNA which is internal and cannot be altered through surgery. If DNA is formed inside the womb

and fixed outside the womb, then DNA dictates gender.⁷⁶ Genome editing inside the womb is a separate issue and will not be addressed in this paper as the premise of this paper is to address gender dysphoria. With this in mind one need remember that the issue of gender dysphoria is directly tied to life in a fallen world and a result of original sin.

When working with someone expressing gender dysphoria one should first seek to listen. Proverbs 18:13 teaches, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” The DSM-V identifies gender dysphoria as a mental illness.⁷⁷ In First John 4:19 it is written, “We love, because He first loved us.” With this perspective in mind one can approach anyone with understanding and empathy before trying to fix or change a person. First Corinthians 13:6 teaches, “Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with truth.” When the truth of the gospel is given, that perfect love has the power to open the eyes of the blind. However, in the event it does not happen immediately one must be reminded of what true love actually is. The entire verse in First Corinthians 13:4-8 describes this perfect love, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” This is the love God has for us and the love that believers are called to extend to others.

Christians are called to see the potential in a person as Jesus does. In Ephesians 1:4-5 it is written, “Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ,

⁷⁶ Rebecca Shepherd, Ingrid Bretherton, Ken Pang, Toby Mansell, Anna Czajko, Bowon Kim, Amanda Vlahos, et al., “Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy Induces Specific DNA Methylation Changes in Blood” *Clinical Epigenetics* 14, no. 1 (2022): 24.

⁷⁷ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2017), 493.

according to the purpose of his will.” Grace is available for all humanity, and all humanity was created to live as sons and daughters of the king, however, the fulfillment of this design is contingent upon choice. Free will offers one the ability to choose the life God has designed or rebel against that destiny. All of humanity was created for a purpose, this purpose is not devoid of struggle, but as sons and daughters of the king this purpose is to live as God designed. This design involves an identity that is rooted and established by God, who is outside of culture and is not swayed by culture. As those who are diagnosed with gender dysphoria or gender nonconformity are considered to have a mental illness, they are not alone in their suffering. While their suffering is unique to their diagnosis, it is not an isolated illness. In Romans 8:19-23 it is written,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

The challenge Christians face is to give truth in love to those battling this disorder. Since the fall humanity has been subject to the effects of sin. From mental illness, birth defects, even weeds in gardens are all ramifications from the first sin when Eve disobeyed God’s command not to eat of the fruit.⁷⁸ Gender dysphoria is a form of mental illness and as such a product of the fall. Therapy works because grace is extended first. The goal is not to condemn but to love as Jesus loves. Ultimately the choice to choose God’s way is on the individual.

⁷⁸ Mark R. McMinn, *Why Sin Matters: The Surprising Relationship Between Our Sin and God’s Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 51.

An Unlikely Convert

Author Rosaria Butterfield describes the inner turmoil one feels when living in sin from a first-hand perspective. She wrote a book titled *The Secret Thoughts of a Convert* in which she reveals what life was like for her as a lesbian professor that advocated for the rights of women and the LGBTQ community. She was a very successful professor and author, as well as being very active in the LGBTQ community. Her journey to Christianity was not an overnight transformation, rather one that she began walking reluctantly at first. It began after writing an article for the newspaper on how God could not exist. After the article was published, she received a letter from a pastor asking her how she was so sure of the claims she made on how God could not exist. She recalls this letter as the first time she was faced with these sorts of questions, and it was confusing for her. Most Christians she had encountered were typically hateful and slanderous so she would quickly discount what was said to her. However, this letter was different, and this pastor invited her over for dinner rather than simply condemning her. This began the journey of her coming to know Christ as Lord and savior. It was not an easy journey and she compares this experience to the aftermath of a war. She left her spouse, lost friends, stopped writing a book she had been working on and became a Christian. Despite all the trauma that she experienced from her life imploding, she describes the peace she felt through it all and still feels.⁷⁹ This is the peace that is written in scripture in the book of second Corinthians 13:11; “Finally, brethren rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

⁷⁹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), 32.

Butterfield underwent the transition from a lesbian to a heterosexual Christian as a result of hearing the truth and then choosing to live it. In her book she expresses the anxiety she felt prior to her conversion, but once she surrendered she felt peace.⁸⁰ In first John 3:6-7 it is written “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.” Once Butterfield embraced the truth of the gospel, she could no longer live her life of sin and turned from it to the point of leaving her home, career, and many of her friends. Butterfield understood what she was doing, as scripture states in Luke 14:28, “But do not begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?” She knew that her decision would leave a wake of destruction in her life, but she also knew it would be worth it. The Bible describes this as the veil being lifted as it is written in Second Corinthians 3:14, “But the people’s minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.”

Due to the fall of man and sin entering into the world the order that God intended has become distorted and abused. Genesis chapter 3:16-19 teaches:

To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil, you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the

⁸⁰ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), 32.

sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust, you will return.”

Pride has been the cause since the beginning of creation, and the ramifications of the fall have left ripple effects on the earth. However, there is a promise of peace that God gives to those who pursue the path He has laid out for humanity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who lived during World War II. He wrote about the road to peace in the context of the war, however, this quote is very real for the personal journey one must take to attain peace.

Peace means to give oneself altogether to the law of God, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of Almighty God, not trying to direct it for selfish purposes. Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won where the way leads to the cross. Which of us can say he knows what it might mean for the world if one nation should meet the aggressor, not with weapons in hand, but praying, defenseless, and for that very reason protected by “a bulwark never failing”?⁸¹

While this quote pertains to a time of war, it beautifully articulates the battle each individual faces daily in the mind as one surrenders sinful pleasures for God’s design. Butterfield describes this war in her book when she states “God saved me, but he didn’t lobotomize me. My deep patterns of thinking and interpretation were also subject to sin.”⁸² While gender dysphoria is different from homosexuality, it is still against God’s design for one to change the gender assigned at birth due to emotion. Paul calls believers to daily renew their thoughts in his letter to the Romans chapter 12 verses 1- 2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good

⁸¹ J.W. Wartick, “Reconstructing Faith,” *Reconstructing Faith* (blog), June 24, 2019, <https://jwwartick.com/2019/06/24/peace-dared/>.

⁸² Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), 80.

and acceptable and perfect.” The old patterns of thinking do not go away once one surrenders to Christ, it is a daily battle of taking each thought captive and checking it against the truth of God's Word. In the second letter to the Corinthians 10:5 it is written, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Surrounding oneself with a community of believers makes the battle more bearable. This community of believers provides support and protection.

Conclusion

There is a stark contrast between the two approaches in handling gender dysphoria. The secular strategy meets the individual in their crisis and affirms their feelings. The biblical approach meets the individual there but challenges the emotion. This particular issue is the only issue in which the patient tells the doctor the appropriate path to take.⁸³ The authority and autonomy of parental influence as well as the influence of the doctor have been silenced in fear of the reaction of the individual dealing with gender dysphoria. Many feel fear when dealing with adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria that they will take their lives.⁸⁴

A study done in 2006 on developing a playground found that children played more freely when the playground had a fence surrounding it. The architects took a group of children with their teacher to two different playgrounds, one with a fence and the other without. The architects observed that the children remained close to their teacher when they were playing on the

⁸³ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 107.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

playground without a fence. On the other hand, when the children were on the playground with a fence, they freely explored every inch of the playground.⁸⁵

Designing supportive environments for normal child development involves more than just physical elements within the landscape. Psychological elements play a major role in promoting normal development in children. But to ignore the physical elements in the landscape can be just as detrimental in developing a complete environment. Together the physical elements combined with the psychological intents to weave a complete environment conducive to normal growth in children. These ideas are woven into the master plan for the Magnolia River Ranch Orphanage; some are obvious and some are not. They exist not arbitrarily, but for the enhancement of early childhood care, education, and overall enrichment.⁸⁶

While this study was done to determine the effects of physical boundaries the psychological benefits are evident as well. The theory provides implications for how to work with adolescents dealing with gender dysphoria. When an adolescent has a healthy understanding of their limitations, they are more likely to flourish and develop into a strong individual. However, when the adolescent is left to establish their own boundaries, fear and anxiety are more likely to set in, as seen in the reaction of the students on the playground. Being surrounded by a community of believers also offers protection and boundaries. With identity being rooted in community it is imperative to surround oneself with believers that will not only encourage, but give truth when one begins to stray. This is also evident in the statistics noted in chapter 1. As boundaries have been lifted the increase in mental health concerns among adolescents is noteworthy. There is a strong natural desire a child has to feel protected through boundaries. When boundaries are removed, the effects can be damaging and even life-threatening. The Bible provides those clear guidelines on male and female identity. When using the guidelines provided in the Bible to help

⁸⁵ Peter Sumerlin, "Magnolia River Ranch," American Society of Landscape Architects (2006), <https://www.asla.org/awards/2006/studentawards/282.html>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

those dealing with gender dysphoria it is more likely for one to see fear and anxiety decrease and a healthy sense of self emerge.

CHAPTER 6 - COMPARISON OF THE TWO APPROACHES TO MENTAL HEALTH

Introduction

The theories on how to approach individuals experiencing gender dysphoria differ greatly in approach and method. The TGST theory is widely accepted among secular thinkers, while the biblical approach of Christian Psychology is accepted among Christians and some secular thinkers. The best interest of the adolescent is fundamental to choosing the method used. While both approaches assert success, only one can be grounded in truth. Truth must be supported with fact and truth must have an objective source. The Bible claims to be both factual and objectively sourced. Therefore, the approach set forth in scripture must be the most effective approach and in the best interest of the adolescent. The Bible does not address how to handle gender dysphoria specifically; however it does provide a basis for truth on identity, which is the root issue of gender dysphoria. This truth can then be used when working with individuals.

The Two Views On Mental Health

The theories presented above both offer support to the adolescent. The TGST theory indulges the emotion the adolescent is experiencing, and the therapist's role is more like a guide walking the adolescent through their self-discovery. The therapist's role is not to challenge the emotion as much as affirm the journey toward self-actualization. Affirming means to offer emotional support and encouragement to someone and not challenge any thought or emotion.⁸⁷ This self does not have to line up with the anatomy of the adolescent according to the TGST approach. The goal of this approach is not to challenge thought patterns as much as it is to affirm them. According to popular culture, true love is accepting someone for who they are and if this

⁸⁷ Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary, Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

acceptance is not absolute then it is not true love. However, this acceptance can be unhealthy. If an individual comes to therapy claiming to be overweight, but in reality is not, a therapist would not affirm this view of oneself. In actuality, the therapist would be ethically obliged to combat the lie as the individual believing this lie could potentially engage in self-harm through an eating disorder. Another example of this thinking being extreme would be in the event an adolescent came to a therapist and wanted to identify as another race. The therapist would challenge this thinking and encourage self-discovery as to why the adolescent does not identify with their birth race. In gender therapy an adolescent is encouraged to seek acceptance for what they are not, but in all other aspects of therapy one is encouraged to accept what one is.⁸⁸

The biblical approach contrasts with the TGST approach as it does not affirm emotion, but it challenges the emotion. Also, this approach does not simply walk with the adolescent through the process of self-discovery, rather it allows the adolescent to express the emotion and then provides truth in love. The biblical approach does not facilitate transitioning to the perceived gender as the TGST approach does, rather it acknowledges the emotion and offers truth about who God created males and females to be. Finding one's identity in culture is fruitless as evidenced in the rising mental health concerns. Trueman identifies reasons it is ineffective to establish one's identity in culture and not God.⁸⁹ Reason one is that it is an incoherent identity, as feelings are contradictory. The second reason is it is unstable as one's emotions are constantly changing.

⁸⁸ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 96.

⁸⁹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 163.

Christian Psychology is grounded in truth, while the TGST approach is grounded in culture and the search within one's self for meaning. The truth is fixed whereas one's inner being may change and therefore, cannot be trusted. TGST does not have a solid foundation as a result of being based upon self-discovery. Christian apologetics, the defense of the Christian faith,⁹⁰ provides solid justification for the truth-basis of Christian psychology and as such serves as a solid foundation for this approach.

When presenting the truth of scripture one must be mindful not to be condemning. The truth of God's love is grace and mercy. This love is transformative, and the primary responsibility of any Christian is to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37). One should always seek to listen for understanding before offering any advice (Proverbs 18:13-23).

Why The Bible Is The Trusted Source

Identity cannot be formed internally as current culture claims.⁹¹ The very premise that identity can be formed internally and is self-determined is a cultural construct. Therefore, identity is determined externally. The source of identity is crucial and must be chosen wisely. This source must be constant and never changing, trustworthy and not swayed by emotion. These characteristics fit the very description of God found in the Bible.

Apologetics is the defense of the faith using facts and engaging one's intellect.⁹² This approach can be very effective when working with an individual engaging in the Christian

⁹⁰ Paul M. Gould, Travis Dickinson, and R. Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 10.

⁹¹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 34.

⁹² Paul M. Gould, Travis Dickinson, and R. Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 10.

psychology approach. According to the Bible, God is the Creator of all life. If this premise is true, then only God has the authority to determine one's identity. Science has developed a theory of creation that removes the concept of an intelligent creator and proposes that creation is the product of chance.⁹³ The Bible, on the other hand, provides an explanation for how the universe came into existence that is centered on a kind and personal Creator. This information can be used to aid one in defending the existence of a Creator that carefully created the universe, and if this Creator can create such a finely tuned environment, then this Creator can be trusted with however He created humanity. This approach can be taken with believers and non-believers alike.

Another aspect of the Christian psychology approach is to explain why the Bible is the trusted source for truth. In order to use the Bible for instruction, one must trust the source. Providing the historical evidence for why the Bible can be trusted is necessary to facilitate trust. This step is necessary in establishing trust not only with the Bible, but with those in the Christian community. Not only is the historical evidence necessary for fostering trust in the Bible, it is necessary for defining truth. Truth by definition cannot be subjective, however, in today's world truth is accepted as subjective. Truth is difficult to define due to its nature.⁹⁴ Truth requires a truth maker which is a fact that makes truth true. Truth is dependent on facts that are by nature objective.⁹⁵ Perspectives cannot change or alter facts. Establishing truth is foundational to applying the biblical approach in therapy.

⁹³ James Porter Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 488.

⁹⁴ Paul M. Gould, Travis Dickinson, and R. Keith Loftin, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

For the Bible to be true there must be facts to corroborate the claims set forth. Many theologians have defended the faith throughout the centuries, bringing both biblical truth and worldly evidence. Setting a foundation for why the Bible can be trusted is an important foundation before beginning any therapy with the biblical approach. Throughout the centuries various apologists have endeavored to defend the Bible, from scientific evidence that can be seen in creation, to the miracles recorded throughout scripture.

Eye-Witness Accounts

Trusting the eyewitness accounts in the gospels can be difficult for those who deny the truth found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. First century apologist Origen wrote about the eyewitness accounts and how they are reasonable and factual. The sacrifice of the apostles post resurrection provides evidence to support the truth found in the gospels. It is unlikely the apostles would have concocted a story of death and resurrection that resulted in their own suffering and death.⁹⁶ J. Warner Wallace is an author and former crime scene investigator. He lists the criteria he used as an investigator to validate the claims made by an eyewitness. Wallace points out that the apostles identify themselves as eyewitnesses to the life and death of Jesus. He uses modern day examples of witnesses that provided damning testimony in court that ultimately swayed the jury to convict the individual on trial. The eyewitness accounts in the Bible provide facts and personal names that provide further proof of the reliability of the accounts. Wallace highlights what is called an undesigned coincidence in which two different

⁹⁶ Benjamin K. Forrest, Josh Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 618.

eyewitnesses provide supporting details of a particular situation as validating the claims set forth in the gospels.

One particular example of this undesigned coincidence is found in the books of Matthew and John. In Matthew chapter 26 verse 71 it is written, “Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” The question then becomes how did this servant girl notice Jesus?⁹⁷ The answer to this question can be found in the gospel of John in chapter 18 verse 16, “but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.” This and many other examples of undesigned coincidences are further evidence of the trustworthiness of the New Testament eyewitness accounts.

Creation

Another necessary truth to embrace is that God is the creator. If one believes that God created everything, then surrendering to His design becomes logical. Seventh-century apologist Hugo Grotius argued that God was the first cause of the universe and the universe testifies to the truth of an intelligent creator. He claims that the God of Christianity is more logical and more powerful than any of the gods worshiped in other religions.⁹⁸ He makes the compelling argument that matter cannot exist on its own, because it is without form and chaotic, but God exists independently and therefore, God created matter of which the universe is comprised.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2013), 72.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ J. P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius As Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of His Work de Veritate Religionis Christianae (1640)* (Leiden: BRILL, 2004), 49. Accessed October 14, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

From what has just been said, that there can only be one God, it follows as a certainty that matter is not a self-existent thing, but it too is God's work. And if you wish me to give further reasons: that which is self-existent must be best of all, but matter is formless, wild, savage and without force, and therefore, it cannot be regarded as self-existent.¹⁰⁰

Grotius claims that Christianity is a reasonable faith as there is credible evidence to support faith in this religion.¹⁰¹ The book of Job is one book in the Bible that illustrates these scientific claims.

One example from the book of Job in which the universe testifies to an intelligent creator is found in chapter 38 verse 32, "Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?" The bear with its cubs is referring to a specific constellation called Arcturus.¹⁰² This constellation was at one time considered to be a single star, however, in the book of Job God refers to the bear as having cubs, meaning there were multiple stars.¹⁰³ In 1971, with modern advances to telescopes and space travel, it was discovered that the constellation Arcturus is not one single star, but one big star with multiple other stars following that one, and the whole constellation is moving together at an extremely fast rate.¹⁰⁴ This truth was recorded in what is considered to be the oldest book in the Bible.

William Paley was an apologist who lived during the 18th century. He appealed to logic and reason by proposing the universe lends itself to the belief in God through the evidence of intelligent design. Paley developed a theory of natural theology, which claimed that if one were

¹⁰⁰ J. P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius As Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of His Work de Veritate Religionis Christianae (1640)* (Leiden: BRILL, 2004), 49. Accessed October 14, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin K. Forrest, Josh Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 289.

¹⁰² J. Warner Wallace, "Is the Astronomy in the Book of Job Scientifically Consistent?," *Cold Case Christianity*, March 19, 2021, <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-the-astronomy-in-the-book-of-job-scientifically-consistent/>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

to find a watch in a field, one would automatically assume the watch had a designer. The same can be said for the universe according to Paley. The intelligent design of the world and universe provide evidence of an intelligent creator that left nothing to chance. Each component of the universe was thoughtfully placed in the exact location for a specific purpose. Gravity is one example that is used to support this evidence.¹⁰⁵ If the earth was so carefully designed, could not the same logic be seen in the creation of humanity? How can the very placement of the sun support life on earth without burning up every living creature, yet the very gender that one is born with was left to emotion and cultural norms?

Faith

Despite the compelling evidence provided by theologians and the eye-witness accounts, the Christian life must still be lived with an element of faith. Augustine of Hippo lived during the fourth century. He believed that faith and education should be taught in conjunction with one another to provide students with a comprehensive education. Augustine records his transformation from unbeliever to believer in his *Confessions*. His journey to faith is found in the many mistakes he made along the way.¹⁰⁶ In his confession he describes how he felt as he looked for satisfaction in worldly endeavors and relationships. When he finally did surrender his life to Christ he was able to reflect on how each and every experience he thought would satisfy the deep longing on the inside of him only left him wanting more and feeling even more empty. Through all of his experiences Augustine found that faith is rooted in wisdom and the intellect must be engaged in order to truly see God. Augustine understood the importance of education and how it

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin K. Forrest, Josh Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 344.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin K. Forrest, Josh Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 137.

fueled one's faith.¹⁰⁷ His work is relevant in today's world because there is a lack of wisdom when it comes to making decisions, especially in regarding the issue at hand of gender dysphoria.

The crux of the Christian faith is an empty grave. The miraculous power that God displayed through the raising of Jesus from the dead is at the core of the Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus sets the Christian faith apart from any other world religion. Scientists claim that miracles are impossible because there are fixed laws that govern nature and these laws cannot be changed.¹⁰⁸ Philosopher Benedict Spinoza claims there is an unchanging order in nature and nothing can come to pass if it does not agree with those pre-existing laws.¹⁰⁹ There is a belief that the universe came from nothing that is prevalent among scientists and secular thinkers, and that once the universe came into existence the laws of nature were then set in motion.¹¹⁰ This very claim provides evidence to support miracles. By definition miracles are supernatural events that interrupt the laws of nature and bring something extraordinary and unexplainable.¹¹¹ The scientific theory that the universe came from nothing actually fits the definition of a miracle and therefore, proves the existence that miracles are scientifically probable. The Bible proclaims that not only are miracles possible but probable.

¹⁰⁷ Frederick G. Lawrence, Randall S. Rosenberg, and Kevin M. Vander Schel, *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 45-48.

¹⁰⁸ Khaldoun A. Sweis, and Chad V. Meister. *Christian Apologetics an Anthology of Primary Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 478.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cahoone, Lawrence. "Arguments From Nothing: God And Quantum Cosmology," *Zygon*. 44, no. 4 (2009): 777.

¹¹¹ Gould, Dickinson, and Keith R. Loftin. *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2018), 63.

The Character of God

The character of God is trustworthy and evidenced throughout scripture. It is important to highlight those characteristics once truth has been established. The evidence of his character can be found in creation as well as recorded on the lines of scripture. The Bible teaches that God is just, merciful, never changing, omnipotent, omniscient, faithful, loving and so much more. These character traits are why God can be trusted. Scripture is true, and God is trustworthy. Once one believes scripture is true, trust in God grows. The Bible depicts the character of God and gives reminders of the promises that are available to all believers. God is merciful and covers sin. No matter how far from God one has run it is never too late to turn and receive His mercy. God made the first sacrifice when Eve sinned. God took the like of the animal to cover their sin and provide clothing for their bodies. In Genesis chapter 3 verse 21 it is written that God made clothing for Adam and Eve out of the skin of the animal. In Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 it is written that God desires mercy not sacrifice. In Matthew chapter 9 verse 13 these same words are repeated by Jesus to remind the people it is mercy God desires. God's mercy has superseded His judgment from the very first sin, and that perfect merciful plan was completed on the cross in the sacrifice of Jesus.

Conclusion

Pliny the Elder writes,

Man, however, can do nothing unless he is taught, neither speaking nor walking nor eating. In short, he can do nothing by natural instinct except weep! As a result, there have been many who have thought it best not to be born at all, or else die as soon as possible. To man alone in the animal kingdom is granted the capacity for sorrow, self-indulgence of every kind and in every part of his body, for ambition, variance, unbounded appetite

for life and superstition; for anxiety over burial and even over what will happen when he is dead.¹¹²

So much wisdom can be found in this quote as Pliny the Elder depicts the depraved state of man. It is clear that humans, both young and old, must be taught everything. As evidenced in this quote, there even needs to be instruction even on death as man is apt to overindulge and overthink everything. If even the physical body is subjective and determined by emotion, then nothing can be absolute. Gender must be taught as part of the DNA or the body; not something that is fluid and changeable. This teaching comes from the evidence listed in the paragraphs above. Without this information, the Bible is just another book. However, with this information, the Bible is authoritative and can be used to formulate a comprehensive therapeutic approach to work with individuals experiencing gender dysphoria. The Christian faith is based on historical events as evidenced in the previous paragraphs. Once armed with these truths Christians can stand firm in the faith and support others.

When working with individuals experiencing gender dysphoria one must exhibit compassion first before challenging any of the lies the adolescent has come to believe. Jesus is not only Savior, but He is Lord too. Following Jesus calls for total surrender, and sometimes that surrender involves leaving the life one knew before encountering the love of Christ. Before that surrender one must first accept the truth of who Jesus is. This acceptance is the beginning of the sanctification process as the Holy Spirit does the internal work to transform one into being more like Jesus every day.

¹¹² Mary Beagon, *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History Book 7* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), 59.

Some individuals may never accept Jesus as their savior. These individuals can also benefit from the Christian psychology approach as it claims acceptance and love for oneself just as they are. While this approach can be useful to use with individuals that do not accept Jesus as savior, it is most effective when working with individuals that do accept Jesus as savior. There are fundamental truths set forth in the apologetic defense of scripture and scripture itself that when embraced fully can be transformative.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

Summary

Acceptance has become the norm in American society. So much so that if one is not accepting of beliefs and lifestyles then it is considered hateful. This is so prevalent in the issue of transgenderism. As seen in chapter one, anxiety and depression are on the rise among adolescents. Many adolescents seek to find a coping mechanism for their anxiety and depression and stumble upon the transgender movement. Anxiety, depression and acceptance are the real issues for adolescents. These issues need to be addressed. The results of not addressing these issues can be damaging and even life threatening.

The Bible is very clear on gender roles and the evidence can be found all throughout scripture. Numerous examples are provided in chapter two that illustrate the roles of men and women and how those roles are to be lived out. The design for men and women to be complementary to each other, and different, can be found in the creation story. God created men and women physically different as well as emotionally different. The purpose of these differences is evidenced when God said it is not good for man to be alone. Scripture depicts the purpose of why God created men and women differently and how they were intended to support each other using these unique differences. Genesis chapter five verse 2 teaches, "Male and female He created them and He blessed them and named them Man when they were created." The differences are intentional in order that the pairing can be supportive to each other.

Over the years the terms used to describe one who is experiencing gender dysphoria have evolved. A list of terms accepted among the LGBTQ community as well as therapists alike is provided in chapter two for clarity. As the issue of transgenderism is explored, keeping the language in mind is important as it provides insight into how this community of people views

themselves and the world around them. Gender dysphoria is a current mental health condition and is listed in the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders. The criteria one must meet to receive this diagnosis states that the symptoms must have been present from the age of four and have continued throughout childhood into adolescence. However, some adolescents state these symptoms existed just to get the diagnosis and begin the process of transition.

Gender relations and confusion are not new to the 21st century. As found in chapter four these issues can be dated back several hundred years. From the traumatic conversion of Herculine Barbin to the hate crimes committed against many individuals from the LGBTQ community the persecution against this community is appalling. Due to these events it is not surprising that the pendulum of acceptance has swung to the complete opposite in which there is total unfettered acceptance of one's lifestyle. Many school districts have adopted policies to force acceptance and limit the possibility of any such discrimination from happening. Adolescents are supported in their decision even if their parents reject it. Teachers are to call the student by their chosen name and gender and not their birth assigned gender or name. This has encouraged the social contagion that is taking over many adolescents in middle and high school in America, as depicted in the mismatch of percentages in the DSM V and the self-assessment given at a local high school.

There are various mental health facilities that support adolescents with their transition. The approach is one of acceptance of the adolescent's choice and support to move forward. Parents often approach the therapist first, only to hear that their adolescent is likely to commit suicide if they do not support their child's decision. Many parents make decisions based on the fear of losing their son/daughter and blindly trust their therapist. The biblical approach is

different from the secular approach. This approach calls for a loving confrontation of the feelings the adolescent is experiencing. Truth is given in love, that God has created men and women to be uniquely beautiful and our feelings do not determine our gender. Acceptance of the individual is paramount to working with the adolescent and validating that their feelings are real, however, they do not determine their reality. As such the Christian therapist works with the adolescent on accepting their feelings and also getting to the root of their discomfort with their God-given gender.

The biblical way is the most loving and effective approach to take when working with adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria. As noted in previous chapters the goal of this approach is to love first, then present truth. Speaking truth in love provides the support the adolescent needs with the truth of the Bible. Trusting the Bible can be challenging for adolescents, therefore, providing the factual evidence to support the reliability of the Bible may be necessary prior to beginning this approach. The various apologists throughout the centuries were included in chapter six to give a basis for discovering the outside support that contributes to the trustworthiness of the Bible. From the eyewitness accounts, the intelligent design in creation and the evidence of miracles it is logical to believe the Christian faith is fact based and therefore, true.

Cognitive dissonance is present in many of the adolescents that eventually do transition. They may have been influenced by social media, friends, or the social contagion itself, to relieve the mental tension they were experiencing by altering their body to physically identify with their chosen gender. Further exploration of why an adolescent wants to transition is an integral piece that many secular therapists seem to overlook. For so many adolescents the desire to transition has more to do with other mental health concerns and acceptance; and less to do with whether or

not they identify with their birth gender. A therapist should first open up the conversation to allow the adolescent to express what they believe. Create space for the conversation, allow wait time. Encourage them in the fact that changing their mind to embrace their birth gender and deal with what is really going on is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength.

Future Research

Academics could also be a potential factor contributing to the current gender crisis. For this premise to be validated further research on the academic gap would be needed. This research would include how many girls participate in courses related to predominantly male-driven careers. Also, a comparison of girls scores to boys scores on standardized achievement tests would be relevant. In 2014 a study was conducted that showed girls were at that time outperforming boys on standardized achievement tests.¹¹³ Updated data would be beneficial to determine if that is still the trend now that more and more adolescents are choosing their gender.

As many adolescents make the decision to transition it is imperative that data is collected on their mental health months and years after their transition is complete. Longitudinal case studies should be conducted on these individuals as they grow, mature, and enter into adulthood. It is important to note how many regret the decision and how many are still comfortable with their transition. Inevitably the hysteria surrounding this issue will dissipate and the issue of transgender will become more like white noise. With the way therapists are supporting and encouraging the transition it is safe to say that there will be many with regret. Therapists and

¹¹³ Wendelien Vantieghem, Hans Vermeersch, and Mieke Van Houtte, "Why "Gender" Disappeared from the Gender Gap: (Re-)Introducing Gender Identity Theory to Educational Gender Gap Research," *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal* 17, no. 3 (09, 2014): 357.
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fwhy-gender-disappeared-gap-re-introducing%2Fdocview%2F1563009036%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

schools will need to monitor this data in an effort to anticipate the mental health needs of these individuals as they will need more support than ever.

Not only is it relevant for the mental health field to monitor these individuals, but also for the medical field. Many of the long-term side effects remain unknown as this is a relatively new issue and the physical side effects of transitioning are not all known. For example, if one were to change their mind and transition back, what would that look like? Can the body handle transitioning back to one's birth gender or are there some things that are irreversible? If treatment is available to transition to one's desired gender, is it as simple to transition back to one's birth gender? A longitudinal study may be able to predict the possible burden that the medical field could experience if and when this social contagion begins to decline.

A survey of adolescents that were counseled using the Christian psychology approach would be beneficial as well. This survey could be used to determine effectiveness of this approach as well as identify any possible suggestions for improving this approach going forward. The data could also be used to compare the two approaches, TGST and Christian psychology, to determine if and how the mental health concerns decreased as a result of the therapy.

Closing Remarks

Even before the studies proposed above can be conducted, it is evident that the logic in handling the transgender crisis the secular way is lacking. Gender Dysphoria and similar mental health illnesses related to gender are the only issues in which the patient can also be the doctor and prescribe surgical transformation based on their own prognosis. The current approach to handling the transgender crisis will only result in further damage to individuals battling this issue. However, it is not too late to change this.

In second Kings 22, King Josiah finds the book of the law and immediately calls the people to return to God's law and tear down any idols and cease to worship false gods. This call to action was extreme, but necessary. This was more than just a simple decree set forth by the king, it was an overhaul and even destruction to portions of the town. King Josiah removed the priests worshipping Baal in the temple, he also removed the male prostitutes and the women weaving for Asherah. He also tore down altars, poles, and destroyed places of child sacrifice. The level of destruction depicted in this story is similar to that of a war zone. There are fires burning and buildings in ruin, this was no easy overhaul, it was total desecration of a way of life.

The example Josiah sets as king is relevant for all who become aware of God's law. While not everyone is king or queen, everyone is called to the same level of commitment when God's truth is revealed. In the case of the transgender crisis believers can overhaul their personal beliefs if those beliefs do not align with the Word of God. If believers embraced the acceptance of the current way of handling this crisis, a return to God's truth is warranted. This looks like no longer claiming that choosing one's gender is acceptable or even appropriate. It also means that believers will not indulge in secular thinking on this topic, but immediately check their thoughts against the word of God. Paul writes to the church in Corinth in his second letter chapter 10 verse 5 to take every thought captive. Thinking drives living and therefore, thoughts must align with the Word of God. Believers also must stop the toxic discourse that one is able to choose their gender. The church must maintain a moral standard and not be swayed by emotivism. Paul warns believers in first Corinthians chapter 15 verse 33, not to be deceived as bad company corrupts good morals. This can be done through not engaging in the conversation if it is a contentious one, or by simply stating that the Bible teaches God made men and women uniquely and as the Creator only God can determine gender.

The goal of the biblical approach is not to build a wall that keeps transgender adolescents away from Jesus but to allow them to experience the love of Christ while delivering the truth of the Word of God. The starting point is to affirm that God loves them, they are worthy and created for a purpose just as they are. In the book of Psalm 139:13-16 it is written,

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My 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. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

This scripture is the core of how God sees each and every individual. God's desire is not that any person would perish, but that all would come to repentance and receive the free gift of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus. In Proverbs chapter 4 verse 23 it is written, "Be careful how you think, your life is shaped by your thoughts." The Bible is true, and God's character can be trusted, therefore, His guidance must be heeded. If thoughts shape living, then thoughts must line up with the Word of God. In closing one must fix their mind on things above, on things that are pure righteous and holy in order to overcome the desire of the flesh and live the life God designed. This life is one that is full of joy, peace, protection and love. It is worth the temporal sacrifice for eternal gain is greater. The gift that Jesus gives all believers, the Holy Spirit, provides the power that is needed in order to overcome sin and participate in the abundant life that Jesus promises His followers.

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