

On Relationships

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I’ve often wondered what impact our transsexuality has on the types and quality of love relationships we form during our lives. Surely, being transsexual makes us different from most people, and as we make the transition from one gender to another, the way we relate to others changes, as well as the way others relate to us.

For sake of convenience, I have divided the transsexual experience into several phases, and will look at how being in one of those phases affects us and those we choose as significant others.

The first stage is what I call *pre-pre operative* (kind of like off-off Broadway!) During this period we are usually young and trying to figure out just why we feel different. We know there is something wrong with our gender identity, but don’t know exactly what to do about it. This phase can go on from childhood to young adulthood. During adolescence, with the emergence of sexual maturity, the problem of transsexuality exacerbates an already turbulent period.

It seems to me a person at this stage in their development will experience difficulty in forming a stable relationship because of the gender problem. When a person can’t relate to their self-image, how can they relate adequately to another human being? Generally, feeling no self-love for ourselves, it is extremely difficult to love someone else. There are rare instances, however, where a TS forms a bond that endures through the complete transition, but I personally have never met such a person.

I call the second phase the *pre-op phase*. This begins when the transsexual has identified the gender problem, and has begun to take steps to remedy it. Needless to say, during this period of time, dealing with hormones, electrolysis, therapy, employment, money and legal issues takes up most of the transsexual’s time and energy. A relationship formed during this phase may necessarily take a back seat to undergoing the initial steps in the sex change process.

This is a transitional stage of life. As the transsexual spends more time in the new gender, she is learning to relate to individuals and society in a new, and sometimes confusing, way. The TS is still genetically male but living, at least part-time, as a female. This makes it very difficult to form a stable relationship with another human being. Sexually speaking, a relationship between a TS and a male during this period is a homosexual relationship, and a relationship between a TS and a female during this period is essentially a heterosexual one. In my experience, very few relationships formed between a pre-op transsexual and either a man or woman survive into the postoperative period. It is asking a lot of one partner to accept a lover’s complete change of genitals!

I call the next stage the *post-operative period*. Immediately after sex reassignment surgery, the transsexual spends a lot of time adjusting to the nuances of having a new sexual anatomy. After the healing process and the physician’s okay for sexual activity,

some transsexuals spend some time “sowing wild out,” trying out the new plumbing, so to speak. This may be a way to verify one’s acceptance as a “total” woman, or a celebration of a new-found comfort in sexual expression. However, in this time of the AIDS epidemic, this postoperative period of promiscuity may hopefully decline.

Some transsexuals enter into serious relationships during this period, but for some, this decision turns out to be too hasty, and some of these relationships do not work out. This period might be considered a “second adolescence,” since the transsexual’s physical development has out-stepped her maturity to deal with it.

After some time, when the transsexual is comfortable with her new anatomy, with most of the transsexual issues behind her, she may be ready to enter into a serious, lasting relationship. Surely, the condition still plays a role, since most TSs will inform a prospective husband/lover of her transsexuality. This may cause some problems in itself, or in conjunction with other issues: low self-esteem, substance abuse, insecurity and other common psychological problems can be a result of having gone through the TS experience. However, at this point, transsexuality itself is generally no longer an issue.

From my personal experience (and not based on ANY research), I think post-op transsexuals fare as well as non-transsexuals in forming lasting loving relationships. Considering what transsexuals undergo in their lifetime, this speaks well of our ability to adjust to extraordinary circumstances, and relate to other human beings on the deepest level.