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A Quality of Life Issue

We Are Not the Ones with Gender Issues!

by norrie mAy-welby

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A few years ago, a few social workers declared the Gender Centre's target population to be 'people with gender issues'. This was done without consultation with the transgender community, as many things were in those days. But it was thought necessary because the Centre's services were for a broader group than just 'transsexuals' and the term 'transgender' was not commonly understood or legally defined.

Times change however, and 'transgender' is now a legally defined term and in popular use around the world as a term descriptive of the broad trans community that includes transsexual (pre-operative, post-operative or non-operative), intersexual, intergender, transvestite and other transfolk.

As a community, we have also become much more empowered and less comfortable with the idea that as transfolk, we are the ones with gender problem's or 'gender issues'. Indeed, many of us see ourselves as quite comfortable with our identity and note that any 'troubles' others have with our identity are a result of *their* 'gender issues'.

It should also be noted that to those outside the transgender community 'gender issues' is a term that refers to such things as equal pay and sexual harassment.

How then, should we address our 'target population'? 'Transgender' has been legally defined, yes, but that fact alone limits its application.

A transgender person in N.S.W. law only applies to someone who lives as a member of one sex or the other, and thus excludes people who identify in intergender ways. It also excludes people who may just be thinking of changing their gender, a group as needing of the Gender Centre's resources as any. Perhaps a term that includes 'transgender', but is obviously broader than the legal concept, and a term that does not see us as being always the ones with 'problems' or 'issues'.

People with transgender qualities.

'Transgender' is the adjective, a descriptive rather than a defining (limiting) term.

'Transgender qualities' is interpreted liberally to include all those things we once meant by 'gender issues'. For example, it is a transgender quality to be questioning your gender identity, or have a partner or family member who is transgender, or to have changed your anatomical sexual topography.

A 'quality' can of course be positive or negative or neutral. (For example, freezing is a quality of water.) And indeed, some people, particularly when they first approach the Gender Centre, may see their transgender quality (for example, uncertainty of gender) as a negative thing. Using the term 'quality' does not negate their experience, but does (thanks to our positive cultural associations) suggest the possibility of transgender qualities being a good thing. 'Qualities' invite more positive outcomes than the pathological diagnoses of 'issues', which seem to invite a lot of wallowing and not a lot of movement.

Because I was sick of being told that as a transgender person I had 'gender issues', I proposed the term 'people with transgender qualities' to this year's Health in Difference conference, which had a high proportion of transgender people from all over Australia actively concerned about our community's health, welfare and wellbeing.

This conference overwhelmingly voted to adopt the new community-coined term in favour of the old social worker coined phrase.

We also discussed this issue at the Gender Centre's general meeting in April. The Gender Centre Coordinator suggested that if we adopt the new term, it would be useful to put ' with gender issues' in parentheses, in case other social workers are using the old terminology. I think this is a good idea, for it is useful for our community to use terms social workers understand.

However, I think the time has come for us to use for ourselves, as a term that describes ourselves, a term that considers that our 'transgendered-ness' may be an asset, or at best, not necessarily an 'issue' that we poor things need help with.

As I said, 'people with gender issues' was foisted on us without any broad community consultation. I'd like to see us as a community consider the terms we want to be used to describe us. I am obviously in favour of 'people with transgender qualities', for the reasons outlined above, but more importantly, I'd like us as a community to think about this and reach a decision.

Indeed, many of us see ourselves as quite comfortable with our identity and note that any 'troubles' others have with our identity are a result of their 'gender issues'.

That's why I raised the issue at the Health In Difference conference, and at the general meeting, and in this article, and why I'll be formally proposing an adoption of the term at the Annual General Meeting in September.

And while I'm at it, how about renaming the Gender Centre, the 'Transgender Community Resources'?

This makes it clear that the Gender Centre is not the centre of authority in our community, but a set of resources for us as a community to make use of as best we collectively and individual decide to.

norrie mAy-welby

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



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

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

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



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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.