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Dad advocates for gender non-conforming kids

NEWS

by Khaled Sayed

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Phil Crawford talked about his gender non-conforming child at a recent meeting of Bay Area Humanists. (Photo: Khaled Sayed)

With more people, especially those who are younger, ditching traditional gender identities, advocates are working to change the language and hope that in the process, more understanding will result.

Generally speaking, when a person is born, they are assigned a gender, male or female, based on their anatomy. While the majority of people accept the gender that was assigned to them at birth, some opt to change their gender identity. Others don't feel they can identify themselves with either gender, and are known broadly as gender non-conforming.

Phil Crawford, 52, identifies as cis (a person whose experience of their own gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth). He is the father of Lux, a gender non-conforming person. Crawford was in San Francisco last week to put the gender issue in the spotlight, making it a subject for people to discuss, and advocating for the possibility of changing the language around gender.

Crawford is a straight married man who often finds it hard to get used to calling his own kid by the right pronouns, but he is making an effort to speak correctly and he advocates for others to do the same.

In a meeting room at the Women's Building in San Francisco on a sunny Saturday afternoon, Bay Area Humanists welcomed Crawford to talk about his experience as the father of a gender non-conforming person. Among the small audience of about 10 there were gay, lesbian, and straight identified people who listened carefully as Crawford spoke about his own kid. Lux was not in attendance.

While many in the audience were understanding, there were people who raised questions about today's language and society. They pointed out that making new rules would require making a new social contract that would involve understanding the gender-neutral identity issue.

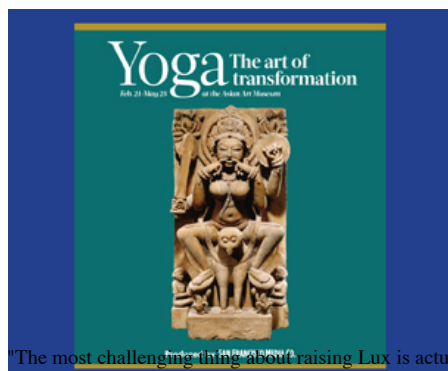
One man who said he was 59 years old said that he did not know how to drop "he" and "she" from his vocabulary and worried about upsetting someone by using the wrong pronoun.

Crawford acknowledged that pronoun use is one of the trickier issues with gender non-conforming people.

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"The most challenging thing about raising Lux is actually the language and using the right pronoun," he said. "It seems like I constantly screwed that up. Sometimes they blew it off, and sometimes it really hurt them. So I really tried to be careful about that."

Crawford uses "they" and "them" to refer to his gender non-conforming child.

Crawford's kid came out in stages. First Lux came out as gay, and then as trans.

"When they came out as gay they were very young and my wife and I had a lot of questions." Crawford said. "We joined Parents,



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Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays ... not only did we get many of our questions answered, but we had a community of people who had similar experiences and also a support system."

Crawford admitted that he is terrified for Lux's safety.

"I'm glad that Lux's appearance does not bring a lot of attention to themselves," he said.

In November 2013, 18-year-old Sasha Fleischman, who identifies as gender non-conforming, was on an AC Transit bus in Oakland when Richard Thomas, 16, allegedly set Fleischman's skirt on fire. Other people on the bus helped put the fire out. However, Fleischman spent several weeks in the hospital recovering from severe burns. Thomas, who is being charged as an adult, has pleaded not guilty to several counts, including hate crime enhancements, and could face life in prison.

Crawford's advice for anyone who encounters somebody like Lux is, "to give them space, take them seriously, and if you screw up just apologize and move on."

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