

# Gender Narcissism

by Bruce Bawer



## **How quickly the world has changed.**

When I was a young man in the 1980s and '90s, being gay was a serious social stigma—and worse. It could land you in prison. Coming out was an act of courage. It involved risks but it yielded wholeness.

I counted myself lucky when, in the late 1990s, I fell in love with a Norwegian. Although, under American law, he couldn't move to the United States to be with me, his country had enacted a partnership law in 1993 that made it possible for me to move to Norway to be with him.

I spent several years of my writing career trying to persuade Americans to support gay rights—and, in particular, to encourage parents to support their gay kids. (Back then, it was not uncommon for parents to throw their gay kids out into the street.) At times, this could be an unpleasant job. Appearing in the 1990s on call-in radio shows, I was regularly

targeted with verbal abuse by listeners who were outraged at the thought of, say, openly gay soldiers serving in the U.S. Army.

There was a plus side, too. Parents of gay kids wrote to thank me for bringing their families back together. Gay people said I'd saved their lives. I'm not saying this to brag, but to give a brief sense of what life was like for gay Americans a generation or so ago.

Anyway, though stressful, my endeavors ultimately proved worthwhile. Steadily, attitudes toward gay people improved. It was good to feel that I'd played a small part in that change.

When the United States finally did get same-sex marriage, I closed up shop. We'd won. Yes, hostility toward gay people still existed, but it was greatly diminished and plainly on its way out. I went on to write about other topics. So did other writers who'd fought the good fight.

## **Smooth Operators**

But the smooth operators—the self-seeking activist hustlers—stayed put. Having already rebranded the gay-rights movement with the letters “LGBT,” they repurposed it—with the help of clueless donors—as a megaphone for radical transsexual propaganda.

Now, being gay had never had anything to do with being trans. Nothing. Nada. Being gay is a relatively common sexual orientation; it's about whom you're attracted to and fall in love with. To be trans—to think you were born into the wrong sex—is to suffer from gender dysmorphia, which, until the current craze, was very rare.

There's no connection between the two things. Zero. But soon (as I discussed in an [article](#) last month) they were being yoked together everywhere. And it wasn't just transsexuality. Other letters were added into the mix: Q for queer or

questioning, I for intersex, A for asexual, and so on. Two-Spirit. [Demisexual](#). Graysexual. Poke around online and you'll find long lists of these terms.

Yes, some of these things really exist, but they are extremely rare. For example, there are a tiny number of asexuals—people who don't experience sexual attraction at all—but why would they even need a label? Why mark them as *not* experiencing something—let alone dedicate a movement to it? Who gets beat up or denied a job for being asexual? Similarly, one in 2,000 or so people is born intersex—with a combination of male and female body parts. Real transsexualism also occurs, but very infrequently.

Most of the other currently popular labels, however, are just newfangled nonsense. Most were invented the day before yesterday. So was the cockamamie notion that an individual can be called “they” or “them.” Yet the young people who slap these labels and pronouns onto themselves expect us to play along without the slightest discussion or debate. They scream bloody murder if someone else “dead-names” them or refuses to use their pronoun of choice. They're so spoiled they think they should be able to alter our society's understanding of basic facts of life by fiat, without a moment's challenge from anybody. This is the very height of vanity and arrogance.

Allow me to note, by the way, that in every few thousand people there *are* one or two who aren't chromosomally either XX or XY. They have Turner's syndrome (X0) or Klinefelter syndrome (XXY). There are even rarer chromosomal combinations, such as XYY and XXXY. But oddly, in all the contemporary talk of multiple genders, few people ever seem to mention these *authentic* biological variants.

## **The Gender Bandwagon**

To defend the kids who pounce onto these gender labels like a dog attacking a bone, a lot of them don't even realize that

all this stuff is brand-new. They hear about these labels from their friends and teachers; they see them used online. They read over and over that “gender identity is on a continuum,” with a potentially infinite number of variants. (From a [website](#) called “Teen Talk”: “There are many different gender identities, including male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, third gender, and all, none or a combination of these.”)

And so they climb on board. They’re too young and naïve to grasp that they’ve signed up for a bizarre, half-baked ideology that didn’t exist before they were born.

I suspect you don’t hear people in the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, or Ezbet el Haggana in Cairo, or the *favelas* of Rio, talking very much about the continuum of gender. No, this is the domain of privileged First World youth—Americans in particular. When Americans go to the supermarket, we expect to be able to choose among a couple of hundred brands of soft drinks, cookies, breakfast cereal, toothpaste, you name it. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that millions of young Americans would jump on the gender bandwagon, with its countless identity-label options. Why settle for less?

But why are they so quick to jump onboard? Because things have changed. Being gay, as I’ve mentioned, was once a stigma. Coming out took courage. Nowadays, being part of this relatively new alphabet community—which began its history with L for lesbian, G for gay, and B for bisexual, but has long since left gay men and women in the dust—is considered cool.

Cool! Being gay was never cool. It was about growing up feeling different, feeling strange, feeling alone. It was about going through a difficult process of self-discovery that ended with the recognition and acceptance that, yes, you were gay. And after that it was about going through another difficult process—that of coming out, one by one, to your

family and friends, some of whom, back in those days, inevitably would reject you, breaking your heart. This coming-out process usually didn't end until you were in your 20s, or later. Often it took much, much longer.

Today, by contrast, grabbing onto one of the letters in LGBTQIA+ is a style choice for teenagers and even for younger children. It's a way for people who are, in reality, nothing more than ordinary heterosexuals to feel exotic and interesting, to get attention and approval from everybody around them, and to instantly gain membership in the coolest of communities.

## Gender as Performance

When did heterosexuals start calling themselves queer? One of the pioneers on this wagon train to hell was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950-2009), who came up with what is called queer theory. Like critical race theory, it's not so much a theory as a set of inane propositions with no connection to reality. Sedgwick was a heterosexual woman married to a heterosexual man, and by all accounts they had a very conventional personal life. But she called herself queer. For her, the word had nothing to do with sexual orientation or sexual conduct. It was about being part of a supposedly subversive intellectual movement—this, even though she was, in succession, a famous professor at two very elite universities, Duke and New York University.

Sedgwick was what is today called “genderqueer.” In an article last October, *Cosmopolitan* [explained](#) that “[Genderqueer](#) refers to someone who enjoys playing with [the] political and activist sense of the experience of expressed gender.” Key word: *playing*. Being gay—coming out as gay—was never about “playing.” It was about opening up the most vulnerable part of yourself.

“A [genderqueer](#) person,” continues *Cosmo*, “may identify as

neither gender, both, or a combination. They do not subscribe to the traditional gender binary.” So it’s not about who you *really* are, in your heart of hearts, but about what you “subscribe to.” Meaning what? A sex therapist explained to *Cosmo* that “I identify as genderqueer, because a lot of times I feel like a woman, and a lot of times I feel like a dude who feels like wearing women’s clothes. Sometimes I feel like a dude who doesn’t wear women’s clothes. I think that it’s a complicated thing.”

No, it’s not complicated. By your own testimony, it’s about stuff like *clothes*. Interesting? Not remotely. If you’re driven to seek attention by yammering on about whether you dress like a woman or a man on any given day, you really have incredibly little to offer. Or so, at least, it should be in a sane world.

Another major influence on today’s gender narcissism is Judith Butler, a Berkeley professor who uses the pronoun “they” and whose 1990 book *Gender Trouble* encourages readers to view gender as a performance. Well, Butler has won. Years ago, seeking gay rights was, quite simply, about wanting to eliminate discrimination on the basis of a fundamental and profound aspect of one’s personal identity. Today’s alphabet soup of gender labels is, more often than not, nothing more than a very shallow way for otherwise uninteresting straight people to be noticed. In short, it’s all performance.

Years ago, when you came out as gay, you committed to something. Often, when kids today announce that they belong in this or that gender category, they also make a point of emphasizing the fluidity of these categories: as they put it, they’re “gender-fluid.” The idea is that they can put these labels on and take them off with ease, on a whim, like someone exchanging Nikes for Adidas. They think this fluidity makes them fascinating. In fact it just shows that deep down, none of this stuff really means anything to them. It’s frivolous attention-getting—and it’s piggy-backing onto something that

was, and is, serious and meaningful.

Years ago, when gay people of my generation came out, we didn't want to be cool. Or be loved by the world. Or to get attention. (The whole problem was that being gay got us *too much* attention—and of the wrong kind.) All we wanted, most of us—and I'm not talking about the relatively small number of radical activist types, but about the millions of ordinary gay men and women—was to be able to live our lives fully, freely, and in peace.

Now it's the opposite. There are no limits to what the alphabet-soup crowd demands. In 2021, when a man who claims to be a woman walks around buck naked in a spa for women and girls, anybody who dares to protest is accused of being a transphobe, a bigot, an enemy of "LGBT rights." This sort of outrage is the very antithesis of what we once campaigned for. It could not have less to do with two men or two women loving each other.

The current madness has other dire consequences. A large percentage of kids who, a couple of decades ago, would have recognized themselves as gay are today likely instead to be persuaded by all the trans PR, and by parents and teachers and psychologists who are in thrall to the current fads, that they're members of the opposite sex. The results: 1) a partial erasure of homosexuality and 2) needlessly confused young gay people—some of whom, thinking falsely that they'll be happier with a different, if fake, set of genitals and gonads and secondary sex characteristics, will submit themselves to surgical mutilation.

Where will all this gender narcissism lead? Nothing remains cool forever: that's the nature of cool. The pendulum never stops swinging. Eventually it will swing back. There will be a blowback against all this. And it'll hit gay people like me, too. And any gay people who have encouraged this mischief will deserve what they get.