

Written evidence submitted by mrs julie wright [GRA1323]

I am a 66 year old, female member of the public. I am a retired midwife with a particular interest in women's health, particularly women's reproductive health and breastfeeding. I currently volunteer in the court witness service supporting many women who have experienced domestic violence.

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It was with great relief that we read in the summer of the decision not to reform the GRA. It seemed that finally, a rational, considered decision had been made. Personally, I hoped that this would put an end to the hysteria and vitriol that had led up to the decision. However, a seemingly unstoppable wave of propaganda from officially recognised organisations such as Stonewall, together with the morass of misinformation and hysteria on social media exploded everywhere .

However, I believe that the way we deal with the issues of self identification go much deeper than the acquisition of a certificate. On the plus side, many issues have been brought to the fore by this proposal. Societal changes have been exposed with the debate around the GRA. Most of the controversy and noise seems to be around transwomen rights. Yet any debate is quickly quashed by activists and there are casualties along the way. The casualties here are women and children.

I did respond to the original request for opinions on this issue but I am willing to offer my reasons again. I will offer them under several headings

Women's dignity and safety

The argument about self identification often descends quickly into the trans woman's choice to use women's toilets and changing rooms, so I will get that out of the way. Possession of a Gender Recognition certificate suggests that the individual has taken fairly stringent steps to be allowed in there. Many women would be horrified however, if they realised that changes to that process can mean that an individual need take no steps whatsoever to either change appearance or behaviour, yet still able to present themselves in a woman's only space. How can women tell the difference between a genuine certificate holding transwomen and a predatory male taking advantage of the open door?. Women will be put into a situation where challenging a biological man in a woman's space invites serious consequences. No one has asked women, of all ages, how they feel about men being able to use their toilets and changing rooms.

Toilets in schools are often a source of discomfort for teen girls. Cubicles of flimsy material which does not fully enclose the space allow for sounds to be heard around the entire room. Menstruation for young teens is often a time of embarrassment. For a young girl to struggle with sanitary products in a cubicle with a trans girl just inches away must be torture. No one has asked the girls how they feel about boys in their toilets. Or in their sleeping and washing spaces on school and organised trips, or their changing rooms. And no one has asked the parents of these young girls how they feel about their daughters being obliged to share their sleeping quarters or washing facilities with biological boys. Alerting the parents of the girls is an invasion of the boys privacy.

Not only women use these facilities. Generally speaking the women's toilets and changing rooms are also used by children, with or without their mother. Self identification encourages unscrupulous individuals to access these spaces with impunity.

Women's refuges, safe spaces and prisons, and hospital wards

There have been incidences where self identified transwomen have attempted, and at times succeed in gaining employment or claimed refuge in a women's safe spaces. This is insensitive to the very real needs of these women. I witnessed recently in my work, a woman who had been severely traumatised by the abusive a man in her life. She had taken every ounce of her strength and courage to take this man to court. For her, men were to be feared and appeased. Sadly, she is not alone. Such women should not have to pull together every ounce of courage to flee domestic violence only to find herself sharing facilities or being cared for by a man who believes he is a woman.

Women in prisons have been raped and assaulted by men who identify as women on numerous occasions. While there are exceptions, most women find themselves in prison for entirely different reasons to men. Often debt, drugs and prostitution push women into prison, whereas men are more likely to be involved in violence. For a man in a male prison to then declare himself to be woman does not take away any inherent violent behaviour he may have. A violent abusive man

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will continue to be violent and abusive wherever he is, and no matter how he presents himself. Women in prison deserve to feel safe while confined.

Women should not have to share a hospital ward or bay with a biological man. Women recovering from surgery, often immobile and in pain, a state of undress and feeling vulnerable, or suffering from dementia and being powerless should not have the added anxiety of having a biological male in the next bed or sharing the (often communal) bathroom.

Data

Almost daily we see reports of sexual abuse or an attack on a woman seemingly by another woman. Yet if an image of the attacker is shown, it is clearly a biological male. If crimes are continually miss recorded, data will be skewed. This is particularly true in health planning. If an increasing number of individuals identify as another gender, services such as female health screening, prostate and aortic aneurysm screening and many other sex based conditions can not be adequately quantified. Time will be wasted calling in a trans man for prostate screening or a trans woman woman for a smear.

Also, I would like to address the falsehood of assigning gender at birth. I qualified as a midwife in 1980. In all those years I did not assign gender to any baby. I observed and recorded the evidence of biological sex before me. Very very rarely, a baby would have ambiguous genitalia which would necessitate further investigations. Babies are not assigned gender at birth. Its boy or girl based on biology.

Language

Daily it seems society is tying itself up in knots with the language around self identity. Organisations large and small attempt to show their support for the transgender community by asking staff which pronouns they wish to use. And daily it becomes easier for people to be punished under the law or by social media for an unintentional misgendering of an individual. The very real biological reality of sex is no longer an acceptable belief and anyone who publicly states this is accused of hate speech. How has the situation come to this when stating a proven fact is considered a crime yet supporting an illusion is seen as progressive. Where organisations are criticised and boycotted because their literature is aimed at women and their specific biological needs. Where manufacturers of women's products feel that they have to down play that fact. Where medical literature is changed to be inclusive and to protect feelings.

We also see women speaking out against the erasure of women and their needs punished by no platforming, silenced, loosing their jobs and harassed on social media. Two perfect examples are JK Rowling and very recently Suzanne Moore. To speak in support of biological women is to invite a torrent of abuse. While someone of JK Rowling's standing can weather the Twitter storm and enjoy some support, there are thousands of women in ordinary jobs, leading ordinary lives who fear speaking out because their employer has embraced the transgender ideology.

Child protection

This is a huge heading. Studies suggest that transgender children and teens often have a diagnosis of other conditions such as autism. Can it be acceptable to affirm a child's belief that they are the opposite sex and ignore another diagnosis. Medication and surgery are not trivial undertakings and lead to a life long reliance on medical intervention. If a teen (under 18) is considered not mature enough to marry or join the army without parental consent, (situations that are fully reversible), how can parents support such a huge decision to change gender on their behalf. Affirming young girls and encouraging breast binding and the taking of testosterone and giving young boys female hormones, breast implants, castration and other feminisation surgery is drastic, irreversible and dangerous for many. It appears to be an uncontrolled experiment on confused children. These children are participating in an uncontrolled experiment on basis of feelings not science.

Using anorexia as an example, where a young person believes they are fat despite being severely underweight, the first course of action is not to affirm their delusion. Yet it seems that affirming a young persons desire to present as the opposite sex as something to encourage. Instead of

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supporting, waiting and counselling to guide a young person through a tricky time, it has become acceptable to fast track them into life changing medical procedures. While some young people continue along this path, some will not. For those that are merely confused and uncertain, their future is unalterably changed forever. Instead of a whole and healthy adult who may be gay, or someone with mental health issues, surgery and hormones are given and change their lives permanently.

A decision to present as a different gender and undergo medical treatment is a decision that only an adult can make. A child under the age of 18 should not be able to make such a life changing decision. This can not be decided by a parent or guardian.

Women's sport

The reality of biology over identity is seen very clearly in women's sport. A biological male who has undergone male puberty is always going to beat a female athlete. Allowing trans women into women's sport will ultimately see the end of women competing. There is no point in years of training and sacrifice if victory is claimed by an individual who is taller, broader, stronger, faster just by virtue of their male biology.

Women in employment

Women's equality has come a long way on the past hundred years, but it is still recognised that there is still a way to go. The small numbers of women in board rooms, in male dominated industries, leadership roles etc. is sometimes addressed by providing extra help to women to achieve this. We then see transwomen being given these precious resources.

Eradication of lesbians.

I understand that lesbians are particularly pushed aside and vilified by transgender ideology. Lesbians have been accused of transphobia for refusing to have sex with transwomen.

Spouse

Often, for an adult man to go onto identify as a woman, there will be a wife or female partner, possibly children also. These women are under such pressure to accept the situation. The man they have had a probably long term relationship with turns their world, and their children's world upside down. For every woman in this situation who accepts this and supports her spouse, how many face the family break up, financial loss and more importantly the psychological impact on their children.

What of the transgender community themselves.

This phenomenon of transgender individuals has been around for centuries and appears in many cultures. Yet it is very recent in our history to have the medical tools to deal with this. The medicalisation therefore is very new and has not had much time to be studied in the long term. Hormones to maintain the illusion of the opposite sex are powerful and need to be maintained for life. Many women are discouraged from long term use of HRT to help the devastating affects of the menopause due to issues such as blood clotting, stroke and heart disease, yet this ideology pushes for young boys to change their bodies and maintain that state for decades with female hormones. Castration and the formation of a vaginal opening (for the individuals that choose this route) is not without complications and can mean life long medical input. For girls, mastectomy, hysterectomy and the formation of a penis is major surgery involving risk and permanent disfigurement from plastic surgery.

On top of this is sexual function and infertility. A young teen, who is still finding their way in life should not have this course of action decided for them. I believe it is a clear case of child abuse. Instead of supporting children through a difficult time in their lives, this ideology rushes children into lifelong medicalisation. This sort of undertaking should not be a route parents can consent to for their child.

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Low uptake of the GRA certificate

The low uptake of the GRA is no surprise really. The trans umbrella shelters many identities. The old style "sex change" is no longer the main presentation of transgender. One glance at Stonewall's web site shows they welcome any sexuality and gender, acceptance without exception. Individuals can make their identity official by changing documents such as passports and driving licences without need a reassignment certificate.

Focus on genitalia

There is much chat about the focus on genitalia and gender. Anecdotally, there are trans activists referring to their lady penis. But genitalia is only part of the discussion. Until puberty there is little difference in physical performance. It is the onset of puberty that changes everything. Males suddenly grow taller, broader, stronger, more reckless, sometimes more aggressive in comparison to the female. Once this process has occurs, even with hormone treatment, many of these physical advantages remain. And so the cry that everyone is focused on genitalia is to deflect from the another significant difference.

Transmen

As I read through this letter, I realise that transmen barely feature in this debate. I often wonder why they slip under the radar. But transmen do not seem to be committing the assaults and violent behaviour at all. Transmen do not seem to be the visible, vocal representatives. Transmen do not seem to be at the forefront of this discussion. Transmen do not seem to be so much of a threat to the safety of women and children. Could this be because they are female and females aren't important to the trans community?

In conclusion

How people identify is completely their own decision in a free and open society. I grew up on a diet of Marc Bolan, David Bowie, Boy George. Sexual ambiguity is not a new thing and was accepted. Gender is not a reality, it is whatever a person thinks it is. There are over sixty terms for gender, male and female are not included in the list. Presentation of whatever an individual feels does not present a problem. However, my concern is where presentation collides with reality. Reforming the Gender Recognition Certificate is only part of a the wide ranging discussion we need to have about the changes in peoples expectations. To reform without the wider discussion risks ignoring some very real issues. The rights of a small group of people should not be allowed to compromise the health, well being and safety of others. I believe that allowing the GRA certificate to be easier to obtain will just fuel an already raging fire that is the rights and protections of women and children versus the rights demanded by a tiny proportion of society. The erosion of the definition of the word woman is the triumph of ideology over biology. But biological sex is a dichotomy not a spectrum.

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