

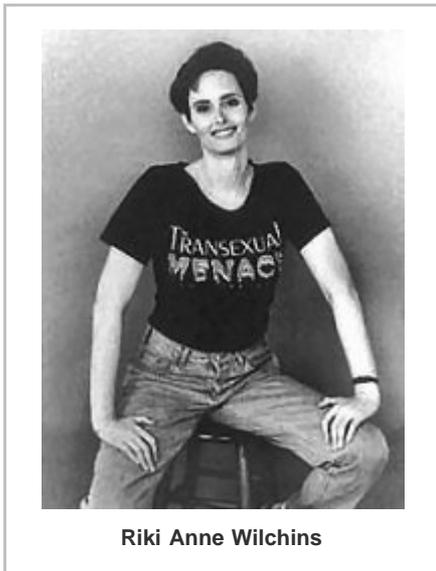
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Eighteen Things You Don't Say to a Transsexual

A Light-Hearted Look at Prejudicial Comments Borne of Ignorance

Riki Anne Wilchins

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Riki Anne Wilchins

1 - "I was just talking to a *change* the other day and..." To me, this suggests that you are having strange conversations with your pocket money. No one *is* a change. One can ask for change, own change, ex-change, change tyres, change clothes, change sides, change to a minor key and change of life, but one cannot *be* a change.

... you probably know a few hundred of us, but you don't know you know us, and we won't tell you that you do.

2 - "You look just as good as I do." Of course I do. And this is precisely the state of grace to which we all aspire. But more than likely you do both of us an injustice.

3 - "Well I want you to know I certainly consider you a woman." It is a never ending source of wonderment that well-intentioned, and otherwise very well brought up, people say this to me, with a light of total sincerity shining from their eyes for which any self-respecting cocker spaniel would kill. Unfortunately, this assurance turns on at least four assumptions which, upon closer inspection, prove to be entirely unfounded: a) my gender is a subject about which reasonable people might be expected to reasonably differ; b) my gender is a topic that is currently open for discussion; c) my gender and your perception of it, is something about which I suffer rather a great deal of anxiety and about which I am seeking

some reassurance; d) you, since you are a non-transsexual, are in just the providential position of providing me with this reassurance I desperately seek.

4 - "I consider you as much a woman as *any* of my friends." What a treat for them; especially your male friends.

5 - "I would *never* have guessed you were a transsexual." This phrase is usually accompanied by a look of the utmost incredulity, followed closely by a searching, penetrating, and largely sotto voice reappraisal of all the things you thought you knew about me (or perhaps only all the times we slept together). Unfortunately, this utterance assumes that your credulity, no doubt a topic of endless fascination to you, is of equal interest to me. Since there are tens of thousands of us (perhaps in your building alone!), the fact that some of us can 'pass' (a nasty concept if ever there was one) as non-transsexuals only prophesies that, wedded to the entirely fragile notion that you should be capable of identifying all of us on sight, you are destined for a life of more or less unending private humiliations.

6 - "When did you decide to become a woman?" Well, when did you decide to become a woman? Oh...I see; with you it is normal. Um-hmmm.

7 - "Can you have an orgasm?" Yes, but only when I'm asked this question.

8 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

9 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

10 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

11 - "You must have a lot of courage to face surgery." To have the actual surgery, I just had to be able to breathe deeply, count at least partway backwards from 100, and fall asleep with some semblance of dignity. In all of these tasks I was reliably aided by enough anaesthetic to subdue a small water buffalo. It would also have helped, had I \$10-20,000 in spare change (See #1 above) about my person. Unfortunately, while I was thus drifting majestically off to sleep, I found I also had to be able to watch my friends, most of my lovers, all of my family, and any Lesbian who used the term 'politically correct' in any context other than a Lily Tomlin joke, fade out of my existence forever. Also, I found that I woke up to endless refrains of *don't(s)* #1 - 7, above. That is the hard part; the surgery I could probably do again before breakfast.

12 - "I don't think it's anyone's concern what's between your legs, unless they're sleeping with you." Well, yes. But you, like me, might be surprised at the profound lack of fastidiousness some people display to even this tender area, as my weekly trips to the accoutrement racks at The Pleasure Chest and Eve's Garden confirm. In any case, I'm quite certain that whatever is between your legs, even during those hot, sticky, yucky days of summer, is totally above reproach and perfectly charming, while what's between mine,

even on the very best of days, is, well, let's just not talk about it.

13 - "No one needs to know ..." Of course they don't. We all have our little secrets, the small indiscretions we would prefer no one know. The thirty-five or so years of my life just happen to be mine.

14 - "How did you know you're a woman?" Well, how did you know you were a woman? Ah-humm: breasts and vagina. Well, I can introduce you to some very handsome, bearded, muscular young men of my acquaintance who began life with the very same equipment, so that's not particularly compelling evidence, is it? I see, inside you just know. Call me sometime, we'll have lunch.

15 - "When you were a man ..." Unless it refers to a prior life of mine (something I have yet to explore), it's always a toughie, because it assumes itself; i.e., that I ever was a man. I think this sentence is supposed to begin with, "When you lived socially as a man ..." or "When people thought you were a man ..." small, but nonetheless, like lapels or pleats, highly significant differences.

16 - "I think transsexuals are just men in drag." Of course you do, and you're entitled, even justifiably proud, to think so. Do not, however, voice this sentiment while surrounded by a full room of men who really are in drag, (for instance, the next Night of a Thousand Gowns) Also, be certain to note the exception to this rule, which is, of course, female-to-male transsexuals, who are really, well, just women in drag. We all know how naturally distasteful it is when men wear dresses or women wear pants. Do not, however, voice this sentiment while surrounded by a room of S/M dykes in full leather and studs.

17 - "Well, I want you to know I respect your choices." And I yours, particularly in transcendent matters, such as whether to register your pattern at Bloomingdale's or Saks, or whether a bright, robust yet tart, Almanden can properly accompany sushi. However, in more pedestrian spheres, such as gender identity, it profits us immensely to recall that none of us exercises much choice.

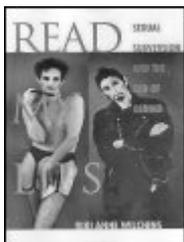
18 - "Isn't it amazing you're the only transsexual I know." Yes, and isn't it amazing, when you came-out to your mother, you were the only homosexual she knew. Ho-hum. The fact that I am the only transsexual you know only emphasises that: a) you probably know a few hundred of us, but you don't know you know us, and we won't tell you that you do; b) there are tens of thousands of us, and more all the time; c) we are secretly plotting to take over the planet earth, and infiltrating your prevailing non-transsexual culture is just our first step; d) while we are waiting to take over your planet, we are amusing ourselves at your expense by seeing just how much we can fuck with your head.

Riki Anne Wilchins

From Wikipedia  and Amazon Books:  Born in 1952, Riki Anne Wilchins is an activist whose work has focused on the impact of gender norms. While she started out as a transgender leader — founding the first national transgender advocacy group (GenderPAC) - her analysis and work broadened over time to include discrimination and violence regardless of individuals' identity. While this perspective has been widely accepted, its breadth has provoked criticism by some in the transgender community. Wilchins' work and writing has often focused on youth, whom she not only sees as uniquely vulnerable to the gender system's pressures and harm, but whom she sees as capable of "looking with fresh eyes". Wilchins' work has been instrumental in bringing transgender rights into the mainstream L.G.B.T. movement, and has helped bring awareness of the impact of gender norms to a wider audience. In 2001, Wilchins' work resulted in her being selected one of just six community activists named by *Time* Magazine among its "100 Civic Innovators for the Twenty-First Century". A founding member of Camp Trans, since the mid 1990s Wilchins has been highly active in founding a number of organizations and events focused on gender issues, including:



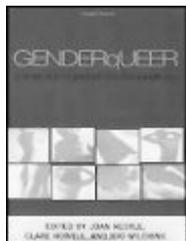
- The Transsexual Menace - the first large direct action group for transgender rights, which was modelled along the lines of Queer Nation and which at one point boasted representatives in over forty cities (co-founder Denise Norris).
- Hermaphrodites With Attitude - the first direct action group for the intersex (co-founder Cheryl Chase, Executive Director of the Intersex Society of North America).
- New York City Gay Community Centre Gender Identity Project (co-founder Dr. Barbara Warren, Director of Social Services).
- New York City Gay Community Centre Transgender Health Empowerment Conference, an annual event (co-founder Dr. Barbara Warren, Director of Social Services).
- Camp Trans, an annual educational event outside the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival that contests the exclusion of anyone who is not deemed a "womyn-born womyn" (co-founders Janice Walworth, Nancy Jean Burkholder).
- National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (co-founder Susan Wright, its first Executive Director).
- National Gender Lobby Day, an annual event on Capitol Hill (co-founder Phyllis Frye).



Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender
Author: Riki Anne Wilchins
Publisher: Firebrand Books (1997)1563410907
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1563410907

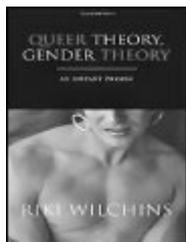
From Amazon Books:  Over the course of the past decade transgender politics has become the cutting edge of sexual liberation. While sexual and political freedom of homosexuals has yet to be fully secured, questions of who is sleeping with whom pale in the face of the battle by transgender activists to dismantle the idea of what it means to be a man or a woman. Riki Anne Wilchins' *Read My Lips* is a passionate and extraordinarily intelligent look at how society not only creates men and

women - ignoring the fluidity of maleness and femaleness in most people, but also explains how those categories generate crisis for most individuals. It is impossible to read Wilchins's ideas and not be provoked in fundamental and mysterious ways.



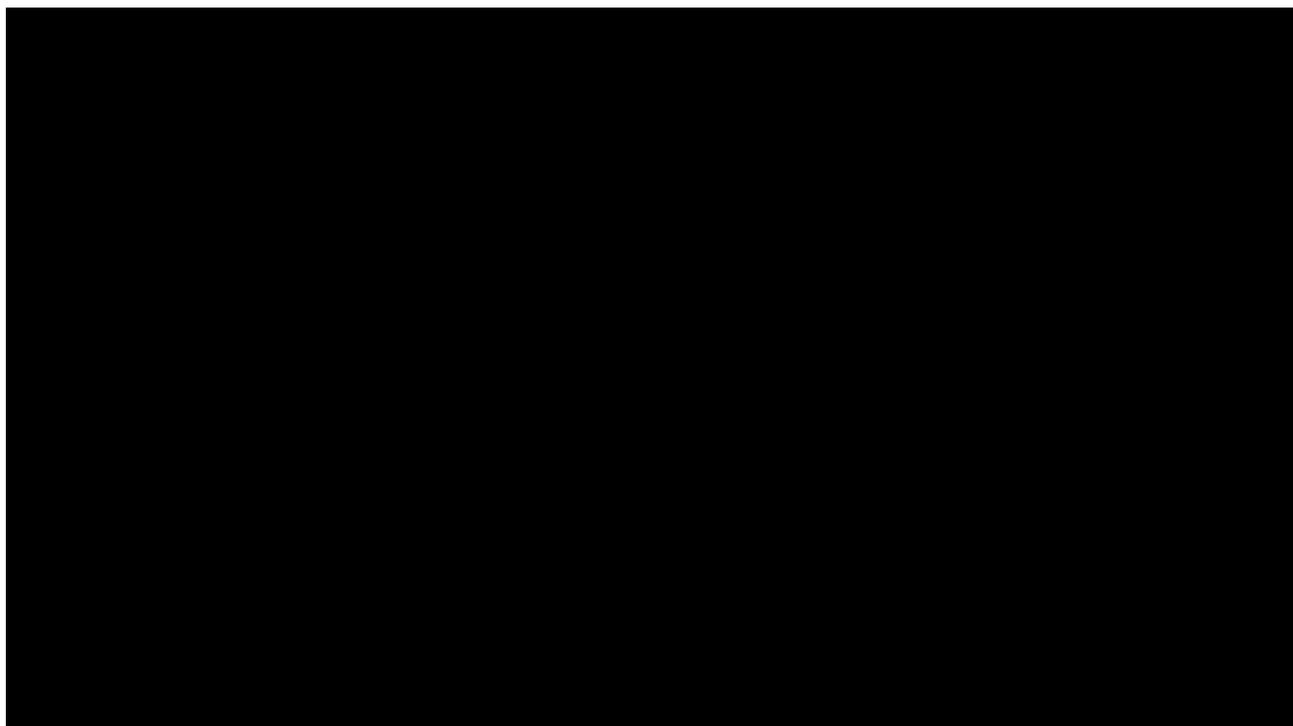
GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary
Author: Riki Anne Wilchins, Joan Nestle and Clare Howell
Publisher: Alyson Books (2002)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1555837301

From Amazon Books: Perhaps more than any other issue, gender identity has galvanized the queer community in recent years. The questions go beyond the nature of male/female to a yet-to-be-traversed region that lies somewhere between and beyond biologically determined gender. In this ground breaking anthology, three experts in gender studies and politics navigate around rigid, societally imposed concepts of two genders to discover and illuminate the limitless possibilities of identity. Thirty first-person accounts of gender construction, exploration, and questioning provide a groundwork for cultural discussion, political action, and even greater possibilities of autonomous gender choices. Noted scholar Joan Nestle is joined by internationally prominent gender warrior Riki Anne Wilchins and historian Clare Howell to provide a societal, cultural, and political exploration of gender identity.



Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer
Author: Riki Anne Wilchins
Publisher: Alyson Books (2004)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1555837980

From Amazon Books: A one-stop, no-nonsense introduction to the core of post-modern theory, particularly its impact on queer and gender studies. Nationally known gender activist Riki Wilchins combines straightforward prose with concrete examples from L.G.B.T. and feminist politics, as well as her own life, to guide the reader through the ideas that have forever altered our understanding of bodies, sex and desire. This is that rare post-modern theory book that combines accessibility, passion, personal experience and applied politics, noting at every turn why these ideas matter and how they can affect your daily life.



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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.