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Realities

Joanne's Recent 'Coming-Out'

by Joanne Charles

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Already, I hear the cries of some friends who are so driven that they see no choices available in their life, while others will think me very naive not to have realised this sooner. Perhaps I have been so caught up in trying to deal with an issue long denied that I have been unable to see the reality associated with it.

Comments by two writers in recent issues of *Polare* highlight the different ways of dealing with gender dysphoria and the choices this entails. In her article on [T.A.G.s](#) perspective on "Surgically Acquired Legal Privileges" (*Polare 10*), Ricki Carne makes the personal comment that "... there is nothing about me which is male, save my chromosomes and nothing about me that is not female, save again for those microscopic chromosomes ..." In another article, "The Middle Way" (*Polare 11*), Geselle Galadriel makes several comments which portray a totally different reality.

From the moment we start to deal with the issue of gender dysphoria at a personal level, we are confronted with an enormous range of (often conflicting) opinions, and therefore choices, from both the medical profession and others within the transgender community. For those of us who have been brought up in a nominally Christian environment, it is trauma enough just confronting the fact of being different to others of our apparent gender somehow it just does not seem right. Reading on the subject of transsexuality can bring one to the conclusion that the only thing to do is to (physically) change - to become the gender that we know ourselves to be.

But is this really the answer?

I have friends who are [post-op](#) and others who are happy so long as they can pass as females in society, and yet another friend sees gender as a role we play and has no difficulty portraying either. Born a male, she has twice been on hormone treatment and lived as a female, and twice gone back to being a male. She refers to herself as belonging to the "third sex", and for her, it is no more than a lifestyle choice. This then, is her reality.

But what of the rest of us?

Hormone treatment and surgery may change our bodies to a certain extent, and we may live as, and pass for, the gender which we choose to be, but the frustrating reality is that, in our own heart, we know that we are unable to fully function as that gender of choice (whether [M.T.F.](#) or [F.T.M.](#)). As Geselle says, "To Start your puberty and know that you can never complete it is close to a nightmare for me. To be taken almost to womanhood only to be dumped out of reach is frustrating beyond endurance ... my female need can never be met".

For me, as for any [M.T.F.](#), no amount of treatment or surgery can enable me to bear a child as a woman does and therefore I must forever feel incomplete. I must forever bear the burden of the gap between my spiritual and emotional self and the body that houses them. I may create the form of my real self but can never have the function. Germaine Greer may accord April Ashley acceptance as, "our sister and our symbol" (*The Female Eunuch* page 63), but this is only a hollow acceptance of the ultimate female eunuch unable to function as a real woman (is it any wonder that so many of us are so often filled with despair?). Nevertheless, the choice of how we deal with this situation is both personal and individual for each one of us.

It was with great relief that I came across the writings of Kate Bornstein who, to me, was the first to propound the transgender idea that we can be both genders but neither. Acceptance of the duality of our circumstance, of being both male and female but neither easier as an intellectual concept than as a daily reality, even though it is in fact the truth and the only path to sanity. Notwithstanding the outside pressures of society, within this concept there is an endless range of options, and therefore choices, where we may find a reality which will enable each of us to cope with our transgender life (use of the word transsexual, for me, always carried the connotation of the need for a sex-change).

I have only recently come-out about my real-self and have chosen to live my life in a more or less male role because of the loving relationship with my spouse, but this does not prevent me longing to be the woman that I am, even though I know that I can never be her. Rationalizing my situation, by telling myself that no matter how far I travel down the path to feminisation, I must eventually come to a point where I can go no further, makes life bearable but does not take away the longing. However, the choice of how I will live is mine, just as it is for each one of us. Doctors, Psychiatrists, friends, and lovers may advise, prescribe, direct but the choice, and therefore the responsibility, is individual and may for each of us.

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Obviously, for Vicki and others like her, verisimilitude is reality and I am happy that they find peace there, but for me, like Geselle, there is only the middle way and a constant battle to find the balance that Linda has written about (*Polare 10*)

Ultimately, the important thing for each of us is to realise that it is okay to choose a different reality to others in the transgender community as long as it works for us. It is, after all, our lifestyle choice.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.