

SO Handout for the 2012 Keystone Conference

The issues that come up with transgender partners are numerous and complex. Some of them include:

1. What causes this?

Because the transgender population is so small, statistically, there hasn't been an expenditure of research monies to pay for any definitive, scientific answer to this question. There are many theories, including:

*being tg is genetic, in their DNA;
being tg is the result of abnormally timed hormone washes, in the womb;
being tg is the result of childhood abuse; or
being tg is a mental illness, related to body dysmorphic disorder. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_dysmorphic_disorder*

No one really knows what has caused this feeling within our partners that their inner gender identity is different than their outer, apparent gender. It is fairly clear, however, that most of our partners remember feeling "other gendered" as young as 3 – 5 years old, so it certainly seems to be an innate characteristic, present from their earliest recollections.

2. Is he gay?

Probably not, if you are defining gay as being attracted to another male partner. Most of us have found that the incidence of attraction to genetic males is no higher than it would be in the general population. However, please keep in mind that, if they strongly identify with their femme side, they may feel attraction to men as if they are women, and not see this as gay. Another twist many of us have seen or heard of is that, often, mtf tg people will flirt with or attempt to provoke a response from men, in order to test how well they are passing, i.e. seen as being convincing in their en femme role. Even with these considerations, however, most mtf tg persons who were attracted to women before they started expressing their inner femme side remain attracted to women, afterwards. Most that are married to women want to stay married to those women. And, yes, some may be bi, or, find out that they are latently gay. Again, though, we believe that is a small percentage of the total.

3. How far does he want to take this?

This is a very unique question that will be answered individually by each mtf tg partner. Some may keep their femme expression totally at home. Some may want to go out to support group meetings or clubs, en femme. Some will want to be dual gendered, and balance their gender expression with equal parts male and female presentation, depending upon the situation. Most will want to remove most of their body hair. Some will want to talk halfway steps toward transition, such as taking female hormones or androgen-blocking drugs, without having surgery on their bodies. A very small minority of the total will want to block their male hormones, take female hormones, remove their Adam's Apple (a tracheal shave), have breast implants, have Facial Feminization Surgery, have Sexual Reassignment Surgery to change the appearance of their genitals, and, if possible, change their legal gender. Of the total transgender population of which we are aware, the vast majority end up choosing to be somewhere in the middle.

4. What about sex, attraction and the way we identify **our own** sexual orientation?

This is a very complex issue for many of us, and, as you're probably beginning to see, will have unique answers depending upon each woman and each mtf tg partner, and the needs each of them has. Some mtf tg people need to have their femme side recognized and accommodated, as a part of erotic interaction. Some do not. Some need ED drugs, such as Viagra and its cousins, to be able to participate in a traditionally male way. Some will no longer be willing to do so at all, even if they are able. As for us, their partners, those of us who are bi, or open to the idea of appreciating the femme side of our partners, can often find a way of validating all that they are, but still enjoying the benefits of "lock into key" dynamics in the bedroom. Others find new ways of expressing erotic energy. Many reject it all, at first, but later find a way to accept it to the extent that erotic exchange becomes possible. Some choose celibacy. Most wives and girl friends of dual gendered and cross dressing mtf tg people can find a way to make it work, if the relationship is otherwise strong. With transsexuals who transition, the odds are not as good, but we are still aware of some couples who find a way to stay together.

5. If he goes out en femme, or otherwise wants to “come out” as transgender to family, friends or community, how do we deal with this?

One day at a time; there is no perfect way to talk about this with family members, friends and co-workers. Each of us has to take the measure of her own personal courage, and how much she is willing to represent, to others, that she supports her partner’s expression of his inner gender identity. This is a very real dilemma for many women, with no facile answers. Although bills have been introduced, we do not yet have protection for transgender identity or expression in federal law, nor in most states, though some local jurisdictions have enacted protections against discrimination.

6. What about porn?

Many wives, when they first find out about this, also find out that their husband is looking at a lot of porn, often of the “shemale” variety. Different women have different reactions to this, but most are not at all happy about it. Often, mtf tg people look at this stuff at the beginning of their tg journey, in fascination at what others have done to express their “femme side”, and, also, because it can be very erotic. Whether it is truly harmful to you, or to your relationship, is very personal, and is something that will probably need to be negotiated between the two of you, if it is an issue in your marriage.

7. If he is otherwise a really great husband, how does being transgender affect us?

No matter how we felt about it all, when we first started to realize that our husbands or partners were transgender, most of us have found, over time, that if he is otherwise a good husband, loving, generous, supportive, understanding, willing to compromise, and willing to respect YOUR feelings, then it is very likely that YOU will be able to accept or tolerate all of this, in some way, and work out with him ways to make it something you can both learn to compromise in regard to, over time.

8. Will it affect work and his ability to make a living?

Maybe, if he wants to “come out” at work. If he owns his own business, possibly not. If he works for a government agency, probably not. If he works for a smaller business, or in a position where he must interact regularly with the general public, maybe. Our best estimates are that transgender people are, at most, about 3% of the total population, so most people have never heard of this, and the whole idea of “changing genders” or “cross-gender expression” is very foreign for most people, sometimes scary and sometimes deeply offensive. Larger businesses and government agencies generally ARE aware of the issue, and their Human Relations departments will often make a good effort to accommodate transition, but whether it succeeds or not may depend a lot upon how his co-workers treat the transition, and whether they are willing to work with it all. “Official” willingness to accommodate a transgender employee is also often compromised by unofficial prejudice in some way. So much of this depends upon how intrinsically strong your husband or partner might be, as s/he may often have to survive a lot of flack.

This is just the most basic starting point, for all of us. Please reach out to us at SO@TransCentralPA.org if we can help you with other issues! Our very best to you on this journey we all share!