

Good Afternoon.

My name is James Inwood.

That's a huge blessing. Were I raised in the wrong environment, I might have ended up with a different name. That's because I have lived with gender dysphoria from a young age. It's a difficult struggle to explain to anyone who hasn't experienced it, but it is real, and I am glad that there's more awareness, given I did not even have a name for this shadow when I was in school.

I cannot, however, say I've been anything but disturbed that this awareness has been saddled with a cultural push towards encouraging harmful body-negativity, telling us that our bodies and embodied identities are the source of our troubles – and rejecting them will somehow bring healing. Knowing what we go through, I can't blame those who give in to it. It's a hard fight, too hard to easily ignore such snake-oil promises, especially when those around us echo them with good intentions.

Alas, the results have been catastrophic. In the midst of an already fragile mental health situation, many of us are spiraling into realms of higher rates of self-harm, whether seen in suicide attempts or medical malpractice. Research is increasingly showing that encouraging this pattern among youth is especially harmful, and evidence-based health systems are moving away from this philosophy. Someday, we will look back on it with the same horror we have for lobotomies today.

Until that day, I encourage you to hold the line against this presumably well-intended but ultimately tragic movement because, frankly, this could have been me. Had I grown up in a world where the answer to these feelings was to reject who I am, to construct a new me based on my illness – one where schools tell students enduring this dysphoria that it should pick their bathroom, their pronouns, etc. – my name today might not be James. I might not have had a healthy puberty, might not have met a girl in college, got married, and given infinitely valuable lives to my children.

In all honesty, I could have been among the 40%-50% who attempt suicide, and perhaps my adopted feminine name would grace a tombstone, collateral damage of a mad culture war.

There's an unfortunate narrative that says that if you don't side with the sickness, you're not compassionate towards its victims. That's nonsense. When someone is sick, by all means, we should support them, fight bullying and bigotry, etc., but we would never take the side of a cancer and call it compassion. Likewise, a compassionate psychiatrist would never encourage schizophrenics to heed their voices – because they know those voices are at war with a victim who needs help.

I can tell you from personal experience that this is no different. Gender dysphoria is a sickness that wars against its victims and too often conquers with dreadful results. When a school tells its victims to live by the sickness, they are choosing a side. When a government school does so, the government is choosing a side. When activists, whatever their intentions, insist you have to promote and enable the sickness, they're choosing a side.

Well, fine – choose a side. Choose the victim and recommend this bill to pass.

James Inwood