

Sexless in the city: a gender revolution

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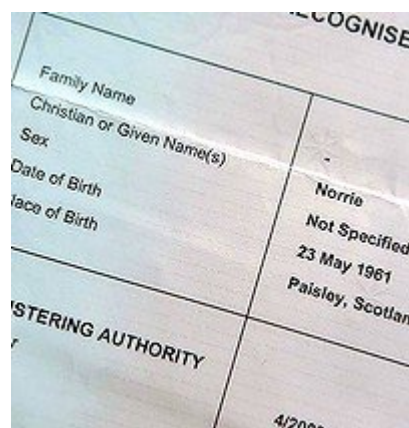


Androgynous . . . Norrie is the first person in NSW to be officially recognised as neither man nor woman by the state. *Photo: Wolter Peeters*

THIS Mardi Gras, Norrie received a gift that no other androgynous person in NSW has had before.

The night before the parade, the postman brought a certificate from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages that contained neither the dreaded "M" nor its equally despised cousin, "F".

Instead, it said "sex not specified", making the 48-year-old Sydneysider, who identifies as neuter and uses only a first name, the first in the state to be neither man nor woman in the eyes of the NSW government.



Historic . . . the gender-neutral Recognised Details Certificate.

Because Norrie was born in Scotland (and used the surname May-Welby), it was not a birth certificate but a Recognised Details Certificate - the version given to immigrants who have changed sex and want it recorded.

The law had not considered that anyone might want neither sex recorded but was able to accommodate the request when presented with evidence from two registered doctors that Norrie was physically and psychologically androgynous.

Norrie has since begun doing the rounds to have all offending records changed.

"I went into the bank and the woman's eyes lit up when she saw the certificate, and she said, 'What a good option'," Norrie said yesterday.

Centrelink was flummoxed and had to call in computer programmers to tackle the task, but agreed to find a way.

Norrie was registered as male at birth, began hormone treatment at 23 and had surgery to become a woman - but has since ceased taking hormones, preferring to live as neither male nor female.

"It's not a detail I think should be part of my identity," neither he nor she said. (Norrie prefers "zie".)

"I think there are a lot of people who would like to have this kind of certificate and not just people who are physically different. Many women would like to have them because sex can so often lead to discrimination."

A spokeswoman for the Attorney-General's department confirmed it was the first such certificate to state non-specified gender, and that even intersex children have their sex determined within weeks of birth.

Tracie O'Keefe, from the transgender group Sex and Gender Education, called it a breakthrough for children whose doctors and parents are confused about their sex at birth and are often operated upon.

A Catholic ethicist, Nicholas Tonti-Filippini from the John Paul II Institute, said birth certificates should also record no gender in such cases, updated with "any changes to phenotypic gender".

He said there was a trend against the practice of selecting a sex for intersex children, which could mean more androgynous people in future.

Bulletin from the cause: **Support decriminalisation of Homosexuality at UN!**

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Posted By: Maurizio Cecconi

To: Members in Support decriminalisation of Homosexuality at UN!

Australia is first to recognise "non-specified" gender

Australia may have made gender history this week, as the New South Wales government lays claim to being the first in the world to recognise an individual's sex as officially "not specified".

This milestone in the evolution of gender queer came about with the issuing of a 'Sex Not Specified' Recognised Details Certificate in place of a birth certificate to Norrie (also known as norrie mAy-Welby) a resident of Sydney.

Zie (a gender-specific pronoun) is now legally recognised by the Australian government as neither male nor female, the Scavenger reports.

It is the end of a long journey for Norrie, aged 48, who was born in Scotland and registered male at birth.

When zie was 23, zie commenced the process of gender re-assignment through hormone treatment and surgery. Zie was later issued with a gender recognition certificate as female in Australia.

However, Norrie did not feel comfortable living solely as a female.

Hir philosophy, developed through hir art and through hir work with Sex and Gender Education, a lobby group campaigning for the rights of all sex and gender diverse people, draws heavily on Eastern concepts of one-ness: of yin and yang being just two halves of a greater whole.

On hir site, zie writes: "The theorists who inform transsexual and intersexual medical intervention presume that everyone has one real gender identity at the core of their being, whether or not this is congruent with their anatomy. Even children biologically hermaphrodite are supposed to be 'really' of one gender, with the surgically discarded sex declared the 'false' one.

"Unsurprisingly, many intersexual children are traumatised by the obliteration of their sexual duality. Many as adults seek transsexual procedures to restore their discarded sex, but at the expense of the surviving sex. This is just one tragic result of our society's belief in mutually exclusive genders.

"Not all human societies see the genders as mutually exclusive. Transgender people are seen in India as "half half" , in the Philippines as "lady-boys" , and in indigenous American cultures as "two-spirited." People seen by our society as having a gender opposite to the one sex they were born with are seen by other societies as simply having two genders. Bi-gendered. In this light, the permanent removal of the characteristics of one sex to allow the expression of the other seems a total waste."

Zie goes on: "I wonder if we in Western culture would have more options for happiness if we too had permission not simply to be of one gender or the other,

but also to be of both genders, if such was our nature."

Norrie ceased lifelong hormone treatment and took up a neuter identity – neither male nor female – resisting any further female or male normalisation.

In January 2010 doctors declared that they were unable to determine hir as either male or female as zie has no gonads, the hormonal system was not typically male or female, and Norrie's psychological identity was neuter.

The rest is now history.

The irony of this landmark decision will not be lost on other trans Australians, who discovered just three years ago that the Australian foreign minister, Alexander Downer, had secretly and without consultation reversed a policy whereby trans people could obtain a passport stating their "intended sex."

<http://gay.pinknews.co.uk/2010/03/11/australia-is-first-to-recognise-non-specified-gender/>