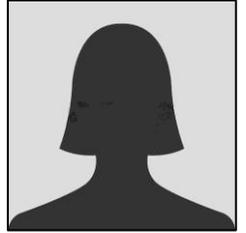


Susan Gilchrist: A Path of My Own

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Transgender and Non-binary Symposium - 30 June 2015**



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BACKGROUND

- **I have conducted academic research since 1966.**
- **Now retired I was a University Lecturer from 1970.**
- **My academic career has been in a different area.**
- **However: I have been involved in reconciliation work since 1969.**

RELEVANT RESEARCH

- **I have been and am involved in research work into the development of community behaviour and the creation of identity and personality in tribal conflict situations where violence occurs.**
- **I have also been and I am currently involved in research work with academic support, which is concerned with the development of personality and identity in situations where gender and sexually variant identities are found.**



PRINCIPLES

- Schools of research led by Gallese, Dawkins, Girard and others show that the early development of learning, personality and identity is driven by physiological mechanisms. Strong contagious, self-reinforcing and un-linked forces are involved.
- Within the brain, little or no neural co-ordinating abilities have developed.
- Traditional psychodynamic and social learning theories require a brain structure to have developed sufficient neural co-ordination for cognitive abilities to be present.
- These do not appear until around the age of two years.
- **Gender dysphoria is used as a case study to map the development of these processes.**
- It is shown that the development of gender and sexually variant activities depends on physiologically driven learning and development, not on cognitively driven ones, as is usually assumed.
- The consequences of this are outlined in my story

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MY STORY: SUPPRESSION

- The picture at the top of these slides is me.
- It should not just be the label of a man or a woman for gender is a multifaceted path of life.
- Born a boy, I was aware that “Something was wrong with Gender” from the age of four years.
- Puberty was a very difficult time.
- That is what I tried to hide/suppress/overcome/dominate/compensate for until I was 29 years of age.
- At that time I came very close to collapse.



NIGHTMARES OF COLLAPSE

- By this time I had reached a point where my drive for suppression and dominance could no longer cope.
- The collapse was both sudden and dramatic.
- The more I tried to fight this drive the stronger its compulsion became.
- I realised that this was a runaway process which if it continued would lead to the total rejection of my male role.
- I would end up by trying to force my identity on others.
- With enormous harm to all those I loved and all the commitments and relationships I had made.
- It was a nightmare which trapped me in its compulsive demand.
- It contradicted everything that my intellect sought.
- To escape from this I had to find a new approach.

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SEEKING DIRECTION

- Instead of trying to fight these conflicts I tried to explore where this was leading me
- I found no limit to the direction in which this was taking
- However as a man I had developed a secure heterosexual orientation
- I felt that transition would swap one set of conflicts for another
- My wish to fulfil the commitments and relationships I had made, and could make, is also why I have not followed a binary course
- Nevertheless I knew that continuing to fight these conflicts would lead to collapse, and a reversal of outlook was required.
- Although I continued my life as a man, I had to invert my approach.

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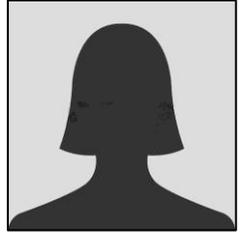


INVERSION

- For my approach to succeed I had to accept that this picture at the top of these slides really does represent me.
- Instead of trying to continue to fight these conflicts I sought to transcend them by looking for the richness this brought.
- Because without fully accepting and welcoming the reality of my gender identity, I could not find a firm base.
- This means that my acceptance of gender has had to be complete.
- This does not diminish or reduce the sense or the intensity of conflict.
- **Inversion has meant that instead a conflict which struck at the roots of my identity it now strikes at the top.**

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IMPLICATIONS

- **Simple acceptance is not enough.**
- **I had to cherish and use what this was telling me in a positive way.**

IMPACT

- **One might perhaps say that I have mentally and socially transitioned but I have chosen to live in a way which encompasses both binary roles.**

CONSEQUENCES

- **This has given me a sense of esteem and security which has remained ever since.**

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ATTITUDES

- I have never wanted to be a woman.
- However the feeling that I ought to be a woman has dominated much of my life.
- **This is not for the role, it is to be myself.**

FOUNDATIONS

- **This analysis sees the conflicts of gender as a symptom of the failure to build a coherent sense of self-identity, rather than the cause.**
- **Although many transsexuals urgently seek gender reassignment the real target to address for its management is the rejection of the current identity and role.**

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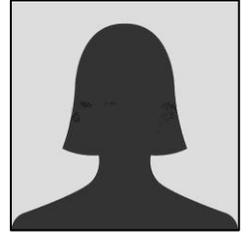


DYNAMICS

- In taking this approach I was helped by the research work I was (and am) involved in which examines personality development and behaviour in tribal conflict situations where violence occurs
- This work examines recent neurophysiological work on identity and personality development and it compares these with the claims of traditional psychodynamic and social learning theories.
- Gender dysphoria is used as a case study to link and compare the two approaches.
- Instead of looking for causes or reasons, I have sought to manage the dynamics instead.

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STRATEGIES

By choosing not to transition I have chosen to live with the conflict. My approach has been similar to that applied to alcoholism. In both cases there is the need to manage a runaway drive.

- The first requirement for this is to totally accept one's personal involvement.
- The second is to acknowledge that willpower cannot be used to control the conflict.
- The third is to find a way of neutralizing the conflict's dynamics.
- The fourth is to live life each day at a time.
- The fifth is to abstain from expressing its demands

However there are limitations to this approach



LIMITATIONS

- While alcoholism leads towards destruction and death. I was using this to resist what could be regarded as a fulfilment of life.
- This means that if this approach is to succeed my hope of finding fulfilment in the male role must always be greater than the rewards which transition and gender reassignment could bring.
- This does not allow me to do what I choose
- It only calms the dynamics so that I can do what is right.

This approach was so successful that for fourteen years I felt that the danger from these conflicts had passed. However depression for a different reason brought another collapse

- And I realised that I had to express my cross gender identity to avoid the distancing that abstention provides.

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PRESENT SITUATION

- **This is only a coping strategy and/or a management method - the conflict still continues**
- **I seek to maintain a truce which balances the aspects of my identity which build on my relationships with others against the selfhood which is created by gender inside.**
- **While my sense of gender identity remains constant throughout life, the others change with relationships, commitments and time.**
- **This means that I have to be able to accept and manage change whenever it is required.**

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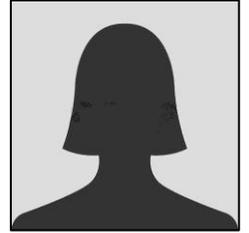
CHANGE

- **The approach I take is not to deny or prevent change. It aims to make a smooth change possible so that if it is needed it can come at the right time, for the right reasons and in a way that minimizes the trauma it creates.**
- **Any failure in these would lead to compulsion and catastrophic collapse.**
- **This is not an easy course. It is about finding ways to manage a volcano of emotions that can erupt from deep inside**
- **I try to be as open as I can about my approach, so that among as many people as possible there are no secrets that I have to hide.**

- **For this approach to succeed I always be convinced that my course is right.**
- **I have managed to keep to this path for the last forty years**
- **But this leads to many future concerns.**

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FUTURE CONCERNS

- As age increases the pressure grows stronger as commitments diminish and ideals for the future give way to the realities of the past.
- The possibility of moving towards gender reassignment must always be kept open otherwise fear of entrapment with age will destroy the transcendence required.
- The need to live each day at a time and to keep these options open means that the cloud of unknowing increases as age progresses
- There is the continuing trauma of living two lives.
- I cannot and must not predict what the future will bring.

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The fear of entrapment with increasing age is a major concern

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PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

- **I first saw a consultant who specialised in this area in Harley Street in 1976**
- **When I last talked to a consultant from a GIC in 1988 about these issues he told me that “he had never met anyone like me before”**
- **I have not tried to seek referral to a GIC since because I was left with the feeling that there was little these could offer that would help me in my approach**
- **The fact that we are still talking about these issues today suggests that not a great deal has changed.**



DIFFICULTIES OF ACCESS

1976

- The reason why I approached the consultant in Harley Street in 1976 was because I was not aware of help being available from any other specialised source.

1988

- I did not want to seek a referral from my own doctor when I next sought help in 1988
- Therefore I approached three other NHS surgeries in order to gain a referral.
- None of the doctors in those surgeries would see me, and I was told by them to approach my own doctor.
- In the end I went privately to a Harley Street consultant, and gained referral to a GIC from that source.
- The waiting list for this was so long that I went to see someone privately instead.



PROBLEMS OF STANDARD PATHWAYS

- **There tends to be a presumption amongst GICs that a standard pathway exists.**
- **This requires clients to test the validity of their identity by undergoing a “life test”.**
- **People are required to live in the gender they identify with before any action is taken.**
- **The presumption is that people have already decided that they want to pursue gender reassignment and this pathway is intended to help them find the correct course to take.**
- **People who do not wish to follow the prescribed pathways may be judged not to be genuine in their attempt.**
- **I refused the offer of female hormones on three separate occasions, and I have not taken any other physical action which would change my appearance.**
- **I HAVE NOT DONE THIS** because of any failure in the genuineness of my intention.
- **I HAVE DONE THIS** to be certain of the correctness of my present actions and that I am certain that the coping method I have adopted is able to work.

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MY PERSONAL PATHWAY

- By taking hormones or making any other physical changes I felt that I would lose control of my approach
- Accepting such physical help would have destroyed the truce I was keeping, which balances the aspects of my identity which build on my relationships with others against the selfhood which is created by gender inside.
- As I see it, the Gender Identity Clinics feel bound by the pathways they set.
- I fear that by not following a standard GIC pathway I would be judged as not being genuine in my approach
- And that I would be denied the help that I needed at the time it is required

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DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

- It is commonly assumed that transsexuals are men who want to be women and vice versa. We may believe that they want to be themselves.
- How do people get to that position?
- For some this has been an objective which has been present for all of their lives.
- For others the gender conflict is an affliction they would not wish on their own worst enemy.
- These people fight this affliction with all their might until collapse occurs.
- From that time on the desperate search for gender reassignment is derived from the need to alleviate the alienation and the trauma the conflict has brought.
- A standard pathway is like a sticking plaster for all wounds.
- It has neither regard for, nor offers any help for the nature of the injury or the trauma that has occurred.

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RESEARCH

An area which has helped in this approach is in the research work I have been involved with on the development of personal identity in tribal conflict situations where ongoing violent campaigns occur.

This work examines recent neurophysiological work on identity and personality development and it compares these with the claims of traditional psychodynamic and social learning theories. Gender dysphoria is used as a case study to link and compare the two approaches.

The impact of religion is also examined.

The papers are available on:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

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RESEARCH

Religious impact:

Gilchrist, S. 2013 "A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality, Transsexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach."

Neurophysiology and Psychology:

Gilchrist, S. 2015 "Living with Difference". Shortly to be available

Gilchrist, S. 2015: "Personality Development and Gender: Why We Should Re-think the Process". Shortly to be available

Access via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>



PATHWAY PRESUMPTIONS

- While there is increasing recognition of non-binary situations, the assumption made in all of the pathways is that people who in this situation are automatically seeking to live in a non-binary social role.
- The recent guidance to General Practitioners on the RCGP website indicates there is a great variety of transgender experiences, but the advice which is given almost exclusively relates to transition, social changes and hormonal and medical requirements needed for moving into a cross gender role.
- The UK Good Practice and WPATH Guideline reinforce this assumption.
- All of the pathways I have been offered have made this presumption, and all of them would have destroyed the truce which balances the aspects of my identity which build on my relationships with others against the selfhood which is created by gender inside.

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EARLY ACCESS TO PATHWAYS

- **There are a many people who are struggling with their own transgender experiences in the hope that thy can keep their family commitments, links, with others and jobs alive. This constitutes a group of people who are suffering major trauma, but who are also likely to resist contacting GICs for as long as they can.**
- **Those who do eventually contact GICs may have already taken damaging action which compromises any sort of truce that they could otherwise have wished to obtain.**
- **By the time the approach is made some may also have been forced to the conclusion that immediate transition and the search for reassignment is the only course they should take, and they see the GICs as primary agents for that purpose.**
- **Ease of and early referral is needed particularly for this group of people**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pathways are needed which do not deny or prevent change, but must also recognise those things which ought to be preserved.
- These should aim to make a smooth change possible so that if this is needed it can come at the right time, for the right reasons and in a way that minimizes the trauma it creates.
- Ease of access and referral should be available, and also be known to be available, at the earliest possible stage to those who are struggling with gender dysphoria in their lives.
- The perception that GICs are always about transition and reassignment needs to be removed.

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QUESTIONS

ANY QUESTIONS?

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SUMMARY (1)

The development of appropriate care pathways is an immediate concern.

This includes the need to ensure that knowledge of these and appropriate information is available long before any decision to approach GICs is made.

I totally support those who seek gender reassignment.

However I believe that the intensity of the conflicts which arise, the trauma involved, and indeed aspects of some current approaches, may unintentionally lead to the diminishing or destruction of other parts of self- identity which need to be supported: to ensure that people are able to do what is right.

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SUMMARY (2)

Gender identity for most people is simply a normal part of life, but it is also a major part in a multi-faceted part of the self.

I believe that by calming the dynamics that are involved, people can have an improved freedom of choice.

Although I identify as binary, others do not and there is a vast range of experience.

The tendency to associate transsexuality with binary labels does a disservice to those who seek a different course

Susan Gilchrist June 2015