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Foreword by
Stephen Whittle

Finding

the

Real

Me

True Tales
of Sex and
Gender Diversity

图书馆
Asexual Transgender
Intersex Androgyne
Multi-gendered



FINDING THE REAL ME

True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity

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and

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FINDING THE REAL ME

FOREWORD

BEING A TRANSEXUAL MAN (that is, someone born with a female body, but who has undergone a “sex change” and now lives his life as a man) I have been obligated to explore the complex understandings that give me my own knowledge of my gendered self. When I first sought help, there was a plethora of theories contained in the text books and medical papers. But none of them appeared to fit my, not fantastic but also not awful, experience of childhood and life. But I did get to know that in order to be, simply to exist, transsexual and transgender people, like myself, had to “pass” the “examinations” of the psycho-experts. They acted as the gatekeepers to the other medical professionals who would provide the hormones and surgery that I knew were essential to not only enhance my life but to keep me alive.

When faced with trans people, psycho-experts find themselves caught between the devil and deep blue sea. They are faced with individuals who simply are not whom they claim to be. How can a person born with a penis claim to be a woman, when to be a woman requires that you are not born with a penis (or vice versa)? Yet the vast majority of these people are plainly not mad, being able to function extremely well, and when they do have their “sex change” they clearly become the person they say they were all along. Trans people beg the whole question of human understanding as it currently is about gender and sex. Taking that challenge, over the past fifty years, the transsexual/transgender community through writing and theorizing has attempted to offer an “insider’s” exploration of the ways in which trans people view gender issues. As this work progresses trans people have been among the first to acknowledge that gender, as we know it, is not a clear-cut issue.

Historically, gender, as a word, used to refer exclusively to an aspect of language (for instance the pronouns “he” and “she”). The change from referring to sex (biology) as gender (social role), to referring to gender as a set of social and cultural constructions came in the 1950s. Originally, the theory came about as part of the medical lexicon surrounding the treatment of intersex people. However it has not remained in the medical

world, nor was it intended to. In the 1970s feminists and scholars appropriated the term to refer to “the social organization of the relationship between the sexes.” Consequently nearly all of us now know that gender is clearly a separate entity from sex.

Part of the appeal of gender and gender identity theory is its contention that all of us have a gender identity and that it is somehow detachable from biological sex. But despite that understanding, “normal” development is still defined as congruent sexual anatomy and gender identity. To be gendered in “opposition” to one’s sex is therefore a problem for society, despite the fact that sex and gender are, in the context of the modern world, analytically distinct.

Yet despite that analytical difference, sex and gender are still tangled together within the systems we use to organize our social world. When considering “sex” we group people according to whether someone has a vagina, breasts, ovaries, and so on, or a penis, testes, and so on. We maintain these distinctions in order to significantly reduce the potential pitfalls of what social gender roles people are supposed to play. Your place in society, your opportunity to join the women’s luncheon group, the men’s pool club, and a lot of other social positions become based on what you’ve got, and what you’ve not got. However the reality of people’s bodies and people’s real lives are not that easy. As science advances and our understandings of the complexities of the human body grow, in 2002 medicine recognizes over eighty intersex conditions as well as that there are real, sane, ordinary people who are transgender and transsexual. In truth, men and women take all sorts of forms, not just visibly—that is whether you are short or tall, fat or thin, blue eyed or brown eyed, but sex as a biological category needs far more categories other than those of “man” and “woman.”

It is the same with gender. It is one thing to say someone has a vagina or a penis, it is another thing to assume that person is either female, feminine, or a woman. So what is gender and therefore gender identity? Gender as a conceptual idea aims to help us answer the question: “Am I a man or a woman or something else entirely?” Most of us do not think about this very much. We tend to let gender assignment (the label we were given at birth by a midwife who noted whether we had a penis or not) stand in for our gender identity. And we feel inadequate or confused on those occasions when we discover we do not feel very happy about the person we are expected to be in order to fit that label. But actually, our identity (and its gender) is personal; it’s what we feel our gender to be at any given moment. This feeling may be influenced by biological factors

that have a cultural tag sticking out of them. The feeling of being some gender might also have to do with sexual fantasy, or a preference for some role. There are as many good reasons for identifying with a gender label as there are people, but feeling comfortable when reconciling what is expected of you and what you desire is at the root of most of them. Our need to feel comfortable, and not to challenge or be challenged by our gender, will affect our life plans in many ways.

In the real world, outside of the antiseptic smelling corridors of the hospital, trans people are working at the raw coalface of the concept of identification. But it is against all the odds: the rigidity of a set of historical and cultural assumptions concerning sex-roles that pervades all discussion of gender—that the two, sex and gender, have an incorruptible sameness that makes them all pervasive. Yet gender, sex, and sexual orientation are fundamentally different for the trans community. We face the everyday reality of that difference in our lives, and our attempts to reconcile it have led to it being challenged in many unanticipated ways. We have moved to expressing a theory in which gender and sex roles are clearly separated (at least for a large number of people). What that means to the modernist view of gender theory is a challenge the trans community is not ignoring, nor is it prepared to come up with trite self-serving answers. Challenging our own sense of self, looking inward to find who we are, using the process of autobiography that we know so well, is producing some very interesting answers that challenge the very binary structure of the complacent world in which gender was invented, and by which it has become obsessed.

This book is a continuation of that process. It is not about justification, but it is an attempt at exploration and explanation. Sex and gender diverse people did not invent gender, yet they are experts in gender and what it means. This collection should lead the reader to understand that gender is merely a word to signify a concept of the human imagination that belongs within and supports the foundations of a patriarchal framework in which many, especially women, are daily oppressed. But the world outside the transgender world can take heart when they fail to understand what is going on. The fact is that within the sex and gender diverse communities there is no hidden answer as to what gender is. However there are answers to how it is experienced and what those experiences mean, and this collection should lead you further into the truths that come from that.

Dedicated to Vincent Keter (lawyer)

Vincent fought for many years in a case of sex discrimination that Tracie O'Keefe brought against several psychotherapists in the United Kingdom, after they attempted to halt the progress of her career when she came out as a transsexual woman in 1997. The effects of the discrimination were devastating to the lives of Tracie and her partner, Katrina, and Vincent went far beyond the call of duty in helping win the case and deliver justice. For his efforts, we are both eternally grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE WANT TO THANK those people who have contributed their true-life stories. It has been a privilege working with them, and our admiration goes out to them. We are honored that they trusted us to deliver their stories to you, the reader.

Thank you to the many people throughout the international sex and gender diverse community who passed on e-mails, letters, and announcements that enabled us to get in contact with the contributors in the first place.

We would like to thank our publisher, Jossey-Bass, and in particular Amy Scott, who had the foresight to want to publish this specialist book. Thank you to them for their enthusiasm and for going bravely into the night and having the nerve to trust us with a small but ever-growing light.

Finally, we'd like to thank Xena and Gabrielle, our two cats, who let us know when we'd spent far too long hunched over in front of the computer screen, by walking across the keyboard, meowing, and looking cute.

Sydney, Australia
January 2003

TRACIE O'KEEFE, DCH
KATRINA FOX

*Be all the positive things that you can be . . .
whatever they turn out to be.*

*Wonder at what you have become . . . again . . .
and again . . . and again.*

*Never ask anyone else to feel your pain for you
. . . only to share your good fortune.*

*Remember . . . life becomes the blessing you turn
it into.*

INTRODUCTION

WHEN WE WERE APPROACHED to edit this book, we were thrilled. Why? Because we realized just how much the times really are changing in a positive way for so many sex and gender diverse people—that is, for those who identify as being transsexual, transgender, intersex, androgynous, or without any sex or gender identity.

This encouraging development is part of a growing political movement akin to that of women's and gay liberation in the 1970s. In the 1990s the seeds of sex and gender activism began to grow, as the Internet united those whose sex and gender identity falls outside the average male-female in a way never seen before. Websites, chat rooms, and e-mail helped begin to dissolve cultural and geographical boundaries, as previously small and sometimes isolated groups of people who challenge society's norms began to communicate, discuss, explore, and redefine themselves in positive terms. No longer willing to stay quietly in the background, often perceived as "freaks" or "perverts" unworthy of basic human rights, sex and gender diverse people all over the world began educating, campaigning, and lobbying to attain those rights.

As members of the sex and gender diverse community have become more visible and vocal, their increasing numbers have inspired others to come out in the sex and gender identity they feel is right for them. These are exciting times. The twenty-first century is seeing a proliferation of newly emerging identities, such as "spansexual" and "metagender." We are also rediscovering that third and fourth genders were acknowledged in many cultures in the past.

So who are sex and gender diverse people, and what kind of backgrounds do they come from? They come from all walks of life. In the book we meet people who are young and old, from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. They are someone's mother, father, daughter, son, friend, brother, sister, or work colleague—they could even be your next-door neighbor. In their own words, they share with us their feelings, emotions, opinions, and experiences on what it means to be different—to challenge some of society's most basic and fundamental norms. Some of

the authors believe they were born “trapped in the wrong body” and have felt compelled to undergo surgery to physically alter their bodies to fit with the sex or gender identity they believe themselves to be; others were born with ambiguous genitalia, sex organs, or characteristics associated with their opposite sex; still others are sex and gender explorers.

When we put out an international appeal for contributions to this book, we were bowled over by the number and quality of stories we received. Many of the authors have never written anything before, and for some, English is not their first language. Their enthusiasm, pride, and achievement in making history by contributing their stories in this way matched our own joy at being part of such an important and groundbreaking work in the field of sex and gender.

You may laugh, cry, or be amazed as you read these stories, but you are sure to gain a sense of wonder, fascination, empathy, and inspiration. The heartfelt stories teach us to open our minds to the wondrous possibilities of sex and gender difference and how it can enrich our own lives. The stories also teach us about tolerance and respect for difference and offer us a window of understanding into the world of sex and gender diversity.

You don't need to have sex or gender “issues” to appreciate this book—it is for anyone who has even the remotest interest in human nature, as well as for clinicians, academics, employers, and the families and friends of sex and gender diverse people. Definitions of many of the terms used in this book can be found in the glossary at the beginning.

A book such as this would have been virtually impossible to put together ten years ago. The sex and gender diverse community had not gained the sense of pride it is now beginning to have, and those willing to share their stories would have been few and far between. What's more, no major publisher would have been interested in the idea. The 1990s saw a profusion of literature on the theories of sex and gender, as well as a smattering of autobiographies. But now we feel that it's time for something radically different.

So here is an extraordinary book and the first of its kind—an anthology of real-life stories told by a wide range of sex and gender diverse people in their own words, with no academic rhetoric or theory. That's right, just the stories. We made a conscious choice not to analyze or comment on the stories in the book, but simply to let them stand in their own right. We think it's about time for those who have often been pathologized by the medical profession, demonized by mainstream society, and ignored by lawmakers for years to speak their truths for themselves.

Reading this book will be a life-changing experience. You will never again be able to view humanity in terms of only male and female. You will be left with a sense of wonder at how inventive, adaptive, resourceful, and adventurous sex and gender diversity is. And as more people tell their stories of sex and gender diversity and teach us about themselves, perhaps we can all reeducate ourselves, dissolve our prejudices, embrace our diversity, and not be afraid of difference but remain in awe of its occurrence.

This is also a healing book—as the authors tell us their stories, we can be part of their journeys to self-acceptance and join the celebration of their lives. Come with us to learn, be inspired, laugh, cry, and appreciate these wonderful, courageous people and their journeys to be their true selves.

GLOSSARY

ALTHOUGH IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED by the editors that sex and gender diversity is much broader than the male-female bipolar model, some of the terms in this glossary have been defined within the confines of this model and therefore can be explained only in reference to it.

Anarcho Anarchist

Androgyne An androgynous person—someone who considers themselves to be both male and female. It can also mean someone who identifies as neuter.

BDSM Bondage/domination/sadomasochism.

Bondage Refers in this context to the consensual sexual practice where a person's movements are restricted and restrained. They can be bound, gagged, or trussed up in various ways.

Boston Marriage In the 19th century, this term was used for households where two women lived together, independent of any male support. Some of these relationships may have been sexual and others may not. Today, the term is sometimes used for lesbian relationships where two women live together but do not have sexual relations.

Crossdresser *See* Transvestite.

Domination (Dom) Domination, when used in its sexual context, refers to dominant and submissive role-play between two or more people. The shortened version "dom" can also mean a person who is dominant.

Fetish A fixation on an unusual idea. Someone with a fetish may have a sexual attraction to inanimate objects or unusual sexual practices.

FTM Female-to-male. Used as a noun, an FTM usually means a female-to-male transsexual.

Gender dysphoria (or Gender Identity Disorder) A sense of profound disturbance or unhappiness about one's gender identity.

GLBT Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender.

- Hir** Pronoun used by some people who identify outside the male-female spectrum, instead of *his* or *her*.
- Intersex** Someone who considers themselves to be in between the sexes. This term can refer to a person who is born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that is not considered to be society's norm for either male or female. However, some sex and gender diverse people not born with obvious physical differences may also use the term to describe themselves.
- LGBT** Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender.
- Metagender** Someone who identifies as neither male nor female. Such a person also does not identify as being both male and female or as neuter. This is a new term that refers to a gender identity outside any current definitions.
- MTF** Male-to-female. Used as a noun, an MTF usually means a male-to-female transsexual.
- Queer** This term used to be a synonym for *homosexual*, but has now broadened to encompass anyone who believes they have a variant or interesting sex, gender, or sexual identity or who engages in sexual practices outside what is considered to be society's norm.
- Sadomasochism (SM or S/M)** Consensual sexual practices involving the taking and the relinquishing of power. They may include some or all of the following: the giving and receiving of pain, torture, domination of one person over another, ritual humiliation, and bondage. A person who inflicts these things on another is known as a sadist or "top," and the person receiving them is known as a masochist or "bottom" or "sub" (short for submissive). The term is often used as part of the acronym BDSM (bondage, domination, sadomasochism).
- Separatist** Someone who favors separation, especially for political or religious reasons. During the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, some lesbians chose to live and work in women-only environments, severing all ties with male family members, friends, and colleagues.
- Sex positive** Someone who is positive about sex. In the context of this book, a sex positive feminist is one who is not anti-sex. In the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, some feminists were against sex, particularly heterosexual sex, as it was seen as colluding with the enemy. Many were and some still are also against erotica and pornography and lesbian couples' use of sex toys. The term *sex positive* was

coined by women who considered themselves to be feminists but who had an open attitude to sex and didn't want to be associated with the connotations of the word *feminist* on its own.

Sex reassignment or realignment surgery (SRS) A surgical procedure that transforms a person's primary sex organs into the appearance of those of their opposite biological sex. Vaginoplasty and labiaplasty refer to the creation of a neo-vagina and neo-labia respectively; phalloplasty refers to the construction of a neo-penis, and metaoidioplasty refers to surgical enhancement of a clitoris.

She-male Someone who identifies as between male and female, or as both male and female. The term generally refers to people born as biological males who later take on the appearance of females, sometimes through hormones, surgery, or both.

Sie, s/he, or zie Pronouns used by some people who identify outside the male-female spectrum, instead of *he* or *she*.

SM See Sadoomasochism.

Transgender (TG) This term can refer to someone who identifies as a member of their original biological sex but who, through hormones, surgery, or both, takes on the appearance of the opposite biological sex. It can also refer to someone who believes they live between the genders. The word is also used in some cases as an umbrella term to cover the whole of the trans community, but this can be offensive to some people, especially many transsexuals.

Trans man or trans woman One who lives across the bipolar gender barrier from their original biological sex. The terms can refer to both transsexual and transgendered people.

Transsexual (TS) A person who may begin life as one biological sex, but believes they are of the opposite sex. A transsexual person may attempt to transform their physical appearance into that of the sex they believe they are. They may undergo hormonal treatment and several surgeries to bring their body in line with their self-image. Transsexuals are often referred to as male-to-female (MTF) if they were born biologically male, or female-to-male (FTM) if they were born biologically female.

Transvestite or crossdresser (TV) A person who dresses in clothes generally associated with their opposite biological sex, as defined by socially acceptable norms. An erotic transvestite is someone who gets sexually excited by wearing the clothes, whereas a social transvestite simply feels more comfortable wearing them.

Zie See *Sie*.

FINDING THE REAL ME
