

First Unitarian Church

August 28, 2016

Angela:

Wasn't that an interesting reading? ¹

I had not heard that breakdown of the Hebrew in the Hebrew scriptures before. I took Spanish and Biblical Greek in Divinity School. One of them is more useful than the other.

Isn't it interesting to know that Eve is referred to as "him," Adam as "they," and Noah as "her;" that gender is "highly elastic" in the Hebrew scriptures?

We don't hear about that. What we usually hear about is what some theologians call "Texts of Terror," texts like the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, texts used to condemn, exclude, and even justify violence against certain people. It has happened against women, enslaved people, people of color, poor people, and gays. The scriptures have been used against unmarried people, and they have been used to prevent people from getting married.

That's why I keep talking about them. However we feel about the bible, it is everywhere in our society and so it's important to know what it really says.

It doesn't support discrimination against transgender people, and it even looks like the ancient name of God is a two-gender name.

Now, I know many of us are still confused about what being transgender is all about, so I'm going to take a few minutes just to break it down a little. And one cool thing is that understanding the concept of transgender actually helps all of us understand our own gender better, whether we are trans or not.

¹ Samath, Mark. "Is God Transgender?" New York Times. 13 Aug 2016.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/13/opinion/is-god-transgender.html? r=0>

To understand gender, we need to understand four related concepts: sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Sex, when it refers to whether someone is male or female, is the biological part of us. It's your anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. If you have two XX chromosomes, you have the physiological features of a female and you are therefore identified at birth as a girl. If you have one X and one Y chromosome, you have male parts and you are identified as a boy.

Occasionally, a person is born with two XX chromosomes and a Y chromosome—XXY. When that happens, the baby is “intersex.” The baby's anatomy is ambiguous.

As many as 1/100 or as few as 1/2000 babies are intersex babies—the exact numbers are hard to track down. But they show us that even biology does not always make sex clear.

Next is sexual orientation. This one should be pretty familiar by now. Some people are attracted to the opposite sex, others to the same sex, some to both, and some don't experience sexual attraction, and it's all just fine. Do your thing and don't let anyone hassle you about it.

Now, **gender identity.** A little trickier.

Your gender identity is an internal sense of your self. It's the relationship between your body and your personal sense of whether you *feel* male, female, both or neither. Gender identity is the way you relate to your biological sex.

While most people do feel their gender is the same as their sex, a significant minority does not. Some are designated male at birth, but know deep within themselves that they are feminine or female. Some are designated female but identify more as masculine or male. Some people don't feel they are either female or male. Others feel they are both.

Research has shown that most people have a clear sense of their gender identity from about age four.

This is where things start to get interesting, because gender is not a biological category. It is a cultural one. Culture teaches us what women

are feminine and men are masculine, and it tries to keep femininity and masculinity separated strictly according to biological sex.

But even among people who do not call themselves transgender, there is a lot of variation in how much a person's masculinity or femininity aligns with their biological sex. The other day I rewatched the movie *Frida*, about the artist Frida Kahlo. When we imagine her, we tend to remember her wearing traditional Mexican women's clothing. But she was not conventionally feminine, and once in a while she dressed like a man.

Gender often correlates with biological sex, but we can all see that masculinity and femininity are a vast spectrum, and they are not *determined* by biological sex.

Depending on our sense of gender, we then develop our modes of **gender expression**. Gender expression is the outside part of gender. It's the way we present ourselves to the world.

It is how we manifest masculinity, femininity, both, or neither, in dress, behavior, the way we speak. When Frida wore men's clothing, she was expressing or presenting masculinity.

Culture teaches us the codes for gender expression. It teaches us what is masculine, and what is feminine. In some cultures, it is masculine to wear robes, which is kind of like wearing dresses. In American culture, men wearing dresses is not the norm.

But why? The theologian Patrick Cheng writes that although there are definitely physical differences relating to biological sex, "the significance of these differences in terms ... gender identity is... is socially constructed."

He says, "even though people may differ in terms of, say, hat size, that particular physical marker of difference has little to no relevance in every day life. Similarly, there is no reason why a person's [body parts] must *automatically* determine everything from hair and clothing styles to preferred color (for example pink vs blue) to family role and career choices. It is important to understand that the spectrum of behaviors

normally associated with an individual's birth-assigned sex are actually a matter of social convention that is constantly changing."²

Expressing gender in a way that is incongruent with your internal sense is really awkward. Think of the tomboy who is forced to wear dresses, and hates every minute of it. Or a masculine man being asked to wear nail polish. Or the reverse: I don't like going out in public in masculine clothing and no make up—it doesn't align with how I feel on the inside and that misalignment is uncomfortable. And there are men who can't imagine expressing gender in a hyper masculine kind of way.

Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression. Got it?

Ok. **Transgender** is when a person's biological sex does not align with their gender identity. When your biological sex does align with your gender, it's called being cis-gender. Cis, CIS, means "same." Transgender and cis-gender.

There are many more transgender people than most of us are aware of. Sometimes a transgender person decides to express the gender they identify with in clothing, mannerisms, etc, or even to change their bodies with surgery, but sometimes they don't.

Although most transgender people know from kindergarten on that their gender and biological sex are not aligned, some keep it to themselves, simply living with the discomfort and with the feeling that they are not expressing their real selves.

Why would someone choose to do that? Often because the cost of coming out is so high.

Discrimination is a serious matter. In some places it's a matter of public policy.

In March, North Carolina passed a law requiring anyone in a government owned building—like a school—to use the bathroom that corresponds with the sex on their birth certificate.³

² Cheng, Patrick. Radical Love: an introduction to queer theology. Seabury: New York, 2011. (18)

³ Liptak, Adam. "Supreme Court Blocks Order Allowing Transgender Student Restroom Choice." New York Times. 3 Aug 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/us/politics/supreme-court-blocks-order-allowing-transgender-student-restroom-choice.html?_r=0

The Obama administration pushed back, threatening to withhold funding from states that discriminated in this way, but that effort is tied up in the courts.⁴

And last week the Supreme Court temporarily blocked a lower court order that had allowed a transgender boy to use the boys' bathroom in a Virginia high school. These laws are popping up, or trying to pop up, all around the country.

If you can't use the restroom that matches your appearance on the outside, and attempting to use the other one could result in assault, what are you going to do? How do you spend eight hours per day at school, without using a restroom?

And this effects a lot of people.

North Carolina alone has about 44,750 transgender residents.⁵

There are 1.4 million transgender adults in the US—or .6% of the US population.

(That's about twice as many people as identify as Unitarian Universalists in our country.⁶ Let's all bring a friend next Sunday, okay?)

Social conservatives have tried to convince the public that if we allow transgender people to use the bathroom that matches their current gender, some of them will use that opportunity sexually assault cis-gender people.

But the truth is that there has never been any recorded case of a transgendered person sexually assaulting a cis gendered person in a public restroom. It just doesn't happen. In fact, what does happen is just the opposite: *transgender* people are assaulted by *cis-gender* people.

⁴Lichtblau, Eric and Richard Faussetmay. "U.S. Warns North Carolina That Transgender Bill Violates Civil Rights Laws." New York Times. 4 May 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/us/north-carolina-transgender-bathroom-bill.html>

⁵ Hoffman, Jan. "Estimates of US Transgender Population Doubles to 1.4 Million Adults." New York Times. 30 June 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/health/transgender-population.html?action=click&contentCollection=Politics&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=EndOfArticle&pgt=type=article>

⁶ "Religious Landscape Study." Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/#religions>

A transgender person is killed in the US every two weeks, and worldwide it is a daily occurrence. Non-lethal abuse is even more prevalent.

Transgender people experience not only disproportionate levels of violence, but because of discrimination they also face high levels of unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. Many are shunned by their families.

The difficulty of many transgender people's lives is so overwhelming, that a whopping 41% have attempted suicide (not just thought about it, but attempted it). This is compared to 1.6% of the general population.

Transgender intersects with other issues, like unemployment and healthcare. It intersects with immigration—transgender immigrants face additional hurdles achieving legal status inside the US, and more likely to face persecution at home if they are deported.

Trans people are also more likely to identify as racial or ethnic minorities, including African American and especially Latin American heritage. That means that discrimination against transgender people disproportionately affects people of color.

The Unitarian Universalist denomination, which honors the inherent worth and dignity of every person, celebrates human diversity and recognizes transgender discrimination as a human and civil rights issue. For twenty years, transgender has been affirmed and defended through the UUA's Office of LGBTQ Ministries. We have ordained openly transgender ministers, and our denomination actively helps them find congregations to serve.

Today I'm proud to share the pulpit with a transgender member of our congregation, someone who I got to know through her volunteering in the church office, serving on the social justice committee and the diversity task force, who is a force of nature and has offered to share her story.

Tara's Story

Good morning, everybody. My name is Donna Tara McCaughin and most of you know me as Tara. 17 years ago, before anyone here, including my wife, knew me, my name was Douglas Thomas Schwartz and I was working for the Daytona Beach Post office.

My outside, surface appearance seemed to be very good. I was in recovery from alcoholism for six years, which was a family trait. Both my parents had died from alcohol related diseases. I seemed to be happily married, had a super well behaved honor role student as a 18 year old daughter and was an active member of Unity Church of greater Daytona.

Unity there had the nickname of being " The 12 step church ". I would see members of Unity at various AA and Al-Anon meetings that I also attended. One of Unity's sermons one Sunday was entitled, " Unity and the 12 Steps. "

I was in good health, a member of the Daytona Beach Track Club and we met every Sunday morning at 6:30 AM for a nine mile training run. No way I could be out drinking the night before a nine mile run ! And finally, my dream to be in elective politics seemed to be coming true.

After a neighborhood town hall meeting on economic development that I had spoken at, the Vice Mayor for economic development of Port Orange, the suburb of Daytona I was living in, informed me that I had the best idea's of any single individual they had heard at their meetings and would I run for city council in the next election? I was promised I would get all the support of the powers that be so I could win. I had to say no to my dream.

In August of 1999 I was diagnosed with Lymphoma in my right femur bone and was told I had a 70% mortality rate. To put it bluntly, that sucked ! Here I was, finally the good guy and it looked like the light at the end of the tunnel was very close. Now this was where my big secret I had been carrying around all my life came into play. I had known since I was 5 and 1/2 that I should have been born a girl. I was a very shy introverted child who overcame this at the age of 16 by discovering that alcohol allowed me to fit into society as a man.

In the words of the old Saturday Night life skit, " I was a wild and crazy dude." By the time I was 45 I was in real bad shape. I ended up going to

Recovery and got sober and this August 23 I celebrated 23 years of continuous sobriety. To me, this is no big deal. It's just something I have to do to have a life.

Now upon having and recovering from cancer, it was no where as bad as the doctors thought it was, I had made myself a promise, that if I had recovered I was going to live my life as who I really am, a woman. However, I figured I was going to die and be mourned as this poor guy who straightened himself out only to get struck down by a horrible disease. I was really liking that ending. However, Goddess had different plans for me. Seems She wanted me to go be a woman. How do I know that? I was testing the butcher knives one afternoon in my kitchen. I wanted to see which was the sharpest to end my life with.

My wife was at work, my daughter at college, where she had a full scholarship. Remember, I mentioned earlier she was a great kid? Anyway, this little voice said to me, " Put down the knife and go be the best woman you can be ". That was November 11, 1999, Veteran's Day, and I will never forget that as long as I live.

I finally came out to my family in January, 2000, and was promptly disowned by every member in said family. They have not had any relationship with me since. Did that break my heart? Yes, very much, especially with my daughter. Did my co-workers accept me? Hah, they referred to me as " it " and the " social experiment ". However, because I was determined to have my sexual re-assignment surgery, I persevered and had surgery February 8, 2001, in Chonburri, Thailand. Why there? Dr. Suporn's work seemed to be the best in the world and the least expensive also. So I returned to the U.S. on March 1, 2001, as a woman and was immediately discriminated against, being referred to as " Sir " by a very snarky airport worker in a very snarky tone.

On my return to work things got worse. One day on my route I had 5 teenagers approach me. They began circling me, saying very nasty things about me. one said, " Let's pull down it's skirt and see what's between it's legs."

I dropped the mail on the ground, went into a fighting stance and said to them, " You'll get me but I'll kill at least two of you. " They left and a half hr. later this all caught up to me and I was a hysterical wreck. The Post office in their infinite non-understanding told me to finish my route. I

brought the rest of the mail back, put it down, said you finish the route and went home sick. I got a doctor's note saying I was suffering from emotional trauma and took the next week off. Work really didn't get any better and I retired the first day I could. Problem solved.

I applied for a job where I was living in Ocala, Florida, which I was highly qualified for. It was a job I really wanted and could have done. When a background check revealed I was transgendered, I was told I didn't fit in and was not being hired.

This case of discrimination really hurt. I got a job as a substitute teacher in the Marion County School System which is really still a red neck bible belt area of Florida. After complaints by students, parents and teachers I was told to resign. Seems I was offending others for just being me. There were snide remarks made about me out in public.

I moved to Gainesville, Fl., which had just added gender identity to their protected status and I was hired by the Alachua County School Board as a sub teacher. The difference was like night and day. In the schools there was no discrimination. Certain teachers always asked for me because they knew I would do a good job during their absence. Students said hello to me in public places because they appreciated me as a good teacher. I have had a few young women i have met come to me for advice at various times.

One even refers to me as her " Mommy " Her real mother disowned her and to this day, since 2003 when we met, she has told me she has adopted me as her mother. I met my wife December, 2009. She is cisgendered and has always totally accepted me for me. Sometimes I wonder about her sanity, having lived with me for six and a 1/2 years, but then I remember we are both just a tad " eccentric ".

I am not saying there is not discrimination today. We all know there is. We have many laws passed or being proposed against the LGBT community. But I refuse to accept this as a condition for living today. I became an activist so I could help fight discrimination, hoping others would not have to go through what I have done. Throughout my activist years I have done a lot, but I would say the highlight for me is being the North central co-ordinator for the National Equality March, October 15, 2009. I was chosen to be the presenter of the Transgender History

workshop the day before the march and was the Pagan Priestess at the Ecumenical service the morning of the March.

Today I am a member of Trans New Mexico's speaker bureau and Equality New Mexico. I am employed now as the asst. office manager of a progressive firm fundraising for the American civil Liberties Union. Today I consider myself an activist for social equality, economic justice and sexual equality.

I am a Pagan today, simply because I have not met any Pagans who discriminate against LGBTQ persons. Many pagans are LGBTQ because of this reason. When I joined UU of Gainesville I mentioned I did so because it was the only church around that didn't discriminate against a transsexual white lite witch, which is one who only practices magik to help others.

Am I sorry I transitioned? No way at all. If anything I wish I had done it earlier. I regret at times not having a girlhood, or being a young woman. However today I look back on a great life since transitioning. Yes I lost a biological family but have an awesome family of choice, one that is not prejudiced because of what you are, but accepts you for who you are.

I have had the opportunity to write and lecture, throughout Florida and also in Chicago, Atlanta and Washington, DC. and now New Mexico. Transitioning allowed me to become the assertive, activist open minded woman I am today and I am so grateful for the cancer that changed my life and made it so much better and bigger than I could have ever expected. Finally, I want to thank Rev. Angela for asking me to be part of this service today on an issue that will always be near and dear to my heart. Thank you.

How to Be Welcoming

Angela: Thank you so much, Tara, for sharing your story. As Tara's story makes so clear, policies to prevent discrimination make a big difference in transgender people's lives, just as anti-sexist policies have in the women's rights movement and anti-racist policies have in the racial justice movement.

It is also important for there to be diversity-loving communities, and that is what First Unitarian is. We love diversity... and we are continually learning to be better at honoring it. So, we are going to close with a few tips on how to be welcoming to our transgender friends.

Tara: Number one: Please use the name and pronoun a person requests.

Angela: Usually, a person with feminine gender expression should be referred to as “she,” and a person with male gender expression as “he.”

Tara: Sometimes it’s hard to tell. If you aren’t sure whether to say he or she...

Angela: *and if you really need to know....*

Tara: Ask!

Angela: Ask, “What pronoun do you prefer?”

Tara: Most people will take that as a sign of respect.

Angela: Number Two: respect a trans person’s right to disclose whether they are transgender for themselves,

Tara: rather than making assumptions or speaking on their behalf.

Angela: Number three: please don’t ask for personal medical information.

Tara: You wouldn’t ask a man at social hour if he’s had a vasectomy, would you?

Angela: It’s the same with sex reassignment surgery. A person may choose to share that information, as Tara did when she was sharing her journey with us, but it’s too personal to *ask* about.

Tara: And number four: Respect everyone’s right to choose the bathroom that best matches their gender.

Angela: The bathrooms in this sanctuary building have signs... And anyone who would rather have a bathroom to their self for any reason is welcome to use the ones in the social hall. They have main doors that lock.

Lately, the public conversation about transgender people and others has often been harsh. I invite you to join me in a closing song that affirms diversity and boldly proclaims our love of neighbor.