

This is such a wonderful review of the editor's book that she couldn't help reprinting it!

Know Thyself (Again)

Review by William A. Henkin, Ph.D.

Identity Management in Transsexualism: A Practical Guide to Managing Identity on Paper, by Dallas Denny, M.A. (from Creative Design Services, P.O. Box 61263, King of Prussia, PA 19406).

The first official, surgically-assisted sex-change recorded in Western history took place in Germany, in 1883, when Sophia Hedwig had her external genitals altered and formally became Herman Karl. Early in the 20th century a well-known Danish painter, Einar Wegener, convinced he was really a female, went to Berlin to have his genitals removed and took the name Lili Elbe. Elbe died soon after a second surgery (intended for vaginal construction). The first sex-change operation, according to gender specialists, took place in England, in 1949, when Laura Maud Dillon became Laurence Michael Dillon; and (considered by Westerners) the first sex-change operation is Christine Jorgensen's, whose 1952 surgery took place in Denmark, and whose transformation from male to female was publicized in newspapers and magazines throughout the world.

Some of the problems shared by Karl, Elbe, Dillon, Jorgensen, and the thousands of transsexual men and women who have pursued their dreams for wholeness in the final third of this century will be immediately apparent, even to people who never thought about the differences between sex and gender: breasts as well as internal and external genitalia to be built up or removed; body hair to be grown or dispersed; voices to be altered; body contours, posture, gait, carriage, manners, and attitude to be reformed; family, career, relationships, and social conditioning to be utterly reconstructed.

But wholly apart from these obvious difficulties of reconfiguring life—apart, even, from the less obvious psychological strain involved in resolving transsexualism—there is a very practical set of problems few people consider (if not confront-

ed with the need to do so). These problems concern the paper trail we all leave behind that defines us, to a large degree, for our fellow humans.

From the day we are welcomed to the world with a birth certificate, to the day we are welcomed from it with a death certificate, our name and designated sex follow us everywhere. When we attend school, enroll for military service, or visit a doctor or dentist... when we apply for a driver's license, a passport, or a library card; get a social security card number; pay taxes; buy insurance; seek credit standing; register to vote; are called for jury duty; become involved with lawsuits; when we marry or divorce; seek government services; calculate our own estates—from birth to death, who we are is defined for others repeatedly by these simple facts: my name is John, I'm a man; or my name is Jane, I'm a woman.

Managing our own identity in the world is rarely a problem for most people, thought the tasks impinge on everyone all of the time—but for transsexuals it is critical, because identity management determines so completely how we are seen and known by others. A few authors have addressed the subject in the past, but since 1990 only *Legal Aspects of Transsexualism*, by Sr. Mary Elizabeth, SSE has been indispensable.

Now Dallas Denny has written what amounts to a companion volume to Sr. Mary Elizabeth's book—and this is also indispensable. Though less complete than *Legal Aspects* regarding specifics of the law, *Identity Management* is also more prescriptive than descriptive, telling people how to achieve as well as define their goals. The book contains appendices with names, addresses, and model forms that are eminently useful. In addition, *Identity Management* is a delightfully personal book, both because Denny illustrates with anecdotes from her own gender journey—and, she is a rather charming writer.

"When I moved to Georgia," she writes, "I was armed with a Tennessee driver's license identifying me as Dallas Denny. My photo was very androgynous. But the license said I was a male. I filled in

the Georgia application, and checked "F" in the box which asked about my sex. The examiner took my old license and began entering information into the computer. I held my breath, hoping she would not notice the "M" on my license, and she must not have, for she said nothing, and when my license came back, it had an "F" on it. Of course, I might have been okay even if she had noticed. She might have thought it simply an error. If you pass successfully, and if nothing otherwise points out your transsexualism, the wrong sex designation on a document may be looked at as a mistake. It rocks the world of the clerk less to believe a mistake has been made in the paperwork than it does to realize someone started out as a member of the other sex."

The world of American transsexualism is changing in profound ways. The first tribal elders remain important figures—in fact, as well as in myth—but for the most part they have made their impact. The next generation of leaders, now really the gender "old guard," is composed of people who founded important organizations and edited publications that changed and defined a movement. Many of them are, appropriately, consolidating these gains for themselves and for their community. A new group of movers and shakers is coming to power in a radically altered world, where gender concerns are part of mainstream dialogue.

In this world, Dallas Denny is a figure of value, and of growing importance—not only because she is founder and director of the American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), publisher of *Chrysalis*, one of the most important contemporary magazines devoted to gender concerns, and was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the Outreach Institute of Gender Studies. No, Denny is important because she has something important to say, the willingness to say it openly, and the ability to say it in ways other people can hear. *Identity Management in Transsexualism* makes all these facets of her value clear.

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