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An analysis of Deirdre's 'crossing' in *Crossing: A Memoir* using Richard Ekins's 'Careerpath theory'

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*Let us be who we are, dear Lord
Please, God, let me be the person you made.*
Deirdre N. McCloskey

Abstract

Donald N. McCloskey's life journeys to live as Deirdre N. McCloskey is discussed in this article using Richard Ekins 'Career Path Theory'. This article traces the different stages which Deirdre crosses in the process of transition to successfully 'come out' and 'pass' in the experienced gender, as a woman. The character's self-realisation, the insults and humiliation she faced, the urge to acquire female clothes, the episodes of cross dressing, the fear of losing her family, her determination to lead a dual life, the confidence to come out to their family members and to the public, the procedures that were to be followed before she underwent SRS, her professional life and life after surgery have been dealt at length.

Key words: career path theory, SRS, transition

Deirdre N. McCloskey – An introduction, Women's struggle

Deirdre N. McCloskey who was Donald N. McCloskey for fifty-two years has recorded her life in *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999). Deirdre's work portrays about the society including her family who treated her during and after her transition. Donald, who was the Professor of Economics, History, English and Communication at the University of Illinois was also part of the state's Economic Growth and Development Association. The uniqueness is that she was able to hold the same position as Deirdre too.

She has also written a few other books related to Economics. They are *If You're So Smart: The Narrative of Economic Expertise* and *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*. A book review given by the University of Chicago Press is worth mentioning here. "*Crossing* is the poignant story of this realization and its consequences". Deirdre's entire journey is different from that of the other three subjects taken for discussion. She was able to lead a very normal life, and her cross dressing episodes and surgery were without any major hurdles, except for one problem - her sister, a psychiatrist by profession and her family by marriage. Her self-confidence paved the way for her achievements and success. Her workplace or her mother did not view any of Deirdre's behaviour negatively.

Though there have been many supporters, there has been no significant work on her memoir. The University of Chicago Press quotes Ruth Shalit, who in her review of this memoir in *Lingua Franca* has appreciated that, "A tautly crafted memoir of her transition from Don McCloskey, conservative Chicago school of economist, to Deirdre McCloskey, power shopper, domestics, super achiever, and campy

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doyenne of difference feminism”. This instills in the readers a hope and a confidence that they too can take control of and steer their lives in a positive direction.

Career Path Theory

Richard Ekins, Director of the Transgender Archive and Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology and Psychoanalysis at the University of Ulster, along with his friend Dave Kings has published *Transgender Phenomenon* and has edited a book, *Blending Genders*(1996). They have discussed the various facts and aspects of the lives of MtoF and FtoM persons and the various problems they face in society. The authors have drawn a framework based on the real life experiences of the gender crossers. Ekins’s career path theory, though has taken a lead from the MtoF of the United Kingdom, mirrors the life of male females across the globe. It also guides to be gender crossers by giving them an idea of their confused state of mind and body.

A transgender person attempts to realise and materialise the inner urges of the body and mind. Based on this Richard Ekins has formulated five phases that a male female undergoes in the process of changing and has termed it as ‘modes of transgenering’. The five phases are Beginning Femaling, Fantasying Femaling, Doing Femaling, Constituting Femaling and Consolidating Femaling.

In the ‘Beginning Femaling’ phase, the gender crosser is in the stage of ‘primary deviance’. According to Ekins, in this stage the subject would begin cross dressing. Cross dressing in the initial stage is not done deliberately, and it is often neglected by the elders as they consider this as a childish prank. According to Ekins, cross dressing is a kind of sensory feeling. He says, “the experience may be conceptualized in terms of the tactile, the visual or the olfactory, or any combination of them and with varying degrees of precision” (Ekins 40).

In this stage the subjects undergo self introspection and they question themselves, “What is the meaning of this pleasure, mystery or awe that I experiences?”, ‘What sort of person am I that could experience such a thing?’, ‘what does it all mean?’” (Ekins 40). During this phase they are in a state of ‘inchoateness’.

Ekins observes that during the ‘Doing Femaling’ stage the subjects accumulate clothes for their own. Cross dressing, which was closeted earlier, is now done frequently. They enjoy their cross dressing episodes when they are amidst their community. Though they accumulate their own clothes the question as to why they are so lingers within. They become more knowledgeable about the feminine world. “ In this phase femalers become more knowledgeable about the gendered world of girls and women, about what dresses they like, about styles and so forth, this , in itself, giving pleasure” (Ekins 43).

During this stage they search for the reasons for their predicament. “The search for meaning is incipient” (Ekins 43). Gender crossers in order to seek meaning for their bewildered state often resort to “purges-the periodic throwing away of offending collections of clothes, cosmetics, jewellery, and so on” (Ekins 43).

‘Consolidating Femaling’ is the stage where they find an answer for their vacillating thoughts. They understand the reason for their bewilderment and proceed with their new changes. The male femaler identifies herself as a woman and undergoes the surgery. “Consolidating body female having come to see that ‘really’, ‘she’ was transsexual all along, takes stock of ‘herself’ and embarks upon a programme of appropriate body feminization, which may be seen as the culminating in ‘the op.’, now defined in terms of becoming as near as is possible and practicable to what ‘she’ should have been along” (Ekins 45).

In this stage they give life to the gender which they experience and try to make a living for themselves in this world of binaries. “ ‘She’ now dresses as a woman, because ‘she’ IS a woman. Her presentation of self is herself” (Ekins 45). In this stage they try to shed their maleness and live the life of a complete woman. They find their own world as they try to progress in their newly taken gender.

Though Richard Ekins has formulated five phases, only three phases are taken for analysis in order to sync it with the life style of the author who is taken up for research. ‘Fantasying Femaling’ and ‘Constituting Femaling’ are the other two phases which elaborate on their longing to identify and give life to their emotions. In Fantasying femaling stage, the gender crossers dream as if by some miracle or magic they would wake up to be a woman. “A common boyhood variant is fantasying ‘waking up in the morning as a girl’” (Ekins 41). It is in this stage they lead a closeted life by hiding what they are and how they behave.

During the ‘Constituting Femaling’ phase, they cross dress and step out to mingle with the straight majority society, which of course does not welcome them. In this stage they try to give themselves a female name and derive pleasure in being identified so. They try to enroll in clubs and societies which serve the well being of the gender crossers.

Beginning femaling

Ekins points out that during the initial stage the ‘male femaler’ involves in cross-dressing. This stage is identified as the ‘primary deviance’. This happens across any age in the life of a transgender person. Cross dressing, then, takes place in such a way that it is not considered as an aberration, and the subject is not affected or blamed for the act. The male femaler is able to remember and experience this act of cross-dressing throughout his life. Deirdre who happened to cross dress at the age of 11 felt a kind of pleasure in wearing women’s clothes. His parents did not consider it seriously as they thought it was a part of that age.

Ekins states that there is a sense of ‘undifferentiation’ in the male femaler as he is uncertain about what really happens within him. Deirdre associates his feeling to that of ‘being’. The ‘male femaler’, who is in a state of inchoateness, feels that the ‘untoward’ incidents make him question as to why he has to feel so when he has the boyish qualities within him. He feels satisfied? when he is able to meet the expectations of the people around him with his physique and behaviour as a boy. The same kind of confusion within Deirdre is revealed in the following words: “He decided not to wish to be a girl, though he kept on cross dressing when he could. He began to keep an emotional distance from his beloved mother, as boys do, nothing strange. He grew taller than his father six feet, a little above average for Donald’s generation of men big boned—and became a regular guy in his private boys’ school in Cambridge. He was elected co-captain of the football team which meant he could not possibly be a girl” (Deirdre 8). He who was in a confused state often made up his mind that he was a boy and that he was a heterosexual cross dresser who did all this for fun. “Am just a plain, English-described ‘cross dresser’. I’m a lumberjack, and I’m OK” (Deirdre 20).

Doing femaling

Ekins points out that, at this stage, the male femaler would fantasise about femaling. The fantasies would relate with ‘real’ life instances. They would even dream that their family accepted them. The constant dream which Deirdre had was “Could I become a woman?”(Deirdre 9). At this stage a few might identify themselves as ‘transsexuals’. The pleasure which they get because of dreaming is a conscious choice. Ekins explains: “An embryonic world will be constituted within which a femaling self and femaling related objects and practices are emerging, but which at this stage, the fantasying femaler keeps separate from the everyday world, thus keeping the latter more or less ‘normal’ and enabling its development more or less boundaried from the incipient femaling world” (Ekins 44). Despite Deirdre’s

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closeted cross-dressing, he still wanted to live as a normal man to the outer world. He spent more time in his cross dressing by getting up at 3.30 am and dressing as a woman. He was interested in doing all the work that a woman does. “He would sweep the kitchen or make the bed while pretending he was swabbing the decks or reefing a topsail” (Deirdre 14).

In the doing femaling stage, the individual starts to live as a woman and starts to accumulate clothing for her. Donald, who was very certain in his decision, did venture into buying a lot of womanly clothes and objects for him. “Once inside Donald was again bumptious, buying makeup, nightgowns, garter belts, camisoles, hip-padded panties and what Lee claimed was a little black dress”(Deirdre 24).

In this stage, Ekins points out that cross dressing becomes a regular habit. As for Donald it became the most important work in his life for “he had been doing it ten times a month through four decades wherever possible, though in the closet. “About five thousand episodes”” (Deirdre 14) and the male femalers not only buy but also secure what they buy. “Donald became cunning at hiding the crossdressing... so that his wife and children never knew...he had accumulated a little of his own” (Deirdre 14). Ekins suggests that it is at this stage the male femaler finds an interrelation with the all the three facets. “They are more prone towards the gendered world and they try to get more knowledge about girls and women” (Ekins 44). One of his chapter titled “Women’s World” clearly indicates how as a ‘male femaler’, Donald enjoyed all the attributes of being a woman. Donald derives pleasure as he gathers the information about women because he desired to ‘be’ one. Though they enjoy the facet of being ‘gendered’, they still try to find a meaning for the change which happens within them. Ekins mentions that in the process of ‘doing femaling’, at one point, they try to find an explanation for their current state. Ekins has found that the male femaler, during his cross-dressing episodes tries to put an end to his new appearance. Donald too felt guilty of his state of cross dressing. “...and into his thirties he would periodically throw out his collected clothing and magazines in a purge” (Deirdre 9). A lot of introspection would take place in this phase which forces them to stop thinking on the grounds for transformation. “What am I complaining about? I have a wonderful life. Though a man Shoulder the sky, my lad...” (Deirdre 15). He constantly identified himself as a heterosexual cross dresser and pacified himself and his wife that he was just doing all this for fun. Though through his assertion he tried to take control of his mind and convince himself that he was a male because of his huge appearance, he was unable to live so.

Consolidating femaling

It is in this stage the male femaler is fully established as a female. The individual gets a frame work to develop his femaling self and world, and he can be as a female in his normal life. Deirdre, at this stage, shook his fear and came out to willingly claim that he is a ‘transsexual’. “At fifty-two Donald accepted cross-dressing as part of who he was” (Deirdre 55). A complete transformation occurs where the male female does all that which would help to identify him as a female. Deirdre went in for Electrolysis and voice training. She also became a member of various associations and groups where she could be in the company of women. In this stage all the three modes along with the three facets will be found prominent in the life of the male femaler. As part of ‘body femaling’, Deirdre went in for sex reassignment surgery and changed his sex to a female. Ekins points out those male femalers would lose all that was male in them. In the same way we find Deirdre claiming proudly that “she forgot what it is was like to be a man” (Deirdre 55).

Deirdre was a perfect ‘gender femaler’, for as Ekins mentions, Deirdre leads the life of a ‘real’ woman. Deirdre was addressed as “‘Professoressa’, the feminine of the occupation, by a gathering in the University of Catania. She paid attention even to the way they addressed her and corrected those who called her ‘sir’. Whenever over phone she was addressed as ‘sir’, she would politely correct them. The

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reason here is very apt. “Since it was awkward to go on and on in the wrong gender” (Deirdre 62). The interrelations between the constitution of the self and the world at this stage, are very clear. The relation with the object, actions and events is all ‘female gendered’.

Thus Ekins’ ‘career path theory’ has been a great source to analyze the various stages which Deirdre has to cross in order to come out and successfully transform into a transgender. This theory definitely can be used by anyone who has to work on gender deviants. This stands as a support to the transgenders for it both syncs and asserts that this change which happens within an individual is very natural.

Works Cited

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