

A Note about Gender, or Why Is This White Guy Writing about Being a Lesbian?

TWELVE YEARS AGO as I finished drafting “Stones in My Pockets, Stones in My Heart,” the last essay in this book, I wrote,

If I live long enough to see the world break free of the gender binary, will I find home not as a butch dyke, a woman by default, but as some third, fourth, fifth gender? Some gender that seems more possible since trans people have started to organize, build community, speak out about our lives. Some gender I have already started reaching toward.

Over the last decade in my continued process of reaching, I’ve chosen to slide across some gender line. This process is most commonly understood as gender transition, but I’ve experienced it less as one discrete transition from woman to man than as a long meandering slide. Today I live in the world as a man, even while my internal sense of gender is as a genderqueer, neither man nor woman. At the same time, I have no desire to abandon or disown my long history as a girl, a tomboy, a dyke, a woman, a butch.

In many trans and queer communities today, my particular gendered story is not all that unusual. But outside those communities, the reality of a white guy having a long, prideful lesbian past can be totally disorienting. Rather than explain myself in the face of cultural confusion, anger, and/or hatred, I yearn for the day when all the rules that confine and constrain gender, that punish gender transgression—rules shaped by misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and shaped again by white supremacy, capitalism, ableism—come crashing down. I want my gendered story to be one of many stories that defy, bend, smash the gender binary. But in the end, what I really want is for all the many gendered possibilities in the world to be, not normal, but rather profoundly ordinary and familiar.