

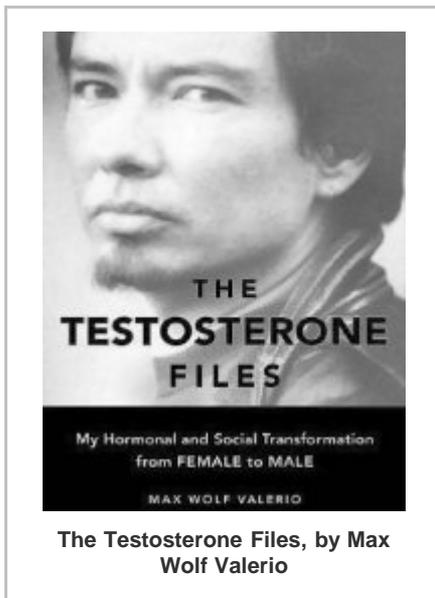
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## Rage Against the Machine

### Two Transsexual Men Discover the Differences Between the Sexes is More than Skin Deep

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The Testosterone Files, by Max Wolf Valerio

**D**hillon Khosla wants to have things both ways. His personal publicist (Levine Communications) bills his new book, *Both Sides Now* (Penguin) as "a rare glimpse in to what it is like to live as both a woman and now, a man, and offers extraordinary insight and perspective into the sexes." Yet in the concluding chapters of the memoir he writes, "If there ever was a time when I thought I had some special insight into the minds of women, that time was now past."

*... it's not just testosterone that plays a part in transitioning to male - socialisation has its place too.*

Dhillon Khosla declined to be interviewed for this article. In a recent appearance on *The View* - explaining his discomfort at the term transgender - Khosla says that after fifteen surgeries, he feels "to use any other label but man feels like a betrayal to those efforts." Elsewhere he's noted that he feels more accepted in blue-collar bars than the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (L.G.B.T.) community. Neither sentiment however, precludes an interest in queer money, and Levine Communications is actively courting the L.G.B.T. press and marketing both sides directly to lesbian, gay and transgender readers.

The East Indian - German first generation American (who recently left his post as a staff attorney to California and federal judges to join the lecture circuit) insists that "warmth and

openness" is his natural state, but nearly every chapter in *Both Sides* references his "murderous, overwhelming rage," which he describes as "simply a reaction to my circumstances."

That fury is directed at doctors, his mother, fellow spiritual students (one of whom says "I hate the kind of masculinity you have come to embrace"); people on the street who mistakenly call him ma'am in the early stages of his transition; and lesbians. Angry that a woman he's interested in won't date him because he's now a man, Khosla - who once identified as a lesbian - fumes in *Both Sides*: "Fuck lesbians. Fuck all of you. When I was in a different body, you all wanted me - drooled over me. And now it's different? Well you're all hypocrites because I'm the same person."

Each chapter in Khosla's memoir opens with a dream sequence and then describes his transition from late 1997 to early 1999. Primarily focused on his push for hormone treatment and sex reassignment surgery, *Both Sides* is like a mythic quest for the Holy Grail - which, in Khosla's case, is an attractive, fully functioning penis.

Without genital surgery, Khosla believes he will never be completely accepted as a man. Like protagonists in most mythic journeys, Khosla faces numerous obstacles - surgical complications and the expense of nearly \$50,000. In the end, he successfully achieves the penis of his dreams.

Although written well enough, *Both Sides* fails to live up to its promise - particularly that of exposing essential differences between men and women. Fortunately the memoir of another former lesbian succeeds commendably in reaching that goal.

In this summer's *The Testosterone Files* (Seal Press), Max Wolf Valerio describes how hormone treatment fundamentally altered both himself and the way he perceived men and women. An American Indian - Latino Sephardic poet - whose pre-transition prose was included in the essential feminist of colour tome *This Bridge Called My Back* - Valerio began hormone treatment nearly two decades ago. His story inspired Monika Treut's short film, *Max* and her feature *Gendernauts* (recently released on D.V.D. from First Run Pictures). *Testosterone Files* focuses on the first five years of that transition, providing engaging and vivid imagery of the punk lesbian-feminist who was Anita; and the chemically, physically and emotionally changed man he became on testosterone.

"The testimony of *The Testosterone Files* should be compelling," Valerio argues, "because I was a lesbian feminist and didn't believe that these changes could be due to hormones alone. I also believed that all differences between the sexes were mostly cultural or socially constructed. I found out that I was wrong."

Risking the wrath of feminists everywhere, Valerio boldly asserts that there are fundamental differences between the sexes, and that those differences are rooted primarily in hormonal influences rather than socialization. Doing so, Valerio elicited some pointed criticism from feminist sources.

"I understand," he claims. "I would have had the same reaction before I began hormone treatment. However, I stand by my assertions that testosterone - and oestrogen - have powerful effects on more than simply beard growth and muscle mass."

Valerio's not put off by controversy. "It's the job of the writer and artist to bring people into challenging experiences, to stretch their boundaries and disturb them," he says.

Despite some negative reactions, others have lauded *Testosterone Files*, including feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling.

"There are obviously people who tend to lean toward a reading of sex roles, or even sexual differentiation, as being very socially constructed who can read *The Testosterone Files* with some nuance and appreciation for its contribution," Valerio says.

Valerio penned the majority of the manuscript in the mid 1990s. In the decades to follow he says she's also come to recognise that it's not just testosterone that plays a part in transitioning to male - socialisation has its place too.

"[Male socialisation] can help you to become a more mature man, more developed, more loving and kind. Socialisation affects us as transsexual men. But, not insofar as the changes I so dramatically describe in the memoir. What I do with these changes, which were so basic and raw, so quick to appear after I injected testosterone, is another matter. This is where culture and therefore, socialisation, kicks in."

For example, under the influence of testosterone, Valerio says he found, "Sexual desire and fantasy can often feel overpowering, and you need to keep your head on straight. What I've discovered with time is that one doesn't have to do anything at all about these feelings; if you do nothing, they pass, like all feelings do ... I have grown into my new sexuality, and the heightened drive is just another part of who I am now."

Valerio says that his frank discussions about sex and violence have been seen as the most controversial aspect of his book.

"I've heard of women actually crying after I read the chapter, "Cock in my Pocket," which is graphic about the heightened sex drive and takes on the issue of rape and violence against women. Because of the intensity of the writing and the fact that I don't pull my punches when describing intense feelings and impulses, people are often shaken."

Arguing that violence seems "a part of the male inheritance," Valerio says he's gained a "darker understanding" of how testosterone activates aggression.

"I describe this in the book: my own feelings of aggression, expressed in many ways, sometimes as simply taking up more space in conversations, or feeling very energetic. I also have had to deal with the sudden aggression of other men toward me, which I hadn't expected - the territory dance. I did not fear rape on the streets any longer, no small thing, but I did have to deal with the increased testiness and territoriality of other men."

To deal with that increased hostility, Valerio says he turned to bio-males to learn ways to safely interact with other men.

"You just learn new ways to cope with certain feelings. I had a genetic guy tell me this, early into the testosterone: that one has to learn to control one's temper or irritability, that this is just part of growing up as a man."

He says he's also had to learn new boundaries around women.

"I have more power, and some of that power is the power to frighten and intimidate, and that is not a welcome thing. It's like waking up and realizing that you are a hulking beast that terrifies people."

Willing to address even the most controversial issues, Valerio says, "I know F.T.M.s who tell me that their sex fantasies became more violent or aggressive. "He admits that his own sexual impulses have become" coloured by an intense and sometimes edgy desire, a sudden desire to take, or even overpower."

But, he says, these are simply feelings or fantasies and he's learned how to express their energies in non-violent and non-sexual ways.

He cautions, "You don't act out your stuff on other people, certainly not without their consent. That's just not ethical. It's part of maturing as male."

In many ways *Testosterone Files* is a celebration of masculinity. "I didn't want to be an apologetic male,"

Valerio says. "So, I wanted my memoir to reflect this exuberance; there is a beauty to what I experience as male energy, it can be creative as well as destructive."

As a transperson with Native American heritage, Valerio finds that others falsely presume his coming-out was easy or that the tribe celebrated his transsexuality. He explains, "My mother is American Indian from a reserve in Canada. She is from the Blood (Kainai) band of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Although it is true that in the old days, people would live as the sex opposite their birth sex, in response to a dream or vision, and this was respected, it is also true that now, much of the memory of this alternative living has been lost. It's actually a silly and romantic idea about Indians that fuels this fantasy - and it is a fantasy - that we are all received as shamans or accepted as two spirits or what have you. The reality is often far less romantic. My mother never wanted me to set foot on her reserve again and ... I haven't gone back yet. But, I will."

Valerio argues that he's not a two spirit, anyway. He's a transsexual man. He clarifies, "Two-spirits aren't exactly the same as

transsexuals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries anyway. Most transsexuals don't want to be, or feel themselves to be, of two spirits." Instead, he says, transsexuals feel strongly that they are of the sex opposite to their birth sex and they "take medical means to alter ourselves to a proximity of that perception, that deeply held belief."

There are other challenges Valerio says, to being a Native American transsexual: "For Indians, your relatives are very important. One aunt once chided me gently that now all of my cousins would have to go into therapy to try and accept my transsexuality. That's sixty people or more."

While most transsexuals worry about the reaction of their nuclear family, Valerio jokes, "I was burdened with the mental health of my entire large extended family." Still, he says, there is one advantage to his cultural heritage.

"One thing I have going for me is not that Native people are more understanding of transsexuals, but that we try very hard to love and accept our relatives, no matter what they do."

The loss of that familial connection has been difficult and he's only recently begun to bridge that chasm. Another painful experience in his transition was going from diehard feminist, to a man accused of sexism. He says she was "shocked and disturbed" by the incident and says, "I really had to wrap my mind around this accusation since I was completely puzzled as to why this was occurring."

He's now come to anticipate that feminists will view him in that light - unless they've had the chance to know him personally - especially as *The Testosterone Files*' testimony about biological differences may at first appear as sexist conclusions.

Valerio says he's been taken to task because he's not actively trying to dismantle the binary gender system. He sees his very existence as a transsexual as rebuking a rigid binary. But argues, "it's not our job to live out anyone's idea of a gender revolution."

"I like being a man." Valerio says. "Male guilt does not empower women. You can be far more helpful to women if you take on your manhood with dignity and responsibility, if you do not shirk the consequences of your choice to embody manhood."

Being a heterosexual man who's largely gender role congruent, casts suspicion upon him, Valerio says, because some feminists believe all heterosexual men are inherently misogynist.

"I enjoy women who like being women in a traditionally feminine way ... I'm attracted to ... femmes. As a man, this makes me appear more traditionally heterosexual [and] many feminists seem to think that male heterosexuality is automatically anti-feminist. I believe otherwise."

Furthermore, Valerio insists, "I do not believe that having a virile heterosexual male sensibility and finding women desirable makes one a misogynist ... lust is not hostility."

Plus, he argues, being a transsexual man, "makes me automatically some kind of queer. It's a paradox. I'm arriving at a normative place through radical means."

Valerio says he's also been accused of being macho. He thinks that perception may be based on class difference, and says feminist author Viviane Namaste once told him, "Max they think you are macho - and therefore exist - because you are not a white, middle-class, queer-identified academic."

"I was brought up very working-class," Valerio explains. "Around enlisted Army men, Indian and white cowboys, and men in working class trades, [and] I think that my masculinity is marked by this."

Valerio says that although he still firmly believes in feminist tenants, his feminism is now mediated by his experience of manhood. "I'm now more empathetic to men's lives and experiences. I see that guys have it rougher than I'd imagined before. Men are actually often kinder and nicer people than I would have thought before I became one. I think the average guy is trying to do the right thing."

Valerio says, "We must take responsibility for our gender." Transmen, he argues, can't identify as male when it suits them, and then be "special because we're socialized female," when their maleness is inconvenient. "Being an ally to women means taking responsibility for being a man now," he says.

Unlike some men (including Khosla) who claim - after they come-out as transsexual - that they were never truly female, Valerio says, "I know that I was female at one time, even if that was hard to accept."

During the period of his life detailed in *The Testosterone Files*, Valerio primarily dated heterosexual women, and in fact, he says, "All of the women I've dated actually for over twenty years have been heterosexual." Partly because of that, he hasn't been involved in the dyke community since the early days of his transition. That all changed three years ago when he met Amy - a femme dyke - at a trans-dyke event.

Dating a lesbian has been an interesting experience for both of them, Valerio says.

"She's had to deal with conflicts in her identity: negotiating her identity with friends and with herself. I've been escorted back into dyke spaces by her, and into spaces for transmen and dykes that are appearing more and more in San Francisco."

Valerio sees his partnership with Amy as "part of a new attempt by the dyke world to accommodate transmen and their dyke partners," and says, "It is really an experiment, and I am not sure where it will lead." As happy as he's been to find a place for himself in lesbian culture, Valerio says he wishes more effort were being made to welcome trans-women into dyke spaces.

"Transwomen are, after all, the women in the equation and they should be the ones going in before we do," he argues. "I actually can't

emphasise this enough. Trans-women should be allowed to be in women's spaces, not transmen!"

Valerio says that he and Amy have also found a place for themselves in the queerish straight community of San Francisco, which he calls "pretty damn kinky and different."

"[Amy] has many bisexual or queer identified girlfriends who date men, or have husbands and date women also. She still identifies as a femme, and as a lesbian-dyke and that's her business. We like to say that we're in a queer heterosexual relationship because it's certainly not a lesbian or dyke relationship - it is a relationship between a man and a woman - yet we're not the everyday heterosexual couple either."

Valerio is currently at work on two projects: a non-fiction compilation that will include analysis of films and books, and essays addressing masculinity, transsexuality and sexual politics; and a book of short stories that may evolve into a novel. In the meantime, he continues his poetry, a medium he's excelled at for more than two decades and which he says is the work most exemplary of who he is. He sees his non-fiction work as bringing to light the real life experiences of transsexuals that have been ignored by academics and queer theory.

"We've been heard incompletely and through the lens of theories, which most of us don't care about or identify with. I think the majority of transsexuals do not identify with queer theory. They're not all that interested in transgressing gender they are interested in having and living their lives as men and women. Like Khosla, Valerio sees his journey as a transformative adventure, but unlike Khosla's hunt for a magic talisman, Valerio describes his quest as "a search for my authentic self, as well as a very potent medicine - that I ingested without fully grasping just how much it would impact my life. It was world shattering in terms of my psyche, even as I grew into a place where I was ultimately more comfortable."

The edgy and thought provoking *Testosterone Files* introduces us to the first leg of Valerio's journey, one in which the traveller is influenced by sex, drugs and punk rock, and in which he explores the dark side of maleness, and returns a changed man - one who is so hopeful that we can't help but be buoyed by his enthusiasm. The only disappointment is that the story concludes nearly a decade in the past, before many of Valerio's greatest insights have had a chance to develop. Here's hoping he'll bring us up to date - and soon.

## Dhillon Khosla

**From Dhillon Khosla's website:**  Dhillon Khosla was born in Brussels, Belgium to an East Indian father and a German mother. After spending his childhood in Europe, Dhillon completed his education in the United States, eventually earning degrees in both psychology and law, graduating valedictorian of his law school class. For many years, Dhillon has served as a judicial staff attorney for both state and federal judges and has lectured on complex areas of criminal law, including the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.



Dhillon is an accomplished singer/songwriter and spent the past several years completing an album of original songs described by critics as "alternative rock with a sophisticated edge". His first solo album *The Temple* was produced by multi-platinum musician and producer, Marcus Barone, and has recently been selected by music supervisors for film and television placement.

Read more about Dhillon Khosla [at his website.](#) 



**Both Sides Now: One Man's Journey Through Womanhood**  
Author: Dhillon Khosla  
Publisher: Tarcher (2006)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-1585424726.

**From Amazon Books:**  On the way to rebuilding the temple that is now his body, he stumbled upon his soul ... *Both Sides Now* is a vivid and compelling account of one man's search for wholeness, leading through multiple, complex, and life-threatening surgeries that not only transformed him physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

While he was born into a female body, Dhillon Khosla never felt fully at home in his skin. But while he knew very early on that his true identity was male, he spent almost twenty years repressing this knowledge and trying to fiercely embrace the beautiful appearing female form into which he developed. Trapped beneath the female disguise, he lived his life from the outside looking in. Shortly after turning twenty-eight, he came across an article about men who were born into female bodies and had undergone surgeries to reclaim their male identity. As soon as he began reading the words, Khosla felt flashes of recognition stirring within, and for the first time, hope.

In this spellbinding memoir Khosla shares his extraordinary journey to reclaim his manhood – a journey that would ultimately lead through fifteen surgeries, one of which almost claimed his life and revealed the very depths of his commitment. As Khosla continued to bravely fight his way home, his nights became filled with beautiful, allegorical – and sometimes prophetic – dreams, while his days brought insight upon insight into the many ways we as men and women leave our fingerprints upon each other. But most poignant of all, was his discovery of the true meaning of self-love: the willingness to turn away from the external forces that tell us who we ought to be, towards that one, inner voice that has known all along.

## Max Wolf Valerio

From Amazon Books Author Biography: Max Wolf Valerio's memoir is about his first five years of transition from female to male. It is not poetry, although many say it is poetic. Most deeply and consistently, he is a poet and has written poetry for over thirty years. Although he has been known to work with punk bands to create primal and seductive alien landscapes of sound, he is not a spoken word poet. Even so, his work is written for the page and then, to be heard and read out loud.

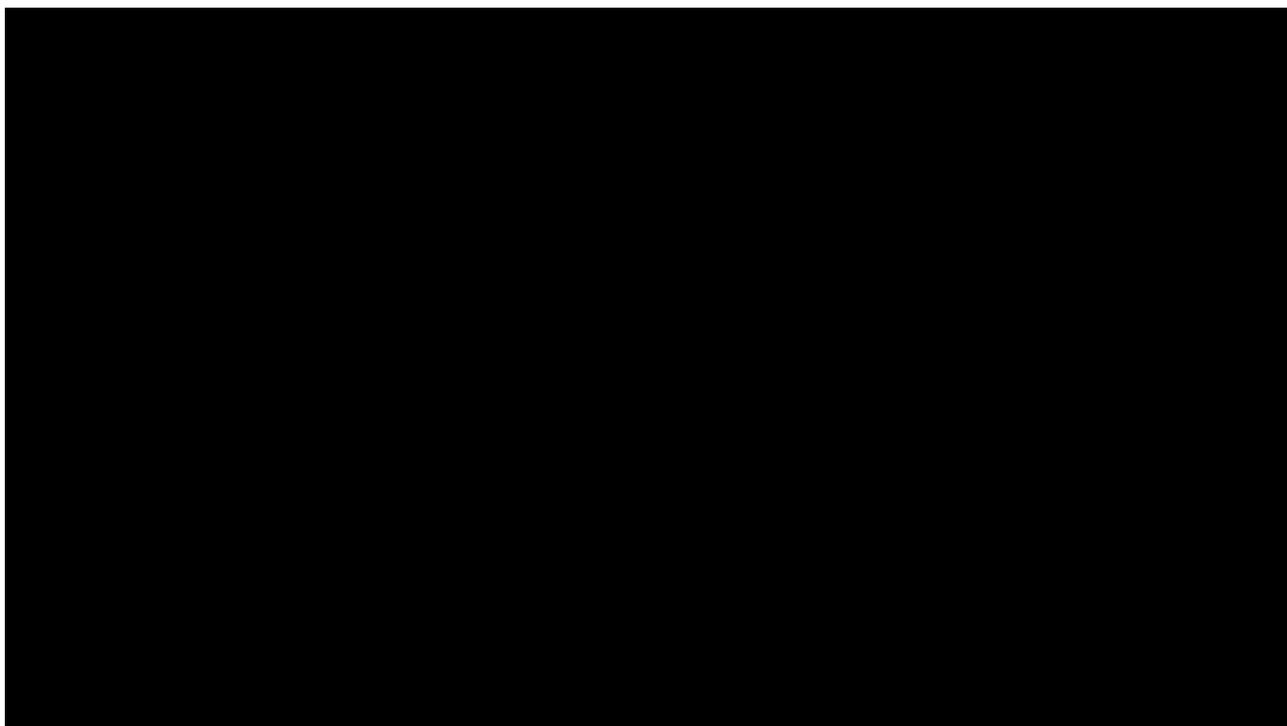


Max is a registered treaty Indian in Canada: Blackfoot Confederacy and Kainai (Blood) band - Treaty 7. His mother is from the Blood or Kainai reserve, and his father is from Taos in northern New Mexico. He has been involved in tracking down his father's lineage, his Sephardic ancestors who were chased up north to New Mexico in 1598 and 1694, principally by the Spanish Inquisition, after sojourns in Italy from Spain after the expulsion.

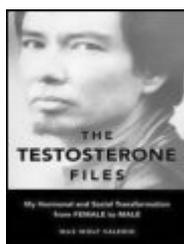
He identifies as many things. he is also a transsexual man, having gone through medical transition from female to male beginning in 1989. Primarily he identifies as just a man, but certainly takes on trans as a qualifier and an accurate description of who he is and where he has been.

He has a wonderful loving girlfriend, and a rich and sweet life in San Francisco. He's a punk at heart, having been involved in the early punk scene, and will always enjoy anarchy and a kind of visceral rebellion. However, he also has iconoclastic perspectives on many issues, and although he leans far to the left on most issues, whenever he senses that a utopian agenda is circumventing liberty or good, common sense, he has been known to lean to a place that he has not yet defined. That is, he is, in some respects, a civil libertarian, or at least, someone who dislikes being told what to do, say or think. He also dislikes identity politics, believing it is the seventh ring of hell, and he would prefer to not think about it, but he says, he is a man condemned in some sense. Possibly, we can move beyond those layers, to a fresh and energizing perspective.

He loves visionary art and poetry and is in love with transformation and intensely lived experience. He has been a part of many religious and spiritual paths including Tibetan Buddhism and Afro-Caribbean traditions, American Indian traditions, and an exploration of Judaism.



Max Wolf Valerio reads an excerpt from "Get a Job!" in the Trans/Love anthology.



The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male  
Author: Max Wolf Valerio  
Publisher: Seal Press (2006)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-1580051736.

**From Amazon Books:**  Max Wolf Valerio crafts a raw, gripping, and poetic account of life before, during, and after injecting testosterone. Valerio's detailed observations about a lesbian transitioning from female to a heterosexual male highlights the physical and emotional differences between women and men, and alternately challenges and confirms readers' assumptions about gender.

*The Testosterone Files* addresses the most fundamental issues of transitioning, from buying men's underwear to choosing a male name, as well as the profound subjects of male privilege, physical power, and existing as a male who was once distrustful and critical of men's intentions. Valerio's honest and forthcoming opinions on gender, identity, and self-perception comprise the core of this intensely personal and absorbing narrative which grapples with the tough and complex issues that emerge in a world whose assumptions about gender binaries are being increasingly challenged as

more people openly self-define across the gender spectrum.

## Jacob Anderson-Minshall

From Diane and Jacob Anderson-Minshall's website: Jacob Anderson-Minshall is a multimedia storyteller and social change artist. He is a board member with Lambda Literary Foundation, the organization that nurtures, celebrates, and preserves L.G.B.T. literature through programs that honour excellence, promote visibility and encourage development of emerging writers.



Jacob creates and manages content for a national online media outlet where he maintains an entertainment channel, producing articles, writing a blog, moderating a forum and producing a weekly newsletter. With his co-conspirator, Diane, Jacob is co-writing a memoir, *Queerly Beloved* about their relationship surviving his transition from lesbian to trans man.

A journalist, Jacob has written articles for *Bitch* and *Curve* magazines, profiled L.G.B.T. entertainers for *Windy City Times* and *Just Out*, written op-ed pieces for SheWired.com and covered environmental issues for KBOO radio news and Sustainable Today Television. For four years, he penned the nationally-syndicated weekly column, TransNation and later he produced and co-hosted the monthly hour-long radio show, *Gender Blender*.

For more on Jacob, please visit [Jacob Anderson-Minshall's Wikipedia page](#). 

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