

Why Aren't We Celebrating Self-Amputation?

The condition is called body identity integrity disorder (BIID) and it was recently the subject of an article in the *New York Post* titled, "The Strange Condition That Has People Hacking Off Healthy Limbs."

According to Susannah Cahalan, BIID was first described in the late 18th century but for the most part has been considered to be some kind of sexually deviant condition in which the person receives sexual gratification by being an amputee.

But researchers have been questioning that, and some now believe that there is clear evidence that the brains of those suffering with BIID send real signals indicating that they should not have a particular limb, causing them torment until it is removed.

In other words, these researchers are not looking at this as an emotional disorder as much as a physiological disorder—something is not registering properly in the brains of these people—similar to people experiencing what is called a phantom limb (when a person experiences sensations in a limb that is no longer there).

But the most striking part of the story is that everyone they interviewed who successfully amputated one of their own limbs (can you imagine doing that?) or who was able to have a surgeon amputate one of their limbs had no regrets with their decision. One of them said that after the amputation, it was the first time in his life he felt whole.

Then why aren't we celebrating these amputees? Why aren't they as famous as "Caitlyn" Jenner? And why do many people look at those with BIID as being "sick" or "disordered" or in need of help while claiming that those with GID (gender identity

disorder, now called gender dysphoria) should be lauded as cultural heroes? Why the double standard?

As I said back in June, "Cutting off your own hand would take far more courage than submitting to all kinds of sex-change surgery, would it not?" By that standard, then, why aren't these people the greater heroes?

From my perspective, people with BIID (which I've been reading about for some years now) need our prayers, and we need to encourage the medical profession to get to the root of their problems so these people can find wholeness without amputation. (See [here](#) for an important article from 2000.)

Yet when I say the same thing about Bruce Jenner, arguing that the ideal would have been for him to find wholeness from the inside out rather than undergoing numerous, fairly radical surgeries and being on hormones for life, I'm labelled a hater and a transphobic bigot.

Why the double standard?

As Selwyn Duke asked in 2009: "Sure, it strikes us as the most horrid malpractice when a doctor amputates healthy body parts, such as a pair of legs. But, then, should we call it something else just because those healthy body parts are between the legs?"

On Feb. 20, 2007, Jerry Springer hosted a show entitled, "I'm Happy I Cut Off My Legs," putting on display the truly tragic story of a man who identified as "Sandra."

This masculine looking man sat in a wheelchair trying to look like a woman, wearing a dress which proudly exposed two stumps, having cut off his legs with a saw 6 years earlier. And he was quite happy with both of his radical life choices, first deciding that he was really a woman in a man's body (although he did not have sex-change surgery), and then deciding to cut off his legs.

The show was as enlightening as it was tragic.

For Jerry Springer (and most of his audience), the fact that this man was wearing a dress and identifying as a transsexual was perfectly fine.

But the fact that he was tormented by the presence of his legs (from his knees down), moving him to saw them off, was a sign of mental illness or extreme stupidity, something to even be ridiculed and mocked.

But why?

After all, isn't it his own life and his own body? And isn't he much happier now? (Leading gay activist Dan Savage is now on record saying that "if someone needs to change or even remove some part[s] of their body to be who they are and to be happy and to be healthy, they should have that right.")

Things got really interesting, though, when the man's former wife and daughter were brought onstage to confront him.

They could have cared less that he cut off his legs. Yes, it was stupid, they said, but that wasn't what concerned them.

It was that this man—a husband and father—had driven his ex-wife and daughter to drugs, depression and almost suicidal despair because he decided he was really a woman. That's what destroyed their lives. He, for his part, was sure he did the right thing.

To be perfectly clear, I write this not to mock this individual—truly, you can only feel pity for him—nor to mock others who struggle with BIID or GID (God forbid we mock their struggles).

But just as it would be wrong to celebrate BIID, it is wrong for us to celebrate GID.

True compassion calls on us to work together to help find

lasting solutions that do not involve the amputation or mutilation of perfectly healthy body parts.

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