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'I transitioned from female to male, then realised I had made a mistake'

Now 25, Cale has re-transitioned into a female CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

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By **Cara McGoogan**

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If Stella O'Malley was a child today, she is sure she would have had gender reassignment treatment. The 43-year-old psychotherapist and presenter of a new Channel 4 documentary, *Trans Kids: It's Time To Talk*, identified as a boy in the 1980s, long before [gender dysphoria](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/22/transgender-brain-scans-promised-study-shows-structural-differences/) was a common part of medical and social parlance. Uncomfortable in her skin until she reached puberty, O'Malley says she “finally connected” with her biological identity when she had her first period.

Fast forward three decades and the NHS gender identity clinic at The Tavistock and Portman in London has seen [referrals for gender dysphoria soar 2,500 per cent](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/09/16/minister-orders-inquiry-4000-per-cent-rise-children-wanting/) in nine years. Hundreds of children are being prescribed puberty blocking drugs to delay onset until they are 16 and old enough to opt for hormonal treatment. This week, 17 pupils at one school were [reported to be taking blockers](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6401593/Whistleblower-teacher-makes-shocking-claim-autistic.html), some of whom may have encouraged by peers to do so. According to research, almost every single person who takes blockers will go on to transition their gender.

However, the number of those regretting changing gender and seeking to “detransition” is also a growing area – but rarely discussed. [Professor Miroslav Djordjevic](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/health-fitness/body/gender-reversal-surgery-rise-arent-talking/), a world-leading genital reconstructive surgeon, says almost 40 people have contacted him in the past year about reversal procedures. Little research has been done into the long term effects of hormonal and surgical treatments, as academics have found themselves shut down by a backlash from transgender activists.

O'Malley investigates this sensitive topic tonight in *Trans Kids*, asking [whether we are doing children harm](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/10-years-ask-did-allow-trans-lobby-hijack-childhood/) by starting the transition process so early.

“There is no doubt in my mind that, for many people, transitioning can be absolutely the right path,” says O'Malley. “But despite all the people I've met, I'm still so uncomfortable with the idea of kids taking drugs that can cause permanent changes to their bodies. I'm haunted by the idea that there are kids out there like I was – kids that change their minds.”

Stella O'Malley meets Cale, a former trans man who chose to detransition two years ago CREDIT: CHANNEL 4

One person that O'Malley meets in her programme is Cale, a 25-year-old former trans man who chose to detransition two years ago shortly after she underwent a double mastectomy.

Cale shares her story

I had a complicated childhood. My parents divorced when I was young and I didn't fit in with my peers. I started self-harming around the age of 10. One day, while researching mental health conditions on Wikipedia, I stumbled upon the term “transgender”. Being “born in the wrong body” seemed to explain everything.

When I was about 16, I started seeking medical help in order to undergo hormonal treatment. I was the only person I knew of in my school who asked to change gender and didn't know anyone who had transitioned themselves. My Dad was distraught and took a long time to

come to terms with it, worrying he wouldn't be able to accept me as a man and that I would harm my body with cross sex hormones. My Mum, seeing how unhappy I was, said if it was what I wanted then she'd support me.

Cale was the only person she knew who had gender dysphoria CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

First, I was prescribed testosterone pills. At school, people accepted my new name, Shin, and I was never bullied, but I was obsessed about "passing" [being accepted as male]. Whenever someone thought I was female, I would correct them. Often, I'd think it was clear that I was trans, and that people were just ignoring the obvious signs. It turned me sour and I used to think: "Why can't they just accept me?" I blamed all of my problems on not passing, and thought once I had transitioned fully, people would treat me the way I wanted them to.

After a while, I became more confident, partly due to the psychological effects of taking testosterone. At 23, I decided to have a double mastectomy. I believed that once I looked "man enough", I would finally be at peace.

But even after years of taking hormones, of looking and sounded convincingly male and having top surgery, my gender dysphoria persisted. It turned out that it wasn't the hormones or surgery that would help me deal with my dysphoria and self-loathing, but the support of my boyfriend.

M has been there for me since I was 18, when I was upset about not passing. He told me that if transitioning was what I really wanted, he would support me through it. M said he accepted and loved my body, which opened the door for me to do the same. I examined my anxiety and faced my childhood traumas and made peace with them. Slowly, I learned to stop running away from myself and trying to become someone else.

The tipping point was when I saw M's sister's wedding video. I felt incredibly sad because, no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't see our wedding or future together. Imagining myself in a suit or being called "dad" just felt wrong, like I was imagining someone else's life. It didn't feel like me. Despite having been adamant all my life that I would never have kids or settle down, I suddenly wondered whether having a house and kids wasn't exactly what I wanted after all.

Taking testosterone lowered Cale's voice and made her feel more comfortable within her own body CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

Luckily, I had decided years earlier not to have genital surgery. It is very costly, requiring multiple procedures, and with no guarantee that the final outcome will look or function like the real thing. I never wanted to go through that, no matter how dysphoric I was.

Slowly, I realised that I was no longer bothered about being perceived as female or fighting gender roles. I had worked so hard to maintain an image that kept shattering that I was tired of gluing it back together, hoping it would hold. It also became increasingly difficult to administer my intramuscular testosterone injections.

There was no fanfare to my detransition. No medical analysis, no gender clinic approval and no reconstructive surgery (the surgery I had undergone was irreversible); I just stopped taking my medication. Slowly but surely, biology took over and my body reverted back to its near-natural state. In recent years, we both expected that I would detransition. It was a gradual process that we both knew was coming.

Cale had hormonal and surgical gender reassignment treatments before she chose to detransition CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

I feel at peace now, as a woman. At 25, for the first time, I am OK with my body and feel I am finally being honest with myself. I don't regret having taken the hormones or even having the mastectomy – it was necessary for me to grow as a person and to come to my own conclusion. I have also learned a lot by living as a man that I would not have been able to learn any other way.

When I first considered detransitioning, I contacted some online trans communities and was met with denial. I was banned from all but one, which asked me to leave as soon as I was "no longer identifying transgender". I remain the only person I know who has detransitioned.

It saddens me that detransitioners, who are vulnerable and lack support, get attacked by trans activists. The trans agenda preaches that you're either born trans or not – but then there are people like me, who had very severe gender dysphoria, who eagerly transitioned, and then changed their mind.

The trans lobby needs to stop bullying and censoring detransitioners. Meanwhile, the medical profession needs to make sure children can't make decisions that can permanently alter their body, delay their puberty and potentially make them infertile.

My gender dysphoria was very real back then – but now it's gone.

***Trans Kids: It's Time to Talk* is on Channel 4 on Wednesday, 10pm**

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