

Dysphoria; A Personal Transgender, Otherkin Perspective

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Dysphoria is generally categorized as a feeling of deep unease and distress regarding something pertaining to oneself; gender dysphoria is perhaps the most well-known example of a specific form of dysphoria, manifesting as distress due to a gender identity which does not match the individual's sex assigned at birth, mainly associated with transgender individuals. Gender dysphoria inhabits a fragile space within transgender spaces; for some individuals, gender dysphoria is a sacred marking of the legitimacy of their gender identity, an ultimately negative experience which must be acknowledged in its purest form in order to cultivate validity and worthiness. For others, dysphoria is merely viewed as a unfortunately common, complex and layered issue which many trans people will experience in a variety of different ways depending on their own personal experiences and the understandings of their sense of self. Because of this, gender dysphoria (and other forms of dysphoria, by extension of association) can be a hot-button topic, even for those of us who experience it to talk about. It is a constant tug-of-war between keeping gender dysphoria in its "proper" place as a pure marker, versus examining the individuality and diversity of experience.

With that unhealthy duality acknowledged, I am now free to speak on my own experiences with dysphoria. Namely, both gender dysphoria, as someone who is transgender, and species dysphoria, as someone who is otherkin. While it is frowned upon by members within both communities to talk about such experiences in the same space and even insofar as (gods forbid) in relation to one another, there comes a point where one must draw the difference between just wariness, and paranoia to the point of cowardice. My experiences are my own, regardless of outsider exaggeration and extrapolation beyond my control, and I deserve a place in which to speak about them.

I have experienced dysphoria throughout my entire life. Species dysphoria was much more prevalent when I was pre-pubescent, while gender dysphoria manifested once sex characteristics started to manifest during puberty.

Species dysphoria came about in several forms; I felt completely separate from my physical body through a majority of my childhood, more comfortable running around on

all fours than I ever was on two. My limbs felt wrong in ways that escaped explanation. I couldn't understand why I lacked in fur, in claws, in digitigrade legs; though I didn't have the words for it then as a child, looking back it was clearly a underlying, constant stressor that rivaled a physical pain. Believing my experience of such strong disassociation from my body was normal, I did not think twice when the inherent "wrongness" regarding my physical appearance only increased as I went through puberty. Gender dysphoria raised its ugly head, especially in regards to my chest. I found myself unconsciously avoiding taking off my baggy shirts in any circumstance save showering and changing, even going so far as to avoid swimming, all because looking at my chest made me angry and upset in ways I figured were standard. Every time I glanced at myself in a mirror, the compounding dysphorias created an effect similar to having a bucket of ice abruptly dumped on my head; unexpected, jarring, and viscerally uncomfortable. I was a stranger to myself.

During high school I was introduced to the idea of gender dysphoria and, much later, species dysphoria. It was then I realized that perhaps such experiences weren't normal, after all, and began tackling both problems in earnest. I had more resources when it came to gender dysphoria than species dysphoria, understandably; a change in clothing and subtle, temporary modifications to my chest helped in the short term while a change in name and pronouns helped in the long term. While hormones and surgeries would have been ideal, those were not and are not currently sustainable options for me; money and time are factors which plague my struggle with gender dysphoria and will most likely continue to for the foreseeable future.

Species dysphoria was not something so easily tackled. Growing out my body hair helped, alongside some more silly modifications: fake canines, a tattoo, certain hats, shoes, and masks. More unconventional methods to be sure, but just as life-improving as my much more standard, gender-related changes. Some changes, such as wardrobe changes, helped both; other times, it was a give-and-take.

It became a balancing act that I'm still perfecting to this day. Some days I manage to overcome both species and gender dysphoria, not letting them affect my emotional state or ability to function. Some days I don't manage.

Given my own experiences, it frustrates me that only one of the forms of dysphoria mentioned above, gender dysphoria, is taken as 'legitimate.' And even then, gender dysphoria is only taken seriously under specific circumstances by cisgender individuals and transmedicalist transgender individuals alike: circumstances I violate through my admission that, for me personally, my gender dysphoria is directly intertwined and interacts with my species dysphoria, therefore 'tainting' the experience and its usefulness as a marking of a legitimate transgender identity. My identity as someone who is transgender is not scrutinized so long as I keep my mouth shut in non-otherkin spaces regarding my experiences surrounding species dysphoria, something I both resent and find perplexing. Why do those who do not share in my lived experiences get to dictate whether or not what I experience is truly "real" and worthy of civility—who are they to make such a call, hypocritical as they are?

It certainly doesn't help that even within the otherkin community, plenty of community spaces exist which openly disavow species dysphoria. Suggestions regarding how to help ease it, or actions which individuals have taken and openly admitted were done for the purpose of helping with their dysphoria, are relentlessly mocked as attention-seeking and ridiculous. Yet when those same actions simultaneously help one's gender dysphoria, suddenly a deafening silence emits from those same people. There is an observable hierarchy of dysphoria present that needs to be abolished. Its existence is a product of foolish human pride and the refusal of a select few to acknowledge experiences outside of their own; a byproduct of what we commonly call online "cringe culture." Instead of persisting in the denial of such highly individual, personal experiences, it would do us better to cultivate a larger understanding of dysphoria as a whole. Rather than viewing dysphoria as black-and-white, something that either hinders you horrifically or is non-existent in your life; something that exists surrounding one, singular part of your identity in a vacuum, it would do us better to widen our view on dysphoria as a whole: the ways it can manifest, the spectrum of severity, what it can exist specifically in regards to. If my gender dysphoria is red paint and my species dysphoria is blue paint, I am not a being splattered half in red paint and half in blue; I'm red and blue and various shades of purple, in areas where my species

and gender dysphoria overlap in terms of treatment, and negative affects on my life. My experience is just one example of many; it is time we adjust our worldviews.