



Written by [Laurence M. Vance](#) on April 23, 2018

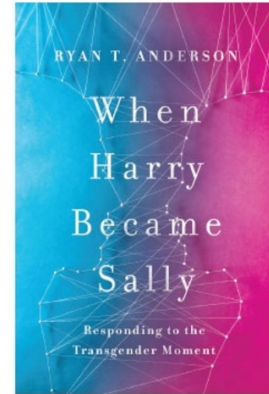
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Desire Doesn't Drive Reality

From the print edition of The New American

When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment, by Ryan T. Anderson, New York: Encounter Books, 2018, vii + 251 pages, hardcover.

In February of this year, something happened in a courtroom that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. A judge in Ohio ordered that a 17-year-old girl — who identifies as a boy — be taken from the custody of her parents and be given to her grandparents. And what was the great crime of the parents? The parents refused to call their daughter by her new masculine name and would not authorize her to undergo hormone treatments to begin the transition from female to “male,” thus triggering “suicidal thoughts” in the teenager. The Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, where the teenager has been treated since 2016, advised the court that she should start treatments as soon as possible to decrease her suicide risk. The court ordered that before any hormone treatment is allowed, the teenager should be evaluated by a psychologist on “the issue of consistency in the child’s gender presentation, and feelings of non-conformity.”



America is in the midst of a “transgender moment.” Some high-profile men have transitioned to being “women.” *Glamour* magazine named biological men Women of the Year in 2014 and 2015. More than 500 companies that have been listed on the Fortune 500 offer “transgender-inclusive healthcare coverage.” Facebook lists 56 gender options for users. Especially disturbing is the existence of 45 pediatric gender clinics around the country. Court decrees involving children such as the one in Ohio are sure to continue. More and more Americans are accepting the pseudo-science of the transgender ideology for fear of being labeled bigots.

This is why America needs *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, by Ryan T. Anderson. It truly draws on “the best insights from biology, psychology, and philosophy” to expose “the contrast between the media’s sunny depiction of gender fluidity and the often sad reality of living with gender dysphoria,” as the book’s dust jacket maintains.



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Anderson is a rising star among cultural conservatives. He is the William E. Simon Senior Research Fellow in American Principles & Public Policy at the Heritage Foundation, where he “researches and writes about marriage, bioethics, religious liberty and political philosophy.” Anderson’s new book’s clever title is based on the classic 1989 romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally*, starring Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan, in which is explored the question of whether men and women can ever be “just friends.” *When Harry Became Sally* contains eight chapters, preceded by an introduction that nicely summarizes each chapter and followed by a conclusion, acknowledgments, 29 pages of notes, and an index.

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Chapter one looks at “recent developments in popular culture that have changed American opinion on gender identity,” “legal developments during the Obama administration that redefined ‘sex’ as ‘gender identity,’” and how medical practice has shifted “away from good medical practice and into what is becoming a transgender-affirmative mainstream.” Chapter two examines the thinking behind the transgender ideology by letting transgender activists speak for themselves, looks at transgender medicine, and explores transgender policy relating to restroom usage, school lessons, and the criminalization of “misgendering” someone. Chapter three contains the stories of six individuals who transitioned to the opposite sex and came to regret it because it “didn’t bring the peace and wholeness they sought, but only new problems.” Chapter four answers questions about “our nature as a sexually dimorphic species,” “how development as male or female begins at conception,” and “the many biological differences that result” from being either male or female. Chapter five looks at “gender dysphoria,” “sex reassignment” therapy, and the causes of “transgender identities.” Chapter six examines “gender dysphoria” in children and the experimental and frightening therapies that are being used to treat it. Chapter seven traces “our cultural gender confusion to its roots in gender theory and in certain strains of feminist thinking.” Chapter eight assesses the evils of gender identity policies as they relate to privacy, safety, equality, liberty, and ideology.

Anderson points out that the problem with transgender activists is not just the agenda they pursue, but about “coercing the rest of us to go along with a radical ideology.” They seek to use the power of the state “to send the message that traditional convictions about human nature are false, discriminatory, and rooted in animus.” They want to penalize “Americans who believe that we are created male and female.” Any dissent is “irrational, bigoted, and unjust.” The majority who do not identify as transgender must conform. High-school girls can have no advance notice that a boy who identifies as a girl will be undressing in their locker room. Transgender students should never be forced to use a private restroom. Students who feel uncomfortable sharing facilities with a transgender student are the ones who should be directed to use alternative facilities. Parents not only have no right to know that their child will be sharing a shower or hotel room with a student who identifies as transgender, but also that their child is identifying as transgender.

One does not have to be a medical doctor to understand Anderson’s explanation of what makes us a man or a woman. Sex is not “assigned” at birth, it is determined at fertilization. Males are determined by the presence of a Y chromosome (XY) and females are determined by the absence of a Y chromosome (XX). This has been known since 1921. No one is born in the bodily form of another gender. It is universally true that the male fertilizes the egg cells of the female. But these are not the only differences between males and females. Male and female bodies also differ in “size, shape, bone length



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and density, fat distribution, musculature, and various organs including the brain.” Anderson concludes that “there are biological differences between men and women, and they are consequential for our health.” Many of these are the direct result of “the genetic differences between the two sexes.”

Identifying as transgender can be a health risk. Anderson refers to studies showing that people who identify as transgender “have an elevated risk for various mental health problems” and “suicide.” They are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. And no wonder, since “no controlled clinical trials of any feminizing/masculinizing hormone regimen have been conducted to evaluate safety or efficacy in producing physical transition.” Hormone treatment and the next step, sex reassignment surgery, don’t make men women nor women men. They make “feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they ‘identify.’” Not only does sex reassignment surgery fail to reassign sex biologically, “it also fails to bring wholeness psychologically.” According to the “largest and most rigorous academic study on the results of hormonal and surgical transitioning,” postoperative transsexuals faced much higher rates of psychiatric hospitalization, mortality, criminal conviction, and suicide attempts than control groups.

If there is one part of *When Harry Became Sally* that is the most disturbing, it is the chapter on Childhood Dysphoria and Desistance. Most important is Anderson’s brief discussion of the causes of “discordant gender identity” in children. It comes as no surprise that “problems in family dynamics can play a role.” Although the vast majority of children with gender dysphoria “naturally grow out of it, if they aren’t encouraged to transition,” some children approaching puberty are given puberty blockers “to prevent the normal process of maturation and development” and then, around age 16, are given cross-sex hormones, which they will have to continue taking throughout their lives. At age 18, some go even further and undergo sex reassignment surgery. Anderson points out that “there are no laws in the United States prohibiting the use of puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones for children, or regulating the age at which they may be administered.” Yet, possible side effects of puberty blockers are “disfiguring acne, high blood pressure, weight gain, abnormal glucose tolerance, breast cancer, liver disease, thrombosis, and cardiovascular disease.”

Anderson raises an important issue that transgender activists would rather he didn’t: sexual predators abusing gender identity policies to gain easier access to victims. Specifically, males who pose as transgender females to gain entry to women’s restrooms and locker rooms.

It is important to point out what *When Harry Became Sally* is not. The book is not an attack on homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, or those who identify as transgender. Nowhere does Anderson say that people who identify as transgender are “mentally ill” or that they deserve “scorn, contempt, and belittlement,” as some left-wing reviewers have claimed. In fact, he goes out of his way to emphasize that social conservatives should be careful “to be respectful and compassionate” toward people they may disagree with, “not to attack or marginalize people” as they “advocate for the truth,” and “not to stigmatize those who are suffering.”

When Harry Became Sally is a fair, sensitive, informative, and well-researched book that all Americans would profit from reading in this “transgender moment,” and especially parents and health professionals who want to protect the health and well-being of children. I highly recommend this essential resource.



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