

# an Androgynous Lifestyle

By ARIADNE KANE

discover and express the fullness of one's personality with self-respect, dignity and pride is perhaps one of the more nobler pursuits for the times we live in. For me it has been a most rewarding experience, thus far, and I would like to share some of it with you.

The search for full expression of one's total self has been reflected in the myriad of behaviors that humanity has explored from the perspectives of history, culture and psychology. A common thread which runs through these behaviors concerns itself with the concepts of masculinity and femininity, not just maleness and femaleness.

Historically, much evidence has been collected on the struggle for total individual expression against the rigid codes of acceptable behaviors for men and women. Statues of Nubaton, an Egyptian pharaoh, indicate his mode of dress was more in keeping with that of a queen. The biography of the Abbe de Choisey, a courtier and diplomatic envoy for Louis XIV, details his life and love as a femme person. The life of George Sand is another example of individualistic self-expression of the masculine within a woman's body.

Data has been gathered on traditional practices among several tribes of North American Indians. Since ancient times there have been men who dressed like the women of the tribe, and performed many functions assigned to women. Among the Chukchees, living near the Arctic Coast, there was a type of Shamanism in which men and women were alleged to undergo a change in sex, either partial or complete. A man who changed his sex was called a "soft man being."

A similar woman was called a "transformed woman." These transformations were decreed by tribal command during early youth.



Psychologically, many hypotheses have been advanced to support the "clear" distinctions of sex and gender for men and women. The theories of Freud, Havelock Ellis, and Magnus Hirschfeld are still used today in offering a basis for deviant gender and sexual behaviors.

Throughout recorded history, societies and cultures have attempted to develop uniform standards and codes to define "the Man" and "the Woman" for their particular needs. The constraints placed on an individual by such efforts left little room for a person who wished to express an alternative lifestyle, free from ridicule and social recrimination.

With few known exceptions, chromosomal and genetic analysis clearly characterizes what is meant by "male" and "female" in a mammalian species. This has generally been supported by visible anatomical evidence.

However, once a person's biologic sex is proclaimed the psychologic/socialization process begins with the main purpose of integrating biologic fact with a set of societal mores and standards of what is and is not acceptable socio-psychological behavior for males and

females: that is to say, the set of cues and codes by which we characterize both men and women for a particular society. The process is also called gender identification.

In aboriginal societies it is clear that biological determinants, such as ejaculation for males and menstruation and lactation for females, have set the tone of most of the psychological and sociological considerations, in defining the roles for men and women in a society. In contemporary societies other determinants share and are perhaps dominant in shaping the characteristics and roles by which males and females function. For today each person has a personal obligation to examine his/her total cognitive and affective experiences and values. From such an inventory we may define a different role, and develop a compatible and constructive behavior pattern for both the individual and society.

One approach to an exploration of a person's current lifestyle is to consider the concept of androgyny. Androgyny can be described as a comfortable blending of manners, clothing choices, styles, values and attitudes — typically assigned to

only one sex or the other — but it is becoming more and more a realizable alternative to the polarization effects of gender differentiation. It replaces the stereotypic roles that polarize the sexes. Furthermore, it offers the individual an opportunity to express the totalness of self. When discussing the concept of androgyny, there is a transcendence from the prison of gender roles from which many negative judgments are made about one's lifestyle choice.

In the process of realizing the androgynous nature of personality, a person becomes more tolerant and appreciative of individual differences. This allows full flowering of an individual's full self-expression and directs it in positive ways.

The Outreach Foundation is an educational organization, formed to help the world toward an understanding of the nature of sexual identity. It was formed a year ago, with the following goals:

- To create an environment conducive to fostering a meaningful exchange of ideas and attitudes about the concept of androgyny, alternative gender lifestyles, and full personality expression;

- To provide counseling and supportive services for persons who want to learn better coping strategies as they move toward an alternative lifestyle;

- To organize and present conferences and workshops for professionals who may receive client referrals with problems related to a current gender lifestyle;

- To share, with all who are interested, pertinent written material by professional and responsible public writers and journalists, through a reprint publication service.

The programs and philosophy of the Outreach Foundation for the past year has focussed on the issues of gender role, crossdressing and sexual



preference. Space does not permit detailed descriptions of all their activities, but one stands out in particular.

Fantasia Fair is an educational/social experience of learning and living, en Femme. For nine days, persons from all parts of the United States and Canada interested in exploring various behavior modes associated with femininity have an opportunity to discover and vent repressed feelings of womaness within themselves. This is accomplished through a series of courses and activities, within the framework of a tolerant and receptive community. In other words, "the closet door is fully opened." The guilt feelings and social recriminations which often come with these behaviors for most males in our society, gradually disappear. There is a genuine ambience of wanting to share some of those feelings locked within each participant's personality. The results of such an experience have been so positive that a Fantasia Fair is planned again this year.

This is one of several programs that the Outreach Foundation has designed to raise consciousness about the possibility of alternative lifestyles, using the concept of androgyny as a basis. A number of training workshops have been developed to assist professionals and other interested persons in coping with problems in the process of transition from a strictly gender

orientation to full expression through androgyny.

The Foundation has recently established a counseling-and-support referral telephone service. Currently serving all of New England, New York, New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, it hopes to provide a viable channel to direct persons with specific avenues for coping and support. The telephone service operates on a 24-hour basis; the number is (617) 267-6464.

The Outreach Foundation reprint list has grown in excess of thirty well chosen articles of relevant interest. They have also published proceedings from two conferences and a symposium on the subject of alternative gender lifestyles. A quarterly newsletter is published, and is free and available to all who write and request a copy. The reprints and proceedings are also available at a nominal cost. A complete listing is available for all interested persons. The address is: 102 Charles St., Suite 433, Boston, MA 02114.

The subject of androgyny and the potential it offers for real personal growth is a challenge for all who are exploring alternatives for growth. It is hoped that people will concentrate less on terminology and "catch-all" definitions, and center on understanding behaviors. There is much need for continued dialogue on the issues of gender, crossdressing and sexual preference. If I have but planted a seed from which new directions and positive attitudes emerge, this writing will have been a fruitful endeavor.

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