

Phyllis Schlafly: Transgender Hero

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The woman who is widely credited as the successful champion of the anti-Equal Rights Amendment campaign in the 1970s is the hero that the transgender community needs. Yes, Phyllis Schlafly, conservative Republican activist and founder of the Eagle Forum and STOP-ERA movement, has inadvertently articulated the importance of transgender rights through her many years as a gender privilege activist. Ultimately, Schlafly and transgender activists have been saying the same thing for years: men and women deserve the legal right to be celebrated and validated in their gender category. The main distinction between these two parties, however, is a different interpretation of gender and what it means to be male or female.

A novice Republican politician and radio commentator during the 1950s and 1960s, Schlafly's political career and advocacy for gender privilege truly began with her STOP-ERA movement during the 1970s.¹ Originally written by Alice Paul and Crystal Eastman and introduced to Congress in 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) proposed ending laws that excluded women from legal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities.² The three sections of the ERA state:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.³

Many of these laws, such as alimony and the exemption of women from the military draft, were originally designed with the intent to give women special benefits and protections. Reintroduced in 1972, the ERA was passed by the House, Senate, and President of the United States and was seemingly on its way to being ratified; then Schlafly stepped in. On July 7, 1972, Phyllis Schlafly began an uphill national campaign against the ERA—twenty-eight of the thirty-eight states needed to ratify the amendment had already voted to support it.⁴ Just two months after launching her anti-ERA campaign, Schlafly's movement gained traction. In St. Louis on September 26, 1972 one hundred prominent women gathered from across the country to discuss anti-ERA strategies, which gave birth to the Stop Taking Our Privileges (STOP-ERA) movement.⁵

Schlafly's STOP-ERA movement, primarily composed of middle-aged religious housewives, focused and led a serious backlash against the ERA. The STOP-ERA movement insisted that ratification of the ERA would lead to homosexual marriage and taxpayer-funded abortions.⁶ The core of the STOP-ERA movement, though, was that gender privileges for women would cease to exist upon ratification of the amendment. Ratification, Schlafly argued, would lead to women in combat, unisex bathrooms, elimination of social security benefits for widows, and would have drastic consequences for housewives as they lacked skills necessary for the working world.⁷

By using what would today be defined as traditional gender symbols, such as women cooking and cleaning, Schlafly was able to rally support for her anti-ERA movement. Her supporters were known for taking homemade goods to state legislators and using slogans such as "Preserve us from a congressional jam; Vote against the ERA sham" and "I am for Mom and apple pie."⁸ Ultimately, Schlafly's 'womanly' rhetoric was successful. The ERA died in 1982 ten years after the House, Senate, and President of the United

¹ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (New Jersey: Princeton, 2005), 4.

² Graham Noble, "The Rise and Fall of the Equal Rights Amendment." *History Review* no. 72 (March 2012), 30-33.

³ Barbara Brown and Thomas Emerson. "The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights for Women." *The Law Yale Journal* 80, no. 5 (1971), 871-985.

⁴ Critchlow, *Grassroots Conservatism*, 215-216, 219.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 225-229. Critchlow, *Grassroots Conservatism*, 218.

⁷ Carol Felsenthal, *The sweetheart of the silent majority: the biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (Doubleday, 1981), 243-245.

⁸ Critchlow, *Grassroots Conservatism*, 224-225. Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*, 225.

States had passed it. Even though the deadline for ratifying the amendment had been extended an additional three years and 63% of Americans were in support of the amendment, Schlafly's arguments and charm proved too compelling.⁹ To this day the ERA has yet to be passed, even though it has been reintroduced to Congress several times.

Pro-ERA groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) couldn't withstand Schlafly's army of mobilized housewives. Schlafly enticed women to join her movement by turning the ERA, which was truly a battle about economic inequality surrounding women, into a battle over womanhood and what it means to be a woman. The women who were the most vocal leaders of the pro-ERA movement, though from all different socioeconomic backgrounds, were predominantly single, career women, making them targetable to the STOP-ERA women who were primarily married housewives.¹⁰ STOP-ERA demonized the pro-ERA movement by extrapolating what had been traditionally associated with womanhood, being a wife and mother, and portraying the ERA and its supporters as the farthest thing from these values. The heart of Schlafly's arguments can be summed up in her commentary on the *Today Show* in 1977, "(The ERA) would treat women exactly the same as men, and women don't want to be treated exactly the same as men."¹¹

What Schlafly defined as 'woman' during the 1970s and 1980s and what is defined as 'woman' today is not totally congruent, though. 'Woman' during the 1970s and early 1980s would have generally only referred to one's sex as opposed to one's gender. Until the 1950s, gender and sex were synonymous terms that both referred to one's biological being.¹² It was psychologist and sexologist, John Money, who first suggested that sex referred to one's biology and that gender referred to one's emotional identity. In his journal articles published in the 1950s, Money explored the biology of gender and sex based on his research on Hermaphroditism.¹³ Gender, Money argued, is a

social response to one's identity, which is the view widely accepted today in the United States.¹⁴

In essence, Money and most other gender researchers agree that sex is something that *we are* while gender is something that *we do*.¹⁵ Individuals are born with male or female genitalia, but to truly become a man or a woman, they must achieve that gender status. Gender roles, a term coined by Money himself, are our own response to sex and identity. Gender, too, is not choosing Barbie dolls over trucks or pink over blue. We are constantly doing gender; we are responding to an innate desire to be identified as we see ourselves. As Simone de Beauvoir, an influential contributor to the second wave of feminism, wrote in her book, *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."¹⁶

John Money's research on the distinction between sex and gender was pushed out even further during the 1960s by the work of sexologist Harry Benjamin, who was one of the first to study transsexualism in depth. Benjamin's book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, published in 1966, popularized the term "transsexual."¹⁷ Transsexual during the 1960s was synonymous for what is today defined as transgender, referring to people whose gender is not identical to their sex.¹⁸ The term transgender also became popular during the 1960s as psychiatrist John F. Oliven, who coined the term, noted that sexuality did not necessarily dictate gender.¹⁹ It wasn't until the 1970s when the term became more mainstream thanks to Virginia Prince, a transgender woman herself.²⁰

Today, as opposed to what was happening during the major push for the ERA, there are two

¹⁴ Rebecca F. Plante, *Doing Gender Diversity: Readings in Theory and Real-World Experience*. (Boulder: Westview 2010), 5-8.

Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Masculine, Feminine or Human? An Overview of the Sociology of Sex Roles*. (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1974), 2-15.
Sarah L. Crawley, Lara J. Foley, and Constance L. Shehan. *Gendering Bodies*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 1-25.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Simone De. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (New York: Knopf, Reprint 2010), 283.

¹⁷ Charles L Ihlenfeld, "Harry Benjamin and Psychiatrists," *Journal Of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1/2 (January 2004): 147-152.

¹⁸ Jack Drescher, "Queer Diagnoses: Parallels and Contrasts in History of Homosexuality, Gender Variance, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39, no. 2 (September 2009): 427-260.

¹⁹ John Oliven, "Book Reviews and Notices: Sexual Hygiene and Pathology". *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 250, no. 2 (August 1965): 235.

²⁰ Drescher, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 435-436.

⁹ Marlee Richards, *America in the 1970s*. (Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2010), 63.

¹⁰ Critchlow, *Grassroots Conservatism*, 221.

¹¹ "Phyllis Schlafly and the ERA" *NBC Today Show* (TV show), New York, NY: NBC Universal, (August 8, 1977.)

¹² Vern L. Bullough, "The Contributions of John Money: A Personal View," *Journal Of Sex Research* 40, no. 3 (August 2003): 230-236.

¹³ Ibid.

primary and well-known classifications of people in regard to sex/gender categories. Transgender, as previously mentioned, refers to one who has a gender that is not the same as their sex. The other, and by far the most common classification of people by sex and gender, is cisgender, people whose gender and sex are congruent with one another. First used in an essay of German sexologist Volkmar Sigusch in 1998, cisgender is still a relatively new classification for gender for one whose gender and sex are the same.²¹ The term didn't become popular in the United States until 2007 with writer and activist Julia Serano's book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*.²²

Adhering to the culture and language of her time, when Schlafly launched her gender privilege crusade she would have only been referring to 'woman' in cisgender terms, assuming that sex and gender are aligned so fully that they are synonymous terms. To this day, Schlafly still advocates for gender privilege under the guise that sex and gender are one and the same. Given the understanding of gender commonly held today in the United States and the discrimination and prejudice surrounding the transgender community, Schlafly and the STOP-ERA's rhetoric towards the importance of gender privilege is even more pertinent.

Schlafly's claim that women don't want to be treated exactly the same as men is absolutely correct. Legally protected gender privilege is a necessary and affirming aspect of culture that validates identity, especially for those who have a harder time reaching the achieved status of gender, such as transgender people. Institutions, clubs, and organizations that grant gender privilege, truly on the basis of gender and not just sex, allow transgender people to be recognized and celebrated in the gender that they know they are. In an era where female gender no longer just refers to the female sex, perhaps Schlafly statement from the *Today Show* could be rephrased as "transwomen don't want to be treated exactly the same as men, they want to be treated as women."

²¹ Volkmar Sigusch, "The Neosexual Revolution." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, (August 1998): 331.
Drescher, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 438.

²² Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. (Seal Press, 2007.), 164-165.
Drescher, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 447.

The influence of in-group and out-group dynamics reinforce the importance and significance of gender privilege as a means of validation of identity for transgender individuals. In essence, humans have two basic groups of people: in-group and out-group. Typically, in-groups and out-groups work on a fairly straightforward basis: if you're like me you're in the in-group and if you're unlike me, you're in the out-group.²³ Being a part of an in-group, particularly those that are well-known and respected, is beneficial for individuals participating. By associating themselves with a group, one is attempting to improve their self-esteem by surrounding themselves with people who like them.²⁴ Consequently, individuals will then attribute more positive characteristics to the members of their in-group, which is known as the in-group bias.²⁵ Therefore, if transgender people are accepted and integrated into in-groups of their gender, such as all female or all male groups, there will be a more positive perception of them, which will come both from the in-group and from within themselves.

The positive perception of people within one's in-group is also supported by the psychology of the ethnocentric attribution bias. Essentially, the ethnocentric attribution bias states that people like people more who look and act like them, born out of an evolutionary response to form groups for survival.²⁶ The preference for people in one's in-group, too, is physiological. Research conducted by social psychologists De Dreu, Greer, Van Kleef, Shalvi, and Hadngraaf has shown that when exposed to oxytocin—a hormone released in the body by touch and interaction that increases bonding—people respond more favorably to members of their in-group.²⁷ Oxytocin, the "love drug" or "cuddle drug" as it is often affectionately referred to, consequently aids in the bonding of groups. Therefore, the legal incorporation of transgender individuals into their desired gender

²³ Elliot Aronson, Tim Wilson, Robin Akert, *Social Psychology*. (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2013), 371, 437-466.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Joseph G Weber, "The nature of ethnocentric attribution bias: Ingroup protection or enhancement?." *Journal Of Experimental Social Psychology* 30, no. 5 (September 1994): 482.

²⁷ Carsten K. De Dreu, Lindred L. Greer, Gerben A. Van Kleef, Shaul Shalvi, and Michel J. Handgraaf. "Oxytocin Promotes Human Ethnocentrism." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States* 108, no. 4 (January 10, 2011): 1262-266.
doi:10.1073/pnas.1015316108.

groups will once again increase acceptance among cisgender individuals.

Individuals in one's respective out-group, however, are deemed homogenous with the other members of the out-group and are viewed less favorably than members of the in-group—a phenomenon social psychologists call “out-group homogeneity.”²⁸ People like individuals who are in their group more and people who are outside of their group less, in essence. The response, once again, is physiological as well as psychological. As oxytocin increases favor for members of one's in-group, it also increases contempt for one's out-group.²⁹ For the transgender community, that means that as long as they are viewed as a third category of people rather than as male or female, there will continue to be prejudice and discrimination against them. Simply acknowledging the identity of a transgender individual is not enough; only integration and public acknowledgement of their in-group status will increase favoritism and acceptance of transgender people.

Members of the transgender community who are seeking to be identified as male or female don't want to be treated as an “other,” out-group, or a third category of people, they want to be treated as the gender they identify with, which is how they see themselves. Intentional places where transgender people can be a part of their gender in-group, such as sororities, locker rooms, dormitories and housing will generate a more positive response to members of the trans community, which will ultimately increase favoritism and acceptance.

Just recently the importance of in-groups, gender privilege, and their validation for the transgender community were brought to the public eye when transgender activist Caitlyn Jenner became one of *Glamour* magazine's women of the year. In 2015, the Olympic hero who appeared on Wheaties boxes for years as the male super-athlete, Bruce Jenner, transitioned into the female, Caitlyn Jenner, which she had known herself to be for years.³⁰ Although a controversial figure for many reasons, the response to Jenner's transition, both positive and negative, has illustrated the importance

of gender privilege and the inclusion of transgender women in the in-group of women.

The very nomination of Jenner for the award illustrated the power of gender privilege for the transgender community. An award that could only be given to someone of the female gender, being honored as one of *Glamour*'s women of the year, showed the power of intentional recognition of gender. It was a defining moment that validated Jenner's identity as the woman that she is. That, in essence, is what gender privilege should look like and what it has the power to do for the transgender community. In that moment, Jenner was treated and identified as a woman and not like a man.

After receiving the award, however, Jenner came under fire when in an interview with the social news hub *Buzzfeed*, she said that, “the hardest part of being a woman is deciding what to wear.”³¹ Enraged, men and women alike condemned Jenner for her comment, claiming that she lacked a real understanding of what it means to be ‘woman’. The award itself, too, was controversial as Jenner's primary claim to fame is her transition, which many would also argue lacks a certain understanding of being a woman.

Like Schlafly's use of traditional gender symbols in her crusade to stop the ERA, Jenner's use of traditional gender symbols are validating, yet met with opposition. Dresses, makeup, and long hair, things that are traditionally associated with womanhood, while affirming for Jenner as they confirm her status as a woman, conflict with feminists who seek to do away with traditional gender symbols. To Schlafly's glee, it is also why transgenderism has the potential to undo the work of feminists, who are ironically also the transgender community's biggest proponents. As the feminist movement has fought for decades to eradicate the lower status of women in society, which is often perpetuated by traditional views of women, the transgender community is able to find strength and comfort in traditional gender symbols and scripts as their distinction leaves no ambiguity and provides a concrete representation of their gender.

Women and men undoubtedly want and deserve to have the same economic, political and

²⁸ Aronson, Wilson, Akert, *Social Psychology*, 437-466

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Katy Steinmetz, and Daniel D'addario. "Caitlyn Jenner." *Time* 186, no. 25/26 (December 21, 2015): 144-150.

³¹ Katia Hetter, "Glamour Woman of the Year Award Returned by 9/11 Widower - CNN.com." CNN. November 17, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/living/widower-911-officer-glamour-award-caitlyn-jenner-feat/index.html>.

social rights, regardless of sex or gender, which is something that both feminists and anti-feminists should agree on, but often don't. But women and men alike want to be treated differently. The problem lies in achieving equality while honoring difference, which is why feminists and anti-feminists are so frequently in conflict with one another. By losing gender privilege, men and women lose an aspect of culture that is affirming to their identity. Yet when gender privilege exists, it is incredibly validating for some, but excluding for others. Humans have a paradoxical need in which they want to be treated like everyone else, to have equality and fairness, but at the same time desire to feel unique and special.

In regard to the ERA, the failed ratification of the ERA is not something that is to be celebrated nor condemned. No law or amendment can truly guarantee equality under the law, especially since it is difficult to quantify what is equal. Even if the ERA were ratified today, it still would not guarantee protection to all women. Section I of the ERA states that:

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”³²

Transwomen, women who have a male sex but a female gender, are not protected from discrimination given that they may still be marginalized on account of their gender. If ratified, the ERA would extend to women by sex only, which means that transgender people can still be targets of discrimination. True equality for women must extend beyond the basis of sex; it must be on the basis of gender as well.

There are claims, including from Schlafly herself, that gender must always be congruent with sex as dictated by biology.³³ These claims marginalize the transgender community and pose the notion that their identity is a “phase” or a persona. Part of the confusion and hostility comes from the misidentification of drag kings and queens in relation to transgender people. Drag kings and queens are cisgender individuals who choose to dress in clothing of the opposite gender as a form of

theatre or performance.³⁴ Transgender individuals, however, choose to dress in clothing that is considered to be misaligned from their sex as a means of claiming and expressing their identity. In essence, drag is a performance put on by cisgender individuals, while transgender individuals choose to dress in clothing counter-intuitive to their sex to express identity. One is a performance and the other is a response to identity.

As a relatively new field of study, there is still much that is unknown and misunderstood about gender. Undoubtedly, there is evidence that biology plays a role in the construction of gender as Schlafly and other STOP-ERA members would argue, which is evident by the effects of sex, testosterone, and estrogen on a person's character. Aggression, for example, which is a characteristic most often associated with men, is linked to testosterone, the male sex hormone. When both male and female individuals have higher levels of testosterone, they become more aggressive.³⁵ On the other hand, when men are in roles such as child-caring, testosterone decreases; child-caring is a characteristic often associated with womanhood.³⁶

In addition, there is increasing evidence from neurological data that estrogen plays a role in shaping the prefrontal cortex—the portion of the brain that contributes to memory, which could explain why men can never remember that anniversary, birthday, or special event.³⁷ Beyond hormones, the results of a 2015 twin study published in the *International Journal of Transgenderism* revealed that 20% of the identical pairs of twins participating in the study *both identified as transgender* while 0% of the fraternal twins participating identified as transgender, which

³⁴ Stephen L Mann, "Drag Queens' Use of Language and the Performance of Blurred Gendered and Racial Identities." *Journal Of Homosexuality* 58, no. 6/7 (July 2011): 793-811.

³⁵ Aronson, Wilson, Akert, *Social Psychology*, 399.

³⁶ Bonnie Rochman, "Why Fathers Have Lower Levels of Testosterone | TIME.com." Time. September 13, 2011. <http://healthland.time.com/2011/09/13/why-do-dads-have-lower-levels-of-testosterone/>.

³⁷ Sarah J.Duff and Elizabeth Hampson, "A Beneficial Effect of Estrogen on Working Memory in Postmenopausal Women Taking Hormone Replacement Therapy." *Hormones and Behavior* 38, no. 4 (December 2000): 262-76. doi:10.1006/hbeh.2000.1625.

Rosemarie Krug, Jan Born, and Björn Rasch. "A 3-day estrogen treatment improves prefrontal cortex-dependent cognitive function in postmenopausal women." *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 31, no. 8 (September 2006): 965-975.

³² Brown and Emerson, *The Law Yale Journal*, 871.

³³ Brian Tashman, "Phyllis Schlafly On Trans Rights: It's Just Plain Nuts" *Right Wing Watch*. (February 23, 2015): <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/phyllis-schlafly-trans-rights-its-just-plain-nuts>.

suggests that one's response to gender may have some biological influence.³⁸

The role of biology in the construction of gender is also evident by the use of hormone replacement therapy to treat gender dysphoria, another conundrum in the debate over the role of nurture over nature in regard to gender. Gender dysphoria refers to the anxiety and stress that one feels in regard to their sex and gender, most commonly referring to transgender individuals. Although currently classified as a mental health disorder in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), many are petitioning that gender dysphoria be removed from the list, claiming that the dysphoria one feels is a social response rather than a biological one.³⁹ Social activists argue that individuals feel gender dysphoria, in essence, because the gender binary is too strict and that labeling it as a mental disorder only contributes to the stigma surrounding the transgender community.⁴⁰ Thus, activists argue that broader acceptance of transgender individuals from society is the cure to gender dysphoria rather than a physiological anecdote.

What is clear is that gender—how one knows whether they are male or female—is not totally a biological or a social response, which is evident by the presence of the transgender community. If gender is totally a social response and has nothing to do with biology, then how can one feel “trapped in the wrong body” as so often many transgender people do? If gender is totally a social response, then one could simply choose to identify or reject the gender of their choosing on a whim, and who wouldn't choose to respond to the gender that matched with their sex and avoid prejudice and discrimination? On the other hand, if gender is only a matter of biology and meant to be congruent with sex, then this only gives more weight to the premise that one could feel “trapped in the wrong body.” If purely biological, there has

to be physiological reasons why someone would identify as female but have a male body or vice versa.

Biologist and transgender activist Julia Serano's transmanifesto *Whipping Girl* is founded on the principle of an interconnected relationship of biological and social factors constructing one's gender identity. Serano's second tenant of her Intrinsic Inclinations Model for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression states that “these gender inclinations are, to some extent, intrinsic to our persons... and generally remain intact despite societal influences and conscious attempts by individuals to purge, repress or ignore them.”⁴¹ Her third tenant, too, states that there has yet to be a single factor found as the determinant for gender identity, thus drawing the conclusion that there are a wide variety of factors in the construction of gender identity.⁴²

Gender privilege, of course, is a complicated and tricky road to walk down. As with any type of privilege, someone is likely to be excluded. In regard to gender privilege, the group that is excluded are those who identify as pangender, trigender, bigender, gender fluid, and other non-binary gender categories. Non-binary gender activists, people who do not believe in or identify as the traditional male/female understanding of gender, condemn binary or traditional views of genders because it is alienating for people who don't identify as only one gender, different genders over time, or no gender at all.

Just as Schlafly has inadvertently articulated the importance of gender privilege for the transgender community, non-binary gender activists are inadvertently slowing the progress for the transgender community. The transgender community is constantly fighting the common perception that their identity is a simple matter of choice or a phase. Additionally, transgender people are frequently in conflict with a society that refuses to recognize them as the gender they identify as and instead by their sex. Advocating that gender is “fluid” is demeaning and harmful to the transgender narrative that *knows* that they are one gender as opposed to another. Additionally, if gender is more discretionary and malleable as non-binary gender activists claim, then this only gives more weight to

³⁸ Milton Diamond, "Transsexuality Among Twins: Identity Concordance, Transition, Rearing, and Orientation." *International Journal Of Transgenderism* 14, no. 1 (January 2012): 24-38. doi: 10.1080/15532739.2013.750222

³⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, (2013.) 451-461.

⁴⁰ Drescher, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 444-445.

⁴¹ Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 99-100.

⁴² *Ibid.*

the argument that individuals should be categorized on the basis of sex as opposed to gender, because sex is the more constant and defined of the two.

Institutional recognition of one's gender is the key to acceptance for both cis and trans individuals, which is why gender privilege is so essential. Public recognition, however, is also the key to acceptance for individuals who are lacking a binary gender. For individuals who identify as pangender, bigender, trigender, or gender fluid they, too, need intentional public spaces of recognition for their gender identity. A third category of gender classification for non-binary individuals allows non-binary individuals to be with people who don't want to be defined as strictly male or female. Unlike similar suggestions made for members of the transgender community, incorporating a third category of gender into society for non-binary individuals grants them the opportunity to be in places where they are undefined, which is in sharp contrast to members of the transgender community who are seeking to be recognized and identified within the binary gender categories of male and female.

One way that third category, non-binary gender categorization is already happening in the United States and other western countries is through the integration and use of gender-neutral pronouns. In the United States, as opposed to traditional gender pronouns such as he, she, his, or hers, several pronouns have been introduced that go beyond using just the gender-neutral plural "they." These pronouns include, ze, hir, hirs, and hirsself.⁴³ Other examples of non-binary gender integration include the use of "other" categories for surveys, removing "girl" and "boy" from the labeling of toys and clothing, and as Schlafly predicted, the creation of unisex bathrooms.⁴⁴

Moving away from categories, especially ones so defined as gender, is not the answer to reducing inequality between genders. The concept in itself is unlikely, if not impossible. Humans are constantly creating schemas, which are mental categories to help them know how to respond to

their surroundings.⁴⁵ Schemas, in essence, are why humans are not startled every time they encounter something new; they have knowledge of that category that guides them in the appropriate response. One knows something is not harmful because they have created a category for it.⁴⁶

Gender, one of the most basic categories, is essential. And its power can be validated by testimonies of both cis and trans individuals. Paige Abendroth's story on the National Public Radio podcast *Invisibilia* is a strong indication of the power of categorization. For a portion of her life, Paige identified as bigender, someone who identifies as two genders at the same time. During that period, Paige felt anxiety, depression, and utter disgust with herself. She felt as if she didn't belong to either category. Now a transwoman, Paige leads a much happier life. According to Paige, "It's so much easier and more manageable. The world, to me, makes so much more sense." For Paige and other transgender individuals, life with a category or life between categories is better than life with no categories.

Asking one to describe why they know they are the gender, the category, that they are is like asking a fish to describe water — it's fairly intangible, and the tangible ideas that are understood are often rejected because they are too stereotypical or not sufficient to truly express the depth of masculinity or femininity. It's a concept that will undoubtedly be fought over until new research in the field of psychology, biology or neurology emerges. As Paige Abendroth describes the seemingly intangible phenomenon, "It's a profound sense of knowing. You don't even have to think about it right now to know..."⁴⁷

Schlafly, although controversial in many regards, has got it right when it comes to gender. As Schlafly predicted, not only is the United States at a crossroads in which traditional ideas of gender are beginning to disappear, but her claims of the value of gender privilege as something worth holding on to are valid too. Gender privilege is important for cis and trans people alike who are seeking to increase their self-esteem by associating themselves with a group. As the understanding of gender has

⁴³ Jay Nordlinger, "What Are Your Pronouns?," *National Review* 67, no. 20 (November 2, 2015): 26-28.

⁴⁴ Alejandro Alba, "Amazon Goes Gender Neutral, Removes 'Boys' & 'Girls' Labels," *NY Daily News*, May 7, 2015. [://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/amazon-gender-neutral-removes-boys-girls-labels-article-1.2214550](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/amazon-gender-neutral-removes-boys-girls-labels-article-1.2214550).

⁴⁵ Aronson, Wilson, Akert, *Social Psychology*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ "The Power of Categories." In *Invisibilia*. National Public Radio. (February 6, 2015.)

⁴⁷ Ibid

evolved, though, so must the understanding and definition of gender privilege. Legislators must extend gender privilege to people by their gender and not just by their sex, along with creating spaces of intentional recognition of those without a defined gender. Ultimately, this is the beginning of a revolutionary time; a new era that is redefining what it means to live in full spirit with the body; and perhaps, too, in the midst of a new ERA that can help eliminate prejudice on more than just the basis of sex.

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