

Straight Man to Queer Woman, By Way of Economic Liberty

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When the conversation turns, as it should more often, to the low percentage of women in economics, especially in academic life (in Sweden and the Netherlands, by the way, it's worse), I'll wait for a pause, and then drop in my usual joke: "Well, I've done my part." It always gets a laugh, amused by the women and uncomfortable by the men. Ha, ha.

It didn't seem so funny when in the fall of 1995 I started transitioning. Terror was more like it. The *Des Moines Register* put the news on the front page, repeatedly if not unsympathetically: "University of Iowa Economics Professor to Become a Woman."

That, of course, is not possible. I'll always have those pesky XY genes, and can never have the life history of a girl and woman, never for example experience the hostility to an assertive female graduate student. At Harvard in the 1960s Donald McCloskey was praised for such assertion; Barbara Bergmann ten years earlier had been thoroughly dispraised for it.

High school football player, tough-guy Chicago economist, I was married from 1965 to 1995, to the love of my life. I was straight. Well. . . since age eleven in strict privacy I occasionally cross-dressed, but that little male peculiarity is pretty common, especially for some reason among engineers. Most are straight in affectional preferences, "heterosexual cross-dressers" being the term. And they don't want to be women. When early in 1995 I discovered cross-dressing clubs, I was struck by the heavily male talk at them; the engineers gathered in drag to talk in a meeting room at the local Holiday Inn about Iowa football. Regularly the few GGs (genetic girls) at such gatherings, a handful of wives or hairdressers, would be serving the food and cleaning up afterwards. Hmm, that's odd, I thought. Don't these guys realize that we are playing at *being* women? Then in August of 1995 I twigged.

There was nothing false about my love over a third of a century for my girlfriend and then wife. If she appeared at my front door today, I'd hug her and invite her in. (So too my son and daughter, who, like my wife, have not knocked at my door for 21 years.) Affectional preference does not correlate with gender preference, contrary to the locker-room theory of people like Michael Bailey of Northwestern that queers are queers, and all the same, and that gay men want to be women. (Incidentally, the "experiments" up in Toronto on which his theory is based have no GG controls. And his "sample" for *The Man Who Would be Queen* [2003] was six Chicana prostitutes from a bar in Chicago. Economics is not the only depressingly unscientific science in which ideology controls the show from behind the curtain.)

And people change, which is something our Max *U* method needs to allow for, and not, as George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton do it, by putting Max *U* inside a wider Max *V*. Identity is not fungible with utility. Ask the mother who runs into a burning house to save her child, or a soldier who goes over the top at the Somme.

Economists on the whole viewed my change with equanimity. (Well, I'll never know for sure: maybe that appointment at, say, Yale was, so to speak, queered.) "He. . . I mean she . . . has the right to choose." Free to choose, you might say. In fact Milton and Rose were smoothly graceful about it at Milton's 90th birthday party. At the first AEA meeting Deirdre went to, Al Harberger of UCLA, who had been Donald's colleague for years at Chicago, chaired the meeting of the Executive Committee, referring to me carefully each time as "Deirdre" because, I think, he was having trouble remembering to use "she." So does my highly supportive mother of 95 years. She has known me as "Donald" longer than anybody else.

Economic historians, my sub-tribe, were especially fine. Claudia Goldin and Elyce Rotella and other women organized a party in November 1995 when I was released from a night at a locked psychiatric ward. (It was one of two such imprisonments arranged by David Galenson and my sister. My sister and I are just fine.) At the party the balloons declared, "It's a Girl!" Joel Mokyr hired a lawyer to spring me from the loony bin. A few weeks later Richard Sutch and Susan Carter invited me to Thanksgiving at their house in Berkeley, my first day as Deirdre, and ever since. Martha Olney and her wife, an American Baptist pastor, then protected me in the East Bay from my sister and David, and showed me how to live a religious life.

My colleagues in history seemed to have a harder time. I imagine it's because they have in their theories no presumption of liberty, as economists do, even when they are willing on even days to give the government massive powers of violence. The Blessed Adam Smith wrote of "the liberal plan, of equality, liberty, and justice." Damned right. Modern historians view identity as a one-time affair, which then is sociological determinative of an entire life. Like Popeye, you are what you are. And my colleagues in literary studies, gay or straight, tend to view my change as something like a fashion choice. Hey, cool. I guess it's better than confused disdain.

A society like ours trying to follow Adam Smith's liberal plan allows gender transition, and out gays and lesbians, and green hair. In Iran, in accord with the queer-killing locker-room theory, gays are *compelled* to change gender. And you know how the queers are treated in Uganda, that bastion of Anglican Christianity. Being religious, other than American Baptist or progressive Episcopalian, doesn't guarantee that you follow the spirit of the tent-maker of Mecca or the carpenter of Nazareth.

I don't need to tell you how much *that* has changed in Northern Europe and its offshoots. (The 100-year legal reign of terror, under the supervision of psychiatrists, did not happen in southern Europe.) A month ago I gave to an enthusiastic audience a talk on transsexuality and economics at, of all places, the Central Intelligence Agency. If a transgendered spy was threatened by the Russians with revealing her former gender, I suppose she would reply, "Feel free, guys." Unlike Trump's worry.

I lived in Adams House as a Harvard undergrad, class of 1964, but didn't know that the place was notoriously gay. It shows how deeply people were then in the closet. Academic life has become an easy place to come out. When I wrote a piece for the [London] *Times Higher Education Supplement* about the ease, a brilliant journalist headlined it as, "It's Good to be a Don If You're Going to be a Deirdre." Most of the private colleges were slow to adjust. By contrast, my beloved University of Iowa, I discovered in 1995, had detailed and liberal policies in place, a decade before Fair Harvard. By now, though, Harvard has a sensible dorm policy and a LGBTQ magazine--though it comes through the mail in a plain brown wrapper. We're not *quite* there.

At my 50th college reunion the Radcliffe women of my class invited me to join them in the big photo on the steps of Widener Library. Huzzah! Only one woman, with whom I had thought I was having an affair in the spring of my freshman year, objected. After my transition I called up a male dean at Harvard – since Radcliffe, idiotically, had been closed – and asked him if Harvard could change my degree to Radcliffe. "Oh, I don't think we can do that." I whined, "But the U. S. State Department had no trouble changing my passport from male to female." Pause. Then with a smile in his voice, "Ah, yes. But Harvard is older than the U. S. State Department."

Sigh. Some things never change.