ACCEPTANCE:

A COLLECTION OF STORIES ABOUT PARENT'S ACCEPTANCE TO TRANS GIRLS

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JAKARTA

Acceptance: A Collection of Stories About Parent's Acceptance to Trans Girls

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PREFACE

We express our deep gratitude to God the Merciful, because of the blessing, we have finished to create a book “Acceptance: A Collection of Stories About Parent’s Acceptance to Trans Girls” as expected.

This book was made as an effort to improve parents' understanding in the process of accepting, strengthening, and guiding those who have trans children. In addition, we hope that this book can also provide a new description for parents to accept what- and whoever their children are. This book also provides a fairly comprehensive view from several perspectives, from several religious leaders who are expected to be able to become a foundation and support for parents in accepting their trans children.

This book has been compiled with a maximum effort and preparation. This book development is completed because of the help from various parties to facilitate its finishing. We hope this book can provide benefits as well as a source of inspiration for parents who have trans children.

Last but not least, we express our deepest gratitude to COC Nederland and The Asia Foundation through the MAJu program and all parties involved in finishing this guideline.

Jakarta, June 10th 2019
Tengku Surya Mihari
National Coordinator

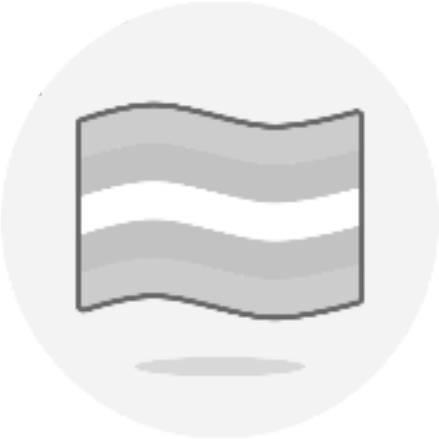
GRATITUDE

Thank you to all participants who have contributed to the process of finishing this document. Thank you to the National Coordinator for the trust that has been given to the author to create this document. Thank you to the transgender community for all of their support. Thank you to CoC Nederland for their support so that this document can be published. Thanks also to parents who will take their time to read this guideline to understand their trans girl.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Kevin Halim is currently serving as Deputy for Transgender Women Division in GWL-INA, an NGO that focuses on HIV response for key populations in Indonesia. Prior to joining the GWL INA, she was a Chevening Scholar in 2017. She obtained her master's degree from University of Aberdeen, Scotland in Sociology - Sex, Gender, and Violence Studies and her bachelor's degree in Clinical and Child Development Psychology from University of Indonesia. She has also vast experience working with various organizations, both in profit and non-profit sector, such as United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Indonesia, Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN) in Bangkok, and also served as the Program Officer for Hivos Regional Office of South East Asia, under the Global Fund-funded project focusing the organizational strengthening in Indonesia and Timor-Leste.

She also had the opportunity as the board of Sanggar SWARA, Technical Advisory Committee for Unzip the Lips (regional forum for key affected women and girls), core member for Youth Voices Count, and UN Cares (Global UN Internal Staff to Raise HIV Awareness) Award for raising awareness of HIV in the work environment. Kevin was part of International Advisory Board of Transgender Europe (TGEU) Global Project: Transrespect vs Transphobia (TvT) and core member of UN Inter-Agency Task Team for Gender Equality during her post in Bangkok. She also co-wrote the Transgender Implementation Tools (TranslT), coordinating group for Asia Pacific Transgender Blueprint for Health Care Providers (AP Blueprint). Her research interests covering the issue of well-being, coming out, religious commitment, media, public policy, violence, and contemporary feminist theory. At the moment she's also documenting trans murder cases in Indonesia.



INTRODUCTION

After seventy-four years from the first declaration of Indonesia's independence, I have rarely heard the discourse about parents acceptance for trans-children, even until now in 2019. There may be some, but it is not popular. Even though, as a trans, I realized that I received a lot of benefits from parents acceptance for transgender children. On the contrary, I even heard that parents are embarrassed and try their best to hide their trans-child so that other people do not know that their child is trans. Stories such as bringing their child to a therapist for conversion therapy or accepting children with another diagnosis of psychiatric disorders are more easily accepted by parents, rather than accepting the fact that people will know they have trans child. This encourages me to write this simple guidance so that, at least it could become a valid proof on how parents' affection to accept trans children has many positive effects. I will explain in this document why acceptance is important for trans children.

Foundation, references, and appropriateness

Acceptance for children helps them to feel the experience of being loved, so it will become a strong foundation to face life. For those who study psychology, we were taught that humans have the task in every stage of social development, where in each stage, there is a task for human development. When children feel rejected, it will not only make the children unable to carry out their development tasks properly, but also produce 'social paralysis' which many people mistakenly perceived as 'social dysfunction', just because the child is a trans. I mention 'social paralysis' because the discriminatory system makes trans-social friends socially problematic. We live in a society that sees a trans condition as the cause of social dysfunction, rather than seeing that the rejection is the cause of this dysfunction. In addition, when a house is supposed to be the main source of security and affection, but does not succeeding in fulfilling this function, this will have an impact for the children to continually seek the feeling of security and compassion in other places that children perceived to fulfill those needs. I realized this because when parents give me a sense of security and affection, to continue my

studies and work becomes easier than compared to if I had not finished the fulfillment of those basic feelings.

In addition, a sense of security and love from parents can also be a reference for trans children to understand how to feel loved, accepted and have a positive self esteem. As mentioned earlier, in addition to be the foundation, the experience of being happy can also be a reference for children to understand what and how to be loved and protected. So they can have reference to identify new feelings outside home. In this way, children become aware that acceptance they are entitled to does not need to be a material burden and involves economic transactions.

Safe feeling and love from parents also help children to feel that they have control in life and are able to identify their rights. I realized this when I met friends who experienced rejection, when they told me about their experiences being treated badly, their sense of self-defense as their rights were violated, was difficult to grow. This is because there is an attitude that bad treatment is "feasible and appropriate" to be accepted. Why is the attitude of not receiving bad treatment important? Because when bad treatment is perceived as something proper, then a change for a better situation is difficult to realize. While this attitude is the key to bring about a better change.

Habitus and emotional labor

Sociologists say that parents inherit different social capital or social modalities. The most talked about social modalities are habitus. Habitus can be simply defined as habits, abilities, skills, and dispositions inherited from the social environment and from the family so as to influence the ability of children in their social environment and influence the path that is formed for one's future. Habitus can also be seen collectively by certain social groups. Those who have high socioeconomic status have different habitus than those in lower socioeconomic status. Why is discussing habitus important? Because when children are not accepted by their parents and (in extreme instances expelled from home), the habitus of trans people is a collective habit that is weakened structurally and systematically. In our current reality, trans people find it difficult to access education and work that can support healthy self-development, so that the habitus created, collectively, is formed

based on negative stereotypes. If we observe, we can see that the habitus formed and inherited by fictitious families for trans people are formed is limited to sex workers, beauty shop workers, busking, and make-up. I do not intend to damage the advocacy for the rights of these occupations. However, the problem is the choices are limited for trans women.

Parents acceptance can help children grow and collect social modalities that can help trans children have a better and non-stereotypical future. So, the rejection will only affirm the cycle that has happened for decades to weaken, impoverish, and "blind" trans people for a bright future with the potential to be respected and socially valued.

In talking about habitus, I was also stunned by the concept of emotional labor. In the concept of emotional labor, individuals must process their feelings and expressions to meet the emotional needs of their work. In relation to gender, there are jobs that are stereotypically in need of certain emotions to facilitate work. For example, many kindergarten teacher jobs are given to women, because stereotypically, nurturing is expected in women. In the context of trans, emotional labor that is formed is an attitude that is stereotypically driven by society. For example, trans women are only able to work in the field of beauty shop, entertainment (there are those who are lucky to be celebrities or make-up artists, but many have to become singers on the street), and sex workers. I do not say these jobs are bad, but if the choice of work is only limited to these, it is truly a shame if the potential of trans people is limited by a work area that is traditionally considered 'friendly' for trans people. It is difficult for trans people to move to areas that are traditionally not considered friendly, such as work in the fields of law, psychology, medicine, economics, etc, because emotional labor formed for trans people is limited to certain areas. It is also difficult to accept that being a trans doesn't have to be 'sissy' and doesn't have to be a 'clown' that must be funny. Many people sometimes ask me why I am trans, but do not tempt men and have no such style of speaking or not being 'clown' when gathering with friends. This makes me dare to give a statement that rejection and stigma and discrimination against trans people “blinded” people, because as if trans people must be funny and have an extroverted personality and must be present to entertain others. As if there is no other reality that can be lived. In fact, many trans people tend to form introverted personalities and do not

support good mental health because of these experiences, yet they are still expected to be funny to entertain others.

So, what is the relationship between family acceptance and emotional labor? The simple answer is that with family acceptance, parents can help shape non-stereotyped emotional labor that can help reduce the negative views and stereotypes that exist in society about trans people. Of course I understand this is not the only effective way, but I believe the acceptance of parents who provide positive emotional labor, can also help trans people to have a better future at the individual level.

I also argue that parents acceptance, coupled with acceptance in education, can shape a healthy emotional workforce. I agree with Kartini's view that education is good for cis women, so education is also the most effective way to help trans people get out of a vicious circle that continues to shackle for decades, added to be accompanied by parents acceptance. Thus, educational institutions that should uphold humanity values and provide opportunities for all people to access education, is able to open up to trans to be comfortable with the gender they choose. However, what happens is that many schools prohibit trans people to express their gender, assuming people with different gender expression corrupt moral values. This has caused many restrictions for trans people to have higher education.

I hope this guidance will help parents to understand that acceptance may be a key for children to have a happier and perhaps more beneficial life. And with this simple guide, I hope this can be a reference for parents. Of course I understand these writings has many limitations, but I hope this can be a first step for parents to be able to understand their children better. Thus, parents can help build the trust between children and parents to make healthy relationships.

BEFORE YOU START

What is gender?

Gender is defined as a way of thinking, attitudes, and beliefs about how men and women are shaped by culture. Gender is a concept that varies in each culture and can change along the historical time frame and differences can be found in the terminology made by people.

With various changes in definitions, the concept of gender is no longer based on heteronormative norms, ie there are more than two concepts of gender categories. The concept that is now understood is a continuum and is no longer a rigid category.

What is gender identity and what is the difference with sexual orientation?

Gender identity can be defined as a person's internal sense of their gender, whether male, female, or other gender identity, which may not be or is in accordance with the gender assigned at birth. Meanwhile, sexual orientation means someone's interest in the emotional, romantic and/or sexual aspects of others. In other words, gender identity is an internal feeling about one’s gender and sexual orientation is what people like or what people feel is interesting. It is important to understand that gender identity is a stand-alone concept, different from sexual orientation.

What is gender role, gender expression, and gender expectations?

Gender role is a set of behaviors that are considered appropriate and are socialized and expected to be carried out by individuals in accordance with the prevailing stereotypes. Sometimes, gender role can be a burden for others. This burden on gender role becomes gender expectation. Culturally, expectations arise for people behaving in a certain way when someone perceives a person's gender identity. For example, when someone perceive

our gender as a woman, stereotypically, people expect us to be submissive and emotional.

What is trans?

Trans is an umbrella term used to describe people with gender identities that are not the same as the gender identity assigned at birth.

Trans individuals can describe themselves using one or more terminological variations, including (and not limited to) transgender, transsexual, queer gender, gender fluid, non-binary, gender variants, crossdresser, genderless, agender, non-gender, third gender, two- spirit, bi-gender, trans male, trans-human, trans masculine, trans feminine, and so on.

How do parents know that their child is transgender?

There is no clear consensus about the age at which gender identity can develop. The terminology of transgender itself has gone through the stages of change that are quite significantly over time. However, the basic principle that terminology can refer to gender diversity.

When children exhibit diverse gender behaviors, basically we do not know whether the child will have a gender identity as a trans in adolescence or adult. If they have a gender identity that is different from the gender assigned at birth, there is a possibility that the child will continue to have such a gender identity. So, in adolescence period, it is the best time to discuss this with the child. Today, there are also individuals who identify themselves as gender fluids, so that communication with children is very important to understand and help children feel comfortable with themselves.

What is the difference between trans and LGB?

Trans individuals, as explained before, have identified themselves with different gender identity assigned at birth. Meanwhile, LGB individuals are people with different sexual orientation from heterosexual norms.

Is it a disease?

Many people who do not understand and raise issues about trans children thought that these children are the result of the wrong environment or education system. In fact, gender identity is not something that is transmitted or the result of wrong or permissive upbringing. There are some children who have a higher awareness of their gender identity than other children. As parents, it would be better if we understand trans identity as something not learned or a rebellious attitude towards parents. Sometimes, genuine feelings felt by children are not learned from the outside but come from within them.

Understanding this situation as a disease will only focus on how to 'cure' something that does not really need to be cured. What needs to be changed is the mindset by opening up as much insight as possible. It is understandable that parents would like to know the cause of the trans condition of the children. However, there is no clear consensus yet about the cause of trans condition.

But I have never seen signs that indicate my child is a trans....

Some children or teenagers may actively try to hide their feelings because they understand that this may not be acceptable in the society. Most also do not want to make parents feel sad, especially with the pressure from the society to see is when children feels depressed and refuses to talk about their feelings. Another sign might be to see their circle of friends that parents think is different from their children. Children are sometimes afraid that if they acknowledge their feelings, parents will drive them away. So, it is important to help children to be ready to tell their stories and provide them the support needed so they would feel comfortable and trust their parents.

Do my trans children have future?

In Indonesia, there is an assumption that trans (especially trans women) only have limited opportunities for work, education, and access to health care that are stereotypically applied in the society because of the stigma. However, with the support of parents, children can have healthier self-esteem which can be an asset for children to try other things that are beyond the stereotypical expectations, and later can surpass the obstacles for trans women to develop themselves in Indonesia.

What is gender dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is a term that refers to extreme discomfort towards one's gender identity. Sometimes, those feelings come with strong identification with different genders that are perceived by others at the same time. It is important to understand that playing or using the opposite sex clothes does not mean that the child is a trans. Strengthening binary gender expectations for children that show varied gender behaviors can make children feel sad. Many children close their feelings out of fear of rejection and expectations that they may not be able to fulfill. What's more, as time goes on, puberty may be a scary thing for them. So, parents will be better if they can listen to the children’s feelings without giving expectations to children. It is also important to know that not all trans individuals have gender dysphoria.

How does this affect me and my children?

Many changes must be prepared to accommodate this. It's important to remember that everyone is different, and whatever the end result is, the child knows that parents will still love them. With parents support and affection, children can feel comfortable with their gender identity. Many parents also feel their children become happier when accepted and supported. Acceptance and support are key so children can live their lives and fulfill their potential.

Is it okay if I feel sad?

Of course it's okay. The things experienced by children are big things. Feeling sad, worried, or grieving does not make you a bad parent. Your efforts to read just this simple guide shows your efforts as a parent who wants to help understand the child regardless of fear of the future that your child might later experience. It is natural that a situation like this is considered as burden and has an impact to the whole family. Finding a place to share stories can be a way to make you feel not alone in dealing with this situation. An example is to find families who are also in the same position so they can share stories and experiences.

What if my children change their mind?

Some children continue the process to the stage of medical surgery, some do not. Everyone has different self identification. It would be better if the child can make a decision after puberty, because puberty is when everyone experiences a process of self-maturation physically and psychologically. Even though after that, if the children change their mind, it's okay, because everyone feels different experiences that make decisions for themselves differently. As parents, what can be done is to make sure that the children know that some changes are permanent and some can be reversible, so that they can help children make better decisions.

Is it wrong if I have expectations for my children?

No. Every parent has expectations for their child. However, it’s better that expectation is not rigid so it becomes a burden for children. What's more, understand that children's feelings as trans are not something they choose, so expectation for children must be adjusted to the child's condition. Thus, both children and parents do not experience disappointment.

May religion intervention change my children?

Many people in Indonesia believe that religious intervention such as being prayed by families or *ruqyah* (exorcism) can convert their trans-child to cis, but children who experience this process may experience discomfort. Especially with reflected rejection of methods like this, it can be a traumatic experience. Acceptance remains the key so that children feel comfortable and safe with their own parents, thus they can feel accepted.

What is trans and what is cis?

Trans refers to individuals who identify themselves with gender that is different from the gender identity assigned at birth.

Cis refers to individuals who identify themselves as having the same gender as the gender identity assigned at birth.

The term cis appears to help a more inclusive understanding of the old terminology that uses biological aspects to define a person's gender identity.

What if other people can not accept my children?

In life, there are always people who disagree, especially if you as parent accept and teach your child to love themselves. However, with this, you can be more selective in establishing relationships with other people. So, you can make friendship circles a more supportive environment, that is, the environment that is most needed by children.

How do I ensure my children's security?

Again, in life, sometimes we cannot guarantee the safety of children or even ourselves. What we can do is to make efforts to minimize the potential for violence that the child might experience. Practical advice is to teach children to self-defense through sports such as taekwondo. However, in the case of bullying, teach your children that bullying requires consent, so that children can refuse to be bullied. In addition, communication with the school regarding

the importance of awareness about the issue of bullying and how to protect children who may be vulnerable can also be the preventative effort.

Why do my children play with friends whose gender is different from them?

Sometimes, children choose friends to play automatically according to their interests, including the choice of the toys as well. It would be better if parents can help children at young age to play and enjoy their childhood with friends of their age, regardless of friends' choices, gender, or toys.

Can I cure my children?

When your child is trans, there is nothing to cure. What needs to be done is to help children feel comfortable with themselves. Childhood is also important for them to explore themselves, to help them know what is comfortable for them. Thus, what needs to be changed is the mindset that this is an 'illness' that needs to be healed.

What is the cause that make my child trans?

So far there has been no consensus on what causes a child to become trans. The most common explanation that is widely accepted by many people is that indeed in life, gender and human sexuality are rich and diverse, so acceptance of diversity becomes more important to think rather than thinking about what are the causes. This can prevent people from focusing on 'healing' something that does not need to be healed.

Can my children feel happy with their condition or live as trans?

Happiness is subjective and interpreted by everyone differently. Acceptance of parents can be a good start to help children find happiness in their lives. Love from parents will also be an asset for children to love themselves so that they can help children to be happy in their lives.

What about society who can not accept my children?

Changes at the society level take a long time. In Indonesia, public acceptance may indeed still be difficult. This is more important thing to think for parents to accept children so that the house becomes a safe place for children to express what they feel. With the acceptance of children in the family environment, society can also learn that acceptance is important for them, to feel comfortable so they can develop themselves.

VOICE FROM THE MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT

About empty and meaningless life

***Dr. Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari**, is a lecturer in Clinical Psychology. She is a Psychologist graduated from the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, who has deep concern on domestic violence cases, continuing master's education in the Women Studies Program at Universitas Indonesia Postgraduate Program, and doctoral education in the Philosophy Department of Faculty of Cultural Sciences Universitas Indonesia. Currently, Dr. Kristi held the position of Head of the Postgraduate Program in Women's Studies at the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Indonesia, and was active in the Pulih Foundation which handle women survivors of violence.*

Actually, I didn't study trans specifically. But, because I was previously involved in gender studies, I am more familiar around homosexuality, especially lesbians and so on. I study a relationship experienced by people of the same sex. Many people out there have fears of it. However, I do not have a particular fear to it. I already had a concern for that, and when I entered gender studies, then I realized about transgender people. I realized how difficult the situation was for them, being different from something normative is not easy. I mean, we who don't have problems with normativity are sometimes confused with our own sexuality. When we were teenagers, we thought, *my goodness, why am I like this*? So yeah, transgender is a part of sexual diversity which I later studied in more detail when I was in gender study.

I have not interacted much with trans people, but I have become more concerned about transgender issues after meeting my trans student and I supervise her thesis. So, I haven't studied trans issues specifically. But I understand how many problems trans people faces.

I have never handled trans people, because I handle lesbian more. What I have handled is a transgender man client. The problem faced is not because he feels chaotic self-emotion, but rather a kind of assistance needed from a psychologist to ensure that when he is indeed going to transition and change identity, he understands about the possibilities and challenges.

If there are parents who bring their children to ask me to cure their children, whether they complain that their children are transgender or homosexual, I need to check their child first, whether it's exclusively homosexual or trans, so I understand the situation. After I understand that their child is a trans, I will try to explain to the parents that this really does not need to be considered as a disorder and indeed it is not a disorder. But it becomes a big problem because people have difficulty accepting it, because this is different from society's norm. So, I help parents to understand that their children cannot be forced to change, to suit the expectation from parents nor the society.

What can be done is perhaps we better understand them, what is also necessary is to equip them with the understanding that it's not easy to choose your life (to make life choices). Chance, in a sense, this is not their choice either, they have to decide to accept the situation, want to live a life for being themselves, but the challenges of the society are enormous. So maybe we should prepare parents and children for that. For example, when a child is a transgender, we talk that feelings that arise within her are indeed unbearable and cannot be resisted, and, should the child feel much more comfortable being that way, I will remind them about the social situation that she might face. This consultation aims to make her be more ready and able to anticipate all the possibilities that can occur and what to do. Parents may not accept, environment will treat unfairly, or suddenly workplace will not accept, expel, or abort her application in the recruitment process. Well, it's important to prepare trans people to deal with the situations like this.

I know there are criticisms that the psychology has micro approach. However, the focus of the work of psychologists is to help and empower people to adapt. Well, with parents, we identify any problems that are faced with children like this, which become any concern. Later after being identified, we discuss it together. For example, parents feel guilty because children should not be like this (trans). Parents might have understanding that this is indeed a choice, but I don't think trans people choose to become transgender, this is

something that is difficult for children. Seeing the condition of the Indonesian people who have a spirituality towards God, we should also be able to understand that God created the children in a perfect condition. It is us who do not understand nor accept this condition. Diversity is desired by the One who creates. This understanding will be given especially for very spiritual parents. Moreover, with the concept of choice, if people are rational-minded, people will choose to become cisgender, because it will be easier, no need to hide, no need to be blamed. You don't have to feel chased and feel guilty or beaten. So the process is to help children to be more accepting the situation, then, to equip parents to be able to deal with their children.

It is also better to help parents to understand that bringing a child to a psychologist to be 'cured' is not the solution, because there is nothing to cure. To understand this, it is necessary to help parents understand what is the objection of parents to accept the child's condition. I understand that parents may feel they have failed to educate children if the child makes the transition as a transgender. But keep in mind that the one who feel the urge to appear with such identities are their children, not the parents, so there is no connection between failure or success of parents in educating. It is a failure for parents if their children become a murderer, self centered, or children who are busy with themselves and not paying attention to others. However, there are other things that exceed our ability or our competence to control.

We, psychologists, don't see anything that needs to be cured or it should be seen as a disorder, so frankly, we hope that parents can see that as well. Thus, children will be much happier. If there is a perception that peer affects gender identity, I think gender identity is not something influenced. Even if parents see their children change, confusion may have been experienced before, then the peer helps them to understand and be honest with themselves. Being honest to yourself is a positive thing. In addition, parents will also better understand that to explain that in general, gender identity is one aspect of the child, even though this gender identity is very basic.

This fundamental aspect of gender identity, if it is not accepted, or respected, will certainly be very disturbing for the child. Thus, exploration of options for approaches in understanding children needs to be done so that children do not feel guilty. This can help children to be happy. When children are accepted by their parents, they feel happier. Indeed, people can see this as an

act of being permissive, but as a person who studied psychology, I understand that the most important thing is child well-being, happiness, and individual comfort. When people criticize parents, it would be better if we understand that not everything that people say is true. Even if parents force their children not doing transition, I do not know how to restore children's feelings to be align with their sex. I learned about conversion therapy for gays and lesbians and it didn't work. Unless they themselves want to change without people forcing them, I will help them to adapt as a cisgender.

I have to admit that we have shared concern that when parents accept, it is not guaranteed that other people will accept. We can not guarantee children's safety. That is the thing we mutually concern, so, we need to identify parents concern and communicate it to children. The potential for violence, I must admit, is still possible in society, and our job is how to minimize it when children are happier being themselves. Things like this need to be discussed with children, thus, parents show concern and respect for children by showing their worries about what the child may experience. This can help children and parents to think of the best ways to prevent experiencing unexpected things.

Parents need to understand that children do not determine their feelings. To understand children's feelings, parents must be able to accept the feelings they experience when facing different children's feelings, especially on how parents want to make decisions that are considered best for children. But what must be considered in making decisions for children is we should understand that it's the children are the one who will live their lives, not us. Yes parents think about the children's future and think about how children can be independent if parents are gone. It would be better if we understand that the parents concerns of children end up on the streets can occur because our own system is made to reduce the opportunity for transgender children to enter the various fields of work they actually want.

To help parents so that they can help their children to develop their potential can be done by identifying children's expectation. This can be done by putting aside children's identity as trans and focusing on their expectation. It's important for parents to help children achieve what they aspire to. Exploring possible choices for children can help children feel happier. Parents should understand that public will judge that parents acceptance will be

perceived as allowing children on the wrong path, but one should remember, sexual diversity exists for a long time, so we can see it as a variation in life, so there is nothing wrong with what parents do.

In case one of the parents can accept but the other can not, it's necessary for parents to accompany children and partner so that both of them can accept each other's situation. On one side, children need to be accepted and get the best for them, on the other side your partner needs to be accompanied to undergo acceptance process to children. It would be wiser not to see it as a mistake in themselves, so that the closest person of parents is also needed as a support system to help ease the burden felt by parents. Parents need a place to share what they experienced and understand the situation in the family.

I, as a psychologist, have the duty to map out the problems, but eventually, parents should make the decisions. I am not the right person to decide because those who live their lives are the parents and their children. Parents concern on difficulties which might be experienced by children should be balanced with the understanding that it's children who will live their lives, not parents who just observe. It must be harder for children who live through it, even though parents also feel it hard. If children have already experienced a variety of bad things in other places, and turns out, at home, parents also do not accept, children's lives will be very miserable. Children can choose not to embrace their identity and avoid abusive treatment from others, but I am not sure whether the child will be happy to live it. Their life could be empty and meaningless. Children's lives become unhappy.

So, support for children's choice to be aligned with their identity or not, must be supported so that children live their lives more meaningfully. If I personally see children choosing not to align their identities, and they do not get support, surely their lives will be very hard. Society already gave the hard time, it would be harder if their closest environment (family) do not accept either. In this world there are some things that cannot be explained. But what is certain is, from the perspective of the science of psychology and the results of existing researches, I can only explain it like that. Maybe parents may not be satisfied with the answers from the professionals. Dissatisfaction to answers can be accommodated by self-exploration. One aspect that can be explored is human spirituality. Not only the one that is punitive religion, that

judges what is right or wrong, but also exploring the other thing to help coping for this problem. And in certain situations, there are things we can't handle, and surrender is sometimes also a way to calm down and find solutions. Because, basically, not everything is in our control. We hope that the best will happen.

VOICES FROM THE RELIGIOUS EXPERTS

About goodness and piety that is counted

***Ms Musdah** is a woman activist, researcher, counselor, and writer in religion field (Islam) in Indonesia.*

I am a person who grew up in a very strict boarding school environment. My grandfather even believed that women should not go out and woman's voice can arouse men's sexual desire. So, when I was a teenager, it was like that; I was forbidden to do this and that. That is my previous life. Then, fortunately I married and met my partner, my husband is now a moderate and open minded person. Actually, my parents are open-minded people, but they were different than my grandfather when I was little. When I was young, I used to live with my grandparents, his view was very very traditional. Not only traditional, but very conservative.

In the journey of my career, maybe it's because the education that made me change, my education was up to doctoral degree, then I saw that there were many things that I had to criticize in my previous understanding. Maybe it's also because my meeting with very critical people like Gus Dur, Cak Nur, and also later my chance to visit various countries in various parts of the world. It all contributes to changes in me. Related to these LGBT issue, why am I different from other people's views is because I see them first hand, because maybe anyone else is just being told about it. I met gay groups in Surabaya, Gaya Nusantara. I visited transgender community in Yogyakarta. In fact, I came to the Transgender Islamic Boarding School in Yogyakarta, and saw organizations that provided support for the rights of LGBT people. Then I realized, there was one thing I needed to do for them. And why is that? Because I am very sure that as a Muslim, one thing in Islam is taught about human equality. Once we understand the Tawheed (Tauhid) well, that there is only one God, that is Allah SWT whom we should worship, we are all God's creatures.

In our position as God's creatures, all humans are equal. From there, from the understanding of the monotheism, I realized that we should not treat fellow humans discriminatively or with prejudice attitudes, stigmatization, violence and so on. Therefore, I truly realize the importance of building equality with fellow human beings. That is a deep appreciation of the meaning of Tawheed because Tawheed is the essence of Islam. In Islam, it is taught that there is only one God. Besides Allah, all beings are God's creations, therefore, for me, respecting and appreciating God's creations is the same kind of act as respecting God Himself. Then I started to learn, maybe I am different from many other scholars. They always close their eyes, then have a distance with different groups, and vice versa. I even went to see what problems they faced. Therefore, I had a long discussion, seeing what's real, that they were mostly experiencing violence, being rejected in the family, being rejected in society, even being rejected by the state. I think, these inhumane attitudes must be ended. Therefore there must be a way of how to make LGBT people not experience persecution nor experience things that are not desirable in life. Both in the family and in society life.

For parents who are worried about their children, I think it's natural that they feel shocked, or even bothered if they see their children are different from children in general. Because our society consider this as a problem, what considered as normal, healthy, and reasonable is something that is mainstream. People who are different from the mainstream are perceived as something wrong. This is a real problem in our society, because we don't want to accept different things. This is also due to education. Our education has not acknowledged that we may accept differences and that not everyone is the same. This is also a problem in education. When I meet people, they always say, *what if my child like this (different)*? I always say, well, what do you feel? As usual, the one who bring their children is mother, I told the parents that it is your child and they are your flesh and blood. Accept them as they are human being, because you are entrusted with this child, and in the concept of Islam, the child is a trust from Allah. Educate them, build them to be a good human being. Because it all depends on the parents, how parents treat their children. So, for example, if they feel different, that means the child is not the same as the mainstream, and it doesn't matter. Children still can be a good person. Because in Islam, it is always said, *inna akramakum indallahi atqakum* (the most noble in the sight of Allah is the most piety), the best among you is who has the quality of piety. Well, whoever they are, just

educate them. Whether they are transgender, whether they have different sexual orientation, or whatever, for me, everyone shall be educated. Directed to be a pietyful person and have good moral behavior. Educated to become people who are beneficial not only for themselves, but also for the family and for the society.

Let me clarify what good and bad means. For me, parents also need to understand what transgender means, that gender is not only two, not only men and women, but in our society there are feminine men, some are tomboyish women, even in Bugis tribe, a place where I have grown up, there is someone known as Bissu, who claims themselves as not man nor woman. They said "I don't have gender to communicate with God who also doesn't have gender". So in my opinion, let's expand our horizons about many things in human life. And in many sciences, human beings are still mysterious creatures, there are many things that have not been revealed in humans, so let us learn as much as possible, read as much literacy as possible, so that our insights become more open, with openness that we become more inclusive, more tolerant of differences. We educate our children to understand. Of course if, for example, they have different sexual orientation, we should not do things that pollute the environment, pollute the family, pollute the society, and things that disrupt public peace, all of them are ruled. So, in my opinion, being a sex worker is wrong, being a sex worker is not allowed, therefore we educate people not to become sex worker because it has no benefit for our future. Many things we can do to build our life. You don't have to break God's rules.

I disagree to sex worker because they are vulnerable to exploitation, have no future. However, not everyone has the opportunity to choose a profession or occupation, many are forced to become sex worker. Although I disagree, I must respect them as fellow human beings. I also fight to protect their rights as human beings and as citizens by advocating for the importance of reproductive health and rights. The goal is that they are not exploited, do not experience violence for any reason, not contract HIV and AIDS, and other sexual transmitted disease.

As far as I know, if the child has passed 18 years old, it's no longer a dependant for parents. In Islam, there is no concept of inherited sin. Each person is responsible for themselves, so yes, as long as parents have

educated their children and their children have reached 18 years old, they are not a child anymore right? Parents have detached their responsibilities. But as a parent, we still provide support and advice, but for example if the child does not want to change, it depends on the children themselves because they are an adult now. As long as they are advised, but do not give advice in harmful ways. For example by hitting, doing things that are discriminatory, and so on. Do the best in wise ways.

There is a general view in the society that if you have a transgender child, you are failing to educate your child. In my opinion, what is meant by failure and success is relative. Therefore, do not believe too much in the words of people, as parents, we should have the principle in educating our own children. Don't be easily disturbed by the stigmas that are scattered in the society. We should have principles in life, yes this is my child. They are bound to their own sins. Sin is not inherited, so there is no need to fear the sins of others. Let us be independent people, have principles in life, and remain good citizens.

I understand parents want to feel safe and comfortable for the family. I think it needs some kind of guidance for parents who have absolutely no understanding about this. Maybe there are also many people who really don't understand what transgender is, what is sexuality, or what is sexual orientation. Pity, actually, if you look at parents like this. Therefore, I think there should be some kind of guidance for parents so they can understand how to treat their children wisely. But in my opinion, the most important thing is that the state must also intervene to make a rule that there should not be anyone in this country, on any basis, to be treated discriminatively, for whatever reason. Because as citizens, all citizens have the same rights in the life of the nation and state.

For parents who feel that children become transgender are the result of their sins, this is in my opinion due to ignorance. Because in many cases I learned, on average parents felt guilty. Feeling guilty then blames themselves as if they have gotten karma because they are given a different child from most people in general, different from the majority. Even many parents who punish themselves like going far away, throwing themselves away. For me, this happened because of they lack of knowledge of sexuality, about many things related to differences which were not taught since childhood. Talking about it in the society is considered taboo. For me, this is what makes us go forward.

These conversations should be widely conducted, so that the wider society can understand, oh, it turns out that in our society there is something called sexual orientation, there is a transgender, so learn what sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior. Because people cannot distinguish which is sexual orientation and which is sexual behavior. For example, anal sex, is always associated with gay, but it is not, precisely what I learned that heterosexual people also do anal sex. This for me is something very risky. Let us distinguish between sexual orientation and behavior. Those are two different things. Therefore, let's enlighten the public, don't be bored about educating the public. Beside, people should also want to learn.

Because of ignorance, people easily think of this because of being infected. Therefore, in my opinion, education in the society is important, especially education for the family. Children's education is important, we need to improve the children's education system so that parents who later have children can understand, oh, my child will be like this later. But the point is how to build an education that covers crucial problems in human life. Because education like this is not widely taught in society. Not only parents do not understand, even educated parents do not understand these problems either.

I understand that in religions, it sometimes focuses too much on “hell”. It's as if this religion is like horror. But how come religion is like horror? In my opinion, that's not how we are religious. Yes, we believe in heaven and hell, but it's not that easy to judge whether you will go to heaven or hell. Sometimes, who judge you is human too, how come they could know? For that, let us all teach, especially religious leaders, don't always focus on heaven and hell. These religious leaders should teach not to scare. Yes, we should know that hell exists, but not everything must go to hell, as if this religion just teach “hell”. For me, religion is how we become better. We are human beings who are endowed with *fitrah* (natural tendency), endowed with a healthy mind. The purpose of religion in the end is how we humanize humans. With our religion, we becoming more human, meaning that we become wiser in addressing every issue, we become more appreciative of our fellow humans, even though there are differences here and there, there are things that are not the same as what we feel. But for me the importance is, as long as you are human, that’s the time we have to appreciate God's creation. Appreciating God's creation means that we appreciate God Himself.

When I talk about *fitrah*, it does not only cover heterosexual, which is considered as normal, it is why it's important that we understand sexuality. Not only in matters of sexuality. For example, one in a million people may have a blood disorder, but a different function does not mean he is disabled right? This uniqueness was chosen by God, because for me, this uniqueness of God's desire, so that we realize that God's creation is very diverse. By understanding how diverse God's creation is, it leads me to realize how great God is and how small we are humans.

Sometimes I raise my eyebrows, that religious people tend to threaten, subject to punishment. God is not an angry God. Let us keep in mind that God is the Most Loving and Most Merciful, in Islam it is clear, that is the term *Bismi Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* (in the name of Allah the Most Loving and Most Merciful). If Lord Himself is Loving and Merciful, why do those two qualities not inspire us as believers to also have the attitude of God? That we also have to love others, must be compassionate to others, do not frighten others. Don't judge people to go to hell, because God that I believe is not like that.

For transgender people, let us compete each other to be good people, still trusting your religion, still being a person who has a religion, can be a good person. But if you choose not to have religion, it doesn't matter to me, each of us has a choice. I think spirituality is important in life together. I believe you have a future, so build spirituality with what you can. The form can be in the form of caring for others, caring for education, caring for the oppressed, and caring for people who do not violate the law.

About Jesus who will meet you here too

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Let me tell you a story, when I was little, I was a homophobic person because my friends used to be like that. Even though I don't think my parents are, but because of taboo, our family did not talk about sexuality. Never talked about how I deal with my own sexuality. My mother only gave books, *here, read*, but I never taught. The book is about being a man, what is sex, what is sexual relations, and so on. But I don't remember whether there is a LGBT discourse in the book, it's a long time ago. Well, when I was in college, I went to college in Singapore where the people tended to be closed. On our campus, I remember once a year we change room friends. If, for example, we stay at room with the same friend, it's okay to deal it together, *okay I'm with him*. But if you arrive late, you only could pick friends left. So yeah, what can I do, I sleep in the same room with him in available room.

I remember at that time, there was a friend whom many people said that he was gay. My friends say *"Umm, you will sleep with him later, you know that he's gay, right?"* He's Malaysian. I was just *"Seriously? I can't sleep later,"* even though he didn't do anything. But we just laugh, that's what I remember.

Apart from that, there are quite a number of books about sexuality in bookstores. Well, there I started to get acquainted with what sexuality is by reading the book **Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex**. But yes, the information is still an old model. For example, it said to just give lesbian a dildo, one dildo each. Later I realized that it wasn't true. You know, the knowledge in the 70s. In Singapore, I studied theology. Well, when I was in America, in 1990, it was the first time I met an actual LGBT community. When I studied in Universitas Indonesia, at Faculty of Social and Political

Science, I took intercultural communication. And one of the books I read, meet and communicate with LGBT is included as intercultural communication, because they have a different culture, have another life and we can learn from it. And I began to realize, oh yeah, it turns out they have a different life from me in a certain sense. Okay, I think, I can accept concept of cultural differences, why not about sexuality?

Well, in America I met some gay friends at seminary. At first, I was scared because someone wanted to approach me. But finally he found out that I came with my wife, so yeah, they were just fine. One time I took the Urban Ministry class in Chicago, city services, and in that class one of the activities was a visit to street children and LGBT programs. The lecturer said that this is tentative depending on whether we as students want it or not. If you don't want it, it's okay. My friend asked, "*Do you want to come or not?*" Oh, yes, I came along, I said, "*If you go, I will join.*" Because we were both from West Chicago, a far away place from the destination. I said I want to go together because I don't have a vehicle at that time, especially the program started at 7pm.

When we left, my friend said, "*Hey, I don't think there are many who will go, just us.*" It was true, when we arrived there, out of 12 people, only 5 people appeared. After that, we met with two pastors who explained about this program, street children program and LGBT program. They came to the place with priest's clothes, black clothes with collars on their necks and they suited like that also at LGBT bars. Many people asked, "*Are you real pastors? Or you just kidding?*" We replied, "*No, we are indeed pastors*". Then the people in the gay bar asked, "*What are you doing here?*" Then the priest replied, "*We believe if Jesus lived now, he will definitely visit you here.*" I thought "*Wow, really great, this is cool!*" I said, I want to make the same approach back in Jakarta. I think I can be open to it. Then we took a walk and I saw a male show, men kissing men. I feel disgusted, I think, what's wrong? I can't accept that. When I went out from a gay bar, I saw near the exit, there were many brochures that had various programs. I tried to take and read, and from a dark place, suddenly there was a sound behind, I thought was it the staff at the bar? I was surprised, I thought this gay guy would approach me, I look back, it turns out it's not, it's my friend, my goodness, I'm still homophobic, I'm still scared, I feel very guilty.

After returning home, I returned to STT Jakarta, to hold the Field Education program. Now I started, okay, we send students to LGBT groups. In 1992, 1993 I began sending students to LGBT groups. I asked a student I knew for a thesis on LGBT. How do you get the source, how to get contacts? Then my student gave me a name, that was a name I knew, one of the children of the lecturer at STT. Then I asked for his contact to request more contact LGBT people. The student gave the Ipos (Ikatan Persatuan Orang-orang Sehati - One Heart Solidarity Association) contact, and Pak Kompol (Mr Kompol) as its leader. I sent students, about 8 people. Their activities including dance, learned to dance and they like to fill in events at the ML club in Mangga Besar. Indian dance, belly dance, all kinds of things, then there is also people who work as a designer, makes a wedding dress. I send students there with expectation that they can get to know who LGBT is, opening their eyes that LGBT is not different from all of us. It just so happened that their lives were a little different. Different sexual preferences. The comparison is like, I like to eat gado-gado, there are those who like to eat pizza, yeah, that's the way it is, it's just a matter of taste, there's no problem about it.

In 2000 I went to America, worked in the Presbyterian Church, one of the most progressive churches. Well, there, I attended their annual conference. This is interesting because at the annual conference, they opened booths, many exhibition programs for organizations affiliated with them. There are stands for both LGBT organizations and anti-LGBT organizations, located nearby. Interesting I thought, I see how could this church reach both? Apparently, they did accommodate both parties and let people choose. I followed their trial, debate about LGBT. The debate was crowded. And from the 70s, they debated it every year and it was always decided, we were not ready to make a decision, because they knew that if we made a decision now, the church broke out. We left it again to the study group every year. While seeing that the Presbyterian Church was very open, from Kentucky, I went to Berkeley for doctoral degree. At Berkeley, I stayed at the Berkeley Mission Hub, Presbyterian Mission Home. By one of the church administrators, I was asked, *"Do you want to go to our church? You will become our kind of affiliation to connect with other churches throughout the world."* Oh, yes, I am fine to it. Then I went to Berkeley, delivered to this church.

I was shocked, the church installed a rainbow flag in front of it. I thought this church is crazy. The church is very progressive! I say it's really cool if there is

one like this in Indonesia. And yes, there are some LGBT members in church and they are free to serve in the church, become servants of the priest. She was a pastor, but because she is a lesbian, she was fired by the church, fired by the synod, but was still accommodated by this church and became one of the activists who helped with Sunday school education and so on. She lives with his partner and two children. There is also a gay couple. One is a black man, one is a white man, also has adopted children, and they are accepted as members of the church. I saw this church treats everyone as equal, everything is normal. There is nothing strange, "*Oh, you are like this.*" And even more interesting, every year this church participates in the pride parade.

I asked two people who participated in Pride Parade, two elderly people. I asked, "*Why did this mother always join Pride Parade?*" My friend said, "*Oh, the mother had children, her daughter was lesbian and she killed herself and jumped from Golden Gate.*" That was in the 70s. Ouch, I think this is amazing, when families fail to accept their lesbian or gay children, and the children feel isolated, rejected, and feels hopeless, eventually they will do something very tragic, be suicidal and so on.

There was also an elderly mother, and I knew that she joins the pride parade every year and my friend told me that the mother used to have a husband who had been married for several years, but at the end, he confessed to her "*I'm gay and we should divorce.*" She said, "*Don't do it, don't divorce. What will people say if we divorce? You can live to what you want, but don't divorce me.*" Her husband said, "*If I do that, I'm not fair to you. Because if we divorce, you still have a future. Can remarry or something. And it's still better than we continue this way.*" Finally they divorced, and yes, the mother remarried another man and had her own family and so on. But because he remembered her husband who once loved each other, and was courageously fair with her, she finally supported her ex-husband. Wow, I think these are extraordinary people in this church. That was what made me return to Indonesia, I said, I should continue this activity. We continued, well, when I returned in 2007, there were already more LGBT organizations in Jakarta. Not only Ipos, but Ardhanary, GWL INA, and so on. I was aware and I began to connect to them one by one.

Previously I had never met LGBT person, even if I found them, I never talked. Actually, I know that there are LGBT people in STT campus, but I was afraid

to approach them. I did not dare to raise the issue because I have to respect them, I did not want to misstep because they were not coming out. I was afraid of talking. So, indeed, on one side, coming out is necessary so that people know who you are and we can relate to you, and people can see that you are good people anyway.

When I once interacted with LGBT people, I had an experience that made them uncomfortable. When I said something wrong, maybe I was harassing and my LGBT friends rebuked me, "*Oh yeah, sorry, I was wrong,*" I said. Since then, I have been very careful not to say anything wrong. What was uncomforting, probably the first time I have created LGBT activities on campus. At that time, we made this HIV and AIDS program to commemorate World's AIDS Day (1 December). Because if you say this is LGBT program, crowds will fill the campus, then the lecturer will react negatively. So at that time, I think this is LGBT program with HIV and AIDS cover.

There were four sessions in the event. First session was to talk about what is HIV and AIDS, second session was what is gay, Mas Dede Oetomo (Mr. Dede Utomo) as speaker, the third session was lesbian with Agustine as speaker, and the fourth session, what is the transgender with Mbak Ienes (Ms. Ienes) as speaker. Last three topics were exciting, first session got ordinary response. I already knew everything, what else do you want to talk about? But once it goes into the next three topics, it became fun and crowded. At that time, there were fifty people who participated, well, it was successful. This was an impromptu event, money was not much, but turns out successful. After that, there were no plans or what, later I realized, my LGBT friends didn't like it when their issue is related to HIV and AIDS, as if they are HIV and AIDS origin, no, it's not. Okay, next year we won't make it that way again, but we make it more LGBT friendly, just ordinary. The following years, it was started without my initiative, but my students' initiative. They made a book launch program. That was the initiative of my students, then for the LGBT week was the initiative of the chairman of Student Council. At that time, I was rather scared, this was the deeper issue, people will think "*What is this?*" Then I said to myself, do not have to think about it, this is my faith risk. I had to take this risk because I believe this is also what Jesus will do.

When I read stories in the Gospel, about Jesus, I always find Him on the side of those who are excluded. People who were considered meaningless in the

community at that time. Among the Samaritans, women who experienced bleeding were considered unclean. Tax collectors, who are considered trashy people, criminals who work with the Roman government to suck the wealth of the Jews. But Jesus approached them. They were sinners but were approached by Jesus and later, Jesus always sat with them, with the prostitutes, and so on. And that shows me, that the church should look for these people to be their friends. Not to Christianize them. First of all, become friends for them. That later people wants to become a Christian or something, that's another matter. Because the first step is how we become their friend. And that, in my opinion, is the church's call. I also felt that I could also be their best friend

Church friends means being with them whenever they need. When they are bullied, when they are cornered, when they are harassed, the church can be with them, support them, protect them, give them moral strength.

My experience with transgender people is in 1996 or 1997. I sent students to gay groups. Mas Dede Oetomo invited me to conduct research on HIV and AIDS with transgender groups. I was confused, where should I look to meet transgender? I looked for it with my friends. Mas Dede was in Surabaya, there was a meeting in Surabaya, then in Jakarta, I contacted Marcel, my student. *"How can I reach transgender?"* Then he gave a contact of transgender people. I got her contact, she was quite old. She gave several names for addition. From there, I got other names. There was one community in the area near Pulogadung. They live there all. I met them. We conducted interviews easier in STT Jakarta. We gave them transport and so on, lunch, then when interviewing, someone asked me, *"Sir, if any of us die as Christian, are you willing to bury her?"*, *"Oh"*, I said *"No problem. Contact me, call me, and I'm willing to help. If I can't, yet many priest friends on this campus can help. Contact me."* I said. There, I met trans friends. Only later with gays and lesbians.

Many pastors do not want to bury trans people who die. Usually if we die, we hold a ceremony. There is a funeral ceremony. In Catholicism, if there is someone who is sick before died, there is an oil sacrament, whereas in Protestant, there isn't. We just pray that the person can leave the world peacefully and the family is given the strength to deal with the lost.

So far, no parent has ever brought a child to me. But there was one father who came to our place several times and his son was trans man. Father said that he was ready to accept his child. He told, he knew his son was trans man. At the time his son was studying in Kuala Lumpur, his best friend committed suicide. His son's friend is also a trans. The father was very afraid that his son will do the same. He took it to a psychiatrist, then the psychiatrist referred them to STT Jakarta, to meet me. Psychiatrist said that the school accepts LGBT. Finally, the father came to the World's Suicide Prevention Day event. It was 2014. It was our event with Benny. He came not to consult, but only for the event, and I said *"Yes, we have to realize that we can be different, not always like what we expect, we must accept the situation."*

If, for example, there are parents who think their children are sinners, I think actually all people are sinners. And I don't feel that LGBT is more sinful than others. Our sins are the same, so we don't have to consider this children worse. Just accept what it is, that they are different. Show that the family gives more special attention to children so that they really feel not rejected, not exiled, not considered a damaged person, but as part of the full family. They must be loved. In my opinion, sometimes what you have to pray for is their parents. There was a mother who contacted me by telephone and told me, *"Sir, my child is like a lesbian, what should I do?"* She said, she had taken her child to a psychiatrist and so, and the psychiatrist said there was no problem. I said, yes there really isn't a problem, the problem is the mother. The mother should pray so that she can accept her child, not pray for the child who has no problem. Finally one day, I met her, the mother, but she said nothing. It's hard for me to ask her about the issue again. She came with her family because there was a church program. Indeed, her daughter has masculine expression.

Someone asked to me, *"Are you gay?"* I said, I am hetero, I have two children, and I do this to prepare me if my child turns out to be a trans, maybe I would be better prepared to accept it. For others, you might not be ready because you did not do that. Maybe my wife is not ready to face if my child is trans. If there are parents who think *"What did I do wrong so that my child is like this?"* I want to say, parents are not wrong. God has his own plan that we don't know, and I don't think we need to regret that there are many LGBT people who are used by God in extraordinary ways. They become great actors or artists in the world. Who knows? Children can be useful for others.

Acceptance of “different” children do not come with conditions. Accept the child and pray for it to become something, become somebody, not to be someone who continues to regret their life, not to be someone who feels rejected in this world. They must be someone, show the world that they have capabilities. I have two-three nephews who are part of LGBT. One of my nephews, he is an expert at making cakes. He helped his mother make cakes, and now that his mother is dead, he continues her efforts and the cake they made is sold out. He is assisted by his brother-in-law.

The other nephew lives in the Netherlands, I haven't seen him for a long time, he's a teacher there. One more person is my distant cousin, he's a musician in America. But he became a social worker. So I think they are successful too despite all the problems they face. With the rejection from the world, they are successful with their lives. I think if we provide opportunities for LGBT people, everything will work. Success should not be the condition for the acceptance, but when we give them support, we can expect them to be as successful as others.

We do not need to be ashamed of our child’s condition, because it is a reality of life. So what? This also often occurs in parents who have blind children, or limp children. Learning to accept them with all their conditions, all the 'limitations' they face, because by accepting them unconditionally, we help them to have confidence and be able to face the life challenges in this world. So I think, the main task of parents is to prepare their children to be ready to face a world that is often cruel. A world that often pouts people easily without realizing that everyone in the world has problems and has shortcomings. I was born as a left-handed person. And when I was little, I was forced by my grandmother, because my parents were abroad at school, I was entrusted to my grandmother and grandfather, and I was forced to use my right hand. But there are things I can't do without using my left hand. There was one side effect, I stuttered. I stuttered until middle school. It affected me badly. So I felt very inferior.

When I was in junior high school, I began to change, using my left hand for things, the stutter gradually disappeared. And that's the way out, when I accept myself, I go back to my real self, a left-handed person, I can overcome my stuttering, but still people can see my difficulties when I talk. Strangely, if I speak English, the stutter doesn't exist, but if it is Indonesian, it will emerge.

If we are worried about children's safety, so I say, children must learn martial arts, whether *karate* or something else, I think it's important. It also helps parents to realize that we will not live forever to protect my children. After they grew older, I couldn't continue accompanying them. I can only protect them when they are children. Entering adolescence, then youth, and adults, I could no longer continue to be with them. So that children must learn to defend themselves. Actually I felt like a failure for my own child, I told her to learn *karate* but she didn't want to.

In life, there must be people who reject. Just avoid people like that. There is a church that refuses, don't go to that church, just go to church that accept. But the difficulty will come later, in the workplace for example, we want to work there but they will refuse. I have no other choice, this is what I think is difficult, because of that I think our society must be educated to accept LGBT people, to acknowledge their existence as it is. Just as we accept people with disability, we must be prepared to accept, that's the problem.

I think we have a lot of homework going forward. How to change our homophobic society to be LGBT friendly, and I don't see this in the next 10 years. This is very heavy. Our main factor is religion, and, the major religions in Indonesia are very homophobic. We have a heavy duty on these two things. That is why in our activities on campus involving other people so that through them, other religious communities can also change. Well, it's a long way to go, which requires perseverance and determination like someone who runs a marathon. For example on our campus, we started sending students to LGBT programs since 1994. Only in 2013-2014, we were able to hold the LGBT International Conference program. It takes 20 years to get there. I do not know if there are people who are now asked to be strong or survive until the next 20 years, whether ready or not. Maybe if I look back, I will not be ready. Because when I deal with it one by one and year after year while trying, it turns out that there are many people who support and that is what happens. For parents, accept your children as they are, love them, give them confidence to be able to face a cruel world that is often full of bullying and rejection. Tell your children that bullying will not destroy them. They must be strong, they must be strong in facing all of that, because after all God has a beautiful plan for their lives.

About strong foundation for child

***Romo Yu** is a pastor who leads south unit of PMKAJ (PMKAJ Unit Selatan). He is known to be friendly with his students.*

When I was young, I had a friend who were possibly, a LGBT. There is my neighbor who have feminine son. At that time, the child was accepted, perhaps it was difficult for the society to accept it. Maybe it's a pity for the family, but that's life. If I looked back from the culture of my family, in the tradition of *wayang* (Indonesian traditional puppet), there is one character whose name is *Kenyawandu*. Kenyawandu is a woman, but not exactly a woman. She has score of 9 in *wayang* card game, and is the highest score. If you get Kenyawandu card, you will win. In *wayang kulit* (*shadow play*), Kenyawandu figures a female man (waria or trans). She worth for score of 9. How does she have highest score? Maybe in *wayang*, she is appreciated because of her perfection of two poles. It gave her score of 9. I remember when I play it in childhood, if you get Kenyawandu card you will definitely win. Well, this is in *Tek Po* game. In the game, we throw onto the picture of *wayang* and see what's the result is. Each character has score. Arjuna has only seven, Kenyawandu is nine, the highest. She is a figure in *Hastinapura*'s story. That's in culture of Mahabharata. Srikandi is a masculine, malevolent woman, but can solve problems. She is masculine. Probably, the story originates from India, I don't know if there is one, but maybe it only exists in Java. Perhaps the influence of religion that came made culture became more open, while nowadays, it makes it more conservative. I used to feel that getting along with the opposite sex was more relaxed. There is a rising tendency for conservatism to understand religion.

That's a little introduction to LGBT stories. I have a friend who has a sibling. They found it out in adulthood. When they were children, it was ordinary. Maybe her female genes are more dominant when she is a girl. That's my introduction. I really didn't have much experience. I used to understand that there are different types of people in the community and how to accept

people who have many differences. I have a lot of family, so from my family, I am taught to accept the differences that exist in everyone. For example, I met people who have mental disabilities, their development is different from others, mentally very dependent. But they have good character, love their younger siblings, and be the one who invite watching puppets.

In studying religion, I did not study LGBT issues specifically, but I learned about morality. How to respect others. To become a pastor, I must learn basic moral, moral theology which its basis of knowledge is to do good and stay away from evil thing, and that becomes the foundation to respect human dignity. From this basis will later develop into many trajectories. When it comes to what is good and what is evil, the lesson I took from moral theology, good thing is related to human identity and human dignity. Humans are images of God. So evil tends to cripple it away. And yes on a side, human dignity is bound to the world, this can be seen from Genesis 2 verse 7, "*man was created from the dust of the ground, but breathed by the breath of God*" became the condition of human life, there is an attachment to this world, remember, breathed by divine breath. Human identity is not only bound to this world, it is able to overcome limitations in this world, which is called transcendence, which means that humans are able to give noble values to something that is bound to the world, including the condition of humanity that can glorify God in its humanity.

So if we go back to it, what is good can be seen from what is noble in humans. An example is how to love someone else, respect others like respecting yourself. Don't treat other people the way you don't want to be treated. The basic principle, is love. So good is always upholding human dignity. That's the concept of the church, what is good and what is evil. It is related to various kinds of people. Regarding diversity of people, both men, women and others, what is good is to treat other people as you want to be treated.

In the relationship between parents and children, whatever the child's condition is, give them love. Because love from parents for their children is the foundation of life. Humans will not survive if there is no foundation, no matter what the conditions are, they do not have to be transgender, children can be damaged in their lives if there is no foundation and never experience being loved. Honoring humans starts there. It's the parents' job to love their

children. Of course, parents must teach children to walk on the right path, but this is different from acceptance. The foundation is love for children, if this already exists, bringing children to the right path is another matter. Children who experience acceptance and experience feeling loved, it will be difficult for them to deviate from the right path. It will not be easy for them to choose a deviant path. This applies to all genders. If one gets a solid foundation, it will not damage themselves. If there are parents who have difficulty accepting their children, it saddens me, because it means that parents have not learned to respect their children. But how to accept? As parents, we must put ourselves in the position of children. If we were treated the same by our parents, how do we feel? For example, can you imagine as a woman but your parents do not accept you as a woman, rejected from childhood? This will be a problem if she feels rejected and does not experience acceptance, and it will have an impact on her life.

I believe that to be a good person, this exceeds one's gender. Men who are not good are useless. A person's good and evil does not depend on their gender. So whatever your condition, be a blessing. Be a blessing, because that is the path to happiness. Yes, parents' awareness must be improved, especially if it is difficult for them to accept differences of their children.

If there are parents who bring their children to be "cured", it's parents who need to be counseled. By accepting, parents can accompany and prepare, especially with the reaction of our society. Not only to trans, but to other cultures as well. Having a daughter alone can be considered problematic. Considered as bad luck, then rejected, not noticed. In the problem of stigma of sin, what is sin? Sin is not so easy to happen. If we return to Catholicism, sin can occur in four ways, they are through thoughts, words, actions, and negligence. Four kinds of sins. Why is sin taken up in the moral topic? Because sin is considered to undermine human dignity. Human dignity in Christianity is not arbitrary in interpreting God's teachings. Nature and behavior need to be distinguished. Behavior attached to nature. Sin undermines human dignity and conscience. Human dignity is how God's image is embedded in humans. So in His creation, there is a trace of God in it. The interpretation that God only created men and women and no other gender was never claimed by the church. It is true in the book of Genesis, God created Adam (male) and Eve (female), but did not say God did not create anything else. Awareness of one's gender identity is a process. Every

creation of God radiates the glory of God. Keep in mind that human dignity is not a matter of men and women, but in creation, there is a picture of God. So even transgender people are created by God, a unity of all God's creations, so it is very wrong not to lift the dignity of trans people as humans. The image of God radiates love. In reading the text in the scriptures, it must be accompanied by reflection. In this perspective, we must understand God as a good Father. With this perspective, many things will open up. But if it starts from the image of God that is not so, seeing things will be very different. This view can also give rise to thoughts if having different children is a punishment from God. Trully, love be grateful to your children is the key word. Get to know our own child. It can help parents to know how to treat children, whatever the conditions. Then this will give a very solid foundation.

In a society, there must be people's scorn. This applies to "different" children. Even though we are good people, there must be still people's scorn onto us. As Catholics, there is no right word to replace a principle of "Love other human" because with this principle, we can see the image of God in everyone. Because God is love. If it is also applied with relations with different people, it is part of love taught by Christ. If parents think that it's better to put children into seminary schools, I don't think that is wise because it's like 'punishing children'. The first education for children is from parents, so wherever children are educated, it is still parent's job to educate them. Don't think that children have failed before educating them by loving them. It is not fair for God to have made them if you thought they had failed. For that, start building a family that has love and respect. Starting from children, if it exists, it will help children's development. If there is no such basis, it will be fragile.

About three things that make harmony, peace, well being, and prosperity

Gus Sutakertya *is now the president of Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia in Jayapura and is an independent consultant for HIV and AIDS issue.*

From the first discovery of AIDS case in 1987 in Bali until now, I still concern and care to health and humanitarian issues, especially HIV and AIDS. I also wrote my thesis related to transgender, when I finished my Masters study at the Universitas Indonesia. I have been involved for a long time with HIV programs, since I was a student, when the first case was discovered in Bali. Thus, the HIV and AIDS prevention program in Indonesia has been started since then. The escalation of HIV and AIDS prevention programs has increased since 1999 until now. There are no diseases that have as many social, cultural and political consequences as HIV and AIDS. There is no country that has not been touched by this disease, as well as in Indonesia, there is no province that does not report HIV and AIDS cases. This pandemic has been a threat to the existence of the human species on earth. Health care systems throughout the world have changed because of that and HIV and AIDS have also forced many social institutions to change the structure and manner of their work.

The problem of HIV and AIDS in our homeland is increasingly alarming, as reflected in the data obtained through surveys and from the results of surveillance. HIV cases have been reported in all provinces in Indonesia with experiences reported by concerning people both from religious leaders, community leaders, academics, from communities including transgender and so on.

I write about HIV programs developed in Indonesia and one of my writings is related to transgender in Jakarta. Well, what's interesting is that I have a lot of contact with transgender people in Jakarta. There are several institutions that specifically deal with and assist transgender, such as the Srikandi Sejati.

Not only made them as resource persons or key informants, I also involved them in every process. When I had a discussion with the testing team, they were present and reviewed my writing. It also helped open my horizons to my examiners. Many positive things can be done. Many things we can learn from, and even many things that need to be appreciated from them.

There are a lot of positive things that will open our horizons to the stigma and discrimination of transgender people, which they experience in everyday life. From there I am reminded, because in the Hindu context there is a concept of *Tat Twam Asi*. It means, you are me, I am you. From there, we really should not hurt and discriminate against other people or with others. If I hurt someone else, then I hurt myself. It gives insight to understand the differences that we must respect. Indeed, in terms of sex, men have penises and women have vagina, but don't stop there, there are different people's gender identities. There is also orientation, different interests with another person, and we must respect each other's differences. In Indonesia, we have a slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), different but one. In the concept of harmony of life, different is beautiful. Beautiful is art. Different is beautiful, beautiful is art, art is expensive, and because it is expensive we must protect it, and protect each other in diversity.

We must not blame something from our point of view, which is not necessarily true. There are important things that are emphasized that need attention. There is a context called *Wasu Dewa Kutum Bakam*, which means that all humans are siblings. All of us are related. So if it is related to orientation, it is an essential thing related to one's interests. In orientation there is actually a gift that other people cannot touch because of privacy. People cannot blame if there is a difference. In the context of HIV, we don’t change people’s orientation, but what we change is their behavior, because everyone can have risky behavior. In order to be a good person, and being useful for others, regardless of their gender identity. It should be a good example for anyone.

As I see, this is not against nature. This is because of our limitations to see it. This is behind the greatness of "nature", which is unreachable from our thinking because there are many differences. We cannot judge transgender people against nature. Open and be close to transgender to learn from them,

do not blame from other people's point of view. Which nature is opposed? Because we conceptually see humans as our siblings.

There is also *Ahimsa* which means not to hurt, which is not only physical, but also in various ways, we also maintain harmony between all. We must be harmonious, maintain good relations with fellow humans, then maintain good relations with our environment. Our environment is nature, the universe, plants because all of that is the creation of the Almighty, maintaining a harmonious relationship between our environment, maintaining the harmony of humans with their God. So there is no place in Hinduism to stigmatize transgender people. This is in Hinduism, called *tri hta karana*, meaning three things that cause harmony, peace, well being, and prosperity. First, the harmonious relationship between humans and other humans, the harmonious relationship between humans and nature and its contents, and the harmonious relationship between humans and their God. If we understand that, there is no room for us to blame His creation. Moreover, judge other people that they are guilty.

We all realize that sometimes our education and knowledge can be very limited. But let us also have to show good behavior, show positive things. Because all groups have good things. Trans people are often positioned and considered to be untrue or lawless, because they only see the worse side, but don't see the positive. By seeing positive things in the environment, it can change the perceptions of our parents and society in the future. Yes, there are parents who see their children are not in line with parents' expectations, and parents are afraid to see that they are wrong in educating, and they are unable to explain to the community about the differences in their children. For this, there must also be parental education to accept children as they are. Then parents still be responsible for delivering a child who is *suputra*, a child who is useful, a child who is good in society, whatever the gender, or other physical conditions. Stay beneficial for your family and environment. Not the other way around, blaming the child. If we blame the child, it becomes karma, we will get the result for what we do. Good karma will get good results, bad ones will produce bad results. If we react badly, the result will be bad. Therefore, take care of our children, appreciate that someday they become *suputra* children whatever their physical form or condition.

It must be understood that karma must be seen with reason, not to be an excuse to blame the child. The concept of karma is experienced by ourselves, not others. Different children are not the result of bad karma. So when people are born and are the reason for mistakes in the past, that's a myth that existed in ancient times. In the Hindu context it is clearly stated as such. Family support is needed to help children feel better. Don't make them feel guilty, on the contrary, it needs to be supported so that they can carry out their obligations to live in this world (carrying out their *swadharma*). May peace, peace in the entire universe, peace in all directions and peace come to us and spread everywhere.

About being human is the hardest

***Pak Aan** is a priest of Arya Dharma who works in Papua.*

I know that public in general, especially other religions, view trans as a bad deed. They see that, why should they be transgender while God created men and women? This is the problem, the general view that this (transgender) is wrong. This is common, people do not understand that transgender do not know that they are born as transgender. Maybe they don't want it either. Be a man or a woman, but when a man with woman soul, it is contrary in his mind. If it's up to them, they want to be "normal", but they can't manage their own feelings. We don't know why God created such feelings. This religious view is not good, let alone consider it as a disease. In general, transgender are seen by society as something that is not good according to the norm. However, in this world, there are many things. How should parents accept? In religion it is taught to accept. In religion it is taught that for people to have a humanistic understanding as parents, they will accept their children. To accept it in the society, it is necessary to inform, perhaps behavior of the transgender people should be adjusted to the society. For parents, there should be understanding. There are certainly pros and cons, even many men are afraid of transgender. In Papua, it's endemic about HIV. In this HIV program, we always voice concerns in sexual behavior, because transgender practice anal sex. They must use condom. To find out their status, they must be tested. We always campaign for HIV.

In the view of Buddhism, there is actually no problem (about trans), because it does not see gender but rather put more emphasis to karma. Because we believe there is past karma. Someone is born trans because of past karma. In conditions, it is better to repent the past karma and not become transgender through kindness. The past karma is not just yesterday, it is also in the past birth due to reincarnation. From now on, if you have accepted and do better, you will be born in a better world. It is action that will determine whether a trans is a good or bad person. The end of human's path is not to enter heaven or hell, but to enter nirvana which is when they will not be born again. It's not

easy to understand things like this. We also need to know because when we know trans, trans people will also respect us.

In Buddhism, there is no such thing as karma sin, there is only a consequence of actions. If parents have a concern, their children remain their responsibility. Secondly, it’s not easy to change, there is something that cannot be changed, there is something that can be changed but it is not easy, and it’s not parents who have to change, but our own self. My advice is, this is because your own karma, and is not because of parent’s karma. Relationship with parents must be discussed properly. The one who can change is their own child. Children must be accepted and improve themselves not to be born into a trans again. Be good according to each religion. Such a good deed because Buddha sees the consequences of actions. Good deeds in Buddhism exist because of past karma that has an effect on us. Buddha alone attained perfection after 500 births. Once we become human, we do not know our actions in the past, but to be human again, we must do good things like do not kill and do not have appetite like animals. Good trans people must prioritize love. Don't kill, including killing ant or mosquitoes, don't have any intentions to it. There are five big things that need to be known to be good people, they are prohibition: not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to be immoral or to commit adultery, and not to drink alcohol.

In Buddhism, these five things can lead us to be born again as human and do good. If parents think that their children are the result of karma, keep in mind that they are their children and must be accepted. Parents need to know that change must come from children, and parents should accept human beings as children. Don't be emotional first, as long as emotions are difficult to accept.

In Buddhism as well, all living things must be respected. Humans sometimes have ups and downs emotion. Because humans naturally does not want to let go and has a high ego. If the defilements are eroded, it's likely that their behavior is eroded too.

As humans, you have to be happy, because being human is the most difficult with a different life journey. There are people who become humans for only 1 day, some are longer. These are all the results of past karma. Once you understand this and teach goodness to improve responsibilities, you will have

a better life. As long as we become human, we need to keep doing good. Thus we will have a better life.

STORIES FROM THE TRANS COMMUNITY

About love is the best wisdom

***Dena Rachman** is a trans woman who works as an entrepreneur, actress, and activist based in Jakarta, Indonesia. She rose to prominence when her transformation from a boy child star to a transgender woman went public and she has been the poster child of the LGBT community in Indonesia ever since. She received her MBA in Design, Fashion, and Luxury Goods from Bologna Business School in Italy. She has her own fashion brand called "DRAMA" and a model management "Future Models ID". Aside from her main businesses, she has been working closely with various development agencies and non-profit organizations such as Hivos, Rutgers, UNDP, and ILO in their programs and initiatives in regard to advocacy for LGBT rights, gender equality, diversity, women empowerment, and sexual health issues. She advanced her knowledge by taking Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in International Law Summer Course in Leiden University in 2018. She also starred in a comedy movie titled "Flight 555" as a Thai trans tourist.*

When I was little, I didn't understand that I was different. Because I think there is no problem by doing what I like, for example playing houses, and performing act like singing. I like to sing and enjoy singing. I have a small compilation photo, I used to wear a skirt, loved to see myself in the mirror, but I didn't understand what it was. I went to elementary school and made more friends, female friends. Even though I had male friend, I was more connected with my female friends. In the middle school, my friend asked me to be honest with myself. They said "*What's wrong with you? Just be honest, no need to cover up.*" And from there, I have not pretended anymore. But only in front of my friends. So I can be myself, without any further thought, just wanted to be myself. I like feminine items, I am also interested to men. When I was in high school, I didn't cover up anymore, from the beginning I just became myself. Just after that, in college which had no uniform rules, I began

to be able to claim identity in a way, how to socialize, and then, there I started androgyny style. Since then, I feel more comfortable. I like that I was quite mature at that time. Then, when I graduated from college in 2009, I decided to come out to my parents that I am actually a woman and more comfortable as a woman. Since then, until now, I can express myself.

In the past, when I came out to parents, what I worried was the parent's concern to my adulthood, what will I do? With the decisions I made, parents would think I won't survive. Because they knew, living like this will be difficult. They know that because they work in entertainment industry, many of their employees may not be trans, but gay or drag performer. So what concerned them was what will I do later because life won't be easy. At that time, I tried to find a job in the fashion industry, I mean I equip myself with all kinds of knowledge and networking, so I can show them what I know and what I do, then everything will be fine, including my future.

Before I came out, there was not yet a gender issue, only a few clues that indicate me as trans. Big talk happened after I came out. Previously, there had never been a dialogue, while I realized they naturally felt scared because their child was different. The way I dressed was different and unique, only I did not open up, like I do now. When it comes to disclosure, I told them what I feel, then they told me what they are concerned about, and yes, their concern was my future. They told me that what's most important is that I must have a high education.

When I was coming out, I hoped that parents would understand because it was so typical at that time, I felt like I was not myself, I felt I was pretending to be someone else. I felt that I cannot express myself, I cannot use my abilities. What I did was not optimal because I was restrained, so at that time I felt rejected, I felt I was not accepted, I felt I had no place, it felt like I just wanted to die. So I hoped that parents understand my situation and accept me. And I was honest with them, well, it took time for them to accept and they understood me at the end. I forget how long it takes until they accept me, I don't count, but time plays there. At first I felt they were indeed very cold or tougher to me, but I had never been scolded or expelled. When I told them about myself, my mother cried because maybe she felt hitted or shocked. At that time, she processed what I talked about for several months, not for years. When they accepted, they did not mention it verbally, but with

their gestures, for example, like there was something they saw, after I was being honest, I became closer, so it was more cheerful, it was more happy and confidence.

When I came out, I didn't think parents will reject me. I understand that my mom will cry when she hears my confession, but I knew that she was the first to understand me. My father might be more proud, think more of his ego as a parent. If I feel like that, I couldn't say how they felt at that time. That's what I perceived. I think this was a normal reaction from them. Of course I was afraid of being rejected, so I told them that if they could not accept it, I would just die or run away from home. Because I was in a position when I couldn't stand it anymore. But I knew in myself, I am sure that they will accept me because they love me.

When I was accepted by my parents, my relationship with my parents became closer. Before coming out, I was lazy to go to family events, just be quiet, there was a distance between us. After coming out, it mends the relationship. If there is a family event like marriage, I will come and participate, and even my big family accepted me. My big family is open minded type that comes from different backgrounds. Even my mom told my grandfather (little brother of my grandmother) that Dena is now transitioning. My grandfather, he defended me. He said, it's okay, that the important thing is that I have achievement. He thought I am beautiful too, that's good, and everyone is different, so I feel supported by many people including big families, so this is a good thing for me. Honestly, one thing brings me to another positive thing too. Maybe there are family members who can't accept it, but I don't know, there is nothing frontal. No one dared to say it in front of me but so far, there is no direct or confronting. In fact, almost all of them asking for me to come when there is a family event. It's kinda weird.

There were some things impressed me when I came out to them, they said that life will not be easy to my life decisions. Their concern was the future, what will I do in the future, so their message was not to dropout of school. That is important to me because I became more aware of my future. That's what made me the most. My mama said that I'm still her child whenever it is, and she would definitely support. And mama understood, rather than I should suffer, mama will suffer more.

I feel that acceptance is the basis of all. We as humans are basically accepted in the family, in society, or everywhere, we have basic needs to have relationship and actually the most important thing is we accept ourselves, and that is sometimes difficult for many people. We are busy looking for recognition from others, even though the closest social unit is family. Maybe there are many that cannot be accepted by the family, so they cannot be themselves. Yes, this happens for both parties. When families see we can accept ourselves, families can try to accept us. And when we are accepted by our families, we can also accept ourselves. That means it happens vice versa, which one is first, it depends, only acceptance is important because from there, everything can change.

In relation to parents, the relationship dynamics are varied, expectations are also different, the situation is different, disappointment is on both sides, but nothing is substantial, because I know my parents are trying to understand their children. I know it's not easy to understand me, but knowing that they can have the effort to understand me makes me have no specific disappointment. I feel relieved. The response from siblings was also very positive. We are very close to each other, I am close to my sister and she is quite sensitive. Both before and now, they knew that there was a time when I was attacked by many people on social media or in public, but they were very positive because they knew where they came from, they knew my life's struggle was not easy to accept and they also knew that this is only a matter of gender identity, is not something wrong, and they feel positive after I transition and come out. They became very supportive, because I was lazy and dramatic with my family, and closed. I am busy with myself, yeah it's weird. It feels stiff and lazy to relate to other people and not open up. Now you can confide. I used to know my sister because we often changed clothes. When I came out, she was just "*good, now we can change clothes*", just like that. Actually she knows, she’s more open, can confide without having to be awkward and as kind. There used to be someone who commented "*maybe it's because all of the siblings are girls.*" I think they are mature enough to respond to things like this. They also know this is the consequence of being a public figure, so that has become common response. Well that's what they are afraid of, but they are more prepared than me to face negative comments from people. They don't care about that. When I came out I knew that it was also what they prepared later if suddenly there were family or friends who commented negatively, that was what they also thought at that time. Maybe

on one hand my parents knew it was the best thing for me, but also thought that their child was happier even though there were lots of people talking. Maybe more to it.

I never imagined if my parents would not accept me. Maybe I will not be in my position now. I am so thankful for my parents, for being good parents who have opened up and have good intentions to listen to my concerns. Listen to my problems and help find solutions together. My parents are very good because they are always there for me. I hope this good relationship continues because this is very important to me.

I think this is very important for parents to listen to what their child wants to convey, and convey what is their concern, because honesty is the main policy in family relationship. Whatever you feel, even if you can't accept it, you can tell them (children) why you can’t accept it. Then, try to listen to what the child feels and then find the best solution to embrace because there are so many ways for that, but of course love is the best policy, because with love, with affection, everything will work, so with love, parents can understand and accept and have good results. If we fill it with love, it is love that come out.

About parenting mistake and contagion

***Baby** is currently working for her own interior design company. She is still active in the entertainment industry.*

My family's background is different, there are strict rules in the family. So, they, when I was little, actually already knew. From my gesture. Only they just okay with it. Until finally in college, I began to transition, discreetly. I used to study at Petra Surabaya, I used to start small because I had to have achievement when I want something, everything must be in accordance with the achievements. When I want to go to college, I even had to get it with distinguish enrollment. My dad used to work in one of the government offices in Surabaya, so he had subordinates, he knew political officials, so I had to maintain the reputation of the family. I couldn't carelessly express myself, until finally I went to college, I finished it, and one day I got a vehicle from my parents.

I used the vehicle as my second home. When I went to college, I groomed like a man, but if in the car going to campus, all makeup equipments were there which I bought little by little, whether it's from my own allowance or from my side job salary. Until finally, when I graduated from college, I wanted to go to fashion design college, but it wasn't allowed by my dad because he thought the fashion designer couldn't do good, he wasn't open minded guy back then, *"There is no diploma, what do you want to be?"* Even though there are culinary schools for people who want to be chefs right now, and fashion designers are also now recognized and can develop, can be successful. He said, if I want to design, it's better to be graphic design.

After I thought I had finished fulfilling my parents' expectations, I decided to be myself. After finishing college, I moved from home to Jakarta. With my own savings budget, because parents disagreed. Parents never agree that I'm transitioning, they want me to stay with them, if possible, maybe live from them. They are worried and scared. Fear of me being someone who is careless, or unable to find food, unable to work, and unable to live.

At the moment, I had no good communication with my parents when I moved. About a year. At that time, I aspired to become a model. If I can't be a fashion designer, I want to be a model or an artist. So I really liked posing in front of mirror. I wanted to act, really happy with Paris Hilton's style, I wanted to be Paris Hilton, whatever, even though my friends said, *"Keep dreaming dear, you can't possibly be like that."*

For a year I moved, I didn't dare to talk to them (parents), and I didn't dare to say anything when I was down or I didn't have money, I don't dare to it. Even if I told them, they would surely give me (money), but besides that, they would tell me to go back and that's that I didn't want to, my pride was too high to do that. I had to prove it. Until finally, when I moved I said to my parents that I already fulfilled what they wanted, now I want to be myself. Although at first they did not agree, but in the end I moved. When I moved to Jakarta, I stayed at boarding house.

In Jakarta there were no siblings, nobody. Then, after one year I tried myself and did not want to tell my parents about my situation, even though they asked me how. Maybe they were worried or something, but I was too proud to tell them. The contact was still there, but the relationship at that time was indeed not good. So when I told them my condition, they would be more worried, and asked me to come home. Even large families would say why, and had the same concern that I might fail. I didn't care about that, from the past ten years until now, I have proven that everything I have achieved is my own result.

Within a year, my communication with parents was not too intense. When I felt like a failure, I apologized to them. I called and said I still asked for their blessing and I apologized if I did wrong, because I felt failed in Jakarta and my dad begged me to come back. I'm sure if I came back I couldn't be myself. I thought, maybe it was time, I had already booked for a return ticket, but within days, I was called for film casting, and finally I got the role, it is in *Mati Muda di Pelukan Janda* (Died Young in The Widow's Hug). At that time, my beliefs reappeared after I get stressed and so on. Apparently given the way, finally I could prove to myself that I can. I could achieve my dreams. Well, from there they began to melt and began to believe that I could achieve what I want if I was sure and could be myself.

That acceptance came when I could show them that I can have achievements. That's the first moment of acceptance. At that time, I didn't expect that my father could be very proud of me. Papa rented a cinema for his employees to watch. I could feel that I can make them believe and be happy, and make them believe in my choices. From there, the acceptance started, they believed, compliant, and accepted. At first they wanted to take me to a psychologist, but I didn't want to. I remember, even though my dad was hard and my mom was soft, but they never said directly that I can't be like this and shouldn't be like that. But they explained more to open their minds that later if I change, the view of society is like this. So it was not directly confronted, it was not outright angry. But once in college, in my car, there was a women's clothing and women's shoes. At that time, my dad somehow took care of my car. One morning I was still asleep, dad took care of my car and he threw away my things by the side of the road. It described how angry he was at that time.

They never directly say bad things in front of me, and they also never say they accept, until the acceptance came through the process that I can live alone, can have a career, with my passion, and I can prove it. Finally they can support 100%. This 100% support is not straightforward, so we have to be earnestly, all of that still needs to be supported by our attitude, our behavior, complemented each other. I went back to Surabaya, changed my name as you can call me Baby, all of that is also not easy, everything is a process, it takes time. I don't really know how to do it until they finally call me by my current name, Baby.

For medical transitions, I never told my parents. Maybe they don't want to know either. So whatever I do, they do not dare to ask and they do not dare to probe, until now. Even though I once told in television about my medical transition, they never offended me at all. So acceptance is not in the form of question and answer or form of communication because maybe they really respect me. So I never mentioned my transitions. They know and see my changes but never ask. Indeed, when I was operating, I called them when at the hospital, I asked for blessings to do what I wanted. The request for blessing is one direction, more like statement than request.

My parents have two children, me and my brother, he is a married man and has children. When he was young, he opposed, until finally the acceptance came when we were both adults. So the maturity factor does affect the way of thinking and accepting. When I hadn't been accepted, I felt tormented with family events that required us to wear uniforms according to gender. But now, they don't need to ask me anymore, they just gave me female uniforms. They have given me facilities for women. They grouped me as women in family photos. It wasn't like that when I was young. The changes happened according to time, nothing changed in an instant.

Parents never casted me out. I moved because I felt I was already enough being a responsible child. I have completed all my obligations, so they couldn't argue. I really think, I have to complete my obligations first and then I can (do something I want), so maybe it's too late for me in terms of transition. When looking at the present, many are brave enough to go transition at a young age. I used to be unable to intake hormones, I was scared, still closed. I still can't be open to it. That's why I transition when I grow up, I'm too late to decide my choice. Although it is possible now that access to information is quite easy, but first when I was in the entertainment industry, there was already such information but I didn't have courage. Because of that family factor, too. Friends behind the scenes are fine. In the entertainment industry, what matters is good attitude, good behavior, and be a pleasant person, that should not be a problem.

Here we can also understand that sometimes other people can become family. I'm just really lucky because my parents and family, I acknowledge them, and I really achieved what I wanted. They can't do anything because I don't bother them, I don't ask for a penny from them. Yes, life takes time, so we do not make people offended, parents are shocked, let them enjoy everything with a process, so that they see with their own eyes without having us to explain. They can accept because they finally understand. That we are like this, so yeah. Maybe this is an old fashion way, but that's it. Finally, without us needing to ask or demand, without us expecting anything, everything happens naturally from that acceptance and understanding.

My parents educated me strictly. My brother and I are not much different, so we were educated together, we were given the same facilities. The same education, means no distinction. All must learn and be smart. There is

nothing at all discriminated. But my brother and I grew up with different personalities. My brother is a cis man, while I am a trans woman, so if someone says I grew up like this because of parental upbringing, that is not true. Or comment that this is contagious, that's not true at all. From I was little until now, I just met friends from the entertainment industry who have similarities with me in sexual matters. But from childhood, from family to school, I met ordinary people. Even so, I remain like this. So the assumption that this is contagious, that is not right, and my parents also know that education is important for anybody without having to consider their orientation and so on. I grew to be myself. I want to say that there are assumptions that are circulating, that my parents failed to educate or erroneously educate me, that is very wrong, because they have been able to educate me and not distinguish its process from my brother. The same education, but different results, because we become ourselves. We are different, even though we are one blood and one gene. Parents never educate me to be a woman, surely every parent educate their children properly.

About what's real for what's believed

***Kesya** is currently active in her career as a fashion model, in and outside the country.*

I realized that I was born in the wrong body since childhood. Not something that happened suddenly to be like this. So from kindergarten. I dress up to schools with boots and hairstyle as I want. I know there are genetic influences because when I went to the doctor and took hormonal tests, the results showed that my blood estrogen level is higher (than normal range). I don't have hair, I don't have an Adam's apple, so maybe those are what caused me to think I was born in the wrong body. I always wear clothes in different ways. I dress up so girly, despite my family responded "*What are you doing*?" I responded, "*What's wrong? I like it.*" Big family knew what I wore. To school, I wore mascara, it was in junior high school. I was not ashamed of myself because in my mindset there is nothing wrong. Like there is no feeling that what I feel is wrong and I have to change. So it's basically the way it is.

I never even considered myself as a gay man. No, I wanted to be a woman. The family wasn't shocked at the time, but it's rather so predictable. My mother really supports me, whatever it is. Because, I was not smart like other girls, I was just a normal student, but I never failed. Nothing like, wow, I had an achievement, not that type of girl. But I just proved I get what I want. Thank God I had the chance to work when I started college, that made me have my own money, so that I had my own saving. Even though family still supports, but at least I have my own money. I went to London School, Public Relation Program. I like fashion from I was little, and when I was in college, I got a fashion stylist job offer in a magazine, so when I was in college, I also worked. It was good for me to add my saving, there was extra money, so from there I think, this is life that I choose, so at least I need to stand up on the money of it.

I worked for fashion stylist photography, until I finally stopped working as a fashion stylist because I still had thesis to do. I heard that if I didn't graduate for 4 years, I'll have different time to graduate from my own, so in 2005 I stopped working for my thesis, finished it, then graduated. When I graduated, jobless, I didn't have any work and I had the chance to go to Kuwait to work for HnM, as their visual merchandiser. I worked in Kuwait for a year. I have started to transition since I was a child because since I was little I had started using women's clothing, it's just natural for me. I returned to Indonesia in 2008, and went to Germany in 2009 for a fashion short course. In 2010, I went back, I just had hormone therapy, if I wasn't wrong.

I met my friend, he said *"You should take hormone, quick!"* At first, I was scared, I thought I'm fine like this.

He said, *"No! It's because you're afraid you cannot cum, mood swings,"* He continued, *"Well life is about choices. You might not cum but you will cum when you look at your body in front of the mirror."*

Then I said, *"Huh? Are you crazy?"*

He asked, *"How old are you now?"*

"24"

"Hurry, before the age of 25!"

I really remember that. Why? Because he said the age 25 is the maximum age for physical development. The changes won't be as good as the young ones. That's why (trans) in Thailand are good. Because they were starting their hormone therapy at young age. Well yeah, after that, I was working in a magazine. Mood swing, in a car that I can cry and scream alone … oh, my mood swing was so severe that I finally had to see a doctor. I went to a doctor until the hormone level was checked and blood was taken early in the morning. It must be early in the morning. I had to continue to use estrogen hormone cream and it costs a lot. In that year, I took blood check in Prodia early in the morning, because blood collection must be before 10 a.m. At that time, hormones in human body is in good condition. I remember it took me numerous of ampoules, because doctor didn't want to do hormone therapy if

the calculation was not correct. Can't be careless, for the risk of cancer. It takes so long to take Androcur pills. And finally, I take it regularly until now.

Uhm ... what is it, I don't know, I've never felt ... It's like this, I'm so blessed because I have a mother who supports me and whatever it is because I want to make her proud. At that time, in 2008 or 2009 I forgot, I was hired to be a model at the modeling agency. That was my first fashion show in Jakarta. I believe that *what you believe what it's gonna be*. That's what I believe. Because from I was little, I wanted to be a model. I wanted to be in the cover of a magazine. I want to be this, I want to be that. That happened. Somehow, yes, God, thank God I've experienced. It really happened. But it's not like, God, please realize it, no, I need to work hard, I need to do diet, that leads to what happen. When that happens, I like, Oh my God, what I want, I'm getting it. But yes, the point is, if you believe, you're gonna get what you wish for. So, if you say, I am very grateful, that's correct. I'm kind of religious person, even though I don't pray every day. I pray only on my birthdays and new years. I never had party on my birthdays or new years. I disallowed my friends to surprise me. *"I don't need surprise, I need to pray."* Because for me, there's a time, God gave you extra life, extra blessings. Yes, I'm Muslim. I believe God is everywhere.

So if I say I'm religious, I am not very religious, but I still do worship. The transition process is indeed not instant, so the parent's response is also not immediately shocked. They were not surprised. One day I got scorned, until finally ... let's put it on this way, there is no turning point to change 180 degrees, but they are denial. I never go home to change clothes and act, I was just like that. Until one day my cousin married, and I wasn't close to my father. He always busy. It's not because he doesn't like me, but because he always does work work and work, so there's no time for me, I have a father figure issue. That's it. I wasn't close to my dad's family because they are too strict and narrow minded, that's the way it is. Unlike my mother's family, whom they have lived abroad and went back to Indonesia, it is very different. Then, my father's cousin was married, and he was like, *"Kesya, please, come."* Okay, this was really like, oh my God, and that my boyfriend was returning to his village in Italy. And I couldn't dress up ridiculous, NO! Okay I'm gonna come, I said. Then I once told my best friend, *"You came with me, you acted as my boyfriend."* Okay. It was drama ... not drama, it was more like I was excited, I wanted to throw up, everything was like ... once they found

out, everyone was blown away! I knew they saw me on Facebook. But I never saw them directly, so, every Eid, I always go abroad. Because family gathers and I don't like it, I don't do chit chat. And I need to be … oh … I hate to see the way they look at me, judging … which was like *"Nice, but I know you're talking behind me."*

Until finally, it came like in a movie, the elevator opened, *dang*, I immediately took my friend's arm, she saw me, my aunt. I was nervous, but went straight to my aunt, *"Hi! Aunty"* and my aunt was like, *"Oh hi!"* My friend was like *"Seriously? You dare to come and dressed up?"* I wore a long dress. It could be the biggest earthquake you can imagine. All of that until photo session in the wedding, my grandfather arrived … some of them were very happy. 20-30% of them. And they were taking pictures with me, *"Kesya, please take a photo,"* that's how it was. My cousin said, *"Oh my God, thank God, you came."* That was really shocking moment until my mom … and my best friend is that close to my family, so he kissed her hand, people were like, *wow, they're blessed!* Mom was proud. *That's my daughter.* But the other side, my dad was straight faced. He is the first child in the family. His family were straight faced as well and his cousins asked for a photo with me, and I was like *"Okay, why not."*

I went home. When I got out, I bursted, oh my God! My best friend said, *"I became a witness of your life."* And when I went home, my friends asked … *"How is it?"*

Two or three days later, my father said, *"I wanna talk."* I replied, *"On what?"* There was mom too. It's sad, we cried, three of us.

Father said, *"You don't respect father, you don't respect me as the first son."*

I just asked, *"Do you want me to be happy? Or do you want me to be what you want? If you want me to be what you want, I would do, but I'm not happy. This is me, so what, I've never asked you anything, you want me to go to school, I go to school, and I stand on my feet. Even though I still got monthly allowance, I never ask like I want an iPhone, no."*

At that moment, mom just kept quiet. My dad was furious and angry all the time.

Then I asked, *"Do you think it's easy?"* I said. *"No. Do you think I want to be like this?! No. I don't want to. If there are options A, B, C, I will not choose D."*

I mean, logically, I explained to them that I had been to a doctor. At that time, when Prodia checked my blood, I said I just wanted to take a health status test. *"What is that for? Do you think I'm stupid?"* It's been a long time, my dad and I argued for hours, until my mom stated, *"You know what, you are my child, whatever you are, you are still my child and I'm the one who gave birth to you, I'm the one who raises you, so whatever it is, you're still my kid! I've never asked anyone's approval."* At the time we argued, mom was just quiet, but then she finally said things like that.

I cried on that. Not because I'm sad, but rather angry. Because I felt they see my cousins who are married and already have children, that's the symbol of they're having a normal life, which is work, marriage, and having children.

Then I said, *"You know what, actually I don't want to go back to Indonesia when I was in Germany."*

Dad said, *"Why didn't you?"*

I actually am a very soft person, but if attacked, I was angry with wrath until finally I said, *"Do you have time for me since I was a kid? No? What you did is only work work work work work."*

"But that's for you."

"No, it's not for me, it is your job to raise me because you are my father." So I'm not acting. In the past when I was in school, I was not a mess or problematic student, did not repeat class or anything.

After that moment, everything was normal. I introduced my boyfriend, and my boyfriend stayed at home.. And my father loved him so much. When my mom said that, I honestly felt sad and *wow, I didn't expect it!* In my little heart, I believe in that. But I never thought he would be like that. It's a part of my life. If I can give a message, it would be like this. Life is hard. Not only for transgender, but it's also hard for cisgender.

So if you want to say transgender has hard life, the difficulty is not in the public eye. It is very important to know yourself, that is also important. It's the hardest thing. In my opinion, I salute to my fellow trans who are proud of who they are. I do believe I'm a woman. And I feel it is better for people to know me not as beautiful sexy person, but as someone who works in the fashion industry, it's not '*that*' Kesya. They'd better know me as a fashion consultant or fashion stylist. As stated in the beginning, *what you believe is what you're gonna be*. I do believe in miracle, I woke up like ... wow. I do believe that!

For parents' acceptance, I actually respect the tradition, but I don't follow the rules. If parents don't accept me, it's okay. Simply put, I do respect them but I have my own way. I'm happy to be accepted by my parents. Back when I was little, I was taken to a psychiatrist. I was invited to play and I didn't know what it was. I remember all Sailor Moon's birthday. All Sailor Moon! I didn't realize until I reach my adulthood. My parents tried to make me no different. Until the teacher was brought in too, taekwondo teacher. I transformed taekwondo uniform into kimono. My parents knew that I'm different, so they tried to make me 'normal'. When I came out, they were not shockingly surprised. Yes, I am really that hard, so, accept me as I am or see me as I go.

About privilege of family acceptance

***Fiqi** is currently living in the Netherlands to end a long distance relationship with her partner, and start a new life there. She's a trans woman who was born on March 12, 1990, and is studying cooking, improving, and honing Dutch language, which was his study program back in her University, while looking for an ideal job.*

Back in my childhood, I was already aware (if I am trans) because I chose toys that were toys for girls. I have never bought Barbie or Polly Pocket, but Barbie Power Ranger, Trini and Kimberly whose hair and clothes are replaceable, from everyday clothes to ranger costumes. I used to have Barbie and Polly Pocket, but it was given from my cousin, not from my parents. So, now that I have my own money, I start to collect women's toys.

From the kindergarten, I had a crush not onto women. If I played with friends, I wanted to have women's role. I remember when kindergarten, I used to imitate the scene of The Little Mermaid with friends, and I became Ariel. I used to have a crush on my friend who became a prince. When playing console games, I definitely picked a female character. So from childhood, I already liked the role of a woman.

It was different times back then, what did you know about trans? I also wondered, why am I different? In elementary school, I already had different choices on clothes; purple shirts, flare pants, and purple converse shoes. There is also purple cupboard and wall in my room, while my bed cover is floral. Books and stationery are all purple. You can see it's all feminine. I like purple actually because of mom, at first I liked pink and asked for a pink room. But mom gave purple, maybe because it's not too girly. After that, I became loving that color.

When I was in elementary school, I was often teased called "banci" (sissy) by my friends, but they never overdid it. But I often pranked by boys, threatened to be killed, strangled, or doused with dirty water and others. Maybe it's

because I look spoiled weak, and they played harsh. I always complained to my mom, and mom would immediately call the child's parents and convey the situation so that their parents apologized. After the incident, the boys actually became pretty good friends.

In junior high school, I started to have a lot of girlfriends, right. We formed a gang with all girl members. When we went home after school, my friends usually hang out at my home, because it's close to school. Confided to each other. Even so, my friends only knew that boys should like girls. There was one point, friends are eager to know, who do I like actually. In those days, puberty, people started to date. So I said I like someone, a girl friend of mine, even though there really wasn't any feelings, just to cover up. Then I really tried to like her, but I couldn't, cause I don't like women.

When in high school, my mom said that I had to start changing, may be because she was worried, fear that I wouldn't be accepted by friends. I remember my shoelaces were purple, and mom was very worried, she asked for a change. But I ignored her, I still used it because I like it. In high school, my friends very well accepted. Still people teased, but rarely people called me a sissy.

When I was in high school I also began to know the term trans. Because there were alumni from the school whose case was the same like me, so many teachers compared me with her. When we conducted high school art festival, male students must be security, but I refused and just want to be cleaning section, with other female students. Seniors gave permission. It turned out that when I was in the cleaning section, they also compared me to trans senior because she was also a cleaning section. I began to find out about her and knew she was starting to change. So I just knew that "trans" term from this. There was an Internet at that time, so I started to know all of those things.

In high school I also began to be active in *Saman* dancing, all of the members were female. Because my high school was quite far from home while I had a lot of activities, I often stayed at female friend's house, and their families also didn't mind that. So you could say my "trip" was pretty smooth. Even so, I was not open up to my friends. I still lie that I like that person, the same

person I like in junior high. The fact is, I had a crush on male student. Moreover, high school was the time that people like each other and date.

When I entered college, I was able to express myself more freely. Because when I was in high school, I wasn't allowed to have long hair and must wear uniforms and all kinds. After college, I began to be able to explore clothes and other things and started to open up with friends. I also started to open, share with friends if I like guys. I don't like girls because I want to be a girl. I don't like men's stuff and everything. My friends can accept that.

From there, I know what my gender identity is. Even if you are a guy but you have a crush on guys, that's something too, but I just don't feel like that. I don't want to be a man, I'm more comfortable being a woman than being a man. Simply put, many do not know that sexual orientation and gender identity are different things. There is a trans woman who likes women. So, her gender identity is a woman, but she also has a crush on women. Coincidentally, my sexual orientation is I like men and I am indeed comfortable being a woman.

Even now I rarely talk about this to parents, but just to know each other enough. Once after dance performance, I had to wear make up, then asked *"Why do you wear eyeliner?"* Then I was confused about how to explain it. I just said, I like men but I'm not comfortable being a man. I cried. I couldn't explain anymore. My parents were also silent, and since that time, they never talked about it seriously anymore.

Everything goes hand in hand and it has never been discussed again. Over time, eventually they knew the process and all kinds of things. Of course I'm afraid of being scolded, but it's just, this is what I want. I just thought, after a long time, surely my mom would accept it because from childhood, mom would know, but she maybe just denied it. I understand that we were not educated about this, especially this topic was considered taboo. It's just that as time goes on, people know about it better. If only I knew about this earlier, maybe it won't be too late.

I was afraid of not being accepted by the real family, afraid of being dumped, ostracized or whatever. But luckily my family isn't like that. I am grateful for my environment, my family and friends, even though there are contradictions,

but I feel I have the privilege of a family who accepts and friends who support. Even though I actually realized there was a friend that I knew was not supportive, because someone said that they supported the transition, but after we met, their comments were *"How come you are like this now."*

To my family, I still hope that they accept me for who I am, this is me, just pray for the best. I admit the way my family accepted is good and I'm grateful to have a family who can accept it. Forgive me if I made a mistake.

When I was in college, I also joined the dance community at UI (Universitas Indonesia). I met a friend who shared the same path as me, we exchanged ideas. In that dance community, we are required to dance as men. Initially, we were given dance routine that can be danced by men and women, but in the second year, female and male dance routine was separated. Ady, my friend, decided to stop.

I actually don't like it. But I've been comfortable with this community and my friends are there. I'm also a person who tends to FOMO (fear of missing out), so I just swallowed it even though I didn't like it.

My hair has started to grow long, and I dressed in women's clothes, so I have started venturing into the women's toilet. It was only when I dance I had to be a man, I just acted when I danced. After dance, I'm back to being myself.

At that time my community offered me to go to Tunisia, carry out a cultural mission with a requirement that I had to cut my hair and dress like a man there. I obeyed, because good opportunities shouldn't be rejected, as I thought.

I borrowed my brother's clothes, Reza, so I can wear it there, but still my style looked feminine, still androgyneous. The Tunisian people were flirtatious and many were teasing. Even I was harassed several times by people there. No matter how I try, I was still girlish. My seniors were angry and rebuked me. The reason was because we all represented UI, and we were dealing with the Indonesian Embassy in Tunisia.

There was time for me to have short hair for two years because of this, to take part in a cultural mission to Europe next year. It was a Agyness Deyn

season of style, so I thought I was a short-haired girl. Seniors have started not to be too strict with my makeup while we didn't dance, but still have to pick a men's toilet (rather than women's). When I was in Spain, the bathroom was open so that if I take a shower, it's like everyone can see me. I had to get up early in the morning for a shower without anyone watching.

After graduating I started to apply for work. At that time, I was accepted as the editor of Cita Cinta magazine under Femina Group. I was lucky because this company can accept me as I am, with my makeup. CC office was in the Wisma Kodel, shared floor with several other companies. Femina even granted my request to change my email and business cards with the name I wanted. But once I got called by HRD because someone from another company complained because I entered a women's toilet. Eventually I should avoid the toilet on that shared floor and use the ground floor toilet or in the Femina Building toilet. It's impossible for me to enter a men's toilet because they will certainly be uncomfortable, even if I went into a men's toilet, the guard said *"Sorry Ma'am, the women's toilet is over there."* So this doesn't matter anymore.

I have started to have my own income, this made me even bolder to express myself. I also started hormone therapy. I had stopped several times, so I finally went to a psychiatrist to get permission for hormone therapy through a doctor. I also started a relationship with a man, actually it started from the third year but it didn't work.

Now I live in the Netherlands. Hormone therapy and gender affirmative surgery are covered by health insurance in this country. However, I have not determined whether I will do the surgery or not. Citizens can determine the gender section on their passports and IDs without having to carry out surgeries. If I have been living for 3 years in this country with my partner and have passed the integration test, I can change citizenship and my gender in the ID.

Because my ID still states me as man, many ask why my ID is written like that, so I have to explain, that I am a transgender. Even though it was written "man" on my ID, the doctor's administration is currently listed me as woman, because when I registered I was asked what gender should they check on form based on my wish.

About question to moving forward or go backward

***Rani** is currently active in the education and creative production industry, having a hobby of traveling and reading world history.*

I don't know whether being trans is by choice or by chance, but the presence of my dad is always there. He was aware that his child is different from any other children. When my dad saw me I was different when I was little, he wondered how does he raise me. Seems there's a particular expectation. He saw signs on me, like asked for a doll, and other different toys. I thought I was gender dysphoria when I saw my male and female cousins. I only wanted to play with my female cousins and didn't want to play with male cousins. And one who talked to me wasn't my mom, it's my aunt. She said, *"You don't play dolls, just play cars!"* And I casually replied *"Oh no, I can't play?"*

Fast forward to a few years later, I did not experience bullying in school. But the question about gender identity came since I questioned myself regarding my sexual orientation, like wow, why do I like men? And I don't know if this happens and is experienced by most trans people like me, but my male friends pay more attention to me. Maybe because it's noticeable, there's someone else beyond this body. But when in junior high and high school, I never confirmed. Some friends asked questions either as a joke or serious. I didn't face bullying a lot. Because the way I walked and dress were actually relatively the same. It's more dapper than other guys, but it didn't show signs that "disturbing" visually.

Until finally, in high school, I experienced a crisis of confidence to join SNMPTN (national selection test for university), especially to choose a university that would be registered by many students. Not because I was not confident about my academic achievement, because I was proud to my academic achievement, but at that time, I had fear regarding my future. Like, when I'm 25 or 35, would humans who are "less normal" like me be

successful? Is there a safe option that helps my life? We can talk about career later, because I have passion, I always liked fashion. I wanted to choose the safe path and explore myself. Thank God, I was supported by my parents, especially my mom. I have never said anything personal, both my romantic and sexual life. And at that age, I did not sexually active. But I felt at that time, whether it's not the time, I wasn't ready, or I was not brave enough, I don't know, which direction I will be taken.

I spent two years in fashion institutions, gathered with a heteronormative environment, but it turned out that I was not impressed or had crush on men who also like men. Even though fashion school is the "center" (of gay men). Friends who hanged out at my home and spent their night, are women. They were fine and their parents didn't even mind, what's wrong with this? Am I that trusted? Until finally, my senior at this fashion school invited me to chat, and he asked, *"Don't you like me?"*

"What? Of course not. I don't have a crush on you," and he said, *"I think you're not a man. Have you ever heard the 'transgender' term?"*

"Oh yeah, I think I saw that being portrayed in porn industries, I mean, I haven't seen them in real, but I know there are people who are beyond gay."

When he said that, honestly, I was afraid that people had guessed that Rani was gay. But I feel that was relatable, despite the fact that I am beyond sexual orientation. Hello, this is Indonesia, what am I supposed to do with that? Excited but nervous at the same time. Because in the end, I was introduced to some other trans people. At that moment, I felt immediately standfast. Okay, this is it. I didn't think about religion, law, or anything, basically I knew that that's my identity.

At the same time, I wanted to continue my education elsewhere, so I felt that this was the right time to express myself, like, go, try it. Well, between those times too, I developed secondary androgynous traits like this, okay, I like guys, rather than I went to the fitness center to hangout with guys, I prefer to go to salon instead. In the end I had hair smoothing, manicure, eyebrow shaping before it was cool, wore mascara discreetly, hair had been extended, wore a cotton ink shirt, wore leggings (and thank God it fitted perfectly), tank

top, cardigan, and slowly but surely, my friends realized, they just got my message and get my point.

But, when it comes to family, mom at that time, when I hung out with her, she actually noticed several times, for example, waitress or security in the elevator prefer to call me "mbak" (miss), and she saw me smile and I didn't refuse to be called "mbak". I just smiled and in the most personal scope, my mom and I were in massage, in the same room, with other women, and we didn't talk until finally my mom was like, not like outing but just questioning, *why did they allow my child to enter girls area*?

Until finally, when she escorted me, thank God, I could continue my education in Milan, at that time I also had an internship with another trans girl, I thought this was the sign of the universe. It's fixed. When finally I wanted to continue my education and leave my mom, she approached me, "*Hey, I know what's been happening. Aunts are asking, grandparents too.*" She didn't want to out me or come out. I didn't want to come out, neither did she, but she finally came out, hardly, "*Do you want to be a woman?*"

I immediately cried, like, wow, the words came out finally. I wished it could have been done sooner before that, but yeah, maybe it was the right moment because we will be separated far away, and I was very lucky that the words came out were, "*Do you want me to help you go forward, or do you want me to help you go back (being a man)?*"

I'm sure she was actually clueless, she said "*I have no reference, but I'll accompany you, it should be clear whether you want to go forward or go back?*" The next day, she had to return to Jakarta. We were separated for about a year. Honestly, from my own side, I was afraid of being thrown away, I was afraid that I would not be considered, I made sure that I went for achievements, achieving something. Simply put, in case in emergency something happens, I was far from her, I had a reason not to spoil. Because I don't know anything psychologically as an only child, but I feel I'm not spoiled, but I might have a spoiled mentality. I'm the only child anyway. When asked whether I wanted to be helped forward or backward, I thought, after all this time, and from this conversation, I have been using unisex clothes for 8-9 months. My hair at that time has grown long beyond my neck and I precisely remember, back to university orientation, all those who would

become friends in class had referred me "that Indonesian girl", so I thought this was a safe step for me to start the transition.

I felt this was a safe step, because I read in many articles, a lot of rejection in the society that happened because trans individual proclaimed herself as trans, but they did not have the expression that was expected by the society. So I knew the inconvenience people had when it happens. In the previous months, I really experienced what was called suffering to pee when I walked with my friends. Let's say, I left at 5 in the afternoon and came home at 1 am, I kept my pee. Eventually, I went to a place where the bathroom was unisex, not a mall, but kind of restaurant or so, because I was scared, and often got confused, even though people called me "miss", but if there were friend of my friend who wanted to get acquainted, my friend was confused how to introduce me.

So I waited for long time to be brave, because gender affirmation is indeed needed. Mom monitored, supported, and helped my journey from a distance. But one thing she said at that time was, "*Always remember God.*" I am Muslim by the way. And the funny thing is, I was obviously not prepared with *mukena*,[1] just prepared a *sarong*.[2] So at that time, I prayed irregularly, because time after time, I was convinced that I didn't want to be a man. The more I think about it, the more I know I'm a girl and I have to be there.

At that time, there was a booming TV series called Glee, which really supported and shaped my mindset to be a positive trans. Not being victimized by my transition. Not asking for sympathy or support, even, imagine, me, my transition journey was far from my parents, which was purchasing my first make up was really unlike makeup at all, just mascara and eyebrows, didn't understand how to apply with brushes, all thanks to YouTube and exercised by myself. One day I put a very good liner, the next day forget how to, forget the way it was yesterday, crisis about my hair, sometimes it was good, but sometimes it wasn't, and the insecurity that plays out. At that time I incessantly tried to show it to others. I used Blackberry Messenger, so it was on my BlackBerry Messenger or Facebook profile picture. Fortunately, there was still social monitoring, so my mom sometimes said, "*Hey, don't dress like that*" or "*Hey, your blush on is just too*

[1] Hijab, female Muslim worship clothes
[2] Male Muslim worship clothes

much". That's to prevent me from being too flashy. So thank God until I returned from there (Milan) I was not so sexually explorative, I was a good child at that time. I dressed up saliently back in Jakarta, because I wanted to give a look to someone who had been a friend, that I had succeeded so. But it applies to every trans. They just want to be seen. Thanks to the era of social media, there is no Instagram yet, there is no Path, only Facebook and blackberry profile picture, my friends did not give negative reactions.

They saw it like, *oh it's time*. So it's not the one who was shocked or opposed, and even their parents who are close to me also saw like, *See? It was okay to let Rani stay with the kids and let kids stay at Rani's house*. Because they knew that the ultimate goal, the final manifestation is physical appearance follows the inner feelings, follows its mentality.

The person I most thankful for is my mom, she prepared the neighborhood for me. You can imagine, I was abstained from home and its surroundings for almost a year, she prepared the closest people from neighborhood, household assistants, neighbors, friends, and family (who can see directly), from the social side, *you can not call her "mas"*[3] *again*, and so I realized it was one of the advantages when she asked me to go forward or go back. It's all happened gradually, but slowly. Although she has a medical background, but we did not know there was this option. We didn't know there was an option for surgery, we didn't know there was a specialist for this, and we didn't know what doctor that we can count on.

It's one step at a time. What was in our head at that time, we did it. Really. I was really shocked at that time, finally I had come home, it took me a year in Milan, because the only child who was loved and missed finally went home. Even though Mom actually knew maybe it's better for me to explore myself there. But yeah, I didn't want to be far away from mom. I used to learn to wear heels there. At that time, I did reshuffle my wardrobe with clothes that prices equal with food, I immediately reshuffled my wardrobe. And it felt like ... I could wear this, wear that, like, oh v-neck worked for me, crew neck didn't work, this dress suited me, *blablabla*, with a body that hasn't lost its baby fat and still hasn't lost its masculinity or formed because I also didn't do sports before that. One mom's kindness is to prepare people around, and I actively asked myself *what's next*, I choose a fashion career, and did not choose

[3] In english: sir or mister, a pronoun added to call a male figure.

university that other people choose because I knew the risks. Change direction from my mom and dad's scene, I broke all tradition path. That means, I had to make my own way. I had to find work, where did I find work? I prepared the path as well as possible and at that time I experienced nervousness of job interview. Nervous to disclose what was listed on my ID card is something that Human Resources don't really expect.

But thank God that discrimination in workplace does not exist for me, I am more comfortable to work on my profession. Now, it is project-based, but it suits me, because if I want to do it aggressively, I will do it aggressively, if I want to lay down, I can do it too, but then again, I am responsible to myself. So I am more comfortable working. Previously, I started working with my senior. I passed 3 job interviews, but I only took one, it didn't last long because I contributed more to many parties, but it could be project based.

But yeah, one thing that I can suggest is that … I wish … I can make up all of my lack of mentality inside … I keep escaping, right? I think I just choose to walk safely. Because I need to protect myself, to protect … I don't know, even though when you think about it, those people are not as bad as I thought if I was not evil to myself. One thing that I'm grateful for, but on the other hand it's like I look in the mirror, that surely not everyone is as lucky as I am. Because at that time I was involved in many fields, production, and so on, I saw some trans people, I actually asked what happened to them that makes them didn't want to join common people, cis majority. Most of them do not dare to continue their studies, they do not dare to apply for jobs, I mean, even though it was not my authority to say while I was only aged 22-23 years old at that time, and had not yet achieved something, yet no income, and also had a fear that if I talk to people about it maybe they would be offended, I hope as time goes by, when I have enriched myself with experiences and things that can make people inspired, the stronger the person, the bigger their voice will be heard, so more people will listen. I just, okay, let's go for achievements first, get life experiences so that my voice can be appreciated and more able to be heard, because there are so many girls like me who are better if they are engaged in young age, from childhood. Because by achieving all the achievements, they can improve.

However, people will look at her, people can see her achievements. To prove we are not what they think. And yes, the most important foundation is family.

It is the family that finally shapes our mindset. Families who are going to talk, who will say no or say yes first to us, and families who will eventually not leave us, not friends, not anyone. Especially when we get sick. I know, my mom, she was opposed by her *pengajian*[4] many times. But she never sought for justification, even though I am her child, the understanding that she sought was the wisest statement. Mom also believes that the child is entrusted by God. What will be accounted later is not what the child will be, but how parents raise their children. It's process oriented, not the goal oriented. In religion I am trusted by God, it's different from humans. As humans, we make a thousand goodnesses but still focus on one bad thing, while for God, 1000 crimes can be erased by one good thing.

So, we can see from this point of view, okay, I violate one or two verses of the Qur'an, but there are thousands of other verses that explain what a good human is like. That's what I'm taught. Mom always teach me that. Don't drop out of school, don't give up hope. So gradually it leads us to a different journey. I've been looking for a doctor, looking for a psychologist, and yes it takes time. This does take time, not happening instantly. Being trans is a lifetime commitment, until we feel everyday is a new day, a new challenge, when we are going to any stage every day, we are always overshadowed by our insecurity. In terms of relationships, on the other hand, we also have a lot of shadows.

For parents, come out is a very early stage, but assisting in every process is important, let alone making the child communicative. One thing that amazed me from mom, she apologized once, that she was not the first person to be trusted by me to discuss this matter. Because when we talked about this, I said that my friends already knew. It turned out that my words became a culprit for her and made she realized, *where has she been*. It was not just my friends, but my aunt has also realized. Until my aunt said to my mom, "*Where have you been?*" It made her realize why she had been in denial all this time to keep her feelings and feelings of her child. "*How come the children themselves don't believe me?*"

I learned, when someday I become a parent, I have to make sure the child believes in me. If my child cannot talk, it is important to make them comfortable. Yes, every child is different, in fact, we as trans are different in

[4] Muslim recitation, usually only consists of one gender members

each step There is a friend of mine who has finished affirming her gender but does not change her legal aspects. There is a friend who wants to change their ID but don't want to affirm her gender.

Indonesia is not a perfect country. I must admit that our mentality as trans often drive us to run away, we want to be safe. But for parents, creating a safe space at home is important, so that we don't have an avoiding mentality, that's the happiest thing, because we are with Asian culture, we will return to our family eventually. Additionally, we don't know our future for now. The family we have surely have to make the situation as comfortable as possible. One thing that needs parents, whose children are trans or not, understand is that small fights with parent will always occur. As bad as I am right now, mom doesn't like me to wake up late or lazy at home. So if there's a discussion or disagreement with something, she never brings the issue or words that I'm trans. That's it, never carry it. In fact, she never brought up this (my emotion) is because I am in hormone therapy. So I'm really considered as her daughter, even when I was younger who still liked going out at night, mom gave me video references, talk about risks or threats for women are everywhere, from strangers, public transportation or whatever, woman should protect herself.

On the other hand, now I understand why parents are very protective to their daughter. I respect my body now. I understand the importance of health and hygiene, and public toilets. I can also appreciate my mom better now. I understand the embarrassment of wearing too short clothes. I used to be very proud when men saw me, but now, I'm more into sell my brain, sell my personalities. So one of them is, like, it's time to be part of a forum that can channel aspirations for market sharing, for community. I am more comfortable sharing myself rather than make people do not dare to ask or discuss. Friends can understand more about how to treat trans women. Because there are so many comments like *"She is not woman enough,not girly enough."* I mean like, it's hard to be trans. Both mentally, or financially. The point comes from there, I might know some trans people, from whom we can set a good example. I tried to remind each other.

And my mom, I'm amazed, because in this life, I can only see from my perspective. While she, as a mother, can see how the people around me pay attention to me. Her baggage is actually heavier. So when she gave me a

choice of help, I felt all my burdens lifted. Before that, I didn't dare to be honest because there was a thought that I would be expelled or thrown away. And even formed a concept that I won’t answer before asked. So, like, at that time, my friend was MBA (married by accident), she didn't tell her parents, but she did wait until it looked big, after that she just dared to talk to her parents. Although it's rather similar, because people have to call me "she" first. But I don't regret whether you want to transition at the age of 19, 24, or 13, I think all of us have our own timeline. If parents are not ready, maybe their children are not ready either. But yes, every trans woman has their own stories. And it’s beautiful!

STORIES FROM THE FAMILIES

About a prayer to understand your child

***Aunt Nina** is a medical worker who is active in the society.*

Back then, I didn't know, because (my child) was born as a male. Then I raised her as usual. However, her habits were different from her friends. She was befriended with girls, and yes, she was very coquettish.[5] Her hobby was collecting barbie dolls, collecting hair cosmetics and asking me about that. If she leave the house, she always asked for hair, skin, lips, nail polish cosmetics. Every time we hang out, she always asked to buy cosmetics. I didn't think anything. She didn't want to buy car toys. Even though siblings gave her, it was not played. Almost always returned to make-up. She didn't like playing football, or playing in front of the house with neighbors, she was not interested. In fact, I signed her to join taekwondo in the elementary school, but at the end she came home crying. Her thumb was bleeding because she had to walk and run kicking, she was crying and said *"I don't want to do it anymore."* Even though her *taekwondo* uniform was still good. I still didn't think anything when she was in elementary school.

I did not ask God either. I did not comment or ask God. It's just that, I followed my daughter's development which led her to like girl toys. But too girly toys, like jump rope, she didn’t like it. She was more into moderate girl toys.

Once I had short house dress, if she wore it, it was just too long on her, then she asked to be photographed, ask to be photographed and continue to act on stairs and asked for photos. She raised the dress and said, *"Beautiful, right?"* Not enough there, she asked for high heels. She started wearing high heels. I thought it's normal because I am a pediatrician myself and I handle

[5] In Indonesia context, it means, extremely girly

many children as usual. The one who felt uncomfortable was my sister, but she didn't say it.

Those who were aware of my child's difference was my sister, because moms in school were also used to see my child as usual, she had beautiful hair bangs, it's no problem for them, so I also thought it's not a problem. She needed 3 months to learn to bike, not like any other boys. In junior high school, this was hard for me. Not because my child was different, I still loved her. But her stubbornness. She was negativist to me back in junior high. I was confused, what did she want? All of her friends were girl. But because I thought maybe she was still befriended with some boys as well. Her female friends said, they feel safe befriended with Rani. I did not understand.

I live in a different house with her dad. He likes to say, *if the child is different, make her return to the right path. Why is she so girly? Is it because she's far away from me*? Her dad reminded me, but never said certain signs. Just said, if she's slipped, make her back to the right path. I finally said, let's go to a psychologist. At that time, it was not because she is trans, but because she was so stubborn, maybe it was because of shame or was not brave enough to open her mind. I didn't understand the rhythm in her head..

She was smart, with achievements, often praised in neighborhood. But at home, *oh gosh*, she was naughty. When she was in high school, season of UNPTN,[6] her teacher called back and forth. Her diploma has been prepared by school. The school called and told that my child hasn't registered anywhere. Every time of the UNPTN, she didn't want to register. At that time, I did not understand why she felt that way because I didn't think thoroughly.

Suddenly I was called on a career day at school. Every student who was accepted was announced to which university, and she was accepted to one of the fashion schools. She was just, "*Mom, I already registered there, you can just pay for it.*" I was not against it, because it seems that she had a big passion for fashion. Additionally, my deceased father (Rani's grandfather) used to start a tailor business, so I was optimistic that Rani will be responsible for her choice.

[6] Ujian Nasional Perguruan Tinggi Negeri (exam for university)

In this campus, she started to wear high wedges, with bangs. She still wore trousers, went home every day. And it seems like she had a friend on the same fate, but she still didn't understand it, so everything was still hidden. What's boiled in his heart hadn't exploded. Honestly, a year back at that time, I often saw her to be called by "*mbak*" (miss) in a public place, but she did not refuse. I chose to just be quiet.

After graduating from her diploma, she got the opportunity to continue her studies to Milan. As for me, I accompanied her to Milan. The day before I went home (from Milan) there was a conversation which wanted or not, it must be opened, before we split up for a year. She went to my feet, said "*I'm so sorry mom, please forgive me!*" She opened the laptop and gave me a look at Facebook, and gave a look at the photo, "*I'm like this but I can't show it to you.*" She kissed me while kneeling. I thought, here it is, the magma that erupted in her head. My heart also erupted too, oh the explosion was right here. I offer her wants for help, to go forward, or backwards.

I was confused about what to do, so I called my sister in Paris. I said something was suddenly exploding, and I couldn't leave my child in this condition. My sister said she already knew, when she was in junior high school, but she wasn't comfortable to talk about it, she thought we were on the same boat. I told her dad. Went home, however, the child must be accepted. Eventually we realized that it is God's gift. I just returned it to the Lord of The People, "*Ya Allah, give me strength to go forward so that I don't go astray to understand my child. Forgive me for not being aware to have different child. Give the best way to understand my child.*"

After all, I must accept God's creation. Even though they'll have three or four eyes, I must accept it. Everyone has human rights, each has the right to a decent life. So I didn't cry continuously or protest to my mother (Rani's grandmother), who also said nothing. My mother was calm. She just said, "*Your child is getting more beautiful.*" Since Italy, she has already worn a skirt. She totally changed her appearance there, updated and sent photos wearing beautiful clothes. The important thing is, that she is well educated, so I just accept it. I once sent her Al-Quran for her guidance, but I didn't send *mukena* because I wanted her to go through the process of maturing by herself.

I came to her graduation, she was dressed like a woman. Even though when she left, she dressed like a man. Back to Indonesia, we dealt with the administration. We looked for lawyers, trial in court, until her ID changed, family card changed, and court decision said that, before we look for doctor, there should be consultations with a psychologist, psychiatrist, hormone doctor, and genital doctor. They must issue a letter stating that my child deserves to be declared as a woman. So that in the court, there was only one trial, and in the second trial we received a letter stating that she is a woman, and she is working now.

I was able to explain to my neighbors. Because I also took part in the Muslim recitation. Questions like, *"Why do your child deviate even though he's good person?"* I answered, her fate is God's will. Then I collected money for the surgery. She continued her hormone therapy until her body was shaped. For the surgery, I went around asking for information to Surabaya. She browsed the info as well and said, *"Mom, I got a good one!"* She chose one doctor and agreed. We were just one voice. She's a very active girl. Before the surgery, she traveled alone to trans women Islamic boarding school in Yogyakarta. There, her eyes were more opened to Islam. She once joined a pageant for transgender people in Australia, returned home with the title of runner-up and Miss Community Service. I let her be happy in her own way.

I wish to Allah SWT that my child will find what she wants. She has a life with her harmonious partner. What made me most calm was that she left for Umrah after her legal administrations were finished. At the beginning of the transition, she said, *"If Dorce can do it, I have to do it too!"* Alhamdulillah.

About unanswered mystery

***Aunt Roosdiana** is a 53 years old housewife and entrepreneur. She has three children, active in organization, and love to gather with her friends.*

When my child was little, I still hadn't seen the signs. Yes, I saw that she didn't like to play with boys. I used to think that maybe because boys tend to be naughty, they like to prank, so I think maybe this was the reason why she liked to play with girls. But to think that she wants to be a woman, it's not that far. Although I did see she didn't like rough games and sports. It was because her brothers like rough sports, but not her. Growing up in high school, my child began to take part in dance class in high school. This continued until college. In college, I didn't monitor her activities so much, but I knew she had started wearing women's clothes. When in high school, maybe because she still had to wear a uniform, her hair couldn't be long either. But after that, she started to extend her hair and tied it up in buns. It was started in college until work, that's the time I realized. There's no way I wanted to stay away from my child or throw her away. At that time, I realized because over time, I was aware of her looks.

At that time, her father said, *"If you are like this, I'll throw and burn your clothes!"* I asked her father, why were you like that? He said he didn't like it. As time went by, it finally went all by itself. There was no frontal moment. Yes, I realized that I cannot force everyone to accept. Her father actually cannot accept it thoroughly. But I said to him, this was not her will either. Her brothers and I were confused, but I did not want to distance myself to my child.

Now she lives alone, we rarely meet. At first, her father might be uncomfortable because she dressed differently, but now it's getting better. Maybe her father adheres to religion so it's hard to accept. But as a mother, no matter what my child is, I have no heart to hurt.

I say it's better to embrace rather than she goes too far, so that we can still monitor. Because we don't know what will happen. We are worried parents. Let alone a different child, if I had a cis daughter, I'll worry too, so does to cis son. Let's get back to our religion. We cannot supervise 24 hours. We as Muslims are just keep praying, keep up with religious norms. We can only invest on that. Because even if she said yes in front of us, it doesn't mean that she cannot say no in the back, we never know. I always pray for the best, to remember God, to fear her sins. Although I still don't know whether this is indeed what has been assigned from the above or not. I think it's all a mystery that I will never know the answer.

I've never experienced people's scorn directly. Because my friends and relatives may not dare to talk about this directly, or maybe they talk about it on my back, I never knew that. As a parent, I really have to accept my child. There should be thoughts on people's mind. Let alone for my child, people still say that it's not enough even though I already wear hijab. I did buy her men's clothes, but my child wore women's clothes discreetly. In the matters of wardrobe, I already tried for the best in the past. It's the color that my child chose. When she asked Barbie, I bought Barbie power ranger.

I was surprised at first when I began to realize. I thought at first it because he was in dancing class, she was just adjusting to her peers; her hair, her look, but after that, she continued it. At first, she wore usual clothes. Later, her dress became bolder, her hair was long, untied. I had thought maybe because when I was a kid, her granny said that she's cute, so she felt herself beautiful. Because besides her are only brothers, her granny hoped that my last child is a girl. So maybe she unconsciously said, "*Oh, my pretty granddaughter.*"

Now she wants to move abroad. What I hope for is that she doesn't forget that I'm still here. So if she leaves, I give her my blessing. Just try it first, but if possible, we gather in Eid, she can come home. It's useless to forbid. If her dream is to live outside, just try it. To satisfy her curiosity, whether it's good or not. People say whatever good other country is, our own country is still best. But I don't know if she hasn't tried it yet. From the first time, I gave my child the choice, because I don't want to manage my child's life, just as I don't want to be managed. I gave all that to religion. I, as a parent, can only pray.

For now, she lives alone, in a rented room, closer to her workplace. Because if she lives with her parents, maybe she will feel her parents are fussy. Which mother isn't fussy to her own child. With her living alone, our meeting is limited, only once a week so we don't meet very often. By that, she still wants to live far, you can imagine how she will be if we antagonize her. She wants to go far away by now, even though her brothers and I never pouted, only if she went too far, we advised. She must have achievements in work for her own good.

No one frontally asked me about my child. Once our household assistant asked me about her, "*Why is he like this now?*" I answered jokingly, "*Yes, it was you who like to comb her hair like a girl when she's little*". I remember when she's little, she loved to play dolls, but children her age loved to play dolls as well. I never bought her clothes. She bought her own women's clothes after having her own income. There's no way I bought her high heels. Even though I thought it's useless to buy high heels. Because she's already tall so she doesn't need high heels. Sometimes people see her so tall. And her clothes are now normal too. If it's bling-bling or so, even if cis women wear it, people will stare. Even her brother sometimes is starred by lot of people. Yesterday, when she asked me to creambath in salon, someone asked "*Oh, so tall, Ma'am,*" that's all. It's nothing, because if you walk, you can feel it uncomfortable too. If you're going to a party, it's okay, but if it's just going to the mall, don't be too flashy, don't be the center of attention. What I hope is that my child continues to carry out her obligations as a Muslim. Don't let her forget her God.

In my opinion, as a parent, I cannot change anyone other than the person who wants to change. As parents, it would be better if we accept, if we really have to, we pray for the best. Do our task as parents, do not need to do special treatment, it's the same to other children. Every child has different characters. Even though a child not trans, each child is handled differently. We cannot impose because the situation will be uncomfortable.

Once I went to in law's house, and it was Friday. In Islam, men must pray at the mosque. I could see it from their face, as if they wanted to ask to my child. They did not ask directly, only for me, that Friday was little confusing for me. It was only like questioning looks from other people. As long as they don't

ask, I don't need to answer. If they ask, I will just explain. When Eid, siblings may just be surprised for a moment. Maybe they're confused what to talk about?

About now and scary news

Fachreza (Reza) *is the second child of Aunt Roosdiana, although his age was a little different, Fiqi and Reza looked friendly to each other. Reza is currently studying Islam and began to start an entrepreneurship.*

I saw her as a delicate child, from she was little. She rode a bicycle very carefully, she never fell. If she was scolded, she didn't rebel, immediately apologized. She was indeed a "good child" in the family, she has never been a bad child. Only she has a different choice, for example, choosing colors, she prefers soft colors, like lavender. When we chose the color for our room, she chose pink, then our mom picked purple for her. Our first brother chose blue, the second (me) chose green, then she chose pink, but mom said purple is okay. Mom frequently ask us to hang out. It was hype time for Power Rangers. I wanted to buy a Power Rangers robot. There are two female characters in power rangers, so she really wants to buy female barbie Power Rangers. I started thinking, oh my sister really likes women's items. I am close to her because she is the younger sister right after me. She was not that close to our older brother because my brother had a rough hobby, such as martial arts and basketball, I also felt that if he had this hobby, I fear that I would be hit or so. But I didn't want my sister feels what I felt from him, I'm a middle child, mediating. Several times her friends came to our house, but rarely boys.

If she asked for a haircut, she didn't want to cut it short. Once, her hair was cut short, she cried and didn't want to go to the salon anymore. She wants to be cut accompanied by me. I began to realize when she joined a dance class in high school. Her hair was a bit long. Since then, when she graduated from high school, she wore mom’s blazer. Mom didn't forbid either. At that time, we knew that she wanted to take a taxi from home wearing a man's shirt, then brought a large number of clothes to change in the taxi. As for me as a brother, I don't really mind it, maybe my dad didn’t accept it very well because there is no one like her in his family. She was never close to dad, dad

was closer to our brother, doing sports together. But Fiqi was closer to our household assistant.

In college, she's really appealing, wore flat shoes, wore women's clothes. We worked in the same office. I entered first. I did not expect that she could be admitted there. At first, she only intended to do an internship there, then she was accepted to immediately took care of Jakarta Fashion Week. At first, she only wanted to do an internship, instead, she became an employee and immediately became show manager assistant. My coworkers were shocked, *"Is that your sister?"* And there's no way I would not admit her as my sister, so I still acknowledged and was proud of her work. Her salary was even greater than mine even though I entered the office first. And she was rising rapidly, from junior to executive, it was fast, maybe people like Fiqi are multitasking, there are many talents, can do anything in any fields.

As a brother, I accept my sister that is different. As long as she can take care of herself, because there are a lot of people tease her. I feel anxious because as an older brother, I feel I have responsibility for my mom, if she comes home late at night and can't be called, of course we're worried. Nowadays, we know from the news and other sources, that we don't want something happen to our sister, worry about her safety. I am most fussy about her responsibility with herself, we must be aware that we never know people's intentions out there, must be aware and protecting ourselves for our health. I'm more like that. I believe she also still needs to pray. Our brother's wife also accepted her very much. Our niece really idolized her, even though our niece had seen photographs of the past and asked, *"Why did you wear a man's shirt? Were Auntie a tomboy?"*

Even though my sister is different, she respects our parents. I don't know how does dad really feel. I can only say, dad doesn't need to do anything, just pray, doesn't have to think much. I also said that, when she was little, dad was not that close, but now he's an old man so maybe it's time to get close. Chat or hug him. It's a dad, a man with a huge ego. Maybe a father will show his love differently.

About unanswered prayer

***Aunt Anna** is currently busy taking care of her granddaughter and spending her daily time praying.*

How to accept a different child? For me, I see it is the only way. So I accept it. The important thing is that my child lives her life right. Can successfully pass all life challenges. Because I, as a parent, am also happy if her life is happy. I used to think, why do things like this happen? She was born as a boy, why does it turn out like this? I felt my prayer was not heard, so what can I say. I had prayed that my child would become a real man. But the fact is like this. So I surrender to God the Almighty. I realized I had to accept my child because I did not want to lose my child. I gave birth to three children, but I don't want to be far from any of them. I love all my children. I'm attached to them. I don't want to discriminate. I even love and respect other people's children, for example, nephew and nieces, how can I not love my own children.

I surrender all to Him. I hope my children's lives are fine. After all, I'm old. Later the one who will live my life is my child. I would be very happy if my children could be independent and remember their family. I realized my child was different since she was little. Neighbors often insulted and mocked, other than that, I still hope that my child will become a man. That's why I enrolled her to a homogeneous school where all the students were boys. But if this is God's will, what else can I do? Indeed, many are insulting. But many also are supporting. My friends say that my child is beautiful and smart. No problem at all. Beautiful, like me when I was young. I think when people think that my child is a rebellious child, I don't think as that bad. I can't change my child. I hope my children can take good care of themselves and achieve what is good in our lives. May God give the best to my child.

I have the same opinion as my family, if possible, she should be a man, but our prayer is not answered. What can we do about it. This is God's way. I feel that this is the way it is, because there was someone who read her fortune

and he said that my child could not carry heavy items, she's too weak. So that's probably why she could not be a man.

ACCEPTANCE:

A COLLECTION OF STORIES ABOUT PARENT'S ACCEPTANCE TO TRANS GIRLS