

So. Welcome, I suppose, to my gender reveal party. My parents didn't throw one for me prior to my birth, and didn't know if I was male or female until I was born, so I guess I will be revealing 19-year-old information. Theoretically.

I was swaddled in a pink and blue striped blanket, the first gender joke of my life, and taken home. Here comes the second joke; my room had been painted prior to my birth and, since my parents had no way of predicting that "it's a girl!" would ring through the hospital suite, my bedroom was green. I've made the joke before and I'll do it again before you leave my party, "The only reason I'm genderfluid is that instead of painting my room pink or blue, my parents chose green." So begins the tumultuous relationship I have with my gender.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Back to the party!

We start with presents, obviously, because you may not know my gender yet, but you do know I'm nothing if not materialistic.

Someone gifts me earrings, because earrings=female.

Someone gifts me a suit jacket, because only men wear suits.

Someone gifts me a pin that says "any pronouns" in a bubbly font.

I put the earrings and the jacket on, and put the pin on the lapel.

It's confusing to look at, because I've done eyeliner and bound my chest for the occasion.

Maybe the cake will give us some clarity.

So we cut into my gender reveal cake, and you're surprised to find the inside full of little question marks, not a crumb of blue-or-pink in sight. You turn to me with a questioning look, all this buildup for so little payoff, and I shrug. You're confused, I'm confused, we're all confused by gender.

Next, I direct you to the big event of my gender reveal, a sick game show called "Presentation". The game goes as follows: You stand in front of a mirror and point out the things that 'prove' your gender. Someone points out their long hair, another their flat chest. The fun part of the game is that we all take turns calling you the gender we think you look, based on arbitrary features. We then debate how our personalities make up our gender. I'm loud and confident, and I like political theory, so I must be a man. I almost exclusively read contemporary romances, and I actively enjoy cooking and cleaning, so I must be a woman.

What does what I see in the mirror mean, really? I have short hair now, shaved close to my skull, but it used to be long. Am I more 'boy' now than I used to be?

Everyone is now confused, and possibly upset, so I bite the bullet and get to the grand finale of my gender reveal; I look around the room, shrug, and say "Today? I'm a girl. Tomorrow? Who knows. This was stupid." and so the exercise in gender affirmation is over.

But here, I'll tell you a secret. This is my *actual* gender reveal party, the one that happens every day:

Waking up in the morning, or sometimes getting halfway through the day, and realizing that something just isn't clicking with my presentation. It's looking at myself and thinking "no", big block letters, underlined three times. So I sift through my clothes, and find something that'll

make my outside match my *inside*. Sometimes this is a struggle, the outfit I've picked sitting weird against my skin. Sometimes it's as simple as the cut of a shirt, the outline of my hips makes me sick to my stomach. Other days, the masculine outline of my nose and jaw makes me uncomfortable. Sometimes adding makeup helps, sometimes binding does.

It's not –obviously– as simple as me looking at myself and saying “no, this isn't me”, its more so a misunderstanding with my brain and my body; am I presenting myself in a way that is true to me? Sometimes I have to suck it up and get on with my day.

When I've made myself at least pseudo-presentable, phase two of Kat's Daily Gender Reveal begins. The telling. This part is the hardest, expressing to others the euphoria I feel, burning and pleasant in my chest, when someone says “they” or “he” about me. Or letting them know I'm fine with the much more common “she” when it matters.

Most days, I find the struggle to be referred to the way I want or need to be a fruitless one. I've learned from experience that it hurts more to ask for recognition constantly than it does to ignore how “she” makes my skin crawl. But maybe this is a failure on my part as a queer and female rights supporter, my *laissez-faire* attitude towards my own gender. As I've read more about the interactions between queer movements and feminism, I've begun to see the two struggles as tied. My frustrations as a white woman, man, person, need to be tied to my advocacy. Feminist scholars have argued this for years.

In Leslie Feinberg's 1998 paper, “We are All Works in Progress”, sie speaks to the concept of a gender binary, and how sie has been forcefully placed into gender-binary-boxes over the course of hir life. This paper addresses the struggles of a gender-nonconforming feminist; someone

who uses the dualist nature of white Western thought to express themselves. White queer and trans folk have a perception of their gender as set within the boundaries of our binary system; to exist as 'other' in our system relies on an already-present system of identities. "Just as most of us grew up with only the concepts of *woman* and *man*, the terms *feminine* and *masculine* are the only two tools most people have to talk about the complexities of gender expression."

(Feinberg 1998, 196) illustrates this, that our current binary system is rife with contradictions and gray areas in which we must find ourselves. That our fight for equal rights as feminists is *not* restricted to those who are simply biologically female, or simply those who identify as female. By this logic, I would only be a feminist sometimes.

The concept of gender in feminism is further addressed in the works of Joyce Green and other Indigenous feminists. As a white person, I find it worth noting that I have absolutely no experience with the cultural intricacies of Indigenous gender identity and expression, but the fluidity with which two-spirit identities interact with gender bears noting in our discussion of the redundancy of a 'Gender Reveal'. "Indigenous feminism is similar to other feminist positions in its foregrounding of women's experiences and advocacy for women's rights and interests, in its recognition of the gendered and raced nature of social experiences, and in its identification of the oppressive nature of patriarchy." (Green 2017, 5) speaks to social justice as an Indigenous person, that their fight for gender equality is tied to their concepts of race and culture. Due to this cultural tie, gender identity is inherently tied to equality, as two-spirit people draw their gender and sexual identity from their connections to their land, spirituality, and communities.

Though the fluidity of Indigenous gender expression appeals to me, I, as a white person, do not fall under the two-spirit umbrella. This is why I identify as genderfluid, the changes in my gender presentation and identity are based in my understanding of gender through a white, settler-

colonial narrative. It is also important to note that though white and Indigenous peoples –and other ethnic groups– have differing cultural views on gender identity, those who lie outside of the stereotypically ‘female’ absolutely *do* belong in the feminist movement.

My resentment of the gender binary is an ironic one. To present myself in a way that gets me treated how I want, gets me that fuzzy gender-euphoria feeling, goes against my beliefs about binary systems. I exist within a this-or-that world, when I wish to exist without. So I must fight beside other feminists for the dissolution of the settler-colonial, white-centric, binary patriarchy. This fight must be ongoing. The binary chafes, but “feminine” and “masculine” and “neither”, pink and blue and green, are all words I’ve made my own, until such point as systemic change has been reached.

## References

- Green, Joyce. 2017. "Taking More Account of Indigenous Feminism: An Introduction," in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, second edition. Ed. Joyce Green. Halifax: Fernwood.
- Feinberg, Leslie. 1998. "We are All Works in Progress" In *Women's Lives: A Multicultural Perspective, 3rd Edition*, eds. Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey. New York: McGraw-Hill.