



The Trans Phenomenon

A talk by David Warden for Farnham Humanists on 18th June 2023

Thank you very much for inviting me.

My interest in the trans topic started in 2006 when I ran a Diversity Essentials training course for Dorset County Council. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 had come into force the previous year.

I was the founding chairman of the Dorset County Council LGBT Workers' Group and one of our members was a transwoman called Rosie. In 2009, I arranged for her to give a talk on her experience of being trans at the Dorset Equality Forum.

In 2016, I arranged for a transman called Jay to give a talk to Dorset Humanists. I remember at the time our vice chair Lyn Glass saying that transgender was a bit of a niche topic and may not be of interest to many people. How times have changed! Our guest speaker on that occasion gave us a very interesting talk about his transition. As a matter of interest, Jay had a pretty impressive beard and if you passed him on the street you would see him as a masculine-looking man. Testosterone can have a dramatic effect on your appearance. At the same event, an NHS sexual health worker gave us a presentation on the whole topic including how to surgically create a penis which I must admit was a bit graphic. And a number of people from the local trans community came along, including a number of transwomen. The transwomen who came along on that occasion were not quite as convincing as Jay in terms of their appearance. I'm not remarking on their appearance to invite prejudice or ridicule – I'm sure we've all heard the description – "man in a dress" – but I'm stating it as an honest observation because it seems to me that one of the things we need to discuss is how to overcome the natural prejudice many of us may feel when we encounter someone whose appearance is incongruous or ambiguous. How can we treat them with dignity and respect? On the other hand, some transwomen are very convincing. There's a very prominent and glamorous trans activist called Katy Montgomery. I think if you passed her in the street you would not know that she is a transwoman. I'm not making value judgements here about whether trans people have an obligation to pass as the opposite sex. I'm just observing the diversity of human beings and how they present themselves.

One more aspect of this is drag – the deliberate impersonation of women for entertainment. As a gay man I'm supposed to enjoy this kind of thing but to be honest I think drag is disrespectful to women and I certainly don't think that drag is appropriate entertainment for young children.

The event at Dorset Humanists in 2016 was the first time I'd come across someone describing themselves as non-binary. He was a young man who was handsome and conventionally masculine. At the time I found it difficult to understand why he was calling himself non-binary. I'll come back to the non-binary discussion.

In 2020, Dorset Humanists had a talk from a gestalt therapist who specialises in counselling people in the trans community.

So we've had a variety of people talking to us about trans issues, some of whom were trans and some of whom were not.

In terms of my own credentials to speak on this topic, I consider myself to be a member of the LGBT community and I'm a qualified humanistic counsellor and I do have some clinical experience of counselling a trans person. But I'm not trans myself.

Now you'll note that I said the LGBT community. I'm a bit old school about this. I think four letters is quite enough. I'm not keen on the alphabet minestrone of LGBTQIA+ because this raises all sorts of debates about the word queer, whether intersex people belong in this so-called community, and so on. But we can come back to this if you want to.

My brother-in-law was trans. He died a few years ago at the age of 78. He had two personas – a male persona as Mike and a female persona as Margaret (after Princess Margaret). His daughter used to take him shopping for women's clothes. He had two wives and six children. And just before he died, it was discovered that he had been in a relationship with another transwoman. One day he explained to us why he liked dressing up as a woman. He said "It's just fun!" He classified himself as a transvestite. Maybe today we would classify him as gender fluid.

I experienced some gender-related distress when I was a teenager. Going through puberty was a bit distressing for me, not because I wanted to be a girl, but because I seemed to be several years behind all the other boys in my peer group in terms of physical development. It was humiliating to see boys much

younger than me sprouting sideburns before I had the merest hint of any hair on my face. I didn't want puberty blockers. I could have done with puberty boosters and masculinising hormones. It amazes me to see what testosterone can do for transmen like Jay. If I could have taken a pill to grow sideburns I'm sure I would have jumped at the chance. I've never been able to grow sideburns – one of the biggest disasters of my life!

This talk is mostly going to take the form of questions because I think we should approach this topic in an exploratory and open-minded way. I don't have all the answers and I think we need to be able to tolerate uncertainty. People on both sides of what has become a polarised debate are far too confident about the rightness of their opinions. And that is the besetting sin of our social media age. We've all become self-righteous fanatics. Humanism should be the antidote to fanaticism and the midwife of discussion and dialogue.

I'm not making any assumptions about you this evening. You might be a trans identifying person yourself, you might be a trans ally or a trans activist. You might be someone who declares your pronouns or you might think it's ridiculous to declare your pronouns. You might be concerned about the effect of trans rights on women's spaces and on the welfare of children.

The task I've set myself is to steer a middle course through all the noise and fury on this topic so that we can have a reasonable, civilised and compassionate discussion with more listening and less pontificating. If you're more of a placard waving sort of person then of course you're welcome, but I am trying to encourage dialogue rather than protest.

These are some of the questions I'd like us to consider:

1. Is it OK for someone who is not trans to talk about this?
2. What is a woman?
3. Is a transwoman a woman?
4. What do we mean by gender?
5. Is sex binary?
6. Can you change sex?
7. Has the trans phenomenon become a cult?
8. What is the political culture surrounding this debate?

Let's have a go at that last one. I don't want to get into a massive digression about politics but there is something on the left of politics today which is

sometimes called progressivism, or social justice, or identity politics, or cultural Marxism. And sometimes it's called woke.

Now, of course humanists are in favour of 'social justice' but the social justice movement on the left of politics today has been informed by Marxist ideas. If you know anything about Marxism, you'll know about his binary categories of capitalists and the proletariat. The capitalists oppress the proletariat and the answer is to overthrow the capitalists in a revolution. To cut a long story short, Marxism has mutated into a more general analysis of oppression cutting across other binary contrasts: men oppressing women, white people oppressing black people, colonisers oppressing the colonised, straight people oppressing gay people, and now we have cis people oppressing trans people. The word 'cis' is an unpleasant sounding word but etymologically it just means the opposite of 'trans'. So to be cisgender means that your gender identity aligns with your biological sex. Now, there's an element of truth in all of this oppression theory. I grew up in what could be called a heteronormative society and it was oppressive. And I'm very glad that society has changed and now I'm free to live openly as a gay man. But when a theory becomes an ideology it can become intolerant and fanatical. Unfortunately, this is what has happened. It's become a culture war.

So the trans issue has been weaponised by a small but very vocal number of fanatics, and that's been a disaster for everyone concerned, including trans people. If we want to work towards understanding then we need to stop using words as weapons – words like transphobe. As humanists, we should be discussing this topic in a reasonable and civilised manner, listening to all of the stakeholders. The four main stakeholder groups are trans people themselves, women, children, and the growing group of detransitioners. We could add paediatricians and medical professionals, schools and universities, HR departments, and of course the big pharmaceutical companies which stand to make gigantic profits.

So my first question is this: Am I permitted, as someone who is not trans, to talk about this subject? Some people say that non-trans or cis people should not sit around debating the existence and the lives of trans people – we should just listen to trans people themselves. Well this is a fair point. But the trans phenomenon affects everyone because it calls into question the whole basis of sex and gender and the relationship between the two. Everyone is permitted to speak on this topic but we should speak with humility. It's a complex subject

and none of us has perfect and objective understanding – including people with relevant ‘lived experience’. Our ‘lived experience’ can be distorted by mistaken beliefs and assumptions. So we need humility and we need to listen to other perspectives.

Many people who want to talk about this are afraid to do so because they see what happens to people like J K Rowling, Kathleen Stock, and Sharron Davies, and they’re afraid that they might say the wrong thing and get into trouble. So this is another reason why I am doing this talk. I don’t mind putting my head above the parapet. My livelihood doesn’t depend on subscribing to a party line.

Our next two questions:

What is sex and what is gender?

I’m going to tell you what I think about this and you can argue with me in the Q&A if you want to. Sex is a reproductive system which is hundreds of millions of years old. It’s a binary system with males and females, sperm and eggs. Sex is not a spectrum. There *has* been some scientific speculation about sex being a spectrum but no Nobel Prizes have been given for scientists discovering that sex is a spectrum. Sex is binary. Intersex conditions are not a third or fourth or fifth sex, and different chromosome combinations are not different sexes. It’s just different configurations in a binary system.

The word **gender** is sometimes used as a polite euphemism for biological sex – as in *what is your gender* meaning *what is your sex*? But properly speaking, gender refers to the traits and roles which are typically associated with each sex. But gender is not binary. I think we can say that gender **is** on a spectrum and it’s fluid. We’ve always had gender-bending. I’m a teenager of the 70s. We had Marc Bolan and David Bowie. Then we had Boy George and the male singer called Marilyn. How many genders are there? Well, if gender is a fluid concept you can make up as many as you like. But it’s all a variation on male and female or masculine and feminine.

What do we mean by non-binary? This can mean a number of things. It can mean that you don’t want to be boxed in by gender stereotypes associated with your sex. To that extent, I think we’re all non-binary. But it can also mean that you don’t want to define yourself as a human being with reference to masculinity and femininity. Well again, that could apply to all of us. None of us is wholly determined by gender norms. But at the end of the day, we are still

either male or female at the level of biological sex. The young man who came to our Dorset Humanists event in 2016 and said he was non-binary presented himself as male. But some non-binary people look androgynous. And that's fine of course.

What is a woman? There are two principle answers to this one:

The first is this: A woman is an adult human female and a girl is a child human female. A female is someone with large gametes – reproductive cells producing egg – and this is one half of the sex binary. There are only two types of gametes – male and female. A gamete is a reproductive cell. There isn't a third gamete. So sex in this sense is binary and females are one half of the binary. The associated claim which is often made is that words such as 'woman', 'mother', 'sister', 'aunt', 'daughter', and so on are properly attached to human females.

The second answer is this: A woman is a human of either sex who identifies as a woman – and I've heard some trans people say this. So on this account, a human male can be referred to as a 'woman', a 'mother', a 'sister', and so on. Now this is very recent and it's revolutionary. So here the word 'woman' is not determined by your sex, but determined by something else. That 'something else' is a bit elusive and hard to pin down but let's say it's an innate feeling, a subjective feeling, it's how you feel and how you want to identify. Maybe you've constructed your gender identity in your mind in some way. So basically, the claim being made is that the word 'woman' is determined not by sex but by gender.

Now these two positions appear to be in irreconcilable conflict. I'll tell you where I stand as we go on.

Can you change sex? No. I don't think anyone is claiming that you can. You can't change your chromosomes or gametes but you can change secondary sex characteristics to some extent with hormones and surgery. In 2004 our legislators introduced the concept of 'legal sex' as opposed to 'biological sex' and you can change your 'legal sex' with a gender Recognition Certificate. I think that was probably a mistake but we can discuss that if you would like to.

Is there such a thing as a male brain and a female brain? I listened recently to an interview with Dr Iain McGilchrist.¹ McGilchrist is a psychiatrist and a

¹ Interviewed by Freddie Sayers the host of UnHerd

neuroimaging researcher. In the Q&A session, he was asked this question: 'Is there a difference between the male and female brain?' He sighed and said 'Yes'. When asked to elaborate, he said 'What's established beyond doubt is that women's excellence in skills is often linguistic. Whereas for men, they may be much less linguistic, but more able to manipulate things in space, visual and spatial manipulation. And that is the right hemisphere property largely, and linguistic fluency is largely a left hemisphere property. And in utero, it is testosterone that causes the right hemisphere to expand. I could go on and on and on.' So here we have some evidence that there is a difference between the male brain and the female brain and that this difference is caused by the effect of testosterone in the womb. He wasn't asked specifically about the trans issue, but it seems possible, or perhaps plausible, that some people could have a biological sex which is male and a brain which is orientated towards female feelings, emotions, and gender identity. And this could give rise to the subjective experience of 'being born in the wrong body' which is what some trans people report as their experience.

However, I do realise this is a controversial topic and the idea of a male brain and a female brain was attacked in a book called *Delusions of Gender* by Cordelia Fine in 2011. She's got a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience.

But if we find that there is literally no difference between the male brain and the female brain, and I find that implausible, it does make it more difficult to explain the cause of gender dysphoria especially when this arises in early childhood and is persistent.

Let's hear what Rosie had to say about this. Rosie was the transwoman I knew at Dorset County Council. She said this: "For a gender variant person, it is a deep-rooted *feeling* of being female with a male anatomy or being male with a female anatomy... The problem was that despite what the doctor had said and the undoubted anatomical truth of his diagnosis at my birth, that was not how I felt. As a result, from about the age of 4, I had great difficulty in understanding why I could not dress as my younger sister did or why I had to have boys come to my birthday parties rather than girls."

So our experience of gender could be partly innate. But it's also partly about social norms and stereotypes. And it's difficult to disentangle the two. It's a classic nature or nurture problem. I think it's both/and, not either/or. And this appears to be supported by the Cass Review. The Cass Review is an ongoing independent review of gender identity services for children and young people.

It's chaired by Dr Hilary Cass who is a senior paediatrician. Its final report is due out by the end of this year, but its interim report came out in February. And it said this: 'There is extensive literature discussing the possible aetiology of gender incongruence. Based on the available evidence, many authors would suggest that it is likely that biological, cultural, social and psychological factors all contribute.' (Para 5.7). So let's just repeat that: the phenomenon of gender incongruence is likely to be explained by a complex range of factors including biological, cultural, social and psychological factors. I'll come back to the Cass Review later.

So is there such a thing as a trans kid? I think there is, based on the testimony of people like Rosie. But I think we need to tread very carefully here. We shouldn't be diagnosing transness based on gender non-conformity. Lots of children play around with gender stereotypes and it doesn't make them trans. I did all sorts of gender non-conforming things when I was at primary school and I'm not trans. I turned out to be gay.

Should we be teaching primary aged children about being trans? I'm going to set out two possible answers to this question.

Activists say yes, we should teach primary-aged children about gender so that someone like Rosie can come out at a young age and get the support they need.

Other people say no on the grounds that we should just let children be children and let them find their own way without imposing rigid gender stereotypes on them. I was allowed to be a gender non-conforming boy in the 1960s.

I think we need to find some way of getting support to someone like Rosie but without making all gender non-conforming children think that they're trans.

I'm not sure how we can do this, but I've studied one of the books which has been written in the United States for young children on this topic. It's called *The Gender Identity Workbook for Kids: A Guide to Exploring Who You Are* (2018) by Kelly Storck. This book, in my opinion, is imposing trans ideology on children and if I were a parent I would be complaining about it.

I had a conversation earlier this week with our treasurer called Dan. Dan is 29 years old and he's got many friends who identify as trans or non-binary. And during the course of the conversation, I learnt something new. I understood from what he was saying to me that quite a lot of young people today are

identifying as trans or non-binary not because they are experiencing gender dysphoria, like Rosie, but *because they don't want to conform to gender stereotypes*.² He went on to say that some young women who identify as trans or non-binary on this basis are challenged by other people saying they're not really trans, just tomboys or lesbians. And so in order to prove that they really are trans, some of them go on to have mastectomies. I was shocked to hear that we still live in a world where young girls are feeling so oppressed by gender stereotypes, or by the idea of being a lesbian, that they feel they have to abandon womanhood altogether. It sounds as though feminism has failed this generation of young girls. But the same applies to some young boys as well. Boys feeling that the pressure to conform to male gender stereotypes, including heterosexuality, is intolerable, and so they seek escape from manhood altogether by identifying as trans or non-binary. This is leading to tragic miscarriages of medical practice and the growing phenomenon of de-transitioning.³ Unfortunately, once you've your genitals surgically removed or re-engineered there's no way back to the body you had before and there are some horrifying accounts of this on YouTube.

We need a lot more research into all of this and the Cass Report later this year might help. My hunch, for what it's worth, is that we're looking at two different things here. On the one hand we have a transwoman like Rosie who

² One phrase being used is "internalised misogyny" meaning girls who hate being female.

³ alexanderl9721 on YouTube is interesting. A Norwegian detransitioner. [\(215\) My Detransition Story: The dark truth behind gender dysphoria and transition regret - YouTube](#) At 46 minutes, he claims that he has cured his own gender dysphoria [not with pills]. **At 1:11 he says "We need more dialogue between detransitioners and trans activists."** He writes: 'I have transitioned from male to female in 2012 and detransitioned in 2016. For a long time i was trying to forget my past but it never stops haunting you. It's time that i put my story out there. I'm also going public with my story in Norway where i live. The sad truth is that detransitioning becomes more common in western society, especially in US, UK and Scandinavia. While i do find the phenomenon fascinating, from a perspective of a detransitioner it saddens me that more people who struggle with insecurity and finding acceptance towards themselves are going through what i went through all those years ago. The left and trans activists don't want us to have a voice and they misrepresent the truth about why so many of us detransition. I have never met a single person who detransitioned because of social stigma or lack of acceptance from their family. I'm not saying they don't exist but i don't think they make as much of the whole as they'd like us to think. However i did encounter several stories of people who were unhappy with their transition, had past traumas, insecurities, schizophrenia, autism or autogynephilia. My own story is one of those. At the same time the right only takes interest in the rise of detransitioners because they want to use us against the trans movement. We are not weapons, we are soldiers. My goal is not to harm trans community but to offer an alternative point of view coming from someone who has spent years walking in the shoes of a transwoman and has a unique perspective on the whole issue because of the reasons i chose to detransition and traumas that caused me to transition in the first place. I think that we need more open, peaceful dialogue between detransitioners and trans activists and find a solution to the culture war surrounding the trans debate based on compromise and mutual respect. After all, i think we both want to see the world in which less people regret their transition and the world in which the people get the help they actually need. In this video i will explain my reasons for transitioning from male to female, the side effects of HRT and my experience with bottom surgery as well as my life after detransitioning.'

from the age of 4 experienced gender dysphoria. I think this is probably best explained by some kind of developmental irregularity in the womb. So Rosie had a male anatomy and a female gender identity probably caused by an unusual hormonal process before birth. And on the other hand we have a growing cohort of young people identifying as trans in puberty or adolescence and the main driver of this could be sociological and psychological rather than neurological. This would explain why there are fewer people in this second cohort who experience gender dysphoria. Dan told me that some of his trans friends don't experience gender dysphoria. They don't hate their bodies. They just want to escape the social norms associated with their biological sex. And this would explain the political pressure for self-ID and for abolishing the medical criteria for getting a Gender Recognition Certificate. In other words, we've raised a generation of young people who believe that they have the right to decide for themselves what gender and legal sex they are and they're demanding the paperwork to go with this with the minimum amount of bureaucracy.

If this is how young people think nowadays does it matter? If this was just about "exploring your gender", as my generation did in the 1970s and 1980s, maybe it wouldn't matter. But there seems to be something much more troubling going on. Some kind of social malaise which is affecting young people, a generation commonly referred to as 'Gen Zee' (born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s).

Let's talk about gender clinics for children and young people. You may have heard of the Tavistock Clinic in London and the Cass Review. The Cass Review, as I mentioned earlier, is an ongoing independent review of gender identity services for children and young people. It's chaired by Dr Hilary Cass who is a senior paediatrician. Its final report is due out at the end of this year. Its interim report came out in February and it makes for pretty grim reading. I would recommend that you read it for yourself, but I will pick out some key points ⁴ from it:

- In 2009 there were about 50 referrals per annum to the Tavistock gender clinic. From 2014 onwards there was a steep increase, and by 2020 the number of referrals per annum was 2,500.

⁴ Paras 1.7, 1.8, 1.12, 1.14, 1.16, 1.18, 1.23, 1.24, 1.26, 1.27, 2.18, 2.19, 3.10, 3.11, 3.23, 3.28.

- This increase in referrals has been accompanied by a change in the case-mix from predominantly birth-registered males presenting with gender incongruence from an early age, to predominantly birth-registered females presenting with later onset of reported gender incongruence in early teen years. In addition, approximately one third of children and young people referred have autism or other types of neurodiversity. There's also an over-representation of looked after children.
- Evidence on the appropriate management of children and young people with gender incongruence and dysphoria is inconclusive both nationally and internationally.
- Young people may not reach a settled gender expression until their mid-20s.
- A lack of a conceptual agreement about the meaning of gender dysphoria hampers research, as well as NHS clinical service provision.
- As with many other contemporary polarised disagreements, the situation is exacerbated when there is no space to have open, non-judgemental discussions about these differing perspectives. A key aim of this review process will be to encourage such discussions in a safe and respectful manner so that progress can be made in finding solutions.
- Disagreement and polarisation is heightened when potentially irreversible treatments are given to children and young people, when the evidence base underlying the treatments is inconclusive, and when there is uncertainty about whether, for any particular child or young person, medical intervention is the best way of resolving gender-related distress.
- There's been research on the short-term mental health outcomes and physical side effects of puberty blockers, but very limited research on broader developmental outcomes including sexual and cognitive.
- Internationally as well as nationally, longer-term follow-up data on children and young people who have been seen by gender identity services is limited, including for those who have received physical interventions
- There's a lack of agreement, and in many instances a lack of open discussion, about the extent to which gender incongruence in childhood

and adolescence can be an inherent and immutable phenomenon for which transition is the best option for the individual, or a more fluid and temporal response to a range of developmental, social, and psychological factors. Professionals' experience and position on this spectrum may determine their clinical approach.

- Failure to have an open discussion about this is impeding the development of clear guidelines.
- Waiting list pressure and lack of consensus on the clinical approach, combined with criticism of the service, have resulted in a rapid turnover of staff and inadequate capacity to deal with the increasing workload.
- Staff feel under pressure to adopt an unquestioning affirmative approach and this is at odds with the standard process of clinical assessment and diagnosis.
- Many of the children and young people presenting have complex needs, but once they are identified as having gender-related distress, other important healthcare issues that would normally be managed by local services can sometimes be overlooked.
- There appears to be predominantly an affirmative, non-exploratory approach, often driven by child and parent expectations
- And finally, the Cass Review will be looking into the data concerning suicide risk in these young people.

There are so many red flags here, and it highlights the need for us to be able to talk about this in a calm and rational manner. The Cass Review is trying to get to the bottom of what has been going at the Tavistock Clinic and why there are lawsuits against the NHS from people commonly referred to as 'detransitioners'. Keira Bell is the most well-known example but there's another one you might start to hear about called Tulip Ritchie. This is a gay man who was subjected to a lot of homophobia in his teens and he thought that the answer to his difficulties was to identify as trans. He had full genital surgery. And now he feels that his life has been ruined because, in his thirties, he recognises that he is a gay man, not a transwoman.

So we'll have to see what comes out with the full Cass Report later this year. But it seems pretty clear that this department of medical care is in complete disarray and that children are being put at great risk of physical harm, partly

because of ideological capture. One of the things that has come out very strongly in Hannah Barnes's book, *Time to Think*, is that the Tavistock Clinic had very strong links to the controversial trans charity for children called Mermaids. Hannah Barnes is an investigative journalist for Newsnight and I do recommend her book.

Has the trans phenomenon become a cult?

I said earlier that some young people are coming out as trans in order to escape from gender stereotypes. I think it's more complex than this. It seems to me that identifying as trans can be seen as a solution to a range of existential problems facing young people. It may be similar to a conversion experience and there are aspects of this which conform to what we know about cults. I'm not saying it *is* a cult. But if it is, then young people need to know what they're getting into. Let's run a quick test on this. Here are ten features of cults and I've only modified them slightly to remove religious references:

1. It appeals to vulnerable people
2. It provides an intense group experience
3. It provides the one and only truth
4. Submission to cult beliefs, even if they are irrational
5. Strongly dualistic – good battling against evil, truth against error
6. There are threats all around
7. Members of the cult are special
8. Dependency on the cult is fostered
9. Cult members seem weird to outsiders
10. Leaving the cult is almost impossible because of the social sanctions imposed by the cult on apostates⁵

Well, pretty much all of those fit to some degree. You can get radicalised online. When you identify as trans you get a new name and a new identity. If you're a girl or a lesbian or gay or you're being bullied you're being offered

⁵ Derived (but modified) from Steven Hassan *Combating Cult Mind Control* 1990, chapter on cult psychology.

salvation – a complete change of your identity.⁶ This gives you membership of a global community which bombards you with love and acceptance. You acquire victimhood status and this gives you enormous power to control the people around you including teachers, parents, lecturers, and medical professionals. You acquire a high level of moral certainty and anyone who questions your new identity or rights can be denounced as a transphobe. And anyone who leaves, such as detransitioners, can also be denounced as if they are apostates or were never trans on the first place (well, that's the point - they probably weren't trans in the first place!). Gen Z females (born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s) are more likely to be on the left politically and so there's an intersection here with my earlier analysis about identity politics. Girls are also more susceptible than boys to social contagion at this age. This is the generation who grew up with social media such as Tumblr and TikTok.

The fact that it's so easy to fit the trans phenomenon into a cult template is *prima facie* evidence that this may be *partly* what's going. It doesn't mean that these young people do not need some kind of support. Their parents will also need support. I don't blame the young people concerned. They're vulnerable young people and it's easy to get sucked into something like this. But schools are getting sucked into it as well, especially in totalitarian countries like Canada. Only slightly joking there!

Suggesting this will be of course be condemned as transphobic – but that's yet more confirmatory evidence. Anyway, I'm hoping that the Cass Review will shed a lot more light on this later in the year.

So is a transwoman a woman?

For most of human history, the word 'woman' has been defined with reference to biological sex. Breaking this link and creating a new link to gender is a radically new and revolutionary idea. I think the answer to this question has to be no and there are plenty of transwomen who would agree. I've come across one transwoman on Twitter who claims that the formula "transwomen are women" is in itself transphobic because we should be validating transwomen as transwomen. A separate category. One of my husband's friends is a fully-transitioned transwoman and she's quite happy to say that she is not the same as a biological woman. She is a transwoman and she lives as a woman. She has a female name and female pronouns. She uses female toilet facilities, as far as I

⁶ In one study of trans children in Finland, 50% of the cohort had experienced bullying.

know without any problems, but of course we don't know what other women think or feel when she does use those facilities.

The slogan 'transwomen are women' is needlessly provocative and it should be dropped. Transwomen are transwomen and they should be allowed to live their lives with dignity. The same applies to transmen.

Should there be separate toilet facilities for transpeople? The transman Jay I mentioned earlier recently posted online a photo of a toilet door which had several signs on it: a disabled sign, a babychanging sign, and a transgender sign. And surprisingly, he said he would be happy to use a separate facility that had this kind of mixed signage. This is one of the things that Kathleen Stock has been arguing for but of course she gets condemned for it. The infrastructure is already there. We just need a few more signs. However, I'm not saying that transwomen like Rosie should be banned from using female toilets. I'd much rather solve this question on the basis of social consent and compromise, rather than blanket bans and so on.

What about pronouns? I regularly get emails from university academics with pronouns in the sign-off section. This is probably well-intentioned as a positive sign of inclusion of the trans community. But it's a bit like someone telling me their religion when I don't need to know. I think it's oppressive and I think it should be strongly discouraged.

One of our former members in Dorset Humanists was a transman. He looked fairly tomboyish but he hadn't had any medical or surgical treatment. I didn't have much difficulty switching to male pronouns. If people made a mistake, he was very relaxed about it. But if any of our members had deliberately misgendered him I would have taken action because that would have been deliberately offensive.

Three patrons of Humanists UK, Joan Smith, Dianne (Baroness) Hayter, and former MEP Carole Tongue have just resigned from the organisation. The background to this is a proposal which is supported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to clarify that the word "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refers to biological sex rather than 'legal sex' as recorded by a Gender Recognition Certificate. Humanists UK is opposed to this change, claiming that it would undermine the rights that trans people currently have to use facilities that match their gender identity. But other people are arguing that gender reassignment would still be a protected characteristic, and that trans rights

would not be affected. Well, it's very complex and confusing and I don't claim to fully understand it. But I don't want someone like Rosie finding that, after 20 years, she is no longer permitted to use female facilities. I do think that we need to be clear about the meaning of biological sex and how it differs from gender and gender identity. Humanists UK claims that there is no legal definition of biological sex. Well, maybe it's time we had one. It can't be that difficult.

What are my overall conclusions?

This issue is dividing the humanist movement which I think is very regrettable. But so is identity politics in general. It's partly a generational divide – younger people tend to be more 'woke'. But we shouldn't assume that younger people are necessarily on the right side of history. They might be going down another Marxist-inspired rabbit hole and we know where that leads.

I'm a humanist and a feminist. I also belong to the LGBT community. I don't think the T needs to be divorced from the LGB. Trans people were always welcome in gay clubs. But our gestalt counsellor has suggested we could put an ampersand between the LGB & T. I think that's quite an interesting suggestion.

I have a huge amount of sympathy for transwomen like Rosie who should be able to live their lives with dignity and acceptance.

I'm concerned about the radicalisation of young people and the idea that you can select your gender identity from a smorgasbord of options. In my day we could be gender non-conforming without having to opt out of our biological sex. And I think that was a much healthier state of affairs both mentally and physically.

I'm opposed to polarisation and fanaticism. If we disagree with people like Kathleen Stock or J K Rowling the way to address this is through discussion and dialogue. Not by witch hunts and death threats. As humanists, we must respect women and we must listen to their perspectives and concerns.

We should teach children about sex and gender but we should be extremely careful not to label them in such a way that might lead to medical harm.

I may not have got everything right in this short talk about a complex and difficult subject. I welcome disagreement and pushback. And I'm willing to learn.

Thank you very much for listening.