

TransSisters

\$3.00 (U.S.A.); \$4.00 (Canada)

The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

Issue #3

Winter 1994



In this issue:

*Of
Transsexuals
and
Transcendence*

*Transphobia:
Where
Separatism
Joins
Patriarchy*

*Twenty-One
Things You
Don't Say to
a Transsexual*

*Surgical
Roulette*

Plus:

*The Importance of Outspokenness • Intersexuality • Gender & Sexuality •
Orgasmic Function in Postoperative Transsexual Women • and more!*



Publisher / Editor
 Davina Anne Gabriel

Contributing Writers This Issue

- Christine Beatty
- Cheryl Chase
- Davina Anne Gabriel
- Anne Ogborn
- Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan
- J.L. Phillips
- Karen Sheddric
- Janis Walworth
- Riki Anne Wilchins

Contributing Photographers This Issue

- Davina Anne Gabriel
- Michael McClure
- David Pincus
- Kelly White
- Petranelia Ytsma

Contributing Artists This Issue

- Rachel Pollack

Contributing Cartoonists This Issue

- Leslie Ewing

Cover illustration: "Shining Woman" from the Shining Woman tarot deck by Rachel Pollack, published by The Aquarian Press; Hammersmith, London. Copyright 1992 by Rachel Pollack. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

The Shining Woman symbolizes self-perfection, integration, and recognition of one's own power and of the sacred roots of one's own being.

Issue #3

Winter 1994

Contents

Letters to the Editor 3

The Importance of Outspokenness
 by Davina Anne Gabriel 5

Transphobia: Where Separatism Joins Patriarchy
 by Janis Walworth 8

Twenty-One Things You Don't Say to a Transsexual
 by Riki Anne Wilchins 10

Of Transsexuals and Transcendence
 by Davina Anne Gabriel 12

New Woman Conference 3 Orgasm Workshop Responses
 by Anne Ogborn & Cheryl Chase 22

Reflections by Karen Sheddric 23

Orgasmic Function in Postoperative Transsexual Women
 by Anne Ogborn & Cheryl Chase 24

Welcome to the World of the Intersexed
 by Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan 26

Surgical Roulette by Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan 28

Do It Your Way by Christine Beatty 31

Gender & Sexuality by Christine Beatty 32

So You Think You Are a Lesbian by Christine Beatty 34

Litany by J.L. Phillips 34

cartoon by Leslie Ewing 35

TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism is published quarterly by Skyclad Publishing Co; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110; (816) 753-7816. Opinions expressed or advertisement contained herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its publishers or staff. Content of all advertisement is the sole responsibility of the advertisers. *TransSisters* reserves the right to refuse publication of any advertisement, article, letter or other submission which it considers contrary to its goals and purposes. Publication of the name, photograph or likeness of any person, business or organization is not to be construed as any indication of the sexual orientation, gender identity or personal beliefs of such persons, businesses or organizations. All rights reserved. Contents may not be reproduced except for personal use without permission of the publisher. Subscription rates: \$12.00 (USA); \$16.00 (Canada) for four issues. Back issues are available for \$4.00 each. (U.S.A.) or \$5.00 each. (Canada) Entire contents copyright 1993.

☽ Letters to the Editor ~



Dear Davina,

I'm writing to say how very, very impressed I am with the first issue of *TransSisters*. You are filling a very real need, one I was awkwardly trying to address in *Rites of Passage*. Being basically a scientist and as apolitical as possible, I didn't feel I was the best person to look at feminist issues. I'm so glad for *TransSisters*. I would love to write for it.

I had already decided to temper the political content of *ROP* with something else I think is needed--spirituality. We really need a spiritual journal. I'll continue to address political issues, but perhaps less extensively than in the last issue.

Once again, congratulations, and I hope you will continue to keep us on your mailing list. Your issues will go into our newly formed National Transgender Library and Archive, and will be kept in perpetuity, as we are a 501 (c) (3)

organization, and our assets must remain with 501 (c)(3) organizations.

Sincerely,

Dallas Denny, M.A., Executive Director,
American Educational Gender Information Service
Decatur, Georgia

Dear Davina,

Thank you for issues # 1 & 2 of your new magazine. As a transgenderist who identifies as a lesbian and also considers herself a feminist, I personally found your approach very positive and enlightening. Your selection of articles in issue # 2 brought me insights into a situation that I have been attempting to follow from afar . . . and occasionally missing pieces of the puzzle.

Kymerleigh Richards,
publisher / managing editor, *Cross-Talk*
Woodland Hills, California

Notice

Beginning with this issue, *TransSisters: the Journal of Transsexual Feminism* will be published quarterly instead of bi-monthly. This change in frequency of publication should not in any way be regarded as an indication of any adversity being experienced by this publication. Rather, it is quite the opposite. *TransSisters* has grown and prospered at a rate surpassing my original expectations. As the amount of material suitable for publication that I have received, as well as the readership of this publication, have both increased dramatically, I have found that the amount of work required to complete each issue has likewise increased substantially, making it very difficult for me to complete an entire issue within only a two-month period. The new publishing schedule will better enable me to serve the readership of this publication.

TransSisters has already increased its size by fifty percent over its first issue and has made substantial improvements in its publishing quality as well, a process that I hope to be able to continue in subsequent issues. Beginning with the next issue, I will be adding a group of regular staff writers which will include some of the most talented and thought-provoking writers writing about the subject of transsexuality today.

TransSisters may return to a bi-monthly publishing schedule in the future if that is feasible. But for the present time, *TransSisters* will be published four times per year: in January (Winter), April (Spring), July (Summer) and October (Autumn).

Subscribers who ordered six issue subscriptions will receive the full number of issues for which they have paid.

--Davina Anne Gabriel, publisher / editor

Dear Ms. Gabriel,

I have just received my "sample" copy of issue # 2, and have not yet had time to read it all, but it is so obviously excellent that I am sure your magazine is destined to become a very important voice in our transsexual community. I look forward to seeing what you are up to -- we need as many voices as possible in our community! By the way, you win the prize for the cleverest magazine title in the field, bar none! Perhaps I will have a chance to contribute something in the future.

Congratulations sisters!

Katherine Collins,
Oakland, California

Dear Davina,

From her interview, I reaffirm my first impression, gained from reading her book, that Leslie Feinberg is one of my favorite people. I actually wrote her a fan letter once. Somewhat like her, and perhaps like yourself, I find myself kind of on the fringes of the lesbian community through born male and slightly younger. I left the community during the p.c. and separatist wars of the 70s and am gradually drifting back.

I've just finished reading issue # 2 and am fascinated with the many voices presented therein. I'm so thrilled to see sisters like you and all those others finally standing up and being counted and accepted by so many and I was especially delighted to hear of your commitment to feminist principles. I was interested to note, in this latest issue, that at least three people share my opinion of Alix Dobkin, whom I've also met. So many people, who seem perfectly nice at a distance, whose politics seem "sympatica" in the rosy glow of edited publications or idolatrous hearsay, don't really hold up well in harsher light of

unpremeditated dialogue. I guess most people have a few flaws scattered in among their virtues, and I don't really think she's quite as much of a jerk as she sounds, but she was facing one of the situations in which she becomes a jerk temporarily. We all have one or two such weaknesses. No one can maintain a saint-like acceptance of differences in all situations.

Alix really had a point, although she missed it later, in a fit of internalized gender phobia, when she said there's more than two sexes. There's more than two of *everything*, an infinite rainbow of variations on every theme. We humans insist on dividing things into pairs of opposites, though; you can't stop people from doing that. It's really not appropriate to say to someone, "Pick another label, I'm using that one," since the labels have an internal reality that we all share as a common heritage. . . You always find gray areas, people who don't quite fit into any particular bin. I think it's best to let people choose their own bins. They're much less likely to make a mistake in fitting themselves gently into the almost-right-shaped holes than a casual bystander is likely to do by pounding them into the one that superficially looks best. When it comes to choosing sides, it's smart to think about the choice for yourself but it's not at all polite to quibble about someone else's choices. People do this all the time about lesser things and no one seems to care very much, besides the occasional bigot or two. . . but let someone choose an unlikely side in the "war" of the sexes, though and many people discover a sudden orthodoxy that instantly bypasses rational thought. But people do choose sides. Sometimes, the choice is a surprising one. At one time, the best psychological theory held that lesbians were inverted in their sexuality, taking on the characteristics of men, and women styled themselves after this fashion. It made some sense, given an essentialist bias, but now we know better.

I suspect that Alix would make the same choice as I, but would she be comfortable sitting next to me? I think not. (Actually, I know not. I once ran across her at a women's music festival, and she made her disapproval fairly clear.) Should I leave to make her comfortable or should she leave to make herself comfortable? I would be comfortable whether she stayed or not but I wouldn't be comfortable leaving. So staying is what I usually do. But I hate unpleasant scenes. I must say that I somewhat sympathize with people who are uncomfortable around transgendered people, without condoning their often atrocious manners. People often fear what they don't understand and it's very hard to understand transgendered people. . .

. . . I do find though, that many people, in a kindly rush of well-meaning pseudo-solidarity with their friends, attribute to themselves experiences that they haven't really had. I once heard a man, fairly nice man, describe his feelings at having been burgled as a "rape." I'm sure he offended many women, who were present as he grandly expounded on the supposed similarity, who had experienced the shattering actuality of rape and felt that

their own experience was thereby trivialized. I was raped as a child, a very different experience, I think, than that of an adult woman whose adult integrity was violated. I would not dare to compare my experience with hers although I am in perfect sympathy with her and sense a relationship between the two experiences that might make me slightly more able to understand her feelings than someone who

has had neither experience. I have heard gays and others state, even one woman in your last issue, that they "understood" the feelings of sexually abused people because they had been abused about their sexuality. I know that they are trying to demonstrate their sympathy and understanding but, having experienced both, I can say that the similarity exists only in metaphor. The devastation of sexual abuse by a trusted family member, with its accompanying residue of life-destroying shame and dysfunction, is beyond comparison with mere taunts and bullying, as rape is beyond mere theft. I can sympathize with the pain and anguish of these people, real as it was for them -- the cup of sorrow always seems full to the brim -- but wish that they could realize that others, who may have drained a somewhat deeper cup to the very dregs, might feel belittled by their unthinking condescension. . . Trying to falsely claim that kinship by analogy is like telling someone you know just how they felt when their mother died because you lost a canary once. It may be meant well but it will rarely be taken well. Better thoughts and words might express your very real compassion and attempt at understanding without professing to have had the very same experience, an obvious exaggeration, and demeaning, if you have not.

In sisterhood, much love,
Name withheld upon request

"Trying to falsely claim...kinship by analogy is like telling someone you know just how they felt when their mother died because you lost a canary once."

Letters to the Editor

TransSisters welcomes letters to the editor from our readers. All letters must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request, except for letters which criticize by name any individual, organization or entity. Anonymous personal attacks will *not* be published. Please also include your address and telephone number in case we want to verify your letter. All letters are subject to editing. Please address all letters to: Letters to the Editor; *TransSisters*; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110.

Submissions Wanted

Submissions of accounts of harassment and/or discrimination experienced by transsexual womyn within the lesbian/feminist community are now being collected for an anthology. Please send such submissions to: Davina Anne Gabriel; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110.

The Importance of Outspokenness

by Davina Anne Gabriel

In the film *The Silence of the Lambs*, FBI trainee Clarice Starling, portrayed by Jodie Foster, makes the observation that "transsexuals are very passive." Although I was grateful that this film went to considerable lengths to distinguish its psychopathic pseudo-transsexual villain from true transsexuals, and to acknowledge that transsexuals are overwhelmingly nonviolent, I nevertheless heaved a sigh of frustration when I heard this particular remark. But it wasn't because such an observation is an overgeneralization, even though it is. Nor was it because I was likewise keenly aware that the distinctions that this film was carefully trying to make would be lost on a considerable segment of the audience anyway.

No, I heaved a sigh of frustration because there really is so very much truth about this observation, because it is indeed all too very true that, in general, "transsexuals are very passive." And not just passive as in nonviolent, as is intended by this particular remark, but passive even to the extent of allowing themselves to be treated like doormats. The very sad fact of the matter is that it is indeed all too true that, in general, transsexuals are far too passive, and even passive to a fault, and to a major fault at that. It has been my personal observation that the majority of transsexuals whom I have known, both pre and postoperative, are generally so passive that they willingly endure injustices and humiliations that most people would never tolerate.

Now I do understand how this tendency develops in the psyches of most transsexuals, as this is a tendency that I have likewise had to struggle very hard to overcome. Perhaps the most significant factor affecting this development is that most of us simply do not ever entirely get over being somewhat ashamed of being transsexuals. By making this observation, I am not meaning to place the blame entirely on transsexuals themselves, as I most certainly do understand how difficult it is to overcome such feelings when one is constantly being bombarded by societal messages that one should feel ashamed about such a thing. But it is possible to overcome such societal messages and to develop a healthy psyche in spite of them, and most transsexuals do manage to do so to some extent. But even among those who do manage to do so, there usually remains some vestige of shame, and that in turn translates into excessive self-consciousness, self-doubt, passivity and withdrawal.

Psychological and emotional vestiges of shame are most obviously manifested in an inordinate fear of discovery. This in turn translates into the tendency to "fade into the woodwork," to blend into society, "to be ignored," which I have

actually heard transsexuals express in those very words as being their highest personal goal in life. But even though we may not harbor any feelings of shame for our transsexuality, many of us still fear discovery because of how we think others will react to us if they discover our hidden pasts. This is similar to, but not exactly the same as fear of discovery because of "not passing."

Another transsexual, who passed extremely well, once told me that she had deliberately burned all of her bridges with her former male self, that no one that she currently knows or remains in contact with knew her as a male, and that she had also been very careful to hide her male past from everyone whom she currently knows. Her stated reason for doing this was that if people knew this about her that they would treat her as if she were a convicted child molester. And of course, there is a lot of truth to what she claims; a great many people do indeed react to transsexuals as if they were depraved sexual perverts.

But then, how is this societal misperception ever going to change if transsexuals do not confront it directly? Are we not to some extent guilty of perpetuating misperceptions and ignorance about transsexuality that are manifested in differential treatment of ourselves if we fail to counter them directly? It seems to me very much that we are indeed. As Martin Luther King, Jr. observed: "He who passively accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it." We simply can not afford to passively await the time that such societal ignorance and bigotry will fade away of its own accord, nor can we wait for others to make this effort on our behalf. Unless we make the concerted effort ourselves to counter such beliefs they will remain firmly entrenched. Another observation of Martin Luther King, Jr. is equally appropriate in this regard: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

Where would most of us be today if it had not been for the determinedly courageous behavior in confronting societal ignorance and bigotry demonstrated by such individuals as Christine Jorgensen, Rene Richards, Jan Morris, and all of those far less well known transsexuals who had the courage to unashamedly tell the whole world their personal stories on television talk shows, or in books and magazine articles? There is no doubt that had it not been for the courageous stances adopted by these individuals that the discrimination, bigotry, harassment and outright hatred that every one of us still has to face every day of our lives would indeed be far greater than it presently is. Who among us can say that we have not been personally inspired by one or more of these courageous individuals to pursue our own course toward self-fulfillment? And not only have such individuals been inspirations to all of us personally, but there is likewise no doubt that they have done an

enormous amount to raise understanding and awareness about the nature of transsexuality among nontranssexuals. I have found it to be very common among people who are very open minded, understanding and accepting of transsexuals that their attitudes were greatly influenced by seeing some transsexual on a television talk show or reading a book or article by a transsexual. We all owe these courageous few individuals an enormous debt of gratitude for their outspokenness.

Yet societal prejudice and discrimination toward transsexuals remains all too resilient, because there are still far too few of us who are willing to confront them directly. The only way that such phenomenon will ever be totally dislodged is for each and every one of us to have the courage to break out of our chains of passivity and to confront them directly. This does not mean that we should adopt a belligerent or militant stance. History has repeatedly demonstrated that such an approach is necessarily doomed to failure. Rather, it means that we must adopt a stance of concerted outspokenness.

As the word indicates, there are two essential components of outspokenness, and the first such component is that of being **out**. This simply means that one is not in the closet about being a transsexual. As the gay and lesbian community discovered long ago, a closeted individual is an invisible individual, and an invisible individual is a powerless individual. This is no less true for transsexuals. So the primary quality of outspokenness is **visibility**. This does not mean that one must make an effort to draw attention to one's transsexuality, and indeed such an approach can be very counterproductive or even dangerous at times, but only that one must not make the effort to conceal it.

Even more importantly, besides making oneself invisible and therefore powerless, closetedness inevitably has the effect of exacting enormous psychological, emotional and spiritual burdens on the closeted individual. The closeted individual inevitably finds herself or himself in the position of expending enormous amounts of energy in the effort of remaining closeted. One inevitably finds oneself having to engage in systematic deceit, which continuously requires an increasing amount of energy to maintain. One finds oneself continually having to maneuver out of potentially embarrassing situations when one is closeted. The old saying, "What a tangled web we weave when we endeavor to deceive" is vividly demonstrated in the case of the closeted individual. As Sandy Stone observed in her 1991 essay "The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto" (from *Body Guards: the Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, edited by Julia Epstein & Kristina Straub, New York: Routledge, 1991.), closetedness literally precludes the possibility of any kind of genuine relationship with anyone.

Ironically, one of the primary reasons that transsexuals choose to be closeted is fear of isolation due to loss of friends or acquaintances upon discovery. Yet, closetedness itself is the source for much more profound types of isolation. I know of

another transsexual woman who also burned all of her bridges to her male past, and carefully maintained silence about it thereafter. But she soon discovered that her closetedness had extracted an unexpected cost. She literally had no one to whom she could talk about transsexual issues, something which she likewise discovered continued to be a very real need for her. Her closetedness had become a cage from which she couldn't escape. When transsexuals remain closeted out of fear of rejection, they trade away the possibility of community with other transsexuals, and all of its attendant potential empowerment, for the pittance of approval of people who are unworthy to be their friends.

One literally provides tacit legitimacy to the reasons that force one to be closeted by remaining closeted, and this can not help but to exact its price in terms of self-esteem. I sincerely believe that a closeted individual can not truly achieve meaningful self-esteem, for to be closeted is not only to live in perpetual fear, but to acknowledge that one has something to be ashamed of. To be closeted is to surrender one's personal power to define one's own reality, to literally hand that power over to another.

Being out of the closet, on the other hand, has precisely the opposite effect, and no less dramatically. It is

true that one may initially encounter some personal setbacks in terms of one's interactions with others after emerging from the closet, but such setbacks are inevitably replaced by breakthroughs. One is immediately freed from the psychological bonds of having to maintain a facade and the inevitable feelings of internalized guilt and shame that are attendant with the knowledge that one is participating in one's own oppression. Fear of discovery, self-doubt and shame gradually give way to feelings of self-confidence, competence and self-worth. Coming out of the closet is nothing less than the casting off of a psychological yoke that has bound one to an existence of limitations, which is precisely what we were all trying to free ourselves from by following the particular course we've chosen in the first place. One discovers just how true those old maxims "To thine own self be true" and "The truth shall set you free" really are when one casts off the psychological shackles of closetedness.

The second part of outspokenness is no less important than the first, and that is **speaking**. Just as being out connotes visibility, spokenness connotes making oneself heard, or **audibility**. Simply being out is not enough, one must also use one's voice, and I use that term to include any and all forms of self-expression, to raise awareness and to counter ignorance and falsehoods about transsexuality. This means that one must be well informed and able to express what one means, and this can only be achieved by a deliberate and concerted effort. One has to be familiar with anti-transsexual sentiments and beliefs to be able to effectively counter them. We can not afford to simply ignore the statements of persons such as Janice Raymond, who have expressed a desire to "mandate [us] out of existence."

"Silence does not equal death just for persons who are HIV+. Silence for transsexuals literally equals death of authentic selfhood and collective empowerment."

because what they say is upsetting to us. And of course, it takes deliberate effort to be able to effectively formulate one's position. None of this is easily achieved; in fact it is enormously difficult, but the alternative is self-annihilation. After all, Janice Raymond and her ilk have not merely expressed a desire to "mandate [us] out of existence," but have actually devoted a great deal of time and effort toward accomplishing that end.

Just as closetedness or invisibility allows someone else to define one's reality, so does silence or inaudibility result in the very same consequences. Nowhere has this more conclusively been demonstrated than in the case of transsexuals. Also in her 1991 essay "The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto," Sandy Stone observed that historically transsexuals have been complicit in their own oppression by allowing others, primarily professionals and academicians, to define our reality for us, rather than doing it ourselves, the result being our nearly virtual disempowerment and lack of self-determination. To again quote Sandy Stone: "Silence can be an enormously high price to pay for acceptance." Silence does not equal death just for persons who are HIV+. Silence for transsexuals literally equals death of authentic selfhood and collective empowerment.

As a transsexual lesbian, I have encountered a great deal of prejudice, animosity and outright discrimination within my own lesbian community, and thus have been confronted with numerous instances which required me to choose between standing up for myself or passively accepting the situation. I have never had any doubt about what I should do in such situations, but finding the courage to do so has never come easily. In every such instance, it would have been much easier to passively retreat from the challenge such situations have presented to me, but I have always realized that there would be a psychological price to pay for taking the easy way out. In every such instance, I have found that standing up to anti-transsexual bigotry and discrimination has been the most difficult and frightening thing that I have ever had to do, and I have very nearly given into fear and backed down from doing so every time it has been necessary for me to do so. But I have also found it to be the most deeply rewarding thing that I have ever done in my life, and not merely rewarding in terms of self-esteem. Not only have I discovered realms of inner strength that I did not believe that I had, but I have also found that taking the difficult stance of defending transsexuals against bigotry and discrimination has gained me an enormous amount of respect and admiration from others. Nothing in my life has ever given me as much personal satisfaction and sense of fulfillment as have all the times that others have remarked to me on how much courage it took for me to stand up to anti-transsexual bigotry and discrimination.

Transsexuals are among the heirs of a proud and noble spiritual tradition that dates back into prehistoric antiquity, and it is incumbent upon us to be true to that spiritual tradition. This means not just knowing who we really are, but also living out the implications of that knowledge. And that self-knowledge must go beyond understanding ourselves in terms of

conventional standards of what it means to be a woman or to be a man, which is the level of understanding that most transsexuals still fail to transcend. It means no longer trying to "blend in" or "to be ignored." It means precisely the opposite; that is, to be assertive, to stand out and to be noticed, not as being bizarre or crazy, but to be recognized as the truly special and exceptional people that we truly are, and that we were regarded as in the ancient and so-called "primitive" civilizations that conformist modern industrial society has very nearly eradicated.

I am certainly no fan of Janice Raymond, but I do think that she makes a few valid points in her stridently bigoted anti-transsexual diatribe, *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979). One such observation which I find myself in general, though not total, agreement with is that the process that the medical profession requires us to undergo in order to obtain surgery has a tendency to co-opt our revolutionary potential. Where I would differ with Raymond on this point, though, is that she sees transsexual surgery as inherently limiting of that revolutionary potential; whereas, I maintain that it is only the particular way in which that process is presently structured that is co-opting.

What Raymond and I do agree on is that transsexuals certainly do have enormous revolutionary potential. More than any other group of individuals in society we have the power to redefine societal norms and values as they relate to gender. We do precisely the opposite when we strive to conform to existing societal standards and gender defined boundaries.

There is another deeper reason for the overwhelming passivity demonstrated by so many male-to-female transsexuals, than I have previously mentioned, and perhaps this is really the most significant one. Far too many of us still internalize the societal message that women are supposed to be passive, so we adopt an attitude of passivity to prove to ourselves and to others, especially to the medical profession, that we truly are women. This is an attitude that the medical establishment expects of us, and which is reinforced throughout our transitions, during which "passing" literally becomes synonymous with "passivity." This is an attitude that we all have to transcend if we are ever to gain the respect that is due to us.

When we fail to stand up to prejudice and discrimination directed towards us, or when we implicitly co-operate in perpetuating the attitudes that make such things possible, by remaining closeted and silent, we are indeed acting in the very stereotypically weak and helplessly passive fashion that society expects women to act in. Instead, we should be challenging such limited conceptions of what it means to be women at every opportunity that presents itself, and that is precisely the opposite of passivity.

When Clarice Starling stated that "transsexuals are very passive" in *The Silence of the Lambs* she meant to dispel the notion that transsexuals are dangerous sexual perverts, but ironically, it is only by truly overcoming our deeply internalized passivity that we will truly succeed in dispelling such societal notions. To do otherwise is to continue to allow ourselves to be lambs being led to slaughter.

Transphobia: Where Separatism Joins Patriarchy

(Editor's note: The following article was originally published in the Summer 1992 issue of Lesbian Contradiction, and was among the educational literature distributed at the 1993 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Reprinted with permission of the author.)

by Janis Walworth

I used to consider myself something of a separatist, not in an extreme way, but I certainly minimized my contact with men and actively opposed the patriarchal system (as I still do). However, I find I must break ranks with separatists on the issue of transsexuals (used here to mean only postoperative male-to-female transsexuals). Separatists' insistence that transsexuals are men is a denial of reality and reflects ignorance on the subject of transsexuality as well as a failure to get to know many of these people personally.

Interestingly, both separatism and patriarchy rely on the ability to distinguish clearly between the sexes. In fact, the differences are not so clear. In our society, babies are assigned a sex at birth based on a cursory examination of external genitalia, and it is assumed that gonads, chromosomes, and hormones, as well as the later development of secondary sex characteristics, gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender role will all match this assignment. However, this is a schema imposed on the world by human minds--nature is not so neatly composed.

This becomes evident when we try to obtain objective criteria with which to differentiate transsexual from nontranssexual women. Anatomically, careful observation by a trained observer is necessary to make the distinction, and even that will not distinguish a transsexual from a nontranssexual woman who has had genital surgery as the result of cancer or to correct a birth defect.

Genetically, there are many variations in sex chromosomes. Not all women have XX and not all men have XY. Some people assigned as females at birth who have never questioned their sex have XY chromosomes. Some transsexuals have an XXY pattern or have a certain percentage of cells with XX.

Hormone levels also do not distinguish between transsexual and nontranssexual women. There is considerable interindividual variation and some overlap between male and female levels. Postmenopausal women and those who have had

their ovaries removed are still women, although their hormone production pattern resembles that of men.

Secondary sex characteristics are not a reliable guide to sex. Flat-chested women may have smaller breasts than overweight men; women body builders have more muscles than most men; and the latest thing at Michigan last summer was to let your facial hair grow--an amazing number of women sported beards and moustaches.

Legally, postoperative transsexuals are considered women. All their legal documents, including birth certificate, driver's license, etc. are changed so that from a legal point of view, they are indistinguishable from nontranssexual women.

In terms of gender identity, most transsexuals have felt like females as long as they can remember, just like most nontranssexual women. They react to having a penis just the way I would if I suddenly woke up tomorrow morning with one.

As far as social behavior or gender role, the transsexuals I know are no more or less masculine or feminine than the dykes I know. It is fascinating to me that some members of the lesbian community rejoice in the natural expression of masculine characteristics in nontranssexual women as a form of defiance

against patriarchal gender norms, but any trace of masculinity in a transsexual woman is taken as proof that she is "really" a man.

Some lesbians argue that transsexuals have been socialized as males and therefore can never escape behaving in masculine ways. In discussing this with transsexuals, I have found that most of them felt uncomfortable with the male socialization others attempted to impose on them. Some actively rejected it, while others tried to conform to expectations, only to feel like failures. Furthermore, some transsexuals were actually raised as girls from an early age.

Many transsexuals who were trained as adults to behave in masculine ways--being authoritative, decisive, unemotional, uncommunicative, etc.--have consciously rejected that training. Contrary to the paranoid fears some separatists and others have expressed about transsexuals taking leadership positions in the lesbian community, I have seen them time and again step back from positions of power and remove themselves from decision-making bodies.

Some have argued that transsexuals haven't been oppressed as women all their lives and so cannot really understand what it means to be a woman in this society. Certainly, there is a wide variation in the amount of oppression

"There is no doubt that some of us have had more opportunities than others. The essential question is whether we use that advantage to aggrandize ourselves at the expense of others or whether we use it to improve the status of women who did not have those opportunities."

nontranssexual women have experienced. Transsexuals have often been treated badly for wanting to be women, and the contrast between the way they are treated before and after assuming a female appearance brings sexism into sharp focus. In fact, many transsexual women I know are feminists and are actively working for women's rights.

The fact that transsexuals have lived in a male role has allowed them to take advantage of male privilege in school, job opportunities, etc., and this is a point of contention for some nontranssexual lesbians. My view is that most of us have taken advantage of vicarious male privilege at some point in our lives-- I went to college on what my father earned as a male. Transsexuals should not be asked to erase their experiences in the male role any more than I should be asked not to use my college education. There is no doubt that some of us have had more opportunities than others. The essential question is whether we use that advantage to aggrandize ourselves at the expense of others or whether we use it to improve the status of women who did not have those opportunities.

Finally, transsexual women define themselves as women. We in the lesbian community value highly the right to define ourselves as we see fit and to have that definition respected by others. I think we should extend that same respect to anyone who self-defines as a woman. Whether we argue for inclusion of transsexuals in our groups or for restricting our activities to so-called "women-born women," we should acknowledge that transsexual women are women and refrain from the offensive practice of using masculine pronouns to refer to them (which some extremists insist on doing).

On a personal level, I am privileged to know quite a few transsexual women and to count several of them among my good friends. They have enriched my life considerably. Although I hate to make generalizations, most of the transsexual lesbians I know are intelligent, have a great sense of humor, and possess an intense spirituality. They are more aware of sex and gender issues than most women and can view social inequities with a unique perspective. In their quest for wholeness, they are struggling with the same issues many other lesbians are dealing with--self-esteem, childhood sexual abuse, parental rejection, alienation from mainstream society, sexism, job discrimination, etc. In addition, transsexual women have fought and sacrificed to make their anatomy match their gender identity, a congruence most nontranssexual women take for granted.

Of course, there is as much diversity among transsexuals as there is among any other group, and I don't expect to like every transsexual woman I meet. Most dykes I've talked to, if they are aware of knowing any transsexuals, have based their opinion of transsexuals on just one acquaintance. Just as we deplore the judgment of all lesbians based on the behavior of the few who are most outspoken and obvious, we in turn should not judge transsexuals on that basis.

In short, there is little reason, other than our own prejudice and fear, to believe that transsexual women are anything other than women. I, for one, prefer to accept the truth of transsexuals' own experience of themselves above a

determination of sex at birth that is based on only a fraction of the characteristics that make up one's sex. Unquestioning acceptance of this rather arbitrary assignment of sex at birth, with is sanctioned by the patriarchal system, endorses the right of the patriarchy to define the truth of our experience for us.

I believe we should include transsexual lesbians in our community, not because there is nowhere else they belong or because there is no reasonable way to distinguish between them and us or because it may be illegal to discriminate against them, but because we owe it to ourselves. We can grow by confronting our internalized transphobia; we can partake in the fullness of womanhood by embracing all its aspect; and we can help deflate patriarchal power by welcoming the expression of the gray areas of gender.

*Janis Walworth has been a member of the lesbian community since before the Stonewall Rebellion, and she has been active in the gender community for several years. She leads workshops about gender and sexuality for women of varied gender backgrounds and sexual orientations. Janis is also a mother, the managing editor of **The Journal of Gender Studies**, a graduate student, and a resident of Ashby, Massachusetts.*



Janis Walworth

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

TransSisters Advertising Rates

Double Page Centerfold	\$70.00
Back Cover	\$60.00
Inside Front Cover	\$55.00
Inside Back Cover	\$50.00
Full Page	\$45.00
Half Page	\$25.00
Quarter Page	\$15.00
Eighth Page	\$10.00

Make checks payable to Davina Anne Gabriel

Twenty-One Things You Don't Say to a Transsexual

by Riki Anne Wilchins

Don't # 1: "I was just talking to A CHANGE the other day and..."

To me this suggests that you are having strange conversations with your pocket money. No one *is* a change. One can ask for change, own change, ex-change, change tires, change clothes, change sides, change to a minor key and change of life, but one cannot *be* a change.

Don't # 2: "You look just as good as I do."

Of course I do. And this is precisely the state of grace to which we all aspire. But more than likely you do both of us an injustice.

Don't # 3: "Well I want you to know I certainly consider you a woman."

It is a never-ending source of wonderment that well-intentioned, and otherwise very well-brought up people say this to me, with a light of total sincerity shining from their eyes for which any self-respecting cocker spaniel would kill. Unfortunately, this assurance turns on at least four assumptions which, upon closer inspection, prove to be entirely unfounded: a.) my gender is a subject about which reasonable people might be expected to reasonably differ; b.) my gender is a topic that is currently open for discussion; c.) my gender, and your perception of it, is something about which I suffer rather a great deal of anxiety about and which I am seeking some reassurance; d.) you, since you are a nontranssexual, are in just the providential position of providing me with this reassurance I desperately seek.

Don't # 4: "I consider you as much a woman as ANY of my friends."

What a treat for them, especially your male friends.

Don't # 5: "I would NEVER have guessed you were a transsexual."

This phrase is usually accompanied by a look of the utmost incredulity, followed closely by a searching, penetrating, and largely *sotto voce* reappraisal of all the things you thought you knew about me (or perhaps only all the times we slept together). Unfortunately, this utterance assumes that your credulity, no doubt a topic of endless fascination to you, is of equal interest to me. Since there are tens of thousands of us (perhaps in *your building* alone!), the fact that some of us can "pass" (a nasty

concept if ever there was one) as nontranssexual only prophesies that, wedded to the entirely fragile notion that you should be capable of identifying all of us on sight, you are destined for a life of more or less unending private humiliations.

Don't # 6: "When did you decide to become a woman?"

Well, when did *you* decide to become a woman? Oh . . . I see; with *you* it is normal. Um-hmmmmmm.

Don't # 7: "Can you have an orgasm?"

Yes, but only when I'm asked this question.

Don't # 8: "Can you have an orgasm?"

Don't # 9: "Can you have an orgasm?"

Don't # 10: "Can you have an orgasm?"

Don't # 11: "You must have a lot of courage to face surgery."

To have the actual surgery, I just had to be able to breathe deeply, count at least partway backwards from 100, and fall asleep with some semblance of dignity. In all of these tasks I was reliably aided by enough IV anesthetic to subdue a small water buffalo. It would also have helped, had I \$10-20,000 in spare *change* (see #1 above) about my

person. Unfortunately, while I was thus drifting majestically off to sleep, I found I also had to be able to watch my friends, most of my lovers, all of my family, and any lesbian who used the term "politically correct" in any context other than a Lily Tomlin joke, fade out of my existence forever. Also, I found that I woke up to endless refrains of DON'Ts # 1-7, above. That is the hard part; the surgery I could probably do again before breakfast.

Don't # 12: "I don't think it's anyone's concern what's between your legs unless they're sleeping with you."

Well, yes. But you, like me, might be surprised at the profound lack of fastidiousness some people display at even *this* tender area, as my weekly trips to the accoutrements racks at The Pleasure Chest and Eve's Garden confirm. In any case, I'm quite certain that whatever is between *your* legs, even during those hot, sticky, yucky days of summer, is totally above reproach and perfectly charming, while what's between mine, even on the very best of days, is, well, let's just not talk about it.

"... while we are waiting to take over your planet, we are amusing ourselves at your expense by seeing just how much we can fuck with your heads."

Don't # 13: "No one needs to know . . ."

Of course they don't. We all have our little secrets, the small indiscretions we would prefer no one know. The thirty-five or so years of my life just happen to be mine.

Don't # 14: "This is women-only space."

This is usually said to me by a rather red-faced lesbian, who probably believes she is confronting the *live penis-monster* (moi) as it approaches her *very doorstep*. But then, these things are so difficult today; perhaps she is really a straight woman complaining bitterly about a lack of men. The only correct response I can ever think of is, "Well I certainly feel better knowing *that*."

Don't # 15: "How did you know you're a woman?"

Well, how did *you* know *you* were a woman? Ah-humm: breasts and vagina. Well, I can introduce you to some very handsome, bearded, muscular young men of my acquaintance who began life with the very same equipment, so that's not particularly compelling evidence, is it? . . . I see, inside *you* just *know* . . . Call me sometime, we'll have lunch.

Don't # 16: "When you were a man . . ."

Unless this phrase refers to a prior life of mine (something I have yet to explore), it's always difficult to respond to, because it assumes that I ever *was* a man. I think this sentence is meant to begin with, "When you lived socially as a man . . ." or "When people thought you were a man . . ."; small, but nonetheless, like lapels or pleats, highly significant differences.

Don't # 17: "I think transsexuals are just men in drag."

Of course you do, and you're entitled, even justifiably proud, to think so. *Do not*, however, voice *this* sentiment while surrounded by a room full of men who really *are* in drag, (for instance, the next Fantasy Ball). Also, be certain to note the exception to this rule, which is, of course, female-to-male transsexuals, who are really, well, just women in drag. We all know how naturally distasteful it is when men wear dresses or women wear pants. *Do not*, however, voice *this* sentiment while surround by a room full of S/M dykes in full leather and studs.

Don't # 18: "Well, I want you to know I respect your choices."

And I yours, particularly in transcendent matters, such as whether to register your pattern at Bloomingdales's or Saks, or whether a bright, robust yet tart, Almaden can properly accompany sushi. However, in more pedestrian spheres, such as gender identity, it profits us immensely to recall that *none* of us exercises much choice.

Don't # 19: "You look just like a REAL woman."

How splendid, especially when you recall I'm composed almost entirely of compressed soy byproducts. And you look just like a *real* transsexual. Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize that was an

insult.

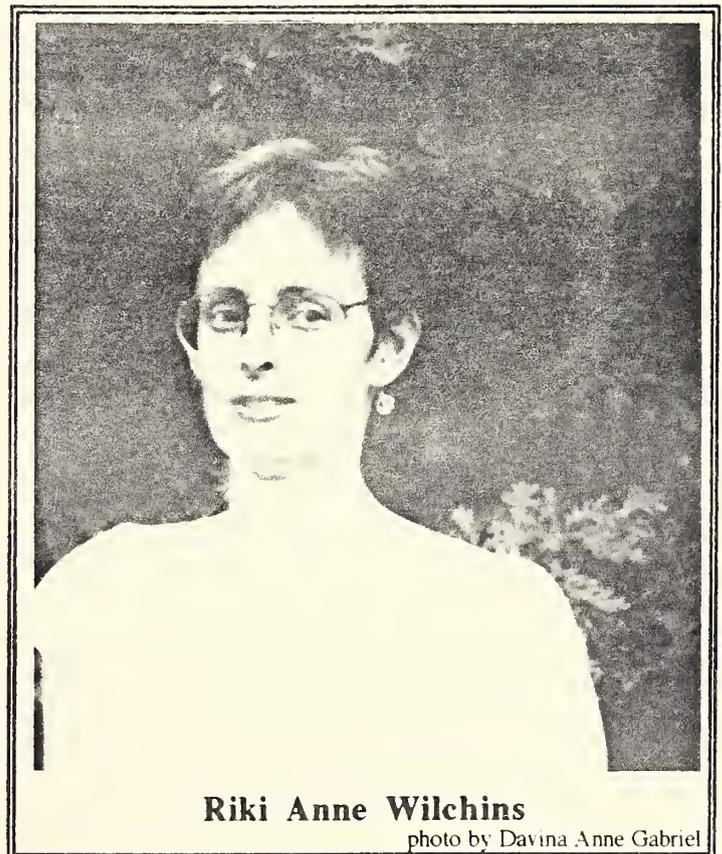
Don't # 20: "Isn't it AMAZING you're the ONLY transsexual I know."

Yes, and isn't it amazing, when you came out to your mother, *you* were the *only* homosexual she knew. Ho-hum. The fact that I am the only transsexual you know only emphasizes that: a.) you probably know a few hundred of us, but you don't know you know us, and we won't tell you that you do; b.) there are tens of thousands of us, and more all the time; c.) we are secretly plotting to take over the planet Earth, and infiltrating your prevailing nontranssexual culture is just our first step; d.) while we are waiting to take over your planet, we are amusing ourselves at your expense by seeing just how much we can fuck with your heads.

Don't # 21: "This may be a really dumb question, but . . ."

No question is dumb, especially yours, and particularly those you feel must be ushered in with a disclaimer. It is wonderful when someone cares enough to ask questions, and to add to their information. However, I *do* confess to problems, with certain kinds of inquiries which (for reasons which continue to elude me completely) I still *cannot* seem to answer properly. These include questions such as, "Have you stopped biting your lover yet?" and "Have you always looked this bad in sunlight?"

Riki Anne Wilchins is the founder of the Gender Identity Program at the Gay & Lesbian Community Center of New York City and of a twelve-step support group for transsexuals in New York City.



Riki Anne Wilchins

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

Of Transsexuals and Transcendence

by Davina Anne Gabriel

The expulsion of Nancy Jean Burkholder from the Sixteenth Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in August 1991 brought to national attention what had previously been merely a local issue in lesbian/feminist communities throughout the country; that is, the legitimacy of the exclusion of postoperative male-to-female (MTF) transsexual lesbians from their larger lesbian communities. Debate surrounding this issue in the lesbian/feminist media has not only continued unabated since that time, but has continued to escalate, and in the process, has sharply divided the lesbian/feminist community into two highly disparate positions with scarcely a scintilla of common ground. The issue is the most controversial and divisive which the lesbian community has yet to resolve, even to the extent of far overshadowing the debate surrounding S/M and leatherwomyn in the community, and quite possibly the most contentious and complex issue that the lesbian/feminist will ever have to resolve.

While the vast majority of lesbian/feminists do not have any objection to the full inclusion of postoperative transsexual lesbians within their communities, there is also a sizable minority of lesbians who do find the prospect of this to be highly threatening, and who have gone to considerable lengths to attempt to exclude them. These are typically women espousing a separatist and/or essentialist philosophy.

There are several reasons commonly cited to justify the exclusion of transsexual women from the larger lesbian/feminist community, none of which withstand sustained scrutiny, and all of which ultimately prove to be based on specious premises.

Justifications for the exclusion of transsexual women from the larger lesbian/feminist community generally attempt to portray transsexuality as a patriarchal construct, the most notable such exposition being Janice G. Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.) However, a closer examination of the assumptions underlying these arguments reveals that in actuality it is these justifications themselves which are rooted in patriarchal assumptions and practices. All of the justifications cited for the exclusion of transsexual womyn prove to be inadequate because, ultimately they are all based on the patriarchal concepts of **determinism**, either biological, environmental, or a combination of both. Determinism, in turn, proves to be based on another patriarchal concept, that of **reductionism**. Likewise, arguments favoring the exclusion of transsexual women also prove to be fundamentally founded in patriarchal concepts of **gender binarism**.

In its most basic form, the biologically deterministic perspective dictates that sexuality is determined entirely by biology; that one's anatomical sex at birth is the sole determinant of sexuality, and is summarized by the aphorism

"biology is destiny." Not only is such a viewpoint exceedingly naive and overly simplistic, even merely from a purely scientific standpoint, but it is one that is entirely antithetical to very basic feminist values. The biologically deterministic perspective is an expression of reductionism, in that it purports that the individual is *only* his or her body, and that sexuality is nothing more than biology. The inevitable consequence of such reductionism is the **objectification**; that is, the reducing of a person merely to an object, of transsexual women in that it denies or denigrates essential elements of their personhood.

Just as biological determinism constitutes the very core of patriarchy, so too does the rejection of biological determinism comprise the very essence of feminism. That "biology is not destiny" is perhaps the most fundamental cornerstone on which the entirety of contemporary feminism rests. Biological determinism, in one variation or another, has provided the very foundation for the existence of patriarchy throughout its existence, and therefore, the basis for the oppression of women. It is the concept of biological determinism whether expressly stated as such or not, that has dictated that women are the inferior sex because they are not as strong physically (which is only one manifestation of the philosophy of "might makes right"), and that has provided the philosophical justification for enforced motherhood and female subservience. Biological determinism is also the basic philosophical assumption underlying heterosexism, dictating that sex that is non-procreative in nature is unnatural and perverse.

Rejection of biological determinism is not only implicit to feminism, but is the very cornerstone upon which all of feminist philosophy rests. The mother of the modern feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir, very succinctly summed this up in her book *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), in which she made the statement most often attributed to her, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one." Undoubtedly, invoking Beauvoir's famous dictum in this context will appear to some to be a deliberate misrepresentation of her meaning and her intentions. But, in fact, subsequent statements by Beauvoir herself demonstrate that such usage is not at all inappropriate. In her 1972 memoir, *All Said and Done*, (translated by Andre Deutsch. New York: G.P. Putnam, 1974) Beauvoir not only reiterates her famous dictum, but cites the research of Robert J. Stoller regarding the development of the sexual identities of MTF transsexuals to corroborate it (p. 451).

Admittedly, Beauvoir's axiom is somewhat of an oversimplification, yet one at whose core resides a profound truth. Beauvoir was, of course, stating that it is one's experience that makes one a woman. But even this is an oversimplification, for it is not merely experience that determines sexuality either; nor ultimately is it even a combination of biology and experience. Nevertheless, the

categorical rejection of biological determinism implicit in her statement alone discredits any "woman-born woman" only policies as inherently anti-feminist.

The assumption of "biology is destiny" can be subdivided into two categories, the most common of which is "anatomy is destiny." "Anatomy is destiny" doesn't even stand up from a purely scientific viewpoint, much less than from a holistic perspective that includes psychological, sociological, and most importantly, spiritual factors. This is demonstrated by an examination of a more sophisticated variation of the basic biologically deterministic perspective; that is, the genetic argument which posits that even if MTF transsexuals are anatomically women that they are still men because they have a male genetic makeup. According to this scenario, "anatomy is destiny" is merely replaced by "physiology is destiny," but it is still an unequivocally biologically deterministic stance. And just as "anatomy is destiny" has proven to be an inherently oppressive construct, so is there no reason to suppose that "physiology is destiny" would be any less so.

Moreover, even mere scientific scrutiny again reveals that the situation is not so dramatically simple. It is indeed possible to be born anatomically male and chromosomally female, and in fact, many MTF transsexuals are actually chromosomally female even before they undergo any surgery. These individuals have a genetic makeup which consists of the two X chromosomes which other women have, but also a tiny fragment of a Y chromosome attached to one of the X chromosomes. This tiny fragment of a Y chromosome is sufficient to cause the individual to appear as a normal male. But who is to say that such a person is not female, if indeed she has two X chromosomes, and identifies as female? Likewise, it is possible to have the XY chromosomal structure of the normal male, and to appear to be female. Some so-called "woman-born womyn" might be surprised to find that they themselves wouldn't pass a chromosomal test. There are a number of other genetic variations in addition to these that can occur as well. These variations from the norm raise the question of whether chromosomes can even accurately be said to determine an individual's sex. It was for this very reason that the International Olympic Committee recently discontinued chromosomal testing as a means of determining sex.

This much alone is sufficient to thoroughly discredit the biologically deterministic perspective, but the matter of sexuality reveals itself to be yet even more complex, just in terms of biology alone. There is also an additional complicating factor that undermines the biologically deterministic argument, and that is the antigen factor. Antigens are substances which are found in chromosomal structures and interact with them to produce a variety of responses. Males typically have what is known as the "HY antigen" in their cellular structure. This substance appears to be what causes chromosomes to pass along the genetic messages which determine whether or not an embryo will become male. Normal males are HY antigen positive and normal females are HY antigen negative. However, even those MTF transsexuals who are XY chromosomally are typically HY

antigen negative. Similarly, female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals are typically HY antigen positive, even if they have the usual XX chromosomal makeup of normal women. (Stuart, Kim Elizabeth. *The Uninvited Dilemma*. Lake Oswego, Oregon: Metamorphous Press, 1983, pp.146-7)

Given that arguments based on the concept of biological determinism have not withstood scrutiny, many advocates of discrimination against transsexual women have turned to environmentally deterministic arguments in an attempt to provide a more sophisticated rationale for their exclusion. The essence of this argument is that an individual raised as a male in a patriarchal culture necessarily internalizes the values of that culture to such an extent that it is impossible to be reversed. According to this perspective, the individual is merely a product of his or her environment, a blank slate upon which any kind of conditioning can be permanently imposed.

As is the case with biological determinism, environmental determinism, whether explicitly stated as such or not, has been the basis for a variety of forms of oppression throughout history, most notably for rigid caste and class systems. Environmental determinism generally is employed as a means of enforcing oppression based on biological determinism, such as in the denial of education to women throughout the patriarchal era. The assumption of environmental determinism also underlies the rationale for denying parental rights to lesbians and gay men.

According to environmentally deterministic arguments, sexuality is determined by how one is raised, but all such arguments ultimately fall back on a biological argument by assuming that everyone will be raised in accordance with whatever one's anatomical sex happens to be. However, reality again proves to be not so simple and direct. There are in fact anatomical males who are raised as girls and anatomical females who are raised as boys. These individuals may or may not accept their conditioning, depending on a variety of factors. However, "women only" organizations and events within the lesbian/feminist community invariably base their criteria of womanhood solely on the anatomical sex of the person in question at birth, and not on how any particular individual was raised. Women who are raised as boys are not excluded and men who were raised as girls are not admitted.

Perhaps the most frequently cited justification falling into the environmentally deterministic category is the "male privilege" argument; that is, that because MTF transsexuals were born and raised as males in a patriarchal society, that they were automatically the beneficiaries of privileges which males in our society are traditionally the recipients of. Male privilege is typically conceived according to a separatist/essentialist position as depicted by Beth Walsh-Bolstad in her article "The New Improved (Surgically Altered) Woman/Lesbian?" in the November 1993 issue of *off our backs* as: "another world women never get to experience where respect can be taken for granted and special privileges are automatically given." (p.14) As with biologically deterministic arguments, this argument fails to withstand sustained scrutiny.

First of all, this argument fails to recognize that transsexuals have given up any such privilege which they might have gained as a result of being born male, if in fact they ever did experience such privileges, which is typically not the case. Undoubtedly, some degree of "male privilege" does accrue to some transsexuals, but it is not something that they actively seek, and it is always achieved at a personal price which far outweighs any advantages which it may confer.

Males who do not conform to patriarchal role expectations are severely persecuted in this society, even to an extent greater than that of females who do not conform to traditional role expectations. It is a manifestation of the greater status accorded to masculinity in patriarchal society that there is a much greater tolerance for nonconformity to female gender role expectations than there is for nonconformity to male gender role expectations. One has only to compare the degree of societal disapprobation accorded to "sissies" to that accorded to "tomboys" to recognize this. While the term "sissy" is generally considered to be extremely pejorative, "tomboy" is considered practically normal. And while "sissiness" in boys is regarded as warranting corrective intervention, either psychiatric or otherwise, manifestations of "tomboyish" behavior in girls are considered no cause for alarm.

Several years ago, a particularly brutal case of child abuse, resulting in the deaths of two boys in Ft. Worth, Texas, received widespread national attention. These two boys were locked in a closet for several days at a time, sometimes also tied up and hung upside down without clothing, deprived of food or heat, burned with cigarettes and severely beaten with a variety of objects, eventually resulting in both of their deaths. This particularly brutal case of child abuse was administered by their mother's boyfriend, who was outraged at them because he perceived them to be "sissies" and to be "acting like girls." It is difficult by any stretch of the imagination to understand how such treatment could in any way constitute "respect taken for granted" or "special privileges automatically given," or even any other conception of "male privilege." But while this is obviously a very extreme case, it is only a very extreme form of the kind of treatment typically experienced by MTF transsexuals in general. What nearly all MTF transsexuals experience while growing up is at the very least a form of severe emotional abuse. Because of their inability to conform to male gender role expectations, MTF transsexuals are typically regarded to be somewhat less than boys, and are therefore subjected to and internalize many of the same messages of inferiority that girls are subjected to.

The "male privilege" argument also fails to recognize that what is privilege to one individual may not necessarily be so to another. In fact, what is privilege to one individual can actually be a form of oppression to another if that particular "privilege" necessitates that one behave in a manner that is antithetical to one's natural inclinations. Much "male privilege"

in fact is not really privilege at all, but is actually a set of demands and expectations which are often unrealistic and unnatural.

Of course, some MTF transsexuals do manage to conform to male gender role expectations, or at least appear to, in spite of their own inner feelings. But even these transsexuals pay a tremendous price in terms of inner conflict which far outweighs any so-called "male privilege" they may receive. Whatever "male privilege" they may have acquired for successfully presenting a facade which conforms to male gender role expectations is always paid for with the price of constant and severe inner turmoil, typically to a degree that is sufficient to precipitate suicidal tendencies.

But while some transsexuals do manage to present an outer facade which effectively conceals their true feelings, the fact is that most transsexuals are simply incapable of constantly maintaining such a facade, and inevitably do give some indication of their true inner selves. To do so is to always invite ostracism, harassment and persecution, often manifested in severe forms such as actual physical violence, humiliation, social isolation, etc. These forms of punishment of nonconformity to gender expectations are administered by every facet of the transsexual's environment; that is, not only from peers, but from

parents, teachers, and other authority figures as well. MTF transsexuals would universally trade whatever small degree of "male privilege" they have acquired for the peace of being free of constant and severe inner turmoil and persecution from society, even if that means having to accept the oppression which all women are to some degree subjected to in this society.

The "male privilege" argument also fails to recognize that there is already a great deal of variation in the degree of oppression experienced among nontranssexual women. Privilege is not something that is accorded in society solely along sexual lines. In fact, the term "male privilege" is itself highly misleading, and would be more accurately characterized as patriarchal privilege. And while it is true that patriarchal privilege falls disproportionately upon males, a great many women are also its beneficiaries, and a great many men are not. To deny this is to assert that the uneducated, unemployed, drug addicted, alcoholic, homeless man sleeping on a heating grate or in a cardboard box under a bridge is more privileged than Princess Diana.

Jan Morris is typically cited as an example of a MTF transsexual who experienced a great deal of male privilege, and it can not be denied that Jan Morris certainly did experience a great deal of privilege throughout her life, both before and after her surgery. However, the degree of privilege that Jan Morris has experienced throughout her life is in no way typical of the general transsexual population and has a lot more to do with class than it does with sex.

The variables of race and class are actually greater factors

“. . . the scientific “nature/nurture” paradigm that transsexuality is a product of biology, environment or a combination of both . . . is the equivalent of viewing a three dimensional object in only two dimensions.”

in determining degree of privilege than is sex, though all of these factors interact synchronistically. Thus, a white woman born into a wealthy family almost always is in a more privileged position than is a black male born into an impoverished family. Therefore, being born male is no guarantee that one will necessarily be the recipient of "male privilege," and being born female is not necessarily an impediment to receiving some other form of patriarchal privilege, which may outweigh so-called "male privilege."

Furthermore, not only do MTF transsexuals give up whatever small degree of "male privilege" that they may have received when they undergo sexual conversion, but they then have to pay an enormous additional price for having to relinquish whatever "male privilege" that may have been bestowed on them as well.

The "male privilege" argument is also no different than the argument frequently advanced by opponents of civil rights protections for homosexuals that because their average annual incomes are higher than that of the general population that homosexuals are not really an oppressed minority. Such environmentally deterministic arguments also overlook the fact that *all* people, both male and female, are raised in a patriarchal society, and as such inevitably internalize a certain degree of patriarchal values. There are in fact, "women-born women" who are more patriarchal in their values and perspectives than some men, yet this is not regarded as an impediment to access to women-only space. Even "women-born women" who consciously reject patriarchal values and perspectives and identify as feminists can retain unconscious patriarchal attitudes and behaviors.

As is the case with arguments based on biological determinism, those arguments based on environmental determinism prove to be inherently anti-feminist, as one of the most basic principles of feminism is that it is possible to transcend one's environment. Feminism, in fact--as Janice Raymond herself has pointed out--*demands* that we do no less. Yet many of the very same women who say that women must overcome their socialization as girls in a patriarchal system will state that it is impossible for transsexual women to overcome their socialization as boys in that same system.

An argument which attempts to circumvent the biological/environmental determinism dichotomy is that of "male energy." According to this argument, MTF transsexuals should be excluded from women-only space because their "energy" is male, whatever that is supposed to mean. But while this argument initially appears to transcend the nature/nurture dichotomy, it is actually just another way of stating a biologically deterministic position because it ultimately assumes that one's "energy" is determined entirely by what one's morphological sex was at birth. It's just another way of equating consciousness with biology, another restatement of the discredited sentiment of "biology is destiny."

Another problem with this argument is that it is based entirely on a subjective construct; that what is "male energy" to one person is not necessarily so to another. A great many

nontranssexual women could likewise be said to possess "male energy," and if this is accepted as a legitimate criteria for excluding anyone from women's space, anyone could be ejected simply because someone else perceives her as having "male energy."

Another set of arguments for the exclusion of transsexual women from women-only space are based on the patriarchal concept of gender binarism. According to these arguments, there is a distinct and immutable boundary between the two sexes and that boundary can never be crossed. The concept of gender binarism is implicit in the position frequently advanced by separatist/essentialists that "modern Western medicine can not make one sex out of the other." What this argument fails to recognize is that there are not two distinct and immutable sexes, but that sexuality exists along a continuum. Even Andrea Dworkin, certainly no friend of transsexuals, has stated: "We are clearly a multisexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete." (cited in Fecteau, Kenny. "Androgyny: Roots and Reincarnation." *Green Egg*, issue # 94, Mabon, 1991, p. 9) The modern medical procedure of sex-change surgery does not literally "make one sex out of the other" as it is typically described, but simply allows the individual to shift his or her position on that continuum to a greater degree than before in the same way that modern Western medicine has made it possible to correct certain birth defects that could not be treated before this century. Undoubtedly, advances in medical technology will enable human beings to shift their positions on the sexuality continuum to an even greater degree in the future. The increasing ability of humanity to shift positions along the continuum of sexuality should be regarded as part of its evolutionary destiny.

In order to transcend patriarchal values, it is imperative that the lesbian/feminist community discard patriarchal definitions of sexuality and sexual identity which rest on assumptions of biological and environmental determinism and gender binarism. As all justifications for the exclusion of postoperative transsexual women ultimately rely on such arguments, all policies which exclude such womyn are inherently anti-feminist in nature. Such justifications ultimately accept the scientific "nature/nurture" paradigm that transsexuality is a product of biology, environment or a combination of both. But such a perspective is the equivalent of viewing a three dimensional object in only two dimensions. The dimension that is inevitably overlooked is that of spirituality.

An alternative perspective toward sexuality and sexual identity is found in non-patriarchal cultures such as Native American culture, as well as other non-patriarchal cultures throughout the world. As Walter L. Williams abundantly documents in his comprehensive examination of sexual diversity in American Indian culture, *The Spirit and the Flesh* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), all but a very few Native American tribes considered that sexuality is not determined by biology, but by spirituality; that it is the spirit and not the flesh that ultimately determines what sex an individual is. In all but a very Native American tribes there has existed a tradition of individuals who

live and function entirely as members of the sex that is the opposite of their biological anatomy. Not only are such individuals accepted as members of the opposite sex by their tribes, but they are highly venerated, and harming or disrespecting such individuals is considered to be a surefire way of invoking the wrath of the deities. It is also highly significant to note that it is precisely only in those tribes that are the most patriarchal and warlike, and which have the least tolerance for gender role flexibility, such as the Aztec and the Comanche, that this tradition is not observed. Likewise, it is highly significant to note that Williams points out that the persecution of gay men and lesbians has always been based on an attitude of intolerance for gender diversity, the very same phenomenon that advocates of exclusion of transsexuals from women-only space demonstrate toward transsexual women.

As rejection of both biological and environmental determinism is inherent to feminism, it is not surprising that a perspective similar to that found in Native American culture is also found in modern feminist thought. Writing about sexuality and reincarnation in her symbolic autobiography *Orlando* (New York: Harvest Books, 1928, 1956), Virginia Woolf stated: "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex. And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual . . . something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. For here again, we come to a dilemma. Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to another takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above." (pp. 188-89)

Contemporary lesbian feminist culture, recognizing that the "nature/nurture" question is simply inadequate to encompass the existential reality of being a lesbian, has to a very great extent rejected definitions of lesbianism based on biological and environmental determinism which have arisen out of academia, and have instead begun to create new definitions based on spiritual constructs. It is therefore simply inconsistent and hypocritical to simultaneously deny the spiritual dimension inherent in the phenomenon of transsexuality which is attested to by an abundance of historical evidence. The acknowledgement of such a dimension inexorably leads to the conclusion that "woman-born womyn" only policies are inherently anti-feminist and patriarchal in nature, and as such, must be discarded. To do otherwise is to remain helplessly mired in the quicksand of patriarchal thinking and conditioning.

References

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *All Said and Done*. translated by Andre Deutsch. New York: G.P. Putnam, 1974.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.

Dworkin, Andrea. cited by Fecteau, Kenny in "Androgyny: Roots and Reincarnation. *Green Egg*, issue # 94, Mabon, 1991.

Raymond, Janice G. *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

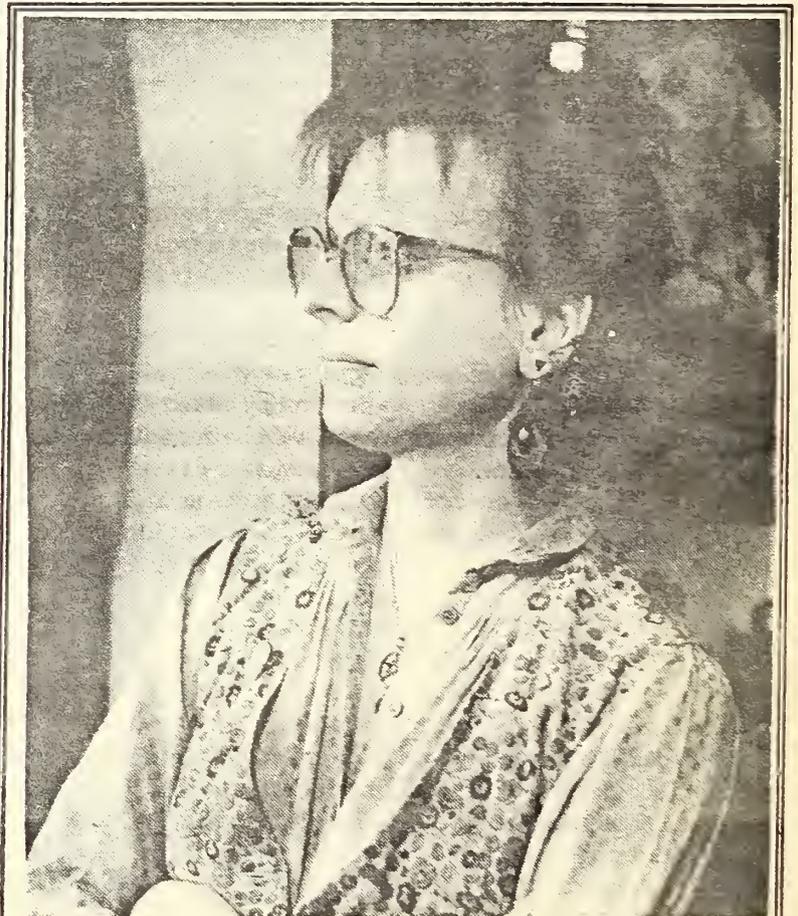
Stuart, Kim Elizabeth. *The Uninvited Dilemma*. Lake Oswego, Oregon: Metamorphous Press, 1983.

Walsh-Bolstad, Beth. "The New Improved (Surgically Altered) Woman/Lesbian?" *off our backs*, November 1993.

Williams, Walter L. *The Spirit and the Flesh*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*. New York: Harvest Books, 1928, 1956

Davina Anne Gabriel is the publisher and editor of TransSisters and a long time activist for queer and feminist causes.



Davina Anne Gabriel

photo by Michael McClure

Subscribe to TransSisters

The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

One year (four issues):
 \$12.00 (U.S.A.); \$16.00 (Canada)
 Sample issue: \$3.00 (U.S.A.); \$4.00 (Canada)
Back issues still available:
 # 1: The Life and Times of a Gender Outlaw:
 an Interview with Leslie Feinberg
 #2: Mission to Michigan:
 Transsexual Womyn at the Michigan
 Womyn's Music Festival
 \$4.00 ea. (U.S.A.) \$5.00 ea. (Canada)

\$3.00 (U.S.A.); \$4.00 (Canada)

TransSisters

The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

Issue # 1 September - October 1993



The Life and Times of a Gender Outlaw: An Interview with Leslie Feinberg

also:

March on Washington Trans Contingent

Issue # 1

\$3.00 (U.S.A.); \$4.00 (Canada)

TransSisters

The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

Issue # 2 November - December 1993



Mission to Michigan: Transsexual Womyn at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

Issue # 2

Subscription Form

- _____ Enclosed is \$3.00 (USA) or \$4.00 (Canada) for a sample issue of *TransSisters*.
- _____ Enclosed is \$12.00 (USA) or \$16.00 (Canada) for a one year (four issues) subscription to *TransSisters*.
- _____ Enclosed is \$4.00 (USA) or \$5.00 (Canada) for a back issue of issue # 1 of *TransSisters*.
- _____ Enclosed is \$4.00 (USA) or \$5.00 (Canada) for a back issue of issue # 2 of *TransSisters*.
- _____ Enclosed is a contribution in the amount of _____ to *TransSisters*.

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____ (U.S. funds only)

Name _____

Apt or Suite # _____ Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Please Make Checks or Money Orders Payable to Davina Anne Gabriel
 Mail to: *TransSisters*; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110

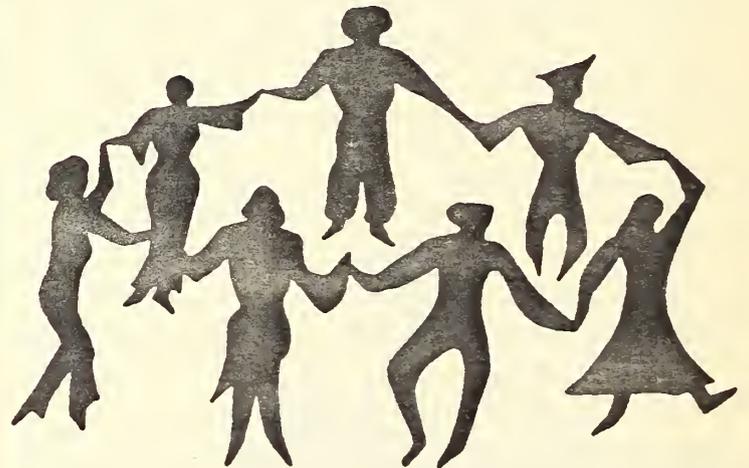
Full Circle of Women

A radically different, politically incorrect exploration of what it means to be a woman . . .
4-6 February 1994 **Essex, Massachusetts**

Are you a woman who . . .

- is transgendered and dealing with issues of community . . . ?
- is a feminist and is dissatisfied with separatist philosophy . . . ?
- is a therapist or educator who addresses gender issues . . . ?
- is excited by the challenges of personal growth . . . ?

If so, the *Full Circle of Women* Conference has particular relevance for you.



It is time for a reformulation of feminism, for a philosophy that embraces all women -- not just those who are politically correct, not just those with a certain sexual orientation, not just "genetic" women, not just those with vaginas, but all who identify as women. *Full Circle of Women* is an opportunity to leave transphobia behind and take a step toward an expanded vision of who women are and where feminism is going.

We will examine the varied terrain our paths to womanhood have led us through. We will ask on what common ground those paths converge. What do we share in our souls that leads us to experience our lives as women? Can we free ourselves from patriarchal doctrine enough to encompass our tremendous variety? What power can we tap with diversity that can't be touched with uniformity? What unique gifts can we bring to feminism?

For those who have been excluded from women's events, *Full Circle of Women* is a chance to include ourselves in women's space. For those who have taken womanhood for granted, it will challenge all our assumptions about gender. Nothing like this has happened before; it will be a ground-breaking experience for all who participate.

Workshops

We come together as experts on our own lives, to teach and learn from each other. Participants are invited to facilitate workshops, ceremonies and other events. Many forms can be employed: discussion, movement demonstrations, ritual, music, theater, readings, slides, massage, etc. So far, women have expressed an interest in conducting the following workshops:

- *The journey from SRS to womanhood*
- *Sexuality*
- *The transgendered as shamans*
- *Transsexual lesbian feminism*
- *Substance abuse in the transgender community*
- *Creating language for the unspeakable*
- *Dealing with internalized transphobia*
- *Spirituality*

Participation

*Full Circle of Women*s for woman-identified individuals living their lives as women -- transgendered, nontransgendered, transsexual (preoperative and postoperative), and intersex people living as women. Participation by women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual, or other-sexual is encouraged. Women of all colors, shapes, and sizes are welcome. If you are not sure whether this conference is for you, please call us at (508) 386-7737.

Cost

The cost of the weekend is \$250.00, which includes double or triple accommodations, all meals from a light supper Friday evening through lunch on Sunday, the use of the hot tub, and all workshops. A limited number of single rooms are available for an extra charge of \$25.00. A nonrefundable deposit of \$100 is required at the time of registration, and the remainder is due by January 20, 1994. All payments will be refunded if the conference is canceled due to bad weather. We hope to have some scholarship money available. If you need financial assistance, please call us at (508) 386-7737.

Registration

Space is limited, so it is important to sign up early. Registration by December 1, 1993 is strongly encouraged. If you are planning on attending but can't register by that date, please call us.

Location

Full Circle of Women will be held at the Essex Conference Center and Retreat in Essex, Massachusetts, a 45 minute drive from Boston. The Center is secluded, its two modern buildings set on 18 acres of conservation land, within walking distance of the ocean. The Center features a hot tub that holds 12 people and a wood-fired sauna that accomodates eight. Bathing suits are optional. Wonderful, healthy, mainly vegetarian meals are prepared by the staff and served in a family-style dining room. Special dietary restrictions can be accomodated.

Schedule

Registration will take place from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., Friday, February 4, and the Conference will end at 4:00 p.m. Sunday, February 6. The schedule of events will be set before the Conference based on the workshop participants offer. Time without scheduled activities will be included to accomodate those who wish to dilate, meditate, walk by the ocean, take a nap, exchange back rubs, or whatever without missing workshops. The hot tub and sauna will be open at scheduled times on all three days.

Information

For further information on any aspect of the *Full Circle of Women* Conference, contact:

Janis Walworth
 P.O. Box 52
 Ashby, Massachusetts 01431
 (508) 386 - 7737

Registration Form

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone _____
 I would like a single room (\$25.00 additional)
 I would like to room with the following person(s) or type of person:

 I would like to offer a workshop. Please use another sheet of paper to describe the workshops or other events you would like to facilitate, including any special equipment needed and the amount of time the workshop might take.
 Enclosed is a check or money order for \$250 payable to Janis Walworth. (If you need financial aid or a payment plan, please call.) I identify as a woman and am living my life full-time as a woman (if not, please call before sending your registration).
 Signature _____
 Return to: Janis Walworth; P.O. Box 52; Ashby, Massachusetts 01431 (508) 386-7737

Subscription Form

Name (as it should appear on the envelope) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

_____ Enclosed is \$4.00 for a sample issue of TNT.

_____ Enclosed is \$15.00 for the next four issues of TNT.

_____ Enclosed is \$30.00 for the next eight issues of TNT.

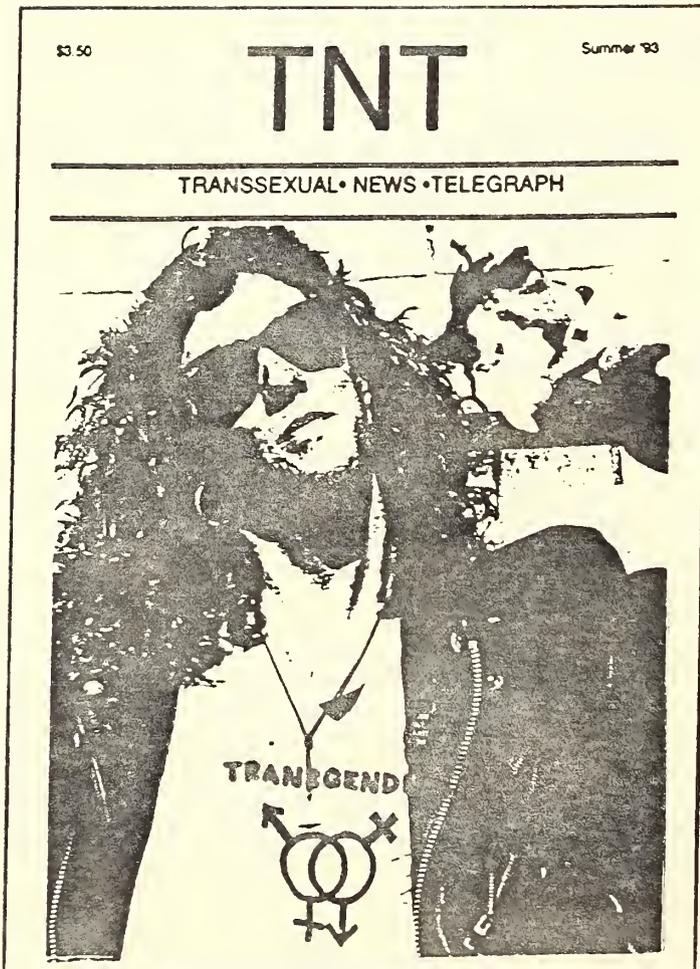
_____ I am an inmate or institutionalized. Please send me TNT.

Name of institution _____

Inmate number _____

mail to:
TNT
Suite # 288;
584 Castro Street
San Francisco, California 94114-2588

Please make checks
payable to Anne Ogborn



Transsexual News Telegraph

*Published for the
Transgendered
Communities*

**The Magazine That
Will Never Contain
Articles About
Shopping or Makeup**

Thank you for your order

Price List

Qty. Total

Chrysalis Quarterly

\$ _____ Subscription (\$36 for four issues; \$46 outside the U.S.)
 Start subscription with current issue _____ next issue _____

Back Issues (#1 & #2 available only as photocopies)

- _____ #6 Transgender Perspectives on the Return of the Goddess (\$11)
- _____ #5 Valuing Diversity in the Gender Community (\$11)
- _____ #4 The Realities of Transsexual Surgery (\$13)
- _____ #3 Politics and Sexism in Gender Confirmation (\$15)
- _____ #2 Being a Good Consumer (\$9) (photocopy only)
- _____ #1 Health and Transition (\$9) (photocopy only)

Transition Series Booklets (All three for \$17)

- _____ Dealing With Your Feelings: (\$6)
A guide to coming out for persons with gender dysphoria
- _____ Deciding What to Do About Your Gender Dysphoria: (\$6)
Some considerations for those who are thinking about sex reassignment
- _____ Discovering Who You Are: (\$8)
A guide to self-assessment for persons with gender dysphoria
- _____ AEGIS Bibliography of Gender Dysphoria (\$12)
- _____ Transsexualism: Information for the Family (\$6)
- _____ Religious Aspects of Transsexualism (\$6)
- _____ HBIQDA Standards of Care: (\$4)
The hormonal and surgical sex reassignment of gender dysphoric persons

Pamphlets (Originally Published by the Erickson Educational Foundation)

- _____ Letter from a Mother (of a Transsexual Person) (\$.50)
- _____ Letter from a Brother (of a Transsexual Person) (\$.50)

Books, Magazines, & Videos

- _____ Dr. Sheila Kirk. *Hormones*. (2nd edition). (\$8)
- _____ Lou Sullivan. *Information for the Female-to-Male Transsexual & Crossdresser*. (\$10)
- _____ Dr. Peggy Rudd. *My Husband Wears My Clothes*. (\$10)
- _____ Dr. Peggy Rudd. *Crossdressing With Dignity*. (\$13)
- _____ Alison Laing. *Speaking as a Woman*. (\$10)
- _____ JoAnn Aliman Stringer. *The Transsexual's Survival Guide: To Transition & Beyond*. (\$15)
- _____ JoAnn Aliman Stringer. *The Transsexual's Survival Guide: To Transition & Beyond. II*
(For Family, Friends, & Employers) (\$10)
- _____ TV-TV Tapestry Magazine. (Contains excellent list of resources). (\$12) #64 _____ #63 _____ #62 _____
- _____ Eugene Schrang, M.D. *MTF SRS Video (VHS, \$24.95)*
- _____ Chrysalis Quarterly Button (\$1)
- _____ Biology is Not Destiny Button (\$1)
- _____ Custom-made 2" Button (\$3) (Up to 15 words)

Custom Button Message: _____

Prices are shown as current net.
 F.O.B. shipping point. Prices are
 subject to change without notice.
 This is a limited time, limited
 quantity offer.

_____ Subtotal
 _____ Postage & Handling *
 _____ TOTAL

Custom Button Color
 White _ Yellow _ Pink _ Blue _

We are a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Corporation. Donations gladly accepted.

*Ordering Information: Add (except for subscriptions, buttons, & pamphlets) \$3 for 1st item & .50 for each additional item for postage & handling. Add \$2 for first-class & foreign orders. We ship within 72 hours.

Ship to:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____

Send to:

AEGIS
 P.O. Box 33724
 Decatur, GA 30033
 (404) 939-0244

New Woman Conference 3 Orgasm Workshop Responses

by Anne Ogborn & Cheryl Chase

In September, seventeen postoperative transsexual and one intersexual woman met for three days at a lovely resort in Guerneville, an hour and a half north of San Francisco, to relax, to enjoy each other's company, and to discuss our lives.

The workshop on orgasm after genital surgery produced some results which disturbed many of us, and which we felt would be of great relevance to our community.

We are determined to further test our initial impressions with thorough and careful research. We are extremely reluctant to start a panic or to sow rumors. On the other hand, we feel responsible for providing this information as soon as possible to those who are considering SRS (sex reassignment surgery) in the near future. In addition, we are in need of volunteer subjects, financial and organizational support to continue our research.

To summarize our preliminary findings, it is clear that only a small fraction of us are orgasmic, and that sexual functioning after genital surgery is disappointing for many of us. In prior research this information has been masked (we believe) by a complex of social, psychological, and political factors within the transgender community. The conditions of the orgasm workshop at NWC 3 appeared to provide a safe forum to discuss this information in a more honest manner.

There are at least three points of view from which the results of genital surgery are commonly evaluated. First is appearance: do the surgically modified genitals have an attractive, feminine appearance? Then again, there is "function" in terms of heterosexual penetrative intercourse. Can the vagina be penetrated by a penis of average size without pain? And finally, there is sensation. Does genital stimulation provide pleasant sensation? Does genital stimulation lead to orgasm?

Our impression is that surgeons performing SRS have paid a great deal of attention to appearance and to function (defined as heterosexual intercourse), and very little to sensation and orgasm. There has been reluctance within both the care provider and the transgender community to discuss this issue, in part due to suspicion that any criticism of SRS surgical results may endanger the very availability of surgery in the future.

Surgically modified genitals feel and function differently than unmodified genitals. Sexual sensation and orgasm is one of the joys of human existence. Unless we can talk with each other about our new genitals and our sexual experience, we cannot take full advantage of that joy, and we cannot encourage surgeons

who perform SRS to improve their techniques.

As a first step in this direction, we want to share with you this paper accompanying this letter, which describes our findings.

In addition, we wish to suggest some immediate changes in the way we negotiate for SRS:

1. Transsexual women seeking genital surgery in the near future may wish to read these findings and to keep careful track of the progress of this project.

2. Transsexual women considering genital surgery in the future should educate themselves about both transsexual and nontranssexual genital anatomy and human sexuality. Mental health professionals and others providing counseling to transsexual men and women are encouraged to obtain such education and to provide such education to their clients. Our findings seem to indicate that no party in the surgical "pipeline" is taking (or able to take) responsibility for ensuring the

client's post-surgical sexual functioning.

Transsexual women considering genital surgery should have clear goals re what they want, in terms of appearance *and* function, from their new genitals.

3. Surgeons performing genital surgery should become educated about human sexuality in a professional way. Male surgeons, in particular, should educate themselves about what the social sciences have learned about female sexuality.

4. Surgeons should ensure that their post surgical data gathering techniques are free of subtle encouragement to "sound good." Surgeons should follow up post-surgical reports of lack of orgasm or sexual sensation. Surgeons should provide honest reporting of data they gather, and consider such statements part of the process of obtaining informed consent.

5. Transsexual women seeking genital surgery in the near future should attempt to educate themselves about the structures which their potential surgeon intends to create, their stability (i.e., do they dissolve back into the skin?), their complications, what (if any) sexual function they have, and the methods used to construct them. Surgeons should cooperate in providing this information.

6. Surgeons should discuss the techniques of surgery at a time in the interview process at which the patient has been assured in a definite way that she has been "accepted" for surgery. Prior to this time, the patient may be unable to state clearly her goals.

7. We should all avoid blaming each other, and instead work together to rectify the situation.

"...surgeons providing SRS have paid a great deal of attention to appearance and to function (defined as heterosexual intercourse), and very little to sensation and orgasm."

What about those of us who have already undergone surgery, and are disappointed with our sexual function? There are anecdotes which leave us optimistic that we can retrain our minds and hearts to make better use of the erotic resources we do have. One of our discussion participants is orgasmic from breast stimulation alone. One of the women who participated in Masters and Johnson's research broke her spine in an accident. M&J recorded her orgasmic response both before and after the accident. She was still consistently orgasmic, although she had no genital sensation at all!

Postoperative transsexual women willing to participate in the research, and anyone willing to help defray the costs of the research are urged to contact the SRS Follow-up Project at Suite # 288; 584 Castro Street; San Francisco, California 94114.

Anne Ogborn is a founding member of Transgender Nation, the publisher of Transsexual News-Telegraph and an organizer of the New Woman Conference.

Cheryl Chase is the founder of the Intersex Society of North America. (photograph not available)



Anne Ogborn

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

~ Reflections ~

by Karen Sheddric

I watch her now,
As I've watched her many times before.

The softness of her mouth
As she speaks,
Her graceful mannerisms,
The way her back curves just so
At the base of her hips,
The way she listens to someone,
And the way she laughs with someone.

Her voice carries a soft lilt,
A lullaby I hear
Comforting me in my dreams.

How many times
Has this woman
Cried in silence,
Or cried alone?

How many times has she been hurt
Because of who she was
And who she is now?

How many times
Has this woman lain awake
thinking of the woman she was,
Dreaming of the woman
She wanted to become,
And finally having the courage
To step out of that dream
Into reality.

Her reality:
A woman who loves women.

How many times
Has this woman been told,
"You'll never make it,
There's no place in this society for
you?"

Boy did you prove them wrong.

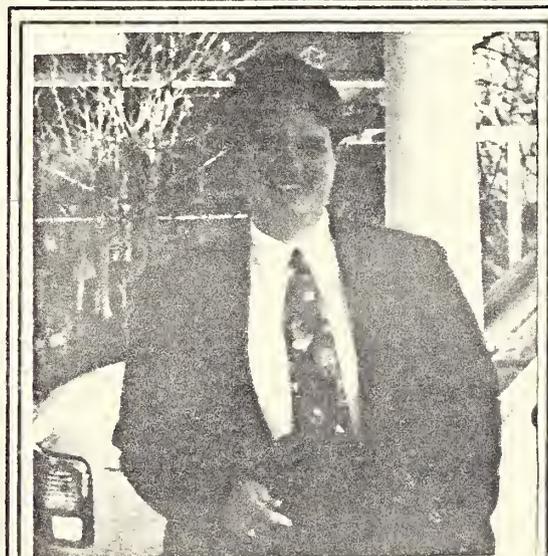
I watch her now,
As I've watched her many times before.

Her hands lovingly caress
The strings of her guitar.
Beautiful music,
Created by a beautiful woman.

I am proud of my friend
For the woman she is
And the lifestyle she leads.

Thank you, Fran.

*Karen Sheddric is a research technician,
an activist on behalf of gay, lesbian &
transsexual issues, and a resident of
Kansas City, Missouri.*



Karen Sheddric

photo by Kelly White

Orgasmic Function in Postoperative Transsexual Women

by Anne Ogborn & Cheryl Chase

Abstract: Follow-up on sexual response following genital surgery has been conspicuous in its absence. We investigated this variable at a transsexual conference after a high level of trust had been established. Our preliminary findings indicate that most transsexual women are inorgasmic following genital surgery.

Introduction

This preliminary study came about as the result of a workshop on orgasm at the September 1993 New Women's Conference, which was attended by 17 transsexual and one intersexual woman. The workshop consisted of two one-hour sessions in a very relaxed, informal setting. A high level of trust among the participants had already been built up by two days of participation in the conference. The workshop was moderated by the authors, a transsexual and an intersexual woman. Realizing that the results might be interesting to others, we obtained permission to produce this paper from the participating women's responses. Both authors participated in the surveys.

Investigation Techniques and Results

The following multiple choice questions were answered (in the order given) by anonymously throwing colored poker chips into a bowl and spilling the bowl into the center of the group where all could quickly grasp the results. Because some participants entered or left the room during the session, and some chose not to answer certain questions, the total number of responses to each question varies. The responses were discussed between the questions.

(see Table I, next page)

In response to the posing of question 1, one participant asked for a clarification of the phrase *sexually active* in the question. The authors defined the term as "doing something that you think of as sex, whatever sex means to you."

The apparent discrepancy between questions 3 and 10 may reflect a change in these women's attitudes during the course of the workshop.

Discussion revealed that the large number of "maybe" responses to question 4 were mostly from participants who masturbate only infrequently. Many women said that they find masturbation frustrating, and do so infrequently.

Questions 5 and 6 were intended to discover whether the difficulties many women were experiencing were emotional or physical. Several women commented that they responded "maybe" to question 6 because they had areas that they could

stimulate, but which soon became insensitive under stimulation.

Question 9 was intended to demonstrate that all respondents could identify the experience of orgasm.

Respondents

The following information was obtained by passing a sheet bearing the heading shown around the room. This occurred about one half hour into the second session. The intersexual woman who participated in the first survey did not participate in this survey.

(see Table II, next page)

Four of 16 respondents (25%) reported orgasm. One respondent was unsure (6%). Realizing that for some of

these women neurological healing may be incomplete, we looked at those women whose surgery was prior to 1992. Of the nine women whose surgeries were prior to 1992, three (33%) were orgasmic.

Conclusion

It appears, based on preliminary findings, that most transsexual women are inorgasmic following surgery. We are well aware of the limitations of small sample size and simple sampling methods used to produce this data. The participants self selected by attending the third New Women's Conference, and hence are not random. The cost (\$270) of the conference and travel, and the politics of the conference, influenced who attended. Virtually all women at the conference attended the workshop. We can identify no factors which would have selected for or against orgasmic function.

We suggest, based on our anecdotal evidence, that a pattern of denial about the effects of surgery exists both among many transsexual women and their caregivers. It also appears that misunderstanding and lack of education about female sexuality are prevalent both among transsexual women and their surgical providers.

Recommendations

Further research is, we feel, indicated in the following areas:

1. The social dynamics of patient/surgeon interactions, and how this influences communication and negotiation in pre-surgical conferences.
2. The effect of education about sexuality on the choices transsexual women and their surgeons make about surgery.
3. The effect of providing professional education about female sexuality to surgical providers on surgical technique.

" . . . a pattern of denial about the effects of surgery exists both among many transsexual women and their caregivers."

Table I

	Yes	No	Maybe
1. Are you sexually active on a regular basis?	5	6	2
2. Are you having orgasms regularly?	3	14	0
3. Are you bothered by lack of sexual activity or of orgasm?	5	9	0
4. Can you pleasure yourself by stimulating your own body? (Can you masturbate?)	4	3	7
5. Do you have a particular spot on your genitals that feels good to rub?	6	4	4
6. If you feel beginnings of arousal in your genitals, can you stimulate it with your hand and make it feel better?	4	2	8
7. If you had been aware of these results, would you have had the surgery anyway?	10	0	0
8. Have you experienced orgasm from a dream?	5	8	1
9. Have you ever (in your life) had an orgasm?	13	0	0
10. Is orgasm important in your life?	13	0	2
11. Do you experience arousal?	10	4	1
12. Do you have a problem with hair inside your vagina (on the vaginal walls)?	4	1	9
13. Do you have hair on your vaginal walls?	6	2	6

Table II

Surgeon	Year	Type	Orgasmic?	Orientation
Biber . . .	1984	P.I.*	no	bisexual
Lamaker .	1976	P.I.	yes	lesbian
Melman .	1992	P.I.	uncertain	bisexual
Dalrymple	1989	P.I.	yes	heterosexual
Lipshultz	1983	P.I.	no	lesbian
Biber . . .	1992	P.I.	no (too early?)	uncertain, probably lesbian
Schrang .	1993	P.I.	uncertain, too new, but probably yes	heterosexual
Biber . . .	1991	P.I.	no	lesbian
Biber . . .	1992	P.I.	no	lesbian
Seghers .	1991	P.I.	no	lesbian
Wesser . .	1976	P.I.	no	heterosexual
Murry . .	1978	P.I.	yes	lesbian
Biber . . .	1993	P.I.	uncertain, too early to tell	lesbian
Biber . . .	1988	P.I.	no	bisexual, mostly with other transsexuals
Seghers .	1992	P.I.	multiple	bisexual

*Penile Inversion – It is unclear whether a skin graft was used to extend the vagina.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF THE INTERSEXED

by Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan

(Editor's note: The following article was originally published in the September 1993 issue of Sound Out, and is reprinted with permission of the author.)

There's a flip side to the genital surgery that provides transsexuals a near-magical opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives. Like most flip sides the refrain is little known, the words and music unfamiliar to most.

For some people, genital surgery is only the beginning of a lifetime of pain, anguish and frustration. They are subjected, violently and against their wills, to medical treatment for which they have not given informed consent, which in many cases is beyond their ability to provide because the surgery is performed in their infancy and early childhood. Their bodies and sexuality are treated cavalierly by the same medical profession, indeed, often the very same providers, who so cautiously dole out hope to transsexuals.

Welcome to the world of the intersexed.

Grace Brian is 36 years old. "I was born with pretty much female genitalia," she says. Her genetic makeup is female, and although she had a cervix, uterus and internal gonads, her clitoris was considered large enough by the medical personnel attending her birth to label her a male hermaphrodite, and for the first year and a half of her life she was raised as a boy.

Then her parents took her to a hospital where, in Grace's words, "They clitorectomized me." Her boy clothes were thrown out and replaced with girl clothes and boy's name changed to a girl's.

According to her mother, Grace didn't talk for the next six months.

Of the dozen or so intersexed individuals she knows at this point in her life, Grace says, "I know two who escaped." Escaped mutilation, that is.

"I think genital surgery performed on infants is universally mutilating--it would be kinder to kill them. The Navaho had a special place in their society for the intersexed individual, while the Apache exposed them to the elements at birth to kill them." Either method, Grace feels, is kinder than what our society is presently doing to people like her.

"Medical treatment of intersexuality is focused on suppressing intersexuality," not in helping individuals live better lives. "If I had been left alone," says Grace, "I would have been fine . . . I would like my body put back exactly the way it was--it was a good body." But that is impossible, of course. The

most highly erogenous zone on the human body was sliced off Grace by a physician more concerned with her appearance conforming to stereotyped expectations than with her future ability to reach orgasm and sexual fulfillment. Couple this with the aura of secrecy and shame that some children who are different--in any way--are made to feel by the adults in their lives, and you begin to get an understanding of what it is to be an intersexed person mutilated in childhood.

Grace knows people whom she considers to have been put through far worse than what she herself experienced.

One of the more common traits of intersexed people is a urethra which doesn't extend to the end of the penis, opening, instead, somewhere along the underside, if not at the usual site for a woman, just behind the penis. Everything works on

such an individual; they simply have to sit to urinate. Such a behavior is intolerable, however, to a medical profession after declaring such a person to be male, and surgery is invariably used to effect a more typical appearance and behavior. The side effects of scar tissue resulting from such surgeries--urethral fissures--hurt. One of Grace's acquaintances sustained ten surgeries on his penis by the time he was 18 and couldn't urinate without pain. Unable to bear the prospect of the additional surgeries planned, and finally of an age where he was legally entitled to decide what was to be done to his body, he went to a surgeon whose clientele were primarily transsexual and had his penis removed.

Based on the people Grace knows, most intersexed individuals are in their 30s before they start dealing with what has been done to them as infants and children, and have a terrible need to heal from the abuse. Some of that healing can occur talking with others like themselves and coming to an awareness of how they have been violated.

Grace began investigating her past when she was 18, finding a gynecologist who promised to help free her medical records for her perusal who then reneged on his agreement with her when he learned what was in her records. When she was 23 she tried again with another doctor, which was how she learned she'd been originally diagnosed as a "male hermaphrodite" and surgical "corrected" to be female. And then, "it took me 14 years to be able to think about it."

"In the ideal world, the medical profession shouldn't be masculinizing or feminizing children to conform. Don't cut off parts of the genitals! But even if parents know to say "no" to surgery, the kid is going to have really tough time." The intersexed have been deprived of role models to know that it's possible to be happy and healthy--and intact.

On the other hand, cautions Grace, "Don't put kids in

"Certain elements have become so fixated on the issue of sexual 'purity' that they fail to see the common thread of our shared humanity."

the front lines of the gender war," expecting them to socialize as intersexed persons when they are children. Let them be male or female socially, she suggests, and if they choose on their own, when they're older, to have genital surgery, well, at that point it's a choice freely made and not imposed by an outside authority.

And for those people, who like Grace, have already been scarred by invasive, destructive medical procedures? "My first priority right now is to connect with other intersexed people," to enable the sort of sharing of common experiences and common ordeals that will permit the intersexed to begin "to heal ourselves."

Working to end the mutilating surgeries perpetrated against children is of paramount importance if further generations of intersexed people are to be spared the ensuing physical, emotional and sexual trauma Grace has experienced. But the right to self-determination and self-definition also includes choosing one's own terms to describe oneself.

The most widely known term applied to the intersexed, "hermaphrodite," is anathema to Grace.

"Hermaphrodite is a stigmatizing term. One thing wrong is it's a noun. You're not a person, you're a 'hermaphrodite.' Whereas 'intersexed' is an adjective."

Grace continues: "'Hermaphrodite' implies half male and half female, stuck together," giving rise to the image of two sets of genitals. "Intersexed genitals are intermediate; not doubled-up genitals."

While most intersexed individuals don't end up transsexual, Grace feels that the issues involved justify a united front with transsexuals. Grace maintains that intersexuality is an important issue to the larger queer community as well, because it has to do with gender variation tolerance; that is, the same unreasonable and destructive myth that there are but two sexes, springs from the same prejudices that resist sexual or gender orientations which differ from the mainstream as well.

Sadly, the gay and lesbian communities are no more or less accepting of the intersexed than straight society--with one notable exception; while straight society really doesn't give any thought to the adult intersexed person, many lesbian and feminist organizations inadvertently engage in discriminating behavior and policies. Events restricted to "women-born-women," in an attempt to prevent participation by male-to-female transsexuals, are in theory closed to intersexed individuals such as Grace, who although now female and born with female reproductive organs, was originally labeled and raised as a boy. And the decision this

spring by a midwestern women's festival to advertise itself as for

"women with double X chromosomes only" would by that criteria turn away my friend from Minnesota who was born with Turner's Syndrome, which gave her female external genitalia and led to her being raised as a girl--but who is possessed of XO chromosomes.

It is simply false that there are only two sexes, male and female, and that myth is as patently untrue as the myth that "normal" sexual orientation is heterosexual or that men are "masculine" and women are "feminine." For that reason it is just as oppressive to claim certain sexual characteristics as the prerogative of one sex or the other. It is male and female chauvinism of the worst kind to pretend one sex has exclusive rights to specific sexual traits. "Women-born-women" do not have dibs on boobs or cunts, to put it bluntly, despite such claims by the gender police, nor does possessing a penis automatically qualify one for male-hood.



Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan

photo by Petranella Ytsma

The lesbian/feminist and women's movements have for over 20 years claimed exactly that, however, and continue to do so, having shared the full-frontal dichotomy most people in this culture have suffered. Certain elements have become so fixated on the issue of sexual "purity" that they fail to see the common thread of our shared humanity. They spend their energy attempting to end genital surgery for transsexuals, feigning concern for our well-being, and ignore the mutilation during infancy of intersexed persons; they decry the infibulation of children in Africa while turning their backs on that and worse in their own land.

It is not surprising that a society that would resort to shock treatment and aversion therapy for young transsexuals would mutilate infants who violate an artificial sense of cosmetic propriety. Nor is it surprising that a society that views gay-bashing a legitimate means of dealing with its queers would destroy perfectly healthy, functional genitals simply because they are different from most. I even understand how the control-freak mentality of the medical profession allows it to justify niggardly parceling out the very same genital surgery to transsexuals which it so freely imposed upon the intersexed.

What I don't for the life of me understand, is how a movement that claims, as does ours, to stand for diversity and sexual freedom, is so narrow and limited in its scope that it has no room for the radically gendered and radically sexed.

Sometimes gay liberation sounds just like the broken record I grew up having to listen to from the straights.

Surgical Roulette

by Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan

(Editor's note: The following article was originally published as a two-part series in the November and December 1993 issues of Sound Out, and is reprinted with permission of the author.)

On September 24, I gave a workshop on the Gallae, the sex-changed Priestesses of the goddess Cybele, at the third annual New Woman's Conference held in Guerneville, California. The New Woman's Conference is planned, organized and attended by and for postoperative male-to-female transsexuals. Most of the conference is open to nontranssexuals if they are significant others of any attending postop but some workshops admit only postoperative transsexuals to facilitate the free flow of information and emotional rapport between people whose life experiences entail a transformation alien to most people in society.

I'm not a separatist -- I've been excluded far too often by separatists wrapped in the banner of lesbian "purity" -- and yet I understand the separatist sentiment that people need to be able to be among their own kind once in a while. At the risk of sounding like a separatist I have to admit that what happened at one of the conference workshops brought home the rationale for separatism.

My workshop was an elaboration of a piece I had written on the Gallae, and had nothing I would be hesitant to present to any audience. I did not tailor my remarks to include the one obviously nontranssexual participant; I took as my cue the method in which Vina Deloria, Jr. addressed the audience when he spoke at the Evergreen State College last year. Deloria directed his comments to the Native people present and let the non-Native people take from his speech what they might. I spoké to *my* people -- and sure enough the person I took to be the one genetically XX female in attendance was the one person who took issue with my use of the term "genetic female" as transsexuals commonly use it to differentiate between us and the majority of women whose assumed biological hegemony is so often used as an excuse to exclude transsexuals from women's events.

With shock I recognized the voice of the woman who criticized me for the use of "genetic female" to be that of Grace Brian, the intersexed individual whom I interviewed by telephone for my article "Welcome to the World of the Intersexed," but whom I had never met in person. My first reaction was happiness that the conference organizers had gone beyond the parochialism of separatism to make room for others oppressed by the medical establishment's self-appointed role as arbiter of sex and gender. My next thought, however, was concern that Grace's

negative and invalidating opinion towards sex-changing surgery might catch unawares conference participants who little suspected the presence among them of a nontranssexual with such views.

During my previous conversations and correspondence with Grace it was obvious she is invested in believing postoperative transsexuals incapable of orgasm. She maintains that postoperative transsexuals are therefore as victimized as the intersexed whose genitals are altered to make their bodies comply with medical and societal standards of "normal." Grace's antipathy towards genital surgery is understandable, given her own experience as one whose genitals were mutilated for cosmetic reasons without her consent, but hardly applicable to those of us who have chosen such surgery with free and informed

consent. It was an editorial decision on my part when writing my piece on intersexuality to exclude Grace's opinions on the sexual capability of postoperative transsexuals; commitment to giving a voice to those seeking to define themselves does not entail providing them a forum with which to define others.

As much as I believe Grace's presence at the conference was a mistake on the part of the organizers, her viewpoint raises the legitimate issue of what

constitutes "free and informed consent." I myself have seen so many instances of "misinformed" consent that I have found myself wondering just how "free" such consent can truly be. My consternation with many sex-changing surgical techniques over the years has been with the overriding emphasis on cosmetic results at the expense of post-surgical genital orgasmic response. Familiarity with most of those techniques led me to conclude that the majority of conference attendees were probably incapable of orgasm as a result of their surgeries. I subsequently feared Grace's attitude could devastate those particular women, especially in light of the fact that she would be involved in presenting the workshop on orgasm scheduled for later in the day when I would not be present.

My fears proved well founded. When one of the conference attendees returned to the home in which I was staying, she was in such a state of emotional turmoil as a result of the orgasm workshop that I feared for her physical safety. For the next three days I watched her go through hell as she realized that she has, in all probability, lost for the remainder of her life her capacity for genital orgasmic response.

She related how, at the workshop, a bowl was passed around, and women put in a red poker chip if they were having orgasms and a white poker chip if they weren't. "As I recall the count was four red and fourteen white," she said. Not only was this woman struggling with the fact of her own personal loss but a dawning awareness that the majority of the transsexual women

" . . . 'transgenderism' used as a euphemism for changing sex masks the reality that transsexuals seek to change their bodies in order to experience genital sexual pleasure without a prick getting in the way."

with whom she socializes have been similarly ill-served by their surgeons. The loss of orgasm, in her words, "does not in any way invalidate the good things, the wonderful, life-saving things that come with surgery." But those things that come with surgery have come, for her, at a terrible price, and I saw her torn apart with the knowledge that, having saved her life, she must now face how to cope with a life devoid of the sexual celebration most other persons can expect to enjoy.

I am one of the lucky ones; despite Grace's incredulity I can reach orgasm easily and completely. I benefitted from luck and perseverance when seeking surgery, and the presence in my life, back in the mid '70s, of a transsexual woman whose radical outlook on surgery and the medical/psychiatric oppression of transsexuals' lives permanently transformed how I viewed myself and what I wanted from surgery.

Dyna Slyter was so radical in her queer politics that 17 years later she still seems radical even by today's standards. One of her radical stances was her criticizing bad surgery and bad surgeons.

Not all sex-changing surgeries provide the same result; there are good surgeons and bad surgeons. Dyna had no qualms about labeling this or that surgeon a "butcher" and spared no pains or words in warning preoperative transsexuals away from practitioners who placed money, prestige or cosmetic criteria above orgasmically functioning genitalia.

Her warnings often fell on deaf ears; after all, a drowning woman going down for the third time has little thought to spare for the sharks circling in for the kill. And yet she did influence some people -- myself among them. In time I realized the university program I initially sought admittance to practiced bad medicine -- resectioning the large bowel and thereby damaging a perfectly good organ in a poor trade-off for nonexistent genital sexual pleasure. Applying to first one and then another program I at last found surgeons willing to give me what I wanted -- and the results were so good that Dyna herself opted for surgery from the same provider, years after becoming a woman socially.

The woman I saw come back from the New Woman's Conference so horribly distraught honestly believes that transsexuals have never freely discussed the destruction wrought by some surgeons upon our sexuality. I believe her attitude is in part to shield herself from facing, while she is so vulnerable, her own responsibility for being ill-informed when she chose her surgeon, as well as the fact that we as transsexuals are so socially fragmented that warnings such as Dyna's are lost to many, drowned in the medical and psychiatric babble that currently defines so many lives. And the sad truth is that some transsexuals refuse to address the destruction that is occurring to so many people's sexuality.

One reason bad surgeons continue to perform bad sex-changing surgery is that not enough transsexuals are radical in their outlook on sex and sexuality; this summer I received a survey from Dallas Denny, a nationally-known transsexual who is a "licensed psychological examiner" who writes for the transsexual population in a variety of publications. Her survey

never even referred to orgasm or sexual satisfaction; it simply spewed forth more of the psychobabble that is the hallmark of our medical colonization. Little wonder that so few postoperative transsexuals are orgasmic -- they are indoctrinated not to think in such terms.

That only a tiny percentage of us are genitally orgasmic does not indict sex-change surgery *per se*; it is but evidence that widespread medical malpractice exists, victimizing those people too oppressed, to disadvantaged--and yes, sometimes too lazy -- to make informed choices. What needs to change, and change NOW, is the all too apparent attitude amongst many in the medical profession that transsexuals are not deserving of the best surgery available.

One way for that change to occur is for transsexuals to take responsibility for themselves and refuse to patronize the butchers who show such disdain and disregard for our sexual well-being. Another way to change the situation is to stop pussyfooting around the issue of orgasm and sexual pleasure. It is necessary for transsexuals to stop pretending that changing sex is about gender and not about sex. When Robyn Alison Ellis of Seattle's Ingersoll Gender Clinic spoke to Evergreen College's LGBPRC last May she said, "Transsexualism isn't about sex." Well, EXCUUUUSE me: it IS about sex, and until we stop denying that sex is at the heart of the matter we'll have women as traumatized as the transsexual woman I saw return from the New Woman's Conference.

Transsexuals have been psychoanalyzed to the point that the focus on us has been reduced to a psychiatric babble emphasizing who "qualifies" for surgery at the expense of scrutinizing the surgery itself. With the continued refusal by most private insurers, national health care programs such as Canada's and, undoubtedly, Mr. Clinton's, to fund sex-changing surgery, there is no Earthly reason to maintain the pretense that such surgery be treated any differently than any other cosmetic surgery. Let those who can make a case for themselves that surgery is medically indicated do so and for the rest let it be provided on demand, as is any cosmetic surgery -- and prosecute for malpractice those surgeons incapable or unwilling to provide for genital orgasmic response as we can do now to a surgeon who performs a nose-job which leaves its victim unable to sneeze.

To accomplish this we will need to discard the concept of "gender dysphoria" as the falsehood it is; gender is a social construct that does not need the permission of medical professionals to disregard. Anyone can bend or cross gender boundaries at will; "transgenderism" used as a euphemism for changing sex masks the reality that transsexuals seek to change their bodies in order to experience genital sexual pleasure without a prick getting in their way. The recent attempt by some to replace the term "sex-reassignment surgery" with "gender confirmation surgery" only further confuses the separate issues of sex and gender.

In many ways transsexuals are much worse off now than in the days of the Gallae, when individuals chose for themselves to change sex without the interference of psychiatric

professionals. What passes for sex-change surgery today is often little more than the complete removal of genitals practiced several thousand years ago coupled with an attempt to provide the cosmetic appearance of female genitals. Such needn't be the case, as my body and Dyna's and perhaps several hundred other transsexuals bear proof. Done conscientiously, with existing surgical techniques, our sexuality can be enhanced -- not destroyed.

It is time the medical profession stop examining transsexuals so intently and turn its attention to itself. Why are transsexuals considered incompetent to choose surgery, yet the medical profession relies solely upon self-reporting to determine our postoperative genital orgasmic response? Why is there such emphasis on our personal histories prior to surgery yet no study of our post-surgical social and sexual lives? The medical establishment's willingness to ascribe mental illness to those whose sexuality is different from the majority, as in its historical attitude towards homosexuality, is proof of its ineptness in handling human sexuality in general. "Gender dysphoria" is but another example of the medical profession's inability to distinguish between apples and oranges.

Transsexuals are misled by gender clinics and professionals who ascribe to the myth of "gender dysphoria," and the result is our treatment by people who view us as sexual eunuchs rather than sexual beings. To save ourselves we must stop listening to the psychiatric establishment which seeks to impose its own paradigm over our own experiences and needs, and focus on the surgery, which is, after all, what distinguishes us from the rest of society. As long as the artifice of gender is emphasized over the physical reality of sex and the body, incompetent surgeons will be able to mutilate people ill-equipped to differentiate between good and bad surgeons.

The anguish I recently witnessed was that of a woman previously diagnosed as suffering from "gender dysphoria" who now suffers from orgasmic dysfunction. She is attempting as best she can to face what was done to her five years ago. What was done to her is a crime -- and the crime is malpractice. It is perpetuated by nationally known surgeons who operate in the open but beneath the deceit that what they treat is mental illness. Restore to the transsexuals the right of self-determination and the horrors inflicted upon so many of my sisters will cease, as did the back-alley abortions perpetrated upon other women before they won their own right to choose.

Fourteen white poker chips were placed in a bowl and passed around at the New Woman's Conference. The four red poker chips are proof that there needn't have been even a single white one.

Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan has written a number of articles on transsexuality and changing sex. She successfully sued the state of Minnesota in the 1970s to pay for her final reconstructive surgery and was instrumental in defeating a bill subsequently introduced in the Minnesota legislature that would have prohibited such funding. She is a resident of Portland, Oregon.



THE JOURNAL OF GENDER STUDIES



At Last... A Professional Publication that:

- Features articles on all aspects of the gender issues (for females and males)
- Introduces excerpts from new titles on gender both fiction and nonfiction
- Reviews selected titles on various aspects of the gender world
- Includes works of poetry, arts (where feasible) and theater on gender questions

Truly a must for all students of the sociology, anthropology and psychology of gender perceptions, roles, and lifestyle options

Outreach Institute
Publication Dept. (JGS)
406 Western Ave., Suite 345
South Portland, ME 04106

Subscriptions are \$16 for 1 year or \$30 for 2 years.
A complimentary copy will be sent on written request.

Submissions

TransSisters welcomes submissions of original articles, interviews, reviews, position statements, press releases, news clippings, editorials, research reports, poetry, artwork or photography dealing with issues of transsexuality and feminism. Although the primary focus of *TransSisters* is on issues of male-to-female transsexuality, material related to female-to-male transsexuality is also welcome, and will be considered for publication.

All submissions are subject to editing. Please enclose a brief biographical summary (two or three sentences) with your submission. Contributors are also welcome and encouraged to submit photographs of themselves along with their submissions, but please indicate the name of the photographer if you do so. Authors/artists should indicate if their work has been published or submitted elsewhere. *TransSisters* reserves the right to reprint all submissions. All other rights revert to the individual authors after publication. *TransSisters* also reserves the right to refuse submissions which do not meet our editorial or aesthetic standards or which are contrary to our goals and purposes. Please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want your manuscript or artwork returned. Contributors receive a free copy of the issue in which their work appears. Please address all submissions to: *TransSisters*; Davina Anne Gabriel, editor; 4004 Troost Avenue; Kansas City, Missouri 64110.

DO IT YOUR WAY

by Christine Beatty

(Editor's note: This article was originally published in the September 1991 issue of Spectator, and is reprinted with the permission of the author.)

You'll see some of us in the display ads of this publication. We are cross-gendered people: transsexual, transvestites and transgenderists (she-males). In American society, we have been a part of the public consciousness ever since Christine Jorgensen's surgery made headlines in 1953. Since that time we have become only marginally accepted by enlightened people, tolerated by others, and just plain condemned by plenty. Even the guys who pay to fuck us don't really accept us for the most part.

Aside from the people who condemn us for moralistic reasons, our greatest detractors are women of various persuasions who detest the oppression that we often symbolize by our values and demeanor. Unwittingly, many of us play a part in perpetuating sex-role stereotypes that are dehumanizing to both men and women. Though I write this article from the perspective of a male-to-female transsexual with a focus on women, there is no doubt that stereotypes can be just as harmful to men.

I don't believe that cross-gendered people have an agenda of oppressing women or men, though we are undeniably products of a society that ingrains these ideas into us from an early age. Most "transies" tend to be insecure about their identity. As a transsexual female, I catch myself obsessing about how I could be more "feminine." I also tend to chide myself for lapses into "masculinity." When I make such judgments I am subconsciously reinforcing gender stereotypes. It is not always easy to keep in mind that these values are NOT the last word on the subject of appropriate sex-role behavior. Nowhere is there a rule book on how males and females should think feel or behave.

We transies tend to incur the wrath of women in several ways. Feminists dislike our image-consciousness, as though it is the clothes, makeup and demeanor that make someone a woman. We displease genetic (born) females, especially non-feminists, when we try to compete with them in a femininity contest. Just as annoying to women is when, out of ignorance or insecurity, we portray ourselves as caricatures of womanhood by using exaggerated mannerisms, putting on makeup with a trowel, or otherwise using the "more is better" guide to being a woman.

A slightly different variation on the theme of exaggerated femininity is that of the cross-gendered sex worker. Though some of us may have insecurities, it is reality that clients are paying for that look. In a market economy that is

highly competitive, it pays to cater to a customer's sexist expectations.

Whoa! Before I give the impression that I believe all women should favor the Earth-lesbian, brown-rice-and-Birkenstocks look (which is just another stereotype), let me say a word or two in defense of garishly painted slatterns such as myself and other women who also use makeup. I see nothing wrong with women (or men) who enjoy using makeup, even lots of makeup. Using the putty-knife approach to cosmetics is a personal choice, even though it looks silly at times. Similarly, the subdued use of makeup is also a choice that in no way makes or breaks one's femininity.

The problem isn't in appearance, it is in expectations. Stereotypes become a problem when other people start making our choices for us by saying what we should or shouldn't do. I have no problem with the femme stereotype; it is my personal choice. I am no more wrong for embracing it than is another woman for eschewing it. We're talking freedom here, folks! The American ideal, you know?

What this article is leading up to could be described as a call for freedom of choice and the nonjudgmental application of that right. I know so many women who express so many rich variations of womanhood, and I consider none of them to be an absolute ideal. I have my own preferences, but they are no more valid than anyone else's. My female friends are mostly other lesbians, and they all represent an amazingly diverse statement of what it is to be female. From the butchest motorcycle/leather dykes to the most ultra-femme lipstick lesbians, none are any more nor any less women than the others.

Transies could learn a lot from such women. Though many of us would doubtless continue to favor a femme look, we might begin to see that it is not appearance that makes a woman. Though I only wear makeup around them about half of the time, many of my sister lesbians tell me that they've seldom, if ever, thought of me as a guy, that my energy is that of a woman. I still prefer being made up, but it isn't essential to my identity. In this way I can express myself as I like without taking away from any other woman's values.

The main thing to keep in mind is that, though people do choose a form of self-expression that may be stereotypically male or female, neither women nor men in and of themselves are stereotypes. Being female or male is not a contest, though many people seem to think it is. Even if it were a competition, there are no rules to judge by except appearance, and that is a very shallow yardstick. Though people will continue to express themselves as they wish, it is a liberating thought to recognize -- inasmuch as one is able to remain continually true to oneself -- that there is no wrong way to be you.

" . . .out of ignorance or insecurity, we portray ourselves as caricatures of womanhood by using exaggerated mannerisms, putting on makeup with a trowel, or otherwise using the 'more is better' guide to being a woman."

Gender & Sexuality

by Christine Beatty

(Editor's note: The following article originally appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *Anything That Moves*, and is reprinted with permission of the author, who was preoperative at the time that it was originally published. She has since that time completed sex-change surgery.)

Gender and sexuality are often confused with one another. Let's face it: ya wanna fuck who ya wanna fuck, and it doesn't matter whether you're a man, a woman, or if your gender identity falls somewhere in between. To wit, neither the gender identity nor the anatomical sex of an individual is a reliable indicator of whom you might find her or him in bed with. I suppose that, with all of the misconceptions about these two topics, they do deserve discussion side by side. Besides, as a transsexual, gender is one of my favorite subjects.

Unfortunately, a lot of myths persist both about gender and sexuality. Atypical behavior is often viewed with suspicion, intolerance and the notion that something must be wrong. The media rarely offers us positive images of either minority. We're the favorite targets of comedians who are not sophisticated or intelligent enough to invent nonprejudicial jokes, or who are cheap enough to pander to the lowest common denominator -- fear. We live in a society that is not interested in broadening its knowledge of those different from the norm.

In place of knowledge, all kinds of pejorative, crackpot theories can be formed, both by the lay public and by psychology and sociology professionals who should know better. Why haven't we seen studies and theories of why heterosexuality exists? Why was homosexuality classified as a mental illness until 1972? Why was a lame form prejudice continued by defining a "condition" called Ego-Dystonic Homosexuality ("Please, God, don't let me be a faggot!") until only four years ago? To recognize the idiocy of such a diagnosis, imagine some yuppie stockbroker-type agonizing over being heterosexual and scheduling appointments with his shrink to become gay.

Whoa! Calm down, Christine. Take a couple of deep breaths, girl. Wipe the froth from your mouth and let's get to work. After all, *ignorance* is the problem, not other people. Getting angry may be one form of personal therapy, but education is the answer. If some people refuse to become informed, that's on them. Well, just what is gender? Well, before I tell you that, I have to warn you that it is impossible to discuss gender without getting into stereotypes. It has been so socialized into us that we just don't have the language to avoid sexist, stereotyped concepts.

What is a man, and what is a woman? What is male, female, masculine, or feminine? Wait! Don't answer too

quickly! Chances are I will be able to point out a "male" or a "female" who completely defies your definition. If we talk about generalities, averages and "normal," then we're dehumanizing those who don't fit into our neat cardboard cutouts of what men and women are.

Before we discuss gender, let's talk about SEX. Not even this concept can be perfectly nailed down. Sexology studies related to transsexualism have separated sex classifications into seven (count 'em) definitions. Each human being has their own genetic, anatomical, hormonal, psychological, social, legal and historical sex. And the degree to which these indicators define a person's sex is not carved in stone. For instance, chromosomal abnormalities may render one's genetic sex in disagreement with the other categories.

There are other complications in classifying sex, some of which apply to me. As a male-to-female transsexual, my chromosomes are male as is my historical (born) sex. Yet, I am hormonally female, thanks to the estrogens I take daily. My primary anatomical sex characteristics are still male, since I cannot yet afford surgery (\$8,000 - \$18,000) to "tuck and roll" my penis, but I have the secondary sex characteristics of a woman: breasts, soft skin, smooth musculature, and less body hair. Socially, I am female; I live as a woman full time and most people relate to me as a woman. I will become legally

female after I have had the sex-change surgery. And psychologically, I *had* to think of myself as female to make this painful, expensive, difficult transition.

So, what do I qualify as? Am I still a man because my original genitals are still intact -- though atrophied from the hormones -- as I write this? It all depends on point of view, which brings us back to the question of gender.

Gender is psychological sex. It is only one possible sex classification. My gender identity is the degree to which I view myself as female or male. If my identity is too much in conflict with the body I was born with, then it is a cross-gender identity (also known as gender dysphoria).

Oops! I almost allowed a lie to slip by, a stereotype to be perpetuated. I should have said "the degree to which I view myself as MY CONCEPT OF FEMALE OR MALE." I recognize the fallacy of gender stereotypes, their inapplicability to individuals, and the dehumanizing way they attempt to shove fragile human beings into rigid, tight little boxes. Yet my social programming is so too strong for me to fight; I see my personal traits as being mostly what I conceive to be female. Even if I could live with a male gender identity, I doubt that society would stand for me running around in dresses. It is so much easier to give up and play their game and just be a woman so I can be myself.

I can't impress enough that "male" and "female" are

" . . . we have only two problems here: stereotypes and labels. Human beings are not boxes or cardboard cutouts, nor are we made to be shoved into them."

more stereotypes than single word descriptions of one's anatomical sex. They imply much of what we expect in terms of behavior, sensibilities, reactions and appearance. Perhaps someday we will reject these outmoded, oppressive views of gender and maybe people won't need to change their sex to feel comfortable with themselves. Maybe people will be able to quit beating themselves for not measuring up to cultural ideals. There may always be cross-gendered people anyway, but hopefully, as society becomes more open-minded, it will be less distressing. This brings us to the subject of cross-gender behavior.

There are TVs (transvestites), TGs (transgenderists), and TSs (transsexuals). According to the latest studies on the subject of cross-gender psychology, these all represent various stages along a spectrum of behavior. To make this discussion easier, and also because the clear majority of such people are/were men (sic), I will confine this discussion to "males."

Male transvestites enjoy putting on women's clothes. Early on in their cross-dressing career, it is mostly a sexual thrill, a fetish. Yet, many of these men reach a point where just "becoming" female for a period of time is a reward in itself. Sexual activity seldom plays a major role at this stage. Many theories abound as to the reasons for this behavior, but there is no consensus. Contrary to popular belief, very few TVs are gay. Most are heterosexual men who are often married. The important thing is that such cross-dressing is not harmful or sick. It is a pleasurable, fulfilling part of the TV's life and should not be taken from him. Gender play is a lot of fun, and helping transform a man into his female self can be enjoyable. Once preconceived notions about "normality" have been let go, this may be real playground in the lives of people who can deal with it. More power to them.

Male transgenderists have such a strong female identity that they live in the female role full time. Quite often they take hormones, have electrolysis to remove unwanted facial and body hair, and even get plastic surgery. TGs, however, do not get sex-change surgery. Their desire for it is either minimal or they have an aversion to the idea. Included in this category are some of the so-called drag queens, about whom little is known because not much research has been done with them. Drag queen is a very loose, catch-all term that is almost meaningless when you try to decide how to label people. In fact, the hardest problem in the study of transgender behavior is deciding how to classify its various manifestations. Unfortunately, most labels greatly oversimplify and generalize behavior especially in these cases.

Finally, male-to-female transsexuals want to become as female as possible, including getting sex-change surgery. This is the final step in the range of cross-gender phenomena. Many TSs have spent time as TVs and/or TGs first, progressing to this point over the years. To prevent a panic among the significant others of TVs, I should stress that it is *very* rare for a TV to want to become a TG or TS, or to complete sex-change surgery. Nobody has a really workable theory as to how people get this way. I have written over 100,000 words in trying to figure myself out. I didn't learn why I want to be a woman, but I did

gain acceptance of it and greatly improved my writing skills.

Now, how does gender tie in with sexual orientation? If you consider how many ways there are to classify a person's sex, then you can see how much of a problem it can be to label sexuality. Though I still have a cock, I consider myself a lesbian. (Well . . . there's a few guys I'll romp with now then.) So I guess according to my genitals, chromosomes, history, and legal status, I'm mostly heterosexual. But I'm a lesbian in other ways. In terms of labels, I'm in limbo until I get my surgery. It is important to keep in mind that we're talking point-of-view here. I'm a classification nightmare for now because of the conflicting designations. Fortunately, a lot of this stuff can be changed or doesn't matter.

My legal sex will change with my surgery. My history is unimportant to me because I don't live in the past. (Should L.A.'s baseball team still be called the Brooklyn Dodgers?) And regarding genetic sex, I have never been attracted to anyone because of their chromosomes (though I might like how they look in tight genes). So why should it matter? If someone needs a chromosome test to get to bed with me, they are not the kind of person I'd want to fuck anyway.

I guess we have only two real problems here: stereotypes and labels. Human beings are not boxes or cardboard cutouts, nor are we made to be shoved into them. People are the way they are, and it's wrong that others should try to make them feel bad for being the way they are. It would be a much nicer world if could just be ourselves without unsolicited commentary. As far as labels go, I don't care for them, thank you. Because unless I choose to announce my orientation to the world, it's none of their fucking business. Unless they want to go to bed with me, that is.

Christine Beatty is a transsexual lesbian author, musician, computer programmer and founder of San Francisco Gender Information Service. Her work has been published in numerous publications and she has appeared on several television and radio talk shows.



Christine Beatty

photo by David Pincus

So You Think You Are a Lesbian

by Christine Beatty

I should have seen our troubles coming
that first time you called me "he" and
didn't it make sense to you
that someone in a dress
with makeup painted face
would want to be called "she"
at least when dressed that way
but I let it slide right then
after snidely telling you
I never met a person with such
a liberal concept of masculinity.

Well, we fell in love anyway
and I thought of us as lesbians
until you told me that I was not
a woman in your eyes and so
I asked you did this mean
you thought I was your man
to which you told me "not exactly"

but rather something in between
a gender not quite
M or F but instead
a blending of the best
except when you got mad at me
and that was when you said
that I was SO MALE which
you knew always hurt.

Though God gave me a cock
and XY genes and all
I know I'm still a woman
in my heart and in my head
an idea which made
no sense to you at all
or so you said to me
which I don't
understand because
though you've had
so many boyfriends
and fucked so many guys

you still believe
yourself a lesbian
so why can't you
bring yourself to see
it's just the same in spirit
it's just the same with me
our feelings and "reality"
they clash like love and money
and just what is *reality* anyway
I'm a woman in spite of my cock
and you are still a dyke
despite all those guys

So you think you are a lesbian
well I believe that's true
'cause Goddess knows I am.

reprinted with permission of the author,
from *Misery Loves Company*, copyright
1993 by Christine Beatty, published by
Glamazon Press, San Francisco, Ca.

* LITANY *

by J.L. Phillips

Queer.

I own that word.
I paid for it
in studied blows
and curses,
drunken beatings
in sudden light
through broken doors,
and dirty things
as well.

Fairy.

That's my word too.
They all found out.
No matter how
I tried to hide
my sissy ways

betrayed it.

My father's shame
made visible
in me.

Pansy.

That word belongs to me.
It was a gift
and thoughtful too.
They knocked me down,
then kicked me
and laughed,
so I wouldn't
ever
forget it.

Fag.

That word is mine.

I found it.

It was written
on my locker.
Whoever left it
never claimed it.
I looked around
but couldn't see
through tears.

All those words are mine
now.
The gaymen (not my special
friends)
will have to share. They're
mine.

All those words are me now --
in my heart or on my skin --
I hear them in my head.

You can't change me
You can't hurt me.
Your're just dumb boys.

I'm smarter.

You can push but I won't move.
You'll never win.
I'm stronger.

You play your tricks
and stupid games
but I don't care,
I hate you.
I hate you all,
you bully boys
and brutal men.
I'm not like you.
I'm something else.
I'm something else,
inside.

*J.L. Phillips is a 46 year old
transgendered lesbian/feminist
Witch, a survivor, and a resident
of Capistrano Beach, California.*

"Non Womyn-Born Womyn
thrown out of Michigan
Women's Music Festival."

OF COURSE, TRANSGENDERED
WIMMIN ARE WIMMIN!!!! THESE
GURLS EVEN SET UP AN INFORMATION
TABLE + WANTED TO "PROCESS!"



(YOU THINK MEN WOULD DO THIS?)

I MEAN... WHAT'S NEXT ?? **INSPECTIONS ???**



Originally published in the November / December 1993 issue of *Dykespeak*; reprinted with permission of the cartoonist.

TV/TS
Tapestry
Journal

for all persons interested in
Crossdressing & Transsexualism

150+ pages of informational articles by peers and professionals; and updated listings on conventions, hotlines, counseling groups, Medical and Psychological referrals, and other helping professionals.

All for \$12.00 an issue. Save \$\$ with a subscription of *four issues for \$40.00* (\$55.00 1st class), then you can submit a personal listing of your own, as well as take advantage of the *TV/TS Tapestry Journal* mail-forwarding service. Call or write for more information !

Published by

THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR GENDER EDUCATION

P.O. BOX 367

Wayland, MA 01778-0369

(617) 894-8340 FAX 899-5703

Misery Loves Company
Christine Beatty



“Christine Beatty writes with the authority of one who has not only lived but mastered her material.” -- *Danielle Willis*

“They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Well, this book could get you into trouble for the rest of your life. What are you waiting for?” -- *Pat Califia*

“... good family values.” -- *Alex Bennett* speaking of the author in a 1992 KITS radio interview. (I think he was joking.)



available for
\$8.00 per copy
(postpaid) from:

Glamazon Press
P.O. Box 423602
San Francisco,
California 94142