

# Polare Edition 38

Published: February 2001 Last Update: June 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

## Manager's Report

by Elizabeth Riley, Gender Centre Manager

Just a brief report from me for this edition since at the time of writing I am about to head off for four weeks holiday.

Firstly I would like to belatedly wish everyone prosperous, health and fulfilling new year.

### Centre Closure

The Gender Centre is undergoing a full organisational review and in order to facilitate this process we will be closing down our normal services for one week from Monday 5th February to Friday 9th February. Only the residential needs of the service will continue during this period.

We apologise for the closure but are confident that when we reopen on Monday 12th February, we will be better able to provide an efficient and effective service to members of the community. Anyone seeking counselling during this time should ring LifeLine on 13 11 14.

The Gender Centre after-hours telephone support line number 9233 6222 will also be terminated from mid-January. We have retained the service as long as possible but the four dedicated personnel who support the line have reported only limited access in recent months. We feel it is unfair to expect the volunteers to continue to give up their free time.

I would personally like to express our appreciation to all involved over the last three years for your selfless commitment and dedication to this service and the community.

### Forum Questionnaire

In November, Jack, our Social & Support Worker, ran a community forum at which community participants were invited to put forward ideas on the types of programs they would like to see run at the Gender Centre.

Thirty people turned up, to the forum with a range of suggestions. As a follow-up to the forum, we are now including a brief questionnaire in this edition to solicit wider community input into those programs.

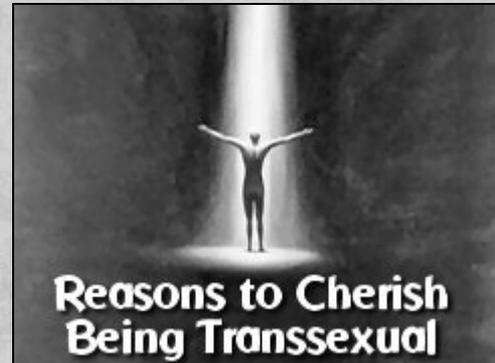
I would encourage every recipient of *Polare* to take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it to Jack.

This way we can ensure that our programs and activities are relevant in meeting the needs and desires of community members.

Once again on behalf of the staff and the Management Committee I would like to wish everyone the very best for 2001.

## News in Brief

## Feature Articles



Because being transsexual is often so hurtful, it is easy to come to the conclusion that the whole thing is utterly a curse.

### Reasons to Cherish being Transsexual

To be transsexual is not easy, it is not a birth that could be envied, but neither is it a damnation. We are intelligent, creative, determined and courageous, we are given awareness that others never experience and we need to grasp these gifts born of our sufferings.

### A Girl Called Adam

Zoe catches sight of herself in a window and just stops and stares at the smiling 19 year-old girl she's become. "Is that really me" she asks. And when she realise it is, she wants to shout for joy. Perhaps you've fantasized about changing your image? This is Zoe's story.

### More Transsexuals Start New Life, Keep Old Job

Until recently, people were likely to quit jobs and disappear, preferring to start a new life with a new identity and employer rather than tell co-workers of an impending transition. But more employers and co-workers are learning how to deal with a colleague's transition.

### One Wife's Perspective on Cross Dressing

When Joan's husband told her about his cross-dressing there was little information around. She tried to bury her head hoping it would go away, but she realised she married a most sensitive men, and without that sensitivity and understanding, we wouldn't love him so much.

### How to get your Hands on a Transman

So you see a cute guy and ask your friends who he is, they whisper that he was once a woman, yet the more you look at him, the more interested you are. How do you approach someone like him and what if you actually do get him interested? What do you do with him then?

### Tribute to Louise Hordern

Moving tribute to courageous, inspirational, and pioneering

## From the pages of Polare Number Thirty-Eight

---

### Compensation for Trans Doctor

**United Kingdom:** A transsexual Harley Street Doctor must wait to find out how much compensation she will get after winning a sex discrimination case. The U.K. Council of Psychotherapy and the national school of Hypnosis and Psychotherapy blocked Dr. Tracie O'Keefe's accreditation on learning she was born a man. She says she is almost bankrupt and wants £400,000 compensation but now faces a wait of several weeks after a tribunal said it did not want to make a hasty decision.

### Holland Allows "Gay" Marriage

**Holland:** The Dutch Senate passed one of the world's most liberal laws on homosexual rights last night, legalising same-sex marriages. and giving same-sex couples the right to adopt children. To avoid legal complications with other countries, same-sex couples will only be allowed to adopt Dutch children.

### U.K. Group Wants to Train Businesses

**United Kingdom:** Britain's Brighton-based Gender Trust, a support group for transsexuals is seeking £75,000 for a three-year project to provide training workshops for employers and health care providers, Newsquest reported. The 450 member group has received a growing number of requests since employment discrimination against transsexuals was prohibited by law last year.

### Trans-Activist's Quiet Persistence Rewarded

**Hobart, Tasmania:** Transgender Activist, Roslyn Houston, was honoured with a Tasmanian Award for Humanitarian Activities at a 4th December ceremony in Hobart Town Hall with dignitaries including Lord Mayor, Rob Valentine, in attendance. The awards were presented by the Human Rights Week organising committee, whose convenor, Robert Henderson, said in his citation that "Ros has taken the lead in educating the Police Service on transgender issues, and has been instrumental in advocating against Tasmania's archaic cross-dressing laws (repealed last month). Ros is an example to all Tasmanians of how someone with a good heart and a courageous spirit can work with quiet persistence to successfully break down barriers, overcome stereotypes and promote harmony in our island community. In accepting the award, Houston said "Transgender and transsexual people experience discrimination and violence far too often and while it is only a tiny minority who perpetrate this abuse, it is made possible by the prejudices, ignorance and apathy of the majority. Awards like this will help to break down this prejudice, ignorance and apathy.

### Beyer Tells of Life on the Street

**New Zealand:** Labour M.P., Georgina Beyer, has given a personal account of selling her body during debate on the Prostitution Reform Bill. Parliament voted last night to send Labour M.P. Tim Barnett's Private Members' Bill to a select committee. The Bill aims to decriminalise prostitution and was supported by a majority of M.P.s. Transsexual Labour M.P. Georgina Beyer has told Parliament the Bill will eliminate the need for "pimps". She said she suffered financially when she was forced to give part of her earnings to a pimp when she was in the business about 20 years ago.

### New Zealand Ombudsman Rules For Sex Change

**New Zealand:** After a three and a half year battle, Ms. Proctor has won the right to have a publicly financed sex-change operation after Chief Ombudsman, Sir Brian Elwood, determined eleven days ago that she had been unfairly denied it in 1997. She was scheduled to have the surgery at Waikato Hospital in 1997, but less than a week before the operation Midland Health, the now defunct regional health authority, decided against paying for it. "I was devastated. I had done everything right." she says. "I had met the requirements. They said 'Yes', and then changed their minds and implemented [the change of policy] retrospectively." She complained to Sir Brian, who launched an inquiry into whether she had been treated fairly. On 16th November this year, he recommended that the health funding authority arrange and pay for psychiatric assessment, and if approval was given, to pay for surgery.

### Judges to Steer Clear of Sexual Stereotypes

**United Kingdom:** Judges are told to avoid "homespun" theories of homosexuality, keep courts clear of bigotry and recognise alternative family models in a new guide published yesterday. The landmark *Equal Treatment Bench Book* which will go to all 4,000 full-time judges and tribunal chairmen in England and Wales is aimed at ensuring equal treatment in the courts. On dealing with homosexuals, judges are reminded that being gay does not predispose a person to paedophilia; AIDS or H.I.V. positive does not necessarily indicate homosexual behaviour and cross-dressing is "an inescapable emotional need" and not a fetish.

contributor to the transgender community, Louise Hordern. Louise was involved in the Seahorse Club of Victoria, local church groups, was interviewed on radio and author of *Cross-Dressing: Questions and Answers*

### Book Review: Gluck

Tracie wasn't previously aware of this 19th century artist's work, but confesses to having been converted to admiring the work of Gluck, born Hanna Gluckstein in 1895 yet dressed as a man sporting an Eton crop and male clothes throughout the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

### Male, Female, Other

This is the tale of two children, born with the outward appearance of girls, but lacking the inner passageways of either sex. Both were traumatized by their physical abnormality and by society's response to it. But only one of them found comfort in their role as a girl.

## Settlement Received For Tyra Hunter

**United States:** Margie Hunter's Attorney, Rick Silber, confirms that payment has been received in the settlement of Mrs. Hunter's lawsuit against the District of Columbia for discrimination and medical malpractice in the 1995 death of Tyra Hunter. You will recall that \$1.75 million settlement was announced on 10th August. After five long years, the case is now settled and closed.

---

**The Gender Centre advise that this edition of Polare is not current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.**

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# Reasons to Cherish Being Transsexual

Be a unicorn with me and cherish it too

by Jennifer Dianne Reitz

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



We are given awareness that others would never experience.

**B**ecause being transsexual is often so hurtful, so filled with sadness and longing, with shame and loss and difficulty, it is easy to come to the conclusion that the whole thing is utterly a curse, perhaps inflicted by arcane and evil ancient gods.

Oh, probably.

But there is an upside too. Most human lives are utterly mundane, devoid of any real uniqueness. The average person somnambulates through an existence devoted to filling the roles expected of them.

But to be a transsexual is a magical, wondrous thing.

Consider! We are given many gifts in compensation for the terrible loss of our childhood as ourselves, and for the pain we endure.

We are by some as yet unknown mechanism statistically far more intelligent, as a class, than perhaps any other kind of people. We are almost universally more creative, and we

often possess incredible levels of courage and self-determination, demonstrated by our very survival and ultimate attainment of our goals. We are rare as miracles, and in our own way as magical, or so has been the belief of all ancient cultures on the earth.

We are given awareness that others would never experience. Understanding of gender, of the human condition, of society and the roles and hidden rules unquestioned within it. We are given a window into the lives of both sexes, and cannot help but be, to some degree, beyond either.

From this, we have a rare opportunity: to choose our own life, outside pre-determined and unquestioned definition or role. We can do new things, original things, only because our experience is so unique.

We get to be true shape shifters, and experience the sheer wonder of melty-wax flesh and a real rebirth into the world. Our brains and bodies gain benefit from having been bathed in and altered by the hormones of both sexes.

We appear to retain our visible youthfulness where others wrinkle, and for years longer. We possess neural advantages from both sexes, such as the language advantages of the feminised brain, and the spatial abilities of the masculinised brain.

We are shocked into waking up, if we allow it, to a life we create for ourselves ... we are not automatically doomed to sleepwalk through life.

After our transformations, after the full-moon lycanthropic miracle that the modern age affords us, we can live lives of success and love, and genuine special-ness, if we choose. If we can get past our upbringing, past the programming, the bigotry, the messages of disgust from the culture around us, if we can stand as ourselves in freedom, then our special gifts grant us a heritage of wondrous power.

We have a proud and marvellous history. In ancient days we were magic incarnate. We were *Nadles*, *Winkte*, Two-Souls, Shamans and Healers and Magical beings to our communities. We possessed the ability to give the blessings of the gods and spirits, and were prized as companions, lovers, and teachers.

We were the prize gift of ancient tribes, entertainers, designers and dreamers. Sometimes we were the, somewhat reluctant, rulers of empires, and the consorts of emperors. We were champions and warriors too, who were feared for our unique gifts turned to inevitable victory.

Know that it is only in recent centuries, with the rise of the single minded, monolithic and monotheistic desert religions, filled with harsh single gods and twisted, narrow morals, that our kind have become reviled, the objects of scorn. Once, we were the kin of the gods.

***When I look around me at the mundane lives, there are times I think that maybe I am glad I was born transsexual, for I would never have been what I have become without that curse.***

To be transsexual is not easy, and it is not a birth that could be envied, but neither is it a damnation. It was once considered a rare wonder, if a mixed one; a faery gift that cuts as it blesses. And in the modern age, of hormones and surgery, we are the first generations of our kind to finally know the joy of complete transformation, of truly gaining our rightful bodies. No other transsexuals in history have been so fortunate.

I say that we are unicorns, rare and wondrous, with still a touch of ancient magic and the kinship of the gods. Though it is agony, beyond the fire we have the opportunity to become alchemic gold.

We have much to add to the world, and to give ourselves and those who love us.

We have always been, we are still the prize of the tribe, for only the world around us has changed, the desert harshness branding us vile. We are still the same.

Our compensations are real, and our lives are special; we have but to grasp the gifts born of our sufferings.

When I look around me at the mundane lives, there are times I think that maybe I am glad I was born transsexual, for I would never have been what I have become without that curse. I cannot help but be grateful for my uniqueness, so I am bought to a strange revelation: Deep down I cherish having been born a transsexual.

Be a unicorn with me, and cherish it too.

## Jennifer Diane Reitz

**Edited from Wikipedia:**  Jennifer Diane Reitz was born in 1959 in Baker, Oregon U.S.A. is an American writer, web comic author, and computer programmer, known for creating web comics such as *Unicorn Jelly*, *Pastel Defender Heliotrope* and *To Save Her*, and computer games such as *Boppin*. She is also the proprietor of *Transsexuality*, a website with general information on transsexualism and the home of the *COGIATI* gender identity test.



Jennifer is also a transsexual woman who underwent sex reassignment surgery in 1982. Since her transition, she has lived in a polyamorous relationship with three spouses. She currently lives in Olympia, Washington U.S.A. and considers herself agnostic. She identifies as bisexual, leaning toward lesbian.

Jennifer created the *COGIATI* (Combined Gender Identity And Transsexuality Inventory), a prototype test for people who think they might qualify as pre-op., pre-transitional male-to-female transsexuals, but feel uncertain. She claims on her *Transsexuality* website that some medical professionals have adopted her prototype test instead of developing a better version, and she expresses mixed feelings about this. She cautions that the *COGIATI* has many flaws and is not a reliable test for diagnosing transsexualism or gender identity disorder. Her insistence that the *COGIATI* is unfinished and not to be taken seriously and its emphasis on stereotypical gender roles has sparked controversy as some people who have taken the test in the process of exploring their gender identity have later said that the test's results skewed their understanding of themselves.

Learn more about Jennifer Diane Reitz at the [Transsexuality](#)  website.

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# A Girl Called Adam

## The Time Has Come to Tell the World

by Zoe

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



"I'm really female," I said out loud. "I'm really a girl" ...

**H**ave you ever had a secret so embarrassing you can't imagine telling anybody, ever? Nineteen-year-old Zoe from the U.K., has. But now she reckons the time has come to tell the world. Every now and then, when I'm walking down the street, I catch sight of myself in a window and I just stop and stare at the smiling nineteen-year-old girl I've become. "Is that really me?" I ask. And, when I realise it is, I want to shout for joy.

*... I catch sight of myself in a window and I just stop and stare at the smiling nineteen-year-old girl I've become.*

I didn't used to look like this. My hair was different. So were my clothes. In fact, I even used to have a different name.

Perhaps you've fantasized about changing your image? Maybe that will help you to understand. But I didn't just change my image - I changed my whole

identity.

The fact is, my name used to be Adam and I used to be a boy.

## The Outsider

I always knew I was different. When my friends wanted to play with train sets, I wanted to do ballet. When they ran around shouting, I'd be sitting quietly. I couldn't relate to them and they didn't want anything to do with me. "Adam's such a girl", they'd say. Funny that!

When I was about fourteen, I started to grow hair all over my body. But instead of accepting puberty as natural, I felt disgusted by it and shaved it all off.

"It just doesn't feel right," I told myself.

I longed to talk to someone about my feelings, but my dad had left home, and although I was close to my mum, I couldn't imagine sitting down and saying, "Mum, er, I think I've got the wrong body."

In the end, all I managed was, "If I'd been born a girl, what would you have called me?"

"Zoe," she said. "It was going to be Zoe." How I wished it had been.

There was nobody at school to confide in either. The boys thought I was weird and the girls called me a poof. Then the bullying started. I was getting beaten-up most days, and I was so lonely I'd skive off school and spend hours on my bed, staring at the ceiling.

"What's wrong with me?" I'd cry.

"Why can't I be like everyone else?" But the ceiling didn't have any answers. No one did.

## Dressing-Up

My mum did her best to help. She arranged for me to be taught at home and begged me to confide in her. But I didn't know what to say.

Then one day I went out and bought some girls' clothes. It was just a plain top and a skirt from the sales but, as I tried them on and looked at myself in the mirror, a strange feeling came over me. I didn't look much like a girl with my short hair and boy's body. But for the first time in my life, I felt completely comfortable.

I wanted to shout out loud, "This is me!". And, at last, I knew the truth. I had got the wrong body. Inside this boy casing, I was really a girl.

## Living a Lie

Deep down, I think I'd always known. But because I didn't know anything about sex changes - or transsexualism, as it's called - I was even more confused and scared. I assumed I must be the only person like this in the whole world. "It's no good," I told myself. "I'll just have to go on pretending I'm a boy."

Things cheered up when I left school and started college 'cause I met some new friends who were Goths. They all wore make-up even the boys! I thought they were amazing, and at last I didn't feel so out of place in the world.

I could grow my hair long, wear lipstick and dress in sarongs without my friends thinking I was strange.

But then one day, I was in a shop when someone pushed past me and said, "Excuse me, Miss." Miss! I shook my head. He'd called me "Miss"! I'd been mistaken for a girl!

I stood there for ages with an enormous grin on my face. And in that moment, I realised. Being a Goth wasn't enough for me anymore. I didn't just want to look like a girl - I wanted to be one.

After that I got really depressed and cried whenever I saw stubble appear on my face. But eventually I decided to do something positive. I didn't know if anything could be done to fix my body but I had to try. I couldn't go on as I was.

I started searching on the Internet and that's when I found the word transsexual. This was someone who'd been born the wrong gender. Someone who felt like they were in the wrong body. I slammed my hand down on my mouse mat. "That's me," I cried. It was good to finally have a name for it.

Even better was my discovery that there were lots of other people who felt the same as I did. Suddenly, I didn't feel so alone. I found out there were operations and hormone treatments I could have to turn me into a girl. I also read about people who'd been through the process and now felt truly comfortable with themselves. Afterwards, I burst into tears.

"I'm really female," I said out loud. "I'm really a girl. A girl called Zoe." Now I just had to work out how to become her.

First, I had to tell someone how I felt. I had an e-mail friendship with a guy called Wolf I'd met on the Internet, so I decided to tell him first, 'cause we weren't face to face.

"If you're sure it's what you want then you should just go for it", he wrote back. Because he wasn't shocked, I found the confidence to confide in my friends Mike and Alex. "We don't understand it, but if it'll make you happy then it's fine", they said.

My best friend Michelle was the same. "Cool," she said, "So that's why we get on so well!".

But there was still one hurdle ahead of me before I could seriously consider having a sex change ... Mum!

## Telling Mum

It took ages to pluck up the courage to tell her and when I did, she wouldn't take me seriously. "Oh, you don't really mean it," she said dismissively.

"Yes I do, Mum".

"No, you don't." And then I gave up.

Finally on New Year's Eve 1999, I started crying and couldn't stop. "Just tell me what's wrong," Mum kept saying.

"I want to change sex, Mum," I said. "I really do. I want to be a girl called Zoe. Please just accept that."

She just went mad, shouting: "You can't be serious, it's totally stupid," and threatened to throw me out of the house. We didn't speak for ages until one day she came in and put something in my hand.

"What's this?" I said.

"A key ring," she replied.

I turned it over, and my chest tightened. There was a name on it: Zoe.

"It's for you," Mum said.

## The First Step

Once Mum was okay with everything, I went to my G.P. and asked to be referred for treatment on the N.H.S. He was really understanding but said the waiting lists were really long and it could take years. I couldn't wait, so I went private, and saw a psychiatrist.

On my second visit, I was put on a course of female hormones. I've been taking them for three and a half months now. My hair is thicker, my skin is softer, and people tell me my figure's much more feminine.

Now I'm saving up for the £9,000 for breast implants and the sex change operation. There's also the cost of laser treatment to stop my stubble growing and elocution lessons to help me sound more like a girl. It'll be about two years before I can afford it all but things are

really looking up.

I have a good job with an Internet company and my workmates are great about the new me. I'll be the only girl in the office but they're putting in a ladies loo especially for me. I've also met Nicky through an Internet group - a girl who, like me, was born a boy. As we're taking the same hormones, we can compare notes on the way our bodies are changing. It's great to be close to someone who really understands.

I know after the operations there'll be things I'll never be able to do, such as have children, but it's a small price to pay for finally being able to look in the mirror and feel happy about the face I see smiling back.

My story probably sounds strange, but it's really about something most teenagers go through - finding out who you are and getting your friends and family to accept that.

That's where I am now. I'm Zoe. And that makes me feel great.

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

## More Transsexuals Start New Life - Keep Old Job

### Positive Trends as Employers and Co-Workers' Knowledge Improves

by Sarah Schafer, Washington Post, U.S.A.

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



... telling her boss about her coming sex change proved far easier than announcing it to anyone else.

**R**on Hoyman had something shocking to tell his boss. He was about to become Rhonda. For months, Hoyman, supervisor of vocational programs for Baltimore County schools, Md.

U.S.A. had changed clothes in his pickup truck each evening as he left work so that he could live his personal life as a woman. But now it was time to become Rhonda full-time, dressing as a woman at work as he prepared for the surgery that would transform him physically from male-to-female.

And it was time to tell his supervisor and co-workers that soon they would have a new colleague. "I am trying to make changes which impact my personal wellness as well as be a more productive worker," Hoyman wrote to his

supervisor in the summer of 1995, explaining that he was a classic transsexual - someone who felt he had been born the wrong sex.

"[If] I can learn to begin living life for myself as well as the benefit of others, could you accept Rhonda instead of Ron as someone you could work with?" he wrote. He signed it "Ron/Rhonda." The supervisor's response? First, shock. And then, "Why not?"

She immediately started discussing ways she and Hoyman could prepare other co-workers for the change. Until about five years ago, someone in Hoyman's situation likely would have quit his job and disappeared, preferring to start a new life with a new identity and employer rather than tell his boss that he would soon change his sex. But transsexuals - people who have undergone or are about to undergo sex change surgery - have gained a new measure of acceptance from employers, according to some mental health and workplace experts.

As a result, more transsexuals, their managers and co-workers are learning how to cope with a transformation that can be long, painful, emotional and unsettling. Roughly one in 30,000 men and one in 100,000 women undergo sexual reassignment surgery, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a handbook for psychiatrists.

About 1,000 people seek reassignment surgery each year, according to an estimate by the Transgender Education Association, a non-profit research organisation. At least half of all people who undergo sex change operations return to their jobs after the surgery, according to the association and mental health experts.

Not many years ago, almost none did. Transsexuals enjoy few legal protections when it comes to workplace discrimination, but that is gradually changing. Minnesota includes transsexuals in its human rights act. Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack plans to ask the state legislature to pass an anti-discrimination law covering transsexuals, according to a spokeswoman. And increasingly, local governments are incorporating transsexuals in their anti-discrimination policies. This year, Portland, Oregon; Boulder, Colorado; Madison, Wisconsin; and Atlanta all expanded their laws to bar discrimination against transsexuals. About thirty-five local jurisdictions have such laws, up from about eleven in 1996, according to the Human Rights Campaign, a gay and lesbian advocacy organisation in Washington.

At least three Fortune 500 companies - Xerox Corporation, Apple Computer Inc., and Lucent Technologies Inc. - cover transsexuals in their anti-discrimination policies. After changing their sex, transsexuals may be straight or gay, and so they do not necessarily qualify for protection under policies that prohibit discrimination against homosexuals. Experts trace the shift toward acceptance in part to the nation's tight labour market and the imperative to retain talented workers. In addition, advocates for gays and lesbians have been paving the way for transsexuals and other minority groups by broadening society's view toward those who go against sexual norms, these experts say.

The competition for talent is extraordinary, and that certainly has presented opportunities for a lot of folks," said Suellen Roth, vice-president of policy, diversity and retention at Avaya Communication, a spin off of Lucent Technologies. Both companies bar discrimination against transsexuals. To be sure, many transsexuals continue to face intense on-the-job prejudice and discrimination.

The American Civil Liberties Union has received an increasing number of such complaints, according to Jennifer Middleton, a staff

lawyer with the organisation's lesbian and gay rights project. But Middleton said the spike in cases reflects a positive change as well: "Today, people are more willing to challenge society to accept them." Because of that willingness, companies are learning - often one employee at a time - how to accommodate transsexuals in the workplace. And some transsexuals find that their co-workers may handle their transition more easily than their families do.

Janet, a computer systems administrator who was once a male, agreed to be interviewed but asked to be identified only by her first name because her teenage children are worried their friends might see this article. Janet said telling her boss about her coming sex change proved far easier than announcing it to anyone else. Janet said she was so nervous that her hands were trembling when, carrying a stack of papers explaining transsexualism, she went in to tell her boss.

She was prepared to be fired. Instead, her boss barely looked up from his desk when he heard the news, Janet recalled recently, sitting on a sofa in her Fort Belvoir apartment, dressed in a short, loosely fitted, flowered dress. "I was told it wasn't an issue," she said. Janet's boss, who had supervised transsexual employees in the past, asked how he could help her prepare colleagues for the change, asked her to use the unisex bathroom, and said he would call a meeting to explain her situation to the rest of the staff.

Switching sexual identities is a long process. The "standard of care" to which most doctors subscribe (only a handful of hospitals perform the actual surgery) stipulates that patients must undergo hormone therapy and live as a member of their desired sex for a year before gaining approval for sex change surgery. During that time, a patient may change the pitch of his or her voice and most male patients begin what will be a lifetime of painful electrolysis sessions to remove unwanted hair. Others get cosmetic surgery. Some say they endure rollercoaster emotions as their body adjusts to new hormones.

Co-workers actually seem to fret most over the bathroom question - which one to use before having the sex change surgery - said Michelle Martin, an American Airlines employee who had such an operation nearly ten years ago and who now consults with companies that have an employee making the change. Martin often recommends that managers ask the transsexual employee to use a particular bathroom all the time or that the company create one unisex restroom. Some co-workers prefer to know as little as possible about a transsexual's experience, but unanswered questions could drive many colleagues to distraction, especially that nagging question, "Why?"

Because of this, Martin said, transsexuals should tell their managers about mental-health practitioners who could come speak to workers. Or, she suggests, transsexuals should be candid with their co-workers. That's what Hoyman did. Hoyman, fifty-three, knew her peers and co-workers would be surprised because, as a carpenter by training, she had always projected a stereotypical guy image at work and in professional associations. "They wondered why I drove a pink pickup truck," she said, laughing, during a recent interview at the Sollers Point South-eastern Technical High School.

After sharing her plans with her supervisors, Hoyman began telling the principals and teachers at the twenty-five schools whose vocational education programs she helped to manage. Telling the large staff of Sollers Point in Dundalk, Md., U.S.A. was one of her toughest moments, she said. Principal H. Edward Parker suggested Hoyman address the faculty at an afternoon staff meeting. Parker, sixty-three, said he had to reconcile Hoyman's revelation with his limited worldview.

"I guess my first exposure to [transsexualism] was in the 1950s with Christine Jorgensen," Parker said, recalling the highly publicised first ever sex change operation that turned American ex-G.I. George Jorgensen into Christine. "As a teenager at the time, I was mortified." Parker said his views hadn't changed much by the time Hoyman revealed her new identity, although he learned to accept her. "This is an age of enlightenment," he said. "I changed a lot of things that I learned growing up. You have to learn to operate in those grey areas." Those areas included watching Hoyman swap make-up tips with the women on staff, "which was interesting to us," Parker said diplomatically. Those tips were valuable lessons in how to fit in at work.

A male-to-female transsexual is "essentially doing a crash course in learning about feminine styles," said Gregory Lehne, an assistant professor of medical psychology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine who has counselled transsexuals for nearly twenty years. "They might dress too young for their age, or overdress, trying to represent themselves as a femme fatale in the workplace rather than "Jane Doe goes to work". Hoyman worked with an image consultant to carefully choose make-up and clothing appropriate for work. "Every eye is on you, judging your walk, your appearance. You have to be willing to re-prove yourself", Hoyman said. At work, Hoyman's transition appears to have gone as smoothly as possible.

But some mental-health experts worry about potential unintended effects of the growing acceptance of transsexuals in the workplace. Transsexuals suffer from more psychological problems - including severe depression and suicidal tendencies - than other groups of people, said Cynthia Osborne, associate director of the sexual behaviours consultation unit at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Osborne worries that if the workplace sends the message that "anything goes," people may not seek out the psychiatric help they need. But many transsexuals say their problems were mostly medical. They would not have suffered such mental anguish if they had been born as a member of the opposite sex, they say.

And once the "mistake" had been corrected, they felt healthier than ever, not to mention more productive, they say. Janet and Hoyman insist they're not activists. They simply want to live life as they think they were intended to live it. Keeping their jobs helps them maintain normalcy, they said.

Besides, starting over from scratch in a new job with a new identity is hard because it means building a brand new résumé at middle age. "It's easier to change on the job," Janet said, "because then you have references."

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc, which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not

necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# One Wife's Perspective on Cross-Dressing

## We Had to Find Our Own Way

by Joan Stone

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Overall, I have come to enjoy Lucy ...

**W**hen my husband first told me about his need to cross-dress my first reaction was, "Just leave my things alone". That was all I ever hoped to hear on the subject. I never expected it to become such a major factor in our lives. However, since we had no one in whom we could confide, we had to rely only on each other.

***Cross-dressers are truly special people, and I hope someday every wife and significant other will come to understand this.***

Needless to say, we had years of discussion where we went round and round in circles. But never did I say he could not cross-dress, and when I saw him, it bothered me that he didn't always look his best. So, as money and time permitted, we began getting Lucy shaped up.

During the beginning years, because there was very little information on the subject, and I kept trying to put my head in the sand hoping it would go away. I realised this was one issue that was not going away, and our discussion became a two way street.

I don't ever remember not being willing to discuss the subject. I just got tired of not having substantive answers. We had to find our own way, and it took a lot of years to find our comfort zone.

Even today, when I am tired, hungry or just suffering emotional tiredness and Lucy wants to emerge, my reaction will be "No". However, give me a little time or rest or eat and my whole perspective will change, and I will be a lot more receptive. As Don says, it is a matter of timing, and neither of us always gets it right.

Overall, I have come to enjoy Lucy, even if at times I wish we didn't have to deal with issues related to cross-dressing. But if there were a pill he could take to make it go away, I would not want him to take it, because it would mean a change in his personality, and I don't think I would like the person who would be left.

I really wish every wife and significant other, could become more open about cross-dressing issues with her cross-dresser, but I also understand that does not always happen. I can only suggest to cross-dressers, be open and above board and show your wife or significant other by example, that your cross-dressing is not a threat to her.

Find ways to make her realise that she is the number one female in your life. I know sometimes it is hard for a wife to understand, because she feels she should be the only female present in her husband's life. But we married most sensitive men, and without that sensitivity and understanding, we would not love you so much.

Cross-dressers are truly special people, and I hope someday every wife and significant other will come to understand this.

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# How to Get Your Hands on a Transman

## And Things Not to Say on a Date

Originally Published in [Scarlett Letters](#) ☒ Autumn 2000 by Raven Kaldera  
Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Raven Kaldera

**A**ll right, so you saw that cute guy across the room, and you ask your friends who he is, and they all whisper excitedly, or contemptuously, or worriedly, or with sort of confused expressions on their faces, that said cute guy was once a woman. Perhaps they are even less diplomatic. However, the more you look at him, the more interested you are, except for one thing. How do you approach someone like that? How do you get him interested, without offending him? And what if you actually do get him interested? What do you do with him then?

***Calling your transman "Little Guy" or such terms is also unlikely to win points.***

Or maybe you've just expressed your interest to a hot butch-looking woman, and she informs you that there's something you should know. She considers herself transgendered, and she feels as if she's really a man, and she's considering getting her body changed soon to reflect those feelings. And if you want her, you'd better start thinking of her as him. Now, before you go any further.

One more note, before we go any further. The following tips are for dating people who are already clear about their transgendered status, including those who have already transitioned and got some body mods, and those who haven't but intend to. If your girlfriend of many years suddenly starts talking about getting a sex change, that's a whole different ball game, and one that is best covered by talking to [S.O.s](#) of transmen who went through that very situation. [Try the S.O.F.F.A. list.](#) ☒ They can also help you with a new flame who is struggling with questions of whether to change or not. Get their advice. You are not alone.

But back to that hottie transman who is looking you right in the eye. First of all, unless they're the really shy type, transmen tend to make eye contact with you more often than bio-guys do, because they've been raised women, and frequent eye contact is part of female training. He may know things that other men don't, which may take some getting used to, such as when you complain about your menstrual cramps and he looks at you with a sympathetic expression and says, "Yeah, I remember those. They were awful. Have you tried calcium supplements?" Some transmen, to their shock, have found that many women actually like having 'feminine mysteries' that they can explain (or not) to men, and they are unnerved when a man already knows all about it. On the other hand, it can be a really nice thing to be able to say that you have to leave because your tampon is leaking, and have your date not give you the look of alien disgust.

Or, if you're male, when you make an offhand comment about not knowing what women want when they say such-and-so, and having the transman across the table shift in his seat and say, "Well, when I was living as a girl and I said such-and-so, I meant this." There's a certain dissonance in dating a man with a female history, if you're not used to it. However, it can give you great insights into the way things really happen around gender expectations.

Your transman may also not know things about being a man that most men just pick up by the time they're in their teens, such as how men use teasing and insults as both affection and dominance play, and he may have a hard time adapting to that without offence. If he didn't have time as a traditional butch who dated femmes, he may not be well versed in much of standard heterosexual courtship and may miss cues. Don't give him hell for it, or even tell him that it's "the expected thing to do." Tell him it's something you like, that makes you feel good. That's positive reinforcement.

You may have to defend your choice of love interest to your friends and family if you're dating a person of non-standard gender. If you're a gay man or lesbian, you may be accused by peers of going straight. Lesbians dating transmen may be plagued with friends who refuse to see him as anything but female, and who may deliberately screw up on pronouns. If you're a straight woman, you may be accused of lesbianism, and if you're a straight man, well, you're going to have to admit that you're not as straight as you thought you were. If you really want this guy, however, you're just going to have to deal with the harassment and be firm about it. Real friends are happy for you, and don't get weird about your lover's genitals or preferred gender. Anyone else can just shove it. Repeat this to yourself often.

On a similar tack, if your transman is out of the closet and open about who and what he is, he made that decision for strong personal reasons that he believes in. Don't ever ask him to go back in just for your personal comfort or embarrassment. Conversely, if he's in the

closet, don't 'out' him without permission.

One of the most important things about dating (and boffing) a transgendered person is that we really need you to express to us that you see us as the gender we are. If your particular transman hasn't made any body mods and still looks, for all intents and purposes, like a woman, this is often a difficult request. That's where that imagination thing gets used, all right? Concentrate on the things that seem male about him, both physically and mentally. Even if you can't quite handle the mental editing needed to do it, use your imagination and treat it as a role play. If that seems too much for you to deal with on a regular basis, then he isn't right for you.

Things to do to show him that you do consider him male: Get his pronouns right. If he's a top, call him "sir"; if a bottom, "boy" is usually okay. If that dynamic doesn't enter your relationship, "my boyfriend", or "my gentleman friend", or "that cute guy" will help. If he wants certain parts of his anatomy called certain things, go with it. (For example, one pre-mastectomy F.T.M. was all right with having his breasts touched, but only if his lover referred to them as 'pecs'.) But don't try so hard that you overdo it and look like you're humouring him, as in: "Fuck me, you big macho hunk!"

## Things not to Say to a Transman on a Date: (or, preferably, ever)

"So what was your real name?" Next time I'll tell 'em it was Richard, okay? Don't follow this up with a list of transpeople that you know and all their former names, either.

"So you're still like a girl in bed, right?" No. It's amazing how little anatomy determines one's sexual behaviour.

"Why do you have to change your body so radically in order to have people treat you like you want?" If you're asking this question, your world view is obviously not ready for a transman to play a major role in your life. Suffice it to say that until you understand, at least vaguely, the concept of body dysphoria that has little or nothing to do with culture, it's better not to bother. Your politics will not change him, and it'll only be frustrating for both of you.

"How can you say anything about feminism? You gave up being a woman." Yes, but you can't erase thirty years of your personal history and experience. Some transmen consider themselves feminists, and some don't. I've been known to wear a 'Feminist On Testosterone' button myself.

However, I've found that even rabid feminism gets modified slightly by actually living as a man for a time (something I sometimes wish all women could do for a little while, with the reverse true as well, of course) and he may not toe the party line on all things. Even if you discuss these things, even if you argue about them, don't be tempted to call him a traitor, or tell him that since he gave up being female, he has nothing to say about it.

Don't disqualify the third-gender perspective; a little objectivity is sometimes a good thing. Besides, as I pointed out to one such accuser, I may have decreased the number of strong women by one, but I increased the number of men sensitive to women's issues (and willing to be role models) by one, and that's an even smaller category. Nobody's come up with an answer to that one yet.

"If you're not going to get a dick, why do you want to be a man?" nine out of ten transmen do not get phalloplasty. This is partly because the surgery is way, way less than ideal, and they may not want to sacrifice nerve endings that work for a possible disaster. Frankly, were I a genetic factory-equipped-male, I would be downright offended by the idea that my dick was the only defining, or important, item with regards to my manhood. We are much more than our genitals. If you can't deal with a man with a vagina, go elsewhere.

"But you're such an attractive woman!" or "I'll bet you were a really attractive woman!" Yes, and I bet I'll be a really cute guy, too. Wanna stick around and watch? ... alternatively ... Actually, I was an ugly, mean bitch. Amazing what a little testosterone will do for ya.

"Can I see your pussy?" Can I see your asshole? Here, bend over this chair for me and spread 'em! Seriously, there is something about a transsexual that makes ordinary people think that they can ask all sorts of stupid questions about one's genitals that they'd never, never dream of asking a non-trans person. Don't do this. You will be more likely to get a chance to see it if you are polite and friendly and interesting and we think you're cute.

Infantilizing names such as 'Babe', 'Sugar', 'Kitten'. Oh, come on, what are you trying to prove?

"I knew you were one of those. I could just sense it." This is most offensive when it comes right after you come-out to someone, and they give you the look of absolute shock, and then have the balls to tell you that they "somehow knew". Even if by some miracle talent of trannyvision they did know, this is not likely to put the transman of your choice at ease about his passing ability. It will likely raise the tension level rather than lower it.

"You're the best of both worlds." Be careful with this one. Some transmen do consider themselves something in between male and female, and would be complimented by that. Others consider themselves men, work very hard to be accepted as men, and would take great offence. Best not to say it until you're certain which variety you've got.

"Do you like being fucked up the cunt?" This is especially offensive when said to a fully transitioned F.T.M. in a public restaurant, particularly while the waitress is standing right there.

A better way to ask would be, "How do you like to fuck?" or "What sex acts get you hot and what turns you off?" But really, don't even start to ask until it's been made very clear that, yes, he does want to do the mattress dance with you.

"Are you stone?" Not every F.T.M. came out of the lesbian community and has read his Leslie Feinberg primer. Don't assume that he used to be a dyke unless you know that to be the case. This term may well make an F.T.M. who hasn't heard it think that you're asking

him if he is a piece of granite, or he may wonder if you are asking him for marijuana.

Even if he does understand it, he may not want to answer it, if an answer would make you think of him in butch lesbian rather than male terms. "Did you hate being a dyke?" or "Do you hate dykes?" are in the same category.

"I know this sex change must have been hard for you." Really? How do you know that? For some people, transition is the best thing that ever happened to them. If we want to bring up our emotions about our transgender-ness, we will do so in time. Don't assume you know how any of it feels. Often, when people say this, one senses that it is them who are having a hard time with our sex change.

"You're so exotic,"

"You're so fascinating,"

"I'm simply fascinated by you." These can come across as patronizing. I personally think I'm exotic, but many F.T.M.s see themselves as regular guys with a difficult history. The last one also has a bug-under-a-microscope feel to it.

"But you're so short!" Oh, please. Sit down and you'll see how much that matters. Calling your transman "Little Guy" or such terms is also unlikely to win points.

"Did it hurt?" (in reference to surgery) Duh, of course it hurt. Major surgery does, even when they give you lots of morphine. Don't be dumb. Better things to concentrate on might be, "You're very brave to go through such hard experiences to be yourself; most people wouldn't," or something like that.

"Hey, guys don't do that!" or

"That's not very masculine behaviour." I am amazed how so many people feel that they're being 'helpful' in pointing out how a transman's behaviour varies from the stereotypical male norm. Believe me, your transman has probably spent more time watching and mirroring male behaviour than you, even if you're male yourself. If he chooses not to do a particular masculine behaviour, it may be because he considers it personally oppressive, so why should he?

Some of us, after being shoved into one tiny little box for the first part of our lives, have no wish to climb into a different tiny little box and close the lid. In fact, after years as a woman, some forms of male behaviour seem awfully silly. (I'll never forget watching a self-professed feminist woman lecturing an F.T.M. on how his gestures weren't masculine enough.) And if your transman is trying hard to act in a traditionally masculine manner and he slipped for a moment, you'll just embarrass him.

Trying to show him how male you think he is by playfully punching him in the shoulder or trying to give him knuckle noogies is not helpful. Any behaviours you might pull on an obnoxious younger brother should be avoided.

"When people use jargon, I think they're not being sincere" as a response to him using words common in the trans community, such as transman, F.T.M., tranny, transgender, packie, diclit, etc. Let's face it, the words needed to describe F.T.M. sexuality do not exist in most people's vocabulary.

If you're going to date him, you need to learn the language. Don't be afraid to ask, "And what does that mean to you?" but don't put him down for using terms you don't know yet.

"Hand her the ... oops, I'm sorry! No, really, I think of you as a guy, it's just that it's hard to remember ..." Pronoun mishaps are the single biggest problem in dealing with transfolk. It makes us wince, and we generally consider all slips to be Freudian. Do try your damndest to get it right, even if that means chanting a little mantra under your breath of "Jonathan-he, Jonathan-he, Jonathan-he likes to rollerblade, Jonathan-he likes garlic," etc.

If you do slip, don't go into a string of profuse apologies. Something simple like, "Damn, I screwed up. I'll do better next time," will do, especially in public where there's no need to call more attention to the slip. If you're dealing with a pre-transitioned F.T.M. and it's really hard for you to remember it, avoid pronouns altogether and just go with names, as in, "Hand it to Chris."

If you're dating a fully transitioned transman, who looks like a normal guy, and nearly all of us pass really well after testosterone and mastectomies, and you get to the taking-off-your-clothes part with him, it's real important not to choke up when finally faced with his genitalia.

Some people, unfortunately, do the deer-in-headlights thing when the dissonance of this male body without the 'expected' dangling male genitals hits them. The minds of some biomen, especially, may instinctively think 'castration!' and they may even flinch. If you're even slightly afraid that you may react this way, I suggest that you buy Loren Cameron's book *Body Alchemy* and study the photos until you're more familiar with the anatomical dissonance of a transman's body.

Believe me, he does not need your negative reaction to genitals he may already feel ambivalent about. He is less thrilled than you, or anyone else on the planet, that he was not born with a factory-equipped penis. The last thing he needs is to have to worry about you freaking out.

Of course, to be fair, some transmen are so dysphoric about their crotches that they will not have sex the first time, or the first few times, or ever, without a strap-on dildo, or their underwear on, or some such. Some will not allow you to touch them there. It's certainly fair to ask whether there may come a time when they will trust you enough to let you handle their genitals, and what you can do to facilitate that trust.

However, if the answer is, "Not until after I've had surgery," or "Never, and it's my problem, and there's nothing you can do," then you'll

just have to make your own decision as to whether this is a situation you can handle emotionally. Pushing your transman to a level of physical intimacy he's not ready for will trigger his dysphoria and make things worse.

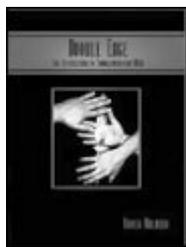
There's a whole continuum of genital dysphoria among transguys. Some are 'stone', and will be until they get surgical penises. Some are perfectly happy to use every inch of erogenous tissue they have, up to and including penetration there, as long as you can prove to them that you think of them as men even while your fist is buried in their cunts. Some will fall somewhere in between, perhaps wanting to start out the sex with a strap-on, or concentrating first on your genitals, and perhaps letting you deal with theirs when they know you better and trust you. Some are fine with what's between their legs, but if they still have breasts, they may prefer that you ignore them.

The best thing to do is let your transman take the lead in talking about his body and sexuality. If he's shy, tell him you're unshockable (and be that way), but he has to let you know how you can make him feel good. If you really want him, let him know it. Feeling desired is important to us; many of us have secret fears that in getting the bodies we wanted, we've alienated the rest of the world. The gift of your desire for us just as we are, not as you or anyone else thinks we should be or hopes we will become, is a good thing for anyone's self-esteem.

## Raven Kaldera



**From Amazon Books:** Raven Kaldera is a Northern-Tradition Pagan shaman, herbalist, astrologer, transgendered intersex activist, homesteader, and founding member of the First Kingdom Church of Asphodel. He is also a teacher of B.D.S.M. spirituality, and an educator and presenter on many topics. He has written (or co-authored) many books and continues to add to the pile. Visit [Raven's "hub" website](#) with links to all of his other specific websites.



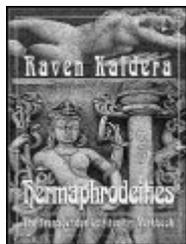
**Double Edge: The Intersections of Transgender and B.D.S.M.**

Author: Raven Kaldera

Publisher: Alfred Press

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0982879405

**From Lulu Books:** *Double-Edge: The Intersection of Transgender and B.D.S.M.* is a smart book that tackles difficult, fascinating, controversial subjects with panache and compassion. It's the latest public service from the fierce and tender pagan priest, activist, farmer, community organizer, oracle, nightmare of those devoted to normal and ordinary, and all-around role-model Raven Kaldera, whose complex identity gives him a rather comprehensive perspective on the topics of kinky sex, alternative relationships, and gender variance.



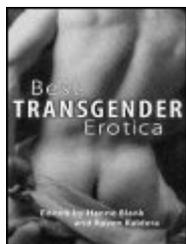
**Hermaphroditities: The Transgender Spirituality Workbook**

Author: Raven Kaldera

Publisher: Xlibris Corporation (2002)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-1401027193

**From Lulu Books:** Transgendered people have long been robbed of their own spiritual history, not knowing that there were once times and places where ours was considered a spiritual path in and of itself. This book explores both our spiritual history and our modern predicaments, shaping the outline of a contemporary spiritual path for those of us who don't fit into just one gender box. This revised and expanded edition of *Hermaphroditities* features third gender myths, deities, personal and group exercises, community service project suggestions, rituals, and interviews with people from all over the transgender spectrum. We are all sacred and it is time that the world knew it.



**Best Transgender Erotica**

Author: Raven Kaldera and Hanne Blank

Publisher: Circler Press (2002)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-1885865403

**From Amazon Books:** *Best Transgender Erotica* brings together twenty stories by writers of every gender. The first book to celebrate exclusively gender-bending, -crossing, and -breaking sexuality through erotic fiction, *Best Transgender Erotica* includes representations of many forms of 'trans' identity. Whether blurring the line between masculine and feminine, or making the transition from female to male, or vice versa, these characters (and authors) had to put on their sexiest, most alluring, heart-racing show in order to make the cut.

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to

make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

## Tribute to Louise Hordern

### Life member of the Seahorse Club of Victoria

by Sally Goldner

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Louise was a quiet pioneer in transgender advocacy

It is with sadness that I advise the passing at 12:30am on Wednesday 27th December 2000, of Louise Hordern, a life member of the Seahorse Club of Victoria, aged eighty-six. To those of you who did not know this remarkable person, I offer this tribute.

*Louise was someone who's simple cheer and goodwill helped many a "first time out of the bedroom closet" tranny.*

Louise was someone who's simple cheer and goodwill helped many a "first time out of the bedroom closet" tranny. Those who turned up at their first Seahorse meeting not knowing anyone had their nerves eased by her friendliness.

Her catchcry when asked "how are you" that, "I'm still giving plenty of cheek because it's more blessed to give than receive" broke the ice for many a new seahorse member.

Louise's hospitality went further: for many years her home in the Dandenongs hosted the January barbecue that invariably ran longer than the scheduled time.

Louise, an engineer by profession took the opportunity to demonstrate her self-designed, amazing disappearing wall that separated her lounge room and balcony.

Most of all, Louise was a quiet pioneer in transgender advocacy. Her involvement in local church groups where she simply was herself, interviews on mainstream radio, and her book *Cross-Dressing: Questions and Answers* all helped increase awareness of transgender people and break down misunderstandings.

Her accumulation of a vast library of transgender literature from around the world, including every *Seahorse Times* published from its inception in 1977 to today, has built a huge and valuable history of transgender knowledge.

Finally, when Louise commenced living fulltime as a female after the passing of her wife, she (Louise) continued to attend Scotch College Old Boys reunions and met with unconditional acceptance.

Like Elaine Barry, 1996 Rainbow Award winner and recently deceased Lady Paula Howard, Louise Hordern is part of a generation owed a debt of gratitude by the transgender community.

For your courageous, inspirational, and pioneering contribution to the transgender community, bless you and thank you Louise Hordern.

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

## Book Review: Gluck

### Biography of the 19th Century English Artist

reviewed by Tracie O'Keefe

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



This is a book to own as much for the pictures within as for the story that it tells.

Tracie wasn't previously aware of this nineteenth century artist's work, but confesses to having been converted to admiring the work of Gluck, born Hanna Gluckstein in 1895 yet dressed as a man sporting an Eton crop and male clothes throughout the 1920s and '30s.

*This biography of the English nineteenth century artist Gluck, is finely crafted and contains many pictures of the wonderful scope of artworks that were painted by this unusual person.*

#### Gluck

by Diana Souhami  
Sterling Publishing (2001)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1842121962

**T**his biography of the English nineteenth century artist Gluck, is finely crafted and contains many pictures of the wonderful scope of artworks that were painted by this unusual person. It is a compelling book in so far as the author

pays an obsessive attention to detail when recording Gluck's life and works. From a reader's point of view it is enjoyable in as much as Souhami has obviously done her detective work in tracking down the endless sources of information needed to write this biography.

Gluck was born Hanna Gluckstein in 1895 into the family that founded J. Lyons & Co Catering Company. They were wealthy Jewish people who took great care of all the members of their clan. Gluck was a daughter who dressed as a man sporting an Eton crop and male clothes throughout the 1920s and '30s. The family kept her in a comfortable lifestyle that meant she never had to do a day's work. This afforded the often temperamental Gluck the opportunity to pursue her lifelong love of painting.

Although Gluck is often overlooked in English art, the diversity of her works are extraordinary, ranging from still life to portraits and landscapes. Through her family connections, even Queen Mary possessed one of Gluck's pieces called Tulips, a study of flowers in a vase.

As an 'out' and very public lesbian in the early twentieth century it was her family wealth that allowed her to move unhindered among the aristocracy and intelligentsia. Her friends and contemporaries included Virginia Woolf, Radcliffe Hall, Somerset Morgham, Noel Coward and many other gifted artists and philanthropists.

During one of her many love affairs with a wealthy married woman, Gluck referred to herself as the husband and her lover as the eternal wife.

Although we have no record that she identified as a transsexual or transgendered person there is the possibility that she might have done if she had been born much later. We must, however, be very careful in the trans community not to steal this possibly dyke-identified hero of the early English lesbian and gay movement.

Having read the book and not previously been aware of Gluck's work, I am now seeking out places to view her pictures and working out ways to sell the furniture so that perhaps I might be able to buy one. Yes, you have guessed it, I have been converted - I am a born-again groupie of a yesteryear célèbre extraordinaire. I probably won't have enough money though, as since her death in the late 1970s the price of her work has soared. Nevertheless I will continue to check around a few museums and disappear for a good many Sunday afternoons.

This is a book to own as much for the pictures within as for the story that it tells.

## Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein)

**From Wikipedia:**  Gluck was born into a wealthy Jewish family, the child of Joseph Gluckstein, whose brothers Isidore and Montague had founded J. Lyons and Co., a British coffee house and catering empire. Gluck's American-born mother, Francesca Halle, was an opera singer. Gluck's brother, Sir Louis Gluckstein, was a Conservative politician.

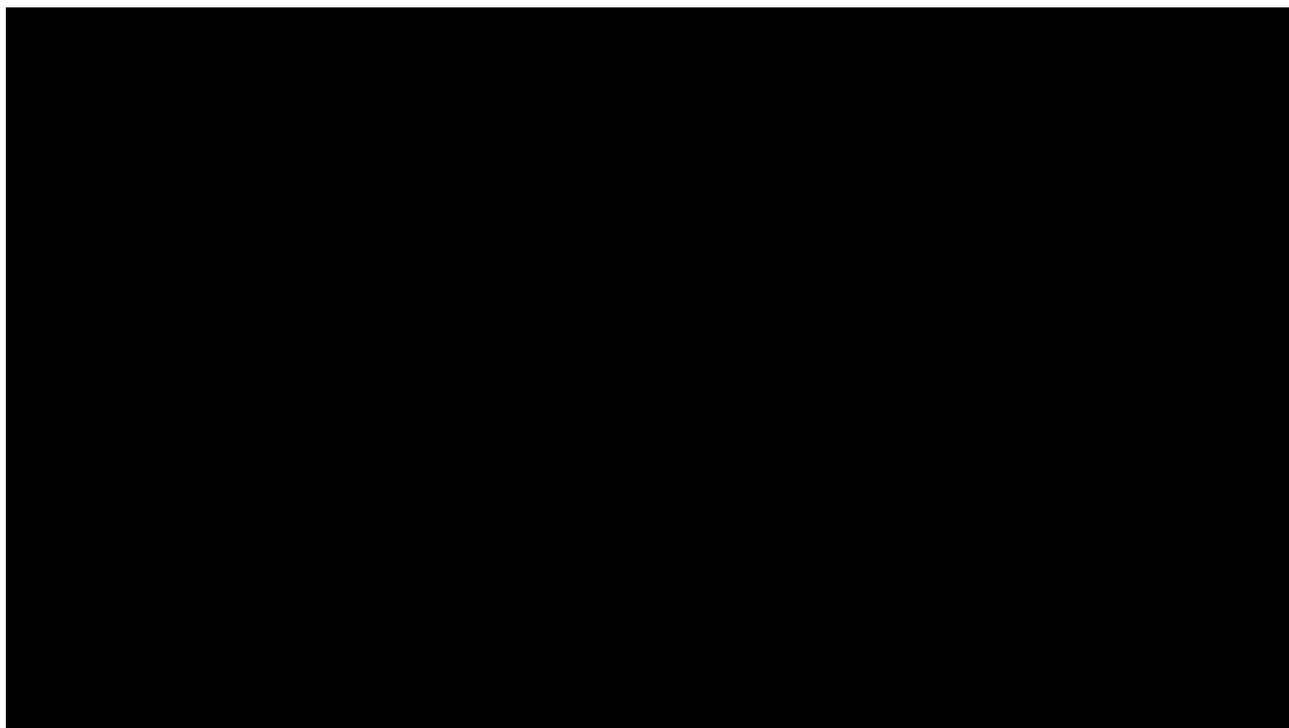


In the 1920s and 30s Gluck became known for portraits and floral paintings; the latter were favoured by the interior decorator Syrie Maugham. Gluck insisted on being known only as Gluck, "no prefix, suffix, or quotes", and when an art society of which Gluck was vice president identified Gluck as "Miss Gluck" on its letterhead, Gluck resigned. Gluck identified with no artistic school or movement and showed Gluck's work only in solo exhibitions, where they were displayed in a special frame Gluck invented and patented. This Gluck-frame rose from the wall in three tiers; painted or papered to match the wall on which it hung, it made the artist's paintings look like part of the architecture of the room.

One of Gluck's best-known paintings, Medallion, is a dual portrait of Gluck and Gluck's lover Nesta Obermer, inspired by a night in 1936 when they attended a Fritz Busch production of Mozart's Don Giovanni. According to Gluck's biographer Diana Souhami, "They sat in the third row and she felt the intensity of the music fused them into one person and matched their love". Gluck referred to it as the "YouWe" picture. It was later used as the cover of a Virago Press edition of *The Well of Loneliness*. Gluck also had a romantic relationship with the British floral designer Constance Spry, whose work informed the artist's paintings.

In 1944 Gluck moved to Chantry House in Steyning, Sussex, living with lover Edith Shackleton Heald until her death. In the 1950s Gluck became dissatisfied with the artist's paints available and began a "paint war" to increase their quality. Ultimately, Gluck persuaded the British Standards Institution to create a new standard for oil paints; however, the campaign consumed Gluck's time and energy to the exclusion of painting for more than a decade.

In Gluck's seventies, using special hand-made paints supplied free by a manufacturer who had taken Gluck's exacting standards as a challenge, Gluck returned to painting and had another well-received solo show. It was Gluck's first since 1937, and Gluck's last: Gluck died in 1978. Gluck's last major work was a painting of a decomposing fish head on the beach entitled *Rage, Rage against the Dying of the Light*.



Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.



(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# Male, Female, Other

## The Tale of Two Children

by Simon LeVay

Article appeared in Polare magazine: February 2001 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

**T**his is the tale of two children, born with the outward appearance of girls, but lacking the inner-passageways of either sex: no cervix, uterus or fallopian tubes or no seminal vesicles, vasa deferentia or prostate either. They did have gonads though one had a boy's testes, the other had a girl's ovaries.

Both of the children were reared the way their appearance demanded - as girls. Both were traumatized by their physical abnormality and by society's response to it. But one of them found comfort in their role as a girl, and she eventually grew into a woman whom everyone now recognises and treat as such.

The other was a tomboy who rebelled against everything girlish; eventually she demanded sex reassignment and is a man today. So which was which?

That's obvious you'll say; The child with the ovaries became a woman, and the child with the testes became a man. Hormones after all are the ultimate arbiters of our sexual fate, so how could it be otherwise?

Well, it was otherwise. The child with the testes became the woman, and the child with the ovaries became a man. This is the story of how that happened.

And, more generally, it's about the biological complexity, the emotional turmoil, and the medical politics of intersexes - people who can't be shoehorned into the comfortable categories of male and female.

Sherri Groveman, a forty-one-year-old tax lawyer lives alone in a ranch style home in a sun-baked suburb of San Diego. She's a pleasant, forthright, freckle-faced, womanly woman. So why, within a few minutes of the start of our interview, did I innocently ask "And did you enjoy playing with other boys - girls, I mean?"

I blushed and apologised, but Sherri wouldn't let me get away with it, it was a Freudian slip par excellence - evidence that a part of me considered her a male, regardless of all the evidence to the contrary. And the reason? Because I knew she had been born with testicles, and that every cell in her body contained an X and a Y chromosome - the genetic signature of a male. Sherri has a medical condition known as Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome or AIS.

Androgens are "male-making" hormones, of which testosterone is the leading member.

Normally, androgens do their business by attaching to "receptor" molecules in target cells throughout the body and brain, in the same way that a key fits in a lock.

In genetic males with A.I.S., a mutation changes the shape of those receptors, so that androgens no longer "fit" them. An affected foetus may be awash in testosterone secreted by the developing testes, but the hormone has no effect, so the foetus develops with the outer appearance of a female.

In addition, the male reproductive tract (prostate, seminal vesicles and vasa deferentia) fails to develop.

If Sherri's entire body had been female, all might have been well. But there's another hormone that is normally secreted by the developing testis, whose role is to switch off the development of the female reproductive tract: the upper part of the vagina, the cervix, uterus and fallopian tubes. This hormone does function normally in foetuses with A.I.S., so Sherri ended up lacking the reproductive tract of either sex.

Sherri's condition was recognised a few weeks after birth, because her testes, in the attempt to migrate down into her non-existent scrotum, became lodged in her groin, where they could be felt as lumps.

They were removed surgically, out of concern that they might become cancerous. (This is a legitimate concern in all cases of undescended testicles but such cancers rarely occur during childhood, so the operation could have been put off for many years.)

Sherri was brought up thinking that she had hernia surgery, but an occasional remark from her mother, to the effect that "not all girls could become mothers" hinted that more might be amiss.

***Sherri and James ... feel that they were violated by doctors who saw them purely as medical problems to be solved - as people to be made normal ...***

Because Sherri now lacked gonads of any kind, she would need hormone replacement to bring about the bodily changes associated with female puberty. When she was eleven, her mother prepared her for this by telling her something slightly closer to the truth: that she had been born with "twisted ovaries" that had been removed to prevent cancer.

Sherri learned that she would not menstruate and could never bear children, but she did not learn the real cause, nor was she told of possible difficulties in her sex life. "the twisted ovaries story is a lie heard round the world". she says." The medical literature recommends that doctors and parents should lie about it - the thought being that we would kill ourselves if we were told the truth." After this ten-minute conversation she did not discuss the matter with either of her parents for twenty-eight years.

With puberty, her private shame threatened to become a public one. She developed most of the outer features of a woman, but she did not grow pubic hair, which depends on androgens in both men and women. So she had to conceal her lower body in school showers and locker rooms, and from future boyfriends.

Worse, she found that her vagina was too narrow and short. "Everyone was using tampons" she says, "so I bought some and tried putting one in, but it hurt like hell because of the narrow entry-way." Her vagina was less than two inches long - too short for intercourse.

Convinced that she had a dirty secret for which she was herself to blame, Sherri became a "gregarious loner" - outwardly sociable, but shunning intimacy with anyone. The only time her condition was discussed was at her periodic endocrinological check-ups. The discussions were not with Sherri, though, but among the doctors and medical students who gathered around her crotch. "They were talking amongst themselves about my genitals", she says, "but they had no idea what they were saying". She was told nothing about her condition, and she was asked nothing about her psychological health.

At age twenty-one, Sherri figured out the cause of her condition on her own by rummaging through textbooks in a medical library. She was devastated - not so much about discovering her intersex status, but at discovering that she had been lied to for two decades by parents and doctors.

This led to her complete estrangement from the medical profession; she stopped taking oestrogens and didn't see a doctor for another fourteen years. "Finding out about myself in the way that I did really damaged me" she says. She thought "How can I embark on a relationship and not tell my partner? I'd be participating in that same lie that was told to me, and yet I thought I would have to lie. After all no one told me the information, so I thought it must be so horrible, such a hideous and freakish thing, that if I told anyone else they would bolt".

At the age of thirty-five however, she did go back to a doctor; she was in a tentative relationship with a man and wanted to know if anything could be done to help her have vaginal intercourse. The doctor confirmed that Sherri had A.I.S., and put her back on oestrogens to correct the severe osteoporosis that had been brought on by the lack of hormones.

She also recommended that Sherri use vaginal dilators - plastic dilators that she was to sit on for fifteen minutes twice a day. Although these dilators do help some women, Sherri did not like them, and she eventually broke off the relationship with her boyfriend.

All those years Sherri had never met anyone resembling herself, and this, she says, was the deepest cause of her loneliness and shame. A few months after the break-up with her boyfriend, however, she came in contact with an A.I.S. support group that was forming in England, and she flew over to attend the inaugural meeting.

There was nothing that I would not have given to participate, says Sherri "I would have cut off my arm - I was that desperate to look into someone else's eyes and have them know what I was experiencing." She has been back for ten subsequent meetings and she has herself founded a U.S. support group that works closely with its U.K. counterpart.

Although Sherri identifies as a woman, her identity as an intersex is now just as important to her. Indeed she is waging a small campaign to have the intersex status more widely recognised: in the M/F box on the census form she wrote "I (intersex)", and she is trying (unsuccessfully so far) to have the same designation included on her drivers' license.

"I'm not asking for unusual accommodations", she says, "I just want people to acknowledge the reality of intersexes."

**J**ames Benson is a forty-five-year-old neuroscientist at a prestigious university. With ample beard, muscular build and male dress and mannerisms, Benson is unquestionably a man, but he was born a girl. Jennifer, as she was named, seemed to be a physically normal girl throughout her childhood, but she was anything but a typical girl in her behaviour.

She wanted to play with boys and do all the hyperactive, mucky things that boys do. She did not want to associate with girls or do anything remotely feminine. As her childhood progressed, she became more and more of a social pariah, ostracised by her peers of either sex.

At puberty, Jennifer developed breasts, but failed to menstruate. When she was sixteen, her mother took her to a gynaecologist, who prescribed oestrogen shots to "get her going", but these didn't work. Jennifer was not especially keen to menstruate anyway, so she stopped the treatment after about a year. In high school her social life was essentially non-existent, instead she "over-achieved" academically, and entered M.I.T. - a male dominated school - a year early.

In college she fell in love with a man, and they attempted intercourse, but without success: Jennifer, it turned out, had no vagina. This fact had not only escaped her own attention for twenty years, it had also been missed by the doctor who had examined her four years before ("A typical bozo gynaecologist," Benson reminisces.)

Jennifer went to see her college gynaecologist, who arranged for exploratory surgery. It was found that Jennifer had ovaries but no

reproductive tract. It emerged that Jennifer's mother had taken progestin hormones during pregnancy, but a connection between that and Jennifer's condition is uncertain. (Jennifer has a twin sister, who was exposed to the same drug in utero but who did not develop Jennifer's condition). The surgeon recommended that Jennifer have a vagina constructed by plastic surgery, telling her that this operation would make her "normal".

"I remember thinking, 'I'm not going to be normal'", says Benson, "but back when I was very intimidated by doctors and I was confused by what was going on. I didn't spend time arguing with them like I would now."

A tunnel was opened up between her rectum and her bladder, and it was lined with skin taken from her buttocks. It did in fact work as a vagina, after a fashion, but Jennifer's problem was much deeper than that; she did not feel psychologically comfortable having sex as a woman.

Eventually she ended the relationship with her boyfriend and invested all her time and energy in her career. Luckily it was a career in which dress codes and gender-expectations were pretty much non-existent.

At about the age of forty, Jennifer was diagnosed with breast cancer which runs in her family.

The surgeon recommended that she have the affected breast removed but Jennifer persuaded him to remove both breasts, in part for prophylactic reasons but also because she had never liked them.

"When my mother had to have her mastectomy, it was this incredibly devastating experience, which is typical for most women" says Benson. "But I was delighted when my breasts were taken off. I never wore any prostheses. This got me to realising that there was something unusual about my gender identity.

Thus, Jennifer had the first stage of sex reassignment surgery almost by subterfuge. The rest - ovariectomy, testosterone treatment and change of name and legal sex - followed a few years later.

James did not have a phalloplasty - the construction of a penis. "I do wish I had one", he says "But \$100,000 for something that can't get an erection and has little feeling and can lead to all kinds of complications? No thank you."

Since James is still sexually attracted to men, he is now a gay man and is tentatively exploring that identity.

At a recent sexology conference in Spain, I had the opportunity to discuss the surgical issues with physician Joss Megens, who runs the celebrated sex reassignment clinic at the Free University of Amsterdam. Megens conceded that the construction of normal male genitalia in an intersexed or female patient leaves a lot to be desired.

For that reason, he said, his clinic has recently begun to offer a surgical procedure which creates a "micropenis" out of the patients own clitoris. In the operation, the clitoris is lengthened by exteriorising the portion of the clitoral shaft that is usually hidden within the body, and a newly-fashioned urethra is embedded within it.

The resulting organ is no more than four to six centimetres long and is not adequate for vaginal penetration, but it is erectile and it usually has good erotic sensitivity with the capacity for orgasm. Even this small penis can have problems however; in about half the patients some kind of repair surgery is eventually necessary.

Luckily, surgical perfection is not the key factor. Even without a penis of any kind, James Benson feels like a new man. "The thing that's so hard to describe is the relief", he says. "I feel it every day, every minute. There's no longer this conflict between my inner-self and that outer woman.

Years ago I read about people who changed sex, and I thought they were some kind of perverts - I'm embarrassed to say that now. But changing sex isn't about sexuality, it's about who you feel you are."

**A**t some levels, Sherri Groveman and James Benson are very different. Certainly they now look very different - one an unmistakable woman, the other an unmistakable man.

Also Sherri has a clear-cut syndrome, whereas the underlying cause of James' condition - the unusual combination of absent reproductive tract and cross-gender identity - remains something of a mystery.

At a deeper level though, Sherri and James share a sense that they have been wounded by more than the hand of nature dealt them. They feel that they were violated by doctors who saw them purely as medical problems to be solved - as people to be made normal, or as close to normal as was possible, by surgery or hormones. Little or no attention was paid to the people behind the genitalia.

More positively, however both Sherri and James share a sense of triumph; a sense that, against all the odds, they have found their way to who they really are. In the process they have overcome life-destroying shame and loneliness. Both want to communicate their stories out of a desire to ease the lives of others like them.

Intersexes are just beginning to build a community and to become socially and politically engaged. The Intersex Society of North America (I.S.N.A.) seeks to provide not only a support group for intersexes but also education and advocacy that will help break down the shame and silence that surrounds them. I.S.N.A.'s founder, Cheryl (nee Charlie) Chase, was born with gonads containing both ovarian and testicular tissue - making her what used to be called a "true hermaphrodite". She also had a small penis, but doctors later reassigned her to be female whereupon the penis became an excessively large clitoris, and it was cut off. In consequence, Cheryl grew up without the capacity to orgasm.

To Chase, the overriding priority is to overcome the sense of shame associated with intersexuality. This shame is not just

psychologically damaging; it is also the main motivation behind the "corrective" surgery done on intersexed children.

Most of this surgery is unnecessary, or could be left until the child is old enough to make decisions for him or herself, says Chase, but doctors and parents want above all to get rid of the anatomical deviations; they want to "normalise" the child. Yet this cannot be with any confidence until the child is able to communicate what is "normal" for him or her.

Unlike Sherri Groveman, with her one-person war against the "M/F" dichotomy, Chase acknowledges the biological and cultural primacy of the two sexes. "I'm not a radical post-modern theorist who wants to deconstruct sexuality", she says, "I don't think it's realistic or beneficial to encourage parents to bring up children with an intersex identity."

What she does want is for doctors to communicate with parents, parents with children and adult intersexes with the public. She herself is a tireless communicator, churning out articles, books and sound bites, and speaking at meetings with everyone from paediatricians to church folk.

Although she faces considerable resistance, there is a gradual movement among paediatricians to rethink the traditional notion of early surgical intervention in the treatment of intersexed kids.

To their credit, none of the intersexes I've met attribute their problems simply to victimisation by society: "It's going to be totally shitty no matter what, there's no way around it", says Sherri. "But I was never sorry that I was born intersexed. I wouldn't trade. This is who I was meant to be in this world"

---

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.