

Gender

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY November 2013

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

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

Genesis 1: 26-28 (the Priestly version—written later than the below but preceding it 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—the earlier of the two versions)

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.

²³The 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.”

Chalice Lighting and Silence

[Covenant Review]

Check-in: How is it with your spirit?— or —What are your Thanksgiving plans?

Quiz: A Ten Question Quiz about Gender Differences

[Facilitators: You might read the question, take a hand count of trues and falses, and then read the answer. Alternatively, you could create question sheets and have people

write T or F privately. Then read the answers. You might want to make a quick round of reactions to the quiz.]

Topic Introduction: 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.

Quotations

Story: “What You Should Know About My Gender Non-Conforming Kid”
(Stefanie Wilder Taylor)

[Facilitators: Read the story to the group or ask one (or more) of them to read it. Show the pictures, if you can. You might want to let group members express a brief reaction to the story. You could also hold those reactions for the Questions section below.]

Questions for Group Reflection

[Facilitators: introduce the question section of this session by reminding people that we are trying to establish, in Sharing Circles, a truly safe space for talking about matters that we may consider “private” in other settings. Encourage them to take risks in telling stories from their lives and to avoid generalizing.]

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. Do you recognize any of the differences in language use pictured in the handout as important dynamics in your relationships? If so, how have you learned to cope with those dynamics? *[Facilitators: Copy and paste the graphic, two per page, cut in half and distribute for this question]*
6. What stories from your life came to mind as you were listening to the story about Matilda? If Matilda were your own child or grandchild—today—how would you relate to her struggle and manage your relationship with her? Would you feel differently if the story had been about a little boy whose gender identity bent towards girl clothes, toys and friends?
7. 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?
8. 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: (Likes: celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met; and Wishes: mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing:

What are little boys made of?
What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails ("frogs" is often used instead of snips)
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.

We are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other -- male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it. ~James Baldwin

Class, race, sexuality, gender and all other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other need to be excavated from the inside. ~Dorothy Allison

As far as I'm concerned, being any gender is a drag. ~Patti Smith

A lot of kids are bullied because of their sexual identity or expression. It's often the effeminate boys and the masculine girls, the ones who violate gender norms and expectations, who get bullied. ~Dan Savage

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different. ~Kate Millett

The difference between men and women is that, if given the choice between saving the life of an infant or catching a fly ball, a woman will automatically choose to save the infant, without even considering if there's a man on base. ~Dave Barry

Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and just visit now and then. ~Katharine Hepburn

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl." ~Shirley Chisholm

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But in fact they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman. ~Margaret Fuller (1810-50)

To me gender is not physical at all, but is altogether insubstantial. It is soul, perhaps, it is talent, it is taste, it is environment, it is how one feels, it is light and shade, it is inner music. ~Jan Morris

I am not this body. I am in this body, and this is part of my incarnation and I honor it but that isn't who I am. ~Ram Dass

I reserve my right to be complex. ~Leslie Feinberg (transgender lesbian)

There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. May as well speak of a female liver. ~Charlotte Perkins Gilman

I'm just a person trapped inside a woman's body. ~Elaine Boosler

UFSB Sharing Circles
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Story

(November

What You Should Know About My Gender Non-Conforming Kid

By **STEFANIE WILDER TAYLOR** | September 16th, 2013 at 2:25 pm

<http://www.babble.com/babble-voices/stefanie-wilder-taylor-baby-on-bored-electric-boogaloo/what-you-should-know-about-my-non-gender-conforming-kid/>



My daughter Matilda transitioned into kindergarten last week. Matilda is a girl who only dresses in boy clothes -*yes*, you're right, *exactly* like Shiloh Jolie-Pitt. On any given day you will see her in basketball shorts, a Spidey tee shirt and some Sketchers bad ass light up shoes from the boy's side of the store. The thing is, although I'm totally used to it since she's been dressing this way since she was three, I still struggled with how I could best help her make the transition into a new school. I don't know if you're aware of this but it's really hard to be different.

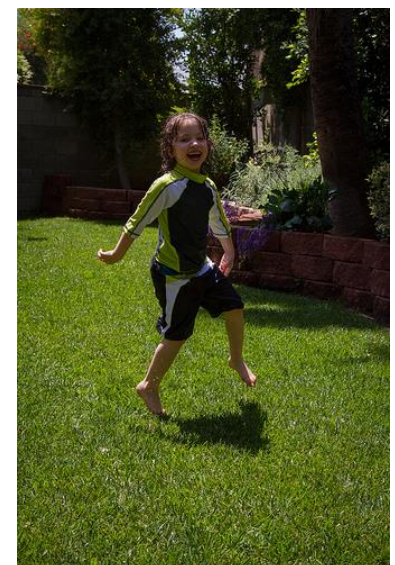
Matilda isn't different on purpose. She certainly doesn't dress like a boy to stand out in a crowd. This isn't like adding a blue streak to your hair when you're fifteen. This is just who she is. I

think if you asked her she would say she wishes she *weren't* different. She would say she wishes it were easier to make friends and that it was easier for people to "get her." This is a kid who craves love, acceptance and friendship.

When Matilda was in camp over the summer she told me that some of the kids kept asking her if she was a boy or a girl. She said she would tell them that she was a girl but they just kept asking her and saying, "Well then why do you like Superheroes? Why are you wearing a Spongebob shirt? Why do you have Hot Wheels in your lunch box to play with?" This really hurt her feelings. At first I tried to ask her if maybe the kids were just confused and I told her it was okay to just let them know that she's a girl and it didn't mean they were insulting her. But she said she tried that and that they just kept asking her even though their question had been asked and answered. Obviously, I didn't like hearing that. But what can you do besides speak to the counselors and make sure they keep an eye out for her right?

About two weeks before school started, Mattie kept saying she was nervous about school. She was so nervous to try to make friends because making friends is really hard, she told me. This is when I made a suggestion to her that maybe we could get her some girl shirts from Target -not girlie but just from the girl's section- so that people would know that she's a girl but she would still feel like herself. She agreed to this and seemed excited when we chose a baseball tee with purple sleeves and she even said she'd wear a pair of purple leggings. The night before school arrived and she laid out a Spider Man t-shirt and the purple leggings to wear for her first day. But the next morning she changed her mind and threw on her basketball shorts instead.

She needed to be herself. For me, it would have been easier if she wore something to signify she's a girl. It would have eased *my* transition. I thought I would worry less if she weren't faced with the questions or the possibility of teasing. But it turns out that this wasn't about me, it



was about her. And she's a girl who only likes boy things. That's who she is. And that's how she would like to present herself. She doesn't want to pretend to be something she's not.

What's School Like for K-12 Students Who Express a Transgender Identity or Gender Nonconformity?



Source is "Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011

She doesn't have a buzz cut, or try to go by a boy's name. She wants to use the girl's bathroom like all the other girls. But she wants to be friends with the boys. And if there's a game of "house" or "school" going on, she wants to be the son, dad, prince, boy etc.

My daughter may look different and act differently than you expect a girl to look and behave but she is the same as your kid. She has the same fears and insecurities, the same passion for fruit roll-ups and Gogurt, the same hugs and silliness. She's kind and thoughtful, beautiful inside and out. She just doesn't like girl sh*t.

If you meet her at school or anywhere else, you are welcome to ask if she's a girl or a boy and if you just assume she's a boy and she corrects you, you don't need to be embarrassed or to try to justify yourself by telling me you didn't know because she's dressed like a boy. All you have to do is smile and say "Great! Nice to meet you, Matilda." Don't worry, I'm still learning too.

1. Men have better spatial awareness.

Men possess a stronger ability to think of objects in three dimensions, helping with navigation, which was also discussed during the British Psychological Society Annual Conference. Even 3-month-old infants exhibit the sex-based behavioral difference. It could be that hunting, competitive battles and other activities conducted in the past helped to lock the skill into males.

2. Women are better at locating specific items.

Men often may have better spatial awareness than women do, but women are "better at remembering where things are," Halpern said. As a result, women are more likely to navigate using landmarks. While both men and women can therefore find their way to places with about equal skill, women might have an edge, since they could likely find things like missing car keys and maps first.

3. Women are better at worrying.

Women produce only about half as much serotonin -- a neurotransmitter linked to depression -- as men do and they have fewer transporters to recycle it, according to Karolinska Institute research. As a result, women tend to worry more. That's not always a bad thing, as women might then possess an enhanced ability to foresee problems and plan how to handle them.

4. Men are better at judging person's size based on their voice.

A study in the latest Biology Letters holds that "men are better than women at acoustic size judgments." This means that men have an enhanced ability to determine a person's size based on the sound of his or her voice, according to Benjamin Charlton and colleagues from the University of Sussex. The findings, conclude the authors, "lend support to the idea that acoustic size normalization, a crucial prerequisite for speech perception, may have been sexually selected through male competition."

5. Women detect colors better than men do.

Women can detect subtle variations in color that men fail to identify, such as noting certain off-white colors versus white, Israel Abramov of CUNY's Brooklyn College, determined a few months ago. It could be that women -- acting as gatherers -- developed improved color detection while searching for edibles. Abramov suspects that sex hormones are behind the differences, given that male sex hormones can alter development in the visual cortex.

6. Men handle lack of sleep better than women do.

A Duke University study found that men could tolerate sleep deprivation more than women could. This is either good or bad news for men, as sleep is involved in brain repair, when the brain sorts out memories and other information acquired throughout the day.

7. We are evenly matched at multitasking.

Some studies have found that men are better at multi-tasking, while others have determined just the opposite. When compiled, the data so far suggests that our multitasking skills could be evenly matched. As we age, we also tend to lose, at about the same rate, our ability to handle more than one activity at once. Older men and women exhibit more difficulty in switching between tasks at the level of brain networks, according to a study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

8. Men are better at detecting infidelity.

Men appear to be better at reading subtle vocal, visual, scent and other cues indicating their partner's fidelity, concludes a study published in the journal Human Nature. The downside, said co-author Paul Andrews of Virginia Commonwealth University, is that these cues aren't always accurate, and men are more likely than women to falsely suspect cheating. Yet another

study on cheating, published in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, found that men are more upset by sexual infidelity, and while women are more upset by emotional infidelity. Women, it should be mentioned, outperform men when identifying emotions, according to a study in the journal Neuropsychologia.

9. We are evenly matched in terms of intelligence

Men tend to be larger and, as a result, tend to have bigger brains. Size, however, does not necessarily correlate with intelligence. Braininess instead relies more on neuronal connections, which we help forge when learning by experience or study. Historically, women's IQs have lagged behind those of men by up to 5 points, but now women are surpassing men in such tests. Rex Jung, an assistant professor of neurosurgery at the University of New Mexico, has found that men tend to have more brain grey matter while women have more white matter. The differences yet again are evident, but it appears that the evolutionary battle between the sexes can, at least for now, be judged as a tie.

10. Women usually live longer than men.

Better immunity, reduced risk for blood diseases and lower risk-taking may give women an edge on longevity. Based on Centers for Disease Control data, women tend to have a life expectancy that's 5.3 years greater than men's, but the gap is narrowing. In 1978, it was 7.8 years. The good news for men is that they tend to remain sexually active longer than women do. "Interest in sex, participation in sex and even the quality of sexual activity were higher for men than women, and this gender gap widened with age," said Stacy Tessler Lindau of the University of Chicago, who worked on a related study.

<http://news.discovery.com/human/life/science-behind-gender-differences-130528.htm>

Differences in Language Use

