

A case of artificial hair today but gone tomorrow or Can wearing a wig really change your personality?

Many crossdressers are born out of a mid-life crisis that cannot be resolved by purchasing a fast sports car. They may have dressed in secret for much of their adult life and have the experiences of a 'conventional' marriage, family, and career behind them. Then in mid life, finally there is both the time and the imperative to address issues of gender and explore the hitherto hidden girl within.

I don't care much for scientific classifications that pigeonhole sections of the transgender population. But it is an inescapable fact that I have found myself part of a large group of girls all of whom had a superficially similar mid-life metamorphosis. Faced with similar problems it is no surprise that we seem to come up with similar solutions.

In this article I am going to generalize about the mid-life crossdresser experience. My observations are based on many years working in a support group and innumerable conversations, but as with all generalizations there will be exceptions. My aim is not to suggest that all mid-life crossdressers are, or should be, treated the same, but rather that we do frequently display common characteristics. Understanding more about the common path we follow can help us interpret correctly the signs we see along the way and assist others in relating to us as we make our own personal journey.

When a transgender comes out as an adult she carries the psychological baggage of many years of mature male life; her life is cluttered with family, social and emotional constraints. In the process of coming out she must not only determine who she wants to be, but also find out what from her past is still relevant. The awakening of the girl within holds both the promise of realizing long suppressed desires, and also the threat of damaging important relationships that have been built up over time.

The emerging girl naturally seeks to project an image of herself as a female. But the risks attached to coming out frequently constrain how and when this can be done. The safest option is to separate and quarantine the female and male aspects of their life and explore each separately. And so from the one personality we frequently see two different personas develop – one male and the other female. The extent to which a split persona develops differs between individuals, but all mid-life crossdressers seem to manifest it at some time to some degree.

Seeking the best of both worlds, the crossdresser often retains an essentially unchanged male persona for family and work whilst developing a female persona amongst her newly found girl friends. Because female and male behaviors are kept separate the new female is not constrained to develop out of the male, and frequently establishes itself as different and in complete contrast. This can come somewhat as a surprise to someone who is familiar with the crossdresser as a male. It is common to hear such girls explain how they are a different person when they put a wig or skirt on. A more likely truth is that their inner personality is unchanged but when dressed as a female they are projecting a very different external persona.

The unconstrained female persona is often great fun and can be an effective way of exploring who we are. An accelerated development allows the crossdresser to squeeze many years of a genetic woman's life experiences into a whirlwind few months. It allows an exploration of possibilities without commitment, and of experiences without judgment; all frequently facilitated by access to a middle-aged line of credit. And with no need to consider the everyday she can enjoy the impractical, trying out large breast forms, high heels, long wigs and delicate lingerie. Showing less restraint than a kid in a candy store the new girl has only one constraint, to keep this new life separate from the boring drab existence of being male.

But the separation of the female persona also presents a significant risk. It can be such fun and so addictive that it becomes confused with reality. So much so that when she comes in contact with her past, in the form of partners, friends or children, the outcome can be unexpected and disappointing. From an outside perspective the female persona is often self-centered, shallow and pleasure seeking. Worse still it may be so different from the person others are familiar with that they feel they are relating to a stranger. The frequent assertion that "I am still the person you married" may be true, but the persona being projected is often far from the same.

Clearly living as two personas, managing to keep them separate, and selecting the right one at the right time, is difficult. It is also feels unsatisfactory as each persona is in some way a denial of the other. As a result few girls maintain the separation for an extended period of time and those that continue do so out of necessity rather than choice. As the mid-life crossdresser becomes more comfortable with their sexuality and with what they want to be, they develop in a way that reflects the relative strengths of their male and female personality. .

Potentially the least satisfactory evolution is where the need to be female is suppressed by the risks attached to crossdressing. Occasionally a crossdresser will abandon the female persona and go back into the closet. Invariably this is a result of pressure being applied by partner or family. Few crossdressers share their experiences after making such a forced denial.

Some girls progress by throwing away completely their old male side and living full-time as a female. This allows them to adopt their female persona and develop their personality, in so far as it is possible, to match. They frequently lose the support of those who cannot live with these profound changes. This can be a difficult path to follow but is the only practical option if the male persona no longer holds any attraction or relevance.

More frequently mid-life crossdressers evolve in a third direction. Faced with the reality of having to maintain, to some degree, their former male role and interests, the crossdresser starts to merge the two personas. Their personality gradually morphs to include the desired characteristics of both being male and female. The girl invades the life of the boy pushing at the boundaries of what may be socially expected or "normal" but this presents little risk in a society used to labelling such behaviour as gay. In the reverse direction the girl becomes more practical developing a wardrobe and interests more consistent with a genetic woman of her age. The crossdresser may still lead a life with separate activities and friends but as the two personas merge it is no longer necessary to consciously switch between them. Often all that is required is

some residual care about sharing personal information, particularly at work – but this is not a problem unique to crossdressers! And without a wig as a reminder the girl may have to think more carefully which door to use in a public toilet!

The visible changes associated with this evolution are often subtle. Girls talk about growing their hair rather than wearing wigs, preferring small natural breasts to uncomfortable forms, removing facial hair, having manicures, and of course their underwear becomes more practical and comfortable as it becomes everyday.

The psychological changes that occur can however be profound. It appears that freed from the artificiality of a split existence the transgender personality within can grow stronger and mature. Girls describe how when dressed as a man the earlier feeling of gender denial diminishes, and when dressed as a girl it feels more complete and permanent. In stark contrast with the earlier “candy store” phase, which frequently leads to impulsive and potentially destructive decisions, the balanced personality seems to result in ultimately more satisfactory life choices.

So if the majority of mid-life crossdressers head down this third path what happens next and where does it ultimately lead? Obviously, that is something that only an individual can discover. The options and opportunities still ahead are numerous, and whilst many girls start their journey in the same way this provides no clue to their final destination.

In conclusion I am proposing that when a crossdresser comes out in mid-life they frequently adopt a female persona that neither reflects their inner personality nor is sustainable. This appears to be a valuable stage in our development that also presents significant risk. Different individuals evolve at different rates in different directions, but many girls appear to gradually modify their male and female personas to establish a more balanced transgender personality that forms a basis for their continuing development.

This article was originally published in the March 2008 magazine of Seahorse NSW. The copyright for this article is retained by the author Amanda. (Amanda@trannyradio.com). She would also look forward to hearing any feedback or comments you would like to make.