



Johna Talks: The Transition Perception

It has been said, “it is about us, not them.” Even though we transition for our own sanity, the journey also affects those around us. Looking back on my own journey, I saw changes in those around me because of the very changes I was experiencing. Personal titles, like mother and father, are one such instance.

In the world at large, as people’s perception skews to fit into our new form, we see them adapt to the view in front of them. The transfeminine could experience a gentle person holding our door. The transmasculine may be surprised to experience male privilege. But none of this happens without the perspective change in those around us.

At work, it becomes more personal. As we transition, coworkers must choose to either tolerate us or not. Whether it is a positive or negative response, they change based on their personal views and upon interac-

tions with the transitioning individual. Once, when I was eating lunch with a supervisor at work, we talked about how their parents couldn’t stand people like me, and how they were curious. We talked about my transition, perceptions, and about how the mental and emotional struggles that transgender people face can be debilitating. As the old saying goes, you get more flies with honey, not vinegar. My supervisor became quite an in-store ally and would refer employees that might be “questioning” to me.

I had the opportunity to go to my 25th high school reunion as my authentic self. Of the people I went to school with, many accepted my true self. It was a very surreal experience for me. The girls I grew up with, now women, accepted me as one of them. One of them had just found out about my transition. Their perception and acceptance were so complete that I was included when the girly gossip started about the men. The gossip was about how attractive one of the men were. He was a personal friend of mine growing up.

The family dynamic is where we see the most adaptation for good or ill. Our families must choose to allow their perception to change with us or let us go. My oldest child had the hardest time with my transition. They insisted they would never refer to me as anything but their father. But with

love and patience, their perception of me changed and my parental title became Madre. Now they are one of my strongest supporters. My youngest child didn’t care, but it gave him a safe place to come out to as non-binary.

My brother on the other hand, was as stalwart as they come. We were already estranged, but he could not accept the authentic me. I was invited to his wedding, with an ultimatum, go as his brother or not at all. I chose not at all. Our journey isn’t over, so I have hope.

My wife accepted me from the beginning but refused to allow me to be called any form of mother for a very long time. They eventually relented, when my kids started to call me Madre. But as our journeys continued intertwined, we both grew, changed, and transitioned to our evolving relationship. We now celebrate Mother’s Day together.

In the end, those around us change as we transition. Without love, patience, and tolerance for those around us, we can lose on a much grander scale. We will win some and lose some, but we all change in the end.

--Johna Melius, SAGE Upstate Trans Ambassador. Join Johna for Gender Blend on Zoom and in person on the 3rd Saturday every month at 7 pm.

Do you identify under the Transgender Umbrella? Or are you questioning? Then come join us at the Gender Blend.

3rd Saturday of every month. Available in-person or Zoom from 7:00 - 9:00 PM.