UNDERSTANDING GENDER DYSPHORIA:
NAVIGATING TRANSGENDER ISSUES IN A CHANGING CULTURE

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WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY & GENDER DYSPHORIA?

- **Gender identity**: How you experience yourself (or think of yourself) as male or female, including how masculine or feminine you feel.

- **Gender dysphoria**: The experience of distress related to having a psychological and emotional gender identity that does not match one's biological/birth sex.

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**Transgender**: An umbrella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present, express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological/birth sex.
**Transsexual**: A person who believes he or she was born in the “wrong” body (of the other sex) and wishes to transition (or has transitioned) through hormonal treatment and sex reassignment surgery. A rare phenomenon.

**THEN WHY SPEND TIME ON THE TOPIC?**
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TAKE A LIFESPAN/DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE
GENDER DYSPHORIA IN CHILDHOOD

An estimated 75% of accurately diagnosed cases resolve by adulthood.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decrease Cross-Gender Identification</th>
<th>Watchful Waiting</th>
<th>Puberty Suppression</th>
<th>Facilitate Cross-Gender Identification</th>
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Social support, family relationships, personal faith, corporate faith community, coping activities, and so on.

TAKE A LIFESPAN/DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE
"There are very few resources. I’m still dealing with gender dysphoria daily. Transitioning is the main secular response; healing through counseling is the main Christian response. Dealing with it daily is the reality for most of us."

- Female-to-male transgender Christian
GENDER IDENTITY CHAPTERS

- Initial Chapter on Childhood
- Subsequent Chapter Regarding Conflict
- A Chapter on Religious Faith
- Revisiting Gender Identity
- Learning to Cope
How does the person experience his/her gender identity concerns?
QUOTE

“Gender dysphoria … for me is the hiss of an old-time radio—a sound which can be ignored with some effort in order to hear the broadcast, but cannot be extinguished without pulling the plug. It has always been there, long before I understood what was making the noise.”

- Renae Madison Gage

It’s like puzzle pieces that won’t fit together. Odd disconnection between body and self-identity. I look around and think, “How is it that it fits together for you?”

- Female-to-male transgender Christian
4/4/2016

32 MALE-TO-FEMALE CHRISTIANS

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<tr>
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<th>Age</th>
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**Q: What kind of support would you have liked from the church?**

*Average age of becoming a Christian = 23 yrs*
Q: What kind of support would you have liked from the church?

A: “...someone to cry with me, rather than just denounce me. Hey, it is scary to see God not rescue someone from cancer or schizophrenia or [Gender Identity Disorder]...but learn to allow your compassion to overcome your fear and repulsion.”
Having gender identity concerns is not viewed as a mental health issue unless distressing to the person. Cross-gender identification is increasingly seen as most helpful resolution. Is the student meeting with a mental health professional? A multi-disciplinary team?
CONTRASTING LENSES

What involvement (if any) does the person have with the TG community? Online support can be particularly appealing.
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Identifies gender dysphoria as confusing the sacredness of maleness and femaleness and specific resolutions of gender dysphoria as violations of that integrity.
INTEGRITY LENS

From the integrity framework: same-sex sexual behavior is sin in part because it does not “merge or join two persons into an integrated sexual whole...”; the “essential maleness” and “essential femaleness” is not brought together as intended from creation. When extended to the discussion of transsexuality and cross-gender identification, the theological concerns rest in the “denial of the integrity of one’s own sex and an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness or femaleness formed by God.”

from Mark A. Yarhouse, Understanding Gender Dysphoria

CONTRASTING LENSES

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<td>Identifies gender incongruence as a variation that occurs in nature (or, for a Christian, a reflection of a fallen world) in which the concerns are more likened to a disability, a nonmoral reality to be addressed with compassion.</td>
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<td><em>Strong form</em>: Deconstruction of sex/gender as oppressive; <em>Weak form</em>: Highlights sexual identity and gender identity issues as reflecting an identity and culture to be celebrated as an expression of diversity.</td>
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If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

- Judith Butler
AN INTEGRATED LENS
TOWARD A DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

WHY?

- To avoid speaking past one another
- To facilitate cognitive complexity and perspective-taking
- To draw on the best each framework has to offer
- To offer distinctly Christian resources
INTEGRATED LENS

Integrity of sex differences

Integrated Lens

Compassionate management of gender dysphoria

Meaning-making, identity and community

Give us pause when we consider the most invasive procedures; seek wisdom and maturity in light of a Christian view of sex and gender.
INTEGRATED LENS

Empathy, compassion; Consider the least invasive ways to manage dysphoria.

INTEGRATED LENS

Identify meaning-making structures that inform identity and locates the person within a broader community of support, a kinship network that affirms the person’s worth and insists on navigating this terrain together.

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Integrity of sex differences

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Meaning-making, identity and community
Implications

- Do not provide care out of rigid gender stereotypes, as they will likely contribute to confusion or premature and unnecessary identity labels.

- Borrow language of “navigating terrain” and create a place for them to explore meaning and purpose.
IMPLICATIONS

- Be prepared to serve as a part of a multidisciplinary team.
- Pursue discipleship and a personal relationship with Christ; foster spiritual maturity
- Foster redemptive meaning

PASTORAL RESPONSES TO GENDER DYSPHORIC AND GENDER VARIANT PERSONS
CONTRASTING FRAMEWORKS/LENSES

- Integrity Lens
- Disability Lens
- Diversity Lens

AT THE LEVEL OF THE PERSON

- Take a lifespan/developmental perspective
- Ask about chapters
- Discuss meaning/purpose
- Offer to assist in finding resources to navigate relationships/find support
- Encourage discipleship
- Redemptive meaning
Redemptive Meaning

QUOTE

... suffering in Christianity is not only not meaningless, it is ultimately one of the most powerful media for the transmission of meaning. We can stand in adoration between the cross, and kneel and kiss the wood that bore the body of our Saviour; because this is the means by which the ugly meaningless atheistic suffering of the world (the problem of evil) was transmuted into the living water, the blood of Christ, the wellspring of Creation. The great paradox here is that the Tree of Death and Suffering is the Tree of Life. This central paradox in Christianity allows us to love our own brokenness precisely because it is through that brokenness that we image the broken body of our God -- and the highest expression of divine love....
QUOTE (CONT’D)

…That God in some sense wills it to be so seems evident in Gethsemane: Christ prays “Not my will, but thine be done,” and when God’s will is done it involves the scourge and the nails. It’s also always struck me as particularly fitting and beautiful that when Christ is resurrected His body is not returned to a state of perfection, as the body of Adam in Eden, but rather it still bears the marks of His suffering and death—and indeed that it is precisely through these marks that He is known by Thomas. - Melinda Selmys

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