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When the Gender Line Isn't Clear?

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The New York Times ran a major article on transgender children on December 2, adding considerable visibility to an issue that had, until recently, hardly been mentioned in public. [See my article of October 18, 2006, "[Gender Confusion in the Kindergarten?](#)"]

In "[Supporting Boys or Girls When the Line Isn't Clear](#)," reporter Patricia Leigh Brown explained:

Until recently, many children who did not conform to gender norms in their clothing or behavior and identified intensely with the opposite sex were steered to psychoanalysis or behavior modification.

But as advocates gain ground for what they call gender-identity rights, evidenced most recently by New York City's decision to let people alter the sex listed on their birth certificates, a major change is taking place among schools and families. Children as young as 5 who display predispositions to dress like the opposite sex are being supported by a growing number of young parents, educators and mental health professionals.

This reporter ventures rather deeply into the issue, noting that in addition to allowing children to pose, dress, and be recognized as the opposite of their birth sex, some parents have gone so far as to use "blocking" drugs to delay puberty. As Brown explains, this raises "a host of ethical questions."

The reporter also acknowledges a divide within the community of activists and specialists dealing with the question. In her words, "The prospect of cross-dressing kindergartners has sparked a deep philosophical divide among professionals over how best to counsel families. Is it healthier for families to follow the child's lead, or to spare children potential humiliation and isolation by steering them toward accepting their biological gender until they are older?"

The appearance of this article in the *Times*, along with the acknowledgment of a split among the authorities it cites, perhaps indicates that even a considerable percentage of *Times* readers are not ready for cross-dressing kindergartners—especially their own children and grandchildren.

The reporter suggests that the parents of these children bear the authority, at least at present, to determine how their child is to be recognized. As Brown explains, "Legal trends suggest that schools are now required to respect parents' decisions."

The article contains some amazing statements. A first-grade teacher in the Boston area laments the fact that many teachers were "unnerved" when a boy showed up wearing a dress. Some teachers, she explained, did not see first-graders as "sophisticated enough to verbalize their own feelings."

Tom Little, director of the Park Day School in Oakland, California (where at least one cross-dressing kindergartner has been enrolled) explained that teachers at his school are taught a "gender-neutral" vocabulary and are told to line up children by sneaker color instead of by gender.

His comment takes the cake: "We are careful not to create a situation where students are being boxed in. We allow them to move back and forth until something feels right."

One specialist cited in the article, Dr. Kenneth Zucker, who has treated about 500 children dealing with this issue, claims that about 80 percent of these children grow out of the behavior. His approach is to help children “be more content in their biological gender.”

Contrast that with Dr. Edgardo Menvielle, who takes the opposite approach: “The goal is for the child to be well adjusted, healthy and have good self-esteem. What’s not important is molding their gender.”

As a society, we are falling (or diving) deeper and deeper into gender confusion. A considerable percentage of the policy-making elite has bought into the ideology of fluid gender and absolute self-expression. Once that idea takes hold, the reality of cross-dressing kindergartners becomes inevitable.

This is where the Christian worldview runs into direct collision with the new sexual ideologies. Christians see the reality of biological identity as a gift—one important way the Creator has told us who we are and how we are to glorify Him with our lives. No one should suggest that negotiating the gender issues in a fallen world is easy. And I am hard pressed to imagine a more difficult parenting challenge than that faced by the parents interviewed for this article. But surrendering to the confusion cannot be the right answer — leaving young children “to move back and forth until something feels right.”

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