

The Sacred Androgen: The Transgender Debate

BY DANIEL HARRIS

Those who choose to alter or even mask their gender merit full protection under the law merely because their decisions, while they may divest them of breasts and birth names, do not strip them of their humanity. TGs face violence, murder, mass unemployment, homelessness, poverty, rampant HIV infection, inadequate healthcare, depression, and, at alarmingly high rates, suicide. Many commentators have singled out tolerance for this most vulnerable part of the population as the final frontier of civil rights, a new contest against bigotry and homophobia, one it would be irresponsible for both politicians and everyday citizens not to address.

And yet just as the issue has come to the fore of public awareness, TGs have ambushed the debate and entangled us in a snare of such trivialities as the proper pronouns with which to address them, protocol as Byzantine and patronizing as the etiquette for addressing royalty. They insult us with the pejorative term “cisgender,” which they use to describe those of us who accept, however unenthusiastically, our birth gender, as opposed to the enlightened few who question their sex. Moreover, they shame us into silence by ridiculing the blunders we make while trying to come to grips with their unique dilemmas, decrying our curiosity about their bodies as prurience and our unwillingness, or even inability, to enter into their own (often unsuccessful) illusion as narrow-mindedness.

A case in point is the now infamous episode of *Pierce Morgan Live* in which transgender activist Janet Mock objected to the headline that appeared at the bottom of the screen, “Was a boy until 18”—a

fact that, while incontrovertible, was apparently tactless and naïve, the correct caption being that she had *always* been a woman and had been born, not a boy, but “a baby.” Mock organized a kind of witch hunt in which she accused the liberal and tolerant Pierce Morgan of having, in her words, “misgendered” her merely because he had questioned her about her past and leapt to the conclusion—medical records would surely bear this out—that she had in her youth changed her gender.

Such bullying interception of public debate should alarm anyone who seriously wants to understand the issues involved, which, while they may affect the transgender community most directly, are by no means their exclusive province, to be broached only by those on whom they most intimately impinge. TGs cannot expect to dictate to us the terms of the discussion, for we are thinking people, too, and nothing, notwithstanding many activists’ attempts to embarrass us into uncritical consensus, can stop us from thinking our thoughts.

Here are a few of mine:

While I fervently support TGs’ rights to transition and to do so without fear of reprisal, I believe that the whole phenomenon of switching one’s gender is a mass delusion.

For one, the physical manipulation involved in transforming oneself into a man or woman is apparently different in kind—or so the transgender community presumes—from the nips and tucks undertaken by the trophy wife or celebrity, anti-heroes of a materialistic culture with whom the TG, having taken advantage of the same merchandising of the body promoted by commercialized medicine, bears a strong and unfortunate resemblance. The general public almost universally disapproves of plastic surgery and laughs derisively at celebrities who present a face “different from the one they rode in on,” as one commentator referred to their futile—and often ruinous—efforts to roll back the hands of time. The obscene trout pout of Donatella Versace, the misshapen nipples and oblong breasts of Tara Reid, the Joker’s grimace of Kim Novak, are all fair game for that most American and democratic of blood sports, the desecration of the rich and famous in tabloids and gossip blogs.

And yet what is the actual difference between Michael Jackson whittling his nose down to a brittle sliver of bone and whitening his skin with alpha hydroxy acid and arsenic in order to efface his blackness and the TG sanding down her brow bone and hacking off a

sizeable chunk of her mandible in order to efface her *gender*? Why is the one decried as a racially reprehensible instance of self-mutilation, self-denial, and self-loathing and the other extolled as a celebratory instance of self-liberation? Why is it not only okay but valiant for Caitlyn Jenner to liberate her inner woman through rhinoplasties and laryngeal shaves while it is deplorable and pathetic for Michael Jackson to liberate his inner Caucasian through bleaching and cleft chin augmentation? When Rachel Dolezal goes to the Palm Beach tanning salon for her weekly \$30 dip, she is committing the unconscionable crime of appropriating blackness (or, in her case, as the *Gawker* put it, not blackness but “Medium Brown Spray Tan”), but when Laverne Cox, one of the breakout performers on the television show *Orange Is the New Black*, slaps on a transdermal estrogen patch, she is lauded as a hero and role model. All of the arguments against plastic surgery—that it is dangerous, even fatal, often botched, and symptomatic of either extreme body dysmorphia or a lamentable effort to accommodate Hollywood’s chauvinistic ageism—can be leveled against those who transition from one sex to another. The trophy wife and the TG swim, it seems, in the same surgeon-infested seas.

Genetic women often sacrifice themselves to unrealistic standards of beauty, of thinness, of eternal youth, of huge bosoms and tiny, pinched waists. TGs likewise sacrifice themselves to outmoded standards of *femininity*, attempting to achieve an hourglass figure with gigantic breast implants that cantilever out from their chests like traffic cones and injections to their hips and butt of silicone—or, for the down-and-out, superglue, Fix-a-Flat, Slime Tube Sealant, and cotton balls. In an effort to become a “body goddess,” famed Florida transsexual Tatiana Williams inflated her buttocks with no less than eight pounds of silicone (an entire gallon!) for each butt cheek. Such black-market inoculations, delivered by medical impersonators at “pump parties,” turned her spindly twenty-five-inch male rear end into a sixty-inch monstrosity, that of a goddess indeed, the Venus of Willendorf. TGs do not model themselves on the average hipless, braless, triple-A-cup coed in jeans and T-shirts, but on such vacuous female fantasies as Kim Kardashian, Pamela Anderson, and the English singer and fashion model Katie Price.

But just as genetic women develop eating disorders and low self-esteem from the omnipresence of images of the voluminously upholstered bombshell, the TG is subject to a whole host of perils in her transition from virago to vamp. Dissatisfied with the meager paps she

developed after hormone treatment, Rajee Narinesingh, a TG featured on the television show *Botched*, sought help from a scam artist and alleged murderer who injected her face and breasts with industrial-strength liquid cement, a substance that over time turned her breasts into ulcerated saddlebags and blossomed into stony excrescences on her once fashionably chiseled cheekbones. Many spokesmen for the transgender community posit a whole range of socially subversive interpretations of gender, but even a glance at the advertisements on Craigslist reveals a clichéd image of a hyper-sexualized odalisque who exists solely for men's delectation—an enchantress who sacrifices her health to her admirers: lungs punctured by syringes, second-degree burns from laser hair removal, amputated breasts, and vaginoplasties that create, not orifices, but fibrous lumps. Far from challenging conventional sex roles, the TG seems to exist in a pre-feminist dystopia of rigidly stratified behaviors that hark back to an age of Hollywood femme fatales, gold-digging tempresses whose anachronistic beauty routines attract heterosexual males dissatisfied with their wives' Spartan toilettes and sexually undistinguished casualwear.

In some less educated and more homophobic cultures, being gay is by definition wanting to be a woman or, in the case of the lesbian, a man. The lower class misunderstands effeminacy and mannishness not as *behaviors* but as manifestations of an ersatz man or woman, an anomalous composite of the genders. The state of being a homosexual is simplified and to some extent rendered less objectionable as merely another form of heterosexuality, another permutation on the acceptable polarity of the genders, one that denies the homosexual his or her autonomy as an individual existing outside this obsolete antithesis. While only some 30 percent of the transgender community is gay, it is not unlikely that a large sector of this demographic has internalized the homophobia present in uneducated assumptions about homosexuality and, in transitioning, are attempting to re-create themselves in this intellectually obtuse image of the man or woman manqué, a chromosomal chimera of sorts, a creature that has somehow fallen short of its true identity and who must go on a prohibitively costly quest to overcome its shortcomings. If we allowed greater latitude in the accepted behaviors of the sexes and recognized that effeminate men and masculine women are not just unstable subsets of heterosexuality, many people would not need to correct this perceived genetic malfunction. The message of the 1960s and 1970s was androgyny, and yet the TG regresses to an age before androgyny. A culture that

recognizes only two possibilities of sexual response, either Adam's or Eve's, gives the TG only one alternative, an ultimatum to reconfigure her entire physiology in accordance with blunt, indiscriminate nomenclature that dulls our understanding of gender.

The implications of this covert homophobia are particularly distressing for children. More and more, parents are encouraging their sons and daughters to transition when they spot even the slightest hint of effeminacy or boyishness on the grounds that such behaviors indicate desires to *be* the opposite sex when in fact their desire to play with dolls and throw footballs may reflect the desire to be something less exotic, even banal, namely, gay. Tolerance disguises a latent uneasiness with homosexuality and an urgent parental need to shoehorn the uncomfortable issues of children's sexuality into pat rubrics. Children now begin hormone therapy as early as the age of four. Laverne Cox was recently confronted by a seven-year-old who professed that she, too, is "trans," to which Cox replied by, as one news outlet put it, "shar[ing] some sweet words": "remember, honey, transgender is beautiful." Her mother, who blogs as "Gender Mom," may very well have been nudging, if not unconsciously importuning, her effeminate son into making an irreversible decision, one that he might later regret, as, evidenced by a study from the University of Toronto which kept track over time of 109 boys with gender identity disorder, only 13 of whom sought to change their genders as adults. In the climate of permissiveness developing around the public discussion of transitioning, well-meaning parents, unsettled by the unorthodox behavior of their precociously gay and lesbian sons and daughters, could easily coerce their children into something like a false confession, badgering them, in a self-congratulatory wealth of good feelings, into decisions that neither they nor their children are capable of making.

The discussion of transgender issues is dominated by the metaphor of the imprisoned male or female, a belief in whose existence requires an uncomfortably wide leap of faith. Such a theory is reminiscent of largely discredited ideas about multiple personalities which, as in the case of the two most famous case studies, that of Chris Sizemore and Shirley Mason, Eve and Sybil (the latter of whom later recanted her story), posit the existence of a whole cast of internal characters, all struggling to shove their clamorous siblings off the soap box. The imprisoned male or female argument also harks back to the superstition of demonic possession, of an inner fiend, except the terms of the exorcism have been reversed and it is the body that is the entity to be

expelled, and the demon the blameless Rapunzel locked away in her tower. Such a crude dichotomy harks back even further to late antique and medieval allegories of the psychomachia, the battle of body and soul. This polarity provides the ideological underpinnings of pop psychology, which defines the apogee of mental health as that point in an individual's history in which emotions and complexes supposedly trapped within—pent-up rage, frustrations, inner children, Oedipal appetites—are released and thus neutralized, presumably by mere exposure to the oxidizing effects of chitchat and air. Pop psychologists describe the body as a pressure cooker in which tensions build, stresses surge, blockages obstruct. Inhibition of any kind is viewed as a dangerous form of self-suppression that manifests itself in an array of neuroses, deformations, and, especially in the case of women (an example of the misogyny of pseudoscience), uterine and breast cancer, a form of rot from within (according to this etiology of disease, men do not rot but, in an empirically more plausible interaction of body and mind, explode, spontaneously combust with strokes and heart attacks, deaths far swifter and less painful than women's slow, guilt-ridden malingering). This odd notion of inverting the self like a glove, of getting the inside out, underpins the new craze for transitioning. The myth of the imprisoned female and her chivalrous rescue on the operating table is a fable of a disclosure culture, one in which all secrets must be spilled, all impostures exposed, all latencies made blatant, lest the toxins generated by inner pressures slowly corrupt the organism, destroying both the mental and physical well-being of the host body.

In resolving one conflict, however, aren't TGs creating another? In liberating the archetypal Andromeda from her chains, aren't they in turn suppressing their male or female selves even more violently than they did their inner genders before they came out, creating an internal embargo as psychologically devastating as the one they suffered before they transitioned? Why is one gender more viable than the other? In being true to themselves, aren't they being false to their own bodies? Physical evidence suggests that there may indeed be a slim genetic component behind the desire to transition, but isn't there even more prepossessing data against it, namely, male or female bodies themselves, the preponderance of a person's genome, which is suppressed at great cost to the individual's peace of mind?

If gender reassignment surgery is the latchkey for the imprisoned male or female, once he or she has been freed are they happier, have they achieved the serenity that is the fundamental goal of a disclosure

culture? An attempted suicide rate of a staggering 41 percent suggests that many TGs experience profound disillusion over the fact that their problems were not resolved during their transition and that they are still as out of sorts with their bodies and their failure to pass as they were before they underwent hormone replacement therapy. High percentages resort to prostitution to pay for their feminizing surgeries, alcohol and drug abuse occur at higher rates, homelessness and unemployment are rampant. Certainly much, if not most, of this unhappiness can be ascribed to social disapproval, but it would be disingenuous to say that the cruelty of stigmatization is the reason for *all* of it. If TGs initiated this journey to find mental health, there is no evidence whatsoever that they achieve it or, indeed, that they even marginally improve their lots in life.

Many TGs insist that they were “born in the wrong body” and that only a sex change, to use an out-of-date expression, or “sex reassignment surgery,” to use a newer, more cumbersome one, can correct nature’s blunders. The word *reassignment* presumes that there is an “assigner,” that there was agency, someone making the decisions, rather than one’s gender having just been an accident, the roll of the dice, and since nature was so maladroit, so incapable of fulfilling its responsibilities, TGs themselves assume the role of commander-in-chief and rectify this gross oversight with amputations and implants. The entire scientific community disagrees, however. Gender is not “assigned,” apportioned like a sum of money or bequeathed like an heirloom. It is *revealed*, first by the transducer of an ultrasound machine massaging a besmeared and distended belly and then by the obstetrician as he dangles the wailing infant by its feet.

TGs, however, are, like all of us, products of a self-help culture in which the will is all-powerful, in which one can be anything one chooses simply by dint of effort, leaping over such obstacles as fate, destiny, tragedy, necessity, and chance to create “an entirely new you.” Biological facts are mere opportunities to strengthen this hypertrophied will, hurdles to overcome on one’s “journey” toward “self-actualization.” As the eponymous Laura in the transgender blog “Laura’s Playground” puts it, transitioning is simply a matter of “disassembling [the] old self, reassembling [the] new,” a kind of culinary rebirth in which one follows one’s own chosen recipe: “More, more, now stir. Now add new ingredients. What kind of person do you want to be?” Unfortunately, there are too many cooks in nature’s kitchen. One can no more change one’s gender than one’s species. However strong

one's will, walls cannot be walked through (*pace* L. Ron Hubbard, who invented the ultimate human potential religion whose adherents, simply through the power of positive thinking, can correct blurred vision, levitate, cure their own maladies, and—imagine the savings on cleanings—grow new teeth). Transitioning is a collision in which the human will slams into the hard, cruel, irrefutable facts of the body.

Let us assume for a moment that the TG really *was* born in the wrong body. Is this internal male or female so gullible that it would be fooled by vaginoplasties and scrotoplasties, by gonadectomies and mastectomies? Is the inner man or woman such a sucker, so brainless, so dimwitted, that it would believe that these cosmetic changes constitute a real reversal of gender and thus feel any happier in its new silicone shell? Wouldn't he or she still feel that, while the penis and breasts may have been cast away like so much medical waste, the arms are still the same, the legs, the torso, the neck, the feet—all still chromosomally identical to the body that existed before they went under the knife? The internal male or female is never really freed from its prison; its cells have simply been redecorated.

Pop psychology may provide the philosophical rationale for the TG's transformation, but postmodern theory provides the modish rhetoric. Many TG activists believe that gender is a "social construct," not a physical reality but a set of attitudes and prejudices, of inhibiting conventions that contain and entrap our infantile polymorphousness. As C. Carter says in "Sex/Gender and the Media,"

Biology is no less a cultural construct than gender socialization into masculinity and femininity. While the point is that biology, like gender, is thought to be socially constructed, that does not mean that there is no such thing as biology. . . . Identity critique seeks to disrupt the very categories we have constructed between the sexes, and to demonstrate how such categorization results in a narrow range of biological differences. . . .

While science teachers across America can all breathe a sigh of relief that Carter recognizes that biology is a real thing, the tone of the passage suggests that its author feels that "identity critique" is a far more compelling study than watching things grow in petri dishes. The "social construct" theory of gender dematerializes the body, which becomes that of a sexless seraph, too sacred and ethereal to be either male or female, a Barbie or Ken Doll whose pubis is a rounded bulge of thermoplastic polymer, the genitals having been magically expunged with the vanishing cream of a few meaningless shibboleths. The "social construct" theory provides a kind of instantaneous,

out-patient sex reassignment surgery performed not by a “genital re-configuration specialist” with a few sharp incisions of a scalpel but by a gender studies adjunct with an onslaught of paper cuts from his copy of *On Grammatology*, for why does anyone need to submit to the knife if one can change one’s gender simply by exploiting the malleability of reality itself? The brave face with which postmodernists confront both empirical reality and their colleagues in the sciences, like Don Quixote tilting at windmills, is one of the great farces of contemporary academia, a turf war with a pitifully foregone conclusion. In the case of the transgender community, such ravings create a certain linguistic elasticity that fosters the illusion that the borders between the genders are more porous than they are.

In most instances, TGs cannot afford the feminizing surgeries and haute couture wardrobe, to say nothing of the bevy of make-up artists, hair stylists, and celebrity photographers of the stature of Annie Liebovitz, that turned Caitlyn Jenner, with her \$100,000,000 fortune, amassed while the spokesman for the *Breakfast of Champions*, into the fairly astonishing success that she is. With a number of exceptions, men’s noses are too big, shoulders too broad, jaws too square, voices too deep, brows too beetling, and gait—at least in heels—too lumbering. When the public sees most TGs, it sees either Mrs. Doubtfires or Victor Victorias, and yet these incomplete figures, these arresting amalgamations of sexual traits, insist that we not only call them “he” or “she” but that we treat them as if they were indeed men or women when all of our training, from the time we distinguished pink from blue, tells us otherwise. The political agenda of the transgender community often seems to demand that we be complicit in their convictions, that we humor them, pretend that we view them as the genuine article when in fact they seem to be staging a kind of masquerade, dressing in a costume, playing at make-believe. We are not asked just to follow the humane policy of live and let live, exhibiting acceptance and tolerance as well as fighting for their rights as human beings, but we are required to act as their enablers, enter into their fantasies, protect them from the truth of a devastating fallacy. We are expected both to support them politically, an easy task for most liberals, and affirm their deeply guarded conceptions of selfhood, something that lies well outside the province of the struggle for equal protection under the law—in truth, that lies firmly in the field of counseling or psychotherapy. I know of no other human-rights movement in which supporters are adjured, not only to advocate for the greater civil liberties

of a minority, but to aid and reinforce its self-delusions, to guard those who harbor them from the truth. When we fail as the chaperones of these misapprehensions, we open ourselves up to criticism that we are narrow-minded bigots, that we have somehow failed the transgender community, been derelict in our psychological duties as its caregivers, the nursemaids of its inventions. Politics has acquired a psychological, indeed, an aesthetic dimension, a deeply personal judgment of a man's or woman's looks, of their passability or ugliness, a determination many of us are too polite—indeed, too compassionate—to make. To support the transgendered community is to profess to admire the aesthetic adequacy of their transition whereas to attack them, in a discussion in which disagreement is tantamount to hate speech, to hurling ethnic slurs, is to admit that their “journeys” have not succeeded and that, absent tens of thousands of dollars of surgery and a doctor skillful enough to perform procedures on everything from scalps to earlobes, are not likely to succeed.

For a minority group that expects us to subscribe wholeheartedly to its usually insufficient illusion of malehood or femalehood, it is shocking to discover how unkind TGs are to crossdressers and transvestites whom they view as dilettantes and epigones, failed women, indeed, as daffy gay men, whereas *they* are genuine heterosexuals, über women of the most refined genetic stock. When I myself experimented with crossdressing (as recounted in my book *Diary of a Drag Queen*), I made many of my contacts with men in an AOL chat room devoted to TGs and their admirers, an electronic brothel of sorts in which transgender prostitutes met their johns, not infrequently members of the online Vice Squad who entrapped these streetwalkers of the information superhighway. It is possible that I stumbled into a unique nest of snakes, but the behavior I witnessed there was so deplorable that each “chat” started as mere emoji'd palaver and quickly escalated to a crime against humanity. Each of our AOL profiles came with a portfolio of photographs so the entire chat room knew precisely how we looked, a type of exposure that, in the case of the crossdressers or the unpassable TGs, led to countless exhortations that we kill ourselves, that we jump off the Brooklyn Bridge or the Empire State Building—injunctions that struck me as at best cynical for a community with such astronomical suicide rates. The bodies of the TGs were also scrutinized for imperfections as if by Nazi phrenologists armed with chromed calipers searching for the perfect Aryan, racial impurities that were broadcast to the room as fodder for sadistic mockery, the

badinage of Internet scoundrels who held up their own pulchritude as an edifying contrast with the hideously disfigured bodies of would-be women. Much of the stigmatization TGs experience comes not only from heterosexual boors and hooligans but from other TGs, who shore up their self-doubts through the ruthlessness of their own constantly appraising tribunals. The crossdressers present in this chat-room-cum-court-of-physical-fascism received by far the brunt of the coven's malice because they were openly gay men, whereas the TGs were heterosexuals who had an innate prerogative to wear dresses and who indeed harbored incongruously homophobic attitudes toward men who violated the sacred taboo against transvestitism. Through such open self-deceptions, TGs at once allay their insecurities and escape the onus of their own self-hatred as gay men.

A key aspect of the impersonation of women was missing from the abominable manners of the TGs I encountered: the milk of human kindness, that most stereotypical component of the female personality, which, while possibly learned—indeed, “constructed”—or just as possibly a genetic prerequisite of maternal responsibilities, often makes women much more pleasant to be around than men. The chat room was a dog-eat-dog world of male aggression, of inane braggadocio and bellicose jockeying for power, a bully's playground in which, in the very act of flaunting their feminine bodies to their customers, they betrayed their true gender, that of quarrelsome Alphas playing an unhinged game of King of the Hill. TGs claim to have released their inner female, but in the case of AOL's chat room they simply gave their inner males wider latitude to dominate and oppress. Their mimicry of women extended only to the most superficial aspects of femininity, the reproductive and secondary sex characteristics, from vaginas to curvaceous hips—in short, a man's interpretation of what it means to be a woman, a misreading made all the more belligerent by the disruptive effects of hormonal fluctuations, which cause irritability and moodiness in TGs similar to PMS or menopause.

Not only is the TG a heterosexual woman, her boyfriend is a heterosexual man, a hemale to her shemale, a stud of such incontestable virility that there isn't a gay bone in his body. The TG and her admirer engage in a deeply subjective *folie à deux* in which they affirm each other's sexual authenticity. Many gay men are beset by the fantasy of being the submissive partner of a straight man, whose masculinity is more legitimate than their own. By remaking herself in the image of the straight man's desires (or for that matter, in the case of the les-

bian transitioner, in the image of the straight woman's desire), the TG engages in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice, self-suppression, not the brave act of self-liberation that she flatters herself she is performing. Clitorectomies in Africa and the Middle East are in part performed to prevent women from enjoying sex and giving erotic pleasure entirely to the all-powerful male who ravages an inert and unresponsive partner who must simply endure his lusts, acquiesce in desires in which she is physically unable to participate. There is a sense in which transitioning is also a form of genital mutilation, in that the gay man seeks to transform himself into a mere vessel for the heterosexual's impulses whereas his own libido is depressed to the point of extinction by the gelding effects of hormone replacement therapy.

If one of the motivations for transitioning is the submissiveness many gay men feel to heterosexuals, there is another motivation for by far the majority of TGs: straight and bisexual men, who constitute some 70 percent of those who transition. "Autogynephilia" is a controversial theory, abhorred by the transgender community, that explains many men's longing to transition as a response to a fetish, to the erotic pleasure they receive from seeing themselves as women, as having a woman's body and interacting with other women as lesbians, Caitlyn Jenner being the most famous and, of late, most photogenic example. Sex reassignment is the logical outcome of an excess of heterosexuality, of a love for women so intense that the straight TG tries to transform himself into the object of his desire. The theory has a great deal of psychological plausibility, but it is violently condemned by the transgender community on the ground that it defines gender dysphoria as a pathology, an illness, a "paraphilia" or sexual perversion, and this is indeed the case if you accept the idea that fetishes are illnesses, maladies as pernicious as the desire to caress feet or hair, to wear leather or soft fabrics, to worship muscles or stiletto heels, to sleep with older women or stuffed animals—calamitous practices known to simply tear apart the social fabric.

In response to this attempt to pathologize and sexualize their decisions, TGs attempt to neuter their desires and reconstrue them as a healthy form of self-expression, salubrious and psychologically nourishing, not "sick," not "degenerate," not "depraved," but nice. Transitioning is nicefied, denatured, its motivations cleansed of base sexual desires, and instead TGs assert that they pursue their quests out of fidelity to an asexual ideal of pure male- or femalehood, to that "inner" man or woman who is emancipated, not to have sex for heaven's sake,

but to comport him- or herself in accordance with some ascetic standard of gynec or andric perfection. The fetish theory suggests that TGs transition in order to accomplish a selfish and ignoble sexual agenda, that they are in fact having a kind of sex in front of us, but the "inner" man or woman theory makes their efforts more palatable by presenting them as part of a spiritual quest, a valorous act of self-disclosure, a demonstration of the guts and glory of the sacred androgen.

In my eyes, she is sterile, too virtuous, a eunuch martyr to a cause. Why are sexual motivations considered inadequate as justifications for the procedures TGs undergo? Why is a fetish not a legitimate reason for modifying one's body whereas a mythic character bound in chains of muscle and bones *is*? Only a sexually puritanical society would condemn people seeking their own unique form of erotic fulfillment. All of the other motivations TGs ascribe to themselves seem like so much temporizing, so much prevaricating with a culture that finds sex out of wedlock, let alone sex out of gender, disgusting and wrong.

In desexing him- or herself, the TG follows the same route that homosexuals have been forced to take in order to achieve assimilation. The public is willing to tolerate, even accept, anything provided that "anything" is in essence indistinguishable from themselves, shares the same values and aspirations, raises the same families, exhibits the same sexual reticence, patriotism, and religiosity. Acceptance is no more onerous than glancing in a mirror. Gay men have become caricatures of bourgeois respectability: they are soldiers who return home in the same flag-draped coffins, spouses who pledge to each other eternal love, dads who coach Little League teams, Cubmasters who award Fire Safety Badges and medals for kite flying and conscientious tooth brushing, and pastors who shepherd their flocks. The cost of conformity to the individual is decimating, but this is a price that many, both homosexuals and TGs, are willing to pay.

Copyright of Antioch Review is the property of Antioch Review, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.