

I Am Trans, Trans Am I, the Case for Solidarity.

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I am trans! and with apologies to that great San Diegan, Dr. Suess,
Trans I Am!

I stand with you,
if you're trans too.

Friends who really know poetry have begged me to keep my day job, but it's too late; I retired from that last year.

What Transgender Is and What It's Not

What do I mean by Trans? It's is a Latin prefix, a pretty good one, meaning Across or Beyond.

In the 1970's Virginia Prince coined the term 'Transgenderist' as a non-inclusive, perhaps disturbingly so, term to describe those who transition full time without a need for surgical reconstruction. Over the years, the T-word took on several forms, for example: A past tense verb, Transgendered, which I discourage. Our identities are part of who we are, not something that happened to us. However, by the 1980s, un-suffixed Transgender began to take on an inclusive meaning of social identity. It was appropriated by the broader community as an umbrella term, a banner of solidarity, and the case for solidarity is what I'm talking about today.

To me, transgender means transcendence! I use it in the broadest, most inclusive sense of community: all those who transcend cultural gender stereotypes.

To me, trans does not mean transition, though it certainly includes everyone who has transitioned our social gender expression or physical sex characteristics

To me, trans does not mean transgress, though it certainly includes everyone who defies and deconstructs narrow cultural binary typecasts of men and women, boys and girls.

To me, trans does not mean transsexual, though it certainly includes TS women and men, and I speak as one.

To me, transgender is inclusive of all the shades of human diversity: of inner gender identity, outer social gender expression, physical sex characteristics, or cultural gender identification.

To me, transgender is inclusive of: my genderqueer sisters and brothers; my crossdressing sisters and brothers; my bi-gender, dual gender, intergender, pangender sisters and brothers; my really masculine and really feminine brothers and sisters at the edges, and my androgynous, agender, and non-gender siblings in the middle; my drag king and queen sisters and brothers my intersex sisters and brothers who were mis-assigned at birth; my gender variant sisters and brothers of all cultures who choose to stand with us as trans, Two-Spirit, Kathoey, Mahu, Hijira and countless more since the dawn of humanity; my closeted and my out and proud sisters and brothers; my sisters and brothers attracted to women and those attracted to men, or both, or neither; my transitioned and transitioning sisters and brothers, without and with hormones or surgery; and my transsexual sisters and brothers, preop, postop, never-op.

Most of all, transgender to me means solidarity in the face of adversity. It means standing proudly shoulder to shoulder with all people who suffer much the same discrimination, intolerance, prejudice, exclusion or violence because of our gender identity, our gender expression, or our physical sex characteristics.

A House Divided

We gender transcendent folk continue to lose our jobs, our children, our homes, our civil justice, our freedom and even our lives.

And like most civil rights movements that came before us, our oppressors pressure us to divide, to be fractured, splintered, Balkanized and therefore silenced.

Sadly, we sometimes succumb. We turn on each other.

The author Kate Bornstein wrote that post-op TS people have a way of looking down upon pre-op TS people, who look down on non-op transitioned people, who look down on drag queens, who look down on cross-dressers, who look down on closet cases, who mock the post-ops!

We have been told from within our own community that an inclusive transgender community label somehow perpetuates intolerance, that it causes confusion. In fairness, most of us should do a better job of honoring diversity and celebrating difference within our community.

However, let me share some words of division from within our Trans-family or attributed to transpeople in the press:

"Transgender is a social construct promoted by the GLBT movement, and it has nothing to do with us."

"Transsexualism is a biophysiological condition, while crossdressing is a fetish." When we internalize the language of our own oppression, when we throw false psychiatric stereotypes at each other, we degrade all of us.

"We don't naturally have anything to do with the other transsexuals" This was in the context of homophobic remarks by a transsexual person.

And from a Florida newspaper reporter, "she's not like other transgender people. She feels uncomfortable even looking at some, 'like I'm seeing a bunch of men in dresses.'"

My sisters and brothers, we owe each other better than this.

Maligning Language

Of the disrespectful language faced by gender variant people, none is more damaging or hurtful than that which disregards our gender identities, denies affirmed gender roles of those who have transitioned, and reduces us to our assigned birth sex. I'm speaking of affirmed transwomen being called "he" and transmen being called "she." I use the term Maligning Language to describe this verbal violence.

Consider the psychiatric diagnosis of "Gender Identity Disorder" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, published by the American Psychiatric Association. The very name, Gender Identity Disorder, implies "disordered" gender identity: that our identities are themselves disordered or deficient; that our gender identities are not legitimate, but represent perversion, delusion or immature development. In other words, the GID diagnosis implies that all transwomen are nothing more than mentally ill men and vice versa for transmen. This is repeated throughout the diagnostic criteria and supporting text for GID, where our affirmed identities and transitioned roles are termed "other sex," and transsexual women are called "males," and "he."

It's certainly true that the portion of the transcommunity who experience distress with our born sex characteristics (and I have experienced this up close and personal) has a pressing need for clear diagnostic nomenclature consistent with hormonal and surgical procedures well proven to relieve this distress, but the diagnosis of "disordered" gender identity in its current form has failed us all.

And it gets worse...

One of the authors of the GID diagnosis, Dr. Ray Blanchard of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto (previously known as the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry) introduced maligning terminology "homosexual" and "non-homosexual" gender dysphoria or transsexualism to sexology literature in the late 1980s. This language is so bizarre and insulting that it's hard to follow. Blanchard labels transwomen attracted to men as "homosexual," reducing them to a stereotype of crazy gay "men." He labels transwomen attracted to women or both as "non-homosexual," again maligning us as "men." Blanchard also labels this second group as "autogynephiliac," meaning a perverse, narcissistic love of one's self as a woman. This cruel, demeaning term is

advanced in the supporting text for the GID diagnosis in the current revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

And it gets worse...

In 2003, psychologist J. Michael Bailey of Northwestern University authored an exploitive and defamatory book that widely promoted this maligning language, entitled The Man Who Would be Queen. He is referring to transsexual women in this title. Here are some quotes:

“men who want to be women are not naturally feminine. There is no sense in which they have women's souls”

"Prostitution is the single most common occupation that homosexual transsexuals in our study admitted to."

Understandable outrage from the transcommunity was met with orchestrated personal attacks on prominent transwomen in the NY Times and national press.

And it gets worse...

Just this month, a courageous young affirmed girl right here in Colorado, her family, and her school district were defamed and ridiculed by Denver NBC Affiliate KUSA-TV, because she dared to seek an education in a public school, just like other girls. This journalist cruelly maligned her as a “boy” in violation of Associated Press guidelines. He ignited a firestorm of condemnation in the national press and verbal violence toward transitioned youth and their families across the internet.

And it gets worse...

Last Saturday, my girlfriend Lisa and I attended a candle light vigil on the beach at Ventura, California. It was held in memory of a 14-year-old gender variant youth, executed by a classmate on the very day that this media fracas had reached a crescendo.

My sisters and brothers, we must speak up when our identities are maligned this way. We must speak up. We must stand up for each other and ourselves.

Transgender Solidarity

What does solidarity mean within our community? There are so many examples of heroes and role models. When I think of trans-solidarity, I think of Mara Keisling of the National Center for Transgender Equality, our national advocate. When I think of trans-solidarity, I think of our own Robynne here in Denver, who put the T in the Rainbow Flag over a decade ago. When I think of trans-Solidarity, I think of our own Ms. TG Spirit. Yes, folks, that’s her real legal name. Teeg, you are my hero. When I think of solidarity, I think of Teeg and Kate Bowman and everyone with the Colorado Gold Rush

and the Gender Identity Center of Colorado who worked so hard to bring us together today.

When I hear a personal narrative, a life story that differs from my own, I should not feel diminished or threatened by that difference. I ask, "How can I support you?" "How can I stand with you?"

I became active in the Seattle transcommunity more than 15 years ago, and the cross-dressing community there was first to welcome and nurture me when I so urgently needed those. My CD sisters were there for me when others were not. Today, when I hear narratives from CD, bigender, dual-gender, gender-surfing folk whose identities differ from my own, I ask "How can I stand with you?" "How can I refute the horrible sexualized psychiatric stereotypes that hurt you?" And by the way, "Thanks for saving my life."

I was deep in the closet as a professor in a small rural university in the Northwest, and I wanted to give something back to our community. I wanted to become a writer, but I had a big barrier to overcome. I'm an engineer geek and was pretty much functionally illiterate. A kindly English instructor took me under his wing and patiently provided the tools I needed to get started. He was a transman, who was also in the closet at the time. When I hear life stories from transmen whose journeys differ from my own, I say, "Dude, you rock!" "How can I stand with you?"

When I hear narratives from gender queer folks whose perspective differs from my own, I thank them for making me aware of my own biases -- for pointing out that real people are not just masculine OR feminine, but sometimes both masculine AND feminine, or neither masculine NOR feminine, and all shades in-between. I ask, "How can I stand with you?"

When transpeople of color or of social class or legal status different from my own describe their journeys, I am humbled at my ignorance of my own social privilege that eased my journey. "How can I stand with you?"

When I hear stories of transitioning youth, given opportunity for self-realization unimaginable to my generation, and facing new unprecedented challenges in schools and neighborhoods, I ask, "How can I remove the barriers that you face?" "How can I stand with you?"

When trans or gender nonconforming youth are exiled to the streets or shamed in 'reparative therapies' or imprisoned in mental institutions, "How can I stand with you?"

When gender transcendent women and men are driven to despair and suicide, or fall to violence by shame, guilt and prejudice that none of us ever deserved, and they can no longer tell their stories, "How could I have better stood with you?"

I am Trans!
Trans I am.

I stand with you,
if you're Trans too.

In Solidarity,
who stands with me?

Kelley Winters, Ph.D. is a writer and community advocate on issues of transgender medical policy. She is the founder of GID Reform Advocates (www.gidreform.org), member of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, and Advisory Board Member for the Matthew Shepard Foundation and TransYouth Family Allies. She has presented papers on the psychiatric classification of gender diversity at annual conventions of the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association and the Association of Women in Psychology. Her articles have appeared in a number of psychology and psychiatry journals and in two books. Kelley assisted in drafting the current human rights ordinances in Boulder and Denver, Colorado. She was instrumental in trans-positive reform of Colorado drivers license policy in 2006 and in adding Gender Identity and Expression to employment policies of the Hewlett-Packard Company. Kelley received the Colorado Pride Award from Equality Colorado in 1999 and the and 2002 Sonja's Dream Lifetime Achievement Award and 2007 Melissa Chapman Award for Social Change from the Gender Identity Center of Colorado.