

# Tirades of a transman

*The Australian media's obsession with transgender stories over the past few weeks demonstrates just how far behind that part of our community is in terms of public perception and acceptance.*

by ARAM HOSIE

First, it was "Cop in 'Tranny Hooker Sex' relationship". This week, it's 'Incredible Pregnant Man!' To be followed up (entirely coincidentally) by 'Senator's Sex Change Partner' – an article in the *The West Australian* featuring yours truly.

It seems we're having a media special on stories about transsexuals, and the copious amount of press has served to make one thing very, very clear to me: the transgender community has a long, long way to go.

For a start, with the exception – dare I say, surprisingly – of the article in the *The West Australian*, the general standard of reporting around transgender issues has been appalling. Case in point is the use of the word 'tranny'. Essentially, tranny should be thought of as the transgender version of fag or dyke – OK for some as a self descriptor, not OK for use in headlines. Still, the Press Council didn't think its liberal use by various media outlets over the last month was complaint-worthy, responding that they're 'not concerned to enforce niceties of English usage'.

The Press Council's response demonstrated its lack of education regarding transgender issues. And therein lies the single biggest challenge facing transgender activists: the broader community – gay, lesbian and heterosexual – has very little knowledge or understanding about us. We're still firmly in the 'unknown other' box, at best and the 'freak' box, at worst.

Take the 'Girlfriend a Bloke' story as an example. A transsexual woman has her right to privacy violated by a couple of bigoted police officers who taunt her boyfriend. The embarrassed boyfriend then goes home and savagely bashes her.

But the focus in the media's coverage was not on the utter violation of her basic human rights to privacy and physical safety, but on her transsexual history. I suppose it would have been far too intellectual to probe into why it should be seen as so embarrassing to a man that his girlfriend has a transsexual background that he was compelled to enact violence against her?



Aram Hosie, a transgender man, is a regular contributor to WA's GLBTI paper *OutInPerth* and is also the chairperson of the WA Gender Project.

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But if the level of that discussion appeared low-brow, then the discussion that followed the breaking news of transgender man Thomas Beatie's pregnancy occurred somewhere around the level of my ankles – and I'm a short dude.

Beyond the usual right wing moralistic outrage, there was rampant doubt that it was even possible. Indeed, it is, and Thomas Beatie is not the first transgender man on earth to give birth. It has, in fact, (gasp!) happened right here in Australia on more than one occasion.

Then, there was the camp that couldn't see what was newsworthy about the story: 'This is just a woman in a lesbian relationship, pretending to be a man, who's now pregnant. There's

nothing newsworthy about a woman being pregnant.' This response stems from the view that humans – according to nature – are either male or female with no possibility of variance of change. To which I say, Google 'sex-change fish' for a beginner's education into the diversity and complexity of sex and gender in nature.

Then there were the questions that revealed a complete lack of knowledge about the basics of a female to male transition. For example, 'Does he/she want to be a man or a woman? This person just needs to make up their mind.'

Another frequently asked question, 'How'd the baby get in there/where's it going to come from?' comes from the widespread assumption that if a person is trans they must of course have had

'complete' surgery – primarily removal or addition of a penis.

The reality, however, for transmen is that not all choose to have their uterus and ovaries removed. Testosterone therapy inhibits their function and removing them involves major surgery and serious risk. The other reality for transmen is that the surgical procedures that exist to create male reproductive physiology are, well, crap. Multiple surgeries and \$100,000 later – if you're lucky – you'll end up with something that loosely resembles a penis, and doesn't have much feeling or function.

And finally, there were those who asked, 'Why a transgender man would go through all that (transition) and then get pregnant anyway?' to which I counter, if pregnancy somehow diminishes Thomas' masculinity, does it also hold true that women who are unable or unwilling to become pregnant are in some way less feminine? Of course not. In Thomas' own words: 'Wanting to have a biological child is neither a male nor female desire, but a human desire.'

Pregnancy is not something I, or many other transmen would ever even think about, let alone do. But if Thomas wants to do so, and is simultaneously able to maintain his masculine identity through out, then why should the rest of us question it?

There was a time when the level of ignorance about gay men and lesbians was equally astounding to those who were, in fact, gay or lesbian. Remember when it was a mental illness? In a context of ignorance, discrimination, abuse and inequality were rampant. Over time, gay and lesbian visibility increased. People started to know someone who was, actually, you know, that way inclined. Acceptance grew. Understanding grew. Laws changed and life for gay and lesbian people improved.

transgender people are just a few decades behind. Transsexualism is still a mental illness. The law, generally, is atrocious, and we're only just getting visible – think New Zealand MP Georgina Beyer or Brandon Teena (immortalised in *Boys Don't Cry*). Though the media visibility is far too often of the circus freak show variety, slowly, slowly, we're getting known, and known about.

And as awareness and acceptance levels grow, so too surely will the inequalities gradually decrease.

So please, do your best to get educated, and don't let transphobic or ignorant remarks go unchecked. And please, please don't call us 'incredible sex-change trannies'. ☹

Aram Hosie is a transgender man who is the partner of Louise Pratt, the newly-elected lesbian Senator from WA who takes office in July. Hosie is a regular contributor to WA's premier gay paper, *OutInPerth* and also the chairperson of the WA Gender Project.



## The 'pregnant man'

The transgender man at the centre of the media storm is Thomas Beatie (pictured). Born

Tracy Langondino, Beatie has undergone several surgeries in his transition from female to male, including a double mastectomy to remove his breasts. However, he retained his female reproductive organs.

Beatie's wife Nancy was unable to carry a child because of a hysterectomy she was forced to have 20 years ago after a bout of severe endometriosis. Beatie stopped taking bimonthly testosterone injections and became pregnant via artificial insemination.

Beati wrote about his pregnancy in gay magazine *The Advocate*, in a feature called *Labor of Love*. He explains that he still very identifies as male.

"How does it feel to be a pregnant man? Incredible. Despite the fact that my belly is growing with a new life inside me, I am stable and confident being the man that I am," Beatie wrote.

His story has since sparked intense media exposure, including an appearance on *Oprah*.

"I see pregnancy as a process and it doesn't define who I am," he told the talk show host.

"Ironically, being pregnant doesn't make me feel any more female or feminine."

This pregnancy is Beatie's second: the couple's first attempt was a life-threatening ectopic pregnancy with triplets.