

Welcome to Nowhere

Field Notes from the Outskirts of Gender

By Donna Lynn Matthews

To Marcy, Allison and Victoria

The most spiritual human beings, assuming they are the most courageous, also experience by far the most painful tragedies: but it is precisely for this reason that they honour life, because it brings against them its most formidable weapons. – Nietzsche

Prologue

What would you do if you woke up one morning to find that you were someone else – same home, family, job, friends – even the same body – but that somehow you were not the same person? Somehow, something was different – the world, or more properly your place in it, was no longer what you knew – what you *thought* you knew. It was all the same – and yet somehow very different.

Inscribed above the entrance to the Oracle at Delphi is the phrase “*Know Thyself*.” Much can be read into this, and many have interpreted it differently over the ages. For me, it became almost an imperative: to *know* myself, not in the usually superficial manner that most do, but to really know and *understand* myself: who I am, why I am, and how I fit in with the world.

These are not new questions. In fact, almost everyone asks themselves these very questions at some point in their lives. However, for people who recognized that they are somehow *different* – that they somehow deviate from what the world wants to call *normal* (a loaded word if ever there was one) – these are not passing thoughts. For these people – for me – these questions become what amounts to a life’s mission: a quest for understanding. Most often, answers prove to be elusive and we spend our lives in the world but not a part of the world. Our search for answers becomes a struggle for acceptance: not only by society as a whole, but by *ourselves* as well. Ask any of us and we’ll tell you: self-acceptance is the hardest of all.

Which is what this little book is about: self-acceptance. One person’s account of their search to find who they are, how they fit into the world and – along the way – how they learn to accept and like themselves. I make no claims to any secret knowledge or insight. All I can do tell my story and hopefully strike a resonate chord – get you thinking. And if perchance you see yourself in my experiences, realize that you are not alone – no matter how different you may think you are.

My friends, I do not want to be confused with others or taken for what I am not. – Nietzsche

A Day in the Life

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

My youngest daughter and I were at McDonald’s and had just finished eating. She ran off to play with the other children over in the play area and I was reading a magazine at the table when I heard a small voice. I looked up from my magazine to find a young girl - maybe four or five – standing in front of me. It was she who asked the question and it appeared that she was waiting for an answer.

It wasn’t the question that surprised me as I am used to getting odd looks and double-takes now and then – I have learned to accept that it comes with the territory – it is the *price* I pay for being who I am. I have over-heard people ask their friends, “Is that a man or a woman?” Sometimes these people will have ‘discussions’ – more like small performance pieces in reality – about ‘people like me’. They are usually *just* loud enough for me to hear – a way for people to let me know what they think without *actually* having to address me directly. People are such cowards...

It wasn’t the question so much as the fact that it was being asked of me directly. But then children are like that. Not knowing any better, they are apt to speak their mind – especially if there is something about which they are curious. It seems I peaked this girl’s interest.

I wondered what it was this time – what buttons I was pushing to elicit her question. I felt that I was dressed quite unremarkably: jeans, a t-shirt and sneakers – I wasn’t ‘going’ for any effect that day – just taking my daughter to lunch. However, as I have found from experience, the less I ‘try’, the more likely I am to be read as a girl. Perhaps it was my hair – or my earrings... Whatever it was, it was enough to make her to ask.

Not that it wasn’t a valid question as it’s quite often a coin-toss as to how I’ll be read. It’s just that I have **never** had anyone come up to me and ask me to my face. And yet, here was this little girl, doing just that – and it caught me off-guard.

I was faced with what, for me, was a loaded question. And while I was curious as to what prompted her to ask, I was **not** going to engage someone else’s child in a dialogue. But more to the point, how do I answer this question? How do I explain to this child the personal implications of her innocent query? How do I impress upon her the fallacy of the assumptions upon which her question was based?

I sighed. Then I looked at her, smiled, and told her “I’m a boy.”

“That’s what I thought”, she replied. She then ran over to her friend and said, “See, I told you he was a boy...” and the two of them continued playing with the other children.

I thought about her question and about my answer. I lied to her – not that telling her I was a girl would have been any more truthful. I lied to her because, all things considered, it was easier than trying to explain myself – especially to a little child. And even though, given the situation, it was the *right* answer, I lied to her nonetheless.

How many times had I done that in the past? How many time had I lied – to myself.

The consequences of our actions takes us by the scruff of the neck, altogether indifferent to the fact that we have 'improved' in the meantime. – Nietzsche

The Awakening

Something happened during the few short hours I was asleep. Somehow, the world changed – *my* world changed. I lay there in bed as an overwhelming flood of feelings and emotions washed over me. The person whom I *thought* I knew – the person whom I thought I *was* – was being swept away by the current. I could feel ‘me’ slipping further and further away until finally, it was gone.

I was able to drag myself out of bed and into the bathroom. Looking into the mirror, I saw a stranger staring back at me with an expression of genuine bewilderment. I found myself, possibly for the first time, naked in the harsh light of reality asking myself one question – “Who am I?”

Thirty six years old and I don’t know who I am.

I had what I considered to be a stable and *workable* sense of self for a while now. It took a while, but I found what worked and held on to it – unfortunately it was little more than a carefully constructed façade. The ‘me’ I knew ceased to exist: perhaps I never really existed at all. Who knows? I sure don’t. But at this point, I’m not sure of *anything*.

Just how in the hell did I wind up here...

We enter this world naked – physically, intellectually and emotionally. While I still had my clothes and my intellect was reasonably intact, emotionally I had been stripped. It was all gone – nothing left but raw exposed nerve. I continued staring into the mirror, looking for I don’t know what. I wanted to wake up – for the dream to be over. I wanted to have ‘me’ back. But I knew that I was already awake – possibly more awake than I had ever been before. Gone was the veil through which I had viewed the world and myself – the dream world that had been my ‘reality’.

And so on Monday, December 8th 1997 at around 4:00am, I opened my eyes for the first time. It was on this day that I would start, in earnest, to *become myself*. We are always telling children to just ‘be themselves’ – and it sounds so easy. However, one can not simply *be* oneself, one must *become* oneself. It is a process of exploration and discovery: a process I had managed to avoid – or rather postpone.

I certainly never intended to re-evaluate my life – I don’t think anyone does. One usually experiences an event of some significance – something ‘life altering’ – which then sets things in motion: much like a rock rolling down a hill can trigger an avalanche. Such was the case with me: the rock that was my identity – my sense of self – had rolled down the hill.

In retrospect, I suppose that it was inevitable. I had always been different – felt different. I have never felt that I really fit in anywhere. Growing up, I had these feelings – almost longings in a way – to ‘be’ something that I knew I could never be. The ‘me’ who I was becoming – who I was told I *should* be – just never felt right. Much like an older sibling’s hand-me-down clothes, I was waiting to ‘grow into’ this person everyone *expected* me to become. It never happened - I never was able to grow into the ideal put forth before me. In an unconscious effort to ‘fit in’ and be ‘normal’, I resolved my inner turmoil by rationalizing all the ‘different’ feelings I had as this ‘kinky’ part of myself. I managed to convince myself that I wasn’t different at all – that I was just like all the rest of the ‘guys’: and it worked. For about twelve years, I was able to rationalize all the feelings, thoughts and actions – which were by all accounts not at all ‘normal’ – as just some personality ‘quirks’. I had managed to talk myself into being normal.

It was in 1997 that I discovered the Internet and the wealth of information available. For whatever reason, I started to poke around for some information about my ‘interests’ and found that I was far from alone in my feelings. A bit more poking and I discovered an interesting little corner of the web called **Usenet**: a collection of forums and support groups where likeminded individuals could discuss topics of common interest. Amongst the thousands of forums I stumbled upon a couple of support groups for individuals who crossdress. Yes, I crossdress: about myself this much – my ‘kink’ – I was willing to concede. It wasn’t long before I became a member of a group of people more or less like myself, with stories and histories not unlike my own.

For most people, the mention of crossdressing brings to mind the image of ‘a man in a dress’. While not wholly inaccurate, there is really much more to it than that. Crossdressing satisfies a *need* that some people have and contrary to what many think, that need is not necessarily sexual. There are people who crossdress just to get their kicks and there is nothing wrong with that – I can think of nothing more harmless than putting on some different clothes to make oneself feel good. I found that for me, however, it did something *psychologically* which nothing else could – it made me *feel* better – it made me feel *right*. This was a part of myself that always made me feel *different* and alone – and it was a liberating feeling to know that I was not alone in the world with my feelings: there were *others* like me.

After reading the discussions others were having, I started to acknowledge that I wasn’t as regular a ‘guy’ as I pretended – but then neither were all the others who posted to the forum. I allowed myself to give a name to the ‘alter ego’ I had kept hidden – that I had denied existed and eventually, ‘Donna’ introduced herself to the others online, becoming a regular contributor to the group.

And it was all good – for a while.

But before I can talk about where this all is going, you need to know how I got here.

Thus, there arises an habituation to a certain causal interpretation which in truth obstructs and even prohibits an investigation of the cause. – Nietzsche

In the Beginning

My earliest memory I can relate to all of this is visiting my grandmother in her apartment around the block from where we lived in Ridgewood, Queens. I was quite young – maybe around four years old I'd guess – and I'd go over there for an afternoon. She would leave her bra and girdle out in her bedroom and I remember putting them on and running around. She thought it was funny and would tell me I was being silly and I was – little kids do silly things. I'm not sure for how long I did this and I don't remember ever being scolded for it, but I am sure that at some point I was told that *big boys* do not do things like that.

In 1971, my family moved from our apartment in Ridgewood, Queens to a house in the suburbs of Long Island. It was nice there: trees and grass – definitely nicer than the concrete landscape of Queens. One thing missing though were any boys my age with whom to play. There were, however, five girls my age and they were my playmates. We would play together all the time: jacks, hopscotch, tag, dress up and all sorts of other made up games; I even learned how to twirl a baton. I played with the girls, pretty much as a girl and we did not play games that required me to 'be the boy'. We just played and had fun.

Not surprisingly, the older boys on the block would tease me on a regular basis for playing with the girls all the time. They would call me a 'femme' and a 'sissy' and were generally nasty to me. My girlfriends would tell me to ignore them – that they were just a bunch of *dumb boys*. Somehow, I was 'different' from the older boys. It wasn't just the age difference, there was something else – something I couldn't understand or even begin to articulate. I felt a closeness, a connection, with my girlfriends. I saw no difference between them and me, and they treated me no differently. I was one of them – and I was **not** one of the dumb boys.

Around ten or eleven years old,, I had what I can only describe as a real 'girlfriend'. She lived around and down the block from me and we played together often. We would eat lunch and dinner at each other's houses, ride bikes together, etc. We even exchanged Valentine's with each other. We were equals, sharing many good times together, and I felt most at ease when I was with her. She was the closest childhood friend I ever had, and when she and her family moved away, I was devastated – having lost someone who was truly my best friend.

A couple of years later, I made new friend around the corner. She was my age and we got along well. She had this little game she liked to play; we would go into the shed in her backyard and swap underpants for the afternoon – which we did pretty much every time we got together to play. We would go into the shed, stand back to back (no looking!), swap undies and then go about the rest of the day. (I remember the first time we did this – her panties were yellow with little flowers on them. They fit differently than my briefs; they fit nicely and I like it.)

There was nothing more to it than that. And before it was time to go home, we would repeat the ritual – switching back to our own undies. One time she had to go in before we had a chance to switch back; I went home in her panties and she in my briefs. We were both so scared, but no one found out. The next day, we returned each other's undies. We continued to do this for a few years, many times swapping for the day and not swapping back.

I realized that something about what we were doing was not quite right. However, we were friends – it was our secret – it was fun – and we enjoyed it. How bad could it be? In retrospect, I feel that this had a significant effect on me. It was perhaps my first ‘real’ crossdressing experience and it was with a friend who *possibly* shared the same feelings I did. It was just that we were both too young to understand any of it.

My time in grade school was not especially fun. The teasing I got on my block at home was duplicated on the playground at school and I was largely a loner with a few friends – mostly girls. At the end of first grade, right after transferring to the local public school, I became the ‘pet project’ of the school psychologist. I say pet project because his ‘observation’ of me would continue for several years – up until my parents decided to remove me from public school.

I can only suspect that he took an interest in me at the request of my teacher at that time. I suppose I seemed distant and distracted which should not have come as a surprise as I transferred to the school towards the latter part of the school year. Nonetheless, I attracted his attention and in addition to ‘observing’ me, I recall having several meetings with him where he asked me questions (the nature of which I don’t remember at this point) and on one occasion, he administered a Rorschach test. That is the inkblot test and he asked me what I saw in them. I remember telling him I saw monsters – a point he would later bring up to my parents in a meeting with them. What he didn't know was that at that time, I could tell you all the monsters in the Godzilla movies. Of course I saw monsters – monsters were cool!

Ultimately, there was a meeting with my parents where he presented his ‘findings’. Concern was raised that I had ‘emotionally’ issues and when my parents mentioned that they were going to send me to private school, the psychologist expressed additional concern that it would be too ‘difficult’ an environment for me. My parents, however, disagreed.

For a long time, I resented being singled out this way and I dismissed the public school psychologist as an idiot. My parents felt that the only real problem was that the public school environment failed to challenge and stimulate me intellectually. It wasn’t until much later in life that I looked back on this and realize that perhaps the school psychologist wasn’t such a dolt after all. He **did** pick up on the fact that there was *something* troubling me – he just wasn’t able to hone in on exactly what it was back then.

After fifth grade, I was taken out of public school and sent to an all boys private school. It was also around this time that my interest in women's clothing seems to have manifested itself in earnest. I tried on my mother's underwear and, as luck would have it, I liked it. And with that, I started wearing pantyhose to school, borrowing a pair from my mother's dresser, wearing them a few times, rinsing them out and then putting them back. To my knowledge, she never knew.

So began my spiral into the confusion of puberty and crossdressing.

Even the bravest of us rarely has the courage for what he Really Knows. – Nietzsche

What the Hell Is Going On With Me?

Incipit puberty! ¹

The mainstay of my crossdressing up until high school was pantyhose as they were cheap and easy to get. Consequently, they were also the first items I purchased on my own. I remember the checkout girls at the drug store would sometimes ask if they were for me and then give me this smile. I'm not sure if they knew they were for me or not, but I am sure that they got a kick out of embarrassing me. A confusing mix of shame and excitement always accompanied these purchases. Nonetheless, it felt good to be able to buy my own stuff.

I have often wondered what possessed me to go out and buy my own 'girl' clothes at such a young age. For many adult crossdressers, one of the biggest hurdles they face is going shopping in person for their girlie things. Many are unable to overcome the fear and embarrassment of standing at a check-out register with their selections and will only ever shop via mail order or online. Perhaps it was simply naivety on my part – not knowing that I was not *supposed* to buy such things – but I had no issues with purchasing what I did. Having started early, I have never had an issue shopping for what I want.

Being in an all-boy's school did not do much for me socially or emotionally, as I felt best around girls and there were no girls around. As a result, my *desires* were pretty constant and I wore pantyhose at least twice a week – sometimes more. I even wore them to gym class a few times. Since we wore sweats for gym, the pantyhose were hidden, but changing in the locker room was a challenge. As I would have to go into the bathroom to change, I didn't continue with this as it was just too difficult.

At home, I would wear them every chance I had and the gratification I got from them (combined with some manual manipulation) is hard to describe. Puberty, it would seem, had succeeded in engaging a sexual aspect of my crossdressing.

By high school, I purchased my first leotard. My mother had one, which I had tried on and I **loved** the way it covered my body, so I biked up to the mall, went to a hosiery shop and bought one. I remember looking at the selection and not knowing what to get, so I opted for a large – it seemed about right – and I paid for it without incident. I wore it every opportunity I could (especially to bed) and wound up with several of these in my wardrobe. To this day they are still one of my favorite items to wear.

I eventually worked up the nerve and bought a few pairs of panties, which proved to be an interesting experience. I biked to a Marshall's type store, went in and looked around, having absolutely **no** clue what to get. As I looked at a rack with some panties on sale, a cute sales girl came up and asked me if I needed some help – I obviously looked as though I did. I told her I wanted to buy some panties for my mom (how lame!) She smiled and asked me "What size is she?" I told her I didn't know; so she stepped back and asked, "Is she about my size?" Nervously, I answered "Probably." Smiling, she told me that would be a size seven and suggested two pairs to me. As I was paying for them (total around \$10), she smiled again and told me that if there was *any* problem with them that I could bring them back to her.

I could feel myself turning red with embarrassment. She knew – I'm **sure** she knew – and for some reason that made it all the more exciting. That night, again combined with liberal manual manipulation I found the sensation hard to describe.

I was hooked... And I hated myself for it.

By my sophomore year of high school, I transferred to a co-ed school. I made friends with several girls and felt much better than before. My desires *seemed* to ease up a bit, but not much – maybe for a couple of months at best. It was also at this time that I ‘found out’ what I was. I was sleeping over at a friend’s house (one of the few boys I had as friends) and we were reading some ‘adult’ oriented magazines he had. One of them had a photo spread of a man in a bra, panties and heels with a woman in leather standing over him, wielding a riding crop. All this time, I thought that I was the only person in the world who did this. Yet, here in front of me was a picture of some ‘guy’ in women’s underwear. I could not stop looking and thinking to myself, “Is this **me**?” As I continued ‘reading’, I found that the subject being disciplined was described as a transvestite. What an awful sounding word – and yet, it matched the general feeling I was developing about myself.

A confusing mix of feelings overcame me. I identified with the man in the pictures: clearly, he was being ‘punished’ for something – I just wasn’t sure whether the underwear was part of the punishment or the reason therefore. Nonetheless, I found something exciting about the whole scene. I was not ready for all of this and, not wanting to ‘let on’ anything to my friend, I tossed the magazine on the floor as if I wasn’t interested in it. He looked down at the magazine and said, “Oh, yea... That one’s a little weird.”

A little weird, that was one way to describe me, I guess.

I went home the next day feeling unsettled by the whole experience. I pulled out the dictionary and looked up ‘transvestite’. There in black and white was a definition of who I was and what I did: it was under my nose all the time. This new found knowledge did nothing to make me feel any better or less alone: if anything, it made me feel more so. I now saw myself as more of a freak than before.

None of this, however, changed the fact that I felt as I did. By now, I was wearing panties more than pantyhose and I had quite a collection: I would guess about ten pairs of panties and four or five pairs of hose. I started buying my panties at Macy’s, as the selection was much better. I was there often enough that one of the regular saleswomen got to know me and would always chat with me for a few minutes. While she never questioned my purchases, I suspect that she knew I was shopping for myself. After all, how many teenage boys are repeat customers in the lingerie department?

I must admit, it was quite such a rush just being around all that lingerie and I would often spend a fair amount of time browsing. Then one day, seemingly out of nowhere, I got the urge to buy a bra. If you thought I was clueless the first time I bought panties, this was even better! Too embarrassed to ask for any help, I found one that *looked* about right and I bought it.

I guess it fit. I didn't care.

One day while at the mall, I purchased a purse. It was light purple, with a little tassel and a thin strap, which I tied in a knot so the bag hung just above my waist. About a week after purchasing it, I took it out of hiding, put my wallet & keys in it and went back up to the mall. I locked up my bike, put my purse on my shoulder and went for a walk **in** the mall – circling around about three times, after which I walked out and rode home. It was the first time I went in a public place and 'broke the rules' so to speak. I wasn't in drag – not in the least. I was just some teenage boy walking around with his purple purse for all to see – and it felt really good.

Surprisingly, or not, there was no reaction from anyone. I am not sure what I was expecting to have happen but it turned out to pretty much be a non-event; I don't know that anyone even noticed me. Much like my first shopping experiences, I am at a loss as to what possessed me to do this. All I know is that while doing this, I had a feeling that was different from simply wearing panties under my clothes.

That summer, I wanted to be 'out in public' again and decided to go biking in a leotard. I put on my terracotta colored leotard with a t-shirt over it, some shorts and off I went. Once I was far enough away from home, the t-shirt came off and I biked around for a couple hours. It was an exhilarating feeling and I had a great time. There was just one small problem; **tan lines!** After I got home, I went into the bathroom, looked in the mirror and saw faint but **noticeable** tank style tan lines on my shoulders and back. Now what the hell was I going to do? You can't *untan* yourself. I had a plan. The next day, went out biking again; no shirt, lots of sun. I got myself good and sunburn, but it covered up the other lines. Suffice to say that I did not repeat this mistake again!

By my junior year, I had added three bras to wardrobe and my urges continued to become only stronger – as did my guilt about all of this. I thought back to my friend with whom I used to swap undies: no matter how much fun we had doing what we did, there was something not right with what I was doing and how I felt. I tried to ignore what I was feeling – pretend it wasn't there, nagging in the back of my head. This did not work – if anything, it only made it worse. By graduation time, a skirt and a blouse rounded out my collection – all of which I would wear, alone in my bedroom.

I must have become quite good at hiding my 'pain' because no one around me ever seemed to notice that I was hurting – not my friends, my classmates or my parents. I would push the feelings from my mind for a while, only to have them come creeping back in when I wasn't paying attention. At night, I would go to sleep with the same wish every night – to wake up 'transformed' into what I wanted most: to be a girl. Every day, I would look around at the other girls and wish that I could be like them – knowing full well that it was something that could never happen. This was my pain and it was mine alone: the closest I would ever get to being a girl would be to dress like one.

My senior year of high school was a real joy. It was bad enough that I felt as I did, but I now had a crush on a girl in my class – I **really** liked her. It took me a while, but I finally asked her out and not surprisingly, she said no. I got the "you're a really sweet guy, but..." routine. Sweet – just what I was shooting for. As I saw it, my life truly was one big cruel joke – I could have all the girlfriends I wanted, just not a '*girlfriend*'. Now more than ever, I felt more like a freak and I could feel myself slipping deeper and deeper into a funk.

I wanted to die – not figuratively, but quite literally. While I had thought about suicide before, I now contemplated it in earnest. I joked with a girlfriend of mine about what would be the best way to do it – our most sincere thoughts are often said in jest. She got really upset with me, telling me to knock it off and not to talk like that. Convinced that all that was bothering me was being turned down, she spent a lot of time listening to me whinge and pointed out just how mean the 'girl of my dreams' treated me. She was a good listener and I was lucky to have her as a friend. While I *desperately* wanted to, I thought it best not to mention my *other* issues. I don't know if she ever really took me seriously about killing myself, but she did help me put the thought out of my mind – if only for a while.

Later that year, for what seemed to be no other reason than to be cruel, a girl in my class walked up to me and asked me, "What are you, about a B-cup?" She patted my chest, smiled and walked away.

I was speechless. I was humiliated. And I couldn't die soon enough.

Terrible experiences make one wonder whether he who experiences them is not something terrible. – Nietzsche

Stop the World, I Want To Get Off

I was accepted at a local college for the fall semester and I thought, for some reason, that this *might* be my chance to change. So right after graduation, I dumped it all: the lingerie, the skirt and blouse – the whole lot of it. This is known as **purging**² and the idea behind this is quite simple: out of sight, out of mind. Any crossdresser who has **ever** purged their wardrobe can tell you the fallacy of this: the source of our drive is not the clothes. However, I did not realize this at the time so into the bin it all went. Take a guess how well this worked out.

I occupied myself with a summer job, biking and the impending sense of dread that would be the start of college. Rather than subside, my ‘desires’ only became stronger: I wanted my clothes back.

Worse than that, I **needed** my clothes back.

I managed to hold out for about two months before it became too much for me. Then, much like a junkie in need of a fix, I made a trip to a dealer who set me up with what I so badly needed. I went home, got undressed, put them on and felt a warm sensation fill my body. It felt good. **I** felt good – for the first time in months.

I was disgusted with myself for my lack of control.

And so my summer progressed.

I was all alone with my little secret. I knew of no one else like me and had no one with whom to discuss this. It was slowly eating away at me and thoughts of an early check-out returned. With whom was I going to talk, my parents? (Mom, Dad – just thought I let you know that I want to kill myself because I like wearing women's clothes.)

Somehow, it just didn't seem like an option.

I managed to make it through the summer, eventually replacing all the lingerie I had dumped only a few months earlier. I hated who I was and what I did. Having always been a somewhat solitary individual, no one at home seemed to notice. Lucky me... I hated that no one knew that I was so screwed up. In short, by the start of college, I was a mess. However, having finally decided that suicide was not a viable option, I resolved myself to the fact that my life, however long it might be, would be such that I was to be forever alone with my pathetic secret.

The thought of suicide is a powerful solace: by means of it one gets through many a bad night – Nietzsche

A Few Thoughts on Suicide

Please do not take this lightly. If you have ever contemplated suicide, you know that this not something one usually wants to discuss. Many people find the idea of suicide repulsive: they just cannot understand why someone would want to kill themselves.

Although what follows is applicable to anyone, understand that it is the basis for why **I** did not choose to kill myself. It is rooted in existentialism³ and does not even attempt to address the effects of suicide on others in our lives. It is presented here for your consideration in the hopes that it may be of some help.

Being rejected in high school made me realize the absurdity of life. As a rational individual, I tried to understand and make some sense of my life and my place in the world – only I was not getting anywhere too quickly. The more I tried to figure it out, the more frustrated I became. Being turned down was just a confirmation of what I had already surmised, life was one big cruel joke. It seemed to me that as time went on, things would only get worse. Therefore, I decided to cut my losses and kill myself – I saw no good reason to stick around.

The rest of my senior year and that summer, I contemplated how and when to do it. I decided that at some point, I would just point my car at something big – a tree, a utility pole, a wall – floor it, close my eyes and **bam**, problem solved. Then I asked myself, "Is this *really* the answer? Am I *really* better off dead?" When I thought about it, I mean *really* thought it through, I concluded that I just didn't know for sure. Great, I was no closer to an answer than before.

I had already decided that life was a joke at best, full of disappointment and uncertainty; in a word, hopeless. However, suicide meant that I was certain that I would be better off dead. I found this to be quite troubling. How could I be so certain of this and nothing else? The answer was that I couldn't. Something inside said that it must be better to **be** than to **not be**, so I decided to reject the absurdity of my life and live in spite of it.

As rational beings, we seek absolutes – we want answers to all our questions. We want it to all be neat and tidy, but the world, on the other hand, offers little in the way satisfaction. It is the disproportion between our wants and what the world yields which is the absurdity of existence. Suicide is a declaration that it is **absolutely** better not to be than to be.

While this sounds like a lot of philosophical nonsense, it was this realization that kept my car on the road. I did not *know* that I would be better off dead than alive. I was, however, reasonably sure that if I did kill myself, and I was wrong, that it would be the ultimate screw up!

I decided that suicide was just the easy way out.

As I saw it, the problem with suicide is that it is an experience from which you gain nothing – and there is **so** much in life to experience.

The danger in happiness – 'Now everything is turning out well for me, now I love every destiny – who would like to be my destiny?' – Nietzsche

A Journey of a Thousand Miles...

I was **not** in the mood for college. As I got dressed for my first day, I decide on wearing a pair of orange hipsters as my panties for the day. They were bright and cheerful and made me feel a bit better. I slipped them on, finished getting dressed and went off to start what I was sure would be a new low point in my life.

Overall, I suppose that collage is ok and after a few weeks, I've made some friends – mostly girls, as usual. For reasons I still do not quite understand, I decided to try some intense male bonding therapy⁴ and I pledged a fraternity. Pledging lasted three weeks, during which time I abstained from any lingerie – which was more torture than pledging! In late autumn, pledging was over I became a fraternity brother. The most male-oriented activity in which I have ever participated did **nothing** to rid me of my desires.

There was a girl in one of my classes to whom I had taken a liking – not that she had any idea. Wishing not to duplicate my **last** dating experience (or lack there of), I sat on the other side of the class and stared at her, not at all hopeful that she would have any interest in me. Later that semester, I went to one of the campus parties and as luck would have it, she was there as well. After a couple of beers, I worked up the nerve to ask her to dance. She said yes and we had a pretty good time. We sat down, talked for a while, and seem to hit it off. A major victory for me and I felt hopeful for the first time in a long time. We went out a few times that semester and while it went well, I was not expecting anything to come of it.

By the end of my second semester, it seems that I have an honest to goodness **girlfriend** and we are getting along really well. At the end of the semester, I helped her move her stuff home and we dated through the summer. With some renewed confidence, any lingering thoughts of an early checkout started to fade and I decided to extend my stay on Earth a while longer.

My second year goes without incident. I have taken a liking to Existentialist Philosophy and am trying to make some more sense of who I am and what the hell I am doing here. My girlfriend and I are an item and happy in one another's company. As we seem pretty serious about each other, I'm trying to figure out just how to tell her about my *secret*.

Year three – I decided that Valentine's Day would be when I tell her about, well, you know. We went out to a nice restaurant and after a few drinks, I tell her. I just kind of came out and said that I like women's underwear. I wait, expecting her to flip out, but she doesn't. We talk about it, and she seems more or less *ok* with this. The rest of the evening goes well and we have a nice time. As time goes on, we discuss my crossdressing a bit more and ultimately, it becomes a part of our playtime. I am pleasantly surprised when one day we go shopping for some lingerie together and she suggests a few pairs of tap pants for me. I wear these pretty much whenever we are alone together.

College, it seems, has turned out much better than I thought it would.

Year four and we're still going strong. My crossdressing continues, but with much less guilt – that is until I come home one day to find that my panties, which I keep in my dresser, are folded wrong. You see, I fold them certain way and put them under all my other underwear, however, today I found them folded differently (gulp!) I've been found out! Remember that renewed confidence I mentioned earlier? In the crapper! I call up my girlfriend in a panic. She asks if I'm sure, I say yes, and we agree I should wait and see what happens. My parents come home and... nothing. We have dinner and nothing is said. I figure that they know something is up, and that I know it too. The incident is never mentioned and it becomes a non-event. I'm relieved (I think!)

Sometimes I can be a real putz. One night I decide to sleep in bra and panties (nothing new) but forget put a t-shirt on over it. Who decides to come upstairs that next morning, but my dad. Needless to say, he saw me in all my – um – glory. Later that day, we have a *talk* about the incident. He wants to know what the deal is. I tell him that it is something I do once and a while (yeah, right!) He asks if I am gay (crossdressers are often assumed to be gay) and I tell him no. Then, in a desperate move, tell him that my girlfriend knows about it – a strategic move that **thrilled** her to no end. He is surprised, but lets it go, telling me that it's good that my mom did not see. I agree and he says that we will just keep this to ourselves.

Dad, however, is no dummy and has a good memory. When I was younger (shortly after I purchased my first panties), my mom found a pair of wet red panties on a ledge above my shower (I had just washed then and had not put them away to dry.) She asked me in front of my father and some other people if I knew anything about them and I said “no.” Since we are having work done in the bathroom, I suggest that *maybe* the plumber was using them as a rag and forgot them (another *really* lame one!) Everyone thought it was pretty funny. She threw them away and that was the end of it. As I see it, they **had** to know that the panties were mine. Taking that, my misfolded panties and my recent sleeping attire, I figure that Dad knows that there is much more to this, but decides to let it go as it's my business.

My girlfriend and I graduated from college in the winter of 1986 and by the next fall, we are husband and wife and I have put any thoughts of an intentionally early demise out of my mind. I am now married to a beautiful and wonderful woman whom I love most deeply and I have my whole life to which I look forward.

Love brings to light the exalted and concealed qualities of a lover – what is rare and exceptional in him: to that extent it can easily deceive as to what is normal in him. – Nietzsche

Welcome to the Real World

Not even a year out of collage and I am married. I can't believe it! Actually, I can believe it. After dating all through college, my girlfriend and I decided that the only possible next steps were either to break up or to get married. Opting for the latter and were married in the fall of 1987. I *really* love her and she seems to feel like wise.

For the first time in years, I feel pretty at ease with myself. My wife's acceptance of my crossdressing has helped a lot, although as far as she knows, my interests do not extend beyond women's underwear, which I have now worn through most of high school and all of college. The nagging discomfort I had felt for so long seems to have dulled considerably – as have my dreams of wanting to be a girl. Perhaps this is all that was missing from my life. No longer having the desire to 'dress up' as I used to do, I start to think that maybe – just maybe – I'm finally 'outgrowing' all of this.

The first four or so years of married life run more or less textbook – dating and living together are two *very* different ways of life but we have settled into our routine and we seem to be doing pretty well. By this time, I have been working as a consultant for a number of years putting on long hours with little time to dwell on things. As luck would have it, I get the opportunity to work from home on a project for the next two years. No getting up before the crack of dawn, no suit and ties, no commuting; a sweet deal as far as projects go. With some better rest and not having to commute, I should be able to get a lot accomplished working at home.

It is about this time that the previously 'dulled' nagging started to become more noticeable again – not bad – but noticeable. I figure that once I get myself 'involved' in my project, it will go away again. And with that, I concentrate my efforts on the work at hand and put the 'feelings' out of my mind... At least I think I do.

However, all work and no fun makes Donna⁵ a dull girl, right?

And too much fun??? Too much fun gets her in trouble...

The value of a thing sometimes lies not in what one attains with it, but in what one pays for it – what it costs us. – Nietzsche

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

The project is progressing well – as are those ‘feelings’ once again. Immersion in my work is proving not to be the distraction for which I had hoped and I continue to find myself distracted by that all too familiar nagging feeling in the back of my head. Unable to put the thoughts out of my mind, I begin pondering what to do about this. Being home alone for about ten hours a day – with no one around to see or criticize what I do – presents me with a unique opportunity – one that I have never had in the past: I’m a crossdresser home alone.

So, what does a crossdresser do when no one will be home for hours? Why they dress up of course! And that is just what I did, taking every advantage of the opportunity. As I had no wardrobe, I had to get some clothes – which I did. I started off small – some jeans and a top – and continued to build from there. Over the course of the two or so years, I had built up quite the wardrobe: skirts, slacks, blouses, a couple dresses and shoes – a lot of shoes. I wound up with about twelve pairs of pumps: with heels from an inch and a half up to three and a half inches. I had them in red, black, brown, blue and antique gold. I wound up **really** liking shoes and as a result of dressing for two years straight, I became very comfortable and adept at walking in heels.

And so every day – right after my wife left for work, I would choose an ‘outfit’ and get *dressed* for work. I was in heaven. It was one time in my life that I truly felt most comfortable with myself. Instead of being distracted by being dressed, I found that I was more productive. Something about it clicked for me and the nagging would subside – it just *felt* right. I would stay dressed up for the day and then go drab (back into my boy clothes) for when my wife came home. I did this for a while until one day, I worked up the nerve and I just stayed dressed up when she came home. Needless to say, she was a bit taken back at first, but not completely shocked.

After some discussion on the subject, my wife seemed to be ok with me dressing at home. And so quite often, she would come home to find me in a skirt and blouse, getting dinner ready.

By all accounts, this was a really sweet deal and I *should* have been thankful for that.

But being the putz that I am, I had to push things.

'Not that you lied to me but that I no longer believe you – that is what has distressed me.' – Nietzsche

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

By now, you should be able to guess what is coming. If not, allow me to elucidate. Donna wanted to go out *en drag*. So that's what she did. First, it was just jeans and a blouse. Then, I added my pumps. Eventually, I went out in a skirt, blouse and pumps. As I felt more confident, I started doing my shopping *en drag*. It got to the point that anytime I went out, I wore at least jeans, some type of sweater or blouse, and my pumps (I told you I love shoes and wore them every chance I got!) It felt quite natural being dressed this way and I made the most of it.

I had a lot of fun with this and found that the salesgirls where I would shop got a kick out of it too. I got to be quite friendly with them – some on a first name basis – and they would make suggestions; help me pick stuff out and what not. I would hang out and chat with them, explaining – as best as I could – why I did what I did. One time when I showed up in my 'boy clothes', one of the girls asked me "What's with the man drag?" They were so used to seeing me 'dressed' that I looked out of place dressed as a guy. They seemed genuinely accepting of me and it felt good.

Positive reinforcement from members of the *outside* world did much for my confidence and self-esteem – perhaps a little too much. Then one day, while semi-crossdressed, I did something really stupid and found myself in a bit of a legal altercation. Suffice to say that I was finger printed and that my wife had to come fetch me. This was now the most humiliating thing **ever** to happen to me – it was also the most sobering.

As I said, my wife bailed me out and was **none** too pleased about it. She was quite embarrassed (for good reason) and ready to leave me right then and there. After much pleading, she agreed not to kick me to the curb – I don't know why as she had every reason to – but she didn't, and for this I am thankful every day.

Clearly, things had gotten out of hand.

I am now asked to choose between my wife and my clothes – I don't even think twice about it.

Incipit purge #2. With the exception of my panties, it all goes in the bin.

It is dreadful to die of thirst in the sea. Do you have to salt your truth so much that it can no longer even – quench thirst? – Nietzsche

Straighten Up and Fly Right

Since my legal run-in in early 1993, our first daughter was born (1994) and I began working in Manhattan again – no more home alone for Donna! My hours have been long (up by 5:00am and home by 7:00pm or later), leaving little time for other diversions. In late 1996, we bought a new house I started working with a new consulting firm. My hours have been better (home by 6:00pm) so I get to spend some more time with my daughter. Suffice to say that I have been busy.

My relationship with my wife is, for the most part, back on track – although she still feels she cannot trust me too much and I can't really blame her. I think she feels that my *craziness* has subsided. She has trouble buying into the idea of *uncontrollable urges* and as I have not made much of a fuss about dressing, it is obvious that I can control this – if I want. (*I can control this?* Yea, about as well as I can control the weather!) My not acting on my urges is in no way indicative of a lack of desire.

At this point, I haven't *really* dressed up in about three years, eight months – not that I have been keeping track. No dresses, skirts, blouses or heels since the big purge in 1993. Since that time, the desire to 'do myself up' has come and gone, sometimes stronger than others. It is all still there – the need to get dressed up, the nagging feeling in the back of my mind, the wishing to wake up as a woman – but I do my best to ignore it all. At this point, what other choice do I have? I just don't know for how long I can keep it up.

I have 'rebuilt' my fem wardrobe (such as it is) which as of fall 1997 consists of the following:

- Everyday wear
 - Jeans
 - Two black and one dark indigo: worn to work and casual outings
 - Two faded, flare leg style: clean and nice looking. 'Dress' jeans, so to speak. The Liz Claiborne jeans are my favorite.
 - One button fly, one acid washed pegged, and one faded 'nothing special' pair, also clean and in good shape.
 - Five pair of well worn, faded, bum around and fix up the house jeans.
 - Two cotton sweaters and one wool sweater.
 - Three black ribbed tee shirts.
 - Panties. Lots of panties.
 - Socks. Ditto above.
 - Assorted other lingerie
 - Sneakers.
- Almost Never Wear
 - Silk Ellen Tracy blouse and pants
 - Black Liz Claiborne jacket and pants
 - Two black knit wool sweaters
 - Six leotards and leggings

As femme wardrobes go, it's pretty pathetic but I'll take what I can get at this point. Although I have managed to integrate items of women's clothing into my daily life, my everyday wear is just that, and is not much (if at all) different from comparable drab wear. The beat up jeans are the ones I live in on the weekends and look like any other beat up jeans. Overall, my drag is pretty drab. My current consulting assignment allows me to wear the black and dark indigo jeans to work, which I do most of the time. I have a couple of pairs of casual, sneaker style shoes I wear with them. Along with a sweater or casual men's button down shirt, and some funky socks, I am ready for work.

Such is my crossdressing at this time. Having resolved myself that it probably will not go much beyond this, at least not for a long while, I make the most of it. I do not own any men's underwear, jeans, socks or sneakers. Given that, I guess that I am in drag every day.

At least this is what I tell myself.

One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one is the whole. – Nietzsche

So, I'm not Alone After All

As a technologist, I was a late adopter of the Internet. It wasn't until I was on a project for a company that had Internet access that I started to 'surf' the net. One of the first things I started to look for was information about other people 'like me'. I found a mix for sexual and not sexually related material on the net – some good, some not so. There was information out there – I just had to hunt it down.

Around September 1997, I discovered Usenet⁶ and the crossdressing newsgroups. And with that discovery, I came to learn that I am not as alone as I once thought. After about a month of lurking in the Alt.Fashion.Crossdressing and Alt.Support.Crossdressing newsgroups, I decided to speak up and join in the discussions. I have only been waiting all my life to be able to **talk** about all of this with others like myself. Not long thereafter, I set up my first website – **Donna's Hideout** – where I started telling the story you are now reading. For the first time in about twenty years, I was able to unload some of the baggage I had been hauling around and it felt good not to be so alone anymore.

While I was never much of a writer, putting together my website has opened a new avenue of expression for me and I found that writing helps me to 'focus' my thoughts on all of this. In October, I wrote the following 'article', which I posted on my site:

Crossdressing and Society

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, October 1997

I am (amongst other things) a M2F crossdresser. This means that while my usual gender presentation is as a man, I wear articles of clothing primarily intended for women: panties, bras, slips, camisoles, dresses, skirts, pants, blouses, skirts, sweaters, pantyhose, pumps and boots. I choose the term crossdresser because transvestite carries too much negative connotation with it. As a transgendered person, my cross-dressing it is really more an issue of self expression than something I do for kicks.

The many and varied reasons for this can be reduced down to a prime-motivating factor: It gives me a more complete sense of self; I feel more like *me*. (Don't get me wrong, there is a definite sensual aspect to cross-dressing. I like the way women's clothes feel: a flowing skirt against stockinged legs, a silk blouse... it's very sensual. Let's be real, men's clothing just isn't sensual. Functional? Yes. Comfortable? Usually. Sensual? Hardly! But I digress...)

Men's clothing is pretty boring: pants and a shirt, and for business – a suit. The stereotypical business attire: blue suit, white shirt, red tie and black wing tips, and if it's raining: a tan trench coat. It looks like a bunch of clones walking down the street. Women, on the other hand, have flexibility in dressing of which, to be honest, I am quite envious. With choices of fabrics, color, style and accessories, women's clothing is just more fun. It allows a freedom of self-expression men just do not have. My cross-dressing, to whatever extent it may be, helps fills that void.

There is nothing inherently male or female about any one article of clothing. The design of a piece of clothing may favor one or the other (a bra definitely fits a woman better than a man) but it remains nothing more than a specific configuration of cloth, metal, plastic, etc. As a culture, we have chosen to associate certain types and styles of clothing with either men or women.

There are those who feel that cross-dressing is unnatural. Well, it is. In fact, the wearing of *any* clothing is unnatural. We have no genetic predisposition to wearing clothes. Cross-dressing is as unnatural as straight dressing. Clothing and the meanings we placed upon it is a fabrication of society.

Men used to wear tunics with tights, knickers, ruffled shirts, wigs, heels... the list goes on and on. Try putting on a tunic length top and leggings today... You get the idea. Interestingly though, items such as sarongs and kilts are alright (in certain settings.) Prince Charles has appeared on TV (how appropriate) sporting his kilt while out with his sons.

Women cross-dress all the time. They buy men's jeans, shirts and sneakers... even underwear, and they do it without shame or ridicule. In fact, the female crossdresser is considered fashionable. I have read many articles in fashion magazines about how to liven up one's wardrobe by borrowing clothes from your boyfriend, husband, etc. Women's fashions have even copied men's: tuxedo shirts and jackets, boxer shorts, and sport coats are just a few items that have been feminized. It seems clear that women wearing men's clothing (female cross-dressing) is socially acceptable.

Men, on the other hand, do not have this freedom. The wearing of clothing associated with women is frowned upon by society. Men wearing women's clothing is not socially acceptable and the male crossdresser opens himself to scorn and ridicule almost beyond belief. We are tagged as freaks and misfits: deviants to be avoided. It is immediately assumed that we are either gay (not to insinuate that any of the above labels apply to either the gay or transgendered community as a whole), which is false more times than not, or that we are just mentally disturbed.

The repression of feelings is not a good thing, and women who want to express their *masculine* side are, in general, encouraged to do so. Society as a whole has no problem with women exploring the stereotypically masculine world. Men, on the other hand, are not supposed to have a feminine side. Any man who shows interest in stereotypically feminine interests runs the risk of being pigeonholed as above.

Men who cross-dress tend to have a strong feminine side that needs to express itself. Whether crossdressed or not, this feminine side is still there, fighting to be heard; although society would rather that it not exist at all.

Can you say ***Double Standard?*** Welcome to the life of a crossdresser.

The simple fact is that the majority of men who cross-dress are really no different than any other men. They work, have families and basically live like everyone else except they like women's clothes.

Ah, I can hear it now "That's not like everyone else!" Allow me to ask, "How do you know?" Many crossdressers never venture into public. Some who do are better looking than some real women are! Many wear women's underwear on a regular basis. The fact is, if no one told you, you would probably never know. He could be anyone: a drinking buddy, an employee or even your boss.

Anyone, put under close enough scrutiny, would probably reveal something, which could be construed as not fitting in with the societal norm. Yet, we all go about our business not really thinking twice about the person next to us. We are all different, and at the same time similar. The diversity of Mankind is something as yet unsurpassed in the animal kingdom, and is something to be embraced and celebrated. It is our differences which define us, not our similarities.

Cross-dressing allows me a freedom of self expression which the confines of society's definition of 'man' just won't allow. And I like that freedom.

It has taken me a long time become comfortable with who I am. I am a crossdresser. And even with all the baggage that comes along with that statement, I wouldn't want change who I am for anything.

Notes:

1. I make the following distinction between the terms crossdresser and transvestite:
 - a. A **crossdresser**, in the broader sense, wears clothing primarily intended for members of the opposite gender (whatever that may be.) Both men and women can be crossdressers. As applied to transgendered individuals, cross-dressing is done more as a form of self expression and for a feeling of completeness of being than for sexual pleasure.
 - b. A **transvestite** dresses primarily for sexual pleasure. It is a term I've heard used only in reference to males. His dressing may be spontaneous or forced by another partner. In general, a transvestite need not have a strong (or any) feminine side fighting for expression. His dressing is more for fun than out of necessity.
2. Male and female, as used here, refer to anatomical differences. Non biological entities can not be male or female. A piece of cloth, no matter how it is configured, is no more male or female than a telephone.
3. The terms man/men and woman/women are used to refer individuals with a gender presentation usually recognized as 'a man' or 'a woman' by the cisgendered (non-transgendered) community.
4. Men's and women's clothing refer to articles of clothing traditionally and/or primarily associated with either men or women respectively. Unisex clothing is considered just that: appropriate for both men and women.

I must have gotten something right as my little write-up would be included in a 1998 IXE (Iota Chi Sigma – an Indianapolis gender support group) newsletter, the July 1998 Fiesta Newsletter of the PHI Tri-Ess Chapter (located in Albuquerque, NM), and the 1998 Fall Femme Mirror. I have also have found numerous links to it from other websites. While I have since revised many of my views expressed in this write-up, it does reflect how I viewed all of this at that time and it is still how many crossdressers continue to see themselves and what they do today.⁷

About a month later: **TANSTAAFL!** I thought I was finally getting all of this settled – again – when I read a few innocuous and well-intentioned posts in the newsgroups. These managed to push just the right buttons and set me off on a re-evaluation of the last twenty plus years of my life. Thinking about things in a way I had not previously done, I found myself no longer at peace with who I was. This could not have happened at a worse time (as if there were a good time for something like this.) We were expecting our second child in March 1998 and life would be complicated enough without my *rediscovering* who I am.

I felt that I had experienced a moment of lucidity unlike any other in the past – an epiphany of sorts. So much of my life's experiences clicked into place all at once. True to form, it screwed me up royally.

It really sucks being me...

Thus there is sought not only some kind of explanation as cause, but a selected and preferred kind of explanation, the kind by means of which the feeling of the strange, new, unexperienced is most speedily and most frequently abolished – the most common explanations – Nietzsche

Pushing all the Right Buttons

I marvel at how our brains work: a sight, a smell, a sound – they can all trigger a long forgotten memory, bringing it to the surface and making as real and immediate as the experience which triggers it. Long forgotten feelings and emotions are experienced as new – and the experience? It can be quite overwhelming.

And overwhelmed is just how I felt as I experienced a set of cascading awakenings set off in part by the following innocently made posts to the crossdressing newsgroups.

Lilith offered the following musings regarding a magic potion to make it all better:

Subject: A little off topic
From: lilithp@xxxx.xxx (Lilith Papillon)
Date: Sun, 30 Nov 1997 22:06:40 GMT
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing

For no particular reason I started thinking of about two movies that deal with gender changing this morning. One is one that you may have seen on cable within the last year, "Dr. Jeckel and Ms. Hyde." The other is one of a similar basis but a bit more obscure, "Dr. Jeckel and Sister Hyde."

Of course my interest is predicated on the concept that many of us may have had, the magic potion that sees our dreams come true. But one thing common in both movies, other than the fact that they were both based on the same book, is that the resulting female persona was distinct from the male from which it sprang and wanted an existence of her own.

So, as a spark to a new thread I put the following to you. Assuming that it didn't result in an evil incarnation, if given the potion to turn you into a woman permanently, would you take it if it meant that you wouldn't be you any more?

My response would be "yes." given the chance to produce a mind/body combination that was more in harmony I'd do it in a NY minute, even if it meant giving up what made me me. At least I'd be reducing the population by one semi-miserable life and replacing it someone more at peace with themselves.

Lil (who is feeling philosophical, if not practical)
Lilith Papillon
lilithp@xxxx.xxx

To which I replied:

Subject: Re: A little off topic
From: ms_donna@xxxx.xxx (Donna)
Date: Mon, 1 Dec 1997 14:43:03 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing

I'd have to say yes also, the fact that I was born a man (an accident of birth) has only caused me grief. I don't think of myself as a woman trapped in a man's body, just that I'd be happier as a woman. I don't think that I'd be losing a part of myself so much as fully realizing who

I truly am. I have often fantasized about this and each time I do, I can't help but feel that my life would have been better had I started out that way.

Love and stuff,
Donna

Ruthie then asked the following regarding crossdressers being perceived as gay:

Subject: Close Encounters>
From: "Ruthie" <nuts4news@righthere.rightnow>
Date: Tue, 2 Dec 1997 14:40:50 -0800
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

Hi All

I'm new to this NG, so forgive me if this has been done to death, but... I was wondering... how many of us have been mistakenly assumed to be Homosexual.

I can't help but feel that at some point in our earlier years that certain feelings were mistaken for other feelings. I know I read an article about a guy who got involved in a gay relationship then realized he was going in the wrong direction then for whatever reason he did himself in because he didn't want to disgrace his family.

This was in 74 or 75 & seems like he was 19 or so and in a small town. But I wonder how many people got caught up in the earlier stereotype, you know, if you like girls clothes then you must want to be a girl.

Then comes the bad relationship, failed marriages & on & on, till you find someone who you can talk to or maybe the person who you were meant to be with for the rest of your life, that you can really open up to & just talk about anything & everything.

I don't mean to go on and on but this NG seems so open & supportive that I can't help but feel that there are many.

Thanks for listnin'
Hearts 2 U
Ruthie

To which I replied:

Subject: Re: Close Encounters
From: ms_donna@xxxx.xxx (Donna)
Date: Fri, 5 Dec 1997 09:27:40 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

In article <661rnh\$3iu@mtinsc02.worldnet.att.net>,
nuts4news@righthere.rightnow says...

Hi All

I'm new to this NG, so forgive me if this has been done to death, but... I was wondering... how many of us, have been mistakenly assumed to be Homosexual.

<Snip...>

Society, in general, seems to have a hang up about the distinction between male/female - masculine/feminine. Men are 'Men' and women are 'Women', any blurring of that distinction causes FUD (fear, uncertainty

and doubt). People don't like FUD and need to understand and resolve what is causing it.

Society teaches us, for the most part, that men and women are polar opposites. When an individual starts to move towards the other side, the FUD level goes up. People tend to get very bothered by the idea of gender ambiguity, and most have a threshold as to how much they will take before the 'need to know why' kicks in. We seem to be most tolerant of women and their desire for self expression and the like. Men, on the other hand, have been prescribed a fairly rigid set of guidelines for social acceptance, clothing being one of the main ones.

Mind you, ANY overtly feminine traits exhibited by a man will generate a similar reaction; one akin to "what's 'his' deal?" Most people can not resolve the juxtaposition a man and feminine traits. In an attempt to resolve this dilemma, the reasoning goes something along these lines:

Society tends to define individuals by their actions. Apart from physical differences, the way men and women behave is the foundation for the distinction between them. Actions are an indication of state of mind.

In terms of sexual attraction, men are into women, and women into men (part of the perceived polar differences between men and women.)

If a man is exhibiting traits commonly associated with a woman, this living contradiction is resolved by the assumption that the individual is of a feminine mindset (point 1) and as such, must be attracted to men (point 2) as a result.

Interestingly, if you exhibit some 'feminine' traits, but demonstrate (read overcompensate with) other very 'masculine' traits, people will overlook the 'confusing actions'. E.G.: as a rule, guys don't wear two earrings. Less now than in the past, a guy with two earrings was assumed to be gay. However, if the man in question were a biker (for example), it is unlikely that he would be thought to be gay.

I have been asked (by both my father and wife) if I were gay because of my dressing. The answer is no, I am very attracted to women.

I think that's enough of my amateur socio-psycho-analytic ramblings for the time being.

Love and stuff,
Donna

Maidelah wrestled with coming out to her sister:

Subject: Re: Time to come out ... again ...
From: maide...@xxxx.xxx (Maidelah)
Date: Fri, 5 Dec 1997 03:00:00 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

Hi girls,

Just got the word yesterday that my sister, 10 years younger than me, is going to be arriving here from overseas next month and will be living with me for a time sufficient enough for her to find a job and a place of her own. I always had the feeling that of all my immediate family, she would be the one person who would be able to accept my CDing. My kid sister has always adored me and I could do no wrong in her eyes. She has grown into a very hip, non-judgmental adult.

Should I tell her?

After thinking about it all day yesterday and last night, I believe I will. It makes more sense to do so than to have to hide everything ... all the catalogs that arrive in the mail in my name ... the constant references to my T* friends and their situations during conversations with my wife ... not to mention my need to dress.

Only questions now are: How, where and when? I imagine fairly soon after she arrives. I'll wait for her jet lag to wear off, and then maybe we'll go out for a walk and/or a drink somewhere (jeez ... my baby sister is of legal drinking age! Don't that make me feel old!).

One of my girlfriends who I met on the net suggested that this might be a time for openness. I think this is true. I also considered something somebody here in the NG said not long ago about having a new person to go shopping with ... why not?

wish me luck. Tell me what you think.

Love,
Maidelah

And then there was Erica's post, which hit me the hardest: brief and deadly on point:

Subject: will the real me please stand up
From: E Stein <xxxx@xxxx.xxx>
Date: Sun, 07 Dec 1997 13:19:52 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

I hope some others will have had the following feelings and will post their stories/opinions.

I have come to the conclusion that I don't really know who I am. I look in the mirror and recognize the face but don't feel that it is the real me looking back. When I am dressed in women's clothes feel the same way. The person in the mirror isn't the real me. I am living in a facade no matter what I wear. What I see is not the real me.

I feel that I am different from the other men with whom I have contact. I am comfortable with women but do not feel that I am one of them. I am very confused.

Thanks,
Erica

To which April replied:

Subject: Re: will the real me please stand up
From: "April Flowers" <xxxx@xxxx.xxx>
Date: 7 Dec 1997 20:25:09 GMT
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

E Stein <xxxx@xxxx.xxx> wrote in article
<348AE8C7.AF682B7A@ibm.net>...

I hope some others will have had the following feelings and will post their stories/opinions.

I have come to the conclusion that I don't really know who I am. I look in the mirror and recognize the face but don't feel that it is the real me looking back. When I am dressed in women's clothes feel the same way. The person in the mirror isn't the real me. I am living in a facade no matter what I wear. What I see is not the real me.

Personally I think you have the mis-conception that your appearance, is to be, the REAL YOU. If you look into the mirror, at yourself, to see who you really are, look deep into your own eyes and you may find that the TRUE YOU comes only from the HEART, and how you feel about yourself, your family, your goals, and achievements.

I feel that I am different from the other men with whom I have contact.

This is true, as it was for all of us, at one time, but we are here at this NG for support to each other, so now, you are no different...

I am comfortable with women but do not feel that I am one of them. I am very confused.

Ahhhh yes... But can you relate to them?

April

Like a set of dominos all lined up, the first one fell and set in motion a chain reaction that could not be stopped.

And when I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity – through him all things are ruined. – Nietzsche

My Moment of Enlightenment

I thought that I had resolve most of my inner conflict vis-à-vis my crossdressing and my sense of self. I thought I had reached a sense of inner peace. I used to feel that the part of me that liked dressing up was something bad. I had gotten over that and realized that the different feelings I have had were all a part of me. The masculine and feminine parts of me were integrated into one homogeneous Self – a heterosexual male crossdresser. The only problem was that I now felt that I had been living a lie for a long time.

This revelation was brought on by the aforementioned innocuous and well-intentioned posts on the Alt.Fashion.Crossdressing and Alt.Support.Crossdressing newsgroups. It culminated in a somewhat manic post I made on Monday – Dec 8, 1997.

Subject: what's going on with me???
From: ms_donna@xxxxx.xxx (Donna)
Date: Mon, 8 Dec 1997 08:32:36 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing,alt.support.crossdressing

Several of the posts to A.F.C. and A.S.C. over the past couple of weeks seem to have pushed all the wrong (or right) buttons for me lately.

These include but are not limited to:

- Lilith's magic potion (and my response)
- Ruthie's question about being perceived as gay (and my response)
- The thread about choosing a fem name
- MaideLah's thread: *Time to come out ... again ...*
- Will the real me please stand up (and April's response)

So, what's so special about these? I began posting here about three months ago. When I did, I took a fem name, partly for anonymity, and partly because it felt good for my alter ego to have a name. I have since gone on to declare that I've come to terms with who I am; I now am not so sure.

The issue of choosing a name was cause for pause; if I'm so friggin comfortable, why hide behind another name. Others here post with their real/male names? Ok, so maybe my comfort level isn't quite where I thought it was.

Then there is the magic elixir, an innocent enough post and one, which should be fun to discuss. My response was from the heart; find it and I'd take it in a second. The first time I've ever come out and said that I feel more like a woman than a man. Robie emailed me, pointing out that my response seemed quite serious. It was.

Ruthie's question set me off on another critique of society vs. the CDing community. I pointed out that sufficient over compensation can, in some instances, 'drown out' other overtly feminine traits. After posting this, I realized that at the start of college, I grew a moustache (check my bio for the events leading up to this wonderful time in my life) and, with the exception of my two year dressing spree (again, see my bio), have had one ever since.

Lately, I've started doing little things to make myself feel more feminine. I've started wearing a thumb ring as well as other rings I have. My watch is a woman's, not so small as to attract undue attention, but definitely not a 'traditional' men's style. I also see my mannerisms

becoming less 'manly'. Oh, by the way, I've also grown a beard for the first time in my life. Over compensation? Hmmm.

Finally, Maidelah's coming out post. With the exception of my wife and one incident with my father, and one other person, no one (other than those who frequent these NGS) knows of my secret. Well, no one that I know of. Funny thing about secrets, they have this nasty habit of eating away at you.

So, where is all this going? This past week, and this weekend in particular, have brought me to a new realization. Actually, it's more of a dilemma. For the last twenty years or so, I've done my best to be what I thought I was supposed to be; a good son and husband. But, as I look back, I feel that it has all been a facade I've been putting up.

In junior high and my first year of high school, joined the wrestling team; I mean, guys play sports, right? I had no interest in Baseball or Football, but felt I had to do something. No one ever knew that I thought that girl's field hockey looked like fun.

In college, I pledged a fraternity; a definite 'guy' thing to do. Again, I felt a need to prove that I am a man. I don't know to whom, though. After college, I got married, assuming the role of husband and eventually father. Surely if there were any doubts as to my true disposition, they would be gone now.

There have been several times during my marriage that the wife and I have had 'heated' discussions about my CDing. She has asked me outright "Do you want to be a woman?" My answer has always been "No, of course not." I never felt right with that answer, but didn't want to lose my wife. She has made it clear that she doesn't want to be married to a woman. When I think back, my mind and mouth may have said "No" but my heart felt "Yes!"

I look back at growing up and can find no male role models with whom I identified not even my father. Hell, of the three of us, I look more like my mother, while my sister and brother look very much like my father. For as long as I can remember, I have most closely associated with and felt most comfortable around women.

Again, I can't help but feel that I have been trying to convince everyone, including myself, that I am a man, no matter what. Only now, I am less and less convinced.

Contributing to this is the fact that I haven't really dressed in three years eight months, give or take a few days. Somehow, I don't think putting on a dress and heels and running around for a while is going to help. My distress goes much deeper. I've said that my CDing is more a state of mind for me; I now think that I better understand what I've mean by this (hell, if I don't understand what I mean, who else will?) Dressing makes me feel better, but no matter what I am or am not wearing, my mental disposition remains, for the most part, unchanged.

Some of us dress because it's fun, and that's good. Some of us dress because of a need for self-expression, and that's also fine. There are those of us who dress because they want to live as women; it goes beyond self-expression. They like being men, but want to live as women. Then there are those of us, sliding further down the end of the scale, who want to be women (I can't believe I just said this.)

Living as and being are very different, to me at least. I don't know that living as a woman would solve my dilemma. Somehow, I feel that it would still be a facade. The fact that I was born with the standard option package for a male child has never really fazed me much. If anything, it has made my life a mess, getting in the way of how I feel and how I should be. I've never felt any closer to any one because I am a guy; my awareness of my difference from most other guys has only served to isolate me further.

So, I think I know what I want to do. It's how the hell do I go about doing it.

I brought up the subject of my CDing to the wife a few weeks ago, not a very productive discussion, so I let it drop. I can't even imagine a discussion along the lines of HRT and SRS (I fear that is where this is going.)

Add to all of this the complication that I have a three and a half year old daughter, with a second child due in March. I love my daughter very much and the thought of loosing her is numbing. I don't want to abandon my family or my responsibility as a parent. The simple fact is, I don't know what to do.

I've spent the last week on autopilot, so to speak. My sleep has been quite restless, as I bounce all this around inside my head. I've thought about just doing nothing and toughing it out. I fear that this will ultimately result in one less troubled soul taking up space on this planet. I need to talk to someone about this, but don't know who. A professional shrink would most likely be in order, but again, what do I tell my wife? I can see it now: "All of a sudden you need counseling? why? Now what the hell is going on now?"

I am going to talk to the only post-op TS I know,⁸ just to get an understanding of the social aspect of life prior to and after. She is the only other person who knows of my secret. I have also considered talking to my sister. She and I have become closer over the years and is the least likely to judge me any differently.

We put up our Christmas tree this weekend and I took my daughter skating. I put up a good front the whole time (I've gotten good at suffering in silence), but basically just felt sick the whole weekend. Why does this crap always seem to happen around the holidays? I think that it was inevitable that this day would come, but the timing really sucks!

Please excuse the length of this. I awoke at 4:00am today (not by choice) and was at work by 6:15am so as to get all this out. I want so badly to go outside and scream, or cry, or something, I don't know what.

The well adjusted me has blown a control rod, and I fear a meltdown is just a matter of time. I hope that those I care most about can avoid the fallout...

Donna

I received a lot of support from everyone – posts and emails – and it helped a lot. Many of the regulars expressed concern for my seemingly unstable mental state. It was nice to have the support of so many other individuals; I never really had that before.

These were two especially helpful replies:

Subject: Re: what's going on with me???
From: lblake@xxxx.xxx (Laura Blake)
Date: Mon, 08 Dec 1997 22:07:18 GMT
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing,alt.support.crossdressing

In alt.support.crossdressing, ms_donna@xxxx.xxx (Donna) said:

I brought up the subject of my CDing to the wife a few weeks ago, not a very productive discussion, so I let it drop. I can't even imagine a discussion along the lines of HRT and SRS (I fear that is where this is going.)

Hi Donna,

It probably isn't my place to say much here, but I do think a note of caution is always needed when this "CD or TS" question comes up...

Bottled up emotion and desire can create a lot of pressure. Like anything else in the physical world, if you build up enough pressure you get an explosion; one that is usually regretted afterwards. It is very easy to take something that if released in a trickle would be nothing, and make it into something far bigger and much more complicated than it needs to be.

I strongly suggest that you take a little time to reflect very carefully on this, ask yourself the difficult questions, such as "Is sex-change REALLY necessary?", "Is there a less complex way to do this?", "where would I be if I had a free outlet and could pursue this without restriction?" etc.

Sex-change launches you into is a long, complicated, and oppressive process that essentially winds up with you giving control of your life over to a bunch of self-appointed experts who will then decide your future for you. And believe me; sometimes they do say "No". Are you prepared to give up a couple of years of your life, and maybe even your marriage, friends and job, all with the constant risk of a "No" at the other end? Many are the transsexuals who convince themselves they will ace this, only to find themselves 10 years later, still pre-op and still trying to sort it all out.

There are many options SRS is only one... You might be able to make some really simple compromises... a bigendered path such as working as a man, socializing as a woman, might work for you. Crossliving (my choice) is an attractive alternative; you get all the social advantages of womanhood without all the BS of sex-change. Crossdressing is also a very valid outlet for the woman within and, of all transgender lifestyles; CDing is probably the least threatening to the rest of your life.

A very sage friend of mine once said "when we solve our problems with the least amount of fuss we actually get to enjoy the rest of our lives."

Anyway... keep an eye on that pressure gauge, don't let it get into the red before you start dealing with this.

Godspeed!

Laura Blake

Our secrets are nasty little mind bombs,
with someone else holding the detonator.

Laura would ultimately prove to be one of the most influential people in my life with regards to all of this. I doubt I would have gotten as far as I have were it not for her.

The other post was by Shirley Ann:

Subject: Re: What's going on with me???
From: Shirley Ann Sometimes <xxxx@xxx.xxx>
Date: Tue, 09 Dec 1997 02:42:45 -0800
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing,alt.support.crossdressing

well, I hope you're happy. Now I should be going to bed and we are both losing sleep. Just a bit of a joke - though true.

Donna wrote:

Contributing to this is the fact that I haven't really dressed in three years eight months, give or take a few days. Somehow, I don't thing putting on a dress and heels and running around for a while is going to help. My distress goes much deeper. I've said that my CDing is more a state of mind for me; I now think that I better understand what I've meant by this (hell, if I don't understand what I mean, who else will?) Dressing makes me feel better, but no matter what I am or am not wearing, my mental disposition remains, for the most part, unchanged.

Some of us dress because it's fun, and that's good. Some of us dress because of a need for self-expression, and that's also fine. There are those of us who dress because they want to live as women; it goes beyond self-expression. They like being men, buy want to live as women. Then there are those of us, sliding further down the end of the scale, who want to be women (I can't believe I just said this.)

Better you than me girl. You've got it bad and it is headed for worse, from the sound of it. Let's see if we can sort it out just a little before it blows.

OK, here is what I got from your message. (There was a lot more but I am just setting up the math here)

You had a 2 year dressing spree.

You laid off for some (long) time and even grew a mustache and beard.

It was apparently bothering you and you got into the news group where you probably felt like a kid in a candy store. "My God, I can do this!"

In a short period of time you went through a lot of mind shifts with various threads helping you along. Now you have rings and more and are aiming at having your problem removed or removing yourself from all of your problems and responsibilities. I know I didn't put this nicely. I didn't try to. Is it accurate?

Laura Blake said it very well. You have built up a head of steam which would have been nothing much more than a trickle of condensation if it hadn't been contained so tightly. Now you have reached red line and something has to give.

Laura went on to suggest very strongly that you not do anything rash. Danny weighed in with waiting also and referred to your one and a half children. The timing certainly sucks. Yeah, the holidays bring their own strain and make this all the worse but your wife is facing the problems of one child here and one still inside. Her hormones are at a high rate of change if what I have always heard about pregnancy can be believed and soon she will have a newborn to care for. She too has holidays coming and I guess I am having trouble seeing her handle this to go along with everything else.

Let's get back to you. Tonya laid some good information on you. What you are dreaming of (you would say considering) is a long, expensive and uncertain road. It is a one way road even if you don't get where you think you are going. If you read her post carefully, you will see that she too is suggesting that you not do anything drastic or rash. LeAndra sent you looking for help which is probably available and it would delay you while you sorted things out. With luck, it could give you time and even a means to let off some of your steam. That is very important. Making decisions, crossing or burning bridges or even making declarations while you are so obviously fired up is an extremely bad idea. You will have to live with the results after the fires are back at a normal level.

Toughing it out is not the answer. That is how you got where you are now. You are past that. It would be like taking a well shaken can of beer and

continuing to shake it even more. You need to stop shaking the can and start peeling the top off ever so slowly. You know the drill.

Pop that thing and there's going to be suds everywhere.

You say you have the mind of a woman. Fine! We all have some of that or we wouldn't be doing what we do. What possible difference can your equipment make unless you want to make a space for other activities? That was not something you mentioned. You simply said that living as a woman was not enough. You wanted to BE a woman. I'm sorry, I get the idea that this is a heat induced drive toward an ideal idea you have. I have been there myself in a much different way though it still had some of the same factors - the heat of the moment.

My "heat" induced me to launch myself into a situation that I knew better than to get into. I was dressed to the nines and should have remained in my car but I was in heat and just had to JUMP out of the car, lock the door and then I was trapped into walking across the whole parking lot to get the other key. If there had been someone there to say, "wait a second, do you see all those people?" that just might have slowed me enough to let the moment pass. I knew it would pass anyway or why else did I jump from the car and lock the door before I could change my mind?

If what you were contemplating were that simple, I would probably be in bed now and you would be walking along that parking lot. Tomorrow you would be fine again and I would be rested. That is not the case here. You and your family won't be fine tomorrow. The results will be long lasting. You need to get out very slowly and think and talk to others and try other things before you lock that door. Telling your wife you want it removed will probably lock the door quite nicely.

You did get some serious support too. I'm not at all sure I can agree that your wife is being totally unreasonable when she says she doesn't want to be married to a woman. I love my wife but... Let's put it this way. There are some basic things that are assumed to be understood when a husband commits to a wife and vice versa. If she now wants to wear pants and skivvies and such some of the time, fine. If, on the other hand she wants to have something real to put in a jock strap, I'm out of here. I love her, but that just wasn't part of the deal. That isn't being judgmental; it's just me making my decision.

Decisions are what it is all about. Just because you may decide to become anatomically correct for you doesn't mean that she has to decide to stay with you. It is then a totally new hand and the other players can put up their money or fold their hands. There was talk of other people and their expectations. You were told that you don't have to live your life up to or down to other's ideas of what and who you are or should be. I agree. If you don't care what they think, do your thing and what they think won't hurt you. But, your wife just might care what people think about her and that is her right. We carry heavy weights based on what we think of ourselves and what we want others to think of us. We often think it isn't fair that we carry this weight. Why would we want to lay that kind of load on our spouse or our kids?

One last idea I think you should consider and then I will wrap this thing up with some suggestions. I'm sure you've seen the cartoon where one character is being chased by another character. The one who is running races out of the house, into a car, speeds to an airport, flies over the ocean, jumps on a train, speeds into the mountains and into a cabin where he hammers all the doors and windows shut. What happens next? Right! The character that was chasing him comes strolling out of the kitchen. OK, why did we watch that cartoon? Simple. You can't run from yourself. A dream existence is wonderful. I love it when I have those dreams - and I do have them. BUT, the reality is that YOU will still be there even after the long run and locking all the doors. The character that came out of the kitchen was you. And you thought you had gotten rid of him. Wrong! He just looks different now but the real world will soon be at you again.

I guess I think the trick is to find an acceptable happiness where you are. If that means shaving and dressing, that is what it means. Finding some others like you and doing it with them might be the answer. Going out one night a week or even two nights a week to let off a little of what is bothering you would probably help. If that is just sitting with your TS friend and talking or dressing or anything else, it would buy you the time to let you make that most important decision which is going to affect the rest of your life and also going to affect your wife and your children. Once you are running at normal pressure and temperature, you can have another close look at what you want to do. Hell, it would take years and years anyway. The steam will be gone before you can ever get it done. Why not get the steam down before you stir up everything else in your life.

You asked for some opinions. I have honestly given you mine in hopes that some of it might help you. I did it because what you said touched me and I cared. I do wish you well.

--
Shirley Ann Sometimes

I took to heart all of what Shirley Ann had to say. Clearly, she was someone who had been through all of this long before I ever got here.

After reflecting on everyone's comments, I posted a followed up the next day:

Subject: Re: What's going on with me???
From: ms_donna@xxxx.xxx (Donna)
Date: Tue, 9 Dec 1997 12:01:12 -0500
Newsgroups: alt.fashion.crossdressing,alt.support.crossdressing

When I started getting involved here, I almost never wrote down anything vis-à-vis my feelings and the like. I have found writing to be a satisfying experience in general. Also, I have found that while spoken words are fleeting, the printed word lives on, often to come back and haunt you.

I have read everything posted and emailed to me since yesterday and can not express enough my gratitude to everyone who took the time to respond. While the intent of my somewhat manic post was more to vent than anything else, I none the less appreciate the support everyone has given.

As to being haunted, I went back and re-read my post several times and feel that I may have come off a bit whacked. Lest anyone fear, I'm not going to run off and do something rash. I'm far too analytical (sometimes to a fault) to do that. I have lived with myself for this long; a while longer won't kill me (no pun intended!)

I am not usually given to emotional rambling, but that's what came out yesterday. It doesn't mean that's not how I feel, just that it could have been spun better. Suffice to say that I feel that I've experienced a moment of lucidity unlike any other in the past. So much of my life's experiences clicked into place all at once and it was overwhelming.

In a nutshell, I feel that I have been less than honest with myself as to who I really am. Am I 'trapped' in a body of the wrong anatomical configuration? I don't know. It all comes back to this ambiguous notion of gender. Ask me my sex and I answer 'male' (no real option on this one). Ask me my gender (or more appropriately the gender with which I identify most) and my answer is 'female'. Perhaps part of this is due to the fact that I don't consider my 'maleness' as anything of paramount importance to me. It hasn't played any major role in the interests I've had over the years.

It's difficult to describe this feeling; kind of like trying to describe the color blue or something. At any given point in time, if there were a 'gender pulse' one could check, mine would come up female. It makes no difference what I'm doing at the time, nothing I do ever 'feels' more male than female. This goes back to the whole idea that CDing is a state of mind for me. I now ask myself, how is CDing a state of mind? CDing is a manifestation of a state of mind, not the state itself. My desire to dress comes and goes. Sometimes it's stronger than others; sometimes I don't feel much urge at all. Maybe this is because I am, to some extent, 'dressed' every day (I'm updating my bio regarding this.) Regardless of this, my sense of self stays firmly to one side.

My immediate difficulty is the resolution of the conflict this produces with my life as it now. While not mutually exclusive, my Self, and the self that has been married for ten years now are now somewhat at odds; both with different wants. The married self has a wife, kids and overall not too shabby life. The other Self has these too, but lacks one crucial thing, happiness. A friend of mine said "You can't make others happy until you yourself are happy." I've been trying to do just the opposite; if I can make those around me happy, I'll be happy. Well, it just ain't doin' the trick.

So, I can either say, "Screw it!" and do what I'd like, or I can try and find some middle ground.

As tempting as the former is, it's not my style. I love my wife and kids too much to be that callous. That leaves the latter. I feel that the road to this middle ground will be a long and difficult one to traverse. I don't even know what I'd like this middle ground to be at the moment, I need to figure out just what this should be.

This is already longer than I wanted (sometime I whine too much!) so once again, thanks for listening.

Love,
Donna (a bit worse for wear, but reasonably intact)

When I looked back on my life, I found that I had worked hard to prove that no matter what, I was 'one of the guys', while all along feeling more like 'one of the girls'. I was intent on proving that, no matter what, I was a man. The question was, to whom was I trying to prove it? I realized now that I had been hell bent on proving it to myself.

That I was delivered into this world pre-packaged in a male body had done nothing for my state of mental well being. If anything, I felt that it had only contributed to my problems. While most crossdressers have fantasized about being a woman, as I mentioned previously, I can recall times when I wished for nothing more than to wake up one morning and find that I had become a woman, as I have always wanted. I can also recall wanting this so badly, and waking up, devastated, only to find that I was still the same as I had always been.

Unless you have experienced these feelings, I'm sure that this is a bit hard to grasp. The fact is that I had been feeling them for a long time, only I never wanted to accept them for what they were: an undeniable part of me. In some respects, this sounds like the "woman trapped inside a man's body" bit. I feel more like a woman than a man. I relate better to women than men. I feel the match between the physiological and psychological aspects of myself would be closer if I were living as a woman. I feel that overall, I would be happier as a woman. But, clearly, I am **not** a woman. I am both something more and something less. More, in that I have a lifetime of experience (more or less) as a man, it's how I was raised (despite the way I'm turning out), and less for all the same reasons.

What the does this mean?

It means that Donna has to figure out just where and how the hell she fits in to the grand scheme of things all over again (and I thought it was tough the last time!)

Nietzsche said, "What does not kill me makes me stronger."

I hope to hell he was right...

Part 2
1998 – 1999

The great epochs of our life are the occasions when we gain the courage to rebaptize our evil qualities as our best qualities. – Nietzsche

Back to the Woodshed

How many times will I have to do this?

How many times will I have to ‘figure it out’?

I had no idea what was going on with me as an adolescent. In college, I decided I was a ‘regular guy’ with a few kinks. Then I realized that I really wasn’t a ‘regular guy’ at all, but that I was different somehow. And now? Now I don’t know what the hell I am. Will I ever find some peace with all of this? I suspect not. But such is my lot in life.

I wish it were as easy as someone just explaining how it works – explaining what it is I am and what I am supposed to do. I wish I didn’t have to keep going through this. I mean, am I *really* asking for so much?

I just wish this were **easier**.

I realize, however, that this cannot be easy. Like my summer before college, I had once again found myself face to face with the absurd. I want – **need** – answers and the world steadfastly **refuses** to yield any. And so ten years later, I find myself no further ahead than I was then.

Once again, I am embarking on a journey to ‘find’ myself – a journey, which would take me the next two years before I could once again feel some inner peace in my life. What follows are writings and the online diary I kept during this time.⁹

January 1998

January 1, 1998

Usenet post - Subject: '98 Starts Out Great

well, 1998 is off and running. Yesterday, I got me some shoes. Two pair to be precise. Got a pair of black ankle boots with a 1 1/2" chunky heel and a pair of black pumps, same heel height. I resisted the urge to get a pair of f**k-me pumps (I'm a nice girl, really!) and went more conservative. Had a lot of fun getting them.

Today, Jan 1, 1998 the wife, daughter and myself went to NYC to the Museum for the day. I got to wear my boots! I was thrilled. As I suspected, no one noticed, and if they did, they didn't care. It felt weird, as I haven't worn any heels in over four years. I dug it none the less.

Major accomplishment in dressing... Not really, but hey, its a start!

Hope everyone had a great New Years. For the moment, 1998 seems like it just might be OK.

Love to ya all,
Donna

--

The way individuals define their situations constitutes, for them, their reality, regardless of how things may appear to others.

January 7, 1998

Jade (one of the regulars on the newsgroups at the time) found an article written almost 30 years ago that just pissed me off to no end!

Usenet post - Subject: Re: cycles

In article <884184183.1582759943@dejanews.com>, jdresser@xxxx.xxx says...

Another factor - which probably popped the bubble - was the reference someone made yesterday to:

http://www3.sympatico.ca/taylor_buckner/transves.htm

I found it and printed it out. I read it yesterday afternoon and it struck home. I identified strongly with the progression described and it left me feeling a bit weak and pathetic.

OK, I got the article (a bit dated - 27 years ago!) and read it. I wanted to wretch. And to think, this guy was supposed to be HELPING people! Based on the works of others dating back to 1948, how can this be of any real value today. Hell, he mentions how electro-shock aversion therapy was used as a 'cure'! (I wonder if they tried lobotomies too!)

I have long maintained that the difference between transvestism and crossdressing was the predominantly sexual aspect usually associated with transvestism. Regardless, this entire work is offensive to the entire T* community. He manages to slam just about everything that isn't man on top, woman on bottom sex.

Did I see myself in there at all? Sure I did; bits and pieces hear and there. I mean, after all, he did interview some (a whopping seven) TVs for this scholarly treatise. I've got to have *something* in common. But for the most part, his progression just ain't me.

Step 1: Association of some item of feminine wearing apparel with sexual gratification - I've gotten myself off both with and without fem stuff. I don't now, or in the past need a prop to do it.

Step 2: Perceived heterosexual difficulties - Low self esteem, had it. Don't measure up to the 'male' ideal, had it too. Low level of sexual interest, not bloody likely!

Step 3: Blockage of the homosexual outlet - No F**kin' way! I like my partners sans extra equipment, thank you very much! The association of this with homosexuality really disgusts me. I've no problem with homosexuality, but to equate TVism with repressed, latent homosexual feelings... PLEASE!

Step 4: Elaboration of masturbation fantasies into the development of a feminine self - The premise here is that you become your own lover, carrying on an intimate ersatz relation with your other, feminine self. I don't know about everyone else here, but also, the notion that wives/girlfriends who are supportive as having problems themselves makes me want to want to throw this bonehead into a wood chipper! We know that our mates are far from disturbed for loving us.

You know, I'm getting sick just going over this. The only lasting impression this made is the knot of nausea I will have for the rest of the day.

I have filed this pseudo-intellectual flotsam where it belongs. I do, however, encourage everyone to give this article the once over, though. It shows how far the world has come in almost three decades.

Jade, (I *will* continue to call you Jade, jockeys or not!), don't put too much credence in this piece of history you found. You are anything but weak and pathetic. It takes a lot of inner strength to accept yourself; so far, you seem to be doing fine.

Love and hugs,
Donna

(who by now, has probably pissed off the world...)

January 8, 1998

Usenet post - Subject: I just can't anymore...

Yesterday was a month ago I wiggled out. Today, I'm feeling about the way I did then. It's another cloudy, dreary day here in the Big Apple, the third day in a row; gloomy I think is the word for it. It matches the pervasive gloom which hovers over me most of the time. For the first time in two weeks, I started off the day in tears.

My wife keeps talking about not quitting work. She was going to, but after the initial unburdening of my soul (assuming, of course, I have one... oops, wrong thread), she has taken the position that she may need to continue working. Prompted by my declaration that I don't know ultimately where I'll wind up in all of this, she feels, and rightly (I guess) that she needs to keep her own interests in sight. I don't blame her for this. Combined with the current hormone cocktail that seems to accompany pregnancy, she is more than entitled to her mood swings. It still makes me feel like crap.

Five o'clock this morning, she tells me that she's going to find someone to watch the kids so she can go back to work full time. A little back and forth and we're back to how I can't promise her what the future will hold. Christ, who can guarantee anything in life? Again, it's not her fault, she has a right to be a bit unsure. I tell her that she's doing it again. "What?" she asks. "Planning your life without me again..."

I start to lose it. I'm upset, she's upset. Friggin' great way to start the day! She says that she didn't want to make me all upset. Hell, just another day in paradise for me!

Rainy days depress me as it is. After three of them, and this morning's 'thing' I'm about ready to open a vein. Calls to the therapist I found have gone unanswered. I feel the transmission (also called a tranny, how ironic!) slowly slipping into reverse as I approach the hill.

After three gloomy days, my mind starts to get a bit loopy.

And so it goes...

Standing on the train this morning (always a joy) I realize I'm dressed for the day: black shoes, black socks, black jeans, black grey & white (very little) sweater; allows me to remain unnoticed to the world. All fem clothes, but it does little to lift my spirits.

Awash in self pity (and a dash of self loathing to help keep my spirits down) - It really sucks being me.

I just can't anymore...

January 9, 1998

Usenet post - Subject: Re: I just can't anymore...

Day four of dreary weather. woke up better today. On the way to the train, a three minute drive, I hear 'I'm Just a Girl' by No Doubt. Strange that in that specific point in time, of all the songs possible I hear that. The following sets my mood:

The moment that I step outside
So many reasons for me to run and hide
I can't do the little things I hold so dear
'Cause it's all those little things that I fear

'Cause I'm just a girl, I'd rather not be
'Cause they won't let me drive late at night
I'm just a girl, guess I'm some kind of freak
'Cause they all sit and stare with their eyes

Arrived in Manhattan, got downtown, and walked around in the dark and fog for about forty minutes. Just couldn't bring myself to go to work. Started raining, so I dragged myself inside and upstairs. Had the rain not come...

The sun is supposed to come out tomorrow. Maybe I'll feel better.

--

In the beginning there was nothing.
And God said, "Let there be light!"
And there was still nothing,
you could just see it better.

January 11, 1998

I posted this Sunday morning at about 7:00am. The entire week leading up to this was crappy. I really can't deal with this anymore...

Usenet post - Subject: Donna doesn't live here anymore

Friday night/Saturday morning at 1:30am, my wife woke me up about a dream she just had. In it, I was no longer the husband she married and her life was a wreck; a common theme. As we talked, it became clear to me that this deluded idea I have about living a peaceful coexistence with myself is just that, a delusion. My wife says that I'll just keep pushing what I can get away with: pants, shirts, shoes... She's right! I want to wear and be what I want, when I want. Yea, right.

She has stated that she doesn't want to have to keep checking that I am dressed in an 'acceptable' manner. She says that I can do my thing when the kids aren't around or socially once a week or so. Fact: with a new child, the kids will **always** be around. And as for a weekly outing; I get home to the suburbs at about 6:30pm. Where the hell am I going to go and for how long at that point. It's a nice idea, but I know better.

Saturday morning, we (my wife, daughter and I) went to Westchester to visit some friends. I cried the entire trip there. I've said it before; self realization is a painful thing. It became clear what I must do.

Relativity states the two objects can not exist in the same space at the same point in time. I now know this to be all too true.

I made a commitment to my wife and kids; a contract, if you will. Terms didn't allow a provision for this.

What I want and what I can have are mutually exclusive. I have but one choice:

I'm sending Donna away.

Donna is like a plant, in need of light, caring and attention. Four years ago, she was shut away, but with just enough light and attention that she survived. I shan't make the same mistake again. This time, with the proper space in which to shut her in, the darkest and most isolated I can find, she'll finally wither and die.

I'm starting the painful process of yet again deconstructing myself and building a more 'socially acceptable' one. With a little luck, I'll make it to see my kids get married.

My web site will remain up. People out there seem to get something from it, and as I've paid for the domain name and such. What's one more site eating up bandwidth?

To all who have been supportive of me: A most heart felt thank you.

To all whom I have helped: I'm glad to have had a positive effect on your lives.

To all who have found the balance in their lives to be themselves: You are truly blessed.

To all those who are struggling with who they are: May you find the peace and happiness which you deserve.

To all the SO's out there: Don't give up on us. We really are good people and worth the effort.

Thanks for everything,
Gary (Donna doesn't live here anymore...)

--
But it was only fantasy.
The wall was too high,
As you can see.
No matter how he tried,
He could not break free.
And the worms ate into his brain.

January 12, 1998

After much prodding by Jade and Joanne, I picked myself up and decided to rejoin the living.

Usenet post - Subject: Guess who?

So as not to be confused with someone of a more stable mental demeanor, I am, on advice of counsel (the firm of Dresser & Hart, PC) changing my name. Mind you this is only temporary (very), but necessary.

Jeez Louise! I have had a bad week and everybody here goes all sappy. Can't a girl have an emotional moment without everyone wiggin' out? For the love of bog, it's not like I was gonna open a vein or something.

Like Bill Shatner to the trekkies - PEOPLE, GET A LIFE!

Whew! That said I appreciate all the posts and support - Again! And Laura, don't be so smug!

I am especially thankful to Doug/Jade for a much needed beating with the guilt stick (special hollow rubber model, most persuasive whilst leaving no discernable marks.) Kept emailing till I answered. It took only three, but I think he would have kept it up indefinitely.

So as to explain a bit better what the hell my problem is, the following is a combination of emails sent to Jade and Joanne:

Excerpt from mail to Jade

Don't dismiss my 'whining' as you call it. It's been fifteen years since I felt this bad and I almost didn't stay for the second half of the show. Yea, I'm lucky I got a supportive wife and such. Fact is that logic and reason don't cut it when one is really depressed.

Have you ever been down that low? If not, then don't trivialize it.

It sucks big time.

Feeling sorry for myself - yup. Is it well founded - nope. Fact is, that's where I am at the moment. Don't like being there, but that's where I wound up.

The following is most of an email to Joanne. We have a regular email dialog going on. This should help put things in perspective:

Excerpt from mail to Joanne

Spent the morning crying - again. Cried typing my post, cried on the couch, cried sitting in the tub in the shower for about half an hour. I'll more than likely wake up and cry tomorrow. Depression hasn't crept up on me, it's

whacked upside my head with a 2x4. I'm probably two steps away from being a manic depressive. Waddaya know - maybe I DO have a disorder after all. This makes a whole week I've felt like shit, with the weekend being the worst. Last time I felt this bad was fifteen years ago, at the start of college.

Saturday and Sunday - dressed the drabbiest I have in months. No desire. Marcy took my daughter to the park this afternoon. Usually, I'd take advantage of the opportunity. No desire. Went to the basement, plugged in the guitar, cranked it up and made my ears ring. I needed to vent. It helped - a little.

Marcy hasn't given up on me finding a happy medium; I have. Maybe I just feel sorry for myself... I don't know (my favorite new phrase!) She asks why all of a sudden I don't think that anything will work? All I can say is "I don't know." I honestly feel that she would give me the space I need to make this work.

It seems that I'm the one who's given up.

She realizes (maybe better than I) that I need to deal with this. Too long have I dealt with my problems alone; she tells me that there is nothing wrong with asking for help. Maybe I'm just too scared to find out. Her 1:30am discussion got to me; but she always says not to put too much emphasis on what she says late at night. In the morning, she was of a different mindset. She really wants me to be happy, and get some help doing it.

As for checking up on my dress, she is right: I would keep pushing it. She wants me to not put her and the kids in a compromising position. I can't fault her for that. Maybe because I don't have an outlet yet, I keep pushing.

Again - I don't know.

You know, maybe there are just too many variables floating around right now. I feel I can't get a hold of enough of them to start doing something about it.

I know that I can't put Donna back into a box. I want to, sort of, but know that ultimately, either she'll get her way, I'll be miserable the rest of my life, or... well, you're a smart girl, you can figure it out.

I need to get a grip and figure out where I'm going. Marcy wants me to be happy, and not suppress all this. That should tell me something.

End of excerpt to Joanne

OK? I'm scared, confused and feeling sorry for myself. I feel that I border on the verge of being a TS as opposed to a CD. I'm not there yet, but could very well be and it scares the shit out of me! I don't know. What I do know is that I have to deal with this and see where it will go. It's just not coming easy. Nothing about this ever has been.

End of excerpt to Jade

That more or less says it. So... As Laura the oracle predicted, I'm back. Oh hell, I never left. I wanted to, but SOMEONE wouldn't let me.

Face it... You just can't get rid of me!

Love and all that mushy stuff we girls say,

Revolving-Door-Donna

January 14, 1998

After being emailed a list of gender specialists in New York, I finally called one and have made an appointment for this Friday the 16th. I have to admit, I'm a bit scared about it. Well, scared isn't the right word, apprehensive is more like it. Outside of my wife and the girls on the newsgroups, I really haven't spoken about this to anyone.

We'll see how it goes. My life just keeps on getting more and more interesting!

January 16, 1998

My first session with the therapist. I was a bit apprehensive about the whole thing. I mean, I'm a pretty shy person, and to just start talking to a complete stranger about the one thing in my life that I've kept a guarded secret just isn't in my nature. But, all in all, it went well. Nothing resolved (I didn't expect there to be), but it's a start.

January 17 – 21, 1998

I done quite a bit of corresponding with Laura as of late; learning about the cast of characters in Alt.Support.SRS¹⁰ and why so many of them seem whacked. They seem to have quite a tight little clique.

I have been on a fact-finding mission, and Laura has been providing me with much information. I respect her opinions on all this stuff, and her documents are quite informative. She suspected that I am trying to decide what to do; she is right. I am in the process of educating myself as best as I can in all of this. I think I know what I want, but just don't want to admit it.

January 22, 1998

Feeling in a mood again, I use humor as a way of dealing with stress. With that in mind, I posted the following:

Usenet post - Subject: Identity Trek: TNG

```
*** WARNING *** WARNING *** WARNING ***
*** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD HAS BEEN COMPROMISED ***
*** WARP CORE BREACH IMMANENT ***
*** PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY WARP CORE JETTISON ***
```

I've been in a mood the last couple of days; more like a state of confusion. How this differs from any other 'normal' state I have remains to be discovered. None the less, I've just got the anxious feeling again and I'm **REALLY** getting tired of it.

Just finished reading a whole bunch 'o stuff:

- HBIGDA SOC, Draft Eight¹¹
- DSM-IV¹² diagnosis and classification of:
 - Gender Identity Disorder

- Transvestic Fetishism
- Laura's treatises on:
 - Extended Informed Consent
 - Transgender Identity
 - Transgender Rights Manifesto
- Lots o' bickering and what not on Alt.Support.SRS

SO, why has this got my knickers all in a knot? well, a week or so ago, I got the latest SOC revision to give a read; seems like reasonable stuff. The other day, someone posts to Alt.Support.SRS the following closing comment:

*If people will defend the HBIGDA SOC they'll defend *anything*. It's for your own good, dontchaknow...*

Got me wondering, am I missing something? So... I ask Laura, what gives? She replies that the SOC is discriminatory against transsexuals. OK. I give it another read, this time with the applicable DSM-IV sections in hand. According to DSM-IV, I really don't have GID, but I kinda do. I also don't have Transvestic Fetishism, but I kinda do. Not that this is bad, but start to get pissed. I feel like I'm all over the damn place. Ah, the absurdity that is life! The more I seek to understand, the further I sink into the quagmire of doubt. My feeling that all this classification crap is just that - crap. I've logged probably thirty plus hours talking with my wife about this since my December meltdown. I *STILL* don't think I have adequately conveyed just what it feels like to be me. And now, I'm supposed to 'fit' into some other category? I defy categorization!

*** WARNING *** WARNING *** WARNING ***
 *** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD INTEGRITY AT 50% ***

I can not predict, from one point in time to another, just how the hell I'm going to feel. I walk down the street and feel myself 'shift' from one mental state to another. Each bit of stimuli moves me to yet another unpredictable state. The closest analogy I can come up with is a Lorenz Attractor (Stephanie A. Brooks - help me out explaining this one - I'm sure you can!) It's a fractal function, known as a 'strange' attractor (how apropos!) In most normal functions, $y = f(x)$, a small change in x yields a predictable change in y . With strange attractors, a small change x yields an unpredictable change in y .

*** WARNING *** WARNING *** WARNING ***
 *** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD INTEGRITY AT 30% ***

That's how I feel. I vacillate from being comfortable with my self, to wanting to go 'all the way', to all points in between. It's pretty much how I've felt most of my life; a lack of control over where I'll wind up and how I'll get there.

*** WARNING *** WARNING *** WARNING ***
 *** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD INTEGRITY AT 20% ***
 *** EMERGENCY WARP CORE JETTISON IN T MINUS 20 SECONDS ***

(Scotty! Do Something!)

I email Laura, asking if it's the guidelines which are discriminatory. I get back her document 'Extended Informed Consent'. Again, really well thought out good stuff. I feel my knowledge increase a bit. Read the other docs she was kind enough to forward to me. I found that I seem to be following the 'Stages of life' outlined in her 'Transgender Identity' document all too closely. I know that, in theory, I can jump off at any point - or can I? The more I examine all this, the more at a loss I feel about who/what/where I am. I know better than to ask 'why?'

*** WARNING *** WARNING *** WARNING ***
 *** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD INTEGRITY AT 10% ***

*** EMERGENCY WARP CORE JETTISON IN T MINUS 10 SECONDS ***

There... That's better! I needed to vent a bit, and I have. Nothing resolved, other than getting some more angst out. Thanks for listening.

*** WARP PLASMA CONTAINMENT FIELD HAS BEEN RESTORED ***
*** EMERGENCY WARP CORE JETTISON TERMINATED ***

(Mr. Scott, Good work!)

*** WARP DRIVE IS BACK ON LINE ***

(Lt. Uhuru - see that a transcript of this makes it to my therapist via a scrambled subspace message.)

(Mr. Sulu, get us the hell outta here!)

Love to ya all,
Donna (boldly going where nobody REALLY wants to go!)

--

One seldom commits only one rash act. In the first rash act one always does too much. For just that reason one usually commits a second - and then one does too little...

January 23, 1998

My second session with my therapist. I felt much more comfortable this time. My wife wants to know what we talk about and if anything has been accomplished. I feel funny discussing this with her. I don't know why, but I am not really comfortable with it. It's not like its any big, deep, dark stuff; just doesn't feel right. Oh well...

Life, for the moment, remains relatively unchanged...

January 26, 1998

Maybe I think too much sometimes. The following popped into my head after reading a post by Stephe and some of Laura's docs. Actually, I have thought about this a bit before, but current events pushed it to the forefront today.

Usenet post - Subject: what is a woman?

well folks, Donna has been at it again. I've been giving a lot of thought to the whole sex-gender-orientation model. In looking at myself in light of this, I have concluded the following:

Sex:

My sex is male. I don't deny it and need not question it.

Gender:

Starts to get fuzzy here. My current read is approximately a 70/20/10 split between female/male/not sure. Values here tend to migrate between categories, but this feel about right as an overall assessment.

Orientation:

Now my head starts hurting. I am married to a woman. I am attracted to women, very attracted. So, what is the problem? Well, it's like this. I have struck up a few friendships here. These are people with whom I correspond on a regular basis. I know them only by the names and manners in which they present themselves. For all intents and purposes, they're women. This is how I consider them. While not important in and of itself, it's how I consider them.

Now, lest anyone get the wrong idea, I have no secret yearnings for anyone here. It does, however, illustrate a point: If one presents as a woman, and is considered as a woman, what makes one NOT a woman, short of physiological configuration? What I'm getting at is: Should sex be an overriding factor here? Presented with a feminine, passing T* individual, how would I feel? Would I be any less attracted?

There was a time when I would have answered NO without hesitation. Now, I'm not so sure. Does being attracted to the aforementioned individual make one homosexual? Does it matter? Why do I care? Why do I think anyone else here cares?

I suppose it only matters if I want it to matter. I care only in so far as I've never given something like this any thought until recently. When I dropped all this on the wife two months ago (my gender - she knew about my CDing two years prior to our marriage) one of her comments to me as that dressing up now and then is OK, but going full time would make me a freak; and who would want to be around *that* kind of person. That hit me hard, feeling that, inside at least, I am one of *those* people.

But it is a good question. Who *would* want to be around a biologic male living as a woman? Well... Me, maybe. Plumbing aside, what makes any transgenderist less of a woman than a cisgender female? My feeling is there is no difference. Relationships are (or should be) more than copulation. Sex aside, it's pretty much an emotional thing. Given that, if one relates as a woman, then they are.

Who knows???

Just some more to think about...

Love and stuff,
Donna

--

Even the bravest of us rarely has the courage for what he really knows.

January 29, 1998

Usenet post - Subject: Reality Check...

Here's a sobering moment I had coming home today.

I'm on the train from NYC back to the 'burbs. No seats, so I stand. As it's pretty warm, off comes the winter coat. My attire for today was pretty run of the mill for me: jeans, off white cotton sweater, and my ankle boots (no heels - I was a work for the day) - all in all, a pretty unremarkable outfit.

As the train pulls in to my stop, I get my coat and bag. I've been carrying a Le SportSac shoulder bag lately with my stuff in it. It's just the 'manliest' of bags, but then, I'm not the manliest of guys. In general, I've gotten no looks (that I've noticed) carrying it around.

I get off the train, and there are two dirtbag types getting off with the rest of us. I walk down stairs, and through the tunnel that passes under the tracks. As I start up the stair to the other side, I hear one of them call out "Hey! Faggot!" I was the only one in front of them, so I knew it was directed to me.

I felt sick; really sick. My car was right outside the stairway. I got in and locked the door. I've *never* had that happen... until today. Never before have two words brought forth the mix of emotions I felt then.

Part of me wanted to run off and cry, part was terrified, and part wanted to run them the F**K over; and then do it again just for shits and giggles.

So... Maybe a small sampling of what I have to look forward to should I ever progress further down this road I'm exploring.

Tonight, the closet looks oh so inviting... Perhaps I'll stay...

Donna

--

He who has to do in secret what he does best and most likes to do, with protracted tension, caution, slyness, becomes anemic; and because he never has harvested anything from his instincts but danger, persecution, disaster, his feelings too turn against these instincts - he feels them to be a fatality. - Nietzsche

January 30, 1998

My third session with my therapist. Discussed the "Hey! Faggot!" incident and what I want to do. Some of the first really serious stuff we've discussed. I think this is going to help, as I need to discuss this stuff openly with someone.

Laura left the NGs tonight. She has had enough and wants to pursue other projects. I'll miss her, but know that I can always email her. Oh well, yet another rung of support gone...

January 31, 1998

Laura got some serious trashing in the NGs today, *after* she left. It figures that people would wait until she's gone. It seems that I have chased away another very good member of our group. Unintentionally, but the damage is done. I think a post I made was taken the wrong way; I feel like crap over it.

With that in mind, I have decided to drop out of the NGs; at least for a while. It seems to be getting dicey too often and I will not be part of the cause of that. So, I'll see how things go post NGs. I just need a break from all of the crap there as of late. I have gotten one or two emails asking me to stay, but I need to regroup my thoughts. I'll keep up with any emails, but have unsubscribed A.F.C. and A.S.C. as of this morning.

Now it's just me again...

February 1998

February has come and gone with little incident. Not that it wasn't busy, just nothing really new. I'm back in the newsgroups, as things have returned to their usual state. It's nice not having it be such a hostile atmosphere.

Laura grew tired of me and has moved on. I thought that this would have bothered me more than it did. While I was hurt by this, I *got over it* pretty quickly. She told me I had to learn to stand up for myself. Well, I seem to be doing quite well, thank you very much!

I have started attending a gender exploration workshop. It's a twelve-week workshop and seems really good. It is the first time I have been in a group of people who could all relate to how I feel. I feel quite comfortable there.

One thing that has always plagued me was the continual sense of guilt around who and what I was. While crossdressing would make me feel better, it did nothing to ease the guilt. In fact, it would make it more pronounced, keeping me at constant odds with myself. As I continued my 'education', I noticed that some of the guilt had started to ease up. Some more self-reflection and analysis prompted me to write the following:

Guilt and the Transgender Individual

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, February 1998

As children, we have impressed upon us sets of rules by our parents and others in positions of authority. At this stage of our life, we do not question the validity of these arbitrary rules. We, for the most part, follow them blindly feeling we must. These are **must do** rules and form the basis of our conscience.

As we mature, we find that we are in a constant struggle between our impulsive desires and the ideals set forth by society. Our conscience reflects this, producing anxiety, guilt and doubt. These checkpoints, so to speak, keep us from deceiving ourselves. They alert us as to when we are acting contrary to our sense of self. They serve to remind us not just of our place in our society and culture, but also of our place in the whole of existence.

Our conscience works because we have the ability to weigh conflicts against an internal set of values. When presented with a choice that we feel is in character with what we consider to be an internal *ideal*, we feel that we *ought* to act on it. This is different from the feeling that we *must* act on something. Must actions have as a part of them, an element of fear of retribution lest one not comply (e.g.: we must obey the law.) Ought actions, on the other hand, are weighed against our self-image; they are *value* judgments. They carry no fear attached to them. While there is no imperative that one calls one's parents, one may feel, never the less, that one ought to call them.

When a thought or action is contrary to our self-image, it produces guilt. Guilt is a strong emotion, rarely equating to a fear of punishment. Instead, guilt is indicative of a violation of some internal value; a kind of disgust at falling short of one's ideal sense of self. It is important to realize that we develop our life style, our sense of self, not solely by the ideals prescribed by society and culture, but by the integration of many different events and circumstances. Some elements we accept and some we reject. Many elements are internalized and refashion to suit our developing Self.

As transgender individuals, guilt is a feeling we seem to know all too well. We experience so much guilt because we live in a society, which teaches us in no uncertain terms, that there are 'right' and 'wrong' ways for men and women to act. Not following the 'guidelines' set forth puts one at odds with deeply engrained societal expectations.

From our culture and experience, we synthesize an image of the *ideal* man or woman whose likeness we strive to emulate. For cisgender individuals, this poses little conflict: men strive to be masculine and women strive to be feminine. As transgender individuals, we have a much tougher time of this. We have internalized the societal ideal and added it to our value system. If (when) we act in opposition to this ideal, guilt sets in, leaving us with the sick feeling that we have once again failed to live up to that ideal. Many times, we simply stop acting in opposition. We repress the *other* ideal we have created; the one more true to ourselves.

On the other hand, by not acting on our urges, we also experience guilt. By not being true to our innermost self, we act in direct opposition to what feels most natural to us. We're damned if we do, and damned if we don't. We have developed a conflicting set of values: those prescribed by society at large, and those of our own persona. As a result, we try to be true to two opposing sets of values. Not a particularly good spot in which to be.

So, which is right? On the one side, there are societal values, and on the other, we have our personal values. We exert enormous amounts of energy trying to resolve this conflict. We read. We talk. We rationalize the hell out of what we do. In short, we spend our lives trying to come to terms with this conflict between the outer world and our inner self. And to what end? It always seems lead back to the same sense of guilt and shame. Clearly, something has to give.

Ultimately, we seem to reach a point where we realize that we are different from others. We start to deconstruct the standard issue societal stereotype, and in its place, create one which fits us better, one more in tune with *who* we are. Once done, the standard rule set no longer applies. It is at this point that the guilt starts to ease up. We start to accept ourselves for who we are and stop trying so hard to fit into the original societal stereotype. We are told, "You ought to be like thus and thus!" Why? Because the arbitrary morality of society would have us believe that because we are different, there is something fundamentally *wrong* with us and somehow in need of correcting? I think not. We declare to ourselves, at the very least, that we are of equal validity as all other members of society. We are not in need of *fixing*. We are fine just the way we are.

And so we cope. Some better than others, but non the less, we make peace with ourselves, allowing the guilt we carry around to dissipate, leaving behind a stronger and more integrated individual.

As I said, some of the guilt had started to ease up. In understanding the source of my guilt, I hope to be able to overcome it that much better.

As I continue to explore all of this gender stuff, I have had a bit of a shift in mindset. While, for the most part, I feel that I identify more as a woman than a man, I am finding that at many times, I seem to feel quite neutral: not really a man, and not really a woman. This *other* state has probably been there all along – I just never recognized it as such.

I find it difficult to describe. I am not really sure what it is supposed to *feel* like to be a man or woman. Whatever it is, I have never really felt like a part of the men's side. I play the part (more or less) and pass as a man (some times better than other times) but do not really belong. This is OK, as I realize that it just isn't who I am. At the same time, I think I *feel* more like a woman. Again, I am not really sure what it is supposed to *feel* like to be a woman, but that's how I feel. For me, it seems, *man* is not the antithesis of *woman*. Note that I said I feel *more* like a woman. More like a woman than *what*? It's as if I add up all the parts, I never hit 100%. Something is missing...

This leaves me in a strange spot. I never really feel like a man, and feel somewhat like a woman. But why must I *feel* more one way or the other? Is there a gap in my self? If so, what fills in the gap? Why does anything have to fill in the gap? Why can't I just simply be? Why do I need to be any particular gender at all?

I think that this is where I'm heading. On a day-to-day basis, I am finding that I feel more neutral than anything else. The best I can describe it is like not having a particular gender at all. It helps explain this continual *shifting* I experience. By not being locked into any specific self-imposed gendered state, I am free assuming whatever state strikes me. Sometimes, it's decidedly more *man* than *woman*, other times the reverse. Still, at other times, it is both and neither all at once.

A sidebar for a moment.

In existentialist terms, this is much like Sartre's paradox of Being (the world) and Nothingness (the self or consciousness.) We ask, "Who am I?" and find that we have no being of our own. We borrow and derive our identity (our being) from the world around us. We are nothing inside, lacking content, with our identity being an empty formalism. Basically, we can only say that which we are not:

We are not our parents

We are not our siblings

We are not our teachers

We are not our friends

...

We are **not** a whole lot of things.

But wait, what about consciousness? Surely *that* is the one thing which is truly our own? Well, what is consciousness? Describe it without describing its contents... If you remove all the contents of consciousness, you are left with, well, nothing! Consciousness has no real properties of its own. It is a lack, emptiness; it is only that which it borrows.

We wind up describing reality in the negative mode. By using the word '**not**', that which is not, now is. Consciousness exists by not being! However, no matter what being you may borrow, you are *not* that borrowing. At the same time, you are *not* the negation of what you are borrowing. Every borrowing is a pursuit of being. We flee from one borrowing while pursuing another. We try to both hold on to and let go of reality at the same time.

OK, enough existentialist theory for now. Yea, it's confusing, but hopefully you get the idea. I feel that the above is a bit extreme, but does express the idea of how I am coming to view my gender.

I am not a man and I am not a woman. At the same time, I am *not* not a man or a woman. The binary gender system cannot accommodate this seemingly paradoxical statement. I borrow whatever gender is appropriate for the moment, shaping it to fit the situation. We all do this; it's just that most people are not aware that they are doing it. It is a liberating feeling, having acknowledged this, as I feel much less stress over the shifting feelings that I have.

This all boils down to how I have felt all my life: **Why can't I just be me?** – without worrying *who* or *what* I am?

Maybe I can.

So, I guess it was an eventful month after all. One thing is for sure, I am not the person I was in January. This just keeps getting better...

March – May 1998

It has been a tough few months and I did not keep up with things, as I wanted to. If there is a word which sums up this period, it is **Rollercoaster!**

There was a lot of up and down in my life. Laura and I resolved our differences, which is good. I hate not knowing what I did to piss people off. My wife and I have had **many** *discussions* about my transgender status and our relationship in general. There were several times when I thought that things were just going to go to hell all together. Somehow, however, we were able to keep things together.

I feel I have made some good progress with my therapist. She has helped me a lot to work through all of this stuff. One thing that we hit upon is the resentment I have developed towards my parents. I don't understand how I could live with them and they *not* talk to me about any of this. I mean, how could they *not* realize that there was anything wrong. End of high school I was ready to kill myself and they had no clue?

Needless to say, I'm pretty annoyed, but am dealing with it. Basically, it's in the past and cannot do anything to change it. Oh well, life goes on...

April 8th I made the following post alt.support.crossdressing:

Usenet post - Subject: I'm Tired

I'm tired.

I'm tired of secrets. Keeping them that is.

I'm tired of putting on a front for my friends, family... the world.

I have this almost overwhelming need to let everyone in the world know just what my deal is. Let them all stand there, mouths open, not knowing what to say. I'd start with my parents:

"Mom, Dad... There's something I need to tell you... I'm transgender."

"You're what?"

"I'm transgender"

"Is that like gay or something?"

"More 'or something'"

"Oh. So what does that mean?"

<snip the unsuccessful explanation>

"Oh. So what does that mean?"

And so on...

I would tell them "I've been this way all my life, but nobody ever paid enough attention to notice that there was something different."

I'd ask them, "Didn't you wonder why I played with girls all the time? why I spent so much time alone? why I was always so moody?"

I'd ask them, "why couldn't see I was in pain after high school?"

I'd ask them, "How could you *not* know something was going on???"

I'd probably get the response "why didn't you tell us there was something bothering you?"

And I'd ask them, "why the fuck didn't you bother to pay attention, as there were ample signs that something was bothering me? Or didn't you care?"

And so it would go, with similar discussions for the others in my life. Some would understand, some would consider it inconsequential, some would be mortified. In the end, though, the secret would be no longer, and I'd be that much surer where I stand in the world.

Little in the way of immediate good would come of this. why, then, would I want to do this? well, for one thing, it would be one less thing which I carry around all the time. To actually come out and say it to the people with whom I associate on a regular basis would be such a weight lifted. I could stop worrying what people might/do think about me. I could filter out, in one fell swoop, all those who don't like me for who I am. I could move that much closer to just being me, as opposed to the 'me' which everyone else expects me to be.

So, what stops me from doing this?

Fear.

Fear of rejection. Fear of ridicule. Just plain and simple fear.

If I had cancer, I could tell people. I might get the same responses as to telling them I was transgender, but I could tell them.

See, it OK to be terminally ill. It's OK to become deformed due to an accident. It's OK to have almost anything wrong with you. People will look at you and say "I'm sorry..." They can accept that something has happened to you. They will tell you about how much more you are than your disability or illness.

"No, I don't have an illness. I don't gender myself in a way which matches my sex."

"Oh... ::snickering:: So you think you're a woman?"

"No, but I think *you're* an asshole!"

People just don't get it...

"Damn it! I'm not sick! Why can't you understand this? Why does everyone think I've got some 'disease' which needs to be cured???"

"We do understand, really. You're just confused, that's all. Don't worry; we'll help you get through this..."

"Cut the patronizing crap! I can do without *your* help!"

Lose an arm, it's sad. Lose your sight, it's awful. Forget about losing, 'question' your gender, your a sick puppy and need some serious help.

Letting everyone know would be social suicide. Am I ready for that? Am I ready to be alone?

I don't know... But right now, it seems better than where I am.

Will I do it? Probably not... But I want to sooo badly.

So, again, why would I want to do this?

Because this is who I am.

Because if I'm comfortable with it, why the hell can't you be?

Because I'm tired of putting on a front.

Because I'm tired of secrets. Keeping them that is.

Because I'm tired.

--

He who has to do in secret what he does best and most likes to do, with protracted tension, caution, slyness, becomes anemic; and because he never has harvested anything from his instincts but danger, persecution, disaster, his feelings too turn against these instincts - he feels them to be a fatality. - Nietzsche

Basically, I'm tired of keeping this a secret and I just want to let the world know what my deal is. I want to, but have yet to act on this. Well see where this goes.

On an up note, my second daughter was born on April 9th. She weighted in at nine pounds fifteen ounces. Yep, she was a big baby. As if my life were not complicated enough, it just got more so. It's OK though, as I love her dearly. My goal is still to strike a balance with all of this in my life. So far, it has been **very** slow going, but I am committed to making it work.

June – September 1998

While my intentions of writing on a monthly basis were good, in practice it hasn't quite worked out as I would have liked. Nonetheless, here is a summary of the last four months. As it happens, they have (thankfully) been relatively uneventful.

As I recall, June was a pretty good month. I attended the CDI (Cross Dressers International) 'Prom'. It was the first time in about five years that I really did the 'girl' thing. I got to wear the black velvet dress I bought at the beginning of the year (yeah!) and actually *go out* as 'Donna'.

Overall, I had a pretty good time, although I felt somewhat weird. Doing the whole 'girl' thing doesn't feel any more right than doing the 'guy' thing does. It is, at best, an act or persona; it's not who I *really* am inside. While it feels much closer to how I identify, it goes too far. This doesn't mean it isn't fun to get all done up, but it's too fake in my opinion. Which leads me to the next 'big' happening...

Having never really felt like I fit in anywhere, the crossdressing newsgroups did not seem like the proper forum for the ideas I'd been expressing. So, I started hanging out in Laura's newsgroup, **alt.support.crossliving**. There were a bunch of us ambiguously gendered posting there and things got a bit out of hand. So, at Laura's suggestion, I undertook the task of creating a new Usenet newsgroup and on Sept 14, 1998 I posted the newgroup control message to alt.config and did just that.

The new newsgroup: alt.support.intergendered

As far as I know, this is not a term in use in the transgender community – I hope to make it one that sticks around. Intergendered means *between* genders. There are a lot of us who do not gender ourselves as either men or women, but as something in between the two, or as in my case, neither a man nor a woman. We really don't 'fit' in the other transgender groups. This newsgroup is an attempt to create such a space.

It felt really good to do this. There is a sense of power in naming and up to this point; I had no name for who I was. While I reject the whole 'labels' thing in general, they seem to be a necessary evil, and this was one label which was *mine*; it wasn't assigned to me by someone else.

So far, the newsgroup is doing pretty well and overall, I am quite pleased.

Overall, things have been pretty good. The rollercoaster that is my life seems to have slowed down a bit, with things at home being generally better.

October – December 1998

All is still pretty much quiet, with life continuing to be the usual day to day existence we all know and love. To me, this is a good thing. I seem to be less bothered by all of this since coming to terms with who I am – not to say that I still don't feel some level of general anxiety. I do, but I seem to be used to it, although some days are worse than others.

I've thought about it in the past and still am considering trying low dosage hormones. While there is not much in the way in empirical evidence, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are definite positive psychological benefits to be had from them. I have decided that if I do pursue this, it will be through a doctor. Hormones are serious stuff and not something with which to be played.

I'm holding off on talking with my parents about all of this. With the holidays approaching, the timing is not the best. It's bad enough that all of this came out last year just before Christmas. A few more months are not going to make a big difference one way or the other.

Halloween was fun this year – the one day of the year when it's *OK* to do what we do. My wife and I went to a party that some of our friends were having. It was the first time that she has ever been out anywhere with me 'dressed up'. She did my hair and makeup for me and was a bit surprised at how well it came out. Many of the people at the party were floored that I would have the guts to do what I did, as it seems that I was the only one to come in drag. I got the questions about where I got the dress and shoes and such. Most amusing was the psychologist who was there - she said that she was taking notes!

All in all, we had a pretty good time. My wife's opinion of me that evening: I wasn't any different 'dressed up' than I usually am, something I've known all along, but I was glad she got to see it for herself.

After creating my new newsgroup, I felt that some explanation of **Intergendered** was in order so I wrote the following – my 'Intergender Manifesto', if you will.

What Is Intergendered?

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, October 1998

Society openly recognizes two gendered states with which people may identify: man and woman. We are born; a doctor looks at our genitalia and declares us a boy or a girl. We are *gendered* at birth in a way which aligns with our *sex*. This alignment of sex and gender has become accepted as a given, creating two valid gendered states. This is a binary classification system and as such, allows two and *only* two valid states. In a binary system, there are no exceptions.

Now, there are two main groups of individuals out there in gender land. On the one hand, you have the cisgendered, who align their sex and gender as described above in what can be considered a *traditional* way (male/man – female/woman). For most people, this is fine and they feel little or no anxiety with this identity.

Then there are the transgendered (in the true sense of the word) who cross-align their sex and gender (male/woman – female/man). While they violate the accepted traditional sex-gender link, they still adhere to the construct that gender is a binary system and feel that they are men or women, but their morphology is wrong.

The former accounts for what is the majority of the population. The cisgendered are the *normal* people (from the point of view of society as a whole.) The latter make up (almost) everyone else.

Now, this is all well and good. Society does its best to see that we all are cisgendered, so as to not upset the apparent 'natural' order of things. There is some validity to the point that being cisgendered makes one's life much easier to deal with in so far as one is subjected to the stigma of not feeling like a *real man* or *real woman*. However, despite all of the socialization, there are people who wind up realizing that they just don't fit the cisgendered mold.

What seems to happen here is that they feel that they are of a gender **opposite** to that which they were assigned. As a result, you wind up with people who were gendered at birth as men realizing that they really feel more like women, and people who were gendered at birth as women realizing that they really feel more like men. This comes to be because of the assumption that gender is really is a binary system: There are only two genders and you **must** be one or the other.

But is this **really** the case? Are there only two gendered states?

There are many in the gender community who subscribe to the construct that there is a gender spectrum and we **all** fall somewhere between the polar endpoints of *man* and *woman*. All of the aforementioned people cluster around the endpoints. They are all either men or women, regardless of their sex. While some may be more masculine or feminine than others, they all primarily place themselves firmly at one end or the other.

I said that the assumptions here are that only two and only two genders and you **must** be one or the other. This is the binary gender model and the majority of the aforementioned all subscribe to it. It makes no provision for **anything** other than man and woman. Yes, one can argue that there are feminine men and masculine women, but they are still gendered and men and women.

In order for the construct of a *gender spectrum* to work, one must be willing to let go of the notion that gender is a binary system. There is no room for a *third* state, let alone a multitude of intermediate states, in a binary system. So, if there **is** a *gender spectrum*, then there **has** to be some group of people filling in the middle, right?

Who then are the people between the endpoints?

Meet the intergendered. Simply stated, intergendered is a gendered state **between** the polar endpoints of man and woman.

Intergendered is **not** identifying primarily as a woman or a man. It amounts to a wholesale rejection of the binary gender system and declaring that there is more than just man or woman. It comes down to stating that there are as many valid gendered states as there are people. Some may feel strong (or weak) masculine **and** feminine qualities all at the same time. Some may not see themselves on the *gender spectrum* at all, describing what amounts to a **null** gendered state.

[An aside for a moment. All my life I've never felt comfortable as a man. I have always had this feeling that I was something else. Raised in a pretty traditional way, I concluded that if I did not feel like a man, then it follows that the way I feel **must** be a woman. I held this belief for quite a long time. After much more introspection, I had a realization: I do not *feel* like a woman. This put me in a difficult position: I know I don't feel like a man, and I don't really feel like a woman. Well, what *am* I? After kicking this around a bit, I have become comfortable with the notion that I do not have any gender in particular. In the framework of the binary gender system, I am both and neither at the same time.]

In any case, intergendered people live a life somewhere between the traditional extremes of *man* and *woman*. As we do not gender ourselves along the either/or lines of the binary gender system, we often choose not to present along these lines. Given that, our presentation can be confusing and it would seem, at times, unsettling. As we present a mixed set of signal, there is often confusion in others as to whether we are a men or women.

Well, that's the point. We are neither and both at the same time. We have rejected the notion that one **needs** to be at either end of the *gender spectrum* and live and present accordingly. We are not really interested in *passing* as women or men. We want nothing more than to be able to simply **be** who we are without having choose between two extremes. This does not invalidate those who feel most comfortable at the end of the *gender spectrum*, it simply expands the options one has. For us, it amounts to nothing more than being honest about who we are.

We have, for a long time, been ridiculed for being who we are (as have many in the gender community.) The thing about it is that we have gotten it from all sides. **Anyone** who holds on the notion of gender as a binary system, anyone who has placed themselves at one end of the *gender spectrum* or the other, has seen us and our lifestyle as a threat to that which they have made a core part of their identity.

The cisgendered tend to look at us like we're just plain weird; that there is more than man and woman simply does not register for them. The transgendered do not quite know what to make of us, as they tend to view us as an anomaly. The transsexuals, much like the cisgendered, simply cannot accept the construct that there is more than just man and woman. The (m2f) crossdressers think we make a mockery of the ideal of femininity because we do not care if we are clocked as men or women.

We are the outermost fringe of the so-called transgender community, daring to live in what amounts to the gender wasteland. We have no problem with presenting as openly **Trans**. Nonetheless, our identities are as valid as anyone else's and we deserve the same respect and consideration as any other member of society.

December marks one year ago that my carefully constructed little world imploded on me. At that time, everything looked as though it was over and I seriously thought about suicide again. Since that time, much has happened and my outlook on life is much better. While I feel I have resolved a lot vis-à-vis self-understanding, I still have a lot more to do.

All in all, a most eventful and educational year, although given a choice, I would have done it differently.

January – April 1999

January through March were nothing special, more of the same as far as life goes. Sorry, but at times my life just isn't all the exciting.

April, however, has proven to be a more interesting month. First, both my daughters had milestone birthdays. My oldest is now five and my youngest is now one. Time really does seem to go by so fast.

Second, I came out to two people with whom I am friends. In neither case was it something I planned to do, but during the course of casual discussion it just sort of came up. Their reactions, apart from a small amount of curiosity, pretty much amounted to "So what." No weird reactions, no aloof attitudes. We still get along as we have been all along, which is nice.

As I continue to sort through all of this, I begin to question the whole construct of transgender. We (the transgender community) talk about how *natural* it is to be transgendered – how we are born this way. I'm not so sure this is the case. Had I been raised differently, in a different society perhaps, I might not have the issues I do. I recognize that I am 'transgender' only insofar as I do not 'fit' the gender role which was assigned to me. I was told that I was a 'boy' and was raised as such – what if I had been raised as a 'girl'? What if I had been raised as something altogether different? Some linguistic analysis and supposition produced the following:

Confusing Cause and Effect

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, March 1999

"A transgender identity is as natural as any other. Why can't people just accept that and let us be who we are?"

This is a common sentiment amongst the transgendered population. Rejecting the notion that we are sick, we declare that this is how we were born and just want to be allowed to **be** ourselves. We recognize that as a group, we suffer oppression at the hands of society.

I do not question that the trans–population suffers oppression. Nor do I question that we are not sick. However, I have to question the validity of the statement that a trans–gender identity is something **natural**. Is a trans–gender identity natural, or can its origin be located **external** to oneself? Is our transgenerness the cause of our oppression, or is the oppressive gender system the cause of our transgenerness?

Some Terms

Let's take a look at some the words we use to classify ourselves. All definitions are from the Merriam–Webster online dictionary:

First on the list is **sex**:

Main Entry: Sex

Function: Noun

- Meaning:
- 1: either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and that are distinguished respectively as female or male
 - 2: the sum of the structural, functional, and behavioral characteristics of living things that are involved in reproduction by two interacting parents and that distinguish males and females
 - 3: a: sexually motivated phenomena or behavior
b: SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
 - 4: GENITALIA

Definition number four is the most common interpretation. When we talk about our **sex**, we almost always are talking about our genitalia. In common daily usage, sex is about parts: penises and vaginas.

Next up is **gender**:

Main Entry: Gen-der

Function: Noun

- Meaning:
- 1: a: a subclass within a grammatical class (as noun, pronoun, adjective, or verb) of a language that is partly arbitrary but also partly based on distinguishable characteristics (as shape, social rank, manner of existence, or sex) and that determines agreement with and selection of other words or grammatical forms
b: membership of a word or a grammatical form in such a subclass
c: an inflectional form showing membership in such a subclass
 - 2: a: **SEX**
b: the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.

While there are several related meanings for gender, it is definition 2b which is the one we want. Gender is a *social* construct. It is about people interacting with one another.

For most of society, these two words – sex and gender – are interchangeable. One's gender and sex are **expected** to match, meaning that the males are boys and the females are girls. These people for whom sex and gender align are known as **cisgendered**.

Main Entry: Cis–

Function: Prefix
Meaning: 1: on this side <cislunar>
2: *usually ital* : cis <*cis*-dichloroethylene> — compare **TRANS-**
2b

Cisgendered literally means: on this side of the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex. Ones **social** presentation matches their physical morphology.

Next up: **transgender:**

Main Entry: trans·gen·der
Function: Adjective
Meaning: exhibiting the appearance and behavioral characteristics of the opposite sex

For a society that equates gender and sex, this is a pretty accurate definition. Just for fun, let's take this word apart anyway and see what the pieces themselves mean. We've already done **gender**, so that just leaves **trans**.

Main Entry: trans-
Function: Prefix
Etymology: Latin trans-,tra- across, beyond, through, so as to change, from trans across, beyond prefix
Meaning: on or to the other side of : across : beyond

Trans means 'on the other side of' or 'opposite'. So 'trans-gender' literally means 'on the other side of' (or opposite) of the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex. No big surprise here.

This little exercise brings an important point to light. In order for there to be a 'trans-gender', there needs to be something which is **not** 'trans-gender'. There needs to be something to which we feel opposed. The one cannot exist without the other. That something is **cisgendered**.

The Issue

Is a trans-gender identity something natural and innate, or can its origin be located **external** to oneself? Is our transgenerness the cause of our oppression, or is the oppressive gender system the cause of our transgenerness?

To answer this, let's look at how we come to be gendered in the first place. We are born and a doctor looks at our genitalia and **assigns** us a gender. The basis of this assignment is simple: men have penises (i.e. are male) and women have vaginas (i.e. are female). We are gendered based on our sex. We have been taught that this is the way things are and it is not questioned. The child is raised as either a boy or a girl on this basis. The process of *gendering* a child is, from the perspective of the child, nonconsensual: the child has **no say whatsoever** in this matter. This is the cisgendered ideal at work.

As a nonconsensual act, the gendering of children amounts to oppression. At no time is the child consulted as to what he or she might actually want to **be**. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Displays of gender traits deemed *inappropriate* for the child's assigned gender are addressed in a swift and decisive manner: they are **not** permitted. Moreover, it is not only by a child's parents that one's assigned gender is enforced, most every facet of society works to keep everyone in their place: boys on one side, girls on the other, and no middle ground.

But what happens if someone does not **want** to be the gender assigned to them? This is where the construct of transgender comes in. If the person in question was gendered at birth as a boy, but doesn't want to **be** a boy? Preferring to be a girl instead and gendering themselves as a girl, this person will develop what has come to be known as a transgender identity since their gender *of choice* is opposite that which was assigned to them. This identity violates the cisgendered notion that gender and sex have to match. The transgendered individual could be: sexed male but gendered as a woman, sexed female but gendered as a man, or any other host of states in-between.

This sounds pretty reasonable, right? So what's the problem?

The problem is this: How can our gender identity, trans or otherwise, be natural if we have no say in the matter? The answer: it can't.

Let's play "What if..."

What if we were allowed to develop *unfettered* by the gender rules in society? There would be no guiding or directing us as to what is appropriate for our *gender*. Such a society would allow us to **become** whatever gender we wanted. Now, assuming that we have been the ones to **choose** our gender; could it be possible for us to be transgendered? Remember the derived definition we came up with for transgendered: *to be on the other side of (or opposite) of the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex*. As there would be no behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex, how could one form an identity in opposition to that which does not exist? The answer is one could **not** have a trans-gender identity were one allowed to choose their gender. In order to have a trans-gender identity, you must start with a gender to which you feel opposed. If you **choose** your gender, then there is no reason to feel in opposition to it.

The Result

More than likely, such a society would not have just two genders but many, probably to the point where there were no real distinct *genders*. Without the oppressive rules governing gender, people would be free to gender themselves as they saw fit. However, given the current system, it seems clear that there is nothing *natural* about any gender at all, especially transgender. A lot of time and effort goes into the creation of **properly** gendered individuals, too much effort to consider the process natural. It is expected that the conditioning one receives will be compatible with the individual, but this is not always the case. A trans-gender identity is usually symptomatic of this lack of resonance with one's gender conditioning.

Again let me state, I do not deny that we suffer oppression from society. Nor do I deny that the oppression directed towards us is because of our transgender identity. Nevertheless, since the institution of gender is itself an oppressive system, a transgender identity amounts to a symptom, indicative of one's natural development stunted by the oppressive ideology of the binary gender system.

While I am sure that others have explored this same idea, my realization of this helps to put to rest some of the *why* surrounding how I have always felt.

Lastly, I called my parents up and told them that there is something about which I need to speak with them. Yes, I going to have *the talk* with them about how I feel and why I dress as I do and whatever else comes up. It should go pretty well I feel, as I know that they know that there is *something* going on with me. They have found stuff of mine in the past but never said anything about it. I hope that this little chat will help them understand just what the deal is with me.

May – October 1999

On May 1st, I had *the talk* with my parents. It started off with a bunch of small talk, but I finally decided to '*get to the point*'. Needless to say, it took a bit for me to actually get to the point, as I didn't quite know how to bring it up. I wound up just coming out and saying, "I have issues with my gender." The reaction I got was a bit surprising. My parents comment at this point: "We've known that all along."

The rest of the conversation addressed most of what I have posted here: how I felt while growing up, my desire to kill myself, my confusion and the first time I *figured it all out*, my epiphany and my current acceptance and understanding of who I am. **Whew!** Not exactly a *light* conversation. Considering how long it has taken me to actually get to the point where I felt I could talk about this with them (about twenty years), it all went quite well. They asked about how my wife felt about all of this, what (if anything) I was planning on doing, etc... All the things I expected they would ask.

After about three hours, we were done. No shock, no horror, no anger... Just them accepting me for whom I am. I was shooting for acknowledgement but got one better. I'm not going to complain.

As a member of a stereotyped group (crossdressers), I have been considering the effect that stereotypes have on people. I had an opportunity to do some first hand 'fieldwork' with regards to this:

Stereotypes and the Disservice we do Ourselves

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, June 1999

I'm androphobic. Don't bother to look this one up. I tried and found no entry for it. I am willing to bet that you know what it means though. It's easy to come up with new words – take a Greek or Latin prefix, slap it onto some other Greek or Latin root and you got yourself a new word. Cool...

First, a little analysis from the Merriam–Webster online dictionary: :

Main Entry: andr–
Variant(s): *or* andro–
Function: *combining form*
Etymology: Latin, from Greek, from *andr–*, *anEr*; akin to Oscan *ner–* man, Sanskrit *nar–*, Old Irish *nert* strength
Meaning: 1: Male human being
2: Male

Main Entry: –phobic
Function: adjective combining form
Etymology: French *–phobique*, from Late Latin *–phobicus*, from Greek *–phobikos*, from *–phobia*
Meaning: 1: a: having an intolerance or aversion for <photophobic>
<Anglophobic>
b: exhibiting a phobia for <claustrophobic>
2: lacking affinity for <hydrophobic>

I'll use entry 2 for **–phobic**, defining this term as "Lacking an affinity for male human beings"

I am *afraid* (not really afraid, but you get the idea) of guys and I tend to avoid them.

This is not on the order of a true phobia, but I tend to avoid guys in favor of girls. The reasoning behind this is pretty simple: I don't feel I *fit in* with them. Too often, I feel out of place in a group of people, especially if they start to flex some of that **male ego** that seems to be so important to them. I do not like to play the one–upmanship game that is so popular with most people – each trying to outshine the other over the stupidest things sometimes. In short, most of the time **they** are not who **I** am and it's been this way all of my life.

So, I gravitate towards women, feeling more *in tune* with them. I like the chitchat and non-competitive interaction that is the usually norm for them. I am much more relaxed and myself in these situations. Don't misunderstand me, I have friends who are guys and we get along well, but quite often, I feel *removed* from situations where there are a large number of guys and **only** guys.

You may be thinking "So what? What's the big deal?" Well, it's not really a big deal. I know women who prefer hanging out with the guys. It's not really anything all that odd. Given that, why would I label myself as I have?

I recently had reason to reflect on this and the conclusion I reached lead me to realize that I have probably doing myself a disservice for a while now.

What prompted this? I'm glad you asked.

I was recently at a wedding for a family member. We were at the bride's house and my wife and daughter went inside to get ready. The baby was asleep outside in her stroller and I was keeping an eye on her. The bride's brother-in-law was sitting outside: he's a Marine. The thought running through my head? "Well, *this* will be awkward." As it is, I'm not comfortable around people I do not know, but I figure that he is probably the antithesis of who I am. Suffice to say I was not thrilled.

He, on the other hand, had no such apprehension, standing up and introducing himself to me. We sat outside talking for about a half an hour about a variety of things, basically hitting it off pretty well I thought. I found him to be a nice guy, one with whom it was easy to get along.

The rest of the day was busy with the wedding and reception. On our way out, I went over to say goodbye to him and his wife. She gave me a hug and kiss and said it was nice to see us (my wife and I) again. He and I shook hands; with him telling me it was nice to meet me. Then he gives me a hug – nothing mushy or anything – but a hug nonetheless.

I'm not making this anything more than what it was, but it did give me reason to reflect. I had this preconceived notion of what type of person he would be. Enough that he seemed to be the stereotypical guy, but also being a Marine carried with it a host of other assumptions. I immediately felt that there would be nothing that someone *like him* and I would have in common. As I said above, I expected it to be awkward at best. Had he not initiated the conversation, I doubt I would have said anything.

It's hard to not be swayed by stereotypes. After all, stereotypes exist because there is some truth to them. However, as gross generalizations, they paint with too broad a brush the individuals which they supposedly represent. I allowed myself to be swayed by the stereotypes of which I felt this person was a representative. Luckily for me, he was more than I had assumed.

Still, I cannot help but wonder if I've done myself a disservice all this time simply because I have taken a stereotype too literally. How many other times have I missed the opportunity to meet someone interesting simply because I had pre-judged who they *might* be based upon a stereotype?

I wonder how many others do themselves the same disservice, accepting at face value the stereotypes of society as fact as opposed to getting to know the actual person themselves.

Just something to think about...

In October, someone posted to alt.support.crossdressing asking about the culture of crossdressing. An interesting notion – the ‘culture’ of crossdressing – as if this were a lifestyle choice. Actually, many non-crossdressers see it as a lifestyle choice. They do not understand the deep-seated motivation – the drive, if you will – behind what we do.

The 'Culture' of Crossdressing

By: Donna Lynn Matthews, October 1999

The following is my response to an article posted to alt.support.crossdressing.

Subject: Re: Is cross dressing legal in Gib?
From: ms_donna@xxxxx.xxx (Donna Matthews)
Date: 11 Oct 1999 00:00:00 GMT
Newsgroups: alt.support.crossdressing

In article <7to4og\$8i0\$1@taliamad.ttd.net>, "Ian Forrest" wrote:

Thanks for that interesting historical nugget; Little Sugar was a male dressing in female clothes, right?

I know the transvestite, usually male, dresses in female clothing for emotional and sexual gratification and that this is not necessarily the case with crossdressers.

Technically, the two (transvestite and crossdresser) are the same thing. Cross-dressing is usually undertaken specifically for emotional reasons, satisfying the need for the expression of that part of ourselves which society in general would rather we pretend did not exist. And while there can (and often is) a sexual component associated with cross-dressing (as there can be with most **any** activity), it is the emotional satisfaction of self expression which is dominant.

As for the terminology, we tend to shy away from the term *transvestite* as it carried too much baggage from the psych community: i.e. Transvestic Fetishism – DSM-IV diagnostic code 302.3, which is categorized as a paraphilia. Also, crossdresser is a more accurate term as it describes the person in relation to the action **without** making any depreciatory implications about the individual.

Can anyone explain the similarity between a crossdresser and an androgyne, if any?

I'll assume that you are using the term 'androgyne' to mean one who is **androgynous**.

From the Merriam-Webster online dictionary:

Main Entry: **An·drog·y·nous**

Function: Adjective

Etymology: Latin *androgynus* hermaphrodite, from Greek *androgynos*, from *andr-* + *gynE* woman — more at QUEEN

Date: 1651

Meaning: 1: Having the characteristics or nature of both male and female
2: a: Neither specifically feminine nor masculine <the *androgynous* pronoun *them*>
b: suitable to or for either sex <*androgynous* clothing>
3: Having traditional male and female roles obscured or reversed <an *androgynous* marriage>

The colloquial usage of androgynous is somewhere between 2a and 3 above. Quite often, individuals who make an **androgynous** presentation will employ cross-dressing as a means of achieving the desired effect.

It would be helpful if someone could also explain the culture of cross-dressing and its significance in modern societies.

Cross-dressing is not a 'culture'. Individuals who cross-dress cut across **all** cultural lines. We are males, females, black, white, oriental, Christian, Jewish, rich, poor, attractive, homely and all other points in-between. The thing we all have in common is a lack of affinity towards the gender to which we were assigned at birth. Many of us identify strongly with that gender *opposite* to that which we were assigned. Others of us reject the binary system of gender which has been embraced by most, declaring ourselves as something *other* than either a man or a woman. In all cases, it amounts an individual declaring, for themselves, their identity. Phyllis Burke in her book "Gender Shock" sums this up quite well:

"To cross-dress, whether across class or gender boundaries, means to challenge the identity that society has dictated, to declare that you are not quite what has been determined by powers outside of yourself."

Cross-dressing is **not** about clothing. It is about the meaning associated with the clothing and using that association as a means to establish an identity and sense of self **independent** of that which has been assigned to us by society.

The significance of this is that we are people who have dared to challenge that which is at the core of how our society is organized. The man/woman dichotomy is assumed to be a natural one. The *naturalness* of this is based on the **assumption** that men are male and women are female. Sex (male/female) and gender (man/woman) have been linked and **assumed** to be the same thing. As a rule, most people use the two terms interchangeably. The problem is that the two are **not** the same thing.

Basically, sex is biology. It's about plumbing and parts. I won't deny the male/female dichotomy, although even that is not as clear cut as one might like. One need only line up people and have a look to see that there is some basis for it.

Gender, however, is **not** about biology. Gender, in its colloquial usage, refers to "the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex." The key here being typically associated. While a gender may be typically associated with a specific sex, it is not a hard and fast rule.

It is important to note that as it is about "the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex", gender is not something static or fixed. It changes from culture to culture and over time. In short, gender is culturally defined and ergo is **not** something natural or innate. That society has chosen to link it to sex is not to imply that gender 'naturally' follows from one's sex. And yet, that is **exactly** how children are raised. Males are raised as boys and females are raised as girls. At no time are the feelings of the child taken into consideration on this point. In fact, children exhibiting non-conforming gender traits are *corrected* immediately. The assignment of gender and its subsequent enforcement are completely non-consensual. Another quote, this one by Pat Califia from his book "Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism" speaks to this:

"...it's not supposed to be hard work to be accepted as a man or a woman; it's supposed to be a natural and effortless process. Few of us are even aware of the pervasive rewards and punishments that shape our gender identities – unless that process was not successful. I suspect much of the hatred and fear of transsexuals is based on the discomfort that others experience when forced to recall the pain of involuntary gender conditioning. It is easier to believe we never had a choice about something so fundamental than to process and accept the fact that the choice was taken away from us and ruthlessly suppressed."

The significance of crossdressers and other gender variant individuals in society is that we are no longer willing to have our identities *assigned* to us. We reject, sometimes on a wholesale basis, the notion that we should be the men and women we were told we are. Instead, we have opted to embrace and accept who are **really** are, whoever that may be. As a result, we are becoming more visible. That means that we can no longer be ignored or discounted as a bunch of *weirdoes*. More and more, gender variant people are **choosing** to be visible, thus bringing us more into the mainstream of society. As we move from the background to the forefront, society will have to yield to the fact that *gender*, as it is defined today, is a wholly inadequate construct and in need of revision.

November 1999 – December 1999

The talk with my parents was an important step for me in that it helped to alleviate a lot of the anxiety I was feeling. While for so long I had wanted them to have done something for me regarding my gender I realized that they had the best possible thing for me: let me figure out for myself who I needed to be. Thanks Mom and Dad.

OK, so it took a while for me to come to terms with all of this, but now that I finally have, it all seems so, well, trivial. I am done with the obsessing and whatnot over whom and what I am and have gotten on with actually **living** my life. My gender, whatever it is (or is not) is **not** the totality of who I am but rather just a small part thereof. There is so much else going on in my life (like my wife and daughters) that deserves as much attention if not more.

For the time being, my life has more or less reached a point of stasis. I do not claim to have discovered all the answers – far from it – but I feel that have discovered who I am and what works for me. Not bad for twenty five years work.

Part 3

2000 onward...

If we possess our why of life, we can put up with almost any how. – Nietzsche

Life goes on...

After the end of 1999, I stopped updating my website – drastically cut back posting to the newsgroups – stopped posting to mail lists of which I was a member. Other than regularly posting the newsgroup charters, I pretty much walked away from it all. It's not that I didn't care, but that I finally felt comfortable with myself – I liked myself – and I had ultimately grown apart from the people on line. Too much bickering and crap in the newsgroups showed me that there was a lot more to my life than typing to people. So, I set about to get on with my life.

I had put my wife through a lot over the past two years – most of it being the uncertainty of what I wanted to do. During that time, we had many discussions, fights and arguments. I pushed, she pushed and at times, it did not look good. Ultimately, she decided to not give up on me – even when I had given up on myself – and by now, it was pretty clear that I did not want to 'transition' nor did I want to actually live 'as a woman'.

What I wanted to do was to live as me.

On an intellectual level, I had come up with a workable philosophy regarding who I am and how I see myself against the world. The natural extension of this into the 'real' world was that I now presented in a somewhat androgynous manner all the time: sometimes more femme, sometimes less – but it was always there. Quite often, it would be a coin-toss as to how I'd be read: sometimes as 'sir', other times as 'miss'. I became a sort of living social experiment: how many or which buttons need to be pressed before I was read as a woman. I found it most interesting that the less I tried, the more often I was read as a woman – go figure.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to do the suit and tie thing for work. As a gendered presentation, it represented me as something that I was not – a 'man' in the stereotypical sense. It conveyed a host of assumptions about my likes, dislikes, sexual status and orientation, hobbies and other interests, etc. – almost all of which were contrary of who I really was. And so, with my jewelry and the start of letting my short hair grow out, I donned my corporate uniform and made the best of it.

In early 2000, my group at work moved from our location in lower Manhattan across the Hudson River to Jersey City, New Jersey, which is to where most of the IT groups were being moved. Besides a longer commute, the significance of this (for me) was that the dress code at our Jersey City location was business casual all the time. Gone were the suits and ties that drove me crazy – I now had the opportunity to dress a bit more comfortably. And as I found that even 'business casual' was not strictly enforced, I began to slowly dress a bit more 'ambiguously' as time went on and by the summer of 2001, I was dressing more women's business casual than men's. It was interesting: no one seemed to care and it made me feel a lot better.

The events of September 11th, 2001 upset everyone's world. I was working across the Hudson River – line-of-sight with the World Trade Center – and had front row seats for the event. As our offices across the river in lower Manhattan became inaccessible, our Jersey City space became the temporary location for the business most of the IT people got booted out. After several moves, we found out that we would be moving to midtown Manhattan in 2002 – and it would be back into a suit for me.

After spending about a year being able to **be** myself, I didn't know how I was going to handle this and I really was having a problem with the whole idea. So I made what was, for me, a big decision: I decided to speak with the Human Resources department about my 'problem'. While I was pretty comfortable discussing *me* with others, this was something altogether different. I would, in effect, be officially 'coming out' to my company – a pretty scary thought.

It took me a while to work up the nerve to make the call. When I finally did, I got our group's HR contact's voice mail and left a somewhat vague message to the effect that I needed to discuss a 'personal issue' and wanted to schedule some time with her. A couple of emails later and I had an appointment with her.

My meeting with her went well: I explained to her about my being Transgender and the issue it caused me and how my 'dressing' as I did helped me to cope with all of this. She did allow that my outfit was more on the feminine side so she got to see what I was talking about. I finally got to the point and told her that I wanted to be allowed to follow the woman's dress code – no skirts or dresses – but not a suit and tie either. We discussed things a bit more and she said that she would have to get back to me. She asked me to check back next week and I left our meeting not feeling too hopeful.

I emailed her that next week and she replied that there had been no decision yet. Later that week, she emailed that she wanted to meet to discuss the issue some more. I asked if it was good news or bad and said that either way I would see her the next day. She replied back to me: definitely good news. I was completely preoccupied after that, wondering what she would tell me. She said it was good news, but what did that really mean? I guess I was going to have to wait until our meeting.

We met the next day and she had a few questions for me – what bathroom was I looking to use, how I would handle people approaching me (if they did) about my dress – they seemed like the kind of questions HR would ask. I answered them and after a few minutes, she told me that HR was supporting my request. I went in and asked not to 'transition', not to be treated 'as a woman', but to be allowed to more or less dress as a woman and they said yes! I was in shock. She told me that they would have to let senior management know about me and about my arrangement with HR – which made sense. I asked if I could process all this for a few days and she told me that was fine.

As an aside: it is interesting that this all happened prior to my company incorporating gender identity and expression as a part of its Equal Employment Opportunity policy, which they did in 2003:

“The Firm does not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, veteran status, disability, age, citizenship, marital or domestic/civil partnership status, sexual orientation, **gender identity or expression**, or because of any other criteria prohibited under applicable law. As part of our commitment to affirmative action, the Firm takes affirmative steps to ensure that applicants for employment and employees are treated without regard to their race, color, religion, gender, national origin, veteran status or disability.”

As defined by GenderPAC (the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition) “Gender Identity or Expression” is:

“The expression through clothing and behavior, or the inner sense of identification and self-awareness, that manifests a person's fundamental sense of themselves as masculine or feminine, and male or female.”

Hopefully, this would make it easier for the next person.

Back to my story: HR said yes – now all I had to do was tell my wife.

Which I did – and it did not go over well. She was uncomfortable with the whole idea that I would be out ‘looking like that’. I tried reasoning that she would not need to be a part of it as I would be at work. I told her that it was what I had been doing for the past year anyway. It didn’t change her position.

A day or so later, I sent the following email to our HR rep:

I would like to thank you and the other members of Human Resources for the serious consideration given to my request and I appreciate all your time, effort and caring regarding my somewhat unusual situation.

I wanted to let you know that after further consideration, I will likely not be taking advantage of the special consideration granted to me by Human Resources any time in the foreseeable future. Please be aware that my decision has in no way been influenced by anyone here at The Firm. My situation, complicated as it, is such that the tensions that would be mitigated by the consideration afforded to me by Human Resources are outweighed by an increase in tensions in other areas of my personal life and I find myself unwilling to compromise the latter for the former. As is the case with most others individuals like myself, I will have to find some alternative means of addressing the issues caused by my somewhat unusual circumstances.

Given my decision, I see no reason to involve the other members IT management in this issue. If they have already been contacted, then please express my apologies to them for any problems this may have caused.

If for any reason you or anyone else in Human Resources wishes to discuss this or any of the issues raised at our meetings, I would be more than happy to do so.

Once again, thank you so much for all you have done.

The absurd was at it again: I had won the battle, but lost the war.

*To have to combat one's instincts - that is the formula for decadence:
as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one – Nietzsche*

A second chance...

Every once in a while I catch a break – early 2003 was one of those times. After just over a year of working in Manhattan, I found out that we would be moving back to Jersey City. I figured that, with a little luck, I would once again be able to **be me**.

And that's exactly what happened.

We moved back across the river and I eased myself back into my 'alternative' dress code. One major difference now was that "Gender Identity or Expression" was officially a part of The Firm's EEO policy. And while it wasn't a license to do whatever I wanted, it did mean that the latitude I had been taking with regards to my presentation was acknowledged and backed up in writing.

As far as I can tell, I am the only 'out' transgendered person in our building – maybe the firm. I do get the occasional odd look from some people, but I think that at this point, pretty much every one is used to it. It has never caused any issues with my colleagues or management. In fact, quite the opposite – I have excellent relationships with colleagues in other groups, my reviews have all been excellent and I was recently promoted. I am treated with the respect I have *earned* during my tenure as an employee at the Firm. I am respected as **me** – as I define me – not as other might think I ought to be. Pretty cool, huh?

My relationship with my wife is back to normal. I will be the first to say that life with me has been less than ideal and she would have been more than within her rights to walk away. Instead, she stood by me through all of my crap – not *our* crap – mine. Every day, I consider myself lucky to have such a wonderful person in my life.

I *think* that we have reached a balance that, so far, seems to work for us. While we never actually set any 'boundaries' per se, I am conscious of not trying to make her uncomfortable and she seems to have become more accepting of me and what I 'need' to feel comfortable. She will let me know if I'm pushing things too much for her comfort and I've learned not to fight that. So far – so good.

My daughters – eight and twelve as I write this – have not been shielded from any of this; not that there is really much to shield them from. They realize the dad is 'different' from the other dads and they seem to be fine with that. I once asked my eight year old if it bothered her that I was different. She replied – with a wisdom beyond her young age – telling me that being different was OK and that people should be able to be whoever they want to be. It was all I could do to keep from crying. I can only hope that she never loses that view of the world.

By all accounts, my life is turning out to be rather – well – ordinary.

Ordinary... There's a label I **never** imagined I would ever apply to myself. Funny how things work out.

Donna's Philosophy

And if someone goes through fire for his teaching – what does that prove? Truly, it is more when one’s own teaching comes out of one’s own burning! – Nietzsche

Donna’s Philosophy?

“But the principals you accept (consciously or subconsciously) may clash with or contradict one another: they, too, have to be integrated. What integrates them? Philosophy. A philosophic system is an integrated view of existence. As a human being, you have no choice about the fact that you need a philosophy. Your only choice is whether you define your philosophy by a conscious, rational, disciplined process of thought and scrupulously logical deliberation – or let your subconscious accumulate a junk heap of unwarranted conclusions, false generalizations, undefined contradictions, undigested slogans, unidentified wishes, doubts and fears, thrown together by chance, but integrated by your subconscious into a kind of mongrel philosophy and fused into a single, solid weight: *self-doubt*, like a ball and chain in the place where your mind’s wings should have grown.”¹³

The question: “For what do I need philosophy?”

Ayn Rand’s answer: “in order to be able to live on the earth.”

Everyone has a philosophy – most people just don’t realize it. For them, their philosophy is as described above: an accumulation, thrown together by chance. Few ever question why they think what they do and view the world as they do. They are largely ignorant of the rules by which they live their lives.

I had no choice: the ‘philosophy’ by which I had been living my life was wholly inadequate and had broken down. I needed a new ‘philosophy’. For me, it was a matter of survival

What I’ve Learned and How

When I set out on my new journey of self-discovery and understanding, one thing of which I was sure was that I did not have the proper toolset to work all this out. All I knew about any of this ‘gender stuff’ was from personal experience and online discussions. And while these were useful as a starting point, I felt I needed to add a bit more colour to the somewhat limited pallet from which I was working. I also realized that I had fallen into the category described by Ayn Rand in that I was allowing my life philosophy merely to ‘accumulate’ rather than develop. It was clear that I had some homework to do.

I began to educate myself about the wonderful world of gender and transgender. I read almost anything I could find on the subject: some good, some not so good – and I sifted and sorted through it all to find what resonated for me. I also revisited my studies of the social sciences: psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc. – drawing connections and integrating it all together. Over the course of two years, I worked my way through the confusion of it all, and my peers online watched firsthand as I sorted out my life. Using the newsgroups as a sounding board for my ideas and theories, what would become my own personal ‘philosophy’ regarding gender, society and life in general slowly coalesced.

What follows are not the only influences on me but they do represent some of the more prominent ones.

The Cisgender Ideal

The first serious piece writing I encountered was courtesy of Laura. Laura is a transgenderist, which means that although she was born male, Laura lives her life as a woman, but has not had GRS (genital reassignment surgery – a.k.a. a sex change.) She has spent a good part of her life as an activist in Canada working for transgender rights. Her article is titled **About Sex and Gender** and in it she challenges the **cisgender ideal** with the notion that ‘sex’ (body parts) and ‘gender’ (identity) are not inexorably linked. Breaking the link between sex and gender allows ‘men’ and ‘women’ (gender) to be either ‘male’ or ‘female’ (sex). It took a couple of reads to absorb all of it, but it made sense to me – probably because at that point, I already felt a disconnect between my ‘gender’ and my body.

The construct of the Cisgender Ideal, or rather the refutation thereof, would become the cornerstone of my own personal views on gender. As such, it deserves some examination.

The Cisgender Ideal is rooted in the notion that gender is a binary system: meaning that there are two fairly rigid categories – ‘men’ and ‘women’ – and anything else is unthinkable. It *mandates* that sex and gender align themselves such that **all** ‘men’ are male and **all** ‘women’ are female, thereby invalidating the construct of transgender. It serves to support and *enforce* the notion that the transgendered are mentally ill. By categorizing us as sick, the transgendered are *accounted* for in such a way so as to not challenge the binary gender system: we really are ‘men’ and ‘women’ – we’re just *sick* or *confused* (or some other marginalizing label.) In short, we’re explained away.

The Cisgender Ideal is a philosophy – a belief system ingrained in our society – and for this reason, it is dangerous. It is dangerous not just to transpeople (for the reasons mentioned above) but to **everyone**. ‘Gender transgressions’ are swiftly dealt with not by some authority (e.g.: the gender police) but by our peers – usually via shame and ridicule. We are all constantly reminded – by nearly everyone around us – how we are *supposed* to **be** in order to fit into the category to which we were assigned. Being called a ‘sissy’ by the older boys on my block was their way of *shaming* me into conforming to the ideal of what a ‘boy’ should be. Girls who are ‘tomboys’ are *reminded* that their activities are not ‘ladylike’. Boys are not *supposed* to play with dolls. They are supposed to be tough, strong, and active. Girls are not *supposed* to play rough. They are supposed to be sweet, gentle, caring. As a rule, there is no middle ground.

Like most people, I never questioned the construct of gender; there were boys and girls – that’s it. While I felt I had more in common with girls and even wanted to be more *like* them, I was a boy – end of story. By acknowledging my ‘feelings’ as that ‘kinky’ part of me, I was able to rationalize their existence while still maintaining an identity as a ‘man’. And the stronger those feelings grew, the more I rationalized – to the point where I would be out in full dress while still maintaining that I was a ‘man’.

Ultimately, the rationalizations would fall short and while I did not have a name for it, it was the Cisgender Ideal that was at the root of my angst. Having been assigned my role, I spent my life trying to live up to the expectations thereof – and it simply was not working. Once I realized that there was something *deeper* motivating my behavior, I came to the conclusion that I needed to ‘realign’ my body and my ‘deviant’ gender feelings so both were ‘in sync’. I was still trapped in the Cisgender Ideal and did not know it.

Laura’s paper was my introduction into a whole other way of looking at ‘men’ and ‘women’ – showing me that there was something more than just two ways to be.

The DSM–IV

Anyone who identifies as transgender knows of the DSM-IV and the section on **Gender Identity Disorder** (GID) contained therein. For some, it is the answer to the ‘why’ question that has plagued them all their lives. They can now say, “I have a medical condition” – end of story. For others, like myself, GID is a tool for maintaining the status quo and marginalizing those who do not fit. It makes sure that there are **only** men and women by stigmatizing anyone who does not *fit* with a ‘mental disorder’.

The DSM–IV – the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition – is the standard classification in the United States of mental disorders and is used by mental health professionals for the diagnosis of mental health related illnesses. As mentioned, the DSM–IV lists a ‘condition’ known as **Gender Identity Disorder** and persons are ‘diagnosed’ with GID if they exhibit what is characterized as “a strong and persistent cross–gender identification” as well as a “persistent discomfort with his or her sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex.” GID can be diagnosed as GID of Childhood (Diagnostic code 302.6), Adolescence, or Adulthood (302.85) and GID Not Otherwise Specified (GIDNOS) (302.6). GIDNOS is the catchall category, covering just about anything and everything ‘gender variant’.

To read the main diagnostic features of GID is to read nearly every stereotype for boys & girls / men & women. Some of the key identifiers are:¹⁴

- For boys: a ‘preoccupation’ with traditionally feminine activities, having a preference for dressing in girls’ clothes, preferring pastimes stereotypical of girls while having a lack of interest in rough–and–tumble play and other stereotypical boy’s activities and wanting to be a girl.
- For girls: a rebellion against the parents desire for them to be ‘feminine’: not wanting to wear a dress or have long hair, liking rough–and–tumble play, preferring traditionally boy’s activities and boys as playmates.
- For adults: a ‘preoccupation’ to live as the other sex, accompanied with the desire to change their appearance by crossdressing and/or hormones and/or surgery. Many will crossdress in private – perfecting their ability to pass as the other sex and even go out in public.

Reading this did not sit well with me. As I mentioned, the ‘features’ of this disorder are little more than a regurgitation of stereotypes. Boys playing with dolls, girls not wanting to wear dresses... This is the criteria used to make this ‘diagnosis’? It seems so... arbitrary.

And then it hits me.

“A strong and persistent cross–gender identification...” This is how the Cisgender Ideal accounts for us. Judith Butler notes, “Indeed, precisely because certain kinds “gender identities” fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain.”¹⁵ This same notion is echoed by anthropologist Ruth Benedict almost sixty years earlier, “For a valid comparative psychiatry, these disoriented persons who have failed to adapt themselves adequately to their cultures are of first importance. The issue in psychiatry has been too often confused by starting from a fixed list of symptoms instead of a study of those whose characteristic reactions are denied validity in their society.”¹⁶

I found it all too reasonable that if one has “A strong and persistent cross–gender identification...”, then crossdressing would be a logical way of expressing that identification. However, if one is diagnosed with GID, then the psychiatric community sees things a bit differently.

Another ‘condition’ found in the DSM–IV is **Transvestic Fetishism** (diagnostic code 302.3).¹⁷ Diagnosed only in heterosexual males exclusively during the course of GID, Transvestic Fetishism is basically crossdressing: the collection and wearing of female clothing. It is classified as a paraphilia if one gets sexual aroused and gratified by this activity. The ‘diagnosis’ goes on to mention the possible involvement in the transvestic subculture, and interest in sexual masochism as well. Interestingly, the ‘diagnosis’ does recognize that the sexual aspect of crossdressing can wane and that crossdressing can become a therapeutic activity to mitigate anxiety. But in general, the most reasonable and harmless activity one could engage in to help alleviate the ‘dysphoric’ effects of GID is classified as a sexual perversion. I find this quite sad, especially in light of the fact that most crossdressing individuals will tell you that they cross–dress **not** for sexual satisfaction, but to feel closer to how they identify gender–wise. Crossdressing just makes us *feel* right.

While it was clear early on that transgender individuals were seen as having some problem that needed to be *cured*, it was now becoming clear why: we upset the system. One cannot maintain that there are only ‘men’ and ‘women’ when someone like me walks up and challenges that assumption. Having been diagnosed with a mental disorder, we are now *accounted for* by the fact that we have a problem. We’re not ‘different’, we’re sick!

We are denied validity and rendered as culturally intelligible.

Balance is restored and we are marginalized in the process.

Postmodernism: Judith Butler

If there is an accepted tool for the analysis of gender and society, it is definitely Postmodernism. Most gender theory and queer theory are firmly rooted in Postmodern Deconstructionism.

I have read some but not a lot of postmodern theory if for no other reason than I find it difficult to work through. One needs to learn a new vocabulary in order to really be able to study it. That said, I have read some primers on the postmodern theories of Derrida and Foucault – enough to get the jist of the ideas behind their philosophies and to confirm some ‘conclusions’ I’ve reached on my own, albeit not as deeply thought out. What I did read – several times in fact – was **Gender Trouble** by Judith Butler. I found that Butler echoed (again, in a much more deeply explored presentation) much of what I had come to believe.

A key point I took away from Butler is how elusive this thing we call ‘gender’ really is. She points out, “As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of acts.”¹⁸ We can find and define many instances of ‘men’ and ‘women’ in the world. Each (instance of) ‘woman’, for example, is a unique adaptation of what that individual *perceives* a woman to be, based on how *other women* present themselves *as women*. These other women, in turn, present their own unique adaptation of what *they* perceive a woman to be, based on how *other women* present themselves... Et cetera ad infinitum¹⁹. There is no ‘woman’ as a construct *a priori*²⁰. All women are adaptations of other women – there is no actual *original* woman. As a gender, ‘woman’ is in a constant state of flux – changing throughout history and culture.

This has the effect of rendering gender an abstract construct as opposed to something concrete. Butler notes that “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”²¹ Gender is no longer something that one *is*; gender becomes something that one *does*. One is a man or woman only to the extent that one adopts the prescribed socially defined traits thereof and is **successful** in their presentation. It is by the act of *doing* ‘man or ‘woman ‘that one *is* a ‘man’ or ‘woman’.

This supported my feeling vis-à-vis lacking a specific or *intelligible* gender. For Butler, “‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.”²² It was only within the context of needing to have (i.e. to *do*) a gender that I would be cognoscente of it. Given this, it also supported my feelings that I do not know (and cannot know) what it means to *feel* like a woman – or a man for that matter. I can only know what it feels like to be me.

Another key construct is that of cultural intelligibility. Butler notes that “Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.”²³

Sex, gender and sexuality *should* be stabilizing constructs – and they seem to be so long as you are a *male man* attracted to *female women* or you are a *female woman* attracted to *male men*. With sex and gender forming what amounts to the core of our identity, the ‘gendered norms of cultural intelligibility’ only permit one acceptable unified core identity: Heterosexual – as defined in the strictest sense. To identify an anything else is to render you as culturally intelligible – unable to establish a firm identity to society as a whole.

In this context, Heterosexual goes beyond the compatibility of body parts. It sums up in one very potent cultural signifier everything that we are **expected** to be. It makes no allowances for variation or diversity – it is quite specific. One is recognized as ‘intelligible’ – i.e. valid – only insofar as one adheres to the definition.

An immediate argument to this might be the apparent ‘acceptance’ of homosexuality in society today. While it is true that the social climate seems to be more favorable now than in the past, is it really one of acceptance? Butler comments:

“What remains ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unsayable’ within the terms of an existing cultural form is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the culturally possibility that calls for dread or, minimally, the loss of sanctions. Not to have social recognition as an effective heterosexual is to lose one possible social identity and perhaps gain one that is radically less sanctioned. The ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture.”²⁴

Butler’s point is an interesting one. It is not that ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings are excluded so much as they are *marginalized*. Anyone who is non-conforming is still “fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture” – they are a part of and yet separate from society as a whole. Continuing my example, homosexuals do not have true ‘equality’ in society – if they did, there would be no reason to differentiate them as ‘homosexual’. They enjoy a marginalized status in society – not as bad as some – but marginalized nonetheless.

For me, cultural intelligibility is key to something for which I have been looking all my life: acceptance. What is it we want when we want acceptance? We want to move from a marginalized position in society into the dominant sphere – what we want is to ‘fit in.’ With self-acceptance, our goal is to stop self-marginalization – to stop treating ourselves as second-class citizens. Having internalized the construct of the ‘Heterosexual’ as the social archetype, we recognize ourselves as ‘incoherent’ by comparison and subsequently declare (marginalize) ourselves as something less than those who ‘make the cut’.

Acceptance by others is nearly the same with the additional twist that acceptance by another of someone ‘discontinuously’ gendered can call into question that other person’s identity and being. A possible consequence of this could be the loss of their current social identity – guilt by association if you will. The impetus to our acceptance by others could be a **fear** of *reclassification* into a ‘radically less sanctioned social identity’ by their peers – manifested as homophobia and transphobia.

Existentialism: Camus, Sartre and Nietzsche

Who am I? What am I? **Why** am I? Questions I have been grappling with all my life could be summed up in what was the *primary* question for Kierkegaard, the ‘founder’ of Existentialism:

What does it mean to **be**?

It was not until college that I was formally introduced to Existentialism. I did manage, however, to stumble upon it the summer before starting college. My recognition and acknowledgment of the absurdity of life, my contemplation of suicide and my subsequent realization that I could not know absolutely that suicide **was** a solution would be examined in depth by the first existentialist I would study.

What follows here is not intended as a complete overview of these philosophers. It is what I took from them – borrowed if you will – in formulating my own views of the world.

Albert Camus (1913 – 1960): The Absurd

Is life worth living?

Is there a reason to go through the all suffering and heartache? Is there a reason to go through the illness, death and tragedy? Most people live their lives in quiet desperation, hoping that one day things will get better. They fail to acknowledge that hope is nothing but a delusion. Is there a point to it at all?

As a rationalist, Camus wanted to make sense of the world. He was in search of absolutes: truth, certainty, clarity. What the world offered him were opinions, uncertainty and vagueness. The more reason demanded of the world, the less the world yielded. One cannot ‘know’ anything with absolute certainty. Camus calls this paradox **The Absurd**.

For Camus, neither man alone nor the world alone is absurd: it is the clash between the two that is absurd. It is the disproportion between reason and reality that is absurd. We want so much and the world yields nothing. We live in a world of tension and frustration where our hopes are crushed again and again. We are in a hopeless position from which there is no exit.

Camus then asks, “How do I live in an absurd world? What other alternative is there if I do not want to live in this world? Is suicide an alternative?”

Heidegger noted that death is our immediate possibility – it is the one thing we can **always** do next. But for the absurdist, is suicide a logically legitimate position? Camus concludes that it is not because by killing yourself, you have concluded absolutely that it is better to **not** be than to be. For the absurdist, this is a contradiction, as the absurd man cannot know **anything** absolutely.

Which brings us back to the question, “How do I live in an absurd world?”

One lives in an absurd world **absurdly**.

You **cannot** accept absurdity as an answer – you must reject the absurdity of the world. Paradoxically, the rejection of absurdity only serves to increase it. To live absurdly, you must be willing to be an accomplice to your frustration with the world. You must be willing to intensify the clash between reason’s desire for absolute knowledge and the world’s **refusal** to yield.

Living absurdly amounts to picking oneself up after being knocked down, over and over again.

Camus used the myth of Sisyphus to illustrate living absurdly. Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to spend eternity rolling a huge rock up a hill. Once at the top, the rock would roll back down to the bottom of the hill, and Sisyphus would start over again. While he recognized the futility of this exercise, Sisyphus refused to be defeated by this. By not letting it get the better of him, Sisyphus got the best of the very gods who condemned him.

To live absurdly, one must defy life and all that it throws at you. To live absurdly, one must have the courage to **be!** In essence, one must live much like a condemned man – sentenced to die and awaiting execution. As we have only this one life, we must live it with indifference to the future. We must live for the now! We will be disappointed and hurt again and again and again. However, we must not allow ourselves to be knocked down permanently. No matter what, we must get back up and **want** to do it all over again!

In Camus, I recognized much of my own experiences. I found no satisfactory explanation for my feelings – no answers to my questions. I tried to deny and ignore how I felt which only made things worse. I had to accept that, much like Sisyphus, there was only me, the world and the absurdity that was the relationship between the two. And no matter how many times the rock rolled down the hill, knocking for a loop, I had to continue to press onward – pushing the rock back up again. In an absurd world, what else can one do?

Jean Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980): Being and Nothingness

Sartre asks a seemingly simple question: **Who am I?**

The question is *seemingly* simple because we have all asked ourselves (or been asked) at some point and we usually come up with an answer. We can rattle off a laundry list ‘facts’ about ourselves, but is that who we are?

At what point do we start to be? For Sartre, our being starts with our mother. Our being comes from her being – we are a part of her – we are one with her. We *derive* our being – not just from our mother, but from **both** our parents. Without the ‘being’ we have borrowed from our parents, what being of our own do we have? If we exclude all the influences from our lives, who are we? What do we have that is ours?

Sartre finds that our identity – all those ‘facts’ – can be found in being (the world) outside ourselves. We have no identity of our own. Our identity is borrowed – derived – from the world. We are empty inside, a lack, a nothingness. As all of our being is borrowed, we can only state that which we are not:

We are not our parents

We are not our siblings

We are not our teachers

We are not our friends

We are **not** all of those things that influence us.

If this is the case, then what is consciousness? Can we describe consciousness without describing its contents? If all the contents of consciousness are removed, what do we have left? Nothing. Consciousness is that which is not. It is nothing, a lack, an emptiness, a hole. It is only that which it borrows – it must borrow being in order to be!

Because consciousness must borrow its being, consciousness itself **is not** all of those things it borrows. This amounts to defining reality in the negative. By listing all of the things consciousness is not, consciousness now becomes something which is. Sartre sees this as an impossible synthesis of Being and Nothingness. It is an abortive duality: to both be and not be at the same time.

If all being is borrowed, then that includes one's gender as well. As mentioned above, Butler noted that one *is* a woman to the extent that one *does* woman successfully: that they adapt – borrow – the attributes of 'woman'. We all 'borrow' our gender to varying degrees, shaping it to fit the situation at hand. And yet, by the very act of this borrowing, we are not that borrowed gender. We have no gender – no being that is truly our own: we have only the nothingness of our consciousness which we continually fill – and empty – only to refill it with new 'being' as needed.

I said at the beginning of this story, my answer to the question "Are you a man or a woman?" is "Neither" – or possibly "Both." I am not a man, nor am I a woman. By Sartre's reasoning, though, I am at the same time **both** a man **and** a woman: an abortive duality. **How** can I exist? I **shouldn't** exist. And yet I **do** exist.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900): The Twilight of the Idols

I graduated from college, with a minor in philosophy. And while having never read Nietzsche for any of my courses, I wound up getting many of his works and *attempting* to get through them. I read the words, but the meaning was lost on me – it just didn't click. Nietzsche saw himself as an 'untimely man', considering his contemporaries as not yet ready to hear what he had to say and he wasn't too far off. With his unconventional ideas – and a style of writing to match – Nietzsche's books went largely unread during his lifetime. And so, like many others in the past had done, I put him up on the bookshelf and forgot about him. I was not ready to hear what he was saying.

My life went on, I had my meltdown and I started to educate myself about all this 'gender stuff'. For some reason, I decided to pull Nietzsche down off the shelf and give him another shot.

And something happened...

It just clicked. I *got* him.

Specifically, it was Nietzsche's **Twilight of the Idols** – a short but powerful book written in 1888 – that had the most impact. *Twilight* is a brilliant summary of Nietzsche's whole philosophy and has become my 'bible' – as it were. While there is so much I could cover from just this one book, I'll stick to the key theme that affected me most.

“There are no moral facts whatever. ... Morality is only an interpretation of certain phenomena, more precisely a *misinterpretation*. ... To this extent, moral judgment is never to be taken literally: as such it never contains anything but nonsense. ... Morality is merely sign-language, merely symptomatology: one must already know *what* it is about to derive profit from it.”²⁵

We view morality – i.e.: the rules by which we exist our existence – to be something transcendent – a set of *universal* values applying to all persons. But from whence did these values originate?

“All supreme values are of the first rank, all the supreme concepts – that which is, the unconditional, the good, the true, the perfect – all that cannot have become, *must* therefore be *causa sui*.”^{26,27}

Rationally, our morality is a product mankind itself. It is an interpretation of our experiences in the world and a codification of those thoughts and actions that *seem* to support our existence in a positive way. Having been under development – and revision – since mankind achieved consciousness, these values have the appearance of being something innate to us. It is almost as if they were somehow something more than we are – existing somehow outside of and *above* ourselves.

These abstract (and seemingly *higher*) constructs have been interpreted – or rather *misinterpreted* – in such a way as to declare that they could not have *evolved* from something *lower*: in fact, they cannot have evolved at all! We have succeeded in turning our *interpretations* of the world into **facts** governing the world. We have taken a moral view that was decided upon – in fact created – by other men, and dehistoricized it, turning into a universal Truth.

We have all been told – by people who can make **no claim** whatsoever to some *higher* understanding – **how we ought to be**. On this point, Nietzsche comments:

“For a condemnation of life by the living is after all no more than the symptom of a certain kind of life ... One would have to be situated *outside* life, and on the other hand to know it as thoroughly as any, as many, as all who have experienced it, to be permitted to touch on the value of life at all ...”²⁸

And finally:

“Let us consider finally what naïvety it is to say 'man *ought* to be thus and thus!' Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and change of forms: and does some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it: 'No! man ought to be *different*'? ... He even knows *how* man ought to be, this bigoted wretch; he paints himself on the wall and says '*ecce homo*'!²⁹ ... But even when the moralist merely turns to the individual and says to him: '*You* ought to be thus and thus' he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. The individual is, in his future and in his past, a piece of fate, one law more, one necessity more for everything that is and everything that will be. To say to him 'change yourself' means to demand that everything should change, even the past. ... And there have indeed been consistent moralists who wanted him in their own likeness, namely that of a bigot: to that end they *denied* the world! No mean madness! No modest presumption! ... In so far as morality *condemns* as morality and *not* with regard to the aims and objects of life, it is a specific error with which one should show no sympathy, an *idiosyncrasy of the degenerate* which has caused an unspeakable amount of harm! ... We others, we immoralists, have on the contrary opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, *approval*³⁰.”

In a nutshell: **there is no universal morality**. All of the guilt, shame and self-deprecation have come from an *internalized* morality created by people who are in *no position* to **know** any better than you or I. **No one** can know the world *sub specie aeterni*³¹ and yet we have allowed what is merely one *possible* interpretation of the world to govern our existence.

Pulling it all Together: Accepting Myself

So, what good is a philosophy if one does not put it into practice?

I had been searching for answers and peace in my life ever since high school – hell, even before that. However, it was my contemplation of suicide in my senior year of high school where I started my search in earnest.

I have already discussed Camus and the Absurd and why I decided that suicide was not a viable solution to my problems. Recognition and acceptance of the disproportion between reason and reality helped to ease some of the pressure I had always felt. This did not mean I would stop questioning and looking for answers – it meant that in all likelihood, I might never get the ‘absolute’ answers for which I was looking. At the very least, my expectations would be more reasonable – a small step in the right direction.

My epiphany in 1997 forced me to take a critical look back over the past fourteen-odd years of my life at that time. In doing so, I realized that I had been trying to convince everyone, including myself, that I was a *man*, no matter what. If I could just **be** that, then I would be ‘normal’ and for a long time I identified as a ‘regular guy’ with a kinky side. Unfortunately, that just didn’t hold up to closer scrutiny. At this point, I didn’t know who or what I was – all I did know was that I **was not** who I thought I was. Emotionally painful as this was, acceptance of this set the stage for deeper introspection and evaluation.

Laura’s paper, **About Sex and Gender**, was a real turning point for me. Having never before considered that there was more to *man* and *woman*, the door to ‘other possibilities’ was opened for me and there was no closing it. For the first time in my life, there was an ‘explanation’ that seemed to make some sense. There was now a *context* for the feelings I had always had.

And so I took another small step.

With my recognition and acceptance of these ‘other’ feelings I had, I ‘gave birth’ to Donna. Donna was now the embodiment of all these ‘other’ feelings I had – she was my ‘femme’ side, and I looked at her as this other persona – apart of me and yet somehow separate. At least now, I had acknowledged the existence of these feelings, which is more than I had done in the past. However, as I considered this ‘other self’ – Donna’s feelings and such – I found that they had been there all my life. There was no Donna as a separate persona – I was her and she was me. From a purely rational standpoint, **none** of what I felt or thought was that of some ‘other’ persona: it was **all** just me – it was **always** me.

That was a big step – and a frightening one. The implications thereof were that I could never be *normal* – with normal being defined as a *man* in the sense that I had always viewed it – in the sense that society as whole viewed it. Having longed to fit in, I now realized that I never would. Once again I was face to face with the Absurd and it took great delight in mocking my situation.

What ultimately tied all of this together for me was Nietzsche. Understanding his unique perspective on mankind as a species caused so much of my life experience to click into place. And while the whole of his philosophy had a profound effect on me, it was his examination of the arbitrary nature of morality that would be pivotal to my self-acceptance.

That there are no moral *facts*, only moral *interpretations* was an idea I seemed to grasp immediately. Echoed by Camus, *facts* for Nietzsche were the same as absolutes for Camus – and *both* recognized that there were no absolutes. At best, all knowledge amounted to our *interpretation* of the world – and something as lofty as *morality* would be the grandest of interpretations.

As I saw it, gender conformity – i.e. the rules of gender – were nothing more than a part of that arbitrary morality. They were nothing more than one *possible* interpretation of how we ought to be – not the only interpretation. There was no absolute definition of *man* or *woman* – any definition was but another interpretation.

I had spent my life trying to be who I thought I *ought to be* based on an internalized ideal derived from one *possible* interpretation of the world. I had allowed myself to be convinced that what I had felt my whole life was **wrong** – that what I felt and **knew** deep down to be true was somehow false. I had allowed powers outside of myself to dictate my identity.

It was the recognition and acceptance of this is what finally did it for me. I am real – I exist – I am as **valid** as anyone else – my life has **value**. And there is nobody who can tell me otherwise with **any** authority whatsoever.

Having accepted who I am and being comfortable with it – that should be it, right?

Well... not really.

I need to keep searching and questioning. I am not content to sit back and allow existence to just *happen* to me. In short, I cannot allow life to get the better of me. Acceptance of the absurdity that is existence – the lack of absolutes in the world – has made me realize that any 'answers' I might find are subject to revision at any point in time. I have rolled my rock to the summit of my hill where it sits, precariously balanced.

Foucault said, "Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for the understanding of other men." At some future time, I may very well find myself going through this all over again. I will not be the person then that I am today and my rock will have rolled back down the hill.

And much like Sisyphus, I will push it right back up.

After all, what other choice will I have?

Epilogue

One is fruitful only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains young only on the condition the soul does not relax, does not long for peace... – Nietzsche

Welcome to Nowhere

I've been out of circulation, as it were, for a while now. Five years later and the Usenet newsgroups haven't changed. While there are many new players – and many of the same old ones – the climate is about the same. Actually, there seems to be less activity there now than when I was a regular there – just not much in the way of quality discussions. Sure, it got dicey at times, but I remember having some really good dialogues in the newsgroups. Perhaps it is because there just aren't as many people frequenting them now as opposed to back then. I think this is because there are other forums that provide a more supportive environment than Usenet. Interestingly, it was because of a post made to the Alt.Support.Crossdressing newsgroup that I discovered one such forum.

I need interaction with my peers and I have found this new forum to be a positive environment for that. For the first time in a long time, I am sharing and discussing many of the ideas that make up my philosophy on life and being transgender. It is a good feeling to be able to share again – too long have I been out of touch with my peers. I place a great value on sharing our experiences – both good and bad – and I have found that, as transgender individuals, it is the best way for us to make it through our lives. For many, connecting online is the only contact they will ever have with others like themselves.

Part of that sharing includes venting as well. We all have times when we need to unload and it is nice to know that there are like-minded individuals who can relate to your experiences and are willing to listen. At the end of January, I found myself needing to do just that:

*Forum post – Subject: **welcome to nowhere.***

Hi All,

A dreary day here in New York and I feel like whinging and I need to unload. If this were Usenet, I'd be a bad girl and crosspost this to a bunch of different newsgroups. But it's not and I can't so I'm posting it here. The moderators can move or delete this as they see appropriate.

I wrote this on the train today. It's long, it rambles and I'm not even sure that I have a point, but it's how I'm feeling today and I refuse to edit it for content or length. I'll understand if you haven't the intestinal fortitude to read through all of this crap. ☺

while I suppose that I've always been different, it wasn't until I was about 12 or 13 that I really thought or did anything about it. I felt alone and that I was a freak and that I was the only person in the world to feel the way I did. There was no internet, no support groups – just me and my secret feeding off of each other like some sick symbiosis. Like most teenagers, I wanted to 'fit in' but found it quite difficult and ultimately found myself 'on the outside' most of the time. By the end of high school, I was miserable and ready to cut my losses and call it quits. I came pretty close, but ultimately decided to stick it out a bit longer. I've often wondered if I made the right choice.

Between 18 and 35 I managed to attend university, meet a wonderful girl who actually liked me, get married and have a child (my wife had the child, but you get the idea.☺) I 'resolved' (i.e. rationalized) my issues during this time with the explanation that I was a 'guy' just like any other, but with a few quirky things I like to do. I pledged and was made a 'brother' of a national fraternity, I got married, worked and had

a family - just one of the 'guys' if you will. It all sounded good and it worked - for a while.

Then I discovered the internet and Usenet. For those who don't know, Usenet are the public internet 'newsgroups' - not unlike these forums - but largely unmoderated and quite often a free-for-all. I found the crossdressing groups and a whole 'community' of other people like myself. Finally - someplace where I felt *included* as opposed to excluded. I logged (too) many hours there and a search in Google Groups for me in alt.support.crossdressing will turn up hundreds of posts starting around 1997-98. My time there, however, came with a price. Perhaps I was just overdue - but I wound up having a meltdown as all my 'issues' came to a head.

It took me a while to sort it all out - again. When the smoke cleared, I found myself enlightened with the knowledge that there was more to the world of gender than simply 'men' and 'women'. I realized that I didn't 'fit' into either camp, and that ultimately, I didn't feel that I really had any gender in particular - "Both... and Neither..." I'd say. I also found out something else: I no longer felt that sense of belonging with my peers on line. Yes, I made my posts, explained my position and lobbied for my definition of self. But for a few likeminded souls, I was once again on the outside. I decided that we 'in-between' people needed a newsgroup of our own, so I went through the whole proposal process and created alt.support.intergendered. We had a good run - about a year or so of activity and some *really* good discussions. Ultimately, however, traffic died down and the group is now all but dead. It doesn't even get spammed. ☹ I was alone again.

As I said before, we all just want to fit in. While sorting my life out, I struck up a friendship with a T* girl in Nevada. For about a year, we exchanged novella length emails offering support and friendship for each other. She was TS tracked and I wasn't. Ultimately she and her wife separated and my friend wound up moving on. The emails between us slowed and it's been a couple of years since I've heard from her. We were two people who connected - really connected - for a short time and helped each other get through a difficult situation. I can accept that the 'parting' was inevitable, but it only reinforces my feeling as an outsider.

For the last four years or so, I have been the maintainer of the charters for four Usenet newsgroups:

- alt.fashion.crossdressing
- alt.support.crossdressing
- alt.support.intergendered
- alt.support.crossliving

I post the charters weekly and scan the groups - but rarely participate in any threads. I've grown too apart from the 'culture' of Usenet and frankly, I have neither the time nor desire to get into flame wars any more. It was good while it lasted, but I just don't fit there anymore.

End of December, I found this site and I have to say that it is by far the best online group I've seen. The members are courteous and there seems to be a *genuine* sense of community here. Everyone involved is to be commended for making this the place that it is. In my search for a community of my peers, this seemed promising.

Someone here posted to the effect that it's a lonely place trying to live outside the societal 'norms' for gender and I can attest to that. I have been reading about what everyone else is doing and has going on in their lives. While there is very much to which I can and do relate, I can't help but feel that I'm somehow removed from it all. There has to be some place I fit in.

So I start to play the label game (again) – and I hate labels. I should be well over this stage, but it sneaks back now and again when I'm in a funk...

Am I a crossdresser? Insofar as I wear women's clothing almost exclusively – yes I am. Do I try and be as feminine as I can – no, not really. While I do have some 'girly' traits, I'm just not into the whole dress up thing. I did it for a while – almost a year. Skirts, blouse, hose & pumps on an almost daily basis. It was fun, I liked it – and I kind of outgrew it. I own exactly three dresses (which haven't really been worn in about five years) and no skirts. I'm more of a 'trousers and jumper' kind of girl. ☺ My 'look' – such as it is – is somewhere in the middle. It confuses people, which is good. I have a person goal to screw with at least one person's head every day. I think by and large I succeed – even if that person is me.

Am I Transgender? Insofar as I identify as something other than a 'man' or 'woman', yes. Do I 'live as a woman' – no. I don't know that I could. I don't 'feel' like a woman... I don't 'feel' like a man... I don't even know what that's supposed to mean – 'feel like a woman'... How the hell could I? It's an entire set of experiences to which I will *never* have access. And while I was raised as a boy, I maintain that being the way I am didn't allow me to have the experiences that regular 'boys' do. I feel like something – but bog only knows what it is.

And on and on it goes – until I've run out of labels and names to call myself.

I spent my entire adolescence hating that I felt the way I felt and that I did the things I did. I was made fun of and felt I deserved it. I felt like a freak. All I wanted was to know where my place in the world was. I mean, was it really so much to ask? Surely I fit in *somewhere*... Someone, just point me to my corner of the playground – PLEASE!

So after some thirty years of self loathing and self indulgence; of purges and promises; of therapy and self reflection; of education and understanding – after turning myself inside-out and *finally* accepting who and what I am, I found my place: standing outside the fence of the playground, watching the other kids play.

And do you know what the really amusing part of this is? (I know you've been waiting for the funny part.) *This is where I was all along.* Clearly, I've lost the plot somewhere along the way. As a kid, I didn't fit in and I felt like a freak – it's now clear why. I need only look in the mirror and acknowledge that which is staring back at me. It couldn't be more obvious if it was tattooed across my forehead.

Sure, I have a few friends and sometimes the other kids will play with me. But for the most part, I'm off on my own, standing by the fence – and even that's too close. So I walk through the gate and find myself outside. I take a deep breath... It feels right. It feels safe. I feel I'm *finally* where I belong.

And as I look around, I find myself firmly rooted in the middle of nowhere – and it really is a lonely place.

Thanks for letting me vent.

Love & Stuff,
Donna

It would seem that I had struck a resonate chord – which is always a good thing. Replies to my post support what I already know, but need reminding of now and again: even in the middle of nowhere, I am not alone.

I follow up the next day:

Forum post - Subject: Re: Welcome to nowhere.

Hi All,

Less dreary, ergo less whinging. I appreciate the supportive words. As I said, I needed to vent. Were I still seeing my therapist, she would have heard this and my purse would be \$70 lighter. I much prefer sharing with a group of like minded individuals. It is only because I was able share and learn from the experiences of others that I've gotten as far as I have in all of this. Thank you.

were I able to 'indulge' only occasionally, I'm sure that my life would be easier. But I tried that and found that it provided little relief. I needed to be me as 'full time' as possible - all I had to do was find who 'me' was. As I sifted and sorted through my experiences, thoughts and feelings, what finally coalesced as a sense of self is what I am now. I have no true experiences as a 'woman' and my experiences as a 'man' are so tainted as to be largely unreliable. What I'm left with is a view of the world - and myself - which is neither a man's nor a woman's - it's something all its own.

I am, by my nature, a shy person and yet I present to the world in a way in which I attract attention to myself. I do it not for the reason of attracting attention, but because it resonates with how I see and feel about myself. An unfortunate side effect of this is that on a daily basis, it places me at odds with what society feels I 'ought' to be. I have, for all intents and purposes, extricated myself from the groups 'man' and 'woman'. And in a society where binary gender "isn't just a good idea - it's the law" I find myself, well... nowhere.

From a functional, practical standpoint, being a 'mix' of genders and having no gender amount to the same thing. However, from an intellectual standpoint they are *very* different things. For me, identifying as a 'mix of genders' implies that I have set of experiences such that I can relate to either gender. Identifying as having 'no gender' implies that I have set of experiences *outside* of those defining either gender. I know I'm picking nits, but their mine to pick.

As I see it, this isn't a 'choice' I've made. I'd like to be able to say "I'm a man" or "I'm a woman" or even "I'm both", but the fact of the matter is that I can't. In a society where 'man' and 'woman' are in binary opposition to one another, where does one position oneself if they are in opposition to both?

Pretty much - nowhere. And I'm **OK** with nowhere - despite my lengthy missive to the contrary.

I'm good with my life about 95% of the time. It's that 5% that gets to me now and again. When I dwell on things, I get in a funk. And when I'm in a funk, I whinge. My apologies.

It's been a long while since I've done a brain dump on all of this and I guess I was due. I wanted to share this. I *needed* to share this. Thanks for providing a warm place to do so.

Love & Stuff,
Donna

Nothing of any real value ever comes easily and this is especially true for anyone transgender. We spend our lives at odds with not only those around us but with ourselves as well. Feeling out of synch with the rest of the world, many of us will spend our lifetime looking for answers – for an explanation. Life is difficult enough and being transgender can make it seem near impossible at times. If we're lucky, we find some sense of belonging and balance.

My rock slips... I catch it and set it right again...

After forty two years, my journey though life can be best summed up thus:

“I came to my truth by diverse paths and in diverse ways: it was not upon a single ladder that I climbed to the height where my eyes survey my distances.

And I have asked the way only unwillingly – that has always offended my taste! I have rather questioned and attempted the ways themselves.

All my progress has been an attempting and a questioning - and truly, one has to *learn* how to answer such questioning! That however – is to my taste: not good taste, not bad taste, but *my* taste, which I no longer conceal and of which I am no longer ashamed

‘This – is now *my* way: where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way’. For *the* way – does not exist!

Thus spoke Zarathustra”³²

Given the opportunity to go back and ‘do it again’, there is little I would change; how could I? I am my life – my experiences: to change that would be to change who I am and I **cannot** know that it would be a change for the better. The issue, however, is moot as *here* and *now* is my reality – all of the ‘what if’ questioning will not change that.

I shift my weight and adjust my footing...

Perhaps my life thus far would have been *easier* had someone been able to ‘explain’ it all to me – to answer all my questions. However, it is often not enough simply for one to *know* a thing. Sometimes one must *experience* a thing – to live it – for it to be real and to have meaning. **My** philosophy – how **I** exist my existence – is real and has meaning; not because it is that which had been told to me, but because it is that which I have learned and experienced – even though it can and does place me at odds with the world at times.

And so at the midpoint of my life, in what can only be construed as an act of defiance against all of the gods, I remain standing here – in the middle of Nowhere...

Balancing my rock on the top of my hill.

Resources

Submitted here for your perusal is a listing of books and such which I have found of interest and helpful to me with regards to all of this.

Books

:: need to fill in ::

Miscellaneous Writings

About Sex and Gender Rules by Laura Blake
A Google search should locate this pretty easily.

Industrial Society and its Future (Sec 4: Oversocialization & Sec 6: Surrogate Activities)
<http://cydathria.com/unabomber.html>

The Gender Rules by Marla Louise
<http://members.aol.com/marlalouis/genrules.htm>

Either/Or...Both/And by Joan Schuman
http://switch.sjsu.edu/~switch/nextswitch/switch_engine/front/front.php?artc=223

Coming Out by Jennifer Diane Reitz
<http://www.transsexual.org/Out.html>

Beliefs That Can Kill by Jennifer Diane Reitz
<http://www.transsexual.org/belief.html>

Notes

¹ Incipit puberty! : Puberty Begins!

² Nearly all crossdressers purge their wardrobe at some point. Many will repeat the cycle of building up a wardrobe and purging over and over again.

³ From Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism>) : Existentialism is a philosophical movement that views human existence as having a set of underlying themes and characteristics, such as anxiety, dread, freedom, awareness of death, and consciousness of existing. Existentialism is also an outlook, or a perspective, on life that pursues the question of the meaning of life or the meaning of existence. This question is seen as being of paramount importance, above all other scientific and philosophical pursuits.

Although I did not know that at the time, I had stumbled onto existentialist Albert Camus' philosophy of the Absurd.

⁴ Another fallacy – we (male-to-female Transgender individuals) do not have enough 'male bonding' in our lives. We have somehow managed to 'feminize' our personalities, suppressing our 'real' male selves. Investing more time and interest in 'male' oriented activities is supposed help and revive our true 'male' nature.

⁵ I choose the name 'Donna' for that part of myself I had denied for so long. It felt good to give 'Donna' a name as it made 'her' real. I have since realized that there is no 'Donna' as a separate identity – I am but one person all the time. Nonetheless, I like the name and tend to use it when speaking of myself.

⁶ Usenet, also known as the Internet Newsgroups, is a freely available public forum divided into thousands of sub-forums – much like bulletin boards – these people can post messages. These forums usually have some topic and posts there are related to that topic. There are a number of newsgroups dealing with crossdressing, transsexualism and transgenderism in general.

⁷ Many crossdressers consider there to be a double standard with respect to who can wear what: i.e. woman can wear men's clothes with little issue, but men cannot wear woman's clothes. While this may be true on the surface, the overriding difference is that women – as a rule – are not doing this to feel more masculine or to emulate men. There is no psychological component to their actions. Male crossdressers, however, are acting out of a psychological need are usually trying to be more feminine – to be more like women.

⁸ I met Riki Anne Wilkins while on a consulting assignment between 1997 & 1998. She was the first transsexual I had (to my knowledge) ever met and was a genuinely nice person. She was also the first person to whom I ever actually 'came out' – it just sort of happened. I suppose that subconsciously, I thought that if anyone could relate to how I felt, it would be her. This was before everything fell apart for me and my intention was to speak with her again with regards to transitioning. Ultimately, I would decide that transitioning was not what I wanted.

⁹ For about two years, I kept my website updated with where I was with all of this. The text here for this two year period consists of those postings as well as the articles I had written during that time with some additional comments.

Notes – continued

¹⁰ Alt.Support.SRS is the transsexual support group on Usenet. At the time, the regular members there were quite the crew and one posted in this forum at their own risk. Very opinionated and cliquish, they were quick to attack anyone who did not identify as a transsexual and who was not planning to have surgery.

¹¹ HBGDA SOC: Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association Standards Of Care.

¹² DSM–IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition. This is the standard classification in the United States of mental disorders and is used by mental health professionals for the diagnosis of mental health related illnesses.

¹³ Ayn Rand, *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1982)

¹⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition*, (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), pa. 33-534.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 17.

¹⁶ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), p. 258.

¹⁷ DSM-IV, pp. 530-531.

¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Et cetera ad infinitum: and so on to infinity

²⁰ *a priori*: knowable independently of experience

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968), The ‘Improvers’ of Mankind, #1.

²⁶ *causa sui* : the cause of itself – i.e. not something created by man.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ‘Reason’ in Philosophy, # 4 .

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Morality as Anti-Nature, # 5.

Notes – continued

²⁹ *'ecce homo* : behold the man!

³⁰ *Ibid.*, *Morality as Anti-Nature*, # 6.

³¹ *sub specie aeterni*: from the viewpoint of eternity. To be able to know all possible outcomes for all possible choices.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zaratustra*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1961), *Of the Spirit of Gravity*, #2.