

GENDER OUTLAWS

THE NEXT
GENERATION



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and
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SEAL PRESS

GENDER OUTLAWS

The Next Generation

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To Stanley Safran Bergman,
the next generation



We're All Someone's Freak

Gwendolyn Ann Smith

Being transgender guarantees you will upset someone. People get upset with transgender people who choose to inhabit a third gender space rather than "pick a side." Some get upset at transgender people who do not eschew their birth histories. Others get up in arms with those who opted out of surgical options, instead living with their original equipment. Ire is raised at those who transition, then transition again when they decide that their initial change was not the right answer for them. Heck, some get their dander up simply because this or that transgender person simply is not "trying hard enough" to be a particular gender, whatever that means. Some are irked that the Logo program *RuPaul's Drag Race* shows a version of transgender life different from their own. Meanwhile, all around are those who have decided they aren't comfortable with the lot of us, because we dared to change from one gender expression or identity to some other.

To hell with that.

You see, I have learned not only that I have to do what I have to do to

be happy regardless of the struggles I may face, but also that I am the only person responsible for my own comfort or discomfort about my gender. I may wrinkle my nose about what someone else might do, but ultimately what others do cannot change who I am.

I had an unusual request from a friend of mine some time back. I was asked not to mention that I was a friend of hers. You see, I'm transgender. More than this, it's hardly a secret that I'm transgender—I am professionally transgender, as well as the founder of Trans Day of Remembrance. Her fear was that if someone knew that I knew her, then it would automatically be assumed that she was transgender, too.

It was a difficult thing to hear that my very existence was perceived as being enough to harm a person I called a friend. I try to harm no one in my daily affairs—yet here I was, being told that all I need to do to cause someone difficulty is to call them a friend.

I asked many of my friends who are transgender, in the wake of this incident, if they too would be uncomfortable being identified publicly as friends of mine. I consider these people close friends, I said, and still if this inadvertent outing would cause them trouble, I promised I would disclaim them immediately. Oddly, no one else seemed all that perturbed. I did not address this with my non-transgender friends, but maybe I should; presumably it will be a great shock to discover that merely being acquainted with me has the potential to cast doubt on their birth gender.

One of the first lessons I was taught at some of my earliest transgender support group meetings (more years ago than I usually would wish to admit) was that being in a group of transgender people exponentially raises the risk of being read as transgender. If you want to remain hidden, I was told, avoid others like you. Large group events would always require remote locations where we could all be hidden away; the concept of meeting with

your transgender siblings just anywhere was taboo. This was a world just a step away from secret handshakes and coded catch-phrases.

Much later, I learned that this divide-and-conquer strategy had been common in the older, university-based transsexuality programs of the 1970s. Associating with other transgender people could get you drummed out of the program. After all, you were supposed to be associating with those in your preferred gender, making strides down the road to Normal, not hanging about with others trying to take paths similar to yours.

While those gatekeeping systems are long gone, their survivors live on. Worse, these individuals, themselves transsexual, perpetuate the enforcement of the system they were required to navigate. If you don't fit the gender-norming rules they were expected to observe, you are a subject of derision, worthy of little more than the ridicule of your would-be peers. They have learned to construct a hierarchical order of who is acceptable and who is not.

Let me break it down this way: some lesbians and gays feel that their issues are more important than transgender issues, because transgender people are freaks. Some transgender people—often, but not only, transsexuals—view transsexual issues as more important than the issues of, say, cross-dressers. Some among the more genderqueer portions of our community look down upon those who opt to live in a more “normatively gendered” space. There are even groups that cross-dressers feel superior to: sissies, drag kings and queens, “little girls,” and so on. Yes, I’m sure that we could follow even each of these groups and find that, eventually, everyone has someone they view as a freak.

This is a human phenomenon, and one which occurs especially, it seems, among marginalized groups. Trekkers versus trekkies versus people in Klingon costumes, or furies versus fursuiters versus, oh, plushies. I’m sure if I looked at model railroaders, I’d probably find that HO gauge fans

look down at N scale, or something like that. The taxonomies are endless, often circular, and are usually graded to a fineness that would be invisible to any outsider. We just want to identify the “real” freaks, so we can feel closer to normal. In reality, not a single one of us is so magically normative as to claim the right to separate out the freaks from everyone else. We are all freaks to someone. Maybe even—if we’re honest—to ourselves.

In the end, we find ourselves with one of two choices: do we push others like us away, to best fit in? Or do we seek out our kin, for comfort and company? For that matter, if we are all someone’s “freak”, does this mean we are all each other’s “normal” too—and worthy of embrace?

These are questions I have asked myself, time and time again. I confess to having a phase during which I did not associate with other transgender people, for fear I would be guilty by association, or even get “tranny cooties.” Maybe I was afraid I would see things in my own being I was not ready to face, or was afraid of challenging my own assumptions. I found it to be a very limiting way to live, and have chosen to embrace those I might see as my siblings.

Yes, even those who might be having a hard time embracing me.

This isn’t to say that there’s no such thing as defamation, or that everything is acceptable. Far from it. There is always a need to watch for attacks on us as a whole. We can’t ignore right-wing demagogues who insist that the word of the doctor who proclaims a child’s sex at birth somehow holds more sway over the reality of the body than the word of the person who inhabits it. Yet just as anyone can call me whatever they want, it is up to me to decide whether I care to answer. More than this, it should be irrelevant to me what any other transgender person opts to do. Their action does not somehow change who I am. It cannot.

I know what I am. I know that I’ve chosen to identify as a transgender woman, and that I am—by and large—happy with where I am in this

world. I'm far from perfect, and I could give you a list as long as my arms of the things I'd love to change. Nevertheless, I am still here, and I am still me, and no one can change that without my permission.

At the same time, even though I am happy to identify as a transgender woman, I also applaud those who are seeking to redefine the notions of gender and are carving out spaces of their own. My own comfort is such that I'm glad to see other people out there challenging the assumptions and to know that their challenges do not necessarily pose a threat to my beliefs. Who knows—maybe my beliefs could stand a good challenge once in a while, and they might end up broader than they were before.

We live in a world of incredible variations, where there are some 200,000 species of moths and butterflies to be found in this planet, where one can find snowy ice caps and boiling cauldrons of lava, and where biodiversity is the very thing that keeps the whole complex system in tune. The notion of classifying things and then claiming that only this or that is a *proper* version of some being is a distinctly human construct, full of arrogance and hubris. When those of us who are gender outlaws of any stripe seek to set definitions on our realness, to determine who is some-how "normal" amongst us, it seems all the more crazy.

I assume it is some sort of human failing that makes us always need to shun someone who we perceive as "more different than thou." Some simply need to feel better about themselves by despising someone further down the chain from them. Nevertheless, this does not seem to help move us further along in the world at large.

We can worry about who is this and who is that, we can argue about who does or doesn't belong. We can talk about how much more legitimate one or another of us is. In the end, we are all somebody's freak—and basic human dignity is not a privilege of the lucky superior few, but a right of all or none.

Trans-Corporation: A benefit analysis of a transgender man in a corporate setting

CT Whitley

I'm hunkering down. My bunker is a tan particleboard desk enclosed by five-foot grey fabric partitions. I've become a corporate cadaver, entombed in my three-walled office illuminated in a fluorescent hue. A harsh voice bellows from the conference room. "You motherfuckers! You need to pull your heads out of your asses!" I take a deep breath. I've had my first lesson in high profile corporate interactions: learn to communicate so it isn't your ass getting chewed on the other side of that door.

This is not the touchy-feely environment I'd grown accustomed to during my liberal arts education in Sociology and Ethnic Studies. It's not an environment where I can capitalize on my queer theory and gender research by challenging the perception of gender norms in the work place. It's not a non-profit that holds diversity trainings or recognizes and values an array of differences. This is a company that records racial categories only to boost its EEO chart ratings, reducing the names on the chart to square boxes of Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic. Privilege is the sweat from management's pores, bonuses are the incentive, performance is everything, and cash reigns king.

During my two-year tenure as a financial officer in New York City, I grew increasingly aware of the gendered nuances of professional interactions in corporate culture, which reinforce binary systems, hamper communication between men and women, and frequently limit women's advancement. With this awareness, I moved at the periphery of categorized gender, shifting and shuffling through the expected communication patterns of my past and present genders. As a gender outlaw long accustomed to carving my own path, I learned to communicate in ways that were unavailable and unidentifiable to my non-transgender male and female coworkers, catapulting my own transgender status from corporate cost to corporate benefit. My female past and male present provided valuable reference points for negotiating interactions with both men and women. These days I rarely notice when I switch communication styles, sometimes even among different participants within a single conversation.

Just a few nights ago my partner asked, laughing, "You were talking to a man on the phone, weren't you?" I nodded, puzzled.

"How did you know?"

"When you talk to women, your voice is higher, you use more intonation, and you're more emotive," she said, "It's not that you become a woman, but you take on the communication style of one." She's right. In my journey, I have learned to call up elements of my past female life into my current male one when that style will strengthen my position. My masculine and feminine vocabularies meld to create negotiation platforms where I can understand and be understood without gendered limitations, expressing myself freely and clearly across sexes and genders.

While I understand sex and gender as socially constructed labels, I also understand that those labels are made real by their enforcement in dominant culture. Gendered behavior patterns were the key to at least

half of miscommunication in my office. Therefore, this is not a deconstructive analysis, but rather a discussion of the realities of the gendered professional world. That world is built on the dominant culture's definitions of male, female, masculinity, femininity, and gay and straight, complete with the misogynist assumptions and biases the dominant culture bequeaths. While I neither believe in nor fit into these binary identity platforms, they nonetheless frame the corporate world. As a transgender man who has used my female past and male present to navigate an unknown world, I used my multi-gendered experience to challenge and manipulate the paradigm rather than to reinforce it; I was able to improve my office environment as well as to propel my career.

Thanks to my time in the queer spaces and liberal enclaves I've been a part of, I was able to view with fresh eyes the heteronormative world I worked in and its heavily gendered corporate interactions. In a corporate world where the infinite possibilities of sex, gender and sexuality went unnamed and unnoticed, gendered stereotypes about communication quickly proved useful. To be heard by men, brevity was key and intonation was a frivolous indulgence I could not afford, but cultivating the all-important air of dominance was well worth my while.

Part of my job was contract management; I would call directors and inform them of their ending contracts. When calling a man, I would say a quick hello and get to the point. "We have twenty-seven clients who need new contracts. I will bump up the value of the contracts, assuming you are okay with that?" They would answer a quick yes or no and I would return the phone to the receiver. By contrast, my female coworker would start with a friendly greeting, then scold him for not answering her emails or calling her back more quickly. After eight or nine minutes she would hang up the phone, excitedly reporting, "They said yes, yes, yes to everything I asked!" only to be livid later when nothing actually materialized.

Her conversation partner had stopped listening after the first "so how are the kids?" and hadn't heard any part of her real request. Lost in the material element of the call, the male colleague had missed the human element in the conversation, the point of real connection where community is developed. In this instance and others, my understanding of female and male communication styles allowed me to avoid the pitfalls of my more seasoned coworker, and my conscious study, awareness, and embodiment of male interactions facilitated my success with upper management.

In another instance, my department was tasked with a project that would have made Einstein sweat. In response to the stress, the non-transgender men hunkered down, stopped returning phone calls and focused solely on the task at hand, as though they were each an army of one. The women searched for reassurance from others, found community with other women by discussing their frustrations, made plans to go out at the end of the week, and leaned on social networks. These disparate responses, while effective for the individuals, created huge problems for the whole as neither side understood the other's stress-management techniques. I found that I could play the middleman, deftly switching roles so that in the presence of men I was isolated and hardworking and in the presence of women I was cooperative and sympathetic. The men stormed into my office grumbling, "She can't get anything done because she has to take time to talk to everyone. We have deadlines, can't she see that?"

Similarly, the women rushed in complaining, "He's so irritating. I try to talk to him to take the edge off and he shuts me down. He's so uncooperative!"

I listened sympathetically to each side's complaints, and then I worked my communication magic. With each side seeing me as an insider, I could venture a guess about what was going on across the gender divide,

smoothing the tumultuous, gendered waters that threatened to flood the office with rage and dysfunction.

Interestingly, I was the first person in my position to receive high marks from both male and female coworkers. When I talked to male supervisors about past female employees in my position, they would say things like, "The men didn't find her to be effective. She made too many phone calls bothering directors about little stuff. The women liked her style, but I guess it's just because women tend to get along." When I asked about past male employees in my position, the same dynamic presented itself. Men found the male employee to be "more effective," but women found him to be "less connected." Both communication styles had something important to offer. Most importantly, because of the heteronormative patriarchy reinforced in those office spaces, it was often the communication styles of my female colleagues that were deemed frivolous, when in fact, their sense of community and collaboration reinforced cohesion, a sense of belonging, and unity among staff. Ironically, despite my openness about my transgender status, management didn't notice the bridge I was building over the gender divide. Nonetheless, I was getting promoted, even if my boss couldn't see that my success had one foot carefully balanced in the male world and the other in the female realm.

Despite the professional advancements women have made and continue to make since the 1960s, I think it is safe to say that many still hit a glass ceiling. My office was no exception. It is widely understood that "male" and "female" are constructed well before birth, which means that by the time a person enters the workforce he or she has had twenty to thirty years of standard gender construction and reinforcement woven into every fiber of the individual's life. This becomes a huge disadvantage for women. Women who are strong, determined, and free-willed are labeled 'lesbians' or 'bitches,' rejected for promotion because their devia-

tion from socially accepted gender norms makes others uncomfortable. Women who present as feminine and communicate in a typically feminine manner see no upward mobility, regardless of their inputs into projects and discussions. Of course, outliers exist: women who can alter their performance of masculinity and femininity to interact with key people so that their outward performance is feminine, but their communication employs carefully selected "masculine" traits, like brevity and curttness. In my male-managed company, these women excelled.

Understanding socialized gender differences in communication is not merely about men expecting women to interact on their terms. It requires an ongoing discussion and assessment of office culture, politics, and engagement. It's not a one-day training on diversity, but a continual process of resocializing the self to use and understand various communication styles within and outside of a gendered context. Through this experience, I learned to value my journey as a transgender man by strategically utilizing my past and present to affect change and promote personal gain.

Over the past two years, I have challenged myself to articulate the communication differences in my office. I have experimented with changing my posture, tone, and style to address the men in management. I notice that in meetings where I was once invisible I am now addressed by management over my supervisor, a woman who has held her position for twenty-five years. It's a bittersweet moment, one where I realize I have mastered a new language. I am a bi-gender communicator. This is a point of joy in my life as a transgender male. I have crossed over to be heard as male by other men. However, power has infused me with a sense of responsibility as I have not always been in this position and can easily recognize the shift in power. In this recognition it is my responsibility to speak up when others are being silenced, to challenge the corporate communication style nested in a masculine paradigm. Knowing how to utilize and

maximize communication styles between men and women helps me to be a better advocate, to assert my voice when others are being silenced.

In my years of transitioning, I often underestimated the complexity of my journey. I never imagined that I would be uniquely positioned to rise up the corporate ladder through my manipulation of gender. For those of us who have second-guessed ourselves, questioned our value, or been confronted with harassment and violence, I offer up this unlikely refuge: we can learn powerful life skills from our negotiation of gender divisions. Our differences are a powerful resource to reshape the social systems we are forced to engage in, even if we remain undercover.

Unfortunately, my corporate management not only perpetuated serious gender issues, but also fell victim to a severe lack of self-reflection, ultimately missing the invaluable perspectives of its employees. If they had recognized the bridge I represented between gendered communication styles, asked for advice, or simply acknowledged that my gender differences created a unique opportunity for them to learn, I could have been not just a behind-the-scenes asset, not just a self-promoter, but a visible, tangible proponent of the company's growth. My life's calling has since led me out of the corporate environment and into academia, but it is my hope that other gender outlaws working in corporations throughout the country will rise up out of their dimly lit cubicles to hold strategic conversations that directly challenge the cultural and political structures of their workplaces. Our voices, speaking from our breadth of experience, can transform dysfunctional companies into pinnacles of gendered bliss. Recognizing the heteronormative communication systems in the corporate world, we can challenge these dynamics from the inside. Becoming the medium of translation between the dual gendered system, we can begin to create spaces where those who have become silenced can speak.

Are You a Boy or a Girl?

Roe-Anne Alexander

IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER EPISODE OF...
ARE YOU A BOY OR A GIRL?



Interlude

But the real watershed moment? The instant in time in which I knew that I HAD to change, to give up whatever had to be given up, to create myself in my own image, to transition? An early-evening showing of *Friday Night Lights*.

Yes, the football movie.

After high school, I had watched *Lucas* 8,000 times, reeling sedly in Corey Haim's football misfit. Years later, confronted with *Friday Night Lights*, I suddenly could no longer pretend. I was so angry that I had been denied football—the sport for which my dad had, for whatever reason, tried to groom me—and I was so sad. They talk about people's lives flashing before their eyes when they die—the life I should have had flashed before my eyes after the movie. Me, being hazed, but not beaten, by the football team. Me, in my varsity letter jacket. Me; playing small safety (or, joy of joys, wide receiver!) in college, probably Colorado or Georgia or maybe someplace in California. Me, writing stories after college, getting published, teaching. Me, a boy, lanky like my brother, narrow-hipped, no-breasted.

Me, in other words, as myself.

—Rafe Poesy

Jihad

Azadeh Arsanjani

jihad

my running-girl heart

queer

is exhausted

jihad

from dragging around

queer

all the wrong definitions

jihad

of these blood words

queer

that white people

jihad

won't stop saying

queer

and when they say them, meaning me.

jihad

I am a brown girl in struggle,

queer

like every brown girl in struggle,

jihad

and if some of us have not been girls for very long,

queer

we make up for it in struggle.

jihad

okity, please trust

queer

that on the glorious day when I come home

jihad

my bags will be full of meat and fruits

queer

we hunger together, and we will feast together.

3

tell me that having a dick made me a first-class citizen. It wasn't until I was a teenager that it really struck me how phallus-worshipping human society is, and by that point, I didn't care. Whatever. Mine didn't show, and it was nobody else's concern unless I got intimate with them, and even then it would be okay, yes?

As it turned out . . . yes. My own personal reveal scenes have been drama-free. No lover has ever reacted negatively about my penis, either regarding its size or its very existence, before or after transition. It's simply how I am, and anyone who's inclined to have sex with me in the first place has probably already accepted that I may be so equipped.

Some of us don't like to take the chance, or can't get past what the organ represents. One of the first trannies I met, back in the mid-nineties before I started transitioning, would have sooner eaten a bullet than let anyone near her mysterious genitals. She wore a thick latexy contraption which smoothed her crotch of any possible personality, and wouldn't even take it off during our few fumbling attempts at sex. As far as she was concerned her dick was the root of all her problems, and eventual vaginoplasty was the cure.

Me, not so much. I'm not opposed to the idea, but I'd also like to get a tummy tuck and see the Aurora Borealis and try a vac-bed and have Joan Didion give my first novel a glowing writeup in the *The New York Review of Books*. Maybe I'll someday have the time and resources, but putting vaginoplasty at the top of my personal Must-Have list would be a path to madness.

Besides, my anecdotal understanding of the process is that the larger the penis, the deeper the vagina, and the greater the overall chance of the surgery being successful, since there's more raw material to work with. Ivory probably has a great one by now. I'm rather lacking raw material, so maybe it's not meant to be, and that's okay. I'm not a boy because I have a penis, and just because I don't have a vagina doesn't mean I'm not a girl.

The Wrong Body

Scott Turner Schofield

Doctors wonder, want to know exactly what makes a person transgender. They hypothesize a rush of hormones at the wrong time, brought on by stress perhaps? They want to find a simple reason, a diagnosis, a cure to make life easier.

I believe it is sheer will.

Yes, embryonic me imagined life infinitely more interesting as a trade between soul and body. And so, here I am. I was not born in the wrong body.

My father fooled around with a nineteen-year-old woman at a crucial moment in my fetal development. My mother caught them in the middle of it, wrapped around one another like baby twins. Call it a rush of blood to her head: I bathed in the trickle of emotions when she kicked him out.

After their breakup, my father broke into the family storage space filled with the treasures he and my mother had saved for their new life as parents, for the time when they could afford to move out of their trailer and into a house together. My mother had taken their money for me, and so he

took an ax to all of their things, smashing furniture, slashing sun dresses, shredding photographs: cutting their shared possessions in half.

Imagine embryo me, inside my mother, walking into that chaos.

Can you feel the hurricane flood of betrayal over love, hot anger and deep sadness rushing in torrents of estrogen, testosterone, and progesterone over baby me, cleaving gender from sex, body from self.

There was no room for another man in my mother's life, only me. Swimming as best I could in this cascade of confusion, I chose to delight my mother by being born a baby girl. I knew even then that she, too, would attempt the impossible for me.

As lines creased into my fetal hands, I chose to be born a baby girl because I saw that I would have time to appreciate my journey, with the head to understand it as a gift and the heart to achieve my whole self through all of the trials it takes. Curled in her warmth, nourished by her food, protected by her very skin, I could feel my mother's desire for my best life. Back then, she held me so that I could be certain that I would have the love and support to find my way later.

Furthermore, I knew that being born female would build a bridge to the kind of man I wanted to become: a man unlike that father in every way. Being born female makes me a man that good men may look to for ways to understand and honor women, a person that people may look to for ways to find and appreciate themselves. Like they say, "mistakes" are just lessons waiting to be learned.

Trauma or no, I would have been trans no matter what body I'd been born with. Tell the doctors that we exist for the health of humanity, which needs to find wholeness and belief in complexity. Girl in boy's body or boy inside a girl; call it fate or biology, will, or spiritual choice. But I was not born in the wrong body.

Performance Piece

Julia Serano

If one more person tells me that "all gender is performance," I think I am going to strangle them. Perhaps most annoying about that sound-bite is the somewhat snooty "I-took-a-gender-studies-class-and-you-didn't" sort of way in which it is most often recited, a magnificent irony given the way that phrase dumbs down gender. It is a crass oversimplification, as ridiculous as saying all gender is genitals, all gender is chromosomes, or all gender is socialization. In reality, gender is all of these things and more. In fact, if there's one thing that all of us should be able to agree on, it's that gender is a confusing and complicated mess. It's like a junior high school mixer, where our bodies and our internal desires awkwardly dance with one another, and with all the external expectations that other people place on us.

Sure, I can perform gender: I can curtsy, or throw like a girl, or bat my eyelashes. But *performance* doesn't explain why certain behaviors and ways of being come to me more naturally than others. It offers no insight into the countless restless nights I spent as a pre-teen wrestling

must do, the braiding of twine and reed into the baskets that carry our people through his days. He is no longer of that people, they say. One of us, now. One of us, always. Born to us before, born to the wrong village, now his claimed. He was a gift to us from the Creator. It is here he shall remain. He was born here, reborn here, given a name, purpose, path, people. Clan and totem, tribe. What could this other people, across the way, offer him? Memories of a childhood that was not his? A family that did not want him? A brotherhood that did not know what to do with him? Some warriors, they say, discarding their most proud, most noble and strong, most wise. A wasteful people, they say. Raised him we have, they say. Ours, they say. I look towards fire, flame. Eyes misting wet. The truth of their words, my longing. To stay, to come be with him and learn their ways. I do not want to leave my women, I say. I do not want to leave this fire, I say. Your people, my people, did not want me, I say. He cries, tears. He has been many years in waiting. He remembers the day I was taken away and cried.

I am to go with him. We are to live in the middle between both camps, visiting both. We are to start, create a new village. And call it wholme.

We will take embers from both fires.

Trans-ing Gender: The Surgical Option

Mercedes Allen

“Have you had surgery yet?” The question is often asked as if Genital Reassignment Surgery (GRS) were the Only Logical Conclusion.TM GRS is revered as the Grail: the only fitting end to the trans quest. Yet in my experience, transition has been more a journey than a destination.

At the age of nineteen, I left home with next to nothing, facing the prospect of either doing sex work or living on minimum wage. Some people have the temperament to do sex work without being affected. I don't. I tried to transition at that time, only to have doctor after doctor give me horror stories, refuse to help, or say they didn't know where to refer me. When finally told that the surgery would cost between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars, plus thousands more for medical procedures like breast augmentation and electrolysis, I gave up and tried to live with what I was given.

I discovered that for many, including many transsexual persons, there are few acceptable excuses for remaining a “pre-operative” transsexual

forever. There may be medical reasons why the surgery is too dangerous for a particular person. The predicted results may not be satisfying. Even financial strains might explain the choice. But in all of these cases, the understanding is that people in this situation are "incomplete" and would surely want the surgery if they could have it. I have even heard the opinion that a "real transsexual" would let nothing stand in the way. When I chose to pass up surgery, some in the community suggested that if I weren't "real" enough to "follow through," I needed to discontinue my hormone therapy immediately and go back to presenting as male.

I know I am real. The decision to keep "it"—the dangly bit and bag—gauge that sabotaged my legal and social status as a woman—did not stem from a fear of surgery, nor from identifying as anything other than a woman. Rather, it grew out of my artistic and spiritual explorations.

An artist myself, I had just discovered the aesthetic beauty of the transfemale body. My appreciation of the transfemale body was not fetishistic or even sexual. The thought of being female (or transfemale) was not itself a turn-on, although whenever I imagined myself in any situation, sexual or otherwise, I had to picture myself as female. This is an important distinction to make because the theory of "autogynephilia" has misdirected some researchers to dismiss many trans women as fetishists (itself a misunderstood concept that invalidates by assuming unreality). Two years after starting Androcur, my body had become nearly non-orgasmic; yet on an artistic and emotive level, I kept seeing transfemininity as beautiful.

I had also developed a spiritual curiosity about the reason I was born male. Was it to call into question the societal assumptions ascribed to gender? To challenge absolutes? To learn new ways of thinking? As someone who is part Native, I was also curious about Two Spirit tradition and understanding how my ancestors lived without surgery as an option.

As I went farther into transition, the journey-not-destination concept

remained at the heart of my soul-search. My journey hinged more on receptivity and reflection than on a checklist of official steps. The struggle I went through, the fear of exchanging the familiar for the unfamiliar, the subconscious fears, the "what ifs": these were my rite of passage into womanhood. Cisgender (non-transgender) women never stop learning their femininity (or their own latent masculinity); cisgender men likewise. How can we say that we've "arrived" at the flick of a scalpel? I'd hazard a guess that someone could conceivably go through the whole transition process and still not know what it is to be a woman, while another can live in the closet as a crossdresser and still come to realize the more important realities of womanhood.

I've been asked whether I identify as female or transsexual. I'm not entirely certain that they are mutually exclusive. I see human existence as being shaped by a combination of biological determination, social conditioning, and choice. My identity is intrinsically female; my history and upbringing are transsexual. I can't separate them, nor do I see cause to hide either part. I'm a woman with a trans history and with some residual trans aspects that will probably remain a part of my life as woman.

The trouble with placing a heavy emphasis on GRS as the "end-point" of our transition is that it focuses on eliminating the ways in which my trans history informs my womanhood. We can become so intent on becoming wholly female or wholly male that we abandon, hide or feel ashamed of those things that make us truly unique.

Transgender people have wisdom and experience that our friends, family, and acquaintances never dreamed of. A woman can talk to her female-to-male (FTM) partner and know that he really does understand the beautification and competition crap that girls are fed when they are growing up. A man can trust that his MTF partner understands the ruthless repression of emotions that were imposed upon him through his youth,

maybe enough to allow himself to be more emotionally vulnerable in front of her. Those of us who have lived in two genders have a front-row view of the battle of the sexes, with a vivid understanding of what hormones do to our moods, of how differently men and women are perceived and treated in public venues, of the pervasiveness of male privilege, of how different dating as male is from dating as female, even if the gender of attraction doesn't change. Those perspectives are hard-won. It would be a shame to bury them.

With a ruthlessly gendered world as our backdrop, the decision to keep "it" can become a badge of honor. A gender transition is one of the most difficult paths to tread. We've gone through the ritual. We've done the firewalk. We have the marks on the soles of our feet. While some are comfortable with covering up the burns and never telling anyone about the experience, we have earned the right to embrace some of the differences and take pride in them.

Easier said than done. Living non-operatively can have some serious repercussions. In many areas, legal protections for transsexuals don't exist. Correct documentation of gender is often impossible until a surgeon's letter is produced, leaving one open to being outed on every occasion that identification is called for. We are segregated by gender in many public settings, including homeless shelters, hospitals, and prisons, leaving open the possibility of institutionally sanctioned rape and abuse. Even public restroom use can be called into question. And people can react quite negatively to the discovery of transsexual status, even to the point of violence.

Some might contend that not having GRS when it's available is "accepting second best." Perhaps, but only by the same kind of logic my mother used when she asked me, "Why would you want to be a woman, when men have the upper hand in life?" Logically speaking, social pressures would suggest GRS in self-defense. However, it would seem to me that

"second best" would be having major surgery to meet societal expectations and legal standards, when I already see myself as a woman.

Despite these reservations, GRS can be a medical necessity. Not every transsexual needs it, but for those who do, it is an absolute necessity. Where the need and driving desire exists, it becomes the pivotal point at which closure can be achieved and one can move forward in life. Certainly the realities of identification issues, citizenship, equality, safety, and acceptance mean that GRS affects lives in transformative ways that no other "elective cosmetic" procedure ever could. It can also be absolutely necessary for one's genitals to be in a comfortable configuration in order to be able to function sexually and even emotionally in relationships.

It was this latter point that caused me to reconsider my decision not to pursue Gender Reassignment Surgery. I had found a wonderful partner with whom I'd connected perfectly on every level. Yet I couldn't bring myself to use my current configuration in any sort of intimate way. The satisfaction of experiencing intimacy in the way in which I felt it was intended still eluded me. Ultimately, the cerebral acceptance of a penis as a part of me could not overcome the "squick" of discomfort and disturbance that was an ongoing barrier to physical intimacy. And so I decided that I would have surgery after all.

But that is my individual journey. I've known others whose negative feelings around their genitals have been tolerable, or even negligible. Expecting one experience to fit all is unreasonable, especially with something as profound and life-changing as Genital Reassignment Surgery. People's reasons for remaining "non-operative" are as varied as their experiences.

We've entered an age in which our diverse community is discovering that we have the freedom to define ourselves, which is both a blessing and a curse. In the years following Stonewall, anything "trans" was ejected from the queer movement; in the politically correct '80s, butches

and femmes were ejected from lesbian culture. This kind of infighting can lead to bitter rifts that take decades to heal. GRS is one more way in which we've rigidly set up a hierarchy of trans accomplishment and put members of our own community down to validate our own identities.

While railing against the manufactured prerequisites of womanhood or manhood, we need to avoid manufacturing our own prerequisites. The non-operative journey and the objections to it illustrate just one area in which we need to open our thinking to other journeys while expecting that others respect our own.

I am the "I"

Sean Saifa Wall

Last Sunday night I sat nervously in the Recovery House living room, looking out at a capacity crowd. As an organizer and activist, I often give presentations on very charged topics related to race, gender, and other forms of oppression. Tonight, though, I would share some of the most intimate details about myself: what brought me into Sex and Love Adicts Anonymous. Like many who enter the rooms of S.L.A.A., I had a familiar story of anonymous sexual liaisons, obsessive relationships, and fears of intimacy. Like other accounts of addiction and compulsion, the story of my shame and isolation has opened a path of liberation and wholeness.

I learned that my body was different as a five-year-old, in the cloistered, pre-pubescent world of playing "house" and "doctor." My female playmates had perforations in their vaginas, while my parts were fused. Unlike other little girls, I could actually pee standing up, which shocked and intrigued my peers. As a child, I ran around the house bare-chested, reveling in this freedom until the weight of gender roles put me into barrettes and dresses. When I started to sprout breasts, my mother bought

Transliteration

Francisco Fernández

A veces me cuesta describir mi identidad en distintos idiomas y a la vez mantener alguna coherencia. La primera vez que leí acerca de géneros no tradicionales fue en internet, donde el inglés es el idioma dominante; así encontré conceptos como *transgender* y *genderqueer* con los que me sentí identificado enseguida. Las personas que escribieron ese contenido en la red pueden servirse de esas palabras en su vida cotidiana, pero yo vivo en Argentina; ¿cómo adaptarlas a mi entorno? Podría usar directamente las palabras inglesas, lo que me haría sentir colonizado; o podría usar la palabra española "transsexual," que no me describe satisfactoriamente. Elegí una tercera opción: apagar mi computadora y buscar gente trans de por acá.

A través de grupos de apoyo, charlas y revistas, encontré una rica tradición trans que incluye el movimiento travesti. Antes sólo había escuchado la palabra "travesti" como peyorativo, pero descubrí que algunas personas se la habían reapropiado para darle ellas mismas un nuevo sentido. Es imposible dar una definición precisa que abarque a todas las

travestis, pero en general son personas que al nacer fueron declaradas varones, y que tienen una identidad femenina y/o de mujer. Consideraré usar el término para mí mismo; nunca conocí a nadie transmasculino que lo utilizara, pero tenía cierto sentido. Sin embargo, no sentía que yo tuviera derecho a apropiarme de un término que jamás fue usado en mi contra. Además, encontré una palabra más adecuada: "transgénero."

"Transgénero" tiene las mismas raíces etimológicas que *transgender*, y a veces se usa con el mismo significado, pero también se suele usar con el sentido de "trascender el género." Es decir que es similar a *genderqueer*—un género *queer* o no heteronormativo—pero su significado surgió entre hispanohablantes, y no como una traducción literal de *transgender*; eso me agrada. La única desventaja es que la mayoría de las personas jamás escucharon la palabra transgénero. Cuando empecé a descubrir y construir mi identidad, eso no importaba mucho, pero ahora quiero poder expresar—en términos comprensibles—cómo entiendo mi propia existencia. Puedo tratar de explicar el concepto de transgénero, o usar la palabra transsexual por pragmatismo. No es una elección simple, porque a veces hasta "transsexual" causa confusión acerca de cuál es mi identidad. En esas situaciones, trato de explicar mi género desde cero. Esta opción también presenta dificultades:

Soy un chico. Un chico que nació nena. No, eso es mentira. No nací nena, al igual que no nací con un nombre—ambas etiquetas me fueron colocadas por otras personas. Quizás debería decir que soy un chico que nació con el cuerpo de una chica. Pero, ¿tenía realmente el cuerpo de una chica? No tenía caderas anchas, ni pechos. Una vez me preguntaron si había nacido con tetas; la verdad es que no conozco a nadie que haya nacido con tetas. Bueno, entonces podemos decir que soy un niño que

nació con genitales de niña. ¿Genitales de quién? ¿De una niña? ¡De ninguna manera! Eran mis genitales—por lo tanto, genitales de nene. Entonces, soy un chico con genitales de chico. (También soy un chico con dedos de chico y rodillas de chico—no sé por qué nunca me preguntan por todo eso.) En resumen, soy un niño con cuerpo de niño, y por eso soy trans.

Eso no aclara mucho, ¿no? Sin embargo, me gusta usar partes de esa respuesta cuando alguien me pregunta por mi sexo. *Hay una diferencia entre género y sexo*, me dicen a veces. *Entiendo que seas un chico, pero ¿tu sexo es masculino o femenino?* Esperá—¿no acabas de decir que el género no es lo mismo que el sexo? ¿Entonces por qué le estás atribuyendo un género al sexo, llamándolo masculino o femenino? O ni siquiera un género, porque la masculinidad y feminidad no tienen necesariamente que ver con ser hombre, mujer, u otra cosa. Por ejemplo, yo soy varón, pero bastante femenino. ¿Eso me hace del sexo femenino? Si me desnudo e imito a James Dean, ¿me vuelvo del sexo masculino? La masculinidad y la feminidad son como las normas del género—las reglas para ser un “buen” hombre o una “buena” mujer—pero ¿cuántos de esas normas podemos cumplir cuando estamos desnudos?

Me parece que el lenguaje crea una confusión formidable de cuerpos y géneros, y no es un problema exclusivo del español: también ocurre, por ejemplo, en inglés y francés. Este desorden no es necesariamente negativo: genera la posibilidad de buscar caminos alternativos. Para mí, ser consciente de este caos es liberador porque significa que cualquier identidad que elija va a ser tan coherente o incoherente como las otras. En vez de buscar respuestas en los binomios—varón/mujer, feminidad/masculinidad, sexo/género—decidí reclamar mi cuerpo para mí mismo, para darle forma y amarlo, vestirlo y moverlo. Sobre todo, para nombrarlo.

Si me esforcé tanto en encontrar palabras para describirme, es porque el idioma cumple un rol importante. En crear—o encontrar— quiénes somos. Ustedes, mis geniales *queers*, y no-*queers*—geniales *per-sonas*—seguro que lo entienden. Hay una fuerza impresionante en el acto de autodeterminación. Para mí, nombrarme tiene el objetivo de crear un lugar en la gran galaxia del género donde me sienta como en casa, y deja abierta la posibilidad de mudarme cuando sea necesario. Ahora mismo soy un chico, pero pronto voy a levantar campamento y dirigirme hacia la hombría. Aún mientras recorro el camino de nena a nene, ya me estoy preparando para aquel cambio de género.

Sometimes I find it hard to describe my identity across languages. I first read about non-traditional genders through the internet, where most content is in English; that's how I came across concepts like transgender and genderqueer, which resonated with me immediately. I am from, and live in, Argentina; how should I translate those ideas into my daily life? I could use the English words, which would leave me feeling culturally colonized, or I could use common Spanish terms like “*transexual*,” which didn't describe me accurately. I chose a third option: turn off my computer and go find the local trans community.

Through support groups, talks, and presentations, I encountered a rich trans tradition, such as the *travesti* movement—a group of people who reclaimed the word for “transvestite.” *Travestis* are usually people who were assigned male at birth, and who identify with femininity and/or womanhood. I considered using it for myself, although I've never met a guy

who identifies as *travesti*. It might be fun to mix things up that way, but I found a term which was even more appropriate: *transgénero*.

Transgénero translates directly as "transgender" but is often used to mean "transcending the gender binary." It's a concept very similar to genderqueer, and I enjoy the fact that it was developed here. There's one drawback: Most people have never heard of it. At the beginning of my self-construction that didn't matter much, but now I want to translate, in a way comprehensible to others, how I understand my own existence. I can either try to explain the term *transgénero*, or define myself as "transsexual" for the sake of communication. It's a tough choice. And when all words seem to fail, I try to explain my gender from square one. Here's one attempt:

"I am a boy. A boy who was born a girl. No, that can't be right. I wasn't born a girl any more than I was born with a name—both labels were stuck onto me by others. Maybe I should say that I'm a boy who was born with a girl's body. But did I have a girl's body at that point? I didn't have hips or breasts yet. Someone once asked me if I had been born with boobs, but I haven't met anyone who was born with breasts. All right then, I'm a boy who was born with a girl's genitalia. A girl's genitalia? Nuh-uh! They were definitely my genitalia—thus, a boy's genitalia. That would make me a boy with boy parts. (I'm also a boy with boy toes and knees—I wonder why no one ever asks me about those.) Yes, I'm a boy with boy parts, so that makes me trans."

Not very illuminating, is it? Still, I like using parts of that answer when someone asks me about my sex. "Gender and sex are separate," they might say. "I understand that you're a boy, but is your sex male or

female?" Wait a moment—didn't you just say that sex and gender are two different things? Then why are you gendering sex by using "male" and "female" to describe genitalia? Maybe we're sexing gender when we use those same words—male and female—to describe pronouns, or when we say "I identify as male."

In any case, we're making a huge messy mix of bodies and genders. This isn't necessarily undesirable—there's fun to be had in confusion and disarray. If my gender is "boy" and my organs are "female" and my pronouns are "male," then what am I? For me, being aware of this chaos is freeing. I am capable of creating my own genderful mess, thank you very much. Instead of looking to the binaries for answers—male/female, femininity/masculinity, sex/gender—I've decided to take my body back for myself—for me to shape, show off, love and dress and play. But above all, for me to name.

If I've gone to such lengths to find words for myself, it's because language is so important in creating—or finding—ourselves. You wonderful queers—and non-queers—you wonderful *people*—probably understand. There's a breathtaking power in self-determination. For me, naming myself is about creating a space where I can feel at home in the gender galaxy. And it's about being able to switch places as often as I need to. Right now I'm a boy, but soon I might pack my things and move to manhood. In my ongoing development from girl to boy, I'm also getting ready for that gender transition.

introduce

She says,

Us queers, we have to write our own scripts. Make your characters how you want them. Laugh when they surprise you. Smile when they stirk you. Smirk when they avert eye contact. It's ok to sleep with someone who doesn't understand you—few people will—

watch how they love themselves; that's how they will love you.

Never settle for baggy pants when you feel like showin' off your ass. Never let a second glance keep you from that nail polish. Be patient. You can adore a body to dance just as easily as it's been numbed and discarded, but it takes time. Be resolute.

Take comfort in creating chaos, and know that we thank you.

... which is why
I'm as cute as I
happen to be.



Part Three

—Kris Bohardt



SHOT, STABBED, CHOKED, STRANGLER, BROKEN:
 a ritual for November 20th

Roz Kaveney

1

It could have been me.
 I was young. I took risks.
 True, I was white.
 I hitched rides with guys
 One at least was a killer
 it could have been me.

It could have been me.
 He came to my door
 He showed me a badge
 He pulled out a knife
 He raped me. I felt
 The hilt of the knife
 I thought it was the blade.
 It could have been me.

It could have been me.
They beat me in the street
They pummeled my breasts
And tugged at my wig
And said they would burn me
It could have been me.

It could have been me.
He drew up alongside
And asked me to ride
And knew who I was.
He followed my cab
And drove his car at me
It could have been me.

2

They died
On the streetcorner with the streetlight that blinked
With the rubbish bin dented by a passing car
Among bricks and bent girders
On the waste ground behind the convenience store
In the car park behind the bar where the toilets flooded
And the johns were bad men. Or in bed
Their own bed where they thought they were safe.
They died where people who die by violence die.

They died because
—Of course, there's no because. Just stupid whys
They died for smiling the wrong way

They died because god told someone gay things need to die
They died because they answered back
Or would not be called out of their names
Or let his hand go there between their legs
Or went on a hot date and told him and he didn't believe them until he did.
They died of other people's stupid violent hating ways.

The ones who died
The ones we know about
Thirty a year—that's more than two a month.
Handsome young transmen murdered in their pride
Duanna, Angie, Kelly, and the rest
Iraqis with their long hair shaved away
Our sisters and brothers
Thirty of them
Dead

3

When people die
Their smiles are taken from us
Who might have seen them
And smiled back.
Their songs are taken from us
Who might have heard
And listened and been glad.
Their stories are remembered
By us, on this day
And always.