

# Polare Edition 21

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## Editorial

by Craig Andrews

It's that time of the year again - Christmas, New Year and Mardi Gras. Overall, things are a little hectic at the Centre here at the moment - looking forward to the end of the year and a fresh start of a new one. By the time the next *Polare* comes out, we will be well past the first two and into week three of festival celebrations.

Over on page 5, as promised, is the update on Elizabeth Riley's new role here at the Gender Centre. She has been calling for resumes from the community. Elizabeth is also fairly involved with revamping all of our resources as well. If you wish to have your say in this process - keep on eye out for any meetings she will be conducting in the near future to get community views on how these resources should look, terminology and information people require when making serious decisions about gender issues.

Note that there is some useful information in the *Health Report* for those considering reassignment surgery. There is more to follow - which will be published in upcoming issues. Sean Taylor - Social & Support Worker - is planning a number of interesting workshops early next year. Please note down the R.S.V.P. dates if you are interested in attending.

Traditionally, the party season is upon us all again. I would enjoy reading your accounts of what you did over this time if you can put pen to paper. I would like to run a short column on what you did for Christmas. I am aware transgender folk may not have the usual, predictable Christmas and New Year celebrations. Sitting by the river on the 25th? - doing your own thing? that too is a way of making the time meaningful for yourself - and that's what counts.

## President's Report

by Fiona Austin

Dear members of the extended transgender community, family, friends and interested supporters; after an "interesting" year at the Gender Centre, I am pleased to report that the recent A.G.M. was a well run and co-operative affair (although quite poorly attended which is a possible sign, in itself, disappointing, of more peaceful and productive times for the Gender Centre), the meeting concluded with some good open discussion and duly appointed both new and old management committee members, and thus the new year began for the current management committee.

Subsequently, we have had a number of meetings, largely concerned with consolidating what I refer to as the "renewed" Gender Centre, a proposition I would support with the following points:

- » Staff: We are more than happy to see a mixture of new and old faces, substantially transgendered, all now in secure appointments and committed to creating a more professional, progressive and above all approachable Gender Centre (You'd better be! Joke, maybe?). Well and capably led by Craig Skinner,

## Feature Articles



... not sure if they thought I was Arthur or Martha, but comfortable that this was not an issue for them.

### Family Love

norrie visits hir extended family in Melbourne for the first time in over 20 years and was given a very warm welcome, arriving during the weekly gathering of the extended family, and being greeted by hir aunt, uncle and hir cousins and their partners and children.

### Are Transsexuals at the Forefront of a Revolution?

Having recently met Susan Stryker at a gender conference in San Francisco, Richard Lavine discusses his observations of transsexualism and features the opinions of Susan Stryker, Jan Morris and others in their exploration and understanding of gender-identity.

### Interview with Jill Hooley

Jill Hooley, is a tutor in Sociology at Sydney University. In 1997 she presented a paper at the "Re:Activate" Conference (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Activisms), *Polare* interviewed her there and also asked her about her involvement in coalition politics.

### Loves Lost & Found

Laura and Carol had the biggest argument ever, Carol coming-out as lesbian and Laura coming-out as a woman, and that was the end of the relationship. Carol went off with her friend and Laura went off with her future. And it's been a long three years for Laura.

- our recently appointed Administration Manager; Welcome Back Craig!
- » Resources: Following the needs assessment survey earlier in the year we have upgraded the previous part-time position of Resource Officer to that of a full-time Education and Resources Officer, capably filled by Elizabeth Riley. With such things afoot as new and upgraded resource kits, library facilities (containing for the first time a properly catalogued and coordinated resource of transgender relevant books, journals, videos etc.), Internet access and presence (by way of our own website currently in development, due probably in early-mid 1998); and an exciting development in the Gender Centre's capability to pro-actively present itself and our message of transgender presence, rights and engendering inclusion in the broader society by way of a training scheme for employers and government, which has been instituted and developed in-house by Elizabeth over this year. This is a major development in our capabilities. Well done Elizabeth. We will also be addressing many other resource issues and needs over the coming year. Any legal advice volunteers out there?
  - » In the broader picture we have or are about to undertake the following projects in support of you - the transgendered community (but more about you later ... )
  - » Improved H.I.V. prevention and support networks; major upgrade of the Centre's computer system; Mardi Gras float, again thanks go to Amelia & Co.; regular general meetings for the community; F.T.M. Prosthesis Workshops - good work Sean!; increased Outreach services - good 'onya Phinn!; a more consistent and full social calendar - well done for recent and future events Sharon and all concerned; great food once again at the recent barbecue - thanks Josie; looking long-term for inner-east location for the resource centre; closer liaison with other relevant services; surgical information sessions; employment action; a third residential house and improved residential services - thanks for the continued good work Paula; a continually improving *Polare* (have a look as I did, at all your past issues and see the progression!) - keep it up Craig, Georgette!; and a host of other events, projects and stuff - keep yourself up to date!
  - » The Management Committee, as President I may well be biased but, whilst individually far from perfect, I feel that the current team is cooperative, intelligent, experienced, empathetic and well aware of transgender issues as well as open-minded and not interested in pushing any particular ideological viewpoints; but in better outcomes for all, aided by the Gender Centre; and this applies even to the more stealth of you out there we fight for and help deliver the outcomes (e.g. Advocacy and training to many government departments and corporations on transgendered rights etc.) that will in some small way improve the lot of all of us.

I would like to now broach the subject of you (note: this should be taken as entirely my viewpoint - i.e. a personal statement and in no way reflects anyone else's opinion).

You lot (I include myself) - represent one of, if not the most discriminated against, ostracised, impoverished, disaffected and generally disadvantaged groups in modern Australian society. This is well known and talked of and even whinged about. However, I believe that the bottom line for all of us, is that whilst we must be aware of our rights, we also, every one of us, have responsibility - primarily to ourselves, but also to our families, friends, workplace, community and broader society and country. And of course, for the well-being of your planet via concern for your local environment.

No service the Gender Centre could provide will help if you aren't willing to take some responsibility - that is, to look after your own health (both mental and physical); to be reasonable and considerate to others; to participate; to make your life your responsibility; to be open and positive in your outlook; to suspend judgement of others and to be willing to learn. We can help but you must do the real work; I know plenty of trannies that have done these sorts of things despite the problems, and have moved on to happier and more complete lives.

The Final Choice is yours. Make it a good one - after all, the main effect is going to be a better life for yourself.

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## Family Love

### norrie's Trip to Melbourne

by norrie mAy-welby

Article appeared in Polare magazine: December 1997 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



norrie mAy-welby

**I** visited Melbourne earlier this year, and decided to pop in on my aunt and cousins while I was there. I hadn't seen them in over twenty years, since I was a little boy (and yes, whatever my gender is now, I was a little boy then. I checked this often enough with the little boy who lived next door. But I digress).

*I am indeed blessed in having a family that values acceptance so highly.*

I rang them and introduced myself as "norrie, Marion's child. You knew me as Bruce." On my way to visit them, I realised that they had no idea what to expect of me gender wise. I was dressed in bright multi-coloured androgynous fashion, as was my wont, devoid of gender signifiers. They may have been homophobic for all I knew. Oh well, they can take me as they find me, I thought.

I was actually given a very warm welcome, arriving during the weekly gathering of the extended family, and being greeted by my aunt, uncle and my cousins and their partners and children. I hadn't seen my cousin Helen since I'd gotten into trouble for playing with her doll when I was four. I was able to talk about transgender issues when they asked about my work. (I was temping for the Gender Centre, and had an acting job as a transgender character). I talked about my understanding of sex and gender in a broad societal sense, and continued this discussion late into the night with my aunt Jean and cousin Diane and her partner. I accepted Jean's invitation to sleep in their guest room that night.

I was given a fond farewell the next morning, still not sure if they thought I was Arthur or Martha, but comfortable that this was not an issue for them.

About a month later, I rang Jean to get my cousin's address and to thank them for their hospitality. (I note my tendency to refer to my family collectively, but that's the way they often work.) She mentioned that the family had seen my appearance on Sex/Life, and congratulated me on my presentation. I was a little thrown out that they could so easily accept me being known on national television as a transgender prostitute. "Family is family", said Jean, "You are the way you are and that's that." It turned out she'd known about my changing gender since my uncle had mentioned it to her years ago (back when I identified my gender as exclusively female). I was surprised at this acceptance, for their background is simple working class Protestant, non-university education intellectual liberal. But to them, and to almost all of my relatives, family is about acceptance.

Thank Goddess for this too, for I hadn't thought through the possible consequences of the television appearance. My father hadn't known I was a prostitute till this was revealed on Sex/Life. "I hope this was a while ago", he said. It seems he can deal with it better if it's past tense. Nevertheless, I realised that even when they might disapprove of what I do, rejecting me is not an option they even consider.

My parents even tried hard to always use feminine pronouns when I thought this was important to me. And because we've stayed close, I've been able to discuss with them my evolving views of gender, sex and society. I've talked with my parents about where they don't fit rigid gender roles, discussed gender fluidity, and how my own identity has changed in light of this. Now that my identity is spansexual, my family sometimes calls me he, sometimes she, and that's the way I like it.

I know of many transgender people who are estranged from their family, or who hide their transgendered nature from them. I am indeed blessed in having a family that values acceptance so highly.

I talked to my mum about this a short time ago, when we were discussing how parents could be helped to deal with transgender children. "You love your children," she said, "you may try to change them when they're growing up, but after a time, there's nothing you can do but accept the way they are. You may not always understand them, but you accept them."

I am grateful to be part of a family that values love so highly, and awed by love's simple power.

norrie mAy-welby



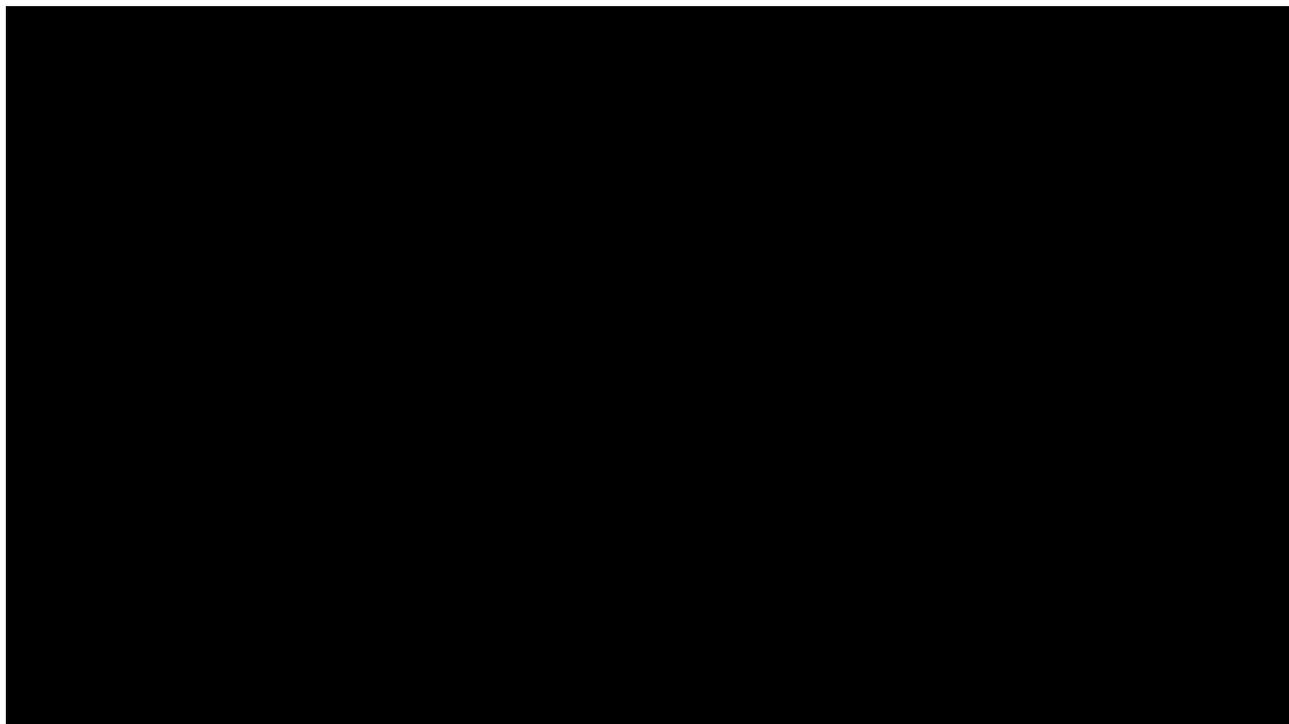
From [Wikipedia](#) norrie mAy-welby became the first person in the world to be officially declared to be neither a man nor a woman, making Australia the first country in the world to recognise a "non-specified" gender.



Born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, as a male and moving to Perth, Western Australia at the age of seven, norrie underwent male-to-female reassignment surgery in 1989, but later found that being a woman was not what zie felt like either. Zie moved to Sydney in the early 1990s. Doctors stated, in January 2010, that norrie was a neuter, neither male nor female, as hir psychological self-image was as a neuter, hir hormones were not the same as a male's or female's, and zie had no sex organs.

One of hir worries about being labelled male or female is that zie now looks like neither and is physically neither as well. Because of this, if hir passport states gender as being one or the other, it is possible that zie might be detained for not fitting what the gender field says zie should look like. This was one of norrie's reasons for seeking recognition as gender neutral. Of hir own sexuality, norrie has stated: "I'd be the perfect androgyne if I was completely omnisexual, but I'm only monosexual. Just think of me as a big queen girl."

norrie has been an integral part of the Gender Centre in many ways since moving from Western Australia many years ago. [Visit hir website for more about norrie](#)  Meanwhile, this excellent video has appeared on You Tube, an interview with norrie in which zie explains her views on many topics



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## Are Transsexuals at the Forefront of a Revolution?

### ... or Just Reinforcing Old Stereotypes About Men and Women?

by Richard M. Levine, [Mother Jones Magazine](#) 

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Susan [Stryker] was wearing what she called her 'radical transsexual-genderfuck-drag' outfit: work boots, black cotton sleeveless t-shirt and ripped-to-the-point-of-shredded jeans over black tights

**O**n her way to the Second International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, Susan Stryker had one of

those tiny moments of existential panic (that can bring a whole world into focus. Susan is a pre-operative transsexual, which means that she is taking female hormones and has developed small breasts but still has male genitalia as well as facial hair that she shaves closely and covers with make-up. She has been 'presenting' as a woman fulltime for almost two years, and yet every time she enters a public restroom, choosing more deliberately than most of us the door marked by one stick-figured symbol over another, she instinctively checks for the absence of urinals before feeling safe. It was the kind of discomfort that she always felt in public rest rooms, even when she was living as a man. But in the Dallas Airport on that particular day she was startled when a teenage boy burst into the women's room, then quickly realised he was on taboo turf and tied in embarrassment.

*... she could easily have 'passed' as a woman, but passing turned out to be the last thing on her mind.*

The havoc that a strictly bipolar system wreaks most directly on transgendered people but also on the rest of us was the subject of the conference in Houston. According to the packet of information I had received, there would be 65 transgendered (both transsexual and cross-dressing) lawyers and activists at the three-day event, held at the Hilton Southwest Hotel. They would participate in workshops in such areas as health, employment, military and personal identification regulations, out of which would come blueprints for further action.

My own interest in transsexualism had begun only two month earlier, when I met Susan Stryker at a gender conference I was covering in San Francisco. Unlike other panellists on transsexualism that day, who were dressed in clothes that instantly signalled their new identity, Susan was wearing what she called her 'radical transsexual-genderfuck-drag' outfit: work boots, black cotton sleeveless t-shirt and ripped-to-the-point-of-shredded jeans over black tights. With her long blond hair, she could easily have 'passed' as a woman, but passing turned out to be the last thing on her mind.

Besides, having taught early American history at the University of San Francisco (her students were surely unique in learning, along with more standard fare, that the current anti-cross-dressing laws in New York originated as an attempt by the state legislature to prevent militant farmers of committing acts of civil disobedience while dressed as American Indians), Susan was also a founding member of a nascent radical civil rights group called Transgender Nation. She saw her 'gender dysphoria', as the medical profession would label it, as a personal quest that pointed the way toward gender liberation for us all.

Gender identity is clearly one of the topics of the 1990s. Half the stories in the newspapers are really about changing perceptions of gender, whether in the guise of gays in the military or dating codes on campus or discrimination in the workplace or the domestic life of the Bobbitts, or any of dozens of other subjects. A recent spate of movies - including *The Crying Game*, *Orlando*, *The Ballad of Little Jo*, *M. Butterfly*, *House of Angels*, *Farewell my Concubine*, and the top box office hit *Mrs. Doubtfire* - explored transgender themes. So crowded has this transgender bandwagon become that a short time after *Mrs Doubtfire* lost its number one position, it was replaced by another Hollywood comedy that touched on the same theme: *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. In the film's climactic scene, the detective's main antagonist, the local police chief (played by Sean Young), is revealed to be (family entertainment not being what it used to be) a pre-operative male-to-female transsexual with breasts and a penis.

Yet the fact is that Hollywood is really playing cultural catch-up. The list of musicians who engage in some form of gender bending is so extensive that the practice almost seems to be a pre-requisite for stardom: Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Madonna, Boy George, Michael Jackson, Annie Lennox, K.D. Lang, Laurie Anderson, RuPaul and many others (not to mention performers from an older generation, such as Liberace, who is, in this context, one of the seminal figures of our time - or that even more problematic icon, Elvis, the cross-dresser as male sex symbol).

If M.T.V. is where we try out new gender possibilities, old-fashioned T.V. is where we ridicule them. Hundreds of talk show programs have been devoted to cross-dressers and transsexuals (Donahue in a dress was not one of the more enlightening televised images of

recent years), and there is hardly a gregarious transgendered person who hasn't appeared on at least one of them. (A recent men's support group I attended in San Francisco discussed talk show appearance tips). We laugh at what we fear and what we fear most is the dissolution of personal identity, gender being one of its essential components.

Frankly, before I met Susan Stryker and her group of transsexual friends, I was a pretty typical talk show viewer. I had never thought a lot about gender liberation - or even gender itself much beyond the standard bipolar "me Tarzan, you Jane" sense. Specifically, I had never thought about the distinction between sex and gender; the one, a chromosomal and anatomical 'fact'; the other, more of a mental and social construct.

In the ensuing weeks I read much of the scant literature on transsexualism. In 1953, a Danish physician turned an ex-G.I., named George Jorgensen into Christine in the most widely publicised early sexual reassignment surgery. Since then, the number of post-operative transsexuals has grown into the tens of thousands, with many times that in various stages of gender transition - and of course, an untold number who feel themselves to be transgendered and do nothing about it physically. And while transsexualism is, strictly speaking, a fairly recent phenomenon (a result, largely, of wartime advances in trauma surgery), there have been transgendered individuals in all cultures and mythologies throughout history. (Joan of Arc, far from being the frail-but-feisty maid of orleans, was a six-foot-plus warrior who was burned at the stake more because she refused to stop wearing male clothing than for her role in a regional dynastic struggle). In many cultures such people have been considered to possess numinous powers by virtue of their knowledge of both male and female secrets, and have played honoured roles. For instance, Native American berdache - effeminate men and masculine women who chose to live in opposite gender roles - officiated at important tribal rituals.

The actual cause of transsexualism is hotly disputed by gender researchers, who line up in the familiar nature versus nurture formation, with pre-natal theories of chromosomal irregularities and hormonal imbalances vying with postnatal notions of opposite sex imprinting and family systems of dominant and absent parents.

The conference, half law convention, half transgender support group, proved to be fascinating, as much or more because of the people involved as because of the issues raised. The news in the first workshop on employment law was mostly discouraging. As the workshop moderator, a transsexual lawyer and business woman named Laura Skaer, put it, "Basically, if you're at the stage where you're filing an employment discrimination suit, you've already lost it." No transsexual has ever won such a suit based on gender issues, although that situation could soon change now that Minnesota has passed the first wide-ranging civil rights bill that specifically includes transsexuals. The closest anyone came was a Boeing engineer, whose initial judgement against the company for not letting her dress in feminine clothing or use the women's restroom while still pre-operative was overturned on appeal.

But overall, the event had an upbeat, get-out-of-the-closet tenor. Participants rarely used the medical term 'gender dysphoria' to describe their condition. They said, 'gender gifted', 'gender creative', or 'whole-gendered'. One transsexual announced that she "wasn't gender dysphoric but gender euphoric". Perhaps two-thirds considered themselves transsexuals, almost all male-to-females. The rest were transvestites, often distinguishable because they dressed to the nines, wore more make-up (to cover their beards, since they rarely underwent electrolysis), and frequently touched their carefully coiffed wigs, as if holding on to a more tenuous femininity.

In sexuality textbooks, the two groups are completely distinct. In theory, transsexuals are generally certain from an early age that their sex and gender are at odds and want to permanently alter their bodies to fit the image they have of themselves, while transvestites are typically heterosexual men who get a sexual charge from occasionally dressing up as women. In the real world, however, this distinction often breaks down. Many transsexuals, for a variety of reasons, must content themselves with cross-dressing, sometimes along with hormonal and electrolysis treatments.

Occasionally there is some tension between the two groups. In private, transsexuals might refer to cross-dressers as "men in skirts" or even "chicks with dicks", but in general transgender activists realise that they are both such tiny minorities that they have to find common cause not only with one another but with other marginalized groups, especially gays and lesbians.



**Martine [Rothblatt] was actually outed to her parents by her nine-year-old daughter who said to them one day, "How come Daddy only wears dresses when you're not around?"**

Some of the most crucial issues for transsexuals were raised at the workshop on health law. It was chaired by Martine Rothblatt, a Washington, D.C., communications industry attorney who had been living fulltime as a female for the past two years and was scheduled for surgery shortly. As Martine, a tall, strong-featured woman who was raising four children, related her experiences, it was apparent that, compared to others, she had had a relatively smooth transition between genders.

When Martine came-out to friends, colleagues, and her parents, she encountered a very surprised but ultimately understanding response. Martine was actually outed to her parents by her nine-year-old daughter who said to them one day, "How come Daddy only wears dresses when you're not around?" Martine claimed to be "maxing out on happiness" since she had decided to live as a woman. But, in one of the many Catch-22's of transsexual life, because gender-dysphoria is officially labelled a psychiatric disorder and a medical pathology, a candidate for sex reassignment surgery who acts completely normal can be rejected for treatment.

The field is regulated by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, named after the New York endocrinologist who first popularised the term 'transsexual' and wrote widely about the phenomenon. The professional group of medical and psychological caretakers has only recently allowed a transgendered person on its board. The Harry Benjamin Association's widely followed standards of care decree that a candidate for hormone therapy and sexual reassignment surgery must have the written approval of a certified therapist after no less

than three months of care; he or she must live fulltime in the sought after gender for at least a year before being accepted for surgery; and a partner in a heterosexual marriage might not be eligible for the operation. (Transsexuals feel strongly that this reluctance to create gay or lesbian couples is homophobic, but it is also true that in 1971 a woman won a hefty judgement from a gender clinic for irrevocably and non-consensually cutting off, so to speak, her marital rights.)

For many transsexuals these protocols foster gender stereotyping (behaviour considered inappropriate for the candidate's desired gender will not pass muster); are class biased (many transsexuals cannot afford the psychological visits that must precede expensive and largely uninsurable surgery); and are just plain humiliating. "We are like a colonised people", said Susan Stryker, wearing a 'Transgender Nation' t-shirt. "We are forced to speak the oppressor's language and submit to his law."

By no means were all transgendered people as militant as Susan. For many, assimilation into their new gender was the fervently desired goal. They gladly attended the gender identity clinic's department classes to learn how to 'pass', if they were male-to-females, by walking on high-heels while appearing sober at the same time. Indeed, many radical feminists complain loudly and with some justification that transsexuals themselves reinforce gender stereotyping.

The more radical transsexuals felt that all of us have masculine and feminine sides to some degree, and that 'gender creative' people were simply those who were willing and able to express themselves completely - something that in our society "takes a lot of ovaries to do", according to Martine Rothblatt, who liked the symmetry that she had spent half her life as a male and would now spend the second half as a female. These people wanted to shift the grounds of the debate from the clinical language of the medical establishment to one of human rights - specifically, the right of transsexuals to control their own bodies and have access to hormone treatment and sex reassignment surgery on demand.

Male-to-female surgery is both less expensive and less problematic than female-to-male, which partially accounts for the fact that male-to-females greatly outnumber female-to-males. (An equally important reason for the gap, which is narrowing, may be the greater latitude society gives women in dress and lifestyle). The creation of a 'neo-vagina' averages \$12,000 to \$15,000, not counting the lifetime use of oestrogen. It involves dissecting the penis while preserving the urethra, then turning the extremely sensitive penile sheath inside out, reinserting it into the abdominal cavity, and constructing an entry framed with labia made from the scrotum. It is frequently orgasmic and ready for active use after six to eight weeks of healing.

In contrast, female-to-male transsexuals must choose between form and function, with neither choice providing a completely satisfactory result and the total cost for both a bilateral mastectomy and genitoplasty running anywhere from \$20,000 to \$40,000 and up. The most common model is a 'micro-penis', where the female clitoris, somewhat enlarged by male hormones, is released from the clitoral hood. Orgasm can generally be achieved but not penetration. Most aesthetically satisfying by much less sensitive is a penis-like flap taken from the arm or thigh and held permanently semi-erect by a bone implant, resulting in what female-to-males sometimes refer to as a 'pants-stuffer'.

All the transsexuals I talked to agreed that the surgical procedure, while perhaps the most dramatic aspect of gender transition, is far from the most important. (Indeed, some transsexuals are satisfied with the changes in their bodies and psyches that hormone therapy alone induces and skip the surgery entirely). If sex is inevitably a male/female polarity, they insisted, gender is a broad spectrum along which each of us stands at different points, even changing our position along this continuum of role possibilities in the course of our lives or, in some cases, in the course of any given day of our lives.

Perhaps no one embodied the fluidity of gender as literally as the workshop leader, Sharon-Ann. At the moment, she wore a demure puffy sleeved dress with a lace collar, but she was also an ex-Marine and a competitive athlete. Sharon Ann is the cross-dressing pseudonym of a man who describes himself as 'bi-gendered'. Married for more than twenty-nine years and the father of three daughters (he planned to give away the middle one in marriage the following weekend, very much the tuxedo-clad father of the bride), he spent 90 percent of his life as a male and "lets Sharon-Ann out" only at transgender events and in the office he rents to conduct his manifold gender-community activities.

Sharon Ann's fondest dream is to wake up each morning and decide whether to be masculine or feminine "based on my mood or the weather or the activities I have on my calendar". His wife and children accept his transgenderism, and his two-year-old grandchild even called him 'grandma/grandpa' on one occasion. But because he fears that coming-out of the closet would cause him to be fired from a job he loves, living such a gender blending life is not an option for him. Sharon-Ann's gender versatility began when he was a boy. His Junior League mother wanted a baby daughter and dressed him in little girl's outfits as a child, but when he began wearing her clothes on his own, she ridiculed him and called him a sissy. At the age of six or seven his father became the dominant presence in his life and encouraged his more masculine side, particularly a love of competitive sports, both as player and fan, that continues today.

In his boyhood and teenage years Sharon-Ann's mother, who had visions of him becoming "another Heifetz" allowed him to wear her clothing only when practicing the violin. ("I'd be sitting in my room in her slip, high heels and pearl choker practicing scales for hours on end, and she'd come into my room for something and actually pretend not to notice). The result was that he became an excellent violinist and a compulsive cross-dresser. In college and law school, where he dated women in public and cross-dressed in private, the 'mixed messages' about his own identity troubled him deeply. But after surviving boot camp and basic training on his way to becoming a Marine Corps lawyer, he "didn't feel I had to apologise to anyone for being less than a man."

"The basic dynamic in my life is balancing both aspects of myself," Sharon-Ann explains, "I think of it as talking two different languages, since language and gender, after all, are the two skills society trains us to perform practically from birth."

Susan Stryker has an even more radical vision of the social role of transsexuals in the larger world, which came out in the debate over the wording of a gender bill of rights that would be presented to the United Nations. She likened those of us who stay in the same gender all our lives to people who never leave their hometown, whereas she and other transsexuals are much more intrepid travellers. She sees her own gender transition, as "a magical journey to transform the constructed realities of nature and society."

Far-fetched as they may be, such transgender visions are more realistic than they would have been only a decade or two ago. Historically, gender identity is a constantly shifting terrain, and there seems little doubt that we are entering a transformative period. It's hard to know where these changes will end up or precisely what caused them. Gender is one of those crucial focal points that act upon - and are acted upon by - all aspects of a society, even contradictory ones.

In some cultures, such as pre-revolutionary France, where women in the court temporarily gained considerable power, a certain freedom of gender identity was encouraged simply because it did not have to be accompanied by a loss of status. (The Chevalier D'Eon, an eighteenth century French diplomat and spy who lived most of his life as a woman, became so celebrated that 'eonism' was an early term for transsexualism.) In other cultures, such as those Native American and Middle Eastern tribal societies where the masculine warrior ideal is taken to an extreme, transgenderism seems to serve as a socially sanctioned escape valve for people who don't want to compete.

By and large, any loosening of social constraints encourages a corresponding freedom of gender expression - think of the late Roman Empire or the Weimar Republic. The reason why gender blurring in the late twentieth century may be more pervasive and longer lasting is that it seems to be part of a worldwide paradigm shift of both the body and the body-politic. The old bipolar Cold War standoff has been replaced by a world where there are many centres of political, economic and military power. The new communications and information technologies pull signals out of an omni-dimensional cyberspace. A growing ecological consciousness envisions humankind as part of a Great Chain of Being that is circular rather than hierarchical, placing more emphasis on inter-dependence than on an evolutionary ascent from 'bottom' to 'top'. Still closer to home, the ideal of the old bipolar mom-and-pop family is being replaced by looser knit networks of kinship and affection.

So it should come as no surprise that even something most of us think of as immutably written in the genes have become more a matter of individual expression than ever before. In gender, fashion - not biology - may be our destiny.

In a world freer from binary oppositions, you could choose to live your life within fairly conventional gender limits, as most of us do, or you could, as Sharon-Ann dreamed of doing, change your gender identity daily. You could set out from one fixed gender polarity and travel to the other, as the majority of transsexuals do, or you could take off for gender parts unknown with Susan Stryker.

Such thoughts occasioned by the Houston conference brought to mind an experience in the early 1970s when I was invited to a party given for the writer Jan Morris. It was not long after she had undergone male-to-female sex reassignment surgery. Most of the other guests had been personally acquainted with James Morris, who had roamed the breadth and heights of the world reporting on far-flung wars and accompanying Sir Edmund Hillary on his conquest of Mount Everest. They seemed frightened and even repulsed by what he had become - a proper, dowdy, middle-aged Englishwoman who looked as though a trip to the local tearoom was about all the adventure she could handle.

She stood alone in her tweed skirt and sensible shoes amid a swirl of literary lights, and so I, untroubled by before and after comparisons, had a chance to talk to her at some length. It didn't surprise me to learn that, far from being a retreat into conventionality, she saw her gender switch as the greatest adventure of her life. But I was struck even then, and much more so upon distant reflection, that she spoke wistfully and somewhat prophetically about a time in the future when "the slow overlapping of the genders" as she put it, when she wrote up her experiences a few years later in *Conundrum*, would make the kind of bloody violation she had endured in a Moroccan clinic unnecessary.

In the day-to-day world most transsexuals, like the rest of us, have less cosmic thoughts on their minds and try to snatch small victories from the ever threatening jaws of defeat. Before I left Houston Laura Skaer told me about an incident that had happened to her late the night before. She had wandered into a nearly empty hotel bar looking for friends and had struck up a conversation with a travelling businessman. For a couple of hours they talked about their lives with the kind of freedom strangers who will never meet again often feel. Towards closing time the man told Laura she was the most empathetic woman he had ever met, and asked what she was doing in Houston.

"When I told him that I was a transsexual attending a gender law conference he was astonished", Laura said. "But after recovering somewhat he asked me politely if he could see me up to my room. At the door he asked if he could kiss me good night. The moment seemed right, and I nodded. Then I told him he had made me feel like complete woman for the first time in my life. "Laura, you don't need me to feel like a woman," he said, and left. "It was such a wonderful moment for me."

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## Interview with Jill Hooley

### Tutor in Sociology at Sydney University & Transgender Activist

by the Polare Editor

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So would you say in coalition politics, that it is really a "coalition" - is everyone, including transgender folk included there?

**J**ill Hooley, is a tutor in Sociology at Sydney University. She recently attended the "Re:Activate" Conference (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Activisms) in November 1997, where she presented a paper. I asked her about her involvement in coalition politics with members of these communities.

*I feel we need to make coalitions with all sorts of groups that suffer disadvantage, especially in a conservative political climate.*

**Editor:** How did you become involved in coalition politics Jill, what drew you to be involved in gay and lesbian issues?

**Jill Hooley:** I felt that we - trannys - had been excluded from involvement with other sexual minorities since the time of the first Mardi Gras. In my opinion, a kind of sexual fundamentalism within the gay and lesbian communities became

entrenched in the late 1970s. There was also as, Gayle Rubin said, a sexual hierarchy that put trannys at the bottom of the pile with sex workers and paedophiles.

**Editor:** Sexual fundamentalism?

**Jill Hooley:** By this I mean, a rigid belief that there are only two sexes and genders and that people don't shift into other categories. For instance, lesbians excluded trannys from the Lesbian Space Project in 1994, on the grounds that we weren't "born women". I would argue along with feminist Simone de Beauvoir, that women aren't "born" but made.

**Editor:** Surgically made is that what you mean?

**Jill Hooley:** No. I'm suggesting that anyone's gender identity is constructed over time; that it's a process. I'm not saying that people's bodies aren't different. For instance, that some people need to visit a gynaecologist and some don't. I'm saying we're not defined by reproduction.

But it seemed to me that we have become thoroughly defined by our sex. Sex came to be seen to be the truth of identity in both the heterosexual and homosexual world.

**Editor:** "Sex" as in, "male" or "female", or "sex" as in intercourse ...? Which sex?

**Jill Hooley:** Well, you're right to suggest it has multiple and ambiguous meanings. I mean the idea that "sex" expresses the innermost truth of ourselves. That you have a "true nature" as male or female. It seemed that sex defined WHO you were, just as much in the gay community as the straight.

**Editor:** Hang on "sex" DOES define your SEX as what (you are) and sex with WHO.

**Jill Hooley:** Yes, but sex doesn't just come in twos; as we know from research done by people like Lee Brown, that there are likely to be at least five sexes and god knows how many genders. But Craig, the idea persists that there are essential "male" and "female" natures that are unchanging and universal. You see, feminists used the idea of gender to contest the notion that women were inherently passive, nurturing, dependant, emotional or the "peacemakers" of society. Some feminists also promoted the idea of an essential women's nature.

**Editor:** Oh! You mean the idea of gender as a behaviour that is a result of someone's sex?

Like when the schoolboy Christos Tsoikas was told to "walk like a man" as if there was a proper way that men walked. As if it was inherent ...

**Jill Hooley:** Sure ... the case you're talking about suggests to me that gays and lesbians also suffer discrimination on the basis of

gender behaviour, not just sexuality. My point is that we live in a culture that has created a rigid model of two genders, based on the falsehood that there are two sexes with inherently masculine or feminine behaviour. Clearly human identity is more mixed and varied than this model provides for. Studies done in lots of other cultures, and across time, show that gender behaviour varies enormously. The native North American cultures had at least another two categories.

**Editor:** So, what if we had a model of five genders - what, if anything, changes?

**Jill Hooley:** My point is that the two gender model is based on two opposing "natures" - which is deeply restrictive of who we might become and is also a hierarchy.

**Editor:** Hierarchy as in one's better than the other?

**Jill Hooley:** Yes, as in superior and inferior. I feel that transgender politics should be about creating and allowing choices rather than limiting who we are. I feel we have a lot of personal power if we don't hide who we are nor our histories. As people, I think we have a rich and interesting mixture that is worth acknowledging.

**Editor:** Jill - so what are you saying? That it's not important to pass?

**Jill Hooley:** That's an individual choice. Crafting any gender position requires exclusions. The more rigid your exclusion of parts of yourself, the more you are haunted by a ghost.

**Editor:** I don't follow you - a ghost?

**Jill Hooley:** The logic of our culture tells us that we can only occupy one position (man) to the exclusion of another (woman). It's really about the repression of the other within yourself. I want to play, I don't want to be put into a box.

**Editor:** But, isn't "tranny" a box?

**Jill Hooley:** Craig, it's very difficult to avoid categorisation. And we need it to make claims for legal and political rights.

**Editor:** You need it. So, what does "tranny" mean to you?

**Jill Hooley:** I think "tranny" is best seen very broadly; I don't want to define it, but allow multiple definitions. I think any category is a mistake because identity always exceeds the category that describes the person. The community is very diverse - ethnically, sexually and otherwise. Three quarters of trannys haven't had surgery. By emphasising diversity we include everyone.

**Editor:** So would you say in coalition politics, that it is really a "coalition" - is everyone, including transgender folk included there?

**Jill Hooley:** It's improved immensely. People in the Gay and Lesbian Research Studies Centre at Sydney University proved to be open to new perspectives about sexuality. I asked Jude Irwin if she would include us along with gays and lesbians in the 1996 Health in Difference Conference. She was quite happy to do this. This is the first time we have been welcomed and included here. Gay and Lesbian attendees were very impressed with papers given by trannys at this conference and at Re:Activate recently.

**Editor:** So, what do you think transgender folk may have in common with lesbians, gays and bisexuals?

**Jill Hooley:** From research I've seen, and research that I've done about trannys suggests that verbal, physical, and emotional discrimination levels are similar. And now, I feel that we all challenge established ideas about sex, gender and sexuality. I feel we need to make coalitions with all sorts of groups that suffer disadvantage, especially in a conservative political climate. This was the feeling too that came out of the last two conferences. There are tensions and differences among groups at these conferences but it seems our similarities are much greater than our differences. You could say the same thing about sex and gender.

**Editor:** Lastly, Jill, what are you working on currently - what do you think needs challenging the most?

**Jill Hooley:** Well, a lot of people still think that trannys are sick and mad; I see it that it is this idea that most needs challenging.

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# Love's Lost and Found

## Carol went off with her friend and Laura went off with her future!

by Laura

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**I**t was ten years ago that I first met Carol. Of course, she wasn't Carol back then, and neither was I Laura. It's funny the twists and turns my life takes sometimes. Travel 400km to a new town and job and become friends with another transsexual, only neither of you lets on about it to the other! But that's what happened. I'd admired Carol's work from afar (she did comix and fanzines, so did I) and so when I moved to the same town, I introduced myself.

***We had the biggest argument ever, with Carol coming-out as being lesbian and me coming-out to being a woman.***

We became good friends and when he came-out to being a she, I wasn't a bit surprised. If only I'd admitted the same feelings myself at that time, life would be different now. But I didn't, I was still wrestling with my inner demons, still denying an essential part of my personality. But I supported Carol 100% in what she was doing, encouraged her to find herself as the new woman she was.

And then I left that town. I had a new job back in the big city where I'd lived for most of my life, and moved in to live with my then girlfriend Lee. And that was the big mistake. Up until that time, we'd barely seen anything of each other, travelling between houses at the opposite ends of a major highway, cities apart. I'd been overwhelmed by having a new job, a new home, and a girlfriend all at once. It was all "proof" that I was okay, that I didn't have to face myself.

And of course, it didn't last.

At the ending of one relationship, I entered another. Carol was now living in the big city too, and making a go of things the best way she could. I felt close to her and we shared a number of interests, and I fell in love with her. I understood her needs better than she knew. And yet, she too "validated" me as an okay guy. I must be okay if I have a girlfriend, right? Wrong.

But I loved her, and supporting her filled up the immense hole I felt to be within my soul. I didn't have to examine my feelings too closely if I looked to her.

And I loved her.

When the time came, I helped to finance her operation. We travelled to Emerald City and she went under the knife of the man himself, and then we returned back to where we'd come from. And that's when the bottom started to fall out from under us. No one had told us about the complications and post-operative problems. And the local medical staff, much as they tried, just didn't seem up to it. The hospitals played games with her, denying bed space and thus preventing surgical correction.

And I stood by her as much as I could, but it just didn't seem enough.

She lost her faith, and almost lost her mind, with all the stress and pain that she underwent; and much as I tried to stand by her, it wasn't enough. I wrestled with her over kitchen knives when she was suicidal, visited her in psych wards and took her to films when things got too much. But it wasn't enough.

One way or another she was changing and I was changing too. In a way, the final coffin in the relationship was her meeting an old friend. She knew where Carol was at, because she'd been there herself, and I hadn't even started. As the months moved on, they grew closer and I relied on her for help and support. That is until things could no longer go on that way without cracking entirely asunder. And they did.

We had the biggest argument ever, with Carol coming-out as being lesbian and me coming-out to being a woman. And that was the end of the relationship. She went off with the friend, (now a lover) and I went off with my future. And it's been a long three years of being me, full of surprises and twists that wouldn't turn up in even the silliest story. But it all happened and it's me.

So if this is a love story, who's it about? Is it about Carol, and how much I loved her? Maybe, but maybe it's really about me, and something that I learned along the way. That in order to love and be loved by anyone else, I have to love myself. And that's something I didn't do when I was with either girlfriend - love myself.

Maybe, just maybe, I'm starting to now. Not an intellectual idea about who I am, but an honest self-appreciation. And all those years gone when I wasn't me (or so it seemed), when I pretended to be someone else, what then? I hid, hiding the core of my being in a safe spot within me. Waiting until the time was right, waiting until I had the courage to face myself. And that time did come, and the present is the result.

And now there seem to be other loves in my life, and none of them human.

I love being a visual arts student. I find studying at university challenging and rewarding. In the process of my first year at university, I seem to have come-out about myself in my artwork and other ways. And the honesty and creative use of that is appreciated. And I love creating in an artistic fashion. Next year when I follow on with Fibre Art and Video, I know that I'll enjoy it and do well. I love my car. I only bought it last February, and I love the mobility it gives me. I find that travel helps heal me - I travel to gatherings, festivals and other events; I visit friends; and as a tarot reader I travel to markets. I've given the car a name - The Kushti Rauni - which is gypsy for "good lady" and she's true to this. The rear windows have copies of tarot cards stuck to them. She has two bumper' stickers: Magic Happens and There is no alternative to being yourself. I find both to be true for me.

Most recently I've come to love a new pet dog. His name is Pegasus, he's a white Labrador cross and as I write a mere seven weeks old. He's still not house broken, but even with cleaning up all the poops and pees, with the effort of training and caring for him, I love him dearly. When he gets older, I'll train Pegasus to travel in the Rauni with me. We'll have adventures together.

And finally, by the time you read this, I'll be in a new house. I never thought I'd own my own house, but here I am ready to settle in the Hunter Valley, courtesy of part of my rollover fund (the rest is reserved for the operation), and a small mortgage. Initially I was spurred on to buy a home because Austudy wouldn't pay me. But as time went on I realised that I really needed to settle down. I looked at a lot of houses, but only this one said "live here" and "buy me".

It'll be good for Pegasus too, in a semi-rural area and with a huge backyard he can play in. I can't explain how I know, but I know that there's going to be a lot of love for me in the new house. It'll be a home, and that's something I haven't had for a while. I'll make it one, with my own efforts and heart.

Carol and her lover visited a few weeks back. They were on a tour of the eastern states while looking for a new place to live. It was good to see them again as old friends. Somehow along the way I'd let go of her, and I only realised this when they came to visit. So it goes.

I don't think I'll be having any human loves for a while and the funny thing is that right now I don't miss them. There's too many good things going on in my life for me to worry about whether or not I have a human companion.

And maybe all these things I've mentioned, really only reflect a new love I have for myself, because they reflect me satisfying my own needs. Life's funny like that, isn't it? Kushti Bok (good fortune).

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