

Gender Identity Disorder

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A Matter of Survival (Part 1) Gender Identity

I was among the huddled cluster of women in the foyer of a large shopping mall. They were warmly bundled waiting for their men to rescue them from the biting cold awaiting them outside. The “chariots” arrived one by one to escort their individual maiden away to the warmth and safety of home.

I could see my reflection in the expanse of glass before me. “I look so pretty,” I thought. I was standing there, not in the self-conscious way of a man encircled by women, but as one miraculously transformed in appearance to be accepted as another woman among them, not a male intrusion.

An admixture of emotions and thoughts swelled within me. “Why can’t this always be the way life is for me?” I was filled with tidal waves of anger, bitterness and remorse that I could enjoy such blissful acceptance only for a stolen moment. Then, nearly as quickly as those thoughts and feelings subsided, I saw through the facade and caught a glimpse of the man beneath the carefully constructed exterior. I muttered in agreement with one who shared my fate, “It is true, neither sex is really mine; I belong to a third sex, a sex apart, which has as yet no name.”¹

I felt very much a freak of nature at one moment, a replicated form of my mother in the next. I wanted so much to emulate her, to be among her “kind,” seen and accepted for the woman I longed to be.

The mission complete, I deposited the artifacts of my secret identity carefully in hiding. “Sometimes I feel like a secret agent,” I muttered. But the intrigue was quickly replaced by an overpowering sense of shame.

I knew, too, that I had once again exposed myself to such an incredible risk of being caught. Why? What would have happened if I had been involved in an auto accident? I was afraid of the consequences of humiliation and rejection if ever discovered. More than that, I realized that I had crossed over established gender lines, emasculating myself once again in that despicable, yet terribly cherished evening.

I wrote in my journal: I am intensely angry and confused! I stood there in the huge doorway of the mall, with two contradictory and consuming emotions: delight and disgust. Delight, knowing that I was at least for the moment accepted as the woman portrayed to the “unseeing” eye . . . but a freak, if they but for one moment had been able to see beneath the feminine wrappings.

I loathe all of this! How can I go on in this type of existence? Always longing for what I cannot have. Always in pain within. Constantly doing what I cannot (in more rational moments) conceive to be true. And all the while suppressing the excruciating, instinctive knowledge that I am in the wrong.

For as I today caught my reflection, it is obvious to anyone who would take time for a second glance, that I am truly a man wearing a dress! Must I forever be doomed to this? Unthinkable!

In the movie, “Alive”, the survivors of an airplane crash in the Andes Mountains, did what was for them (at first), unthinkable. In order to come out of the eighty day ordeal alive, they finally resorted to eating the corpses of those who had died in the tragedy.

Cannibalism is unthinkable, considered even to be immoral to our culture. (It is my understanding that those survivors, once back home, were treated harshly by the church for their treatment of the dead). But, as the real life drama revealed, we humans will resort to whatever is necessary in order to survive. It’s built into us by God so to do.

Survival is what transvestism and transsexualism is about at its core. We simply want to feel good about ourselves, to love our life, enjoy the act of “being.” We have the incredible need to feel connected to the feminine, to devour (or be devoured by) womanhood. Even though we profess Jesus Christ to be Savior, the unthinkable fleshly passion mercilessly grinds away at any sense of common decency, wearing down any resistance to its demands.

Because we have suffered a breakdown in our “psycho-social development,” we have eroticized the other sex, thinking that being one of them would be the appropriate medicinal agent to cure our intense emotional pain.

As Leanne Payne suggests, when a man refuses to accept himself, his eyes are directed to someone else, (typically his mother for the transsexual), finding himself “stuck in some form or manifestation of the wrong kind of self-love. Failing to love himself aright, he will love himself amiss.”² This misplaced affection results in an inordinate, highly immoral, self love of the woman of our own making that attempts to destroy our God-given sexual identity. Interestingly, as I stood there in the foyer of that shopping mall, I was delighted to at least catch a fleeting glimpse of mother in me.

Masculinity is something we have found most distasteful as transsexual males. I believe it stems from our basic childhood misunderstanding of what true masculinity is. In many it stems from the traumatic events surrounding our most formative years that led to our rejection of what we interpreted to be manhood. We have not been properly instructed on what it really means to be a man. A captivating role model most usually was not available to us to integrate us with the true masculine.

Most of our fathers did not affirm us as sons in our sexual identity. It was not necessarily intentional on their part. “The masculine within is called forth and blessed by the masculine without.”³ Of course, the basic reason for our failure to be called into manhood by our father (or father replacement) is derived from the fact that our fathers were not properly affirmed in their own masculinity. How then could we think them capable to affirm ours?⁴

Charles Williams’ *Descent into Hell*, revealed the effects of a man’s choices to fabricate a woman for himself to love. This “imaginary woman” eventually consumes every thought, the illusion becoming progressively more captivating and the ‘descent into hell’ all the more a reality; a form of worship of the “false or narcissistic self.”⁵

Survival is one of the motivating factors for the transsexual lifestyle. We who have struggled for our sexual identity are merely attempting to survive the steady assaults of shame, guilt and despair. Many transsexuals with whom I work have little or no sense of personal identity of their own. They have learned to survive their personal “nothingness” by integrating their personality to that of the person who has meant the most to them—mother.

Nicolosi’s observations apply to the transsexual most accurately, when he builds his case for the innate reparative process that is in place within each person. The sense of “normalcy” we experience when cross-dressed only exposes our deeply wounded heart striving to heal itself through this form of sexual identification. Our emotional mastication of the female is our feeble attempt to survive, to be sustained in some form of identity.⁶

The transsexual male is subconsciously trying to repair the damage done, primarily between himself and his father. Male attention and affirmation is continually sought (perhaps mostly on an unconscious level), through becoming acceptable to men . . . in the desirable image of a woman. We protected ourselves from further hurt and the paralyzing fear of our masculinity being again rejected, by “defensively detaching” ourselves from father.⁷

We took instead the identity of mother, aunt, etc., in order to cope with the pain of a lost, forsaken, or rejected male identity. We have responded to our hurts, saying by word and action, “I reject manhood and all that it stands for!”

This type of wound and inner vow making isolates us from other males and from our own sense of being masculine. The world of the feminine becomes the most trustworthy, the most familiar and desirable for us to associate with, while being with males becomes a mysterious, uncomfortable, perhaps repulsive idea.⁸

The inner vows we make when we are children are usually not consciously remembered, but very much at work in

our lives as adults. We retain those vows like a programmed VCR, no matter how hard our adult mind contests the stored information. "Our inner being persistently retains such programming no matter what changes of mind and heart may later pertain. The distinctive mark of an inner vow is that it resists the normal maturation process. Inner vows resist change. We do not grow out of them."⁹ And with that, our masculine self is methodically emotionally (and potentially, physically) destroyed.

I actually believed I hated males. To be one was reckoned the most despicable of fates. I lied to myself, saying that it was a genetic malfunction that locked me into this loathsome and perilous existence. But I have come to see that what I was doing was actually detaching myself from males in order to survive. By the age of three years I had concluded I could never succeed as a boy, and the answer to my dilemma was to become a girl. In effect, I reattached my severed emotional umbilical cord to mother, in the vain hope that I could thereby survive. Ironically, in the end, that which at one time had brought solace and sustenance threatened my existence altogether. That which had once brought such satisfaction and peace, ultimately delivered intense pain and suffering. Strange paradox!

Many of us can easily relate to the all-too-common testimony that since childhood we felt "castrated, emasculated, weak, queer, twisted." These feelings were constantly reinforced because of our father's emotional distance from us and by mother's incessant pampering or protection of us.

Mothers often think of their sons as helpless victims and in their nurturing attempts to protect us from the harsh world of men, we become demasculinized, narcissistic, depressed, and utterly passive.¹⁰ Our identity becomes so tied into mother's that we find it nearly impossible to separate ourselves from the emotional umbilicus. We are suspended by this tether throughout all of life, with the unfortunate climatic end of our being suffocated by it.

I know that I was separated from mother after only a few weeks in this old world. She had to return to her place of work in order to provide for our growing family. She was a new hairdresser and was required to work long, hard hours. The only time that I was with her was in the early morning or late at night. It was most likely during this vulnerable time that I became emotionally bonded to her nightgowns or silky underclothing, the symbolic representations of mother. And, in her absence or in times of stress, these articles became my means of solace. Nearly three-fourths of the transsexuals I know share stories similar to my own. Psychologists refer to it as "separation anxiety."

Leanne Payne touches upon the matter of "separation anxiety" as a prime-mover in the formation of the transsexual neurosis. She explains, "The cross-dresser suffers from separation anxiety and gender confusion related to his failure to make a secure attachment to his mother and thereby gain a strong sense of being or of well-being. This loss has led to a most grievous symbolic confusion in him. The related coping mechanisms (cross-dressing) leave him in the throes of the dread-ridden shame and compulsive behavior."¹¹ Most transsexual "survivors" can relate to that!

Our industrialized society has altered the normal interaction that should transpire between child and parent. One of the most powerful ingredients to healthy male development is the interaction between father and son. It is typical to discover that in the early life of the transsexual the father is "gone," either emotionally or physically, leaving the son primarily to the care of women, which hinders the son's growth into manhood.

As Sandford observed, "Before we are six, the ability later to enjoy our sex fully has either been enabled or destroyed. Failing to receive from our father especially, we cannot enter into the fullness of what ought to be. Aberrational forms subsequently await us like reefs under the shallow waters of our living."¹²

Robert Bly understood how cannibalism works in relationships, especially between the father and son. On the positive side, he wrote, "When a father and son do spend long hours together . . . we could say that a substance almost like food passes from the older body to the younger . . . The son's body—not his mind—receives and the father gives this food at a level far below consciousness. The son does not receive a hands-on healing, but a body-on healing. His cells receive some knowledge of what an adult masculine body is. The younger body learns at what

frequency the masculine body vibrates. It begins to grasp the song that the adult male cells sing.”¹³

Conversely, when the deep longing of the son to have a strong identification with his father is interrupted or annihilated, the father becomes an object of contempt or is considered of little significance. “Caught in such extremes, he is thus denied genuine relationship with the father, and with himself as a man.

In either case, the earthly father remains the fixed standard which dictates the man’s life responses-whether positively or negatively-and the unique person the Father God calls the man to be is lost, either in running after or away from the earthly father.”¹⁴

We are emasculated in so many other ways, too. It is difficult (and totally improper), to place all of the blame at the parent’s doorstep. So emotionally castrated are we (by an endless myriad of external and internal voices), that we eventually give up any hope in achieving real manhood. We abandon the effort early on in our developmental process, instead opting for the feminine since it is the identity that feels so “right.” What other options are there?

So we become “cannibalistic” in our attempt to survive the starvation within our demasculinized soul. We join the ranks of the heathen cannibals, who eat the ones they admire the most in the effort to acquire their traits.¹⁵ In our deep hurt, despair, envy, and lust, we ravenously devour womanhood in the attempt to emulate and live out our concept of the female role, with the mistaken belief that is the best choice for our lives.

I expressed it this way in one journal entry: I cannot conceive of ever doing without the routine rituals and the act of cross-dressing! It is too painful to think that I could never do that again. How can I ever survive without this source of life, purpose, satisfaction and sense of well-being? I’ve got to be able to express my feminine self! Just slipping on that dress today made me feel at one with womanhood.

I thought of the many times I have come home from an exhausting day, slipped off my shoes and plopped myself upon the couch in utter delight, saying, “I’m finally at home”. Well, that’s how I feel each and every time I cross-dress. I am “finally at home!” I eat, drink, literally digest womanhood. I consume it like food for my soul.

Don’t even suggest it, you well-meaning, but ignorant therapists, that I will have to cut this out of my daily diet! No way!!! I will die without it! I’ve got to live. And the only way I can survive is as the woman I should have been, Jennifer Elaine.

We learn to rationalize our plight, arguing, that what we are doing cannot be considered a sinful act, for we were obviously born this way, because it is all that we remember. But as Dalbey recounts, “Biblical faith understands that all of us are born into sin, and are unable by our own natural power to fulfill God’s will for our lives. The good news of our faith is precisely that the inborn brokenness of our human nature has been overcome and redeemed by Jesus, that the power to walk in His victory is accessible to those who surrender their lives to Him.”¹⁶

The only way we can truly survive is to cut our emotional umbilical cord to mother and secure it to our Christ through submission to His Lordship. To survive is to submit; to live is to die.

I am not referring to a “quick fix”. I fully recognize that much is involved in that process. Limited space forces me to end this discourse with these very abbreviated remarks. In next month’s “Part II” I will attempt to unravel some definitive things that must be experienced for this complex restoration of our human soul.

Footnotes: 1. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1992), 11. 2. Leanne Payne, *The Broken Image*, (Wheaton, IL: CrossWay Books, 1981), 55. 3. Leanne Payne, *Crisis in Masculinity*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 4. *Ibid.*, 14. 5. Payne, *The Broken Image*, 86. 6. Joseph Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991), 132. 7. Elizabeth Moberley, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1989) 8. Nicolosi, 58. 9. John Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man*, (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, 1982, 192-193 10. Payne, *Crisis in Masculinity*, 26. 11. Payne, *Restoring the Christian Soul*, Wheaton, IL, 1991), 129. 12.

Sandford, Transformation, 271. 13. Gordon Dalbey, Father and Son, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 17. 14. Ibid., 19. 15. Payne, Crisis, 28. 16. Gordon Dalbey, Healing The Masculine Soul, Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988, 107.