

# SEXUAL ORIENTATION & GENDER IDENTITY

The general acceptance of new categories of human beings based on sexual attraction or self-identified gender is part of a radically new understanding of human nature. Christians must continue to make God's design for human sexuality primary in how we understand ourselves and in the choices we make concerning marriage, sex, and procreation.

## Who am I?

For most of human history, people were defined by received identities: a person was Erik's son, a Roman citizen by birth, or a farmer as his father was before him. Such identities are received from nature, family, and culture, not chosen based on personal feelings or preference.

This has changed in the last few hundred years. We now live in an era of "expressive individualism."<sup>1</sup> Rather than being ruled or defined by others, Westerners believe everyone should be free to make their own life choices and express their uniqueness however they wish.

We can celebrate more opportunities for people to develop their unique God-given talents. But an ideology of freedom that views human nature and morality as restrictive social constructs is destructive. This is manifest today in matters of sexuality and gender, where objective standards of biology and design

have been cast aside in favour of subjective identities based on feelings and behavioural choices. Not only do newly invented categories of sexuality and gender not comport with reality, but they also impede the ability of those who experience same-sex sexual attraction or gender dysphoria to truly flourish.

## Man is Made in the Image of God

The psalmist David asks God, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"<sup>2</sup> Philosophers have pondered this question through the ages. David knew the answer: "You have made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet."<sup>3</sup>

The psalmist recognized the core identity of every human being is that we are made in the

## DEFINITIONS

### Sex:

the biological aspects of being male and female.

### Male:

the sex that has the ability to produce sperm.

### Female:

the sex that has the ability to produce eggs and bear young.

image of God.<sup>4</sup> After creating the world, God says in Genesis 1:26-27, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” This defining characteristic – that human beings are made in the image of God – sets human beings apart from animals and all other forms of life.

While other religions and philosophies tend to divide human beings into various constituent parts (e.g. Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, Hinduism), Christianity understands the human person as a comprehensive whole, an inseparable unity of body and soul. Our bodies are not a shell or vehicle for a disembodied self, but are integral to the personal reality of being human.

### Man is Sexually Dimorphous

An essential element of God’s design is that human beings were created male or female. Sex is innate, immutable, and integral to human flourishing.<sup>5</sup> Both men and women are made in God’s image to do the tasks He has given them. Genesis is also clear that men and women come from each other. The first woman came from man’s side and every future man was born of a woman. And though they are both made in God’s image, they are different from each other.

Genesis 1:27 teaches that human beings are sexually dimorphous – the two sexes look and act differently from each other. In fact, they were made for each other. Genesis is clear that God made everything good in creation except one thing: when Adam was found to be alone. After saying six times in Genesis 1 that His creation was good, God says in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I

will make a helper fit for him.” The term “helper” is not derogatory. It is used elsewhere in the Bible of God Himself. Eve was made because Adam needed her. She was made as a helper for him, not as an afterthought or add-on, but someone equally essential for mankind to accomplish our God-given tasks.

### The Science of Sexual Difference

Sexual development begins with genetics. From the moment of fertilization, every human being is designed to develop either as a male (primarily determined by the presence of a Y chromosome) or as a female (primarily determined by the absence of a Y chromosome).<sup>6</sup> As the cells of a zygote divide and multiply, each cell in that human body bears the chromosomal markers of the person’s sex. Throughout a person’s entire lifespan, those genetic markers remain the same. They are fixed. Thus, sex is not “assigned” at birth. It is genetically determined at conception and, in nearly all cases, easily recognized at birth or even in utero.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout our lives our sexual development continues through the action of our hormones. As a human body develops in utero and through puberty, chromosomes play a dominant role in the production of sex hormones.<sup>8</sup> While estrogen and testosterone are both present in males and females, greater levels of testosterone are present in males and greater levels of estrogen in females. These hormones become especially important during puberty, when they spur the development of reproductive systems.

Reproductive systems are generally considered in biology to be the key differentiators between males and females. Males have the ability to produce sperm and females the ability to produce eggs and bear young.<sup>9</sup> These two complementary reproductive systems are designed by God to work together to create new human beings. Maleness and



## Canadians should affirm and celebrate the goodness and immutability of biological sex while showing compassion to those who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria.

femaleness are manifest as developmental pathways directed towards and shaped by one of two reproductive roles.

Sexual development and differentiation include differences in appearance aside from primary sex characteristics. Secondary sex characteristics in males include facial hair, relatively thick and dark body hair, thicker and tighter skin, a deeper voice, a larger face, a more prominent brow, nose, and chin, and an Adam's apple. Females are characterized by an absence of facial hair, relatively sparse and light body hair, a smaller face, a higher pitched voice, and the presence of breasts. People are able to identify an adult's sex with an astonishing degree of accuracy merely by observing his or her face.<sup>10</sup> Although the differences in secondary sex characteristics are the most visible aspect of our sexual differentiation, sex is not reducible to these characteristics.

Sexual differences extend beyond genetic sex, sex hormone levels, reproductive capacity, or primary or secondary sex characteristics, most of which are categorical differences. A burgeoning

body of literature reveals statistical differences between the sexes, including the percentage of muscle mass and fat tissue, hearing ability, susceptibility to diseases, learning styles, and patterns of brain activity.<sup>11</sup> These statistical sex differences can be illustrated by overlapping bell curves.<sup>12</sup> For example, males will tend to be taller and physically stronger than women on average, but there are some women who are taller and stronger than some men. The consequences of these strength and size differences are obvious. For example, they account for the statistical differences in outcomes in sports where all male sports have faster, stronger, or longer world records than in women's sports.

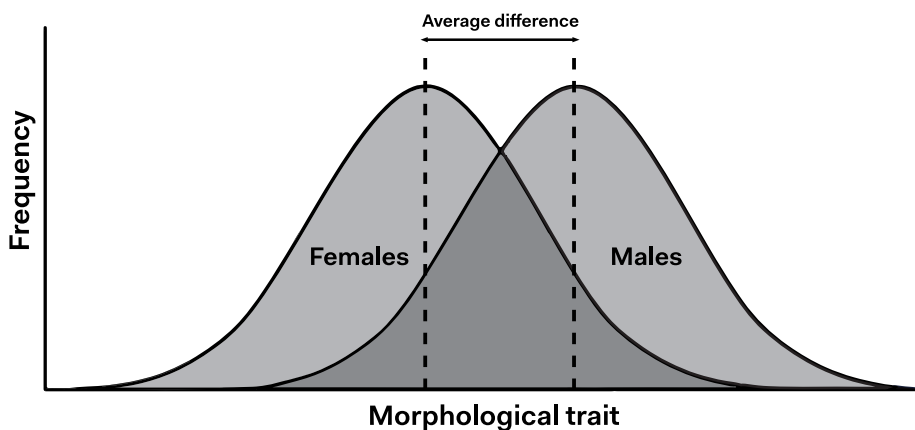
### Normative Implications of Sexual Difference

In light of the profound importance of human sexuality, the Bible gives proscriptions and prescriptions about sexual behaviour. Starting once more in Genesis, the Bible makes it clear that sexual relationships are designed to be between one man and one woman for

one lifetime.<sup>13</sup> Only marriage between one man and one woman is explicitly upheld as God's design for sexual relations. No passage in scripture condones any other sexual behaviour including adultery, extra-marital affairs, polygamy, rape, prostitution, or homosexual behaviour.

In fact, several biblical passages directly forbid same-sex sexual activity.<sup>14</sup> The biblical injunction against such behaviour is not directed at Christians only. It is a creational norm, or natural law, given by God for all humanity. For example, Romans 1:26-27 warns of "dishonourable passions" that lead some people to "exchange natural relations" for sexual relations with persons of the same sex.

Scripture also speaks normatively about gender roles, which are tied to sexual difference. (For a discussion of the terms sex and gender, see the heading Understanding Gender, below.) For example, in marriage, men and women's roles are complementary but not identical.<sup>15</sup> Men are given tasks fit for their design as the stronger sex, including physical labour and as soldiers in war. The Bible also limits certain ecclesiastical offices to men only, alluding to God's spiritual design in the garden as being those tasked with spiritual leadership.<sup>16</sup> With this understanding of sex and gender, the Bible teaches that a person should not present himself or herself as a member of the opposite sex.<sup>17</sup> Doing so would be akin to hiding or marring the image of God given to us when we were created male or female.



## Social Constructionism and De-Norming

Standing against the biblical and creational understanding of sex and gender is the social constructionist understanding. Social constructionism posits that many facets of human culture and identity are not based on eternal or objective truths. Rather, people perceive many things as true or real simply because society has collectively deemed them to be so, often based on personal preference.<sup>18</sup> For example, the value of a Canadian dollar is a social construct. The value of the dollar depends on people's agreement to use Canadian dollars to exchange goods and services. The value of Canadian dollars could change suddenly if people collectively decided that it was worthless (i.e. the Canadian government issued a new currency, the dollar experienced significant inflation, or Canada joined a monetary union).

Social constructionism provides insights into some facets of human life. But sex is not a social construct. It is not something constructed by human language or consensus. Sex is not determined by how we feel. Sexual differentiation is real and intrinsically meaningful. Sexual orientation and gender identity, on the other hand, are social constructs (as explained further below). These terms and ideas have been crafted by society to establish new cultural categories of human beings not based on God's creational design.

## The Effect of the Fall into Sin on Sexuality and Gender

God created a perfect order for human sexuality. However, humanity's fall into sin disordered human sexuality in two ways. First, the fall into sin affected humanity's ability to choose what is good and right.<sup>19</sup> Men and women are now naturally inclined to sin, and it is only by God's restraining hand and His

Holy Spirit that people can choose what is right. Therefore, human feelings and choices are always fallible and must be judged in light of Scripture.

Second, the very fabric of nature is affected by sin so that many things that human beings consider to be normal, expected, or "natural" are still the result of sin.<sup>20</sup> Natural in this sense does not equal good. For example, a person born with a cleft palate is not culpable for her deformity. But a cleft palate is still an effect of sin that we rightly seek to remedy.

These twin realities about the impact of sin in the world are critically important for discussions about sexuality. A person's choices regarding sexual behaviour or gender expression are not good or right just because someone feels like something is right for her. Internal feelings and individual choices, in a sinful world, are not the ultimate standard of morality. This also means that, even if biology contributes to same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, these experiences or feelings do not determine one's true identity or excuse same-sex sexual behaviours or transgender identification or expression. Rather, we should look to the pattern established in God's Word and creational norms for expressing human sexuality and gender.

## Understanding Sexual Orientation

The concept of sexual orientation (and the term itself) was developed in the late 19th century. The terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual" were coined by Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1869.<sup>21</sup> Sexual orientation is a social construct that changed how people understand same-sex sexual relations. Until the early modern era, same-sex sexual relations were simply activities that some people engaged in. In some ancient societies, it was quite common. A wealthy man in ancient Rome, for example, could (and

often did) treat female and male slaves, adult or minor, as sexual objects for his own use. But this activity did not define a category of person or individual identity. People were not categorized as straight, gay, or bisexual in that era as they are today. There were no sexual minorities. The Bible, for example, never speaks of homosexual or gay persons, but only same-sex sexual conduct and persons who engage in it. According to God's good design, human sexuality is defined in terms of male and female, married and unmarried.<sup>22</sup>

Today, the term *sexual orientation* often does "triple duty" in our lingo.<sup>23</sup> It is helpful to break down sexual orientation into related yet distinguishable aspects: sexual attraction, sexual identity, and sexual behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

Sexual attraction involves whom (or what) a person is sexually attracted to or aroused by. Although sexual attraction is generally subjectively self-reported, there may be more objective means for ascertaining an individual's sexual attraction.<sup>25</sup>

Sexual identity refers to a person's self-perception as heterosexual or homosexual (or something else). Some people may experience sexual attraction but not identify with that attraction. For example, a person who experiences same-sex attraction may not identify or define himself as gay because of his Christian faith. Some might claim that such a person is "in the closet" and has not "come out" yet, even if the Christian openly talks about his struggles.

Finally, sexual behaviour includes not only sexual intercourse, but any touching of a sexual nature, or any conduct engaged in for the purpose of sexual stimulation, such as viewing pornography. People who experience same-sex attraction may live celibate lives or even form an exclusive relationship with a person of the opposite sex.

Conversely, some people (such as prisoners in a men's-only institution) may be attracted to members of the opposite sex and identify as heterosexual but engage in same-sex sexual behaviour.

### Sexual Attraction, Behaviour, and Identity

While sexual orientation is used in ways that encompass all three of these facets of sexuality, the term is largely unhelpful because it is imprecise. For example, a common question is whether sexual orientation (e.g. "being gay") is a choice. The answer to that question depends on whether you're talking about sexual attraction, identity, or behaviour. Engaging in consensual sexual *behaviour* is a choice. But when it comes to attraction or identity, it is more complicated.

In many ways, sexual *attraction* is not chosen. Many people experience unwanted sexual attractions or desires, straight or gay. A married person can be physically attracted to someone other than their spouse or a single person can be attracted to multiple partners. In those cases, scripture and society agree that the attraction is not the same thing as the sexual behaviour. A person can control his conscious thoughts. For example, a person can choose whether to fantasize about certain persons or behaviours. To some extent, sexual interests and attractions are malleable and can be shaped by one's choices and habits. And these in turn can influence whether a person experiences sexual desires in various situations.

Whether homosexual *identity* is a choice depends on your anthropology, whether you think that sexual identity is innate or a social construct. A Christian might experience persistent same-sex sexual attraction yet not identify as homosexual. In other words, we may not be able to choose our sexual attractions but we

can choose to make that orientation the foundation of our identity. Same-sex desire is one of many kinds of disordered sexual desire, but the normative sexual framework provided by the Bible and general revelation is that we are created male and female. For this reason, scripture recognizes the only legitimate place for human sexual behaviour as between adult humans joined in an exclusive union with a person of the opposite sex in an institution called marriage.

Immoral behaviour should not be excused or legitimized based on the social construct of sexual orientation. Rather, sexual desires, behaviours, and identities should be tested against God-given norms that govern human sexuality. Sexual attraction, identity, and behaviour are designed with marriage as the goal. Disordered sexual desires, identities, and behaviours – which include far more than homosexuality – are sinful and destructive.

All of this is true because human beings are designed for sexual union with a person of the opposite sex within the context of a covenantal marriage. Human reproduction can only arise naturally in a relationship between a male and a female; the male and female reproductive systems complement each other for the purpose of procreation. To put it another way, each human being only has half a reproductive system - the other half belongs to a person of the opposite sex. Same-sex sexual activity by its very nature rejects this purpose of sexed bodies.

But there is a further dimension to human sexuality. Human sexuality and marriage reflect the relationship between Christ and His Church, where Christ is the husband and the Church is His wife.<sup>26</sup> In this covenantal relationship, two Christs do not come together and neither do two Churches. One Christ and one Church come together. The



## DEFINITIONS

### Sexual orientation:

a social construct that encompasses sexual attraction, sexual identity, and sexual behaviour.

### Sexual attraction:

whether a person is aroused by members of the same sex or the opposite sex.

### Sexual identity:

a person's self-perception as heterosexual or homosexual (or something else.)

### Sexual behaviour:

a person's sexual activity in relation to other people.

basic diversity of humanity as male and female, united in faithful life-giving love, reflects something of God Himself.

### Causes of Same-Sex Attraction

In popular culture, same-sex attraction is seen as simply a matter of being “born that way.” Is this true?

The best evidence suggests that there is no single, definitive cause of same-sex sexual attraction, although there are various hypotheses and observations. Some scientific literature suggests that same-sex attraction is rooted in natural causes. The elevated presence (or absence) of opposite-sex hormones in utero,<sup>27</sup> genetic variation,<sup>28</sup> and fraternal birth order all have been shown to contribute to same-sex sexual attraction. The fraternal birth order effect alone has been estimated to contribute to 15-29% of all instances of male same-sex attraction.<sup>29</sup>

There is also evidence that sexual attraction can vary during one’s life.<sup>30</sup> In one study, over 80% of teens who first reported same-sex attraction and sexual activity reported exclusively heterosexual attraction and sexual activity within 6 years.<sup>31</sup> In another longitudinal cohort study, young females who identified as lesbian averaged 3 orientation changes over 8 years.<sup>32</sup>

Another line of evidence suggests that sexual attraction can be affected by external events. For instance, there is a strong correlation between same-sex attraction and childhood sexual abuse.<sup>33</sup> One interpretation of this evidence is that the trauma of childhood sexual abuse can *cause* victims to have different sexual attraction as adults. Alternatively, some suggest that the difference may be due in part to minors’ same-sex attraction and related gender-atypical behaviour exposing them to a higher rate of abuse. Finally, cultural shifts may also influence

sexual identities. In a 2021 Gallup survey, the proportion of Americans who self-identified as LGBTQ varied starkly by generation: 0.8% of persons born before 1946, 2.6% of Boomers (1946-1964), 4.2% of Gen X (1965-1980), 10.5% of Millennials (1981-1996), and 20.8% of Gen Z (1997-2003).<sup>34</sup> Statistics Canada estimates that roughly 1 million Canadians identify as LBGTQ. Those aged 15-24 are almost three times more likely as those aged 24+ to identify as LGBTQ.<sup>35</sup> These numbers raise important questions about how culture may shape sexual identity and sexual attraction, especially for young people.

Regardless of the extent to which biological and social factors contribute to same-sex attraction, human sexuality is designed to allow for bodily union and covenant partnership with a person of the opposite sex. The reality of same-sex sexual attraction simply demonstrates that the fall into sin and the temptation to sexual sin affects people in various ways.<sup>36</sup>

### Understanding Gender

Historically, the words sex and gender were interchangeable. They describe the categories male and female. But today, these words mean different things. They are now used to describe the difference between biological function and social function. While sex refers to the biological reality of being male or female (chromosomes, primary and secondary sex characteristics), gender refers to the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female.

Despite the cultural change, it is obvious to most that gender differences are rooted in sex differences. Differences in clothing, for example, are a cultural phenomenon that are at least partly related to a biological reality. Because male and female bodies have different organs and different shapes, clothing is

often customized to account for these differences, leading to different cuts and styles of clothing. The same can be said of many occupations, sports, and recreational activities.

Recovering this connection between sex and gender is essential for preserving our mental and emotional well-being. Reinforcing gender stereotypes that are not based on biological reality (e.g. that ballet is only appropriate for girls and that rugby is only appropriate for boys) artificially limits women and men and may cause a child who enjoys activities that are typically associated with the opposite sex to experience confusion about his gender identity.

Early feminists rightly highlighted both the differences between and the fundamental equality of men and women.<sup>37</sup> Treatises by early modern feminists spoke of the equality of the sexes (rather than *gender*) in their writing.<sup>38</sup> However, the focus of gender discussions is now gender identity, a concept that overrides and even erases sex.

### Understanding Gender Identity and Gender Expression

Gender identity, like sexual orientation, is a new concept – and a social construct. It is not the same as gender. Whereas gender refers to the social and cultural aspects of being male or female (an immutable reality that transcends cultural-historical gender norms), gender identity refers to one’s internal, subjective sense of being male or female. In the past, a man who wore a dress and make-up might have been called “a man presenting as a woman.” But now, a man who believes he is “truly” a woman inside but who does not make any effort to appear female would be considered “a woman presenting as a man.”

Gender expression refers to the way in which a person attempts to express his

or her gender identity, through clothing, cosmetics, and mannerisms. Ironically, gender expression usually depends heavily on gender stereotypes or social constructs (e.g. that pink is a feminine colour and that blue is a masculine colour).

Gender ideology today claims that a person's "true" identity as male or female (or both, neither, or somewhere in between) depends on his or her self-conception, not his or her body. This is based on an irrational belief in a disembodied (yet somehow gendered) self. People rarely ask what it means, for example, for a male to "feel" or "know" he is female. He might desire to be female, or imagine what it would be like to female, or even mistakenly believe he really is female. But none of these would make him female. As former transgender and now Christian speaker Walt Heyer

said, when he lived as a woman for eight years he never was a woman. He only copied what he saw women do.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the explanation given when it comes to identifying young children as "transgender" is often shockingly shallow, such as noting that a boy prefers (stereotypically) feminine toys, colours, and clothes.

For the vast majority of people, their gender identity is said to "align with" their biological sex. Modern gender identity theorists label such people "cisgender." A small minority of people (0.33% of the population 15 years and older in Canada)<sup>40</sup> identify as "transgender" or "non-binary." Again, it is important to remember that the terminology of cisgender, transgender, and non-binary implicitly assumes that gender identity is a legitimate anthropological category.

## Understanding Gender Dysphoria

For decades, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) used the terms gender identity disorder, transsexualism, and sexual maturation disorder to describe the incongruity between gender identity and biological sex.<sup>41</sup> The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) III (1980) and IV (1994) listed gender identity disorder as a mental disorder for children and transsexualism as a mental disorder for adults.<sup>42</sup> However, both manuals have updated their terminology in the latest editions. The DSM 5 (2013) now lists only *gender dysphoria*, defined as "the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender."<sup>43</sup> The ICD-11 lists only *gender incongruence*, defined as "a marked and

## DEFINITIONS

### Gender:

the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male and female.

### Gender identity:

a social construct that describes the self-perception of being male or female, some combination of the two, or neither.

### Gender expression:

the way in which a person expresses his or her gender identity through clothing, cosmetics, and mannerisms.

### Gender dysphoria:

the distress that accompanies the incongruence between one's gender identity and biological sex.





persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, while the ICD categorization continues to recognize gender incongruence itself as a mental disorder, the DSM 5 only recognizes the *symptoms* (the distress) that may result from gender dysphoria as a mental health condition.<sup>45</sup> In the past this incongruity was generally resolved by attempting to change one's self-perception and embracing one's biological sex. Today, this incongruity is predominantly resolved by altering one's body to match perceptions.

Gender dysphoria in children and adolescents rarely persists into adulthood. Several studies have found that about 80% of children experiencing gender dysphoria “desist” or outgrow the distress or rejection of their sexed body after puberty, becoming comfortable with and accepting of their natural bodies.<sup>46</sup> Both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association recognize that gender identity fluctuates and that most gender dysphoric minors will eventually accept their biological sex.<sup>47</sup>

### Causes of Gender Dysphoria

There is no single generally accepted cause for gender dysphoria.<sup>48</sup> The Cass Report, which investigated the treatment of gender dysphoria at the UK's Tavistock gender clinic, suggests factors that can lead to gender dysphoria include trauma, questioning sexual orientation, autism, and other associated conditions.<sup>49</sup> Some experts attribute gender dysphoria primarily to high levels of opposite-sex hormones in utero.<sup>50</sup> Other researchers distinguish between different types of gender dysphoria<sup>51</sup> which may have different causal factors.<sup>52</sup>

Scholars have recently begun to distinguish between early onset gender dysphoria and rapid onset gender dysphoria. The former is expressed by

young children. The latter appears very suddenly, often during or shortly after puberty and primarily in teen girls. The number of referrals to gender clinics to treat gender dysphoria, particularly rapid onset gender dysphoria, has sky-rocketed in recent years, as has the number of such clinics. In the United Kingdom, referrals to the country's sole clinic at Tavistock increased from 77 in 2009 to over 2500 in 2019, an increase of 3,363%.<sup>53</sup> Specific numbers in Canada are harder to ascertain, but individual clinics have also seen referrals increase by over 1000% in recent years.<sup>54</sup>

The drastic rate of increase for referrals to gender clinics for gender dysphoria, particularly for rapid-onset cases, has led researchers to conclude that rapid-onset gender dysphoria is a social contagion rather than an innate condition. Professor Lisa Littman and journalist Abigail Shrier document how this phenomenon is highly concentrated among teenage girls. Girls with a transgender friend are more likely to come out as trans, and entire “clusters” of girls will come out as trans together.<sup>55</sup> While gender dysphoria was rarer and concentrated in young boys only a decade or two ago, it is primarily experienced by teenage girls today.

It is critically important to diagnose gender dysphoria correctly because the correct treatment or response depends on a correct diagnosis.<sup>56</sup> The former head of the John Hopkins Psychiatric Department, Dr. Paul McHugh, said, “This is a disorder of the mind. Not a disorder of the body.”<sup>57</sup> And while gender dysphoria may or may not be classified as a mental disorder today, it is *dis-ordered* in that it entails a denial of or alienation from one's own bodily identity, which is integral to one's personhood.

### Gender Dysphoria and Comorbidities

Gender dysphoria often presents alongside comorbidities or other psychological issues. According to a



survey of Dutch psychiatrists, 61% of patients exhibiting gender dysphoria experienced comorbidities like alcoholism, depression, anxiety, self-harm, a history of neglect or abuse, personality disorders, eating disorders, or psychotic and dissociative disorders.<sup>58</sup> The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), a promoter of the gender-affirming model of care, also recognizes that people with gender dysphoria often struggle with mental health concerns, particularly depression and self-harm, eating disorders, autism, ADHD, intellectual disability, and psychotic disorders.<sup>59</sup> WPATH clearly states that an “adolescent’s mental health concerns may interfere with diagnostic clarity, capacity to consent, and/or gender-affirming medical treatments ... Mental health challenges that interfere with the clarity of identity development and gender-related decision-making should be prioritized and addressed.”<sup>60</sup>

Given these complexities, Dr. Kenneth Zucker, a leading expert in paediatric gender dysphoria, cautions that the distress a person with gender dysphoria experiences is often not reducible to a single problem.<sup>61</sup> To simply affirm a person’s chosen gender identity may neglect a complex matrix of related psychological and social issues a person is struggling with.

### **Minority Stress or Faulty Anthropology?**

Gender dysphoria and transgender identification are correlated with many adverse health and social outcomes. Bauer et al (2015) document that 22-43% of the transgender population in Canada, Europe, and the United States have attempted suicide; 35% of transgender Ontarians had seriously considered suicide and 11% had actually attempted suicide in the past year

alone.<sup>62</sup> Considering that only 3.7% of all Canadians had ever seriously considered suicide and only 0.6% had actually attempted suicide in the past year, transgender Ontarians were 9.5 times more likely to seriously consider suicide and 18 times more likely to actually attempt suicide than the average Canadian in the past year. Canadians identifying as LGBTQ are also more likely to be homeless and to report poor quality of life, poor mental health, higher rates of substance use, higher rates of childhood sexual abuse, higher rates of sexual harassment, lower wages, and higher poverty rates.<sup>63</sup>

Many scholars explain these poor health outcomes through minority stress theory, the idea that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against people experiencing gender dysphoria create a hostile and stressful social environment.<sup>64</sup> However, Bränström et al (2022) found that minority stress is a relatively minor factor behind these poor outcomes, finding that only 13-15% of suicidal ideation and attempts are attributable to minority stress.<sup>65</sup> Little attention has been paid to the possibility that same-sex orientation or gender dysphoria themselves (with any comorbid conditions) directly contribute to these poor outcomes. If same-sex orientation and gender dysphoria are indeed in conflict with the purpose and nature of our sexed bodies, then it would be unsurprising that these correlations or even causations exist. Simply creating a culture that is more accepting of sexual and gender minorities will not eliminate these disparities.

### **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity as a Worldview**

The general acceptance of new categories of human beings based on sexual attraction or self-identified gender is part of a radically new understanding of

human nature. It replaces immutable, biological traits with subjective personal feelings. Categorizing ourselves as “gay” or “straight” makes our sexual attractions define our sexual identity. Gender ideology goes even further, claiming that our subjective understanding of our gender, regardless of biology, determines our identity. Such feelings are made core to who we are, even for children whose life experiences and maturity severely limit their self-understanding. This ideological revolution has no objective boundary. If personal feelings and attractions can determine one’s core identity when it comes to sex or gender, there is no rationally consistent way to insist that an individual’s ethnicity, age, or even species are not subjective as well.

Paul Wolscht is a middle-aged Canadian father of seven children. But he now identifies not only as female, but as a six-year-old girl. He left his wife and children to be “adopted” by a family that had a seven-year-old daughter. He now goes to work with heavy duty equipment dressed like a little girl and then goes home to use colouring books with his “older” sister.<sup>66</sup> Though the transgender movement refuses to support Paul, it can provide no moral or rational argument for why Paul’s trans-ageism is any different than his transgenderism. We cannot reasonably explain why someone can identify as a different gender but not a different age.

Gender ideology itself is a form of religious belief. Claiming a gender identity apart from biological sex is in effect claiming a metaphysical identity (e.g. a soul) beyond one’s physical body. In fact, Aboriginal individuals who identify as transgender use the term “two-spirited” to describe their gender identity, claiming that they have both a male and female soul.

A worldview that affirms sexual orientation and gender identity is not compatible with the Christian worldview.

Christians must make God's design for human sexuality primary in how we understand ourselves and in the choices we make concerning marriage, sex, and procreation.

Sean Doherty was sexually attracted exclusively to men. He became a Christian as a young man and began to reflect on the fact that God made him a man and designed his body to be able to unite sexually with a woman. Over time, says Sean, "I came to think that in fact my feelings were what were relatively superficial, in comparison to my physical identity." Eventually, "Without denying or ignoring my sexual feelings, I stopped regarding them as being who I was, sexually, and started regarding my physical body as who I was." Remarkably, "Rather than trying to change my feelings so that I could change my label, I changed my label and my feelings started to follow suit."

Sean eventually fell in love with a woman and got married. Like most people, Sean sometimes experiences attraction to someone other than his wife, typically to another man, but when it comes to marriage, he says, "It doesn't matter in the least whether someone is attracted to women or men in general. What matters ... is whether someone is attracted and called to marry one person in particular." Not everyone is called to marry, of course. But Sean's story illustrates the power of being rooted in the reality of God's creation design.<sup>67</sup>

## Recommendations

Canadians should affirm and celebrate the goodness and immutability of biological sex while showing compassion to those who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria. Same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria are real. Persons who identify as LGBTQ have inherent dignity and value and should enjoy the same legal protections as everyone and be free to participate in

public life without fear. But we should not use their experiences as a pretext for disregarding basic biological realities and fundamental norms for human sexuality, marriage, and family life.

Accordingly, public policy in Canada should be reformed as follows:

1. Governments at all levels should remove the misleading phrase *sex assigned at birth* in legislation, public communication, and government issued identification and maintain the scientifically accurate term *sex*. A person's sex is *determined* at conception and *detected* or *recognized* by others at birth (and often sooner).
2. Governments should protect a robust, broad freedom to speak about and debate sensitive or controversial matters, including matters related to identity and sexuality. Just as people should be free to criticize or question religious beliefs or practices, so should people be free to question or criticize transgenderism, "gender transitioning," or same-sex sexual relations.
3. The terms *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, and *gender expression* should be removed from law. The terms are fluid and subjective - they cannot be objectively evaluated or measured. They embody contestable social constructs. There is no coherent reason to prohibit discrimination against those in same-sex relationships but not polyamorous relationships, or to protect transgenderism but not protect trans-racism,<sup>68</sup> trans-ageism,<sup>69</sup> trans-ableism,<sup>70</sup> or even trans-speciesism.<sup>71</sup> Further, adding gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds of discrimination in human rights legislation is unnecessary, since persons with gender dysphoria are already protected in law.<sup>72</sup>
4. Governments should cease funding and promoting policies and programs that celebrate same-sex sexual relations and transgender identification (e.g. pride parades, drag queen story hour, or LGBTQ2SI+ action plans).
5. In places where a reasonable expectation of privacy or safety exists, (e.g. washrooms, changerooms, sex-segregated institutions such as prisons or women's shelters) a person's biological sex must be the determining factor for access to these facilities. While people who experience gender dysphoria no doubt simply wish to use the facility in which they feel comfortable, there is no objective means to identify who is using a facility for that purpose and who may use this as an opportunity for abusive behaviour.<sup>73</sup> The government must recognize that the safety of women in having access to women's only spaces, trumps the right of a biological male to have access to that space.
6. Eligibility and funding for domestic sports programs (if segregated by gender) must be based on biological sex rather than self-identified gender to preserve their intended purpose of recognizing the best female athletes.
7. No school policy should exclude parents from discussions on sexuality and gender identity. Schools must draft policies that are shared with all parents that requires the school to notify parents if their children are experiencing gender dysphoria. School policies should affirm children in their biological gender and help them accept their biological sex as part of a healthy sexuality.



## Citations

- 1 1 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).
- 2 Psalm 8:4
- 3 Psalm 8:5-6.
- 4 See, for example, Statement 2 of PCA, "2021 Human Sexuality Report," 2021, [https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2021\\_human\\_sexuality\\_report.pdf](https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2021_human_sexuality_report.pdf).
- 5 Throughout this report, the terms "sex" and "gender" are used as seemed best in each context to minimize confusion and maximize clarity. The use of the term "gender" in this report should not be taken as an endorsement of the view that a person's gender is merely a social construct and a completely distinct reality from a person's biological sex. Indeed, we affirm that a person's gender corresponds to and is synonymous with their sex. It is very clear what we are referring to in the opening sentence of this report when we say, "gender matters." Had we opened with "sex matters", it would have left a very different impression.
- 6 Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally* (New York, New York: Encounter Books, 2018), 82. This development occurs in 99.99% of cases. In very rare circumstances, a genetic abnormality may lead to an extra or absent chromosome (e.g. X or XXY) and a genetic disorder that may be broadly categorized as intersex. However, these are rare exceptions that prove the rule that sex is binary.
- 7 Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 128; PCA, "2021 Human Sexuality Report," 26.
- 8 Men also produce estrogen and females also produce testosterone, but in much smaller quantities.
- 9 Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 79; Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 120-21; Debra Soh, *The End of Gender* (New York, New York: Threshold Editions, 2020).
- 10 V. Bruce et al., "Sex Discrimination: How Do We Tell the Difference between Male and Female Faces?," *Perception* 22, no. 2 (1993): 131-52, <https://doi.org/10.1068/p220131>.
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- 13 Genesis 2:24
- 14 Leviticus 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10; Scripture also forbids other types of sexual behaviour such as adultery (e.g. Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 14:5), bestiality (Exodus 20:19; Leviticus 18:23; Leviticus 20:15-16; Deuteronomy 27:21), incest (Leviticus 18: 6-16; Leviticus 20:11-12; Deuteronomy 27:20, 22, 23), and polyamory (Genesis 2:24; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6), but same-sex sexual activity will be the focus for this document.
- 15 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:21-33; see also Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock, *The Grand Design* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2016).
- 16 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6
- 17 Deuteronomy 20:5; 1 Corinthians 11:6, 14-15
- 18 For more on social constructionism, see Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1966.
- 19 Canons of Dort III-IV; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 5-8, 91; 2021 Human Sexuality.
- 20 Romans 8:19-23
- 21 Robert D. Tobin, "Kertbeny's 'Homosexuality' and the Language of Nationalism," *Genealogies of Identity: Interdisciplinary Readings on Sex and Sexuality*, 2005, 3-18.; This list could be further expanded to other categories of human sexual attraction (e.g. asexual or pansexual). Some even argue that pedophilia or zoophilia are also proper categories of sexual attraction. If all sexual attractions simply showcase the diversity of the human experience, as many claim, then there is no reason to limit the list of sexual orientations to adult human beings. However, this report will focus on same-sex attraction.
- 22 Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5
- 23 J. Michael Bailey et al., "Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 17, no. 2 (September 2016): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100616637616>.
- 24 In an effort to be as clear as possible, this report will use the terms sexual attraction, sexual identity, and sexual behaviour instead of sexual orientation.
- 25 For example, researchers have measured the blood flow to genitals while exposing people to same-sex and opposite-sex erotic stimuli (penile and vaginal plethysmography). However, this approach is less suited to measuring sexual arousal in females than males. While such measurements may be possible, ARPA Canada has ethical objections to the use of pornography in all contexts, including for research purposes such as this. The objectivity and reliability of such methods are also subject to dispute.
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- 33 See Thersa Sweet and Seth L. Welles, "Associations of Sexual Identity or Same-Sex Behaviors with History of Childhood Sexual Abuse and HIV/STI Risk in the United States," *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* (1999) 59, no. 4 (April 1, 2012): 400-408, <https://doi.org/10.1097/QAI.0b013e3182400e75>; Sweet found that 38.1% of lesbians and 43.5% of bisexual women reported childhood sexual abuse compared to 14.2% for heterosexual women. As for men, 18.6% of gay men and 19% of bisexual men experienced such abuse, compared to 4.6% of heterosexual men.
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