

Who's on Top?

(and why are we on the bottom?)

(and is that really such a bad place to be?)

Safety First

If real men and real women are in fact social constructs, that means they're constructed of *something*. I've been looking more and more closely at gender, and I think I've got a better idea of its components, beyond the basics discussed in the last chapter. But this is tricky stuff, and we need to proceed safely.

One of the first tenets of safety is awareness. Ask anyone who works with hir hands: you need to know where you are, where your tools are, what they're capable of doing, how they're capable of hurting you if they're misused. So the first step in safety around gender play would be to look at what gender is, what it's made up of, what tools we use to perform man, woman, or whatever it is we're performing. If we *haven't* looked very closely at whatever comprises our gender, we may change something about ourselves that we truly value.

Right now, I think I am [living a life without gender]. People don't want to consider me a woman, and I don't want to be a man, so I walk in the middle not because I wish to, but because I am forced.

—Nyssa

How Do We Look at Gender?

Since gender itself can't be seen, we tend to rely on models and metaphors. There are quite a few models these days for gender, none of which I've found adequate to describe the deathgrip gender-as-system has on us both personally and culturally.

- There's the old *binary* model: these are two completely opposite creatures, and only two, who have nothing to do with each other. It doesn't

I spent so many years wondering and feeling lost and scared. I thought I was the only one who was a transsexual lesbian. I am a 24 year old half-Japanese, half-caucasian male who has been living wondering if I was the only one who felt this way.

I don't know what a man is or what a woman is . . . all I know is that I feel like the yin and yang. Where the mind, soul, and flesh is the black circle, the white circle and the flesh is the outer circle of what we are not who we are. There is a life in this circle of three that is both man and woman and sometimes neither.

—S. L. Morita

work. That particular metaphor leaves me and a whole lot of people out of the picture. Maybe you, too?

- ⊗ There's a *yin/yang* model that looks like this: black and white, being opposites, form a circle with each other, and each half contains a portion of the other. That might be a real good metaphor for principles like "active" and "passive," but we still don't know what comprises "black" and what comprises "white" when it comes to *gender*.
- ⊗ The idea of a *continuum* is currently coming into vogue among those who study gender, as well as with some transgender activists. This is a better metaphor, allowing as it does for a wide range of genders along a pole, with *man/male* on one end, and *woman/female* on the other. I don't like it for two reasons: the man/male part, and the woman/ female part. Seriously, why hold those two as fixed points by which we define ourselves, when we can't for sure say what the two fixed points are made up of?
- ⊗ Several Native-American nations have described gender as a *circle*, and anyone can be anywhere on the circle of gender expression. That's about the closest I can agree with. It does away with any idea of a binary, but I still don't find it satisfying, because again there is no clearly defined marker on that circle against which I can measure myself.

These days, people are coming up with new, truly creative systems to describe or delineate gender. One such schematic can be found in the book *The Apartheid of Sex*, by Martine Rothblatt. Ze's come up with a fascinating and seductive way to determine gender, using a metaphor of colors. Rothblatt isolates what ze refers to as three basic elements of sexual identity (hir words), and assigns each of them a basic color. Hir three basic elements are: ". . . activeness (or aggression), passiveness (or nurturing), and eroticism (or sex drive)." The idea is that as each of the basic elements shift in proportion to the others, then the resulting color combination will change,

How about seeing gender as a Mobius strip? That's the "one-sided" piece of paper that has two sides. You make one by taking a strip of paper, putting one twist in it, and then making it into a circle. If you start to draw a line along it, you eventually end up right where you started!

—Terry Mason

providing a unique representation of that gender. A truly innovative theory. My opinion is that while Rothblatt's color wheel may in fact be an excellent way to construct our genders in a world that accepts his three criteria as essential to gender (and why not? they are very loving criteria), we need something that illustrates the destructive construct of gender within the dominant culture (which seems to have more criteria than Rothblatt's three areas) more clearly, if for no other reason than that we might begin to dismantle it. *Then* we can look at the possibility of mindfully constructing a very beautiful gender system, using Rothblatt's model.

The gender-as-color model, while possibly something to aim for in the future, is missing an intermediary model, as it does not reflect the current world that's driven by binary thinking. Rothblatt's gentle vision does not express that which we need to first overcome: a world driven by greed, acquisition, and the very human need to belong to some exclusive (and excluding) group. I wanted to come up with a visual representation of gender *the way it is* in the world today, something beyond man/woman in a world that says there's no such thing as "beyond."

© Gender Is a Pacifier! Nah. Close, but No Cigar

I don't know if man or woman have ever been adequate ways to categorize people in such a way as to offer individuals the respect we each deserve. Certainly, the bipolar designation invisibilizes many unique qualities that people possess as individuals.

The bipolar gender system serves as a kind of safe harbor for most of us, and I'm definitely including myself in that, even though I don't personally identify as either a man or a woman, because I walk through this world *appearing* to be a woman for the most part. I *pass* as a woman. I can do that. And I do it because it allows me to rest for a moment. I use my passing times as moments when I don't have to fight the good fight against gender tyranny. It's a safe harbor from all the jeers and oppression that attend gender transgression. But I'm reminded of the text I read once on a rather smarmy Hallmark-type poster: "Ships are safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are built for."

I must admit that I'm sort of on the outside looking in. Being a white, heterosexual male puts me in a very comfortable position. Well, it used to. I am constantly amazed at the number of times I have been asked if I am gay, a cross-dresser, have ever done drag ... simply because I'm a fan of RuPaul.

My mother still isn't totally convinced that I'm straight. So, let it be known, while white hetero's aren't exactly Gender Outlaws, we do sometimes become Gender Outlaw Sidekicks.

—Travis Prebble

All right, then . . . how can we look at gender?

⊙ Gender Is a Circle! No, no . . . It's a Square! No, no . . .

I like pretzels.

⊙ That's It! Gender Is a Pretzel!

No, no . . . gender isn't a pretzel.

⊙ It's Not?

Well, maybe gender *is* a pretzel, but that's not the model I want to use. I *really* like pretzels. I eat boxes of them, the real salty hard sourdough variety from Pennsylvania, if you ever wanna send me some. And I was eating pretzels one day, and I was reading the back of the box, and lo and behold, there was the US Food and Drug Administration's Basic Food Group Pyramid. It was a true *eureka* moment, let me tell you. Here's what their food group pyramid looks like:



See? The really good stuff is at the bottom: grains, complex (interesting word) carbohydrates, stuff we're supposed to eat a lot of, stuff that's good for us. Fruits and veggies come next on the pyramid; they're very important. So are dairy and meats, but less so. And at the very tippy-top, there are fats, oils, and sugars. Bad bad bad . . . a little goes a lonnnnnng way, and they're not all that good for you, right? Well, my *eureka* moment with that box of pretzels was simply that gender is like that pyramid.

Works like this. We're accustomed to defining gender by some sort of biological component, be that hormones or chromosomes or genitalia or reproductive ability. We've defined gender by biology. Okay, that's old. It's too simple for today's complex world. Some "forward thinkers" have said, ahhhhhh, but that's *sex*, and sex is biology, but gender is psychology. That sort of thinking still posits something (sex) that's biologically essential.

Right idea, wrong solution. Let's get off that merry-go-round once and for all.

This would be a very good time to do your Ten-Minute Gender Outlaw Exercise. Good for what ails ya.

Some theorists are now saying that sociological factors have a lot to do with gender, and I think this is closer to the mark. If gender is a social construct, which includes respectful nods to biology, physiology, and psychology, then let's develop a model of gender that *demonstrates* that system.

The hallmark of today's *two*-gender system is that the preferred gender, the privileged gender, the gender that goes home with all the cookies, is labeled male. In sociological terms, though, we need to be more specific. The easy thing would be to say "It's all men." But it's not, not if this pyramid image reproduces the way gender structures hierarchies in the world today.

Examining the food-group pyramid we've got this wide base at the bottom: grains and carbohydrates. We're supposed to eat a lot of these things, they form the basis of our healthy diet. They're good for us. Working up the food group pyramid, we require fewer and fewer of these foods in our diet, until we get to the very top: sugars and oils. Don't eat too much, they're not all that good for you. Okay, I'm going to do some metaphor stretching. What if the pyramid represented humanity as it's living in our Western or Western-influenced cultures today, and the height of the pyramid was a function of power? The higher up on this pyramid you are, the more power you have to do whatever it is you want to do, and the more access you have to things like wealth, care, protection from harm and wrongdoing. And what if the very topmost point on the pyramid represented some perfect identity, some perfect gender, that we've all been taught to be, be like, or be liked by. All of a sudden, this pyramid idea of gender makes sense, and we have the representation of a graduated gender system that reflects power and privilege as it exists in the world. If the breadth of the pyramid reflects quantity of people, the model also interestingly enough seems to reflect relative numbers of people *belonging* to the different levels of this graduated gender system. The higher up we go on the pyramid, the fewer people there are belonging to that preferred gender. The higher up we go, those fewer people have more and more power.

Please keep in mind: I don't think this is how gender can be. I just think that this pretty accurately describes gender the way it is.

© The Case for a Perfect Gender

i am a queer woman of color. by the very nature of the term i break all gender constraints, because what we imagine to be gendered is never a woman of color. by the very virtue of being colored i break every rule that white feminists have created regarding gender, by being queer i break every rule that communities of color have created for a woman. so by the virtue of my being, of my existence, i am breaking every rule and convention of gender.

living without gender?

hmmmm . . . well, i guess i'd like to one day, but it's really hard when everyone in the whole fucking world reminds you of it constantly and consistently, like even [your] questionnaire. it is impossible for a queer woman of color to live without gender in the same way as it is impossible for us to live outside of race. hope this adds some color to the approach.

—c. b.

This phenomenon of graduated perfection in gender is easy to spot; it gets back to the troublesome concept of “real men” and “real women.” In terms of gender, there will be in any group of men some who are going to be more “real” as men than others. Similarly, in any group of women, some are going to be more “real” as women than others.

For example, when I was growing up, I was a boy. In any mixed crowd of girls and boys, I was one of the guys. But, and this is very important, when I was with a group of boys only, I wasn't a boy—I was a Jew. Because of our age, none of us were “men.” We were all boys. Is “boy” another gender? I think so. And among those boys, was I less male simply because of my ethnicity, my religion? Yup, I was less male.

I would even go so far as to say Jewish men are a different gender than Christian men, and that's the way I see it, but *it's not a bad thing!* It's just a fact. It's how Jews are perceived within the larger culture, and so it has some cultural weight. No doubt, some people are going to think I'm saying that Jewish men are *lesser men* than Anglo-Americans. No, no, no. That's an old anti-Semitic argument that survives to this day, but it's not how I see it—and it's certainly not limited to Jewish men.

Moving up or down on this pyramid representation of the gender system is a function of *power*, not a function of humanity. What I'm saying is that there's a *difference*; and that by some standard, not mine, Jews are *judged* by those differences to be *less*, as are Asians, African-Americans, Hispanics . . . the list goes on and on, and even includes *most* Anglos (when you get into areas of age, class, education, appearance, social polish, etc., etc., etc.).

I'm not saying that each of these categories necessarily considers *themselves* to be less. I'm taking the point of view from the top of the pyramid, right? From that point of view there's an attitude of perfection, and everyone else is less, or Other. Everyone else is less perfectly gendered. What I'm

thinking is that different kinds of men might as well be tagged as different *genders*, different ways of expressing oneself within some sort of male range, none of which measures up to the cultural ideal: the perfect gender. Wanting to be *considered* a "real man" by impossible standards keeps most men in the position of *supporting* the impossible standards.

Since the perfect gender does seem to be defined in terms of the culturally accepted male range, then is there a "perfect woman" in this system? If so, it's not by any standard set by women themselves, as most cultures currently accept male-defined qualifications for women.

Your Gender Is HOW Long?

What makes me curious is why anyone *cares* what a real man is or isn't. Why is that so important? What is it about the classification "man," or the category "woman" for that matter, that makes us so enraged (and we *do* get enraged) when someone accuses us of not being a "real" one or the other? *Those* are some valuable questions to ask, and once they're finally raised, we can begin to topple the system that's been keeping us bound up in living most of our lives running around in some hamster wheel, failing to measure up.

Truthfully I would say that the only time I HAVE lived without gender is before the concept of it was absorbed into my own psyche. Given the verbal and non-verbal "talk" that is given by adults I would say this was probably before the age of one.

Gender to me is neither bad nor good. It is the assuming that just because one wears lip gloss or drives a Mack truck makes them predictable and placeable as higher or lower life forms that bugs the hell out of me.

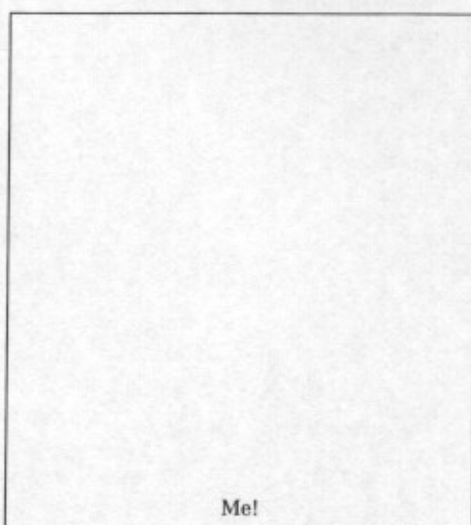
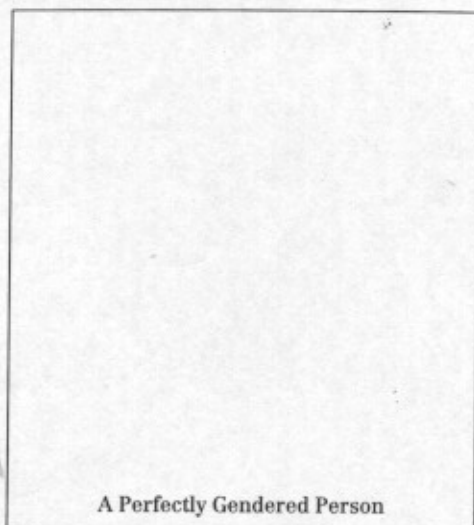
—Jennifer Weinke

The Top of the Heap

I wanted to nail down this perfect gender, so that I'd know who or what it is I have to watch out for. Contrary to the laws of physics, I started building my gender pyramid at the top. I looked for the folks who have most of the power and wealth, the folks who claim to be the ideal, the *very* few people who can actually hold themselves up as REAL MEN in the world. More than that, I wanted to see if there was anyone who himself was not conflicted by that designation. Some guy who's got all the confidence in the world, and the power to back it up. I put him at the top of the pyramid because there *are* so few of him, and frankly, they're like the oils and sugar: take them in moderation. They have no nutritional value, they're not good for the culture. And we'll get to see exactly what they look like in just a bit. But first, let's see how *you* measure up to the idea of some perfect gender.

EXERCISE: Draw your idea of a perfectly gendered person (yes, only one) in the left-hand box. Then, draw yourself in the right-hand box.

This isn't a test of your artistic abilities. You're doing it for yourself and it'll be just fine however you do it. I promise.



There! You did it! Okay, now keep this image in mind as we look a little bit deeper into gender perfection. You'll have a few more cracks at this exercise later in the book.

© The Gender/Identity/Power System

We're starting to define "gender" as a hierarchical dynamic masquerading behind and playing itself out through each of only two socially privileged monogendered identities. The power of this kind of gender perfection would be in direct proportion to the power granted those who can stake legitimate claims to those identities. The power is derived from the very invisibility of the gender/identity hierarchy. This makes gender, identity, and power each functions of each other, inextricably woven into the web of our culture beneath an attractive tapestry called the bipolar gender system.

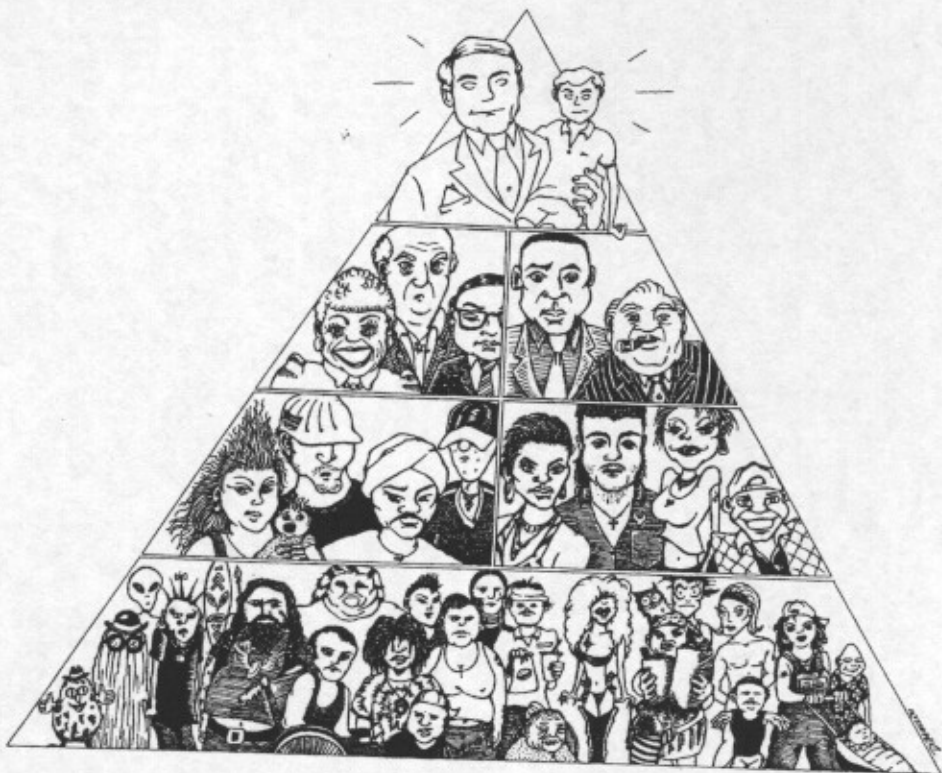
::panting::

Thanks. I needed that. My need for the occasional theoryspeak is something akin to my need for the occasional Whopper Junior and fries.

So what does the dude at the top of this pyramid look like? Remember, the height of the pyramid measures the amount of power a person wields in the world, and the breadth of the pyramid measures the number of people who wield that much power. I'm thinking the guy at the top looks like this:

- ⊗ white
- ⊗ citizen of the USA
- ⊗ Protestant-defined Christian
- ⊗ middle-aged
- ⊗ middle- to upper-class
- ⊗ heterosexual
- ⊗ monogamous, monofidelitous
- ⊗ able-bodied
- ⊗ tall, trim, and reasonably muscled
- ⊗ attractive, according to cultural standards
- ⊗ right-handed
- ⊗ well-educated
- ⊗ well-mannered
- ⊗ professional or executive level
- ⊗ politically conservative
- ⊗ capitalist
- ⊗ self-defining and self-measuring
- ⊗ physically healthy, with access to health care
- ⊗ in possession of all rights available under the law
- ⊗ free and safe access to all private and public areas as allowed by the law
- ⊗ property-owning
- ⊗ binary-oriented
- ⊗ logical (linear thinking)
- ⊗ uses power over others
- ⊗ possessing a well-formed, above-average-length penis, a pair of reasonably matched testicles, and at least an average sperm count
- ⊗ parent of more of the same

The reason I chose these categories out of the many possible is that each of these factors contributes to the amount of power a person currently wields in the world. If the gender/identity/power pyramid is to work as a metaphor, than each of these factors must truly be a measurement of not only how much power a person wields, but also how much of a real man or a real woman that person might be; how close to being the perfect gender that person is. Assuming the characteristics above are somewhat complete, the gender/identity/power pyramid might look something like the one on the following page.



The Gender/Identity/Power Pyramid

- Can you spot someone like yourself in this picture?
- Can you spot your neighbor?
- Can you spot someone you're afraid of?
- Can you spot your friends?
- Can you spot someone who's got more than you?
- Can you spot someone you'd like to be?
- Can you spot someone who you wish would like you?
- Can you spot yourself in more than one place?

Each of these components or qualifications can, of course, be further qualified. In any group of people who meet these criteria, there will always be someone who is taller, more educated, has more or "better" sons, and is healthier, etc., etc., etc. . . . so the pyramid reaches its point with *some* hypothetical person at the very top who's "better" (more culturally valuable, has more power) than everyone else. Conversely, as the qualities defining this perfect, unnamed gender identity drop away from an individual, that individual's gender identity shifts itself downward to the bottom of the pyramid where there are more and more people with less and less power.

It stuns me that most everything in the culture forwards this ideal gender identity and its exclusivity. Nearly everything in the culture pushes us to:

- ⊗ be some perfect gender (impossible for most of us)
- ⊗ be *like* that gender (possible for a very few people)
- ⊗ or be *liked by* that gender (possible to many, but not all people)

What's more, the further removed we are from the qualities expressed by the top of the pyramid, the less and less our gender is perceived as *real*. For example, if our genitals are in any way anomalous to the prescribed genitals for our gender, that obviously makes us unreal men or women, right? Similarly, if we're in our late teens or early twenties, we're told we're not-quite-men and not-quite-women; we're told we'll grow into that.

No, I'm not going to try to name it beyond referring to it as the Perfect Gender. I'm sure by reason of my own cultural indoctrination that I've left out some of its defining qualities, maybe important ones. But you can give it a name if you want to, all the while listening to the names that others have given it.

⊗ The Case for a Perfect Identity?

I'm toying with the idea of putting the gender/identity/power pyramid into three dimensions, calling it simply an identity/power pyramid. It's tempting to call the top of this pyramid, the very tip-top, the Perfect Identity. Looking down from the top, from the viewpoint of this perfectly identified individual, each side of the pyramid can be defined by some aspect of classification *by the standards of the top's own claimed perfection*. That is, how do the folks at the very top see the rest of us, and does the very top of the

pyramid reflect a possible common source of oppression for many if not most oppressed groups?

For example, the two-dimensional side we've been looking at is gender. Another side *could* be race. Another side *could* be age, or class, or religious beliefs. There are so many ways to classify people, but the top of this pyramid just might remain the same: the Perfect Identity. At the top we'd have the Perfect Gender *and* the Perfect Race *and* the Perfect Class. So, the culturally agreed-upon standards of perfection just might all converge into one identity that's got the bulk of the power in the world, and *that* identity relies on its granted perfection from each of the classifications that support it.

The posited "perfect identity," this powerful oppressive force made up of the composite perfections of all systems of classifications, has a lot of names today. Feminists call it MAN. Jews have called it GENTILE. African-American activists call it WHITE. Bisexuals, lesbians, and gays call it STRAIGHT. Transgendered folks are beginning to call it GENDERED. In this binary-slanted world, we keep naming our oppressor (some person or group who has more power than us and is using that power to withhold access, resources, or wealth) in terms of some convenient opposite. On the other side of the fence, we have a tendency to call *our* gender or identity the "good" gender or the "good" identity. "Transgendered is better than traditionally gendered because blah blah blah."

We have to knock that off, all of that good-and-bad way of thinking. It's a tactic of the privileged to name others by using themselves as a yardstick. We need to realize that no single attribute gives a person enough power to oppress us. No *single* quality of identity resulting in a privileged status gives a person enough power to keep the rest of us in thrall.

Just something to think about, that's all. Try it out for yourself. See what it's like to devise other faces to this pyramid, call them race, age, class, whatever . . . see if it holds up for you.

But for now, let's get back to gender, shall we?

© The Moment of Truth, The Big Exam: Are You Perfectly Gendered?

Test instructions: This may not be a fun test, unlike the last one. The last little quiz determined your aptitude for playing with gender; it was about your potential. This one is going to take a look at how you stack up in terms of gender perfection right now in your life. This isn't a fair test. I wanna get

that out in the open from the start. But it's written in the same way that we're tested every day of our lives in this culture, so if it's not fair, it's an accurate measure of where we stand in the world, and that's the purpose of this test. The good news is that it will be a pretty fair measure of where you stand gender-wise in terms of being a real man or a real woman.

If parts of the test make you angry, sad, lonely, or whatever, it might be helpful to make some notes about that: Where exactly did you start feeling like that? What question brought stuff up? Was there ever something in your life experience that brought up the same or similar feelings? Part of the emphasis of this workbook is to find the places that are scary, the places that are shameful. I think that's an important step in making this gender exploration more safe. I promise there's stuff later in the book where we examine exactly what is frightening you, angering you, or shaming you, okay? For now, it's time to be really honest.

Just check the answer that's *most* accurate, okay? Okay, here we go.

Part One: Your Birthright

A. Penises

1. *Were you born with and do you still have a penis?*

- a. Yes, with a matching set of testicles, thank you
- b. Yes, but I was also born with a vulva and a vagina
- c. No or No, but I grew one later

(NOTE: If c, skip to Section B, "Other Genitals.")

2. *Is your penis*

- a. Five to eight inches long?
- b. Longer than eight inches?
- c. Shorter than five inches?

3. *Do you and others think your penis is attractive and well-formed?*

- a. Yes
- b. Most of the time, yes
- c. No

B. Other Genitals

4. *Were you born with and do you still have a vulva, vagina, and clitoris?*

- a. No
- b. Yes, but that's not all
- c. Yes

5. *Do you or others think your vulva, vagina, and clitoris are attractive and well-formed?*

- a. Yes
- b. No one's complained yet
- c. No

C. The Rest of Your Body

6. *Could your race be described as white or Caucasian?*
- a. Yes
 - b. No, but people think that's what I am
 - c. No
7. *What's your age?*
- a. 35-55 years old
 - b. 25-34 years old
 - c. Other
8. *Others would describe you as*
- a. Fit and trim
 - b. In pretty good shape for your age
 - c. Fat, skinny, or otherwise out of shape
9. *Are you free of any chronic or congenital diseases?*
- a. Yes
 - b. I don't know, or I'm not sure
 - c. No
10. *Do you have, or have you ever had a sexually transmitted disease?*
- a. No
 - b. I don't know, or I'm not sure.
 - c. Yes.
11. *Is there some disease that by reason of family history, you're susceptible to contracting at some point in the future?*
- a. No
 - b. I don't know, or I'm not sure
 - c. Yes
12. *Do you have what might be considered a mental disorder?*
- a. No
 - b. Possibly, I don't know
 - c. Yes
13. *Are you under professional care for, or currently taking medication for some mental or emotional problem?*
- a. No
 - b. No, but I used to be
 - c. Yes
14. *Are your hormone levels balanced according to the current medical standards for the gender you were assigned at birth?*

- a. Yes
 - b. I don't know
 - c. No
15. Are your "gender" chromosomes either XX if you were assigned female at birth, or XY if you were assigned male?
- a. Yes
 - b. I don't know
 - c. No
16. Is your body capable of reproduction, according to the gender you were assigned at birth? (high healthy sperm count or good quantity of healthy eggs)
- a. Yes
 - b. I don't know or I'm not sure
 - c. No
17. Is your corpus collosum the proper shape for the gender you were assigned at birth? (tubular for male, bulbous for female)
- a. Yes
 - b. I haven't the foggiest idea. What's a corpus collosum?
 - c. No
18. You are:
- a. Right-handed
 - b. Ambidextrous
 - c. Left-handed
19. Would you be considered "differently abled" than many people, either by reason of your senses or the shape or configuration of your body?
- a. No
 - b. Yes, but people might not know at first
 - c. Yes

D. Interactions

20. Do others sometimes take you for a gender other than that which you were assigned at birth?
- a. No, never
 - b. Sometimes, but not frequently
 - c. Yes, frequently
21. Do others sometimes take you for a gender other than that which you wish to present?
- a. No, never
 - b. Sometimes, but not frequently
 - c. Yes, frequently
22. You are considered by others to be

- a. Handsome
 - b. Beautiful
 - c. Plain, average, or unattractive
23. *Others would describe you as*
- a. Having an ideal height
 - b. Having an average height
 - c. Too short or too tall
24. *Do you dress with some awareness for your safety?*
- a. No
 - b. Depends on where I'm going
 - c. Yes
25. *Do you dress with some awareness of compensating for some flaw in your appearance?*
- a. No, never
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Yes, frequently
26. *Do you generally feel safe walking alone on the streets of a city?*
- a. Yes
 - b. It depends on the neighborhood and time of day
 - c. No
27. *Your class status could best be described as*
- a. Middle or upper class
 - b. Working class
 - c. Other
28. *Do you agree with the gender you were legally assigned at birth?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. No
29. *Have you ever been hospitalized against your will for some mental disorder?*
- a. No
 - b. I almost was, or I should have been but I wasn't
 - c. Yes
30. *Have you ever been arrested or convicted?*
- a. No
 - b. I almost was, or I should have been but I wasn't
 - c. Yes
31. *Have you broken some law for which you could now be arrested or convicted?*
- a. No

- b. There's no way I could be caught, or the statute of limitations is up
 c. Yes
32. *Is there some situation you know of where your fundamental human rights are not protected by the law?*
- a. No
 b. Maybe, I don't know
 c. Yes
33. *Were your birth parents legally married to each other at the time you were conceived?*
- a. Yes
 b. I don't know
 c. No
34. *You were raised by*
- a. Both your birth parents
 b. One of your birth parents
 c. Others
35. *In what religious belief were you raised?*
- a. Protestant-defined Christian
 b. Other Christian
 c. Other
36. *You or others would describe your political views most nearly as*
- a. Conservative
 b. Liberal
 c. Radical

Part Two: Getting As Close As You Can

A. Membership

37. *Are you a member of, or do you support some civil rights organization or movement?*
- a. No
 b. Not actively, but I believe in their rights
 c. Yes
38. *Have you ever converted to a Protestant-defined Christianity?*
- a. No, that's where I started
 b. Yes
 c. No
39. *Are you now or have you ever been a member of what might be called a cult?*
- a. No

- b. No, but I've thought about joining one.
- c. Yes

40. *Are you currently active in any religious group or organization, other than Protestant-defined Christianity?*

- a. No
- b. Occasionally
- c. Yes

41. *Have you ever had and worked hard to get rid of some regional accent or dialect?*

- a. I never had one to start with
- b. Yes, I had one but not any longer
- c. Yes, I had one and I still do

42. *Do you make conscious decisions to dress correctly (and differently) for different parts of your life, rather than for the fun of it?*

- a. Yes, but it requires very little thought
- b. Yes, I've got wardrobes worked out for different things I do
- c. I can do that, but mostly I dress for the fun of it

43. *Do you sometimes either wish for or actively seek membership in some group that's defined by some identity you're not usually acknowledged as having?*

- a. No, I belong to the groups I need to belong to
- b. Yes
- c. There are groups like that, but I don't want to belong to them

44. *Do you pass up buying or wearing something you might like because others you want to be liked by might not approve?*

- a. I would pass things up, but not because of any individual's disapproval, rather because it simply wouldn't be proper
- b. Yes, frequently
- c. Not really

B. Relationships

45. *Are you a birth parent of one or more sons?*

- a. Yes
- b. No, but I'm adoptive, foster, or stepparent to a son or sons
- c. No

46. *Are there people toward whom you definitely feel superior?*

- a. Yes
- b. Only the bad ones
- c. No

47. *If you chose to marry your lover, could you do so legally?*

- a. Yes

- b. Depends on which lover
 - c. No
48. *For who and what you are, do others consider you generally to be "within your place or station" in the culture?*
- a. Yes
 - b. I try
 - c. No
49. *Are there some people you don't wish to associate with, primarily because of how it might make you look?*
- a. Yes, and I don't associate with them
 - b. Yes, but I associate with them anyway
 - c. No
50. *Do you feel less important than members of some groups of people?*
- a. No
 - b. Yes, but rarely
 - c. Yes
51. *Others would describe your sexuality as*
- a. Heterosexual
 - b. Lesbian or Gay
 - c. Bisexual, Pansexual, Omnisexual, Sex Worker, S/M player or other
52. *Others would describe the general nature of your relationship(s) as*
- a. Monogamous, faithful
 - b. Monogamous, unfaithful
 - c. Non-monogamous, polyamorous, or other

C. Ideas

53. *Which of these statements about power most nearly matches your own point of view?*
- a. Power should be wielded solely by the responsible
 - b. Power, in the wrong hands, is dangerous
 - c. Power should be shared on a consensual basis
54. *Which of these statements would you most agree with?*
- a. There are two kinds of people in the world: those who agree with that statement, and those who don't
 - b. There are two kinds of people in the world: and depending on the day of the week, I'm one or the other
 - c. There are as many kinds of people in the world as there are people
55. *With which of these statements can you most fully agree?*
- a. I have an essential identity by which I can easily measure the identities of others

- b. I measure myself against the essential identities of others
- c. My identity is not essential to me

Part Three: Sense of Self

56. *Do you find yourself interrupting others' conversation for one of these reasons?*
- a. I only interrupt another when the other person isn't making sense or is saying something less important than what I have to say
 - b. Whenever I do, I feel I'm being impolite or pushy
 - c. I try not to interrupt another unless interrupting is part of the social or cultural convention for that group
57. *When you find a seat in a movie theater, are you concerned that you might be blocking someone else's view of the screen? (perhaps a child's or someone else shorter than you?)*
- a. No, the theater is a public space
 - b. I never really thought about that
 - c. Yes, and I sit somewhere else if I can
58. *When someone sits in front of you in a movie theater and blocks your view even though there are plenty of other seats available, you*
- a. Take it personally, and get upset
 - b. Get annoyed and don't say anything
 - c. Ask them to move or slide down and if they don't, then you move
59. *When there's a long line to get into some event, you*
- a. Figure out the best way to get to the front of the line ahead of the others and do it
 - b. Get annoyed because the people in front of you shouldn't be in front of you
 - c. Wait your turn in line
60. *When a clerk or agent overlooks the person in front of you in line and serves you first, you*
- a. Proceed with your transaction, gratefully
 - b. Feel guilty and proceed with your transaction
 - c. Allow the person who was in front of you to be served first
61. *When you're introduced on a first-name basis to someone for the first time, you*
- a. Shorten their first name to a nickname, and use that
 - b. Use their name the way you were introduced
 - c. Get around to asking the person how they like to be addressed

62. *Is there some particular group of people that you don't belong to, about whom you enjoy telling jokes or listening to jokes about them? (e.g., blondes, Pollacks, men, Irish, etc.)*
- a. Yes
 - b. I listen and sometimes I laugh, but I rarely if ever tell those jokes
 - c. No
63. *Is there some group of people you believe are better suited to do work you find unpleasant to do yourself?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but I do the work anyway
 - c. No
64. *When someone who you think does not have a similar identity to you tries to claim the identity you have, you would probably*
- a. Simply refuse their claim
 - b. Try to find out why they think they have that claim
 - c. Try to find out why they think they have that claim, and why you thought they shouldn't
65. *Do you think you take up too much physical space in the way you sit, walk, stand, or speak?*
- a. I never really thought about that, or People have told me that, but I don't understand it
 - b. Sometimes I consciously or unconsciously take up less space
 - c. I try to take up as much space as I need, not more, not less
66. *Do you believe there is some group of people who deserve their bad fortune and/or mistreatment?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but I'm trying to see their side of things
 - c. No
67. *When someone from an under-represented group to which you don't belong accuses you of discrimination, you usually*
- a. Feel you're a victim of reverse discrimination
 - b. Feel sorry for them
 - c. Listen to them, and if they're right you work to avoid repeating that kind of behavior
68. *Without having met someone personally, are there ways you know you're better than someone, just by the way they look or dress or behave?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, and I try to act compassionately
 - c. No

69. *Is there something you own that makes you feel better or more important than someone else?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but I don't let that affect how I deal with that person
 - c. No
70. *If you were told you weren't allowed in some space set aside for an under-represented group to which you don't belong, you would most likely*
- a. Ignore that and go in anyway
 - b. Feel hurt or angry, and complain to others about it
 - c. Work to understand the need for their exclusion of you, and honor that
71. *If you were to hear that some group is complaining that they aren't properly represented in some field or organization in which you are represented, you would probably*
- a. Dismiss the claim on the grounds that they're not working hard enough to be included or tell them you will take their best interests into account anyway.
 - b. Agree with them that they should do something to become represented and/or tell them to form their own group
 - c. Work with them to ensure equal representation within your group
72. *Do you commonly refer to some other people in terms of their not being something you are? (e.g., nonwhites, lower classes, transgendered, non-transgendered, or disabled)*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but when I do, I don't mean that I'm better
 - c. No
73. *Are there any questions on medical, membership, or government forms or applications that leave you out?*
- a. No
 - b. No, but I can see where there are some questions that might leave out others
 - c. Yes
74. *If you hear that some group is trying to get a new word or words into the language by which they might identify themselves, you might*
- a. Feel they're being nit-picky and then refuse to use the new word
 - b. Use that word to their face, and the old words for everyone else
 - c. Adopt the word and use it
75. *If you hear that some under-represented group to which you don't belong is legislating for laws that would name them specifically in laws that already exist, you would most likely*

- a. Fight them on the grounds that they want special rights
 - b. Assure them that the law could be interpreted to include them
 - c. Do what you can to support them
76. *Did you grow up believing that you were entitled to a certain good standard of living, or that a good standard of living was within your grasp if only you worked for it?*
- a. Yes, and it's true
 - b. Yes, but I think the world has changed since then
 - c. No
77. *Do you sometimes find you mistake a person for another person because it's difficult to tell those kinds of people apart? (e.g., another race, age, body type, person in a wheelchair, etc.)*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, but I really don't meet enough of those kind of people to tell the difference
 - c. Not usually, but if I do, I work to find out where I'm not looking
78. *When you meet someone on the phone, in a letter, or online, do you assume they're the same race or class or age or other aspect of identity as you?*
- a. Yes
 - b. Yes, and I'm embarrassed if I find out it's otherwise
 - c. No
79. *Do you regularly credit, by name, the ideas, beliefs, or opinions of others?*
- a. No, there's really no need to
 - b. Sometimes, but I believe we all have or can have the same ideas anyway
 - c. Yes, whenever I can
80. *Do you sometimes adopt the dress or mannerisms or craft of an under-represented group to which you do not belong without acknowledging its origin?*
- a. Yes, because I don't believe anyone has any special rights to those sort of things
 - b. Yes, but I think that's part of our melting-pot culture
 - c. I try not to

Part Four: Bonus Points

(check all that apply to you)

- 81. Blond
- 82. Blue eyes

- 83. Manager or executive
- 84. Annual income over \$35K
- 85. Annual income over \$50K
- 86. Annual income over \$100K
- 87. Own a car
- 88. Own your own business
- 89. Proud of your parents
- 90. Parents are proud of you
- 91. Proud of your children
- 92. Children are proud of you
- 93. Have your own Net account
- 94. Have Net access without a commercial service
- 95. Have all your hair and don't color it
- 96. Don't need glasses or contact lenses
- 97. Play some sport (men only)
- 98. Have received some honor or medal as an adult
- 99. Have an excellent credit rating
- 100. Never questioned your own gender before reading this book

© Okay! Let's Score!

Congratulations on the work you did in answering these questions. Assuming you were really honest, you'll be able to see how closely you match up to the Perfect Gender.

Penises

- In this world, the Perfect Gender is first defined by a penis and matching testicles. In fact, if you didn't check 1A on this section, you simply are not in the running. So, here's how you can score this section:
 - 1.a. 250 points
 - 1.b. 5 points
 - 1.c. 0 points
- For the remainder of this section, give yourself
 - 10 points for every A answer
 - 5 points for every B answer
 - 2 points for every C answer
- Maximum points this section: 270

Total Points This Section _____

Other Genitals

- ⊗ Genitalia other than penises simply don't give you much of a leg up on the ladder to Perfect Genderhood. Sorry, that's just the way it is.
- ⊗ For this section, give yourself
 - 2 points for every A answer
 - 5 points for every B answer
 - 10 points for every C answer
- ⊗ Maximum points this section: 20

Total Points This Section _____

The Rest of Your Body

- ⊗ Your race, age, state of health, and how you measure up to the posited gender norm, are each important factors in determining just how perfectly gendered you are you are.
- ⊗ For this section, give yourself
 - 10 points for every A answer
 - 5 points for every B answer
 - 2 points for every C answer
- ⊗ Maximum points this section: 140

Total Points This Section _____

Interactions

- ⊗ How we're perceived, and what freedom we have to move around in the world also contribute highly to the perfection of our genders.
- ⊗ For this section, give yourself
 - 10 points for every A answer
 - 5 points for every B answer
 - 2 points for every C answer
- ⊗ Maximum points this section: 170

Total Points This Section _____

Membership

- ⊗ While formal or informal membership in some organization isn't as important as your body or your birthright, it does give some indication of how well you pass in the world, so it's worth some points.
- ⊗ For this section, give yourself
 - 5 points for every A answer

2 points for every B answer

1 point for every C answer

- Maximum points this section: 40

Total Points This Section _____

Relationships

- How we structure our relationships is a factor in how we're perceived, and so you're going to get more points for this section.
- For this section, give yourself
 - 7 points for every A answer
 - 4 points for every B answer
 - 2 points for every C answer
- Maximum points this section: 56

Total Points This Section _____

Ideas

- The directions in which we think will eventually lead to how we live our lives, and to what degree or aspect of perfection we wish to attain.
- For this section, give yourself
 - 20 points for every A answer
 - 10 points for every B answer
 - 5 points for every C answer
- Maximum points this section: 60

Total Points This Section _____

Sense of Self

- An important indicator of those with a Perfect or near-Perfect Gender is a sense of entitlement. Race, age, physiology, education, and many other factors may contribute to this sense. If we feel *entitled*, that's a pretty good indicator we're nearly Perfect in some regard.
- For this section, give yourself
 - 15 points for every A answer
 - 10 points for every B answer
 - 5 points for every C answer
- Maximum points this section: 300

Total Points This Section _____

Bonus Points

- ⑥ This is all whim. Or it's not. This section is totally unfair. Give yourself 10 points for every category you were able to check off. In fact, if you can think of some *more* reasons that you might be better, more perfect, more privileged, or in any way more powerful or higher up than other people, go ahead and give yourself 10 points for every reason you can come up with. If you can't think of any other ways you might be better or better off than others, go ask some friends of yours. Remember, it's 10 points for each way you come up with! Cool, huh?
- ⑥ Maximum points this section: 200 or 300 or *more!*

Total Points This Section _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

⑥ Ratings

1500 + Cool, doode! You are PERFECT! Well, almost. Since you took this test, you must have some doubts, so you're ALMOST perfect. Very cool, though. Very. A question, though: Why in the *world* are you reading this book???

1200-1499 You're definitely up there in the top, say third, of the gender pyramid. Almost everyone loves you and wants to be near you. Well, everyone who *counts*, that is. You can easily pass for being a real man or a real woman. Odds are you probably don't get all the respect you want, right? And sometimes you feel guilty for the respect you *do* get. Here's the deal: you'll never make it to the top, and you've got a lot of privilege to scrape off if you ever hope to make it to the bottom. It's up to you.

1050-1199 You're considered very important in the circles in which you travel. While others might question your occasional eccentricity, it's doubtful they would question your gender identity as a real man or a real woman. If the world was a banquet, you'd be the meat and potatoes. You're working hard at being accepted, and it probably shows. If you play your cards right, you can probably move up a notch or two on the social ladder, which in turn would help you move up your job ladder.

750-1049 You know your place and pretty much stick to it. People tend to appreciate you like they'd appreciate a loyal dog, right? Don't count on

others being too surprised when you start playing with your gender. Don't count on too much support, either. The good news is that without much work, you could very easily nose-dive into real outlaw status.

550-749 Um, you don't get invited to a lot of ritzy places, do you? Look, if you're going to be Perfect, you've got a lot of work to do. Probably too much work to bother with, you're so far away from Perfect. On the plus side of things, there's that old line from the Kris Kristofferson song made popular by Janis Joplin: "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." You're pretty close to that, aren't you?

0-549 Heh, heh. You're weird. You *know* you are, so why'd you take the test? Oh, I know: you take pride in what the culture persists in calling your flaws and imperfections, no? My kind of outlaw!

Okay, so the scores are totally arbitrary. Right. So's the rest of the culture. So are the ideas of real men and real women. So's gender in general. So there.

© It's Just a Metaphor

The moon is female.
The sun is male.
Ah, darlings,
we must be the "stars"!

—Emily Lloyd

The benefit of any agreed-upon metaphor is that it gives people a framework around which to develop theories and question concepts. A good metaphor for a good metaphor might be a coarctation on which we get to hang our favorite ideas. The *danger* of an agreed-upon metaphor, including this pyramid model of the gender/identity/power system, is that it might inhibit the development of newer, more inclusive metaphors.

So while I think there are a lot of ways you *could* break the remainder of the pyramid into little components (like the top half of the pyramid is all the people with penises, and the top part of *that* is all the people who are white *and* have penises), I don't think that's the point. The point is that as soon as we fall away to any degree from the established, privileged norms, we start to become a less-than-perfect gender; our anxiety to attain that perfection and its attendant power increases as we continue to find ourselves short in any of its defining categories.

© Is It Possible to Shift Power or Identity without Shifting Gender?

Our genders are comprised of identifiable qualities that shift in importance and intrinsic power depending on the values we and others place upon those factors. That being the case, we need to come to terms with the fact that the identities by which we name ourselves are also susceptible to constant shifting. We think we're one thing, then we move to another town and we're seen as something else entirely. Or maybe we find a lover, only to discover that our identity has shifted from single to coupled. Or maybe a loved one gets very sick, and our primary identity shifts from lover to caretaker.

Just look at all the things we've been in our lives: child, adolescent, employee, student, healthy, sick . . . the list goes on and on, and with each shift in even an identity we'd normally take for granted, our genders shift imperceptibly. Over a lifetime, those changes can add up, and we suddenly find ourselves in the position of being someone we never intended to be.

Some of my own former identities include boy, young man, guy, middle-aged man, marketing director, Scientologist, husband, sailor. I'm making a list of all the things I used to be. I'm combing those identities for things I liked, and I'm trying them back on for size. How about you? If you're questioning your gender, or even if you'd simply like to know more about the gender you've got right now and are quite happy with, mightn't it be a good idea to examine what you've *been*, so that you can pick and choose some qualities you threw out with the bathwater once you left that identity behind?

"My Androgynous Summer" was the summer two years ago when I transitioned. I wasn't ready to go full out, so I just let the wind take me where ever. I took the nickname Kat and made an effort not to give store clerks any clues when they used gender references. Part of what made it work was simply not caring—and a certain part of me which enjoyed watching people trip over their pronouns and contradict one another.

But I think a person has to be ready to live without an identity for a while. People can't relate to you like that, and you become an object or oddity to be looked at.

—Katherine Turner

EXERCISE: Make a list of the different things you've been, *and no longer consider yourself to be*. Alongside each former identity, list out some things you liked about it, and some things you didn't like at all.

⑥ Would You Sell Your Genitals for a Million Dollars?

Still attached to your genitals despite all this great theory? Fond of those puppies? Let's have a look at why that might be the case.

I'm not knocking a fondness of one's own genitals, or a fondness for anyone else's for that matter. I'm simply wondering why we have insisted for so long that biology and physiology comprise the entirety of gender? Why, even now, when gender can be a wide-open field, do we dignify biology and raise it above any other criteria by referring to biological gender as "sex?" Why did we stop there and rest for so long before we're finally questioning that?

If I had been born female physiologically I would be happy in that identity and would probably have never had all the stress that goes with gender conflict. If I could stand at the threshold of conception and direct a sperm bearing an X-chromosome toward the ovum, I would. But I was born stressed instead. That's what chose me.

—Mona

I think the answers to those questions have a lot to do with knowing how dangerous (to ourselves and to the culture we've created) it would be to question gender. I think it's also partly because we haven't wanted to admit how truly fragmented we've become as a species, how disconnected and different we've become from one another. By positing some large class to which most of us belong (MALE or FEMALE, MAN or WOMAN, GIRL or

BOY), most of us can belong to one or another. So, we have the *illusion* of membership despite the fragility of the defining lines of the group to which we belong, despite the conflicting definitions: at least it's *something*. It's safe. And if we make something more or less concrete, like genitals, the sole qualifier for some identity, it's predictable that most of us will fall into *some* identity category to which we *belong*.

And what is it we're claiming to belong *to* by reason of these genitals of ours? A gender! Why is that so important? And what happens when we question or play with that identity?

Let's Take a Look beneath Your Genitals

People talk about gender-bending these days. It rolls trippingly off the tongue in casual conversation; it's no longer confined to the talk shows or tabloids. But gender-bending isn't simply a matter of genitals, and gender itself isn't the only identity one can bend. Gender-bending is only one way to bend identity; it's currently an extreme way, but it's not the only way.

Gender, like sexuality, just happens to be an identity that nearly everyone in most cultures is forbidden to play with; and with the recent developments in medical technology over the past fifty or so years, genital manipulation has come to be considered an extreme way of bending gender; but it's not the only way, not by a long shot.

Genitalia as Membership Card

In our age of identity politics, it takes a lot of courage to bend or question *any* identity. Those acts nearly always result in our being cast out from some group. If we understand identity as the sole qualification for membership in a group, then the equation goes like this: I am an identity, so I belong to a group of people who have only the same identity.

A group member who abandons the group-sanctioned identity for any reason can raise questions within the group about the *value* of their chosen identity; and that can result in the group labeling the playful or questioning one as outcast.

It's all a matter of degree.

A Simple Scale of Cultural Rejection

- ⑥ If we *question* gender, we might be considered eccentric.
- ⑥ If we play with our gender presentation, we might provoke hostility.
- ⑥ If we cross the sacred line of the biological imperative and alter ::gasp:: our genitals, we are in effect banished from the culture, unless we hide very well indeed.

How does this scale relate to the broader concept of identity? Very nearly one to one.

- ⑥ If we simply *question* a basic identity, we might be considered eccentric.
- ⑥ If we play with our presentation of some basic identity, we might provoke hostility.
- ⑥ If we cross the sacred line of the bottom-line qualifier for some basic identity, we are in effect banished from the culture, unless we hide very well indeed.

If I identified as a lesbian, I was welcome [in a Lesbian Avengers meeting]. When I sometimes jokingly identified as just your average straight white guy with a cunt, heads started to turn and folks started to get anxious. I had not changed, but my cultural identity had, simply by saying aloud the words "I am . . ."

Instant sex-change. Gender not only as performance, but as performativity.

—Riki Wilchins

EXERCISE: Take this book and read a section or two on public transportation, or in some public place. No, I don't think it would be a good idea to read aloud, but do be very obvious about *what* you're reading. Let lots of people see the title of the book. Note their responses to you.

It's Lonely at the Bottom (and it's still worth it!)

I live in Moscow. Gender roles are more distinct here than in most parts of the United States. In the metro, for example, men are supposed to let women out first, if possible. Women, for their part, are supposed to be as close to the door as possible, so the men don't have to stand back and wait for them to get out once the train pulls in to the station.

I am currently semi-passable in my cross gender. Some days I'll find my path to the door blocked by a wall of women. Other days a path will open through a sea of men and I find myself being swept forward to the door. And some days, for whatever reason, both things happen at the same time.

On the days when I am pushed the right way, I am happy. On the days when I am pushed the wrong way, I am frustrated. On the days when I am pushed in both directions at once, I feel like I am breaking the rules.

—Laura Franks

Feeling alone is a signpost to myself that I'm coming to a point of self-acceptance and integrity.

Outcast, Unclean, Outlaw . . . all terms for one identity not too many people want, especially if there's no nearby group of similar outcasts in which we might claim membership. For me, it boils down to loneliness, and that gets back to an even more basic drive: connection with others. Doing any kind of gender play can result in some degree of outcast status. It can result in a pretty horrible loneliness, and part of preparing for playing with or even simply questioning gender is to prepare oneself to deal with that loneliness.

No, I don't know how to prepare anyone to deal with loneliness. The best I can do right now is let you know it's going to happen. I think dealing with loneliness, coming to terms with it, and ultimately embracing alone-ness is a journey we all need to make on our own.

I'm learning the old difference between lonely and alone.

Lonely, for me, means I want to belong to some crowd, and I don't belong. *Alone*, on the other hand, is the same sense of apartness, but without the overwhelming desire to *belong*.

Feeling lonely is a signpost to myself that I'm coming unstuck, usually unwillingly, from some fixed or unnatural identity.

Alone is the way I try to experience life. But there's always a tug: I've always wanted to be included. I've always been tempted to settle myself

into one identity and say to the group, "Hey! Now I'm one of you, now can I spend time with you?" I like companionship. I like hanging out with folks. I just don't want to lock myself into an identity in order to do it, and what I've done is move on when I no longer have any room to shift and grow.

How about you?

EXERCISE: What was the last group or relationship you were a member of and no longer belong to? Write down the reasons you left or were asked to leave.

Do any of those reasons have anything to do with a shift in your identity, gender or otherwise? How do you feel about yourself now that you're no longer a member of that group or relationship?

Gender Is Pure and Simple When You're Pure and Simple, but Who Ever Really Is?

Playing with *any* identity can be scary, but our fear seems proportional to how valuable the identity is to our existence. Pure identities (or identities that pass as pure) are valuable things. They're valuable to those who have them, because there's a sense that *someplace* will always be *home*, a space with others who claim similar pure identities. And our pure identities are valuable to others. We become easier to deal with. Other people know who we are. So we begin to lean into an identity, we support our lives on some identity, and when we or someone else starts to mess with it, then all of a sudden we've got something, this identity, to lose, and we get very protective not only of our own identity, but of the purity of that identity as a membership requirement for others. This might be how identity politics does itself in. We need to get past this.

You mention [in *Gender Outlaw*] that we, as [transgender] "fools" must not belong to any group permanently. I'm wondering if this is a lesson you learned in your own life, one you learned through reading of Native American Shamanic paths, or what. In my life, though I only recently owned up to my own TG nature, I've never really fit in any one place for very long, and I seem to move from place to place, group to group on a semi-regular basis. I gotta tell ya, it makes for some hard times, to suddenly feel outside the group that only yesterday seemed to want your presence so badly. It leaves me feeling hollow and empty and lost.

—Taaleb, otherwise known as Katherine

I wonder if it's possible to live without an identity; because that's the direction in which I seem to be moving. I want to keep peeling these identities back from myself, one by one; and I'd like to spend my time with people who, if they aren't doing that themselves, will at least be happy that I'm doing it. Taking liberties with identity wreaks havoc with identity politics. It raises questions about the value of identity itself.

So Okay, Would You Sell Your Identity for a Million Dollars?

What value do you place on the factors that make up your identity? Would you sell part of your identity for, say, a cool hundred thousand?

What's your identity worth to you?

I wonder about all our identities, all the ways we say to ourselves "This is me, not you." They're so valuable to us, these markers, that despite knowing their shortcomings, we cling to them like children to a raft in the middle of a stormy lake. We need some sort of security, don't we? And gender is one identity, by reason of the agreed-upon bipolar system, to which we find it extremely easy to cling. Well, cling we do. But is that necessarily a good thing?

Insecurity, commonly regarded as a weakness in normal people, is the basic tool of the actor's trade.

—Miranda Richardson

In this next exercise, let's find out in more detail what you *like* about the various components of your gender identity. That way, going into some changes that might allow you to better express yourself, you'll be aware of what you might lose, what you don't *have* to lose, and what you may have to give up.

1. How does being a member of your race enhance or detract from what you consider to be your gender?
2. In terms of your gender, what do you enjoy about being a member of the ethnic group you are?
3. How does being as old or as young as you are affect how you enjoy or dislike your gender?

4. Are there any rights, privileges, or maybe any freedom you get from being a gendered member of the class you belong to?
5. Being the gender you are presenting, does the kind of work you do give you anything particular that enhances that gender presentation, either materially or socially?
6. Is there something that gives you pride in your gender that you get from being as educated (or not) as you are?
7. Do your religious, philosophical, or spiritual beliefs make it good to be the gender you are?
8. Are your genitals a source of pleasure for you just the way they are? How?
9. Is there something about your body type, shape, abilities, or disabilities that you really like?
10. Is there some sort of security or safety you get out of defining yourself in terms of the gender or genders you are romantically attracted to?
11. What benefits might you get by naming yourself something based on what you like to do sexually?
12. What does simply being the gender you were assigned at birth give you?

13. Is there something you enjoy about being defined by or defining yourself by something you used to be? (e.g., an ex-nun, a former woman, a widow)
14. How do your politics or your political beliefs make being the gender you are pleasing to you?
15. For someone of your gender, is how much economic power you do or don't wield particularly pleasing or disappointing to you?
16. What is it you might not want to give up that you get from defining yourself by your physical health, or lack thereof?
17. What do you (or have you) like(d) about being known as Other?
18. What sort of comfort or security do you get from defining yourself by your relationship to someone else (familial or otherwise)?
19. Is there anything about being defined by others as something you don't consider yourself to be, that you would miss if people no longer did that?
20. What perks do you get from being on the outside of some group or identity that won't have you as a member?
21. Is there something about your particular astrological sign or some other identity-system category you fit in that reenforces the way you see your gender?

22. What gendered benefits do you derive by reason of your membership in some club, group, party, or organization?

23. In addition to those listed above, what benefits or perks do you get from other identities or self-descriptives you use for yourself?

24. In addition to those listed above, what privileges or comforts do you enjoy by reason of any other identities or descriptives that others define you by?

⑥ In Terms of Gender, Upwardly Mobile Is a Contradiction

People continue daily to buck different parts of the gender/identity/power system, with varying degrees of success. There's a genuine need to claim more rights and access, a very genuine need to free ourselves from what we perceive is holding us back, limiting our self-expression, or locking us out of a circle of people who have more privileges at the expense of many others. Unfortunately, I think, this need is translated into a move *upward* on the gender/identity/power pyramid, as if being squeezed into some teeny tiny pure and simple and perfect identity with no hope of change would be a fun thing. Rather than move upward in hopes of achieving one's fair share of the power and access, why not simply dismantle the pyramid itself?

It all starts with questioning gender. Just like you do in your daily Ten-Minute Gender Outlaw Exercise. You've been doing that, haven't you? HMMMM?
