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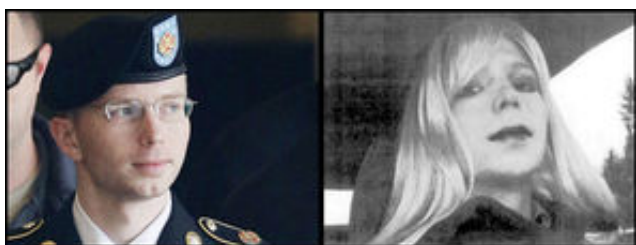
Nation & World

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Bradley Manning comes out as transgender: 'I am Chelsea'

Army officials said Pfc. Bradley Manning will receive counseling from mental-health professionals at the all-male prison, but that the service does not “provide hormone therapy or sex-reassignment surgery for gender-identity disorder.”

The Associated Press and The Washington Post



Army Pfc. Bradley Manning on Thursday announced plans to live as a woman and seek hormone therapy while in prison, confronting the military prison system with a demand that has prompted state and federal institutions to reluctantly offer similar treatment to inmates.

Manning's statement wasn't a complete surprise.

Testimony in the sentencing portion of the soldier's espionage trial was devoted to mental-health issues, including a struggle with gender dysphoria, as the condition is known, and a photo of the soldier in a blond wig and lipstick was submitted as evidence.

Manning received the diagnosis in May 2010, shortly before being arrested in connection with transmitting hundreds of thousands of classified documents to the organization WikiLeaks.

Still, Manning's statement — read on NBC's “Today” show — that “I am Chelsea Manning ... I also request that, starting today, you refer to me by my new name and use the feminine pronoun” was unexpected.

The declaration the morning after Manning was sentenced to 35 years in the military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., confronted the Pentagon with questions about where and how the Army private is to be imprisoned.

Leavenworth spokesman George Marcec said that if Manning wants to go by Chelsea in prison, a name change would have to be approved in court and then a petition submitted with the Army to change its records.

Army officials said Manning will receive counseling from mental-health professionals at the all-male prison, but that the service does not “provide hormone therapy or sex-reassignment surgery for gender-identity disorder.”

Manning's attorney, David Coombs, was adamant that he will try to change that policy, foreshadowing another legal battle between a transgendered person and a prison bureaucracy.

Manning was convicted of Espionage Act violations and crimes for turning more than 700,000

classified military and diplomatic documents over to the secrets-spilling website WikiLeaks. Coombs said the soldier could be paroled from prison in as little as seven years.

"Private Manning is facing 35 years in prison and needs to make a decision about what she's going to be doing for all those years," said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Greg Rinckey, a former Army judge advocate general, said he expects the Pentagon to "take the position that Private Manning is still male. He still has a penis and hasn't gone through surgery. If he fears for his safety, he can be put in isolation or protective custody."

He said he thinks Manning's attorneys are trying to secure a transfer from Fort Leavenworth to a federal prison. "The military has the ability to do that," he said. "It is rare, but it can happen."

In recent years, a federal judge has ordered Massachusetts corrections officials to provide an inmate's sex-change operation, and federal prisons were forced by a lawsuit to offer hormone therapy to prisoners even if they were not receiving them before incarceration.

A Federal Bureau of Prisons policy implemented last year requires federal prisons to develop treatment plans, including hormone therapy if necessary, for inmates diagnosed with gender-identity disorder. But the bureau oversees only civilian prisons.

Manning was returned Thursday to Fort Leavenworth, where the soldier has been held for more than two years.

Fort Leavenworth staff members have some leeway to separate soldiers from the other inmates based on the risk to themselves and others, Marcec said. Manning would not be allowed to wear a wig or bra, and the soldier's hair would have to be kept to military standard, Marcec added.

Gender dysphoria affects people whose sex at birth is contrary to the one they identify with, according to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the bible of psychiatric diagnoses.

Capt. David Moulton, a military forensic psychiatrist who examined Manning for the defense, said the soldier has had symptoms of the disorder since childhood.

While on leave in January 2010, Manning spent a good deal of time living as a woman. The soldier took a photo of himself dressed as a woman that he eventually sent to an Army superior.

There is little data on the number of transgendered people in U.S. prisons. Similarly, it is difficult to estimate the number of transgendered people in the U.S. population, advocates said.

But transgendered people are overrepresented in the military, with 20 percent of those surveyed saying they have served, Keisling said.

Hormone therapy to transition from male to female can take years to produce its ultimate effects, experts said, although continuous doses will result in changes such as softer skin, fat and muscle rebalancing and breast development in the first few months.

Those changes begin to become irreversible in six to nine months. The younger a patient is when starting to take hormones, the better they work, said Grace Kim, a Washington, D.C.-based psychologist with a number of transgendered patients.