

Why Being a Welcoming Congregation is Important

February 4, 2018

Opening Words:

While studying under Dr. Freud, student Helene Deutsch told her grandson about a lesbian patient she had been treating. Nicholas Deutch recalls,

“My grandmother was disturbed because, although the analysis finally concluded successfully – the woman could deal with various problems in her life – she was still a lesbian.

My grandmother was rather worried about what Freud would say about this turn of events.

When she next saw Freud the first thing he said was, “Congratulations on your great success with Miss X.” My grandmother, startled, said, “But she’s till a Lesbian!” To which Freud replied, “What does it matter as long as she’s happy?”

Reading: *What is “Normal?”*

As the Industrial Revolution blossomed in the late 19th century, the concepts of labor and family began to change. For example, the inter-dependent and self-sufficient farm was gradually replaced by the reality of the male breadwinner. Families had always been patriarchal, but now the economic role of women and children was transformed from producers to dependents and consumers.

As a predominately white, urban middle class developed, women and children, without an economic role, had little if any legal agency. When a woman married, she and her property, things like her wedding presents, heirlooms, hope chest, etc., and any children she might bear, became her husband’s property. If she were to leave, for example, an abusive husband, she had no legal right to anything. The home or ‘private sphere’ was the domain of the middle-class wife who was expected to provide a haven in which her husband could escape the nasty ‘public sphere’ of business and politics.

Throughout this era, both sexes were consigned to different social worlds along with expected gendered roles and behaviors. Masculine gender attributes were expected to coincide with biological ‘maleness’ and feminine gender attributes with ‘femaleness.’

Men needed to be masculine, meaning physically and intellectually strong, aggressive, competitive, and rational. Women needed to serve humanity by protecting the feminine virtues of spiritual strength, passivity, cooperation, compassion, and emotion. Scholars have named and described this “Cult of True Womanhood” as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. When women left their houses and entered public space, a ‘good’ woman took along her femininity; just as a man did not leave his masculinity at the office.

French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about American gender roles:

...The Americans have applied to the sexes the great principle of political economy which governs the manufacturers of our age, by carefully dividing the duties of man from those of woman in order that the great work of society may be the better carried on....

These gendered codes of behavior, and their rigidity, are key to understanding later attitudes and behaviors toward those who did not conform to a specific and rigid gender role.

Scholar Eve Kornfeld expanded on this observation when she wrote:

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Paradoxically, the construction of more rigid gender boundaries reconciled many middle-class Americans to the tremendous social changes and fluidity of the early 19th century.... (by) anchoring their own identities in a world of flux...while the doctrine of separate gender spheres also formed the standard for understanding and judging the lives of others....

In this regard, it can be argued that one of the reasons Indigenous People were perceived as ‘savage’ was because of their refusal to abandon communal economies in which women actively participated in contrast to all private property being owned by males....

Similarly, the ‘poor’ were condemned as indolent and immodest for their ‘failure’ to separate family life from public life and to keep women and children out of the workplace, off the streets, and in the home.

As Kornfeld suggests, gender cannot be fully separated from the categories of race and class. This situation would not only be inherited by 20th century white America but used by many to continue marginalizing those outside the idealized and rigidly gendered middle class.

After the Civil War, the Republic faced the upheaval of Reconstruction and even more rapid industrialization. It seemed masculine qualities were essential to fulfilling the duties of citizen and capitalist.

For many, effeminate men and masculine women were both threats to the ‘normal’ social arrangement: undermining in one case and usurping in the other.

The years of Reconstruction produced both legal and social activism which influenced all subsequent thought and activity around the issue of civil rights. The debate over equality between the races produced questions, arguments, court cases, and three constitutional amendments concerning the rights of U. S. citizens.

Although civil rights as a movement is usually associated with the years following WWII, its structure was built on the groundwork laid during the activist years of Reconstruction and it’s ‘minority model’ has since been used effectively by LGBTQ activists.

The effectiveness of this activist model may help explain some of the hostility and reprisals still going on today against minority groups and those engaged in the struggle for justice

(Source: *Queer America: A People’s GLBT History of the U.S.* by Vicki L. Eaklor, 2008)

How About Some History?

1. Gay English playwright and author, Oscar Wilde was found guilty of “gross indecency” and began serving two years of hard labor in prison.
 - a. 1825
 - b. 1895**
 - c. 1925
 - d. 1955

2. German physician, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, founds the Institute for Sexual Science in _____, building on the work of Karl Ulrichs who theorized that occasionally at birth, a male

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body would have a ‘female soul’ and a female body might have a ‘male soul.’ Both men believed that to persecute people born thus was “cruel, unjust and senseless.”

- a. 1830 b.1850 c. 1890 d. **1919**

3. In the early 1950s, the Immigration and Nationality Act banned homosexual immigrants from entering the U.S. and Executive Order 10450 made homosexuality grounds for dismissal from federal employment

_____ **True** _____ False

4. The _____ created the broadest protection yet against racial and sexual discrimination

- a. The 24th Amendment
- b. *Boutilier v Immigration Service* Supreme Court decision
- c. **The 1964 Civil Rights Act**
- d. The East Coast Homophile Organization

5. In _____ the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders

- a. 1960 b.1965 c. **1973** d.1983

6. What do the letters mean?

- P** _____
- F** _____
- L** _____
- A** _____
- G** _____

7. Name three (or more) political and/or historical events concerning the LGBT community which have taken place over the past 5 years in Wyoming.

Bonus Question:

What does it mean to be an ally?

List three ways you are/can be an effective ally

Reading *Understanding Gender as a Spectrum*

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The idea that gender is a spectrum is grounded in two widely accepted beliefs: historical precedence and basic biology. From Hijras in India to māhūs in Hawaii, there have always been people whose gender doesn't fit into the stereotype of what it means to be a man or woman. These examples of nonbinary and nonconforming gender throughout world history have laid an important groundwork for how we understand gender identity today.

What's more, sex isn't always binary — even on a biological level. One in every 2000 people is born with an intersex condition. Intersex is used to describe people who have chromosomes, anatomy, or other sex characteristics which can't be categorized as exclusively male or female; and the term 'intersex' has replaced the outdated term 'hermaphrodite.'

The notion that both sex and gender are binary — with everyone fitting into either a male or female box— is a social construct. This system has historically been used to differentiate between biological and gender-related traits in males and females.

The idea there are just 'male and female' isn't false — it's just incomplete. Many people, intersex or not, have a mix of biological traits or gender expressions which fall outside of the male or female checkbox. We must begin to understand that gender identity is probably rooted in nature, nurture, and a combination of both.

Although more research is needed, growing data suggests there is a biological component to gender identity because the sexual characteristics you are born with may not always align with your gender identity. Current thinking is that gender is not necessarily an either/or concept, instead it can derive from many different identities existing along a spectrum of understanding

Reading: Excerpt, *Becoming a Visible Man*, by Jamison Green (ftm)

For me, the process of coming out as trans was less like opening a closet door and more like slowly lighting a series of candles in a dark cave. Each of us, every trans person, has his or her own unique story; there may be some elements that overlap or ring true for some and not for others. Some trans people say they knew from their earliest consciousness; others say they realized it later in life, in their 30s or 40s or even later. Yes, there are people who begin transition in their 50s and 60s.

Because I was born in 1948, my experience will be different from that of people who are coming of age now, when a language of transgender or transsexual experience has developed and made certain concepts more accessible. Still, I suspect there are aspects of my own experience of increasing awareness that are somewhat common for many of us, including for some people who do not identify as transsexual or transgender. The search for identity, community, and self is common to us all.

Older family members tell me that I began to refuse to wear dresses before I was two years old. Like many female-bodied children, I struggled all through my childhood against wearing clothing that designated me as female. I did not have a say in the matter. There were times when I was simply required to dress 'properly.'

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The tenets of the northern European heritage I received from my reserved, socially and politically conservative parents included ‘proper’ (read; sex-and gender-role specific) attire and behavior as a sign of respect for my elders and society.

But to me, wearing a dress was a form of subjugation that concretely symbolized my lack of power to assert myself, just as wearing a suit and tie might feel to a feminine, male-bodied child. And when, even though ‘properly’ dressed, my behavior, bearing, or demeanor seemed inappropriate to the gender role designated by my attire, or when strangers registered confusion as to whether I was a boy or a girl -- the blame for their confusion rested squarely on me, as though I had a choice in the matter.

If only I were more conscientious, I would not so willfully disrupt the social order. To me, on the other hand, the easier course would have been for them to acknowledge the boy they were trying to suppress and let me wear the clothing in which I felt right. Instinctively, I knew the discrepancy would not be so glaring. But although I could resist (often, but not always successfully) ‘proper’ attire, I could not find the words to say that I felt like a boy.

My parents, who in spite of their conservative bent, were gentle loving people, also believed children should be free to enjoy their childhood. They struggled to allow me to be myself while trying to indoctrinate me with ‘a good upbringing.’

I learned housework and cooking and how to serve guests, and I learned to sit and stand with my legs together (though it always felt awkward). Not to roughhouse or climb trees in a dress (though I frequently did anyway). And when we came home from Presbyterian church we attended on Sunday, or when I came home from school every weekday, I got to change into my ‘play clothes’ --- pants and a shirt that felt infinitely more comfortable – and I could just be myself, but I had no words to say who that self was. I had no words to tell them that I was trying hard to be who they wanted me to be, but it just didn’t feel right.

In spite of my own discomfort with the dissonance between my innate gender identification and society’s gender-related expectations of me, I was lucky. Even though my gender expression was more often aligned with my identification than with my apparent sex, and this often caused frustration or irritation in my family, I have been relatively unscathed by the aberrations of family life. There was no alcoholism, no adultery or infidelity in my family, no divorce, no criminal behavior, no sexual abuse, and no mental illness – all of which have been proposed as causes of transsexualism.

Sex role stereotyping and corporal punishment, though present, were not enforced as harshly in my family as in many others I’ve seen or heard about. The neighborhood I grew up in was safe throughout my childhood, and nearly all our neighbors were kind and generous with all the local children.

My intellectual development and my physical freedom were both encouraged (though periodically constrained by social conventions), and I was always given the message that I was valued and loved, even if I was also sometimes misunderstood. The drama of coming to terms with my difference has been a subtle one, punctuated by occasional moments of stark absurdity and lucid clarity.

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The NBC network's live telecast of *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin in March of 1955, when I was six years old, was one of those lucid moments. I clearly remember thinking, during Peter's first scene in the bedroom as he tried to retrieve his shadow, "If she can be a boy, then so can I."

And as I watched the performance progress through flying and sword fights and pirates and Indians, I remember watching closely, thinking, "I'll be a much better boy that she is!" Certainly, I would not have been so cavalier with Wendy's affections, or fearful of taking on the father role.

The closest I could come to talking about how I felt, though, was to ask my mother to make a Peter Pan outfit for me.

She did, and I put my rubber dagger in my Roy Rodgers toy gun holster and flew around the back yard for most of the following summer, saving Wendy and Tiger Lily from evil and leading packs of wild boys on harrowing adventures.

My parents gave dinner parties for their friends every few months, and once, when I was about eight or ten years old, a visiting couple was invited who had moved out of the area when I was an infant. The woman saw me standing next to my father and she said to him, "Oh Ray, your son is the spitting image of you." My father, in a moment of absurd humor only he and I shared, clapped me affectionately on the shoulder and replied proudly, "That's my boy." Then he gently said to me, "Go to your room."

It was a Saturday and I was wearing 'play clothes,' jeans and a t-shirt, nothing particularly gender-specific by today's standards. Yet this incident typifies my particular transgender experience: people of the time perceived me as a boy, sometimes even when I was wearing a dress.

Though some people might find it absurd that others would see me as male, for me the absurdity occurred when people interpreted me as female; yet I understood I was absurdly expected to act in ways that would support their beliefs, not my own.

Some parents might have told the woman about her 'mistake' after I had left the room; perhaps she would laugh with embarrassment and apologize, and they would commiserate over the difficulties of ill-mannered children.

I don't think my father would have done that though. I think his goal was to avoid making guests uncomfortable. That left me hidden, invisible -- perhaps due to his fear about how my gender variance might be interpreted by others.

Being An Effective Ally: Using Gender-Neutral Language

Incorporating gender-neutral language into everyday conversation is essential to challenging stereotypes and being inclusive of those who don't want to be addressed using gendered words or pronouns.

It is important to affirm an individual by using the words they use to describe themselves.

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When meeting someone for the first time, ask how they like to be referred to or what pronouns they use. If you are addressing group or are unsure of someone's pronouns, opt for gender-neutral language such as they or folks.

Gender-neutral terms

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Ladies/ Gentleman | <i>folks, persons, people, guests, everyone</i> |
| Daughter/Son | <i>child, offspring, spawn ☺</i> |
| Sister/Brother | <i>sibling, familiar</i> |
| Niece/Nephew | <i>nibbling, family member, familiar</i> |
| Mother/Father | <i>parent</i> |
| Husband/Wife | <i>spouse, partner, significant other, ball & chain ☺</i> |
| Grandmother/Father | <i>grandparent, elder</i> |

Responsive Closing Words

Leader: Women are women regardless of sex,
men are men in the same respects

Response: You can be both or a mix of the two

Leader: You can be neither if that's what suits you

Response: But people are people whatever their parts

ALL: Because what really matters is inside of our hearts