

"Transsexualism"

A personal reflection by *Li Sam*



**Consider body, mind and soul. What's gender versus gender role?
Transsexual gender=sex with a twist. If your gender's questioned, you don't exist.**

In the Beginning

In the Western world people have recognized the issue of transsexualism for a long time. However, it was only about ninety years ago that the words "**transsexual**" and "**transsexualism**" came into use, with "trans" meaning "from-to/over-to" and "sex" meaning "gender." Back then, people didn't quite understand the meaning of the new words, and it's only in the last twenty years that we've begun discussing the subject more seriously. Even now though the question remains: Do we really understand transsexualism?

Westerners often think of transsexualism as something new, despite transsexuals playing important roles our culture's history as well as having an even stronger presence in the history of ancient cultures. To deny transsexualism is actually to deny our history, our present and our very future.

Some Terms

One way to define a "transsexual" is a person wishing to change his or her sex from man to woman or from woman to man. The usual abbreviation for transsexual is "**TS**," and the "**transition**" (changing sex) from man to woman is written as "**MtF**" (Male to Female) and from woman to man as "**FtM**." Thus, a **TS** woman is **MtF** and a **TS** man is **FtM**.

Experiencing the pain of "**Gender Dysphoria**" (transsexualism) can be described as being hit by a

car whose impact causes much misery, changing a person's life entirely. Transsexualism is indeed painful, and most people "hit" by it, must change sex in order to survive.

Please also note that in terms of transsexualism, "gender" may not have the same meaning as "sex." Read on to find out what I mean.

Transsexual: A Who or a What?

Transsexualism is a phenomenon, not a person. It *doesn't* mean that any person wishing to change sex is a transsexual; it instead indicates that a male person with a male body can have a female soul, or the other way around. Many people describe this as being trapped in a body of the wrong sex. We call these persons transsexuals, but really they are men and women like anybody else, just with this unfortunate phenomenon affecting them.

People who have been hit by transsexualism have an anatomical body that's opposite what they feel their gender really is. Yet they don't perceive themselves as transsexuals (or, even worse, as transpersons), but as men or women independent of their physical assets.

Transsexual: What Gender?

So what gender *is* a person who has been hit by transsexualism?

First let's start with how we determine gender, which itself is a primary problem. Today, a person's gender is determined by body, not by soul or by how a person spiritually perceives him or herself. Our genders are decided for us when we are born according to our bodies, and as adults it's likewise determined by others who depend on their physical perceptions of us.

That's how gender *is* determined, but how *should* it be? By people's anatomy or by how people perceive their own genders spiritually? Certainly among the ways we should *not* determine gender is through the outside trappings of clothes and behavior, since they both can be misleading. And when people take on the role of the "opposite" gender for reasons other than spiritual conviction, that's a private act that shouldn't determine our outward social identities. When you look at the alternatives, determining gender by one's own spiritual conviction seems to be the most logical solution. All in all, gender seems to be much more about self perception than it is about physical appearances.

Even here, however, lurk perceptual problems. People who think about a spiritual understanding of one's own gender or one's "soul" sometimes use the term "mental perception." But the word "mental" is often associated with illness and deviating from the norm, especially regarding transsexuals, whereas mental illness has nothing to do with transsexualism. A person's soul is basic—it is life itself, the person you really are. It has nothing to do with illness, but it definitely has a lot to do with gender identity.

Transsexualism: a Handicap?

Transsexualism is difficult to explain and almost impossible to understand, as gender is something we take for granted and never question (unless we are forced to face the issue head-on). But if we look upon transsexualism as a physical handicap of some kind, we may come close to a solution to the mystery.

Some children are born without identifiable gender anatomy. They have a handicap, and doctors correct this problem with surgery and medicine, making these children boys or girls. For society, that's the end of the story, so to speak.

Now look at the problem another way. A girl born with a penis could be said to have a serious handicap, but what do we do? In this case we label the girl a boy without a second thought.

In both cases the *spiritual* gender of a child—who the child feels he or she is—is never considered. This is the enduring handicap, one we should take very seriously as the death rate that it causes is high. (But seldom is the cause of suicide diagnosed as transsexualism because the shame

amongst relatives can be so great that no one is prepared to admit it.)

Transsexual: What to Do?

Today there is a cure for those hit by transsexualism. By surgery and hormone treatment, among other things, the major physical problems can be corrected so that these people can have a life worth living. Just as the death rate is high for people living in the wrong sex, so too is the survival rate high after transition.

Not all problems are solved after transition, however.

Transsexualism deeply affects the people in the lives of transsexuals, including relatives, friends, workmates and other acquaintances, in ways hard to deal with. For people wishing to change sex it's a serious mistake to ignore these factors and demand immediate acceptance and understanding. We too (I myself am a transsexual) have to accept and understand that the people around us can have difficulty understanding transsexualism and may need help (our help) accepting it.

A wish for a sex change is in reality a wish for survival, a wish for a life. Our companions are after all a part of the change, and to bring the fairy tale to a happy ending we all have to help each other to learn to know this *new* person resulting from a sex change. A little work on relations will connect people with a new, pleasant, much more alive and happy person than ever before.

A Final Word

There are all the reasons in the world for society, parents, relatives, friends and others to help transsexual children find a meaningful life worth living. The case is the same for adults of all ages. Money, assets, status and even sexual orientation (hetero/homosexuality) all have nothing to do with transsexualism. The ability to live a meaningful life is rooted instead in happiness and love. Basic to these is the ability to express oneself emotionally, and that is not possible in a body of the wrong sex.

The many repercussions of transsexualism are cruel and more common than we may think. Those transsexuals who have been helped blend well in our society, just like you and me. To be normal as a person is to be special, and that includes transsexuals too. It's diversity that colors life and make our lives worth living.

yours sincerely, Li Sam