

The Cass Review and the Treatment of Transgender Conditions Presentation. Susan Gilchrist

Susan Gilchrist

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Background

In August 2020 the then UK Government commissioned Dr Hilary Cass to conduct an independent review into services for transgender children (The Cass Review).

However, these are matters of intense dispute.

In any independent review it is essential that the arguments of all sides are equitably considered. In these documents I question the independence of the Cass Report

I also examine the consequences of misdiagnosing these conditions

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Terminology

This presentation serves as an introduction to a series of articles. These can be downloaded using the bibliography tab on the website www.tgdr.co.uk

I use the word “*Transgender*” in these documents to describe the full range of transgender conditions. People often use the word “*Trans*” or “*Trans**” to avoid making a distinction. I use the words “*Gender Identity*” to describe the sense of identity, which arises through the separation of the self from the other and social relationships in society. I use the words “*Sexual Identity*” to describe the sense of identity, that arises through sexual orientation and love in relationships that are made. Although it is a preferred identification, I avoid using the description “*Trans Woman*” in these accounts: because the definition of the word “*Woman*” is a contested term. The confusion that this can create is well illustrated within these documents when people conflate gender with sex.

For want of a better description I use the word “*Transsexual*” to describe those who as immigrants or emigrants seek to totally cross a notional and binary gender divide.

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Dispute

The nature and origins of transgender conditions are matters of intense dispute.

The Word Authorities and Professional Medical Institutions who now define transgender identities as personality variations, which are *“naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life”*.

This is against the attitudes of gender-critical feminists, religious groups, and others who define these conditions as personality disruptions, which are *“paraphilias, perversions, or disruptions to the gender role”*.

And when the motives, timescales and methods of management differ to the extent that what one side considers to be those of compassion and concern are almost inevitably regarded as recruitment, grooming, capture, and coercion by the other, any misdiagnosis can have a harmful effect.

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Identity or Behaviour

Making the correct diagnosis is essential

For diagnosing transgender conditions as personality variations identify the cause as a search for a coherence of identity

Diagnosing them as personality disruptions presumes that the cause of transgender conditions to be the desires for a role or the attractions of sex

In the end the answer comes down to the dispute about whether transgender conditions are internally focussed compulsions in search of a coherence of identity, and the rejection of what is wrong, where no threats to others are created

Or merely the expression of feelings that are desires for a role and/or the attractions of sex, where fears for women and children's safety and identities can arise.

There is therefore a medical, a social and a political focus to these disputes.

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Independence

In an independent review Cass must equitably and objectively consider both sets of arguments.

However her decision to adopt as her terms of reference, a definition of gender identification and identity that dates from 1966 which considers only the influence of gender role: together with her similar disregard of the known effects of the major advances and transformations in neural and cognitive links and profiles affecting the forming of personality and self-identity during the first three years of life: This is even though she recognises their effects when puberty occurs

Means that the viewpoints of the World Authorities and Professional Institutions which diagnose these as personality variations are dismissed without further consideration.

This leads me to question the independence of the Cass Review, when she considers these to be personality disruptions alone.

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Back to Beginnings

Instead of just considering how transgender identities differ.

If we are to properly examine these issues we must first go back to beginnings to examine how personality and identity for everyone, including gender identity is created.

My examination of the Cass Review does not begin with gender. It begins with my involvement in the work for reconciliation in societies divided by tribal violence

Here the work of the anthropologist, René Girard has proved invaluable, not just in terms of how identities develop, but also how they and tribal conflicts should later be managed.

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Girard

Around 1965 Girard used his observations of the behaviour of very young children to put forward a theory of infant development where the process is driven by the need to seek what another infant possesses.

This is for possession in its own right. It is not possession for any other purpose. Girard defined this type of possessive imitation as mimesis. He called the behaviour mimetic desire.

This is a self-reinforcing process where each feature builds on the preceding one.

Girard also showed that the driving forces behind this process are so strong that any awareness of an individual incident or the thought that triggers it loses significance. The dynamics take over and any awareness of the cause often becomes lost

Therefore, core elements of personality and identity coalesce through the actions of strong, innate, and pro-active forces, from early fragmented thought.

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Dawkins

Dawkins and others identify a different form of mechanism which is innate and operates from birth.

In 1976 Dawkins defined the Meme as single strand of thought which competes with others in the mind in order to achieve superiority.

The process which Dawkins presents predicts a similar power and contagion to that which Girard describes. He argued that imitation and contagion in the broad sense are the ways in which such memes can replicate.

Individual strands will combine together to form memeplexes, which give the concepts of self and identity each person possesses.

Although Dawkins defines a separate mechanism from Girard. Dawkins, like Girard, argues that core elements of personality and identity coalesce from early fragmented thought through strong, innate, and pro-active forces, also dominating from birth.

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Gallese

Gallese in the 1990s suggested that an alternative form of we-centred mimesis takes place very early in life before any separation of the self from the other is made.

Because gender and other identities depend on interaction with others, they cannot form before birth. This separation of the self from the other is a crucial issue.

From extended studies, Gallese showed the physiological bases for empathy, imitation and inhibition depends on the action of fundamental powerful and innate neural forces, involving mirror neurons, possessive imitation, empathy, and the like. These dominate from birth and only gradually come under control as the powers of cognition come into increasing effect.

This work by Girard, Dawkins, Gallese, and others paves the way for the understanding I use in this analysis. That is supported by further developments in neuroscience in recent years

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Early Development

All of these approaches show that early development is driven by strong, innate, self-reinforcing and pro-active forces, which dominate from birth and only gradually come under control during the first three to four years as the powers of cognition come into increasing effect.

Therefore, far from considering the first three to four years as a time of seething emotions with little impact; in line with social leaning theories and Freudian psychodynamics, which rely on cognition for their explanations.

Or dismissing their effects, in line with gender-critical approaches.

These considerations completely reverse the perspective

Instead of disregarding it: understanding pre-cognitive development, and what happens during the first three to four years becomes of crucial importance instead

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We must also consider the timescales Involved

These on the whole are well known. Children do not exhibit an awareness of gender through peer interaction with others, without understanding what it means, much before around a median age of two years.

From this time a massive explosion in cognitive and neural capabilities occurs. In this study I show how the core elements of personality and identity coalesce from previously fragmented thought during the rapid expansion of neural interconnectivity around a median age of two years. The words “*quorum sensing*” have been used to describe the process.

That matches with an explosion in language capabilities, a unique peak period in early neural development, and the time when an awareness of gender difference first appears. The ability of the core gender identity to separate the self from the other is also needed. And it must be secure before cognition and the identification with the gender role can fully come into effect: That ability is considered to happen later, around a median age of three years.

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Awareness

Children do not develop sufficient awareness (called *Theory of Mind*), to understand this and that only comes sufficiently into being from about a median age of four years.

This means that all these processes are hidden from view. That can lead transgender people to believe that they *are* “*born into the wrong body*” and that gender incongruence has always been present. For others, gender should coincide with sex.

A key feature of early development is the existence of peak periods of rapid neural development. These extend across all brain areas. Before these periods, neural development is relatively limited, and after these periods have passed, the capabilities of those features which are most used are greatly increased, but those which are not used become permanently lost.

I conclude that the core elements of personality and identity, which form during this peak period give us the stability to bring order to life, while the freedom given to the development of the gender role allows the greatest human potentials to be reached.

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Freud

Like Girard, Dawkins, Gallese and others, Freud recognised that powerful, compulsive, and innate forces drive development forward. However, in the absence of any alternative available to him, he chose the motives of sex

The analysis I present is essentially a Freudian analysis in which Freud's identification of sexual motives is treated as a subset of the innate neural forces identified by Girard, Gallese, Dawkins and others, where the primary driving force is considered to be the search for a coherence of identity, instead of the drives of sex.

Freud also recognised that the need for this ability to separate the self from the other must take place at an early date, and he chose the Oedipal complex to describe it. However, he had to place its timing to between the ages of three to five years because he needed the powers of cognition to explain the constructs he used. In this analysis I argue that the same ability to separate the self from the other starts instead to rapidly coalesce from previously fragmented thoughts around a median age of two years.

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Summary

The existence of a stable base provides a secure framework, upon which concepts of “*What makes me, me*”, and “*Who am I*” can be based: And that may give greater insight into how consciousness is formed.

We are not clones of each other; and by mapping how development takes place during the first three to four years of life, I show that the psychological and physiological aspects of brain development act pro-actively together in these early years to form a finely tuned system in which the maximum amounts of individuality, possessiveness, intelligence, and inquisitiveness, together with the minimum degrees of energy expenditure are generated. The effects of the pro-active nature of the forces which drive early development, when combined with the wide range of human physiology, can lead us to expect that both gender and sexually variant identities would be created without any obvious cause. I also conclude that it is because of these experiences, each of us can come to recognise who we are; and can celebrate the full richness of life.

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Confirmation

The results of this analysis confirm the understanding of the World Authorities and Professional Institutions who now define transgender identities as *“naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life”*:

They do not support the views of gender-critical feminists, religious groups, and many in sociology psychiatry and psychology, who define these conditions as *“paraphilias, perversions, or disruptions to the gender role”*: Who argue that development is driven by social learning alone. So, the pre-cognitive elements can be ignored.

The recognition of both these experiential and these neurological elements of early development completely reverses the perspective: This is from one whereby these pre-cognitive elements and neurological advances during the first three years could be disregarded, into one in which; what happens during the first three years of life becomes of crucial importance instead.

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Comments

None of this can be considered without regard to the horrendous histories of male abuse, violence, subjugation and discrimination which for centuries all women have had to face, and which is still rampant today. In this examination I liken transgender people to immigrants or emigrants who cross a gender divide. The abuse of any invitation on this journey is as harmful as its denial:

And one approach may seek ways to welcome the stranger: while the other seeks to deny it. In the face of uncertainty and unknowing the pressure will always be to deny it instead.

This is not a new dispute. It goes back to the time when Money McHugh and others were using Freudian psychodynamics to try to explain the nature and origins of transgender conditions, against Stoller and the American Professional Medical Institutions who recognised gender identities to be core elements of the personalities that are created very early in life.

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Denial

However, Stoller could not adequately explain how gender identities are created.

That is also the case for those groups who rely on Freud for their explanations: since both social learning theories and Freudian psychodynamics rely on the powers of cognition to give the explanations they require.

It follows therefore that how personalities and identities, including gender identity develop during the first three to four years of life remain largely unknown

Therefore, the existence of these forces cannot be denied, and can be no justification which allows any group to condemn the views of the other by branding the arguments they present, as not being based on credible science, merely the work of activists pursuing a one-sided approach, and impugning the integrity of the people involved

And there cannot be justification for Cass's approach, in which the viewpoints of the World Authorities and Medical Institutions are simply dismissed, ignored or denied.

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Core Gender Identity

Most modern understandings of gender identity divide it into two components. The core gender identity describes an inner sense of belonging without behavioural implications, and the gender role identity arises from behavioural stimuluses and what society expects. It is generally accepted that either or both are usually; but need not always be in accord with biological sex.

This means that our conscious awareness of gender is a combination of these: where the gender role identity acts as an overlay on the core gender identity which precedes it, so has already been created. When incongruence is absent there may be limited impact. But if incongruence occurs at the time when the core elements of personality and identity are at first being created, this can have a major effect.

Attacks on the legitimacy of the core gender identity ravage the foundations of self-identity that all of us possess: That is why approaches of “*conversion therapy*” have always been shown to fail: For destroying it leaves guilt and an emptiness inside. Not least when many have been trying to practice itself on themselves for many years.

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Motives

We've seen that the Word Authorities and Professional Medical Institutions now define transgender identities as *“naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life”*. and internally focussed compulsions, involving the rejection of what is wrong, where no threats to others are created.

That must be set against the attitudes of gender-critical feminists, religious groups, and others who define these conditions as *“paraphilias, perversions, or disruptions to the gender role”*, and as sexually motivated desires, where fears of recruitment, grooming, capture, coercion, and threats to women and children's safety and identities can arise.

This examination considers transgender conditions to be internally focussed compulsions in search of a coherence of identity, where alienation and rejection are the major drives.

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Rejection

That experience of rejection is confirmed in this account where it is shown that transgender conditions are not driven by desire, they are driven by rejection instead.

Some reject the gender identity assigned to them from their earliest years. Others fight the gender identification assigned to them from the outset, until attrition and exhaustion destroys their attempts to conform; before collapse or breakdown far too often occurs. Only after that is gender reassignment urgently sought.

Here the desire is not to be men or women, but to live lives in ways that are true to themselves. And what rejection means, does not wait for the gender role to be understood: So, this deep-seated sense of rejection can be felt from the earliest years.

But for others, this rejection may only break into conscious awareness when a major change, such as at puberty occurs.

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Impact

I conclude that For Cass, gender-critical groups and others who refuse to recognise the separate existence and independence of the core gender identity, the nature, depth, and integrity of transgender conditions is being denied.

I also conclude that Cass, through the terms of reference she sets for her report, attempts to enforce a diagnosis of personality disruptions on transgender conditions, which understands them to be mere feelings caused by the desires for a role; or the attractions of sex, instead of their correct diagnosis as internally focussed compulsions in search of a coherence of identity, which develops very early in life.

Because the motives, timescales, and methods of management differ so greatly, these all must have major consequences as far as transgender children are concerned.

And that must be a major consideration in any independent report.

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Consequences

We have seen that the focus of this dispute is the disagreement between the World Authorities and Professional Medical Institutions who now define transgender identities as “*naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life*”:

This opposes gender-critical feminists, religious groups, and others who define these conditions as “*paraphilias, perversions, or disruptions to the gender role*”.

In this examination I argue that attempting to treat transgender conditions as personality disruptions when the diagnosis should be that of personality variations is potentially disastrous, because the time when transgender children and their parents most need help to manage these conditions occurs from early childhood, not later in life. And that considerable harm can be created by imposing a diagnosis that is incorrect

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Puberty Blockers

A major concern involves the use of puberty blockers to delay development

Their administration can be a justifiable action when transgender conditions are diagnosed as personality variations, but if these conditions are understood to be personality disruptions involving the gender role, driven by suppressed sexual emotions, a consequence of any administration would be to reinforce a runaway drive towards transition instead.

The correct administration of any drug or treatment must always be a balance between the benefits it brings and the harms of any side effects, so no judgment or statement can be valid if the diagnosis is incorrect.

And there should be no justification for any immediate ban or their use which relies on the diagnosis presented in the Cass report.

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Timescales

We have noted that Cass adopts as the terms of reference and evidence base for her report a definition of gendered behaviour and gender identification by Kohlberg from 1966. which considers only the impact of the gender role. This does not just require dismissing the work of the World Authorities and Professional Institutions as delusions, conspiracies, or their views as merely the work of transgender activists.

It also takes us back to the time when, along with Kohlberg, Maccoby; Berger; Bannerjee; Slaby, Frey; Martin, Ruble; and others who; using Piaget and social learning theories alone, were trying to define gender identities as social constructs involving only the gender role: with the effect of delaying the stages for the development of gender identity to ages which are even greater than those which Freud implies: and longer than the experiential evidence today now expects.

It additionally demands the denial or dismissal of the work and research undertaken since Kohlberg in the 1960s, on how personalities and identities for all of us develop. And it means that Cass diminishes the depth and integrity of transgender conditions.

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Evidence Base

In any independent review all viewpoints must equitably be considered. I conclude that the decision by Cass to adopt an evidence base which dates from 1966, with her comment that this still resonates today, and through her failure to consider any other, does not meet the requirements for an independent review.

This includes her suggestions that clinicians are deceiving parents and patients in pursuit of their own ideologies, or that parents themselves are trying to enforce the idea of being transgender on their own children

I further conclude that she attacks much of the research which supports the view that these conditions should be treated as personality variations by imposing a diagnosis of personality disruptions upon them, and by criticising their methodologies instead of properly considering the substance of their results.

Her approach to research and experiential evidence is covered in many other reviews of her report: These support my own conclusions, and they should also be consulted.

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Failures of the Cass Review

From these, I argue that Cass Review analysis gives rise to conclusions which ignore the reality of transgender people's lives.

In place of motives which search for a coherence of identity, it presumes that the motives are desires for a role, or the attractions of sex.

It imposes timescales for the development of gender identity which are far longer than those known to exist from the massive amounts of clinical, medical, and experiential evidence which is now available.

Not only does this approach diminish the legitimacy of transgender identities. It decrees that these conditions must be managed as personality disruptions, instead of personality variations. This is potentially disastrous, because the time when transgender children and their parents most need help to manage these conditions occurs from early childhood, not later in life. And considerable harm can be created by imposing a diagnosis that is incorrect

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More Failures of the Cass Review

It is also not surprising to me that Cass considers the research, clinical, medical and experiential evidence which support these transformations in understanding to be very weak.

When she uses the terms of reference for her report to impose only one unchangeable diagnosis on how gender identities for all of us develop.

When she only considers how transgender conditions differ.

When she ignores the work of Girard Dawkins and others.

When I argue, she tries to enforce a diagnosis which treats these conditions as personality disruptions instead of personality variations.

And when she attacks the methodologies of transgender research without properly considering the substance of the results.

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General Viewpoint

However, Cass is not alone in this. The principal issue addressed in account is the continued and exclusive reliance by many practitioners in sociology, psychiatry, education and psychology, on the traditional social learning and psychodynamic theories, and on motives of sex and cognition as the driving forces involved.

This is despite the large amounts of experiential evidence now available, together with the disregard of anthropometric and neuroscientific work pioneered by Girard, Dawkins, Gallese and others, all of which has been available for the last sixty years. The primary organising and driving force propelling learning and development is still presumed to be that of cognition alone: So that impact of these early and innate forces continues to be denied.

It is manifested in the failure of many practitioners to recast the concept of cognition, from one which defines it as the primary organising force that drives development forward, into one which creates order out of disorder: Until that happens, transgender conditions will continue to be misdiagnosed, with the harms that arise.

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Challenges, Social Implications and Transgender Disputes

For many centuries the criminalisation and condemnation of all gender and sexually variant behaviour, by Western Christianity in particular, as intrinsically disordered sexually motivated perversions or disruptions of physical morality and the gender role could never be challenged.

However, access to the experiential evidence and research which has become available from the 1960s has transformed the situation into one where people now recognise that these activities are instead about searches for identity; and can celebrate them in same-sex marriages and other acts.

In many cases these changes have been accepted. But in many others, where fears of abuse and reliance on traditional values or traditional theologies still dominate, the reverse is the case.

This takes us into the second section of this presentation, where I consider the challenges and social implications in relation to transgender disputes

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Resistance

Although the work by Girard, Dawkins, Gallese and others is well known and has found many applications, little attention seems have been paid to it in the mainstream of physiology, psychology, education, and sociology. Few publications refer to it: Cass does nor even consider it.

The work by Girard has found support in many quarters. This includes my own work for reconciliation in societies divided by tribal violence: However, it has generally been regarded as idiosyncratic by the mainstream in sociology, psychology and society: And it has usually been ignored, or rarely been properly applied.

Even though Dawkins and Girard disagree in many areas, most notably on the foundations of religious belief. They agree on the nature of early development and the power of religion to do the greatest harm or the greatest good. But neither they, nor their followers, seem to have cited the other in their work: And for these reason I examine religious issues separately elsewhere.

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Transgender Journeys

In this examination I liken transgender people to immigrants or emigrants who cross a gender divide. The abuse of any invitation on this journey is as harmful as it's denial.

It took Western Christianity only about 150 years to transform the egalitarian approaches of Jesus and Paul, combined with the paternalistic approaches of Peter, and the need for a powerless group to survive in a powerful society, to give Paul a bad press, and to enforce a gender complementarity in which these journeys are denied.

Instead of the core elements of personality and identity being the consequence of a coherence of identity, I show they are the foundations of it. They are pre-cognitive in nature and form before awareness exists. That may lead some transgender people to believe they are “*born into the wrong body*”. Conversely it means that it is natural for others to believe that gender identity should always be congruent with biological sex.

Transgender people form a small and often hidden minority. Many people have to rely on what others say about them. Therefore, a major credibility gap often exists.

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Diagnoses

The differences in the methods of managing personality variations are well known and are applied to many other situations.

Each side in these disputes can put forward totally cogent and logical arguments which totally oppose each other to justify their positions, depending on the starting point that is taken

And when the motives, timescales and methods of management differ to the extent that what one side considers to be those of compassion and concern are almost inevitably regarded as recruitment, grooming, capture, and coercion by the other, it is essential to get the diagnoses correct.

This is why making the correct diagnosis is supremely important, and why it is essential for any review to equitably, extensively and impartially examine and compare all of the disputed understandings of the natures and origins of these conditions. And major conflicts will occur when that is not done or is one-sided.

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Confusion

It is therefore not surprising that a great deal of confusion arises. And fear without reason is sufficient for discrimination to occur. Judith Butler, a prominent and very highly regarded feminist, touches on this in her publications, and in her book *“Who’s Afraid of Gender”*. She states:

“It is not easy to fully reconstruct the arguments used by the anti-gender ideology movement because they do not hold themselves to standards of consistency or coherence. They assemble and launch incendiary claims to defeat what they see as “gender ideology” or “gender studies” by any rhetorical means necessary. For instance, they object to “gender” because it putatively denies biological sex or because it undermines the natural or divine character of the heteronormative family. The anti-gender movement is not a conservative position with a clear set of principles. No, as a fascist trend, it mobilizes a range of rhetorical strategies from across the political spectrum to maximize the fear of infiltration and destruction that comes from a diverse set of economic and social forces. It does not strive for consistency, for its incoherence is part of its power”

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Resolution

Butler, in these comments I believe, is attacking the current backlash against transgender people now being imposed by conservative religion and by right-wing political and social groups.

I fully accept that Cass and many in the gender-critical movements may believe they are acting in the best interests of women and children, but these experiences which Butler identifies demonstrate the harms that can be created when incorrect diagnoses: which identify transgender conditions as behaviours and desires driven by sexual motives or desires for a role, instead of a search for a coherence of identity, are applied.

The analysis I have presented so far relies on the work of Girard, Dawkins, Gallese, Dennett, Joel, Swaab, Blackmore, Greenfield, and others, which dates from the 1960s onwards, and is well known. Therefore, it does not demand the use of new research.

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Research

At the clinical level this is a dispute about whether transgender identifications should be treated merely as desire or behaviour driven disturbances involving only the gender role, or as personality variations and searches for coherence of identity, which lie at the core of the personalities that are created.

No report which accepts the first and uses its terms of reference to deny the validity of the second can justify any claim to be independent.

And no report which relies for its foundation on definitions of gender and gender identity which date from the 1960s, and which fails to take account of the subsequent understandings of how gender identities for all of us develop, can justify its claim to have authority.

In the following section I wish to consider how gender and other identities are created, using both previous more recent work.

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Cognitive Neurology

This area is also the subject of an intense dispute between cognitive neuroscientists such as Rippon who argue that the core elements of personality and identity, along with the consequent neural differentiations, first arise through the cognitive interactions alone.

Against this are the behaviourist neuroscientists, including Fordor and others who consider additional pre-cognitive elements to be involved. Both use MRI studies, one group to deny earlier influences, the other to explain them.

The argument by Rippon and others who use MRI studies, who argue that MRI studies fail to provide a reliable means of differentiating between men and women, with none in children. And who also use work by Joel, Swabb and others to argue that gender identification is purely a matter of social conditioning, associated with the gender role, is disavowed by Joel, Swaab, and others on the grounds that distributed concepts, such as gender identity arise from a mosaic of many brain areas, some with more male characteristics, others more female, so such deduction can be made.

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Behaviourist Neurology

These approaches argue for the existence of low-level modular structures which are contained within specific neural domains. These are genetically determined and are associated with distinct low level neurological structures that are themselves computationally autonomous. Since at least some of these are needed to provide the instantly available neural capabilities that are required for basic functions and survival, they have to be in action from birth

Recent work at Stanford University shows that a previously unrecognised and computationally separate “*Who am I?*” neural network in the brain also exists: What is also notable is that it is independent of the “*What makes me, me*” network. So, stimulating one area has little effect on the others. And that may impact on our earlier considerations of the independence of the relationships between the core gender identity, and that of the gender role. This offers the prospect of new insights into how consciousness, and how the stable core elements of personality and identity for all of us, come to be formed. And they disagree with the cognitive approach.

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Inconsistency

It is argued in this account that gender identities arise through interaction with others, therefore they cannot form before birth.

Cass recognises the effects of these neural transformations during puberty: In doing so she also describes in considerable detail the effects of the changes and transformations in neural structures, emotions and capabilities caused by these features during adolescence and puberty, together with the processes of synaptic pruning, myelination, input of the limbic system and the maturation of the pre-frontal cortex. Yet exactly the same processes and far greater transformations are involved in the creation of the core elements of personality and identity during the first three to four years of life. And these are totally ignored.

Virtually all handbooks on sexuality and psychiatry show that gender identities; measured in terms of interactions with society, and sexual identities; measured in terms of sexual orientations, form together as part of a single complex, very early in life. And when gender and sexuality are in conflict, it is usually gender that wins out.

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Contradiction

In addition, I show that there is a contradiction in the gender-critical approach. Those feminist groups who argue that gender identity is a “*nebulous and undefinable social construct determined only by association with the gender role*”, also means that gender identity must be a choice or be products of desire for everybody. That would place Cass alongside the feminist pioneers such as Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and others, all of whom have defined gender entirely in the context of its performance and how men and women interact with each other in society

But that contradicts the view of other feminists who argue that because of biology and or social conditioning, transgender people who claim to identify as women are always be seen to seek power over women and threaten women’s identities, safety, and lives. It further means that, in place of the egalitarianism of the feminist pioneers, these groups attempt to enforce a dogma of gender complementarity and exercise an exclusion, which places them alongside, and bears close comparison, to the traditional teaching of the Christian Church.

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Exclusion

These perceptions allow only two definitions of gender: each of which must coincide with the expectations of biological sex: And it is the application of both definitions at the same time which exposes this fundamental contradiction in the gender-critical arguments. When this happens, confusion is bound to occur.

By some of his statements and actions Pope Francis for example, appears to recognise the sincerity, and integrity of transgender identities, and quite rightly condemns an incorrect “*gender ideology*” foisted on transgender people, which alleges that transgender people believe they can “*choose, change or deny biological sex*”. But he, the Catholic Church, gender-critical groups and others then go to the other extreme, by imposing a gender complementarity which presumes that gendered behaviour and the definition of men and women, should always be congruent with biological sex.

This also misdiagnoses transgender conditions, where the search is for a coherence of identity, not drives of sex.

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Opposition

Cass goes to the other extreme. By aligning herself with Kohlberg, Maccoby; Berger; Bannerjee; Slaby, Frey; Martin, Ruble; and others who; using Piaget and social learning theories alone, were trying to define gender identities as social constructs involving only the gender role, she also aligns herself with feminist groups, who both define and separate men and women from each other entirely through the ways they relate to each other in society, and through their performance of the gender role.

This does not just diminish the legitimacy, depth, and integrity of transgender conditions. It also leads Cass to identify a timescale for gender identity development which is far longer than that shown by the experiential evidence, and by what the fast-tracking of early development provided by the psychodynamic theories would expect.

In this account I conclude that neither approach on its own can be completely correct. I show that even though strong and stable core gender identities are created, they need not always follow biological sex.

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Impact

It is absolutely essential that the safety of women and children should have the highest priority. And it is absolutely right that campaigners or politicians like Hayton, Moore, Badenoch, Braverman, Stock, and others should campaign with all their might about this, and what they believe is right.

However, it is the ways in which it is used that is important. And there should never be any attempt to justify only side of a toxic dispute, by discrediting the others without reason or proper justification; for any purpose, at any time.

Transgender people form a small and often hidden part of the general population. The creation of fear alone without reason is sufficient for exclusion and discrimination to take place in the ways that Butler describes.

My approach in this examination is to compare transgender people to immigrants or emigrants who cross a gender divide. In the following section I want to find ways to break through the barriers that fear, exclusion and misinformation provides.

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Identification

The current understandings show that, although on average there are significant differences in male and female behavioural patterns, with men more prone to engage in physical violence, considerable overlap occurs.

Since gender identities are derived from interactions and behaviours, and because they develop through the capabilities and allegiances which have previously been created, it means they are consequent effects. That allows all women, including male-to-female transsexuals: acting as women with women, to pursue the same feminist arguments with the same vigour, from a stronger base. Equally for all female-to-male transsexuals: acting as men with men, to pursue any equivalent male arguments from a similarly stronger base.

Because the core gender identity can be described as an inner sense of belonging without behavioural implications, it further means that gender-critical ideology, whichever way it is interpreted, must be the less effective approach. And the feminist demands for equality are not attacked.

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Gender Allegiance

In this account I have shown that a child's initial associations, if unconscious, with personality and identity coalesce from previously fragmented thoughts during the peak period of neural development around this median age of two years. This fragmentation means that a different endpoint for every individual exists.

These same processes apply to everyone. So, the same deep intensities and profundities of their allegiance to a gender identification occur in all gender and sexually variant people, as well as those whose gender identities are in harmony with their biological sex.

Experiential evidence shows that there is as wide a range of sexual orientations and identifications in the transgender communities as there are in the general population. Thus, gender identity instead of biology should be used as the marker to guide the legislation and to allow or restrict those behaviours which are based on how people socially interact: And that gender identity, along with sexual identity or orientation should equally be a protected characteristic in any legislation that is provided.

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Children

I conclude that Cass, through the terms of reference she sets for her report, attempts to enforce a diagnosis of personality disruptions on transgender conditions, which understands them to be mere feelings caused by the desires for a role; or the attractions of sex, instead of their correct diagnosis as internally focussed compulsions in search of a coherence of identity, which develops very early in life.

Because the motives, timescales, and methods of management differ so greatly, these all must have major impacts as far as transgender children are concerned.

I conclude therefore that, until psychiatry, sociology, education, and psychology are prepared to recast the concept of cognition, from one which defines it as the primary organising force which drives development forward, into one which creates order out of disorder, the impact of these early and innate forces will continue to be denied. The nature, depth, and integrity of transgender conditions, and of all gender and sexually variant conditions, will be misunderstood: And incorrect methods of management for transgender children and adults will continue to be applied.

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Discussion and Review

As we have seen this is a conflict between The Word Authorities and Professional Medical Institutions who now define transgender identities as *“naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life”*: against the attitudes of gender-critical feminists, religious groups, and others who define these conditions as *“paraphilias, perversions, or disruptions to the gender role”*.

However, it is not a new conflict. It goes back to the time when Money McHugh and others were using Freudian psychodynamics to try to explain the nature and origins of transgender conditions, against Stoller and the American Professional Medical Institutions who recognised gender identities to be core elements of the personalities that are created very early in life. Nevertheless, Stoller could not adequately explain how gender identities are created. That is also the case for those groups who rely on Freud for their explanations: since both social learning theories and Freudian psychodynamics rely on the powers of cognition to give the explanations they require.

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Uncertainty

It follows therefore that how personalities and identities, including gender identity develop during the first three to four years of life remain largely unknown. And that uncertainty still exists today.

Therefore, it is the gender-critical groups, who specifically argue without foundation, that the first three years make little or no contribution to how gender identities develop. And who, by disparaging all other viewpoints, are instead the ones who are adopting ideologies, which are “*not based on credible science*”, deny any objective approach.

This continued uncertainty has led me to conduct my own investigation, which is described in this introduction and in these documents: It confirms the viewpoints of Stoller and the American Professional Medical Institutions.

However, Cass does not attempt to do any such comparison.

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Objectivity

Instead, Cass adopts as the terms of reference and evidence base for her report, a definition of gendered behaviour and gender identification by Kohlberg that dates from 1966, which considers only the impact of the gender role. And because she refuses to consider any change to this base, I conclude that Cass dismisses the advances in understanding that have since taken place. And that she uses this to dismiss the credibility of all subsequent research.

I fully accept that Cass may genuinely believe that she is acting in the best interests of transgender children, and that she totally rejects the accusation of the gender-critical groups, but the fact remains that, in the Cass report, the impact of these early innate forces first identified by Gallese, Girard, Dawkins and others from the 1960s onwards, continues to be ignored.

Regardless of merit, I conclude therefore, that Cass attempts to enforce an incorrect diagnosis on transgender people which considers these conditions to be perversions, paraphilias or disruptions to the gender role.

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Consequences

I conclude that attempting to use social learning theories alone to diagnose transgender conditions does not just diminish the legitimacy, depth, and integrity of transgender conditions. It also leads Cass to identify a timescale for gender identity development which is far longer than that shown by the experiential evidence, and by what the fast-tracking of early development provided by the psychodynamic theories would expect. I fully agree with Cass when she notes that many children do go through a period of questioning their gender before they grow out of it, and that considerable caution is needed before any irreversible action is taken.

When the motives, timescales and methods of management differ to the extent that what one side considers to be those of compassion and concern are almost inevitably regarded as recruitment, grooming, capture, and coercion by the other, any misdiagnosis can have a harmful effect. However, I also argue that there is a strong bipolar element to these conflicts. And that does not mean increasing the timescales involved; it may decrease them, and it need not take two years before making a decision. It crucially depends on getting a diagnosis that is correct.

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Experiential Evidence

No research, theory, theology, doctrine, dogma or philosophy can have any validity unless experiential evidence, supports it. In the United Kingdom access to this for all gender and sexually variant conditions, goes back to the 1960s, and some fifty years.

However, this detailed analysis should not be needed, since the contrasting methods required for managing personality variations and personality disruptions are well known: They are encountered in many other circumstances. And as they differ so greatly it should be easy to tell them apart.

That has already happened in many societies, where access to experiential evidence is already available: And where, without needing further explanation, it has transformed the understanding of all gender and sexually variant behaviours and relationships, including transgender behaviours, from ones which had previously considered them to be intrinsically disordered sexually motivated perversions or disruptions, into ones which now celebrate these relationships in same-sex marriages and accepts them as true expressions of love and identity instead.

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Self-Identification

To require two lesbian or gay people to undergo a medical examination by an anonymous medical panel, and to produce all the confirming documentation and certification before they could enter a legally recognised same-sex marriage would cause an outrage in today's society. And allowing transgender people to self-identify their gender is part of that same rationale.

A similar transformation in outlook to self-identification has been adopted by many people, including, in my experience, a great many feminists who are happy to accept male-to-female transsexuals as the women they say they are, because that is the way in which they interact with society and are seen to be true allies in the feminist cause.

Although Cass seems to accept this experiential evidence for transgender adults, in the case of transgender children she denies it. However, there are no grounds for defining transgender conditions for adults as personality variations, while at the same time defining them as personality disruptions when children are concerned.

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Use of Evidence

Relying on experiential evidence to provide a diagnosis and treatment regime is not unique. By far the greatest amount of medical research concentrates on proving the reliability of the experiential evidence rather than identifying the cause. And Cass has already defined transgender conditions for everybody as personality disruptions through the terms of reference she sets for her report.

There is now a great deal of experiential evidence available which justifies the position of the World Authorities and Professional Institutions as personality variations which are *“naturally expected variations of the human condition, intrinsic to the personality created, arising very early in life, and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life”*.

However, Cass dismisses this experiential evidence as unreliable: It does not match the diagnosis which Cass expects, and these considerations lead me to believe that concentrates her report on attacking the methodologies of research which is confirmed by the experimental evidence, and the substance of the results.

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Implementation

Cass strongly argues that more research is needed. She also asks that more gender identity clinics are needed, and that these take a “*more holistic approach*”.

That call for more clinics and more research is supported.

However, if this research and these clinics fail to take account of the pre-cognitive influences, and the nature of the forces which drive early development; by continuing to enforce diagnoses which treat transgender condition as desire and behaviourally driven perversions, paraphilias, disruptions in search for a role; or the attractions of sex: instead for the search for a coherence of identity; driven by the alienation and by the rejection of what is wrong.

Then that will be a retrograde approach.

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Judgement

The arguments I present in this account may be wrong or they may be right. I do not claim any professional status or reputation to maintain, or any professional accreditation for these views. Nor do I attempt to prescribe. I have never been a patient or sought support from the Gender Identity Clinics. Or medical interventions of any kind. I continue to balance the life I have built, against the demands of a compulsive drive. Therefore, it is for others to judge this work on its merits alone. As an academic I am aware of the importance of the peer review process. All on my documents have been written with the intent that they should pass that test.

However, just being correct is not the point: In any independent review all sides in any argument must be fully considered. At the clinical level this is a dispute about whether transgender identifications should be treated merely as desire or behaviour driven disturbances involving only the gender role, or as personality variations and searches for coherence of identity which lie at the core of the personalities that are created. No report which accepts the first of these and uses its terms of reference to deny the validity of the second can justify any claim to be independent.

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Authority

And no report which relies for its foundation on definitions of gender and gender identity that date from the 1960s, and which fail to take account of the subsequent understandings of how gender identities for all of us develop, can justify its claim to have authority. These are also matters of intense dispute and there is no evidence of that in the Cass Report.

By disregarding the anthropometric and neural studies by Girard, Dawkins, Gallese and others from the 1960s onwards, and by relying on Kohlberg, Cass does not just deny the legitimacy of transgender identities:

We are taken back to a time when all gender and sexually variant conditions were considered to be intrinsically disordered and in pursuit of inappropriate sex.

For all of these reasons, I conclude that the Cass report is not an independent report

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Withdrawal

In place of the approaches of the previous United Kingdom Conservative Government which have pursued policies which have maximised the exclusion of transgender people from everyday life, and who have misdiagnosed these conditions, the present Labour Government claims to seek inclusion instead. However, this Labour Government has at present accepted in full the recommendations of the Cass report.

Because the Cass Report considers only one side of the arguments presented in a toxic dispute, I urge the present Labour Government to reconsider its full acceptance of the Cass report.

And because it misdiagnoses transgender children and adults, I call for at least a judicial review of its conduct, content, and conclusions, while strongly advocating for the complete withdrawal of the Cass report.

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Access

The results of this study are presented in a family of documents

This presentation is available on

Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*The Cass Review and the Treatment of Transgender Conditions: Presentation*”: <https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassTreatmentSlides.pdf>.
(11 pages)

The companion introduction is available on

Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*The Cass Review and the Treatment of Transgender Conditions: : Introduction*”: <https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassTreatmentIntroduction.pdf>.
(59 slides)

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Other Documents

Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*Current Disputes on the Natures of Transgender Conditions and a Commentary on the Cass Review: Preface to the Series*”:

<https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassFinalPreface.pdf>.

(2 pages)

Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*An Examination of Current Disputes on the Natures of Transgender Conditions, and a Commentary on the Cass Review: Abstract*”:

<https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassFinalAbsract.pdf>.

(2 pages)

Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*A Summary of Current Disputes on the Natures of Transgender Conditions and a Commentary on the Cass Review*”:

<https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassFinalSummary.pdf>

(4 pages)

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Gilchrist, S. (2024): “*Current Disputes on the Natures of Transgender Conditions and a Commentary on the Cass Review: Introduction to the Series*”:

<https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassFinalIntroduction.pdf>.

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<https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-CassFinalCommentary.pdf>

(63 pages)

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