

Probe Live – Thinking Clearly About Gender Confusion



Probe Live – November 18, 2021



God's good gift of gender—male and female—has never been more broken or confused. Sue Bohlin brings the clarity of biblical worldview thinking to this issue with grace and truth.

There was a problem with part of the audio recording on the video, but here is the back-up **audio recording**:

www.ministeriosprobe.org/mp3s/GenderConfusion_11-18-21.mp3

Powerpoint Slides:

PDF form: app.box.com/s/iv7z9jlao9thnn2syfwrajh94pjrxxm

PPT form: app.box.com/s/iv7z9jlao9thnn2syfwrajh94pjrxxm

Princess Warrior, First Responder

One of my favorite things to talk about is [the Gender Spectrum](#), because I think it provides a very helpful understanding of people. Instead of a single spectrum with masculinity on one end and femininity on the other, I believe God has created a masculinity spectrum and a separate femininity spectrum.

The masculinity spectrum runs from the rough and tumble, athletic and physical kind of males on one end, to the sensitive, artistic, creative kind of males on the other—and everything in between. Although Western civilization tends to equate masculinity with the rough and tumble guys, I think that is a stereotype that gets in the way of appreciating the divinely created range of masculinity.

The femininity spectrum runs from the girly-girl on one end to the tomboy girl on the other. And just as with the masculinity spectrum, Western civilization tends to equate femininity with the stereotype of pink-loving, cosmetic-wearing girls who twirl in dresses to be admired. God delights to make plenty of females who are gifted athletically, are often natural leaders, and don't really care for the stereotypical appearance-oriented manifestations.

My belief is that Jesus Christ is the whole masculinity spectrum all at once, and as boys and men grow in Christlikeness (which is the goal of spiritual maturity), they will take up more bandwidth on the spectrum. Rough and tumble guys grow in sensitivity and compassion, and sensitive/artistic/creative men grow in their physicality and willingness to initiate and lead.

It seemed to me that a similar growth into taking up more bandwidth should happen on the femininity spectrum as well, as spiritual and emotional growth would produce a fuller-orbed experience of God's beautiful intention for His beloved female image-bearers.

I have certainly observed this happening in fully devoted followers of Christ. I have seen tomboy girls become more comfortable in their feminine skin, especially those who didn't particularly like being female because of abuse or a lack of connection with other girls growing up. It's been good to see women who protected themselves with a hardened, tough outer shell grow softer and more trusting of the Lord and other women. But I've wondered, what happens when girly-girls start taking up more bandwidth on the femininity spectrum? How do they grow and change?

One of the things I love about my tomboy girl friends is their fiercely protective willingness to fight—bullies, injustice, evil. Most of them are not in the least interested in protecting their non-existent manicures or messing up their fancy, fussy outfits (since they don't own any). Some of them grew up with a burning desire to defend the defenseless, and they were frustrated at the unfair rule that girls weren't supposed to fight. And some of them felt shamed for this supposedly unfeminine passion.

Instead, in our culture, girls are usually expected to fall in love with Disney princesses and see themselves as a princess. Now, there's nothing wrong with being royalty. In fact, when I tell my story of trusting Christ and entering into His family, I share my childhood dream to grow up to be a princess. It was a major lightbulb moment of my life to realize that I am now a child of God, who is the King of Kings, and the female child of a King is a princess! Then I pull out my tiara and pop it on my head. I totally own the princess identity.

But one day I realized that the Bible's call to engage in

spiritual warfare is not gender-related in the least. Every believer is called to don the armor of God and do battle with demons with the Lord's protection and in His strength (Ephesians 6:1-18). The person who does warfare is a warrior, right?

Voila—the opportunity to be a princess warrior! Or a warrior princess, either one works, satisfying both ends of the femininity spectrum. Justice-fueled protectors who want to go to war or even just fight the bully on the school bus have every biblical invitation—it's actually a command!—to give themselves fully to the God-given desire to fight in a way that glorifies God. Girly-girls fulfill a larger vision for femininity when they move beyond a self-oriented focus on looking good, shopping, disdaining sports, and the domestic arts, and give themselves to standing firm against evil and serving others in intercessory prayer.

Recently, though, I had another lightbulb moment when the women's director at my church, addressing a "Leaders of Leaders" equipping time, told us that we are first responders. Invoking the image of 9/11 when firefighters ran into the burning buildings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, she pointed out that we are also first responders when we deliberately walk into spiritual burning buildings to rescue those trapped by faulty, unbiblical thinking. We're first responders when we're willing to have hard conversations with those struggling with where scripture teaches unpopular and uncomfortable standards. We are first responders when we're willing to walk people in conflict through the steps of biblical conflict resolution (Matthew 7:3-5, 18:15-17). We are first responders when we are willing to reach out and love the unlovely and difficult. We are first responders when we are willing to walk a woman through spiritual warfare material to identify places she has given the enemy a foothold in her life and help her take back internal real estate that should belong to Jesus.

So, regardless of where a woman finds herself on the femininity spectrum, she can glorify God as she trusts Him to expand and grow her into a more well-rounded follower of Christ. Even (and especially) if that includes pink nail polish and spiritual firefighting gear.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/princess_warrior_first_responder
on March 5, 2019.

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"](#))
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- 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.
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- 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!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/raising_gender_healthy_kids
on July 28, 2015.

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 (Judges 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” (Romans 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.

Boy Scouts: Let's Hear It For Masculinity

Ceremonies make me cry. Any ceremony, no matter how cheesy. But some ceremonies are deeply meaningful and important, which is how I about cried off all my makeup recently at a Boy Scout Court of Honor where the son of my Probe colleague Byron Barlowe received his Eagle Scout rank.

Understanding God's gift of gender is a big deal to me, and I viewed the ceremony through that grid. I saw the glory of healthy, godly masculinity on display, particularly the

goodness of men teaching boys to be men.

I saw men serving others through leadership and modeling. The long-term commitment of many volunteer years in this particular troop showed that the leaders understood the value of faithfulness and persistence over time. Each Eagle Scout recipient was featured in a video that included remarks by the scout, each of his parents, and his troop mentor, and the many thank-yous to the men who gave of themselves as leaders pointed to their servant leadership.

Boys who had earned badges and who had advanced in rank were rewarded with a badge, affirmation and applause. (Which included the [left handshake](#), which I now know, thanks to Uncle Google, is a worldwide scouting thing.) Nobody gets badges and pins, much less the coveted Eagle scarf and pin, without working hard for them, a powerful antidote to the “everybody gets a trophy for showing up” mentality. It was a good reminder that true self-esteem and confidence don’t come by speaking feel-good affirmations into a mirror; they are earned the hard way by accepting a challenge and working through it to achieve a goal. But none of the boys who earned badges and rank advancement did it on their own. It took cooperation with and encouragement from others to achieve these things. The men were teaching boys that “no man is an island,” that God intends for men to do life in community, learning to ask for and accept help from others even as they offer help to others.

In the midst of all this male-glory, I loved that each boy advancing in rank was called forward with his mother, given a pin to place on a ribbon worn over her heart, and directed to give her a hug. When one of the scoutmasters was honored for achieving a leadership rank that he had worked on for many months, his wife was asked to come to the platform to assist with the ceremony, and he asked for the whole family to come up. All nine children. In this troop, boy scouts are not just about boys and men. Their connections and commitments to family are also valued, another glory of godly masculinity.

At one point, one of the scout leaders was at the microphone calling scouts and their mothers forward. His own son and his wife, carrying a toddler boy, stood on stage to receive their pin. As soon as the toddler saw his daddy, he started jumping excitedly and reaching for his father with uncontainable joy and delight in his daddy, who took him into his arms with a big smile. Later, I told this leader something I heard recently from an experienced therapist who wrote *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*: even with boys on the emotionally sensitive, artistic, creative end of [the gender spectrum](#), the ones more at risk for taking a gay identity when they get older, if a little boy lights up and runs to his father when he comes home (or, as in this case, when he sees him unexpectedly), that boy is in a good, secure place emotionally. A warm and positive connection with his father is the best foundation for emotionally and gender-secure boys.

And that is one of the benefits of Boy Scouts for any boy, especially the fatherless or the badly fathered. When a boy receives attention, affirmation and affection ([the Three As](#)) from father-figures, he gets what he can only get from men, and which he needs to grow up to manhood. Even if a boy's dad is not around, those needs can be met by other men who can introduce him to the world of men in safe, healthy, godly ways. (And that is why the idea of gay scout leaders is scary: men who lack gender security cannot impart to boys what they don't own. They are still looking to get their own need for the Three As met, and that unmet need can so easily turn into predation. Even if they don't intend that initially.)

The final highlight of the evening was the scoutmaster's comments and charge to each of the two Eagle recipients. His grasp of the meaning and application of God's word, combined with his personal knowledge and understanding of each young man's character and story, was one of the most excellent manifestations of a pastor-teacher I've ever seen. The newly-minted Eagles were blessed by a man soaring in his position

and responsibility as a spiritual leader as he pointed them, not to himself, but to Christ, and urged them to follow hard after Him. This is what godly leadership looks like.

I have long seen that women cannot imprint masculinity on a boy's heart; we can confirm it, we can affirm it, we can clap and cheer for it, but we cannot imprint it. We don't have what it takes, because God gives *men* that privilege.

And I am so, so glad He does.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/boy_scouts_lets_hear_it_for_masculinity on May 6, 2014.

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

Your article [“What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites?”](#) makes this statement: “The biblical view is that God’s intent for every male is to grow into masculinity, and for every female to grow into femininity.” What Bible passages support that contention?

I would define masculinity as the characteristics of being male, and femininity as the characteristics of being female,

per God's intention. I would also suggest that as a culture, we have a too-narrow idea of what it means to be male and to be female. I think that masculinity is a [spectrum](#) from the rough-and-tumble, athletic-loving male to the sensitive, artistic, musical, aesthetic-loving male, and everything in between. I think that femininity is a spectrum from the girly-girl to the tomboy/jockette, and everything in between, and it pleased God to make both male and female, masculine and feminine, in His image. That's a VERY wide range!

But there is a difference between male and female, between masculinity and femininity. When people of one gender long to be the other other, and indulge the fantasy of being or becoming the other, there is a hatred and contempt for the gender that they are—and that means something is wrong. God chose their gender, which means it is good; to hate what God has made means someone's thinking is skewed and needs to be adjusted, to come into alignment with God's.

I say this to lay a foundation for the scriptures that answer your question: I believe that "male and female" and "masculine and feminine" mean the same thing. When they don't, I believe, it's because we have adopted a too-narrow understanding of masculinity and femininity.

From the beginning, the binary nature of "male and female" has been God's design and God's intent:

Genesis 1:27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Genesis 5:2 "He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created."

Genesis 6:19 "And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female."

Then, in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus reiterated this truth:

Matthew 19:4 "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female. . ."

Mark 10:6 "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female."

Then there's this:

Deuteronomy 22:5 "A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."

The point of this law, like that of many other OT laws, is to underscore the importance of not blurring distinctions, of maintaining boundaries between separate things. One of the reasons for this importance is so that God's people would think clearly about reality. The differences between male and female are God-designed and good, because He reveals His glory differently through men and through women. (Note throughout the Psalms the way God reveals Himself to be a God of strength and protection, masculine glories, as well as a God of nurture and caring, feminine glories. Our masculinity and femininity both come from the heart of God.)

Scripture also teaches that God's plan and design is for things and people to grow to the mature forms of what they are (references to animal husbandry; parables of crops growing; God's intention for us to grow to maturity [Ephesians 4:13]). Apples do not grow up to be corn, and lambs do not grow up to be bulls. Boys grow up to be men, girls grow up to be women.

My husband the scientist points out from Psalm 139 that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," as God knits us together in our mother's womb. Part of that is genetics, which is that God determines if we are male or female. These days, some people are unhappy with their gender as if it were a mistake or a

joke, but God has made that determination for His glory and our good.

Thanks for asking.

Sue Bohlin

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