

Brian Haimbach, Ph.D. Sabbatical Report Winter 2021

As the Lead Theatre instructor, it is important that I maintain a healthy professional life in the field. But professional work in a smaller market like Eugene is difficult to come by for theatre practitioners. Solo performance allows busy academics to fit professional activities into an unwieldy schedule. Since solo performers almost always write their own material and the production elements allow the shows to be produced in just about any venue, this genre of live performance is perfect for those who are willing and able to create their own material and performance opportunities. There are numerous theatre companies around the country that specialize in solo performance and the one-person show is a staple at the hundreds of “fringe” theatre festivals around the world.

In 2017 I produced and performed my first solo show, “How to be a Sissy with Percy Q. Shun” at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the largest and most respected performing arts festival in the world. I wrote the show to tour fringe festivals and to perform in bars. In it, my alter ego “Percy” teaches lessons on how to live your best fabulous life. In between Percy’s lessons, Brian comes out and delivers personal narrative monologues about growing up gay with an African-American female best friend in the southeast in the 1980’s. I received a substantial financial award from the Oregon Arts Commission for my travel expenses. I also received two five-star reviews and numerous four-star reviews from professional reviewers – getting good reviews in Edinburgh is the main reason to perform there as they are essential for marketing the show after Edinburgh. I have performed the show in Portland and California as well as Eugene, on campus and off. The experience of producing the show and touring it was extremely rewarding and confirmed my suspicion that becoming a solo performer would be a realistic way to maintain an active professional life.

I also realized that although it is realistic, it is costly. Box office income did not come close to covering transportation and lodging for the Edinburgh Fringe. My original goal for sabbatical was to write a second show that would allow me to earn twice the box office income by performing both shows at the same festival. The goal was not to make money, just not to lose thousands. I quickly realized this goal was not only ill-informed, but dangerous to my sanity.

Changing Expectations

After the first show, I felt there would be a second. I envisioned a few shows in which Percy teaches different lessons with each show having a different theme. In January of 2020, I was at a drag show and it occurred to me: why have I never had the balls to be a drag queen? I had found the gimmick and title for show number two. So I applied for the sabbatical. My original application detailed that I would not only write show number two, so I could earn double box office revenue, but that I would take show number one to two fringe festivals in the spring of

2021 which I could only do while on leave. Then Covid hit and travel was not possible, so I ended up taking my sabbatical in the winter.

Although I knew what I wanted to write about a year before my sabbatical, I didn't start writing until I was forced to. Mostly because I am not (was not?) a disciplined writer. But another important reason I felt hesitant about writing this show had everything to do with the feeling that I should not be taking up any more space on a stage. Why should some self-absorbed white guy be asking for any more attention when this country was finally beginning to realize the value of giving voice to marginalized perspectives? But one simple word of encouragement from Seth Barrish, the director of Mike Berbiglia's solo shows that have appeared on Broadway, kept me going through the whole process. He told me that if one person needed to hear what I had to say, then it was worthwhile. I frequently had to remind myself of this advice throughout the writing and still do today as I look towards performing it.

Winter of 2021 arrived and I was officially on sabbatical. I had to start writing. The first show took me five years to write and develop. But I was going to write this one in ten weeks! From scratch!

I had my title and my topic. I was going to lampoon toxic masculinity in the gay male community. But I didn't know exactly how. With the goal of having two different shows to perform at the same fringe festival, I started with the idea that this second show was going to be different than the first. That is when the trouble started.

I realized my unspoken assumption that this topic would be best served by the same format as the first show, that Percy would give advice and Brian would tell autobiographical stories. So I struggled to come up with alternative types of shows. One idea was to create different characters that had dealt with the issue of the show, characters based on real individuals or composites of real individuals. This type of show creation is something I have done frequently with students; it is inspired by the work of Anna Deavere-Smith, who interviews individuals and mimics them in her highly crafted performances. So the interviews began. I sought out members of the gay community who had been rejected because they had been judged for being too femme. After Zooming with a few kind souls who responded to my Facebook call for interviewees, I found my way back to drag performers. I wanted to know what it was like to be a member of the drag community, but I think I really wanted to know what was so appealing about drag that would drive them to risk the ostracism they can often face from within the gay community. I found that the same aspects of live performance that draw actors to the stage are what drive drag entertainers. This connection I discovered actually led me away from the idea of using the interviews as part of the show. If I had such a strong understanding of what propels them to deal with the difficulties of performing, then why would I need to mimic someone else? The obvious answer would be to tell their stories in their voices, but I actually did not hear stories of these performers suffering because others found them unmasculine. So, one idea for a new structure flew out the window.

Around the time that I was realizing I wasn't going to use interviews as a part of the show, I started to get responses from another Facebook post asking other fringe performers how frequently they had performed two different shows at the same festival. Of the dozen or so performers that took the time to reply to my post, every single one told me it would be suicide to attempt such a feat. When one is performing at a fringe, they are also promoting the show. The latter is what kills you. Having to promote two shows would prove insurmountable. This was the point at which I realized my experience with fringe festivals was extremely limited. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe lasts the entire month of August. Practically every other festival in the world is only one week, some of the smaller ones are only one weekend. The good news is that paying for lodging at practically every festival would be a fraction of the thousands I paid in Edinburgh. The bad news is that there would be no way that a festival producer would book two very similar shows at the same very short festival. So, the idea of doing two shows at one festival was also tossed out the window.

I was having to admit to myself that the goal of doing two shows at the same festival was actually not my real goal and that my original unspoken artistic goals of performing the same type of show over numerous years at the same fringe festivals were not only driving the decisions that had led me to take this sabbatical, but the practicality of performing at fringe festivals was leading me back to those ideas. I needed to get the first show out into the world and then take on writing other shows that would allow me to return to festivals with additional iterations of the original structure with the hope that audiences would remember the first show and want more. But there was still that pesky problem of paying for travel.

Those Facebook performers who told me to call it quits on two shows at once also said that if I wanted to earn a few extra bucks at a festival, that having a standup comedy set that I could perform at bars and other late-night venues would help. I took this idea a step further. I still wanted to write a new hour-long solo show, after all that was the whole reason for the sabbatical. I decided I was going to augment my original show structure with more standup techniques. Show number one is a comedy at heart, but the joke density is much lower than standup. I felt learning more about standup would make the structure of the show stronger and perhaps even easier to perform sections of it as a stand-alone routine. So now – I was going to write standup! Even though I had never done it!

The Writing Really Starts

Two fortuitous events happened at this point. A good friend let me stay at her home on the coast for a week for a week of solitary writing and I stumbled across *The Comedy Bible* by Judy Carter. Having the solitude to write for a week was invaluable – writing lesson number one. And *The Comedy Bible* provides an extremely clear step-by-step process for writing standup that guarantees any novice can produce an hour of comedy.

The first step of The Comedy Bible process is to come up with three topics you can rant about for at least three minutes. I knew I wanted to take on femme haters in the gay male community. It didn't take me long to add gay republicans to the list of things I can rant about. And, as a way to address my white guilt, I decided I wanted to take on racism within the gay community as well. It really helps to have an entire house to yourself when writing in this manner. And Word's voice recognition feature made turning ranting into writing a piece of cake. With the standup writing progressing at an acceptable pace, I took advantage of the available time during sabbatical to take some writing workshops.

I participated in six different workshops offered by four different theatre organizations via Zoom. Some were one-day affairs and some met once a week for up to six weeks. Of these thirty or so hours I spent in these valuable workshops, the storytelling workshop offered by Oregon Contemporary Theatre yielded the most writing. For this workshop I wrote a five-minute personal narrative that actually ended up in the final draft of solo show number two, although while I was writing it I had no intention of it doing so.

After the week on the coast and after feeling like I had made some progress with the standup comedy writing, things stagnated. I reached the limit of what I had to say with the jokes. But I persisted. I watched numerous standup routines and analyzed their structure and I kept trying to write jokes. And the weeks started passing. Around week four of my eleven-week sabbatical, I had a meltdown. Fearful that the sabbatical was halfway over and I could not see the possibility of having a completed draft in the next few weeks, I laid on the floor and cried. Nothing too maudlin, but enough to make my husband sit me down and ask me why I was doing this in the first place: "what do you want to write?" Like Seth Barrish's advice, this simple question kept me going through the rest of the process. I had to admit that there was something in me that was still holding onto the idea that show number two should be radically different than the first. I had to admit that although the producer in me felt it silly to write another show similar to the first, the writer in me was not finished with that structure, even if nobody would want to produce it. I had to admit that I was trying to impose standup techniques in a way that was not working. Although I had learned enough about standup to know that I could do it if I focused on doing just that, trying to turn "my" style of show into something else was not something I could or wanted to do. This is the point where I let the writing take me where it needed to go, the point where I realized that trying to write prescriptively is not something I was able to do in a creative way.

So NOW The Writing Really Starts

Now that I had removed a significant mental barrier, I was able to write. I looked forward to sitting down in front of the computer. And I felt less pressured to churn out something within the temporal restraints of sabbatical. So, I decided to write a couple ten-minute plays. The Student Production Association produces an evening of short new plays each year, so I knew

there would likely be a need for a short play or two – SPA prefers to produce student-written works, but coaxing students into writing is not always easy, so frequently they are looking for at least locally written plays. During my week on the coast, when I was grappling with too many ideas about the form of show number two, I wrote a monologue in which a man breaks up with his boyfriend because the boyfriend has started doing drag and, due to the demands of hiding his eyebrows, they have waned to wispy representations of their former bushy adorableness. Of course the real reason for the breakup is that the man cannot abide the newly confident and very feminine aspects of his boyfriend. I turned this monologue into a conversation. It was horribly overwritten; it contained every problem of characters saying how they feel instead of showing it that I have ever coached a student writer away from. Yet, SPA decided to produce it. I have directed dozens of new plays, but this was the first time I had been in rehearsal as a playwright. It was one of the most important learning experiences of my life. The play went from an overwrought mess to a solid piece of dramatic writing. I also wrote another short play that I will submit to SPA in the years to come as they may need it to fill out an evening's worth of entertainment. And I plan on writing many more plays in the future, probably more plays than solo shows. Writing these two ten-minute plays will most likely have the most important outcome of my sabbatical.

Back to show number two. I took stock of what I had written: about half an hour's worth of pretty decent standup about femme shaming in the gay community and gay republicans as well as two autobiographical stories that fit easily into the theme of femme shaming. The weeks of wandering around in standup and self-indulgent naval gazing had actually yielded some material that could be finessed into one show utilizing "my" structure. After a week or so of trying to make this show have seven sections just like show number one, I realized that it really only needed five sections. But, one of those sections had to be then ending. How to end it...

Storytelling workshop to the rescue once again. During the workshop mentioned above through Oregon Contemporary Theatre, I had written nuggets of other stories in addition to the full story that ended up in the show. I took one of these nuggets and started turning it into a final monologue. This writing was slow because it was actually the most difficult writing; trying to give the show some kind of point, message, or take-away for the audience proved difficult to make interesting. This final monologue was also the point in which I implicated myself as complicit in the ills of femme shaming as well as racism in the gay community. Once I admitted that, "its easy to stand up in front of people and tell them how you overcame adversity, its hard to admit that you are part of the problem," the final monologue went in some painful but necessary directions and really became the finale that this show needed.

Back to Life, Back to Reality

Sabbatical was now over. I had to start teaching. But fortunately a friend and theatre producer in town agreed to present a workshop reading of this new solo show. It would not be

until October, but that gave me the summer to keep tweaking as well as to get some space from the work. The biggest development during these months was an addition to the ending. The final monologue did a good job of tying the show up, but it sure was boring. Sometime before school started for the fall, I had the thought that I should be putting on makeup during the final monologue. This action would provide some theatrical interest while suggesting a type of transformation of myself, a way of embracing the femme parts of myself that I had spent a lifetime hiding.

So I had a draft of show number two. “Why I Never Had the Balls to be a Drag Queen with Percy Q. Shun” was going to see the light of day at a workshop reading of mostly invited audience members.

The Show as it Currently Exists

This show is structurally identical to show number one: Percy and Brian take turns talking to the audience. But this show has only four sections whereas show number one has seven sections. Brian ends show number two, which is an evolution in my thinking about which “character” is strongest, at least for this show. Percy opens this new show explaining how the world has changed him; he is no longer interested in prescribing behavior but wants to just revel in the absurdities of this crazy world. This new focus has led him to taking up standup comedy. In an effort to identify with performers who have taken on such horrifying tasks, Percy interviewed drag queens. So now we have the connection to the title. Another important part of section one is Percy describing what a sissy really is, because in show number one he really just took it for granted and these days we should never take anything for granted.

In the second of the four sections, Brian comes out and discusses how he was born a girl. Although identifying as a gender other than the one assigned at birth was not an option in the 1970’s, Brian’s behavior clearly indicated that he was female. Brian then wonders whether or not he would have been transgender as a young child and dares to assert that perhaps we should not be allowing our children to decide that they are transgender for fear of losing the opportunity of being as happy with their gender as Brian is today. After posing such a risky idea, Brian admits that he has come to realize that he was actually not transgender as a child because he never felt alienated from his body. Brian realizes that he was just a little gay boy who didn’t want to be a boy because every male figure in his life was a “fucking asshole.”

The longest section of the show is the third, in which Percy takes on femme shamers on hookup apps and gay republicans. This section has the highest joke density. Although the jokes are not as dense as a typical standup routine, they do utilize classic joke structure. After lampooning toxic masculinity on social media and gay republicans’ willingness to protect their pocketbooks even if it means harming their fellow LGBTQIA community members, Percy turns the tables and mocks liberals too.

This show ends with a description of the process of putting the show together. Actually, the last monologue is probably a much more entertaining sabbatical report than what you are reading now. While putting on eye liner, eye shadow, mascara, blush, and lipstick, Brian details the process of coming up with the idea for the show while focusing on his feelings of complicity in the evils he rails against. Seth Barrish's advice figures prominently in this section; it gives a cohesion to the final monologue by presenting Brian's resistance to the idea of the show and offers the advice in the last moments. This last moment presents Brian as a flawed man who is making the first steps towards realizing his privilege by looking closely in the mirror. And now in that mirror what he sees is a man looking pretty fabulous in his makeup.

Takeaways from the reading:

Performing for an audience wearing masks is not the most effective way to really get feedback on a new work

My jokes require too much mental processing to get a quick laugh

My jokes require too much knowledge of gay culture

I am much better at writing personal narrative than I am at writing standup

People like to laugh at themselves more than they like to laugh at those they disagree with

Future Goals

The next step is to let the work sit while I focus on other things and come back to it this summer. Meanwhile, I hope to perform show number one at a fringe or two this summer. As a way to market the show(s), I plan on looking into creating a YouTube channel for queer storytelling. While on sabbatical I generated over fifty ideas for short stories about growing up gay. These five-minute shorts could easily be put up on the platform and be used for drawing more audience members to a venue when Percy comes to town.

Outcomes

The most important outcome for myself personally and artistically is that I have a daily routine that makes room for writing. When my sabbatical was over and I returned to my responsibilities at work, I continued to write every morning for one hour. I am happy that I have continued this habit. By doing so I rekindled my love for writing and reminded myself why I got into theatre in the first place. The reason I changed my major to theatre, so many years ago, was because I wanted to write plays. Once I took acting classes, writing fell off my radar, but now I am happy to make room in my life for this important outlet. Being able to teach students how to write plays and coach them through the writing process is extremely valuable in my job. Every

year we produce an evening of short plays written by local writers, many of which are currently enrolled students. My ability to provide them with helpful feedback on their writing has greatly increased in the past year.

When preparing for the sabbatical presentation while undertaking assessment work for the Theatre program, I realized how my experience during and after sabbatical reinforced the program outcomes I created. I am pleased to realize that these program outcomes had a direct application to my work which strengthen my ability to apply them to my class and artistic work with my students.

Program Outcome 1: Design and execute an effective time management strategy and work ethic that allows for punctuality, preparation, and contribution to group and personal goals.

By creating a daily schedule for writing, I have learned to create space in my life for writing. This is an ongoing goal that requires daily commitment.

Program Outcome 2. Solve problems, collaborate, and communicate with the self-awareness and confidence required to embrace failure as an opportunity for growth.

This writing process has been largely about rebounding from disappointments and creating a new path forward that led to the final product.

Program Outcome 3. Express a personal artistic aesthetic using informed vocabulary and a clear understanding of how the dramatic arts are and have historically been a vital form of personal and social expression.

Writing without a personal aesthetic is pretty much impossible, as I discovered when I gave up on my original goals and let the writing take me where it wanted to go. And I humbly contribute my voice to the genre of solo performance.

Appendix: The full text of “Why I Never Had the Balls to be a Drag Queen with Percy Q. Shun” for A Squared workshop reading

Part 1 – Percy Welcomes the Crowd

Hello my little ones! What a fabulous looking crowd. Thank you for coming out tonight. My name is Percy and I’m a sissy. And I’m here to teach all you sissies, sissies in training, and honorary sissies how to be fabulous! But my first order of business is to thank A Squared for having me. I hope they know what they’ve gotten themselves into. How many of you have attended other Hope on the Butte shows this summer? If you were expecting beautiful concert music that will uplift your soul, I’m afraid you might be in for a shock. I fully intend to send you out of here with a big injection of hope. But you might get a bit dirty along the way.

This is actually my second foray into spreading sissiness around the globe. It’s my life’s work to help you live up to your full sissy potential. And I’m so grateful to A Squared for giving me the opportunity to test drive my new show all over you. Yes, I am giving you all my second show’s virginity. Please be gentle. I hope you like them young. This show is hot off the presses. I cut two pages this morning. I’m not even fully memorized. Why bother. The next time this show sees the light of day it will be completely rewritten, based on your feedback and reactions. So I would love it if you stayed around for a little talkback. I know half of you got in for free today. So at least half of you will get your money’s worth. And if you did pay I would love to extend the offer of a free ticket for the next iteration. Coming sometime this spring perhaps.

How many of you saw the first show? It’s ok if you didn’t. It might even be better if you didn’t. I wouldn’t want to artificially inflate your expectations for tonight. The first show is good. It is a well-crafted hour of clearly defined methods to help in attaining ultimate sissiness. This show is not quite that pretty. It’s a little rough around the edges. But, you might like it rough. I hope so.

The first show premiered quite a few years ago. The world has changed quite a bit since then. We’ve had a global health crisis, escalating racial tensions, and four years of Trump. What’s next? A plague of locusts? In the years since the first show, there has also been a lot of progress in acknowledging the spectrum of identities that we can all embrace. Especially gender and sexual identities. So I need to keep up with the times and clarify something I took for granted. In the first show I talked a lot about how to be a sissy and what is fabulous about being a sissy, but I never defined what a sissy is. Back then I just wanted everyone to decide for themselves what the heck they thought I was talking about.

How many sissies are here tonight? Exactly. I think in this new world, clarity is of the utmost importance.

Many people thought I was just using a “Sissy” as a euphemism for being gay. I think many people, even some of the professional reviewers, thought that I was talking just about boys who like to have sex with boys. That’s understandable, after all I am a cis gay boy. Boy 😊. But to say that that alone makes me a sissy is too limiting, I think.

So what is a sissy? In my humble opinion a sissy is someone who just wants to be who they are without catching a lot of grief from other people who are afraid to be who they are. It is someone who is probably being told by others that what they are is not good enough or not acceptable or not the top of the heap as it were.

This definition of a sissy is very broad. It includes many people of many shapes, sizes, colors, identities and methods of getting your thrills in and out of the bedroom. Most importantly, a sissy is someone who has the courage to be who they are at all costs and who they are does no harm to anyone else. If your beliefs or if who you are causes suffering to others, then you are clearly NOT a sissy. So let your freak flag fly. As long as its not flapping someone else in the face.

For example, I like to move my spine when I talk. I like to use my hands in a fluid kind of way. I personally don't enjoy walking around looking like I'm constipated. Some people throughout my life have made it very clear that because I was born with a penis I should not express myself in this way. Fuck them.

Sissies are full of self-love that they don’t need anyone else’s approval. But being a sissy is hard. It takes its toll. Often daily. Friends and family are often asking you for fashion advice. And you have to decide if they can handle the truth. And then there’s the issue of being the only person in the room who knows you are. This problem is especially taxing for my trans sissy friends. I’m glad I was never transgender. I can’t afford the shoes. But being a sissy is particularly hard because a lot of people assume that we’re bitchy, catty, sarcastic, that we have a caustic wit. And that’s simply not true. Not all sissies are bitchy. Just the clever ones.

So now that we know what a sissy is, I’ll ask again. How many sissies are here tonight? Much better.

Now let’s get the show on the road. For show number two, I’m embarking on new territory. Although I hope you leave here having learned a thing or two, I’m less concerned with my lesson plan and more concerned just with reveling in the absurdities of this fucked up world. Life just gets more absurd every minute, so learning how to laugh things off is more useful than actually trying to do anything. Ask a congressman they’ll obviously agree.

Tonight I hope to teach you life lessons in the same way a standup comedian does, I’m not pretending I have any answers, I’m just pointing out the atrocities of life. Percy is doing standup!

Good heavens. Standup takes an enormous amount of courage. In order to prepare for this frightening task, I interviewed other performers who have lots of balls. I talked to drag queens.

We all know that no one has a bigger set of kahones than a drag queen. A drag queen is the ultimate example of a strong sissy. They have to deal with a lot of judgement from those weaker than they. They're often used as the poster child of how decadent and twisted the gay community is. When some conservative new channel shows a video of a gay pride parade, front and center is a fabulous drag queen. Even within the gay community drag queens are often viewed as outsiders or just too over the top. So many gay men say "I'd never fuck a drag queen." That is just absurd on so many levels. Primarily because most drag queens are tops. So they're the ones doing the fucking Mr. Man. And after a few White Claw you're probably the one bending over asking for it.

Yes, we sissies still have to deal with haters of all kinds. All the haters, be they Bible thumpers, bullies in junior high school, parents who are too afraid to understand, or even the occasional gay boy who takes pride in not being a sissy have one thing in coming. Besides being an asshole. They all hate us because they see us as too feminine. If you think about it labeling someone as feminine is just about the worst thing you can do in our society. And it comes with a whole host of disadvantages.

Many a sissy would have had such an easier time growing up if they had been a little bit less swishy. Some people think that its just wrong for someone who was told that they are a boy to not act the way society tells us a boy should act. The unformed would consider the term swishy sissy redundant. In addition to being a fabulous tongue twister. You know redundant terms like unexpected surprise, the sum total, singularly unique, which is another fabulous one for oral dexterity. But my favorite redundant phrase of all time: toxic masculinity. Isn't masculinity intrinsically toxic?

We live in an extremely misogynist world. Toxic masculinity is the law of the land. From the playground to the oval office. We proved it in 2012. The most racist country in the world would rather have a black guy for president than a woman. Sure, Obama is only half black. But Hillary is only half female. Now that remark was not misogynous. I think Hillary is half woman, half politician. Is politician a gender? Its definitely an identity. Can you be assigned 'politician' at birth? They show you images of Ronald Ragan and Bill Clinton. If you gravitate towards either, then you are a politician.

Why are politicians so concerned about everybody's junk? If you have this kind of junk you're supposed to act this way if you have that junk you're supposed to act that way. And they make laws to make sure that we conform to our junk. Maybe if they spent more time playing with their own junk they'd be less concerned about everybody else's.

Alright my little ones. Here's how we'll spend our time together today. I'm sharing the stage with my friend Brian. He is going to come out here and tell you all about himself. He's a bit self-absorbed. Been doing a lot of navel gazing lately. And I'm going to pop back one more time to warn you about a few things that make being a sissy a pain in the ass. Sounds delightful, doesn't it? So let's bring out Brian now. Be kind. He has issues.

Part Two – I was not Transgender

I was born a girl. If gender identity is based on behavior and interests and not your junk, then from my earliest memories I was a girl. I don't recall doing anything that could be interpreted as anything that a boy would do. I played with dolls, I fantasized about having long hair and wearing flowing clothes. I adored flowy silky garments. I was never really into shoes I don't think. Of course that might be because my mother made it very clear that adorable shoes meant pain.

Not only did I act like a girl, but I proclaimed that I wanted to be a girl. I told my family and I told my closest friends. So my parents sent me to therapy. Perhaps I should say that my stepfather insisted that I go to therapy. He was trying to get a therapist to fix me and keep me from being gay. The only observation that I remember the therapist coming up with was that I had a doll who had hair the color of my mother's. My mother was away from home frequently with work and the therapist thought that this doll was a surrogate for Mom when she was gone. But that really doesn't tell the whole story. What were the legions of blonde Barbies a surrogate for? A blonde harem of unrealistically proportioned super models? My family had a motor home. Was my Barbie van just a substitute for our RV when it was in the shop? To the therapist's credit, the surrogate mom doll was my favorite. She had this auburny-brown ponytail that you could pull out and have it be long or you could cock it back and make it shorter.

I don't remember when I stopped wanting to be a girl. But I can gather when I stopped telling people I wanted to be a girl. I failed the third grade. Kind of ironic because that same therapist that told me that my ratchet ponytail friend was a substitute for Mom had given me an IQ test and I scored on the genius level. Yet I failed the third grade. I'm no scientist here, but it makes sense to me that my brain was thrown into high gear because I was constantly living in a state of threat. I mean, most animal's brains are used for defense, for survival. Maybe having to constantly negotiate a world in which I was having to do battle made me smarter? Or maybe IQ tests are written by gay men. At any rate, scoring high on them does not mean you will pass the third grade. It seems you have to actually do your homework in order to pass. Is it still that way today? Not sure.

My mother divorced my stepfather and we moved to South Carolina. If you are ever going to fail a grade, do it when moving to another state. Third grade try number one was in Georgia. Third grade try number two was in South Carolina. At least I didn't have to endure the shame of all my classmates knowing I had failed a grade. Third grade try 2.0 in South Carolina marked the time when I stopped telling anyone I wanted to be a girl. I don't remember taking any dolls with me or playing with dolls in SC. I also don't remember any anguish at not taking any dolls with me.

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about young Brian and how much he wanted to be a girl. In the 1970's being transgender was simply not an option. What would little Brian think about the world today? If I had grown up in a world in which being transgender was an option, would I have wanted to transition? Would I have begged for hormone blockers? Would I have asked my family to support my decision to wear a dress to school? And putting my little self in that place is really frightening. But its frightening because I love being a male now. Please stick with he here. I know what I'm about to say is going to make me sound like a dick. Should we be letting kids with their yet to be mature brains make these dramatically life-altering decisions? Are they going to ruin their lives because they are simply going through a phase of development that many other kids go through? Are we going to deprive them of the potential to be as happy with their bodies as I now am today?

All these questions have made me look at my childhood much more closely. And its difficult because I actually don't remember much at all from my childhood. But part of what I do remember is how much I enjoyed my body even then. Although I proclaimed that I wanted to be a girl, I can't ever remember feeling alienated from my boy parts. When I said I wanted to be a girl, I was yearning for the clothes, the hair, the dolls, the ability to express emotion, the permission to express love like the love my mother expressed for me, and the ability to giggle and act silly without anyone looking at you like you had something wrong with you.

All this self-indulgent examination of my childhood has led me to the realization that no, I was NOT transgender. I just liked dolls and long hair. I didn't have to deal with body dysmorphia. I just had to deal with the fact that all the men I was exposed to were fucking assholes. No wonder I didn't want to be one of them. I wasn't transgender. I was just a little cis gay boy who had no access to other cis gay boys and was told that gay men were sick. They should go to therapy. And to assume that I knew or know anything about what it means to really be transgender would be more than arrogant, it would be destructive. As hard as being gay is today and certainly was in the 70's and 80's, it was never as hard or required as much courage as my transgender students have. Once I made this realization, I magically developed the ability to remember my students' preferred pronouns.

Part Three – Femme Shamers and Gay Republicans

We know that just about anyone can be a sissy. But I want to take some time and talk about the queer community. And specifically, those in the queer community that some might think act too feminine or girly. There are lots of people out there that have a problem with men who don't act like men. And when we think of these sissy haters we usually think of the straight world. Those scary straight people trying to suppress our rights or just trying to punch us in the face. But there are also some members of our own community who behave in very strange ways. There are some people that we may feel a connection to that really don't have our best interests at heart. And sometimes they're not very nice about it. Just because you're gay does not mean that you have good manners.

Now if you are a feminine sissy, you probably know it. But you might not know if someone is treating you unfairly because they see you as too feminine. Maybe someone ignores you on a hookup app. A butch guy at a bar refuses to make eye contact. Even Bank of America doesn't want you on their gay pride float.

And the virtual world that we live in has made it much easier for them to be assholes. I call them assholes and even though that is accurate there is a more precise term: femme shamers.

Hookup apps are the worst! Its easy to be an asshole when you have that layer of anonymity. Frequently you can tell if someone is a femme shamer before you engage. Look for the tale-tell signs. Avoid anyone with these indicators on their profile: "Masc4Masc;" "no fats no femmes. Don't be a hater it's just a preference;" "My father never loved me and I compensate for my self-loathing by hating in others what I hate in myself. Can't host."

Now there is also the phrase "no fats, no femmes, no Asians" on hookup apps too. I was going to take some time to talk to you about racism in the gay community. But then I thought to myself, "who the fuck am I to be talking about racism?!" That's what this world needs, another white guy trying to fix a problem he's never personally experienced. So let's not go there. I do have one observation on the topic: if your profile indicates that anyone of a specific race should not take up any of your precious chat time, you're a dick. Now back to femme shaming, something I can talk about.

Language is not the only way to identify a femme shamer on a hookup app. Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Be very wary of anyone who only has headless torso pics. Anyone who only has pics clearly taken at the gym locker room to get full mileage out of the post workout pump. Anyone who has a pic in which they are giving you the finger. Nothing says "do me" quite like "fuck you." Now don't get me wrong. Some of you may be into being degraded. I am not a kink shamer. If that's what turns you on, go for it. But I suspect that Mr. Man with the bird in hand and one in the bush is probably not looking for some kinky fun as much as he is looking for

someone to make help him support his assertion that “just because I’m gay doesn’t mean I’m a sissy like you faggot.” And we all know that the best kink scenes always start with the top needing an ego boost.

If you find someone who passes these tests, you may want to engage. But still keep your guard up once you progress to chatting. You know you’re chatting with an asshole if he asks you if you’re masc, if he asks how many times a week you lift, if he asks for a recording of your voice. I know that was third in the sequence and supposed to be the laugh line. The only thing funny about it is that it actually happens.

He might say “I like your pic but I can’t tell if you’re straight acting.” Straight acting? That's something to aspire to? What does it mean to be straight acting? It obviously means you are pretending to be something you are not, which is so attractive. Does it mean you have a minivan? You and your spouse have matching Christmas sweaters? Oh no. The gays do that too. Do you like to burn thousands of acres of old growth forest as a result of your gender reveal parties? You're in a crappy marriage and have a mortgage you can't afford? Alas the gays do that as well these days. We’ve come a long way baby.

I hate to tell any gay boy who takes pride in being straight acting but, if you’re a boy and you have other boy’s dick in your mouth, you’re acting pretty gay.

Straight acting. Is that redundant or an oxymoron? I love oxymorons. Civil war. Virtual reality. Water based lube. But my favorite oxymoron is: Gay Republican.

Yes my sissies, they are real. Many members of the LGBTQIA community actually vote republican. They vote for the party that frequently creates legislation that harms them. Some of you may not consider yourselves very political. I have to admit that before the orange menace was elected, I didn’t pay as much attention to politics as I do now. Maybe that’s one good thing about living through a four-year farce. I think we’ve all realized that any advancements in society can be reversed with the stroke of a pen. So we must be vigilant. We have to watch out for ourselves and each other. But not everyone in our community feels that way.

You must be careful when dealing with gay republicans. The first step is just trying to spot one. Sometimes its not easy. Occasionally they actually do dress very well. You know you’re talking to a gay republican when they never seem to want to talk about politics, when they make excuses for not going to Pride, and when you learn that the only gay charity they ever donate to is Exodus International.

If you’re talking to a gay boy and they say, “I like daddies. I’m more of a Sean Hannity lover than a Tucker Carlson lover” then run my little ones!

Speaking of Fox news. Are they the problem or a symptom? Isn't all media biased? No, all media doesn't out and out lie, but all media is biased. And what we need right now are clear FACTS, the TRUTH. Because trying to figure out what politicians are doing is a full-time job. But no. Every news source only focuses on what they think their viewers want to hear. Unfortunately I don't have a solution to this problem. But I do know how fun it would be to watch Rachel Maddow kick the shit out of Tucker Carlson. Because you know she could. I don't condone violence, but that would be fun. Someone needs to write a graphic novel in which our superhero Rachel Maddow vanquishes Rupert Murdoch. I'd buy that. Rachel Maddow is a superhero. She is the necessary counterbalance for Fox news. And like all superheroes, she does have her kryptonite. Her biggest weakness is... DJT. If he passes gas she spends half an hour railing against the corruption in his digestive system. Other very important things might have happened that day, but oh no, if there is any way she can expend a great deal of energy on the vilest human being on the planet, she will.

I guess she has to because even some gays support Trump! I know, it's a shock! The hair alone. I know. Jokes about his hair are hack. Or his little hands. But being a Trump supporter of any ilk is just weird to me. And it takes so much work.

You have to actively choose not to believe facts when they are presented to you. You have to put all your hopes for the future in someone who puts his own ambition over everything else. You have to actively make sure that you are getting more free money from the government than any person of color that you personally know. That's time consuming.

It's really scary to me that someone who has cum in my mouth would vote for that man. Hmmm. I crossed a line there didn't I.

Could I catch republicanism? Is there a pill for that? For the number of Z packs I've taken you think I would have stumbled across an anti-Republican pill by now. Its too bad we can't treat republicanism like we can an STI. Of course no pharmaceutical company would ever do anything to reduce the number of republicans in the world. Well, except for that little oxycontin kerfuffle.

Be careful my little ones. You might come home from that hookup and have an irresistible urge to share a Qanon conspiracy theory on Facebook. Or even worse. If you feel an impulse to Google the Log Cabin Republicans, you may have been exposed.

Have you seen the list of candidates that the Log Cabin Republicans endorsed for the last election? On their website they have pictures of all of them. Why do they need the pictures? I know why. They want to make sure you know they're all white except for ONE. It looks like whack off material for the Aryan nation.

In July of 2016 the log cabin Republicans placed an ad in USA Today condemning the newly written GOP platform for being the most anti LGBT platform ever. I think it was based on the

book of Leviticus. So they know that the GOP is homophobic. Talk about a group of gays who get off on being degraded. Spank me Mitch.

But we must be kind. Its really hard to have a split personality. Being a gay republican is hard because you frequently have to choose between voting your conscience and voting your pocketbook.

Do I want my fellow gays to be treated as equals or do I want to be able to afford to go to two more circuit parties this year... Hmmm. Hard decision.

Do I want social and fiscal policies that create a more stable and equitable society, or do I want another French bulldog?

If I vote this way the rates of trans people of color who get murdered will probably rise, but I'll be able to afford a condo in Puerto Vallarta.

Being a gay republican is hard because they are committed to their beliefs. They believe in personal accountability. They believe that the welfare state had done more harm than good. They believe trickle down works if given a chance. Actually that last one was the joke. They believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of a marble backsplash.

Straight Republicans think poor people can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Gay Republicans think they can pull themselves up by their leather harnesses. They might as well do something with it besides just wearing it as a Halloween costume. So many gay boys dress in drag for Halloween. I suspect they have republican leanings. "I don't like wearing heels and makeup, no I'm mocking drag." I find that offensive. After all, can you imagine a real republican drag queen?

You know most drag queens perform for charity? That takes out all the republicans. You can always spot republicans in a drag show audience. They're the ones not tipping. If they did do drag they'd be out there working those tips and keeping them all for themselves. Making all the people of color give them five dollar bills instead of singles. And you know their drag would be horrible. When your divas are Sarah Palin and Anne Colter, you don't stand a chance. Maybe I'm being hasty. Sarah can pull off a good outfit. Especially when she's bucking for a new reality show.

Now. I've spent a lot of energy abusing republicans. I must be fair. Sometimes conservatives have some great ideas. And liberals can also be batshit crazy.

Hippies can be very judgmental. When I moved to Eugene I went to the Saturday market. An enthusiastic woman of a certain age, desperately in need of a haircut, was giving out flyers for a peace rally taking place at a time I could not attend. So I made a wide girth around her so I wouldn't take a flyer that would just be thrown away. As I walked past her, she said, "What, you don't like peace?" Excuse me. You don't know me. I'm trying to save the planet by not using up

one of your paper flyers. “You don’t like peace?” Not if it means I have to be nice to you. Yes. I envision a world of peace and harmony. A world where love triumphs over greed and hate. A world where I don’t have to be judged by old hippies organizing rallies for the sole purpose of making the attendees feel morally superior. That’s the world I want to live in. Its hard to love the world and judge it at the same time. Believe me, I know.

I do understand though. Being a Eugene liberal is hard. You believe society is strongest when we all help each other. You believe greed is the root of all evil. You believe Bernie is a sex symbol. I get it. It’s the accent.

Republicans always complain that liberals want to regulate everything. Like my toilet. I put a toilet in my basement. As I’m sure you know, you have to get a permit to change a lightbulb in the city of Eugene. The city of Eugene failed me on the inspection because I didn't caulk around the toilet. Why the fuck does the city of Eugene give a shit about the caulk around my toilet? I looked it up. There is debate in the plumbing world whether or not you actually should caulk around your toilet. But the city of Eugene in all their wisdom has decided that if I don't caulk around my toilet the world is going to come to an end. They tell me I fail inspection because of one stupid little thing that doesn't really need to be done yet down my street there are at least three homes that should be condemned. They have more moss on their roof than Bilbo Baggins' house. Yet the city of Eugene doesn’t seem to care.

Just being human is hard. And having beliefs and sticking to them is even harder. Its important that we look at ourselves and make sure we don’t do stupid things that hurt others. Speaking of looking at yourself, let’s bring Brian back out. If you enjoyed hearing him talk about himself before, you’re going to love the next fifteen minutes!

Part Four – Confronting Myself

(Brian puts on makeup during this monologue.)

If you want to learn a lot about yourself, write a solo show. If you want to learn a whole lot about yourself, write a second one. After the first one, I knew there would be another, although I didn’t know what the gimmick would be. Then one day I was at a drag show having a really good time and it occurred to me, why have I never had the balls to do drag? And there it was, the title of my second show.

I think one of the reasons that it took me a year to write anything had a great deal to do with what was going on in the world and how the world was waking up to some important realizations. Why should some self-absorbed white guy take up any more space on a stage?

A few months after the title appeared to me, I applied for a one-term sabbatical from teaching. When you apply for a sabbatical, you actually have to tell them what you're going to do during your time away. So I said I'd write another solo show. I got the sabbatical. So now I had to write the damn thing. You would think that having a sabbatical during a pandemic would be a great time to churn out a show that would be as awesome as the first. Right. The first show took me 5 years to write and develop, and I thought I was going to write the second one completely from scratch in 10 weeks.

After the requisite three weeks of emotional breakdowns, I latched onto the idea of standup because it was a way of making the second show different from the first. But most importantly, it was a great way of not talking about myself.

I read an extremely helpful and very clear guidebook on how to create and perform stand up. Email me and I'll send you the bibliography for this show. The first step in this book is to come up with your three topics that you can rant and rave about. That was super easy. I decided I was going to look at femme shaming and republicanism in the gay male community. And as a way to assuage some of my white guilt, I decided I was going to include racism as one of the topics even though I was supremely unqualified to talk about it. I created lots of jokes making fun of mostly white gay men. I was doing lots of finger pointing and lots of finger wagging. It wasn't until I started pointing the finger at myself that the show really went anywhere. And that's where it got tough. The first show was all about how I dealt with some really crappy things that other people had done to me. It's easy to stand up in front of people and describe how you've overcome adversity. It's hard to stand in front of people and say that you are part of the problem.

Admitting my sexual preference for muscular men was easy. But if I was going to really confront my own femme shaming I was going to have to look at the first show and the character I created. I would have to admit that I was hiding behind Percy. I would have to admit that Percy is not a character but is very much a part of who I am. I would have to admit that although being an introvert was one of the reasons I had a hard time handing out flyers from my show to the crowds at the Edinburgh Festival fringe, the real obstacle was the fear of going up to strangers and asking them to come see a show about how gay I am.

And did I really want to take on racism? And how could I do that without talking about the time when I was a kid and I called my best friend the N word. And how as late as college I had used the word as a joke. I can't deny the effect that growing up in South Carolina in the 70's and 80's had on me. I'm racist because "everyone's a little racist" as the song goes. It's easy to take part in the worst parts of society. Especially when they don't appear to have a direct effect on your daily life. Or at least you think they don't.

But how did I become so femme phobic? Something that has had an extremely obvious effect on my life. Something that has caused me more harm than any other single aspect of what it means to be me?

I thoroughly believe that one of the most important political statements I could make is to come out as non-binary. I know I am non-binary. And I would delight in making old straight people wriggle when I make them call me "they." And, come on, skirts are just really comfortable. The only reason I don't come out as non-binary is because I want butch gay boys to find me attractive. I want to be able to feel masculine when I'm in a gay leather bar.

How did I learn that being masculine was important? Was good? Was desirable?

So I started looking at how I shaped my identity and my belief system and realized that the people I identified with had a huge influence. The people I took refuge in. The people I felt safe with. The people who brought me the greatest joy.

Its like when I came out to my high school drama teacher, Mr. Spearman. And he told me that I would be very popular with the gay boys because I was young, pretty, and had a great ass. And he proved it. He took a group to London my senior year in high school. There was nothing that would have kept me from going on that trip. On one of our free nights we were walking around town and walked past the Hippodrome, one of the largest clubs in London. It just so happened that it was gay night. And we were just in time for the festivities to start. Thankfully there were two chaperones. The French teacher took all the kids under 18 back to the hotel and the few of us that were 18 stayed with Mr. Spearman and went inside. I have never been so grateful for failing the third grade. Otherwise I would have been 17 at this time. I had never seen anything like it. It was huge. Multi-level with a huge dance floor. The laser lights pulsing to the "Relax" by Frankie Goes to Hollywood. I had my first gin and tonic. I'm sure it was Beefeaters, after all I was in London. But it was a little scary too. I know I looked like a deer in headlights. There was one individual on the dance floor dancing all my himself and having an amazing time. He had on a green outfit that I would today call drag. It was cinched at the waist and had a little skirt and leggings to match. But on his bald head, he had done the most intricate makeup design that made it look like a giant egg had been cracked on the top of his skull and was running down his face. After a couple GnTs he became less scary.

But the highlight of the night was when the best-looking man in the place kept staring at me. At least that's the way I remember it. Probably because after we returned to the hotel, Mr. Spearman told me so. Mr. Spearman apologized for not letting me go home with this guy, but that would not have gone over well if it made it back to Dorman High School. This man was tall dark and handsome. When this guy was chatting with his friends but clearly staring at me, it was the most horrifying thrill of little my life.

The one thing I wish Mr. Spearman had told me was that, yes, being young and pretty will get you far. But you have to be careful. There is a line you can't cross. If you are too girly or swishy, other gays will support you and cheer for your existence, but they will keep you in that box. The box reserved for our friends that we will love like sisters but not like lovers. Once you cross that line, the gay world only has a specific use for you. And it is not for fucking.

I learned this lesson from my first boyfriend. Bobby. I met him at the Stone Castle in Greenville, SC the summer after I graduated from high school. The Castle was only the second gay bar I'd ever been in. The first was the Hippodrome...one of the biggest clubs in London. Somehow the Castle paled in comparison. But I was still thrilled to be there. My first time there was on a blind date with Mr. Spearman's best friend, Greg. He took me to see "A Chorus Line" at the local community theatre. A bit stereotypical for a first gay date. But after the show and an awkward run in with a friend of a friend at an ice cream parlor where I had to introduce a "friend" who was fifteen years older than me, we went to the Castle. This date was a very informative excursion. The most important thing that happened was, I met Bobby. When Greg was at the bar getting me a GnT, because that was my drink, Bobby introduced himself to me, he called me the next day and we dated for a year and a half. Bobby was very muscular, and he had been a stunt man on the TV show CHiPs. I was in love and I thought he knew everything. He taught me a lot about being gay. Some things stuck, some things didn't. Like using Vaseline for lube. But the things that did stick are the fact that, if you're gay it's the law that you lift weights and that being girly is not acceptable.

One time I appeared at his house wearing a long overcoat, my hair had grown out and was particularly poofy that day, and I had done that trick to my eyebrows to make them look pointy. He told me how girly I looked and that I needed to stop plucking my eyebrows. And I internalized so much of the machismo he sent my way. I used to keep track of the number of times that he topped me so that I would top in the same number of times. Because I was NOT going to be the girl.

When things between Bobby and I started going south, I struggled a lot. It took me months to finally break it off. I finally worked up the courage to do it when I came to the realization that if I were a woman, I would be a lesbian. I'm gonna let that sink in for a bit. I realized that if I had been born female, I would probably be a lesbian. Now I can see this realization about my gender and sexual preference was really nothing more than my fear of admitting that I was bisexual. And that there was no place in the straight world and especially not in the gay world to act on it. I did go on to date a few women after Bobby. But even then, I remember being so proud of the fact that I could be straight, if not straight acting.

As much as I can accuse gay men from perpetuating the evil of femme phobia, and at the risk of ruining the theme of this show, I know we're all products of our upbringing. That any problems gay men have with femininity come from the way they were taught by the larger society.

Like the time in third grade when I was playing in a group of kids and screamed a note high up in my head voice that I wish I could hit today, and my teacher pulled me by the arm out of the group and told me she didn't ever want to hear me screaming like that again.

In the 80's it became cool for men to take an interest in their appearance. I adored doing my hair. But I went too far and put a mirror in my locker and the girlfriend of the most popular boy in school saw it. I became a legend. My life was never the same.

But before that, there was the shaving my legs incident. My cousin Kelly was about five years older than me and I really looked up to her. She frequently spent summers at our place because she and her mother were having some growing pains. But really it was probably because our apartment complex had a pool. We spent the entire summer in our swimsuits. One day I walked into the living room she still had her swimsuit on and was shaving her legs. I was in the 4th grade. I started watching her very carefully and she could see that I was taking an interest. I decided that I should shave my legs too. It didn't occur to me that this was something that boys didn't do. All I knew at that time was that the person that I most closely identified with was shaving her legs and I saw no reason that I shouldn't shave my legs too. So I picked up the razor. She coached me through it. She explained that long strokes were preferable. She pointed out the spots that I needed to be careful of. And she gave me other advice on how to avoid nicks. I remember feeling really connected to her, really feeling like she was teaching me something that was a very important part of what it meant to be her. And I felt like somehow this brought her to a better understanding of who I was.

After my legs were sufficiently hair free and while I was admiring what a good job I had done I realized Kelly wasn't in the room anymore because I could hear her voice in my mother's bedroom. The next thing I know Mom is demanding that I come into her room. While I'm walking down the Hall towards Mom's bedroom I can hear Kelly laughing with this malicious little giggle. I walk into Mom's room and I will never forget the look of disgust I see on her face. it's the first time I see that look and thankfully I won't ever see it again.

Mom forbids me to wear shorts until the hair on my legs grows back. It occurs to me that this is a cruel punishment because long pants in August in South Carolina is just torture. But it also occurs to me that it is a completely unnecessary punishment because I did not have any visible hair on my legs. No one would actually notice what I had done.

I really felt betrayed. Kelly had acted one way when the two of us were together and then she immediately goes to my mother and mocks me. And that look on my mother's face makes me feel like there is just something deep down inside of me that is so wrong it probably can't be fixed.

Many years later when I was in college I go to see a psychic. She asks me what happened when I was young that made me have to pull away from my family and start making my own decisions. I really struggle to think about what she could possibly be referring to, but I can't imagine what she could possibly be talking about.

Many many years after seeing the psychic I find myself in my little writing cubby at home working on this show. Thinking back on this experience with shaving my legs and trying to exploit my personal life for theatrical purposes, and I realized this shaving the legs moment is the moment that the psychic was talking about. I realized that this betrayal on the part of my cousin and my mother was the moment the young Brian learned that there are certain things about yourself that you can't share with other people. I learned that there was something about me deep down inside that not even family loyalty could tolerate.

I learned that there are three important ways of negotiating the world. When you're with one other person when you're with a few people and when you're with a lot of people. I already knew that when you're with lots of people, there are acceptable ways to behave. And what's the point of being yourself when you're one of hundreds? This event taught me that you can't trust the way people behave when it's just the two of you because when you add more people to the group their behavior is going to change. And that hurts. I think we are always seeking approval or influence. With just two, that's easy. In three, it becomes complicated. Kelly taught me that it's difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate a group larger than two without someone getting hurt and that I was going to have to be careful about who I open myself to.

But I feel very fortunate to just now in my 50s to be putting together all the pieces of this puzzle. I think if I had fully admitted everything that this event implicated I would have become a very sullen person. But now as an adult trying to gain perspective on things, I realized that the real lesson of this event was not about who you can't trust, but it was about the importance of finding the people that you can trust. Perhaps I learned that there are people in your life who will betray you. And it will hurt and it will change you. At the time of the shaving legs incident and even in college, I didn't have anyone in my life that I could trust. I'm so grateful that I didn't put this all together until I did. Now I realize the real lesson I learned was that when you do find those people you hold onto them with all you have.

So here I am. Feeling a bit lost about my place and the world, feeling like I'm part of the problem. But I am feeling a bit more optimistic. I feel like I'm at the end of a South Park episode where Kyle admits that he finally realizes that he just doesn't get it. That society has turned him into a selfish short-sighted person. I have things I need to address. Racism and especially misogyny are very ingrained in me. But its time to stop blaming others and take responsibility. Is that progress??

The gimmick for my first show was that it was a kids show in which Percy teaches the little sissies how to be fabulous by doing hair and dealing with bullies. The biggest step in creating this show was when I stopped trying to teach anybody anything.

I was talking to a guy who runs an acting studio in NYC. He also coaches solo show writers and performers. I asked him why a white guy should take up any more time on a stage. He said that if one person needs to hear what you're saying, its all worth it.

I don't have any answers. I don't know how to solve any problems. But I do know simply admitting that to myself is the first step. And I also know that I look pretty good in eye liner.

Thank you.