

'What am I: MAN or WOMAN?'

Maya Posch (25) is intersexual. She has both male and female gender characteristics. Until her 21st she went through life as a boy, meanwhile she has chosen for her female side. But who or what is she really? This painful search has lasted all her life already.

TEXT: *Marjolein Hurkmans*, **PHOTOGRAPHY:** *Sasha Lambert*

My mother immediately noticed after my birth that I was so much more slender than my brother. 'It almost looks like a girl,' female friends said, 'he has such a fine face.' And that's how it has always been. I had a penis and thus I was a boy, but I looked like a girl and behaved like one too. After a year or five it really became noticeable. Then the big split starts: girls think boys are scary, boys think girls are icky. It's that easy at that age. But not for me. I didn't understand it. I didn't feel at home with the boys nor with the girls. I was merely a child. Nothing more. You don't make friends that way. The children at school thought I was just weird. I got teased a lot at school. Until I beat up the leader. After that they began to ignore me. I simply wasn't popular. Not even during high school. Everyone entered puberty and began to discover his or her sexuality, I remained stuck in being a child. I didn't understand myself and build a wall around me. I had no friends. Even during puberty I remained very girl-like. I didn't develop an Adam's apple, though I did develop hips and even breasts. My two brothers are both quite tall, I got stuck at 1.75 meters. Meanwhile my penis did grow until an average size. But I couldn't do much with it. If I looked into the mirror, I didn't see a man nor a woman, no adult, only a child. Remaining a child was the safest option for me. All those things which are part of adults - relations, sex - didn't apply to me.

Making choices

When I was twenty I was still regularly seen as a girl. If I went to the men's restroom at a store, I would be sent out by the cleaning lady. No, it didn't bother me. I actually considered it more pleasant when people thought I was a girl than when they addressed me as a boy. The first time when I really realized this, was when I walked into a hardware store with my mother and was regarded as a girl. 'I don't know what I am,' I thought to myself that night, 'I have never made the choice. But I can still make that choice. Apparently I like it more when people think I am a woman. Maybe I should go through life as a girl.'

My mother and my oldest brother immediately understood my decision. My younger brother found it more difficult when I changed my name from Thijs to Maya. Meanwhile he is used to it. All three support me. I don't have much contact with my father since he divorced from my mother. I'm really grateful for the support I get from my mother. I can talk about anything with her and she really only wants me to be happy. She always thought I was more of a girl than a boy. I'm the most lady-like of the family, more feminine than even my mother and my aunts.

Initially I thought I was transsexual. That same night I began to look for information on the internet. That way I came across a site for intersexuals: people who have both male as well as female gender characteristics. I stood in front of the mirror and took a good look at myself: my wide hips, my small wrists... It didn't take long for the proverbial light bulb to go on. Yet knowing what was going on didn't make it easier. With it I hadn't convinced the medical world, which was and is really important to me.

My discovery was followed up by five hellish years of tests and scans which should tell me what my real gender was. One doctor found a closed-off (hidden) vagina, the other said there was no way it could be that and that I was merely a transsexual boy who was deceiving himself. I knew for sure that the latter was wrong. A transsexual is one thing, and wants to become the other. I don't want to become anything, only to be myself.

Unanswered love

It resulted in excited and depressing talks with psychologists. I quickly got pushed into the transsexual protocol, even though I quickly knew I didn't belong there. I didn't want to get rid of my penis, I merely wanted to look like a girl and further stay who I was. I was no boy and have never been one. Meanwhile I struggle with my sexuality. Did I like men or women? And how does one in heaven's name start a relation when you look like I do? I quickly got the feeling that the people with whom I got a relation only dated me because they considered it an exciting experience, such an intersexual. Once it became old news, the relation would rapidly crash. This hurt a lot. How can I ever know whether someone really loves me, or only sees me as a toy which will get thrown away once it becomes boring? I don't even dare to begin to love someone. It won't get answered anyway...

The tests are costing me lots of money. Just like the hormone treatment. Doctors for the longest time wouldn't want to prescribe me hormones, so I ordered them myself via internet. Fortunately I'm now being treated at the UMCG in Groningen, there I do get them. I take various medicines to suppress that small amount of testosterone my body produces. But I do want to undergo castration. Because of the testosterone blocker which I now use, I have an increased chance on thrombosis. If my testicles get removed, I won't need that blocker any more.

Yet deep inside I don't want that. My penis is a part of me. It is quite useful when you need to pee. Although I always ensure that nobody sees me. It doesn't get in the way either. Not even when I go swimming. I just put it backwards and you don't see a thing while in a swimsuit. But should they yet discover that I do have a hidden vagina, then I think I will have surgery. If I know what I really am, I can make that choice. But I will have to know for sure first. I won't get a gender change surgery. An artificial vagina seems to me like the most horrible thing ever. I only want a female reproductive organ if it is really mine. I want to be what best fits me. And that can't be an intersexual. It isn't accepted in this society. If I want to pick up my medicines at the apothecary, I won't be able to take them with me. Because on my identity card it says I'm a man. And yes, I do look like a woman...

I have been looking for answers for five years now. By now I'm beginning to wonder whether I'll ever find them. Sometimes I hate my body so much because it makes my life so difficult. My body represents pain, uncertainty and frustration. At those times I just want to be rid of it and my tummy until it's bruised. Or I scratch myself until I bleed.

I need this physical pain to suppress the emotional pain. I have made a half-hearted attempt at suicide once as well. I put my hands around my throat and pushed until I couldn't breathe any more. It doesn't work, of course. The moment you lose consciousness, your hands lose their strength. Apparently I didn't really want it either. My rational side still wins it from the emotions. But sometimes I do worry that one day it will change and my emotions will win after all.

Sidebar

INTERSEXUALITY

- About 1 in every 2,000 children are born with both male and female gender characteristics, the so-called intersexuals.
- With some the intersexuality is very clear: they have both a penis and a vagina (hermaphrodites), for others it is at first glance harder to see. It could involve an enlarged clitoris or a closed-off vagina.
- Intersexuality can have various causes: during pregnancy a male embryo can merge with a female embryo. It can also be caused by immunity for estrogen or testosterone (female and male hormone), which would for example make a baby with XY-chromosomes not develop as a boy because the male hormones can't take effect.
- Look for more information on Maya on her own site: www.mayaposch.com