



The Landscape of Gender Identity
Basics Conference 2024 | Jonathan D. Holmes

About Jonathan

Jonathan Holmes is the Founder and Executive Director of Fieldstone Counseling. He previously served for fifteen years on the pastoral teams of Parkside Church and Parkside Green. Jonathan graduated from The Master's University with degrees in Biblical Counseling and History and his MA from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is the author and contributor to a number of books including *The Company We Keep*, *Counsel for Couples*, *Rescue Skills*, *Rescue Plan*, and the forthcoming book *Grounded in Grace: Helping Kids Build Their Identity In Christ*.

Jonathan has written for *Christianity Today*, *The Gospel Coalition*, the Biblical Counseling Coalition, the ERLC, and the *Journal for Biblical Counseling*. Jonathan serves on the Board of Trustees for CCEF (Christian Counseling Educational Foundation), the Advisory Board for ABC (Association of Biblical Counselors) and the Council Board for the BCC (Biblical Counseling Coalition).

Jonathan is a Visiting Faculty member at CCEF, an instructor at Westminster Theological Seminary in the Masters of Counseling program, and he speaks frequently at conferences and retreats. He and his wife, Jennifer, have four daughters.



Carl Trueman: The fact that “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” makes sense to Joe Smith probably has far less to do with him being committed to an elaborate understanding of the nature of gender and its relationship to biological sex than to the fact that it seems intuitively correct to affirm someone in his or her chosen identity and hurtful not to do so, however strange the particulars of that self-identification might have seemed to previous generations.¹

Expressive individualism

Traditional identity

Modern identity

Understanding the terms

- *Biological sex*: male or female according to chromosomes (XX- female, XY- male), external/internal physiology (anatomy)
- *Gender*: the psychological, social, and cultural manifestations of maleness and femaleness (masculinity and femininity)
- *Gender identity*: how a person perceives or experiences themselves as male/female (how they understand themselves)
- *Cisgender*: someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth

¹ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 38.

- *Gender dysphoria*: the experience of incongruence between one’s biological sex and gender identity (duration of at least 6 months)²
- *Transgender*: broad umbrella term for a person who experience a different gender identity than their biological sex
- *Gender-fluid*: gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days.
- *Gender non-conforming*: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category
- *De-transitioner/desisting*: A de-transitioner is someone who previously identified as transgender and received medical and/or surgical interventions as a result, but stopped taking these interventions and no longer identifies as transgender in the same way.³
 - *Keira Bell*: I was adamant that I needed to transition. It was the kind of brash assertion that’s typical of teenagers. What was really going on was that I was a girl insecure in my body who had experienced parental abandonment, felt alienated from my peers, suffered from anxiety and depression, and struggled with my sexual orientation.

We are told these days that when someone presents with gender dysphoria, this reflects a person’s “real” or “true” self, that the desire to change genders is set. But this was not the case for me. As I matured, I recognized that gender dysphoria was a symptom of my overall misery, not its cause.⁴

² In order to receive this diagnosis, feelings of dysphoria must last 6 months in duration, cause great distress (APA, DSM-5, Washington RD: APA Publishing, 2013) p. 452.

³ <https://can-sg.org/frequently-asked-questions/what-do-the-terms-detransition-and-desistance-mean/>.

⁴ Keira Bell, “My Story,” April 7, 2021, *Persuasion*, <https://www.persuasion.community/p/keira-bell-my-story>. Accessed 18 January 2024.

Understanding the statistics

- 2011: Williams Institute at UCLA: .3% of the US population (700,000 people)
- 2016: Williams Institute at UCLA: .6% of the US population (1.4 million people)⁵
- 2022: Gallup Poll- LGBTQ+ population is at 7.1% of the total US population⁶
 - Double the number from 2012 when Gallup first measured it
 - 86%- straight/heterosexual
 - 6.6% prefer not to answer

 - Trans* .7% of the total US population
 - Other .3% of the total US population

Americans' Self-Identified Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Which of the following do you consider yourself to be? You can select as many as apply: Straight or heterosexual; Lesbian; Gay; Bisexual; Transgender.

	Among LGBT U.S. adults	Among all U.S. adults
	%	%
Lesbian	13.9	1.0
Gay	20.7	1.5
Bisexual	56.8	4.0
Transgender	10.0	0.7
Other (e.g., queer, same-gender-loving)	4.3	0.3

Percentages total more than 100% because respondents may choose more than one category.

GALLUP, 2021

⁵ <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/How-Many-Adults-Identify-as-Transgender-in-the-United-States.pdf>.

⁶ Jeffrey Jones, "LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%," February 17, 2022, *Gallup News*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>. Accessed 13 March 2022.

Americans' Self-Identification as LGBT, by Generation

	LGBT	Straight/Heterosexual	No response
	%	%	%
Generation Z (born 1997-2003)	20.8	75.7	3.5
Millennials (born 1981-1996)	10.5	82.5	7.1
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	4.2	89.3	6.5
Baby boomers (born 1946-1964)	2.6	90.7	6.8
Traditionalists (born before 1946)	0.8	92.2	7.1

GALLUP, 2021

- Gender dysphoria in children and teens
 - Gender dysphoria DSM-V criteria
 - A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
 - A strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one’s experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
 - A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
 - A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)
 - A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)
 - A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)
- *Mark Yarhouse*: In order for experiences of gender dysphoria to warrant the diagnosis of GD, the experiences have to be present for a minimum of six months and be associated with significant distress or difficulties in important areas of functioning, such as social or educational functioning.⁷

⁷ Mark Yarhouse, *Talking to Kids About Gender Identity: A Roadmap for Christian Compassion, Civility, and Conviction*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2023), 109.

- Dr. Jerami Carswell: [“When does a child know they’re transgender?”](#)
 - A child will often know they are transgender from the moment they have any ability to express themselves. And parents will often tell this to us. We have parents that tell us that their kids knew from the minute they were born practically. And actions like refusing to get a haircut or standing to urinate, trying to stand to urinate, refusing to stand to urinate, trying on siblings’ clothing, and playing with the “opposite gender” toys. Things like that.
- *Dr. Paul S. McHugh* further noted studies of children who had expressed transgender feelings but for whom, over time, 70%-80% “spontaneously lost those feelings.”⁸
- *Mark Yarhouse*: A passing interest in mom’s clothing or various secondary sex characteristics is probably not a sign of dysphoria. These interests happen quite often. I would encourage you as a parent not to be anxious when your child expresses an interest that is gender atypical or otherwise falls outside of rigid gender stereotypes. This kind of thing is common and does not persist in most cases.⁹

Co-morbidity in transgender children and teens:

- *Dr. John Whitehall* (Western Sydney University professor of pediatrics): Dutch children with dysphoria aged 4-11 revealed 52% had associated psychiatric problems with diagnoses including anxiety, phobias, mood disorders, depression, attention deficit disorder and oppositional behavior.¹⁰

ROGD: Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria¹¹

- Common factors amongst them for a sudden trans identity
 - Few of the children showed any signs of gender dysphoria to their parents growing up
 - Their new identity seemed to appear out of the blue
 - Many if not all of their friends at school were trans, and their coming out often followed their friends’ coming out as trans
 - Many of them became more popular after they came out as trans

⁸ Paul McHugh, “Transgender Surgery Isn’t the Solution”, Wall Street Journal, June 12, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/paul-mchugh-transgender-surgery-isnt-the-solution-1402615120>. Accessed 10 March 2017.

⁹ Mark Yarhouse, *Talking to Kids About Gender Identity: A Roadmap for Christian Compassion, Civility, and Conviction*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2023), 111-112.

¹⁰ Dan Flynn, “Confusing Gender Ideology Not For Vulnerable Children”, March 2, 2017. http://www.acl.org.au/confusing_gender_ideology_not_for_vulnerable_children?recruiter_id=3606

¹¹ Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, The Church, & What the Bible Has to Say*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2021), 163.

- They engaged in heavy online and social media activity surrounding their coming out
- Many of them had other mental health concerns that weren't being dealt with¹²
- What is the typical path of treatment for a teen/child who is struggling with GD?
 - Social affirmation
 - Puberty blockers
 - Cross-sex hormones
 - Gender affirming surgery
 - Legal affirmation process

Modern identity: problems and critiques

- Modern identity is incoherent
 - *Nancy Pearcey*: Though our feelings are important...they are not what define our identity. Nor are they a reliable guide to God's purposes. Because we are fallen and sinful, our feelings fluctuate over time. The most reliable marker of who we are is our physically embodied, God-given identity as male and female.¹³
 - *Brian Rosner*: The cruel irony is that, while it's never been more important to know who you are, it's rarely been more difficult.¹⁴
- Modern identity is crushing

¹² Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, The Church, & What the Bible Has to Say*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2021), 163.

¹³ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering the Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 156.

¹⁴ Brian Rosner, "Is it good advice to "be yourself"? Why looking inward is not necessarily the answer", July 3, 2022, https://www.abc.net.au/religion/brian-rosner-is-it-good-advice-to-be-yourself/13957180?fbclid=IwAR1VDj9Fn7nj37_wqVmyAifLcYZ9Pc8G7N-JIAGo6-UmTE7pPG3ygXP_Jc. Accessed 6 March 2024.

- Modern identity is fragile

- Modern identity is exhausting
 - *Alan Noble*: But the freedom of sovereign individualism comes at a great price. Once I am liberated from all social, moral, natural, and religious values. I become responsible for the meaning of my own life. With no God to judge or justify me, I have to be my own judge and redeemer. This burden manifests as a desperate need to justify our lives through identity crafting and expression. But because everyone else is also working frantically to craft and express their own identity, society becomes a space of vicious competition between individuals vying for attention, meaning, and significance, not unlike the contrived drama of reality TV.¹⁵

- Modern identity is an illusion
 - *Jeremy Treat*: It's interesting how being "true to yourself" usually means aligning with some mainstream cultural narrative.¹⁶
 - *Trevin Wax*: We think we're blazing our own path, but the paths we take look strangely like everyone else's.¹⁷

Gospel Identity

- *Matthew 10:39*: Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
- *John Stott*: The astonishing paradox of Christ's teaching and of Christian experience is this: if we lose ourselves in following Christ, we actually find ourselves. True self-denial is self-discovery.
- *Alan Noble*: There is no image for you to maintain because you were made in the image of God. There is no identity for you to discover or create because our identity was never actually in question.¹⁸

¹⁵ Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God In An Inhuman World*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 4.

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/JeremyTreat5/status/1173624816382795777>.

¹⁷ Trevin Wax, "The Faithful Church in an Age of Expressive Individualism", October 22, 2018, *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/faithful-church-age-expressive-individualism/>. Accessed 6 March 2024.

¹⁸ Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God In An Inhuman World*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 136-137.



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BOOKS & RESOURCES

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