

Fragments of Gender

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Over the years many people have read and responded to the things I have written. All of you have helped shape the way I see and interpret the world. Thank you!

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The essays in this volume contain the opinions of the author; don't blame anyone else for my beliefs or the way I state them. In the works of fiction, any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is coincidental. Poetry is not meant to be understood literally, so please don't try.

Cover photo taken by the author in March 2000 on the campus of Michigan State University. Graffiti along the Red Cedar river.



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“One of the great myths of our culture is that at birth each infant can be identified as distinctly ‘male’ or ‘female’ (reproductive physiology), will grow up to have correspondingly ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ behavior (gender), live as a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ (social role), and marry a woman or a man (heterosexual affective orientation). This is not so. There is much disagreement as to why this is not so, but a significant number of people in fact do not fit this simple idea of biologically predetermined gender/role destiny.”

Lisa Lees, *Gender: Exploring Diversity and Acceptance*, MSU workshop handout, 1997

Contents

Introduction	1
<i>My Left Hand</i>	2
<i>Who/What Am I?</i>	3
<i>Sharing Our Stories</i>	11
<i>TG-101</i>	16
<i>Clique</i> Columns	25
<i>Transgender Talk</i>	26
<i>It's a Girl!</i>	29
<i>Gender as Theater</i>	31
<i>Transgender Under Covers</i>	33
<i>Is Butch/Femme a Transgender Thang?</i>	35
<i>Transgender in Fiction</i>	37
<i>Transgender Inclusion</i>	40
<i>Gender Anarchy</i>	42
<i>That Fearful Tension</i>	44
<i>Transgender Sexuality</i>	46
<i>Transgender Spirituality</i>	49
<i>Transgender Relationships</i>	51
<i>Q*News</i> Pieces	53
<i>Coming Out as Something Else</i>	54
<i>What is Transgender?</i>	56
<i>The Private Life of a Public Freak</i>	59
<i>The White Queer's Burden</i>	62
<i>Spring Dreams</i>	64
<i>A Call to Arms</i>	66
<i>Identity Island</i>	68
<i>I'm Not Dead Yet!</i>	71
<i>Who Art Thou, Romeo?</i>	74
<i>Gender Perception</i>	77
<i>Proud To Be... Me</i>	80
<i>Titanium Oxide</i>	83

Point of View Essays	85
<i>Is it a Choice, and So What?</i>	86
<i>The Surgery</i>	90
<i>Breaking the Model</i>	92
<i>Iatrogenic Blues</i>	96
<i>Transphobia</i>	98
<i>Transgender Monologue</i>	102
<i>“Have a nice day, . . . freak!”</i>	104
<i>Who will love me as I am?</i>	108
 Short Fiction	 110
<i>The Second First Time</i>	111
<i>The Rules We Make</i>	120
<i>Early and Stormy</i>	137
<i>City of Dreams</i>	150
<i>Reflex</i>	188
<i>A Touching Story</i>	191
<i>The End of the Nick Gang</i>	198
<i>Gay Days Are Here Again</i>	202
 Poetry	 205
<i>Uncertain Territory</i>	206
<i>Touch</i>	207
<i>Object of Desire</i>	208
<i>Art and Eros</i>	209
 About the author	 210

*For everyone who doesn't fit in,
and doesn't really want to*

Introduction

The essays, poems and stories in this book were written between 1995 and 2005, during the first ten years after I did what is variously described as changed my sex, lost my mind, altered my public performance of gender, killed the person I was, headed straight for hell, became the person I always was, or simply pissed off just about everyone.

The theme that ties everything together in this volume is gender, hence the title, *Fragments of Gender*. All my writing is an attempt to engage people in a discussion of things people mostly don't want to discuss about sex, gender and sexuality.

Another reason I write is to keep my head above water. It's hard work being different in a culture that abhors difference.

I have done only minor editing of the original work for publication in this volume. The date when I wrote each piece is indicated. I do not necessarily still believe everything I have written in the essays, and in many cases I would use slightly different language to express my opinions today.

The first section contains several miscellaneous early essays.

My Left Hand

I was identified at birth (so far as I know) as right-handed, but I have often felt this was a mistake, and that I am in truth left-handed, and perhaps ambidextrous. This was very difficult for me to deal with at a young age. I was rapped on the knuckles and made fun of in first and second grade. I went from public to private school at third grade (USA) and I use that to explain why I never learned cursive writing. But perhaps there is a deeper explanation? That my brain is truly left-handed, and so I have always been awkward in a right-handed body?

Late in life, I decided to assert my left-hand inclinations. When I do so, I find a wonderful feeling of relief and joy. I can do most things very well in that mode, and I think with a little practice, to make up for lost opportunity, I could pass perfectly well as a left-handed person. I am seriously considering making such a transition.

This is a true story. In addition to my transsexuality, I have had to deal with a form of dyslexia that played havoc with my math and music skills, and this thing with my handedness. Perhaps in my case they are all interrelated, but I refuse to generalize.

(1999)

TG-101

Gender Identity Primer

Before we can talk about ‘gender identity’ and ‘transgender’ you need to know how I use the words **sex**, **gender** and **sexuality**. (By the way, I am not very fond of the term *transgender* as an identity label because it is a word modeled after *transsexual*, and gender never has had the clear definition that people once thought sex had. But *transgender* is the word people use, so I will use it here.)

Basic definitions

Sex is those biological, physical things one can see; internal and external organs, chromosomes, and hormone levels. These things do not always line up along strictly **male** or **female** lines, as is attested by the existence of a significant number of **intersexed** people, but biology is what most people are talking about when they say a person is female or male.

Gender is observable behavior; what gives rise to the idea that **men** and **women** think, feel, talk, react, play sports, nurture children, *et cetera*, in fundamentally different ways called **masculine** and **feminine**. Though this is a pervasive belief, everyone knows that exceptions are easy to find to any and all of these behaviors. Still, these stereotypes are taught and reinforced constantly from birth.

Sexuality is biological, behavioral, and political; to whom one is attracted, who in turn finds one attractive, and what one does about the attraction, is complex and for most people changes over the course of their lives. Terms such as **heterosexual** and **homosexual** are relatively recent inventions and are more prescriptive than they are descriptive of actual human sexual

practice over a lifetime. The bottom line is that people simply are sexual.

Somewhat loosely we use **male/female** to denote sex, **masculine/feminine** to denote gender, and **man/woman** to denote the social role expected of masculine males and feminine females. Sexuality is assumed to be **male/masculine/man** paired with **female/feminine/woman**. The extreme effort with which the culture tries to teach that this is right and anything else is wrong indicates just how tenuous this model actually is.

Gender Identity

We usually are not aware of the biology or the sexuality of the people with whom we interact each day. But we are very much aware of the gender of the people in our lives. The single most important thing to determine about a person we meet for the first time is their gender. We try to make this determination within seconds. (Try going through a day being conscious of doing this, and try to figure out why you peg each person as feminine or masculine. Be aware that sometimes your gender judgment is subtly at odds with your feelings about a person's biology or social role.)

Why is it critical that we immediately determine a person's gender? Until we do, we don't know how to address them, what to think of their clothes, what jokes to tell, whether it is okay to find them attractive, and a hundred other things. It is almost impossible to interact with another person in a non-gendered manner, and most people would find the attempt insulting and rude.

The store clerk does not need to know the shape of your genitals. But the clerk will be confused if it isn't obvious whether to use Madam or Sir when addressing you. The clerk may ignore you, make fun of you, or call the police if your gender is not clear.

Transgender

The notion of transgender is based on the idea that a person's sex (male or female) determines their gender, social role, and

sexuality, conflating the latter three into a simplistic identity called gender. So a cross-dresser (trans-vestite) tries to temporarily disguise their sex, act and dress like the opposite gender, and pretend to be in the opposite social and sexual role. A trans-sexual person does all that and also seeks to modify their body to make the change permanent and justified. The reality is nowhere near so simple and tidy.

One may cross dress to a lesser or greater degree. Social conventions are such that crossing in the female to masculine direction is more difficult to do in a manner that is seen as crossdressing. When an explicit sexual component is added, crossdressing becomes drag, which has a long history in theater and entertainment, often with a homoerotic connotation.

Most people who keep their eyes open are aware of a current or historical person who, upon mischance or death, was found to have been living a gender role other than the one assigned them at birth. (The jazz musician Billy Tipton is one of the more recent well known instances). Most of these historical figures have lived without hormones or surgery, and it is difficult to fit them into our current categories (which is itself an interesting comment on our current categories). Most of these people have been female-bodied persons living as men, which is easier to do successfully without body modification than the other way around, and has probably been done quite a bit more than most people think.

Transsexuality was invented in the twentieth century as differences from culturally taught sex, gender and sexuality became medical problems with medical solutions. The term itself denotes the idea that one's total identity must be congruent with one's genitals, that one is not truly a woman/man until one loses/gains a penis (has 'the surgery') and so can have 'heterosexual' relations in one's 'new' role.

MTF and FTM

Gender and role are not at all symmetrical in society, so it

should be no surprise that people going in the two directions transsexually have little in common. There seem to be about as many people going in each direction, but transmen have been made all but invisible in most contexts.

The cliché of rugged man transforming into stacked babe is what the media push as the image of transsexuality. This image has some basis in the attempts of some MTF people to first drown their feelings in ultra-masculine activities or careers, and then way overshoot to the sexpot cliché extreme when they do transition.

Going the MTF route can include dieting, electrolysis, hormones, various cosmetic surgeries, and genital reconstruction surgery. Many people feel that ‘having the surgery’ and ‘becoming a girl’ is the goal of the process, though the everyday visible aspects of gender are much more important to a person’s long term success and happiness in whatever social role they pursue.

In the FTM direction, breast reduction surgery is often critical to being able to pass, hormones usually have a swift and dramatic effect, and many FTMs go no further with body modifications. Castration (hysterectomy) for an FTM is major, expensive surgery; for an MTF castration (orchietomy) is an outpatient or office procedure. Genital cosmetic surgery for the two are worlds apart.

MTF genital surgery is widely available for as little as \$10,000 and is done in one or two surgeries. The result can be cosmetically very good, and orgasmic ability may be retained. Crudely put, the penis is emptied and pushed inside-out into a newly created body cavity. Lifelong dilation is required to keep the cavity large enough to receive a penis during sex. A number of complications are possible.

FTM genital surgery is much more difficult. The best result seems to be achieved through accepting the hormonally enlarged clitoris as a small penis, freed with a little surgery. If hysterectomy has been performed, the vaginal opening can be closed, and a scrotum fashioned around prosthetic testes. When one embarks on rerouting the urethra into the clitoris, or actually trying to construct a larger penis from skin taken from other sites on the body, one

takes a serious risk of failure, loss of orgasmic ability, and many complications. It is easy to spend upwards of \$100,000 on breast reduction, hysterectomy, and genital surgery (easy if one has the money, that is).

I hope it is now clear that there is no single procedure by which one may ‘change sex;’ that there is not in fact really any such thing as ‘sex change surgery.’ A transsexual person makes what changes they can and need make in the myriad of details by which each of us is pegged as man or woman. No two people follow exactly the same path.

Anyone who modifies their body to live out their gender and role is not doing so on a lark. This is serious, agonizing, life threatening necessity. Every transsexual person I know has weighed suicide as an alternative.

Is body modification itself so radical? I have before me an advertisement from a local lifestyles magazine. There is a photo of a woman wearing a bikini, her arms crossed under her ample breasts. The surrounding text reads, “I could have worn padded swimsuits. I could have learned to live with what I had. I had breast enlargement surgery instead.” We cannot see this person’s chromosomes, hormone history, genitals, or sexual feelings, but we all know what we’re supposed to assume, right?

Politics, Identity

How transgender people see themselves is one thing, how they are seen by other folks is something else. When Transsexual Menace (www.camprans.org) staged a protest at the Michigan Womyns Music Festival to make a point about who qualifies for entry as a womyn, furious politics erupted.

Though one often sees the acronym GLBT, and recently GLBTI, these days, the folks denoted by those letters are a long way from being cozy with one another. G and L and B are anchored in a binary, biological definition of sex and tangled in the traditional implications of gender. Queer is breaking away from all that, and

queer is where many trans (and intersex) people place themselves.

This sex/gender/sexuality stuff is a long way from being sorted out. Expect things to keep changing for quite a while.

MTM, FTF, and ?T?

Masculine to male, feminine to female, I-don't-know to what-the-heck. Many trans folk don't see sex, gender, and social role the way mainstream folks do. The label is not important; getting to a place of comfort so you can stop thinking about slitting your wrists is the thing.

Trans is not about men trying to be women or women trying to be men, it's about people being who they feel they truly are, reacting to other people and the messages of our culture in the way that works best for them. Short-haired women and long-haired men; men who use cosmetics, women who don't; men who stay home with the kids, women who drive trucks; people who do not let the prescriptive gender norms of the culture dictate how they live their lives.

Transgender is not simple. The only people I know who make a list of terms like crossdresser, butch, nellie, drag king, drag queen, femme, sissy, tomboy, transgenderist, transsexual and try to define them are people who don't know what they're talking about. Those words weren't thought up by trans people, those words were thought up by people who are scared of trans people. Sure, we've taken some of those terms as our own, but who we are is simply *ourselves*. So listen to *us* for a change.

Final caveat

The view that I present here of sex, gender, sexuality, social role and transgender is not the only view you can find on the 'net.

Books to read

These are a few of my favorite books about gender identity. As

you can see by the publication dates, this is a new field.

Kate Bornstein. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest Of Us*. 1994. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-90897-3. “I know I’m not a man—about that much I’m very clear, and I’ve come to the conclusion that I’m probably not a woman either, at least not according to a lot of people’s rules on this sort of thing. The trouble is, we’re living in a world that insists we be one or the other—a world that doesn’t bother to tell us exactly what one or the other *is*.”

Phyllis Burke. *Gender Shock: Exploding The Myths of Male and Female*. 1996. Doubleday. ISBN 0-385-47718-X. “Looking through three lenses of gender identity—behavior, appearance, and science—Burke challenges the notion that men and women are from different planets.”

Patrick Califia. *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. 1997. ISBN 1-57344-072-8. Cleis Press, P.O. Box 14684, San Francisco CA 94114. “Who would you be if you had never been punished for gender-inappropriate behavior, or seen another child punished for deviation from masculine or feminine norms, or participated in dishing out such punishment?”

Loren Cameron. *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*. 1996. Cleis Press. ISBN 1-57344-062-0. “For the longest time, transsexuals and especially transsexual men (female-to-males) have been virtually invisible to the dominant culture. ... *Body Alchemy* is the first photodocumentation of transsexual men from within our community.” Check out www.lorencameron.com for photos and ordering information!

Jason Cromwell. *Transmen & FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders & Sexualities*. 1999. University of Illinois Press. ISBN 0-252-06825-4. A wonderful, myth-shattering, outspoken, truthful, honest, open exploration of the lives and experiences of transmen (and other transpeople). Not quite as good as having a few

transmen in your life, but the next best thing.

Alice Domurat Dreger. *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. 1998. Harvard University Press. ISBN 0-674-08927-8. "...takes us inside the doctors' chambers to see how and why medical and scientific men constructed sex, gender, and sexuality as they did."

Anne Fausto-Sterling. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. 2000. Basic Books. ISBN 0-465-07713-7. An important book for understanding why we think about sex, gender and sexuality the way we do, and why we seem to find evidence to support our assumptions. (See also, "The Five Sexes, Revisited," the emerging recognition that people come in bewildering sexual varieties is testing medical values and social norms, in *The Sciences*, July/August 2000, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp 18-23, www.nyas.org.)

Kris Kleindienst, Ed. *This Is What Lesbian Looks Like: Dyke Activists Take On The 21st Century*. 1999. Firebrand Books. ISBN 1-56341-116-4. It's way past time to drive a stake through the heart of the elitist, separatist, supremacist thought that has characterized too much of gay and lesbian politics at the end of the 20th century. Some of this material dates back to the early nineties, so this book is also a record of a change that is taking place at the grassroots level and only now is affecting "the movement" in large visible ways.

Kate More & Stephen Whittle, Eds. *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle*. 1999. Cassell. ISBN 0-304-33776-5. A collection of thirteen essays by trans writers who refuse to see gender through male/female glasses and who see much more to sexuality than heterosexism and its homo converse. Yes folks, trans is not simply a bus stop on the route to becoming

the man or woman other folks want you to be!

Riki Anne Wilchins. *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*. 1997. Firebrand Books. ISBN 1-56341-090-7.

“Perhaps a gay rights movement will be sufficient to change the whole structure. It is, doubtless, much better than nothing, and a worthwhile goal for many. At the same time I cannot escape the nagging suspicion that gay liberation has disregarded Audre Lorde’s oft-quoted dictum that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,’ and has, instead, contented itself with simply building a small, yet tastefully furnished addition out back.”

Find more books and links on my gender pages at:
www.wiltedflowerchild.com

Clique Columns

I wrote these essays for *Clique*, a magazine for bisexual and lesbian women published in New York, as a “Transgender Talk” column during the spring of 1997. The essays were submitted in this order, with these titles. I saw only one issue of the magazine, so I don’t know if all the essays were actually printed. (I received very little feedback, so I’m thinking not, but then those were early times in terms of people having Internet access.)

Transgender Talk

I've volunteered to write a column for *Clique* because I find very little mention of transgender experience in the queer publications I usually see. I know we're out here, you know we're out here, so how about we not be quite so shy about it and talk some transgender? (You don't have to admit to anyone that you read this column. :-)

What is transgender? It could almost be defined as all those things nice queers don't talk about. It's not just transsexual people, the ones like me who modify their bodies. In some circles butch and femme expression is transgender because it goes against the notion that lesbian is its own gender and has nothing to do with those supposedly het roles of masculine and feminine.

How many transgendered people are there? Lots. More than you ever dreamed. Unless you live by yourself on an island, there are transgendered people in your life. If 10% of the general population is queer, I would bet that at least 10% of the queer population is transgendered.

The Intersex Society of North America (www.isna.org) estimates that perhaps 1.7% of the general population is intersexed, born with some anomaly of the genital area, sex organs, endocrine system, or chromosomes. These people do not fit the biological stereotypes of male and female. They do not necessarily identify as transgendered, but are one more example that sex and gender are not the simple dichotomies we often pretend they are.

Many transgendered people pass as people who are not transgendered. This may be their goal, as it is for some transsexual people who desire to live their post transition life with no one aware of their complete history; it may be for safety, or it may be because they fear lack of acceptance from their queer peers.

That last bit kind of sucks. It's hard being in a space that is queer safe, and still having to be on guard because you know

people will think you're different if you give true expression to how you feel. I am not a big fan of political correctness.

Sometimes transgender is a surprise. It's like a gift. You don't know exactly what you will find when you remove the wrappings, but you know the gift is presented with love and that if accepted, the gift will enrich you; and perhaps change you.

I suggest that the 'trans' in transgender stands for transcend, and that what we are about is transcending fixed gender roles. Transgender means that you decide how you interact with other people. Some days I feel femme, and some days I feel butch, and that's okay.

There are transgendered people who will swear up one side and down the other that they aren't queer. Straight women who are so butch they make your teeth hurt. Guys who crossdress and spend an evening flirting with the boys, but it's all just good clean fun, cause underneath the dresses they're just heterosexual males. I ain't queer, Ma, no, not me. Uh, huh.

An article in *The Advocate* at the end of 1996 suggested that perhaps all queer people are transgendered. I think this is a useful thought. We're called queer because we don't conform to the social expectations for the gender assigned us at birth. That's the root of what 'they' think about us, that it is queer for women to love women, men to love men, and for someone to not constrain love along gender lines.

I dare to suggest that homo-centricity is not a big step forward from hetero-centricity. Transgender is about making individuals more important than classes, it's about letting each person define themselves, it's about letting each person interpret their own history. A transsexual person, for example, does not hide their past, they reinterpret their past; as do lesbian women who once were married to men.

If you want to know more, I recommend the book *Lesbians Talk Transgender*, by Zachary I Nataf (1996, Scarlet Press). This little book (60 pages) consists of text intermingled with comments from many people, transgendered and not. It is a very good

introduction to the terminology and the way people feel about and react to all ways in which we trans gender.

In future columns I'll talk more about terminology, the individual experiences of transgendered people and of intersexed people, T inclusion with LBG, and about some other interesting books and online resources. I'd be happy to answer polite email and I am always pleased to have people browse my web pages.

***Q*News* Pieces**

Q-News (with several variations in typography over the years) is a youth-oriented queer magazine published at, or by students of, Michigan State University (it now has a web presence at www.msu.edu/~qnews). These are some of the items I have contributed, often for specific occasions.

Coming Out as Something Else

The usual reaction to a person coming out as transsexual is silence. The reality that a person's initial diagnosis as male or female is subject to change or to radical reinterpretation is so far beyond the comprehension of most people that you might as well tell them you're going to paint yourself purple and live in a cave. (If on top of that news you add that you are queer, well, their eyes just glaze over.)

A person does not choose to come out as transsexual, they decide they must transition from one social male/female (m/f) role to the other and are outed in the process. The goal may be to abandon your past and reach the point where you can live in your new role clear and easy, but there is a period of generally a year or two where there is no way to hide what is going on. Even if you are blessed with the best of attitudes, this transition period can only be described as living hell. Beyond that, unless you move to the other side of the country and leave no forwarding address, little reminders of the way you were forced to live the first part of your life will continue to haunt you for years and years.

Most transsexual people who are successfully past their transition in m/f role do not remain out and do not maintain contact with the transgender community or with other transsexual people (especially those who are out). This path of secrecy was not open to me, and I don't believe I would have chosen it if it were. But I do understand its appeal.

While I am quite out, I don't (usually) carry a sign that says I am a transsexual person, and I also try to be out as queer. So I am never certain just what anyone knows or thinks about me. Transsexuality is such a taboo subject that people never mention it to my face; but what do they say about me after I leave? Do they whisper about me because they think I'm queer? Do they believe they know the whole story? (Only I know the whole story.)

In general I have had no problems as the result of coming out as transsexual or in living my life post-transition. I'm still together with my spouse and our children, live in the same house, work on the campus of the same large Midwestern university, and so on. Many people in the area are aware of my history, but it doesn't seem to make much difference. Of course I do have a fair amount of attitude.

Am I queer? If so, what am I? I do not claim to be either male or female, in fact I'm not either one now, kind of a later-life intersexual person. But our society forces each person to live in the role of 'man' or 'woman' and I have chosen the latter as the best fit for me, though I can't say I agree with the current social construction of those roles. So I guess none of the sexual orientation terms apply to me. (I am mostly attracted to 'women', but what am I, and what does that make someone who is attracted to me? Oh, it's all so very difficult.)

I am hopeful that the younger generations of queer people will be truly inclusive of the many transgendered people who self-identify as queer. In my generation (I am 45) we have often been treated, well, rather poorly, by the very people we feel ourselves most akin to. All the infighting among LBG&T people seems so silly to me, as does the insistence on narrow goals that denies that so many people are oppressed and marginalized by the same social forces.

What's it like to come out as transsexual? Complicated, lonely, painful, frustrating, expensive, exhilarating, joyful, and dangerous. Many if not most of us who have transitioned have done so as an alternative to suicide, when we reached the point where we had nothing to lose and everything to gain. I pray that we can make this a less desperate path to follow for those who must do so.

[Published in the 1977 "National Coming Out Days" issue of *Q*News* at Michigan State University.]

Titanium Oxide

Queer life. Life as a queer. What could be more queer than life? Everything important happens in your head, you know.

Where does ‘you’ stop, and everything else begin? Take a piece of very fine sandpaper and gently rub your arm. At first nothing seems to happen, but before long there is pain and then blood. Have you found yourself? Was the previous layer of cells not part of you, but rather the boundary between you and everything else?

The difference between that piece of sandpaper rubbing your arm and someone’s finger rubbing, say, your left nipple, is what? On your side of your skull, it probably feels better (but at least you know whether it does or not). You really want to believe that the person attached to the finger rubbing your left nipple is having more fun than did that piece of sandpaper, but that can at best be a theory. You cannot know another person better than you can know a piece of sandpaper.

What are the implications of this wisdom to a discussion of family values?

Given that there is no way, absolutely no way, you can be certain of what any other person believes or feels, which makes more sense?

(1) Line everyone up, tell them what to believe, administer an oath (“I believe in...”), then arrange dire consequences for behavioral evidence that the oath didn’t take.

(2) Ask people what they believe and how they feel, and talk about making a world in which they are free to be like that.

If you think #2 is the better choice, congratulations! You are queer.

You knew that, huh? Okay, my advice for living the queer life is to listen to yourself, believe in yourself, and help make a world in which everyone is free to do the same.

Titanium Oxide

There are a lot of complications to making that work, but that's what life is for, working out the details. Go to it!

[Published in the fall 2003 "Welcome" issue of *Q*News* at Michigan State University.]

Point of View Essays

I write a lot of essays. On my wiltedflowerchild.com web site I have a section called “Point of View” where I collect essays that are mostly reactions to current events or things that happen in my personal life. These are a selection from those essays.

Is it a Choice, and So What?

It is fashionable for gay and trans folk to state that their sexuality and/or gender identity is not a choice, preference or lifestyle, but is determined in some way by genetics, by drugs used during pregnancy, or by some other vaguely defined neonatal hormone event. In other words, homosexuality and transsexuality are ‘intersex’ conditions, only less obviously so because the organ involved is the brain. The point being, of course, that what is not chosen cannot be said to be morally wrong. True, but that argument goes only so far.

That one has a certain sexual passion or desire has never been held in and of itself to justify acting to realize that desire. It may for example be true that most males are biologically inclined to impregnate as many young females as possible, and that most young females are receptive of this behavior, but such action is deemed neither morally nor socially acceptable. Systems of ethics and law exist in part to deter a large number of such normal human tendencies.

So saying that one’s body inclines one to homosexual passion does not seem to be much of an argument for legitimizing such behavior. This is why certain groups place so much emphasis on trying to convince people that gays are just like straight people except for the M/F of their partner; they are simply trying to slightly enlarge the definition of ‘straight’ to include discreet same-sex monogamous relationships, tacitly adding themselves to the conservative right-wing who oppose BDSM, polyamory, casual sex, drag, and other kinky stuff.

Some trans folk follow this same path, stating that gender identity disorder is a medical problem that must be corrected so they can lead a straight (whether hetero or homo sexual) lifestyle, emphasizing that transsexuality has nothing to do with sexuality, *per se*. These people often style themselves as ‘true transsexuals’ to

distance themselves not only from the above mentioned sexual libertines, but from drag queens and kings, impersonators, crossdressers, bi-genders, transgenders, and especially people who situate themselves between the purely male or female.

These are conservative, reactionary times, so this scramble to fit in and be absolved of choosing to be different is not surprising. Nor, given human nature, is the fact that people do so by recasting others in the mold of villain. But clearly this scramble to be accepted by the conservative right has little to do with biology and everything to do with one group seeking power and privilege at the expense of others. It's a dangerous tactic, though.

What happens if and when science does find something like a gay gene or a transsexual brain anomaly? Will the gay and trans conservatives support screening for this condition, make it illegal for carriers of the gene to have children, or push to develop the technology to fix this problem and so arrange their own extinction? (What if a person exhibits gay/trans behavior but fails the medical test? Does this prove their behavior is in fact a choice? What is to be done to such people?)

For all those people who “wouldn't have chosen to be gay or trans,” would you choose to eliminate all such people through genetic engineering? That is the ultimate conclusion of the argument that such differences are a biological error; and the medical technology to do so may well exist by the end of this century. If human genetic engineering becomes a reality, ‘normal’ takes on a frighteningly solid aspect.

I suggest that all concerned pay attention to the intersex people who have been speaking up in great number to protest that any ‘fixing’ of their problems should wait until informed consent of the fixee is possible. Also note that most gay (which includes bisexual and lesbian) people are vehemently opposed to the so-called ‘ex-gay’ programs of the religious right. (With increasing trans visibility it shouldn't be long before we see ‘ex-trans’ programs, too.) And like it or not, there are many trans people content to be something other than male/masculine/man or

female/feminine/woman. The assimilationists are actually a small minority; they simply have the power and privilege to make things happen on a political level.

With hope that not even the conservative right will set themselves up as Christ's Genetic Engineer, let's rewind a bit. Homosexuality and transsexuality are not biological problems, they are moral and social problems, not so much different than the problems presented by differences in ability, ethnicity, nationality and religion. Segregation, slavery, institutionalization or imprisonment, murder, war, genocide and even assimilation has not solve those problems in a morally palatable manner; neither will such tactics solve the problems of recognizing and welcoming human gender and sexual diversity into society.

An aside about behaviors and social constructs

Biological evolution (genetic variation and selection) has proven a powerful tool for understanding how and why our bodies are as they are. It appears now that similar processes affect our behaviors, beliefs, and ideas (memes). Important behaviors and ideas also evolve, though perhaps not with quite the conscious intent we have so egotistically assumed.

Genes control the construction of the bits and pieces of our bodies, including our brains, which though part of the body, does transcend the purely physical. How finely our behaviors are programmed by biology has long been a problem for ethics and free will. The physical aspect of our senses of taste and smell may predispose a person to certain likes and dislikes, but we can educate and develop these preferences. We can learn to jump out of airplanes, walk on hot coals, or enjoy disco music.

Sexuality and gender are extremely complex behaviors which may be at least in part genetically determined. But they also seem to be larger in scope than any individual. Heterosexuality certainly fits the description of a meme.

The idea of memes and memetic evolution is fascinating. I'll

be writing a essay on that topic soon.

Conclusion

Sexual behavior and gender identity have large enough components of individual choice that one cannot hide behind the simplistic idea that “biology made me that way.” One is not born a sexual being or a fully gendered being; one becomes sexual and gendered. So stop looking for a safe place to hide in the *status quo* and work on making the world a place that is safe for all the wonderful diversity of humanity!

That’s what I think, here in East Lansing at Samhain, 2000 CE.

Transgender Monologue

I was born in 1952.

So, in a sense, was Christine Jorgenson.

“Ex-GI becomes blonde beauty!” screamed
the headlines when I was six months old.

The headlines are no longer
quite so self-assured,
but the subtext hasn’t changed.

Trans this, change that,
but go from one to the other.
Don’t stop in the middle,
that’s much too confusing;
under or over shoot and it’s
camp or drag or impersonation;
mix it up and you’re just a freak.

Fuck that.

Do you think I’m standing
outside some store, choosing
from what you want me to be?

Ah, no.

It’s not like that with me.

I’m not working within the system.

I don’t care if I rock your boat.

Drowning offers more freedom than the
life-jacket you want me to wear.

I wrote the above when I thought I might participate in the
“Transgender Monologues” session at the 2002 *Midwest Bisexual
Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference* at Michigan
State University, organized by Rachel Crandall of Transgender

Michigan. I did not make it to the session, but I support the general idea of such a session. Trans stories are many and varied and need to be heard, especially in today's conservative "I'm just like everyone else" times.

That's what I thought, here in East Lansing in the spring of 2002.

Short Fiction

This section includes mild erotica, literary fiction, science fiction and two very short play scripts.

A Touching Story

Josie sighed contentedly, rolling away from me. After a moment she asked, “Alo? Why’s it feel so good to do this? Why better with you than by myself?”

One of the reasons I like spending time with Josie is she’s always thinking and questioning. I kissed her cheek and thought about how to answer. “This is another story about long ago, before we were changed.”

Josie snuggled closer. “Is it a scary story?”

“A little, in places. But the scary parts are long ago.”

“So tell.” She nibbled a sensitive spot.

“Stop that! I can’t think when you do that.”

“Why not?”

“Shush. It’s part of the story.”

She let her head rest on my shoulder. I pulled the blanket up under our chins. It wasn’t cold in my room, of course, but the gently circulating air would raise goose bumps as we cooled off after our body play. Briefly I wondered about goose bumps, and exactly what a goose might be. Some even older story, no doubt, one I’d never hear.

“Long ago...”

“And far away? On Earth, right?”

“Of course. There’s no one but us out here, silly. Body touching is something left over from the big people.”

“The original humans.”

I bumped her nose with my nose. “Which of us is telling this story? Huh?”

She scrunched up her face. “Sorry. I’ll be quiet. Poke me if I fall asleep.”

“Being sleepy afterwards is part of body touching, though I don’t know why. Listen. The big people, the humans, made more

humans using direct sexual reproduction. A male human exchanged genetic material directly with a female human, who then grew a new human inside her body, seeded from a random combination of the genetic material from both of them. After about nine months, the new human was expelled from the female's body, along with the temporary growth environment, after which the new human began to live on its own."

Josie sat up. "Yuck! That's the stupidest, grossest, ickiest thing I have every heard! Is that really true? It isn't true, is it, Alo?"

It did sound pretty weird, but I knew it was true. "You've seen the wombs in the creche? A latent genie grows in a biosac, a placenta, inside each womb." Josie nodded. "The word 'womb' once referred to an organ in a female human, and the placenta was the temporary growth environment for the new human. After a viable infusion of genetic material from a male, a latent human formed inside the placenta. The details sound impossibly complicated and haphazard, but that's what I've been talking about. For nine months the female was a living womb."

Josie grimaced, trying to imagine something growing inside her body. "That can't have been very much fun."

"The nine months probably wasn't fun, and it often didn't work out correctly. But the important thing was to start the process, and that's why body touching feels so good, so people would keep on trying to make more baby humans. Until humans had technology, making more humans and finding or growing food and keeping warm was almost all people did during their lives."

"That sounds about as much fun as being a plant!"

"Maybe it wasn't as dull as it sounds. I agree that life on Earth sounds dreadful, though people seem to always find ways to have fun. However, that's the way it was, for hundreds of thousands of years."

"No wonder Earth was such a weird place!"

"Indeed. But that's the story of why body touching is so much fun. Reproduction required frequent contact between males and females, so body touching is as fun a thing to do as other things that

are still actually necessary, like eating, eliminating, sleeping and exercising.”

Josie lay down again, but remained propped up on her elbows. “How come you know so much about this, Alo? And why do we still do it? They could have gengineered it away, too, couldn’t they? We can’t stop eating or exercising, but we don’t use our own bodies to make more genies.”

“I know about it because I’ve viewed all the books and films we brought from Earth and Moon. I’m trying to understand what humans, big people, were like, why they made us, and how we’re different. It’s our past. I think it’s important to try to understand this while we’re still near enough in time to have some memories. In another generation or two, Earth truly will be only a story.”

“It already seems really bizarre,” said Josie. “I was born on the ship. Do you remember Earth, Alo?”

“No, Josie. There was never anyone on the ship who came up from Earth. I’m one of the few still living who were born on Moon. I was only five when the ship began its voyage. A while back, before you were born, I did talk with the older genies who had had some contact with big people. They all have died now, though.”

“Spooky! Do you have more stories to tell?”

“I do. They’ll be part of the book I’m writing.”

“Maybe you’ll tell me some of the stories in our together times?”

“Maybe you’ll help me make the book?”

“Can I? Do you need an assistant?”

“I do. You can be assistant ship’s historian.”

“What does that mean?”

“History is writing down stories so they can be retold correctly in the future.”

“Dark and deep!” She assumed a serious expression. “So body touching is just a fun thing left over from when it was a necessary thing?”

“I don’t think it’s an accident that we still like body touching. You know we were gengineered for space. We’re half the mass of

an average big person, we don't have much hair, we don't have complete reproductive systems, and there are other subtle changes. But we still have genitals and other hormone induced body differences that aren't strictly necessary."

"I like genitals," said Josie, "and touching is more than just fun, it's a way of not being alone inside your own head."

"What do you mean, Josie?"

"If I sit in my room with the lights out and the sleep sound turned on, but stay awake, it can be scary. Sometimes I almost convince myself that I don't have a body, that I cannot move to turn the light back on. But then, somehow, I do move."

She dropped down to her side and put an arm over my chest. "When I do body touching with myself, it feels nice, but I always know what's going to happen next. With another person, there are surprises. When I'm here with you, I don't doubt that I have a body."

I smiled at her. "I think you'll make a good assistant, Josie. There are some old books about a subject called philosophy I think you might like to read. You're not the first person to have such thoughts. How old are you now?"

"Fourteen! I finished my basic schooling when I was twelve. I've done a lot of different tasks for duty hours. Nothing so far has seemed interesting enough to sign up for more schooling or an apprenticeship. I don't have to do that for another two years, but I've been doing a lot of thinking."

"Being my assistant could be an apprenticeship."

"Really? Is historian an actual duty?"

"It should be. I've been thinking of making a case to the Council to have it added to the list. It will help my case to say I have found someone who wants to apprentice."

"Speed of light! I'd like that."

"Okay, we'll give it a try. Should I finish the story about touching?"

"Oh, sure. So you think there is a reason for body touching other than fun and helping me believe that something exists outside

my own head?”

“Yes. We could have been gengineered to all be the same, with no genitals, or the same genitals, or maybe just a single exciting spot to touch.”

“That would be kind of dull!”

“Now here’s the difficult thought, Josie. I think we like touching so much because the big people wanted to do body touching, ‘have sex’ they called it, with us. When people first began moving into space, there were large places in orbit and on Earth’s moon that were living places for genies, but fun visiting places for the big people.”

“We were crew, we built the space palaces, the lunar caverns were our domain!” chanted Josie.

“That’s what the song says,” I nodded, “and I believe it’s true. But many of us were something other than crew. We were employees, servants. Those aren’t words we use any longer. They mean we had to do what other people told us to do. And one of those things was body touching with big people.”

“You mean even if we didn’t want to?”

“Yes, like a checkbox on a duty roster.”

Josie was silent for a few moments. “I don’t like this story now, Alo. I would not want to have been there.”

“No. I think that’s one reason why we left.”

“Stole a starship?”

“Yes. Do you know what ‘stole’ means?”

“Well, no. I guess I’ve never heard it outside the song.”

“It means the big people did not intend for us to set the ship in motion by ourselves. We were crew. There were supposed to have been big people on this ship, also.”

“Oh! That’s why the middle section is different! The rooms and corridors were supposed to be larger, for them. It wasn’t for exercise and skating and groups and theater.”

“Yes. That section wasn’t finished when we stole the ship, so we finished it our way.”

“We stole the ship so it would be ours, with no big people

along on the trip?”

“I think so. I think it was the only way we could be free, to not be slaves.”

“Slaves? How can a person be a slave? A slave is a device that is totally under control...” Jose swallowed. “Oh, stars around us and ever on! The big people created us so they could control us. We were tools they used to get into space, and then they used us for other things. Is that right, Alo?”

“I think so.”

Josie put her hands over her face. Her voice sounded far away as she asked, “Are you going to tell this part of the story in the history book you’re writing?”

“I don’t know, Josie. Perhaps it would be best if no one knows, if they go on believing the big people were our friends and benevolent creators. As my assistant, you can help me decide.”

She was silent in thought for a few moments, then moved her hands to reveal a tear-streaked face. “Alo? If you, we, don’t write the story that way, no one would ever know?”

“If we don’t write the story, and I erase the notes I’ve made and the few files I’ve found. No one could ever know. We can never return to Earth.”

“Communication failed once the ship began to move; we are alone on our journey to the stars,” Josie chanted softly.

“That part of the song is not true,” I sighed.

“What do you mean?”

“Again, I don’t completely understand this, but I have found records which indicate that the comm equipment was deliberately destroyed, to prevent people on Earth from somehow gaining control of the ship’s computers and forcing us to return.” I decided to keep to myself for the time being that the real fear seems to have been that the ship would have been told to self-destruct.

“Wow, Alo. What else that I think I know is totally wrong?”

“That’s a good question for an historian to ask, Josie.”

She wiped tears on the back of a hand and said in a strong voice, “I want to be your apprentice, Alo! I want to figure things

out. Being on the ship and not knowing how or why we got here is like sitting in the dark in my room and wondering if my body is real.”

I smiled. “A little bit like that.”

“No, a lot like that, Alo. We stole the ship for reasons most of us don’t know about, or understand. Where are we going, and why? Who are we? Is this ship on our journey, or is it on the big people’s journey? The big people probably wanted to go to another planet, but what do we want? We’re not planet people, we’re space people. If we don’t answer these questions, we’re still just tools, part of a ship and a future that’s not under our control. That’s bad and scary, Alo.”

I was shocked. These thoughts had not occurred to me. Had the Council discussed these issues? I didn’t think so. It is indeed time that I have an assistant, and an heir. There is work to do!

(March 2005)

This story is part of a larger set of stories on the general theme of altered humans, trans-humans or post-humans. We’re already here, you know.

The End of the Nick Gang

This is simply silly.

A Play in One Act
by Lisa Lees

For 3 - 7 performers

JUDGE
BAILIFF (optional)
D.A.
NICK
SHERIFF (optional)
GUARDS (optional)

Opens in courtroom. This is a hearing, so there is no jury. There may be a COURT REPORTER who takes notes and scowls, a SHERIFF, and a GUARD or two. NICK should be in jail clothes but with traditional spectacles, beard and belly. The JUDGE should look judicial and probably close to retirement. The D.A. (District Attorney) is slick, efficient and willing to send her/his own mother to jail for jaywalking. The BAILIFF may be combined with the D.A. for a minimum cast of three.

JUDGE: Well, Nick, I've been expecting you to hit this town. I only wish it hadn't been while I was on the bench! (Bangs gavel. The JUDGE likes to bang her/his gavel.) Okay, let's get this hearing started. Bailiff! What are

the charges?

BAILIFF: (Picking up what is clearly a long list.)
Ahem! Making hit lists, running a gang,
wearing gang clothing, smoking in public
buildings, breaking and entry, assault.
(Throws down list.) There's more, your
Honor, but I think that's enough to begin
with.

JUDGE: Quite right. (Bangs gavel.) Thank you.
Prosecutor, please question the defendant.

D.A.: (Steps close to witness chair, perhaps with
thumbs in suspenders and a swagger.) You run
a gang, right Nick?

NICK: Well, I wouldn't call my elves a gang, but
I guess I am the person who calls the shots.

D.A.: Not a gang? You all dress alike, hang out
in your clubhouse, have secret signs, and
break into people's homes while they're
sleeping! If that's not a gang, then I'm
not the District Attorney!

NICK: But we're delivering gifts! People want us
to drop down their chimney. They leave milk
and cookies for me.

D.A.: Yeh, I can see you need to go on a diet.
Delivering gifts, you say. Where do these
"gifts" come from? Who's behind your
organization? Or does this explain some of
the shoplifting and hijacking that goes on

around here during the rest of the year?

NICK: (Spluttering.) We make everything in our workshop at the North Pole!

D.A.: The North Pole? Maybe, but where do you get the tools and materials? The North Pole is a little sparse on natural resources. And come to think of it, the North Pole is international territory. What are you doing there? Are you an American?

NICK: (Getting angry.) A thief? An American? This is absolutely preposterous! I and my flying reindeer are a cherished multicultural institution!

D.A.: Flying reindeer, eh? You got a permit to keep deer as pets? Are they on the endangered species list? And who gives you clearance to fly in that part of the world?

NICK: You, you! (Throws hands up in air.) You're what's wrong with this world! Destroying the myths and traditions! (Pounds on railing in aggravation using both fists.)

D.A.: Got a temper, huh? Is that why your gang attacked that French guy, Babar, when he tried to have a word with you?

NICK: Attacked? My elves threw snowballs at that elephant and his noisy little dog. We've got a right to privacy!

JUDGE: (Bangs gavel.) I've heard enough! I've heard more than enough! (Bang.) Bailiff! Guards! Take him away and lock him up! Sheriff, find the rest of his gang and lock them up, too! We'll put an end to this nonsense!

CURTAIN

(1999)

Poetry

Poetry seems to be a dying form, which is too bad. There are some things which can't be said in complete, well-formed sentences, or within the rhythm of a song. Poetry is often the next best thing to a face-to-face chat.

Uncertain Territory

Wiggle my fingers, yep, all there.
Toes, too.
So I guess I am like a tree; roots in
the moist soil, fingers in the breeze.

Girl tree or boy tree?
Have you ever asked that question?
Been frightened when you cannot tell?
Nah.

But me, I make you sweat.
My skin is soft, my breast fills your hand,
my nipple is large enough to suck, and
your hands,
your hands,
want to follow the curve.

But they don't.

Uncertain territory down there.

And so you
cough
blush
mutter
and leave.

I?
I.
Yes, again, just
I.

(February 1998)

About the author

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1952; grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma; went to college (philosophy) and graduate school (computer science) in Missouri; lived briefly in Kansas and New Jersey, and finally ended up in Michigan in late 1978; where I've lived in Flint, Ann Arbor, Lansing and, since 1993, East Lansing. Perhaps this explains why I prefer semicolons over periods.

The most important thing in my life is my own two children, currently teenagers. Right behind or beside them is young people in general; that's why I've always worked or taught at universities, and have been heavily involved for the past ten years with a children's theater company. (The kind of children's theater where it's children on stage and on the crews; not adults doing everything for children.)

Most people think I'm whacko because I gave my drivers license back to the state in 1981 and haven't driven a car since. If that doesn't weird people out, there's being queer and transexual. As a final *coup de grâce*, not only do I not like Microsoft Windows, but I do all my work on a GNU/Linux system (I've used Unix since 1985).

I also tend to annoy people by not answering questions the way they expect. Perhaps you can tell that from this brief bio.

For all the details you could possibly want, please see my web pages at lisalees.com and wiltedflowerchild.com .