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Era of the Gender-Crosser

Buoyed by the Success of Gay Liberation and Freed by Medical Advances, The Transgender Community Has Found a Voice

by Mary McNamara, [Los Angeles Times](#) 

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Patrick and Matt's son was born into a family of two male parents and a world that ten years ago did not even exist.

Once upon a time in San Francisco, two people fell in love, broke up, got back together, joined their names and had a baby. A conventional love story, except for one detail: When Patrick and Matt Califia-Rice met ten years ago, they were women.

Women who had felt, from the time they were small, that they should be men.

Matt was the first to exchange desire for reality. On the day the two broke up, he began taking testosterone. He grew a beard, had his breasts removed.

They got back together five years later, and though they could not legally marry, they took each other's names. Patrick, who was still living as a woman, began thinking that he too would become a man.

Then things got complicated.

The couple decided they wanted to have a child. With their unusual history, adoption would be difficult if not impossible, and Patrick had undergone a hysterectomy for medical reasons years before.

The only option, they felt, was for Matt to conceive. Plagued by hormone induced migraines, he had already stopped taking testosterone and had begun to menstruate again; his doctor had advised a hysterectomy.

Instead, they found several sperm donors, and the handsome, bearded thirty-seven-year-old computer network analyst entered the world of morning sickness and water retention. During Matt's third trimester, Patrick began taking testosterone and contemplating chest surgery.

A year ago, their son was born, into a family of two male parents and a world that ten years ago did not even exist.

Since the story of Christine Jorgenson hit the New York tabloids in 1952, transsexuals have hovered on the edge of public imagination, stock characters in a myth that went something like this: Due to a mistake in nature or biology, a woman is born trapped in a man's body. After years of denial and mental torture, he has a sex change operation and goes on to live life as a traditional heterosexual woman, revealing her past only as the result of a medical emergency or as a guest on 'Jerry Springer'.

But in 2001, that scenario is outdated, if not obsolete.

Gender identity disorder, as defined in medical manuals, is characterised by a 'persistent discomfort about one's assigned sex'. It has no known cause. Numbers are hard to come by in a still mostly closeted population, but those who are 'out' make up an exceedingly diverse group. There are as many female-to-male transsexuals as male-to-female, and they come from every race, religion and cultural background.

Some transsexuals are straight, some are gay and some are bisexual. Some have children before they make the change, some have children after.

Many have sexual reassignment surgery, many do not; many take hormones to change their secondary sex characteristics, some do not; many dress and live as close to the traditional definition of male and female as possible; others are androgynous.

In fact, transsexual, with its historical implications of surgery, is being replaced by the broader term 'transgender', which includes cross-dressers, people who identify themselves as stone butch lesbians or flaming queens and anyone who feels or acts outside the traditional gender norms. Within the transgender community, the word 'transition' has become a verb to describe what used to be called a 'sex change'.

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Buoyed by the success of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, freed from enforced isolation by changes in the medical and psychiatric establishment, and brought together by the Internet, the transgender community has emerged in the last five years as a new voice in social activism.

This voice suggests that, although gender is an identity we are born with, an identity that no amount of social influence can sway, it is too great and varied a force to shoehorn into those ubiquitous boxes marked 'F' and 'M'. While human desires for love, passion, work, respect, friends, family remain constant, the way those desires are felt and expressed cannot always be categorized at the moment of birth. Anatomy, as feminists have long argued, is not destiny.

"This is the last phase of the sexual identity movement," says Vern Bullough, a [U.S.C.](#) adjunct professor of nursing who has written extensively on sexuality in America. "The community is much more organised than it was five years ago. It's learning to live with its own differences, and becoming more mainstream. The long-term effect will be interesting. Certainly, it will blur gender lines even further."

It seems a natural extension of arguments made by feminists, gays and lesbians and transgender people have found solace, aid and allies in both those communities. But they have also encountered rejection and hostility. Change is difficult, even for revolutionaries.

"Many mixed-race people are saying that race, as a means of categorizing people, no longer works," says Robert Dawidoff, a history professor at Claremont Graduate University. "Transgender people are showing us that gender, as a similar construct, has no meaning either. Which is, of course, very frightening to many people."

A Difficult Pregnancy for Matt and Patrick

For Matt and Patrick, that was clear right away. It was a difficult pregnancy, physically and emotionally. Tasks most couples take for granted, finding a doctor and a birthing class, telling family and friends became dramatic events.

To strangers, Matt looked like a man trying to hide a beer belly with bigger and bigger overalls.

His appearance at a birthing class caused a stir. "We had found an instructor whose partner was transgender," says Patrick, a psychotherapist and the author of several books, including *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (Cleis Press, 1997), "so that was no problem. But the class was pretty frosty."

"Matt was very clearly a man when he walked in," says midwife Kim Touevs, whose classes are geared toward lesbian families. "And he was also very clearly pregnant. Everyone was very respectful, but they were waiting to hear what Pat and Matt had to say in the introduction circle."

The two were very open, says Touevs, who has since had two other transgender parents in her class, and by the end of the session, everyone seemed comfortable, or as comfortable as a room full of expectant couples can be.

"We had to buy a lot of chocolate," Patrick says. "I have always found that it's kind of hard for people to say nasty things after you've fed them."

A man, however, cannot have a baby without someone taking umbrage, and to the couple's dismay, the most hurtful criticism came from some of their friends.

In San Francisco, they were part of one of the largest and most visible transgender communities in the world. But within that world, they were a scandal.

"A lot of female-to-male transsexuals are very invested in seeing themselves as 'real men', says Patrick. "And they said 'real men' don't have babies. But Matt said 'real men' don't have hysterectomies either. He refused to be shamed."

"One of my girlfriends said during an argument, 'I can't believe you were ever a woman' says James Green."

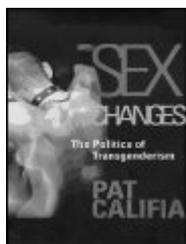
And I said, "I wasn't. That's the whole point. I was something else."

How does he think of himself now?

"I am a man," he says, "with an unusual history."

Patrick Califia

From Wikipedia:  Patrick Califia, born in 1954 in Texas [U.S.A.](#), is a writer of non-fiction essays about sexuality and erotic fiction and poetry. Assigned female at birth, he grew up in a Mormon family and came-out as lesbian in 1971 while living in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 1973 he moved to San Francisco, California, and worked on the San Francisco Sex Information switchboard. With the founding of [Samois](#), a lesbian-feminist [B.D.S.M.](#) organization, he shifted focus from having articles published in lesbian, gay and feminist magazines, to the lesbian experience of [B.D.S.M.](#) and made a major contribution to the diversification of the leather subculture. Califia founded the leatherwomen's quarterly *Venus Inferis* in 1992, and in 1996 was co-editor of *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader*. During this period Califia was both writing about queer studies and gender identity and coming to terms with these issues on a personal level. During the mid-1990s, Califia decided to transition, adopting the name of Patrick. Since the 1990s, Califia has had fibromyalgia which has reduced his ability to type or write. He is currently in private practice as a therapist (he is a licensed marriage therapist and family therapist in the state of California). He continues to publish his work and attend leather community events.



Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism

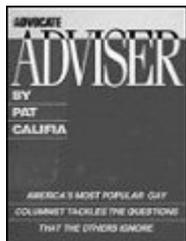
Author: Pat Califia

Publisher: Cleis Press (1997)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-1573440721

From Amazon Books:  *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* is Califia's meticulously researched book based on an astute reading of the available literature and in-depth interviews with gender transgressors who "opened their lives, minds, hearts, and bedrooms to the gaze of strangers". Writing about both male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, Califia examines the lives of early transgender pioneers like Christine Jorgenson, Jan Morris, Renee Richards and

Mark Rees, contemporary transgender activists like Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein, and partners of transgendered people like Minnie Bruce Pratt. Califia scrutinizes feminist resistance to transsexuals occupying women's space, the Christian Right's backlash against transsexuals, and the appropriation of the berdache and other differently-gendered by gay historians to prove the universal existence of homosexuality. Finally, *Sex Changes* explores the future of gender.



Advocate Adviser

Author: Pat Califia

Publisher: Alyson Books (June 1991)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-1555831699

From Amazon Books:  Lesbians and gay men have often felt ignored by traditional advice columnists like "Dear Abby", "Ann Landers" or "Miss Manners". Fortunately the national gay/lesbian weekly *The Advocate* offered an advice column, "The Advocate Adviser", for them ten years ago.

This book collects and groups some of the columns into categories like "Meeting People" or "Coming Out" or "Sexual Problems" with an excellent "Resources" section at the end. Califia's responses artfully combine practical advice with a supportive, often humorous delivery. Given that many of the queries reflect consenting adult sexual behaviour, he is truthful and refreshingly non-judgmental. Califia plainly calls it as he sees it, and while some of the language is raw, it is not offensive. Recommended for all public libraries. - Richard Drezen, Merrill Lynch Capital Markets Library, New York. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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