

"Transsexualism" Partnership

A personal reflection by *Li Sam*



*In matrimony we promise to love each other 'til death do us part.
A change in gender: is that the end or is it where love really starts?*

Can Love Ever Survive Transsexualism?

Worse than death?

In a loving relationship where transsexualism emerges, questions about partnership and relations can turn out to be a nightmare even worse than death. To have a loving spouse change gender is probably the worst experience ever.

Emotions affect both partners that we had no idea existed, and we need to understand that what we experience is deadly serious and shouldn't be ignored.

A transsexual person's partner will be faced with the inevitable question, "Should I stay or should I go?" In either case your lives will change, and many times it hurts badly. Family's and old friends' attitudes may change, and it's often then that we begin to understand the value of a loving partner and a happy relationship.

Relationship: hetero or homo or what?

You can categorize a relationship as good or bad and as hetero- or homosexual, but there is also the issue about it being appropriate or not.

To me, whether a relationship is hetero- or homosexual is not really an issue because at least then a couples' gender is not in question. But when transsexualism affects a relationship, something happens that begins a whole new category of relationship issues.

For a woman who starts off living in a heterosexual relationship, a change in her mate's gender really turns things upside down. A wife may suddenly be confronted with being married to and living with a woman. What does that make her, a lesbian? And what about her relationship: is it or will it be homosexual?

Under these circumstances a well-founded question is: *Can sexual orientation change?* A wife experiencing spousal transsexualism will find herself in a situation of total and utter disaster. What will the rest of the family say or, worse, think? What about neighbors and friends? What about work: how can she socialize, chatting about husbands—what can she say? And what about herself? She can have a lot of ugly thoughts at this time.

As much as the transsexual person is left alone in a situation that's very hard to deal with, so too is the spouse. All the emotions bubbling up to the surface are new and scary and can be very traumatic. It's not uncommon that psychiatric help is needed to sort things out and establish some kind of understanding about what is happening.

To begin to give spouses some sort of comfort in this situation, let me just say this: *Your sexual orientation doesn't change. All traumatic reactions you experience are very normal, and there is nothing wrong with you.* However, you must not isolate yourself and be left alone with all your emotions, as they actually can destroy you. For you, as well as for the transsexual person, it's vital to come out with your feelings, learn about yourself and start to deal with your situation.

Relationship: how to cope?

In a situation where transsexualism affects you and your relationship, you need to understand that you shouldn't merely cope. If you try to trudge ahead without facing your emotions head-on or try to deny what is happening, everything will get even worse.

You might discuss with your spouse about setting up rules regarding when, where and how the transsexual partner can dress up and such, but it doesn't solve the problem and it's not what a relationship is all about. A relationship is about love and happiness without any straitjacket rules making each of you miserable.

Somewhere along the line you need to recognize when a relationship is killing you and where to step off. You shouldn't let your relationship crash just by merely coping. But you also need to understand that transsexualism doesn't mean that you have to break up. The person you love is still there, and you don't have to stop loving that person, even if his or her gender has to change.

A relationship is a mutual process, which means we have to learn how to be together in both good and bad times. And there is that *something else* that can make relationships work, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. You don't have to endure a situation that makes you miserable. Being your true self and learning about that *something else* is the key leading to love and happiness whatever the future brings.

Relationship: what to do?

When relationships start to fail, sometimes you may wonder, *What did I do wrong?* In this case you haven't done anything wrong. Instead, the question should be *How do we move forward?* To do so you have to understand that the love of your life may not be lost after all.

There are no simple answers to all the questions emerging. We are all different and we are all special. A change in gender is quite dramatic, but we need to understand that the change we see is like an outward coating; inside *the soul of a person* doesn't change. If you have loved your partner, the person he or she really is, then somewhere you have met and loved that soul. You shouldn't be afraid to explore that other inner side of your love more. What is it you love about your spouse and partner? What is it that makes you happy?

However, do remember that every basic part of being a person relates to gender. When we look at, talk to or touch another person, we always relate to gender and our behavior adjusts accordingly. Unconsciously we tie emotional bonds, and when gender changes, some of these bonds will break. But there is nothing prohibiting you from tying new, slightly different bonds with that very same person.

There is something called friendship and there is also something called a loving friendship. You don't have to be homosexual when you live with a person of the same sex. To be gentle while learning about each other is a way to deal with the situation. A loving, friendly relationship shouldn't exclude family, workmates or any other acquaintance. However, relationship privacy should always be respected. Remember, happiness is necessary for making relationships last. Loving friends can go out to meet other people if they sometimes need more intimacy.

Just as transsexual people need a life, so do their spouses and partners. The fact that living in the wrong gender is a major trauma for transsexual people is beginning to reach the public in general, but also transsexuals' near and dear and *their* trauma should also be announced and not kept in the dark as so often has been done.

Finally

Spouses and partners are still the same persons as before even if their life situations are changing. Talking and learning about transsexualism and its many repercussions does help, if we just give it a try.

Transsexualism is a life phenomenon and not that uncommon at all. Sharing emotions, talking to one's partner, and overcoming fears are the core to keeping a relationship alive. Being together and caring about each other is how relationships develop, and transsexualism is an obstacle that a loving, happy couple certainly can overcome.

yours sincerely, Li Sam