

## “Hey, I’m in the DSM – IV , are you”?

### **According to the Standards of Care:**

*The DSM-IV. In 1994, the DSM-IV committee replaced the diagnosis of Transsexualism with Gender Identity Disorder. Depending on their age, those with a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and a persistent discomfort with their sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex were to be diagnosed as Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood (302.6), Adolescence, or Adulthood (302.85). For persons who did not meet these criteria, Gender Identity Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (GIDNOS)(302.6) was to be used. This category included a variety of individuals, including those who desired only castration or penectomy without a desire to develop breasts, those who wished hormone therapy and mastectomy without genital reconstruction, those with a congenital intersex condition, those with transient stress-related cross-dressing, and those with considerable ambivalence about giving up their gender status. Patients diagnosed with GID and GIDNOS were to be sub classified according to the sexual orientation: attracted to males; attracted to females; attracted to both; or attracted to neither. This sub classification was intended to assist in determining, over time, whether individuals of one sexual orientation or another experienced better outcomes using particular therapeutic approaches; it was not intended to guide treatment decisions.*

## **To Label Or Not to Label**

**or does the expansion of gender terminology exacerbate division and reinforce prejudice?**

### **Andrea**



[www.gender.org.uk/gendys/journal/01andrea.htm](http://www.gender.org.uk/gendys/journal/01andrea.htm)

It is a basic human need to be understood. We write novels and poems, ring up talk radio shows, argue in bars and hold long intense conversations with lovers, all in order to help others understand us. Each one of us is unique, not only genetically, but also in the way in which our life experiences have molded us and made us who we are.

For a few months this year I had the opportunity to read the E-mail correspondence on the Press For Change Forum, and it left me with several distinct impressions which I would like to share with you.

On the Forum messages from one individual would sometimes inspire many replies on the same or related subjects. One of the most controversial and lengthy discussions concerned "terminology". In other words, what transgendered, transsexual & people should call themselves and what labels they were prepared to accept from others.

Over the last 30 years there has been a growing tendency in the media, in employment, and politics, towards "political correctness" - the attempt to reduce stigmatization and discrimination by making it socially unacceptable to use terms which in the past have been used in an abusive or derogatory way such as "nigger" or "spastic". This censorship, (and it is censorship even if imposed with the best intentions), has been adopted with particular enthusiasm by the feminists, both gay and straight, and academics and political theorists.

But it is debatable if political correctness has done *anything* to reduce prejudice, or improve individual quality of life. The arguments for it are eminently reasonable, and in theory it alters people's mindset by making them examine the way they address others, and challenge the assumptions they were brought up with. Much in the same way as the "New Speak Dictionary" in George Orwell's 1984 attempted to make subversion and individuality impossible by removing the very words with which people might express "thought-crime". If you have no word for a concept then how do you communicate its existence to others, how can you be motivated by it?

The fact that political correctness has been taken to ridiculous lengths in some cases, has provoked a back lash of often violent hostility and ridicule from the so-called silent majority, who find such changes threatening and may feel they are being imposed upon by it. Political correctness also makes it no easier for the "physically challenged" to get into buildings without wheelchair access, or enable "people of ethnic origins" to overcome discrimination in the job market.

It is an observable fact that politicians, bigots and the privileged themselves will often pay lip-service to political correctness, to camouflage their true intention of maintaining the status quo, as regards this long-standing inequality of opportunity.

It is also a good opportunity for academics to make a name for themselves by writing long papers about the terms used by others, since people who deal in words will always give to words a greater importance than they will to practicalities.

OF COURSE it is preferable to be able to define yourself, rather than have to cope with a label applied to you by society, which, it goes without saying, will be wrong, misleading, stigmatizing and dehumanizing.

*Labels are always all of these things*, because they attempt to make sweeping generalizations, often based on ignorance and fear, that tar unique and disparate individuals with the same brush.

We all need to be able to say "Listen, this is me."

But, and it is a huge but, if, in defining ourselves, we end up saying only "I'm not like them." we simply succeed in reinforcing both our own and other's prejudices.

Over the past few years I have heard lesbians reject transsexual women because they "were not like them"; and heard transsexual people reject gays, transvestites and people with intersex conditions in exactly the same way. It sometimes seems as if members of minorities can only define themselves by disassociating themselves from everyone else. Even some trans-people seem to be saying: "I must make it clear, I am not gay, I am not a cross-dresser, I am not pre-op, I am not intersex. I'm better than them, I'm a real transsexual."

It also seems that some transgendered people, following the example of feminists and lesbians, feel superior if they wear their label on their sleeve, as it were. They don't call themselves women. Oh no, they are "*Transsexual Women*" and everyone has to know.

I do believe that in order to obtain equal rights it has been essential that some brave individuals came out, as transsexuals, in order to give all transsexuals a voice, to represent the majority who cannot or dare not be visible.

But, by what right do we judge others on the basis of whether or not they reveal their past to the World and risk making themselves objects of curiosity and cheap thrills for other's amusement? Surely the whole point of gender affirmation is that you are a woman (or a man in the case of our FTM brothers), not that you are seen as a token transsexual for the rest of your life!

I know that the terms transsexual and gender dysphoria are problematical because they were coined by medical professionals and come with the assumption that they apply to patients, who have an illness or disability and have to be fixed by jumping through the ludicrous hoops put in place by the medical profession.

But will finding new labels to apply to each other actually achieve anything constructive? Might it not be better to refuse to be labeled at all, to throw the stereotypes away, (at least after you have used the medical profession to fulfill your needs)?

The civil rights campaign is also hindered by a burgeoning of terminology. We have only just got the public and the politicians used to the word transsexual, and the word is now associated in their minds with an issue - i.e. equality of civil status, which they

are being asked to address. If they are confronted with "Pre-femisexual" "Complisexual" or "Pansexual" are we not going to create not only confusion and bewilderment but also make ordinary sensible practical people switch off?

The Government already defends its inaction by stressing the complexity, (as they see it), of the problem of legislating for transgendered rights. We do not need to add to this perception!!!!

We don't need more words, we need to de-sensationalize the word in common usage now - transsexual/transgendered, and de-sensitize the public to its use. We need more exposure not in a sensationalist way, or an academic way, but in ways that enable ordinary people to relate directly to the experiences of trans people.

We are, first of all human beings, who have more in common than the things that separate us. If we squabble among ourselves, and redefine ourselves and redefine ourselves until we all belong to a minority of one, we will have lost more than we have gained. We will have lost a sense of solidarity, lost touch with reality, and the powers that control our civil status will have won without a fight, because we cannot ask for rights for ourselves without also asking for rights for all our brothers and sisters.

United we stand, divide we fall, even if it is only by empty words.