

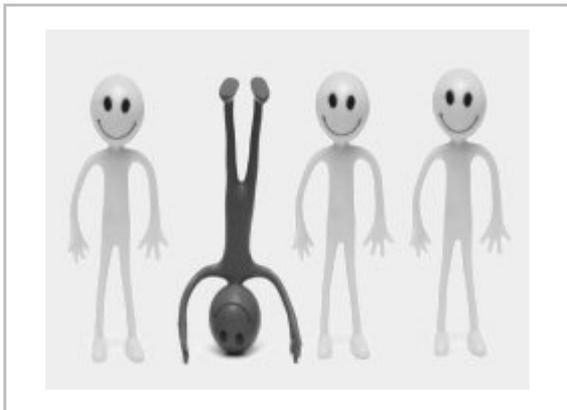
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Avoiding Negative Attention

And Considering Your Fellow Travellers

by Marika Jackson

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Many of us share a history of finally arriving at the time when we faced the reality of our true gender and the consequent realisation that, whatever decision we took to do something about the situation it was going to be painful in terms of our future relationships with partners, family, friends and colleagues.

It's so maddeningly frustrating to have my personal progress in terms of mainstream acceptance as just another woman, undermined by attention-seeking or demanding individuals

In common with many of you, this certainly proved to be so in my experience, especially in view of the fact that I'd been married with children for some thirty-

eight years.

Furthermore, at the time I was living in a part of the country where fundamental, conservative Christian values are, to this day, the foundation of many people's lives.

In turning my life around I hurt many people who'd known, trusted and respected me over many years. This was especially true in the case of my lovely wife, my children and grandchildren, the last-named for their entire lives.

Although, by and large, most people took it much better than I'd expected, it was inevitable that those closest to me, my family, would feel betrayed and angry. This manifested itself in attempts to use the law to stop me. When they failed, their only recourse was to banish me.

The point of this snippet of personal history is that, whatever negative reactions we may face from people we've hurt, it was my decision that led to it. I refuse to be angry at those who fail to understand me. I certainly understand them. I can't see myself as victim. It is they who are the victims.

Over the last couple of years I've listened to numerous tales of rejection and humiliation. Many of them heart-rending but, by and large, related in terms of matter-of-fact resignation or expressions of a dogged determination to make the best of things, no matter how challenging they may be. There's mostly a robust refusal to play the 'victim'. It's all a matter of attitude. What I find sad, however, is to hear some individuals repeating, over and over, their tales of woe and injustice to anyone prepared to listen. Sometimes to the extent that their story and their identity become almost indistinguishable.

I do realise of course, that having said all this, you could be excused for concluding that, perhaps, what I'm actually expressing is a degree of guilt for putting my loved ones through all the drama associated with my 'coming-out' and subsequent reassignment. Well, it's not. I did what I had to do.

There were two options and I chose life. Admission of guilt, I believe, would simply have provided the excuse to avoid informed action. A way of buying time out of the pressing need to make some clear choices. A weakness of character.

Besides, I also happen to believe that regret is invariably an awful waste of energy. It's only good for wallowing in.

Isn't it strange though, that, within our ranks, the loudest voices protesting injustice, in terms of acceptance by the wider community, tend at the same time to behave in ways almost guaranteed to draw negative attention. I don't think it's simply the volume of these voices, but rather their insistence that we're somehow deserving of special consideration.

I don't think so! I'm sure the slogan 'Out and Proud' was never intended to encourage defiantly anti-social behaviour or a total disregard for generally accepted norms of public decorum.

It's so maddeningly frustrating to have my personal progress in terms of mainstream acceptance as just another woman, undermined by attention-seeking or demanding individuals.

I'm not a 'goddess', a 'princess', or anything more than simply someone trying to maintain a lifestyle that I've worked very hard to achieve, and will continue to work at.

My aim is to merge so seamlessly that my gender history is not an issue. I know that sounds unrealistic. Maybe it is, but I remember reading somewhere: "If you think you can, you're right".

"If you think you can't, you're right". In short, it's all about self-confidence. To use another quote, attributed to Anita Roddick, the Body Shop ® founder: "If you feel gorgeous, you'll look gorgeous". In other words, all the finery, make-up and heels are pointless if you can't wear them with confidence. On the other hand, if you do have the confidence, if you're "comfortable in your own skin", maybe props are mostly unnecessary.

In fact, it's often the props themselves; the precipitous heels, the skirts that are too tight or too short skirt, the extravagant 'bling' or the 'pancake' make-up, that scream out for negative attention.

Having said this, however, those of you who've read my earlier columns will recall my expressing a personally-felt obligation to present always in one's true gender in such a way as to avoid causing confusion and social embarrassment for others.

But what's so hard, I wonder, about simply aiming to be a nice, modest girl or woman? Heaven knows, there are enough of them out there. Just look and learn.

In the process of planning an impending trip to Indonesia with girlfriends, a travel-piece by Gillian Kendall in the May edition of L.O.T.L. magazine caught my eye on a related subject.

To paraphrase, she advises that, when travelling alone in predominantly Muslim or Catholic parts of the world, it's important to err on the side of modesty. She goes on to suggest that if you have some objection to skirts, you should at least carry a scarf as a wrap or head-cover, especially when entering holy places. To quote her: "Dress like the local grandmothers".

No problem for this 'granny'.

She also advises that in such sensitive locations, the use of sunglasses to avoid eye-contact will go some way to avoiding being harassed in the street. I'd recommend Gillian's interesting article to anyone planning an overseas trip. Anyway, having got all of that off my (now nicely developing) chest, I feel compelled to wind up on a really positive note.

I don't seem to have the time to watch much television lately, but I have managed to tune in to A.B.C.2 occasionally, and I've been surprised and delighted to catch a number of programs dealing with gender identity issues on that channel.

I say delighted because what struck me was the quality, sensitivity and honest integrity with which each was presented. The three that immediately come to mind were *The Boy who was Born a Girl, Head First* and *My Transsexual Summer*.

All very good and honest. I really liked the story of the young F.T.M. The teenager was delightfully candid about his feelings, his relationships with friends and fellow students and the difficulties around leaving school as a girl and returning the following year as a boy.

It was the single mother however who brought a tear to my eye. Although clearly troubled by the impending loss of a pretty daughter, her stoic determination to make her child's transition as seamless as possible was truly heart-rending but, at the same time, heart-warming. Lucky child.

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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.