



## Nobody Gets Hurt?

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A few years back, I gave a talk entitled “Thinking Through the Transgender Question” at a local parish. In the audience were several individuals supporting the transgender movement. During the question-and-answer session, one of them, a young woman, raised this difficulty:

“If someone wants to transition, how does that hurt anybody else? If my friend wants to be transgender, how would that harm any of us?”

Behind this line of argument, first, is the widely held notion that each of us is an isolated unit and our private choices don’t affect others. Yet the old adage that no man is an island rings perennially true. Grave harms to others, in fact, follow in the wake of the radical personal decision to “switch genders.”

I recently spent some time with a husband and wife who had a son struggling with depression and schizophrenia and who was convinced he was a woman. They shared with me how their son no longer spoke to any of his siblings or relatives, shutting everyone out of his life. He moved away to link up with the transgender community at his college for support, and his

parents summed up his new way of thinking as the detonation of a bomb that had ravaged the whole family.

That kind of devastation has been thoroughly catalogued by those who have gone all the way through the process of transitioning, and years or decades later come to regret it.

Walt Heyer is one such individual who turned to hormones and surgeries to try to take on the appearance of a woman. Many years later, he “detransitioned,” and started writing and speaking about his experiences. He has summarized the painful effects of his choices on those around him in several of his essays.

“Being transgender required destroying the identity of Walt so my female persona, Laura, would feel unshackled from Walt’s past, with all of its hurt, shame, and abuse,” he wrote. “It’s a marvelous distraction for a while, but it isn’t a permanent solution when the underlying issues remain unaddressed. Gender change is at its heart a self-destructive act. Transgenders not only annihilate their birth identity,

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they destroy everyone and everything in their wake: family, wife, children, brothers or sisters, and career.”

Walt had been married for many years, but after transitioning, he and his wife divorced. Communication with his children ceased. He was fired from his well-paying job as an engineer, and became practically destitute. Virtually all the significant relationships in his life were damaged, some irretrievably.

In his essay, Walt follows the trail of breadcrumbs in his own life to its logical conclusion.

“It occurred to me after much self-reflection that asking a surgeon to modify my appearance through a series of cosmetic procedures was simply a socially acceptable means of self-mutilation and self-destruction,” he stated. “Taken to the extreme, self-destruction leads to suicide.”

Follow-up studies of those who undergo sex-change operations have shown that they experienced highly elevated suicide rates, even many years post-surgery, revealing yet an-

other of the grave harms associated with transitioning that brings untold heartache to family and friends, relatives and acquaintances.

Beyond wreaking havoc in the life of patients and those around them, other damaging societal consequences arise in the wake of transitioning.

In a recent article in *Public Discourse*, Dr. Monique Robles, a pediatric critical care specialist, stresses how schools and institutions of higher learning are now “enforcing the use of preferred gender pronouns and opening bathrooms and sports teams to students of the opposite biological sex. Educators who refuse to comply are losing their jobs. Parents who do not agree with the trans-affirmative approach for their gender dysphoric children are faced with legal consequences. In the sports arena, biological males identifying as transgender are competing in women’s events with an unfair biological advantage. Biological females who claim to be male are allowed the unfair advantage of competing while taking testosterone, which is considered ‘doping’ in any other circumstance.”

Coming to the conclusion that “no one gets hurt” whenever someone transitions is simply naïve, con-

tradicted by the facts on the ground and by the tortuous lives of those pursuing this misguided “solution” to their gender confusion. They, along with their families and broader society, clearly deserve better.

Instead of propping up a fictitious and harmful understanding of human masculinity and femininity, we owe it to those struggling with gender dysphoria to address compassionately their underlying mental health concerns. Through evidence-based therapies, including appropriate psychiatric and interpersonal outreach and counseling, we hope to bring healing, preserve family unity, and help sustain important, lifelong friendships.

That’s what those struggling with their gender dysphoria deserve and all those who love them desire.

*Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. Father Tad writes a monthly column on timely life issues. From stem cell research to organ donation, abortion to euthanasia, he offers a clear and compelling analysis of modern bioethical questions, addressing issues we may confront at one time or another in our daily living. His column, entitled “Making Sense of Bioethics” is nationally syndicated in the U.S. to numerous diocesan newspapers, and has been reprinted by newspapers in England, Canada, Poland and Australia.*

