



Exploring Psychology

Exploring Psychology: Gender 1

Intro music playing with woman singing..

Wendy

Lisa Lee is 24, and is a successful singer and performer. However, the reason we asked her to give us an interview, is that she grew up thinking that she was a boy and only discovered that genetically she was female, when she was nearly 20. Lisa Lee's experience is therefore highly relevant to a psychological understanding of sex and gender.

We first came across Lisa Lee's story, when broadcaster John Peel interviewed her for the BBC Radio Four programme 'Home Truths.' You will hear Lisa Lee describe the condition which led to her being identified as a boy at birth.

John Peel

Throughout her childhood, Lisa was known as Lee and was raised as a boy. The confusion was caused by a mistake in assessing which sex Lisa Lee was when she was born. Her genitals appeared to be male and so she was brought up as a boy. The cause of the wrong assessment of Lisa Lee's sex, was a rare medical condition which affects only one in 4500 births.

Lisa Lee

It's called 'Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia', or CAH for short.

John Peel

Okay, and what exactly are the effects of this.

Lisa Lee

It's an extremely complicated disorder. And it's a family of inherited disorders.

John Peel

So you were sort of poised somewhere between male and female when you were a child?

Lisa Lee

Yes. Well what it is. You have what they call 'an enlarged clitoris', so it looks like a male organ, so you can quite easily slip through the net, unless they test, or completely check you.

John Peel

When you were growing up, I mean, were you happy. Or did you suspect that something was wrong.

Lisa Lee

I didn't have an extremely happy childhood. No. But then that's not because of the condition, that's because I had other sort of lots of family problems and sort of.. I used to get bullied quite a lot and I think I was mostly bullied because I had a slightly feminine thing picked up on and I never did. You either sink or swim.

John Peel

But your mother never spotted that you were actually female?

Lisa Lee

No, nobody did.

John Peel

And the doctors, I mean, you must have had medical checks and things when you were a child.

Lisa Lee

Well I assume so, because I had my injections, but it can happen. It's quite rare to slip through the net but it does happen sometimes, I think because this isn't such a well know condition, doctors themselves don't know much about it themselves.

John Peel

So how did you respond to this bullying? Did you just kind of retreat into a corner. And wait for it to end. Or did you start getting more aggressive yourself?

Lisa Lee

Well to start off with, I sort of used to get very upset and for years and years I didn't do nothing, I just sort of backed off and left them and sort of concentrated on my music and my writing, so I became more creative in that sense.

John Peel

But what happened when you hit puberty? That must have been a difficult time, I would have thought.

Lisa Lee

It was but more so because I was having sort of very bad migraines, I was having muscular pains, I was having dizzy spells, I passed out a few times.

John Peel

So, Lisa, if you don't mind me asking, so as a kind of fifteen year old, what did you look like?

Lisa Lee

Well the funny thing was, I was thin then, until I started on all these steroids and hormones. People sort of quite often did mistake me for female as well so I was sort of quite strange. Some people thought I was male, some people thought I was female and I think certain people picked up on certain things and other people picked up on other things. But I could never understand what they were picking up on so that.. but I was brought up to believe I was male so as far as I was concerned, I was male.

John Peel

Do you think of yourself as male or female. Presumably because you call yourself Lisa Lee, you feel female.

Lisa Lee

Actually, no.

John Peel

Do you not?

Lisa Lee

People find it quite strange. They sort of think that you will think one or the other. I have never classed myself as being very masculine, nor very feminine.

John Peel

So you just feel like you?

Lisa Lee

Exactly, I tell people, well if you can't accept me that's your problem, it's not my problem. I am the only person that has to wake up with myself in the morning, and live with myself.

John Peel

What does the Lisa Lee 2001 version look like?

Lisa Lee

Rough, because basically as I said, with the steroids, it made me gain between 5-7 stone in weight and it gives you more of a masculine sort of appearance because of all the male hormones. You put a lot of weight on your face and you sort of look quite sort of ..and your shoulders broaden slightly. At the minute I don't look too great but I'm not sort of trying to be really feminine either and I'm not going to try and be really masculine either. I am just going to be myself.

John Peel

Just going to be Lisa Lee.

Lisa Lee

People who have grown up with me as well, seen me as a little boy, I think it would be too much for them to cope with as well to see me be extremely sort of feminine and stuff, and it wouldn't suit who I am, my character, because my character has been built on growing up as a little boy. I am just sort of going to carry on as I am.