drag

carleton college • 2009
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Drag has many different definitions.

In mainstream communities, it generally means glamorous and highly feminine representations of women on stage, performing to the latest dance sensation in skin-tight sparkling garb. But for queers and their allies, the transgression and parody of gender, in male, female, and a variety of other forms, creates spaces for building community and affirms differences that are usually dismissed. No matter how you think of drag, it's certainly more significant than simple entertainment: through appearance and performance, gender boundaries are consistently blurred, whether participants are cognizant of these messages or not.

But the word “drag” can mean a lot more than that. It’s about how gender manifests itself publicly in all respects, and not just how it can be explicitly challenged; it’s about how anyone can conceal or play up any part of their identity; it’s about how each one of us conceives of our own gender, and how we choose to present ourselves. By looking through drag, we can grab hold of the bewildering complexity that is gender and use it for new, surprising, and empowering purposes. The reason that we chose Drag as the title of this publication is because it forces us to recognize and have fun with the ways in which we perform our gender identities.

This publication wouldn’t have been possible without all of the energy students have put into it through writing, editing, designing and a variety of outlets for support. Additionally, thanks to the Publications office for advice and guidance, and the generous support of the Gender and Sexuality Center, Human Sexuality Endowment Fund, and the Carleton Student Association.

Members of the Carleton community have expressed their joys, frustrations, difficulties and realizations about gender in this publication in order to foster a dialogue that everyone on this campus can and should be having. We hope that you read these pieces and think about what they mean for you, and how exactly you yourself do drag.
There is a kink in my genetic coil.
The doctor looked between my legs and said:
“It’s a boy!” But I am a girl.

I ripen with the heady scent of soil,
A wet, wooden pillow beneath my head.
There was a kink in my genetic coil.

She jumped. I felt her eager hands recoil
With errant reasons running through her head.
“You’re a boy!” But I am a girl.

My father blamed my mother, called me spoiled.
My mother did not speak…her eyes were red.
Was she the kink in my genetic coil?

I was ripped into flesh and human oil,
Their hands were on me, in me as I bled.
Was I a boy? Was I a girl?

As a child, I once stole my mother’s pearls
And dressed up in the sheets from off my bed.
There was (even then) a kink in my genetic curl:
I was a boy. I was a girl.
I have four tattoos. The first one I got is on the back of my neck, a design I created when I was twelve, and it symbolizes my attachment to innocence. The second is on my shoulder and collarbone, Da Vinci’s sketch of a fetus in a womb. It’s seventeen years of life spent in a female body. The third is another fetus, right in the center of the smooth, pale flesh on the inside of my forearm. It’s there to remind me that it was a great effort to be born, so I should not cut my wrists. The fourth tattoo is the newest, an old plum blossom branch growing out behind the second fetus and wrapping around my forearm. I got this tattoo after spending one year of my life as a stealth transsexual. And it’s an umbrella.
The summer before I went to Japan I was desperate to find a job. I was walking in downtown Pittsburgh, dressed in a light suit coat, short-sleeved dress-shirt, going to a few interviews and picking up applications. For some reason, in my memories of this moment I still have my long hair, but I know in fact that I had cut off that two foot blanket nearly three years ago. I was sweating, the smell strangely sweet as I hadn’t been able to buy testosterone for a few months. The sun was extremely overbearing, and I listened to loud headphones as I focused on my shiny, thrift store store shoes.

From the corner of my eye I could see a large, fat, white man wobbling behind me. He had an oversized, bright green bottle of Mountain Dew, and watching the liquid sway with his movements made me feel a little sick. My heartbeat increased, but I didn’t walk any faster. I couldn’t tell if he was drunk or mentally challenged and I didn’t want to look at him long enough to find out. Very suddenly, he toppled off the sidewalk and into the street. I don’t know how long I stared at him, but I did nothing. I took one headphone out of my ear and stood and thought about helping him. I suppose we were lucky that a car didn’t come.

He was covered in filth, flailing and enormous. I looked at my shoes, and when I looked up a young black man in paint-covered clothes was helping him. The fat man pulled on the young one, roughly using him to help himself get out of the street. I turned and walked away.

An enormous anxiety began to build up inside of me, and the heat was suddenly unbearable. I threw away the applications I’d been collecting, took off my jacket and collared shirt, and got on the bus to go home without going to my second interview. I had almost let a man die because he was dirty and because he was fat. What would I have done if during my pause a car had come and smashed the man’s skull right in front of me? Scattered his blood all over my clean clothes?

Something I find peculiar about Japan, at least where I lived, was that when it rains almost every person has an umbrella. Or anyone without one will go to a convenience store and buy one.

It was one of those spring days when the temperature suddenly drops. The rain had started the night before and was large and freezing. I was in a hurry, on my way to pay a last visit to my flower-arranging teacher and his family. I was walking on one of the massive roads around Kyoto’s Imperial Palace, the dark tree-covered outer wall of the palace running bleakly on the other side of the road. Walking near the palace always gave me a certain amount of anxiety, because being a tourist destination
means that it is fair game to stare at a foreigner in curiosity. And as any stealth transsexual will probably tell you, being stared at in even the friendliest manner sends up an immense rush of inconsolable paranoia. I kept my eyes half on the ground, but entirely watching everyone around me.

Then, coming towards me was a sight much more odd than I was, a young woman without an umbrella. She was very pale, her black hair cut short to her jaw. I assumed that she was Japanese, but when I thought about it later I have no way of knowing that. She was wearing only a small red t-shirt, a jean skirt, and small flat baby doll shoes without socks. And she was shivering intensely, wrapping her arms around herself. She walked very slowly and kept her eyes mostly on the ground.

My entire body ached when I looked at her, and I wanted nothing more than to give her my jacket, or at least my umbrella. We were approaching each other too slowly, however, and I began to have second thoughts. My first thought was that I cannot get the letter I’m carrying for my teacher wet, because that would be unbearably embarrassing. As she came closer and closer, my heart raced faster and faster. She would probably be afraid of me, a small fat foreign man speaking terrible Japanese, giving her, a random stranger, his umbrella. Her frozen skin looked like death, almost blue. I was in long sleeves, jeans, and a hooded sweater.

If I don’t give her my umbrella, I’m going to regret it. I have thoughts like these all the time, and I always take the coward’s way out and do nothing. As she finally passed, she glanced at me just slightly. My mouth was open, ready to speak, but nothing came out as both of us kept on our way. It was devastating.

If I don’t give her my umbrella, I’m going to regret it. I have thoughts like these all the time, and I always take the coward’s way out and do nothing. As she finally passed, she glanced at me just slightly. My mouth was open, ready to speak, but nothing came out as both of us kept on our way. It was devastating. As I slowly walked on, suddenly all that I could think about were the eleven heads of the Bodhisattva Kannon. Eleven…Do I have even one head? What is wrong with me? I thought about compassion, giving up desire and attachment. I turned around, determined in my heart to give this woman my umbrella whether it embarrassed me or not. I started to walk after her; she was quite far from me by then. Perhaps I could just run up ahead of her, stop her, insist she take the umbrella, and then run away as fast as I can…that would be ridiculous. I lost heart again, and turned around.
As predicted, when it was no longer possible to just give her my umbrella, a heavy weight settled over me. Why couldn’t I just give her the umbrella? What was I so afraid of? Embarrassment? Awkwardness? Rejection? My wet clothes in front of my teacher? Pride then?

I never noticed when or how, but somehow I had become the type of person who needs to be dry. When I think about it logically, my teacher wouldn’t have cared that much about my wet letter, and the girl probably would have welcomed the umbrella if I were charming enough about it. We would have just chatted awkwardly until she got to the train station. When did I come to consider myself so weak?

Then, I remembered something that had happened only a few days prior. I got a random email from a friend I hadn’t talked to in years, a friend that I’ve always had a strong affection for. In the first message he was just asking if the email address he’d sent it to was mine and saying that he had something he wanted to tell me about. I replied back casually, telling him it was the right address, and asking him how he’d been. His next email was his coming-out story.

I can’t say I was surprised that he’s gay, but I also can’t say I wasn’t surprised by any parts of his coming out process. As I started to write out a reply to him, another immense uneasiness came over me. He had told me that he thought of me when getting up the courage to come out, that I am strong, and brave, and a plethora of other such adjectives I wish I could actually attach to myself.

After visiting my flower arranging teacher, I got back on the train to Osaka. I couldn’t stop thinking about the girl without the umbrella. It was still raining, still getting colder. My umbrella was folded in and upright with the tip on the floor, its hooked white handle coming up between my legs like some kind of distorted phallus. The uneasiness was pressing and pressing, and as I sat there watching the water flow down the silvery folds of the closed-up plastic, pooling on the brown floor beneath the tip, I found myself almost whispering in English, “Get off of me.”

It’s not uncommon for me to get the question. “What is it like to be you?” Or more indirectly, “I wonder what its like to be you…” Or better yet, “Wow, it must be fun to be both.”

Being me is like living inside a giant orb of fire ants, whose human hands and faces are my own. They bite at my skin, bruising with their fingers and peeling at the broken muscles, trying to find out what they are eating. Even when they’re drowning in the blood, they keep burrowing into this thing they’ve fallen into until they’re running
through my veins, poking and scratching and trying to find the invisible nothing that I call ‘my male self.’ They look for it in the brain, but when they get there they can’t tell if the flesh is a boy’s or a girl’s.

Later that night, I went out for a ride on my bike. I didn’t have a destination in mind, and decided to explore a few paths I’d never considered taking. Really, I just wanted to wear out my body. I wanted my muscles to burn, my heart to explode in my brain, my breath to blast out the sound of my headphones, my chest to pull the entire physical world into my lungs. I was suddenly starving and found myself leaning against a fence eating a riceball.

My fingers were burned from gripping the handle bars too tightly, and little bits of rice fell onto my chest because my arms were flinching and shaking. With my body heaving, sweating, aching, I quite calmly thought, “Maybe I’m not weak? Maybe… there is a difference between being weak and pretending not to be strong?”

I couldn’t tell a soul. There was dry, sterile white cotton stuffed into every hole of my body. I suddenly wanted to crush my rice ball and throw it at a passing car, screaming in an obnoxiously loud American accent “I AM A TRANSSEXUAL!” And then at the moon. “I HAVE A VAGINA!” And then to my rice ball. “I DO NOT WANT YOUR PENIS!”

I don’t know what I’m going to do after graduation. Maybe I’ll become a teacher? Maybe I’ll be a monk, a tattoo artist, or finally get locked away in the mad house? But I do have one goal. To be the kind of person who gives you my umbrella, and is not afraid of the rain.

The ‘transgender umbrella’ includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, gender queers, transgenders, transgendered people, intersexed women, intersexed men, people with no sex, and it goes on forever. It would probably be easier to say who it does not include. ‘Normal’ people. But who the hell are these normal people anyway? These people that have nothing to do with me?

If your skirt is too short, your hair too thin, your skin too dark, your lifestyle too queer, your music too ugly, your God too weird, your eyes too blue, your pencil too short, your ass too fat, your wallet too thin, your face too beautiful, your sex too kinky, your glasses too thick, your life too plain … I will give you my umbrella. I’m not brave enough to ask you to take it, and I know you might not want an umbrella from someone as scary and strange as me. But if you want it, and can just look and see the hand through the swarming ants, I will give you my umbrella even if it’s raining shards of glass. That is my career objective. But resumes aren’t supposed to be longer than a page, and job applications only have two boxes. Male. Female.
It’s a whole different level of me

It’s a whole different level of me
What is beauty outside of comparing between
One girl’s hair and another girl’s jeans?
It’s a whole different level of me

Seeing what sex could feel like
But just playing with fire
Being desired at a level
I had never permitted myself to be

Free to satisfy my needs
Without being resentful
Or going through another guilt trip
It’s a whole different level of me

Being in college all alone
Gives me the opportunity
To really look into who I am
Yeah I believe in God
But the battle between
Angels and demons seems
Too simple to me

So I continue to live a life separate
From that I ever expected
I need to show myself who I can be
I need to discover a whole different level of me

I’m beginning to love myself
For who I truly am
I can express my curiosity
Without feeling like a whore

These people lack the basic knowledge
Into who I really am
I am not an object of sex
I am a bright intelligent madam
I am everything you should fear, with a softer side

Desired and craved
Respected and brave
It’s a whole different level of me

-Mari Ortiz
Mostly pink with a hint of blue is the way my outfit, a salmon colored raincoat with teal mittens, was recently described. I’ve come to think this is a pretty good description of me as well, though it does use pretty problematic and/or traditional colors as stand-ins for gender.

You could say I do drag everyday. I identify as an androgynous woman, meaning I wear non-descript clothes, have short hair and occasionally feel more connected to menfolk. Sometimes this is hard for others to deal with, or at least confusing. But being referred to as a man isn’t something that’s fun, and there’s a little sting every time it happens. You never know when you’ll be able to pass and take advantage of the privilege that goes along with being assumed to be a man and when you can’t. Or when being in that middle ground is going to cause much more harm than either of the binaries. These are my messages to some of the people who have confused or been confused about my gender:

**To John** who comes into Hogan Brothers with his wife for chili and bread each week: That one time when you asked Andrew who Trinara was and said we got so many new employees that you couldn’t keep up then looked me in the eyes and asked who the new boy was, that wasn’t cool. We’ve had conversations before, John. I know you want cheese, sour cream and crackers with your chili. And I’ve been working there for five months. But maybe my short hair and your lack of exposure to queer communities confused you. Next time should I wear a barrette?

**To the usher** at the Michael Franti show: So when my friend asked where the bathroom was, you could’ve just directed her to the women’s room. But you didn’t. You looked at me and told us where the men’s was as well. And I didn’t even have to go.
To the first person: I interacted with after arriving in Mexico: I’d been on a plane for hours and really had to pee. Using the restroom shouldn’t need Spanish, a language I don’t speak. But then you said women’s and pointed to the line we were in then pointed me to the men’s room. I decided I didn’t really have to go after all. Thanks for the great start to my trip.

To the hotel clerk: at that sketchy hotel in Denton, TX: Nah dude, I’m a lady, I promise. And no, I’m not dressing like a guy, as you said. All my clothes were purchased in the women’s department. Head to foot. You calling me a guy made me look over my shoulder the entire time I stayed in your hotel. At least my girlfriend stayed in the car. That might’ve been even more confusing for you.

To my professor: remember when you called me a man? I’d been in your class for two weeks. You had the roster sheet with a picture of me with shoulder length hair. I was also wearing a hoodie with a woman symbol and my name on it. That sucked. And I didn’t talk for the next eighteen weeks I was in your classes.

To the little girl: who came in to try on clothes: You came into the Target fitting room where I was working, and I accidentally told you to go into the boys section before you corrected me. I’m sorry. Your mom said that if you didn’t want that to happen anymore you’d wear clothes from the girls department. But I think you should be able to wear whatever you want. Thanks for making me more aware of my own assumptions. It sucks when you do things to other people when you hate it when they’re done to you.

queen
It’s a girl! (She’s in pink)
Attaboy! (He’s in blue)
Gender’s a drag, which means
(Tee hee) : you are, too
-Chelsea Rae
I’m involved in drag because I identify as an artist, an activist, and an academic. I think that drag exists as a unique form of queer theater in which we can produce and talk about gender theory, and also form coalitions with other groups and individuals who are passionate about fighting for equality...especially those who don’t have traditional gender or sexual identities.

I would say that general society’s perception of drag (some GLBT folks included) is that we’re simply “men dressed as women,” as if we aspired to transgress some binary system of gender...in my opinion, drag is a high art in which a body attempts to reconstruct an idea. So, the body becomes the canvas and through the amplification of it, we present the idea of high femininity. To me, this is classic drag performance.
Do finances ever become an important part of why you do drag?

I feel that I’m driven to make almost every costume that I own. It’s an expression of individualism and creativity to choose the materials, and it really means a lot to me that I can construct my own designs. I adore color, but am also drawn to hard lines and black and white.

Is drag an art form for you, or do you see it as a profession?

I feel that drag is an art, but for some of us, it is an expression of and an investigation of parts of our unstaged identities. We all negotiate so many genders at the same time! I think drag can also be an extremely powerful political tool in terms of furthering GLBTQ rights and the production of queer theater.

How much do you spend on the average drag outfit?

It definitely depends on the type of act, the amount of fabric needed, and the accessories. Thinking on average, I would say that I spend between two and four days gathering materials and sketching designs for a costume and anywhere from $40 to $200 for all of the materials. Make-up, eyelashes, padding, tights, and shoes...drag is definitely expensive!

Do you make your own clothing or buy it? How do you find pieces that are so visually exciting?

I’ve thought of drag as a form of supplemental income at times. But I try to stay away from viewing it solely as a job, because it’s my art and my identity. I don’t see myself ever making money off of drag...it’s a different kind of investment: an investment in art as education and the power of progressive creativity.

I don’t think about it as a profession, but as a form of self-expression and a way to explore different aspects of my identity. It’s a way for me to bring my personal experiences and interests to the stage in a creative and powerful way.
Sometimes, it feels like I fit a lot of stereotypes about queer women: I love the Indigo Girls and Melissa Etheridge. I’m mad about Rachel Maddow. I’m as big a feminist as they come. I own enough flannel to outfit a small army of lumberjacks. Often, it seems like I’m my own one-woman lesbian stereotypes parade.

That is, of course, until you look at me. Quite simply, I don’t “look gay.” But it goes beyond that: to say I “pass” as straight would be an understatement. On the right day, I make some straight girls look gayer than myself. In other words, I “pass” with flying (non-rainbow) colors.

And so, how I looked became an issue to me, particularly when I was in the process of “figuring things out” in the sexual orientation department. For us girls who like girls but eternally look like straight girls, there’s a whole lotta self-invalidation going on at the personal level, for me at least. There were two glaring facts tug-o’-war-
ring each other. Fact A: I had the inkling I was attracted to women. Fact B: Women who liked women looked like k.d. lang or my gym teacher. According to my logic, they screamed masculine from a hundred feet away. I, who scampered about in frilly frocks and skinny jeans, did not. And if I didn’t look like them, then I assumed (with a fatal leap in logic), I guess I couldn’t be Like Them.

See, I had it in my mind that sexual identity was solely equated with gender expression. And so, upon going through Carleton and becoming gayer by the trimester, I started to dress differently. Put away the pink clothes. Wear more flannel. But I did venture into the boys’ department at Target and purchase my first boys’ garment, in a desperate attempt to Look Gayer.

Except that the problem became wearing these things felt like a costume. I’m not masculine looking. I could walk around naked, wearing no clothes and still look feminine—it’s just how I am. Now, I don’t go running around in tutus, because I’ve still got that feminist sensibility about me when it comes to what I wear. (And I’ll take a raincheck on those stilettos, too, thanks.) But I also don’t feel a pressure to constantly look like someone I’m not—a tie-wearing, suspenders-doning, menswear-outfitted young queer woman—because I’m not that woman.

Recently, I’ve found out that I’m not alone. Apparently, there are queer femme women everywhere. The catch is, you see, that they (we!) are rather invisible. And unless you’re Portia de Rossi walking arm-in-arm with Ellen DeGeneres (or you’re Portia de Rossi and the world cares a lot about your sexuality), you’ll likely be classified as “straight” to the outside world, and young, confused and questioning infant-dykes like myself would assume that they were some kind of black femme sheep in a sea of masculine-looking women.

It’s taken a while, and over a year of watching *The L Word*, the non-stop carnival of lipstick lesbians that it is, to finally let myself go with Project: Become More Butch. For myself and other feminine queer women who have abandoned this project, admirable though it is, dressing “straight” also means we’re more privileged within society generally. We ought to acknowledge that it’s not a given to be born into a body (hips! breasts!) that feels a-okay with your gender mentality, and for dressing in drag to really feel like dressing in drag.

Feminine queer women may be invisible, but that doesn’t mean we don’t exist. And until the day I tattoo that rainbow on my forehead, I’ll just go on being The Surprise Queer, straight looks and all.

-Beth B.
You need to know that gender role is a social construct, and that gender identity comes from within and is as private and internal and fluid and individual as the pump and flow of blood through the heart.

Gender role is a set of ideas about how you in your sexed body are supposed to perform and behave according to your sex. Gender role is institutionalized coercive social regulation, and what it does is keep everybody locked in place and submissive to that regulation. Gender role expectations get mixed up with class and racial and ethnic and religious and socioeconomic and political and age and body and sexual expectations, so that if you have to be meek or macho or vulnerable or thin or covered or busy all the time then it's harder to resist those obligations because you're a person in a really specific place.

That place is your body, by the way, and your body is your temple and your most sacred space. A good lover will know this automatically and will treat your body with reverence and respect. A good lover will let you know that you are safe and that you can trust this person. A good lover will embrace you and will transcend with you, and you can be an open, fluid, beautiful person in the embrace of such a lover. You need to treat your body as if you are your own greatest lover.

Gender identity is inside your body and you can bring it outside and wear it if you want to. Some people have to wear and express their gender identities outside on their
bodies because if they keep their gender identity expression hidden underneath their skins and clothes, they’re hurting themselves through suppression. Some people can make a choice about whether to wear or express their gender identities, and these people can choose to gender express themselves just a little bit or to the max if they want to.

For some people, gender presenting themselves as themselves in a public or even in a private space is really really really dangerous and unsafe, and somebody else might hurt them or even kill them for this. Often, the people who need to gender express their identities the most are the ones who might get hurt or killed if they do so, and these people are really sacred and brave and admirable because they live their lives authentically anyway.

You need to know that a lot of times what happens is gender role expectations coercively regulate people so strongly that people get afraid to be who they really are. This makes people want to regulate other people the way they’ve been regulated. Or what can also happen is people can forget who they really are or who they might potentially be, and that’s one of the saddest most horrible things that can happen to anybody.

My advice to you is to take off all your clothes and coverings if you can or if you want to and really be in your body, and then put all your clothes and coverings back on one article at time and really be in your clothing. And if something doesn’t feel right at any moment in the process, stop and really be in that moment until you can identify what it is that makes you uncomfortable, and I challenge you to break through that discomfort.
I remember the first time that I decided that I didn’t care how I stood—I was really scared. Boys weren’t supposed to cross their legs, only girls stood like that. It wasn’t that long ago really, just a few months, when I finally felt comfortable standing the way that I wanted to stand.

Perhaps it seems insignificant—who cares how one boy stands when he’s talking to other people?—but it was important to me. And other people noticed. I remember the first time that my dad and I had a conversation since I had started standing my own way. I had only been home for a little while; we were standing right inside the back door to my house. I had on grey puma shoes and my favorite pair of jeans. He didn’t notice my posture at first, but then he did and I could feel him wonder what was going on.

Here was his son, standing with his legs crossed—closed tightly, thighs pressed against each other, knees interlocked, ankles crossed, and feet that had switched places, pressed against one another. He never said anything, but he did a double take, pausing to realize how close together my thighs were. Men are supposed to stand open and ready, firmly planted on the ground, ready to take a hit.

The best thing about standing this way is the way it lets you rotate your hips. Side-to-side, forward-and-back, your gyrating torso can be as much a part of your body language as your hands or your face. Standing with feet squarely forward just feels so stuck, so planted, like one is making a stand instead of creating a dynamic interaction with someone else.
With my legs crossed and pressed, I can teeter and rock, stick out one hip or the other. I lean in and throw myself off balance a little bit. I can sway backwards until I need to snap forward, bringing my center of gravity back above my switched-around feet.

Later that same trip home, I went to a large family gathering—Thanksgiving, I think. My uncles already see me as some sort of nerdy little kid, but at least I knew how to stand. Instead, I crossed my legs tightly in front of me when I was talking to them, when I was telling them about my trip over the summer and about my classes at school. That time, I had on my favorite blue shoes and a pair of boot-cut khakis. They too paused. Was I crossing my legs because I was unsure of myself? Because I was nervous?

I felt like I should just explain to them that my new posture made me feel more confident, more expressive, and more comfortable with my body. But I didn’t. Growing up, they were always the paragons of manliness, and, to stand differently from them was to repudiate their model. And they noticed—how could they not? All of us cousins had been copying them for so long, of course when someone stopped mimicking they felt it. And I bet they asked my dad if he noticed my new way of standing. Sometimes I wonder what they all said about it; other times, I don’t care.
Once again I find myself wasting time on online pharmacy and transgender resource sites, exploring the idea of hormones. It has become a ritual, repeated every few days, rarely is new information found. It does get me thinking. I go over the pros and cons in my head, tallying them up, seeing how everything balances. The MTF regiment can be quite expensive and somewhat dangerous and I don’t want to go in unless I am committed to going full in. The time is getting close now. Every time I look through the negatives seem to become insignificant compared to the positive benefits.

Still, though, I am nervous. The human body does not often like to be messed with and I worry for my health and well-being still. This feeling unsettles me, but actually puts some of my friends at ease. They say they would be more concerned were I not nervous about this decision.

Each of the drugs alone cause me enough worry, put them all together and things get a bit complex.

First we have the synthetic estrogen estradiol. You can get it in 4 lovely flavors. It can be injected into the muscle, rubbed on in a gel, slapped on a patch, or now stuck in pellets under your skin. A lot of transgendered people prefer the injections as you only need one every 2 weeks and supposedly it feminizes better. I don’t know how they get past the 1.5 inch needle they gotta stick into their ass or thigh. Oh the glamour of it all! Also, you get lovely mood swings, possibility of blood clots forming, liver issues, and they will probably kill your sex drive. Did I mention weight gain?

Then we have your testosterone blocker. Sadly, estrogen alone isn’t really enough, and the effects will be counteracted by the testosterone in the body. So,
another drug! A few drugs are on the market, the most common seems to be spironolactone. Spironolactone is actually relatively safe, only one major side effect. It is a potassium saving diuretic. Basically it means you’ll have to pee more and you have to watch your potassium intake. Now this may not seem like much, especially for you banana haters out there, but the having to pee more thing is a problem. Transgender people, especially androgynous identifying ones like yours truly, do not like the general male/female bathroom system. We often have to hold it a loooong time to find a private bathroom, or wait until we get home. I can find nothing less fun than having to pee more than I already do.

Finally the last major portion of a good hormone regiment for those wanting feminization is finasteride. Finasteride stops testosterone from being turned into DHT, a very powerful hormone. Really it doesn’t have many side effects that haven’t already been covered. The problem becomes clear after I mention the brand name for this drug...Propecia. Yes, people being treated for male pattern baldness, only two drugs away from a good feminizing regime. (They would also have to multiply the dosage of propecia by about five). Now of course being one of the more marketable drugs on the list, it also is one of the most expensive.

In the end, despite this list of nasty problems I still want to start taking them. I want hips, and a waist. I’m tired of having to shave so often. I can even admit I want breasts.

Now when researching cost, I go so far as to add the drugs to the shopping cart. I look closer at clinics and doctors. I’ve started researching health insurance coverage. I’ve started working on what to tell my parents. I’ve begun trying to get healthier, getting my body ready...

Because I’m taking the next step.

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Anonymous

My body and mind do not match. My brain is undeniably male and my body is female. I cannot imagine a more jarring and terrifying realization. I look at my future with fear and uncertainty. I have no idea what I will look like, who I will be, or how I will be received by others. There is, however, one thing in which I find solace. I look back on my tumultuous and troubled past and think, “Wow, everything finally makes sense.”
I love to dress up, and I’d do drag for any excuse to buy new shoes! I wasn’t blessed with a singing voice, so instead I like to tell stories this way. I think it’s healing to get lost in another character, for me and the audience. And it means a lot to me to get to explore myself through those new characters.

I only like to keep company with people who have a very positive perception of drag, gay or straight. And even those who are skeptics change once they’ve seen a really good show...that’s just the thing. I always try to put on a good show because it has to be good drag for even myself to want to watch it.

In order to prepare for a show, I need to focus, but I have to distract myself from the fact that I’m about to go on stage. I rehearse lyrics, plan my movements and piece together all of the other details of my performance a few weeks in advance. Also, a good stiff drink never hurts to take the edge off before stepping on the stage!
Performing in drag allows me the chance to reach people and express myself. I relate a great deal to music both in and out of drag and I really listen to what the song is saying. It’s a chance to express my feelings and convey a message. I also like to entertain...I enjoy the spotlight, always have, and always will. I like making people react, and I never feel more loved and appreciated than when I’m on stage with people reacting to my presence and performance.

For me as a gay man coming out to my family was very difficult, but surprisingly announcing that I performed as a drag queen was more upsetting to them. It was yet another blow. Over time I’ve had the opportunity to educate and entertain my family, and have really opened their eyes to a whole new world. I have aunts and uncles dying to know when my next performance is, cousins who brag about me on a daily basis and a brother who very recently asked to be forgiven for his lack of support and has embraced my drag persona. Society has a lot to learn about drag queens, kings and all other people who fall under drag performers: we’re sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters.

Nikki Vixxen
The Unbounded Stages of Daycare Drag

[Dominic Vendell]

Stuck in the Arizona desert between Tucson and Sierra Vista in a house full of dancers, I tried out drag before I knew what it was called.

I was the son of a dance teacher, and I was full of surprises. Just like when my mom surprised me, spinning me round and round when I least expected it. Barely above her knees, I discovered the distinct joy of twirls, lifts, leaps, kicks. My mom could flip me up and down and turn me inside out, making me feel flexible and stretched and supple with the possibilities of transformation. I wanted to do that to myself, to remake myself, to be the dancer whom I loved so much.

With the resourcefulness of a five-year-old proto-proto-femme little boy, I discovered a new way of wearing socks. I seemed elegantly feminine when I slid them up my arms, ready for a night on the town that was actually my bedroom. I pulled my t-shirt up my torso, over my nose, just below my hairline until it flowed down my back into long strands of swooshable fun. Jillian, the girl who eventually taught me to kiss in a closet, found her own little boy, and without looking back, we genderfucked our way through long afternoons of waiting for my mom to finish her dance classes. I remember a photo of the two of us and our smiling stares of juvenile i-do-what-i-want drag pride.

Once my mom began taking me to daycare, where the stage was wide enough to accommodate bolder moves, I became comfortable with an audience. I had
stumbled through plenty of dance numbers with Nick, Emily, Carol, Carrie—high schoolers too sexually entangled to get their choreography straight. Carrie was my favorite teacher, the Black Cat of the Halloween dance concert. She strut up and down the floor, stretching up the wall stage right, pointing her dance shoes like paws. I watched from the linoleum floor in rapturous envy until I made my debut. The painted columns of the daycare were perches from which I began the walk I had perfected each night. The other kids and the teachers didn’t seem to notice or care, letting me flit from wall to wall and shoot eyefuls of brazen announcement. At once antagonizers and spectators, they did not seem to understand the strange behavior of this uncomfortably feminine child, yet the entertainment was too riveting to ignore.

But my performing days only lasted as long as the bliss of pre-kindergarten infancy, most of it occurring in sun-baked solitude punctuated by the visits of teenage dancers and their moms. School was different. The brutality of the classroom, the hours spent avoiding the boys in the hallways, my dad’s implicit disapproval of my childhood pursuits all added up to something less than affirmation. But, more than all this, the anger that laced itself through the intimacy of mother and child spoiled the drag that we had nurtured. I could not find a stage that matched what we created with the improbable tools of a lonely desert childhood. Instead, I cultivated a stony, silent comportment. I only broke through to tell my mother how much I suffered from the callousness of schoolyard gender policing.

Because the kids knew that something was just not right. An inflection of my voice. A too-close-for-comfort relationship with Ms. Turner, Ms. Winn, and countless other Ms.'s with lunches in their classrooms and long conversations about the pain of an unstable household. A tendency to mix up the colors on my three-piece zippered cargo pants. A five-month period
of obsessive lisping. Something didn’t add up, but I was just as much at a loss to explain as the boys who threw me up against the wall after class. Our disagreements aside, we all faced a future of gender confusion with trepidation, lacking a stage to accommodate the not-right-

something. Where could I put this inescapable urge to turn myself into a much more interesting piece of choreography than biology or my grandmother could produce?

Boys were the place just as boys had been the problem. Because boys have bodies even though they don’t always like to display them. And with the inevitable arrival of erections, I began to notice those bodies as they sauntered through the frighteningly expansive campus of my high school. I wanted them, but I did not want to be them, and I knew that it should’ve been the other way around. That should’ve-been-the-other-way-around, just like that something-not-right called for rectification. A place on the map. The place called Gay.

So, not wanting to give God or my mother or Mrs. Turner the English teacher the wrong answer, I went to the place called Gay and announced my arrival to all those who happened to ask. Kate told Leah who told Neil who asked me about anal sex, and, suddenly, I owned a plot in that place. Except that Gay was crowded with investors who were busy regulating their own juvenile drag performances, not always with the intention of displaying them to the public. The residents of Gay looked back at their drag days with a mind-boggling mix of shame and nostalgia. They had settled into a place that promised the benefits of labels properly stuck and read and signposts to sex and dating and maybe even Canadian marriage. Drag did not appear in the indefinite leases that they had signed when Kates told Leahs who told Neils, who asked them about anal sex.

Not wanting to break my lease, I followed the rules of the place called Gay, codified and enforced by the fierceness of women and the bribery of sexual desire. I looked at myself longer and more critically in an increasing number of mirrors. I sprayed a chilling mist around my person so that the boys, even those might have wanted to find a little warmth, turned away. I learned and taught a bewildering array of signals sold with sassy indifference on bodies tan and hard and skinny and plucked. I swallowed it bucket after bucket until it turned my stomach. Still, I swallowed more.
The place called Gay, however, was not a free market. All the men who set up a plot scrambled to establish a franchise, a security against the dizzying twirls of childhood that led to the violence of adolescence. Some did it better than others, enjoying the jealousy and sexual hunger of their peers. Those who were in it to win it attempted to lay claim to everything that had laid claim to them. Being dragged, dragging oneself was no longer an option, but drag, the drag, drag people could be made profitable. So my fellow residents and I forced up our zippers and squeezed into our v-necks in preparation for the many shows of drag that we would attend. As spectators. Not performers. Denying any correspondence between our flips of the hand and their tosses of the hair, we hesitantly took our seats.

Little did we know that leases, like most structures, have a way of flirting with their own disaster. And the ineffable, uncontainable magic of drag permeated the entire theater, converting the seats into a stage and the stage into a balcony. Not that we didn’t try our best to keep everything in its own place. Waiting for that song, that lyric that hearkened to the Arizona deserts of transformation, I gazed at the drag queens and kings who enacted the something-not-right that I had long tucked away. They parodied and embraced all that which told me to fear and repulse, all that which poisoned the intimacy of mother and child. With a microphone and Whitney Houston at their side, they reminded me that gender, the order of all thing in the place called Gay, could be a plaything. I found myself incited by a terrifying joy and love to jump out of my seat, wallet in hand, heart in throat.

Yet, the money, the mere brush of hand to hand, cheek to cheek, face to crotch could not satiate my desire to affirm the crafted magic offered that night. To be in league with drag so that the there was no place called Gay and no place called Straight but only unbounded stages whose names changed with the telling. I realized that I wanted to get dragged. I wanted to reconnect with whatever I had estranged but not erased somewhere between the twirls of my mother and the place called Gay. I wanted to nurture and share the child that turned a daycare into a drag show. With socks on my hands and a shirt turned inside out.
Okay, so I’m aware that my question isn’t initially very clear. So let me help. Recently I was asked: “How do you define gender?” I responded, “There are many ways to define what gender means. Gender can be the way one fits into socially manufactured gender roles (which refers to the socially constructed spectrum, typically defined as ranging from masculinity to femininity), or gender can be related to the expression of one’s sex-identity (not to be mistaken for sexual orientation or for genetic sex, sex-identity is a person’s identity regarding being a man, a woman, bigendered, non-gendered, third gender, or gender queer).”

Of course, reflecting back, there are problems with this answer. Can’t gender role identity be something from which one abstains? Are there gender-neutral roles? Can non-masculine not mean feminine, or non-feminine not mean masculine?

Well, sure. But you may have a difficult time convincing people that this is true. I like to think about gender as non-mathematically as possible. Meaning, gender isn’t a compilation of spectrums or (to be more correct) even a compilation of multi-dimensional graphs. For me, gender is simply a feeling.
My feeling of my gender may change weekly, daily, sometimes hourly. I’ve gone months content and happy as a self-identified feminine woman only to backlash into boydom. If you were to ask me if I am a man or a woman, even on a drag day, I can answer “woman” with ease. Within the restriction of a two-point binary, I know which of the two is the honest answer: I am a woman. But nothing about my womanhood is simple. The words “just” and “only” have no place in describing my womanhood.

I am a woman who sometimes wants to be a man.
   I am a woman who sometimes is a man.
      I am a woman who likes to kiss men.
         I am a woman who likes to kiss women.
            I am a woman who likes to kiss people.
I am a woman who wears dresses as drag.
I am a woman who binds her chest for drag.
I am a woman who wants to be a mother.
   I am a woman who wants to be a parent.
I am a woman who doesn’t want to be a wife.
   I am a woman named Susan.
I am a woman who is a man named Drake.

I am always a woman. But being a woman doesn’t say much about me. I am always a woman, but who I am, what my gender is, is something bigger and more complex than any of that.

And yet, my gender isn’t complex at all. While I may never be “just” a woman, my gender will always be just what I feel.

trans...what?
“Pregnant man!” the TV decries
   Replete with images of belly taut
      The public frowns at his lies
         Until we find out Thomas has a twat
   e: all of the above
      Gender is like US politics
         ‘Two irreconcilable extremes’
            Except really there many independents
               Who’ve learned to play nice with both teams

-Chelsea Rae
There’s a pyramid in Cholula, state Puebla, central Mexico. It’s sacred space built on sacred space where you can light a match instead of a chalice and the norteño wind will blow it out before it finds light, dust from the otro lado, a baptism in dirt, salutations: with love, America.

Largest in the world, by volume, this pyramid, a pre-Hispanic space for keening and breaking bread aka tortilla with frijol and chile now has a church on top, like bridegroom/bridebride/groomgroom/bridegroombride/maybe-we-just-want-icing-on-top-of-our-committment-cake. But this isn’t just a Catholic/Mesoamerican matrimony—it’s evangelism wins, faith born of force and conquest, sometimes called genocide.

So I’m on this pyramid having alternachurch, trying to keep my rituals from becoming forest fires, and I’m thinking about genocide and god and gender and God and GENDER and that part in Dogma where Alanis Morissette is barefoot doing cartwheels through the Apocalypse or the Beginning of Time because I can’t really remember if that scene was the rapture or just god-comes-to-earth-part II. Anyways, she’s in the grass, frolicking. I’m pretty sure I remember frolicking, and she’s breaking lots of Ye Olde Arbitrary Truths by being a girl god and I’m not really sure I give a fuck who’s throwing down the sacred - whether god has a mystical metaphorical vagina or not. All I really want is godspace without the genderfuck.
By genderfuck, I mean that in my limited sacred space experience, there’s a lot of potentially great churches/temples/mosques/living rooms that become less places to search for truth and meaning and more places ruled by the unsacred and the shitty because there’s a priest up there who I could never be or an altar right there that I could never stand at or hymns that are full of Him, and how am I supposed to get to god if oppression is being all pissy in the doorway, waiting to pat me down and take my flask? Hi my name is GENDER and I’m fucking with your spiritual growth just like I fuck with everything else.

Right, but if every anything that makes me alive is big G little g worth and dignity GOD then there’s nothing closer to holy in heaven then the body that sometimes makes my gender and the kids in the struggle who transgress it. Hence, godspace = genderfucked.

Because hey, todos somos nosotr@s, right? And I believe in vaginas not because of gurrrrlll power or sisterhood but because they’re alive and part of this body which is how I touch this world, touch you. So I believe in vaginas just like I believe in scapula and sacrum, navel and fingernails, And if you want a vagina and you don’t have one, or you have one and you don’t want it, or you just wish you were dust and words and vaginas were like gallbladders heading toward tails, I want to be gentle to you and your traveling soul.

So dear god, get up in our collective faces, walk with us towards light and community even when we don’t wanna anymore--because more than calling gender at the boys who say bitch and believe in binary, more than using pronouns that agree with identity, more than making up the better words, I think it might be the journey.

Cue cheesy inspirational music, but really: finding god, finding gender. It’s like the same thing where no one really knows, but I try and fuck it up and keep doing cartwheels barefoot and crying.

So that’s my part of this truth. The Happy Ending is probs impossible, but the adventure that comes before it is not. So adventure: pyramids and vaginas and gender and god and all I really know is that living must be worship, body part of praying.
Men are Assholes and
Women are Insane

by Ben Page

And I would rather not be put in a box lest this discourse do it anyways. But the new sexual revolution has indeed come, a cipher rebellion. A false reign of self professed sexual revolutionaries, filled with all the old conceits. We have invited everyone into the bacchanalia, consumer driven sex market for pubescent girls and shaved pussy. We all just want to get laid. It’s the trophy on the mantle piece beside grandpa’s ashes and the respect we no longer have for things.

And now we got it all: doll fucking, slings and whips and chains, orgies and fisting and scat and whatever the fuck you want to do to another human being. We got it. And shame is here all the time under the thinnest façade of a renewed pride. Because nowadays you die from fucking. We’re just animals after all, but unlike other animals, you can die by sticking your prick somewhere it shouldn’t belong.

And that happens in one instant and people are so fucking ignorant they don’t put a condom on and then they get sick and they will die. Cause latex is uncomfortable.

And then there was the Bravo channel and it would set the stereotypes for the gays. Those fags sure are talented with that cooking and cleaning and making clothes.

And then you switch the channel to any other channel and you see some bikini-clad tits selling beer or slaying vampires or whatever else you can do in that outfit.

We live in a culture of death and sex, spirals of
violence that overthrow the limits of our conscience; it is a new abuse that leaves less visible scarring. We raise our children to devalue themselves.

I see them dressed up, painted faces laden with inexperience caked on too hard; they try too hard. Parading their twig legs through the mall with skirts cut high and boots that clack against the tile. They play with their mobile phones with glitter and gemstones and bat their eyes because they don’t know what’s going on; and they carry around bags filled with designer underwear and fragrance and listen to songs that tell them to just shut the fuck up and dance. If they want to look really cool they smoke a cigarette on the corner, a thin feminine smoke that makes them feel like they’re in Hollywood. And it’s what it’s all about when you’re a middle school girl these days. And they still think they’re feminists.

I think our language determines our worldview. It is perhaps an obvious point. But I hear us all using sexual jargon in the negative. “That test raped me”, “I’m so fucked”, “that’s gay”. The homophobic slang used in the negative is often followed by “no offense” if a gay man is present and it is expected that none will be taken. If two guys are playing a video game and one wins and the other shouts “you faggot!”, knowing the person is not gay because that would be actually hateful for some reason, this is permissible in public social setting. You would not be able to exclaim the n-word to someone who was or was not black in the same context and not expect to get your ass handed to you by a mob of angry liberals. Maybe the liberals just aren’t so liberal.

The standard of American masculinity must change before we can address the true gender issues today. It’s a false sense of machismo that demands men be the cowboy, soldier, oppressor. And there is little room for much else in the modern paradigm. Women put men into this box as much as men do themselves in promoting a masculine sexual ideal that is rough, hard, and aggressively dominant. This is a cycle built into the modern sex market; the fetishization of hyper-masculine behavior perpetuates a narrow discourse of gender. It essentializes masculinity and demands uniformity in that ideal. This in turn has direct ramifications on the public conception of femininity as well as a wide spectrum of gendered experience. I think this is because we are raised in a culture that thinks it still has primacy over all other nations because of its military capacity; our cultural ethos itself perpetuates a limited discourse on sexuality by demanding hyper-masculine uniformity.