

Debating the footnotes

S.O.B.'s STORY (spouse of boss) Dan Hammes/St. Maries Gazette Record

So the big news is he wants to be a she.

All of which has caused considerable navel-gazing in media circles.

The last few weeks there has been plenty of media coverage over the trial of Bradley Manning. As there should have been. Manning, as you will remember, is the former Army private privy to lots of secrets. Secrets he shared with an Internet outfit that gladly published the secrets.

Sure, some people may ask how it is a mere private had access to highly-classified material, but hey, the Army is a big place – it's not easy to keep track of people. Of course, the fact this particular private had access to some 750,000 pages of secret information does add to the mystery. But no matter how it happened, the release of the information was characterized as 'the most extensive release of classified information in U.S. history.'

And those are all good reasons for reporters to be interested when the culprit was caught, tried and convicted.

In the end Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison and that, well – should have been the end.

But then Manning decided he wanted to be a she – and the media went agog all over again.

We cannot be alone in wondering why media-types think it matters if a he wants to be a she. We get it that because of who he is – a soldier convicted of espionage - Manning attracts attention. But are his particular peccadilloes newsworthy?

Apparently so. The media were awash in reports about Manning's decision to change from a he to a she, including the new name he had chosen for himself. While this may be odd enough already, it was then when things really got strange.

The Manning story generated considerable debate within media circles. Not whether the entire gender-bending thing was news. Nah. All those crack editors had no doubt about that. In their minds there is a huge story when a male inmate declares he wants to be a female inmate.

No, the debate was about what pronoun was appropriate when talking/writing about Manning. Following his announcement, is Manning a he, or is Manning a she?

Seriously. Some people worry about such things.

It may be a reach, but could the Manning he/she 'story' be somewhat connected to other seedy items in the media today? Repugnant items that do not seem to bother anyone – especially the people involved.

There was a time when items about Manning's gyrations about gender would not have been published. Editors would have considered that the private's private matter. Most people would agree that if Manning wants to wear women's underwear, that's his business - but they don't think it should be fodder for live news coverage.

So is it merely coincidence that people today – especially politician people – have no shame? Today we have a guy who is not at all embarrassed about being a pervert AND a candidate for mayor of New York. What's more, his wife thinks it's just grand as well. Then there is the creepy mayor of San Diego, who admitted mauling and pawing women and actually thought he could continue to mayor.

And those are two examples. Similar stories surface quite regularly. There was a time when such behavior ended careers. Perhaps we have become so inured to the sordid that it all seems normal.

Meanwhile the debate whether Manning is a he, or a she, rages in newsrooms across the country.
– *DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.*