

Just because you've been
made invisible

doesn't mean you don't exist

-what it might mean to be

an ally to folks who are trans



For Otush

To read this booklet, you'll need to have some familiarity with the following terms. The meanings of these terms are not set in stone. They mean different things to different people and they shift over time. New terms come into existence and others become seen as irrelevant or inaccurate and drop out of use. But giving some initial definitions means we can start off on the same page, even if you yourself define things differently.

Cisgendered: If you are a “cisgendered” person (or “cis”, for short), it means that you identify with the decision that someone else made for you at your birth when they looked at your genitals to decide if you were a boy or a girl. It doesn't mean that you have to agree with all the decisions society makes about how a boy should behave and how a girl should behave. But it does mean that on some basic level and for whatever reason, you are content to identify with the gender that society has given you. For most cisgendered people, it remains something that goes without questioning that you take on the gender that you were assigned at birth. You might not actively identify as “cisgendered” because you might never even have heard the term. It might be that you identify with the gender that you've been assigned because it's the path of least resistance – it means that the society around you will not give you hassle. But it might be that you feel a strong sense of identity in being a “man” or a “woman”. What is usually left invisible is that this sense of identity is as a *cisgendered* man or woman.

Transgendered – If you are “transgendered” (or “trans” for short), it means that you do not identify with the decision that someone made on your behalf when you were born as to what gender you should be. It means that the sense of gender that you have inside you does not match up with the gender that the world around you gives to you. The term for this is “gender dysphoria”. It may be a feeling you have inside from childhood, or it may be a feeling that develops at some point later on in your life. You may choose to act on this feeling and decide to take on another gender role, or you may choose not to act on the feeling and continue living in the gender role you have been ascribed, or you may choose to play around with your gender but not take on any fixed gender. Or you may experience something else altogether. There is no single experience of what it means to be transgendered.

Transition: this is when you decide to take action to change from performing the gender role you

were given at birth to performing the gender role that you feel is consistent with the sense of gender you have inside you. A process of transition can be long or short, and can take many forms. If you decide to transition, it does not mean that you will need to take on every single characteristic that is attributed to being male or female. It means that you can do what is comfortable for you in terms of feeling better about your gender expression and in terms of getting the recognition that you need from the world around you that you have a particular gender. It might mean that you want people to refer to you as “he” instead of “she”. It might mean that you change the way that you dress. It might mean that you modify your body in some way or in many ways. This might mean taking hormones or surgery, or it might mean getting your ears pierced or changing your hair. It might mean that you alter your behaviour, or it might mean that you stay the same as you always were, but want other people to treat you differently. It will probably be much easier for you to transition if you receive support about your decision(s) from the world around you, especially from family, friends, and your wider community.

Trans man: someone who has transitioned from presenting themselves to the world as having a female gender to presenting themselves as having a male one. Sometimes it's useful to use the term “trans man”, but it ignores the fact that someone is living as a man and can therefore be referred to simply as a man.

Trans woman: someone who has transitioned from presenting themselves to the world as having a male gender to presenting themselves as having a female one. A trans woman can also be referred to simply as a woman.

Gender binary: this is when people understand the world of gender as being easily divided into two categories: male and female. In this understanding, people see some characteristics and behaviour as male and others as female. It is easy to see that the world is far more complex than this, and that people's characteristics and behaviours cannot easily be divided into two neat boxes, because gender is better understood to be multidimensional or on a spectrum. And even when it's decided that some things are male and others are female, ideas about which gender should do what change over time. But on a basic level, seeing things in terms of a gender binary means that the world is divided into these two categories. The extent to which this is done by any one person depends on the society a person comes from, the culture or subculture a person is part of, and individual ways of understanding the world.

Core gender: your “core gender” is the sense you have of your own gender; it is the strong feeling inside you that makes you identify as a particular gender.

Gender queer: if you are “gender queer”, it means that you do not have a strong sense of identity as being either in the category of male or in the category of female. It probably means that you have a different sense of “core gender” to people who are cis or trans. Cis and trans people identify with being either male or female. However, if you are gender queer, you might feel that having a sense of being either male or female is not something that resonates with you internally. It may also mean that although you have a sense of being either male or female, you are working actively to change the way we categorise behaviours and characteristics into two separate boxes because you find it unhelpful. As with all other genders, you might feel that you have always been gender queer, but it's something that for a long time you didn't have words for. As a gender queer, you may feel that you are made invisible because you are not easy to put in a category and because people don't always deal very well with “in-betweens”. But to be gender queer is as valid as any other gender identity and expression. And it should be recognised that in being gender queer you are also experiencing gender dysphoria, in the same way that trans people do.

Passing: you could have met any number of trans people in your life that you did not know were transgendered, because many trans folk have no obvious characteristics from the gender that they transitioned from. They are therefore referred to as “passing” as a man or a woman. However, many trans people have characteristics of what are commonly attributed to both male and female. Western society is often not very accepting of people who demonstrate characteristics outside of their own gender category. Trans and gender queer people commonly suffer as a result of this, which may take the form of social exclusion, verbal assault, physical assault, legal problems and more. However, it should be pointed out that cisgendered people also suffer as a result of not following all the rules of their own gender; for example, cis women with hairy legs or facial hair are often thought of as “unfeminine” and there is a lot of pressure on them to behave differently; to behave in a way that can be easily categorised as feminine.

Why I've written this booklet

I don't identify as transgendered myself; I identify as a cisgendered woman. It's become important to me to understand myself as cisgendered, because it means that I learn to recognise the privileges that I have in the world as someone whose sense of gender matches up with the way in which the world sees me.

Until some years ago, I wasn't aware that I knew any trans folk, and so by default didn't know that it was possible to be cisgendered. I probably wouldn't have made friends with many trans people if I hadn't started to identify myself as having a queer sexuality and hadn't started to spend time in spaces that are created for people who are queer in both their sexuality and gender. (In this context, the term "queer" refers to people that do not fit into the norms of sexual and gender behaviour that are prescribed by the society they live in). Before I had spent time in queer spaces, my idea of trans people came only from the mass media's portrayal of drag queens; men dressed up as hyper-feminine women in over-the-top performance roles. When I finally started meeting people who I knew identified as trans, I realised that the media fails to represent the diversity of experiences that being trans covers. I realised that outside of specially created queer spaces, trans people are often either completely invisible or are made hyper visible; in fact there is often open hostility towards people who are visibly trans.

I've had a lot of conversations with other cisgendered people where it has been clear to me that cis people often have limited understandings of trans issues, and in these instances I have tried to advocate for trans folks. I think that it's really important that other cis people become trans allies, because I've seen what an ongoing and exhausting struggle it can be to be trans. The trans people that I know struggle not just with being accepted, but with having the fact that they even exist recognised at all. I wrote this booklet to try to bridge some gaps in understanding that cisgendered people often seem to have about being trans, and so that there is a little less pressure on trans people to explain themselves to the world all the time.

To be an ally doesn't mean that I understand everything about what it means to be transgendered, and it doesn't mean that what I do understand has necessarily come easily to me. It doesn't mean that I'm right about everything that I've written here or that every transgender person who reads this will agree with me about my understandings of what it might mean to be trans. It does mean that I

understand that being trans is something really serious for people. Because I've picked up on it being a serious issue, I've explored why that is. It doesn't mean that I've asked people relentless questions about why they are trans. It does mean that I've spent time listening, empathising, and thinking things through for myself. I might still do things that trans folks find stupid and annoying due to my lack of understanding, but I'm willing to make those mistakes and try to learn from them.

Why are people trans?

You might wonder why people feel their gender is different from the one they have been assigned. You might also decide that because you don't understand it, you never want to think about it again. This seems to be something that cisgendered people do quite frequently, but if you do this, it means that you are pretending that other people's experiences don't exist. I guess at times I've puzzled over why people find it important to change gender, and the way that I've come to understand it is by drawing parallels between what happens in my life as a cisgendered person and what I have observed in the lives of trans friends I have.

First of all, for some reason that I don't completely understand, I want the world to recognise me as a woman, and I really don't like it if people completely overlook my femininity. Although people usually identify me as a woman, occasionally in the past people have thought I'm a boy, and, especially when I was younger, I really, really didn't like it. But at the same time, I don't want to be seen as a very feminine woman who is in need of male attention and help; it's really important to me that I don't receive help from males just because they view me as a weak female, because that makes me feel bad. So I present a version of myself to the world that means that as far as possible I can avoid being treated like that, but at the same time I make sure that I am recognised as feminine in some way. And that's an example of how complicated our genders are; I want to be recognised as a woman and want my femininity to be recognised to some extent, but I don't want to be recognised as a woman who needs a man.

So I don't really know why I am this way, but in the end we are social beings, and the way that people read us and consequently treat us is really important to us, because it affects both how we feel about ourselves and our ability to access the social groups we want to be in. In terms of how I am presented to the world, if I felt forced to wear a short pink dress and stilettos I would *hate* it. But actually I would hate it just as much and feel equally uncomfortable if I felt forced to wear a baggy

grey tracksuit with grease stains down it all the time. However, as cisgendered people, there are many ways in which we can *choose* how we want to present ourselves to the world. This means that no-one will take issue with a large number of ways we have of expressing ourselves.

Of course, there are also many freedoms that we *don't* have, and many pressures that we *do* feel. The world is organised in a way which means that in every society to a greater or lesser degree, (cis) women are subjected to male authority and control in all aspects of life. (Cis) women in any society struggle in different ways with the multiple pressures of having poorer access to jobs or education than (cis) men, juggling family life with paid work, political systems made up mostly of men which then operate mainly in the interests of men, legal systems that often favour men over women, a mass media which demands that women must look or act in a certain way, and many more pressures. It should also be recognised that although (cis) men tend to have extra economic or social privileges, they are also living in a hierarchy where some men (white, educated, upper/middle class) get much easier access to those privileges than others. High expectations are also made of (cis) men to act in a certain way that is seen as masculine – men are supposed to be strong, right about everything, and show little emotion or weakness, which can make for unhealthy relationships with other people.

So we need to remember those pressures and the ways in which we lack freedom, but it's also important to highlight the freedoms that we *do* have as cis people, because our freedoms are something that most of the time, most cisgendered people never seem to think about. Because we've always had these freedoms, we take them for granted and don't even recognise them.

I've come to see that one very basic freedom that I have as a cis person is that it is pretty easy for me to do a lot of different things that make me feel better both about myself and about the way I think the world sees me. The way I present my gender plays a big role in how happy I feel in myself, and I wear certain clothes and doing certain activities which make me feel more like myself. As I understand it, for trans people, their particular difficulty is that it is very often painfully difficult to present themselves to the world in a way which matches up with their internal experience of their own gender because the world around them refuses to accept them for the way they are.

When something is easy for you, it is normally because you have privilege in some way. In our society, people with the most privileges are often white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied and

economically well-off. If you don't fall into any of these categories you'll know from first-hand experience that life can be pretty damn difficult because you find so many doors closed to you and so many obstacles to overcome. If you fall into some of the above-mentioned categories of privilege and not into others, you'll probably recognise how some things in life feel easily obtainable and some things feel really, really hard. If you fall into all of these categories, you may well have other ways in which you find life really hard, but you should also be working on your skills in empathy, because you have a lot of things made easy for you that other people don't.

One privilege that almost always gets left off the list is having *privilege as a cisgendered person*. In the book "Gender Outlaws", Evin Taylor creates a list of questions to highlight cisgender privileges (2010, p269). Here are some of the key questions asked. If you can answer "yes", it is an indication of having cis privilege in some way.

- Can you be confident that your healthcare providers will not ask to see your genitals when treating you for a sore throat?
- Can you expect to find a doctor willing to treat you with urgent medical care? (GP's often claim they do not know how to treat trans people, denying access to even basic healthcare).
- Are you able to assume that your genitals conform relatively closely to portrayals of "normal" bodies?
- Can you be reasonably sure whether to tick the "Male" or "Female" box on a form?
- Can you be reasonably sure that your choice of ticked box on such forms will not subject you to legal prosecution of fraud or misrepresentation of identity?
- Are incidental parts of your personality (ie. being trans) defined as mental illness?
- Can you expect that your gender identity will not be used against you when applying for employment?
- Can you consider social, political, or professional advancements without having to consider whether or not your gender identity will be called into question as being appropriate for advancement?
- Can you expect to be reasonably eligible to adopt children if you should want to?
- Can you be sure that your children will not be harassed at school because of your gender identity?
- Does the state of your genitals cause you to fear violence if they are discovered?
- If you are having a difficult time making new friends, can you generally be sure that it is not because of your gender identity?
- Are you able to use your voice and speak in public without fear of being ridiculed?

- Do teachings about your national and cultural heritage acknowledge the existence of people of your gender identity?

This lack of recognition and understanding can translate into a lack of respect for people who are trans, which can manifest itself in many different ways. It may take the form of treating trans people's bodies differently, as if being trans is some kind of joke. I've seen trans people have their breasts and genitalia groped at parties and (cis) people emulate sex with them unconsensually. It can also take the form of outright hostility, like attacks in the street. It can take the form of ostracism, like not allowing trans people into certain spaces, or it can take more subtle forms, like ignoring people's requests to be referred to by a certain pronoun ("he" rather than "she", for example). Any of these things can be referred to as "transphobia".

*But wait a minute, I hear you think, isn't it a person's **choice** to change their gender? If someone decides to change their gender from the one they've been given, doesn't that mean that they just bring on all these problems themselves?*

So ask yourself, *did you choose your own sense of gender*, or is it just a part of your identity; something that you feel you are? It's just the same for trans people, except that if you are cisgendered, you are lucky enough for that feeling to match up with how the world sees you and understands you to be. Can you imagine how that would feel if that wasn't the case for you? How much energy would you need to expend trying to get the world to understand you that at the moment you don't need to expend at all?

*Okay, you think, so maybe it's not a person's choice to be trans, but maybe that means it's a mental illness. Surely our internal sense of gender **should** match up with the way our body is, and if it doesn't, isn't there something wrong?*

Trans people are still classified as mentally ill by the World Health Organisation¹. But have you ever thought about how weird it is that our sense of our own gender **does** match up with the body we each have? If you look a little deeper, you can start to find that things aren't so fixed. For example, it has been found that in more than 130 different Native American cultures, an idea of "two spirits" evolved to describe people who express varying genders and sexualities². Two spirits people do

¹ Cited from European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT rights. www.lgbt-ep.eu

² Roscoe, Will (1991). *The Zuni Man-Woman*, p.5.

work and wear clothes associated with both male and female, and are seen as having insights into the world that other people don't, as they understood something of what it means to have experiences of different genders.

From this we can learn that being trans isn't something that's some new fad; it's something age-old, and something we don't always have the language to express. Why does Western society see it as a mental illness to behave in a way that is different from accepted norms of behaviour? Why are we so fixed in our thinking about gender? What are we trying to hold onto? What are we scared of? What understandings of the world do we miss by being dismissive of people who don't feel themselves to fit into the particular box they've been put in? Why should any of us be in a particular box? Why are we doing things just to keep the society around us happy? It might make things easier and more comfortable, but does it make us *happier*?

The question that for me needs further investigation is not about why people are trans or find it important to transition, but,

Why is it that cisgendered people so often either:

(a) have a lack of understanding, or

(b) have outright hostility towards people who have either transitioned or want to transition to a gender other than the one they were given at birth?

What is it that cis people find so hard?

I still don't quite get it, but the following is about my current understanding of transphobia in Western societies.

There is belief that's inherent to our society that men should fulfil their roles as men and women should fulfil their roles as women. Sometimes things happen in society to change how those roles are viewed; the various waves of women's movements have certainly altered how men and women's roles have been played out; women now work and wear trousers; men raise children and do the washing-up; and so on and so forth. But in spite of the ways that the roles of men and women have changed over time, gender remains something that we see as solid and fixed – maybe because it gives us something to hold onto. It's something that needs to be decided even to give a baby a name; it shapes our entire life before we've lived it.

To suggest that *you are not your gender*, but that your gender is something you get up every day and *choose to perform*, is a notion that can rock the fundamentals of your own identity because it messes up all the roles that society gives you and that you then perpetuate. To illustrate this, count as many things as you can think of that you have done today that helped you perform your gender as a male/female. Which of those things did you actively choose to do because you wanted to, and which did you do just out of habit? And where did that habit come from? Could it be a out of some kind of fear that people would see you in the wrong way? Like if you ever accidentally walk into a public toilet of the wrong gender for your genitalia and it momentarily feels like the most embarrassing thing *in the world*...have you ever thought about why you get that feeling?

Generally, we only see there to be a performance when people cross dress for a party or a show; we don't see the *whole* of our gender expression as something we perform. So when people want to transition to perform another gender in their everyday life, cis people don't understand it, and seem to find it threatening to their own sense of self. Maybe the possibility that you don't have to do what society has prescribed for you is something that makes people angry, because it's a horrible notion that someone else is more free than you are...

It begs the question,

If we believe that we should not be dictated to; that we should be able to take control of our own lives, why shouldn't our own gender expression be a part of that control?

And then there's the hidden homophobia.

Our initial sense of sexuality develops at a later time than our initial sense of gender does, but it doesn't mean that it's supposed to be less solid than our gender identity. We're supposed to choose whether we're straight or gay (and let's face it, we're still supposed to be straight really. If we're not it's a bit wrong, or it's okay and can be tolerated but it's a bit of a shame because it would be better if we were straight). And we're then supposed to stick to that sexuality. If we deviate from that solid identity, then it's, well, deviant (you know – bisexuals are just fickle and indecisive. They should make up their minds and pick a gender to be attracted to. Stop being so greedy). So what about that cute guy that works behind the bar? What about the hot girl who works at the public library? How would you feel if they had started life as one gender and now lived as another? If you knew that their genitals were different from the ones that you'd imagine to be there? What does that make

you? Are you still straight or are you suddenly gay? If gender identity becomes different to our fixed understandings of it, how can we work out what box our sexuality is supposed to go into? How does the breaking down of the boxes feel? Do you feel liberated? Or terrified of accidentally being a homo? What is it about these identities that we need to cling onto so much? Who are we without them?

Something that cis people I have come across think is,

If you want to change your gender, you should get rid of your gender altogether. It's better to be recognised for not having any particular gender.

Cis people I've talked to say that they understand why people would want to stop being seen as any particular gender, but don't understand why people want to be recognised as a gender that's different from the one they were assigned at birth. *And in any case, the thinking goes, we should be trying to get away from categorising people according to things about them which tell us which gender they are, and we shouldn't care so much about what other people think, and shouldn't be trying so hard to present ourselves to the world in a certain way.*

However, it's easy to think these things when the world recognises you as having the gender that you feel yourself to be. Whether it's a good or a bad thing that we put energy into presenting ourselves in a certain way is actually quite irrelevant, because it's something that all of us, almost without exception, do. It takes honesty to recognise that we have a sense of gender and want to present ourselves in terms of that gender to the rest of the world.

As well as that, it's important to be very wary of the "should" in the sentence, "you should get rid of your gender altogether". It doesn't recognise what a person might want themselves, but is telling them what they *should* want. If you think the gender binary itself is wrong and so trans people should actually not want to have any particular gender,

What are you doing yourself to stop perpetuating it? Why have you decided that it's the job of somebody who wants to transition to do this? Why do you still have a binary gender identity if you don't believe in it and think other people shouldn't believe in it?

This isn't to say that I think we should live in a world where gender is clearly divided between "the things that men do" and "the things that women do". I believe in completely messing with those roles so that we can do things we can't do now, because that's how we become more free. But it is a misunderstanding of trans people to think that they are just wanting to perpetuate the gender binary. Of course some trans people want to perform their gender in a way that's understood to be very extremely feminine or extremely masculine (which is also fine), but that certainly isn't what all trans people want to do. It's the same as the way that cis people perform gender roles across a whole spectrum. As a cis person there are countless things you'll do in a single day which inform the world as that you are a male or a female. Most of those things you'll have been taught to do by our society. Some things that you do may not usually fit with your gender category, but because you really don't like how society told you that you can't do those things just because you're a boy/girl, you've decided you're going to do them anyway. But there are things that you *keep doing because you like doing them, and because you want the world to recognise you as a male or a female*. If this is true for you as a cis person, why wouldn't it be true for a trans person? The only difference is that a trans person wants to be recognised as having a gender different from the one that s/he was assigned at birth.

So why not play a little? Do something today that is outside of the usual gender role you perform. See if it makes you feel a little more alive...

Don't forget the gender queers...

Of course, I'm concentrating on the issue of being trans in this booklet, but we also need to remember that there are other people who definitely don't identify with being either male or female, and may identify with being both at the same time. These people are often called "gender queer" and often use the pronoun "they" rather than "he" or "she". A lot of the time, gender queers are made invisible in a different way to trans folks. This is because our Western society doesn't deal well at all with people who don't fit neatly into categories but exist in the in-between. I've already talked about how trans folks don't fit into the strict categories of male and female that people must behave in from the time of the assignment of their gender at birth. But in some way, our society is more understanding of people who you can still fit into a category. So if you were assigned as a man, but realise you're a woman, you still in some way fit into the category of woman.

but don't experience those things? Does that make you less of a woman?

- Does it make you a woman if you have breasts and a vagina? What about women who are completely flat-chested? What about intersex people who have “ambiguous genitalia”, meaning that the sexual characteristics of an intersex person's body cannot easily be identified as male or female?
- What about trans women who “pass” as women and so no-one even contemplates that they are not cis-gendered? Doesn't this necessitate some kind of “gender-policing” to ensure that only women assigned as female at birth can enter these spaces? (And wouldn't that make women-only space horrible places to be?).

After a lot more puzzling over what gender actually means (or if it even exists), my current belief is that our sense of gender is about who we feel an *affinity* with. Both cisgendered and transgendered people originally had their gender roles decided for them by their society. The difference is that trans people don't feel an affinity with the gender they've been given. And now that I've met lots of trans folks, I've come to realise that just because you transition to being a woman or a man doesn't necessarily mean that you will be hyper-femme or hyper-macho. For instance, I've met a trans woman who refuses to wear skirts. The weird thing is that performing our gender roles doesn't *necessarily* mean having *any* particular behaviours characteristics. It's about how each of us, on an individual level, understands the world around us and chooses to be. Gender isn't something you can pin down. It's always changing and (hopefully) evolving.

I believe women's spaces are incredibly important as places where women can feel safer and start to understand things about themselves that it's hard to whilst living in the daily grind. They should exist, but I also believe that if we have too rigid a definition in our minds of what it means to be a woman then we end up creating unnecessary hostility against a group of people that are already hugely marginalised by the society around them. Where are trans women supposed to go? If you are trans and you want to live as a woman, chances are you'll want to spend time with other women to explore what being a woman means to you, and the particular oppression that you face as a trans woman.

At the same time, I believe that there are always moments when we need to create spaces that are for some groups of people and not others. It may be the case that at some times, cis women want to get together to pick apart what it means to have been raised as a girl by the society around them.

But we've got to be clear about when it's important to exclude people and to what ends, and when we are actually stunting our own growth as a group by leaving people out. In the example I've just given, surely trans men and gender queers would also be included, as people who have/may have been raised as girls. So actually, maybe it's not really necessary or possible to create spaces that are only for cis women.

As cis women or trans men or gender queers or cis men, I believe there's something else we should be asking ourselves about the ways in which trans women are marginalised from both women-only spaces and society at large, which is,

To what extent are trans women marginalised because of our own fear and contempt of femininity?

To me, this contempt is exemplified by the way that (some) people find it the ultimate in hilarity when a (cis) man puts on a dress and make-up. Why is it found to be so funny? Could it be because we feel that if someone is masculine, they shouldn't demean themselves by presenting themselves as feminine?

But cis women are also judged if they want to present themselves to the world as very feminine, and this judgement also happens in women's spaces. So in the context of a woman's space, we'll accept cis women who aren't too feminine, and trans guys – who generally don't present as feminine – and gender queers who were assigned at birth as female...but trans women and cis women who feel themselves to be very feminine will be judged or excluded. Which means we create women's spaces where it's great to be a woman as long as you're a bit more like a man. But if you're seen as too much like a man, you can't come in. Is anyone else seeing the contradictions here?

Final words...

In the end, none of us want to be thinking about our gender all the time, but we all get stuck sometimes and feel horrible about the way that the world around us sees us and treats us. As allies, we need to give our support to people in the times that they are stuck so that they can get through it and move onto other things. If we treat people as if their problems with gender are irrelevant or unimportant, it just makes things worse and makes them feel unsupported, which means the sense of stuckness will go on for longer. Support may take many forms, from active listening to actively

struggling for people's rights.

I'm not saying that trans people have the absolute monopoly on struggling with gender; in fact I would argue that we *all* struggle with the way in which our genders confine us, even if this process looks very different for different people. Because we all struggle, it's important to support one another. I guess my most important observation, and at the basis of why I am a trans/gender queer ally is this:

People seem to be much happier when they have found a gender expression that they are comfortable with performing and which other people around them accept.

This is regardless of whether people are trans or cis or gender queer. The ways in which we already feel free are because some people somewhere at some time have fought for some kind of liberation that we now all take for granted. The ways that we don't feel free are because there is still some struggling that needs to be done. For trans people (and gender queers) there are many ways in which freedoms have not been won, and that's why trans folk (and not forgetting the gender queers) commonly struggle to live a daily existence. When the world around you either pretends you don't exist or is openly hostile to your existence, you're going to find it tough. As cis people, the very least that we can do is recognise the privileges that we have and recognise the trans struggles of non-cis people as real.

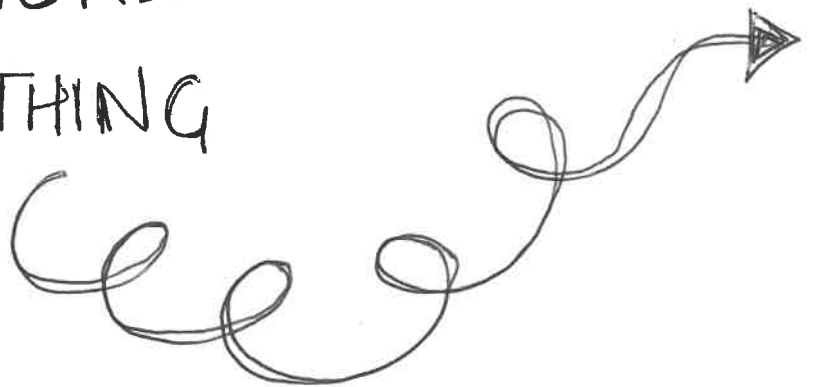
Whatever happens in life, we either choose to try to accept it, or choose to try to change it. Cis people often seem to think that we should all learn to accept our bodies as they are, but I think that's a false moral ideal. It's great when we are able to accept things, but the fact is that we are always making choices about our bodies and modifying them in some way. It doesn't mean that we hate our bodies; it means that we have agency over what we do to make ourselves feel good. Whenever we use our agency this can make us feel more empowered. The people I've met who are in a process of gender transition very obviously feel a sense of their own liberation in what they are doing, which can only be a good thing.

I guess the way I see it is that our gender expression is just another of life's dances; it's always moving, always in flux. I started this piece by saying that I was someone cisgendered, but actually the whole process of writing this booklet has left me feeling so much freer in my thinking that maybe I don't feel so cis any more, and maybe I'm ready to embark on my own gender journey of

liberation.

So now I don't know what I am, but after all this writing it's clear to me that there are some things that I don't even need to have words for.

ACTUALLY
THERE'S
ONE
MORE
THING



In the process of making this zine I kept having more conversations that changed my way of thinking and led me to a process of what felt like constant editing... so now I'm at the point where I feel I've done enough and I can say that the zine represents my own thought processes and understandings at a particular point in time.

After I wrote the zine I came across a book called 'Whipping Girl' by Julia Serrano, and it completely blew my mind... so many things I'd never even thought of. So if you got something out of this zine and would like to go on expanding your imagination, I thoroughly recommend it.



(self-portrait)
I look like
~~a mushroom~~

a mushroom 🍄

Written and produced
by
Snowy

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