

Good afternoon,

I am Dr. Leo Taylor – a public speaker, social justice educator, writer, performer, artist, and Columbus resident. I'm a biologist and entomologist with two degrees from Ball State University and a PhD from Cornell University. I'm also a transsexual who began my outward gender transition 24 years ago to masculinize my body so that it matches my gender – the gender that we collectively call “man.”

I knew without a doubt by at least the age of 8 that I was not a girl despite having a female body. My identity has never been uncertain – I've always known this about myself. The helping and medical professionals who I met in my early 20's were never uncertain about my identity and the treatments I received likely saved my life. I wish they had been available to me much sooner. When my breasts started to develop I would punch them or hit them with hard objects hoping I might cause enough harm that they would go away or need to be removed. This was in the 80's before the internet - I was an isolated child in distress with no support from anyone with knowledge about the issue I was experiencing. I desperately needed support and resources but instead I was forced to live a very strict life and adhere to rigid gender norms.

You see, I was raised Pentecostal and forced to live according to strict gender rules. As a girl I wasn't allowed to wear pants or cut my hair. Women in the church aren't allowed to wear makeup or jewelry or even participate in certain activities such as preaching. Men and women of the church are to look and behave differently and deviating from the norm is an indication that you're doing something wrong. As a teen struggling daily to understand why I didn't feel like a girl but had to pretend to be one this caused me a tremendous amount of suffering. It was like I had been typecast for the wrong role in a play – it felt like I was swimming upstream every single day.

As if the daily internal struggle wasn't enough, when my church community found out about my struggles in 1991 the entire congregation laid their hands on me and tried to perform an exorcism – I was told my confusion was nothing more than a demonic possession. When I experienced no relief, I decided enough was enough and I attempted suicide. I was only 16.

I'm only one of hundreds of thousands of trans people who attempt suicide at some point in our lives – the statistic is staggering – more than 41%. Compare that to less than 1% of the general population. Does this imply that something is inherently wrong with trans people? I would argue that depression and anxiety are normal responses to a toxic society that is actively seeking to deny you the basic right to exist.

The interesting thing is, I don't think anti-trans legislation is even about trans people. It's about intolerance to difference and holding on tightly to rigid gender norms – norms that harm EVERYONE, not just trans people.

Gender dysphoria is the distress that many trans people experience when their body and gender do not align. It's what motivated my own transition. I believe gender dysphoria is not unique to trans people. The reason gender dysphoria exists is because we have a culture that perpetuates gender stereotypes that affect everyone, including nontrans people. Why else would we have a global breast augmentation industry worth \$3 billion – a market that's expected to grow to 5.34 billion by 2023<sup>1</sup>? Thousands of teenage girls get rhinoplasty each year to conform to conventional beauty standards. Teenage girls are even allowed to get breast augmentation and for what purpose? Most cosmetic surgery reality shows,

such as Netflix's *Botched*, feature remorseful nontrans people who had unnecessary cosmetic procedures as teens. While surgeries for trans people are commonly referred to as gender affirmation surgery, I think there are far more and more concerning gender conformation surgeries happening with nontrans people. Where will your laws stop? If you ban trans teens from access to life-saving care, will you also stop letting 16 year old girls get nose and boob jobs? What about other alterations? Whose bodies are you going to outlaw next? Shouldn't every person have the right to bodily autonomy given that one typically needs to feel good in their body if they are to pursue a life of liberty and joy.

What I see happening here is nothing more than an attempt to police bodies according to gender norms that were established long ago by people who lived very differently – norms that are always in a constant state of adaptation – just look at how gender has evolved over the past 100 years. Change is inevitable. Preventing trans children from having access to care will not put an end to transness. The problem isn't the trans person, the problem is the system that labels transness as abnormal. You see, all natural variation is normal, just because something is less common doesn't mean it's pathological.

Creating and enforcing strict rules about "doing gender" in our society is rooted in the assumption that there is a correct way to do gender. That belief harms everyone, just ask any nontrans person who has been bullied for stepping outside of the gender lines. Legislation such as HS68 seeks nothing more than to outlaw difference yet difference is not a crime and should not be illegal.

Banning doctors from making educated decisions suggests a profound lack of trust with the medical community. My question for you is who are you to decide what qualified doctors and other healthcare practitioners can recommend for their patients? Are you inserting your opinions into the relationships of nontrans people and their doctors? Is that the role of government?

I always wonder if I might have suffered less or even decided not to medically transition if I had been raised with a less rigid view of gender. Would I have more closely identified with boys if the things that made me "boy-like" were also acceptable for girls? Would I have felt the need to transition if I had more freedom to express myself? I don't know. But what I do know is that every person deserves to make decisions for themselves and their body – even if they later regret certain decisions, because the alternative is self-loathing, shame, and even suicide. I believe every person deserves to live in a body that they feel is worth celebrating and I'm tired of seeing trans children and adults die at their own hands because of intolerance and white supremacy.

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