

# GENDER PERSONAL

EXPLORING GENDER VARIANCE THROUGH ART



# Finnbar

Gender Personal  
Interviews #1&2

## **Acknowledgement:**

# **Understanding Grows, Views Change**

This interview is part of the Gender Personal project (2013-2014) created by Jacqui Beck. For an overview of the project, including its origin, visit [www.genderpersonal.org](http://www.genderpersonal.org).

The following is a transcript of two of the nine interviews done for the Gender Personal project. Seven people were interviewed once each, and Jacqui's son, Finnbar, was interviewed twice.

Since that time, the people who were interviewed have grown in their understanding of themselves and their gender. Please take this into consideration as you read.

## **Appreciation**

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in this project, especially to those I interviewed. A more detailed list of thanks may be found at <http://genderpersonal.org/project-origin/#gratitude> (this link will open in your web browser).

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# Gender Personal: Interview #1 with Finnbar

## 1. How old were you when you started to experience your gender as different from what the world seemed to expect?

**Finnbar:** Well when I started noticing was probably in my senior year of high school. I started noticing more trans\* people and genderqueer people and I just started noticing in myself that I kept wanting to dress as a man and just be different and I wanted to experiment, but I knew people wouldn't really like that, or at least they wouldn't let me just try it. If I wanted to experiment and see what felt right to me, I knew that I would get a bunch of questions, of "what are you doing? Why are you dressed so weird? Why are you doing this?" And, frankly, I'm not guessing. I knew, because people actually did that.

But really, when I was, looking back, I see a lot of other times when I wanted to experience or express my gender as different and I either just thought about it or I did it, but I didn't really know that's what I was doing.

**Jacqui:** so you didn't really have a consciousness of it, but you found you did do it. You were actually doing it before you had an awareness of it.

**Finnbar:** Yeah.

## 2. Tell me about your experience of yourself regarding your gender. How do you identify regarding your gender?

**Finnbar:** That's a really hard question. The truth is that it changes so much, it's ever-evolving and it changes so quickly, that it's a hard question to answer. At the moment I would say I identify as gender-fluid because I feel different day to day and I feel different throughout the day. And it changes in so many ways, like whether I feel male or gender-neutral or genderqueer (and I see those as two different things). But also on another level whether I am in a space where I want to identify or not and I think that's probably even more important. Sometimes it feels great to me to say: *I feel male now. I am male now* or something else and sometimes I'm in a space, and I almost like that space even more, where I don't think I could figure out what I was then. I'm just something else and it doesn't matter.

## 3. How long did you know you were trans before you came out, before you told us?

**Finnbar:** I was saying that the reason I didn't talk to people for a while was that I wanted to sort things out myself, but also because I was just really doubting myself, and I feel like I'm not sure "know" is the right word. I think it's definitely not the right word for before. And if it is ever the right word, it's only right a while after I came out to you guys.

But, to answer what I believe your question is. I forget how long it was. All I remember, but I think I've already told you this story, is what really prompted me thinking about it was when I was in *History of Psychology* and Patrice was talking about Halloween and how we tend to dress as things we want to be or, whether it's parts of ourselves that we suppress, or something like that.

And it didn't stick out to me then, but later, when I was thinking about something completely separate, and thinking about Halloween, I thought I really wanted to dress as a man, and I remembered that, and then I remembered that I had also dressed as a man the Halloween before. But no one had noticed because I didn't really have any good clothes and so I wore shoes that didn't fit and a jacket that was too big for me, and it just kind of looked like I was wearing clothes that were too big for me. So I was kind of not only trying to express that, but I was also kind of trying to hide it at the same time. I mean, I didn't draw any facial hair on myself and I didn't tell anyone [laughs]. I just wanted the excuse and from there I started thinking about it. I started thinking, *is this something I'm trying to express?* and so I started cross-dressing a little bit more and just thinking about it a lot more. And that was when I was... I remember very shortly before I came out, I was housesitting for Amanda and Toni and I did a lot of writing and a lot of thinking, sort of pounding my fists on things because I was really confused, and kind of upset. And then I decided *I'm getting myself nowhere. I'm going to ask people to change my name and pronouns and see if it feels right.*

**Jacqui:** So, kind of an experiment, a but also...

**Finnbar:** But because I was pretty sure, but wasn't getting anywhere, so it was sort of my next step.

**4. Did you have an experience of... the best word I can think of is "fear," but do you have the experience "I know this is true about myself, but I'm afraid to tell it or show it"? Is that an experience you had?**

**Finnbar:** It was more a fear of being wrong, I suppose. But not only for myself, for how other people would take it. I kind of figured that people wouldn't really believe me, and I ended up being pretty right about that one. I figured that people wouldn't believe me and that if it turned not being what I wanted that I would look like a complete fool. And then I said, *oh, never mind.* [laughs] And so that's ... I basically dealt with that by saying, *I need to figure this out. I can't just ignore it.* Also just by taking small steps like taking the next step and then checking in with myself and saying, *how does that make me feel?* and going on... But I remember I hated it at school because it was my senior year and people weren't really good with the names and pronouns and I was still really uncomfortable, I mean I just felt like I basically ended up just wearing clothes that were too big for me and so it didn't feel right. I didn't know how to be that person that I wanted to be.

**Jacqui:** Has that changed?

**Finnbar:** I think so. I think it has changed a lot. Now I'm actually back to wearing clothes sort of like I used to wear when I was a lot younger, just really simple, really plain, comfortable,

usually dark clothes that I don't feel like I'm trying to hide myself. I feel it's what I feel good in, and it makes me sort of gender-neutral. To me it's just always been what's felt comfortable to me. And I think I was trying to ... I don't think it means that I'm any less male, that I don't do certain things, it's sort of what I choose to do and not do, and when I choose to do it. Just a few things like, I ask myself, *If I was on a desert island, what would I do? Or, If I was a biological male, what would I do?*

And I make most of my decisions off of that, like hair length and clothing. And then there are certain days when I really want to be perceived as more male, or I want to look in the mirror and see myself that way, and so on those days I'll wear chest binders and I for sure won't wear jewelry on those days probably, and things like that.

**Jacqui:** I've noticed that sometimes you wear jewelry and sometimes you don't. Do you want to say anything about that?

**Finnbar:** I want to say that in the interest of oppression, I think it's very important for trans\* and genderqueer people to not bow down to gender "requirements." On days when I identify as male, I have definitely worn jewelry and skirts and things, because that's what I would do if I was biologically male. And so I feel like going into those boxes, or telling yourself that you're not really male or female if you don't do these things, or since people won't see you that way, it's not worth it, I mean, I go to Alderleaf knowing that I'm wearing earrings and I'm not the kind of person that at the beginning of the day is going to say, "I know I'm wearing earrings, but I'm still identifying this way," first of all because I'm pretty introverted, second of all because I don't want to spell it out for them. I want them to realize it on their own. and thirdly, because I don't feel like identity is always that clear. It's not necessarily that I know how I identify or it's super clear-cut. So I just think it's very important to keep confusing people by staying true to yourself.

**Jacqui:** So, which comes first, the staying true to myself or confusing people?

**Finnbar:** I think they're very interconnected, but I think staying true to yourself comes first and I think everyone is confusing enough within their true self that if they stay true to themselves, they will confuse people.

**Jacqui:** [laughs] good one. So, you've talked about there's something going on for you, something that's appealing to you, or deeper than appealing, about men in dresses. Is there meaning involved in that? Just talk to me about it.

**Finnbar:** Well, I think *men in dresses* has become symbolic to me of kind of a gender struggle. I feel like it's one of the next steps when men can walk around and feel comfortable in that, a new day has come, not that the struggle is at an end, but I think that would show a big step. So it has sort of become this beacon for me in some way, but I also just think it's beautiful. I know in different cultures and at different times, men have worn dresses and/or dress-like things, and of course, these days women wear pants, but dresses and skirts, they can be so beautiful in themselves. But there's something to me, as I was saying before, gender ambiguity I often find very beautiful (and also strong masculine and feminine together, where it's working).

Often, whenever I have seen men in dresses these days, it's usually been a bad dress on their body, or a making-fun-of-it, or a terrible bright color, or something like that. And my dream is to get a beautiful man and put him in a beautiful and flattering dress. Because most dresses these days, you know, fit female curves. Well, I can talk about his forever [laughs]. But men have beautiful bodies, too, I think a lot of people would agree with me. They just often have a different shape. Their chest is... their bodies are sort of more rectangular than women's are, and their chest is ... I feel like dresses could completely be made to fit with that, and there are probably already are designers out there doing that.

**Jacqui:** So, you're not talking about, like with a transvestite, where they would make it look like they had breasts, but you would actually dress the male body in a dress.

**Finnbar:** Oh yes, most definitely. I support transvestites 100%, but I am definitely talking about men being men in dresses. Not that they have to have a solid identity in that way, or say, "I'm a *man*," but yes, making the dress fit the man, and having it work for him and with him.

**Jacqui:** And you used the word, "clash" before, like you said, the "gender ambiguity," but then you said you also really appreciate the what you called the "clash."

**Finnbar:** Yes, well I think there can be so many layers. I mean, in the most surface explanation, men represent masculinity and dresses, usually, in our culture, usually represent femininity. So there's that clash. But on top of that, the person themselves, they have masculine and feminine energy, and you can have sort of tough edgy dresses or flowing dresses. I love it when there is layer upon layer. There are so many... well, take a man, for example, and purely physical, he can have a strong, masculine jaw and also be an extremely beautiful man. And I love that! And I definitely notice that, and to me, the dress is only adding on and playing with that whole dynamic. And it can be the same for women, you know, masculine and feminine energy and...

**Jacqui:** It sounds like you like the combination, like on one person.

**Finnbar:** Yeah, and especially because I feel like men have a disadvantage in our current culture, when it comes to gender and sexuality.

## **5. How has your view of gender, or your relationship to gender, changed over time?**

**Finnbar:** With gender and with a lot of things, I find my relationship usually to be that I don't think about things much, not ...

You know how I don't really think... oooh, a hummingbird... I don't think about politics much or ... yeah, maybe I should start over.

### **5 A. How has your view of gender or your relationship to gender changed over time?**

**Finnbar:** For many years [about 17] I just took it as a given that I was female and also that because I was female I should like men and I didn't really think that it could be anything else,

but it didn't really matter a lot because it didn't seem to affect me very much. I still chose to do the things I wanted to do and I didn't really date any men or really like men that much so it just sort of ... it was sort of something that I knew about myself and yet it wasn't true, which is kind of funny [laughs]. Then my relationship changed where I thought that I might identify as male and basically what changed there was I thought 'okay, I'm not female. I'm male.' and I was very much in the binary at that stage and I was just kind of unsure of myself and I just wanted everything to be clear-cut so that it made sense.

And then I moved from there to a more fluid place where I was thinking, 'well, I mostly identify as male but, I'm kind of a queer man and it's not so clear-cut, and now I'm in an even more fluid space where I'm thinking gender and sex, they aren't unimportant, especially because of the culture we live in, but to me, it's becoming less and less important.' It's becoming more about how do I *feel in the moment*, not *who or what am I?* But it's more of an experience than anything else.

## **5 B. How has Kate Bornstein, how has reading her stuff (or knowing her work) affected you?**

**Finnbar:** Honestly, the ground work she provided for me was validation. I think that we do need some validation in our lives and knowing that we aren't the only person that feels a certain way and I read things in her book that I had been thinking about for months but had never heard anyone else say, so that was definitely one thing.

And the other thing she provided for me was her lack of accepting boxes and the cultural "male" and "female." I had read other gender work, but it was all about: *yes, be confident, you are trans, so you are a man or you are a woman* and it was just different. It was: *no, you're whatever you want to be*. And I had already been thinking a lot about that, but hearing it from someone else just brought it home.

**Jacqui:** One of the things I believe about what I've seen with you is that you know how you were talking about how when you came out and it was like: *I knew I had to be a "man."* I had to go from here to there and then I was there and now you're saying it's like... that's why I asked you the question about Kate, because what I hear you saying is: *I'm not looking for somebody else's box to come into*. I'm saying: *Who am I and how am I going to be in the world that's true to me?*

And I don't think you can go from zero to that place. I think you've done so much in a year. Because, like what you're saying, it's been about a year since you came out as transgender.

I guess what I'm saying... it's like that Anderson Cooper show, where the guys who he interviewed, they were people who still kind of fit in the gender-male/ gender-female boxes and I'm hoping with this project that I can talk about gender-beyond that, too. Not to say...some people do go from gender-male to gender-female or from gender-female to gender-male and that that's fine, too, but it's who they are... it's who we all are.

## 6. What do you want others to understand about how you experience yourself and your gender?

**Finnbar:** Ha ha.

**Jacqui:** And maybe a little of what are they not getting? Like, what seems to be the hardest?

**Finnbar:** I feel like I'll need about a year to answer this, but let me focus. Okay, listen, people: Just because I'm not dressing like a man, I'm not acting like a man, even if I'm dancing around, speaking in a really high voice, and wearing a skirt, it does not mean that I do not identify as male at that time. That is what I really want people to understand!

**Jacqui:** Okay, so what's your gender? What's your identity?

**Finnbar:** Well, I just want people to get that you can't trust your eyes. You can't trust your assumptions. You have to talk to the person! And I'm just so sick of saying, "I identify as male. I identify as male," or "I identify as queer. I identify as male. I identify as male" and then wearing a skirt and them saying, "Oh, you must identify as female today," without even asking me about it.

So, probably the biggest thing is I want them to understand that it's fluid, you know. It's fluid and it changes, but only I can only really know how it's changing. So if you're ever unclear, which basically would be all the time, the only way you can really *know* is by asking me, not by assuming.

## 7. Why do you think people are afraid of gender variance?

**Finnbar:** I think they're afraid of transgender, but I think they're even more afraid of genderqueer or gender-fluid. People give them like...genderqueer can potentially be less frightening because people can tell themselves that the person really is their biological gender, they're just trying to... they really are their biological gender, they just want more equal rights or something, or they're confused. So I think maybe part of it is... I don't know. I think part of it is chaos related. They want comfort. They want stability, and we've just built so much on identity and labels, you know: white, male, landowners... if you're this race, you get these rights. If you're this gender, you get these rights, so we differentiate between people and we divide them up. We don't end up actually looking at the person.

And also, maybe it comes back to some survival instincts. We label things and categorize so that we won't die, so that we can say, *lion*, or, *is this thing a threat to me?* And these days, you know, walking down the street, people still say, *male? or female?* and if it's a certain gender then they might they're probably more of a threat to me. So we still have things like that, and if you can't categorize and label then I think you literally feel less safe. But in our current culture that has turned into more of a mental thing than an actual physical threat.

**Jacqui:** Safety, then, that it's somehow about safety...



**Finnbar:** Yeah. I do mean that sort of more in the past it was more of a physical safety and these days it's more of a mental safety. But it's sort of translated into... we still have that survival instinct in our brain. It has just changed its format a bit.

## 8. How do people respond to you?

**Finnbar:** It's sort of in phases. I mean, first of all, if I haven't met the person or if I haven't met them since I came out, I either introduce my pronouns and my different identity right away. Or, if they walk right up and say, "How are you ladies?" and I'll correct them then. And so that gets me just sort of a surprise reaction, and usually that does not do the trick. Usually even correcting them several times, many times, depending on the person, will not make a change.

And the next, almost always what happens then, is the next sort of deep conversation I have with that person, they will bring up that they're just *confused* by it because I was always such a nice girl and I look like a girl and even now when I'm telling them my differing gender identity, I still look like a girl and I'm still not dressing super male-y. So, that's pretty universally consistent, is the second reaction, or their first reaction, when they're telling me their reaction. And then I try to explain to them and then I have the interaction again later. I'm not sure what really happens after that. They get a little bit better.

**Jacqui:** Is there anything that people do that really bugs you?

**Finnbar:** Well I feel like people just don't know what questions to ask or how important and vulnerable a topic it can be, so I get a lot of, just a lot of things people say or ask unintentionally, like telling me I'm pretty, so I don't need to identify as male.

**Jacqui:** I'm sure that's [unclear]

**Finnbar:** [Laughs] I'm thinking about the other day, and it seems to me that that should sort of show them that I do identify as male because, and I don't mind saying it, I have a nice body. I have a pretty face. I'm attractive as a girl. I'm not attractive as a man, because I don't look like one [Laughs]. And so you'd think, if I really cared about that, I would most definitely identify as female, if that was the reason.

## 9. How do you wish people would respond to you?

**Finnbar:** It would depend where they were in their lives. If it wasn't someone I'd interacted with before, I suppose a gentle curiosity would be nice. You know, nothing sort of accusatory or assuming. But also, I would really want them to spend some personal time with it, thinking about their gender, thinking about gender in the world because I feel like they lay it all on me, and I'm happy to talk with them about it, but it's like they want me to give them all the answers about gender, but I only got where I did by thinking about it myself. You can talk to as many gender

experts or gender fluid people as you want, but if you don't tie it to your own life, it's just, kind of, words. So I feel like they don't get it anywhere with them.

And I also sort of, in my ideal, would want them to approach me and themselves and everyone else with just a *let's all be together*.

**Jacqui:** say more about that. What does *let's all be together* mean?

**Finnbar:** It means, sort like I said in another question, just being in the present, being who you are, however it changes, and so not having gender even factor into it, you know, just: *who are you now because of how we're relating?* and that can change any second. So it's not like I'm basing anything off of it. I'm just being with you.

## 10. What are the hardest things you deal with?

**Finnbar:** Canelli [his therapist] helps me with that. I think the most difficult thing is not fitting in the box, and in my case right now, that's identifying as male, not being on testosterone, and not necessarily acting male. People just don't get that. They don't accept that. They think that's crazy or stupid, or I'm just wrong. Yeah, so it's hard being a queer man in a female body.

**Jacqui:** that totally makes sense. I was just thinking about Cognitive Dissonance.

**Finnbar:** I know what that is. Isn't that like when your brain doesn't match up with. . .

**Jacqui:** I think it's kind of like... I'd have to look it up, but I think it's kind of like what you're saying... like, you tell them you're male, and they look at you and they see someone who looks more female to them. And that makes cognitive dissonance for them. They're being told one thing and seeing something else, and they're cognition is dissonant, and so what do they do with that? They either say, "well, you're full of shit. You're a female. I can tell." Or they have to live with this dissonance which is uncomfortable.

**Finnbar:** That's true, because, I mean I didn't really think about the discomfort phase because I was thinking, often they side completely with what they're seeing and what they *know* and don't think about the other part, but I've basically never seen someone, unless they're queer themselves, say, "Oh, I guess I'll just trust you then." That never happens.

**Jacqui:** What about Sarah [his sister]?

**Finnbar:** Well, that's true. Sarah was an exception to that.

**Jacqui:** And Canelli

**Finnbar:** Well, both Canelli and Sarah are queer. But that makes sense because they're given a chance to think about it. I mean, a few years before I came out, if a trans\* person came out to me, I probably would have had the same reaction that everyone's having to my experience

because I hadn't thought about it yet. We just aren't raised with any sort of grey area or middle ground for almost *anything*.

### **11. Do you have a motto or something you say to yourself that helps you get through?**

**Finnbar:** Well, as I was going to maybe say for the last question, another really difficult thing I deal with is my own, you could call it self-doubt, but I just call it checking myself, but I think sometimes I check myself too much. I try and make sure that I really listen to what other people are saying, and I give it as much value and credit and consideration that I would want them to give what I'm saying. And that's a fair amount.

So I definitely deal with ... I make sure I ask myself: *Do I really feel this way?* And I check back, so I don't really have a saying or anything, except that I make sure that I also check myself on checking myself to say: *I think maybe I need to give myself some more credit here.* And then although I need to consider what other people are saying, it's possible that what they're saying is also coming from a place of ignorance and fear. So I'd say reminding myself of that is really important or else I'd just feel completely lost, stuck and sad.

### **12. What helps you get through the tough times?**

**Finnbar:** Mostly I fake it, but it's sort of a delicate balance because a lot of what gets me through is just myself, my reflection and my thinking. So it really helps me to think about the day and, you know, if someone said something to me or did something, or I didn't speak up for myself or I think back through the year or back my whole life. That can help me, but it can also not be helpful, in fact be somewhat detrimental because I start going around in circles and really questioning myself. So another thing that really helps me is just an action, you know, I'll wear a beard the next day because I want to. Or I'll just say something and I won't really censor myself, or I'll act how I know I want to act, even though I know that people will probably be validating their experience of me as female if I act that way. So I'd say, depending what I need, it's a balance of thought and action.

### **13. Is there anything you'd like to say to gender variant people, or people who wonder if they're gender variant, and then the other part is a message to all people. And feel free to split it or just do it together.**

**Finnbar:** I want to take this time to say: It goes way beyond gender, because variance and going outside the box is something I think we all need to do because I personally don't think that we fit inside of ... that anyone fits perfectly inside of any box, completely. And so I noticed today so many people taking sides or telling other people to pick a side, and there's almost always only two sides. When do you ever see in life only two sides, except when people make it up, and say that's the way it is? And so if you don't pick a side and ignorantly and angrily defend that till you die, then you're seen as a person with no conviction or of no use in some way. And I think that is ridiculous. So I think variance should be practiced by everyone and people can pick and choose what they find themselves to be variant in or what interests them about that. But I feel

like if you practice that in any area of your life, it will bleed over into other areas, and that obviously includes gender.

**Jacqui:** Anything else?

**Finnbar:** Well, maybe specifically to people who are questioning their gender, I've never really felt like I fit, even with gender variant and genderqueer communities. When I was coming out, I didn't feel really connected to anyone. I kind of felt like a poser and like I didn't know what I was doing, and like I was making a fool of myself. So, I just want to say that I didn't feel confident and that I think it's really important to trust yourself and also to not see it as a horrible thing if you end up being trans or if you end up deciding that you don't identify as trans, either way.

#### **14. What do you wish I would ask you and what have I left out?**

**Finnbar:** I feel like those were some really good questions. Maybe just throwing some ideas out there: maybe giving some concrete things that people can do when they interact with gender queer people. And really everyone just changing the idea of gender and also just because it really interests me, maybe more of a question about the culture in general. Well, you've pretty much asked that about "why are people afraid of variance and things like that?" Those are probably what I would say would interest me.

## Gender Personal: Interview #2 with Finnbar

### 1. How old were you when you started to experience your gender as different from what the world seemed to expect?

**Finnbar:** How old was I? When I was a very young kid I started to experience *myself* as different from what the world seemed to expect. And I currently see that as more significant.

**Jacqui:** Are you saying...not just gender-wise, but yourself? Your whole experience of yourself?

**Finnbar:** Mm-hm. Basically, what that looked like is: I kind of lived inside my head and I *was* myself as a kid, but people didn't really like that, so I slowly learned how to be somebody else. And that ended up...It didn't work very well. It ended up being a very flat persona. I did end up really trying to be a girl, and really trying to dress a certain way, act a certain way. Once people have sort of started to treat me as a guy, because now certain people read me as a guy I noticed female prejudice because they treat me as a much more competent person, and I've slowly started to feel that way about myself. Which I think I would have worked on anyway. But people in general think I'm more intelligent, think I'm less likely to make stupid mistakes.

**Jacqui:** Wow...

### 2. Tell me about your experience of yourself regarding your gender. How do you identify regarding your gender?

**Finnbar:** Ooh...I'd love to compare this to my first answer. Sort of like with question one, the way I interpret this question is "How do you identify?" Not "...regarding your gender?" because as I grow up things just keep becoming more and more connected. As in: less and less separated.

**Jacqui:** "Things"?

**Finnbar:** Everything. So, I think it would be a more full answer to answer that question as "How do you identify?" and gender is going to be in there. Anyway, I identify...Part of me identifies as a person, but I'm not going to say "human" because there's a lot attached to *human* and *humanity* that I think is false. Part of me identifies as *thing* [and/or] *being*. I definitely identify with cats—I think we have a lot in common. And I *do* identify as *male*. I don't identify as *female*, but that doesn't mean I'm not also female, because what we judge to be *female* is going to be a part of everybody. And a lot of people might not get that when I say "I identify as male" I'm really not attached to that identity, except for reasons of insecurity and things like that—things that are left over from my childhood and from growing up in this culture and being treated a certain way. But I actually feel very calm about my male identity. I just feel calmer as a person. And the more I go on living my life, feeling like the person I am, the less I think about my identity and the less I do actually label.



**Jacqui:** Can I ask a clarifying thing? We were talking about the fact that you use gender-neutral pronouns for other people and you prefer others to use male pronouns for you at this point. Can you say something about that?

**Finnbar:** Sure. Well, a lot of people struggle with the idea of gender-neutral pronouns because they assume—and even if you talk to them about this they can't get it out of their heads—that with gender-neutral pronouns there can't be gender expression. Which is *complete* bullshit. What's more, what does "neutral" mean? To me, neutrality is not flat. Neutrality is nature. Because nature, in my mind, is neutral because it doesn't judge, it doesn't deliver justice, but it also doesn't save. It does do all those things, but not on purpose. So, to me, neutrality actually means [that] you can go anywhere, because you're safe. You are a being, not a gender, so the possibilities are actually infinite rather than *one* or *only*, which is how some people read *neutral*. And in my mind [neutral] is much better than one or the other. Or even: male, female, genderqueer, bigender, agender. Yes, we can keep adding things, or we could just cancel it all out and let people be what they are. So if people called me "they" I would have my same identity, and I would have my exact same gender expression. And so I would have no problem if people called me "they." I do prefer that people call me "he," because I think it feeds a very old desire inside me to have that recognition. I believe if I had been born cis-male—or, should I say, if I had been born and the world had seen me as male and I had been called "he" for 19 years—I would probably right now be going by "they." But I would still have that male identity. A lot of people might interpret my "they" as my feeling gender-neutral. And, yes, I *would* feel gender neutral, but in the way of: I would feel like me.

**Jacqui:** This is so interesting. So, there's a way...I think what you're saying is that your preference for using male pronouns at this point in your life is honoring yourself and speaking to that part of yourself that kind of missed that for many, many years.

**Finnbar:** Yes, and I understand how someone could hear that and go, "That's hypocritical of you." But I actually think that would be close-minded of them to view it that way, because you can't just have one view of the world. I have the view of everyone just being a person and being who they are, but that doesn't mean that I don't also understand that culture does exist and we do have these concepts of male and female even if they are completely made up. And even though I actually...I don't think that should birth complacency or "Oh, that's just the way things are," it's more [that] I'm honoring that there is this desire in myself, even if it's a desire based on a stereotype it's still there. So I should honor that, not shove it, so that I can then move on from it.

**Jacqui:** What I heard you say in terms of gender-neutral...instead of it being *empty*, it feels complex and full of possibility.

**Finnbar:** Mm-hm. So I would actually imagine a society that used gender-neutral pronouns as having much *more* gender expression than ours does, and much more honest gender expression.

### 3. How long did you know you were transgender or gender non-conforming before you came out/told other people?

**Finnbar:** I can't really remember the timeline. It was probably at least a few months.

**Jacqui:** Can you talk about your looming understanding? How you figured it out?

**Finnbar:** I think one of the most important bits is that...I would say I *didn't* know before I came out. I would say I didn't know I was gender-variant, transgender, my gender, until maybe a year after I came out now that I think about it. Because I was filled with self-doubt, and I was so confused. Basically what was going on in my head....I have so many thoughts going on, and if I ever think I'm sure of something that's when I immediately start to doubt it. So that was perhaps the most difficult thing, because as soon as I started to actually accept or actually believe that I might be male, that's when I would go *How do you know?* to myself, *How can you be sure? You can't be sure.* And that was horrible. So when I came out I had been doing that to myself for a while. I had sort of tried to shift my clothing, I had thought about what it might be like to use [male] pronouns, but really coming out was just me—making the pronouns request *wasn't* me coming out, it was me going *Let's test this hypothesis.* And then it just kind of went from there and it happened to be correct.

**Jacqui:** So, I'm just going to ask you one more piece to this question, because I remember you talking about...Could you just say a little bit about how you came upon the hypothesis?

**Finnbar:** What I remember is: I was going to Queer Group at my school. And identifying as... [laughs] So, ok, so I did think I was lesbian for a while, but now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure I was going to Queer Group because I liked *guys!* Which makes *no* sense...unless I sort of knew I was queer for liking guys. That's really interesting... And at the same time I was in this class called *The History of Psychology.* And it was Halloween. And [the teacher] said "At Halloween people sometimes dress as the thing that is inside them but they're not showing." And [they] gave the example of a french maid that someone who's kind of sexually repressed might dress as. ...Or that was the day before Halloween, I can't remember...But on Halloween, without thinking about it, I dressed in male clothing, but not *as a male character.* Just in male clothing. But not to the point either where anyone would know I was wearing a costume. And then it occurred to me that I had done the same thing last year. All I did was logically say [to myself] *Is there a guy in me that I'm not aware of?* And I just started thinking about that day-to-day and started realizing that that seemed kind of right. And at the same time I was going to Queer Group. I had Debbie—who was queer—as my advisor. I can't remember the order of things, but at some point—without telling Debbie...I hadn't said anything to them—we always went around at the beginning of Queer Group and said a name and a pronoun and how we were feeling. I can't remember what name I gave, but I said "he" one time, because it was a safe space and because I knew people would honor that. I can't remember if anyone had the opportunity to refer to me during that time, but obviously Debbie noticed and things kind of went from there.

At some point after a few more Queer Group meetings I had a meeting with Debbie about school stuff, and we talked about identity and pronouns. And I'm pretty sure I told them, you know "I don't know. I don't know about this. And I don't know if I want to make this a public thing

because what if I *change my mind*?” That is probably how I framed it at the time. *What if it turns out that I’m wrong about this?* But at the same time I didn’t think I was wrong. So, anyway, Debbie and I decided...Or Debbie gave me the space to decide that I did want to send an e-mail out to the teachers so they could just start referring to me like that in class day-to-day. But at the same time I was going *What are they going to think of me? Are they going to think I’m faking?* and it’s just awkward. There were certain teachers that I thought *How are they gonna take that?* And the next—I have a very clear memory. It must have been during a break because classes were set up to start again—a new set of classes—and all the teachers go around to each Core and speak a little bit about each of their classes. Terrence...they come in, say their bit, then they needed to call on someone or something....and I wasn’t raising my hand or anything, and they go “Eli,” –which was the name I was using— “What do you think?” And I felt...I thought I would hate it, because I hate being put on the spot and hardly anybody knew, but I *liked* it. And that was definitely significant.

**Jacqui:** Go Terrence.

**Finnbar:** Yes. Terrence. Thank you. I remember thinking when Terrence said “Eli” to me in front of everybody, *Am I going to not like that they said that? Was that actually bad of them to sort of call me out?* But then I realized that at least to me it really wasn’t because they were actually honoring me and respecting me more than anybody else really had, except for maybe Debbie. And just thinking about it right now...after that came the months and months of nobody [calling] me by my name, nobody would call me by my right pronouns...And Terrence not only had done that, they had done that without me requesting it in any form except the e-mail. So that was really impressive on their part—that they also didn’t feel shy about it.

#### 4. Did you have an experience of being afraid to come out?

**Finnbar:** You know what I really don’t like? How in this culture you’re supposed to be sure of things. You’re not supposed to change your mind. You’re not supposed to make a declaration and not be able to stand by it and defend it until the very end. And I think that doesn’t provide very much space for self-exploration, and I think that’s a bad thing. What if it had been welcomed that I was going on this internal journey and having these discoveries, whatever they might end up being? But, *no*. Instead the reaction was “Whoa! How can you be sure? How can you know? What does it mean? *How do you know you’re male?*” Of course, that lovely question. So, yes, I was afraid to come out because it was gender, but I was also afraid to come out because I was *unsure*.

**Jacqui:** Can you say a little bit about the...when you were faced with the question of “How do you know?”

**Finnbar:** So, the question “How do you know you’re male?” or “How do you know you’re not female?” was asked of me many times. And because I was having so much trouble not doubting myself my response to that was often “I don’t know.” It was very...My response was often very defensive and unsure and apologetic. And as I started to learn more about gender variance and started to become more comfortable with myself I started to realize that that was a very ignorant question because people who believed they weren’t gender variant almost never asked it of

themselves. And why not? It's an interesting question if you aren't looking for a solid, specific answer because it leads us into areas like *What is gender? What do we mean when we say "I identify as male, I identify as female"*? But, basically, the way I see it is...they were taking their self doubt and their doubt that they *were* actually male or female or that they *knew* they were, and forcing that onto me. Because you don't have a problem asking yourself questions like that if you do know the answer, but no, nobody know the answer to that question, so they *wouldn't* ask themselves.

**Jacqui:** I agree. I think it's also...I mean, I discovered very early that that was a very bad question but I think that the question can come from fear *for you* [Finnbar, etc.] I'm thinking of...certain people...who thought "Oh no, this is gonna lead to bad things for you, I want to protect you..." so...pushing on that.

**Finnbar:** Oh, yes. So, I think you're kind of saying that if they ask me that question I probably *wouldn't* be able to answer it and maybe they unconsciously or consciously knew that, so that would likely put a seed of doubt in me—which they didn't need to do because it was already there.

**Jacqui:** And to change your mind.

**Finnbar:** Change my mind. Yes.

**Jacqui:** Get you to stop being foolish and stop all this silly talk about being a different gender, and put the dress back on.

**Finnbar:** Mm-hm. *Well*, I will put the dress back on.

**Jacqui:** Yeah, from a totally different place I must say.

## **5. How has your view of gender or your relationship to gender changed over time?**

**Finnbar:** It's become more connected to everything else that I think about and deal with. It's basically...First it rose to the surface and became the center of my universe, and now...it has melted and become a part of my life, but not in a solid form.

## **6. How have writers and other people affected you or helped you?**

**Finnbar:** Not much. I would say writers about the topic of gender haven't affected me very much—there have been a few, but I don't even think it's worth mentioning. Writers who have affected me are Thomas Moore, who wrote Utopia, the book I'm currently reading, Prisons we choose to live inside...books like that which question reality, those are the ones that have affected me very much regarding gender, and of course other things. Because people can write about gender all they want, but the problem with that is: you're still...you're then dealing with it through the eyes of the culture and even if you're trying to say *The cultural view is wrong*, that's still where you're starting from instead of [coming from] more of an open place. I mean, I guess

the books I'm talking about, too, are still trying to convince people of certain things and even [though they are] suggesting very different ideas they are coming at it through the lens of the culture we live in now or the culture they lived in at that time. But....Ah! What I've learned is: break down the oppressor within the self. Another influential book [for me] was Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Friere. And that's what I've been focusing on. So, reading those books helps me break down those things internally, and that's why they've been helpful.

**Jacqui:** I have to say Kate Borinstein.

**Finnbar:** I think they affected *you*. They did help me, but it doesn't top my list. It more kind of helped me not commit suicide, which I know seems like a rather big deal, but in the end, it was too simplistic.

**Jacqui:** However, at least it kept you around so that you could read the other books.

## **7. What do you want others to understand about how you experience yourself and your gender?**

**Finnbar:** That it's probably not how they experience themselves.

**Jacqui:** Who?

**Finnbar:** Anyone. So, One: everyone has a different experience of how they identify and how they experience their gender, even if they all say "I identify *this way*," and the words are the same.

Secondly, I want them to understand that I've spent a lot of time thinking about this that they probably haven't. And I don't mean that in a way, I just mean that I've spent a lot of time thinking about it that they probably haven't. And so I *will* probably have a different view on it because of that.

Thirdly, I don't want to be viewed as a *trans man*, because—like a bunch of other concepts—it's taken on a life of its own and I don't agree with that and I don't identify with that. People ask me how I identify...I identify as male. Right? So, did you hear "trans" anywhere in that?

Right now I have scars on my chest that are visible and if people were to see that, or if I were to change in a male changing room and I don't have a penis the way they expect me to, that's probably going to cause a bunch of people some anxiety...It's going to make them treat me differently! I want thinking about that on a walk the other day, and it pissed me off! I almost had to punch something. I realized that...Say I'm consistently *passing*, and then someone—consider all of this to be in quotation marks—say I'm "passing" and then someone "find out" that I was "born female"...It makes me *so mad* that that would change who I am in their eyes, because I am *no different*. And that from then [on] they might start seeing me as female in some way that they are *not* female. Or [as] a woman who *became* a man. And see, I'm even leaving out the worst options, like: *You're a woman who thinks that you're a man*, and everything like that.



So, what I want people to understand is that I'm a *man*, and that's it. I have a different life experience than you, and so does the person sitting next to you who was born with a [typical] penis. It's so fucking stupid, and it's just because of their ignorance and their prejudice, and yet I'm the one who would have to deal with not being respected, not being seen, not just being who I am! No! If you're cis you *don't* have to deal with that! You *don't* have to deal with taking your shirt off and having there be scars that someone might see and then make that judgment about you and completely negate your personal identity and your experience.

**Jacqui:** And that's what this is about. It's about pushing back.

**Finnbar:** I kind of already said it, but...Some people identify as *trans\** but in my mind there isn't *trans\** and *non-trans\**, because if you identify as a gender...I mean, that's a big thing that *trans\** people say—[laugh] did you see what I said there? ["trans"]—that cis people identify as their gender just as much as someone who physically transitioned. And people don't think about that. And we talked about earlier the question of *How do you know you're this or that?* Well, it may be a stupid question, but it's just as valid to ask somebody who don't have a problem with the body that they're in. And that's what I really want people to understand.

It's amazing how much people still think that it *is* a choice, that we went *from* female *to* male or male *to* female, that when we came out is when we started *being* male or female. All these things. Or when you went on hormones or had surgery. Or that you are pretending. That it's maybe a step *above* pretending, but you're still just *passing*, you're not *being* that gender. And it's very reminiscent....*Trans\** was considered a disease for a long time. Well, so was being gay. And what did people think? People thought that you chose to be gay or that it was a disease. It's very reminiscent of what's going on now. And what have we realized? That all of that is inaccurate.

**Jacqui:** And I talked to this guy at Gender Odyssey who said he really hates the word "stealth," because he said "I just want to live as myself. I do not want to be saying all the time 'I'm a trans man, I'm a trans man.' I'm not. I'm a man."

**Finnbar:** Right. People would consider that *hiding*, but it's actually probably being the most genuine. Unless the way you want to live and the way you consider yourself...

**Jacqui:** Or that you want to do something politically.

**Finnbar:** Or when it becomes relevant. And I look at it as everyone's personal lifestyle choice, it's just that ours happens to be under more scrutiny.

I was at Lake Chelan recently, I had just had chest surgery, and I took my shirt off to go in the water—because I wouldn't get arrested, which is stupid—and depending on who would be looking at me that could have been me *coming out* in my own way. But that was just because of who *I* am, and if I had been someone else I might have left my shirt on, I might have done [what I did] for *extremely* political reasons. It just depends on the person. My gosh...

## 8. What is gender?

**Finnbar:** Yeah, I saw that in your book...And I thought, *I'm not sure I want to answer that*. I'll try and answer it really quickly: I don't know.

**Jacqui:** Great. Shall we go to the next question?

## 9. What have you learned about gender and gender expression?

**Finnbar:** I've learned that...I feel like I'm really repeating myself...I've learned that it's all individual, it's all personal, and the best way to do it is to go inside and as best you can [try to] not pay any attention to what people outside you are thinking—or what you think they may be thinking.

## 10. Why do you think people are afraid of gender variance?

**Finnbar:** I think it's highly cultural. I think we've been taught that variance of any kind is a negative thing unless it's currently popular. But if it's popular to be variant, in my view, it's not really variance anymore. I think we've been taught to block out or make unconscious anything that doesn't fit with the way we've been raised. And this really doesn't fit for a lot of people. It's a reality break. That's why it doesn't pay to be certain. Because certainty is foolish. *We can't* be certain. We can't be certain that we *exist*, we can't trust time and space, so how on earth can we trust male and female? So, the most certain you are about something the more of a threat it is to your personal safety if something shows you...People only find it threatening if they actually think it's true. If they really thought we [trans people] were all just making it up, then they would just wave it off. [They would think] that we seriously *would* get over it. But they somehow know that it's not fake, because it's in them too. Basically what I'm saying is: they're afraid of it because then they couldn't live in their bubble anymore.

## 11. How do people respond to you?

**Finnbar:** I'd like to address the more recent things, because I've probably covered some of it [in my last interview].

Now, especially if I talk, people will “dude” me and stuff. If they interpret me as being male—especially if they also identify as male—it's a very sort of *bro* relationship, I find. That's how they relate to me. I haven't noticed women being afraid of me, which might have something to do with my “hippie” look or my height or my stature. But often if I'm just wandering around and I haven't said anything—especially if I'm with a female identified person—I still get “ladies” a lot. Which is very bothersome, because they are making a strong assumption. And I think that might have something to do with the length of my hair...which is also stupid.

What I don't know—I'll be really curious to go back to school, because I've also noticed that if people are unsure [about your gender] they tend not to speak up and not to ask questions. So a

big chunk of how people are reacting to me *I have no idea* because they aren't saying anything to me. I might get some vibes from people, but I have no idea if I'm interpreting that right. The vibes I feel like I'm getting are: confusion: *Is that a man or a woman? I can't tell*. And I think that makes people uncomfortable.

It was very interesting in my last class at Evergreen. I wasn't specifically trying to be seen as male, though I hoped that would happen. I didn't put a lot of effort into it. But that is what happened. Everyone called me "he," without me *ever* requesting it, which was a *very* different experience from my experience at Alderleaf. And at that point I had not had chest surgery, but I didn't want to let go of the fact that they had seen me that way [as male]. And I didn't want to do what I had talked about in the previous question, where people know that I'm *male*, but then when they see certain bits of biology, change their minds or act differently towards me. So I did hide my breasts in that class.

Other than the fact that a bunch of things about it made me uncomfortable and angry that that's how our culture still is, even at institutions like that, that was so nice. It was just so nice.

**Jacqui:** Do you want to speak about Alderleaf at all?

**Finnbar:** Alderleaf is a wilderness college in Monroe, Washington that—at the time I attended, which was not very long ago [2011]—was not aware or accepting of gender variance *at all*. Not the teachers, not the students. People knew nothing, people were extremely disrespectful. I can't tell you how many times I told people to use "he" for me. *One* person sort of switched by the end of six months, or however long it was. And maybe two to three people used "he" once if I corrected them multiple times in one sentence. They would say, "Oh, right." They would probably say "Oh, right." and not actually say "he," the fuckers. And the teachers had good intentions, wanted to help, had no idea how to. And, granted, I was very much on the journey of discovery—new discovery. I didn't know how to help myself. But that's all the more reason that I really needed support, and I did not get it. And it was awful.

## 12. How do you wish people would respond to you?

**Finnbar:** Very simply, I wish people would see me as a person. I wish they would see my gender as literally *no different* from anyone else's gender except when it comes to my experience. And everybody's experience is going to be different. That's all.

**Jacqui:** If someone is unsure about your gender, do you like being asked?

**Finnbar:** When we come to specifics, I wish people would ask a lot more. It's also a cultural thing—you don't want to offend anybody. But I think it's much more important to ask the individual than to offend a bigot by asking them what pronouns they prefer. Because guess what? You never know until you ask. And just so everyone's aware: no, it's not more ok to offend and oppress trans\* people than cis people. No, it's not more ok to treat minorities badly, or to treat them worse than majorities. It's just...it's not a question. But, in our culture, you don't offend the idiots, [the privileged people] you offend the people who are already getting hurt every day.

I was talking to someone the other day, and I was asking them about queer radicals because it's relevant to a project I'm doing. And I know virtually nothing about queer radicals. But what they were saying was: the radicals that they respect are aware that there is virtually an ongoing war against queer and trans people. To the death, basically. It sounds a bit extreme, but if you actually think about it, people are trying to kill us, including members of our family, including our friends, whether they realize it or not—which is rather scary. The epidemic of queer teen suicide—those [suicides] could very easily be interpreted as collective murder. Which is a hard truth to face: that your own society and your own culture would rather have you dead than honest. And the truth is, that's true for everybody. Everybody in society—I would imagine—feel like they can't be their true self in one way or another. And if they were—depending on how far they took it—society might kill them for it. My point is that I'm not sure if people realize that when they question trans\* people in certain ways, when they're not supportive...how damaging it is. And all you have to do is look at the suicides to tell how damaging it is. You might be killing your kid.

### **13. What are the hardest things you deal with or have dealt with?**

**Finnbar:** Depression. Since I like to question everything, and I live in a rather oppressive culture, it's really difficult not to get into a negative spiral. And gender has both really helped and really been hard [when it comes to depression]. In a way, it's been great, because I'm so much more myself now that no matter what the outside world is doing, as long as I can do what I want and what I need, I can manage. And I wasn't doing that before. But on the other hand, it just gives...It automatically makes me more of a target. And it opened up my eyes to a whole part of society that I wasn't even aware of. And I was one of those people living pretty clueless—living very clueless as to what gender-variant people that *knew* they were gender variant, dealt with.

So, not losing hope is a really hard one. I want to say *other people*, but it doesn't feel all that...accurate. They don't...They might do things that are kind of horrible, but in the end the hardest things that *I've* dealt with...The hardest thing I've dealt with is accepting myself. And of course I'm still working on that, but I've taken huge steps and once I took those [steps] life got so much easier. The things other people did, including the absolutely horrible things, became more neutral to me. If anything, I want to fight those things much more than I did, but I've...I view them now as choices people made and are making, that are just like my choices. They happen because of who that person are, where are how they grew up, and a series of events that took place before that decision they made.

Something I said the other day was: Once I decided that I wasn't stupid, that I wasn't a certain kind of stupid, no one could make me feel stupid in that way, because I knew that I wasn't. So, my next step is knowing that I'm not evil, that I'm not *bad*, I'm not a bother to society, I'm not insane—I am insane—, I'm not *messed up*, I'm not gross... *I* need to know these things, or no one else ever will.

#### 14. Do you have a motto or something you say to yourself that helps you get through?

**Finnbar:** I currently say to myself—I'm writing a script, and I had to ask myself why I was writing the script and what I wanted to communicate with it—and I decided what I wanted to communicate was: that everyone's really smart, interesting, complex...no matter what their beliefs are, *and* everyone's an idiot. I think it's really important to not get stuck in thinking that the people that you think think like you are better than the people that don't. Even the people that think totally differently than you do. They have reasons for thinking that way, believe it or not. And they probably think *you're* an idiot for thinking the way that you do, even though you think it's perfectly reasonable. So, I might have the belief that we should all respect each other. But someone else might think that we *shouldn't!* And who's to say? Besides, it's all super complex, anyway. You know: What does respect mean? and I might think we should respect each other in *this* way, or *this* is what respect looks like...whereas other people might have a totally different picture!

And here's another thing that I live by: *I'm not right*. And I'm definitely not right about everything. I also live by: There is no *right*, there is no *wrong*. I might use those words [occasionally], but I'm trying to stop using them. And I honestly, genuinely, fully believe that there isn't such a thing, because nature doesn't have *right* and *wrong*. So why should I? But at the same time—I say this sarcastically—I don't assume I'm right about that.

#### 15. What helps you get through the tough times?

**Finnbar:** [Laughs, J laughs] I love to laugh. My sibling said to me a while back when I was seriously depressed, something to the effect of: even when I'm [Finnbar] at my lowest, I still low and still have a sense of humor. It tends to be rather strange, it tends to be rather dark, but I think everything's funny. You know, one of the funniest things in the world to me are people. So the ability to laugh at people being idiots has been so helpful [Laughs].

#### 16. Is there anything you'd like to say to gender variant people or people who wonder if they're gender variant?

**Finnbar:** I would like to say to...everyone—which I remember is the second part of the question—that you *are* gender variant. I would say that to people questioning as well, of course, question, because I think everybody need to know these things: You *are* variant. You *do* see the world differently from everybody else, even if you're perfectly functioning person in society, even if you seem to live by every standard society asks of you.

#### 17. What is unique about you?

**Finnbar:** Apparently I'm wise. [J laugh] Or so I hear.

**Jacqui:** Does that mean you're a wise guy?



**Finnbar:** [Laughs] Yeah, it does mean that. And I know that—‘cause I’m wise. I seem to have a particular kind of insight. And at the moment I’m struggling because my culture has taught me not to say things like this about myself because it’s...what’s the word I’m looking for? Egotistical.

But people made fun of me as a kid for not knowing certain things about how society functioned, but I believe it’s because I didn’t care. And I was interested in other things. So, I think what’s unique about me is what is unique about everyone, and that is: my interests. Because what you’re interested in is what you’ll hopefully allow yourself to focus on. And you’re gonna focus on it a lot, because you’re interested in it. And it’s going to end up being its own unique *combination*, because you’ll be interested in *this, this, this, this, and this side of that, and that side of this*, and it’s going to form your own interest ball. So, *you* are going to want to study frogs, and someone else will want to study daffodils—which is obviously a highly simplistic version.

So I think what is unique about me is that I’m interested in the things I’m interested in, and I love to think about and work on those things. Sorry—just so everyone’s not confused: *that’s* not what is unique, what is unique is what my interests are. Because that will always end up being different.

**Jacqui:** But it seems to me that one thing that’s unique about you is that you have learned to follow those interests...to dig into those interests.

**Finnbar:** That’s true: I happened to be interested enough in thinking and reflection to notice that school and various other things had made me believe I didn’t care about many things that I do care about, like Social Justice, like learning itself. And another thing I love to do is apply that knowledge, so that’s what I did next. And now I am perusing my interests, and I don’t even know how that happened, but I love it. And if I can help people be more loving toward each other, I’d like to do that.

## 18. What are a few of your favorite books or movies?

**Finnbar:** Pedagogy of the Oppressed. What are those other ones? Oh! Summerhill! And the one I’m reading, Prisons We Choose to Live Inside has been really helpful right now, too. I like Summerhill because it has a lot of ideas about parenting and children that would still be considered quite progressive. I don’t happen to like that word very much, but I don’t have a better one. I think what I took from that book was that children are people. Because—like the work “trans-”—the words “kid” and “child” have a lot of connotations with them that are not very healthy. And I think ageism is a huge problem in society—in our society, and [it] is *not* being addressed the way gender and sexuality and things like that are being addressed. What I’m trying to say is that everyone’s a person, and it doesn’t matter how long they’ve been on the earth. And, no, you’re not necessarily *wiser* than someone who have been alive for less time than you. I think all those books I’ve mentioned—and the ones I didn’t mention that have really affected me—spoke to me because they understood the complexity of the world and that there’s never one answer. I really don’t like books that have the mentality of, “Here you go. *Now* you know.” It’s just never true.

**Jacqui:** How about movies?

**Finnbar:** [laugh] Movies...I like ones with creative psychopaths that I can identify with. Another part of myself that is not very easily accepted is my sadistic, psychopathic part. *I'm* very accepting of it now, and some [other] people are as well. I just...*love*...the feeling that those characters give me. Especially if they're written and acted very well.

**Jacqui:** Do you want to give me a title?

**Finnbar:** I liked Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*, though Batman's stupid. I liked *There will be blood* and *No country for Old Men* a lot. *Silence of the Lambs*...good book and good movie. Probably better book. And, believe it or not, my answer was related to gender.

Addition: I like movies that understand and show that there is not a clear cut "good and evil." And even movies I like where there is such, I don't tend to look at it that way, because I'm often very annoyed by the *good* person and really enjoying the *bad* person, so to *me* it is not clear-cut. I also like movies where *everyone* are the villains. It fits in well with my motto that everyone's an idiot. I think it's very important to recognize the darkness and chaos within ourselves in order to fully access the light.

## 19. What are a few of your favorite pieces of music?

**Finnbar:** I really like *Les Miserables*...in other languages. I really like music in other languages, because each language is beautiful. But, more importantly, they have different sentence structure, words that can't be translated, ways that the language reflects the culture...And the biggest reason I want to learn a bunch of languages is to gain personal practice in reality shifting. Language, I think...People often say that language mirrors the culture, language blinds you in certain ways. So I think studying and learning different languages is very important because it can provide a different way of seeing the world, and I think hardly anyone actually view it that way. That's another reason that I prefer to learn language as a baby would learn it. So—I'll surround myself with that language without translating it instead of learning: cow, vaca; snake, serpiente. Because if you learn through translation, not only will it actually probably take [more] time, and you'll be less fluent and able to think in the language faster, but *languages do not actually translate*, and if you learn that way you're going to keep your language block, your language barrier, and your language bias. And that has to do with gender because...we're stuck! We're stuck in our culture, we're stuck in our way of viewing the world, we're stuck in our way of viewing gender. And people get stuck in the way they view the people they're close to—they don't let them be fluid, they don't let them be changing...be whoever they are.

So, if someone you believe is female—even though that's totally your personal judgment—comes to you and say, "Oh, I'm actually male," then you freak out because you were stuck, whereas if you're more comfortable with going between the languages, between the worlds, between the genders, between realities, then it's not as scary.

## 20. What is the best part of being transgender?

**Finnbar:** I'm sure it's been said a lot, but a big thing for me is: the amount of thinking time and reflection time it has given me. Because you can't think about *What gender am I?* without thinking *Who am I?* and that covers so many more bases for yourself. And that question is asked surprisingly little, and even if it is asked, it can be forgotten easily. But you have to stick with the question in this case—it forces you to stick with it. If you care. So, it really helped me take a long, hard look at how I was living, who I am, who I want to be, what's inside me, “How *do* I view the world?” And that hasn't gone away. And I've probably spent more time doing that than the average cis-gendered person my age because of it. And I will probably spend much more time over the span of a lifetime doing that. So I definitely thank it for that. Of course, I would have much rather just grown up in a society that encouraged that from the *beginning*, but...oh, well.

## 21. What do you wish I would ask you and what have I left out?

**Finnbar:** Because of who *I* am, I think it's important to ask questions that are about the world in general and/or seemingly unrelated to gender. But I'm not sure if other people getting interviewed would get that or not, or if that would be beneficial to *them*. But, in this case, I managed to interpret certain questions the way I did.

**Jacqui:** Can you think of a question? The ones about your favorite books and movies? Favorite music?...Those are non-gender question. And I ask those on purpose.

**Finnbar:** I liked those.

### Bonus Question:

## 22. What words do you use to describe your gender and that of people that are *not* cis-gendered? What pronouns do you prefer?

**Finnbar:** Language question...Do you have in there “What words do you dislike?” Including popular words. I don't like the word “ally,” because it differentiates people, it separates them. And it gives the impression that your friend [the queer person] is the weird one, and you [the cis/straight person] are the sane one, and you're just kind of helping them be their weird [abnormal] self. Also, it really doesn't encourage...I think you'd be a much better *friend*—I prefer the word “friend” shall I say—I think you'd be a much better friend if you *self-examine*. And I think that if you view yourself as an *ally* your focus goes towards the other person, and gosh, I totally agree with myself about this. I would say my advice in general, if you know someone gender variant and you don't consider yourself gender variant, is: look at yourself. Look at your gender, question your gender, question your gender roles, question the gender roles of society. Forget that other person even exist!...in a certain way. Because you will be a much better help to them if you are a similar path than if you're just trying to understand their experience, because you never will, because no one will *ever* understand someone else's experience.

My words keep changing. Another thing I've discovered is that you can use language however you want, and I really wish other people would start to understand [that] and use that more. I'm really trying to take out [of my vocabulary] the words that I don't agree with—whether about gender or not. I don't like saying “male *to* female,” “female *to* male,” because that very clearly communicates the picture that you *were* one before you were the other, and I don't feel that I was. I was *treated* that way. I don't really like the word “trans” myself, or “transgender,” because of the connotations and because I think it means *across*. But I do like the word “transition,” because I think it's an important part of life, and I think everybody goes through it. And as someone in my family said to me, “We all transitioned with you,” and I think that's often left out: It's not [just] the *trans\** person who's transitioning, it's *everybody*, transitioning their reality!

**Jacqui:** So it's transitioning our reality, not transitioning you.

**Finnbar:** Right! Because they *were* always that person. What they're doing is realizing it within themselves, and possibly physically making alterations.

Words I do like: person. I don't like “he” “she” I don't like “male” “female” “woman” “man.” I've sort of adopted that I will describe specific things, as opposed to using a label, if possible.

**Jacqui:** Like the furry thing with paws that you feed cat food to?

**Finnbar:** Yeah, like that. Exactly! Because it's gonna be different, and then you can describe your experience. You can say, “When I was young,” or you can say “When I was a kid,” or you can say “When I was five,” or you can say “When I had recently been born,” “In the past.” It all depends on what actually works for you, because maybe you didn't identify as a “child” in the way society sees it. Does that make sense?

**Jacqui:** It does. And one thought I had was: Once we put the title, the label, the name on something, then we think we both understand what it means. Like, if I say “the child,” my picture of “child” and what “childness” is and what “children” do...then I think we're in agreement of what that is and how we should interface with that...thing. And you're saying by *not* labeling it, that we leave more of the conversation open to discussion. It's more process oriented.

**Finnbar:** And it might seem like it's being more vague, but actually, if you have to describe something you're much clearer. And the thing about labels is that then it leads to some very confusing statements once people start realizing that those labels don't work well enough, like “precocious child.” We only have to say that because when we say “child” it's very often assumed that they're young *so* they're stupid, or they're immature or something like that. So if you're talking about a child and describing them because you met them and they had these incredible insights or something to that effect...

**Jacqui:** Well, one of the things that's sort of flashed through my brain a couple of times as you've been talking is how the question came up of “Are you old enough to make this important decision?” How many times did that question come up to you?

**Finnbar:** A lot.

**Jacqui:** A lot. And now I've talked to people who are half your age—less than half your age—who are very clear that they're not the gender that everybody thought they were when they were born. And if I talk about those people wanting to, say, take the hormones...to change what they're body's looking like as they go through puberty, I hear people go: \*gasp!\* *They can't possibly be old enough to make that decision, to make that choice, to do that thing.* People get really afraid of people who are younger than they are making important decisions.

**Finnbar:** But no one would question someone we consider to be male-bodied choosing to go through male puberty. [laugh] You know? But they're only 12! Maybe 11. [sarcastic] Seems pretty young to *me!* We shouldn't let people make that decision at such a young age! We should do puberty blockers for everyone until they're 25, because that's when your brain is fully developed! ....I can't tell you how many times I've heard that.

**Jacqui:** Brain fully developed?

**Finnbar:** Brain fully developed: age 25.

**Jacqui:** I thought it was 26.

**Finnbar:** [sarcastic] Yeah, it's 26. No—it's 30.

**Jacqui:** [sarcastic] Another year to... 77!

**Finnbar:** Do you really want to throw an arbitrary age out there, or do you want to look at who the person actually are? I mean, I've run into some 36-year-olds making terrible life decisions—HUGE terrible life decisions! And the decision I made to go on Testosterone was such a great decision! It may have saved my life as well in its own way. So, *yes*, I think people do know who Finnbar...

**Jacqui:** What if they change their mind?

**Finnbar:** Then they'll change their mind. But they probably won't. People do know who they are. I think they actually tend to know it *less and less* as they get older—not that that would happen naturally, but because we learn to suppress it. So, probably, a younger kid would be much more aware of who they really are in our culture, and be much more aware of what they need and what their hormone balance should be.