

Transgender People and Women's Concerns

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The recent United Kingdom Government proposals to allow transgender people to self-declare their gender identity has promoted a backlash, which I believe is driven by two concerns, one of these is the fear of predatory men, disguised as women entering women-only spaces for the purposes of sexual abuse. This is increased by the worry that some men may use the self-declaration reassignment processes and surgery to become utterly convincing as women for this purpose. The second concern is that of the feminist movement alleging that this is a way of exerting male power over women, and that the hard-won rights of women will be destroyed.

Transgender people can rightly respond to these fears by saying that they are due to misunderstanding and misinformation. However a simple response of protest and hurt will not by themselves make them go away. Simply reciting mantras that "Transgender People are Women", however genuinely it is believed, reinforce these prejudices, and they encourage the reverse slogan "Transgender people are Men" to be used. (Nothing is heard about those transgender people who travel in the female to male direction). Transgender people also disrupt the "good order" of societies, where the requirement to adopt the behaviour and stereotypes which match the biological sex are enforced. The enforcement these stereotypes has been embraced by the Christian Church. Those transformations have brought the Church to collude with the secular demands of society rather than to challenge them. Not only has this collusion reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them. One only needs to look today at the behaviour of Daesh and Boko Haram to see how extreme this can become. However it is important to note that this type of discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief³.



For many transgender people the response has been to demonstrate their integrity in everyday lives and to attack the discrimination and scapegoating imposed by the Church. They are supported by the current worldwide consensus amongst the vast majority of the major professional medical institutions, which declare that these conditions are driven by the search for identity: they are not determined by behaviour or sex. Therefore the same full range of moral attitudes and inclinations will be found amongst the transgender community as in society at large. Also, because of their need to understand the gender divide, the likelihood of sexual abuse by a transgender person is less that it would be from anyone else. In addition the great majority of transgender people are not driven by the need to be men or women; they are driven by the need to be themselves. However the present focus has moved away from the legitimacy of transgender issues to fears about sexual abuse and the politics of power and sex.

It is true that a major concern in society is that over male sexual abuse (Although abuse by females also occurs). This has reached horrifying proportions, as the "Me too" campaign demonstrates. The transgender

¹ Personal Biography <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² Document available online at: Gilchrist, S. (2018): "Transgender People and Women's Concerns": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/243P-TransgenderSocialIssues.pdf>

³ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/238P-SecularScapegoating.pdf>

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communities ignore these issues at their peril, as well as they ignore the arguments by the feminist lobby over issues of power and sex. Articles such as Debbie Hayton's are excellent in their attempts to address these feminist issues (<http://quillette.com/2018/03/30/plea-trans-activists-can-protect-trans-rights-without-denying-biology/>)⁴. One expects groups like Christian Concern to have the best interests of children at heart when they apply the traditional Christian doctrine to their approach to transgender children. However a problem still exists, because the usual presumptions are made on how gender identity develops are incorrect. That has been the focus of a substantial research study⁵ which shows how harmful medical misdiagnoses have been made because incorrect conclusions have been reached⁶.

The results of this research show that every individual develops a sense of gender at a very early age, which is usually but not always associated with biological sex, and that this occurs before any other is created. Attempts to deny that identity lead to the horrors of reparative therapy because it leaves a vacuum inside. Many transgender people fight this contrary sense of gender identity with all their might until capitulation due to attrition occurs. This process also means that for everyone the development of their own gender identity proceeds in the same way. Transsexuals develop an allegiance to their gender which is contrary to their biological sex, but this is at least as firmly held as those for whom their gender identity and allegiance follow a normal path, indeed it may be argued that the gender allegiance which is felt by transsexuals should be even stronger because it has had to be fought for all along the way.

The results of this research entirely support the medical consensus, which regards both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as naturally expected variations of the human condition, which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life. This does not fit with either feminist approaches or the Christian tradition, which defines gender formation entirely in terms of learned experience and wants and desires.

In her article Debbie eloquently describes her own experiences and what led to her transition; however her description that gender identity as "merely a collection of feelings" disregards these deeper issues. Instead of grounding any argument on these broader issues, it moves the frame of reference for any discussion into the feminist camp. By doing so the foundations of our arguments about identity are destroyed. There will be transgender people who feel short changed by this approach, it does not address the concerns over transgender children, it reinforces the hurt and trauma that is encountered and it does not correct the medical misdiagnoses which lead to high rates of suicide, because wrong treatment and management methods are applied.

However, having made this qualification, I strongly recommend Debbie's article since it very fully describes the reality of the situations that we face although I do not agree with major conclusions she makes. As transgender people we transgress and challenge the social boundaries of society, and we will always be vulnerable to any secular scapegoating that occurs. If we do not face up to and address the concerns of others with true care and compassion we shall never get the acceptance by society that we wish for, and need.

It is no longer just a case of saying society does not understand us. I totally agree with Debbie that our pasts should never be denied. Indeed the variety and richness of our experiences should be celebrated and enjoyed. However we must also learn to understand each other. That is where these issues of gender identity must be fully addressed. We are not predatory men, and as women we are just seeking to be ourselves. It would be a poor world if one group of people could not empathise and support another group of people whose histories are different from our own. Instead just being rejected by any feminist movement or being made ineligible for all-women shortlists perhaps the question that should be asked is "How may we help humanity, and also the feminist cause?"

⁴ Hayton, Debbie. (2018) "A Plea To Trans Activists: We Can Protect Trans Rights Without Denying Biology"
<http://quillette.com/2018/03/30/plea-trans-activists-can-protect-trans-rights-without-denying-biology/>

⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-InfluencesPersonality.pdf> Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf>

⁶ Gilchrist, S. (2018): "The Medical Misdiagnosis of Transgender People by the Christian Church" Leaflet: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/241P-MedicalMisdiagnosesLeaf.pdf>