

How to Love a Vulnerable Friend: Responding to the 'Transgendered'

First, thank you for your commitment to your friend. Sometimes devout, energized persons like you can help prevent an already vulnerable soul from doing further injury. I realize your friend is on the verge of doing just that by pursuing gender reassignment surgery.

Gender is not a product of the mind; it is a fact of our birth. To be sure, your friend has a deep conflict with his or her true gender self, for which one must only be compassionate. Such compassion flows from the truth. Your friend has a gender self and to be at odds with that truth is a serious affliction. Your advocacy may help him or her to begin to resolve this identity confusion in the right way.

Your friend is not hearing the truth today, only pretty lies. To paraphrase Dr. Paul McHugh, the idea that gender is a matter of choice remains unquestioned in our culture and is utterly without scientific foundation. Studies reveal that in spite of terrific costs to all family members, gender reassignment surgery does not result in happiness but the same or worse mental health conditions than existed before the surgery, including drug addictions, psychotic disorders and the risk of suicide.

Your friend is vulnerable to robbers, and needs understanding and inspired care. This is a person who looks in the mirror and hates the reflection. He or she believes that self-acceptance lies in becoming the other gender. Wrong. I have worked with several persons whose 'fantasy gender selves' arose in response to profound distress. Their fantasy selves became the prison. It is a joyful labor of love to accompany the gender afflicted out of unreality and into the truth of their real selves.

Spiritual and emotional intervention makes sense. Why? We cannot change our genders. Guess what? Bruce Jenner is still a man! The only real choice we have is to make peace with the gender of our birth. Nevertheless, we must recognize that our gender identities (the psychological adjustment we make to our gender) are subject to profound frustration. We may feel chronically inadequate to master certain 'gender' tasks, or experience repulsion over one's body type combined with a persistent desire to have different body traits.

The gender-afflicted need inspired therapy, not surgery. It is cruel to subject a vulnerable soul to knives and implants and alien hormones. We do not 'cure' an anorexic by exercising fat from her body because she feels fat any more than we 'cure' a man who feels like a woman by cutting off his penis. We help him make peace with his intrinsic manhood, just as we help the anorexic adjust to a true body image.

Your friend is imprisoned by the lie that 'feelings' can and should determine biological gender.

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Wrong. God determines our gender and we must work that out in fear and trembling. Yes Jesus is the door that swings out from the prison and yes we must open it. Praise Him—we can do so in the light of Divine Mercy and merciful friends like you.

For this transformation, we need entire faith communities. I would suggest that you check out our offerings at Desert Stream/Living Waters (desertstream.org), the national Restored Hope Network of ministries (restoredhopenetwork.org), and the international network of Courage (couragerc.org). Please stay in touch. If your friend and family want to come out and meet with some of our staff, please let us know.

Andrew