Sex-change Operation: The Ethical Issue of the Transsexual Process and Opposite Gender Identification

by

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In a television commercial for Korean cosmetic company DoDo, she sits serene and confident gazing off towards an indefinite point while an oft-sung Korean nursery rhyme plays in the background. For a cosmetic commercial, her face is flawless; however, her beauty is in reflection of nature and devoid of the usual elaboration of artificial color enhancements. The backdrop is black as is her wardrobe. The focus is clear; she is the center. Her hair is long and healthy; her posture upright. She laughs—as if in response to a joke withheld from to the viewers. As she tilts back her head, the camera zooms in on her extended neck revealing a digital recreation of an Adam’s apple. Is she really a man? The joke is on you. Her name is Harisu.

Harisu was born a male with the name Lee Kyung-yup in Seongnam, Korea. She is often described as “prettier, sexier and more glamorous than a woman.” However, this has not always been the case. In an interview with the Korea Times, she reveals that as a child she never thought of herself as a male. In 1997, Harisu moved to Japan to study at the Tokyo Design School. It was there that she underwent gender reassignment surgery at the considered young age of 23. She was discovered as a talent while singing at a Japanese nightclub and began working as a model under the stage name Harisu (which is an adaptation of the English phrase “hot issue”). In 2002, the Inchon District Court ruled that 27 year old Lee Kyung-yup be allowed to legally change her sex and granted her desires to change her name to the more feminine Lee Kyung-eun.

Today, Harisu is a successful entertainer in Asia as a model, singer and actress among other venues. She has released four music albums which range from techno to rhyme and blues. Harisu is known for her provocative dance moves in music videos and live performances. She has starred in the film Yellow Hair (or Blonde) 2 for which she
also recorded a soundtrack. In 2004, Harisu became the only known transsexual person in the world to be featured in an advertisement for women’s hygiene products.

“Even if I fail, I have no regrets. I will have done what I have wanted all along and that as a woman.”

**Gather the Facts**

The relevant facts in this scenario are that Lee Kyung-eun was born a male. Is she no longer a male today? That is debatable. Kyung-eun is a post-operation transsexual woman. While the Inchon District Court allowed her (henceforth, Kyung-eun will be referred to in the female specific pronouns for the sake of social acceptance in written form) to legally change her name and sex, her sex chromosomes reveal that she is genetically a male. It is only through recent medical technology advancements that make it possible for a male to undergo surgery which will have him anatomically a woman (and vice versa). Genetically speaking, Kyung-eun is male. However, Kyung-en identifies herself as a member of the gender opposite to the one assigned to her at birth. She desires to establish a permanent social role as a member of the gender she identifies with in her mind. The modern culture in Asian celebrates Harisu as a celebrity.

**Determine the Ethical Issue**

Does the moral code established by God in the Bible help us draw an ethical conclusion for sex-change operations or individuals that identify with transgender positions? The Bible does not directly address the issue of sex-change operations, because the technology did not exist until recently. However, it is clear that God created both man and woman. Genesis 2:20b-22 says “But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was
sleeping he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord
God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the
man.” Also, the Bible also states “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”  
(Jeremiah 1:5a). This means God determined the gender of an individual before they
were conceived. The conflict arises when transsexual individuals feel that the gender
they are born with does not match their physical attributes. The ethical issue could be
summarized as the need to identify as a gender versus the desire to honor God.

What Principles Have a Bearing on the Case?

The principles for this case are not drawn from the Constitution, laws of the land
or social normative but from the Bible. Honor for God is established in the moral code in
the first four of the Ten Commandments. Is it possible to honor God with our body?
Paul offers an affirmation to the church at Corinth stating that believers exhibit this
through sexual purity. He writes “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for
the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13b). He continues “All other sins
a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.
Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you
have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore
honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18b-20). God predetermined our gender
and sexuality but sin has distorted both. Perhaps the important question to ask is Will a
sex change operation give me satisfaction? Will it honor God?

The principle of responsibility or accountability comes into play in sharing the
Christian message. Kyung-eun rose to stardom through her shift in gender. Does this
provide an opportunity for her to share the message with the world obsessed with
constant entertainment and sex? Does her sex change operation prove that entertainment revolves around sex appeal? Kyung-eun through her deliberate and sensible actions can be a witness to the world. While she may not have known about the gospel message before her life changing operation, Kyung-eun has the opportunity to accept that there is a God that is personally invested in her. Because Kyung-eun believes that she is a woman, she feels it is natural to desire men. However, some transsexual individuals identify as homosexual or bisexual. She is the perfect example that Christians should love all people regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation.

The core focus in weighing the principle of honor for God with the responsibility to share the gospel message is the idea of romantic intimacy. Kyung-eun has expressed in public interviews that she has abandoned her gender in order to find the person to love. Her greatest wish was to wear a wedding dress. The conflict arises then on whether a sex change operation alters (or as some doctors would say corrects) the gender of an individual. Because Kyung-eun will always be a man on the level of genes, she can accept that she is a man and never love. In addition to the principles, Kyung-eun faces the hardships of reconnecting with her family and finding acceptance.

List the Alternatives

Various alternatives exist for Kyung-eun in order to address the situation. Because she has already gone through invasive surgery, alternatives for post-operation transsexual individuals are relative to her situation. Before the operation, Kyung-eun could have chosen to remain a man as a homosexual. Kyung-eun could have chosen to honor God with her body by not undergoing invasive surgery. Further, she could have remained celibate. Now that she has transitioned as a woman, Kyung-eun has the
opportunity to revert back as a male. However, this alternative comes with health risks and does not reflect her inner sense of identity as a woman. She could remain a woman and choose to live a celibate life. This negates the very reason for her transition—to find true love in another man. Kyung-eun could further embrace the advancement of technology as a means to become a complete woman (except on the level of genes) and dismiss the idea that sex change operations do not change gender. In the following paragraph, the alternatives are compared to the principles.

**Compare the Alternatives with the Principle**

Kyung-eun can decide that honor for God only comes through the acknowledgement of acceptance being born a male. Before the operation, she could have chosen not to undergo surgery. While her family and others would view this to be the best alternative, perhaps God does not wish for Kyung-eun to suppress herself. Because the Bible does not speak directly of issues that pertain to the advancement of technology, the principle of honor for God in its expression is a personal decision between God and the individual. It is also possible that Kyung-eun could find someone who understands her position and loves her for who she is as a man. She may even marry and live a full life as a man. Kyung-eun may understand and believe that this option best represents her as a Christian that succumbs to the will of God, especially in a core manner of her being.

As Kyung-eun has already done chosen, she can decide to undergo surgery. Under the principle of sexual purity, she can embrace that she is now a woman and search for a man to love or remain celibate. If she chooses to be celibate, it is because she acknowledges that she is a man. In this sense, sex change operation is purely cosmetic. However, Kyung-eun has already declined that reality.
Consider the Consequences

An individual that struggles with opposite gender identification has various severe consequences to deal with based on the alternative that he or she chooses. If the individual decides to forgo the sex change operation in pursuit of God, he or she loses out on what we all want: love. However, God is the greatest lover! (I am still in the process of learning this reality.) Perhaps this surrender will lead to a deeper and more satisfying relationship with God. Also, it is important to remember that there are such things as miracles! While God does not always allow for them to happen in all situations, there is merit to an honest petition that derives from a desire to live in accordance with His will. Perhaps Kyung-yup will always identify as a woman. However, an intimate relationship with God is far more valuable than with any human being.

Post-operation transsexual such as Kyung-eun faces the acceptance or dismissal from both society and her family. While a negative response has not been the case for her, moral choices should not revolve solely around the response of others. Kyung-eun realizes that her success is in part due to the curiosity of people in a transsexual entertainer. Does the acceptance of society make something moral and upright? The Christians response is negative. However, there is something to be said for the change in attitude of society in both eastern and western cultures from fear and hatred to acceptance and tolerance. While God hates the sin, He loves the sinner.

Make a Decision

The issue is difficult because people are born with contradictions and conflicts. Although an individual may believe he or she is not of the correct gender, the genes say otherwise. For this reason, I feel that a transsexual person should live a happy and full
life without discrimination or suppression from society or the church. However, I cannot
deny that on the basic level of human identity found in the genes, the sex of the
individual is predetermined. Therefore, I believe the transsexual individual should not
have sex with a person of the same gender. While society and the entertainment industry
may deem Kyung-eun a beautiful woman, science reveals her as a man. Does this mean
Kyung-eun should pursue a relationship with another female? What if she fell in love
with a woman that became a man? These questions muddle the issue.

I would choose to live a celibate life regardless of whether or not I choice to go
under the knife. In the instance I was convinced I was a lesbian, I would live a
heterosexual life. However, I do not know the personal difficulties and magnitude of the
issue for the individual and immediate family. Deliberation is a personal matter, and I
commend those who have made a decision in hopes of living a full life. While I respect
the decision of Kyung-eun, I feel her best bet is to establish a foundation relationship
with God. Without God, her decision is for a life that has no future.
Works Cited


