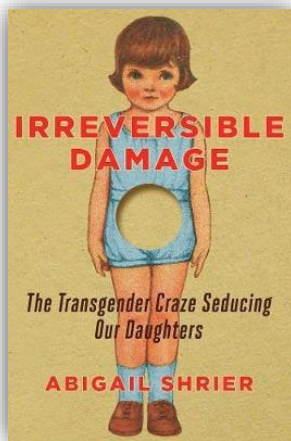


BOOK REVIEW

Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters

By Abigail Shrier

Reviewed by Vincent E. Gil



Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing
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I first came across Abigail Shrier's work when the vitriol that encircled its prepublication in 2020 was loudly heard. It was ugly; it was merciless; and it ignored, as those feeling threatened often do, any careful data collection or year's worth of investigation by Shrier. When the book was finally released the acrimony persisted, with such as Barnes & Noble and Amazon taking it off their websites—only to have it

returned after much backlash from parents¹ and some professional peers, all of whom felt she was telling truth.²

This review begins here because as a medical and psychological anthropologist, as a specialist on sexuality and gender, I believe Shrier's work raises the very questions that should engage us as anthropologists and as Christians amidst cultural protests. As OKHJ puts it, "to examine the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others . . . and the role divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice."³

Shrier's work circles back to earlier work by Lisa Littman, who coined the term "rapid onset gender dysphoria" to name a phenomenon she had noted, then investigated—one that was quickly surpassing statistical odds-ratios in gender identity problems among tweens and adolescents.⁴ *Gender dysphoria*—a severe and usually historical discomfort with one's biological sex—was dramatically increasing, from less than 0.01 percent of the population and afflicting almost exclusively males a decade ago, to groups of young females, tweens, teens, in high schools and colleges, "coming out" as "trans." The U.S. prevalence of adolescent gender dysphoria has increased by a thousand-fold over the last decade. In 2016, natal

¹ Genspect.org was founded by parents who felt their children needed a wider range of treatment options and more evidence based approaches for gender questioning children and young people. <https://genspect.org/position/>.

² Perspectives by Laura Edwards-Leeper and Erica Anderson, interviewed by Daryn Ray for *The Washington Post*. "The Mental Health Establishment is Failing Trans Kids." November 24, 2021.

³ On Knowing Humanity Journal. "Editorial Policies," Section: Focus and Scope. <https://okhjjournal.org/index.php/okhj/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>.

⁴ Lisa Littman, "Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria." *PLoS One*, 13 (8) DOI: e0202330.

females accounted for 46 percent of reassignments (surgeries); a year later it was 70 percent, according to The Trevor Project.⁵ Across the pond, the UK reported in 2018 a 4,400 percent rise over prior decades of children wanting gender change.⁶

Shrier's work investigates the reasons behind what she has called a *wave of social contagion* among the young,⁷ fueled by the social isolation of tweens and teens today, their incessant consumption of social media via smartphones, blogs, and web platforms, all of which *encourages* and *makes it cool to be trans*. "If you are a female, and teen, it prompts you to deny birth gender as a salvo for all that afflicts you and keeps you not popular." Shrier's tome is an excellent teleological exploration of the ways and means in which the overarching social contagion she describes repurposes media avenues by which adolescents cope with their sense of self, isolation, and emotions, in the internet saturated world of the 21st century.

Shrier is an investigative journalist and attorney. She isn't an anthropologist, but proceeds in her investigations much as a social scientist would. Her work has been called "unscientific" by those who oppose what it concludes, this despite her clear and early detailing of her methodology (which I address below). She is verbal, graphic, and conclusive; sometimes anecdotal; yet her findings corroborate much of what Littman and others have also been reporting, and what I myself have discovered through my own anthropological and sexual scientific research.

The work combines well-researched unobtrusive data and hundreds of interviews with parents, trans persons, teachers, physicians, politicians, and gender specialists, along with personal stories of informants: of

the "craze" (her word) and its results; of mental health profession's "betrayal" of the Hippocratic Oath of *doing no harm* via gender affirming therapy, bypassed guidelines, and "off label" hormone therapies. These, sans longitudinal clinical research so necessary to validate them.

Shrier also looks at the effects of media on the young—particularly on GenZ and iGeners—and the 'influencers' who've achieved celebrity status in social media by means of their gender transition. Like a noble anthropologist (again, she's not), Shrier dives deep into her unobtrusive sources: social media platforms, blogs, Instagram, TikTok, etc., to discover how these facilitate trans thinking and offer advice. We hear their mantras: "If you think you are trans, you are (44)." "You can try out trans by using a binder to flatten your breasts (46)." "Testosterone is *amazing*. It may just solve all your problems. You don't have to be certain you're trans to go on hormones (47)." Most subversive are the posts and instructions on how to lie to your parents; how to fake symptoms and pass therapeutic tests of dysphoria by saying the "right things." Like those gatekeepers we anthropologists identify in many social spaces, here influencers are quick to reward those who elevate their platform's numbers. "If you've ever felt different, anxious, or afraid, or felt like you don't fit in, there's a transgender community ready to accept you and become your new family" (50).⁸

Perhaps to Shrier, the more insidious and "reckless" (her word) part of this gender moment is the new "affirmative care" standard of mental health that has been adopted by most medical accrediting associations for gender-diverse presenting youth.⁹

⁵ The Trevor Project. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/public-education/>.

⁶ Gordon Rayner, "Minister Orders Inquiry into 4,000 Per Cent Rise in Children Wanting to Change Sex." *The Telegraph* (September 16, 2018). <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/09/16/minister-orders-inquiry-4000-per-cent-rise-children-wanting/>.

⁷ I've likened it to a *culture bound syndrome*, a term borrowed from medical anthropology, where it means a combination of symptoms that identifies a condition, all of which only occur within specific, bounded cultural spaces. I'm referring to the series of social actions that affirm *expressive individualism* above any biological, social, or other designation; and which therefore are symptomatic of a belief that you are your own (best) master; and that no other criterion matters as much. Consequently, "feeling trans," "not wanting to be one's natal sex," is sufficient to manifest distress despite no earlier history of gender disconnect. The manifestation *deviates* from the usual behavior and beliefs of individuals in the culture. See Vincent E. Gil, *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution: Gender, Cisgender, Transgender, and Intersex* (Cascade Books, 2021).

⁸ All quotes are from various sections of Shrier's work as reported in the Kindle book edition.

⁹ APA. "Guidelines for Practice with Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming People." <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/transgender.pdf>.

Among these associations, the American Psychological Association (APA) has mandated therapists *adopt* the novel gender ideology themselves: these must *affirm* the patient's self-diagnosis (which often means bypassing *gender exploration therapy*, once the standard for mental health evaluations of gender conflicts.) Issues that surround affirmative therapy are well explained by Shrier: denying gender exploration therapy initially; ignoring other possible emotional issues in the tween or adolescent that may be contributing to the confounding of gender identity; ignoring that for a good number of younger tweens and teens, over 80% stop identifying as another gender as they get older; ignoring the hesitation and pause of many in the profession who—at a great personal and professional cost—have questioned affirmative therapy and a rapid move to hormonal transitions.¹⁰ She isn't alone in her concerns.¹¹

Should You Read Shrier's Work?

I've argued earlier in this journal that Christian anthropologists—social, psychological, medical, missional—should be attentive and keen to engage social issues and concerns as a means of bringing the lived experience and practice of our subject to better light.¹² Such is especially relevant in the arena of gender today. Moreover, the church is not immune to the tsunami of gender change that now accosts young persons, here and in developed countries especially. Neither are missional families immune.¹³ Just as we've seen with other sexual issues (homosexuality, bisexuality, involvement in porn, sexual abuse), sexual *and gender* conflicts will also emerge as our young continuously experience a fractured world and internet dependency, all which Shrier so deftly delineates.

The problematic of sex and gender as rendered today beckons anthropological inquiry. Christian anthropologists are in a favored position to also bridge the understanding of socially destructive behaviors

with the hope divine redemption can play in human outcomes. Shrier isn't arguing from a religious platform, but she will resonate with Christians—Christian academics in sociology, anthropology, psychology, theology, missions—as well as clergy and those who are parents. Put aside your academic persnicketies and yes, agree she isn't an anthropologist doing an investigation on a sociocultural phenomenon. But do also agree she does a great deal of credible work in providing clarity to the issues she explores. Even if you don't have academic interests that align here, but you *do have family*, have *adolescents*, *grandkids*, as Shrier also asks, "I invite you to read this dangerous book and decide for yourself"! (Foreword, xvii).



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¹⁰ Darin Ray. *op. cit.*

¹¹ Emily Bazelon. "The Battle Over Gender Therapy." *The New York Times* (June 15) 2022.

¹² Vincent E. Gil. 2022. "Wither Biological Sex: The Gender Takeover. A Position Paper." *On Knowing Humanity Journal* 6(1): 42-61.

¹³ See Dwight P. Baker and Robert J. Priest. 2014. "The Missionary Family: Witness, Concerns, Care." Evangelical Missiological Society Series. William Carey Library. Note especially Part Three: "Forum on Sexual Orientation and Missions: An Evangelical Discussion," pp. 205-293.

Professor Emeritus, Dr. Gil continues to research, train, and write. His most recent work, *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution* (Cascade, 2021) assists Christian parents, pastors, therapists, and individuals in understanding the 'gender moment'. His nonprofit, *Faith and Sex Science*, continues to engage with counseling, training, and information for Christian institutions. Dr. Gil's website is <http://drvincegil.com>, and he can still be reached through the email below.

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