

A
TRANS
MAN
(-IFESTO)



BY
SAWYER
REID

**Do not stand
By my grave, and weep,
I am not there,
I do not sleep.**

**I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints in snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle, autumn rain.
When you awaken with morning's hush
I am the swift upflinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the day transcending night.**

**Do not stand
at my grave and cry -
I am not there,
I did not die.**

-Immortality

By Clare Harner

Table of Contents

Introduction

What is anything?

Pretty self explanatory

The Oddity

An attempt to explain queerness' role in feminism

Not Your Loss

What and why the problem is

Stream of Consequence

The damage the problem causes

He-Man and the Answers of the Universe

A potential solution to the problem

Conclusion

CONTENT WARNINGS!!!!

INTENSE CONVERSATION ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF LOSS

REFERENCE TO TRANSPHOBIA AND HOMOPHOBIA

My name is Sawyer Reid, and I have barely been on this earth for twenty years (it'll be 20 on the day we present these). Despite this fact, I have seen and experienced enough major life events to make even my closest friends proclaim that I speak like an author. Please know that I poured every ounce of that energy into this Manifesto in order to ensure that my words come across as I intend, but that there may be moments where things come off as inaccessible due to flowery and fancy language. I did my best to “translate” the more complicated concepts became, but despite my best efforts there are in fact some moments where I can see this being inaccessible, in which case I am extremely sorry.

This Manifesto will have an intense focus on the concept of loss, as referenced in the content warnings on the table of contents. There are also references to homophobia and transphobia, as well as some generally heavy concepts. The conclusion is pretty corny, though, so brace for impact in that regard. Otherwise, any and all feedback is *greatly* appreciated.

What is Anything?

I personally have come to the understanding that my definition of “society” is based around Judith Butler’s concept of there being a Regime a truth. Specifically, I think society can be accredited to institutions that have large influences on how life is lived. These institutions include but are not limited to, government, legal systems, medical fields, media, religion, families, culture, education, and even arts. All of these structures employ different restraints in order to ensure individuals maintain abilities that benefit the particular natures of those very institutions. It is this endless cycle’s influence on individuals that I declare, for all intents and purposes, is “society”.

For an easy to digest example, think of Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* and the impact it had upon its release. Individuals saw that movie and left thinking that sharks were the most danger they’d ever have the displeasure of encountering. Not only is it highly unlikely that this individual would ever actually encounter a shark, but even more unlikely that a shark would act in the way it did in the film itself. Yet, despite this, viewers of the film were so impacted by it that it spurred a phenomenon that is now referred to by Christopher Neff as “The *Jaws* Effect”. According to Neff, “The public is aware of shark bites and their interest has led to a cottage industry of entertainment and media to reinforce attention to these events” (Neff, 2). To summarize, in this specific example of society’s impact the film and its audience feed into one

another. The audience is entertained and thinks sharks out to be monstrous animals, and the film makes over “\$1 billion dollars in the box office” (Neff, 2) while simultaneously milking the concept of sharks being dangerous for profit and entertainment. Within this cycle, no matter what example the cycle is applied to, there is always a common factor, and that is the simple fact that *someone* will be hurt by the cyclical nature of society’s influence. In this case, sharks are the victims of society’s scrutiny. The article by Neff goes into detail about how the film has affected real life Australian policy making, like a “\$22 million investment in shark mitigation strategies” (Neff, 2). This, my friend, is society in motion.

Now to specify, a patriarchal society like the one we live in means that all of those institutions are fitted for and created by cisgender heterosexual white men in order to ensure their own power within said institutions. Those same characters work within those systems in order to ensure that marginalized communities remain under their jurisdiction in every facet possible.

The definition of who is a woman within the confines of this dais is simple; whoever wants to call themselves a woman, is a woman. And if someone actively doesn’t want to consider themselves a woman, then they are not a woman and are rather whatever self-identified existence they desire. While it seems to be a fairly simple concept to grasp, it still manages to be perplexing for a lot of people. I would know, considering I happen to be a part of the ladder. I could lie and say *society* dubs a woman to be someone who is born with XX chromosomes, but again, that would be an intensely incorrect statement considering that for a majority of my existence, I am seen as a man, and as far as I am aware have managed to maintain two XX chromosomes.

As a kid I didn’t get it. I didn’t get the lipstick, or the nail polish, or the sheer amount of pink that was plastered everywhere it could be. I never *hated* any of that stuff. I just didn’t get it. This perplexity made itself clear when it became apparent that I was not in fact a girl, but a boy who looked forward to growing into being a man. Because of this eye-opening realization, the things I *did* hate are almost all things that I look back on with a different colored lens.

The Oddity

The moment I vividly remember in childhood that impresses me is something I would say rather frequently. I had a trained response to every single time someone would bring up the fact that I didn’t shave my legs. “If people are staring at my legs, they’re the one with a problem, not

me.” At the time that was just genuinely what was on my mind as a response. But looking back on this answer, it impresses me. To think that any child’s default answer to not accommodating to a societal norm is essentially “only people creepin on me are staring at my legs,” would baffle and stun even the most composed adults who would ask why I never shaved. Not once did I ever answer that question with the answer, “it’s because I’m a boy, Aunt Linda.” Because me shaving my legs and me being a trans man never really had any correlation to one another. Instead, the things that were inherently related to one another were my early onset queerness, and my need to rebel against society and it’s gross standards *by* not shaving my legs.

Queerness and societal resistance are forever affiliated with one another. Queerness is and will always be the ultimate form of societal resistance, but not every form of societal resistance is inherently queer. Think of the way that technically, every square is a rectangle, but not every rectangle is a square. This concept is loosely inspired by Jabir K. Puar’s “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages”. Note how I use the words *inspired by*. Puar’s perspectives are rather intense, comparing queerness to the destructive mindset of terrorists, but the primary sentiment I absorbed from this piece is the concept of queerness being classified as a disruption to societal norms (Puar). Naturally, queerness will always be a foil to society. Institutions like the law and religion enforce concepts like monogamous, cisgender, heterosexual marriages. It’s in ways like this that queerness is the ultimate disruption, either rejecting the concept of marriage entirely, or utilizing the supreme court ruling of Obergefel v Hodges for same sex partners to get married.

In my queerness it has become increasingly difficult to relate to the meaning of feminism due to my disconnect to my own femininity. Because of this concept, I have had to rework what my own definition of feminism *is*. After thinking long and hard about what on earth the definition of feminism could remotely include, I finally settled on a definition that I am content with. My definition of feminism is this; a movement that encourages the dismantling of oppressive patriarchal systems by amplifying and recognizing the voices of marginalized persons.

Because I believe queerness to be the pinnacle of resistance, and therefor a pillar of feminism, seeing as it naturally displaces societal standards and norms, you can imagine my surprise when my queerness was ridiculed by someone else who self identifies as a feminist.

Not Your Loss

Let me preface this story with something important before you read; my stepmother is wonderful. Get that image from Cinderella out of your head, because my stepmom is the opposite of wicked. This woman is more powerful, independent, and iron-willed than I will ever be. She raised her two kids (my step siblings) single handedly, while also maintaining a teaching job. Bearing these things in mind, she is also white, cisgender, heterosexual, and a thriving member of the upper middle class. This means her form of feminism is very different than mine. In “Theory as a Liberatory Practice” bell hooks recognizes a specific line of feminist theory as being exclusively accessible to white women with high status and visibility (hooks). My stepmom’s feminism falls directly into this category, excluding gender expansive folks in conversations about reproductive rights, and being extremely closed off to new information concerning what feminism is. It is a very selfish form of feminism, accidental or not.

Now, with all of this being said, it should come as no surprise that my lovely stepmother caught me completely off guard with a single sentence this past summer. It was something like this: “It was hard, ya know,” in reference to my transition, “it really was a loss.” *Loss*. That word echoed in my head like no other ever had. To stand in front of a strong feminine presence in my life, one who proclaims to exist within the peak of feminist culture, as she called my existence a loss, hurt like a bitch. It took everything that I have fought to become and tore it to shreds. Every ounce of joy that I had felt in being able to exist as myself, and that she had *seen me* feel, suddenly became replaced by images of a depressed kid who had no idea who they were. Was that really what she thought of my happiness? My joy? Was losing that kid and gaining a happier one really bad enough to call my existence a *loss*? The harm in that sentiment is important, and we’ll get to that. But to start, let’s take a moment and analyze why on Earth anyone would ever feel strongly enough about this concept to tell it to their kid’s face.

The roots of this form of transphobia come from the origins of what today American society classifies as a family through the confines of heterosexual marriage. Let’s start from the beginning. There is an uncomfortable amount of familiarity with the concept of a father holding his daughter for the first time and seeing prophetic flickers of him walking her down the aisle and handing her away to another man. I can imagine that my own father experienced this when I was born, and that my stepmom vicariously anticipated that for me. Freidrich Engels’ “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” clarifies the specific historical significance

of the evolution of what is thought of as a “standard” United States familial unit, and simultaneously the root of this harmful perspective. Engels clarifies that the masculine member of a relationship was meant to take control of his partner. “The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children” (Engels, 108). In essence, marriage historically has placed women in an inherently objectifying position, and placed men in positions that allow them to *do* the objectifying. This is one of the foundations of the cisnormative and heteronormative perspective.

Leslie Feinberg’s “Transgender Liberation” builds on this concept with intense and engaging detail. Not only does Feinberg agree with Engels, but she claims “A tremendous societal change took place [historically]. The desire to pass on wealth to male heirs demanded wifely monogamy; the patriarchal family became the new economic unit of society” (Feinberg, 209). This trend, Feinberg notes, has set an expectation for women in our present day, dancing across the corner of every father’s mind as he graciously accepts the fact that his daughter will be his to give away one day. Men have daughters with their wives, then hand over those daughters to other men through a big over the top ceremony that makes a point to have him physically deliver her to him. This concept is still ingrained into not only fathers in our society today, but it has generally swept over the thoughts of all parental units. This, on a historically significant level, can explain why some parents of queer kids share this perspective of “loss” when viewing the change their child is taking on. Their kid suddenly doesn’t fit into their ideals of marriage that they have been taught to live up to their entire lives, therefore that person’s definition of a happy, healthy future for their child is “lost”. They truly believe they are entitled to grieving a future that they couldn’t even guarantee to begin with. Is that potential future *that* much more important than their kid’s long term happiness?

Culturally, there is also a misconception from cisgender people attempting to analyze *why* kids turn out to be trans. One of the many misunderstandings stems from an extremely psychoanalytically feminist perspective, described in detail in Nancy Chodorow’s “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life”. Chodorow goes into detail describing all of the different ways that she thinks gender can be misconstrued or misinterpreted by a child if raised in a societally devious family structure (Chodorow). The dangerous implications that Chodorow provides are that if a kid is queer, something must be horribly wrong in the way they were raised to prompt the child’s

need to compensate for negligence of some kind. This in itself is extremely problematic, creating a framework for queer kids that forces them into a place of pity or scrutiny in the eyes of society. This is another way that the word “loss” can cause distress, as some cisgender people see transgender people through a lens that indicates the loss of a happy childhood.

Stream of Consequence

After learning the background behind *why* exactly cisgender people view transgender people in this light, it’s time to dive into the harm that these perspectives bring to trans communities. Cisgender heterosexual individuals claim entitlement over the grief of both the past *and* the future of trans and queer persons. This creates an ethos of queer people feeling as if something about the part of them that was “lost” held more value than the *present* them. The impact of this is intense and extremely significant within the realm of the queer community.

It is extremely important to note that at the time of this conversation, I had no viable way to describe how hurt I was by my stepmom’s words. I desperately craved evidence to surge through me only to make me regurgitate it onto the kitchen floor in front of her. Instead in it’s place remained shock, confusion, and pain. I can only assume that other queer individuals who have experienced this mindset from obtruders have also felt this discomfort.

One of the many consequences of this thought process is the fact that it instills internalized transphobia upon both cisgender and gender non-conforming individuals. According to Julia Serano’s “Trans Woman Manifesto”, “transphobia is first and foremost an expression of one’s own insecurity about having to live up to cultural gender ideals” (Serano, 547). When exposed to societally enforced gender norms, there is already an underlying transphobic tone to the enforcement of the gender binary. Specifically when in reference to the concept of oneself prior to coming out, referring to that individual’s evolution in doing so as a “loss” is extremely damaging to one’s own self image and self esteem. To be told that your present existence, in comparison to a theoretically far less happier version of you, is a loss, is extremely phobic of both the trans and homo variety. To have that perspective instilled upon you by others is beyond harmful, and can cause deep rifts in relationships.

Nan Boyd’s “Bodies in Motion” also speaks on the subject of control within the context of one’s own body. Boyd states that “the body remains a highly politicized, unstable, and symbolic structure, intimately connected to the state, and as a result it reflects both nationalism

and resistant social movements” (Boyd, 421). At this point we’ve touched upon the fact that queerness is pinnacle in reference to the movement of feminism due to it’s resistant nature, but it is also a platform that is extremely easy to be controlled by society, or as Boyd references, “the state”. Due to the constant reenforcement of cis-heteronormativity, queer and trans individuals occasionally find themselves in a position of feeling the need to conform to extreme binaries in order to stay within what society deems to not be a loss. In order to compensate for the destruction of their past selves, they attempt to replicate the inverse of the binary alternative outcomes rather than existing as their true selves.

To make this easier to understand, I have faced many literal examples of this concept manifesting and reinforcing itself. After a certain amount of time after beginning my physical transition through the beginnings of hormone replacement therapy, I found it would be an apt time to pierce my ears for the simple reason that earrings are cool. Upon this realization my biological mother decided to tell me “Guys don’t pierce their ears.” Ryan Reynolds would beg to differ. Multiple of my uncles also had piercings in college. But this in itself is a primary example of binary thinking being enforced despite the fact that as a transgender person I literally contradict the binary simply by existing. Because somehow, queer individuals manage to be both sites of control, and sites of resistance.

People have a deep seeded desire to enforce these rigid binaries in order to satisfy the expectations that society benefits from. Mind you, *my* definition of society is rooted institutionally. The institutions that benefit from rigid gender binaries include but are not limited to medical institutions, politics, sports, legal systems, religion, and many many more. Each of them equally impact and benefit from constructed gender roles. Specifically this cycle is brought up by Michel Foucault’s “Discipline and Punish”. “The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely” (Foucault, 137). In essence, Foucault is crediting bodies to be useful to institutions not only when said bodies crumple into obedience, but learns to make itself feed into those institutions with less and less challenge. This ideal is instated within the confines of societal standards, individuals being rewarded for falling in line and simultaneously being a benefactor of whatever institutions they adhere to. When queer individuals don’t find themselves falling in line with societal

standards, shame is used as a source of punishment and correction in an effort to force queer persons into conformity.

These concepts don't even begin to scratch the surface of the harm that is caused by queer people's existence being seen as a "loss" by society. There is also the blatant fact that genuine loss that people feel about others is usually only ever experienced in grief over that person's death, or when they become suddenly absent. To even compare a queer person's existence to literally "killing" that past version of themselves is extremely harmful because of the sheer intensity of the comparison itself. By doing that you are not only claiming that person's past potential to be inherently worthy of grief, but you are also literally comparing them to being a metaphorical murderer of said potential and therefore less than, and even a destructive force.

He-Man and the Answers of the Universe

There is no easy way to make this problem disappear. But if I could play magician I would throw this thing in a box to saw in half, then aptly make it vanish in a poof of rainbow glitter. Despite this wonderfully miraculous ambition, there are some efforts that can be made in order to acquire a world where this harmful mindset can begin to be erased.

While an effort needs to be made worldwide to erase the grief that comes with coming out, there are aspects of existing that each queer individual needs to manage in order to ensure that change happens. One of bell hooks' many important sentiments that I aptly agree with is that queerness will only be able to exist freely in a world with "no gap between feminist theory and feminist practice" (hooks, 42). This adds a hefty sum to the stereotypical "practice what you preach" idiom that has echoed for what feels like eternity, but it also makes the same implications to feminism extremely clear. If you believe in something, you've gotta show for it. If you want something, you've gotta go get it. And if you aim to fight a power that lies beyond the space of a singular person and rather an entirely formed society, then we've gotta be ready to hold each other accountable. That accountability applies to this solution.

It was most plainly stated in an anonymously passed out text that was passed out during the 1990 New York Gay Pride Parade. "The Queer Nation Manifesto" is a strongly worded set of demands that lovingly proclaims "We come out of the closet, face the rejection of society, face firing squads, just to love each other!" (Anonymous). And that, in itself, is the effort that you can guarantee comes into fruition. *Exist*. Don't *survive*. Don't just float along this big ol' rock

waiting to kick the bucket. Exist in knowing that you are your happiest, truest self within your identity and your love. I can lie to you and say that at the end of the day “who needs the approval of non-queer identifying individuals?” but I would be lying through my fingertips if I wrote that for your eyeballs to consume. Clearly the disapproval of a non-queer person was enough to motivate me to teem through all of this, anyway. But if I can ensure that the kid my stepmom “lost” is now as happy as he could ever be, I think her point is what *becomes* lost.

I know it’s cheesy. But at the same time, if society has built the concept of joy around people who find themselves fitting comfortably into set standards and boxes, then it’s time to disidentify. Disidentification was a term coined by José Esteban Muñoz in “Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics”. In essence, the word means to reinvent and transform coded meaning to empower minority communities (Muñoz). Because of happiness as a concept being motivated by the driving force that is society and the institutions that benefit from it, by reframing joy into *Queer* joy, a new and more hopeful future can be created. This requires taking the moments that you feel the most community, or love, or acceptance, and allowing yourself to fully revel in those moments. Allow yourself to indulge in what is typically only constructed for those who society benefits.

Another important point made by bell hooks is this - “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. While that specific statement follows suit with the name of one of her many masterfully written articles, the title alone manages to carry a suitable weight to it, and the article even more so. It addresses the fact that white-high-educated and privileged feminism is not going to disassemble the patriarchy or any of its horsemen. That is why it is extremely important that I acknowledge that in my position of both white and male passing privilege I can see the sheer importance of this article within the title alone. I mention my privilege not only because it is vital that you recognize said privilege within me, the writer, as you read this, but I also mention it because the solution “just be happy” can come off as fairly simple and tone deaf. It is far more easily said than done, especially within communities that are not as privileged as I have had the opportunity of being. That won’t stop me from urging the practice of Queer Joy, but please note that I do see the intense amount of privilege I command within that sentiment.

The other part of me mentioning this piece by hooks, is that because of the pain enforced by society onto the queer community, *that pain is now a societal tool*. Like it or not, the constant

reinforcements and rigid binaries that have caused that pain have forced it into the position of a powerful societal tool. What this means, is that by wallowing in self-agony, isn't going to succeed in forcing change to come. *We* are allowed to grieve the millions of queer lives *literally* lost. *We* are allowed to throw a fit over the lack of protective policies and enforcements. Acknowledging the pain and being angry are both extremely useful in order to bring about change and progress, but Queer Joy has the ability to be more powerful than any form of hatred. Queer people are not the aggressors shouting on street corners with red picket signs, they are the ones throwing a party on the other side of the road with one singular sign that says "Fuck You" as Katy Perry plays in the background. They are the act of dancing. The act of looking in a mirror and smiling. The act of falling in love. That is what Queer Joy means. By experiencing Queer Joy in all of it's facets, you are already guaranteeing a future where no one greives the loss of someone who is as happy as they can possibly be.

Works Cited

- Boyd, Nan Alamilla. "Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transexual Histories."
- Chodorow, Nancy, et al. "The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life from The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 278–294.
- Engels, Friedrich, et al. "The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 106–108.
- Feinberg, Leslie. "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come (1992)." *Materialist Feminism*, 1997, pp. 239–247.,
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203699720-31>.
- hooks, bell, et al. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 15–17.
- hooks, bell, et al. "Theory as a Liberatory Practice." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 37–42.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics." *Cultural Studies of the Americas*, vol. 2, 1999.
- Neff, Christopher. "The Jaws Effect: How Movie Narratives Are Used to Influence Policy Responses to Shark Bites in Western Australia." *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 6 Dec. 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2014.989385>.
- Puar, Jasbir K. "Jasbir K. Puar Queer Times , Queer Assemblages." *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, 2012, pp. 525–538., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720776-42>.
- Serano, Julia, et al. "Trans Woman Manifesto." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, NY, 2013, pp. 547–551.

The Queer Nation Manifesto, History Is a Weapon,

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/queernation.html>.