

FROM MR. DONALD N. MCCLOSKEY TO MS. DEIRDRE N. MCCLOSKEY

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I am not ashamed of this and am not going to let people treat it as shameful. For myself and for the politics I am not going to be put back into a closet, ever.[2] Gender deviance, gender dysphoria, gender blending, gender incongruence, gender role etc., are terms which have found a prominent place in present day vocabulary. The term gender binary is no more associated with just two gender categories. According to Kate Bornstein it is the 'fluidity' in gender which provides room for the various gender categories. This fluidity has opened its doors for Gender blending which refers to cross dressing and sex changes. Sex change will be dealt in detail in this paper with special focus on the work *Crossing – A Memoir* (1999) by Deirdre N. McCloskey, currently working as a Professor in the University of Illinois at Chicago, who till the age of fifty one was Mr. Donald N. McCloskey and at the age of fifty two came out of the closet to be identified as Ms. Deirdre N. McCloskey. The painstaking journey which Mr. Donald N. McCloskey persistently undertook can be studied in detail with Richard Ekins's, a pioneer in the field of Gender studies, grounded theory where he uses the career path to discuss in detail the three modes - sexed, sexualized and gendered (SSG'D) and the five phases which the 'male femalers' undergo in the event of evolving as a woman.

Keywords: fluidity, Gender blending, career path theory, male femalers, sexed, sexualized and gendered.

INTRODUCTION

Gender deviance, gender dysphoria, gender blending, gender incongruence, gender role etc., are terms which have found a prominent place in present day vocabulary. The term gender binary is no more associated with just two gender categories. According to Kate Bornstein it is the 'fluidity' in gender which provides room for the various gender categories. Gender identity is understood to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the persona of the body and other expressions of gender such as dress, speech and mannerisms. Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male or female. Such is not the case with the 'Transgenders' or the 'male femalers'. Deirdre clearly puts it as "Gender must be enacted daily in a hundred ways, but to be acted it must be felt, too, 'from the inside'. Like method acting. Pretend you're an orange. Be an orange". [2] The life of 'male femalers' is definitely not a bed of roses as the surrounding where they live is not that cozy. 'Male Femalers' closeted life makes this clear. The career path which is discussed below gives us an overview of the life style and stages which a 'male femaler' endures in his life. Richard Ekins, a pioneer in the

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field of sociology has made an analysis on the different stages of the male femalers. He used the grounded theory to know about the life style of the male femalers. He came out with a methodology called the career path which accommodates the various phases or stages which a male travels in the process of 'consolidating' into a female. He identifies these phases under three major modes or tendencies like 'Body Femaling', 'Erotic Femaling' and 'Gender Femaling' which he compares with the three facets 'sex', 'sexuality' and 'gender' respectively. Apart from bringing in the co-relation with the above entities he also analyzes the 'male femalers' interrelations with the objects, actions and events around them, which they conceptualize with their 'self' and 'world' in terms of 'sexed', 'sexualised' and 'gendered' (SSG'D). 'Body Femaling' is associated with sex i.e., male or female, 'Erotic Femaling' is associated with sexual i.e., arousal - it refers to the excitement or desire towards femaling, and 'Gender Femaling' is associated with gender i.e., the sociocultural correlates of the division of the sexes. The 'male femaler', in the process of 'evolving', passes through the various aspects mentioned in the five phases. These aspects which are mentioned need not be faced by all the 'male femalers'. The modes and facets vary according to the situation. Though Ekins views career path in relation to sociology, in this paper we would deal with his ideal path by relating it to the field of gender studies in literature. Deirdre N. McCloskey, distinguished Professor of Economics at the University of Illinois, Chicago, has given a record of his life events through his work *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999). As Jeannie Marshall puts it "McCloskey's story does not read like the ravings of a crazy person, but rather the very courageous story of someone trying to live an honest life, whatever the consequences". Donald lived a closeted life till the age of 51, but at the age of 52 'he' (Donald) became 'she' (Deirdre). It is through her persistence that she was able to identify her 'real' self. He was earlier engulfed with the fear of being identified as he would lose her family members. But at one point made it clear that he would eventually change his identify as 'her'. When he was spotted by his wife for his cross dressing there was, a heated argument, when his wife burst out, "What am I supposed to do, help you become a transsexual?", he replied, "Not to become, I am, and always have been... And why wouldn't you go on loving me and helping me?"[2].

Phase One: Beginning Femaling At this initial stage, Ekins points out that the 'male femaler' involves in cross-dressing. This stage is identified as the 'primary deviance'. This happens across any age. Cross dressing takes place in such a way that it is not considered as an aberration and the subject is not affected or blamed for the act. The male femaler is able to remember and reexperience this act of cross-dressing throughout his life. Deirdre who happened to cross dress at the age of 11 felt a kind of pleasure in wearing women's clothes. His parents did not consider it seriously as they thought it was part of that age. "Donald's mother never suspected"[2]. His father "Probably he thought it some usual heterosexual

fantasy. Or nothing”[2]. Ekins points out that there is a sense of ‘undifferentiation’ in the male femaler as he is uncertain about what really happens within him. Deirdre associates his feeling to that of ‘being’. He explains his feel when he wore his mother’s undergarments. “...found a rush of sexual pleasure – not joyous or satisfying, merely There. It was mild ache, pleasant and alluring, mixing memory ... was not curiosity about what lay underneath women’s clothing. It was curiosity about being” [2]. The ‘male femaler’, who is in a state of inchoateness, feels that the ‘untoward’ incidents make him question “What does it all mean?”[1]. Deirdre, in this phase, was going through all the three modes but in a confused state. According to Ekins the interrelations between the constitution of self and world as SSG’D, in this phase, is ‘normality’ which states that the male femaler would want to live in the new appearance (femaling) while at the same time retain the old one (male). Similarly Deirdre cross-dress’s but often insists to him he is a man and that cross-dressing is just his hobby. “‘Just’ a heterosexual crossdresser[sic]. Just sex. Not identity”[2]. “But so what? He said to himself. It’s a minor matter. I’m just a heterosexual crossdresser[sic]”[2]. “But of course I am a heterosexual cross-dresser. Just wondering”[2].

PHASE TWO: FANTASYING FEMALING

Ekins points out that, at this stage the male femaler would fantasy on femaling. The fantasies would relate with ‘real’ life instances. They would even dream as if their family had accepted them. When we look into the interlinks between the modes and phases, here persons are in a state of cluster. They are not able to identify their own self. The constant dream which Deirdre had is “Could I become a woman?”[2]. At this stage a few might identify themselves as ‘transsexuals’. The pleasure which they get because of dreaming is a conscious choice. Ekins explains “An embryonic world will be constituted within which a femaling self and femaling related objects and practices are emerging, but which at this stage, the fantasying femaler keeps separate from the everyday world, thus keeping the latter more or less ‘normal’ and enabling its development more or less boundaried from the incipient femaling world”[2]. Despite Deirdre’s closeted cross-dressing, he still wanted to live as a normal man to the outer world. He spent more time in his cross-dressing by getting up at 3.30am and dressing as a woman. He was interested in doing all the work that a woman does. “He would sweep the kitchen or make the bed while pretending he was swabbing the decks or reefing a topsail”[2].

PHASE THREE: DOING FEMALING

In this stage, Ekins elaborates that, crossdressing becomes a regular habit. As for Donald it became the most important work in his life for “he had been doing it ten times a month through four decades wherever possible, though in the closet. ‘About five thousand episodes’[2]. At this stage the ‘male femalers’ begins to accumulate

all feminine clothing for themselves and secure them. "Donald became cunning at hiding the crossdressing... so that his wife and children never knew...he had accumulated a little of his own"[2]. Ekins suggests that it is at this stage the male femaler finds an interrelation with the all the three facets. "They are more prone towards the gendered world and they try to get more knowledge about girls and women"[1]. One of his chapter title "Women's World" clearly indicates how as a 'male femaler', Donald enjoyed all the attributes of being 4 identified as a woman. Donald derives pleasure as he gathers the information about women because he desired to 'be' one. As regards the interrelation between the constitution of the self and the world of SSG'D they are in a state of confusion. Though they enjoy the facet of being 'gendered', they still try to find a meaning for the change which happens within them. Ekins mentions that in the process of 'doing femaling', at one point, they try to find an explanation for their current state. Ekins has found that the male femaler, during his cross-dressing episodes tries to put an end to his new appearance. Donald too felt guilty of his state of cross dressing, "...and into his thirties he would periodically throw out his collected clothing and magazines in a purge"[2]. A lot of introspection would take place in this phase which forces them to stop thinking on the grounds of transformation. "What am I complaining about? I have a wonderful life. Though a man. Shoulder the sky, my lad..."[2].

PHASE FOUR: CONSTITUTING FEMALING

According to Ekins it is in this phase the male femaler tries to get at the meaning for all his activities. In the first phase a questions lingers in his mind. 'What does this mean?'. The experiences and activities as male femaler have made them to 'make sense' and 'explain' their state.

It is at this stage the male femaler would seek the 'professional guidance' either from those of their same group or from media or literature. Deirdre sought the help of people who cross-dressed and he browsed the internet for a plausible rationale to his change. He admits that "media paid some attention to cross-dressing and he had formed the habit of using newspaper indexes at the local public library to dig out stories"[2]. All this gave him lot of mental and physical courage to take up the new label 'transsexual'. Ekins adds that it is in the 'constituting femaling' phase where they associate themselves with 'a label that fits'. It is at this stage the male femaler narrows down on 'what' he is. In this phase the emphasis is on 'self and identity'. Donald began to get interested in the real-life stories and the technical advice on a cross genders life. Odd. The sexual part started to fade, something new in his cross-dressing, though he didn't notice" [2] Ekins also ascertains that in this phase reference can be made to the Beaumont Society, an association for the transvestites and transsexuals, 'whose motivation for cross-dressing is primarily of gender, rather than a sexual, nature'[1]. "It was not about sex. It was about

identity” [2]. Throughout his memoir Deirdre insists that he wanted to ‘be’ a woman. “I like being a woman to a man”[2].

PHASE FIVE: CONSOLIDATING FEMALING

It is in this stage the male femaler is fully established as a female. The individual gets a frame work to develop his femaling self and world and he can be as a female in his normal life. Deirdre, at this stage shook his fear and came out to willingly claim that he is a ‘transexual’. “At fifty-two Donald accepted cross-dressing as part of who he was” [2]. A complete transformation occurs where the male femaler does all that which would help him identify as a female. Deirdre went in for Electrolysis, voice training and she also became a member of various associations and groups where she could be in the company of women. In this stage all the three modes along with the three facets will be found prominent in the life of the male femaler. As part of ‘body femaling’, Deirdre went in for sex reassignment surgery and changed his sex a female. “‘He’ is coming as ‘She’”[2]. Ekins points out that male femalers would lose all that was male in them. In the same way we find Deirdre claiming proudly that “she forgot what is was like to be a man”[2]

Deirdre was a perfect ‘gender femaler’, for as Ekins mentions, Deirdre leads the life a ‘real’ woman. Deirdre was addressed as “‘Professoressa’, the feminine of the occupation by a gathering in the University of Catania. She paid attention even to the way they addressed her and corrected those who called her ‘sir’. Whenever over phone she was addressed as ‘sir’, she would politely correct them. The reason here is very apt. “Since it was awkward to go on and on in the wrong gender”[2]. The interrelations between the constitution of the self and the world, at this stage are very clear. The relation with the object, actions and events is all ‘female gendered’.

CONCLUSION

Richard Ekins’s grounded theory and his career path methodology has best been used by many researchers to analyze the sociological standards and ways of living of the ‘male femaler’. “It enables the proper respect to be paid to the processual and emergent nature of much cross-dressing and sex-changing phenomena”[1].

There are many issues which Deirdre has discussed in her memoir in terms of ‘gender femaling’ and ‘body femaling’. As Maxine Kumin puts it “this is a woman worth knowing. She has given us a highly readable, dramatic account of her crossing”. It is because of her persistence to lead the life of a woman that she was able to ‘evolve’ as one. According to him most ‘male femalers’ will go back and forth in the career path in order to get an identity of their own.

Though Ekins collected data reagrding among the ‘male femaler’s in UK, it stands true with the lives of Revathi and Living Smile Vidya, transgenders who belong to Tamilnadu. On the whole the lives of the transgenders are at stake. Though

some like Susan Stryker sweat out for the betterment of this community they still have a long way to go. “When at last we have all come out, when the closets are used for keeping clothes instead of people, when all hatred based on stupid fear is dissipated, we will have got our prayer answered, the prayer of identity”[2]. These lines make it clear that Deirdre has taken great pains to ‘evolve’.

References

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