

Raising Gender Healthy Kids

Emotionally healthy children who grow up to be emotionally healthy adults are comfortable in their own skin, in the gender God chose for them. These days, when a child shows non-stereotypical gender behavior, people start to freak out, afraid that their child is actually the opposite sex on the inside.

Good news! There are things parents can do to raise gender healthy kids, girls who are content to be girls and boys who are glad to be boys. Without resorting to artificial stereotypes, either.

First, loosen up your expectations of what boys and girls should be like. A friend of mine now in college was recently exasperated when the instructor taught that “Little girls play with dolls and wear dresses.” Carol shot back, “I was NEVER like that!” My friend preferred to climb trees and ride her skateboard, and absolutely hated it when her grandmother tried to teach her to make gravy because “that’s what girls do.” And it really irritated her that her brothers never had to do any kitchen work because “boys don’t do that sort of thing.” Narrow gender stereotypes don’t honor the creativity of the God who makes varieties of girls and boys on a femininity spectrum and a masculinity spectrum (my blog post on [the Gender Spectrum](#) has been helpful to a lot of people; please read it!).

When parents can relax about the kind of boy or the kind of girl they have, it is easier to support and encourage children according to the way God designed them. Some boys are not the rough-and-tumble, athletic type; they are born emotionally sensitive, more relational than most boys, often creative and artistic. I know one little boy who pretty much danced out of the womb, and has been dancing ever since. That’s his gift, his divine design. His family loves it, loves him, and

supports him fully. Some girls just aren't the girly-girl type; they are natural athletes and gravitate toward more classically masculine interests, but God intended them to be more of the tomboy feminine. Like my friend Carol.

Second, cultivate warm, affectionate, respectful relationships in your family—between husband and wife, between mom and children, and between dad and children. Emotionally healthy, gender healthy kids are grounded in the security of parents who love each other and their children. A hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent is the biggest contributing factor to a later development of homosexuality, but there are other forms of brokenness that can also arise from hurtful family relationships.

Third, appreciate the different contributions from mothers and fathers. God created the complementarity of male and female (Gen. 1:27) for our good and for His glory. Moms and dads are not interchangeable, which is why He intended for families to be led by a mother and a father.

Here are some suggestions from Ricky Chelette, my esteemed colleague at Living Hope Ministries, who has been helping parents deal with gender issues for decades, my friend Anne Paulk, author of *Restoring Sexual Identity* . . . and from me:

Fathers and Sons

- Strongly connect with your son at an early age.
- Affirm the son's identity as a boy.
- Take interest in him and his interest(s). Be his #1 fan.
- Demonstrate love by word and deed. He needs to hear you say "I love you, son."
- Love his mother and assure her security and safety.
- Powerful affirmation: "You're good enough, you're strong enough, and you have what it takes."
- Always give affirmation, attention, and affection ([The "Three As"](#))

- Don't feel rejected by the mother/child relationship.
- Draw out your son ("Hey, let's be guys together!").
- Show him what maleness is.
- Do things together. Even a trip to the grocery store or Home Depot counts.
- Cultivate a habit of "thumbs-up" attitude of affirmation. Look for things to affirm.
- When he doesn't get it right, don't dismiss him and send him to Mom.
- Encourage and affirm "be-like-Dad" behavior.
- Be physical. Boys need safe male touch.
- When giving hugs, let kids (both boys and girls) pull away first.

Mothers and Sons

- Push your son towards his father and encourage their relationship.
- Affirm your son's masculinity.
- Point out the differences between you and him, between him and his sisters, etc.
- Allow for emotional distance and independence. Don't try to keep him bound to you like a baby.
- Demonstrate positive, safe touch with him (not just spankings).
- Love and respect his father.
- Bring other boys into the home and encourage connections with other boys.
- Reinforce the father's role.
- Tell him that being a boy is wonderful, and you're glad God made him a boy!
- Build up the similarities to his daddy.
- Refuse to diminish the glory of the father/son relationship; don't get in the middle of it.
- Affirm what is valuable in your son's father so your son can model it.
- Nurture and comfort with empathy, but allow your husband to

nurture differently (aggression nurturing), such as “Hop up, you’re OK.” Boys need to learn to develop a thicker skin from their dads.

- Don’t insist that he look you in the eyes when you’re having a difficult conversation (except when it’s time to apologize). It’s especially threatening and painful for most boys. Take a walk or drive with him where you are shoulder to shoulder, or talk to him in dim lighting (such as bedtime), to encourage him to open up to you.

Fathers and Daughters

- Love and build up your wife, and make sure she feels secure and safe.

- Affirm your daughter’s femininity with words and deeds.

- Be your daughter’s “protector.”

- Tell her she is loved and beautiful 3X more than you think is necessary.

- Love and serve her. Set the bar high for the man she will marry.

- Girls are tactile. Touch is the key to your daughter’s heart. Appropriate touch is SO powerful and necessary.

- Girls are verbal, so words are also very powerful. They need to hear words of affirmation more often than boys.

Mothers and Daughters

- Respect and honor your husband.

- Affirm your daughter’s femininity.

- Show her what strength and nurture together look like.

- Love your daughter, don’t compete with her.

- Do girly things together early and often. She needs to learn to be a girl from you.

- Communicate feelings, not weakness.

- Continually develop and demonstrate a healthy relationship /romance with your husband.

- Be confident so she can admire you.

- Stand up for what is right in godly femininity, in the family and in the world.
- Demonstrate biblical femininity: relational, nurturing, vulnerable, responsive, and beauty (for an excellent article on this, read [A Real Woman: Defining Biblical Femininity](#) on the Living Hope website.
- Pursue contentment; enjoy life where you are right now.
- Model Christlike submission to God, husband, authorities.

And finally: pray, pray, pray for your children!

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What I'd Love to Say to Bruce Jenner

In Bruce Jenner's recent TV interview with Diane Sawyer, the world-famous former athlete disclosed that "For all intents and purposes, I am a woman." He's being widely praised as a courageous hero for normalizing the T in LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender).

I have a few thoughts I would love to share with him over a cup of coffee:

Bruce, you said you've known since you were young that you felt a mismatch between your insides and your outsides: "My brain is much more female than it is male . . . that's what my soul is." I have no doubt this was confusing for you, as a boy so clearly athletically gifted.

May I share a different interpretation of your experience?

Most people think there is a single [gender spectrum](#) or continuum that runs from masculinity to femininity. Since God's Word says that in the beginning, He created humankind male and female (Genesis 1:27), I think there is one spectrum for masculinity and a separate spectrum for femininity, and God chooses what kind of masculine or feminine each baby starts out as. On one end of the masculinity spectrum are the rough-and-tumble, athletic boys who tend to emotional insensitivity—the ones often called “All-American boys.” On the other end, equally masculine albeit a different kind of masculinity, are the creative, artistic, musical, emotionally sensitive boys. Boys and men can be anywhere along that spectrum. And with emotional and especially spiritual growth, they can start taking up more bandwidth. The athletic ones can learn to listen well and show empathy to others; the sensitive ones can learn to be more comfortable with their bodies and feel more like they actually belong to the world of males.

Some, like you, are given the rare gift of possessing almost the whole spectrum at once (like Jesus, I think—a “man's man” who drew other men to Himself, and the ultimate in creative, artistic and sensitive, since He was the Creator of the universe, of sunsets, and of women!). You were crazy-gifted physically, becoming arguably the world's best athlete in the 1976 Olympics. And at the same time, you said that you believed God gave you “the soul of a female.”

I don't think your creative, sensitive soul is that of a female, but of a sensitive, gifted kind of male. This was understood better in earlier days. During the Civil War, General Joshua Chamberlain showed uncommon courage and leadership during the battle of Gettysburg, complemented by deep compassion and respect for others. He would walk the battlefield, seeking out and caring for the casualties. He sat down with the wounded General Sickles to try and cheer him up, who whispered, “General, you have the soul of the lion and the

heart of the woman." Chamberlain, clearly honored by this praise, returned the blessing to the one who gave it.

Bruce, I don't think God gave you the soul of a female. I think He gave you a body and soul very much like His Son. I think it would be fair to say you have the soul of the lion and the heart of the woman, and that does not detract one whit from your masculinity.

One Christian to another, I want to encourage you to develop an eternal perspective rather than only thinking about the here-and-now earthly life. In your interview, you said, "I couldn't take the walls constantly closing in on me. If I die. . . I'd be so mad at myself that I didn't explore that side of me." But the end of your earthly life is only the last step before entering the glory of eternity. We need to always put more weight on the unseen and eternal rather than the seen and temporal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Your unhappiness with your gender identity qualifies as "momentary, light affliction" according to the standard God uses. You will spend the rest of your (eternal) life in your new body, a resurrection body similar to the Lord Jesus'. God chose for you to be male, just as His Son was male, and is still male. So will you be, for all eternity. That should help put your earthly life into perspective.

Bruce, I say this really, really gently: your sense that you are male on the outside and female on the inside is an error of thinking and feeling, not an error based in reality. Dr. Paul McHugh is the psychiatrist who shut down the sex-change surgery program at Johns Hopkins University because they discovered that patients were actually no better off after surgery. According to Dr. McHugh, those who identify as transgender, like you, are like the 78-pound anorexic girl who

looks in the mirror and sees a morbidly obese cow. It's your *thinking* that needs to be adjusted, not your body. You look in the mirror with your male eyes in a male body, a body that has fathered six children, and you say, "I am really a female." But Bruce, you're not. God chose to create you as a male. He made you to be a man.

Like the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, brother, you are fooling yourself. You can't change your gender, you can only amputate perfectly healthy, functioning organs and tissue. If you move forward with surgery and continued hormone treatments, everyone will always know that you are Bruce Jenner The Once-Uber Male Athlete, trying to look like a woman.

I recently learned from a computer animator that due to the different bone structures of males and females, men can never walk like women because your hips don't move like ours do—male hips and pelvis were not created for pregnancy and childbirth. It's yet another evidence that true sex change is not biologically possible.

Please, Bruce, before going any further down this path, talk to those who have gone down the path you are on, and who deeply regret it. People like Walt Heyer of sexchangeretret.com. People like the very tall female-looking man who told me through tears, in a very long conversation, that he would give anything to go back to the day before his surgery because he now feels like a fraud.

Bruce, our Bible says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Since God chose to give you the gift of maleness, and He calls you to be a good steward of every gift He places in your hand (1 Corinthians 4:2), please reconsider how you can reject His gift of masculinity to the glory of God.

You can have “the soul of the lion and the heart of the woman”—and be the man God made you to be.

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Arguments Against Abortion

Kerby Anderson helps us understand that concerns about abortion are more than just a fundamentalist backlash. He reviews arguments from a Christian, biblical perspective and then introduces arguments from medical, legal and philosophical points of views as well. He concludes, “The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.”

Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

In this essay we will be discussing arguments against abortion. The first set of arguments we will consider are biblical arguments.

That being said, we must begin by acknowledging that the Bible doesn't say anything about abortion directly. Why the silence of the Bible on abortion? The answer is simple. Abortion was so unthinkable to an Israelite woman that there was no need to even mention it in the criminal code. Why was abortion an unthinkable act? First, children were viewed as a gift or heritage from the Lord. Second, the Scriptures state—and the Jews concurred—that God opens and closes the womb and is

sovereign over conception. Third, childlessness was seen as a curse.

One of the key verses to understand in developing a biblical view of the sanctity of human life is Psalm 139. This psalm is the inspired record of David's praise for God's sovereignty in his life. He begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows what David is doing at any given point in time. He goes on to acknowledge that God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might go, he cannot escape from God, whether he travels to heaven or ventures into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. Finally David contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (vv. 13-16).

Here David speaks of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn't speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David: this is David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

In verse 13, we see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14 and 15, David reflects on the fact that he is a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praises God for how wonderfully God has woven him together.

David draws a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he refers to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion harkens back to Genesis 2:7 which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also notes that "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated *unformed substance* is a noun derivative of a verb meaning "to roll up." When David was just forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion already extended to him. The reference to "God's eyes" is an Old Testament term used to connote divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or group of people.

Next, we will consider additional Old Testament passages that provide a biblical argument against abortion.

Additional Old Testament Arguments Against Abortion

Now that we've looked at Psalm 139, the most popular argument against abortion, let's look at two other Old Testament passages.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. It was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). David concludes that from his time of conception, he had a sin nature. This would imply that he carried the image of God from the moment of conception, including the marred image scarred from sin.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Bearing the image of God is the

essence of humanness. And though God's image in man was marred at the Fall, it was not erased (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9). Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and therefore fully human in God's sight.

This verse also provides support for what is called the traducian view of the origin of the soul. According to this perspective, human beings were potentially in Adam (Rom. 5:12, Heb. 7:9-10) and thus participated in his original sin. The "soulish" part of humans is transferred through conception. Therefore, an unborn baby is morally accountable and thus fully human.

Another argument against abortion can be found in the Old Testament legal code, specifically Exodus 21:22-25.

If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

The verses appear to teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies then the law of retaliation (lex talionis) should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb has the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some commentators have come to a different conclusion because they believe the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they argue that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born.

There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, the normal Hebrew word for *miscarry* is not used in this passage (cf. Gen. 31:38; Exod. 23:26; Job 2:10; Hos. 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in verse 22 is a premature birth not an accidental miscarriage. Second, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, the passage cannot be used to justify abortion. The injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Also, the action was a criminal offense and punishable by law.

Medical Arguments Against Abortion

Thus far in our discussion we have looked at biblical arguments against abortion. But what if someone doesn't believe in the Bible? Are there other arguments we can use? Yes, there are: medical arguments, for example. Let's look, then, at some of the medical arguments against abortion.

The medical arguments against abortion are compelling. For example, *at conception the embryo is genetically distinct from the mother*. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother. A developing embryo is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another set of medical arguments against abortion surround *the definition of life and death*. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could they also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb.

If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus in about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a majority of abortions.

Opponents to abortion also raise the controversial issue of fetal pain. Does the fetus feel pain during abortion? The evidence seems fairly clear and consistent. Consider this statement made in a British medical journal: "Try sticking an infant with a pin and you know what happens. She opens her mouth to cry and also pulls away. Try sticking an 8-week-old human fetus in the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth and pulls his hand away. A more technical description would add that changes in heart rate and fetal movement also suggest that intrauterine manipulations are painful to the fetus."[\[1\]](#)

Obviously, other medical criteria could be used. For example, the developing fetus has a unique set of fingerprints as well as genetic patterns that make it unique. The development of sonography has provided us with a "window to the womb" showing us that a person is growing and developing in the mother's womb. We can discern eyes, ears, fingers, a nose, and a mouth. Our visual senses tell us this is a baby growing and maturing. This is not a piece of protoplasm; this is a baby inside the womb.

The point is simple. *Medical science leads to a pro-life perspective rather than a pro-choice perspective.* If medical science can be used at all to draw a line, the clearest line is at the moment of conception. Medical arguments provide a strong case against abortion and for life.

Legal Arguments Against Abortion

At this point in our discussion, we need to look at legal arguments against abortion.

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. It violated standard legal reasoning. The Supreme Court decided not to decide when life begins and then turned around and overturned the laws of 50 different states.

Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous. It overturned state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 30 million abortions (roughly the population of Canada) in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by acknowledging that it did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then it should have acted "as if" life was in the womb. A crucial role of government is to protect life. Government cannot remove a segment of the human population from its protection without adequate justification.

The burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. Put another way: "when in doubt, don't." A hunter who hears rustling in the bushes shouldn't fire until he knows what is in the bushes. Likewise, a Court which doesn't know when life begins, should not declare open season on the unborn.

The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence. The defendant is assumed to be innocent unless proven guilty. Again the burden of proof is on the entity that would take away life or liberty. The benefit of the doubt lies with the defense.

The Supreme Court clearly stated that it does not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal principle by acting as if it just proved that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamental Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Just as there are solid medical arguments against abortion, so also there are legal arguments against abortion. *Roe vs. Wade* was a bad decision that needs to be overturned.

Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion

Finally, we will conclude our discussion by looking at philosophical arguments against abortion.

A third set of arguments against abortion would be philosophical arguments. A key philosophical question is where do you draw the line? Put another way, when does a human being become a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Ethicist Paul Ramsey frequently warned that any argument for abortion could logically be also used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, of DNA fame, demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal

Nature that if “a child were considered to be legally born when two days old, it could be examined to see whether it was an ‘acceptable member of human society.’” Obviously this is not only an argument for abortion; it’s an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, “A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural influences later.” Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

More recently some line-drawers have focused on a mental criterion for personhood. Dr. Joseph Fletcher argues in his book *Humanhood* that “Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are.” This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it’s adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ. In other writings, Joseph Fletcher suggested that an “individual” was not truly a “person” unless he has an IQ of at least 40.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Obviously there are a number of biblical arguments against abortion. But there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

Endnote

1. H.P. Valman and J. F. Pearson, What the Fetus Feels, *British Medical Journal* (26 January 1980): 233-234.

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Note from Kerby Anderson:

So many people ask for more information on abortion; I suggest you check out the Abortion Facts Web site at www.abortionfacts.com.

Abortion: A Biblical View

Sue Bohlin takes a hard look at abortion from a biblical perspective. Her Christian viewpoint focuses on the Bible's perspective on the source and sanctity of life while understanding the emotions many women face.

Why Abortion is So Volatile

Abortion is one of the most divisive and controversial issues of our day. People generally have strong views about abortion. It is not a social issue of mere preference, but an issue about life and death.

Abortion draws out the clashes between two divergent world views. The humanistic worldview says, "Man is the highest standard there is. You don't answer to anyone, so do whatever you want." The Christian worldview says, "We answer to God, and He has commanded us not to murder. We must always submit our desires and preferences to the authority of His word."

I believe that the *real* reason that we see such emotional, tenacious commitment to the availability of abortion goes even deeper than the issue of abortion: people want sexual freedom without consequences.

Our culture has a definite agenda supporting any and all sexual expression. It's difficult to find a new movie, or a successful TV show, or a popular song, that doesn't embrace this view of sex. When the director of a Crisis Pregnancy

Center in Dallas offered a school district a presentation supporting abstinence till marriage, the district turned her down. Their own presentation featured birth control devices, and they couldn't let her talk about self-control one day if they were going to sell the kids on condoms the next.

As a society, we are amazingly schizophrenic about this sort of thing. My son, who was born in 1982, is a *de facto* member of what they're calling the "Smokefree Class of 2000." No one bats an eye at this worthy national goal of graduating an entire class of non-smokers, but people laugh derisively at the thought of kids not having sex. Which is easier to get, a sex partner or a cigarette?

Teenagers are becoming more and more open about the fact that they are having sex, and this is a reflection of the sexual mores they see in movies, on TV, and in music. The whole society is loosening up to the point that people who have chosen to remain chaste are openly ridiculed on Geraldo; the decision of Doogie Howser, a TV hero and role model for young people, Doogie Howser, to lose his virginity is hailed as "responsible sex"; and a couple that *doesn't* live together before the wedding is asked, "Why not?"

Western civilization has been heading down this path for a long time. With the rise of Humanism during the Renaissance, societies began turning away from God's laws and God's ways. From the Enlightenment sprang a virtual worship of nature. Once nature, not God, became the standard for morality, people started believing that, since humans are a mere product of nature, anything we do naturally is normal, and even good. Sex is natural, sex is powerful, and so it eventually followed that sexual expression was seen as a natural and normal part of all human existence in any circumstances, much on the level of eating and sleeping.

It's no coincidence that the two most heated issues of our day are abortion and homosexuality; underlying both is an

insistence on sexual freedom while thumbing one's nose at God and His laws.

Given the sexually charged atmosphere in which we live, it is not surprising that so many people are having sex outside of marriage and getting pregnant. And so abortion is treated like an eraser; people see it as a way to try to get rid of the consequences of their sexual activity. Of course, there are always exceptions; pregnancies do occur as a result of incest and rape. Some women get pregnant because of someone else's sin. But does that make it right to kill the baby that has been conceived?

The Bible's View of the Unborn

Historically, hiding the evidence of sexual activity was the main reason for abortions. One of the early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, maintained that "those who use abortifacient medicines to hide their fornication cause not only the outright murder of the fetus, but of the whole human race as well."(1)

Pro-choice advocates don't like the use of the word "murder." They maintain that no one really knows when human life begins, and they choose to believe that the idea of personhood at conception is a religious tenet and therefore not valid. It is a human life that is formed at conception. The zygote contains 46 chromosomes, half contributed by each parent, in a unique configuration that has never existed before and never will again. It is not plant life or animal life, nor is it mere tissue like a tumor. From the moment of conception, the new life is genetically different from his or her mother, and is not a part of her body like her tonsils or appendix. This new human being is a separate individual living inside the mother.

The Bible doesn't specifically address the subject of abortion, probably since it is covered in the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder."(Ex. 20:13) But it does give us

insight into God's view of the unborn. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for the unborn (*yeled*) is the same word used for young children. The Hebrew language did not have or need a separate word for pre-born babies. All children were children regardless of whether they lived inside or outside the womb. In the New Testament, the same word is used to describe the unborn John the Baptist and the already-born baby Jesus. The process of birth just doesn't make any difference concerning a baby's worth or status in the Bible.

We are given some wonderful insights into God's intimate involvement in the development and life of the pre-born infant in Psalm 139:13-16:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

All people, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, or whether they are healthy or handicapped, have been personally knit together by God's fingers. He has planned out all the days of the unborn child's life before one of them has happened.

Sometimes you will hear a pro-choice argument that says the Bible does not put the same value on the life of the unborn as on infants, citing an Old Testament passage on personal injury law. Exodus 21:22-25 gives two penalties if fighting men hit a pregnant woman. The first penalty was a fine, and some people conclude from this that an unborn baby doesn't have the same value as a born child. But that penalty was for a situation where nothing serious happened. If there was serious injury,

the offender was severely punished with the same injury he inflicted. If the mother or baby died, the offender was to be put to death. This actually shows very eloquently how valuable God considers both the mother and her unborn baby.

Post-Abortion Syndrome

After having an abortion, many women feel a sense of relief at having avoided the stress and responsibility of pregnancy and a baby, but abortions eventually cause serious emotional damage in millions of women.

The American Psychiatric Association has identified abortion as one of the stressor events that can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many of us associate PTSD with Vietnam Veterans suffering from the effects of the war; but post-abortion syndrome is a form of PTSD that affects women who have had abortions.

The death of a child is one of the biggest stress points a person can experience in life. Post-abortion syndrome is the emotional stress of not grieving, not letting ourselves feel the pain and suffering that is part of a loss. To be emotional healthy, we all have to grieve through our losses; but what do you do when society tells you there's nothing to grieve about? If a woman does not recognize her need to grieve for her baby, or if she does not allow it to occur, that emotional pain is going to go *somewhere*. Frequently, following a woman's abortion, she goes into what one CPC counselor described as "self-destruct mode": getting pregnant again, having an affair, punishing herself, and generally showing all the variations that severe depression can take.

Depending on how stressed a woman is, PAS can show up within weeks or months of the abortion, or she can have a delayed reaction to it, typically seven to eight years later. Women experiencing post-abortion syndrome generally feel a confusing and overwhelming sense of guilt. One study reported that 92

percent of women who have had an abortion feel guilt.(2) One woman who is now involved in a post-abortion healing group reports that after her abortion, the memory haunted her. She heard this little voice in her head: "Abortion, abortion; you're a terrible, awful person."(3) For many women, the guilt and shame is expressed through a deep anger—at the doctors and abortion counselors for hurting her and her baby, at her husband, boyfriend, or parents for pressuring her into an abortion, and at herself for getting pregnant and having the abortion.

Many women dealing with the effects of abortion spend a great deal of emotional energy denying the death and denying that what they did was wrong. A woman uses denial to keep herself from coming face to face with the fact that her child was killed and she allowed it to happen. One young woman pleaded with my sister not to leave her alone the day she had an abortion. This hurting teen tried to keep her feelings at bay as she spent the afternoon telling dead baby jokes.

Abortion is not an eraser to rub out a mistake or an inconvenience. It has more than one victim; women as well as their babies are victims of abortions. It is essential that a woman grieve for her baby and face her role in the baby's death; in fact, women who allow themselves to grieve and understand their need to grieve are not likely to experience post-abortion syndrome. But even more essential is that women who have had abortions accept that there really has been a death, that abortion is sin, and that the Lord Jesus Christ's death covered every wrong they have ever done. No sin—not even abortion—is greater than the power of His blood, and He offers total forgiveness and cleansing to everyone who will come to Him in faith.

The Sawyers' Story

Steve and Tessie Sawyer will never forget Halloween 1990. Tessie was four months pregnant, and her doctor had suggested,

“Tess, you’re 35 years old; let’s do a neurological test on the baby. It’s just a simple blood test.” Sure, that was fine with Tessie...until the day before Halloween, when the test results came back.

The alpha-fetoprotein test indicated that her blood count was extremely low. Normal was 450, and hers was 120. This test has three parts, and the part that came back so abnormal tested for Down’s Syndrome. Neither Steve nor Tessie were the least bit prepared for the staggering news that something might be terribly wrong with their baby.

This baby was a surprise to the Sawyers, who already had two very active little boys and weren’t anticipating any more. But, being believers, they knew that God’s sense of humor and timing is something to be reckoned with.

Later, they did another alpha-fetoprotein test. Hoping against hope, they waited in anguish for the results to come back to Dallas from the lab in Santa Fe. But the second results were just as abnormal as the first. The doctor informed Steve and Tessie of their option to abort the baby, since there was an almost certain indication that he would be handicapped. But that was never an option for them. The doctors wanted to do amniocentesis on Tess, but they refused that, too.

At this point, the Sawyers’ friends had two different perspectives. Their church friends were wonderfully supportive, both emotionally and in prayer; their unchurched friends questioned them: “Why don’t you have an amnio?” Steve and Tessie were delighted, in the midst of their fear, to be able to share their faith that God was the One in control: “It doesn’t matter what the test results would be. We’re not aborting this baby. There’s a risk of miscarriage or early labor with amniocentesis, and five months’ peace of mind in exchange for our baby’s life just isn’t worth it.”

At seven months, the doctor did a special, extensive sonogram

to measure the baby's femur. Down's Syndrome babies have longer than normal extremities, but the doctor couldn't see anything unusual about the baby's bones. And he couldn't see the baby's face, either. The waiting, and not knowing, went on two more months.

Tessie had a scheduled C-section. As she was being prepped for surgery, it hit her that in a matter of moments, their lives could be changed forever. That kind of fear feels like a cold, hard iceball in your stomach. But Steve and Tessie were trusting God no matter what happened, believing in His love for them and for their baby, believing that He was still in control.

The doctor delivered Lucas Clay Sawyer and turned him over. "He looks perfectly normal," he pronounced cautiously. But sometimes Down's Syndrome takes a while to show up, and for the next 24 hours they ran a lot of tests on Luke. And I'm glad to say that today he is absolutely, positively, the healthiest, most robust, smartest little kid you've ever seen.

All the world's conventional wisdom advised Steve and Tessie, "Your baby is probably not normal. You should seriously consider abortion." But are they glad they didn't!! We need to hear that test results are sometimes wrong. No one knows why the Sawyers' alpha-fetoprotein test came back with such dismal numbers on such a healthy baby. How many other healthy babies are being aborted after the parents get misleading or just plain wrong test results?

Handicapped Children

The Sawyers had a very happy ending to their story, but sometimes the tests do tell the truth and babies really are sick or handicapped. There's no doubt about it, raising a handicapped child is painful and hard. Is it ever okay to abort a child whose life will be less than perfect?

We need to ask ourselves, does the child deserve to die because of his handicap or illness? Life is hard, both for the handicapped person and for her parents. But it is significant that no organization of parents of mentally retarded children has ever endorsed abortion.

Some people honestly believe that it's better to abort a handicapped child than to let him experience the difficult life ahead. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, has performed thousands of pediatric surgeries on handicapped children. He remarks that disability and unhappiness do not necessarily go together. Some of the unhappiest children he has known had full mental and physical faculties, and some of the happiest youngsters have borne very difficult burdens.(4) Life is a lot harder for people with disabilities, but I can tell you personally that there is a precious side to it as well. I have lived most of my life with a physical handicap, but it hasn't stopped me from experiencing a fierce joy from living life to the fullest of the abilities I *do* have. I can honestly rejoice in my broken body because it is that very brokenness and weakness that makes it easier for others to see the power and glory of my Lord in me, because His power is perfected in weakness.

Often, parents abort children with defects because they don't want to face the certain suffering and pain that comes with caring for a handicapped individual. By aborting the child, they believe they are aborting the trouble. But as we discussed earlier, there is no way to avoid the consequences of abortion: the need to grieve, the guilt, the anger, the depression.

What if a baby is going to die anyway? Anencephalic babies, babies born without brains, have no hope of living any length of time. I think we need to look at the larger picture, one that includes God and His purposes for our lives. When a tragedy like this occurs, we can know that it is only happening because He has a reason behind it. God's will for us

is not that we live easy lives, but that we be changed into the image of Jesus. He wants us to be holy, not comfortable. The pain of difficult circumstances is often His chosen method to grow godliness in us and in the lives of those touched by the tragedy of a child's handicap. When it is a matter of life and death, as abortion is, it is not our place to avoid the pain.

My husband and I know what it is to bury a baby who only lived nine days. We saw God use this situation to draw people to Himself and to teach and strengthen and bless so many people beyond our immediate family. Despite the tremendous pain of that time, now that I have seen how God used it to glorify Himself, I would go through it again.

Not all abortions are performed as a matter of convenience. Some are performed in very hard cases, such as a handicapped child or as the result of rape or incest. But again, we need to back off and look at things from an eternal perspective. God is the One who gives life, and only He has the right to take it away. Every person, born or unborn, is a precious soul made by God, in His image. Every life is an entrustment from God we need to celebrate and protect.

Notes

1. Paedagogus 2:10, 96, 1
2. Ann Speckhard, "The Psycho-Social Aspects of Stress Following Abortion," doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota.
3. Nancy Michels, *Helping Women Recover From Abortion* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1988), 76.
4. C. Everett Koop, "The Slide to Auschwitz," in Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 45-46.

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The Dark Underside of Abortion: A Christian Worldview Perspective

Sue Bohlin looks at the common effects of an abortion on the women who choose it. From a biblical worldview perspective, it is not surprising that many women experience guilt, shame and denial. Christ can bring forgiveness and healing for those who have taken this brutally wrong path in their past.

Laura's Story

No matter how many times Laura^[1] took the home pregnancy test, it kept showing up positive. She was pregnant, and seventeen years old. She'd gotten an A on her paper against abortion in school. Her parents would never understand, especially since her mother volunteered at the crisis pregnancy center! Her boyfriend was hot, but hardly husband material. He was more committed to skateboarding than to her. Laura had never felt more confused in her life.

When she called her boyfriend to tell him she was pregnant, he

just said, "That stinks. Well, I gotta go," and he was gone. She carried her horrible secret for three weeks before finally telling her parents. Her father exploded: "What did I ever do to deserve this? Well, we'll just have to get rid of it. It's the best thing for everybody. You're too young to be a mother." When Laura's eyes flooded with tears, he said, "You may hate me for a while, but I'm willing to take that risk. You'll get over it. You're young. You can have a real life with a real future this way."

Her mother, visibly shaken, said, "How could you do this to us? What would people think of us, to have a pregnant daughter? You've really gone and done it now, Laura." Two days later, her mother took her to a Planned Parenthood clinic. Laura cried the whole way there: "Please, no! Don't make me do this, don't make me do this!" Nobody listened, nobody cared that she didn't want the abortion. When a counselor asked if she was sure, she just shrugged her shoulders, beaten and defeated.

As soon as it was over, everyone seemed to forget about it. Her parents never brought it up again. All her relationships fell apart. Laura was deeply depressed, not knowing how to handle her feelings. She was too ashamed to talk about the abortion with her friends, and her parents made her promise not to tell anyone.

She didn't get over it. She was stuck in a place filled with anger and hurt. She couldn't overcome the loss of her baby, and she didn't even have words for that. Anything related to babies made her cry: new baby announcements at church, diaper commercials, even driving by Babies-R-Us. Everything triggered relentless heartache. There was a wound in her soul that would not stop bleeding.

Abortion is not the cure to a problem pregnancy. It is what counselor Theresa Burke calls an "emotionally draining and physically ugly experience." [\[2\]](#) The majority of those who have

an abortion experience a variety of problems afterwards. One post-abortive woman described it as “emotional torture.”

In what follows, we’re going to explore the ugly underside of abortion.

Why Women Choose Abortion

The banner of the pro-choice movement is, “Every woman has the right to choose.” But why do women choose to have an abortion? Many women report that they didn’t want one. Various studies have found that sixty-five to seventy percent of women who get abortions also believe it’s morally wrong.^{3} When women violate their conscience or betray their maternal instincts, that’s going to cause a lot of stress.

Years after their abortion, women will often say that they didn’t want to have one but they felt forced to. They thought it was wrong, but they did it anyway because they felt pressure—from circumstances, or from one or more key people in their lives. Often it’s boyfriends, sometimes husbands. When a boyfriend threatens to leave unless a girl has an abortion, most of the time they break up anyway. Then she has lost both her baby and her boyfriend. Crisis pregnancy counselor Dr. Julie Parton says that almost as often, the pressure comes from parents, especially Christian parents.^{4} She says that there are three main factors influencing Christian mothers to push their daughters toward abortion: selfishness, shame, and fear.^{5}

But the bottom line reason for abortion is spiritual. Even though they’re usually not aware of it, people are listening to the voice of the enemy, who Jesus said came to steal, kill, and destroy.^{6} Satan hates women, and he hates the image of God in the unborn baby. Abortion hurts women and destroys babies.

And for every woman who has had an abortion, there is a man

whose baby has died. Whether he pushed for the abortion or fought it, [{7}](#) God's design of his masculine heart to protect and provide has been violated as well. Dr. Parton points out that over forty-five million men have bottled-up feelings about their abortions, and wonders if there is a connection with the heightened amount of violence in our culture of death. Could road rage be the boiling over of deep-seated anger in some of these men?

We need to talk more about the ways that abortion steals, kills and destroys. But it is crucial that you know that *abortion is not the unpardonable sin*. Jesus Christ died to pay for all sins, including abortion. He extends cleansing and forgiveness to every man and woman who has been wounded by abortion. He offers reconciliation with God and the grace to forgive ourselves. No sin is greater than His love or His sacrifice to pay for that sin. There is peace and joy waiting for those who have received Christ's gift of forgiveness and cleansing from guilt. [{8}](#)

Post-Abortion Syndrome: Self-destruction, Guilt and Anger

Abortion is deeply troubling because it touches on three central issues of a woman's self-concept: her sexuality, her morality, and her maternal identity. She also has to deal with the loss of a child. This loss must be confronted, processed, and grieved in order for a woman to resolve her experience. [{9}](#)

Many women find themselves troubled after their abortion because they don't think through these issues before their abortion. The fact that they experience relief immediately after the abortion is no guarantee that problems won't surface later. Unresolved emotions will demand our attention sooner or later.

For millions of women, Post-Abortion Syndrome is an ugly

after-effect of abortion, consisting of a number of powerful emotions that can erupt in dangerous and destructive behaviors. Far from being “no big deal,” which is how abortion is often minimized in our culture, abortion is a traumatic event in the life of most women who have one. Life becomes divided into “before the abortion” and “after the abortion.” So it is no surprise that so many experience some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder. They used to call this “shell shock” after World War II. PTSD is a collection of negative, destructive behaviors and ways of thinking.

In many women with a history of abortion there is an alarming increase of self-destructive behavior. Many women are consumed with self-hatred, expressing it in drug and/or alcohol abuse. Millions of women battle depression and suicidal thoughts.[{10}](#) One woman said, “I became a tramp and slept with anyone and everyone. I engaged in unprotected sex and each month when I wasn’t pregnant I would go into a deep depression. I was rebellious. I wanted my parents to see what I had become. I dropped out of college. I tried suicide, but I didn’t have the guts to slit my wrists or blow my brains out. I couldn’t get my hands on sleeping pills, so I resorted to over the counter sleep aids and booze.”[{11}](#)

The majority of post-abortive women are plagued by guilt.[{12}](#) As one woman put it, “I hated myself. I felt abandoned and lost. There was no one’s shoulder to cry on, and I wanted to cry like hell. And I felt guilty about killing something. I couldn’t get it out of my head that I’d just killed a baby.”[{13}](#) This high guilt rate is unique to abortion compared to any other medical procedure. There are no support groups for those who had their appendix or gall bladder removed, and people don’t seek counseling after orthopedic surgery. Guilt is a painful aftereffect of abortion.

Some women react with anger and rage. They feel deeply isolated and angry at anyone who hurt them and their baby. They are irritated by everyone and everything, and no one can

do anything right. They can fly into rages with the slightest provocation. Often, they are not aware of the connection between their abortion and a constantly simmering heart full of anger, especially since most women feel pressured to have the abortion in the first place.

Post Abortion Syndrome: Shame and Denial

A huge aspect of Post-Abortion Syndrome is shame. Post-abortal women often feel like second-class citizens. They live in fear of others finding out their terrible dark secret. One woman told me that whenever she would walk into a room, she was constantly scanning the faces: *Do they know? Can they tell by looking at me?* Some women are afraid to attend an abortion recovery group where anyone would know them, even though everyone is there for the same reason. When a Christian has an abortion, she often goes into one of two directions; she either cuts herself off from God because she's so ashamed of herself, or she tries to become the ultimate "Martha," wearing herself out in service to try and earn her way to back to God's approval and blessing. The shame of abortion drives many women to perfectionism because they feel so deeply flawed and sinful.

Denial – Many women spend huge amounts of mental energy trying not to think about their abortion. Romans 1 calls this "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." The horror of participating in the death of one's child is too painful to face, and many women work hard at maintaining denial for five to ten years.[\[14\]](#) But eventually reality usually comes to the surface.

Some women find themselves falling apart when their youngest child leaves home, or at menopause. Others become uncontrollably sad when they hold their first grandchild. One woman's denial system shattered when she saw a museum exhibit of pre-born babies and saw what her baby looked like when she

aborted him. Another woman almost lost it in nursing school when she learned about prenatal development. The abortion counselor had told her it was just a blob of tissue. Even those who deny their unborn child was a human being and not a clump of cells admit they have to work at maintaining denial. One woman said, "I didn't think of it as a baby. I just didn't want to think of it that way."[{15}](#)

Child abuse – As the number abortions continues to rise, so does the incidence of child abuse.[{16}](#) Unresolved post-abortion feelings are tied to patterns of emotional or physical abuse of living children. One mother erupted in intense rage whenever her newborn baby cried. She came to realize that she hated her daughter for being able to do all the things that her aborted baby could never do.[{17}](#) One woman beat her three year old son to death shortly after an abortion which triggered a "psychotic episode" of grief, guilt, and anger.[{18}](#)

Healing After Abortion

Post-Abortion Syndrome is a dark, ugly underside of abortion. Researchers have reported over a hundred psychological effects of abortion stress, including depression, flashbacks, sleep and eating disorders, anxiety attacks, a diminished capacity for bonding with later children, increased tendency toward violent outbursts, chronic problems in maintaining intimate relationships, and difficulty concentrating.[{20}](#)

Death – Women who abort are approximately four times more likely to die in the following year than women who carry their pregnancies to term.[{21}](#)

Breast Cancer – The risk of breast cancer almost doubles after one abortion, and rises even further with two or more abortions.[{22}](#)

Cervical, Ovarian and Liver Cancer – Women with one abortion

face a 2.3 relative risk of cervical cancer, compared to non-aborted women, and women with two or more abortions face a 4.92 relative risk. Similar elevated risks of ovarian and liver cancer have also been linked to single and multiple abortions. These increased cancer rates for post-aborted women are apparently linked to the unnatural disruption of the hormonal changes which accompany pregnancy and untreated cervical damage.[{23}](#)

Damage to Cervix and Uterus – This causes problems with subsequent deliveries, and can result in handicaps in subsequent newborns.[{24}](#)

Increased Risks for Teenagers – Teenagers, who account for about thirty percent of all abortions, are also at much higher risk of suffering many abortion related complications. This is true of both immediate complications and of long-term reproductive damage.[{25}](#)

What do you say to someone who's experienced the trauma of abortion? It's a terrible loss. How do you help someone grieve? What do you say? Perhaps something like, "I'm so sorry. It must be very difficult for you. Do you want to tell me about it?" We can offer a listening ear, full of compassion and grace: "What was the abortion like? What has it been like to live with it?" Seek to validate the woman or man's grief with honor and respect so they can get to a place of healing peace.

What if you're the one who's had an abortion? You need to grieve. Grief is a natural and necessary response to loss. It's more than a single emotion of sadness. It includes feelings of loss, confusion, loneliness, anger, despair, and more. It can't be turned on and off at will. Working through your grief means confronting your loss, admitting it, grieving it with tears and other expressions of sadness.

The pain and grief of abortion is complicated by the fact that

it is also sin. But it is not the unpardonable sin. Confess it, and receive the cleansing and forgiveness that Jesus offers. He paid for your abortion on the Cross. He offers you the healing that allows you to be at peace with God and with yourself. He offers you the courage to tell your story with someone safe, which transforms your pain into something redemptive. He offers you the stability that means you don't fall apart if someone else is talking about abortion, or pregnancy, or babies in general.

Dr. Parton suggests three steps toward healing. First, acknowledge the wound that needs to be healed. It may take ten to fifteen years before a woman may be willing to take this step. Second, reach out for help. The Bible tells us, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."[\[26\]](#) Find others who have walked the same path, either in person or online.[\[27\]](#) Dr. Parton says there is an unusual strength of emotional bonding in post-abortive groups. Receive God's forgiveness and cleansing in community; that's His plan. Third, get into God's Word. It's a supernatural source of comfort and encouragement.

There is a dark and ugly underside to abortion, but it's not too dark for God to redeem. Praise the Lord!

Notes

1. This account is based on a true story, with the name changed, found in Theresa Burke and David C. Reardon, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002), 23-25.
2. Ibid., 41.
3. Ibid., xx.
4. Personal conversation with the author, Sept. 21, 2007.
5. **Selfishness** – because she had all these dreams, plans, hopes, and ambitions for her daughter. When the daughter turns up pregnant, mom has to grieve the loss of all her dreams for her precious daughter. She'll say things like, "I just can't

stand by and watch you throw your life away” or “If you have a baby right now you’re just going to be stuck for the next eighteen years.”

Shame – Mom feels that if her daughter’s pregnancy becomes public knowledge, everyone will know she was not a good mother. She failed at teaching her daughter morality and purity and the things a good Christian mother should have taught her.

Fear – of rejection. She fears that her Christian friends will judge and reject her. So she thinks, or says, “How could you do this to me?” The mom can be so focused on her own stuff, her selfishness and shame and fear, that she can’t or doesn’t step up to the plate and help her daughter do what they both know is right, because these other factors are overwhelming her.

6. John 10:10.

7. I am aware that many men never know about the abortion of their child. Some find out later and they often experience deep grief and anger, not only at the loss of their child’s life, but the unilateral decision to keep them in the dark about their own child’s life or death.

8. Come to our website at Probe.org for help with that. [“The Most Important Decision of Your Life”](#) and [“How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change”](#).

9. Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 33.

10. Sixty-three percent of women who have had an abortion seek mental health care. There is a one hundred and fifty-four percent increase in suicide. The suicide rate within one year after an abortion was three times higher than for all women, seven times higher than for women carrying to term, and nearly twice as high as for women who suffered a miscarriage. Suicide attempts appear to be especially prevalent among post-abortion teenagers.

Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.info/psychol.html (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

11. “Before I Had Time to Think,” Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

12. A poll by the *LA Times* revealed that fifty-six percent of

those who admitted to an abortion felt guilty. But since another poll showed that seventy-four percent of those who admitted to having an abortion believe it's morally wrong, I believe that number is way too low. See Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 47.

13. Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence of Abortion* (New York: Random House, 1978), 61. Cited in www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/women_who_abortion_and_their_views.asp (accessed February 23, 2008).

14. David Reardon, *Aborted Women-Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987).

15. Francke, *Ambivalence*, 63.

16. Psychologist Philip Ney has studied the connection. He sees several effects of abortion:

1) Failure to bond with subsequent children. One mother admitted, "We had our first daughter and I never felt the deep love for her I should have. For several reasons, I guess. The first is that I had never grieved over the loss of the child I had aborted. I was also afraid to love her too much. I felt that God was just going to take her away from me to punish me for killing my first child."

2) The weakening of maternal instincts. Killing one's own child violates the God-given instinct to nurture and protect. It can result in a hardened heart as a way of protecting herself from the truth of her action.

3) Reduced inhibitions against violence, particularly toward children. (Theresa Karminiski Burke and David C. Reardon, "Abortion Trauma and Child Abuse," Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org.)

17. Reardon, *Aborted Women*, 129-30.

18. Ibid.

19. R.F. Badgley, et al., *Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law*, Minister of Supply and Services, Ottawa, Canada, 1977, 313-319.

20. The following citations are found in "A List of Major Physical Sequelae Related to Abortion" at Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

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Transgender Children

How should we think about the growing number of children being told they are transgender? A recent YouTube video from parents of a six-year-old transgender child named Ryland went viral, with well over six million views in just a couple of weeks. A beautiful little girl announced she was a boy, *insisted* she was a boy. Her parents' research apparently was limited to LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) sources, and they decided to raise her as a boy, cut her hair like a boy, dress her like a boy, and use male pronouns to feed her illusion that she is a boy. The internet exploded with enthusiastic praise for this family.

How should we think about situations like this from a biblical perspective?

That's the key: we need to understand that this is really a worldview issue. Perspective is crucial. Where you start makes all the difference. If you leave God out of it, starting with

the person trying to make sense of the feeling that one's body is not aligned with their internal sense of gender, then confusion is inevitable. If people feel free to define themselves as they wish, then sex and gender can be seen as elastic or fluid—and manipulatable. It's the modern-day expression of an Old Testament phenomenon that never worked out well, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" in the times of the Judges (Judg. 17:6).

But if you start with God as creator, with the right to choose a baby's gender, then that makes a huge difference. When baby Ryland's birth was announced with a happy, "It's a girl!"—God was speaking His intention for her identity and her life.

Sometimes children try on alternate identities—girls saying they are boys, boys saying they are horses. Parents are responsible for modeling logic and wisdom (not to mention life experience) in their response to this kind of proclamation. When Ryland started screaming "I'm a boy," it was a perfect opportunity to ask some critical thinking (and critically important) questions: "What *is* a boy?" "Why don't you like being a girl?" Their video says that Ryland "began to show aversion to anything feminine." This, of course, is the story of many girls whom God created as tomboys, who don't like the stereotypical pink-girly-girl attributes our culture labels as feminine. The problem is not an aversion to pink frills; the problem is a too-narrow definition of femininity. [Please see my post [The Gender Spectrum](#).]

If Ryland's parents continue down the path of other parents who enable their children to feed the unrealistic fantasy that they can choose to be anything they want, including the other gender, that will include giving Ryland powerful hormones to suppress puberty, and other powerful hormones to cause her body to mimic maleness: muscle mass, a stubble, a deeper voice, more body hair. But as one girl who stopped taking testosterone [put it](#), "This is not who you are. You are hiding behind a chemically induced mask." No hormones or surgery can

turn Ryland into a male. Nothing will change her XX chromosomes. Most boys grow up to become fathers, but she can never father a child. She is NOT a boy, she will NEVER be a man. It is neither loving nor wise to cooperate with confusion, which will only get worse with age.

When adults tell a child “you are transgender,” and the child then parrots that idea, both the parents and the child get something right and something wrong. The something right is an awareness of a heartbreaking brokenness, which is what can happen in a fallen world. The something wrong is the diagnosis of *what* is broken: it’s not their body, it’s their feelings. Transgender transition and therapy try to change the part that is healthy (one’s body) and bring it into alignment with what is broken (one’s thinking and feeling).

To return to a biblical perspective: God says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Regardless of what the situation, whenever our thinking and feelings are out of alignment with God’s intention, we need to submit our will and our thinking to the transforming power of God. What does that look like? Speaking the truth to oneself, encouraged by other truth-speakers. In the case of those struggling with their gender: “God made me female (or male), and I choose to trust that He is good and He knows what He’s doing. I surrender my beliefs and feelings about femaleness (or maleness) to Him. I choose to pursue intimacy with Him over my own sense of self, and allow Him to change me from the inside out.”

It’s not easy, but it’s always the right thing to choose the truth over an illusion. Over a lie.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/transgender_children on June 17, 2014.

The Dark Underside of Female Friendships

April 8, 2014

Cherry and Beth met in a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group at their church, hitting it off immediately. They loved the mutual connection with another mom, understanding the stresses and joys of having small children about the same age. Their weekly playdates became the highlight of each girl's week. They would chat on the phone every day, comparing notes on what they would be fixing for dinner or what great, repeatable golden nuggets their toddlers spouted. That morphed to texting each other throughout the day, at least once an hour.

The intense sense of connection, of feeling heard and understood and valued, grew to be like an emotional drug for them. Over time, they realized they felt closer to each other than they did to their husbands. They preferred each other's company to anyone else's—including their husbands'. Texting throughout the day felt like a lifeline, a continual source of reassurance that all was right with the world. Eventually, caring for their children, the very thing that had brought them together in the first place, started to feel like an unwelcome burden that interfered with their first love—each other. Anyone and any thing that came between them was cause for resentment and annoyance . . . when it didn't make them outright angry.

This was not normal female friendship. What started out as a lovely gift from God was corrupted into emotional dependency, which Lori Rentzel* defines as "When the ongoing presence and/or nurturing of another is believed necessary for personal

security.” Emotional dependency happens when one or both people are looking to a person to meet their basic needs for love and security, rather than to God (relational idolatry). It is characterized by a desperate neediness of the other.

Emotional dependency (the other ED) is at the core of most lesbian relationships and a lot of homosexual relationships, but it is not limited to these. Husbands and wives can be emotionally dependent on each other, and so can women friends. When friendship spills over the retaining walls of what is healthy into an enmeshment with another person—when they put all their emotional eggs in the other’s basket, so to speak—the relationship has become broken and unhealthy.

My favorite anthem to emotional dependency is Barry Manilow’s *Can’t Smile Without You*, which sounds romantic until you think about how unhealthy it is:

*You know I can’t smile without you,
I can’t smile without you,
I can’t laugh
and I can’t sing,
I’m findin’ it hard to do anything.
You see, I feel sad when you’re sad,
I feel glad when you’re glad,
If You only knew what I’m going through,
I just can’t smile without you.*

Do you see how sick that is?

Emotional dependency feels like, “My happiness, my sense of security, is completely wrapped up in you giving me ‘[The Three As](#)’ I need: attention, affection and affirmation. And if you withhold any of these from me, I will feel insecure, unloved and abandoned.”

When people feel insecure, they feel powerless. And when they feel powerless, they usually resort to some kind of control to

get their power back. Manipulation is the glue that holds emotionally dependent people together, since the desperate neediness (remember, "I can't smile without you"?) drives people to do desperate things to make sure the other person is tied to them at the heart. Such as sending close to 100 texts in a single day, to make sure the other person responds to them. And getting paranoid and angry ("Why aren't you answering my texts? I can tell you read them, my phone tells me you read them, why are you avoiding me? What did I do? Why aren't you answering me? TALK TO ME!!!!"). Such as giving gifts and anything else designed to bind the giver to the recipient. Such as using guilt to force the other person to engage ("You're the only person in the world who understands me! You're the only real friend I've ever had. If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone!").

The good news is that when friendships have overflowed healthy boundaries into emotional dependency, people can repent of their relational idolatry (making another person more important than God) and step back into balance. The other good news is that every aspect of unhealthy, emotional dependency on a person, is healthy dependency on God. One of my friends told me, "This was life changing for me, to realize that I could redirect my unhealthy energies to Jesus and it would make me a much better disciple!" Contacting Him 95 times a day through prayer (no texting necessary) is healthy. Feeling desperately needy toward Jesus is healthy. Giving gifts to Jesus to bind one's heart to Him is healthy. Saying, "If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone" is true-but praise God, He has assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

When I have spoken on this topic in churches, I hear, "I expected that the dark underside you'd be talking about was gossip or something. I never would have expected THIS. Wow. I see how it can happen so easily."

Forewarned is forearmed, I trust.

*Lori Thorkelson Rentzel's little booklet Emotional Dependency, published by InterVarsity Press, is an invaluable and highly practical resource for understanding this issue.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_dark_underside_of_female_friendships

DWTS and the T in GLBT

The big controversy in the current season of Dancing With the Stars is the presence of Chaz Bono, born Chastity, the daughter of pop icons Sonny and Cher. The media has documented Chaz' transition from female to male, bringing "transgender" into people's living rooms and water cooler conversations.



For over a decade, I have loved and walked with people struggling with their gender identity and unwanted same-sex attractions. When I see Chaz, my heart just aches deeply.

How should we wisely, biblically, and compassionately think about those who feel trapped in the body of the opposite sex? [I am not talking about those who were born with chromosomal abnormalities or an endocrine imbalance, which results in hermaphroditism, or—the new term—intersex. These are biological effects of living in a fallen world, and are in a different category from those born with normal, functioning

bodies who want to change those bodies.]

People who identify as transgender report feeling different from a young age, which is easy to describe as feeling “born that way,” especially when that is the new banner cry of the marginalized, thanks to Lady Gaga’s mega-hit of the same name. But it’s a big (and, I would respectfully suggest, tragic) step from “I have always felt different from the other boys/girls” to “I am a girl in a boy’s body” or “I am a boy in a girl’s body.”

I would suggest that the core misunderstanding of those in the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgendered) community is the same core misunderstanding of the vast majority of people: a too-narrow understanding of God-designed variations in masculinity and femininity. (Please see my blog post “[The Gender Spectrum](#).”) Many of my friends who struggle with same-sex attraction confess that they’ve often thought how much better life would be if they were the other gender, but transgender-identifying folks take the fantasy to a new level.

The fantasy that “becoming something other than what I am will make me happy” marks transgender. It’s wrapped up in a deep-seated envy of the opposite sex, and a hatred of one’s own gender. That’s why so many believe that surgery to remove the offending body parts will kill what they detest in themselves, their own gender, and transform them into what they admire and believe will give them life.

Fantasy and pretending are part of childhood, but now thanks to advances in technology, an adult can gain access to medical treatments that will feed the fantasy and turn it into reality—or at least the promise of it. Our post-modern culture invents words and redefines language in ways that adds layers of confusion to the issue: instead of the dual simplicity of God creating male and female, we are now told that there is a difference between sex, gender, and sexual identity. No wonder there is so much confusion about this issue!

“I am a man in a woman’s body, and I need to bring my outsides into alignment with my insides.” (Or the opposite.) This feeling may be strong, but it is not accurate, and it is not trustworthy. We are fallen people living in a fallen world with fallen understanding, and we should not trust our conclusions when they vary so much with what God has said. He declares Himself as our Creator; when God creates a female, which we know by the female body He creates, He is making a statement about His intention for that girl. When God gives us the stewardship over His creation, which includes our bodies, that precludes mutilating them by amputating healthy body parts because we hate them.

Our culture looks at life through a purely naturalistic, materialistic lens that excludes the spiritual. Our feelings are part of that total focus on the temporal and transitory. When they are particularly strong, they can be all-consuming, and it’s easy to say they are true—regardless of what God says in His word. Some people insist that their brains and bodies are mismatched, that transgender is a purely biological issue that, thanks to modern medicine, can be addressed instead of leaving them feeling miserable.

We are broken people, and we try to fix our own brokenness with our own broken methods: enter sex-change clinics. One of the heartbreaking aspects of this issue is what is NOT told to those putting their eggs in the sex-change basket. I had a very long talk one night with a MtF (male to female) post-op transgender woman who blessed me with her heart-wrenching honesty. She was so sure than she would get affirmation and praise as a woman, that the hole in her heart would be filled by what she would see in the mirror. Many surgeries later, from penis amputation to cosmetic surgery to reduce her adam’s apple, when she looked in the mirror she saw a man trying unsuccessfully to be what God did not make him to be, and it broke her heart. She said she would give anything to go back to the way God had made her as a him, but now she felt stuck

maintaining the charade because that was her identity, both personally and professionally.

This story is one of the reasons psychiatrist Dr. Paul McHugh shut down the sex-change program at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. In his extraordinary article "[Surgical Sex](#)," he wrote, "When I became psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins, I realized that by doing sex-change operations the hospital was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We would do better for these patients, I thought, by concentrating on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia."

I am grateful for the voices of those who have walked deep in the transgender waters and then decided to listen to God (mainly from the helpful website help4families.com): "I remember reading in the Word that our bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I wondered, 'What have I done to myself?' After reading Psalm 139, I began to cry because it spoke of how God had created me and how He had known me from the beginning."

"I had a hard time having fun, because when I was out with my friends I was jealous of the girls and fun they were having. That started to become a theme in my life, I was jealous of females; their curves, softness, and what I perceived as superiority over men. I hated everything about my masculinity; I had fantasies at times of castrating myself and ending the control of testosterone over my life."

"I told my wife I was leaving and wanted to divorce and transition to becoming a woman. I went out and bought supplies and women's clothing that night, and went to hotel room. I won't go into all the details, but as I sat there in all my 'feminine glory,' reading on my computer the stories of other TS folks I remember praying 'God what am I doing???' And I

remember this still small voice ask, 'Is this what you really want?' My response was 'No, what should I do?' and what I heard still rings in my head to this day: 'Run!! Run back to your wife.' So I did, my wife being the faithful, loving, and godly woman that she is accepted me back, and forgave me. . .

“[Later on] I again told my wife that I could no longer live this life and that I needed to leave to pursue my 'true life' as a female. I left my wife that night and told her that I wanted to separate. As I left to go back out and check into a hotel, I was feeling really angry with God. I was yelling on the drive, 'God, this is bigger than You. I can't do this anymore, I am so tired of fighting and I just want to live the way that my mind wants me to live.' I remember God distinctly telling me, 'I am your Father and you are My son. You do not need to do this; you need to get your significance from Me.' I yelled back, 'No God I am done with this crap, this is ridiculous, I am living a lie and I need to be female.' I wrestled and wrestled with this for hours. Finally I was worn down and just asked God, 'What do I need to do?' The answer I got was, 'Get your significance from Me, not from being female. You need to follow Me and love Me more than this.'

“I was worshiping femininity and was ready to sacrifice myself, my wife and my children on that altar. After searching my heart I also realized that I was angry with God, I think mostly for not 'fixing me' the way I wanted. I wanted to pray the prayer and any desire to be female would be gone and I would be some sort of super-man. When God did not fix me this way after years of praying for it, I became bitter.”

“If He had intended me to be a woman, He wouldn't have made me male in the first place.”

May those who struggle with the lie that they are not okay as they are, find their significance in God who made them the way He wanted them, who delights in them, who loves them with a tender, compassionate love, and says, “Come to Me. Don’t try to fix this on your own. Let Me pour truth and grace, love and life into your heart.”

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See Also Probe Answers Our Email:

[“What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites?”](#)

[“My Daughter’s School Wants Us to Welcome a Transgendered Student”](#)

[“How Does the Bible Support Your View That God Intends for Males to Grow into Masculinity and Females to Grow into Femininity?”](#)

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[The 3rd Grade Transgender Bus Driver](#)
[Transgender Children](#)

On Gender and Refusing to Disclose It

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June 7, 2011

There was a storm of controversy recently over a Toronto couple's [announcement](#) that they were not disclosing the sex of their now 4-month-old baby. They "believe they are giving their children the freedom to choose who they want to be, unconstrained by social norms about males and females." Not only are they raising their child Storm to be genderless, but they decided not to tell the world—and the world did not like that one bit.

The mother, Kathy Witterick, writes, "When the baby comes out, even the people who love you the most and know you so intimately, the first question they ask is, 'Is it a girl or a boy?' If you really want to get to know someone, you don't ask what's between their legs." But genitals are only one indication of sex; gender-bound brain structures and chromosomes also delineate the fact that we live in a boy/girl world. And the way God set things up—to maintain the boy/girl distinction—you don't have to ask what's between someone's legs because there are plenty of other signs far less intimate.

Ms. Witterick and her husband, David Stocker, hold a loose ideology about gender, which they are encouraging in Storm's brothers, Jazz (five years old) and Kio (two). Jazz loves traditionally girly things like pink and purple, and chooses to wear his hair long in braids, which regularly invites people to assume he's a girl. His parents give him total freedom in how he presents himself.

"It is true that my oldest son Jazz does not have a

traditional notion of what boys should wear, look like or do. It is also true that we believe our children should have the right to choose their clothes and hairstyle. Jazz has a strong sense of being a boy, and he understands that his choices to wear pink and have long hair are not always acceptable to his community. He chooses freely to do them anyway, because he also has been taught to respect difference, love himself and navigate the world in a way that is true to his own voice.”

This is a five-year-old boy. How free is he, really, to make choices that he “understands” are “not always acceptable to his community”? How much understanding of the nature of the world does a five-year-old have?

Jazz’s mom suppresses her natural instincts in order to parent ideologically:

“In my heart of hearts, I squirm when my son picks a dress from the rack (won’t people tease him?), even though I know from experience and research that the argument that children need a binary gender orthodoxy taught to them in order to feel safe is simply incorrect.”

I would suggest that teaching “a binary gender orthodoxy” is not incorrect; it is woven into the very nature of how things are because God made it that way: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:27) When we depart from a biblical explanation and understanding of reality, and we start making it up as we go along, we invite chaos and confusion.

I think she’s right to squirm when her son picks a dress from the rack, and not just because people will tease him. The binary nature of gender is part of God’s plan for helping us maintain boundaries between things that need to be kept separate. The Old Testament includes a prohibition against cross-dressing (Deut. 22:5) to support the natural distinction between the sexes. Creating confusion by dressing in the other

gender's clothes is not consistent with God's intent to maintain separations between things that should not be confused or blurred. Genesis 1 tells us that He separated the light from the darkness, the waters above from the waters below, the land from the sea. And when he created humans, He created them in two distinctly different types: male and female. Then, in Isaiah 5:20 He said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

I do understand the frustrations of Storm's parents concerning society's too-narrow definitions of boy and girl. (Please see my blog "[The Gender Spectrum](#).") Jazz is one of those [emotionally sensitive boys](#) who delight in color, texture, fabrics and vibrancy, and his parents apparently fully support the kind of gifted, creative boy he is, which is great. But when parents fully indulge a boy's gravitation to pink, and dresses, and long hair, yet he wants other people to know he's a boy (as Jazz does), there's some needless confusion going on because of a lack of common-sense boundaries.

There's another aspect of this philosophy of parenting that is disturbing: the desire for children to discover "their true gender self," as psychologist Diane Ehrensaft puts it, and to choose what they want to be. Storm's mama wrote,

"[I]n not telling the gender of my precious baby, I am saying to the world, 'Please can you just let Storm discover for him/herself what s(he) wants to be?!. . . We've decided not to share Storm's sex for now—a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a stand up to what the world could become in Storm's lifetime (a more progressive place? ...)'"

There are lots of legitimate choices that children can make for themselves, and exercising those "choosing muscles" develops self-confidence. But some choices are not legitimate: deciding whether or not to brush their teeth, refusing to eat

anything but junk foods, discovering their own religious “truths”. . . and choosing their gender, regardless of what their body tells them. From a biblical perspective, God as creator is the one who gets to choose a child’s gender, and His choice is revealed in the first moment of birth: “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” It is our place as His creations to accept and embrace God’s choice for us, not insist on the personal freedom to define ourselves according to our own limited ways of understanding. That is anarchy. That kind of independence from God is the essence of sin.

I am reminded of the deep wisdom of Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Just because something sounds good to us at the time doesn’t mean it will end up well. And this seems especially true of encouraging children to make their own paths without parental limitations.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/on_gender_and_refusing_to_disclose_it

The Gender Spectrum

When I use the term “gender spectrum,” you might think in terms of masculinity on one end and femininity on the other. We hear men being prompted to “get in touch with your feminine side.” (For some reason, women never seem to be exhorted to “get in touch with your masculine side.” Huh.)

But I don’t think that’s the way it works. In Genesis 1, we are told that “God created them male and female” (Gen. 1:27). I think, rather, that there is one spectrum of masculinity and

another spectrum of femininity. I also think that God is the one who chooses where on the spectrum babies are born, according to His design and for His pleasure and glory.

The Femininity Spectrum

I suggest that little girls come into the world at some point on a femininity spectrum. On one end is the girly-girl who comes out of the womb asking for the little flower headband to wear in the hospital nursery, and she keeps on running toward all things frilly and girly. She loves pink, loves to wear dresses and twirl around to “be pretty,” wants to wear nail polish and makeup just like Mommy (or like the other ladies she sees on TV). On the other end of the spectrum is the tomboy jockette, who can’t stand wearing dresses, wants to climb trees and play tackle football with the boys. These girls are often gifted athletically and many are natural leaders. When these little girls’ type of femininity is supported and encouraged, they are comfortable in their skin just the way God made them. Wise parents also make sure they wear dresses and “act like a lady” when it’s time to do that—with the promise that when they get home, they can put their jeans or sweats back on and be comfortable.

Sometimes, though, girly-girl types can morph into “mean girls” and inform the jockettes that they’re not good enough as girls, and they can receive the message that it’s not okay to be the kind of girl they are, the kind of girl God chose for them to be because He has a good plan for them. They can grow up not feeling secure in their femininity.

The Masculinity Spectrum

On one end is the rough-and-tumble boy—athletic, noisy, enjoys getting dirty. He bonds to other boys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaging in common activities or tasks, and tends to find face-to-face interaction intimidating. On the other end of the spectrum from the *athletic* boy is the *aesthetic* boy:

emotionally sensitive, gifted in art, music, theater, dance, or some other kind of art. He usually avoids athletics, getting dirty, and anything having to do with balls coming at him. He bonds eyeball-to-eyeball, connecting to others' hearts through their eyes the way most girls do, but they are not girls. And then, of course, there is everything in between.

In our culture, we tend to define masculinity in terms of the rough-and-tumble type ONLY, but I don't think God agrees, since He delights to create so many sensitive boys and those who are a balance between the two. In fact, even as toddlers, they can reveal themselves by responding to another child's upset by dropping what they're doing and going over to pat them, soothe them, and attempt to comfort them: "You okay? It's okay." This sensitivity is a beautiful thing to behold, but it can get a little boy in trouble. Since we define masculinity so narrowly, it is easy to marginalize and shame the masculinity of the sensitive boy. Especially if his daddy is a rough-and-tumble sort of man who is flummoxed by a little boy who would rather Daddy read to him than throw a football.

If the sensitive boy is affirmed in his type of masculinity, he can grow up to be a phenomenal husband, father, pastor, counselor, artist, musician, dancer—the list goes on. When tomboy girls are loved and accepted by their parents just the way they are, they can grow up to be great moms and teachers and scout leaders, especially of boys. If, however, they are ostracized for the way they are designed, they can burn with the indignity of being "other than."

It's these sensitive, gifted boys that are most at risk for embracing a gay identity, especially when others wound them by slapping false labels on them, even from a young age: gay, queer, homo, fag. Tomboy girls, especially the ones gifted athletically, are quickly tagged with ugly false labels as well: lez, queer, gay. They can easily think, "What do others know that I don't know? If they say it, it must be true."

But it's *not* true. They're not gay, they're gifted. If only they could be helped to see themselves that way!

Our goal as adults should be to help all children grow into gender-secure, emotionally healthy kids who are glad God made them a boy or a girl, and are comfortable in their own skins just the way God made them. I think it starts with affirming the different kinds of masculinity and femininity. It's ALL good!

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