

Why Gender Matters 3: What Children Need

'We urge healthcare professionals, educators, and legislators to reject all policies that condition children to accept as normal a life of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex. Facts—not ideology—determine reality.' American College of Pediatricians, May 2017

Children want to belong. We discover who we are in community through positive encouragement and reinforcement of our biological gender. That may be a harder road for some than others. We who help a struggler make peace with his or her gender help that one take a necessary step into reality.

I was a girly boy. It is hard to look at one early family movie of me in nail polish, lagging behind my brothers with my younger sister in tow. At 6-years-old, I recall playing in a skirt and being 'caught' by my mom. I was ashamed, aware that my fantasy clashed with the reality of being a boy. My mom was great. She said: 'You know, it's ok once or twice to play like you are someone you are not. It can make you more understanding of that someone. But you are a boy. And it's not good to practice being someone you are not. You are a boy and boys don't wear skirts.'

My mom did not add to my shame. But she corrected my unreality. Thank God she did not encourage my 'gender expansiveness'; rather, she reinforced the goodness of the boy I was, one who needed to make peace his gender. That included accepting good restraints like not crossdressing! Gently directing a child away from what will make it difficult for him or her to adjust to reality is love, pure and simple.

Sadly, we throw kids under the bus when we mistake their opposite-sex impersonations as some kind of ultimate reality for them. In a recent third grade classroom, the teacher introduced a girl to the class 'who had become a boy.' She (the teacher) insisted in a loving manner that the whole class embrace 'Tom because that is who he truly is now.' Anything short of that, added the teacher, was unloving as it rejected Tom's true self.

A friend of mine's daughter came home and recounted the incident to her mother. She was a Christian little girl who had been taught her whole life that love was the highest good. She became visibly distress when her mother gently pointed out that one might best love 'Tom' by realizing that she is sad and confused but not really a boy as it is impossible to change one's gender. The mother brought up how God made us as either male or female, and though that can be hard for some to live out, we cannot change who He created us to be.

Her daughter escalated emotionally—here was a Kingdom clash, two dueling views of love, acceptance and identity--too much for an 8-year-old to wholly grasp! Mom kindly gave her daughter space then she and her husband spent some time with her reading the Bible, praying, while intending to continue the conversation at another time. Their commitment is for their daughter to live in Love's reality. So should it be for all of us who value human freedom.

'Father, forgive us for denying reality in the face of another's confusion. Continue to teach us what love is, as we accompany persons who are caught in the crossfire of false freedoms. We pray especially for children who need loving parents and other caregivers to help them integrate their gender value.'