

Let's Have an Honest Discussion About Bruce Jenner

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Only a cruel person would wish Bruce Jenner ill will now that he has morphed into Caitlyn Jenner. Hopefully, he is now at peace with himself. Assuming he is, what are the chances he will stay that way? Regrettably, they are not good. Worse, the glamorization of his condition is risky: It will only encourage those who are in rebellion against their nature not to seek professional help.

It is important to clarify what Jenner's condition is. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, he is not a transgender: he is a transsexual. Gender refers to socially learned roles that are appropriate for males and females; sex connotes a nature-determined status, as exemplified by the two sexes.

Gender roles, moreover, typically take their cues from nature; this explains the similarities in the way boys and girls are raised in different cultures. Moreover, boys are more aggressive than girls – in every society – and this has important social and cultural consequences. The reason has everything to do with nature: Boys have a higher level of testosterone than girls.

Are transsexuals mentally ill? Until two years ago, the answer was yes. In the 3rd edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published in 1980, those who underwent sexual surgery were seen as suffering from a psychological disorder, often schizophrenia.

When DSM-4 was published in 1994, they were also considered mentally ill. But when DSM-5 was published in 2013, they were no longer listed. Instead, it was determined that such persons

suffer from “gender dysphoria,” not “gender identity disorder”; the new term refers to an emotionally distressful condition. What changed, however, were mores, not science.

Not everyone is buying into this politically correct interpretation of what is now called transgenderism. Dr. Paul McHugh is former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Not shy about challenging the conventional wisdom, he is adamant in his conviction that people like Jenner suffer from a mental disorder. What they need, he says, is treatment.

He maintains that “the idea of sex misalignment is simply mistaken – it does not correspond with physical reality.” Also, this sex-change experience “can lead to grim psychological outcomes.”

McHugh’s fears are not unfounded. The majority of those who undergo a “sex change” suffer from an increase in depression. Conversely, the vast majority of those who say they had transgender feelings when they were young, but did not undergo surgical treatment, spontaneously lost those feelings later in life.

Also, we know that 41 percent of those who are transgender have attempted suicide – nine times the national average. Those who attribute this condition to transphobia are wrong: In fact, those who are out in the open about their transgender status are more likely to attempt suicide.

Many are saying that Jenner is absolutely happier now that he is “out.” Hopefully, s/he will stay that way. But the likelihood that s/he will is dim. McHugh notes that in a long-term Swedish study released a few years ago, “beginning about 10 years after having the surgery, the transgendered began to experience increasing mental difficulties. Most shockingly, their suicide mortality rose almost 20-fold above the comparable non-transgender population.”

The widespread elite reaction to Jenner – lauding him as a

fabulous role model for others struggling with their nature – is tragically mistaken. It will only serve to convince these troubled persons not to seek the help they need. It has already led some states to ban psychiatric efforts to help these people come to terms with their sex.

Recent conversations about Jenner's transformation assume that "sex changes" are a reality.

They are not. A male who undergoes surgery can never ovulate or conceive, and a female who makes the switch can never produce sperm. In truth, there is no such thing as a biological sex change.

From a Catholic perspective, all persons possess equal human dignity, and this certainly would include Jenner. But the church also sees body mutilation as sinful. In 2003, the Vatican released a confidential document to church leaders about this issue.

The text defined transsexualism as a psychic disorder. The fact that most of those who believe they need to change their sex suffer from a dissociative disorder only confirms the wisdom of this document.

We need to have a healthy and honest discussion about this issue. Sadly, those who want to hijack Jenner's experience and use it to advance their own political agenda are not doing anyone any good. Nor does it help when elite pressure invites the public to think that getting Jennerized is simply an expression of different strokes for different folks. It is not. It is an expression of an underlying psychological problem that demands attention.

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