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Coming-Out Transgender in Same-Sex Relationships

Stories of Heartache and Triumph, Confusion and Clarification, Finding Identities and Transcending Labels

by Brian Van de Mark, reprinted with kind permission of the [Gay and Lesbian Times](#) ☑ Issue 994, January 11th 2007
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When a person is in a same-sex relationship and makes the decision to transition, it's not an easy road.

Chances are one is familiar with stories like that of Roy, who in the 2003 groundbreaking film *Normal*, finds after twenty-five years of marriage that the stress of being a woman in a man's body is too much to bear. For Roy, played by Tom Wilkinson, it's not an easy transition but a necessary one. And in the end, his wife, played brilliantly by a quiet Jessica Lange, comes to accept his decision. But what happens when a person in a same-sex relationship 'comes out' as transgender? The answers are as varied as the people who tell the stories. And in the cases of the nine transgender persons we spoke to for this discussion, they are each, in their own way, stories of heartache and triumph, confusion and clarification, finding identities and transcending labels.

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People use the acronym L.G.B.T. to describe a community that shares a common bond of sexuality or gender outside society's majority. It can be argued however, that there are different levels of understanding of each of these sub-communities within the larger L.G.B.T. community.

In fact, says Daniel of North Park, "The farther you get from the beginning of the acronym, the farther you get from someone's ability - or willingness - to understand the people involved." Perhaps we can take one step further in our path for understanding.

Daniel

Daniel is a forty-two-year-old female-to-male transgender person who was involved in a lesbian relationship for nearly a decade before deciding to transition to being male. "I was with my partner for about six years in a lesbian relationship, and I thought that was who I was," Daniel explains.

"One day, we were out to dinner and a friend introduced us to a man who was genetically still a female but had transitioned to being a man, and I suddenly stopped eating. When they walked away from the table, I turned and said, "Sara, I think I'm a man."

For Daniel, formerly Jamie, like most transgender people, the transition was a long process, one that involved physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual changes and awakenings. Daniel formally began the transition process in 1998 after a year of discussing it with his therapist.

"It was really like a second coming-out," Daniel explains. "After years of struggling with my sexuality and coming-out to my family and friends as a lesbian, it was not something that I was ready for. So coming-out again seemed really confusing to a lot of people." And, like many transgender persons who come-out in a same-sex relationship, the other person most impacted is the partner.

"My partner, Sara, finally said to me one night, "What does this make me, straight?" Daniel recalls. "I think that's a really fair question. I mean, we had been lovers and we were both open as lesbians. Suddenly she's starting to refer to her lover as Daniel, and people were like: 'What, are you straight now? Who's Daniel?'"

Sara faced what many partners in same-sex relationships face if a partner transitions. In a case when a partner transitions female-to-male, seldom is sexual reassignment surgery attempted. However, as the person begins to live their life as a male, the social changes required of a partner can be overwhelming. In particular, people question the partner's sexual identity.

"You could see the pain that Sara went through when she would talk to people and talk about her and Daniel doing something for the house or whatever," Daniel says. "I can't even count how many times I overheard her explain, "Yes, I'm still a lesbian, but Jamie is transitioning." This continued for nearly four years before Sara finally had to leave. This is not altogether uncommon, says Kurt Buis, staff psychologist at The Centre. Buis, who has been working with the transgender community for the last two decades, says there is a

sense of loss that comes with a partner transitioning.

"It's about the sense of losing some of your identity," Buis explains. "For the partner in the relationship who is not transitioning, and in the case of a lesbian relationship, for example, the transitioning person is still going to present himself as a man. And so, by my association with you, I lose that sense of self that I have built as a lesbian. I can lose a sense of my identity, of my community, of in some cases everything that made me lesbian. It's about how people deal with that loss."

Sara and Daniel fought through the transition, staying together. In larger part, Daniel says, this is because he didn't go through the sexual reassignment surgery.

"I guess the way Sara saw it was that I was just that much more butch than I was before I transitioned," Daniel explains. "The biggest issue was that she had to start referring to me as a male, using male pronouns. Sometimes she would call me Danny, and she could skate by because people would think it was a new girlfriend. Kind of like Jamie because it doesn't really tell whether it's a male or female. Sara changed a lot of her friends when I transitioned just so she didn't have to go through those explanations."

But the one group Sara couldn't change or run from, Daniel explains, was family. Sara's family, in particular, had trouble understanding their daughter's relationship. It was not uncommon for Sara to be fielding questions such as, "Are you straight now?"

In fact, Daniel says, that was the eventual downfall of their relationship. Monica Helms is a transgender activist in Atlanta, Georgia, and attended San Diego's Transgender Day of Remembrance. Helms explains that it's often not the partner but rather the friends and families of the partner who drive the wedge.

"A lot of times it's the friends and family who can't deal with it," Helms explains. "They refuse to acknowledge the transitioning partner's new name, or they refuse, can't or are somehow unable to use the correct pronouns. All of these things are very powerful and can speed up the end of a relationship. If you don't have the support of your friends and family, it can be a very hard situation to overcome. People often say, 'I have a problem with that.' Well, you have a problem, start working on that problem. At some point, people have to say either get on board or get out of the way."

"I think if it was just me and Sara and no one else, we would still be together," Daniel avers. "But the pressure of having to redefine our relationship to the rest of the world as a heterosexual one was too much for Sara."

And a heterosexual relationship is what it had become, Daniel explains, which led many of Sara's family to say, "Well, if you can be with a guy, why not be with a real guy?" The pressure was too much for Sara, and Daniel completely understands.

"When I transitioned, we went from being in a lesbian relationship to being in a straight relationship," Daniel says. "Even though I was still genetically female, I was a man. And when I transitioned, I was living as a man in every single way, and that meant being Sara's boyfriend. That meant being Uncle Danny instead of Aunt Jamie, even though the kids had a sense that I was the same person as Jamie."

Connor

For many transgender people, being in a same-sex relationship is the first step in a long transition.

Connor Maddocks, a female-to-male transgender person, entered a series of lesbian relationships after being married for twenty-five years. These same-sex relationships were prior to Maddocks transitioning to a man. "I didn't like girl things from a very early age, but I didn't know anything about transitioning," explains Maddocks, now fifty-three. "When I got divorced, I was in a lesbian relationship with a woman for about three years. Then I began to learn about people who had transitioned (female-to-male). Whenever I would bring up the idea to my partner, she would go crazy."

Maddocks believes this is likely because people go through years of coming to understand and be comfortable with their sexual orientation. And when one partner decides to change their gender, the whole idea of sexual orientation is upset again. She would say, "I'm a lesbian and I want to be in a relationship with a lesbian," Maddocks recalls. "It's a double-edged sword, really. She knew she was a lesbian, but here she was in a relationship with a guy, and she was trying to figure out how she could be attracted to someone who is a guy when she's a lesbian. She was really upset and so I put all my ideas away again, like I had when I was married."

Maddocks and her partner split up after three years, with the pressure of Maddocks' gender identity too much for the relationship to withstand. Maddocks doesn't consider the irony of having to oppress his questioning while in a lesbian relationship. Instead, he is empathetic to his former partner. Examining one's gender isn't something one does very often, if at all.

"We really think only about sexual orientation, about who we are attracted to," Maddocks says. "People never really question their gender, so most people don't know how to react when their partner does. It's pretty common for people to run from this examination. It's scary. It's painful. People spend a lifetime building their sexual orientation and sexual identity, and suddenly they have to rethink everything. What would it mean if she was actually attracted to a man?"

Mattheus

Mattheus Stephens is a female-to-male transgender person.

"For me, I understood my gender identity, that I was a boy, before I understood my sexual identity," Stephens explains. "You don't have a sense of sexuality until adolescence. From a very early age, I was very clear that I was a boy. The notion of sexuality didn't come about until I was older."

For some, then, coming to an understanding of their gender precedes, and in many ways supersedes, any notion of sexual orientation

or identity.

"The choices we make to survive are often difficult choices," Stephens explains. "In my view, deciding to be a member of the gay community was a much easier decision; it was a much easier decision to be a lesbian than it was for me to say, 'I'm male'. Deciding I was male was the harder of the two understandings even though it was nearer to me."

Stephens is also clear about his sexuality. He is heterosexual. Stephens is currently involved in a heterosexual relationship with a female. Stephens admits this is not without its fair share of confusion among those in society at large. "In my view, to the extent that someone on the outside is struggling to define or understand the relationship is really a struggle to understand people like me," Stephens explains. "And that is understandable in my view because we know so little about the biology, chemistry and brain function of what we call gender identity. What do we do when we come across someone who doesn't fit in a box of what we know of boys and girls based on certain behaviours?"

Vicki

For Vicki Estrada, a male-to-female transgender person, the issues Maddocks' partner faced are understandable. Estrada entered a series of same-sex relationships while transitioning. She is currently involved with another post-operative transgender male-to-female.

Prior to her current relationship, she was involved as a woman in a lesbian relationship.

"My girlfriend's family was really what ended the relationship," Estrada explains. "They took the ability of her to define herself away from her. They began to first define her as a lesbian. And then there was the added issue of being with a transgender person. How could she, their sister, date a transgender person? They stopped inviting her to Thanksgiving dinners. They disowned her."

Estrada explains that it is not that unusual for a male-to-female transsexual to be in relationships with other women.

"When you're male-to-female, people automatically assume you want to be with a man," Estrada explains. "But in reality, that isn't what always happens. In fact, one third of us end up with other women, one third with men and about a third end up with other trans persons. What people don't take into account is that it's really about the person you fall in love with, not the body parts."

So, would Estrada label herself a lesbian?

"Labels don't work," Estrada avers. "If you have only male and female, only gay or straight, only black or white, things begin to fall apart. There are so many choices, so many colours, you can't pin it down."

There is one area that Estrada believes is a given, and that is always being there for her community. "My dream is to someday be able to walk down the street and just blend in," Estrada says. "I just want to be, I guess. But I know that I will always be there for my community, no matter how much I am able to blend in."

Estrada was set to have facial feminization surgery in Boston a few days after the interview. Being a part of the L.G.B.T. community isn't always the goal for transgender people. But for Stephens, even though he is in a heterosexual relationship, being a part of the L.G.B.T. community is important.

"It's important that transgender people continue to identify with the broader queer community," Stephens explains. "I think there are a couple of factors that play themselves out. First, the gay community has fought so long and so hard to get acceptance, and then to layer on that acceptance for transgender people is difficult.

Second, I think there is a misconception that once you align yourself and are in a heterosexual relationship, you stop being a member of the queer community. There is a certain amount of assimilation in the broader society. I think this is becoming less and less true as transgender people find a more welcome home in the broader queer community, but it is still widely the case."

Benjamin

Benjamin doesn't agree. At thirty-five, Benjamin has been living as a man for nearly fifteen years. Benjamin transitioned during college, a decision that nearly cost him his life.

"I attempted to take my life at least three times," Benjamin recalls. "I was in college and I was dating another girl. I hadn't outwardly transitioned yet, but I knew that I was a man on the inside. One day, I came home from class and just threw it out there.

I couldn't live this way as a woman. I hated myself and everything I had to do to maintain being Angie." (Angela was her name given at birth.)

Benjamin's partner at the time "went ballistic." She began threatening Benjamin, then Angie, physically, as well as threatening to cut off all social ties within their circle of friends, who were mostly lesbian.

"Basically, she said she was humiliated and disgusted," Benjamin recalls. "I guess I was thinking that she would be more understanding because she is a lesbian." Helms explains that, at some point, it doesn't matter whether you are gay or straight. Sexual orientation doesn't seem to influence a person's reaction.

"The reaction by a partner in a same-sex marriage is likely to be the same as a partner in a heterosexual relationship," Helms says. "When it comes to learning that your partner is transitioning and you start to question your sexual identity as they are addressing their gender, a person's reaction goes from being a gay or a straight reaction to being a human reaction. And being gay or straight doesn't in any way seem to mean that you are more tolerant when it comes to transitioning partners."

In fact, Helms says there is a sense that gays and lesbians have the same sort of problems in understanding transgender issues as straight people. Unlike Mother Nature, Helms argues, humans are, for the most part, incapable of binary perspectives.

"When you have a mono-sexual orientation, whether that is a straight orientation or a gay orientation, it's hard to understand the transitioning person," Helms says. "I really think that people who identify as bisexual are the people who best understand transgender persons. They think in a non-binary way. It would not be hard for someone who is bisexual to say to a partner who wanted to transition: 'Hey, that's fine. Gender doesn't matter anyway.'"

Benjamin thought that going to a small liberal arts college and being in a lesbian relationship would make the transition easy. He thought people would understand. If Benjamin's girlfriend's reaction was any indication, they weren't going to be nearly so understanding. As a result, in order to fully transition, Benjamin transferred to a larger state school and essentially started life anew.

Now Benjamin lives what is called a "stealth" existence, essentially the equivalent of being in the closet about his transgender status. Benjamin avoids things that require disclosing his birth gender. And that includes physical intimacy.

"I guess I would rather go without having sex than go through the whole discussion about who Angie was and all of that," Benjamin explains. Benjamin, who will agree to dates and is often teased by his friends for being too "gentlemanly" with the ladies, simply isn't interested in facing another reaction like his college girlfriend's. Benjamin works for a package shipping company and loads and unloads trucks. Work is the easy part, Benjamin says. All of Benjamin's official documents have been legally changed to male, and 'Angela' doesn't appear on his driver's license or passport. But the fear of falling in love with someone and then having to go through disclosure is enough of a deterrent to entering serious relationships.

"There are two conversations I just don't want to have," Benjamin explains. "Why I can't marry a woman and why I don't have a penis."

Instead, Benjamin lives a quiet, stealth life in hopes of one day finding a way to answer those questions. According to the 2006 San Diego County Transgender Assessment Report, a project of the Family Health Centres of San Diego's Transgender Health Project (S.T.A.R.), Benjamin's position is not uncommon among transgender persons. In fact, the desire for what is called 'passing privilege', that is, the ability to pass, in Benjamin's case as a male, is highly correlated to self-rated social satisfaction. Passing privilege, as it is called, is the ability to go unnoticed as a transgender person. Only a third of transgender persons surveyed for the S.T.A.R. report indicated they can 'always' go unnoticed or 'pass' in social settings.

Like Benjamin, of those surveyed for the S.T.A.R. report, more than 62 percent either 'always' or 'often' hide their birth gender from neighbours or co-workers.

And if those numbers are correct, and only a third can 'always' pass unnoticed but nearly two-thirds try, that means there will be situations transgender persons encounter when they attempt to 'pass' and are unable to do so. And those may be very uncomfortable - and scary moments.

Leading the way of concerns in those situations is the fear of physical harm. It is not uncommon, says Benjamin, for him to feel afraid in a large group setting that if someone were to discover his birth gender he would somehow be injured.

In many ways, Benjamin relies on the skills he gained during his first 'coming-out', those skills attained when Benjamin came-out first as a lesbian woman. Skills such as gender pronoun avoidance, protective walls during conversations and learning who can be trusted were the three that Benjamin indicated steadied him through his initial coming-out. Transgender activists are quick to point out, though, that 'out' in the sense of sexuality and 'open' in the sense of gender are two different things.

According to the S.T.A.R. report: 'Out' is unique to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, and this admission may take years to occur as L.G.B. persons come-out at different ages. Yet 'out-ness' usually refers to sexual orientation, one's emotional, romantic and physical attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is often descriptive of biological gender, since the labels 'heterosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' refer to the gender of the sexual partner.

For transgender persons, 'out-ness' is not applicable because the defining characteristics of transgender persons are not dependent on the sexual partner. Instead, 'openness' about one's true gender identity is most important.

In other words, a person's 'openness' is defined by how open a transgender person is about their birth gender. For many, then, "coming-out" initially as a gay man or lesbian woman was incredibly hard. The idea of being further exposed, and in this case, 'open' about their gender identity process is seemingly unbearable.

Lauren

Lauren, unlike Benjamin, has gone through sexual reassignment surgery and has had nearly twenty years of hormone and other therapies.

Like Benjamin though, forty-seven-year-old Lauren, is not open about her past with the exception of a few close friends and her doctor.

"It took me years and years to be able to walk in a restaurant and sit at a bar and have a man come up and buy me a drink," Lauren explains. "And I really like strong, manly men. I guess I haven't met the man who could handle my past."

And that includes Lauren's former boyfriend. Lauren, then William, was in a relationship with another man, named David.

"There are so many ironies about my relationship with David," Lauren recalls. "I remember when we met and had sex, even for the first probably two years, he wouldn't admit that he was gay. Here he was having sex with another guy and he wouldn't admit to being gay."

Part of that, I think, was because of how we had sex. Sex for us was very set in terms of our roles. He was always the top and I always received. I don't think he ever actually engaged my penis in the five years we were together." Having met in February, their first Halloween together came several months into their relationship. William decided that he was going to go in drag. At first, David wasn't sure. David was, after all a football player and "had a reputation to uphold," Lauren says.

Still, William persisted and arrived "dressed to kill". The look on David's face was "priceless," Lauren recalls.

"You know, like one of those credit card commercials," Lauren laughs. "Wig, \$20. Dress from second-hand shop, \$15. Lipstick, \$3. Sex that night ... priceless."

And so a new phase in their relationship began. And Lauren, who had always known something was different, even beyond sexual attraction to men, welcomed the new phase.

Socially, David would refer to William as his 'buddy' or 'friend'. William was not an overtly masculine guy and would be considered by most to have been pretty androgynous. Lauren cannot remember a time when David referred to William as his boyfriend, lover or partner. In fact, David would often go out of his way to simply deflect any questions about being in a relationship. And still, William loved David. And though David had never said those three words in return, William was convinced David loved him.

"I guess I could say, 'Hey, I was young, what do you expect?' But I don't think that's really fair," Lauren says. "I think we can, and should expect young people to be responsible to themselves. There's no magic age where someone suddenly turns say thirty, and they're like old enough to know better, you know?"

And that's just what Lauren believed she was doing when she decided to transition.

Lauren spent about a year thinking about it, researching it and trying to decide how to tell David that William had made the decision to transition to being Lauren. It also seemed to Lauren that David would welcome the formal transition.

"The fact is that David never acknowledged me as his boyfriend because I was a guy and always talked about getting it on with a girl to his friends," Lauren explains. "Our best sex is when I would dress up and he could call me 'baby' and 'his girl.' And that was strangely okay to me, actually. Somehow I just thought that my decision to become the woman that I am, that I really was even the whole time we were together, would be a good thing. Oh, but it wasn't."

David barely let Lauren finish the conversation before walking out.

A series of negative messages and threats followed, and a sense of loss that Lauren never wants to revisit.

"I can't even describe to you how painful it was," Lauren recalls. "At the same time I am losing so much, and I knew from the onset I would lose my family, I lost the love of my life. Here was the man that I planned to be with forever, and by making this decision I was giving all of that up."

Still, Lauren had to transition. While there was a great deal to be lost, that which would be gained would far outweigh the loss. And Lauren still held out hope that David would come around.

"I kept telling myself, 'This is what you need to do, you need to transition. He'll be okay once he settles down'," Lauren says. "David never settled down and he was never okay. And I think that is one of the biggest reasons why I stay stealth. I like that a guy will come up and hit on me, with those big shoulders and that big moustache. I like that he'll buy me a drink, take me to dinner, hold my hand. If there is one thing I learned from David, it's that men can't handle knowing everything."

Lauren has spent a lifetime weighing pros and cons, the good points and the bad points of every decision she makes. For Lauren then, exercising that 'passing privilege' of being able to manoeuvre through life as a woman without detection and the satisfaction she believes she has as a result far outweigh any desire to be 'open' about her status. What makes this doable for Lauren though, is that she was able to quite easily move from her birth gender to her identified gender without extensive surgeries or feminization procedures.

Cassandra

Cassandra Stahl had a similar experience to Lauren's. She, too, was dating a man named David. But for Cassandra, her David's reaction was slightly different.

"I met David about ten years ago," Stahl explains. "I had sort of started my transition, but I really started going through it when we were together. It was hard for David, really. He had come-out later in life after being married to a woman and having lived a heterosexual life. So all of this came at him after years of coming to grips with being gay, and he said, 'What does this make me now?'"

Like Lauren, Stahl had always been on the androgynous side, and that was something both David's seemed to like about their partners. More importantly, Stahl says, it was Stahl as a person whom David was attracted to.

"In the relationship, I was the girl," Stahl recalls. "No ifs, ands or buts about it. And I think when we were dating, David saw me as the girl, but when I actually transitioned to being a woman, that's when it was different. I think he still tried to love me, and did, I think. But at some point, he just had too much of the changes. Finally, he just said he couldn't do it anymore."

There is also a physical element involved in transitioning of course. Even if, like Stahl, you are pre-operative, hormones can affect the physical nature and function of male genitalia. Mood swings are common. In general, there is a lot going on with physical changes, Stahl says. Sometimes the partner can't face these changes.

Unlike Lauren, though, Stahl remains very open about her identity. In fact, Stahl is an active member of San Diego's Imperial Court.

Timothy

By contrast to Lauren and Stahl, Timothy and his partner have been together for fifteen years, the first four of which were as lesbian partners. And they have remained together. In 1994, Timothy, then Sheila, announced to his partner, Kathy, that he was in an identity crisis situation. After three years of being together with Kathy, Sheila had come to the conclusion that she was not a lesbian but rather that she was a man.

"It all made sense to me," Timothy explains. "We weren't your typical Connecticut lesbian couple. We both hated softball, neither of us really drank much or watched football. I'm not sure either of us owned flannel shirts."

For all her jokes, Timothy understands there were some serious changes happening. And not just internally. Timothy's relationship with Kathy was the most important thing in his life.

"I told Kathy, 'I don't know how you're going to react, but whatever it is you need me to do, I'll do it'," Timothy recalls. And that included not transitioning if that was the decision Kathy made.

Before anything was formally done, the couple spent about six months really talking about options. Sheila would transition to her identified gender and assume the name Timothy, and Kathy would, as Timothy says, "stand by her man." But that determination did not come easily, especially for Kathy.

"I don't think many people experience what it is like to give up everything they know," Timothy avers. "I suppose in some ways a person like me who transitions gives up some stuff, but we gain so much more. We gain our identity, our health and so much more than we lose. Kathy stood to gain nothing because she already had me. She just had to find a way to outweigh the loss."

A decision was made, and Timothy and Kathy moved to California, leaving behind all their family and friends, their community. "I have certainly seen in some lesbian couples when a female-to-male transitions and they stay together," psychologist Buis explains. "In this case, it's about the strength of the relationship; their fluidity. The person says, 'I want to be with you and we will make a new type of definition of who we are.'" However, that woman who makes that decision to stay with a transitioning partner may lose a part of the woman's community. Not all of it, but a loss of some of it.

It is a grieving process that she must go through.

For Timothy and Kathy, the move to California wasn't easy. When they arrived in San Mateo, they realised that whereas they were comfortable with making friends easily in the lesbian community back home, this was a different situation. They weren't going to be the lesbian couple who everyone came to for recipes and decorating tips.

They were going to have to pass as a straight couple. After all, Timothy says, that's what they were.

"I think one of the most confusing parts of being in a relationship that moves from being lesbian to being straight as ours did," Timothy says, "is the idea that it is, in fact, a straight relationship. From everyone on the outside, that's what they see. I may not have the deepest voice on the block, but I identify as a man. And Kathy identifies as a woman. That makes us a relationship of a man and a woman."

Buis helps put this in context. "In the case that a couple is, in a sense, living a secret, being in this stealth relationship," Buis explains, "it's about what is emotionally happening for each of them. In many cases, this may work, sort of like a throw-back kind of thing to when gays and lesbians were in relationships presented to the world as roommates or best friends. They are living a secret and eventually all of the same elements are going to play out. The question is, how does each person in that couple handle it? How are they internalizing it?"

Helms explains it this way: "In the cases where a couple's relationship survives one partner transitioning, it is because there is a very deep and strongly rooted love that is not based on gender.

It's based on being with that person. I have some friends in Tennessee where one of the women transitioned. The other partner chose not to change their sexual orientation and still considers herself lesbian even though she is in a relationship with a man. For her, the love for her partner outweighed any thought of leaving."

When a person is in a same-sex relationship and makes the decision to transition from their birth gender to their identified gender, it's not an easy road. Many of the same issues that face heterosexual couples like those portrayed in *Normal* are faced by same-sex couples. In particular, the transitioning person knows he or she is going to, in some way or another, ultimately upset the balance of the relationship, and the partner will undoubtedly end up questioning his or her sexual identity.

For those who try to fight through it, it can be a very difficult process. And, in the end, the majority of relationships may not sustain the transition. Daniel, Maddocks, Estrada, Lauren and Stahl all have experienced this loss. For those relationships that do survive the transition, there is a host of new issues to face, as Timothy and Kathy learned in their move to California. But in exchange for all of the loss comes a tremendous gain, that of one's true gender identity.

Most persons who transition certainly do go to seek, and in many cases find very loving and meaningful relationships, viewing their transition as a rebirth or a new beginning of a life that they have always needed. Others like Benjamin, choose a different path, content with the change itself as an end rather than a beginning.

And all of these stories have something powerful in common: They tell of brave men and women who overcame not only the challenge

of nature's mistake of birth gender but also the challenges presented by a society that needs labels for understanding and categories for comprehension. These stories prove one powerful point: We have yet to discover all the many possibilities and variations.

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