

Shortly after our separation, I transitioned to three-quarter time living as Allie. Very shortly after that I was fired from my job. I assured E that I'd continue to support her and the boys in any way I could; I borrowed money from my family and engaged in exhausting legal battles for unemployment benefits and for financial damages as the result of my unlawful firing. Through all this I remained committed to my newly found state of mental health, determined that I could face anything as Allie. I was also amply aware of the irony that, as hormones inexorably reduced Robert's potency, shrinking his gonads to the size of unripe May apples, Allie had more *balls* than Robert ever did.

Soon there were many people who knew me only as Allie, people who had never seen the vestiges of my past. The boys were introduced to her: J actually liked her; A would take some time. E, whenever we met, appeared as if she'd seen a ghost.

So now E and I are standing in her kitchen (formerly known as "ours"). We are discussing logistics: She will be going through a routine exam at a local hospital—nothing serious, but it will leave her groggy and in need of transportation home. Would I mind picking her up from the hospital? No, of course not. I want to do anything to help. Good. E wants to say something else . . . What . . . ? When you pick me up . . . ? Yes . . . ? Will you be wearing women's clothes?

The snow leaves only a small path on the sidewalk. I am heading back to my apartment after visiting the boys. I'm wearing clogs and a big wool hat but still not technically "presenting." I'm right behind a family of out-of-town parents and their college-age kids. The father is holding up the rear of the caravan. He senses me walking up behind him. The caravan is moving slowly, a herd of contented cows. The father turns to look at me, smiles, then moves to the side of the walkway. He yells to the others in front of him, "Wait, let this woman pass."

### WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA—CIRCA WINTER 1961: ONE PASSING RETROGRADE FANTASY

"My daughter would like to play basketball."

"Sorry, the team isn't coed."

"Excuse me?"

"No girls. Only boys."

"My daughter is a boy."

A look of confusion . . .

"Go ahead, dear, show the man your penis."

"Well, ah . . . yes . . . But he can't play looking the way he does."

"How do you mean?"

"His hair. The pigtails. He can't play like that."

"Why not?"

"It'll affect his playing."

"Go ahead, dear, show the man . . ."

She dribbles the basketball a few times, then shoots from mid court. The ball whooshes through the net.

"That's fine . . . but . . . she still looks like a girl."

"Well, naturally . . . He *is* a girl."

## Look! No, Don't! The Invisibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men

*Jamison Green*

... Walking down the street in San Francisco or New York City, Boston, Atlanta, Portland, Seattle, London, Paris, Rome, no one seems to take any special interest in me. I am just another man, invisible, no one special. I remember what it was first like to feel that anonymity as testosterone gradually obliterated the androgyny that for most of my life made others uncomfortable in my presence. It was a great relief . . .

Now . . . people are quite comfortable with my male presentation. My psyche seems to fit nicely into male packaging: I feel better; people around me are less confused, and so am I. So why tell anyone about my past? Why not just live the life of a normal man? Perhaps I could if I were a normal man, but I am not. I am a man, and I am a man who lived for 40 years in a female body. But I was not a woman. I am not a woman who became a man. I am not a woman who lives as a man. I am not, nor was I ever a woman, though I lived in a female body, and certainly tried, whenever I felt up to it, to be a woman. But it was never in me to be a woman. Likewise, I am not a man in the same sense as my younger brother is a man, having been treated as such all his life. I was treated as other than a man most of the time, as a man part of the time, and as a woman only rarely. Certainly I was treated as a little girl when I was young, but even then people occasionally assumed I was a little boy. I always felt like something "other." Can I be just a man now, or must I always be "other"?

... Seeking acceptance within the system of "normal" and denying our transsexual status is an acquiescence to the prevailing binary gender paradigm that will never let us fit in, and will never accept us as equal members of society. Our transsexual status will always be used to threaten and shame us. We will always wear a scarlet T that marks us for treatment as a pretender, as other, as not normal, as trans. But wearing that T proudly—owning the label and carrying it with dignity—can twist that paradigm and free us from our subordinate prison. By using our own bodies and experience as references for our standards, rather than the bodies and experience of non-transsexuals (and non-transgendered people), we can grant our own legitimacy, as have all other groups that have been oppressed because of personal characteristics.

Transgendered people who choose transsexual treatment, who allow themselves to be medicalized, depend on a system of approval that grants them access to treatment. That approval may be seen as relieving them of their responsibility—or guilt—for being outside the norm. They then become either the justification for the treatment by embodying the successful application of "normal" standards; or they become the victims of the treatment when they realize they are still very different in form and substance from non-transsexual people, and they still suffer from the oppression they wished to escape by looking to doctors to make them "normal." By standing up and claiming our identity as men (or women) who are also transpeople, by asserting that our different bodies are just as normal for us as anyone else's is for them, by insisting that our right to modify our bodies and shape our own identities is as inalienable as our right to choose our religion (though not nearly as

inexpensive or painless), we claim our humanity and our right to be treated equally under law and within the purviews of morality and culture.

...  
Look! No, don't! Transsexual men are men. Transsexual men are men who have lived in female bodies. Transsexual men may appear feminine, androgynous or masculine. Any man may appear feminine, androgynous, or masculine. Look! What makes a man a man? His penis? His beard? His receding hairline? His lack of breasts? His sense of himself as a man? Some men have no beard, some have no penis, some never lose their hair, some have breasts. All have a sense of themselves as men.

... Look! No, don't! What is true, what is false? What is a "real" man?

I am real; I am an authentic and reliable man. I am also a transsexual man. I am a man who lived for 40 years in the body of a woman, so I have had access to knowledge that most men do not have. Invisibility has been a major issue in my life. Throughout my childhood and young adulthood I—my identity—was, for the most part, invisible. I was always defined by others, categorized either by my lack of femininity, or by my female body, or by the disquieting combination of both. The opportunity to escape the punishing inadequacy imposed on me by self-styled adjudicators of sex role performance was one I could not ignore. I simply will not accept a similar judgement of my masculinity. And I have yet to meet someone who could look me in the face, who could spend any time at all in conversation with me, who would deny my masculinity now the way they would dismiss it before as "just a phase" or "inappropriate behaviour for a girl."

... One of the most difficult things for me to reconcile about my own transition was my movement out of a place in lesbian culture and into a white heterosexual embodiment. Let me emphasize: Not all transsexual men have lesbian histories, and not all transsexual men are heterosexual. Nonetheless, my personal politics are quite closely aligned with queer culture, so I am again a different sort of heterosexual man. I am not afraid of homosexuality, though I do not practice it. Many gendered and heterosexist social constructs collapse like cardboard sea-walls against the ocean of my transsexual reality.

...  
Look! No, don't! It all comes down to attitude. If you accept me—if you can acknowledge that I am a man, even a transsexual man—then you can accept that life has variation, life is rich, you don't control it, you experience it. You can still analyse concepts, you can still have opinions, you can even disagree with me. And if you don't accept me, well, then you don't. But as you go through life categorizing and qualifying, judging and evaluating, remember that there are human beings on the other end of the stick you're shaking, and they might have ideas and feelings and experiences that are different from your own. Maybe they look different from you, maybe they are tall women with large hands, maybe they are men who have given birth to their own children, maybe the categories you've delineated won't work in all cases. Look! No, don't! Transsexual men want to disappear because we are tired of being forced into categories, because we are beyond defending ourselves.

Look! No, don't! Transsexual men are entering the dialogue from more perspectives, more angles, than were ever theorized as being possible for them. Maybe if we are ignored we will go away. Maybe if we are continually not permitted to speak, not allowed to define ourselves, not given any corner of the platform from which to present our realities, then we will disappear and refrain from further complicating all the neat, orderly theories about gender and sex. Maybe if no one looks at us we will be safe.

At first I thought my transition was about not being looked at any longer, about my relief from scrutiny; now I know it is about scrutiny itself, about self-examination, and about losing my own fear of being looked at, not because I can disappear, but because I am able to claim my unique difference at last. What good is safety if the price is shame and fear of discovery? So, go ahead: Look!

## An Entire Rainbow of Possibilities

Gary Bowen

I'm a gay transman of Apache and Scotch-Irish descent, left-handed, differently abled, the parent of two young children—one of whom is also differently abled—of an old Cracker frontier family from Texas, a person who values his Native heritage very deeply, and who is doing his best to live in accordance with the Spirit, and who keeps learning more about his heritage all the time. . . . I am also a gay author and editor, with several books in print, as well as numerous short stories.

Arriving at this current place has been a journey not only of self-discovery, but of discovery about my family and my culture. Coming out transgendered was easy; grappling with racism, classism and ableism and other barriers is much harder. Once I figured out that "transgendered" was someone who transcended traditional stereotypes of "man" and "woman," I saw that I was such a person. I then began a quest for finding words that described myself, and discovered that while psychiatric jargon dominated the discourse, there were many other words, both older and newer, that addressed these issues. While I accepted the label of "transsexual" in order to obtain access to the hormones and chest surgery necessary to manifest my spirit in the material world, I have always had a profound disagreement with the definition of transsexualism as a psychiatric condition and transsexuals as disordered people.

My own transgendered state is a sacred calling given to me by Spirit, not a neurosis discovered by white medicine. Further, the battles that rage in feminist circles and elsewhere about the legitimacy and nature of the transgendered identity smack of racism to me, centered as they are upon white experience and white authors to the exclusion of minority voices and viewpoints, many of which contradict some of the conventional wisdom about what transsexualism is and what it means. It is extremely important to remember that "transsexual" and "transgendered" are terms that have arisen out of the dominant culture's experience with gender, and are not necessarily reflective of a wide variety of people, cultures, beliefs, and practices relating to gender.

As a person of Native descent I look to my ancestors for guidance in these matters. But the record is broken; trying to learn about the sacred people is like trying to reassemble a million pieces of pottery with only a few hundred potshards as clues. This then is the thing I know: that Spirit gives to each of us Visions of who we are which we must manifest in the material world to the best of our ability. Transgendered people, combining elements of male and female, are at the interstice of the material and spiritual worlds and are thus able to act as mediators for the benefit of our communities. We earn honor for our wisdom and strength, measured by our hard work on behalf of our families and communities. For this reason the sacred people are an integral part of our communities, not alienated or shameful, but often hidden to protect them from the ravages of the dominant culture. And, where white culture has triumphed, they have been almost entirely lost to the contemporary Native world—which means that there are many Native people today who do not know about or who do not value our sacred people.

It is important for Native people to reclaim our sacred people who have been murdered, burned, beaten, hanged, imprisoned, flogged, stripped, humiliated, and otherwise forced into compliance with the dominant standards of gender and sexuality or exterminated when they resisted. It is common for white people to refer to these people as "berdache"