

Article in *Transliberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*
Editor Leslie Feinberg (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998)

I am honored to have been given this opportunity by Leslie Feinberg to contribute to the book. At the same time it feels like an overwhelming responsibility to adequately provide information in a forum that is one dimensional. I have racked my brain trying to come up with something unique that hasn't already been said by someone else.

So here goes. We are told from the time that we learn to walk that the magic number is two: male/female, black/white, right/wrong, day/night, sun/moon, good/evil . . . the list goes on and on. People seem to casually ignore the fact that there are more than two races, an entire field has been dedicated to the gray area between right and wrong (i.e. Ethics), dawn and dusk separate night and day, an entire universe of planets, stars, wormholes and more exist, and good and evil depend largely on religion and/or perspective. Yet two remains the battle cry until we get to behaviour and then the magic number is one. We are told that there is only one way to be, one way to act, one way to feel.

The One True Path dictates that all people are alike and should want the same things. That those who are different are to be converted at the earliest possible opportunity. Those who fail or refuse to convert are to be ostracized or better yet, killed, for fear that they will taint the true followers. The One True Path conscripts people into marriage and buying that house with the white picket fence further mandating that all people be heterosexual and that they procreate, but only after marriage. That there is only One God and you better toe the line or else. I broke away from the One True Path when I came out as a lesbian. I was exhilarating to be free from the oppressive gender coded rules. In time I learned that the lesbian community had it's own version of the One True Path. I broke away from that when I walked on the fringe of that community and again was exhilarated for a time before finding that each community that I have been a part of has it's own rules and ideology.

When I first started taking testosterone, I believed in two as the magic number. After a number of years as the invisible man, it was impossible for me not to overcompensate. I needed to belong somewhere and I was convinced that belonging was being like-minded. Like-minded has become tainted for me. It is full of dogma and exclusion and an exorcism of that which is different. Time passed and experience colored my perceptions of the world. As I grew more comfortable with myself I found a balance, a sense of peace. I am more than male and more than female. I am neither man nor woman, but the circle encompassing both. I am a walking dichotomy who is struggling not to have a dyke-otomy. My lesbian culture and heritage are important and as the days pass it is the female side that disappears from view yet colors my opinions, actions, and belief system. I am now perceived as the privileged white male despite the fact that there is less legal protection for transpeople and I can be fired or not hired for my gender status, I'm Latino, and my body remains a mixture of secondary female and male characteristics. Seeking medical treatment is an anxiety

ridden ordeal. You never really know what you are going to get. Transmen (FTMs) can be thrown out of their homes, fired, have their children taken away from them, be denied visitation rights, be refused medical treatment or care whether gender related or not, be beaten, humiliated and raped. Look at me. Look at all the privilege that I have now. There is a price for everything and that's what people forget. Every benefit has its burden. No one rides for free.

It is difficult enough being transgendered without throwing sexual orientation into the mix. I am on the fringe of society by being transgendered, on the fringe of the transgendered community by being homosexual, and on the fringe of that community by being transgendered. Would that be considered fringe cubed? What about my identity as both lesbian and gay? What happens when leather gets thrown into the mix. The mathematics boggle the mind.

In struggling with who I am and where I belonged, I learned that there was no consensus from the outside. Everybody had a different opinion. Only I had the answers to these questions and they were certainly not taken as valid by everyone. Yet only I can live my life and decide what is right for me. If I rely on someone else to make these decisions or set policy for me, then I am destined for disappointment.

I just am. The name and the fit aren't that important anymore. There is always something that will make me different. It's a part of my nature and a part of my path. I have grown beyond the numbers game. There are more than two or even three. Gender and behaviour are as variable as the stars in the sky. There is no typical pattern which provides definitive proof that one is transgendered. There are so many similarities and even exact childhood histories in those who identify as lesbian, transsexual, or transgendered, that it is impossible to rely on someone else's experience to define yourself. No one has the answer, but you and that answer is subject to change without notice.

My life today is very different than yesterday. There are days when I know where I am going and days when the doubts overwhelm. All in all I am a better person because I found my own way in the world. It may not be the same as yours and it certainly is not better than yours, but it is the right way for me.