



They never tell you about the good things. It's almost as if as soon as we queer + trans folk come to explore and understand our identities society finds a need to apologize for us. And apologize to us. There, there. Like we need to be consoled for our destined lifetime of depression, oppression and assortment of ABBA CDs.

It is true. For a lot of us we'll go through some really rough times. Experiences of discrimination can make tasks as mundane as feeling comfortable in public washrooms a challenge and the most loving things such as holding our partners hand can become dangerous. It sucks. We shouldn't have to deal with fitting ourselves into the moulds society has made for us. We shouldn't have to struggle to feel safe in being who we are.

I was gathering research on queer and trans youth and all the rhetoric confined our lives to that of victims. It was all about how we're more likely to experience depression, drug abuse, self-harm, bullying, homelessness, and feel like there's nobody out there for us to turn to. I used to fit many of these statistics. A snapshot of me at 14 would have been a perfect psychobabble portrait of a rebellious suburban queer girl struggling with a myriad of mental health problems and spiralling downwards in self-destruction. But that could only have ever been one part of my story. The picture is so much more expansive. The research doesn't speak to how I found community, how my friends became an intimate family of trust and support, how we formed a Gay-Straight Alliance to raise awareness, how we danced to those ABBA CDs, how I fell in love, and how I found strength in all of these things to stay alive and

ask questions. read stuff. be curious and non-assumptive in your thinking. let people self-define. define yourself. speak up when you see homophobia and transphobia. be nice to yourself and your friends. express yourself. get involved. be willing to change your mind about stuff. listen listen listen listen. give a shit. try. try harder. reflect. think. listen more.

Last year I was walking hand-in-hand with my partner along Sherbrooke. We make a striking couple in several respects, appearance certainly being one of them. He's tall and pale, sporting purple hair (at the time), eyeliner, and sometimes nail polish, while I'm a short brown-skinned girl. As we waited to cross St Laurent, a guy leaned out of one of those obnoxious stretch jeep limos and yelled "Hey, pretty in pink!" This threw me off. First of all, the guy's tones sounded like those of a belligerent drunk, and it was only about 4 pm. Secondly, neither I nor my partner were wearing pink. It took me a split second to realize that this person must be referring to my partner's hair, a split second in which I seem to remember those eyes falling upon our joined hands, then me, and a look of confusion crossing that mean-spirited face. It's entirely possible that this is my memory projecting, however, because the entire interaction happened so quickly, four words and the engine revving as the limo sped away. Before this incident, I was aware that people who went against the norms of society were subject to heterosexism - I'd just never been confronted with it before. But as the limo's window rolled up and my partner's expression became guarded and closed, I felt the pain of a stranger judging someone dear to me on the basis of his gender presentation, and I held his hand all the tighter.

keep on fighting.

I'm making this zine because I remember how difficult being a young person can be, especially for people in marginalized groups in our society. No one person is ever going to have the same experience and part of what gives communities their strength is that we all have our own stories to tell. I just wish our stories- told by us and to us- were told more often. That we could define our own spaces. That's why you won't find any statistics in here and I've tried to avoid research from mainstream institutions and have instead focused on personal narratives and experiences from myself, from interviews and from submission call outs. The truth is we don't fit ABC or D categories of sexuality and gender and we don't need to have a university degree to tell you that. We don't need more academics to specialize in how disenfranchised we are. We need more queers and trans people reclaiming our identities and experiences and creating our own meanings.

I want this zine to start to fill in the gaps that the media and the academic jargon feeds us. I want this zine to say all the things I wish someone had told me when I was younger. I want people to know that pain and oppression is real but that it's not all despair. Being queer and/or trans can be really difficult but these difficulties can be overcome and they help to shape us into really beautiful people and communities. We have the power to resist all the negative things we see in the world and although we cannot fix everything we can make positive changes a reality.

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A wee note:

First, thanks a million to everyone who shared their stories in this zine, both through submissions and through interviews. Y'all rock.

Secondly, I want to apologize for the lack of French included in this Montreal based zine. I recognize Montreal as a predominantly French-speaking city but regretfully I have never mastered French so I didn't feel I could adequately include it here. But please, make your own translations and French versions!

Last, I encourage you to go to the photocopier and reproduce this zine, pass it along to your friends, lovers, parents, community centres!

If you have any questions, suggestions, comments, or thoughts I'd love to hear them, so please e-mail me at queertransyouthzine@gmail.com

<3 sarah tea-rex

montreal, quebec 2009

www.nfcm.org

514-499-1854

Offers information and support to Aboriginal people including services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and two-spirit Aboriginal people. Bilingual.

Project 10

2000 Northcliffe #218

Montreal, Quebec H4A 3K5

www.p10.qc.ca

514-989-4585

Through a harm reduction approach works to promote the personal, social and sexual wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, intersexed and questioning youth. Provides a listening line, peer counseling and accompaniment, online groups, drop in hours and workshops. Bilingual.

Queerline

514-398-6822 (Mondays-Saturdays 8pm-11pm)

A free, confidential, non-judgmental listening line providing peer support and referrals on queer and trans topics.

Queer McGill

3480 McTavish Street, SSMU/Shatner Building, room #432

Montreal, Quebec

<http://queermcgill.ca/en/index.php>

Non-profit organization that promotes the political and social wellbeing of queer people and their allies. Holds a coming out group and a general discussion group, social activities, political action as well as a lounge and alternative library. Wheelchair accessible.

Ste. Emilie Skillshare

3942 Ste.Emilie

Montreal, Quebec

<http://snap.mahost.org/distro/>

514-933-2573

Artists and activists promoting art and self-representation. Primarily run by and for people of colour and queer people but everyone is welcome.

Union for Gender Empowerment

3480 McTavish Street, SSMU/Shatner Building, room #413

Montreal, Quebec

<http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/uge>

514-398-2569

A trans-positive feminist space that includes an alternative library and zine distro, a co-op selling gender empowerment items, a resource centre and lounge. The UGE also holds Trans 101 and Anti-Oppression workshops and runs a weekly Gender Discussion Group. Wheelchair accessible.

Resources

The following are some introductory Montreal resources but the list is hardly exhaustive, I'm always discovering new organizations in the city. I apologize that the organizations are all either Anglophone or Bilingual, there are lots more Francophone organizations around. If you're interested in more resources I suggest contacting one of the following organizations and asking for information or try searching on-line.

2110 Centre for Gender Advocacy

2110 Rue Mackay
Montreal, Quebec
www.centre2110.org
514-848-2424 x 7431

A collectively run organization committed to fighting gender oppression who provide peer counseling, an alternative library, trans-specific referrals, and educational classes/workshops. Wheelchair accessible.

ASTTeQ (Action Sante Travesties et Transsexuelles du Quebec)

<http://cactusmontreal.org/en/astteq.html>
514-847-8850

Aims to educate the public and specifically health and social services on transsexuality, provides information and assistance on transitioning, creates social support networks for trans people and hosts weekly discussions. Bilingual.

GayLine

514-866-5090 (Every evening 7pm-11pm)

A free, confidential phone line providing help and information to gender and/or sexual minorities. (Call 1-888-505-1010 if you're outside of Montreal)

Gender Construction Zone

tranniesatwork@gmail.com

A confidential discussion group for young trans, gender variant or questioning people to create peer support, resource sharing and community building. E-mail the facilitator for more information and meeting times/locations.

Head and Hands

5833 Sherbrooke Ouest
Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P5
www.headandhands.ca
514-481-0277

Promotes physical and mental health of young people in a non-judgmental, queer positive and trans positive environment. Offers a range of support from referrals, free counseling, health services, legal assistance, and promoting safer sex. Bilingual.

Native Friendship Centre of Montreal

2001 St. Laurent Boulevard
Montreal, Quebec H2X 2T3

As a trans person, a large part of my oppression comes from situations I end up in which make me feel anywhere from awkward to scared. I am told I'm in the wrong washroom, or the wrong section of the clothing store, am called names on the street, am asked probing questions about my genitals or sex life, and am otherwise subject to many experiences that non-trans folk rarely face. Often times, I can be shaken after such an experience, and feel emotionally vulnerable, often times feeling unwilling to put myself out there again. Of course, if I decide not to return to the space, I am in fact giving in to transphobia, and allowing transphobes to keep me out of their space. As I'd rather not do that, I need a way to regain the confidence necessary to put myself out there and to tell them that me and my trans-ness are not going away.

One way in which I gain that confidence is through cuddles. I find that cuddles do wonders for my emotionally well-being, and make me feel loved and supported. Sadly cuddles are underappreciated in heteronormative culture; since coming to be a part of the queer community, I have found that my opportunities for cuddles have expanded tenfold! The queer community provides me with the physical and emotional support necessary to regain my confidence, rebuild my self-esteem, and resist oppression. Cuddles, whether they are with a lover, a friend, or a stranger are an important part of maintaining my well-being and thus an important part of my resistance.

Some Vocabulary

These definitions are adapted from the Trans 101 workshop that was originally put together by the (now defunct) Trans/Gender Alliance at McGill University around 2004/05. It was refined and updated by a working group I was involved with at the Union for Gender Empowerment at McGill in 2008. The Trans 101 workshop is a facilitated introduction to some basic concepts, terms, and anti-oppression material as it relates to gender and trans identities. We organized the workshop and the definitions based on consensus made decision making. Usually these workshops are given to clubs and services on campus to help create safer environments and get people thinking. However, we don't claim expertise, and would rather these definitions be seen as an introduction to thinking about trans and queer issues.

None of the terms given below have a single, set, dictionary definition. The meanings of terms such as these change all the time, and it is important to know what each person means when they use a given term to describe themselves or others. If a person chooses to identify with a term, it is theirs to claim, regardless of whether they fit into the definition given below.

Gender: the expression, behaviour or identification of a person considered as masculine, feminine, androgynous or any mix thereof. Not necessarily dependent on the sex one is assigned at birth or on sexual characteristics. A fluid concept with different classification schemes in different communities. Different cultures have different ways of thinking about gender and of gendering people.

Sex: the male or female (or intersex) classification that one is assigned at birth based upon one's anatomy. Gender is commonly thought to follow from (or be synonymous with) this. One's sex is often of as a more concrete matter than it is: one's assigned sex may or may not be the same as one's present anatomical sex which may or may not be the same as one's sex of identity. Even purely biological sex can be defined in term of chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, or any combination, and there are always people who are male under one definition and female under another.

Gender identity: one's inner feelings of being a woman, man, or something else entirely.

We need to be conscious of the ways in which queer and trans communities have often prioritized the perspectives of those considered presentable to mainstream society. Often the aims of some queer and trans communities have totally marginalized members of its own group. For example, queer couples adopting children is great; we should be allowed to adopt without interference depending on our partner's gender. Some activists claim this fight to be won since queer couples in Canada now can legally adopt. But this has by in large excluded dialogue on how transpeople, single people, people with multiple partners, poor people, people with disabilities, racialized people and people without citizenry status are often discriminated against as potential adoptive parents. Adoption remains inaccessible to many of us queer and trans folk who also fit one or more of these other categories. Therefore the battle has only been won for some of us while others needs have been overlooked.

While communities can be inclusive in some ways they are often exclusive in others. We must look within our own communities and bring the marginalized voices to the centre. We need to be taking the time out to listen and learn and support each other. It's not a matter of 'one step at a time', it's a matter of recognition and solidarity so that we can come together as an even stronger collective. That's when we start making the real strides towards progress.

It's often exhausting to be the one having to push the boundaries but for every boundary we stretch, every boundary we break down, we are making a little more room for the next person. We have, in some ways, a gift of creating progress just by being who we are. Change and resistance for us goes beyond just the picket lines- we resist with every new friend, every rock song, and every bout of laughter we generate with pride.

The remarkable thing about us trans and queer folks is that we are making change happen. We're making it happen damn fast too. The way in which trans and queer people are recognized and treated in most of Canada today is considerably better than it was 50 years ago- both legally and socially. This is testimony to the power of our resistance and the potential it holds for us. Of course we live the everyday experiences of transphobia and homophobia that still exists in our society but we can choose to make their prejudices a reminder of how important it is for our communities to keep on fighting.

While there are advantages to this, our ultimate aim doesn't always need to be gaining recognition and acceptance from heteronormative society. Not only do we not need to be assimilated into it, we can alter it, and make dominant society incorporate our own goals and what is important to us.

One of the most beautiful things about being trans and queer is that some really amazing communities have come out our identities. We have our own alternatives to the homophobic and transphobic spaces that exist in dominant society. We have our own fashion, media, education, art, politics, history, and wicked good parties.

Corporations have discovered the buying power of the trans and queer communities. Marketing schemes have seized on the opportunity to absorb our so-called 'pink dollars'. Gay villages throughout North America have become increasingly middle class and typified by an expensive bar and club culture. This means the imagery we have of 'out and proud' is a poster picture that privileges the conventionally attractive, wealthy, white dude with a six pack of beer- or running shoes, or magazine depending on the corporate sponsor. Corporations are trying to sell back to us our identities by skewing representations of our community to fit their profit margins.

Gender expression or presentation: how one expresses oneself, in terms of dress and/or behaviours that can be characterized in ways including (but not limited to) feminine & masculine.

Sex/Gender Binary: the system that holds that there are, and should be, only two genders and that one's gender or most aspects of it are inevitably tied to assigned sex.

Intersex: people who are born with or develop primary and secondary sex characteristics that do not fit neatly into society's definitions of male or female. Many intersex babies/children receive surgical intervention (without their consent and sometimes without their knowledge) to make their sex characteristics conform to binary expectations. Intersex people do not necessarily identify as trans. While people may identify with the term hermaphrodite, intersex is considered a more neutral term.

Transgender: used most often as an umbrella term to include the following:: those whose gender identity, behaviour, or expression is different from their assigned sex; those whose gender changes at some point in their lives; those who identify as a gender outside the man/woman binary; those who have no gender or multiple genders; those who perform gender or play with it (e.g. in drag contexts); and others

Cisgender: identifying with the gender assigned to you at birth. AKA non-transgender.

Tran(s)sexual (TS): those who identify as members of a sex that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many pursue hormones and/or surgical interventions, but not all those who pursue such medical interventions identify as transsexual.

Cissexual: Julia Serano defines this term to refer to: "people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned". AKA non-transsexual.

Trans: a term commonly used to refer to transgendered and/or transexual people. While it is often used as an umbrella term, some people identify just as trans. Can be used to form other words such as transkids, transpeople, etc.

Gender Non-conforming: A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from their society's expectations as related to gender.

Transition: the process of changing one's gender expression. It may include any combination of coming out; changing one's dress, appearance, and mannerisms; changing one's name and/or pronouns; hormones; surgery.

Passing: the act of living and/or being perceived as a certain gender, sexuality, etc.. This is often used to refer to "succeeding" at presenting as the gender one wishes to be perceived as, but people can pass in other circumstances, sometimes even when they don't want to.

MTF/M2F: a person who transitions from male to female.

FTM/F2M: a person who transitions from female to male.

Trans man: a trans person identifying or living as a man. Usually FTM or intersex-to-male. Often will simply identify as a man without the prefix 'trans'.

Trans woman: a trans person identifying or living as a woman. Usually MTF or intersex-to-female. Often will simply identify as a woman without the prefix 'trans'.

Queer: a term that was once (and in some contexts still is) derogatory, but has been reclaimed to refer to those of non-normative sexualities. Can be used as an umbrella term to refer to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, cisgendered people, transgendered people, allies, leather fetishists, and others, although some people simply identify as 'queer' & nothing else. Not all people in the above categories identify as queer, & many people not in the above groups do.

Genderqueer: a term used to refer to non-normative gender identities. It can be used as an umbrella term to cover all gender identities other than man-born-male and woman-born-female, or can be used to refer to a specific gender that is neither man nor woman. The terms 'gender variant', 'gender outlaw', 'omnigendered', 'polygendered', and others all refer to people falling under the genderqueer umbrella.

Last summer I went to an H.E.B. (huge-ass grocery store) with my best friend from San Antonio to get some ingredients. After we checked out, we were walking along the bagging side of the checkout row when one of the baggers grabbed my arm, "Will!" I looked at him and vaguely recognized him. "Any word about the drop-in center?" he asked. He was one of the high-school kids I'd worked with to set it up.

"No, I haven't heard anything at all."

Where are these queer kids? Better yet, where are these queer university students? San Antonio has a population of 1.4 million people and a university population that may rival Montreal's. For example, the University of Texas at San Antonio has as many undergraduates as McGill has people! If you believe that one tenth of people would identify as queer or not-straight, surely it would seem to you as much as it seems to me that there must be something awry with either San Antonio or Montreal.

Having experienced the high-school experience, I can vouch for the difference. 'Queer' as a concept just isn't discussed. As ridiculous as any Gay-Straight Alliance's Day of Silence might seem, it's true that, with regard to queer issues, voices are vehemently squelched. The mature community in Texas, that is parents, educators, psychiatrists, professionals, and churchfolk, don't have much to say about not-being-straight.

There are a lot of stereotypes of Texans I find abominably weird. When I first came to Canada, I get the same sentiment of surprise from non-Southerners or non-South-westerners. I don't have an accent, I don't use 'y'all' (well, only when I'm kidding), and, believe it or not, I only wear a cowboy hat in bed, if'n y'all know what I mean.

One of them is incurably true, though. Texas is overwhelmingly socially conservative, and it's the case that Texan queers face a lot of marginalization. If the queer scene here in Montreal is Queer v1.0, Texas's queer scene is still in alpha-production (t.i.t.s. Queer v.0.0).

When I did get involved in queer activity in San Antonio, it was to find that queerfolk mainly found each other through the local Metropolitan Community Church. The institution provided secular gatherings specific to the trans, bear, HIV-positive (medically), and queer communities. I had met "most" of the active queer people in San Antonio, so they claimed. A psychiatric intern at the hospital, the minister of the MCC (who married his partner in Canada), and a few people who had jobs I don't remember. There weren't any university students, and I was one out of three high school kids who worked with the MCC. They had been working to establish a queer youth drop-in center at their church by remodeling a house which they bought as a meeting space.

I haven't received word as to its progress to this date, despite the MCC's having all of my contact information. I discovered through a younger friend of mine who stayed in San Antonio after I had left for university that the committee in charge of founding the drop-in space only took action on the drop-in center when us high-school kids nagged them about it. What's worse, said younger friend was the only high-school kid nagging.

Two Spirit: a term used among many Native American and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups to refer to people whose gender-variant sexualities and/or gender identities are seen as non-normative by colonialist non-native mainstream culture. While this concept might overlap with our concept of queer or genderqueer, this concept can only be fully understood from within Native culture.

Crossdresser (CD): a person who crosses gender boundaries by the way they dress at least partially or part of the time. While some people may identify with the term transvestite, crossdresser is considered a more neutral term.

Drag King: a person who performs a masculine role but may or may not have any masculine expression in their everyday life - generally in reference to a stage performance.

Drag Queen: a person who performs a feminine role but may or may not have any feminine expression in their everyday life - generally in reference to a stage performance.

Ally: a person who actively supports the struggles of a minority or oppressed identity group (such as transpeople), but may not be a member of that group themselves.

People have this tendency to squeeze us into boxes, neatly labeled and stashed away, one community here and another there. Part of this is super useful; labels can give us a shared understanding and a premise from which to unite. But often these labels are ones that are forced on us, that we're pressured into, that are too restrictive, and fail to take into account the many different categories we may simultaneously fall under. Our identities are not something for others to claim or a basis for others to decide where we ought to be placed in this world.

Communities often employ labels so that we can identify people with shared experiences. So that we can be distinct groups that can make demands and create change as a collective. Labels can be important in order for society to recognize marginalized social groups, or else risk them being subsumed under more dominant and mainstream narratives. We can reclaim words and categories that others have used to degrade us, take on the old meanings and reshape them to make them our own. We can use them to better express who we are to others. We can use them to find others more like us. Labels can be powerful tools from which we can organize and create community.

We are not a matter of 'tick the box where applicable,' we're beyond the surveys and the stereotyped judgment of other's three second glances. Labels and stereotypes are going to exist- they are reproduced every day in the media, in education, in our social interactions but we can take the time to sit down and question where these stereotypes are coming from and who benefits from their existence. Instead of instantly judging the people around us we can

[Being an activist has been rewarding for me because] I now know so many people I know I can count on. Having huge gatherings of people with so many great ideas making awful people feel bad. It transforms oneself. Collectives [create] strength through relationships.

We [the queer activist community] are quite white most of the time but at the same time "white" is quite blurry, people don't always identify by biology. [We're] mostly educated too. The way we say things, people who aren't [in formal education] are often considered rude and we don't always take the time to listen to what they mean.

The community needs to start being more political. Start to think of patriarchy as a system. I feel people are quite individualistic in their forms of resistance. We need controversy. What we can say to each other, let's say it loud. We are not one, we are hundreds thinking it. Take reactions, form allegiances. Migrant issues are so similar, different too, what it is to be an outcast. Solidarity is important. It's not just queers- it's everyone if we don't want to live in a fascist world. Break out of the iron cage.

Follow your desires they are the only true material that you can make your life of. By doing this searching people can help each other. Organize the biggest parties you can think of.

Miguel Gosselim, 22 years old

Miguel is an anarchist, feminist, queer activist who has been involved with the Pink Panthers, Queer Reaction, Pervers/Cite, Queer Semaine, Le Rhizone, and is part of the student movement. He has ambitions to run workshops on the financial crisis and wants to create a sex workers coop. He lives in Montreal where he studies Sociology at l'Universite de Quebec A Montreal. This piece is an assortment of his responses from an interview I sleepily did with him one morning over tea and coffee.

I started [being politically active] in social movements against the Iraq war in 2003. It was the first time I explored my own abilities. It wasn't what others wanted me to do- it was what I wanted to do so I had to push boundaries.

I think queer and anti-capitalist resistance go together in ways that if we think about gender and class structures in an individual we can transform these categories. The gender binary is a tool used by men to force certain behaviors on certain bodies. Just think of how you would act if you weren't trying to be "feminine/masculine enough"! Little pressures like this, so close to our bodies, really constrain us into obedience.

In high school most people are depressed because they are structurally taken apart from control in their lives. Control is taken by parents, by teachers, but [young people] find ways to resist. They are resisting when they are discovering themselves and their abilities. For my friends who had huge depression it was because they felt they couldn't resist, couldn't do anything. That's why it's really important to me that people have the tools [to resist].

When you are in a position of resistance you are in a position to declare your own will... in a way that other people may take for granted. I do think that most heterosexuals don't have interesting perspectives on sexuality. When they start to think about what they like, they too are resisting. The system doesn't teach us to think about sexuality. We get thrown in the world and then we meet people and our meanings can be shaped. Liberty is more fun when it's shared.

take the time out to understand a little better how they view themselves and what they're all about.

Nobody neatly fits most of the labels society subscribes us to, or at least not in the way that dominant society tells us that we should. Most of us have the capacity to act in ways which are more masculine, feminine, androgynous, gay, straight, and something else entirely depending on the situation and how we interpret it. Identities are not stagnant- they change with time, culture, and within the individual depending on the context. I have identified as straight, bisexual, lesbian, homoflexible, dyke, queer and 'attracted to cuties with good humor' at various points throughout my life. Sometimes I'll identify with more than one of these labels at the same time even if this seems contradictory to others. I do it because it more accurately reflects how I feel, and because I kind of enjoy the confusion it causes people- it's a way to challenge and destabilize categories.

You don't have to identify with the labels society tries to stamp onto you. You can make your own identity. You also don't have to identify at all. And it's ok to be unsure about how you feel or how you may want to label yourself. It actually seems totally unrealistic to expect anyone to be able to summarize in one or two words the complexities of their gender or sexuality. So go ahead and experiment with labels, try them on, switch 'em around, stretch their boundaries, disrupt their meanings and make them your own.

Carly is a listener, a feminist, a knitter and a grubby-femme queer lady. She's also able bodied, white, university educated, and cisgendered. Most of her community work has been with the Sexual Assault Centre of McGill's Student Society (SACOMSS), Rez Project, Head and Hands' Sense Project and Project 10. We met through mutual student activism and some top quality games of bannanagrams. This interview is from a series of e-mails we exchanged.

I have always been interested in the myriad of ways that people express themselves, but it was really the academic study and concrete practice of feminism that brought me into the world of anti-oppression and gender variance. I also found myself [at SACOMSS] surrounded by a really diverse, talented and ass-kicking group of women who made me believe that I could make changes in the world around me.

I think resources are a big problem, particularly for groups that are more marginalized (ie, transfolks, queer and trans people who are incarcerated, queer and trans people of colour). Organizations that offer support to these folk are overwhelmed with the demands for services, but between just a few organizations, it is hard to meet the needs of everyone. For example, there are only two doctors in Montreal who are known to prescribe hormones. One works at the Montreal Children's Hospital, doing incredibly progressive work with people under the age of majority who are trans or think they might be, and the second works at Head and Hands' medical clinics, and sees people 25 and under. This means there is no consistent and reputable source for hormone therapy if you wish to begin this kind of treatment after your 25th birthday. Organizations like Project 10, the Union for Gender Empowerment and the 2110 Centre do great, grassroots work and support a lot of people, but are constantly working with limited people power and limited funding. People see money itself and working to raise money as really taboo, especially in radical and anti-capitalist communities. Organizationally speaking, money is a tool that allows you to do things for people. We need to address that taboo and start acting like we deserve to have the money we need to provide the services that queer and trans folks really deserve.

I attended a talk by a writer and activist called S Bear Bergman at McGill, called "Sing if You're Glad to Be Trans". Ze proposed that what we are suggesting when we talk about self-identification is a really radical kind of freedom. We are saying, yes, you can be who you are and who you want to be, and you should feel entitled to ask others to respect that. But this is pretty different than the messages we receive throughout our youth, in school, from

like we're some sort of lost cause. They try to write us off as mere tragedies. As if to have mental health problems is to suggest that we are broken.

We are not broken, we are intricate beings, pieces occasionally missing or blurred but no less barred from beauty. We are not tragedies, we may have tales of hardships but beneath that are narratives of profound endurance. We are not lost, we are people strong enough to explore the paths less taken and discover new aspects of ourselves and new meanings in the world. We may struggle sometimes but ultimately we also withhold a powerful resourcefulness, often more so than we even recognize of ourselves.

We can learn a lot from our pain. Pain is a powerful emotion, a powerful state to be in, a telling part of our lives. We can hone pain and grow from it. We can take pain, take our experiences and make them something from which we can find compassion and a means of reaching out and supporting each other.

to know how to handle it. Damn I wish we could all just be happy and love each other. But we can't all do that all of the time. And it's not our fault. We don't need to be told to just 'pull ourselves together', sometimes allowing ourselves the space to be upset is the strongest thing we can do.

Sometimes we also need to accept that people's coping mechanisms are not ideal. If someone is cutting themselves, abusing drugs, starving themselves, or is otherwise 'self-destructive' we don't need to blame them or ostracize them for this. We don't need to call them 'disordered', coping is not disordered at all- it is a technique of survival. Instead of stigmatizing others we should take the time out to listen to what they are going through. We should respect that even though these methods of coping may be harmful to them in some ways it may also be helping them to deal in other ways. Sometimes we need to work on getting through the short-term before we can work on being healthier in the long-term. For some of us these methods of coping are necessary to keep going until we find healthier alternatives.

I have felt serious lows, severe depressions that have left me with feelings so deeply painful that I couldn't find it in me to bear living anymore. Now I know that I was lucky. I did attempt suicide but today I am still alive. I never thought that it would be possible for me to find happiness. I'm not happy all the time now, I still have a lot of issues that I'm working through, but I've found support and I've learned self-care. Slowly I've come to see that I am worthwhile and I do have a place on this earth and that I can affect change. It didn't happen right away but now I honestly believe that no situation is ever hopeless. I have learned that humans have a rich and deep capacity to survive and that all of us have something beautiful we can give to this world.

So they don't know what they're talking about when they speak of us

our families, from the media, whatever. We are given a set of rules to follow: have to go to university; have to play soccer, have to speak about our emotions in certain settings but not others; have to play the gender game; have to make sure we toe the line. And so when we suggest to people that they have an infinite number of choices, and every right to make them, they can feel cheated that they didn't "know" earlier that they could have more freedom or jealous that someone else has been given this freedom, but they have not. This really brought to light for me how transpolitics are not only about transpeople, but are about a kind of freedom from the intense gender constraints that we all struggle with in different ways.

Bear also addressed the popular models of trans-ness in media and culture right now as all about publicizing the hardships of being trans. Which serves a reasonable social function, because throwing a pity party can lead to increased awareness of the barriers transfolks face, and aid in the battle for rights and opportunities. This is all good stuff. But... can also be a pretty discouraging picture to paint for young transfolks, right? So I think it is useful to point out that being trans is not hard and terrible and obstacle-filled in and of itself. Being trans in Montreal in 2009 is hard because of the particular social setting in which we abide. It's like the stat that always gets repeated about young queer folks, and how they are something like 5 times as likely to attempt suicide than non-queer youth. Queers are not out there harming themselves because being queer is horrible, they are doing it because of the way they are treated for being queer. It is a subtle difference, but a crucial one to point out and think about.

I think that Rez Project has been one of the most incredible endeavours of my life. We began [putting it together] in 2004, drafting a workshop that serves two important functions. a) we do some introductory education about sex, gender, sexuality sexual assault, to reduce the taboos on these subjects, give people vocabulary to talk about them, and set some ground rules around how to respect people of various experiences/identities. b) it says to the survivors of sexual assault, the folks who might be questioning their gender identity or sexuality, or those who identify as queer or trans (or have friends, lovers, or family who do) that there is support for them. It's hard to accomplish both of these goals, but it's really rewarding work. Rez Project stands out as an experience of activism: firstly, because the growth of this project has been steady and enormous. We went from doing workshops for each floor of one residence with 8 trained facilitators, to recruiting a crew of nearly 100 facilitators to give workshops to over 2000 students in every residence at McGill. It boggles my mind that an idea that I talked about with a co-volunteer at SACOMSS over tea became this HUGE project that lives on and continues to develop. It also stands out because the workshop has really been viewed as

being constantly in progress. Rez Project has changed significantly every year, given feedback from students, residence staff, facilitators and other folks who care about what kind of popular/informal education is going on out there. The workshop is a living document that is constantly improving, and no one seems to feel protective or possessive of it aside from feeling committed to its original goals. Thirdly... we did something in an institution, and not only did it work, it was supported by the institution without the institution taking power over it. The former Director of Residences at McGill gave the organizers complete freedom to form this workshop, and offered us moral, financial and institutional support to pull it off. When I reflect on the project as a whole... it just blows my mind. These issues are often so silenced- sexual assault, gender variance, and queerness, and I think it is really incredible that we have the opportunity to introduce people to these issues when they first arrive here. I think of it as radical education.

So... back to the topic at hand... what can rock about being queer/trans....

1. Choices! People can choose to express their genders and sexualities in a bajillion differnt ways.
2. Sex! Queers and transfolks exist kind of outside of traditional sexual scripts, which means all kind of freedom and creativity can happen between the sheets, or other places... think of it as sex a la carte, rather than the same old table d'hote. This is not to say that nontrans/nonqueer folks can't have awesome creative sex, just that they might have to do more work to get out of the box, so to speak.
3. Deliberate communities. Many of us queers and weirdos have found ourselves groups of inspiring, strong, ass-kicking folks to surround ourselves with. Folks who share or shared some of our experiences. Folks who can guide us and rub our backs when things go awry. We don't just make friends; we create our own families, and love them fiercely.
4. Gossip! Nothing like news travelling fast in small communities. I realize that not everyone sees this as a positive, but I LOVE gossip, and so I am putting it here.
5. I guess I see it as a kind of privilege that my sexual identity and desires match up really nicely with my philosophical and political beliefs. It means I get to live and act out my beliefs every day of my life.
6. Self-knowledge! Again, this is something lots of nontrans and nonqueer people can gain also, but they may not be forced to in the same way. We have to stand up for ourselves, defend our choices and identities, support our friends and lovers, educate our families and communities and doctors and teachers and and... we have to spend a lot of time an energy investing in ourselves to gather the strength, confidence and competence to do that. It's a cool thing.

Being a young person is hard enough. People are constantly telling us what to do and how to behave. There is so much pressure on us to achieve to standards that other people have set for us. Often our opinions are discounted as lacking maturity and experience. We are shown little trust, respect or rights to determine for ourselves what we want. Although these realities do not always disappear in older age they are particularly stringent when we are both economically and legally dependent on other people.

As long as young people are considered dependent on others, officials may deny us access to information, consider us unable to consent, refuse to treat us, and curtail our confidentiality. This can mean that we're scared off from seeking support or that when we do seek it we don't always get what's most effective. If we're institutionalized in psychiatric facilities our options are almost completely restricted and any behaviour considered out of line can furthermore be labelled as disturbed, symptomatic signs of illness.

We trans and queer folks are really complex. There are so many factors that are impacting how we feel and how we act. Just because we are queer and/or trans does not mean that it is our main experience. We all have different realities when it comes to homophobia and transphobia and we all deal with these in different ways. If a queer or trans person is struggling it is not necessarily anything to do with this- there's plenty out there that can stress us out and we don't need to have all negative experiences explained away and reduced to this one aspect of our lives.

The important part is that these struggles are real. Whatever the causes are that mean so many young trans and queer people are dealing with so much pain we need to be out there acknowledging it. Our pain is so complicated, hard and exhausting. It can be difficult

Queer and trans folks have a long history of being pathologized. Not just us, actually. Generally speaking, psychiatry seems to have struggled with the idea of anyone other than rich, white, able-bodied, heterosexual men enjoying or challenging their sexualities and genders. At one point, any woman who had an orgasm was considered crazy and in need of psychiatric treatment. People who challenge common notions of what it means to be normal are often considered to be insane. Unfortunately, it seems in the past a woman gaining sexual satisfaction was not considered normal or ideal by the men who had the means to label others mentally ill. What is considered healthy is, to some extent, a reflection of the values of the people who have enough power to judge others behaviours and bodies.

It's only been a few decades since homosexuality was removed as a diagnosable psychiatric disorder in North America and diagnoses such as Gender Identity Disorder and Transvestic Fetishism, which pathologize being trans and pathologize cross dressing, are still in existence. Additionally, a lot of the symptoms which are used to diagnose other disorders are also gendered so that a so-called 'disorder' is more likely to incorporate 'symptoms' of expressing sexuality or gender in a way other than what society expects.

A lot of the time if we're not officially considered crazy for being queer or trans we can be considered crazy for the ways in which we cope with the hardships we face. It is true that we are more likely to experience homophobia and transphobia and it's not always easy to handle being a target of harsh prejudices. As young people, it can often feel like we are left without a means of escaping these hardships; it is not always an option to leave sites of our hardships and we're left to cope with homophobia and transphobia in our homes, in our schools, and on our streets.

I felt connected to queer resistance struggles well before I had acknowledged, even to myself, that I was queer. I remember knowing about Section 28* when I was 11 years old, and being full of righteous indignation about the injustice, and how tangibly it had affected my school life. I followed the story in the news, and celebrated quietly to myself when I heard that it had been repealed in 2003. However, a Conservative local government in Kent, in the South East of England, decided to implement an even more reactionary version of the law. It was at a protest against this law that I had my first taste of queer activism.

My friend Adam and I told our parents we were going to London to get cheap tickets to a matinee, and then heading off to the county hall in Maidstone, Kent. On arrival, I wished we had actually gone to London. The police almost outnumbered the protesters, on this grey and cloudy Saturday in 2004. Perhaps because of our meager numbers, I had this gnawing feeling of embarrassment: if so few people thought this was important, why were we standing out in the cold and making so much noise? I cringed when people began to chant "We're here, we're queer, we will not live in fear," and I wanted to disappear when someone attempted a rousing rendition of "I am what I am." I realized then that being part of a queer movement meant that I also had to confront my own homophobia.

This was the first time I had heard speeches that now I take for granted. We took a moment of silence to remember FannyAnn Eddy, a Lesbian activist from Sierra Leone who had recently been murdered. After the protest, we decamped to the one gay pub in this provincial town, amusingly called the Queen Victoria. I drank alcopops - coolers to you North Americans - as I had yet to develop a taste for beer, and tried to impress the older, cooler activists.

* Section 28 was an amendment to the Local Government Act 1986 in England that stated that a local authority "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

So what is it that makes us queer or trans? I'm not really sure but I'm willing to bet it has something to do with us being pretty kick ass.

Besides, what is it that makes people straight or cisgender? Was it the way their parents raised them? Is it some sort of childhood disturbance? Is there a 'straight gene'? Oh those poor, unfortunate souls destined to leading a normative lifestyle. Whatever can we do to save them?

For too long the 'experts' have been prodding and poking at us trans and queer people. They have treated us like there is something wrong, something absurd to us, something that would lead us to challenge what they have considered to be proper-ideal-normal.

The experts have tried so vehemently to explain us. They insist that either it is a choice, that we are therefore to be blamed, or that it is out of our control and thus we are to be pitied. A lot of research tries to cloak itself as progressive by advocating that our identities are imposed on us by biology, psychology, society or a mix thereof. This way, when we just can't help being queer or trans, they can chalk us up to a grand misfortune.

Queer and trans people are treated as victims of our identities. They use these causal explanations to plea to society not to be so homophobic and transphobic because it is not our fault that we are this way. Or worse yet, some will use these so-called causes as a basis of trying to 'fix' and normalize us into gender abiding citizens.

internal conflict with the hostile world of homophobic adults and teenagers.

The things went better when I entered the welcoming walls of a private school after the high school. It was a totally different environment and foreign professors made my world a brighter one by teaching me Latin, English and Italian. 2000 was marked by coming out to my wonderful mother and to my American friends. It was a year full of hope and pride, big and small achievements.

One cold October night at a Halloween party somebody was so full fear of the unknown that he beat me so bad that I ended up in a hospital with a brain concussion. It took me quite a while to heal my physical and emotional wounds. The hardest thing was to understand why somebody would want to hurt you so much for nothing. It was also hard to let it go and forgive. I've been trying not to dislike Halloween parties since then but I always failed. I managed to forgive the guy who attacked me. I am relieved not to harbour any feelings of hatred or animosity towards him. He is now part of my past. I forgive but I don't forget. I don't forget that there are many challenges and struggles ahead of me. I am grateful to my family and friends who have always stood by my side and who never failed to prove that love defies no difference!

Ever since I was a little child I was different from others. In one way or the other. Sounds familiar as a beginning of a gay survival story? Growing in soviet and then post-soviet Kazakhstan as a gay child was a constant challenge. Challenge to survive, no matter what! In some peculiarly interesting way I've always known that my being gay was alright. I don't even know where this conviction came from. You wouldn't see gay couples in the streets of my city or neither would you hear your mom about a gay couple living next door, yet having very little information from a good source I knew somewhere inside my heart that there is nothing wrong with me, I was just special and different. But I believe I was the only one to know that and believe that.

I often think of the roots of homophobia and all sorts of phobias in our world. I think of that inexplicable hostility that other people showed to me only because I was different from them. The fear is a constant companion to the unknown. And the aggression is a natural reaction to the fear. My looks have always been androgynous and people would often freak out. At school children and teenagers would mock me, insult me, laugh in my face and behind my back I would feel bitter resentment against anyone who stared at me with a who-the-hell-are-you look. The spring of 1997 left a now hardly visible scar on my wrist as a result of my

When they try to discover the routes to our being queer and trans they totally bypass the point. We don't need to be excused. We don't need an explanation to remove us from blame. Blame never belonged to us to begin with. Trying to situate our sexualities and genders as the problem distracts society from thinking about where the real issues are located.

The issue isn't why we are queer or trans, the issue is the question itself and why it is being asked.

Millions of dollars are being poured into searching for a basis to our deviant genders and sexualities. If we all took a step back and instead of searching for the answer to what causes us to be queer or trans we could start searching for what it is about our society that has such difficulty with letting people be any gender and love people of any gender. Imagine if we took all of that money, that time and investment and put it towards supporting queer and trans people.

Let's take their questions, let's take away the idea that we are problems to be scrutinized or solved. Let's take the problem to where it's really at. We need to be asking tough questions about the existence and origins of homophobia and transphobia and ways we can work together as queers, trans people and allies to confront it. We need to be asking ourselves about what type of world we want to live in and what we're going to do to make change.

Sara, 26 years old

Sara is a part of the queer, trans and intersex communities in Montreal. Until she transitioned she didn't see herself anywhere in the future. She doesn't have professional ambitions and finished high school long ago. She doesn't remember most of her childhood but knows there was a lot of bullying. She describes herself as having two personalities- an adult one and a child one; these are part of a coping mechanism for her. Sara also has Asperger's Syndrome and a really good sense of humour. I met her on a retreat for queer and trans youth leaders and this piece is part of an interview that took place during the retreat overlooking the winter's Laurentian mountains.

I'm seen as someone who doesn't know who she is and what she wants. There's been a lot of patronizing. The role of the clinician [should be] to take the goals of the client and to help the client reach them, but the clinicians prefer to define their own goals. It's negatively impacted me because my goals are ignored. They find it too weird and too out of the mainstream. They want to fix my mind.

I've been able to resist this by going around it. For instance, I was able to get hormones without having a diagnosis. The queer, trans and intersex communities have supported me. I didn't seek help at first, I didn't expect help. At first it was mostly friends, then I found organizations. But the best I found was support groups. I've been able to find people who can understand what I'm going through. People who can give feedback and I've made friends. But I couldn't find anything that could help me concretely, such as finding doctors- these things I found myself.

The intersex community can be exclusive. Often the intersex community requires diagnosis but most intersex conditions are not diagnosed. Most others [queer and trans] have been pretty inclusive, depending on the organization.

Having Asperger's has impacted my relationship with the queer, trans and intersex communities. Not because of the label but because of what it does. Mostly having to do with difficulty socializing. I can be detached, very idealistic, I don't always seem like I'm talking about me.

I've had to do a lot on my own. You can't expect the communities to make you grow; you have to make your own effort. A lot of it is self-discovery. People in the community- what people can do is to ask the right questions. Make you think about things from an angle you didn't think about before. A positive thing about being queer, trans and intersex is thinking outside of the box, you're pretty much forced out of the box. If you don't think out of the box you don't discover as much of who you are.

If I had a message to send out to young queer, trans and intersex young people it would be to always have hope. Things can get better. Don't be afraid to ask for help, it is a sign of strength- to recognize that you need help. I recommend thinking out of the box even if it doesn't conform to the stereotype of what society wants you to be. It helped me to be open minded also. If you are [queer, trans or intersex] you will be discriminated against and may experience violence. Don't turn around and be violent yourself. Be accepting of other people like you want them to be accepting of you. This is something that is true everywhere, of all communities.