



SIBYLS NEWS

Issue no. 76 July 2016



Choir and sanctuary of Ely Cathedral

EDITOR'S APOLOGIES

In June I lost my soul-mate of 50 years, and it became impossible to work on the Newsletter. It will seem very self-indulgent on my part to touch on personal matters, but in explaining the late appearance of this issue, I need to assure contributors that nothing less would have delayed publication. Please continue to rely on the regular appearance of the Newsletter in future, and keep the material coming. Thanks.

Next copy date is September 5th, with projected publication on the 10th.

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I am glad to report that the clergy of Ely Cathedral, where the funeral took place, knew my own history, and were wholly supportive. I gave the address from just before the High Altar. It was a very intimate and sincere service, despite the grandeur of the surroundings. I did find myself wondering how the C of E has managed to make such a public mess of its institutional relationship with trans people, while demonstrating the greatest compassion, sympathy and flexibility on a personal level.

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THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

c/o 10, Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

www.sibyls.co.uk E-mail: enquiries@sibyls.co.uk

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, their partners and their supporters. It offers companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches.

Sibyls seek to fulfil the two great commandments of Jesus: To love God and love one another. To achieve this we provide opportunities to meet in safe and friendly establishments. We promote the freedom to talk, to learn, to pray and to seek God's will.

If you are having difficulties reconciling your faith with being transgendered or are concerned about acceptance in your church then maybe Sibyls is what you have been looking for. It could be that you just need to talk with fellow Christians who understand what it is to be transgendered, or simply wish to be yourself as you worship in fellowship and in a safe environment.

If you are looking for an accepting church, it may be useful to visit our website, where there is a resource for this. Go to the Resources page on <http://www.gndr.org.uk/sibyls5/indexmain.htm> Click on the "Pastoral" and then on the "Churches" tab. This is being updated, but has useful links. Especially supportive are the MCC Churches.

We like to know of churches which welcome transgender people. Also if you would like more information to give to your church please do contact us.

We welcome new members, young and old. There is no membership fee or annual subscription, and no commitment,

Sibyls Website - www.sibyls.co.uk

- Dates and information on future events are posted on the website
- A full range of resources is also available. Click on the "Resources" tab on the right of the top banner on the website to access these.

There is also a member's section for which a Username and password is required.

The current username for the member's section is **SibylsWeb** (all one word). The password is **4All-Members** (All one word: use uppercase and lowercase as indicated)

Forthcoming Sibyls events:

11 August, 13 October, 8 December - St. Anne's, Soho The dates for the 2016 London Evening Meetings are:
From the start of 2016 the time of the service has changed to 6:00 p.m.

17TH September 2016 - Sibyls Reflective Day at The Sisters Of St Andrew, Lewisham

Theme: 'Reflections on Love' More details p.3. Booking form p.4.

28- 30th October 2016 - Weekend at Hilfield

Theme: 'The Traveller's Way' More details p.3. Booking form next time, but places can be reserved by contacting Susan Gilchrist via "Sibyls Day Meeting", 8 Greenways Drive, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 5DU.

Alternatively please email sgen4144@gmail.com

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS - NEXT MEETING
11 Aug. 2016 6:00 p.m. at St Anne's Church, Dean Street, Soho.

We meet on the Second Thursday of every second month for a Service at St Anne's Church, followed by a meal together

THE SERVICE IS OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, TO THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS
Come in whatever role is convenient at the time

During the intercessions we normally pray for those we know and also on behalf of others who would like our prayers.
If you would like your name, or the name of someone you know to be included on the prayer list, please email me.
You can email me privately at sgen4144@gmail.com. (

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing,
followed by a good meal in congenial surroundings

St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, is 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.30 a gathering at a Soho restaurant. You can just turn up on the evening, but it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you do know you are coming, please email me at sgen4144@gmail.com. We normally decide on the restaurant at the end of the service. If you are late please ring 07546 213 971. The next dates for 2016 are: 11 August. 13 October, 8 December. Remember it's 6:00 p.m. *Susan*

SIBYLS REFLECTIVE DAY AT THE SISTERS OF ST ANDREW, LEWISHAM 17TH SEPTEMBER 2016
'REFLECTIONS ON LOVE'

In Galatians 3:26-29 Paul writes:

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise".

During the course of the day we will reflect on what this passage means for us in the Gospel of Christian Love

For those who wish to join us, we will be arranging a meal in a local restaurant on the Saturday evening after the event. If you are travelling a distance and want to stay over Friday or Saturday night accommodation will be available with the Sisters of St Andrew, although this must be booked separately from the event.

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

Provisional Programme

10.00-10.30 Coffee
10.30 Welcome and Introductions.
10.45-12.15 Session 1: Love and God
12.15-12.45 Eucharist
13.00-14.00 Lunch
14.00-15.00 Session 2: Love and Others
15.00-15.30 Tea
15.30-16.30 Session 3: Love and Ourselves
16.30 Closing thoughts and Evening Prayer

18.30 Optional Evening Meal in a Local Restaurant

To register your interest or for more information please email:
sgen4144@gmail.com

Booking form overleaf—can be scanned and printed
or cut out and posted



SIBYLS HILFIELD WEEKEND:
FRIDAY OCTOBER 28TH – SUNDAY 30TH OCTOBER 2016.

Following the success of last year's Sibyls Weekend at Hilfield Anglican Franciscan Friary in Dorset, a further weekend has been booked for the 28- 30th October 2016, which is NOT a bank holiday. There will be plenty of time for discussing and relaxing. Saturday afternoon will be kept free and I am sure that entertainment will be provided on the Saturday Night.

The anticipated theme is "The Travellers Way". St Francis was a traveller. We are anticipating input from one of the Brothers, and from someone who is part time Chaplain to Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in the Salisbury Diocese. We are all travellers in our own journeys, and we are hoping that insights from other who have encountered their own journeys of challenge and discrimination will help us in our journeys through life and the gender divide.

We will be self-catering for breakfast and the evening meal, and joining the Brothers for lunch. Both Juniper and Leo house have been booked so there is accommodation for 19. The Franciscans ask for donations rather than payment, and for this coming year their requested donation will probably be between £55-£66 per person, for the complete weekend.

Booking details and further information from Susan on sgen4144@gmail.com

BOOKING FORM: SIBYLS REFLECTIVE DAY AT THE SISTERS OF ST ANDREW, LEWISHAM

17TH SEPTEMBER 2016

'REFLECTIONS ON LOVE'

Please print or cut out and send the completed form with your donation to:

"Sibyls Day Meeting", 8 Greenways Drive, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 5DU.

Alternatively please email sgen4144@gmail.com

Your Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Post code: Telephone:

E-mail:

Dietary Requirements

Will you stay for the meal in a local restaurant on the Saturday evening?

Are You a Member of the Sibyls?

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

The suggested donation for this event is £25-£35. (Includes lunch). Please give as much as you can.

Please note that no one should be deterred from coming if they cannot afford this.

Please make cheques payable to "Mr P. A. Raftery - The Sibyls"

For catering purposes please book at least 5 days in advance.

I enclose a donation for this event of £

Your booking is provisional until we have received this form (completed), with your donation. If you require confirmation, please tick the box on the right and we will send you confirmation to your e-mail address above or else please enclose a stamped addressed envelope. ☐

Limited Overnight Accommodation on the Friday and Saturday Nights is available with the Sisters of St Andrew. This must be SEPARATELY booked. PLEASE NOTE that overnight accommodation has to be booked directly with the Sisters of St Andrew. Accommodation is self-catering only but very comprehensive kitchen facilities are provided. There are also plenty of restaurants in the area. The accommodation is available on a first come first served basis. Details are on the Sibyls website at

<http://www.gndr.org.uk/sibyls5/headlines/SuG0627b-SibylsStAndrewDayCosts.htm> : or follow the website links.

This is my Body, the Sibyls' book - sales progress

Orders have now stopped coming in to me at all, after a very strong start. I think it is a direct result of the usual suspects such as Amazon getting into the market with cheap offers. Overall sales are good. See:

<http://www.best-book-price.co.uk/Product-266239/0232532060-This+is+my+body+Hearing+the+theology+of+transgende.html>

I'm happy to report that we had already sold most of our allocation and have broken even. (Editor)

An email from: Robyn Golden-Hann [mailto:robyngoldenhann@gmail.com] Sent: 29 June 2016 13:22
Can you please spread the word among Sibyls that there will be a Pride parade in Salisbury
on the 30th July, starting 6pm from Salisbury playhouse.
It will be our very first, and as Salisbury is a small parochial city, quite a big deal for us!

A Letter from David Horton , (see Chris Dowd's account of David's work in the March 2016 issue of the newsletter)

I should have written long before to assure people I am still very much alive! The vertigo I've had since 2004 persists, and I now have Diabetes 2 and some eye sight problems. I rarely travel more than a few miles. I do still help out at the local parish church with the kind support of the two vicars the parish has had since I moved to Bromley to retire. In fact we will have to move soon as the landlord is selling up. It's been the longest time in one house since I left home to join the navy. I'm not sure what we will be able to find but if God wants us to stay with the local church I'm sure his providence will overcome the difficulties. As it stands this part of London will end up with only bankers and lawyers able to afford the housing costs! If not I hope to find somewhere else to be useful.

I received the print version of the new Sibyls book a few days ago and I have a Kindle for the e-version. Ayup it's posh! When I wrote Changing Channels I wanted three things: short but as accurate as possible; inexpensive so anyone could afford it or camouflage the purchase; and published by a 'reputable' evangelical publisher. Grove Books treated me well and made it their first ethical series e-booklet when the print version sold out quite quickly. It apparently still sells quite well and they still forward the occasional (almost all very positive) letter from a reader even after 22 years! In return I had the cover illustrated by one of London's top tranny cartoonists and the covers of most of their booklets improved afterwards. My object in writing was always pastoral - even if Grove put it in their ethics list. I wanted people to know that God loved them even if Christians weren't always little Christ's. So I hope this more erudite offering will help more than just the transgender community. I'm a bit sad to be the only entry in the 'Allies'. I hope there are many others out there!

Please feel free to pass any of this on in the newsletter. I am glad it's there to keep me in touch.

With my best wishes, David

Philippa Whittaker (Communications Officer for The Sibyls) writes:

There was discussion at the AGM at Windermere about communications with members. Two resolutions were passed that will affect the way that Sibyls communicates with individual members.

1. **It was resolved that the existing newsletter circulation list will be used to send URGENT and current notifications of likely interest to most Sibyls in addition to the newsletters.** This will not be used to forward spam or

scattergun requests, but regularises the existing position when the newsletter list has been used to circulate information such as the dates of the Sibyls London services. As this constitutes a change of the terms of inclusion on the list, after the publication of this newsletter an email will be circulated to all Sibyls on the email list asking notifying them of the technical change of terms of use of the email list inviting them to unsubscribe if they are not happy to receive such notifications from Sibyls. We hope that nobody will wish to unsubscribe. Postal members will continue to receive newsletters but not other messages in view of the postage cost and the possibility that urgent messages may have ceased to be relevant by the time that the message arrives by snail mail.

2. **To encourage Sibyls to get together the AGM agreed a proposal to trial Regional meetings of Sibyls.** The Committee recognises that our membership (currently 89 with members as far away as Australia and New Zealand) cannot necessarily attend the limited number of existing Sibyls meetings (the two weekend meetings, occasional retreat days and the St. Anne's, Soho services every two months). One of the aims of Sibyls has been to foster care and support not only at these meetings but also through personal contacts and friendships between individual Sibyls. Such individual relationships are not likely to form unless Sibyls meet each other.

The Committee therefore seeks volunteers to organise Regional events. The Regions are nonetheless quite large:

- Scotland and North East England
- Yorkshire and Humber
- North West and North Wales
- West Midlands and mid-Wales
- East Midlands
- South West and South Wales
- South East
- Overseas

Sibyls emails are ALWAYS sent out BCC ONLY to avoid disclosure of identities. This will continue to be the case: There will be Regional subsets of the main email circulation list kept on the same computer as the main circulation list and the Regional Organisers will notify the Communications Officer to send out communications to members in their Region (and this will extend to members who receive the newsletter only by post). Members who attend regional meetings will get to know the identities of Sibyls. There are Sibyls in the same town (and in one case the same village) who are unaware of each other's existence as we cannot disclose their identities to each other - but in such cases we would hope that Sibyls may encounter each other through Regional meetings. **PLEASE CONSIDER PUTTING YOURSELF FORWARD AS A REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR.** If we have more than one person in a region who are prepared to get involved in such organising, so much the better, as they can work together.

Raising the T profile in The European Forum. Elaine Sommers

I have just returned from the annual conference of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, held this year in Sweden. Over a hundred delegates from all corners of the Continent gathered together in Gothenburg to share and celebrate how God is using LGBT people as they work towards equality in the Church. 'Richness in Diversity' was the theme this year and by the end of the event there was no doubt that more and more people, from all denominations, are waking up to the fact that wherever there are Christians, inevitably some of them will identify as LGB or T. They too are God's people, and they need to be loved and respected, especially by the rest who (groan!) describe themselves as 'normal'.

The letter T in the Forum's full name suggests that trans people are very much a part the work it is doing, but when I looked around the conference hall, the trans representation was in reality quite small. However, much progress has been made in recent years, much of it thanks to the encouragement of Shanon Ferguson, who has just stepped down as one of the Board's co-presidents. The Forum now needs to build on the foundations that Shanon has laid.

I sensed that for some of the delegates, having trans people around was a new experience, and not always a welcome one. Some of their questioning revealed a considerable lack of knowledge or understanding. Such a situation can put off trans people from getting involved in the Forum, which is a great shame.

So what can be done about this? Do we just shrug our shoulders and conclude that we can't work together? If we do that, we will miss many of the opportunities which working together offers. It also suggests that we're not able or willing to speak up for and support each other in our advocacy work - in effect not being inclusive about our desire to be inclusive! I learned the value of mutual cooperation when I was a trustee of Changing Attitude, and I've continued to work on the premise of 'better together' ever since.

One of the tasks at the conference was the election of new board members. A suggestion had been made that I should stand for the position of Co-President, thus stepping into Shanon's shoes. This idea had never even occurred to me, considering that I was a new girl, and that this was only my second conference. Anyway, once I had looked into what was involved, I agreed that my name should be put forward and, astonishingly, I was duly elected, although not totally surprising when you consider that I was the only candidate! This job will be quite a responsibility for me and I would value your prayers as I set out on what will no doubt be a steep learning curve. One of my aims is that I can bring a greater trans presence to the group during my time in office.

So here's my challenge to you, dear reader. Will you consider joining me in the work of the European Forum, to be a voice across the Continent, to ensure that we are fully represented, and to support those living in nations where there is much greater discrimination and transphobia than we experience in UK? Do have a look at the Forum website, and learn about the various on-going projects we are involved in. And maybe even think about joining me at next year's conference in Poland. It would be great to have you along, and I wouldn't feel quite so lonely.

AN EVENING WITH NADIA BOLZ-WEBER

Organised by St. Mark's Church, Broomhill, Sheffield and The Centre for Radical Christianity, in association with Canterbury Press

WHEN ? Thursday, 1 September 2016 from 19:00 to 22:00 (BST)

WHERE ? St. Mark's Church - Broomfield Road, Broomhill, Sheffield, S10 2SE

This will surely be a very unusual evening, well worth consideration by our more Northerly members. See the article about Nadia in Sibyls Newsletter No.73, page 18. (Please apply to Carol or Philippa if you want a 'back issue'). **She is a very original and deeply thought-provoking speaker.**

Some Boeing employees on the airfield in Sydney decided to steal a life raft from one of the 747s. They were successful in getting it out of the plane and home. Shortly after they took it for a float on the river, they noticed a Westpac Rescue Helicopter coming towards them. It turned out that the chopper was homing in on the emergency locator beacon that activated when the raft was inflated. They are no longer employed at Boeing.



Reflections from Windermere: Debbie Hayton

Sibyls weekends in Windermere will always be special for me. My first ever Sibyls meeting was there, four years ago in May 2012. That came one week after my first consultation at Charing Cross. I had told the psychiatrist quite confidently that I was planning to transition the following December. She raised her eyebrows somewhat. I was dressed in my suit and tie (I had gone there straight from work) and I cheerfully admitted that I had never been out of the house before. I knew that I needed to transition, though I had little idea how to do it. One ray of hope for me was that 2012 Windermere weekend.



That weekend was everything I could have hoped for. It was a weekend of many firsts: my first Sibyls meeting for one thing, but it was also my first experience of interacting as a woman in a group of people, a first outing with others on the Saturday afternoon (thank you Helen M and Amy B), and my first walk out by myself down to the lake early on the Sunday morning. I remember buying a newspaper on the way back. I was quite astonished that the shop keeper gendered me correctly. It no longer seemed difficult, it was affirming and maybe even fun. Indeed, the hardest part of that weekend was changing back to male role in the toilet on the train back home. I felt like Cinderella must have felt as the clock struck midnight. At least the train did not turn into a pumpkin.



This latest weekend was just as helpful. I feel at home in Sibyls, even if I do still feel like a newcomer. The group is friendly and welcoming. Christian groups generally are, but Sibyls is special for me because it is one place where I never feel judged by others or – more pertinently – by myself. I can just be. I am grateful to all of those who organised the event, prepared activities and led sessions, whilst I floundered about. It was also lovely to share in the launch of the Sibyls book. I had heard much about that book over the past four years so it was wonderful to see it finally in print. I am trying to disseminate as many copies as I can. The high point of the weekend for me was the walk on the Saturday afternoon; a chance to make new friends and enjoy the finest countryside in the world. We seemed to have that countryside to ourselves just a couple of miles to the east of Bowness, which was heaving with tourists on a sunny Saturday in May.

Sharing communion on the Sunday morning was special as always, and then it was time to leave. The sadness of that was tempered by the thought of an autumn meeting this year that is planned at Hilfield in Dorset.

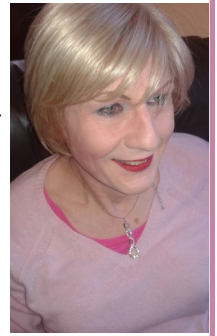
Windermere—A Postscript by Elen Heart (who organised the Windermere weekend this year)

I'm back at my computer after a wonderful Sibyls weekend at the Windermere Centre. The case is unpacked, payment of the centre arranged, and a date for 2018 booked (in June rather than May for technical reasons). I can relax for a while!

I want to thank all those who came to this last weekend for their contribution to making it such a successful event. It was lovely meeting up with old friends (as in long standing rather than aged, although for some of us that is also true!). It was wonderful, too, to meet a few new faces and make new friends. It's the pleasure of sharing time with other Sibyls that, for me, makes the effort of arranging the weekend worthwhile. I look forward to 2018 and hope to see many of you there again. For those of you who couldn't make it this year, put the dates of the next one in your 2018 diaries (when you buy them) to ensure you don't miss out!

Next Sibyls weekend at Windermere: Friday 1st to Sunday 3rd June 2018.

"I was at the airport, checking in at the gate when an airport employee asked, "Has anyone put anything in your baggage without your knowledge?" To which I replied, "If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?" He smiled and nodded. "That's why we ask."



What joy to be back in the Lakes – where I had been only the previous month, just up the road at Ambleside, walking the glorious hills with the “Translakes” group of transgendered fell-walkers. But it was with far keener anticipation that I looked forward to being re-united with my dear sisters in Christ and their partners. I was not disappointed. A “URC Retreat Centre” has a slightly forbidding air, at least to this Catholic, but the staff could not have been friendlier and more welcoming: the accommodation was excellent and they made a valiant and on the whole successful effort to cater for my veganism.

It was a delight to meet again those who, even if I had met them only once, a year ago, seemed like old friends and just as great a pleasure to meet new people who almost immediately also seemed like old friends. I derived huge support and encouragement from them all. Of course, to add to this was the exciting sense that we were assembling not just to enjoy each other’s company, but for an even more important purpose: to celebrate the publication of “This is my body”, hear from some of the authors and share reactions to it. It is a long time since I awaited the publication of a book with such eagerness (possibly not since *The Silmarillion* was published in 1977). So I listened avidly to the story of the book and of reactions to it, presented by Tina with help from her co-editor Michelle (and from Skype). I was sorry to hear Michelle say she had little or no connection with any church in New Zealand (it was later explained that this was because of the way the churches treated LGBT people). It did make me question yet again how I manage to stay in a Church which treats women as second class and regards gay people as “intrinsically disordered” (amongst other things). As Susan writes in chapter 10 of the book, the reliance of the church on its traditional doctrines in this area, so out of step with common-sense attitudes, is destroying the credibility of Christianity and gravely diminishing the power of its witness. Why do I (or any of us) stay? I suppose because there is much that we love in our Churches; because change is gradually happening and because we want to work for that change from within. Maybe “This is my body” will contribute to that change.

Both evenings ended with a night office thoughtfully prepared and led by Philippa and Jasmine. Philippa rather teasingly chose a hymn with a tune a bit too high for some of us to comfortably manage and incorporated an intriguing discussion on the nature of our risen bodies. Susan reminded us that St Augustine speculated that women, if they were very fortunate, would be rewarded in heaven by having male bodies....no one knows but it is safe to assume that in heaven there will be no dysphoria, no dissonance between the outward body and the inner spirit but perfect harmony in a unity unimaginable to our present senses.

As we are not yet in heaven (even in Windermere), we had to make do with our own slightly dilapidated and creaking (speaking for myself) bodies on the walk on Saturday afternoon led by Philippa. The weather was lovely, the scenery delightful, yet I hardly noticed the surroundings because of the pleasure of conversation with my fellow walkers. We arrived in



Bowness and were rewarded with ice cream, which no doubt revived us, but were still grateful to ride back to Windermere on the bus.



Saturday night was movie night. I did not vote for the film we watched but it was an excellent choice, a Dutch film looking at the lives of a number of older trans women including April Ashley, mainly through their own words as they reflected on their lives and their younger selves. None of us needed reminding how difficult the trans journey can be, but these women were pioneers to whose courage we are all indebted. It was very moving. And there were chocolates and ginger bread....

Sunday morning was taken up with committee business (a necessary if not the most enjoyable part of the weekend) and we must all be grateful to the committee members who have given so generously of their time – with special thanks to Elen who organised the weekend, followed by a Eucharistic service presided over by Jenny-Anne. It was done reverently and graciously but I’m not sure I was quite comfortable about it. Sorry. I am a Catholic, after all.....

I would only wish to add that once again I thought the presence of a number of partners enhanced the experience for us all. Their journey can be just as hard (perhaps harder) than ours and the love and loyalty they show is inspiring and humbling.

After being upheld by all this love and encouragement, it was awful to drive off, alone, but I know I can rely on the prayers and help, if needed, of other Sibyls and there is Hilfield to look forward to once more later in the year. And the book is there as a constant help and inspiration. It will repay many re-readings.

(Thanks to Stephanie for the photo’s taken on the walk. (Ed.))

Discovering Sibyls, Rose and other tales of the unexpected! by Yve Taylor



I thought I knew what to expect from a Sibyls weekend before leaving my flat in rural Devon just outside Exeter at 4:30am on the Friday morning, attempting to avoid the heaviest morning rush hour traffic jams. Wrong!! I was completely unprepared for what unfolded in Windermere during the weekend. You know what they say about the 'best laid plans'? My northbound journey couldn't have been going any better; through the Bristol section of the M5 before 6am and the M5/M6 intersection at Birmingham by 7:15. By 9am I was approaching junction 34 of the M6 and about forty minutes from my destination when there was a loud 'BANG!' "What the...", I said to myself as an alarm deafened my ears accompanied by a dashboard warning message, "Puncture stop!". Uttering something along the lines of "umtwiddlyunctiousbumpkin", I nursed the car into a works lane lined by cones lamenting the likely loss of the breakfast I'd planned to have on leaving the motorway a few minutes later, wondering whether or not Friday 13th or sight of a single magpie earlier in the journey could possibly explain my sudden misfortune! Of course we Sibyls don't believe such claptrap do we?!!!!

After briefly transforming my flame red Renault Clio into a hazy shade of blue for a few minutes, I found a card with my Renault dealer's number on it to relate my predicament and they duly alerted their breakdown services so they could rescue this damsel in distress. A few minutes later I received a phone call from them to ascertain my exact location and assure me that someone would be with me in about 30-45 minutes. Meanwhile, I thought I'd just check with my dealer that all the various policy add-ons I'd taken out when I purchased the car would cover the costs of getting me back on the road. Imagine my horror and deepening shade of blue to which both the interior and exterior of the car turned once again when I was told that punctures are excluded!!! When a very nice man from the Highways agency arrived, and suggested the impact of the puncture on the wheel may mean a replacement and could cost around £1,000, my cheeks were aflame!!!! After swallowing several gulps of air and lamenting the absence of a full English and a mug of fresh coffee, I returned to the drivers seat contemplating what was rapidly turning into a disastrous start to my weekend!

Then as if things couldn't get any worse, the man from the Highways Agency offered to change my wheel for me with the spare, only to discover my car only had a tyre repair kit, for a clearly irreparable tyre!! Still stranded on the M6 after seventy minutes, with only a Highways Agency man for company, pleasant as he was, I was becoming impatient and frustrated. Then my mobile rang again and a voice told me that it would be another 40-80 minutes before breakdown assistance would be with me!! Then I realised my mobile phone needed charging but I'd left my charger at home!! "Umtwiddlyunctiousbumpkin"!!! Could this Friday 13th get any worse as another single magpie appeared!!! "Oh no!", I thought, "I hope they're not filming a remake of the air-crash scene from Emmerdale of years ago anywhere near here or I'm done for!!!!" Resigned to my fate, I tried in vain to compete with the day's contestants on Ken Bruce's 'Popmaster' quiz on Radio 2 before my knight in shining armour finally arrived!

Oh boy! There I was in the driver's seat, door ajar as my knight in shining oil stained overalls approached and started taking photographs of my beleaguered vehicle to extricate himself from charges of unintentional vandalism during the removal of my car to a local Kwik Fit depot. As I sat there amid the noise equivalent to a dozen jumbo jets flying overhead as traffic roared past, he asked me questions to which he had no hope of hearing my answers to! In frustration, I refused to sign his hand held gadget to verify the car was undamaged if he didn't hurry up and get me off the motorway where I'd been left abandoned for over two hours to which he responded "well I can't move you then"!! Funny how he could hear that!!!! To my embarrassment however, it transpired he had hearing aids in both ears!!!! I was overcome with guilt at venting my frustration on my knight in shining oily overalls who was deaf as a post! I was very apologetic which he graciously accepted! Soon, the car was loaded onto the breakdown lorry and with the help of the man from the Highways Agency, we left the motorway for Lancaster Kwik Fit depot. "Why a two hour delay?" I asked. It transpired that my original call didn't reach the breakdown service until over an hour later!! I made peace with my knight in shiny oily overalls and gave him something to purchase some refreshment of his choice with at the end of the working day.

As he left, I felt sure that my ordeal would soon be over. How could I be so foolish on Friday 13th with lone magpies all over the place!!! Whilst the damage to the wheel rim was minor and hadn't damaged the wheel itself, there was a wait of about 80 minutes to have a replacement tyre fitted!!! With an air of resignation I plonked myself down on the nearest seating in the waiting area to watch endless latest headlines on the BBC News channel!! Eventually, four hours after my little car had succumbed to a stray piece of sharp, metal debris on the M6, a very nice man had 'kwik-fitted' a new tyre compatible with the others in 90 minutes!!!! I burdened my credit card with another £100, thanked the nice young Polish man who fitted the tyre and left to complete the remainder of my journey, utterly drained, tummy rumbling and in need of something long, iced and full of gin irrespective of potential ruination!!!

Shortly after 2pm, nearly ten hours after leaving home, I drove down through Windermere town centre and eventually arrived at the venue for the Sibyls weekend. The friendly receptionist who booked me in, gave me the keys to my room and told me where to find some nice bistros in town as the stress of the preceding five hours slowly ebbed away. By now my stomach was so noisy, it was difficult to know the reason for the strange looks aimed in my direction as I walked hastily towards the town centre but by now I was ravenous and didn't care!!! After a quick circumnavigation of the one way system, I found a bistro where love and service were in freely abundant supply. In less than five minutes, I was in possession of the best cinnamon topped cappuccino ever and a Cumberland sausage panini with salad. I was just finishing a repeat dose of the cappuccino when a tall and rather glamorous woman entered the bistro wearing a crochet-knit top to die for! Immediately, I wanted to

introduce myself and ascertain from this woman the origins of her beautiful top so I might acquire one for myself. Suddenly coy, I chickened out, hurriedly finished my cappuccino and went to settle my bill. To my surprise, this woman turned to me saying what a beautiful day it was to which I agreed. Then I grabbed my chance and told her how much I loved her top. My jaw hit the floor with a horrendously loud smack as it turned out she owned the fashion boutique on the opposite side of the street and had one identical top left!!! Naturally I tried very hard to convince myself that I really couldn't afford it, then left the bistro with a woman I'd only just met in search of new clothes!!! Well what's a woman supposed to do, really!!

What followed was utterly surreal and all but knocked me off my feet. The woman's name was Rose, with unbelievable faith as I was to discover in our hour-long conversation!! We freely shared our stories of pain and suffering and readily recited scriptures to each other in acknowledging that it is in and through our suffering that we are closest to God and he is closest to us. It has never taken me so long to purchase an item of clothing, almost rivaling the time spent at Kwik Fit earlier in the day but much more fun!! As I left, we agreed to try and meet up again during my free time on Saturday afternoon and after a warm hug, I returned to the Windermere Centre to get ready for dinner and to meet my new friends and fellow Sibyls, reflecting on the events of a quite remarkable day.

It already felt like I'd been away for a whole weekend as I eagerly sipped a long G&T on my return!! I was greeted by other Sibyls with warm hugs and instantly felt welcome, loved and very much at home as I showed off my new top, briefly relating the days remarkable events. After a hearty three course meal, the serious weekend Sibyls agenda began in which I would learn about their current work and who was who! It was the official launch of Sibyls' inspirational book, 'This is my body' for which Christina, Michelle and all contributors deserve much credit for producing an informed gospel of hope for long-awaited change. I'm already encouraging clergy and lay contacts I know to read it. Let's hope the ties which enslave the angel on the book's cover will finally be removed from those who prefer to oppress the poor, vulnerable and those who, like us, identify differently to that expected by wider society.

Maybe then, we too may be free to serve God, whose son Jesus also died for us that we too may have life and have it abundantly. After evening prayer, I retired to bed, tired but full of optimism, feeling loved by a new family instead of alone.

Saturday morning began with a full English breakfast which I'd missed out on the previous day. This was followed by some stimulating theological reflection on 'This is my body' where we were privileged to have some of the contributors present to share and expand on this with everyone. As a theology graduate myself, I was fascinated and reminded of a talk given at Exeter Cathedral recently by Exeter University Professor and Lecturer in Theology, Adrian Thatcher which offers theological evidence from biblical texts that the historical teaching of the main Christian Church denominations on same sex relations and gender identity is fundamentally flawed, urgently needs to be reviewed and those who have been cast out of any involvement within them for so long, embraced just the same as anyone else. For those unfamiliar with Adrian's theology on this, his full length lecture 'The churches, sex and gender' is available on his website www.AdrianThatcher.org and well worth listening to.

After a hearty lunch, as some Sibyls prepared for a sunny afternoon walk in the beautiful surroundings, I walked with new friends into town hoping to meet up with Rose and continue our conversation of the previous day. I found her in fine form, surrounded by many customers eager to purchase items from her elegant, stylish, eco-friendly clothing ranges. Following further deliberation about extravagance, having erroneously picked up a floaty dress which I instantly fell in love with, I quickly set about looking for a suitable mesh knit cardigan to wear over it and there it was waiting just for me on the rear wall of the shop! Well, I ask you, how could I refuse?! Especially as Rose so kindly reduced the price by ten pounds!!! Rose then shared the story of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her faithfulness to God before handing me a card in a sealed envelope. Inside it, she had written a message for me, as if from God himself, to hold fast to my faith for the Lord's favour is with me and my God given path before me!!!! She also wrote that when I told her that despite everything, I felt that 'He (God) won't let me go', it was one of the most beautiful things she'd ever heard from anyone!! "So much love and all we ever really need. It's enough"!!!

As the last customer left her boutique we went back to the bistro for afternoon tea and some blackcurrant cake which I'd previously resisted! My mind was a whirl but prior to this weekend, after nearly ten years living alone, feeling largely unloved and unlovable, alienated from everyone and everything, this was an answer to prayer that God would show me what love is!!! It seemed as if our time together really was by divine appointment though I'm still covered in goosebumps thinking about it as I type this!!! After a final hug, I left Rose and returned to the centre. Wearing the dress and cardigan I had purchased from Rose earlier, I described all that had happened with my new Sibyls friends. With Lennon and McCartney's 'All you need is love' ringing in my ears, it seemed ironic now having sung 'O Love that will not let me go' on Friday evening!! After another excellent evening dinner, more chat and a film show, we closed this momentous day with evening prayer before I retired to bed with Rose's words ringing in my ears - "Every time our heart beats, it beats 'I am', 'I am', 'I am'. Listen, then you will know His words are true 'I am with you always' and so He is! Amen!"

If the post Sunday breakfast Sibyls A.G.M. agenda was rather mundane by comparison with the events of the previous two days, the Eucharistic celebration and roast beef lunch, which followed was a perfect end to a momentous weekend which I simply didn't want to end. Hopefully the loneliness of home won't feel so overwhelming now that some of my new Sibyl friends have offered friendship support when I need it. You all know who you are and with all my heart I thank you. I'm already looking forward to joining you all at Hilfield Priory in Dorset in September provided my newly qualified status as a teacher of English as a foreign language doesn't take me to some far off land! Who knows what the future holds? All I can say is that God is good, God is truth, God is love and all will be well if I continue to trust Him. I know this because Rose said so, by divine appointment of course!!!!!!

Good news for the poor?

by Yve Taylor

By the grace of God, no matter how tough the hard times have been, through it all, I have always had a roof over my head, food to eat, clothes to wear and the means to wash, refresh and look after myself. Yet, I and many in similar life situations to myself may just as well dwell among the ranks of the homeless such is our vulnerability as the ignored and forgotten people of our beloved country in the world which God created.

For all the loss I have incurred on my journey of self discovery, I rejoice in the times when I can engage with other people whose lives are also broken or otherwise incomplete because of societal ignorance, oppression and social injustice which denies us of opportunities to use our many gifts and talents in service of God to experience life in all its fullness which God promises to us all. It is at such times when I feel real connection with real people in the real world rather than in the chaotic maelstrom of the capitalist, results driven political and materialistic one which mankind has somehow contrived to create instead and which has left so many people behind in its wake. It is also at such times that I feel closest to God.

This has got me thinking of late about the New Testament, so often referred to as 'Good News for the poor'. Of course this is true for us all, not only the poor in spirit; those without faith. However I would also argue that it is the poor and outcast in our society who very often reveal God's love and that Good News to others in our world. I don't think we should be surprised at this either. Let's be honest, Jesus' ministry on earth turned the political and social structures of His time upside down, challenging political and religious leaders, patriarchal and other societal structures, the rich and ignorant of the time to embrace a completely new way of life that was ultimately to cost him his own life.

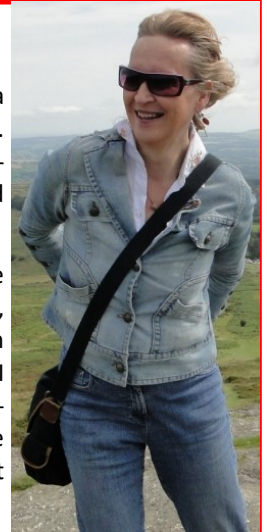
Jesus made it his business to associate with those considered outcasts by the majority. For example, the haemorrhaging woman who touched Jesus' cloak as He was en-route to another mercy mission involving the critically ill daughter of the much respected, honoured religious leader Jairus. I think it's fascinating to note what actually happens here. This goes way beyond Jesus' act of healing of this woman, much to the chagrin of some of his disciples because Jesus risked making himself ritually unclean in doing so, while Jairus' daughter lay dying. Here the woman's humanity, worth and faith are affirmed by Jesus as he heals her. Jairus on the other hand is brought to a complete powerlessness and desperation by his daughter's illness in falling at the feet of this itinerant, vagrant preacher who seems more concerned with discrediting the religious structures of the day which Jairus represents. As Jesus heals the woman of her twelve year long affliction, Jairus' twelve year old daughter dies. Coincidence? I don't think so.

The unnamed woman had been 'imprisoned', denied life by the religious laws imposed by the girl's father, himself 'imprisoned' by the trappings of wealth, possessions and abuse of power for exactly the same length of time this ailing little girl had been living a life of wealth and privilege nearby. It is powerful symbolism which challenges injustice on every level. You would think that at news of his daughter's death, Jairus would rail at Jesus, who would be the last person Jairus' family would wish to see. Yet Jairus somehow disregards his own religious law, 'the law of God' and allows Jesus into his home. As we know, Jesus then restored the little girl's life. If we accept that Mark's account of these extraordinary events is true and accurate (5:21-43 see also Mt.9:18-26; Lk.8:40-56), we have a clear statement that the poor, oppressed and vulnerable in society will have special honour and status which will otherwise be with-held from the rich and powerful until they are able to receive it. In other words, when the rich empty themselves of the power and material wealth which damages others. Jairus' life was transformed by the grace, mercy and love of God in making the decision to deaden the oppressive, obstructive religious rules of the religious system in which his daughter, believed lost, was raised to new life.

Yet were it not for the crucial intervention and act of faith of the haemorrhaging, outcast woman who distracted Jesus in the first place, the change in Jairus, his family and the community in which they lived would most likely never have happened.

Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) is another example of the Good news emanating from those ignored by mainstream society, rooted in similar themes of injustice overcome through the faith of the poor and vulnerable able to receive God's love, while oppressive leaders and rulers remain unable to see this for themselves. In his book 'Finding Mr Goldman', former journalist and parish priest David Rhodes challenges us to embrace this theology in his modern tale which echoes the stories of Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress and Dickens' A Christmas Carol. It tells the story of a wealthy and successful businessman and entrepreneur who lives in a huge mansion served by a butler and many servants, owns many oil refineries and other businesses, luxury yachts, cars and all the trappings of material wealth not to mention status and power. Outside his mansion, a smelly vagrant can often be found sleeping rough by the gates, much to Goldman's annoyance, whose daily rant at his butler, demands the vagrant be beaten and moved on for defacing his home! I encourage you to seek this book on Amazon and read for yourselves. It represents a well-informed and clever reworking of these themes that sees this dirty vagrant become the unlikely hero in a story of Goldman's redemption and ultimate salvation. I may be biased but I think it's a brilliant story from which we can all learn so much. I would also recommend David's book 'Faith in Dark Places' which elaborates further on the faith found in and around those people so often scorned and disregarded by society.

All of which brings me to Sibyls. We all have a story to tell which some of us have, most eloquently. These stories also need to be heard by both the religious and political authorities and all who may have ears and eyes to hear and receive them. It is vital



Good news for the poor - continued

that we continue with the work begun in 'This is my body' for the reasons I have suggested in this article. We are all witnesses in some way or other to the grace, mercy and love of God in our various journeys of self-discovery, despite the worst kinds of active discrimination which seeks to deny us the career, religious and social life otherwise the experience of the so-called 'great and the good'! I have come so close to abandoning my faith in abject despair at the family, career and Christian church roles I have lost which I had pre-transition. I'm confident 'This is my body' will be a catalyst for marked change within the Christian churches, the political and commercial arenas and wider society. I know in my heart that I have been blessed by all my travails and sufferings.

During this time, God has never let go of me and however close I came to doing so, I could never let go of Him. If this were not so, I would not be here typing this today. Ours is a voice which, through the psalmists laments (Pp. 6 & 10 for example) speaks Good News from among a people similarly reviled and cast out from all of life but which one day will be the catalyst for the change which will see not only transgender people but all who identify as LGBTI, the disabled, refugees, regardless of colour, creed or circumstance, at last, take their place at God's table in the world. If Jairus and Mr Goldman can be changed, I guess there's hope for the Bishop's Council and the British political machine too!

A hero of mine, the late, great, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, whose supreme acts of self-sacrifice, supported by former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, ultimately healed and united a nation amid the ashes and evils of apartheid, once said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid but he who conquers that fear." He also said, "no-one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." So let's be encouraged. We must not cease the work begun with 'This is my body' for love will conquer all in the end. If it's not o.k. now, it's not the end. The sequel starts now.

HEAVEN by Susan Gilchrist

Is heaven a place when observed from afar
The Palace of God in His Might and His Power
A place where the righteous sing out His Praise
To God in His Glory, and where no humour strays?
You show me a place where my feet must feel sore
From standing and singing God's praise evermore
Then sometimes I'd tire of the bright golden light
And instead wish to see the stars of the night.

But these views of heaven are not ones of mine
For my thoughts see heaven a place outside time
Where eternity soars free in its own place apart
To observe the time passing like lines on a chart
Extracting from life all the times which we've set
When all the best moments of life have been met
And revealing in these the whole Godhead of joy
With each moment the fountain of love I enjoy.

Eternity is not now, in the future or past
For eternity is where every moment shall last
And the heaven I sense is piled high to the brim

With the passion of love and of care and concern
Overflowing with people whose delight I perceive
Through love which I give and the love I receive
And joining those people whose rapture I share
Are all those I love who will always be there.

Heaven is not here, in the earth or the sky
And you will never find heaven however you try
For heaven finds you from the cries of the heart
Then growing through gladness its praises impart
For whatever our suffering our weakness or strife
When we share all we are with the others in life
We rebuild ourselves in the love and the grace
At one with creation that gives us our place.

Then heaven is never a goal we'll achieve
It comes only from faith and the will to believe
But could heaven be true or is it solely in mind?
It is only through death such an answer we'll find
And should heaven be false we will never detect
For we'd have nothing left to confirm it's correct
But the heaven that comes in our heavenly birth
Is true to the heaven we make here on earth.



The owner of a car wash was losing significant amounts of money from his coin machines each week. They set up a camera to catch the thief in action. Well, they did catch him on film!

The bird had to go down into the machine, and back up inside to get to the money!

It was not just one bird -- there were several working together. They found over \$4,000 in quarters on the roof of the car wash and more under a nearby tree.

This gives a new twist to the term "nest egg".

The traditional teaching of the Christian Church condemns homosexuality, and by implication all gender and sexually variant behaviour as invariably sinful lifestyle choices, which are reward driven and disordered acts. This investigation adopts a new approach which uses neurophysiology and psychology to conduct a critique of the traditional teaching on gender and sexual variation in the Christian Church. From the scientific study it is demonstrated that a moral duality must exist whereby gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities in ways that conform to the highest moral standards of their own societies should be highly regarded, while those who misuse these relationships have to be severely condemned for their acts. This contradicts the traditional teaching of the Christian Church. Therefore a purpose of this investigation is to find out how and why this contradiction occurs.

An extended analysis of the attitudes to gender and sexuality in first century society is conducted. This uses the results of the neurophysiological and psychological to examine not just Christianity, but also the attitudes to these in Jewish, Roman, Greek and other societies. It includes the cultural clashes which occurred. By removing the theological presumptions which have dominated Christianity for the last two thousand years new insights become available in the understanding of biblical texts and the New Testament accounts. It is shown that the teaching of Jesus incorporates the same moral duality as that predicted by the neurophysiological and psychological study. Therefore it is concluded that the source of the contradiction must come from changes in the theology of the Church.

The nature of this transformation has been the focus of many theological studies: however the major difficulty has been one of determining how it was managed. That is addressed in this analysis. It is shown that the statement by Jesus in Matthew 19:12 where he says. "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" allowed Peter, Paul to move forward with the compromises that were required. That transformation was essential to ensure the survival of the Church; and to enable it to bring the Gospel message to the world.

However this was not just a statement of compromise. It was also the command for the Christian Church to express in full the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex as soon as it had the power to do so. Instead of returning to the radical teaching which Jesus had presented: the Church used these opportunities enforce its own power and authority. Today; that has still not happened and it is now time to follow in full this commandment of Jesus, by restoring the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex to the present day Church.

Great emphasis is also placed by GAFCON and others on restoring the "Godly Authority" of bible texts. (The "Global Anglican Future Conference", representing the conservative elements in the Church). However the correct understanding depends on the context in which these are placed. It is shown in this analysis that the traditional teaching on marriage and family life remains intact; but it also establishes that other valid loving relationships should not automatically be denied. This study additionally supports the views held by GAFCON and others that the traditional Church teaching on gender complementarity, gender and sexuality and on the silencing of the public ministry of women has Apostolic Authority. However GAFCON assumes that these doctrines accurately represent the teaching of Jesus, while this analysis shows that they are the results of the compromises that were made to ensure the survival of the Church.

If this context is based on what is today regarded as the traditional teaching of the Church, these attempts at restoration do not return to the teaching of Jesus, they return instead to the compromised Christianity which was presented by the 13th Century Church. The correct restoration can only be made if the moral duality disclosed in this neurophysiological study and in the teaching of Jesus is used. This demands that all people are treated alike, and that the same criteria of use and abuse are applied to all aspects of gender and sex. As with Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28, this demands that all transgender people, transsexual lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities in roles that are true to themselves; must be accepted alike. All sexual behaviour is governed by the purity of intention and there is no automatic condemnation of any same-sex act.

It is important to note that discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief. The transformation needed to gain acceptability in the Greco/Roman culture brought the Church to collude with these secular demands of society rather than to challenge them. Not only has this consent reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them, it reinforces the severity of the penalties that are encountered and it contradicts the results which the neurophysiological and psychological analysis presents. Instead of recognising the moral duality which is inherent in gender and sexual behaviour, without exception all of these people have been made the scapegoats for abusive sex. Great harm has been done by the medical misdiagnoses that have been and are being made. The persecution and slaughter of gender and sexually variant people, not only in Christianity but in Islam, Judaism and all other religions, states and cultures which have drawn their teachings from this has been enormous, and repentance is needed for these acts.

Centuries of criminalisation and condemnation have prevented any awareness of the moral duality being observed. Little could happen for as long as that existed, however the changes in society mean that this is no longer the case. This moral duality is now available for everybody to see in the love expressed in same-sex marriage and civil partnerships. It has become easy for an unbiased observer to separate a same-sex relationship given in faithfulness, love and lifetime commitment from a strong heterosexual friendship, and to discriminate between loving and illicit same-sex behaviour, even in the absence of sex. Instead of exploring this new situation many Christians have taken refuge in the traditional doctrines of the Church. It is argued in this analysis that this fervent reliance on its disproved traditional doctrines is destroying not only the credibility of the Church; it is also destroying the credibility of Christianity itself.

This is a summary of an extended analysis. For the latter: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/217P-FoundationsSexGender.pdf>

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Gender Fluidity – A talk delivered for the Department of Health by Pauline Fleck

I must apologise to anyone hoping for a learned exposition of the latest developments in gender theory. I am not in any way competent to deliver it. When I read of a school questionnaire providing 23 different options for gender identity I am as baffled as the next woman. Or man. Or person.

I can only speak of a personal experience of a gender identity that has taken a very long time to crystallize and become more definite after a long period of indeterminacy and fluctuation. This must seem very puzzling to many people for whom gender is a very intrinsic and constant part of their identity. But we used to think the same of sexuality until fairly recently, did we not? I have, or sadly perhaps should say, had an old friend who is a CofE vicar of the evangelical type. By a very extraordinary coincidence, when I was on the brink of transitioning, to changing my outward appearance of gender to be more consistent with my inner experience of it, I happened to be paying one of my occasional visits to his Church. He preached on how God created Adam and Eve, how he made them male and female. He then ridiculed the whole notion of gender as variable or as socially constructed, utterly confusing in the process the distinction between gender and sexuality. He spoke of the complementarity of the sexes, of how in his home tasks were allotted by gender, so that his wife did the ironing and he sorted out problems with the computer. Well, that may be the way it happened in the Garden of Eden (though presumably in the paradisaical state where clothes were not worn little ironing was actually required and there was no internet connection) and in that vicarage, but it is not how it is in our fallen world and utterly remote from the reality of most people's lives. As you can imagine, we had some lively discussion over lunch. I subsequently received an email telling me I needed to exercise self-control.

My friend is a far better and holier person than I am, far closer to God. The rupture in our relationship caused by my transitioning has been very painful. I also am a person of faith and the story of my life has been one of the attempt to manage my discomfort with my male body and the masculine roles of son, brother, father etc that has come with it and also the sense of guilt, the feeling that it is ungodly not to accept one's biological gender, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church still decrees. Thank God all this is now changing and transsexuals, people with gender dysphoria, are now treated not with ridicule and hostility but mainly with sympathy and understanding though on Transgender Remembrance Day each year we remember those around the world murdered and martyred simply for being who they are and the Churches still have a long way to go before recognising the right of people who are sexually or gender-variant to be treated as equals. The NHS too has been slow to react and allocate sufficient resources so that the gender identity clinics, including that here in Leeds, are overwhelmed by demand and have really unacceptably long waiting lists, with grave risks for the mental health of people unable to afford private treatment. I might add here that anyone who thinks being transgendered is just a lifestyle choice is crazy – it is not a condition to be envied. Let anyone who thinks that try for themselves laser and electrolysis treatment for facial hair....I was however encouraged by the recent report from the rather strangely named Women and Equalities Select Committee, which was a thorough examination of the problems still facing transsexuals and included some recommendations that if implemented will make a real difference, including the adoption of much simpler and less bureaucratic procedures for obtaining a gender recognition certificate.

The reality is that people do not transition for any reward but to affirm their true identity. An extreme example of this was that of Lili Elbe, the Danish Girl, as portrayed by Eddie Redmayne, in that beautiful and moving film. Her need to be herself ultimately led to her death as for her, her idea of womanhood was inseparable from motherhood and the well-meaning attempt to transplant ovaries and a womb, in the light of the primitive science of the time, naturally killed her. I will also mention Roberta Cowell, the first Briton to have gender confirmation surgery, who was a racing car driver and wartime fighter pilot before accepting the inevitable and becoming the woman she truly was. Even someone like Kellie Maloney, who in her dreams as a child was a little girl, but grew up with a love of boxing and Millwall Football Club, helps to dispel preconceptions and moves us on from obsolete and irrelevant stereotyping.

So what of the future? Most people will remain happy with their gender and experience no dissonance between its inner and outer expressions. For the minority for whom this is not the case, one hopes for ever greater acceptance and the availability of options, not just for transitioning and gender confirmation but for those who choose not to identify entirely with either gender, recognising that gender, like sexual orientation, is a spectrum not a polarity, with infinite gradations and variations. We may have to change the English language itself and perhaps introduce a gender-neutral pronoun. In this way we can reflect and respond to the reality of people's lives as they are, not as some people, well-meaning but misguided, wish them to be.

[The talk was given as part of an event to mark International Women's Day, on 8 March, and was very well attended and received – I felt a great rapport with my wonderfully supportive audience and felt so privileged to be working in such a trans-friendly environment: not everyone is so lucky.]

Did I read that sign right?

In an office: TOILET OUT OF ORDER..... PLEASE USE FLOOR BELOW

In a Laundromat: AUTOMATIC WASHING MACHINES: PLEASE REMOVE ALL YOUR CLOTHES WHEN THE LIGHT GOES OUT

In a safari park: ELEPHANTS PLEASE STAY IN YOUR CAR

On Wednesday, 20 April 2016, Sibyls received the following enquiry from the Readers Digest, which I think will be of interest and perhaps encouragement. To: "enquiries@sibyls.co.uk" Subject: Reader's Digest feature

I am currently working on a feature for Reader's Digest online about what it's like to be a trans person aged 50+ in the UK today. It's a piece that will aim to educate and inspire, presenting the positivity of progress we've made in the UK towards trans acceptance but also highlighting the progress that still needs to be made. I'm looking for a FTM interview candidate aged 50+ who identifies as trans and would be willing to talk about what life is like culturally and socially as an older trans person in Britain today. I am already talking to the equalities minister Nicky Morgan and some MTF trans women for the piece.

Any advice, or candidates for interview, you could help with would be greatly appreciated. I intend for the piece to run online towards the end of May / start of June, dependent on when interviews run.

Anna Walker, Assistant Digital Editor, Reader's Digest

On 22 June 2016, this was followed up by another email, which I reproduce not because it has new information in it, but because it shows us how the social context is improving:

I thought you might be interested to read our series on what life is like for Britain's transgender community aged 50+. We're very proud of the positive message it conveys and it would be great to see that message spread as far as possible.

<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/inspire/transgender-and-over-50>

Anna Walker

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF SOMEONE IS TRANSGENDER?

The transgender community has entered the media consciousness at an unprecedented rate in the last ten years. Here are some of the most common questions about what it means to be transgender answered.

What does transgender mean?

Transgender is a word used to describe people whose internal sense of their gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This could include, for example, somebody who was born male but identifies as a woman. The sex they were physically born with and the gender they feel inside do not match. Transgender people often (though not always) report feeling that they were born into the wrong body.

A wide variety of terms are used by the transgender community to describe themselves, including but not limited to, transsexual, gender fluid, gender-queer or gender non-conforming.

A Home Office study conducted between 2013 and 2015 estimated that there are between 300,000 and 500,000 transgender people living in the UK.

A person who identifies as transgender may or may not:

- Receive hormone therapy
- Have gender-related surgical procedures
- Receive legal recognition of their gender

It is no longer a legal requirement to have surgery or hormones in order for the government and society to recognise people as the gender of their choice.

The medical term used to describe what transgender people go through is gender dysphoria. This is a medical condition for which people can access NHS treatment. Importantly, it is not deemed a mental illness. Many experts believe that the hormone levels that a baby is exposed to while developing in the womb may contribute to the development of gender dysphoria, but this has not been proved.

Being transgender is by no means a modern phenomenon. Trans people are well documented throughout history and across the world and cultures. It is only recently, however, that Western cultures have developed the language to describe being transgender.

HOW DO PEOPLE KNOW IF THEY'RE TRANSGENDER?

The first signs of gender dysphoria often present themselves from a very young age. Children may refuse to wear clothes that are typically for boys or girls, for example. For some, the realisation may not have happened so early on, though they may always remember feeling different to their peers, or like they didn't fit in. Because Western societies have only recently developed the terminology to describe being transgender, many transgender people are only recently discovering their identities and may have spent many years hiding the gender they felt inside.

HOW DO I REFER TO SOMEONE IF I'M NOT SURE OF THEIR GENDER IDENTITY?

Always use the pronouns that the person uses to describe themselves. If you still aren't sure then it's better to just ask. The awkwardness of asking is far preferable to the problems that could arise by using the wrong pronouns. Misgendering, a term used to describe the phenomenon of calling someone by a gendered pronoun they don't identify with, is seen as an insult by many transgender people because it characterises them in a way they don't relate to. Some opponents of trans rights deliberately misgender trans people to express their disapproval. This acts as a constant reminder to trans people that large sections of the population still don't understand or approve of their personal identity, which can be very upsetting.

WHAT ARE THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF BEING TRANSGENDER IN BRITAIN TODAY?

In the United Kingdom transgender people are extremely likely to become the victim of a hate crime at some time in their

lives. In a 2013 survey of 215 transgender people, over 40% reported experiencing hate crime in the past 12 months alone. 70% of these crimes included verbal abuse, 5.6% reported physical assault and over 7% reported sexual assault. Over 67% never felt comfortable reporting the crime, suggesting that the vast majority of trans hate crime is under-reported. The process of gaining official status as your preferred gender in the UK is a long one. First, you must pick between male and female, which complicates matters further for those who identify as gender fluid or non-binary. Then you must provide evidence including a birth certificate, medical report and proof that you have lived as your desired gender for at least two years (such as bills or a passport). [This rises to six](#) if you're married or in a civil partnership. There is also an initial £140 admin fee before handing in any documentation.

When transgender people are finally referred to a gender identity clinic, the waiting time for an initial appointment can be frustratingly long. The average time period is currently 18 months in the UK. For those people who find living as the sex they were assigned at birth highly traumatic, this can mean opting for private treatment, which is hugely costly and can often drive them into extreme debt.

Transgender people are at a far higher risk of suicide than the rest of the population. A [2014 UK survey](#) found that 48% of transgender people under the age of 26 had attempted suicide, while 59% had considered doing so.

These are just a few of the many issues reported by Britain's transgender population, and each individual will experience their own unique set of challenges.

WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT SAY?

The current Minister for Women and Equalities, Nicky Morgan told us that the current government is "committed to ensuring that everyone has the freedom to fulfil their potential and be true to who they are, regardless of their gender identity. Over the past few years, we have come a long way in raising awareness and increasing support for transgender individuals. We must continue to tackle discrimination, harassment and victimisation of all LGB&T people."

"While we should be proud of the progress we have made, we must do more to support older transgender people and make sure they feel able to speak out and make their voices heard. Transgender equality has powerfully entered public debate in the last few years and I have seen first-hand some of the fantastic work that is being done to raise awareness and support transgender people here in the UK. We must continue to work together to build a more tolerant and inclusive society where people can live their lives free from fear and able to fulfil their potential."

HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE OF A TRANSGENDER PERSON IN MY LIFE?

Try to educate yourself about transgender issues by reading articles like this and resources released by helpful charities such as The Gender Trust, Mermaids and Press for Change. It's most useful, however, to hear about what life is like as a transgender person from transgender people themselves. The YouTube project My Generation, an independent documentary series exploring gender variance, is a great place to start.

Know that every transgender person has a different journey, and will identify slightly differently. Being transgender is not their defining feature.

Use the names or pronouns that they have told you they prefer. If you're not sure, it's always better to ask.

Don't make any assumptions about the person just because they are transgender. It's important to remember that being trans has nothing to do with a person's sexual orientation and that not every trans person will necessarily be seeking hormonal or surgical treatments. If you have a reason to know these details, ask. Otherwise, try to appreciate that it's really not your business.

Keep lines of communication open with the transgender person in your life, and let them know that you are there to listen, without judgement, whenever they need to talk.

Get some support for yourself. Finding out that somebody you are close to is transgender or transitioning can be a big adjustment and you are not alone in the way you feel. Support groups and counselling can be found through most transgender charities, including Gendered Intelligence for parents and family and The Beaumont Society for partners.

Like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter for more from our Transgender Pride series

DISTRACTION



The School of Psychology, Harvard University, recently conducted a public survey called "What really do you see?"

People were asked to focus their attention on a very simple picture, and then asked if they had noticed anything odd. Now, you have the chance to take part. Study the picture for 1 minute.

Question : What do you see that is HORRENDOUS?

Answer : There's a MOUSE on one of the doughnuts!

Results of the Survey :

1. 100% of males failed this test. They were distracted by the bosom.
2. 100% of the females also failed this test. They were distracted by the wide choice of doughnuts.

What's in a word? The challenges of the word 'transgender' May 27, 2015

by KJ Rawson, Assistant Professor of English, College of the Holy Cross

Thanks to recent media coverage like the New York Times' *Transgender Today* series, celebrities like Laverne Cox and television shows like *Transparent*, most people are becoming increasingly familiar with transgender culture. Of course, *trans-ing* gender roles has occurred for centuries. And with help from collaborators from around the world, I'm in the process of building a digital transgender archive to help bring together the long and complicated history of humans who have *trans-ed* gender roles.

What few realize, however, is that the term *transgender* is new. The relative infancy of the word, along with fact that gender is understood differently in different cultures, presents a significant challenge for historical work in this area.

The history of transgender

The word *transgender* gained widespread popularity in the 1990s as an umbrella term to describe people who cross over – or trans – traditional gender roles. Transgender-identified author Virginia Prince is most often credited with coining the term. In 1969, Prince used the term *transgenderal* to distinguish herself from transsexuals, or those who physically alter their bodies through hormones and surgery. Her use of the term *transgenderal* clearly distinguished between trans-ing sex (male or female) versus trans-ing gender (masculine or feminine).

"I, at least, know the difference between sex and gender," she wrote, "and have simply elected to change the latter and not the former. If a word is necessary, I should be termed a 'transgenderal.'" Throughout her lifetime, Prince frequently sought recognition for coining the term – and she regularly attempted to control how the term was being used.

But in research I conducted with Cristan Williams, we found an earlier use of the term: psychiatrist John F. Oliven used *transgenderism* in the medical text *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology*, published in 1965. Oliven used the term *transgenderism* in a medical sense to indicate an "urge for gender ('sex') change."

What's particularly fascinating about this history is not the quest to determine coinage, but that even within its first five years of documented use, the term took on new, even opposite, meanings. Currently, *transgender* is generally understood to be a broad category encompassing many gender identities and expressions, including transsexual, genderqueer and cross-dresser, among many others. As it turns out, Virginia Prince would today be lumped together with the very people she sought to distinguish herself from in the first place.

What's at stake with transgender?

Given the breadth of experiences and identities the term now includes, *transgender* presents an opportunity for researchers to revisit historical figures, events and movements that may now be included under its umbrella. At the same time, *transgender* presents numerous challenges. It can be applied anachronistically. It can reach too broadly to include those who wouldn't want to be described by it. And it can minimize the unique identities and experiences of people in different historical moments and cultural contexts.

Though the term *transgender* has only been used in print for about 50 years, transgender-related practices have existed throughout history. For example, in the late 18th century, a male-born French diplomat named Chevalier d'Éon famously identified, dressed and passed as a woman for more than 30 years. D'Éon's life was so notable that in 1913, the English sexologist Havelock Ellis coined the term *eonism* – in honor of d'Éon – to describe similar cases of cross-gender living. But should d'Éon be considered *transgender* when the identity didn't exist at the time?

Take another example: *two-spirit* is a term used by American Indians to describe individuals who possess both masculine and feminine spirits. Two-spirit can clearly be connected with *transgender*, but what's lost if we include such culturally specific identities under the *transgender* umbrella?

Of course, throughout human history, a host of other individuals might have been included under a broadened definition of transgender. As these examples show, the encompassing nature of *transgender* helps to bring together the widespread practice of trans-ing gender. But it also risks erasing the historical and cultural specificity of these practices.

Digitizing transgender history

These are some of the many challenges we've encountered while creating the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA), a new project that seeks to create an online hub for transgender-related history.

This project is a transnational collaboration among more than a dozen archives, including university-based collections, historical societies, non-profit organizations and private collectors. To improve access to transgender history, the DTA virtually merges these disparate archival collections, digital materials and independent projects. The DTA treats *transgender* as a practice rather than an identity label. In other words, the archive includes any materials related to trans-ing gender, not merely materials created by or about transgender people.

We are developing a number of resources to address the imprecision of the term *transgender* with respect to time, culture, and individual identities. For example, we have created an extensive glossary of culturally specific gender identity terms – such as hijra (South Asia), māhū (Hawaii) and travesti (South America) – many of which also appear in the digital materials we are collecting. Our hope is that, for the first time, anyone interested in trans-related history will have quick and easy digital access to a wealth of sources and material.

Comment by Andrew Nelson, Lecturer of Anthropology, University of North Texas

Interesting article. I agree that it is important to distinguish transgender from other culturally specific understandings of gender. It seems to me that transgender is a North American-European category that implies a transition from one gender to another, whereas two-spirit and hijras, to take two of the above mentioned examples, are defined more as permanent third gender categories.



When do children develop their gender identity? March 29, 2016

by **Vanessa LoBue**, Assistant Professor of Psychology, Rutgers University Newark

Gender is generally thought of as a stable trait: we are born male or female and we stay that way as we grow from small children to adults. It turns out that for young children, initial concepts about gender are quite flexible. In my own research, I've found that children don't begin to notice and adopt gender-stereotyped behaviours (e.g., preferring colours like pink or blue) until the age of two or three. A few years later, their concept of gender becomes quite rigid, and although it becomes more relaxed by middle childhood, even adults have trouble going back to thinking about gender as something that's flexible. So, how do children come to understand gender? When do they begin to

think about gender as a stable trait?

What Is gender?

We often tend to think about gender as the biological differences between men and women. It is true that the path to gender development begins at conception. Each cell in our body has 46 chromosomes. A father's sperm and a mother's egg each has only half – 23 each. At conception, the chromosomes of the sperm and the egg match up into 22 identical pairs, with the 23rd pair being the sex chromosome. In most cases, XX chromosomes will become female and XY chromosomes will become male. But this isn't always the case. Gender is what actually gets expressed – how we look, how we act and how we feel. While sex is determined by what is written into the chromosomes or what is dictated by our biology, known as genotype, it is the interaction between the genes (genotype) and the environment that determines gender.

Sex doesn't necessarily map to gender perfectly, and the environment plays a role in determining the gender of each person. Perhaps this shouldn't be that surprising, given that the sex of many species of animals is determined *entirely* by environmental circumstances and not by their biology. For example, there are animals that don't have sex chromosomes at all, and some species of coral reef fish can actually switch genders if their schools require it. Alligators, crocodiles, turtles and some lizards don't have sex chromosomes either: their sex is simply determined by the temperature of their nest during incubation.

It's true that most of the time, a person's sex and gender are quite similar, but this doesn't necessarily have to be the case. And of late, the lines between sex and gender are becoming more blurred as people are becoming more comfortable identifying as transgender – or with a gender that is not consistent with their sex. In fact, for some people, gender is nonbinary, and exists on a spectrum of masculinity and femininity

Children's early gender concepts

So it turns out that gender is more of a flexible state than most people think. And surprisingly, as children, we start out thinking more flexibly about gender than we end up. Before the age of five, children don't seem to think that gender has any permanence at all. A pre-schooler might ask his female teacher whether she was a boy or girl when she was little, or a little boy might say that he wants to grow up to be a mommy. Research supports this early flexibility in children's gender concepts. For example, in a well-known study, psychologist Sandra Bem showed preschool-aged children three photographs of a male and female toddler. In the first photo, the toddler was naked; in the second the toddler was dressed in gender-typical clothing (e.g., a dress and pigtails for the girl, a collared shirt and holding a football for the boy); in the third photo, the toddler was dressed in stereotypical clothing of the opposite gender. Bem then asked the children a variety of questions. First she asked them about the photo of the naked toddler and the photo of the toddler dressed in gender-typical clothing, asking children whether the toddler was a boy or a girl.

She then presented the children with the same toddler dressed in opposite-gendered clothing. She told them that the toddler was playing a silly dress-up game, and made sure that the first nude photo of the toddler was still visible for reference. She then asked the children whether the toddler in the third photograph was still a boy or a girl. Most three- to five-year-olds thought that a boy who decided to dress up like a girl was now indeed a girl. It wasn't until children understood that boys have penises and girls have vaginas that they also knew that changing your clothes doesn't change your gender.

Developing gender identity

Further research suggests that children's concept of gender develops gradually between the ages of three and five. After the age of five, most children believe that outward changes in clothing or hairstyle don't constitute a change in gender. Once children begin to think about gender as a stable trait, they also start to incorporate gender into their own identity. Around that time, they become motivated to relate to other members of their group and seek out gender-related information, often becoming very strict about adhering to gender stereotypes. For example, children between the ages of three and five prefer to play with members of their own gender. And they also prefer to engage with gender-stereotyped toys and activities. It isn't until a few years later – when they are between seven and 10 years of age – that children become more relaxed about maintaining behaviors that are strictly male or female. It is around that age, for example, when both boys and girls might admit that they "like to play with trucks" or "like to play with dolls."

The recent coming-out of American television celebrity Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner) as a transgender woman has once again drawn our attention back to the fact that while our chromosomes determine our sex, they are not the only factors that affect our gender identity. This is something that children seem to know early on, but that most discard as they begin to learn about basic anatomy and incorporate that information into their own gender identities. We often think of children's thinking as immature, but it may be that preschoolers are actually way ahead of their time.

Global survey finds homophobic views are still dominant 17th May 2016

Two-thirds of adults would be upset if child was gay, and only a quarter would accept a trans child. Two-thirds of adults would be upset if their child told them that they were in love with someone of the same sex according to a new survey, conducted to mark International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). It included 96,000 people in 53 UN member states.

Results – released 17th May – showed that although regional differences in opinion exist, overall “deeply entrenched heteronormative concepts” dominate. For example – just 28% of respondents globally said they would find it acceptable if a male child always dressed and expressed themselves as a girl.

A separate report – also released by the ILGA – looked at laws worldwide. The report found that same-sex sexual acts can be punished with death penalty in 13 states, or parts of states (representing 6% of all UN states). The threat of imprisonment exists in 75 countries and five entities.

In addition, many residents of these countries believe that being LGBT should be criminalised. 45% of respondents in Africa agreed “being LGBT should be considered a crime” along with 34% of respondents in Asia, 17% in Europe, 15% in the Americas and 14% in Oceania.

The ILGA also asked whether people felt that same-sex desire was a “western phenomenon”. 47% of respondents in Africa said yes, with 42% in Asia believing this was also true. However, “western” countries also agreed with this statement – 24% in Europe, 21% in the Americas and 20% in Oceania.

Despite this, the ILGA says things are improving:

- ⇒ In 70 states, it is now prohibited to discriminate against an individual in employment on the basis of sexual orientation (38% of all UN states).
- ⇒ In 26 states, joint adoption is legal and in 40 states marriage is available to same-sex couples and those marriages have equal or almost equal legal standing as opposite-sex couples.
- ⇒ Last week, the UN issued a joint statement calling for countries to stop treating homosexuality as an illness.

Headlines from the U.K. (As usual, please contact the editor for the story behind the headline.)

Sadiq Khan has pledged to work with the city's schools and the police to “promote gender diversity” and bolster acceptance of trans people. 11th March 2016

Scotland's police force has ramped up its commitment to tackling anti-LGBT hate crime. 14th March 2016

Parents at a school in Sussex pull kids out of school – because an anti-bullying lesson would teach them that transgender people exist. 17th March 2016

The Scottish National Party is facing pressure to ditch a candidate who mocked a “tranny trope” of EU diversity funding. 28th March 2016

A trans woman will take on the role of Channel 4's continuity announcer today – to mark the International Transgender Day of Visibility. 31st March 2016

A new study has found that 60% of transgender people have experienced discrimination at work. 31.3.16

A specialist (James Barrett) has warned of a number of cases in which doctors cited their religious beliefs as a reason to not treat transgender patients. 5th April 2016

Union calls for gender-neutral toilets for transgender pupils 5th April 2016

The head of Ofsted has admitted he has “never thought” about how to protect transgender students in bathrooms. 14th April 2016

The Minister for Women and Equalities is still “working through” a report calling for an urgent shake-up of gender recognition laws, over three months after it came out. 18.4.16

Nicola Sturgeon We should help kids make informed choices about their gender and sexual identity 20th April 2016

The Care Quality Commission has warned that NHS gender identity services are falling short of targets as backlogs and waiting lists grow. 11th May 2016

Government delays transgender rights review to consider ‘significant reforms’ 9th May 2016

David Cameron has lamented the UK losing its top ranking on LGBT rights issues in Europe and says he wants to change the world on global LGBT rights 17th May 2016

The new Mayor of London Sadiq Khan is flying the rainbow flag from City Hall today to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). 17th May 2016

A hundred MPs have signed a motion urging the government to legally recognise people whose identities are neither male nor female. 16th May 2016

Evangelicals attack York Minster over Pride ‘blessing’ and meditation class 16th May 2016

The Girls’ School Association has hit back at press coverage of its trans-friendly policies, after newspapers claimed teachers had been ordered to stop using the word ‘girls’. 21st June 2016

Spectator slammed for featuring ‘trans-spotting’ cartoon 22nd June 2016 see right

This proud transgender lesbian firefighter is here to douse the flames of bigotry 23.6.16

Two transgender athletes are set to compete for the UK at the Rio Olympics next month. 4.7.16

Another trans woman sent to men's prison, despite government promises 4th June 2016

The British Government has announced a review of the way trans people are able to legally change their gender. 7th July 2016



Pope Francis has claimed that transgender teens should be taught to “accept their own body as it was created”. 11th April 2016

The Pope last week released a long-awaited report on ‘the family’ which affirms existing church teachings opposing gay equality and same-sex marriage. Amongst much else, he writes:

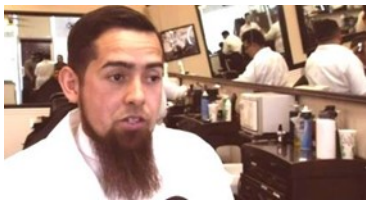
“The young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. Only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centredness and self-absorption. Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it”.

NEWS FROM THE U.S.A.

1. A trans man from California says they plan to take legal action against a barbershop after the owner refused to give them a haircut. 14th March 2016



The US army sergeant – who uses the gender-neutral pronoun “they” – said The Barbershop in Rancho Cucamonga refused to give them a haircut this week, saying the shop doesn’t offer cuts to “women”. Oliver said the rejection was an insult to LGBT people, with legal experts warning that the denial is a clear violation of California anti-discrimination laws. “It did hurt my feelings, and I don’t want anyone else to experience that,” said Oliver. “There is a separation of church and state. And if you have a public business, then everyone in the public should be entitled to access those services.”



The owner of the barbershop, Richard Hernandez, did not dispute the central facts of Oliver’s account. However, he claimed that he could not be accused of discrimination because Oliver did not make it clear to him that they identify as transgender. “We’re definitely not targeting the LGBT movement,” said Hernandez – who in an interview with The Guardian repeatedly referred to Oliver as a “woman”, using the “she” pronoun. “We simply don’t cut women’s hair. It’s a traditional men’s barbershop.”

Attempting to explain his reasoning, Hernandez said he is a member of the Church of God and said the Bible stipulates that women should have long hair. “To cut a woman’s hair would be a violation. God teaches a very clear distinction between the genders.”

Oliver added that, despite increased recognition in the US, the fight for justice for LGBT people is not over, which is why they want to pursue some kind of lawsuit. If I have the opportunity to keep things advancing, I would like to try.”

2. A barber in Southern California has been slapped with a discrimination suit – after refusing to cut the hair of a transgender person. 31st March 2016

Rose Trevis, who is described in the case as a “transgender male with a masculine gender expression” – but appears to use female pronouns. Trevis had gone to Hawleywood’s Barber Shop in Long Beach to get a men’s haircut.

However, the barbers refused to serve Trevis, claiming that women are “not allowed” in the shop and that they do not offer “women’s haircuts” – despite Trevis having short hair and requesting a men’s cut.

The “old school” barbershop touts its men only policy online. Its website states: “Remember waaaay back when in the good ol’ days when you could go down to the local barber shop, get a straight razor shave, a nice tight haircut and enjoy the relaxed and comfortable atmosphere of a real men’s sanctuary? Well guess what? It’s back and it’s called Donnie Hawleywood’s Traditional Barber shop! One thing you won’t see at Hawleywood’s is women. You all know how distracting a woman can be and who wants a straight razor shave with a buxom blonde in the joint? So leave yer’ ol’ lady at home because you might need to talk about her. And besides, no one ever looks cool in the middle of a hair cut.”

Trevis filed a lawsuit against the barber shop today, with attorneys Gloria Allred and Byron Lau alleging the case was discrimination based on gender identity. “I felt humiliated, discriminated against and frowned upon. I was dumbfounded and appalled that this kind of behaviour continues to exist and hope we can bring an end to this observed type of discrimination. A business that excludes women, refuses to serve women and that confirms a discriminatory policy in its advertising is in violation of the law. Furthermore, a business that refuses to serve a customer based on gender identity or perceived gender identity also violates that customer or potential customer’s civil rights.

“We have, therefore, filed a lawsuit today against Hawleywood’s alleging discrimination based on gender in violation of California’s Unruh Civil Rights Act and alleging discrimination based on perceived gender in violation of that same Act (California Civil Code Section 51.)



Trans inmate to finally get gender-reassignment surgery 21st March 2016

In 2015, Michelle Norsworthy became the second person in the United States to have a federal judge order a state to provide her the necessary surgery for a full transition. However after being paroled by the state, Ms Norsworthy announced she would use California's low-income health insurance to have surgery she requires this summer. The 52-year-old told the San Francisco Chronicle she was proud of her fight, as officials have announced new standards for treating transgender inmates.

"I had to adapt my personality in order to survive," she said. "I had to be a man just to be a woman. Now I'm in an all-female facility...I go to sleep knowing nobody's going to hurt me or rape me. That's a relief."

Having been convicted of second-degree murder in 1987, Ms Norsworthy said she was in denial about who she was and only acted out in order to come across "overly male". She added that the crime still haunts her today.

Although she began to transition in the 1990s, the state refused to allow her gender-reassignment surgery – even after it was recommended by several doctors. The state eventually dropped its challenge to the case.

By far the biggest trans issue in the U.S.A. at present is still, unbelievably, toilets. If I included every news item on this issue over the last four months it would take two pages at one line an item. Politicians and pastors alike seek to bolster their own prestige, and often, income, by appealing to an atavistic fear of what T represents, namely the breakdown of old 'certainties' and a requirement to look below the superficialities of life. The Love of Christ is rarely in evidence, but hysteria and cruelty often are. As we have seen, violence is never far away. An equally strong reaction from the LGBT community and the liberal press gives the impression of a society becoming ever more polarised. Trump seems to have decided that more votes lie with the anti-LGBT stance than the liberal, so after months of dithering and U-turns, he seems to be settling into an entrenched reactionary position. Let us pray he doesn't make it to the White House, but in America, anything is possible.

Rather than trying to reflect the ping-pong of shout and counter-shout which has been drowning out sense in America, I reproduce a thoughtful article, which seeks to probe the motivations of the warring parties:



What's the backlash against gender-neutral bathrooms all about? April 4, 2016

by **Alison Gash**, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Oregon

Last week North Carolina became the first state to pass a law requiring transgender individuals (including students) to use only bathrooms that match their biological (rather than identified) gender. They did so in response to an ordinance passed in Charlotte that supported transgender bathroom choice.

Transgender students' access to bathrooms is an increasingly active front for LGBTQ rights battles. Recent calls for safer bathrooms have inspired "shit-ins" at California Polytechnic and San Diego State, where transgender advocates asked student allies to use only gender-neutral restrooms. In April last year, "urine" blockades confronted Berkeley students at Sather Gate, the main entrance to campus. Advocates filled plastic cups with fake urine and lined

them up to greet students as they crossed the threshold into campus to protest inadequate restrooms for transgender students.

To a degree, these strategies have been effective. Courts, campuses and communities across the country have supported calls for transgender bathroom safety. But in many cases, these efforts have launched a visceral backlash – now with North Carolina at its helm. It took state legislators only 12 hours to initiate, discuss and sign into law its prohibitions.

Why is bathroom safety so essential for transgendered individuals? And why is it greeted with such hostility?

Issues of physical, emotional safety

Studies show that transgender students can be harassed, sexually assaulted or subjected to other physical violence when they are required to use a gendered bathroom. One survey, commissioned by the Williams Institute, a think tank at UCLA, found that 68 percent of participants were subjected to homophobic slurs while trying to use the bathroom. Nine percent confronted physical violence. Seventy percent of transgender individuals surveyed in Washington, D.C. experienced verbal or physical assaults or were otherwise threatened when attempting to use the bathroom of their choice. Some experienced more than one form of such behaviour Yet another survey found that 26 percent of transgender students in New York were denied access to their preferred bathrooms altogether. As a result, transgender students need to constantly weigh the trade-offs as they consider bathroom options. As one University of Washington student articulates:

Do I choose physical safety or emotional safety? Do I choose physical health or mental health?

Bathroom policies

For some policymakers, these facts are compelling. For example, University of Pittsburgh, Arizona State University and the University of Maine, among several others, have established policies that would permit transgender students to use the bathroom of their choice.

The private sector is responding as well. Hours after North Carolina passed its bill, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and other high-profile organizations expressed their opposition. A store in Georgia has gone one step beyond opposition and relabelled its bathrooms as gender-neutral.

What's the backlash against gender-neutral bathrooms all about? (continued)

Bathroom panic

But “bathroom panic” appears to be the new focus in the story of gay rights backlash. Wisconsin is considering legislation that would impose significant burdens on schools attempting to support transgender bathroom safety. And in South Dakota, a bill that would have restricted transgender students’ use of restrooms, locker rooms and other gender-specific facilities was recently vetoed. Incidents of backlash have surfaced in elementary schools as well. For example, an elementary school student in Stafford County, Virginia, was prohibited from using a bathroom associated with her gender identity after parents and politicians in the state spoke out against the student’s request.

Federal intervention too has sent out mixed signals. On the one hand, the Department of Education issued a letter to an Illinois school district stating that denying a transgender student’s rights to access a bathroom consistent with their gender identity is a violation of Title IX. On the other hand, a federal court rejected a transgender student’s claim that his equal rights were violated when his university rejected his request to use a locker room that matched his gender identity.

Is it only about women’s safety?

So, why is there so much backlash against these moves to provide safe bathrooms? Opponents say that they are concerned about the possibility of men using “women’s showers, locker rooms and bathrooms” or “sex offenders...follow[ing] women or young girls into the bathroom.” But these explanations are problematic. Bathroom opposition tends to affect far more than just bathrooms. In many cases, so-called “bathroom bills” create obstacles for all LGBTQ individuals in a variety of different settings. In Houston, voters threw out an entire ordinance outlawing LGBTQ discrimination (an ordinance that is now standard in over 200 cities and counties) because it would provide bathroom choice to transgender individuals. Similarly, North Carolina’s “bathroom bill” (HB2) prohibits all municipalities from passing any ordinance that protects LGBTQ individuals from discrimination. These strategies suggest that something more than just concern for women’s safety is at play.



Many are opposing such redesigned bathrooms. Furthermore, this opposition exists even when transgender advocates invoke the needs of students with disabilities, those who may need “family bathrooms” and students who have survived sexual abuse and are more comfortable with single-stall facilities.

Need for safety

At this point, for many transgender students, bathroom options are limited. Either they have to travel quite a distance to get to the nearest single-stall gender-neutral bathroom, or change in an “alternative” locker room (often a faculty bathroom or custodial closet). There could even be days when they go to class in their workout clothes or “hold it in.” Such options have clear drawbacks and health risks. Urinary tract infections, depression and even suicide could be among them. As a result, sometimes students see their best option as renting a house near campus so they can go home to use the bathroom. One student in North Carolina has decided to fight HB2 – by using the letter of law. To anyone who might meet him, Charlie Comero is a man. But because his birth certificate lists him as female, Charlie must now use the women’s bathroom. To offset any confusion about his presence in the women’s bathroom, Charlie passes out cards with the following text.
I’m following a law that was passed on March 23. I am a transgender man who would rather be using the men’s room right now. This is likely uncomfortable for both of us. Please contact your legislature and tell them you oppose HB2.
To be sure, lawsuits have been filed and protests have ensued. But for now in North Carolina and elsewhere, transgender individuals (who are far more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of assault) will be forced to fend for themselves.

Editor’s Comment

This article could be said to overlook those in the trans community who identify with the binary sex that matches their gender identity. Perhaps they feel their male or female identities are at stake if they use or support gender neutral facilities, and therefore fail to support the pretty obvious idea of having non binary bathrooms. Because these people are not secure in their identities, they’re not willing to support gender neutral facilities which would protect the whole trans community, including the non-binary.

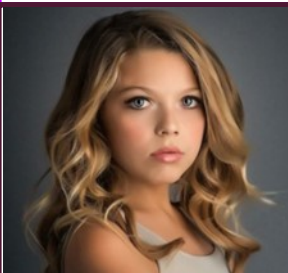


Photo of young trans girl highlights hypocrisy of North Carolina’s transphobic ‘bathroom bill’ 28th April 2016

Photographer Meg Bitton decided to share her image of a young transgender client named Corey Maison in response to the anti-LGBT laws in North Carolina. In the post, Bitton calls out the North Carolina legislation, highlighting the hypocrisy of those who support it. “If this was YOUR daughter, would you be comfortable sending her into a men’s bathroom? Neither would I. Be fair. Be kind. Be empathetic. Treat others how you would like to be treated. Corey Maison is transgender.

She was born with male anatomy but identifies as a female. Under the new laws, SHE would be forced to use the men’s room. Therefore, I would not be comfortable sending HER into the men’s room if she was my daughter.”

A suggestion who's secretly pushing all those new anti-LGBT laws...14th April 2016

More than two dozen laws targeting LGBT anti-discrimination protections and transgender bathroom rights have been filed in the past few months, with some making it onto the books in North Carolina and Mississippi. Why is there such a backlash all of a sudden? It seems very conveniently timed, with a wave of legislation ahead of November's presidential election, almost as if someone is coordinating the effort. CBS looked into the mysterious forces pushing the new wave of bills across the US. The network's investigators found the fingerprints of **The Liberty Counsel**, a hard-line evangelical law firm, on many of the bills.

It found that the group's leader Mat Staver had helped Republican lawmakers draft legislation for conservative lawmakers in at least 20 states. Approached by CBS, he admitted: "There's certainly a thread of information that is similar and the same. "They all have the same intent and that is to protect religious freedom."

Mr Staver conceded helping lawmakers push the laws, insisting: "It is only about being free to pursue your faith. We have no interest in discriminating against anyone." But he insisted the gays and liberals were all to blame, continuing: "The Supreme Court in the 5-4 opinion on marriage in 2015 lit the house on fire. All we're trying to do is control the fire at this point in time."

Genny Beemyn, the director of the Stonewall Center at University of Massachusetts Amherst, reflects on recent setbacks on trans rights – and why victory is inevitable. 23rd May 2016

There is a long way to go before transgender people throughout the United States are treated with respect and dignity, as shown by the opposition in some places to trans people using restrooms that match their gender identity. A number of states and school districts have taken a stand against the Obama administration's reading of Title VII and Title IX – amendments that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation – as applying to transgender people too. But as a scholar on the experiences of young trans people, I believe my research suggests that it is only a matter of time before trans people achieve equal rights and wider social acceptance. While gender is different from sexuality, the history of the struggle for same-sex marriage in this country shows why this will be the case.

From social outlaws to family in-laws

Prior to the year 2000, no state recognized same-sex marriages or even civil unions. At the time, the federal government also defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Public opinion polls indicated that a clear majority of heterosexual people in the U.S. opposed the recognition of same-sex relationships.

By 2011, six states had legalized same-sex marriages, and national opinion polls showed an equal split between those in favor and those opposed on the issue. And by the time of the Supreme Court's ruling in 2015 that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the country, proponents led opponents, according to the Pew Research Center, by 16 percentage points. The ruling was heralded by President Obama, who had "evolved" to become supportive. The White House, where Democratic President Bill Clinton had signed a law banning federal recognition of same-sex marriages, was lit up in the colors of the rainbow flag.

Foremost, it was the demographic power of millennials that led to changes in opinion polls – a trend that policymakers could not ignore. Millennials generally see same-sex marriage as a basic civil rights issue and back it by a wide margin. Older generations have also become more supportive during the last decade, but by a much lesser degree. This means, demographically, the number of individuals who are supportive will grow over time, while members of older generations, who are generally less supportive, will pass away. Support for the issue among heterosexual millennials was largely based on their knowing individuals who self-disclosed to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual – friends, co-workers and sometimes partners. The issue became personal. Research has consistently found that heterosexual, cisgender (non-transgender) people in the U.S. who know a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individual are generally more supportive of that particular group and their rights.

It is difficult to deny the humanity of a group of people if someone close to you belongs to that group. And according to a 2015 Pew Research Center poll, 90 percent of heterosexual millennials report personally knowing someone who identifies as lesbian or gay. That includes 58 percent who have a close friend or family member who is out to them as lesbian or gay. To know us is to at least like us.

Trans people are just beginning to benefit from this support-by-personal-contact effect because there are seemingly fewer of us than cisgender lesbian, gay and bisexual people – and fewer of us are out. A 2011 Williams Institute study placed the number of LGBT people in the United States at approximately nine million, of which about 700,000 are transgender. In terms of U.S. adolescents, estimates suggest between one-half percent and 1.5 percent are transgender, whereas estimates of cisgender LGBTQ youth range from 4 percent to 9 percent.

As reflected in schools and colleges throughout the country, a growing number of young people are coming out as trans. But many others are not out, or out to only a few cisgender family members, friends and colleagues, because the climate has often been hostile for trans people. A national study I conducted for a book I am writing on LGBTQ+ college students found that only about half of the students who identify outside of a gender binary were out to a parent.

According to a 2015 Harris poll, just 16 percent of non-LGBT people say that they personally know someone who identifies as transgender. While this figure is double the percent found in a 2008 study, it pales in comparison to that 90 percent figure for knowing someone lesbian or gay. For many cisgender individuals, trans people will remain a scary, amorphous danger until they knowingly have direct experiences with trans people.

continues.....

Genny Beemyn (continued)

There is a catch-22 here. If more trans people were out, it would help improve the political and social climate for us. However, many trans people understandably do not want to self-disclose, if they can avoid it, because the current climate is often hostile. Trans individuals who are out now, many of whom are young people, regularly encounter harassment and micro-aggressions, such as being misgendered and verbally and physically attacked in bathrooms. But, at the same time, young, out trans people are bringing about changes in cisgender people's attitudes that will help ensure trans individuals in the future will have equal rights and not experience this level of discrimination.

According to a 2015 Human Rights Campaign survey, for example, 66 percent of cisgender individuals who said they know a transgender person expressed supportive feelings toward them, as compared to 37 percent support among cisgender individuals who indicated that they do not know a transgender person.

Trans college students

My own research on transgender college students who have come out describes the struggles they must overcome to be treated with dignity on their campus. While some trans students find their college has policies in place to support them, most discover that their institution denies them the ability to feel safe and fully be themselves. Few colleges formally acknowledge and respect transgender students by, for example, recognizing the first name that trans individuals use for themselves, providing a nonmedical means to switch the M/F gender marker on campus records, or enabling them to be recognized as neither M/F.

Only about 150 colleges enable trans students to change their name on campus records without having to make changes to legal documents, and only about 50 will change the gender marker without students having to making legal changes. Similarly, colleges that do not provide gender-inclusive bathrooms, housing or locker rooms signal to trans students, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that they should not be out and are not welcomed at the institution.

The lack of administrative support for trans students creates a negative campus climate. This is exacerbated by the failure of colleges to require students, staff and faculty to attend an educational session to address discrimination against trans people, as is commonly done to counter sexual harassment. The inclusion of gender identity and expression under Title IX's prohibition against sex discrimination will make campuses more trans-inclusive over time.

The law requires colleges to treat trans students in accordance with their identity and gives them recourse if they experience harassment or discrimination because of their gender identity or expression. But laws and policies can only do so much. Transgender people and cisgender supporters will still need to push institutions and society at large to change and understand that gender is not a binary. This is gradually happening.

While open opposition to trans people being treated in keeping with their gender identity is increasing, so too is support. For example, the passage of North Carolina's anti-transgender bathroom law has led to a boycott of the state by a growing list of businesses, other state and city governments, national organizations and musicians. A recent national opinion poll finds that almost 60 percent of people in the U.S. oppose laws like the one in North Carolina. That same poll indicates that three-quarters of cisgender people support laws guaranteeing equal protection for transgender individuals.

It took 15 years to bring about a sea change on same-sex marriage. Transgender equality nationwide is not only a matter of time, but it is likely to happen faster.

Why trans rights nationwide are only a matter of time Genny Beemyn, University of Massachusetts Amherst
(This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.)

Editor's note: This article is part of The Conversation's collaboration with Point Taken, a new program from WGBH that next airs on Tuesday, May 24 on PBS and online at pbs.org. The show features fact-based debate on major issues of the day, without the shouting.

Other World Headlines

The daughter of evangelical pastor Billy Graham has suggested that God let 9/11 happen because he's too upset about transgender people. 13.5.16

A professional writer and producer refused an Airbnb apartment because she is transgender. 7.6.16

US military lifts ban on transgender troops 30.6.16

Germany: 3 teenagers arrested after allegedly trying to stone two trans women in the street. 18.1.16

Madrid: Free annual travel passes are being given away to transgender people, in an attempt to raise awareness of transphobia among the public. 26.1.16

Bolivian chamber of deputies approves law to allow trans people to legally change gender 20.5.16

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said today that Canada is considering gender-neutral national ID cards. 3.6.16

Norway has become the fourth country in the world to allow trans people to decide their own gender. 6.6. 2016

The 28 EU member states have reached a consensus on LGBT rights for the first time in European history. 20.6.16 **IRONIC!**



Australia: A six-year-old trans-girl who tried to tear off her penis and refused to drink water to avoid using the boys' toilet at school, has now begun her transition. 15.2.16

Germaine Greer admits mistake! 12.4.16 "When I first was thinking about what is a woman, I fell for the usual view that women were people with two Xs and men were people with an X and a Y, which made life nice and easy for me. I now realise that this was wrong. There are all kinds of intersexual conditions and there's all kinds of ways that genes are expressed in behaviour and development."