



Detransitioning

Detransitioning is being discussed more frequently in the news. This is the process whereby persons who previously went through a “sex change” do their best to reverse that procedure. From a Catholic perspective (and also the common view of nearly all cultures and religions until very recently), a person is either male or female, and this biological fact is good and should be accepted. LGBTQ+ activists and their theorists have come up with the idea that one is only “assigned” a sex by our biology and that a person can therefore experience gender dysphoria, a sense of “being in the wrong body.” Their solution to this mental anguish is to dress and interact as a member of the gender they identify with and frequently take hormones, drugs, and surgery to “transition” their bodies so that they transform themselves into their self-perceived gender.

Although the appearance of those who gender transition may change dramatically from female to male or *vice versa*, the fundamental biological reality of their genetic code is inalterable. They are either biologically male or female. In effect, what detransitioners are affirming is that they made a mistake in attempting to do something that is impossible to achieve.

It is unsurprising that detransitioners are often treated as traitors and [persecuted](#) by adherents of the gender ideology. I do have to point out, however, a basic lack of coherence in gender activists who simultaneously affirm that people can be “gender fluid,” changing their gender identification and expression at will, who then also object to detransitioners who want to affirm their biological sex. It reminds me of a group of protestors I saw who loudly chanted that homosexuality was genetically determined and not a choice. On the back of some of their jackets was “Lesbian Avengers: We Recruit.” One of the most frustrating things about the LGBTQ+ worldview is that the “scientific facts” they believe in keep changing.

The [testimonies](#) of detransitioners, often young women, sometimes express the joy of having a child after fearing they had destroyed their fertility with cross-sex hormones. Many tell stories of confusion and vulnerability. It is not uncommon to hear of young people quickly affirmed as transgender and put on a medical conveyor belt that includes powerful drugs and surgeries. The increasing number of teenage girls in crisis is a topic that is making [headlines](#) in the area of transgenderism. Girls seem to be at higher risk of what is called “rapid onset gender dysphoria.” This is when people suddenly experience gender confusion, frequently as a result of social media, peer influence, or trauma. From 2009–2019 there was a 4,400% increase in biological females referred to clinics for gender transitioning in the UK. That kind of explosive growth points to a social phenomenon.

Catholic bioethics sees the phenomenon of detransitioning as an acceptance of the basic fact that one cannot change one’s sex or gender. It is important for people to live their lives based on truth and not false beliefs, so detransitioning is positive in that respect. The sad realization

for many detransitioners is that some of the changes they underwent are not reversible, including at times sterility due to drugs or surgery.

Secular bioethics is much more likely to take a more expansive view of autonomy, one that would sanction such radical choices as gender transitioning. The Church acknowledges that we have God-given free will but recognizes that we frequently make bad choices. Our bioethical understanding is that individuals should not be affirmed in choices that go against what is true, what is just, and what is good for them. Respect for autonomy and individual freedom is important, but it is not an unlimited value. An example would be our duty to try and prevent someone from committing suicide even if it was freely chosen. That choice is simply wrong, and our respect for autonomy should not go so far as to accept it.

One area where there should be more consensus is the need to exercise extreme caution when it comes to young children experiencing gender confusion or gender dysphoria. There is no doubt that children are not mature enough to give true informed consent for medical procedures. Therefore, parents are called be decision-makers for what is in the best interests of their children. I find it especially ethically aberrant that gender transitioning is attempted in prepubescent and teenage children. They cannot legally consent to these life altering interventions, some of which are permanent. In fact, very liberal places like [Sweden](#) and the UK have been backing off from medical transitioning of children. Several US states have also passed legislation to protect children from gender transitioning interventions.

It may be that the recent phenomenon of [lawsuits](#) by detransitioners against the medical professionals and institutions that facilitated and performed the transgender interventions on them will lead to more caution. It is a sad reflection on the current state of the US that fear of expensive lawsuits can drive decision-making and policy changes. We should do what is ethical for its own sake and not out of fear of legal consequences.

The powerful testimonies of detransitioners are a welcome addition to the gender ideology debate. The pro-life movement received a big boost when it became possible to show the victim of abortion through ultrasound technology. The tales of the devastating effects of transitioning interventions from growing numbers of persons should help open the eyes of many who previously thought it was the compassionate thing to do for those suffering from gender dysphoria.