

What You Need to Know About Gender Identity Politics



Session 3

SEX CHANGE REGRET

Reading 1: I Was a Transgender Woman

Walt Heyer

Notes

Please write any comments or questions for discussion here.

It was a pivotal scene. A mom was brushing a boy's long hair, the boy slowly turned his head to look at her. In a tentative voice, he asked, "Would you love me if I were a boy?" The mom was raising her boy to become a trans-girl.

In that split second, I was transported back to my childhood. I remembered my grandmother standing over me, guiding me, dressing me in a purple chiffon dress. The boy in that glowing documentary about parents raising transgender kids dared to voice a question I always wanted to ask. Why didn't she love me the way I was?

I am haunted by that boy and his question. What will the trans-kids of 2015 be like sixty years from now? Documentaries and news stories only give us a snapshot in time. They are edited to romanticize and normalize the notion of changing genders and to convince us that enlightened parents should help their children realize their dreams of being the opposite gender.

I want to tell you my story. I want you to have the opportunity to see the life of a trans-kid, not in a polished television special, but across more than seven decades of life, with all of its confusion, pain, and redemption.

The Trans-Kid

It wasn't my mother but my grandmother who clothed me in a purple chiffon dress she made for me. That dress set in motion a life filled with gender dysphoria, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, and finally, an unnecessary gender reassignment surgery. My life was ripped apart by a trusted adult who enjoyed dressing me as a girl.

My mom and dad didn't have any idea that when they dropped their son off for a weekend at Grandma's that she was dressing their boy in girls' clothes. Grandma told me it was our little secret. My grandmother withheld affirmations of me as a boy, but she lavished delighted praise upon me when I was dressed as a girl. Feelings of euphoria swept over me with her praise, followed later by depression and insecurity about being a boy. Her actions planted the idea in me that I was born in the wrong body. She nourished and encouraged the idea, and over time it took on a life of its own.

I became so accustomed to wearing the purple dress at Grandma's house that, without telling her, I took it home so I could secretly wear it there too. I hid it in the back of a drawer in my dresser. When my mom found it, an explosion of yelling and screaming erupted between my mom and dad. My father was terrified his boy was not developing into a man, so he ramped up his discipline. I felt singled out because, in my view, my older brother didn't receive the same heavy-handed punishment as I did. The unfairness hurt more than anything else.

Thankfully, my parents decided I would never be allowed to go to Grandma's house again without them. They couldn't know I was scared of seeing Grandma because I had exposed her secret.

Uncle Fred's Influence

My worst nightmare was realized when my dad's much younger adopted brother, Uncle Fred, discovered the secret of the dress and began teasing me. He pulled down my pants, taunting and laughing at me. At only nine years of age, I couldn't fight back, so I turned to eating as a way to cope with the anxiety. Fred's teasing caused a meal of six tuna-fish sandwiches and a quart of milk to become my way of suppressing the pain.

One day Uncle Fred took me in his car on a dirt road up the hill from my house and tried to take off all my clothes. Terrified of what might happen, I escaped, ran home, and told my mom. She looked at me accusingly and said, "You're a liar. Fred would never do that." When my dad got home, she told him what I said, and he went to talk to Fred. But Fred shrugged it off as a tall tale, and my dad believed him instead of me. I could see no use in telling people about what Fred was doing, so I kept silent from that point on about his continuing abuse.

I went to school dressed as a boy, but in my head that purple dress lived on. I could see myself in it, standing in front of the mirror at my grandma's house. I was small, but I participated and excelled in football, track, and other sports. My way to cope with my gender confusion was to work hard at whatever I did. I mowed lawns, delivered newspapers, and pumped gasoline. After high school graduation, I worked in an automotive shop, then took classes in drafting to qualify for a job in aerospace. After a short time, I earned a spot on the Apollo space mission project as associate design engineer. Ever eager for the next challenge, I switched to an entry-level position in the automobile industry and quickly rocketed up the corporate ladder at a major American car company. I even got married. I had it all—a promising career with unlimited potential and a great family.

But I also had a secret. After thirty-six years, I was still unable to overcome the persistent feeling I was really a woman. The seeds sown by Grandma developed deep roots. Unbeknownst to my wife, I began to act on my desire to be a woman. I was cross-dressing in public and enjoying it. I even started taking female hormones to feminize my appearance. Who knew Grandma's wish in the mid-1940s for a granddaughter would lead to this?

Adding alcohol was like putting gasoline on a fire; drinking heightened the desire. My wife, feeling betrayed by the secrets I had been keeping from her and fed up by my out-of-control drunken binges, filed for divorce.

Life as a Woman

I sought out a prominent gender psychologist for evaluation, and he quickly assured me that I obviously suffered from gender dysphoria. A gender change, he told me, was the cure. Feeling that I had nothing to lose and thrilled that I could finally attain my lifelong dream, I underwent a surgical change at the age of forty-two. My new identity as Laura Jensen, female, was legally affirmed on my birth record, Social Security card, and driver's license. I was now a woman in everyone's eyes.

The gender conflict seemed to fade away, and I was generally happy for a while.

It's hard for me to describe what happened next. The reprieve provided by surgery and life as a woman was only temporary. Hidden deep underneath the make-up and female clothing was the little boy carrying the hurts from traumatic childhood events, and he was making himself known. Being a female turned out to be only a cover-up, not healing.

I knew I wasn't a real woman, no matter what my identification documents said. I had taken extreme steps to resolve my gender conflict, but changing genders hadn't worked. It was obviously a masquerade. I felt I had been lied to. How in the world had I reached this point? How did I become a fake woman? I went to another gender psychologist, and she assured me that I would be fine; I just needed to give my new identity as Laura more time. I had a past, a battered and broken life that living as Laura did nothing to dismiss or resolve. Feeling lost and depressed, I drank heavily and considered suicide.

At the three-year mark of life as Laura, my excessive drinking brought me to a new low. At my lowest point, instead of committing suicide I sought help at an alcohol recovery meeting. My sponsor, a lifeline of support and accountability, mentored me in how to live life free from alcohol.

Sobriety was the first of several turning points in my transgender life.

As Laura, I entered a two-year university program to study the psychology of substance and alcohol abuse. I achieved higher grades than my classmates, many of whom had PhDs. Still, I struggled with my gender identity. It was all so puzzling. What was the point of changing genders if not to resolve the conflict? After eight years of living as a woman, I had no lasting peace. My gender confusion only seemed to worsen.

During an internship in a psychiatric hospital, I worked alongside a medical doctor on a lock-down unit. After some observation, he took me aside and told me I showed signs of having a dissociative disorder. Was he right? Had he found the key that would unlock a childhood lost? Rather than going to gender-change activist psychologists like the one who had approved me for surgery, I sought the opinions of several "regular" psychologists and psychiatrists who did not see all gender disorders as transgender. They agreed: I fit the criteria for dissociative disorder.

It was maddening. Now it was apparent that I had developed a dissociative disorder in childhood to escape the trauma of the repeated cross-dressing by my grandmother and the sexual abuse by my uncle. That should have been diagnosed and treated with psychotherapy. Instead, the gender specialist never considered my difficult childhood or even my alcoholism and saw only transgender identity. It was a quick jump to prescribe hormones and irreversible surgery. Years later, when I confronted that psychologist, he admitted that he should not have approved me for surgery.

Becoming Whole

Coming back to wholeness as a man after undergoing unnecessary gender surgery and living life legally and socially as a woman for years wasn't going to be easy. I had to admit to myself that going to a gender specialist when I first had issues had been a big mistake. I had to live with the reality that body parts were gone. My full genitalia could not be restored—a sad consequence of using surgery to treat psychological illness. Intensive psychotherapy would be required to resolve the dissociative disorder that started as a child.

But I had a firm foundation on which to begin my journey to restoration. I was living a life free from drugs and alcohol, and I was ready to become the man I was intended to be.

At age fifty-six, I experienced something beyond my wildest dreams. I fell in love, married, and began to fully re-experience life as a man. It took over fifty years, but I was finally able to unwind all the damage that purple chiffon dress had done. Today, I'm seventy-four years old and married to my wife of eighteen years, with twenty-nine years of sober living.

Changing genders is short-term gain with long-term pain. Its consequences include early mortality, regret, mental illness, and suicide. Instead of encouraging them to undergo unnecessary and destructive surgery, let's affirm and love our young people just the way they are.

Reading 2: Trouble in Transtopia: Murmurs of Sex Change Regret

Stella Morabito

Notes

Everyone has regrets. Some of us have big regrets. Most everyone has some place to go to get help dealing with them.

Except for, say, a guy who had sex-change surgery and now would like to have his penis back. (The one God gave him.)

Our culture seems pretty much “to each his own” when it comes to elective bodily mutilation and the regret thereof. And there’s a lot of regret out there. According to a British poll, a whopping 65 percent of those who’ve had various cosmetic surgeries regret it. People who regret their tattoos, plastic surgery, or more extreme body modifications (here’s a sad BuzzFeed pictorial on the effects of ear gauges) can read up on the Internet and find an open array of remedies. Plastic surgeons make money both puttin’ it in and takin’ it out.

Hollywood stars can speak openly about misgivings over their boob jobs and whatnot. Regarding her lip enhancement surgery, Courtney Love said: “I just want the mouth God gave me back.”

But the difference between Love and the guy with phantom penis syndrome is that the guy isn’t allowed to talk about his regret. Not openly. The transgender lobby actively polices and suppresses discussion of sex-change regret, and claims it’s rare (no more than “5 percent.”) However, if you do decide to “de-transition” to once again identify with the sex in your DNA, talking about it will get you targeted by trans activists. So it’s a challenge to understand the scope of regret for sex change surgery. It’s out there, but...

Let’s start with Alan Finch, a resident of Australia who decided when he was 19 to transition from male to female, and in his 20s had genital surgery. But then, at age 36, Finch told the Guardian newspaper in 2004:

. . . transsexualism was invented by psychiatrists. . . You fundamentally can't change sex ... the surgery doesn't alter you genetically. It's genital mutilation. My 'vagina' was just the bag of my scrotum. It's like a pouch, like a kangaroo. What's scary is you still feel like you have a penis when you're sexually aroused. It's like phantom limb syndrome. It's all been a terrible misadventure. I've never been a woman, just Alan . . . the analogy I use about giving surgery to someone desperate to change sex is it's a bit like offering liposuction to an anorexic.

Finch went on to sue the Australian gender identity clinic at Melbourne's Monash Medical Center for misdiagnosis. He also was involved in starting an outreach to others called "Gender Menders." The reaction from the transgender community was fast, furious, and abusive, particularly in the Susans.org discussion forum as described in Sheila Jeffrey's book, "Gender Hurts."

Since then, Finch's outreach website has been archived and there is no further information online. In fact, Finch's subsequent silence is the norm for those who change their minds. This is perhaps not surprising, given the vigor and vindictiveness of the transgender community in persecuting those who have the temerity to suggest that all is not well in sexual La-La Land. But if you look you can find rogue headlines every now and then that even Hollywood's fawning over "all things trans" can't quite control. There's much evidence that the carefully crafted pictures of transgender "authenticity" and "happiness" are more fiction than fact.

Buried Stories of High-Profile Regret

Rene Richards and Mike Penner remain fairly well known as male-to-female transgenders, the former from the 1970s and the latter recently. Both have stories of misgivings and sorrows that cannot be explained away through the old standard "it's-society's-fault" routinely trotted out by the transgender lobby.

Tennis champion Rene Richards was one of the first to go through sex-change surgery and was something of a sensation in the 1970s. As such, you might expect Richards to be a tower of strength, offering encouragement to those in similar circumstances today. Well, not so much. This is what Richards had to say in an excerpt from a March 1999 interview attributed to Tennis Magazine (unavailable in full online):

If there was a drug that I could have taken that would have reduced the pressure, I would have been better off staying the way I was—a totally intact person. I know deep down that I'm a second-class woman. I get a lot of inquiries from would-be transsexuals, but I don't want anyone to hold me out as an example to follow. Today there are better choices, including medication, for dealing with the compulsion to cross dress and the depression that comes from gender confusion. As far as being fulfilled as a woman, I'm not as fulfilled as I dreamed of being. I get a lot of letters from people who are considering having this operation...and I discourage them all.' —Rene Richards, "The Liaison Legacy," Tennis Magazine, March 1999.

A 2007 New York Times interview, "The Lady Regrets," describes Richards' temperament this way: "... as she wearies of the interview, her body language seems to become more traditionally male, suggesting an athlete who is wearying of the game."

Penner's story is even more tragic. In April 2007, Penner, a Los Angeles Times sportswriter for 24 years, announced in a stunning column that he would come back from vacation as "Christine Daniels." He then wrote a blog, "Woman in Progress," as he lived as a woman and served as a spokesperson for transgender activism.

But then, with no explanation, Penner decided in 2008 to de-transition. He readopted his byline, Mike Penner, and lived again as a man. All blog posts and bylines by Christine Daniels were mysteriously scrubbed from the LA Times website. Penner discussed none of it. But according to one report, he was devastated over not being able to save his marriage. Then tragically, in November 2009, Penner killed himself. The funeral for Penner was strictly private to keep out media. The LGBT community had their own memorial service, but only for "Christine Daniels," not Mike Penner.

Another heart-wrenching story, of a female-to-male transgender, is that of Nancy Verhelst in Belgium. She was aghast after her surgery, saying she felt more like a “monster” than a man. She also spoke of her sad childhood, in which her mother rejected her in favor of her brothers, and isolated little Nancy in a room over the garage. Nancy was so distraught that she asked doctors to put her to death under Belgium’s lax euthanasia laws. They coldly complied.

Trying to Drown the Iceberg

These stories may be the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There are many such scattered about, and you can see my blog for supplementation. No doubt they’re not widely reported because they don’t fit the “transgender-as-paragon-of-personal-courage” narrative so popular in the media today. But there’s also that element of active suppression by the trans activists.

Take, for example, one Reddit thread entitled “Grieving” from “m2f2m” (male-to-female-to-male) which generated a reader’s friendly warning to let him know that his subreddit was reported to the “transphobia project” which “has a habit of invading linked threads with its own method of education which includes name-calling and downvotes.” In fact, it looks like that’s been deleted. But here’s a poignant excerpt from m2f2m’s painfully honest blog:

I am grieving at how I have mutilated my body. . . . In the case of my surgeon, he seemed all too happy to cut off my testicles, as soon as he had a couple of glowing letters from my doctor and former therapist, saying what a nice lady I had become, how well I had ‘assimilated’ etc. Fuckin crazy. Anyway, I’ve been cryin’.

Stella Morabito

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See also this Reddit conversation that seems to confirm both how common trans doubts and regrets are, and how threatened transgender activists are by them:

[–]PrairieFlame 3 points 3 months ago

Thanks for the links. This sub has been pretty dead, but /r/gender_critical has got a lot of activity.

[–]Guyrl[S] 2 points 3 months ago

It has been, and that's too bad. The perspectives of people who have detransitioned has been the most helpful thing for me right now.

[–]thirdwaytrans 2 points 3 months ago

I'm so glad you find my perspectives helpful. It makes them worth writing!

[–]grvsmth 0 points 7 days ago

Too bad /r/gender_critical is so intolerant of any non-essentialist critiques of gender, huh?

[–]Guyrl[S] 0 points 3 months ago

I linked to this post in r/asktransgender in a post by someone wondering if they should detransition and asking for advice, and it got me banned.

[–]thirdwaytrans 0 points 3 months ago

Welcome to the banned club! I really worry about all of the people that are questioning and then people are actively censoring any alternate information.

[–]Guyrl[S] 0 points 3 months ago

Haha thanks I suppose. I don't understand how anyone would want to limit their perspective so militantly. Especially given the severity and permanence of decisions concerning transitioning. I myself am terrified of the thoughts and feelings I've been having about my gender identity and want to consider all possible aspects and angles before making a decision. I didn't think detransition was such a threat to people in that community.

A Survivor's Mission to Reach Out to Regretters

While conversations like the above go on—and are suppressed—some brave souls push to get the word out about the potential for regret and other consequences far more severe.

Walt Heyer is perhaps the most active among the survivors out there, and possibly the most vilified by transgender activists. He is a clear-eyed and gentle man, now in his 70s, who had sex reassignment surgery and lived as a woman for many years. Because of the devastation sown by the gender confusion, Heyer offers information and support in blogs called sexchangeregret.com and transdetransition.com.

Heyer has also authored three relevant books: "Paper Genders," "Gender, Lies and Suicide," and "Trading My Sorrows" that provide resources to understand the destructive effects of gender confusion. He cites, for example, a national survey of more than 6,500 transgenders that asked the question, "Have you tried to commit suicide?" Forty-one percent answered, "Yes." One need look no further for compelling evidence of widespread transgender and sex change regret.

A Bit of Honesty from Sweden

A Swedish study from 2003 found that post-operative mortality and suicide rates for transsexuals are many times higher than the general population. And that's in Sweden, probably the friendliest environment on the planet for transgender individuals.

Also out of Sweden is a 2010 documentary entitled "Regretters" in which two older Swedish men who each lived as a woman for many years decided to go back to their male identities. (The film has made the rounds at various LGBT events, interesting given its controversial nature.) I recently watched Regretters on YouTube with English subtitles, but that option is no longer available. I hope you can still watch a subtitled trailer [here](#). A few more subtitled excerpts are available in this three-minute discussion with the director.

In “Regretters,” one of the men, Mikael, describes how he felt immediately upon seeing the results of the surgery and his penis gone. He rues aloud: “I was devastated. What have I done? What on earth have I done?” In the full version he explains how he cried and would have likely changed his mind if the doctor simply asked him just before the surgery if he was certain about it. Mikael also explained that he was always painfully shy towards women and never felt he could find someone who would date him or marry him. So—starved for a woman and fearful of rejection—he concluded that he needed to be a woman.

The other man, Orlando, who still looks and dresses androgynously, stated he was “shocked” to see his penis gone after the surgery. Absolutely shocked. Orlando passed very nicely as a woman and managed to trick a man who wanted children into marrying him. Orlando describes his many machinations in covering up, but after a decade the truth came out and the “marriage” ended.

A Coming Wave of Regret?

Thanks to the courage of the people who speak out, these regrets have been getting more attention in recent years. A British man who regrets his surgery recently claimed that there has not been enough psychiatric counseling of patients. He is now pressing the National Health Service to reverse his surgery. Britain’s youngest patient –much touted in the press for his courage in changing to a female—has also spoken out. Bradley Cooper begged his family for years, then finally got the go-ahead to switch at age 17. But after a year of living as a woman, he found the whole thing “overwhelming” and cancelled the surgery. Another story appeared on Huffington Post here. Radical feminist Julie Bindel wrote an article, “The Operation that Can Ruin Your Life.”

A few voices within the transgender community seem to expect a coming wave of regretters. Consider this excerpt from a March 2014 report by an Australian transgender activist, entitled: “Coming Trend within the Trans Community, including Doubts and Regrets:”

Yes, there are several well documented cases of regret or de-transition. . . . Most however, hide their dissatisfaction and de-transition in stealth, with the outcome that the true numbers will never be known. This is most unfortunate, as we need to understand these problems that they face and why it is happening more over time. I am not just alluding to Australia, but the World at large if we are to understand what causes us to have doubts and regrets.

Finally, Sundog Pictures, a well-known UK documentary production house, seems to have been exploring the possibility of a documentary on the phenomenon of sex change regret. But chances are you won't be hearing about it.

Consider this October 2014 blog post at TransActivist.com: "No I will not Help Sundog Make a Documentary about Trans 'Regret'" which reacts to a letter of inquiry about the project from a Sundog representative. "NotRightRuth" scolded and lashed out against Sundog Pictures for its interest and stated that such a documentary would be "harmful" to the trans-agenda. A number of followers retweeted it here.

If Sundog Pictures is indeed interested, that's yet another indication that sex-change regret is far deeper and broader than reported. But with or without a new documentary, murmurs of regret are liable to get louder. Biological truth has a way of outing itself. The hard reality of it is written right into our DNA as "male" or "female." In the end, transgender activists and their media enablers won't be able to drown that massive iceberg.

Suggested Questions About the Readings:

1. What are some common things people regret about their attempts to change their sexual identity?
 2. What are some ways to support a person in this situation?
 3. Why do you think stories about sex change regret do not receive as much media attention as stories of people who do not regret their surgeries and hormonal treatments?
 4. What problems do people encounter in attempting to de-transition?
 5. With whom would you like to share this material?
 6. How can the members of the group support you this month or week?
 7. Whom would you like to invite to the next session?
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