

LETTERS

George, Julia and a transsexual's troubles

IT MIGHT be thought that transsexuals would welcome a programme such as *A Change of Sex* (15-17 October BBC2). Here is one who certainly has not done so.

One wonders why on earth the BBC chose Julia Grant, who is not a typical transsexual. For a start, most transsexuals actively shun publicity. We want to get on with living as useful a life as possible and be accepted in society in our chosen gender roles. Whether she likes it or not, Julia is now labelled as a transsexual, so she is not succeeding as a woman.

Most transsexuals do not align themselves with the drag scene. Medical research in Canada has shown quite clearly that homosexuality and transsexuality are different conditions. Quite frankly many of us were sickened by the frequent reference to gay clubs - not because we have anything against homosexuals, but because the public may identify transsexuality with homosexuality.

The psychiatrist said that Julia had not conducted herself tactfully. This could sum up the programme. Would a tactful person really embarrass a shop assistant by telling her he was changing sex? I doubt whether many of us who have changed roles have found this necessary. While I do not have a high regard for the doctor in question, was his requirement that one live in the chosen role for a year before surgery so unreasonable? It is, after all, one of the most irreversible steps one can ever take.

With few exceptions (the female-to-male transsexual and his girlfriend conducted themselves admirably) the programme cheapened transsexualism and gave an incomplete and misleading picture...
(Name and address supplied)

Unsympathetic psychiatrist?

I am writing to congratulate BBC2 on an extremely interesting and sympathetic look at the life of transsexuals. I had never realised before the trials and tribulations they must go through for the sake of acceptability in society.

I congratulate Julia on being able to be so honest and on her bravery in certain situations. Her self-discipline was truly amazing in her interviews with the psychiatrist, who appeared totally unsympathetic, pointedly petty and trivial, and so condescending, towards her troubles...

Vicki Law

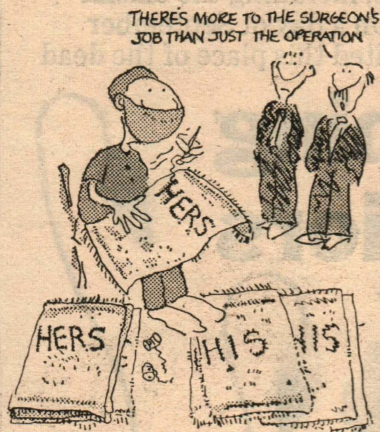
Manchester

Not fictional

Some of those who viewed the Julia Grant programme may have thought that some of the interview scenes must have been 'reconstructed' or even partly fictionalised. I can assure them that the psychologist at least was wholly himself.

(Dr) Judith Pinnington

London, SW12



Sympathy

I have much sympathy with George/Julia's predicament. Considering the complexity of the development from two cells to a human being, the wonder is that we are ever born whole, let alone of one gender or another.

But I have even more sympathy for the predicament of the two babies born from George's early marriage.

Will Julia as a woman be able to care more about their welfare than could George, as their father, when the marriage broke up?

Jean Medawar

London, NW3

Not biological

... Even after the operations George/Julia could never truly be able to experience what it means to lead the life of a biological woman - the whole life rhythm of female hormones. Periods, pregnancies, birth, milk-flow in the breasts are constantly influencing the emotional state of any woman to some degree. Julia's expensive prostheses will never come to life and suckle a baby...

I still wish Julia all the best in her personal life and I hope I gained some understanding for people like her. But, surely, much of her confidence stems from George having grown up without being conditioned into female submission roles. Julia is still overflowing with male confidence. She is actively managing her life and would not easily be dominated by anyone...

Julia's sterility concerning all true female body functions, together with her glamorous image, come dangerously near to a vision one might have of a future where all women are 'neuters' liberated from any dependence - while test-tubes, incubators and state nurseries take over the rearing of all replacement specimens.

Monika Simpson

Liverpool

DAVID PEARSON, Producer, 'A Change of Sex' replies:

As was said before the programme went out, it was not our intention for viewers to take Julia Grant as

a typical transsexual. Transsexuals are as varied as anyone else: Julia happens to be an outgoing individual, thereby allowing us an opportunity to see what can happen to a transsexual. Inevitably, therefore, the films were particular to Julia. Some people apparently found it difficult to believe that some scenes, filmed as they happened, happened as they did.

That being said, there are plenty of areas in Julia's case similar to many transsexuals. I would agree that not many transsexuals have had Julia's range of heterosexual, gay and drag experiences. But there are well-defined criteria for transsexuals and all these origins were included. Julia at least showed that it is possible to survive an appalling past. As regards the gay club, they provided Julia with a job and support when others would not.

One assumes that a male-to-female transsexual will be attracted as a woman to men. It is not very difficult to imagine that some would-be transsexuals might have what society defines as homosexual experiences in their quest to find themselves. After all, information or understanding on the subject was, until recently, difficult to come by, with isolated transsexuals wondering who or what they were. Judging from the hundreds of sympathetic letters and phone calls we have received from viewers, including transsexuals, the programmes have promoted some understanding and debate on this difficult problem.

From the family of a transsexual

I hope you will permit me one reply to your letters of 8-14 November ('George, Julia and a transsexual's troubles') before declaring this correspondence closed.

Jean Medawar asks whether Julia as a woman will be able to care more about her children's welfare than could George as their father before the marriage broke up.

Why not? My own father is a male transsexual who changed roles six years ago. As a woman she has at last found personal serenity, and has been able to give me the kind of material support and the love of a parent and a good companion which were beyond her power as a tormented man.

I might well have preferred a more 'natural' or conventional relationship. But where does that get us? As it is, my mother, my wife and I, together with our families, rejoice in the happy release she has found through her change. We have received sympathy and love, and have found happiness in one another. We feel in a new way closer to her than before.

Perhaps other families may feel differently; perhaps we are in a minority. But even though Julia Grant's family might possibly welcome Jean Medawar's to us somewhat presumptuous allocations of sympathy, we would hope she might offer it equally to all who suffer.

D Walker

Liphook, Hampshire

D Walker

JULIA TV
GRANT-
LETTERS

from

PRESSMATS

[PRESS MONITORING
AGENCY FOR
TRANS-SEXUALS]