

Why Some Gays Are Trying to drop Transgenders from LGBT

Are you confused or alarmed at the rise of Transgenderism? You're probably not alone. In fact, you might even have some unlikely allies not only in the form of radical feminists, but even gays and lesbians who feel it's time to "Drop the T" from the LGBT movement.

In November 2015 a group of gay and lesbian men and women launched a [petition](#) to have the T dropped from the LGB, arguing that:

"the transgender community needs to be disassociated from the larger LGB community...as we feel their ideology is not only completely different from that promoted by the LGB community (LGB is about sexual orientation, trans is about gender identity), but is ultimately regressive and actually hostile to the goals of women and gay men."

Opponents of the petition will argue that it represents only the smallest minority within the LGB movement, and indeed only 3,000 people have signed the petition so far.

The counter-petition has more than double the number of supporters, but if the LGBT movement has taught us anything, it's that minority views are important and deserve attention.

The petition cites four issues that justify the call for a parting of ways:

The vilification and harassment of women and gay/lesbian individuals who openly express disagreement with the trans ideology...

The infringement of the rights of individuals, particularly women, to perform normal everyday activities in traditional safe spaces based on sex...

The appropriation and re-writing of gay and lesbian history and culture, most notably attempting to re-cast the majority gay white men who participated in the Stonewall riots as

transgender...

Most troubling, by persuading parents and health professionals to diagnose children as young as four as transgender, despite considerable research that shows that more than 90 percent of children who express 'gender dysphoria' at a young age grow out of it by adolescence and, in most cases, grow up to be well-adjusted gay men and women.

What's going on here? Isn't LGBT supposed to be all about tolerance, acceptance, affirmation, love and rainbows? LGB and Transgender people stand together because they are both victimized minorities. But what happens when one victimized minority feels victimized by another?

This ambivalence within the LGBT community expresses a deeper problem with the Transgender movement and its social, cultural, and political aims. We need to understand that Transgenderism operates on more than one level, not only as a psycho-social phenomenon, but as an ideology.

Two kinds of transgender

Transgenderism operates on two levels.

The basic level is how most of the public seem to understand it: transgender means a man becoming a woman or a woman becoming a man. It's associated with sex change, and the social expectation is that the rest of us "play along" with the change so as not to embarrass the transgender person and give the game away. If they're lucky, they can pull off the transition and everyone will just assume the man is actually a woman or the woman actually a man.

From this point of view, the Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner phenomenon is interpreted as an "awareness-raising" exercise. Jenner was too famous to quietly transition and hope no one would notice, so he/she thought it better to make the whole thing public and do a good deed for the broader transgender community.

More puzzling from this point of view was Jenner's ambivalence about undergoing a complete "sex change". Most people still associate gender with sex, and assume that if the former changes the latter must change as well. Isn't that the whole point?

But there's a more complex level of Transgenderism as well, and this *complex* level is not about a man becoming a woman or a woman becoming a man. Instead it is about breaking the connection between gender as a social construct and biological sex. It's a different paradigm from the basic, popular understanding. This is not your grandfather's Transgenderism.

Gender is a social construct. Society has developed different ways of treating people according to their biological sex, but how we treat people is not biologically determined. Sex alone does not tell us how to dress, or what pronouns to use, or how to behave socially. We are not born knowing that dolls are girls' toys or that boys dress in blue. In every instance it is sex plus culture. These things arise in a social context and shift and evolve like language, fashion or customs.

Transgender activists would like to entirely sever the link between sex (male and female) and gender (man and woman). Or rather, they believe the link is already arbitrary and changeable, and so we are free to use gender however we like. The only obstacle is getting the rest of society to come on board.

From this point of view, Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner wasn't trying to pass as a woman, he was taking control of the public expression of his gender identity.

This confusion over the basic and the complex levels of transgenderism appears even in the terminology: is Caitlyn Jenner a woman or a transwoman? From the basic point of view, calling someone a transwoman would be "outing" them and breaking the social conventions such as they are. But from the complex point of view, a transwoman is more or less a new category that exists to describe people who have changed their gender from man to woman.

The complexity of Transgenderism is a reflection of how gender is constructed in society. What constitutes a man in the majority of cases is a person with male biology, who is assigned male gender by society, and also *identifies* as male.

Transgender typically refers to people whose gender identity does not match their biology or their socially assigned gender. So a transwoman is a person with male biology, who is assigned male gender by society, but actually identifies as a woman. This is why the term "gender

identity” has been so central to the public discussion – identity is key.

In keeping with the dominant principles of modern Western society (because, let’s face it, transgender is a social construct too), being true to one’s identity is seen as more important than conforming to social norms or biological limitations. Hence the transgender movement pushes for social change on the level of assigned gender.

At face value this appears reasonable. Current research suggests that gender identity is formed at an early age and difficult to change. Biological change is complicated, expensive, and of questionable merit. Of the three factors, social assignment of gender would appear to be the most malleable and open to influence.

But challenging and changing social norms is not easy, as evidenced by resistance to the transgender movement as well as confusion and resentment at being told we must fundamentally re-evaluate our use of language and terminology.

Freedom of speech and social coercion

Are you familiar with the pop-feminist neologism “to mansplain”? It means “to explain something to someone, typically a man to woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing.” The analogous neologism “transplaining” has likewise arisen out of popular frustration at being told how to think and speak by transgender activists.

But frustration, confusion and resentment are no match for victimization both real and perceived.

It is hard to imagine the transgender movement being derailed in the current cultural and political environment where most people are good-natured, inattentive, or socially compliant enough to learn to modify their use of pronouns. It’s a small price to pay to avoid the kind of condemnation levelled at even the most popular celebrities for their faux pas.

In a brief protest against the admittedly deplorable and unintentionally humorless *Zoolander 2* in late 2015, LGBT activists [complained](#) that actor Benedict Cumberbatch’s transgender-model character:

“is clearly portrayed as an over-the-top, cartoonish mockery of androgyne/trans/non-binary individuals. This is the modern equivalent of using blackface to represent a minority... By hiring a cis actor to play a non-binary individual in a clearly negative way, the film endorses harmful and dangerous perceptions of the queer community at large.”

How did Cumberbatch feel about being accused of using modern-day blackface? The correct answer is that no one cares or should care, since Cumberbatch embodies all kinds of white, Western, wealthy, cisgendered, heterosexual, celebrity privilege. His role in the film is categorized as “punching down” on LGBT people for cheap laughs.

It’s hard not to sympathise with victims and underdogs. But many express discomfort with the increasingly conformist and collectivist tone of what is usually presented as an individualistic, non-conformist phenomenon. I’m supposed to respect the subjective truths of other people’s gender identities in a spirit of openness and compassion, but will my philosophical beliefs about the relationship between language, truth and reality receive the same tolerance?

Transgender activists and fellow-travelers insist that people be treated in accordance with their self-professed gender identity. Their rationale is that a failure to respect gender identity delegitimises Transgenderism and contributes to an unsafe climate for transgender people.

They’re right, to a degree. But then it’s equally true that using social, legal, and political coercion to control people’s use of language delegitimises alternative points of view on gender theory, linguistics, ethics, politics, psychology and philosophy, and contributes to an environment that is intolerant of freedom of expression.

Transgenderism has thus [created turmoil](#) in the Feminist community with high profile figures such as Germaine Greer unwilling to accept the notion that being a woman is, or should be, divorced from biology. Greer has won herself unlikely admirers and enemies with her firm (not to mention [profane](#)) insistence that being a woman is far more biologically grounded than the likes of Jenner could ever appreciate.

The “Drop the T” petition likewise cites freedom of expression as one

of the points of conflict with the Transgender movement.

The transgender paradox

But aside from freedom of expression, there's a paradox within the Transgender ideology that revolves around the supposed fluidity of gender on the one hand, and the pressing need for change on the other.

Gender identity is undeniably informed by the pre-existing gender norms of the society into which we are born. The transgender movement believes in the malleability of those norms, and intends to alter them. Yet these are the very norms that many transgender people wish to embrace in the first place. The circularity is hard to fathom.

On the one hand, transgender people "know" that they belong to the opposite gender. On the other hand, the transgender movement also holds that gender is fluid, an arbitrary construct open to change, and they intend to change it. Transgenderism is not simply about men and women or girls and boys quietly passing as members of the opposite sex. It's about breaking down the very gender categories themselves.

As the more complex Transgenderism filters down into the broader public, people will get the message that gender is fluid and that social norms must change. If the change is successful, then the source conditions for gender identity will be altered. No one knows what effect this will have.

While the more basic transgender goal of simply passing for a member of the opposite gender upholds the integrity of those formative gender roles, the more complex transgender aim of deconstructing gender and gender norms on a societal level is profoundly radical. The former is a plea or a demand for greater awareness and a shift in etiquette. The latter is a fiercely ideological program with a coercive streak.

It's hard to predict how the current wave of Transgenderism will work itself out in our societies. The nuances of the ideology are far too complex for the public to meaningfully apply them in daily life, and it remains to be seen how the ideology will translate into practice.

Getting ordinary people to think about pronouns is hugely ambitious. Homosexuality produced a set of new labels and, like new brands, worked hard to win public acceptance and approval. But Transgenderism is at face value seeking to change how we conceptualise and apply very ancient and deeply ingrained language and labels. It's hard to imagine

it succeeding on that level.

It's more likely to succeed, or at least have a real impact, by targeting institutions and cultural phenomena that give form and shape to "outmoded" or politically incorrect expressions of gender. Expect attacks on very public expressions of gender norms designed to delegitimise those norms in the public square. If you can't get people to adopt your ideology, you can instead, as the same-sex marriage campaign has demonstrated, label them bigots and apply social, legal, and political pressure to silence them.

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