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My husband is now a woman? The experiences of transgender individuals in partner relationships

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♂ The Transgender Partner Study ♀



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Project Goal

To research the romantic partner relationship experiences of those who identify as trans*, transgender, and other non-cisgender identities.

Participants

37 Transgender Individuals

- 17 Female to Male (FTM)
- 20 Male to Female (MTF)
- Age range: 18-70
- Racially mixed sample from US

Procedure

Participants completed a one-hour, semi-structured interview via Skype. Most advertising was done through Facebook. Each participant received a \$10 Amazon gift card for their time.

Data Themes

1. Emotional and Physical Sexuality

Participants shared the challenges of sexuality in regard to gender transition and gender non-conformity. These challenges were both physical and emotional. Many participants expressed the unique challenges of finding and keeping partners who have the capacity to love them for exactly who they are.

"So what was below my waist was out of bounds prior to my surgery and just never played in our relationship." – MTF age 53

"I think I would probably start with people who are trans in some way, not necessarily just trans men, but trans-women and non-binary trans people just because the thing that I found about a lot of cis-gender people is that sometimes they just don't get it." – FTM age 23

2. Coming Out and Disclosure Decisions

Participants shared the challenges of disclosing to current and/or future partners about their transgender identity. Many shared stories of failed relationships and negative situations that arose because they are transgender. "Coming out" is a lifelong, daily decision.

"They like you, they think you're funny, [...] then they'll say, 'Well, I want to come and meet' and I'll say, 'Well, that's fine, so long as you know that I'm transgender' and without even saying, that's not my thing, all of a sudden they just cut you off" --MTF age 61

Safety is another concern.

"I'm always aware of safety concerns, especially in part of the country that I'm not super familiar with, or, in general, if there's not a lot of visibility. I don't want to become a statistic" -- FTM age 40

Almost all shared the struggle of finding supportive partners.

"The other person didn't sign up for this" -- MTF age 49

3. The Gender Binary System is Oppressive

Most participants shared the challenges of fitting into simple social labels such as male-female or straight-gay. Most described how binary language did not capture their experiences.

"My wife felt that, 'Okay, so I understand that you need to change your gender, that, in order to be authentic, that's what you need to do. But that makes me inauthentic in terms of my sexual orientation, so how's that fair?'" –MTF age 59

Others also described how fluid sexual orientation language was a starting point to exploring the fluidity of their gender identity.

"The biggest challenges are trying to explain it to people. I'm not really a binary, straight trans guy. A lot of people are like 'if you wanted to date boys why didn't you just stay a girl' but that's two completely different things." --FTM age 22

4. "I am who I am"

Many discussed how living an authentic life in terms of gender identity is helpful in their partner relationships. Most expressed relief about being able to be genuine about their gender identity in relationship experiences now.

"I gave it the good college try, and nothing changed" - <when he was a female and was trying to like males> -- FTM age 48

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