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# Transsexual Acceptance

## Gail's Personal Experience

by Gail Bennett

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A transsexual life can be very difficult.

I guess for the transsexual, our respective "coming-outs" are similar to what most members of the gay community would experience. Family rejection is not that uncommon when a transsexual has announced they are changing gender. Maybe I am too much of a humanist, but I can appreciate how family must feel. For all their lives, in my case, they have known me as a male and now, as a result of hormonal treatment my body exhibits female characteristics and my body's chemical make-up is female aligned.

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The reaction when I announced to my only sibling that her brother was going to become her sister was rather accepting at first, but it didn't take too long for that to change. That initial acceptance turned into comments of shame and anger which resulted with me being isolated from family last Christmas. That hurt greatly.

Because of the attitude of my sister and her family I became rather angry that they refused to accept my decision without question. With the benefit of time I realised my attitude was rather selfish and that I needed to become prepared to be more tolerant.

In mid-January my sister visited me in Canberra. I thought that over those few days she was with me she had developed an understanding of why I have made my decision. She stated that she could see I was very happy in my chosen gender, nevertheless her contact with me since she returned home to Newcastle has been somewhat minimal. I am still not allowed to speak with her teenage son and daughter, who I love intensely.

If my problems are great, then I pity those persons who have embarked on gender reassignment and who are married and possibly have children. The torment for them and their partners and children must be immense. Some partnerships stay together after sex reassignment surgery, but most dissolve. Some dissolve mutually, whilst other result in bitter custody battles.

A transsexual life can be very difficult. You are going through so much change. You may be the victim of insults from narrow-minded cretins or frustrated by the lack of financial resources to accomplish essential things such as electrolysis (in the case of male-to-female transsexuals).

A dear friend who resides in the United States has been constantly harassed by her family since her reassignment surgery two years ago. The family refuse to associate with her. The family of a male-to-female transsexual in Sydney harassed her surgeon and psychiatrist in an endeavour to stop her surgery. Families can be a very difficult thing to deal with.

During the process of "coming-out" I have found that genetic females seem to be able to more readily accept my gender reassignment decision than males. Any rejection from friends to date has come from males.

In a book called the *Transsexual Survival Guide* the author, Jo Ann Stringer quotes the reason for this attitude by men would appear to be aligned with the feeling of male-to-female transsexuals being traitors to their birth gender. From my experience, I think there is possibly some truth in that statement.

The fact is, I am not a traitor. I, and my fellow transsexuals, have endured many years of internal torment and anguish and we have been prepared to make a decision and to change our lives. For me, I believe that change is for the better.

For me, and heaps of other transsexuals life can be just so much better if people were more prepared to accept who we really are, and to not be so narrow-minded.

If a family member came home from their general practitioner one day and announced they must have a limb amputated, the entire family would gather around them and appropriately render support, but if that same family member announced they were embarking on gender reassignment, most likely, that family would treat him or her a leper.

I guess the only appropriate way to end this story is to say, "us human beings are a strange lot."

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