

Gender

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Chalice Lighting and Opening Words: Two Stories of the Creation of the Male and Female Human Being

Genesis 1: 26-28 (the Priestly version—written later, but appearing first in the text of the evolving Bible)

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” ²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 2: 19-23 (the Yahwist version—composed earlier, though appearing later in the text)

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

Check-in: How is it with your spirit today?

Topic: Getting on the Same Terminology Page

Our gender is different from our **biological sex**. Most of us are XX and XY females and males, born with genitals that match our chromosomal sex. About 1,000 babies are born every year in the United States, however, whose genetic sex does not match with the appearance of their genitals. These are “intersex” individuals. They will either remain physically intersex their whole lives or be surgically or hormonally nudged toward one gender of the other. So even our assignment at birth as male or female is not a completely straightforward matter.

Our **gender** is the way we enact our biological sex in the world and that enactment is highly (perhaps almost solely) determined by how the culture in which we are embedded dictates that we “should” act. Men and women are expected to look, speak and act within certain gender-specific parameters. Individuals that challenge those boundaries are likely to experience pressure from those around them to comply with cultural standards. Uncertainty about the gender of an individual causes anxiety. **Gender identity** seems to form very early in life under the influence of complex biological, psychological, and social variables and is most likely irreversible by age 4.

Society functions best when the parameters for gender presentation allow males and females equal access to what they need for personal fulfillment and meaningful contribution to the world around them. **Gender stereotyping** functions in the opposite way, permitting groups and society to open or close doors based solely on general assumptions about the ways a person’s gender limits or enhances their ability to function in various realms.

Some people are unable to merge the biological, psychological, and social sides of their gender. They suffer **gender dysphoria**, emotional confusion and pain over their gender identity. Specifically, some believe they were born into the wrong-gender body, that their internal sense of gender is inconsistent with their external sexual biology. A **transgender** person is one who has, with or without sex reassignment surgery, chosen to live as the opposite gender, the one that feels more comfortable to them. Many people now understand gender as a spectrum of possible identities, along a line between the poles of “male” and “female,” or even beyond that duality.

Questions for Reflection

1. When you were growing up, what did you learn about how you should or shouldn't behave as a “boy” or a “girl?” Were there ways in which you were punished/harassed/bullied for not “acting like” the gender culturally appropriate for your biological sex? Do you think that gender stereotypes have changed since you were a child?
2. What have you enjoyed about being born the sex you are and living a culturally congruent gender identity as a boy/man or girl/woman? Are there ways that you have thereby benefitted from certain privileges that people of the opposite sex and gender did not?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life when you couldn't acquire, achieve or do what you wanted because of your gender?
4. What are the “rules” for using a public bathroom when others are present there? Is the etiquette different in men's rooms and women's rooms? Have you ever used a “gender neutral” bathroom? If you have, what was that like? If you haven't, can you see yourself choosing to use one?
5. Have you ever met someone whose gender was not clear? What feelings came up for you when you couldn't firmly identify that person as either male or female? How did you resolve your confusion?
6. Have you ever in your life wished you had been born the opposite sex or that (regardless of your biological sex) you could live a gender identity somewhere between the two (polar), a shifting gender identity (fluid) or a gender identity outside the “either/or” framework (third gender)?

Likes and Wishes

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing:

What are little boys made of?
What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails
And puppy-dogs' tails,
That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice
And everything nice,
That's what little girls are made of.