I am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A History of Transgender Identity and What It Means For Progressive Christianity

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I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE:
A HISTORY OF TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR
PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

by

CLARA MONIQUE DEAL BARLOW
Under the Direction of Monique Moultrie, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the historical evolution of the term transgender in the United States, mainly since the Second World War. The history of varying terms and conceptions regarding non-conforming gender identity may help clarify contemporary debates among Christian Evangelicals regarding the creation stories in Genesis and how gender is depicted there. The advantage of presenting a more complex history of Evangelicalism will be to counterbalance the mistaken view that Evangelicals are unilaterally conservative; in fact there is a long history of progressive Evangelicalism in this country. Without a consensus understanding of transgender identity and how it may or may not appear in scripture, churches remain uncertain how best to minister to transgender parishioners. This thesis offers a terminological history that may sustain an understanding of transgender identity within progressive Evangelical churches, and shows how different progressive interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis may serve to promote tolerance and acceptance.

INDEX WORDS: Transgender, Transsexual, Gender, Biblical Christianity, Evangelical, Holy Bible, Progressivism, Queer Theory
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DEDICATION

To my husband John, whose enduring love and support made this project possible. I’m so glad you kicked my boots in Ebrik two and a half years ago. Daiman wa abidan. To my children, Thomas, Lucas, Helen, Jack, and Charlotte—thank you for your encouragement and excitement…I love you the most. To my father Julian, whose love of learning ensures we will probably be in school forever. And to my mother-in-law Cheryl, whose support, advice, and childcare were constant sources of strength. I am grateful for and love you all.
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1 INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the term *transgender* has shifted significantly in the past seventy years. There are complex cultural and historical reasons for these shifts. This history is further complicated as the term refers to “both a specific identity and a consolidation of various sex- and gender-nonconforming individuals.”¹

Beginning in the nineteenth century, psychological, medical, legal, and scientific institutions conceived of individuals who manifested ambiguous gender behaviors and/or characteristics as subjects whose bodies (and minds as well) were susceptible to various social interventions.² Based on these earlier institutional regimes, a “science” of the transgender person in the United States emerged in earnest after the Second World War. Volumes of technical and professional literature have been produced over the past 150 years, to promote gender congruence while eliminating incongruity through a high degree of institutionalization. Some individuals have resisted the socially constructed behaviors reinforced by a strict gender binary. Theologian Virginia Ramey Mollenkott promotes the idea that an enormous range of gender diversity is more conceivable now, stating, “[w]hat I have learned from my most recent studies is that gender normality is a myth as long as it is forced to locate itself within a binary paradigm that fits very few members of the human race.”³ Confronted with such diversity in the reigning gender paradigm, there is little wonder the gender paradigm has been so controversial.

Just as the concept of the *transgender* person has evolved over the past 150 years, the same can be said for Evangelical Christianity. Both terms denominate a diverse body of persons.

There has, in fact, been a progressive wing within Evangelicalism in the United States that has been rendered less visible in the past thirty years by abundant scholarly attention dedicated to “Christian conservativism” and the “Christian Right.” A more recent aspect of progressivism has been the recognition and acceptance of transgender parishioners as active members of their congregations. A worthwhile point of approach is to ascertain that arguments for inclusion often come from the same Scriptures that others cite to advocate punishment, rejection, and exclusion from church participation.

This thesis traces the historical emergence and evolution of the term, *transgender*, as a term describing non-normative gender identity in the United States. I will also trace the history of a certain type of white, progressive evangelicalism from the late 19th century to the early 21st century. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on white, middle to upper-class Protestant Evangelicals. Lastly, I will survey the non-secular resources (such as scriptural reasoning) available in Evangelical churches that may help to enable recognition of previously marginalized persons.

Biblical Scriptures are used to defend or defame individuals who identify as transgender, and I will demonstrate how this plurality of interpretations may collide within various white Evangelical, Protestant communities by comparing conservative Christian uses of the Bible (e.g., by Southern Baptist theologian, Albert Mohler) with progressive evangelical responses (e.g., by the self-identified “evangelical lesbian feminist,” Virginia Mollenkott). Without a consensus on the meaning of the term ‘transgender,’ churches are uncertain how best to minister to a broad spectrum of parishioners who self-locate outside the traditional gender binary.

To specify this traditional gender binary, I will use the term *cisgender* in this thesis to indicate a person whose gender identity coincides with their biological sex at birth. Biologist
Dana Leland DeFosse is typically credited with using the term in 1994. Epistemologically, the term is an antonym of transgender, the root *trans* denoting “across, beyond, or on the other side of;” whereas, *cis* means “on this side of.” By adding gender as a suffix, cisgender and transgender become descriptive terms for individuals’ gender expressions.

Even using the term *cisgender* has proved political. Some have stated the term is a necessary way of differentiating between lived experiences and identities. While others claim cisgender is an unproductive, dated term that reinforces a gender binary some scholars have been trying to dismantle for decades. Clarifying why some fundamental sexual and gender terminology is uncertain, as well as why the transgender identity is difficult to recognize, may contribute to greater understanding of an emerging transgender identity within white progressive Evangelical churches that wish to promote greater tolerance and acceptance for their transgender parishioners.

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2 AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In his introduction to the English edition of Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite, Michel Foucault describes how the designation of “hermaphrodite” was given to individuals in whom both male and female bodily characteristics were presented “in proportions that might be variable.”

Foucault describes Barbin’s early life in which Barbin was raised as girl and sent to school on a scholarship in an Ursuline convent where she lived a “happy limbo of non-identity, which was paradoxically protected by the life of those closed, narrow, and intimate societies where one has the strange happiness, which is at the same time obligatory and forbidden, of being acquainted with only one sex.”

While at the convent, Barbin was attracted to a fellow student, sneaking into her room at night. In 1856, at the age of 17, Barbin was sent to Le Chateau to study to become a teacher. She successfully completed her studies and received a teaching position the following year in a girls’ school. After Barbin pursued an affair with a female colleague and received a medical examination following years of experiencing poor health, it was discovered that Barbin, despite the presence of a vagina, had a small penis and testicles inside her body.

Foucault argues that, based on biological theories of the time in which one “true sex” existed, notions of individual juridical subjects combined with bureaucratic administrative controls in modern states to create a climate in which it was easy to reject the idea of a mixture of two sexes, thereby “limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals.”

In 1860, it was determined that Barbin was in fact, genitally speaking, a male. A legal decision was made following this

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6 Ibid, xiii.
7 Ibid, vii.
8 Ibid, viii.
discovery that forced Barbin to change her name to Abel Barbin and to live “as a man.” Failing to find work as in Paris and in a state of extreme poverty, psychological trauma, and physical deterioration, Barbin committed suicide in 1868. Barbin was defined by cultural proscriptions of a forced gender identity. Forced to renounce the female aspects of the identity, while instinctually denying the male aspects, Barbin is thrust into a world in which fitting into neither binary and feeling the “crushing reality” in the absence in these designations, leads to an attraction to death. A death that might free Barbin from the lonely vigil, societal suspicions, and medical and legal accusation.

2.1 Tracking the Transgender Subject

The new ideal of the modern scientific medical establishment, according to Foucault, simply had to “strip the body of its anatomical deceptions and discover the one true sex behind organs that might have put on the forms of the opposite sex.”9 Court decisions supported the biological assessment or assignment of the one “true sex,” eliminating the appearance of free choice that had existed in the Middle Ages when hermaphrodites could “choose” their sex upon reaching adulthood, and placed the onus of determination on the medical “expert,” thereby emphasizing “the moral interest that inhered in the medical diagnosis of the true sex.”10 Foucault acknowledges the possibility that an individual may adopt a sex that he or she does not biologically “possess,” or a gender identity that does not correspond to genital biology and highlights the increasingly complicated relationship between sex and truth in the modern episteme. In modern scientific regimes, the triumph or hegemony of this relatively new medicalized subject ultimately settled on the idea that truths about the individual exist through its

9 Foucault, ix.
10 Ibid.
“complex, obscure, and essential relationships”\textsuperscript{11} with sex and gender. A complexity that might be clarified by the ability to self-identify with greater ease in the modern episteme.

This “true sex” required study, explanation, and excavation. “Sex itself hides the most secret parts of the individual: the structure of his fantasies, the roots of his ego, the forms of his relationship to reality. At the bottom of sex, there is truth.”\textsuperscript{12} Foucault further suggests that the intersection between sex and truth was the foundation for the psychoanalytic regime that offered the tantalizing promise of revealing a sexuality that might also reveal personal truth, if only we remain vigilant and sufficiently honest. Without the required truth of a “true sex,” perversions exist and those wishing to express non-normative gender behaviors belonged in a world strongly aligned with bisexuality (as it manifested in the developing infant), as explained by Freud in \textit{Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex} (which he revised in 1909, 1914, and 1920, the only of his texts in which he provided revisions).\textsuperscript{13} Changes in gender assignment would follow much later. Along the lines that Foucault argues for modernity, anything outside a heteronormative, marital relationship posed threats to the social order and quite possibly legal and medical censure against an individual. Rather than establishing boundaries to contain sexuality, our scrutiny has caused us to view almost all aspects of our lives through a lens of sexuality.

Given the gender fluidity that the regime of a “true sex” denies, “the uneasiness about their identity finds expression in the desire to pass over to the other side—to the side of the sex they desire to have and in whose world they would like to belong.”\textsuperscript{14} What Foucault will later refer to as the “biopolitical” site of embodied conformity led to the development of professional

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Foucault, x.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, xi.
\textsuperscript{13} Freud, Sigmund. \textit{Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex}. Translated by A. A. Brill. Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2014, 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Foucault, xiv.
\end{flushleft}
organizations, medical standards of care for sexually ambiguous individuals, a significant body of case law and public policy, peer reviewed social-scientific publications, and academically affiliated research centers and clinics.\textsuperscript{15} It bears noting that a new scholarly subject or approach achieves maturity and/or the status of a scholarly tradition when a journal is established, and to this point, the \textit{Transgender Studies Quarterly} was established in 2014. How we arrived at this point is the purpose of this history I offer here.

On December 1, 1952, a private life matter became public spectacle when the headline of the \textit{New York Daily News} announced, “Ex-G.I. Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth.”\textsuperscript{16} Christine Jorgensen (1926-1989) became front-page news after her gender reassignment surgery (a series of surgeries, in fact, beginning in 1951 in Denmark) and was thrust into the public sphere as the “it girl,” the globally recognized face of “transsexuality.” Gradually, the term of choice would become ‘transgender’ (see Appendix A).

Endocrinologist and sexologist, Harry Benjamin, popularized the terms \textit{transsexual}, \textit{transsexualism}, and \textit{transsexualist} in his “medicalized transsexual story”\textsuperscript{17} when he published his paper on “Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psychosomatic and Somatopsychic Syndromes” in the \textit{American Journal of Psychotherapy} in 1954.\textsuperscript{18} Prior to Benjamin’s seminal publication, medical and psychological care providers used the term “Harry Benjamin Syndrome” (after the endocrinologist who pioneered the study of gender dysphoria—a conflict between a person’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\end{thebibliography}
biologically assigned sex at birth and the gender to which an individual might identify) to describe individuals who did not conform to the gender binary. After 1954, most of these providers began using the term *transsexual* as prescribed by Benjamin. When Benjamin popularized this term, he intended it as taxonomy for all people who claimed an ambiguous gender identity whether they took hormones and/or undertook surgical intervention or not.

In 1965, psychiatrist Dr. John Oliven proposed *transgenderism* as a term to replace *transsexualism*, arguing that the concept of sexuality could not account for the assumption that transsexuals were simply women born into the wrong body. He writes, “Where the compulsive urge reaches beyond female vestments, and becomes an urge for gender (‘sex’) change, transvestism becomes ‘transsexualism.’ The term is misleading; actually, ‘transgenderism’ is what is meant, because sexuality is not a major factor in primary transvestism.” To echo Dr. Benjamin, it was a gender, not a sexual ambiguity.

In 1966, Dr. Benjamin used the term *transsexual* as an umbrella term, but developed a scale based on psychological and medical terminology for those individuals who did not identify with their medically designated sex at birth. For instance, his typology included the following:

- **Type 1 Pseudo Transvestite**: an individual who occasionally cross dresses, but usually lives according to their biologically assigned sex at birth;
- **Type 2 Fetishistic Transvestite**: an individual who cross dresses periodically, as well as wearing clothing typically assigned to the opposite gender under their clothing, cross dressing is typically required to achieve some level of sexual satisfaction;

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Type 3 *True Transvestite*: an individual who dresses frequently in gender non-normative clothing, may assume a “double personality” and attempt to live and be recognized as the opposite sex;

Type 4 *Transsexual*: an individual who lived part-/full-time in a role opposite to the sex assigned at birth, but did not feel fulfilled when living as their biologically assigned sex, but who did not want to have genital reconstructive surgery;

Type 5 *True Transsexual*: an individual who lived full time opposite to the sex assigned at birth and for whom genital reconstructive surgery might sometimes be prescribed; and

Type 6 *True Transsexual*: an individual who lived full time opposite to the sex assigned at birth and for whom genital reconstructive surgery is *always* appropriate.\(^{22}\)

Benjamin did not believe that surgeries could change someone’s “authentic” sex, but rather that genital reconstructive surgery was generally an appropriate response to significant *gender dysphoria*, stating in 1966, “The transvestite has a social problem. The transsexual has a gender problem. The homosexual has a sex problem.”\(^{23}\) For the purposes this study, and building on this taxonomy, gender dysphoria will be defined as:

A clinical threshold…passed when concerns, uncertainties, and questions about gender identity persist in development, become so intense as to seem to be the most important aspect of a person's life, or prevent the establishment of a relatively unconflicted gender identity.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{23}\) Ibid, 17.

For many years after the publication of *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966, the six-point Benjamin scale was used as a diagnostic tool and as a basis for providing standards of care for individuals on a gender non-conforming spectrum, it also introduced the term *transsexual* into popular culture.\(^{25}\)

Virginia Prince (1913-2009), a self-identified heterosexual male crossdresser who lived socially as a woman, played an indisputably important role in establishing gender variant communities, organizations, and identities in the 1960s. She was often erroneously credited with creating such terms as *transgenderal* and *transgenderist* (although, she did self-identify using these terms interchangeably) as early as 1969. Prince carefully distinguished sex from gender as she felt that the former was purely biological whereas, the latter was purely cultural. This self-naming was a means to highlight the specific behavior of living fulltime in a chosen social gender role that was different from the gender role typically associated with birth-assigned sex, without undergoing gender reassignment surgery (now called *gender affirmation surgery*).

Although, in 1970, Prince did not use *transgender* in its contemporary, more general sense, the case and the debate it generated is important as the earliest documented medical and psychological uses of “transgender,” uses which did not distinguish between cross-dressing or living full time without surgery from transsexual identities. Prince stated, “I, at least, know the difference between sex and gender and have simply elected to change the latter and not the former.”\(^{26}\) Unlike Dr. Benjamin, Virginia Prince thought that sexual reassignment surgery was almost always the wrong choice to make since she believed the discomfort was a *gender* issue.


\(^{26}\) Prince, Virginia. “Change of Sex or Gender.” *Transvestia*, December 1969, 53.
and not a *sex* issue.\textsuperscript{27} Further, she used *gender* differently from Benjamin and Jorgensen; she claimed that the usage of *transsexual* as an “umbrella term” was incorrect, since she equated *gender* with a cultural sex costume and could not apply it, rendering it inapplicable to the transsexual experience.\textsuperscript{28}

In 1975, Oliven again used the term *transgender*, but now as a term that included transsexuals and transvestites, while psychiatrists Robert Hatcher and Joseph Pearson used the term “transgender” to define solely those transsexuals seeking gender reassignment surgery. They explained as follows, “The transvestite rarely seeks transgender surgery since the core of his perversion is an attempt to realize the fantasy of a phallic woman.”\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps it is no coincidence that popular culture evolved in tandem with theory, as we see in the introduction of Dr. Frank N. Furter in “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” who boisterously proclaimed in 1975:

I could show you my favorite obsession
I've been making a man
With blond hair and a tan
And he's good for relieving my tension
I'm just a sweet transvestite
From Transsexual, Transylvania.\textsuperscript{30}

While Frank N Furter’s character was a homosexual, crossdressing male who self-identified as a transvestite (from Transsexual), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* was revolutionary in that it

\textsuperscript{27} Williams. “Tracking Transgender: The Historical Truth.”
created visibility for individuals with non-conforming gender behavior to be themselves in a safe space within a conservative society. Communities formed around producing the show and offered a place where individuals could experiment with gender and sexuality. As acceptance of diversity evolved, Frank N Furter’s portrayal as a “freak,” a laughable trope exaggerated for effect, is usually not the reality for individuals living outside the male-female gender binary.

Individuals who want their gender representation taken seriously—not as a token of a caricatured fictional character. Even the woman who was arguably the face of transsexuality up to this point in American culture, and the darling of transgender activism, Christine Jorgensen (the aforementioned former G.I. who underwent gender affirmation surgery in the 1950s), eschewed the label *transsexual* in favor of *transgender* in 1979.31

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, medical professionals, popular cultural icons (such as Holly Woodlawn, the Warhol superstar and the “he was a she” in Lou Reed's hit 1972 pop song “Walk on the Wild Side;”32 Renee Richards, tennis star and spokesperson for the transgender community;33 and Sylvia Rivera, a drag queen and gay liberation and transgender activist34) and advocacy groups all began using *transgender* inclusively as the preferred term for transsexuals, crossdressers, and many other gender-variant individuals.35 The dramatic rise in the popularity of this overarching term has been viewed as the “acceleration of a longer trend rather than the

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creation of a new meaning for an existing term that originally meant something else.\textsuperscript{36} 

*Transgender* slowly evolved as the product of an organic, cultural convergence of multiple conversations situated in different social, professional, and geographic locations. It was to emerge as the consensus term of choice by the early 1990s.

In 1992, Leslie Feinberg’s pamphlet, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, laid out the consensus understanding of the term “transgender.”\textsuperscript{37} *Transgender* emerged as a generic term to describe gender-variant identities and communities within the United States, gathering together a broad range of interrelated categories through historical shifts in the language of sex, sexuality, gender, and identity. The definition resonated with the start of the early 1990s that infused transgender with the collective energy of a social movement\textsuperscript{38}—a social movement that enabled different individuals to congregate together in order to seek acceptance of their gender diversity. Without this politically minded coalition focused on collectivity and unity in diversity, it would have been impossible to include all the gender nonconforming identities and behaviors and particular modes of being under a single umbrella term.

### 2.2 Under the Canopy of the Umbrella

In the early 1990s, the Human Rights Commission of San Francisco drafted an early version of the “transgender umbrella” illustration designed to educate public service officials regarding

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Singer, T. Benjamin. “Umbrella.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (2014), 260.
\end{itemize}
the civil rights ordinance adjudicating “gender identity.” A hand drawn umbrella sheltered now dated terms (“crossdresser/drag,” “transvestic fetishist,” “transvestite,” “transgenderist,” “transsexual,” and “man/woman”) that reflected generational, geographic, political, social, and cultural differences.

In 1998, Susan Stryker, professor in Women and Gender Studies at the University of Arizona, utilized the metaphor of the terminological umbrella in an influential definition of transgender that covered the multiple subjectivities as follows:

An umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual’s anatomy at birth, a non-consensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions. The umbrella diagram has enjoyed widespread popularity as an educational tool, and as it was initially a tool for political advocacy, the image intimates sheltering individuals from a deluge of discrimination. The umbrella implies all embodiments of sex and gender are “not only possible but taxonomically containable” and opens an umbrella to a visual collective including a wide array of formations of sex- and gender-nonconforming identities and expressions. An updated version of the umbrella graphic designed by activist and graphic artist, Mel Reiff Hill is available in Appendix B.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will adhere to the Stryker definition established in 1998. This 1998 definition of transgender has been extensively debated and refined since then,

39 Ibid, 259.
culminating in the creation of the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* in 2014. As debates among secular progressives continue to swirl, it is not surprising that a progressive Evangelical community should debate the issues inscribed in this terminology as well.

### 2.2.1 Cleaving Sex and Gender

Transgender awareness and the advocacy for individuals who identify as transgender have required linguistic adjustments. Previously definitive concepts (such as transsexual) were demoted to lesser status as exposure increased and cultural understanding evolved from this exposure, and invented or borrowed words assumed greater significance relating to the self-identity of the individual. Similar to second wave feminism’s attempts to distinguish between biological sex and socially constructed aspects of gender during the 1970s, a significant linguistic adjustment has also existed within transgender studies to decouple “sex” and “gender.” “Sex” has typically been used in the male-female binary normally defined by the genitalia with which an individual is born. The GLAAD (formerly the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) Media Reference Guide, a guide designed to assist journalists, entertainment media, and the public at large in presenting “LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) people’s stories fairly and as accurately,” cites “sex” as:

> The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily

characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.\textsuperscript{43}

By contrast, “gender” was invoked as a non-essential quality of an acculturated individual. Prior to this linguistic turn, you were either one sex or the other, and this became a fundamental fact of identity.

There is yet to be a consensus on what “gender” actually is, much less how to use it in context of lifestyle or choice or nature, and this confusion has transferred to Evangelical outlooks on transgender parishioners. Mollenkott is a progressive Evangelical who has taken transgender thinking to a conclusion of sorts by advocating for the elimination of the gender binary in favor of the omnigender paradigm suggesting, “What society has constructed, society can also deconstruct and reconstruct. The goal is worthwhile: to learn from the facts of human sexuality and genderedness and to develop attitudes that match those facts and, thus, alleviate human pain.”\textsuperscript{44} The bipolar social constructs of the traditional gender binary may serve to reinforce power structures that justify rejection and exclusion.

The GLAAD Media Guide further differentiates between “gender expression” and “gender identity.” Gender expression is identified as, “external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than

\textsuperscript{44} Mollenkott, x.
the sex they were assigned at birth.”

It is interesting to note the Media Guide continues to assume the existence of a gender binary.

Gender identity is defined as “[a] person’s internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.” While GLAAD’s definitions assumes the constancy of a traditional gender binary, many transgender people simultaneously articulate neither or both gender identities that fall outside a traditional binary framework (e.g., ambigender, describing those who identify to some degree with both the male and female genders; bigender, describing those who alternate between two distinct gender roles which may involve crossdressing; and neutrois, or agender which describes an individual who identifies with neither gender or one who maintains neutral presentations of gender).

It is interesting to note that transgender persons and individuals who are not heterosexual are now increasingly lumped into one acronym of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender); although they often disagree over the status of biology, manifestations of gender and sexual identity, and how to self-identify. For instance, some gay rights advocates would be thrilled with the notion that being gay was as simple as a chromosomal matter that confirms the chorus of being “born this way.” Whereas, most transgender activists usually strive to minimize the

45 GLAAD Media Reference Guide.
46 Ibid.
“conceptual importance of chromosomes that define an individual as either male or female.”

Difficulties in differentiating between expressions of sex and gender may contribute some progressive evangelical church’s struggle to apply verses interpreted as condemning homosexuality but finding relative silence on transgender persons.

The taxonomies continue to be loose, fluid and evolving. It is certainly understandable that churches anxiously search for Biblical interpretations that make sense. I will evaluate how the confusion in the terminology of transgender parishioners provides Evangelical churches with the unique opportunity to introduce many religious resources that encourage acceptance—a necessary precondition for welcoming. Further, I will evaluate how Biblical scriptures are used within some evangelical churches and how these scriptures are used to influence the rules, regulations, and judgments placed upon transgender parishioners.

I will examine how some congregations’ hermeneutical narratives interpret transgender individuals and how these verses are used or discussed by Evangelical Christians as they navigate their confusion regarding transgender identity within a religious context. Further investigation will determine how similar verses are used as texts of comfort through expressions of the Christian ethos of love, kindness, welcome, etc. or texts of exclusion and misrecognition.

While there have been various approaches to defining the transgender person, I have shown historically how a general idea of transgender identity evolved in the United States since the Second World War. Even the most standard definition of transgender includes an individual’s anatomy at birth, non-consensual assignments to gender categories, psychical identifications with body image and subject positions, and social functions of gender, biological sex, and kinship.

49 Fleming, 115.
This is enough to confuse, and even aggravate, the most well-meaning person. In order to enact church policies that might lead to greater cultural harmony, where can we turn? Unsurprisingly, most Evangelicals turn to the Bible.
3 PROGRESSIVE EVANGELICALISM AND THE TRANSGENDER FLOCK

Progressive Evangelicalism is not an historical anomaly. Certainly, for many secular Americans (especially those who associate the rise of modernity with the retreat of religion), there exists an association between self-identified white Evangelicals and political or theological conservativism. However, popular perceptions of “right wing predilections” miss the diversity within Evangelical Christianity.\(^{51}\) A history of white, evangelical Protestantism in the United States demonstrates how some of its representatives resist the binary of political conservatism or liberalism.

For the purpose of this project, I will utilize Brantley Gasaway’s definition of *progressive evangelicalism* (Gasaway uses this term interchangeably with *evangelical progressivism*) to signify a combination of political orientation and religious identity as affirmed through the designation of a core set of values: “the primacy of biblical authority, the need for personal conversion and faith in Jesus’s atoning work, and a dedication to evangelistic and humanitarian efforts.”\(^{52}\) Some of its followers sought an alternative in the early twenty-first century to the dominant cultural voice of politically conservative evangelicals. Virginia Mollenkott recalls her felt need for connection between her belief in a heavenly eternity and her human connectedness to all people while on the Earth.\(^{53}\)

One of the central tenets of the so-called Social Gospel (a progressive, turn-of-the-century, white Protestant movement for a wide array of social reforms) is this: “Christianity in its nature

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 17.
is revolutionary.” An historical reformist impulse stemming from Quakers and Unitarians active prior to the Civil War and the United States’ entry into World War One spearheaded campaigns promoting abolitionism, prison reform, alleviating poverty, promoting temperance, and women’s suffrage. This liberal Protestant theology was culminated in Walter Rauschenbusch’s Social Gospel, which maintained that Christian principles should be applied to social problems and that activism should be utilized to bring society into conformity with Christian values.

Rauschenbusch pushed followers to reframe their thinking by stating, “ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it.” As Christ’s first preaching concerned the imminent arrival of “the Kingdom of God” on earth, the ultimate goal of the Social Gospel was not getting individuals into Heaven, but to bring life on Earth into alignment with the harmony of Heaven. These individuals were encouraged to place emphasis on biblical commands to love one another (especially the “least of these,” such as the poor and oppressed), as well as to take up the cause for racial and gender equality.

The rhetoric of “sexual purity” played an integral part in the first wave feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To this point, the home was a domain belonging to women and some women used the ideas of feminine moral superiority (in that women were less controlled by their sexual desires) as a way to shift and assert their authority beyond the boundaries of the home into the political sphere (by seeking to end prostitution and hold men to

56 Gasaway, 5.
the same standards of sexual purity as women). “The control of sexuality through religious teaching has remained a significant strategy for evangelicals facing the gain or loss of their own cultural capital.” The ideals of proper, sexually pure Protestant women sought to restore virtue through social and political equality. Early followers of this sexual purity movement believed gender equality with normative gender behavior and a standard set of behaviors for each sex. America’s progress was dependent on the fulfillment of these explicit gender roles. The formulaic idea that the model woman was white and middle class and men were morally lax and sexually licentious did not set well with some reformers who believed in the normativity of gender roles of men and women necessary for the stability of the family. There were accepted gender differences, but some reformers did not accept society’s version of these differences. Societal ideals of manhood and womanhood were integral for the middle-class Victorian American, and the rhetoric of normative gender roles were seen by some as essential to a burgeoning capitalist society.

“Prostitution and other kinds of female exploitation, alcohol, and sexual impurity were threats to domestic harmony and its ability to act as a civilizing agent.” Men who were unable to abstain from the aforementioned vices were a risk to the stability of the family, as well as society. The Social Gospel followers believed these pressures were intensified in the new

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58 Ibid, 17.
59 Moslener, 17-18. Reformers from this period hoped the above-mentioned gender roles might increase women’s public influence and thereby, elevate the worthy to the ideal of White, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Education reforms began for young men and women through sentimentalizing childhood and increasing the age of consent that created a new liminal space between childhood and adulthood: adolescence. Religious piety education combined adolescence, sexual purity, and nationalism, offering a safe transition from adolescence to becoming a productive adult member of society and promoting proper values and virtues for all citizens.
60 Ibid, 19.
industrialized urban landscape. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell called white, Protestant women to a “special race work”⁶¹ that required women to focus their creative energies on birthing and sustaining the civilization while holding men accountable for the behaviors that threatened the well-being of future generations.

By the mid-twentieth century,⁶² some white Evangelical Christians were increasingly dissatisfied with this fracture and rejected the binary of traditional fundamentalists and theologically liberal “modernists” and wished to reengage with the American public through a form of “new Evangelicalism.”⁶³ Some practitioners hoped to build a broad coalition of theologically conservative Christians through the successful revival movements of theologians like Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell. Yet some progressives continued to struggle against this fundamentalist ideology, finding their way to a more progressive social and political ethos, by attempting to reconcile certain aspects of evangelical piety with modern social reform.⁶⁴ This

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⁶¹ Ibid.
⁶² Spiritual renewal and moral transformations were regarded as superior means for social reform in the Social Gospel. This “Great Reversal” was responsible for divisive theologies, fracturing evangelicals into still ongoing progressively liberal Protestant movement and those who defended traditional “fundamentals” of Christianity against theologically liberal “modernists.” Protestant liberals, some of who sprang from the fundamentalist side reinterpreted and sometimes rejected doctrines against an application of scientific developments and biblical criticisms. Some followers continued to embrace the Social Gospel of Rauschenbusch and prioritized progressive reforms of social injustices over individual regeneration,” certain these reforms would further the kingdom of God on Earth, and eventually reach agreements with traditionally progressive churches. Gasaway, 7-8.
⁶⁴ Many religiously conservative practitioners were suspicious of progressive reforms and responded lukewarmly to rising politically progressive campaigns and social protests entering into the 1970s. However, a group of white evangelicals challenged the larger circle of fundamental Evangelicals steeped in an individualistic social ethic to campaign against injustice and inequality and commit to rebalance personal and social transformations through the Gospel of Christ. In 1973, a small group of evangelical leaders (including Jim Wallis and Ron Sider) presented the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concerns that implored American
traditional line of theology influenced the social reform theories of Virginia Mollenkott and David Gushee and intersected with their ideas that scientific and technological developments, as well as contemporary interpretations of the Bible, might accommodate a greater number of parishioners who did not subscribe to gender conforming behavior.

The late 1970s found the progressive evangelical movement overshadowed by a more separatist, extensive, and well-funded network of Christian conservatives labeled the new “Moral Majority.” Reacting to perceived attacks on Christian heritage and “traditional family values,” Conservative Evangelical leaders such as James Dobson urged their followers to focus on the family and abandon their skepticism of political and social engagement and focus their campaigns on reversing the secular humanism of public culture through combatting abortion, feminism, and gay rights. Intensifying their dedication to economic conservatism and American militarism, the Religious Right quickly established the popular perception that fundamentalists and Evangelicals are uniformly politically conservative. Some evangelical progressives feel the that Religious Right betrayed their religious heritage of social concern by promoting right-wing ideology and ignoring social injustice.

In 1996, progressive evangelical Anthony Campolo founded Call to Renewal, an organization specifically designed as an alternative to the “Religious Right” that encouraged its members to push beyond partisan and ideological divisions in its founding statement: “We refuse the false choices between personal responsibility or social justice, between sexual morality or civil rights for homosexuals, between the sacredness of life or the rights of women, between

progressive evangelicals to confess and repent for their failure to confront racism, sexism, poverty and militaristic nationalism.

65 Focus on the Family—a conservative Christian organization founded by Dr. James Dobson in 1977 that “provides relevant Christian advice on marriage, parenting and other topics.” www.focusonthefamily.com/
66 Gasaway, 10.
fighting cultural corrosion or battling racism.” Through this push in the early twenty-first century, progressive Evangelicals some led by Ron Sider and Jim Wallis (progressive Evangelicals whose books analyzed biblical principles and paradigms that provided the framework for Christian public engagement in social activism), began as a grassroots social movement that offered an alternative to the theology of the Religious Right. Progressive Evangelicals developed a public theology affirming that humans are made in the image of God (imago Dei) and that, as such, dignity and sanctity should be the cardinal biblical principle used in social engagement. Wallis asserted, “[t]hat most foundational premise gives each person an equal and sacred value.” In essence, this sacrosanct egalitarian ideal was the basis of equality for all people in all societies.

Sider, Wallis, and Campolo hoped to restore the past progressive political engagement of the early twentieth century and appealed to their followers to channel their Christian beliefs to redress social problems. Mollenkott shares a joke she heard while growing up in fundamentalist Protestantism that suggests some followers “were so heavenly-minded that they were no earthly good.” A group calling itself “Red Letter Christians” based their practice on the biblical words on Jesus often printed in their Bibles in red. Red Letter Christians “share an Evangelical theology,” and a “passionate commitment to social justice.”

67 Ibid, 11.
71 While the progressive evangelical movement did not replace the influence and visibility of the Religious Right, the increasing visibility of the progressive evangelical’s political movement began to more accurately reflect the complexity of white Protestant identities. Contrasted to their fundamentalist contemporaries, progressive evangelical leaders pressed their followers to
Just as the history of the evolution of the term transgender is incredibly complex, the history of progressive evangelicalism has been as well, even if overshadowed at times by the Religious Right. Local, regional, and international acts of compassion, human and civil rights activism, and intentional communities are the benchmarks of contemporary progressive evangelicalism. David Swartz professor of history at Asbury University suggests these progressive movements are also finding resonance among more politically conservative evangelicals whose participation has increased in human and civil rights activism, intentional communities, and acts of compassion in an attempt to live a consistent life ethic.72

Leaders such as Sider and Campolo encouraged other evangelicals to recognize social problems and respond with Christian kindness. Despite the contrast in political priorities and public policy preferences, fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals acknowledge a Christian responsibility to care for the suffering. Social justice activism can be found in contemporary issues as “alleviating poverty, combatting sex trafficking, promoting HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and supporting domestic and international relief and development work.”73 While mainstream media has influenced Americans’ views of evangelical Christians as part of the ultra-conservative Religious Right, some younger evangelicals are especially active in grassroots social activism within the LGBT community. What makes the contemporary moral and sexual revolution different than its predecessor cultural revolutions is the unprecedented reach beyond the concerns of individual sin and expand their promotion of social justice to eliminating poverty, promoting peace, protecting the environment, and defending human rights.


velocity with which it is advancing in society and churches. Non-normative gender identity expressions challenge the parish’s understanding of gospel, sin, salvation, and sanctification.\textsuperscript{74} Evangelical Christians who use the Scriptures to validate and minister to their transgender parishioners often find themselves at a crossroads between condoning a lifestyle at odds with some Christian theology which assumes a male-female gender binary, and freely offering God’s love and acceptance as a fellow traveler on a path to redemption.

3.1 The Theology of the Body

Some Evangelical Christian biblically informed theological ethics may be seen to revolve around four metanarratives: the first creation of man and woman, their subsequent fall and expulsion from paradise, their potential redemption through Christ, and the new creation that Christ’s return augurs for those so redeemed.\textsuperscript{75} All Evangelicals turn to scripture when confronting contemporary ethical questions such as the welcome to be afforded the transgender parishioner. Some progressive Evangelicals believe that scriptures do provide compelling resources for addressing these questions, if they are approached with an adequate understanding of the scriptural context, and the overriding conception of covenant in relation to the four master-narratives outlined above.

Genesis 1:1-3:24 offers two different creation stories sewn together at Genesis 2:4, and these stories may complicate an interpreter’s understanding of divine creation as there is more than one account of such crucial aspects as the creation of humanity, the gender of the persons so created, the nature and purpose of human sexuality, and the assumed destiny of these beings shortly after

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\textsuperscript{75} Mohler, 5.
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their creation by God. Genesis 1:1-2:4 provides a six-day creation story (with the seventh day set aside for rest). The first day in Genesis 1:1-5 begins with the creation of the universe and the separation of the darkness from light. On the second day, God created a dome, separating the waters that were under and above the dome, thereby separating heavens and firmament (Genesis 1:6-7). Genesis 1:9-13 narrates the separation of the sea from the firmament, and the creation of plants on the third day. The fourth day narrates how God created the sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 1:14-19). The fifth day saw the creation of birds of the air and fish in the sea (Genesis 1:20-23). Animals of the earth were created on the sixth day with God’s wish that all birds, fish, and animals populate and fill the earth with their offspring (Genesis 1:24-25). The day concluded with the creation of humans (male and female) in God’s image who were intended to care for the animals of the Earth. God blessed them to be fruitful and multiply, and provided stipulations for the humans’ and animals’ dietary needs (Genesis 1: 26-30). The first creation account then concludes with a brief synopsis noting that the Earth was completed in six days. The seventh day was separated from the days of creation as a day of hallowed rest for God and his people (Genesis 2:1-4). At the end of each day, it was closed with God’s proclamation that each day’s creation was “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31).

The significance of this first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4 is that humans are created last and in God’s image. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This does not necessarily imply that God is male or female.

The second creation narrative in Genesis describes in detail only the day in which human beings were created, an event that is described in much greater detail. The first account pays a great deal of attention to waters and the difficulty in containing them; the second account
presupposes a more arid, desert-like topography and focuses on the soil. There was no one to care for the plants (Genesis 2:5). God formed Adam from the dust of the ground (adamah) and breathed air (or spirit, ruach) into him and then placed him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:7-8). After the creation of man, God created the trees and plants in Genesis 2:9, and issued a warning that man should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17). Following this, animals were created and brought before the man to be named (Genesis 2:19-20), but man was lonely and God felt the need for man to have a helper and partner. This need was first expressed in Genesis 2:18 (“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner”), but not addressed until Genesis 2:21-23 when the man was placed in a deep sleep and the woman was formed from his rib, then brought to the man. The section concludes by explaining the man was to leave his parents and cling to his wife and that the two were to become one flesh, and that both were naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:24-25). This story has been utilized by many Christians (ever since Paul) to discern the purpose of marriage: for companionship and/or procreation.

The first creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:4 discusses a step-by-step guide for the world’s creation and creation of people, emphasizing that humans are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-28). Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that this passage may be used to suggest that God’s purpose for humanity was an embodied existence. This can be explained through the use of different Hebrew words for “made” and “formed.” Created (from the Hebrew word bara בָּרָא) and made (from the Hebrew word asah עָשָׂה) are often used interchangeably in the description of the creation of the sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, trees, rivers, man, the heavens, and the earth and in some verses are both used to describe the same event. By contrast, the term formed (from the Hebrew word yatsar יָצַר)
suggests a separate and distinct conception of divine activity from other terms like ‘created’ and ‘made’. One interpretation could suggest that God created, made, prepared the concept of humanity in the first creation narrative and then brought it into physical form in the latter. Mohler shows how the physical form allows them to follow God’s ultimate plan in that, “[t]heir bodies allow them, by God’s creation and his sovereign plan, to fulfill that task of image-bearing.” This image seems to deploy a strict male-female gender binary, according to Mohler:

The Genesis narrative also demonstrates that gender is part of the goodness of God’s creation. Gender is not merely a sociological construct forced upon human beings who otherwise could negotiate any number of permutations. But Genesis teaches us that gender is created by God for our good and his glory. Gender is intended for human flourishing and is assigned by the Creator’s determination—just as he determined when, where, and that we should exist.

Another interpretation might consider the two creation accounts individually and reconcile their differences by following the sequence of creation in the first narrative and clarifying its most important aspect of the creation of man in the sixth day in the latter narrative. Some fundamentalists feel there is no contradiction, simply a description of an event from general overview to specific details.

There is a general consensus, though certainly not complete agreement, that the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were created from four distinct sources and edited together. In the first creation narrative, man and woman are created at the same time by the divine word. The second narrative accounts for a wholly different creation of humanity. In the latter version, adam, the earth creature, is formed out of adamah, the dust of the earth. Further, in the latter

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77 Mohler, 5.
78 Ibid.
narrative, God appears to believe that the first human is lonely and creates a second, female-bodied creation out of the rib, or side, of the first Adam.

The first creation narrative, dated to roughly the eighth century BCE, gives a general outline of creation. Whereas, the second account provides a more in-depth description of the creation of the first man and woman. This is how some Evangelicals reconcile the differences in how the creation of the woman is described in the creation stories.

Mohler draws an important conclusion for the second creation account. God makes man from dust and then breathes the breath of life into him life into him, stating, “[w]e were a body before we were a person.” Typically, this verse has been interpreted by some conservative Evangelical Christians to mean that transgender individuals are, in effect, playing God by re-determining their own creation. In seeking to become a gender other than their biologically assigned sex at birth, some Christians feel that surgery only creates “an illusion of biological reality that isn’t there.” Some Evangelicals feel that even if neurobiology confirms the psychic reality of a transgender identity, not even that determination can be allowed to interfere with the perfection of God’s original plan of a biologically determined male/female gender identity.

Some progressive evangelical Christians, such as David Gushee, interpret these verses to demonstrate that while gender is a social construct, it does exist in a binary. However, other progressive evangelical Christians, such as Virginia Mollenkott, feel that gender is imposed upon human beings who could choose any number of gender expressions under the so-called umbrella, such that gender variance is part of the goodness and purity of God’s original creation: “Genesis

80 Mohler, 5.
1-2 affirms that God created without stating how God created.

Mollenkott concludes that both the first creation narrative (a hymn of creation) and the second creation narrative (an “earthy folktale”) were intended to glorify God and his involvement with humankind. Some progressive commentators have interpreted Genesis 1:27 to mean that all beings are created in God’s image and that God does not make mistakes. Therefore, if persons are transgender, people were created exactly as God intended. Gushee defends a transgender parishioner who opts to self-identify and fit into a male-female gender binary. Whereas Mollenkott argues for much greater flexibility in self-identification and argues against the necessity of having a binary. There is also the possibility that the first humans were bigender, intersex, or agender (non-bigender). Further, some progressives believe that any attempt to categorize God into gender or sex is inappropriate as those are simply human and human created categories. As I’ve highlighted, placing transgender within the gender binary does not necessarily equal a socially progressive understanding of the gender spectrum, especially as Mollenkott theorizes an elimination of the gender binary.

Mollenkott believes that everyone is on their own path to divinity through maximum spiritual growth and that “[i]f a person is born transsexual…then precisely those experiences are perfect for the development of that particular soul.” She further explains that belief in a radical separation between God and people, combined with extreme divine judgment, results in cruelty that separates its parishioners from a loving relationship with God. Her observation is that, due to the separation of individuals into the male/female binary, parishioners who do not subscribe to

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82 Mollenkott, 89.
83 Ibid.
84 Mollenkott, 14.
85 Ibid, 87.
either of those genders are judged by others within the congregation, further pushing the transgender parishioner away from what could be a fulfilling relationship with God.

To fulfill God’s command to multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28) with God’s image bearers, Adam required companionship. Genesis 2:18 states: “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.” One interpretation of this verse is that gender was intended for human flourishing and was assigned by God. After the expulsion, when they are mortal, they need to procreate. That is when Adam gives “the woman” a name: Hava, life bearer.

As one Evangelical Christian counselor states, “[e]ven if science does determine differentiation in the brain at birth, even if there are prenatal influences, we can’t set aside teachings of the Bible because of research findings.” As embodied followers, given bodies by God, individuals are given the gift and stewardship of sexuality and gender in covenant with God that serves as testimony that his image-bearers fill the Earth with descendants through procreative sex and spread the glory of God.

However, some progressive evangelicals view the second chapter of Genesis’s emphasis on male and female as simply being a cultural reflection of the time and place in which it was written and believed that reflection has been modified over time by human experience. The conclusions drawn from this verse thus become two-fold: “that it is important to behave in line with our natures and that life is intended to be pleasurable.” This conclusion may be used to support transgender parishioners who fall outside the male-female gender binary.

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87 Mollenkott, 95.
In 2014, the annual meeting of delegates at The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) approved a landmark resolution that countered these progressive interpretations of the Genesis creation account. The statement begins by insisting that all individuals are created in God’s image and as a result of this intelligent design are fashioned within a complementary gender binary. Gender roles are divinely ordained and these roles should be internalized “in every human heart” and expressed in an external manifestation of gender normative behavior. The Convention’s statement does provide a general nod to physically sexual ambiguities, but differentiates between those and transgenderism as a psychological ambiguity. The delegates acknowledge the treatments available for individuals experiencing gender dysphoria, but suggest that such treatments are harmful since transgender experiences should not be normalized, and so conclude that schools should not provide spaces for individuals who wish to express non-normative gender behavior.

The SBC resolution concludes by stating that gender is determined by the biological sex at birth, not self-perception, and this misperception is a consequence of humanity’s fallen nature. The statement goes on to suggest both physical and psychological manifestations of gender ambiguities are conditions to be grieved and that imperfect bodies will eventually be redeemed in Christ (referring to Romans 8:23). The SBC states that it will extend love and compassion to those individuals who are in conflict, that it hopes that transgender parishioners will experience renewal through Christ as his Image-bearers, and therefore it condemns the abuse and bullying of parishioners. However, the statement concludes by defaulting to its opposition to bodily alterations, to the validation of transgender individuals both culturally and legally, and it concludes by returning to the initial claim that God intended for the creation of a male-female binary.
The resolution explicitly stated:

WHEREAS, All persons are created in God’s image and are made to glorify Him (Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 43:7); and

WHEREAS, God’s design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes, male and female (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6) which designate the fundamental distinction that God has embedded in the very biology of the human race; and

WHEREAS, Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles as ordained by God are part of the created order and should find expression in every human heart (Genesis 2:18, 21–24; 1 Corinthians 11:7–9; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Timothy 2:12–14); and

WHEREAS, The Fall of man into sin and God’s subsequent curse have introduced brokenness and futility into God’s good creation (Genesis 3:1–24; Romans 8:20); and

WHEREAS, According to a 2011 survey, about 700,000 Americans perceive their gender identity to be at variance with the physical reality of their biological birth sex; and

WHEREAS, Transgenderism differs from hermaphroditism or intersexualism in that the sex of the individual is not biologically ambiguous but psychologically ambiguous; and

WHEREAS, The American Psychiatric Association removed this condition (aka, “gender identity disorder”) from its list of disorders in 2013, substituting “gender identity disorder” with “gender dysphoria”; and

WHEREAS, The American Psychiatric Association includes among its treatment options for gender dysphoria cross-sex hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery, and social and legal transition to the desired gender; and

WHEREAS, News reports indicate that parents are allowing their children to undergo these therapies; and

WHEREAS, Many LGBT activists have sought to normalize the transgender experience and to define gender according to one’s self-perception apart from biological anatomy; and

WHEREAS, The separation of one’s gender identity from the physical reality of biological birth sex poses the harmful effect of engendering an understanding of sexuality and personhood that is fluid; and

WHEREAS, Some public schools are encouraging parents and teachers to affirm the feelings of children whose self-perception of their own gender is at variance with their biological sex; and

WHEREAS, Some public schools are allowing access to restrooms and locker rooms according to children’s self-perception of gender and not according to their biological sex;
and

WHEREAS, The state of New Jersey prohibits licensed counselors from any attempt to change a child’s “gender expression”; and

WHEREAS, These cultural currents run counter to the biblical teaching as summarized in The Baptist Faith and Message, Article III, that “Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, June 10–11, 2014, affirm God’s good design that gender identity is determined by biological sex and not by one’s self-perception—a perception which is often influenced by fallen human nature in ways contrary to God’s design (Ephesians 4:17–18); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we grieve the reality of human fallenness which can result in such biological manifestations as intersexuality or psychological manifestations as gender identity confusion and point all to the hope of the redemption of our bodies in Christ (Romans 8:23); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we extend love and compassion to those whose sexual self-understanding is shaped by a distressing conflict between their biological sex and their gender identity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we invite all transgender persons to trust in Christ and to experience renewal in the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:15–16); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we love our transgender neighbors, seek their good always, welcome them to our churches and, as they repent and believe in Christ, receive them into church membership (2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Galatians 5:14); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we regard our transgender neighbors as image-bearers of Almighty God and therefore condemn acts of abuse or bullying committed against them; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose efforts to alter one’s bodily identity (e.g., cross-sex hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery) to refashion it to conform with one’s perceived gender identity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we continue to oppose steadfastly all efforts by any governing official or body to validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy (Isaiah 5:20); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose all cultural efforts to validate claims to transgender identity; and be it finally
RESOLVED, That our love for the Gospel and urgency for the Great Commission must include declaring the whole counsel of God, proclaiming what Scripture teaches about God’s design for us as male and female persons created in His image and for His glory (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 20:27; Romans 11:36).88

The way in which transgender individuals seek out distinction can be seen as a corporeal corruption that is misaligned with the creation-redemption narrative from the Hebrew Bible.

Some Evangelicals view gender reassignment surgery as a way to medically deface God’s creation, an act of rebellion against God’s order and his sovereignty over gender.89 Dr. Craig Kline, in an article explaining the medical procedures involved in gender reassignment surgery framed in a biblical context, suggests, “Christians believe that despite the sincerest intentions of transsexuals, the surgery they desire to perform on the body needs to be performed on their heart.”90 Transgender individuals who have gender reassignment surgery have traded the glory of things by refuting the glory of God (Romans 1:23) and therefore, have succumbed to a “depraved mind of what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28).

However, Kline explains that other, more progressive evangelicals may attempt to understand a transgender individual’s possible desire to undergo gender reassignment surgery as a part of their personal salvation and utilize this desire to “speak of a greater gospel, a greater circumcision, and ultimately a greater bodily transformation—the redemption of the body promised to all who are alive in Christ” (Romans 8:23).91 One possible lesson that seems attainable from this is to love one another no matter what.

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90 Ibid, 45.
91 Ibid, 46.
Transgender individuals have the potential to undermine very public, socially constructed gender narratives. This can be confusing for many parishes. Transgender individuals sometimes attempt to conform to social norms of cultural stereotypes of dress, appearance, and voice pitch. Most parishioners understand when a transgender individual might pursue a unique gender distinction that is distinct from their biologically assigned sex. However, while a transgender parishioner sees the beauty in God’s creation of gender distinctions, some cisgender Evangelical parishioners feel that a transgender parishioner denies their own biological gender in an affront to God’s master plan. Each manifestation of creation is wrapped in transformation. Reading Scripture combined with a contemporary interpretation of narratives might assist in faithful Evangelical engagement with its transgender parishioners.

3.2 From the “Big Six” to the Six Thousand

A common refrain among some Evangelical Christians has been to “hate the sin but love the sinner,” a theology that certain younger Evangelicals find offensive. Integrating a church is no easy task and the above scriptures may contribute to a litany of biases and exclusions. These behaviors may occur within a congregation at the most basic level: welcoming visitors. However, some Evangelical Christians are more diverse than I initially thought, with diverse religious and political views—especially among younger Evangelicals. They are more likely to

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92 Gushee, David P. “Reconciling Evangelical Christianity with Our Sexual Minorities: Reframing the Biblical Discussion.” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015), 142. Gushee uses this expression to correlate the six bible verses known as “clobber verses” used to advocate the male/female binary and procreative heteronormative sexuality with an expression of acceptance at large of all God’s creatures.

support social justice efforts, such as antipoverty movements and causes within the LGBT paradigm.

It is often safe to state that some young, white Evangelical progressive Christians explain their view by asserting that their faith justifies such opposing views. One student from Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida expressed it as follows: “My mind keeps wandering back to the many times Jesus met with prostitutes and thieves. Even though this was looked down on in His time, He still treated them with love and respect. We need to do the same for people of different beliefs today.”94 This exemplifies the challenge some evangelicals have with the contradictions between their fundamental beliefs and their desires to maintain a “Christian walk” of ministry and acceptance. Part of this influence to accept transgender parishioners could be peer or family influenced, but admittedly, knowing someone who is transgender is the greatest factor regarding acceptance.

Some of these parishioners view acceptance as an issue of family, justice, human dignity, and reconciliation in Christ.95 One possible reason for this acceptance is offered by Shane Claiborne, who self-identifies as a “radical Christian social activist,” and who states, “[t]he most important camps for young Evangelicals are not ‘Left’ and ‘Right.’ They are ‘nice’ and ‘mean.’”96 Claiborne calls this movement the “post-Religious Right America” and continues, “[y]oung Evangelicals have done something really dangerous. We picked up our Bibles and we read them. It put us at odds with the Evangelical establishment… When we looked at the Moral

94 Chamberlain, 331.
95 Gushee, 153.
96 Chamberlain, 336.
Majority [and other groups], we saw the inconsistency of the church.”

Young Evangelicals are speaking freely and openly about issues with which their elders ardently disagree.

Some parishioners are uncomfortable excluding a form of human diversity that has existed in many different cultures and epistemes. When progressive evangelical parishioners are unable to find answers in the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, some parishioners look to parallels in proof texting for gender non-conformity in forty-two separate references in ten books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 37:36, 39:1, 40:7, 40:2; I Samuel 8:15; I Kings 22:9; II Kings 8:6, 25:19, 23:11, 9:32, 20:18, 24:15, 24:12; Isaiah 56:3, 56:4, 39:7; Jeremiah 52:25, 38:7, 41:38:7, 41:16, 34:19, 29:2; Esther 1:12, 1:15, 2:15, 2:14, 1:10, 4:5, 7:9, 2:21, 6:2, 6:14, 4:4; Daniel 1:3, 1:7, 1:8, 1:9, 1:10, 1:11, 1:18; I Chronicles 28:1, and II Chronicles 18:8) and instead embrace the Gospel at its deepest and most central meaning for love and acceptance. Virginia Mollenkott urges society away from a gender binary that ignores, and often contradicts the reality of some individuals in society. Her goal is to alleviate the inflexible gender binary of femininity and masculinity with a new paradigm: omnigender. A “third gender” that accounts for the gender diversity of humankind. What Mollenkott suggests is that actions should unite us into one body and that “it makes no sense for contemporary Christians or Jews to recoil from an omnigender construct because they associate a rigidly binary system with orthodox beliefs and practices and associate transgenderism (including homosexuality) within ‘pagan unbelief.”

97 Ibid, 337.
99 Mollenkott, ix.
100 Ibid, 162.
101 Ibid, 118.
Some evangelicals struggle against the idea of a plethora of gender identities, preferring instead to adhere to an acknowledgment that while not everyone fits into their system, acceptance of transgender parishioners occurs only as they fit into a gender binary. Some parishes have less stringent rules regarding gender conformity (e.g., dress) but there might be intolerance for those parishioners who do not easily fit into binary gender categories.

David Gushee is a Christian ethicist and incoming president of the American Academy of Religion who believes that the tragic misinterpretation of biblical scriptures has blocked transgender individuals from access to God’s grace.\(^\text{102}\) Psalm 139:13-14 emphasizes all are knit together in their mothers’ wombs and you are fearfully and wonderfully made in a reflection of the love and glory of God that created them. As such, it stands to reason that everyone should be entitled to the benefits of redemption and forgiveness: adoption into God’s family (Galatians 4:5), peace with God (Colossians 1:18-20), and eternal life (Revelations 5:9-10). Further, Gushee proposes an alternative way of reading Genesis 1-2 that allows for the documented diversity in actual creation, even though this diversity is not discussed in these texts. He feels that this is a solvable faith/science problem. Integrating reasonably certain scientific claims regarding gender diversity allow followers to conclude that “just because creation accounts fail to mention this diversity, it does not mean that it does not exist or that such diversity is morally problematic.”\(^\text{103}\)

Gushee claims that many progressive evangelicals center their Christianity on the foundation of the Christian ethos of justice, deliverance, compassion, human dignity, and love.\(^\text{104}\) Traditionalist interpretations instead “produced a harvest of bitter fruit: injustice, oppression,

\(^{102}\) Gushee, 152.

\(^{103}\) Ibid, 148.

\(^{104}\) Ibid, 153.
mercilessness, degradation, and hatred or indifference.” As traditional Christians use Scriptures to justify disdain, rejection, and sometimes there is a pushback against the moral blind spot that discredits the moral witness of Jesus. There is a temptation to join in the culture and social war regarding gender. Mark Yarhouse, a leading Christian scholar on gender dysphoria, is concerned that a disruption has fallen closely on the heels of what some feel is promiscuous sexual behavior and abandonment of heterosexual marriage values. Progressive Evangelicals feel called to rise above and offer themselves as joint witnesses of redemption by extending the same grace and mercy to transgender parishioners that cisgender parishioners expect in their own lives.

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105 Ibid.
4 CONCLUSION

I have traced a complex, and often controversial, history of the term transgender. Through this history, I have followed how the term has changed in meaning, based on psychological, medical, legal, and scientific approaches that conceived of individuals who manifested transgender behaviors or characteristics as subjects whose bodies could or should be manipulated. As the term transgender evolved in the latter half of the twentieth century, it caused much confusion, and while I may not have cleared up the surrounding confusion, I hope have brought clarity to some of the reasons why this particular category remains so unsettled.

Just as I discovered that there are a multitude of identities sheltered under the umbrella category of transgender, I also came to see the same multitude under the umbrella of “Evangelical Christianity,” especially the room for those who might label themselves progressive. Using biblical texts, I traced two separate philosophies in ministering to transgender parishioners: progressives and neotraditional. Transgender individuals often clash with traditional Christian theology that assumes the only legitimate expression of gender and sexuality is through the God-given male/female binary gender and heteronormative, marital sexual relationships. While many in the congregation might realize that individuals are desperately searching for hope and acceptance, parishioners are unwilling to set aside biblical teachings simply because cultural, medical, and scientific influences contradict the authority of Scriptures.

However, there are some progressive evangelical Christians who feel that the Scriptures have historically been misinterpreted to justify discrimination against various groups (e.g., the poor, women, ethnic, or religious minorities) and that “today it is being used to persecute lesbian,
gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.”¹⁰⁷ Some churches are changing and some congregations do not force parishioners to choose between belonging to a faith community and living their lives through a normative gender expression. There is a hope for reconciliation by those Christians who have recognized “we have tragically failed to notice our LGBT neighbors bleeding by the side of the road, mainly bleeding because of what we Christians had done to them while not even knowing we were doing it.”¹⁰⁸ There are congregations who will affirm, respect, and celebrate those expressions as a witness of God’s love that welcomes and calls all people to the table, whether that is a strict male/female gender expression or one that is expressed through an omigender paradigm that eliminates the gender binary altogether.

I discovered that there are no clear answers for gender expression in the themes of biblical reasoning in condemning or supporting transgender parishioners, other than faith in Jesus Christ. Redemption is not found in how closely a person’s gender identity aligns with their biologically determined sex at birth. Even among progressive evangelicals, there exists a disagreement regarding a gender binary, but the journey of redemption suggests that today, “Christians are to foster the kinds of relationships that will help us know and love and obey Jesus better than we did yesterday.”¹⁰⁹ Perhaps if Evangelicals find common ground in the death and promise of eternal life through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and offer a place of reconciliation and peace for transgender individuals that acknowledges their fearfully and wonderfully made

¹⁰⁸ Gushee, “Reconciling Evangelical Christianity with Our Sexual Minorities: Reframing the Biblical Discussion.” 53.
bodies, then all can find shelter under the umbrella of acceptance, redemptive love, and reconciliation.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Timeline of Transgender in the 20th Century

- 1952—Christine Jorgensen, former G.I., completed gender reassignment surgery
- 1954—Dr. Harry Benjamin popularized the usage of *transsexual, transsexualism* and *transsexualist* as psychological diagnoses
- 1965—Dr. John Oliven used *transgenderism* to replace *transsexualism*, arguing that the concept of sexuality could not account for the assumption that transsexuals were simply women born into the wrong body
- 1966—*The Transsexual Phenomenon* was published by Dr. Harry Benjamin, which included psychological and medical terminology for those individuals who did not identify with their medically designated sex at birth. Used *transsexual as an umbrella term*.
- 1969—Virginia Price uses terms *transgenderal* and *transgenderist* to describe the specific behavior of living fulltime in a chosen social gender role that was different from the gender role typically associated with birth-assigned sex, without undergoing gender reassignment surgery
- 1975—Oliven again used the term *transgender*, but now as a term that included transsexuals and transvestites
- 1975—Drs. Robert Hatcher and Joseph Pearson used the term *transgender* to define transsexuals seeking gender reassignment surgery
- 1975—*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* was released
- 1979—Jorgensen replaced *transsexual* with *transgender*
- 1980—*Herculine Barbin* was published
• Mid-1980’s—various groups began using *transgender* as an umbrella term for transsexuals, crossdressers, and many other gender-variant individuals

• 1992—*transgender* emerged as a generic term to describe gender-variant identities and communities

• 1998—Susan Stryker developed the umbrella term *transgender* used for research purposes
Appendix B: Transgender Umbrella

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