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Are Conservatives Winning the Debate on Transgenderism?

By [MADELEINE KEARNS](#) / MAY 14, 2023

Most Americans' objection to transgenderism concerns practice, not principle; harms, not truth.

ARE conservatives winning the debate on transgenderism? The *Washington Post* published the results of a [poll](#) it fielded with the Kaiser Family Foundation that showed that, as the headline put it, “most Americans support anti-trans policies favored by GOP.”

Of course, it wasn't so long ago that similar findings were published about same-sex marriage. In 1996, only 27 percent of Americans favored redefining marriage to include homosexual unions. By 2006, that figure was at 37 percent. By 2016 — post-*Obergefell* — it was at 58 percent. Today, more than 70 percent of Americans, including 55 percent of Republicans, accept same-sex marriage. Might transgenderism move in the same direction, or is there something different about it?

Let's start with the evidence that transgenderism is different. The *Post* notes that “the [Pew Research Center](#) found 60 percent last year saying one's gender is determined by the sex assigned at birth, up from 54 percent in 2017.” It observes, also, that “even among young adults, who are the most accepting of trans identity, about half said in the Post-KFF poll that a person's gender is determined by their sex at birth.” In the *Post*'s poll, 57 percent of respondents said that whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by their sex “assigned” at birth. But does this translate into policy preferences?

Around two-thirds of participants favored laws that would prohibit “discrimination against trans people” by medical professionals and in getting health insurance, as well as in housing, in the workplace, in colleges and universities, in K–12 schools, and in the U.S. military. Obviously, definitions are critical here. Today, “discrimination against trans people” doesn't usually refer to denying a good or service based on someone's trans identity. Rather, it tends to refer to distinguishing between males and females (e.g., in sports or college dormitories) or to the refusal to administer medically controversial drugs and surgeries that permanently impair one's healthy bodily functioning.

If sex is determined at birth — or, more accurately put, if sex is determined at conception and *observed* at birth — then “trans people” are men and women with false beliefs about their sex. While these individuals deserve all the same legal rights and protections as everyone else, they do not deserve special privileges based on their false beliefs (however sincerely held). For

now, most people accept that sex is “assigned” at birth. But it’s not clear that they accept that this fact — and not individuals’ feelings — ought to be the basis of law.

Here’s another cause for concern. The poll finds that “a majority of Americans support gender-affirming counseling for youth and teens but oppose medication.” Once again, the language that was used advantages transgender activists. When applied to drugs and surgeries, “gender-affirming care” would more accurately be described as sex mutilation. And when applied to therapy, “gender-affirming counseling” would more accurately be described as encouraging patients to disassociate from their sex in pursuit of the impossible. Given that most participants accept that sex at birth is unchangeable, why would they support counseling that denies this truth? Isn’t counseling that tries to change the unchangeable with false or misleading claims tantamount to conversion therapy?

It seems that when it comes to convincing the public about some of the harms associated with transgenderism (e.g., in irreversible surgeries for children and in women’s sports), conservatives are winning, but when it comes to convincing them on principle (i.e., the importance of objective truth), they’re losing. That makes the issue more like abortion than like gay marriage (where conservatives lost on both fronts). Like abortion, public opinion on transgenderism could settle on some [contradictory compromise](#). As a friend recently reminded me, most Americans believe that abortion is the killing of an innocent life yet support abortion into the second trimester. It isn’t hard to imagine a similar scenario in which most Americans accept that sex is real but also believe that people should have the legal power to veto this truth in most (though not the most egregious) circumstances. That is essentially what the Biden administration suggested in its latest rewrite of Title IX.

Jonathan Haidt notes in *The Righteous Mind* that liberals are more likely to reject something if they can see people being harmed by it, if they see it as unjust, or if it impairs self-expression, whereas conservatives are also invested in preserving sanctity, loyalty, and authority. With gay rights, conservatives struggled to articulate the day-to-day harms of same-sex marriage — the only line of argument that could have convinced liberals. But with transgenderism, as with abortion, there is a clear conflict of rights: Women’s rights vs. the rights of the unborn in the latter case; transgender rights vs. women’s rights, children’s rights, and parental rights in the former.

Most participants in the *Post* poll opposed the participation of “transgender women” in women’s sports at the youth level (62 percent), in high school (66 percent), in college (65 percent), and on the professional level (65 percent). In sports, the harms are obvious, and yet without accepting the truth that “trans women” are men and men should not be permitted to compete against females, any compromise will still be grossly unfair to women. Major sports-governing bodies have tried to keep both sides happy by setting an arbitrary level of male-hormone impairment as the threshold of eligibility for men seeking to compete in women’s sports. The implication of which — that male impairment or mediocrity is equivalent to female excellence — is deeply insulting to women.

Likewise, many recognize the harm caused to children who are prescribed irreversible drug treatments and life-altering genital surgeries. But their objection is framed primarily in terms of

consent (or the lack of it). While it's obviously true that children cannot consent to such experiments, the more fundamental issue is that the promises of so-called gender affirmation are false. Human beings cannot change their sex, and there is little reason and even less evidence to think that those with gender dysphoria will be happier for attempting the impossible.

The current objection to transgenderism concerns practice, not principle; harms, not truth. Indeed, some of those who concede that transgenderism can be harmful will simultaneously insist that truth-telling on the subject is also harmful, as in the case of referring to transgender activists by their actual sex or using pronouns that correspond with reality.

If that winds up as the majority position, will conservatives have really “won” in any meaningful sense? Long-term success on the transgender issue means reinforcing the reality of sex in law and in all aspects of American life. This requires making the complete argument and helping people connect the dots: Transgenderism is harmful *because it is false*.

- https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/04/theres-no-appeasing-transgender-activists/?utm_source=recirc-desktop&utm_medium=article&utm_campaign=river&utm_content=more-from-author&utm_term=second

There's No Appeasing Transgender Activists

By MADELEINE KEARNS / APRIL 30, 2023

The time for confidence is now.

WHEN debating [trans activists](#), it's best not to use preferred pronouns or defensively emphasize one's heartfelt sympathy for "trans people." Doing so is playing into a trap. Much of what is intended as courtesy is interpreted as concession. And much of what is intended as a show of good faith is interpreted as weakness.

Consider [J. K. Rowling](#). In writing her defense of women's sex-based rights, the Harry Potter author has repeatedly underscored her liberal sympathies, writing: "I know and love trans people," "I respect every trans person's right to live any way that feels authentic to them," "I feel nothing but empathy and solidarity with trans women who have been abused by men," etc.

It's not clear what Rowling means by "trans person." Since she's an ardent defender of the reality of sex, she presumably means a person who so hates their sexed body that they would go to great lengths to disguise it. But of course, that's not what trans activists mean.

Rather than soften the blow, Rowling's proclaimed respect for transgender identity only further angered her detractors, who added the charge of hypocrisy to the charge of transphobia.

"Rowling can say she likes everyone, but she has displayed that [transphobic] prejudice time and time again" (*Vox*). "When Rowling flags herself as an ally . . . she routinely follows up with some form of 'but' that draws a thick line between trans women and all other women" (the *Cut*). "Rowling's views on transwomen [are] a strange brew of prejudice, ignorance and paranoia" and "the opposite of everything that was good about Harry Potter" (the *Telegraph*).

In other words, only total allegiance will do. As Lia (formerly Will) Thomas, the controversial swimmer who competed in the NCAA women's swim championships despite being a man, explained on a recent podcast: "[Some people are] like, 'Oh, we respect Lia, as a woman, as a trans woman or whatever, we respect her identity, we just don't think it's fair.' You can't really have that sort of half support where you're like, 'Oh, I respect her as a woman here, but not here.'"

A man previously known as Rhys McKinnon — who has ridiculously changed his name twice, first to "Rachel" then to "Veronica Ivy" — made the same point to Sky News in 2019: "[Sport] is central to society. So, if you want to say, 'I believe you're a woman for all of society except this massive central part of sport,' then that's not fair. So, fairness is the inclusion of trans women."

In a way, they're right that the middle-of-the-road position is logically inconsistent. The problem isn't that "transgender women" are women with special, unfair advantages. The problem is that "transgender women" are men. And as a matter of principle — as much as practicality — men do not belong in women's sports.

If our desired outcome is protecting women's sports and spaces, then we must use sex-based language consistently and without apology. Besides, what do we have to lose, given that nothing other than total compliance to the trans activists' demands will placate them anyway?

Many adults have now reached this point of "peak trans." The price of not being called transphobic is simply too high. But for adolescents and young adults, the thought of being hated or rejected by peers can seem a fate worse than death. That's the real reason Thomas's competitors tried to take the middle-of-the-road approach. It's not because they really respect him as a "transgender woman" or even care about his identity. They just want to be able to compete in their own sports fairly without being publicly shamed.

Parents of Ivy League swimmers wrote a [letter](#) published in the *New York Post*, explaining the injustice in clear terms.

Athletic associations are cautiously asking: How do we balance fairness and inclusion? And they ask scientists to tell them the precise level to which a male body needs to be impaired to compete fairly against women. But they are asking the wrong questions. These questions are misogynistic, degrading, and dehumanizing for women. There is no balance of fairness to assess. Women deserve fairness without caveat, and they should not be asked to shoulder the mental health of others at their own expense. A male body cannot become a female body. *A woman is not a disadvantaged man.* [Emphasis added]

On a recent episode of *Dr. Phil*, Kara Dansky, the author of *The Abolition of Sex: How the 'Transgender' Agenda Harms Women and Girls*, was asked if by "women" she also meant "trans women." Dansky replied with great aplomb: "I don't mean men. I mean women." A trans-identifying opponent replied: "So you think trans women are men?"

"It's not a matter of opinion," Dansky [said](#) calmly. "We're talking about the material reality of biological sex, which is grounded in science and reality. Women are female, and men are male. And it's okay to say so. It really is."

She's right.

There's nothing wrong with being a man. There's nothing wrong with being a woman. And there is nothing hateful in observing which of the two categories a person belongs to. There can be no appeasement when it comes to transgenderism. Please stop using activist jargon. The time for confidence is now.