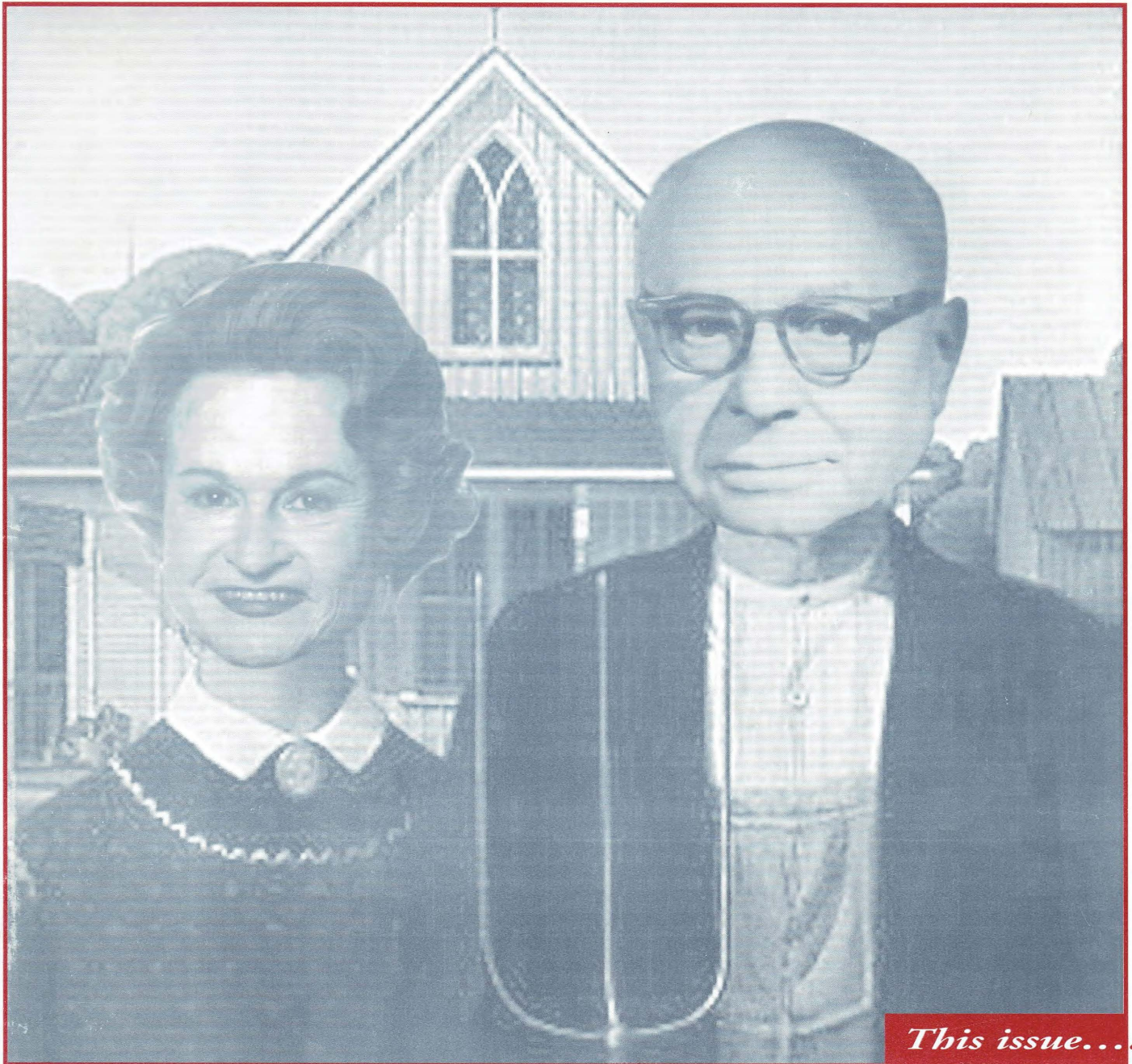


Chrysalis

THE JOURNAL OF TRANSGRESSIVE GENDER IDENTITIES

VOL. 2, No. 3

\$9.00



*This issue.....
Transgender Gothic*

*This issue of Chrysalis
is dedicated to...*

The late Harry Benjamin, M.D.



and Virginia Prince, Ph.D.



Scientists, Pioneers, Humanists

this issue

*Chrysalis: The Journal of
Transgressive Gender Identities*

About this Issue

*The theme of this issue is
Transgender Gothic*

*What, exactly, do we mean:
transgender gothic?*

*The word gothic has been
applied to art, literature, and
architecture. Technically, the
gothic period in architecture
was the last of the Middle
Ages, but a drawing of Notre
Dame Cathedral in Paris
(above), with its gingerbread
and arches, is much more
instructive, don't you think?*

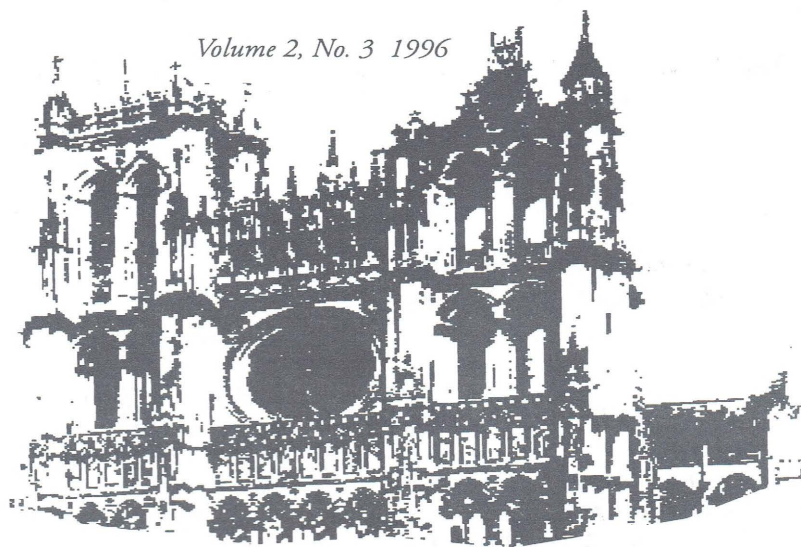
*It shouldn't surprise you, then,
that an example of a
gothic romance
would be Mary
Shelley's Frankenstein. Or think
Edgar Allen Poe.
Very definitely
gothic.*



*In this postmodern age,
the word gothic has become
synonymous with something
which is dated or old-fash-
ioned. And yet things gothic
are enduring and beautiful.*

*What better metaphor for the
ways we have classically
looked at ourselves than
transgender gothic?*

Volume 2, No. 3 1996



contents

<i>From the Editor</i>	3
<i>P.O. Box</i>	5
<i>Poetry</i>	7
<i>Bits n Pieces</i>	52
<i>Medtalk</i>	60

Transgender Gothic

<i>Transgendered People</i>	17
<i>Heteropocrisy</i>	23
<i>Homophobia Hurts Us All</i>	31
<i>In Search of the "True" Transsexual</i>	39
<i>A Cup of Bitter Yaupon</i>	45
<i>Starting to Cross-Live</i>	49

Special

<i>Transgender Self-Mutilation</i>	9
<i>Premarin: The Untold Story</i>	12

Fiction

<i>Out of the Broom Closet, Up, Up, & Away</i>	35
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Upcoming in *Chrysalis*:

Number 11 (Vol. 2, No. 4)

The World Of Work

*How transgendered & transsexual
folk cope with employment
discrimination*

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Mission: Chrysalis is dedicated to the in-depth exploration of gender issues. Our focus will be on topics which have been ignored or only lightly touched upon in other forums. Our treatments will be intelligent and balanced.

Submissions: We welcome your stories, articles, letters, editorials, news clippings, position statements, research reports, press releases, poems, and artwork.

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Benjamin and Prince were pioneers, not just because they were courageous, venturing into unknown ground at considerable risk to their reputations and freedom, but because they developed coherent, well thought out philosophies of (respectively) transsexualism and crossdressing.

A little over four decades ago, Dr. Harry Benjamin, a New York City endocrinologist, was working with a few transsexual patients, providing them with counseling and hormonal therapy, helping them to make sense of their lives.

A few thousand miles to the west, in Los Angeles, Dr. Charles Prince, a chemist — and a cross-dresser — was trying to make sense of his own life. He was beginning to correspond with other crossdressers, planting the seeds of what would one day become the transgender community.

Both Benjamin and Prince were pioneers, not just because they were courageous, venturing into unknown ground at considerable risk to their reputations and freedom, but because they developed coherent, well thought out philosophies of (respectively) transsexualism and crossdressing.

In his classic 1996 monograph, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, Benjamin laid the intellectual foundation for transsexualism, a condition which had not previously been rigorously defined or adequately described. It was the first book-length clinical treatment of the subject. In its pages, he wrote of the anguish of his patients, the relief they obtained from sex reassignment, and the techniques he had developed to work with them.

Prince, who took the name Virginia, developed her philosophy in the pages of *Transvestia*, a magazine she published from the early 1960's to the late 1970's, and in a series of journal articles and presentations at scientific conferences. She made others like herself and the world in general aware that many cross-dressers are heterosexual, and that men cross-dress for a variety of personal reasons (and not solely because they find women's clothing sexually arousing).

Benjamin and Prince were the principal architects of identities which for many years comprised 100% of the options in the transgender community. The community had little room for the only other available category— female impersonation/drag.

At the time of my fieldwork, there were only three gender options (social identities) available for physical males who cross-dressed among the group I worked with: the surgically oriented male-to-female transsexual, the male transvestite, and the gay female impersonator/cross-dresser (1994, p. 451).

That's anthropologist Anne Bolin, describing "The Berdache Society," a transgender support organization which she studied in the mid-1980's.

There is a problem with having but a few options: one tends

Reference

Bolin, A. (1994). Transcending and transgenering: Male-to-female transsexuals, dichotomy, and diversity. In G. Herdt (Ed.), *Third sex, third gender: Essays from anthropology and social history*. New York: Zone Books.

to be channeled into one of several pre-ordained paths. Bolin writes of the Berdache society:

Newcomers were presented with only two mutually exclusive possibilities for experiencing cross dressing. If one was transsexual, then pursuit of hormones and surgery accompanied one's transition. Desire for bodily reassignment became a mark of authenticity to male-to-female transsexuals (p. 452).

Conversely, if one was a crossdresser, one was expected *not* to take hormones, *not* to live full-time as a woman, and *not* to have or desire sex reassignment surgery. "If one was not absolutely committed to having the surgery, then one was de facto a transvestite" (pp. 451-452). But a decade later, when Bolin took another look at the transgender community, she found things had changed considerably:

Ten years ago male-to-female transsexualism supported the binary gender schema by dividing gender-dysphoric individuals into men and women where transvestites were considered "sick" or pathological men and transsexuals were women on whom nature had erred. In contrast, the recently emerging transgendered identity offers an account of gender as a social product by giving one the option of living as a woman or a "blend" without surgical reassignment. The transgenderist may or may not feminize: some appear androgynously, and others pass (p. 482).

In a speech given at the 1995 annual conference of IFGE, (see

p. 17 — *Ed.*), Callan Williams noted that the ways of thinking given us by Harry Benjamin and Virginia Prince no longer provide a good "fit" for all of us. It is time, she said, to move beyond the "Benjamin/Prince model."

It's no secret that we are in the midst of a period of turmoil and change. A "beyond the binary" view of transgender seems to be emerging — and it is having a major impact on the "Benjamin/Prince" model. But without that model, upon which our community is founded, we would not be in a position to question it. The Benjamin/Prince model was an essential part of our history.

If a new model is emerging, it is not *despite* Harry Benjamin and Virginia Prince — it is *because* of them. Their courage and hard work made it possible. Their model, even if it no longer "fits" some of us, has served *all* of us well. They have done all of us a great service.

Harry Benjamin died in 1989, at age 101. His concept of

transsexualism had been under attack for some ten years, but the opposition consisted only of isolated voices. He did not survive to see his model come under fire from transsexual people themselves. Virginia Prince is alive and well today. She has lived to see the community she birthed and parented grow to maturity, using the model she and Dr. Benjamin developed. And in the last few years, she has seen this community march boldly into unknown territory, away from her model. How frustrating it must be for her — but what a mark of her success!

If there are heroes in the transgender world (and there certainly are!), then Dr. Harry Benjamin and Dr. Virginia Prince are two of the greatest. Their contributions have ensured their place in history. Two or three hundred years from now, when our descendants have this transgender thing all sorted out, they will still be standing on the shoulders of giants: Harry Benjamin and Virginia Prince.

About our Cover

Our cover is based on the famous painting *American Gothic* by Grant Wood. We substituted the faces of Virginia Prince and Harry Benjamin for the couple at the right.

Wood's painting depicts traditional values in the face of change. It's well known to be satirical, and so we took some liberties with it. We offer it in a spirit of good humor. (We ran the idea by Virginia in hopes that she would not say "no." She didn't).

We would like to thank JoAnn Roberts for her work on the cover.



Dear Dallas:

Thanks for the latest *Chrysalis*, which just arrived. As usual, it looks good and reads even better. Your publications are the best I've come across in the TS world. They're consistently intelligent, sensible, candid, clearly written and edited, and encouraging without being soppy.

They're so good, in fact, that I've given my small collection of them, plus the rest of my TS library, to a genetically female friend who's co-director of a women's studies program at a state university. I haven't "purged" my library, exactly. I've given it a new life. My friend is interested in the subject, as she is in gender issues generally, and is delighted to have such a rich addition for her shelves.

I will be forever in your debt. Your publications were exactly what I needed. They helped me give my psyche permission to go to whatever lengths it needed and gave my brain important facts and ideas to contemplate.

Name withheld by request

Dear Editor:

As one of the most visible and vocal critics of the University of Minnesota sex reassignment program in the 1970's and '80s, I have refrained from comment on your assessment of the Program in Human Sexuality (*in Chrysalis Vol. 1, No. 6 and Vol. 1, No. 7 — Ed.*) until I could acquaint myself with the current situation, the better to offer an opinion based on verifiable information. This I have now done, and my conclusion is that, like the old saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

By now many transsexuals may know of Minnesota's recent legislation, signed into law in late spring by Governor Arne Carlson, which ended seventeen years of public-funding of sex reassignment surgery in that state. Only those individuals already undergoing treatment for transsexualism have been "grandfathered" into continuing care under the law, which took effect July 1

of this year (1995— *Ed.*). What most transsexuals undoubtedly do not know is that the University of Minnesota ceased providing sex reassignment surgery for the ensuing year (Satterfield, 1995).

Considering the anti-transsexual sentiment evident in the current Minnesota legislature, it is possible even the grandfather clause contained in this year's legislation may be revoked in the upcoming legislative session. If this scenario does indeed come to pass, then the next twelve months will be the only window of opportunity in which currently eligible transsexuals will be able to receive sex reassignment surgery. For the University of Minnesota to curtail surgery at this crucial moment in time is unconscionable — and contraindicative of your conclusion that "the Program in Human Sexuality is aware of and responsive to the needs of their transgendered clients." The University's decision to cease providing SRS at this time is nothing less than an abandonment of those human beings whose health and well-being is dependent upon receiving medically necessary care which, as the course of events has proven, they would have been better off seeking elsewhere.

To those of us aware, from years of first-hand observation and sad experience of the University's past neglect and abuse of transsexuals, however, this abandonment comes as no surprise. Indeed, the very same situation occurred in 1977-78, after Jane Doe vs. Minnesota opened the University of Minnesota's surgery program to welfare patients, who had formerly been denied services. During the months between Jane Doe and the successful conclusion of my own lawsuit, which freed Minnesota's indigent transsexuals from dependence upon the University, the University program curtailed surgery even as legislation was introduced which sought to prohibit public funding of our health care. In December of 1977, it was common knowledge amongst transsexuals and medical service providers that such a bill would be introduced the following month, yet as reported by Diane Egner in the April 28, 1978 *Minnesota Daily*, "(T)he chief sex-change surgeon, Dr. Colin Markland, was scheduled to leave the

P.O. BOX

country in December for a year's leave of absence. (Markland is now out of the country. During his absence no sex-change operations will be performed . . .)"

During the recent legislative debate on continued funding of our health care, which resulted in loss of that funding, medical professionals from the University of Minnesota were notably absent from public view, just as they were in the 1970's. Then, as now, transsexuals testified on their own behalf, relinquishing their privacy, while those professionals whose opinions could have contributed so much to continued funding avoided the limelight. That I was able to place a lengthy opinion piece in Minnesota's largest newspapers urging continued public funding of sex reassignment surgery during the recent legislative debate raises the question of why the University's professionals familiar with the transsexual plight did not do likewise. The University knew more than twenty years ago the desperate financial situation facing most transsexuals: "Potential patients, approved by the Gender Committee, must now deposit \$9500 in escrow with the hospital business office... (t)he adoption of this policy, instituted so that transsexual surgery would not be at the expense of the Minnesota taxpayer, has seen the transsexual surgical program virtually halted at Minnesota. The vast majority of our applicants turn out to be medically indigent" (Hastings, 1974, p. 336).

I agree with your opinion that "it would be unethical for PHS to authorize sex reassignment when the interdisciplinary team does not feel it is the client's best interests." However, ethical considerations have not always played a part in the University's decision to perform sex reassignment surgery. As the surgery program founder, Dr. Donald Hastings, himself admitted in *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* (October, 1974): "Three of our operated cases were and are profound psychopaths who were selected largely because of it; one member of the Gender Committee had had a long-term interest in sociopathy and was curious to see if high estrogen dosage and surgery might alter the condition for the better" (Hastings, 1974, p. 336).

The University program has seen itself as experimental for the bulk of its existence, from the first surgery which was performed in December of 1966 until the 1990's, and has justified itself as such. According to Dr. Sharon Satterfield, writing in *Transgender News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, "(T)he hospital chief of staff (1993) decided that since the surgery is no longer considered experimental, there is no need" (Satterfield, 1995).

The same cavalier attitude towards our welfare exhibited in refusing indigent transsexuals health care, and evident in the blatant experimentation reported by Dr. Hastings above, is present as well in the University program's ongoing failure to follow-up those transsexuals to whom it denied treatment. None of my friends and acquaintances who, along with myself, dared to criticize the University for refusing to treat us, have been included in any assessment by that program in determining its success rate, despite the fact all of us subsequently received sex reassignment elsewhere and went on to build successful, productive lives and despite the fact we remained known to program officials years after our rejection. That omission renders the University follow-up studies meaningless: our success is just as indicative of the University's failure to adequately diagnose and treat transsexualism as the most abject failure on the part of those transsexuals which it did accept. Furthermore, exclusion of us from the University's studies results in statistics which are fatally flawed at best — and self-serving on the part of the University at worst.

My first-hand experience and observation of the University of Minnesota sex reassignment program goes back to the early 1970's, and includes the advantage of having had personal interaction with every one of the four men to have headed the program since its inception — Hastings, Lloyd Sines, Eli Coleman, and Walter Bockting. As much as I might wish it otherwise, my criticism of the University of Minnesota remains. I cannot recommend PHS to anyone.

Margaret Dierdre O'Hartigan

According to Walter Bockting, PHS has not done SRS on-site since 1988; all surgery has been by referral out of state. I know this to be true, for I received a call from Bockting in 1989 or 1990. He was building a referral list of surgeons, and asked me to provide him with names and contact information. You quote Dr. Sharon Satterfield as saying that the hospital chief of staff "decided that since the surgery is no longer experimental, there is no need." This could not have referred to PHS "curtailing surgery at this crucial moment in time" (1993 or later).

I think it's important for our readers — and for you — to realize that PHS was not involved in sex reassignment until late 1979 or early 1980 — long after Dr. Hastings' 1974 article. The previous program, like the other 40 or so university gender programs in the United States, went belly-up after the closing of the Johns Hopkins clinic, which itself closed due to the publication of Jon Meyer & Donna Reter's now-discredited 1979 article in the Archives of General Psychiatry. If PHS had not been courageous enough to take over the program at a time in which other universities were disassociating themselves from the care of transsexual people, there would have been no gender program anywhere in Minnesota.

In removing public funding for SRS, Minnesota has taken a great step backward. We are all unhappy about it. PHS, like you, did what it could to prevent the loss of funding — Ed.

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I Was Astride a Young Man

by Riki Anne Wilchins

I was astride a young man
at my favorite sex club
I don't usually bother with men
 but he was so beautiful
 dark-skinned and sweet
 with gentle, smooth hands
 and veins like rivers running down his muscles
and as we were nearing the end of our quietly
energetic encounter
I said to this sweet boy, about half my age
"What's your name?"; almost shyly.
"Tom. What's yours?"
"Riki."
"That's an awfully masculine name."
"Well, it used to be Richard."
And I watched his eyes go unfocused
the gears in his head churning
through our entire encounter,
 the breasts he couldn't get enough of
 the soft, then hard nipples he sucked till I cried
 the warm wet rose which clung to his cock
"I'm sorry... didn't know... you'll have to get off."
Which of course I did, wondering quickly if this
might get a tad ugly, which it didn't
and thinking how I had changed
that something like this no longer bothered me, but
was his limitation, not mine.
An interaction which, 10 years ago,
would have left me shattered
for days.

Her name was Emily,
we met in my favorite lesbian bar.
She had the smoothest, flattest stomach I had ever seen
and I licked each inch and the
line of fine downy hair
which marched down across her navel as
we made love for hours that first night.
We saw each other three more times.
On the fourth and to-be-final date we finally got
around to talking and my transsexuality came up.
I do not run from this.
"I can't handle this."
And gathering her things, she turned and walked
out of my apartment,
 no backward glance
 and out of my life,
this woman with the flat stomach
who had feasted

her tongue
and lips
and whole hungry mouth
on the insides of my cunt and over the top of
my clitoris,
trying every way to see which stroke
made my hips arch up high off the bed
and my breath come
in rapid labored gasps
I watched her then
looking down my own body,
her eyes deeply focused on mine
the bottom half of her lovely face
nested barely visible
in my red tangled bush
I could feel
not see
 her finger circling my vagina
 teasing, tempting,
 thinking to open me slowly
until one of us lost patience
 perhaps she,
 thrusting forward in a rush
or I,
 impaling my greedy hips on her rigid middle finger
but anyway, inside quite sincerely until
my breath wouldn't come at all
my stomach knotted and the
piercing sweetness drilling my femme little soul
like an icepick through warm butter.
and I watched her then,
walking out of my life forever
I groaned for long minutes
curled in a fetal position
too miserable to move a single fiber
crying for 2 or 3 or 4 hours I don't know
and that is how my lover, who had a key to my apartment
happened by and found me:
this desolated fetus, wanting only to
be dead.

The young man's taut butt recedes across the crowded mat room.
I wonder if anyone knows what has just happened.
I realize I don't care.
I reach for the small, pouting triangle,
the soft special place where I am
still sensitive to the lightest touch,
using my knowing hand
the rhythm it knows better than my own
heartbeat
I come
relax against the pillows
a smile of satisfaction
flickering like a small flame across my lips.

Originally published in SCHE Mail,
Spring, 1995

No More Tears

by Riki Anne Wilchins

How do we come to grips with the reality of death, of mutilation, especially when it comes to those in the full prime of life whose only crime is to be gender different? Brandon was raped and beaten, then publicly outed by the authorities, and raped again and shot. Marsha was found drowned in the river, and only now, two years later, are the police finally starting to investigate her death as a possible homicide. Chloe is HIV-positive today, sometimes in the hospital, working to bring needle exchange to streetgirls shooting bootleg 'mones with dirty works. Hannah was a white suburban girl, trying to transition, working towards eventual surgery and fighting off the whole world. Deeply depressed, this beautify 20-year-old sculptor tried to kill herself by sticking her arm into a moving saw. With two years of surgery and therapy, she has regained about 40% of its use. Christine was going through many of the same struggles, and, unable to get work during her transition, she entered the one profession society allows the gender oppressed: she became a sexworker. Strung out and finally suicidal, she overdosed on PCP and cut off each finger of her right hand; the ER staff, perhaps realizing this was a streetworker with a history of drugs and suicide, didn't even try to reattach them.

And Sarah, living alone and on welfare, trying to save for surgery, repeatedly rebuffed by the women's community to whom she turned for emotional shelter and safety, tried and finally succeeded in ending her pain. I don't know how we come to grips with this kind of carnage; I only know it has to stop, and we have to stop it.

Other than the deceased, those mentioned in this poem have given permission for their names and situations to be used — Riki

*I want to suck
I want to suck blood
I want to suck the blood from the
hole
in the back of Brandon Teena's skull
taste each bullet-torn tissue
and touch each dangling fibre
retrieve each naked failing fragment
from clothing, carpet, wall
re-place it even better than before
and make our Brandon whole again
taste his still warm lips
lick his cheeks of just-dry tears
and kiss with strict fraternal affection
the purplish stains from beneath his
skin
the bruised man-cunt where he was
raped
before they executed him as queer
I want to suck
I want to suck blood
I want to suck the blood pooling
in Marcia Johnson's forehead, belly,
thighs
rescue it from gravity's indifferent pull
see it dance down pulsing arteries
and spit it back down once-firm veins
hold back each blind unknowing
wave
breaks now upon her silent back
lick her cooling skin of each & every
grain of spicy sea-salt frosting
press ear so near her open mouth
I hear her live and vital cry
as clear as yours or mine or hers once
was
and laugh with her away
that look of last surprise
that look from knowledge gained in
drowning
from whatever could amaze such eyes
already witness to too much*

*I want to suck blood from the needle
I want to suck the blood from the
needle
leaving my sister Chloe's arm
the virus just went in her vein
tell the taste of HIV
find its flavor and write its rhyme
savor its scent and suck the needle
clean before
the blue-eyed teenage transie sitting next
shoots her own hit of 'mones*

*I'll lick my sister Hannah's blood
the radial arm saw, the sculptor's
hand,
each learned tendon, skillful muscle
outraged with the first clean cut
the first clean touch of rude cold air
I'll lick my sister Christine's blood
the two-edged sword, the vulnerable
hand
that played guitar, was gifted, able
the second knuckles, exposed and bare
the fingers lay here, count them, kiss
them
cut one by one, count 1 2 3 4
I'll lick the very scalpel clean
unlocked my sister Sarah's wrists
and turn the blade but oh, so slightly
to cut my tongue, mix mine with hers
and count red water spindles swirling
soap scum seasoning, sweat and tears
I swear I'll ride that scalpel like a
broom
down each and every cut and sliced
incision
and follow too in forced and mocking
slumber
Oh
Sister Sarah
my Only Sarah
Successful Sarah
not like my Hannah
or my Christine
No
Sister Sarah
Successful Sarah
Sleeping Sarah
has cut herself so well so good
my Sarah has stopped the pain*

*So come now Hate
Ho now Hate
Come here now Hate
face babysmooth unblemished
carefree Hate with angel's smile
see here now Hate;
our blood has washed this world
our blood has washed this world
so clean so clear
Your feet can never find this ground
Your footsteps any purchase
our blood has washed this world
so clear so clean so free at last
Your shadow cannot fall here Hate
our blood has washed this world.*

This article was prepared for simultaneous publication in Transsexual News Telegraph and Chrysalis. We have paired it with Riki Anne Wilchins' powerful poem, "No More Tears."

Transgender Self-Mutilation

by Christine Beatty & Hannah Blackwell

Transgendered people hurt themselves every day, either in a suicide attempt or some other cry for help. The lives we lead can be difficult and sometimes overwhelming. If we don't have a lot of self-assurance and/or a strong support system, we can fall prey to the doubts and rejection we often encounter. Sex hormone therapy can produce vicious mood swings and depressions, especially when beginning or ending treatment. Our lives can start to feel hopeless, and happiness may seem an unattainable goal. That's when the danger looms.

We hurt ourselves in a number of ways. We retreat, isolating ourselves, which makes us feel even lonelier. We neglect our physical and mental health, thinking that if we aren't happy then it doesn't matter. We abuse alcohol and drugs, seeking that quick fix for our feelings, only to damage ourselves and even risk death. And, like the authors of this article, we take sharp objects to our bodies, trying for some kind of escape.

Hannah's Story

My name is Hannah. I'm twenty-three, and I've tried to end my life four times. The last time was a little more than five years ago on Thursday, August 24th, 1989 at 2:30 in the afternoon. I remember that date so well because that was the day I cut off my left hand with a radial arm saw. I was tired of the constant uphill battle, trying to justify my feelings. There appeared to be no one around who cared or who said it's okay to feel different. I was lonely, and I was hurting.

The attempt came after a two-week vacation in Athens, Greece. I came home to my adopted parents at about 11:00 pm, and by 1:00 am I had already consumed 200 Tylenol, 200 Advil, and 20 sleeping pills with 2 liters of Sprite to wash it all down. I lay down to die, only to wake vomiting a few hours later. My parents assumed it must have been the airline food, and I didn't bother correcting their assumption. I didn't care.

I spent the next morning being sick. All I knew was that I was still here, and I was still in pain. I kept dwelling on other ways to do the job. I considered running a car into an overpass or asphyxiating myself in the garage. When I was younger I had tried using a razor, but I couldn't cut the artery. That's when I thought of the saw. The saw would take care of that.

I remember lying on my bed and looking at the clock. It read 2:25 pm. If I was to do anything it would have to be soon, before anyone came home. Dangling one foot off the bed, I knew if I touched the floor I would go down and use the saw. I did.

I assumed that after I engaged the saw with my wrist I would die. That would be all there was to it. But I was wrong. I opened my eyes. *Damn!* I was not dead. I jerked what remained of my limb from the blade. I could not feel my hand as I once did. It hung by a portion of skin, freer than it was ever meant to be.

Screaming in horror at what I'd done, I grabbed my wrist and hobbled to the garage door opener. Hesitating, not wanting to let go of my wrist, I hurriedly pushed the button. Making my way outside, the next door neighbor heard my cries and met me.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed. "Try to sit down." He ran past me to find a phone. By the time he came back there were three other neighbors there. You experience a sobering of the mind when you have your hand wrapped in a towel and hear things like:

"Here, hold his wrist and hand while I check on the ambulance." "Is this the hand?"

"No, it's over here." I started realizing what I had done. I never wanted to hurt my body — I just didn't want to live anymore.

After sixteen hours of surgery, two years of physical therapy, and a medical bill well over \$250,000, I have the hand I was born with . . . minus the strength, minus the fine motor coordination, minus some feeling, and with a scar that makes it look like a railroad track from coast to coast. I consider myself one of the lucky ones. I still have both of my hands.

I think about how things could

have been different. The would-haves, the could-haves. How I would not have chosen to grow up the way I did: middle child of a mother of three who had problems with men, booze, who was a religious fanatic one week and a chemically-imbalanced psychotic the next (I'm not sure those aren't the same thing), crying for days on end. Poor me

.....
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ran away at 14, severed parental rights at 16, and finally got kicked out of my adopted parents' house at 18 because I couldn't be the son they always wanted. Sprinkle in a few suicide attempts for good measure. But what good does that do? I only come back to reality: this is the way it is, this is who I am, and there's no changing the past.

Christine's Story

The year I turned 28 might have been the last year of my life. It was 1986, and everything was going topsyturvy. First, I had begun to cross-live full time. The hormones had already had quite an effect on my body and mind at that point, and not only was I unable to pass as a "normal" guy anymore, I didn't want to. I was finishing my second year of college. I had no more money to cover tuition and expenses and no employment prospects. Since I was unwilling to masquerade as a man any longer and because transition was so expensive, I decided to become a full-time prostitute. Not only was the money good, my tricks were often respectful and they made me feel like a beautiful desirable woman. (Between that and the employment discrimination we face, it's no wonder that many transgendered women opt for the sex industry.) Of course hooking *does* have plenty of downsides (such as illegality and having sex with people you don't

want) which eventually got to me.

I was rejected in varying degrees by my family and "friends" who suddenly no longer wanted me in their lives. This cold reception added to a growing pile of self-doubt. Because of all these problems, because of things I was told when I was growing up, because of cues, both subtle and blatant, from society at large, I began to wonder if I was doing the right thing. So I went to a counselor to get some therapy to handle all the aforementioned stuff, to deal with my feelings of not fitting in. Unfortunately she was not very sympathetic to my issues. She was a radical feminist lesbian who asked how could I know how a woman feels, and who made me cry from her challenges almost every time I went to see her.

This kind of stuff can wear you down, especially if you are smoking pot daily, drinking daily, shooting heroin several times a week and smoking Angel Dust once or twice a month. It is *not* a regimen for mental stability. I had a great excuse for my drug-saturated condition: escape from the aforementioned aforementioned. I'd been doing softer, recreational drugs since my late teens, so as my life filled with doubt and despair, it seemed that increasing both my scope and level of consumption of mind-altering substances was the natural thing to do.

By fall of '86 I was miserable and scared. I felt trapped and hopeless. While I was very pretty, I was also somewhat of an obvious former male and I had to work my ass off just to maintain my looks. My electrolysis wasn't complete, and I had to wax (ouch!) my chest and legs at least once a month. People still ridiculed me on a regular basis. I had no job outside of whoring, and no real prospects for employment. So after a year of taking hormones and living as a woman, I concluded that I was a failure as a transsexual. My low self-esteem told me that I was a hopeless case, that I had no choice but to regress to living as a man again. So I did.

Though part of me *knew* I was cheating myself, I had another reason for quitting: my lover. She had mixed feelings about it, but I believed that, deep down, she really wanted a husband. Since I was the one that got us

clocked everywhere, my decision seemed appropriate.

Desperate to get myself in the job market, I enrolled in a computer vocational school with a good placement record. With my long hair shorn off and a mustache grown over my lip, I found people taking me seriously again. I was no longer the object of ridicule. Going to school was easier, because I wasn't self-conscious about my no-longer-obvious transgendered state. Part of me hated myself for being a coward, for selling out, for denying what I knew was inside of me because it was "easier" to just be a guy. And I never quit getting high. I managed to taper my drug use down to the point where it didn't interfere with my classes, but I still got loaded, partly out of habit, partly out of the need to suppress the self-loathing I felt.

I needed to talk to someone, but didn't know who. Certainly not my family. I didn't have a therapist at that point, and the waiting list to get another was over a month long. The person I loved and trusted most, my lover Nola, was a transsexual, and I knew she would feel partly responsible for me quitting living as a woman. I didn't want to burden her with my despair, so I kept it to myself. It began to eat at me. As my disillusionment and feelings of failure grew, I began to want to escape. Not necessarily to die, but just to get away. Not surprisingly, it wasn't long after this that I smoked Angel Dust again—the ultimate escape drug. It always brought total oblivion. But let's not forget the chemical psychosis and the potential for violence-filled blackout states. Oh, no, we can't forget *that*.

I never will forget it, because during my chemical frenzy, I took a sword and cut off the fingertips of my left hand between the first and second knuckle. I was barely cognizant of doing it. The police brought me into hospital under arrest for terrifying my neighbors with the sword, charging me with "aggravated assault." (I couldn't believe it! Me?! I'm barely capable of assaulting a cockroach!) My memory is very sketchy of the whole episode because I was in and out of a blackout state all the way until surgery almost fifteen hours later. It took four days for

the chemical psychosis to wear off completely. The surgical team decided not to try to reimplant my fingers because of two previous trips to the psychiatric emergency ward for PCP-related problems. I didn't discover that they could have restored my fingers until after I had been transferred to jail, where I had bigger problems than figuring out how to sue the doctors. Welcome to hard times, Baby!

Now, eight years later, I can joke about it, although it took a long time to be able to do that because I had been a pretty fair guitar player up until my radical manicure. Learning to play left handed has been intensely frustrating, but is finally becoming rewarding. More importantly, I have been off drugs most of that time. It took four and a half years of total abstinence, but I am now able to drink like a reasonable person and the dope-monster bit is merely a (bad) memory. I am fortunate.

I was not really trying to kill myself. I was just trying to wake up from a bad nightmare, both the PCP blackout and my life. In a way, recovering from a PCP trip is a lot like adapting to a transgendered life: it's disorienting, everything seems strange, and you feel awful from time to time — maybe often. The answer is that you must believe you are on the right track, that things will get better, and that you can just ride it out. Be good to yourself, talk to other people, and learn to trust yourself. It's very simple, but it's never easy.

Conclusion

Self-mutilation can take many forms. Sometimes, as in Christine's case, it may be seen as a cry for help. Other transsexuals, desperate for surgery, try to perform their own penectomies and/or castrations. (To anyone contemplating unsafe genital alteration, the authors implore you not to try it. You are already a woman! A penis does NOT make you a man. We know you are impatient, but you could kill yourself, or at the very least, prevent yourself from ever getting proper SRS.) Finally, some transgender self-mutilations are a direct attempt at suicide, as in Hannah's case.

All human beings have moments of extreme despair, but it seems that transsexuals have more than the average person. During such times it is important to have someone you can talk to, someone you really trust. It is important to develop a support network, to cultivate that trust before a crisis hits. If you are not comfortable with people you can rely on in times of despair, you won't turn to them when you really need them.

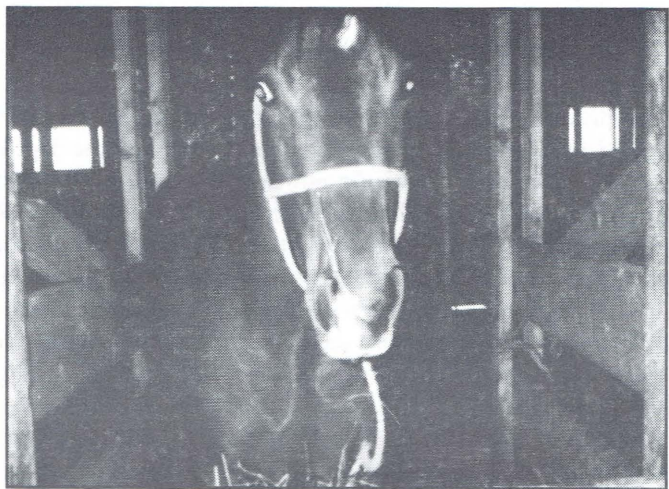
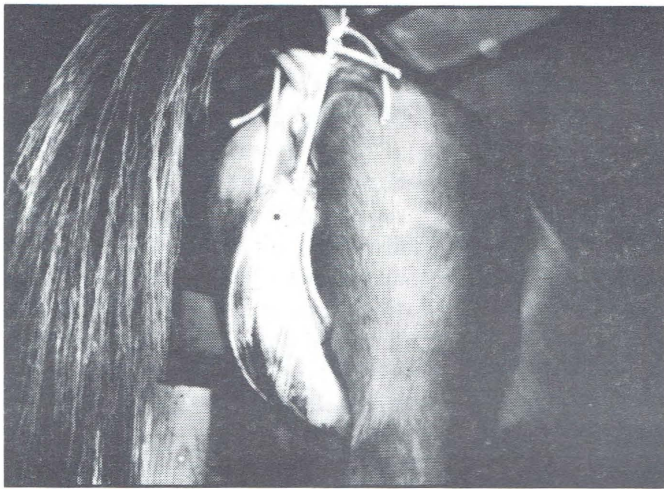
Christine, for instance, made a big mistake by not rejecting her transphobic counselor from the outset and requesting somebody more appropriate. If she had a therapist she felt she could confide in, perhaps her situation would not have gotten as out of hand as it did. Hannah also had no support system in place. She couldn't afford to continue seeing her therapist, and there were no support groups available at the time.

As therapists are often priced out of the range of many transgendered people, a support group is usually the more likely place for a transsexual to find others to talk to and trust. Support groups, even if they are informal, are a good way to network with your peers. They provide a place to air your concerns and doubts. Even more importantly, in such a group you will likely hear from others who had similar experiences and who have already worked through them. A good group can provide solutions to your problems, or at the very least, provide you with a sense of hope. If there is no support group in your area you can help start one. There is nothing more empowering than taking the lead and doing something for yourself.

If there is a message to this article, it is this: Don't keep your problems to yourself. There are plenty of people, transgendered and non-transgendered, who really do care and who will listen compassionately and offer whatever advice and support they can. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to find these people and develop bonds with them early on. For the authors, it was feelings of isolation and loneliness that drove us to self-mutilation. If you can bring yourself to look around and see how many helpful, caring people that are out there, you can prevent such tragedy in your life. ☪



Horses confined for urine collection in a Wyeth-Ayerst contracted PMU barn, Rugby, ND (feces, tiny stalls, cement floor, brands). Photo © 1994, PETA, Box 42516, Washington, DC 20015. Used with permission.



L. Mare with "pee bag". R. Yearling tied in stall at a PMU farm. Photos © 1994, PETA. Used with permission.

Docs Say Neigh to Premarin

"There is no clinical difference between synthetic, or vegetable-based estrogens for use in estrogen replacement therapy." — Josh C. Tunca, M.D., Schaumburg, IL

"Estraderm, which is a natural hormone, is my treatment of choice, but I also use Estrace ... Premarin is a combination, as you know, of horse hormones. I have yet to figure out why any woman would need to be filled with horse hormones." — Susan M. Haack, M.D., Williamsport, PA.

"In my experience, plant-derived synthetic ERT drugs are preferable to Premarin, and they do not contain the hidden ingredient of cruelty." — Stephen Rosenman, M.D.

PETA Survey of 1600+ Veterinarians

Is regular exercise necessary for the health of pregnant horses?

Yes 90% No 10%

Do you agree with *Black's Veterinary Dictionary* that "heavy draught horses . . . when standing idle" should get 20-30 minutes of exercise daily?

Yes 92% No 8

Ordinarily, should pregnant horses be allowed water on demand?

Yes 100% No 0%

In your opinion, is it humane to tie a 1700 pound pregnant mare to a 5 1/2' wide x 8' long stall for a full six months?

Yes 3% No 97%

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I once had a partner who ate red meat, but who preferred to think that hamburger magically appeared in plastic-wrapped styrofoam containers in the grocery store. She did not want to see or hear anything which reminded her of its bovine origins. I did not consider her quite moral about the issue, since she chose to avoid thinking about the consequences of her actions rather than confronting squarely just what she was doing.

Recently, there has been some controversy about the production of the prescription estrogen, Premarin. After I read up on the issue, I made the choice to switch from Premarin to the synthetic estrogen Estrace. Over a six month period, I have noticed no particular difference in the way I feel or look.

As we go through life, it behooves us to be intellectual honest about our actions, rather than to avoid asking the hard questions. Only then can we make wise and moral choices.

Lauren Hotchkiss' excellent article provides us with a balanced perspective and a list of resources which can help us come to our own conclusions about the Premarin issue—Ed.

This article has appeared in abbreviated form in the ETVC newsletter.

Premarin: The Untold Story

by Lauren René Hotchkiss



Over the past several years, my gender journey has taken me from transvestite to transsexual to transgenderist to androgyne. For much of this journey I have been on hormones, beginning in 1991 with Estrace, and switching over to Premarin a year later.

Earlier this year, a concerned friend gave me an article that had appeared in the August/September 1994 issue of the *PETA Times*, a bimonthly magazine published by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The article detailed reputed incidences of animal abuse in the production of Premarin, a process with which I was largely ignorant. Upon making some calls, I subsequently obtained some further information from PETA as well as a pamphlet put out by the Animal Protection Institute (API).

Premarin (Conjugated Equine Estrogens) is the most commonly prescribed estrogen replacement drug for menopause symptoms and one of the main hormones of choice for the male-to-female members of the transgender community. It's currently being taken by more than eight million women and by thousands of male-to-female transsexuals, both by prescription and on the street. Premarin is also the single most prescribed drug in the United States. In addition, it holds 80 percent of the estrogen supplement market worldwide, and is Canada's most lucrative pharmaceutical export. Premarin's revenues amount to more than \$642 million a year — more than 14 percent of manufacturer, Wyeth-Ayerst's, annual gross of \$4.5 billion. Wyeth Ayerst Organics, in turn, is a division of American Home Products, which also manufactures Advil, Anacin, Black Flag, Chef Boyardee, Dristan, Easy Off, Jiffy Pop, Neet, Pam, Preparation H, Quick and Easy, Sani-Flush, and Woolite.

Apart from its well-established familiarity to physicians — Premarin has been marketed in the United States since 1942 — it has also, until recently, been one of the cheapest estrogen drugs.

This much is common knowledge. What is less known is the fact that Premarin is distilled from the urine of pregnant mares. Essentially, it is a mixture of the seventeen estrogens which occur naturally during various stages of equine pregnancy.

The industry has grown enormously over the last 50 years or so. By 1993, there were an estimated 75,000 mares confined for urine collection on 485 farms in North Dakota and the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba. These mares, in turn, gave birth to 70,000 foals. By 1995, the numbers had swelled to 100,000 mares on some 600 farms, with another 1200 farms on the application list to become PMU (pregnant mare urine) producers. The financial incentives are enticing to the enterprising horse rancher, with PMU producers under contract to Wyeth-Ayerst being paid up to \$17 a gallon for pregnant mare's urine.

Each September the mares are inseminated, either naturally or artificially, and then put on the production line. Each mare may spend as long as 18 years of her life as a PMU producer, PETA charges. At the end of their usefulness, PETA claims, the mares are generally auctioned off for slaughter or rewarded for their long years of service, with a one-way trip to the rendering plant.

According to PETA and API, the foals do not fare much better. Each year, in March and April, each mare will give birth to a foal. These foals are considered by-products. Some will be raised to replace worn-out mares, others will be sold as pets, but most will be fattened for a few months and will then follow the older mares to slaughterhouse. Over the past fifty-three years this "harvest" has killed millions of foals.

The mares are kept on a "peeline" — ranchers' slang for the rows of stalls where the horses have their urine extracted. They are fitted with a rub-

ber urinary collection device attached to a hose and then confined to their stalls for seven months of their eleven month pregnancies. These collection harnesses often chafe their legs, PETA charges, causing sores which remain untreated throughout the animals' lives. To concentrate the urine (for bigger profits, says PETA), the mares are poorly fed and receive less water than is normal.

Because allowing mares out to pasture would mean losing some of their precious urine, PETA charges that the mares are forced to stand on concrete floors in stalls as small as 8 feet long and 3 1/2 feet wide for more than half of their eleven month pregnancies. The mares are unable to take more than a step or two in any direction, the narrowness of their stalls preventing such simple movements as turning around or lying down. As a result, they often develop "stiff leg" from standing, heavy with pregnancy, on the hard, cold, concrete floor for months on end.

According to PETA, many of the mares used at PMU facilities have never been confined before. They whinny in terror and tug frantically at their ropes. Others develop repetitive movements seen in confinement-crazed animals in zoos and on fur farms, weaving their heads from side to side and pawing rhythmically at the concrete floor. Many become panic-stricken and begin to kick and gnaw their stalls in frustration and fear. PETA claims these inhumane conditions and the medical complications that result have led to the premature deaths of tens of thousands of horses.

On the ecological side, there are grave concerns on the part of Canadian environmentalists and legislators regarding the PMU industry's waste disposal practices. The proposed \$100 million expansion of Wyeth-Ayerst's Manitoba production facilities, with aid of \$20 million from the Canadian Government, threatens to overwhelm an already overtaxed sewage treatment system. In addition, according to Marianne Cerilli, member of the Legislative Assembly and Environment Critic for the Canadian New Democratic Party, the expansion has "serious consequences" for the Assinboine River, a

river that many Manitobans use as a drinking water source.

Fortunately, alternatives do exist. Synthetic, primarily plant-based estrogens have been developed in recent years which have been clinically found to be equally effective as conjugated estrogens (those derived from the urine of horses, cattle, or pigs) in alleviating the menopausal symptoms in women, and in enhancing feminization in male-to-female transsexuals.

Synthetics, at least in numbers of brands available, now dominate the market, with Premarin as the last surviving animal-derived estrogen. In many ways synthetics, formulated to be an exact chemical duplicate of human estrogen, are more natural than the conjugated estrogens.

According to Stephen Rosenman, M.D., of the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRP), the estrogen found in Premarin is not the same as that in humans, and, like all animal-derived products, it shares the problem of dosage inconsistency. Synthetics, produced in sterile, laboratory conditions, are assured of much greater quality control. The ingredients are constant, always in the same concentration, and without the impurities contained in animal waste.

The following is a list of the leading prescription synthetic brands:

Estraderm (estradiol transdermal system) is a clear plastic patch that releases small amounts of estradiol — the hormone produced by ovaries — through the skin into the bloodstream. Estraderm is manufactured by CIBA Pharmaceutical Company.

Estrace (estradiol) is derived from soybeans and Mexican yams. It is manufactured by Mead Johnson Laboratories.

Estratest, manufactured by Solvay Pharmaceuticals, is a combination of esterified estrogens and methyltestosterone. It is processed from yams and soyplants and then synthesized to resemble human estrogen.

Estratab also consists of esterified estrogens. Up to fifteen percent of Estratab contains synthetic equine estrogens. It too is manufactured by Solvay Pharmaceuticals.

Ortho-est (estropipate) is derived from soybeans or Mexican yams, and is identical to human estrone in its estrogen composition. Ortho-est is made by Ortho Pharmaceuticals.

Ogen also consists of estropipate and is identical to human estrone in its estrogen composition. Until recently, it was manufactured by Abbott Labs. It is now produced by the Upjohn Company.

Other alternative brands include Theelin, Menest, and Progens.

The newest entry into the synthetic arena may be the most promising. Manufactured by Duramed Pharmaceuticals, the drug, not yet available, and still unnamed pending FDA approval, is chemically identical to Premarin with the same blend of seventeen estrogens but, being synthetic, is not derived from animal sources. Evidently the company is keeping a low profile until the drug is released, for my calls were not returned.

Non-prescription plant-based estrogens such as *Fem-50*, or *Woman Power* (both manufactured by Michael's Pharmaceuticals), are available or can be special ordered through health food stores or vitamin supply houses (*AEGIS considers them ineffective — Ed.*). Others, such as *Evanesce*, can be purchased by mail order through ads found in *Ladylike* and other gender community magazines. These plant-based estrogens usually contain black (or blue) Cohosh, licorice root, Don Quai, and other natural ingredients. *Pro-Gest*, a cream derived from yams, and containing progesterone identical to that made in the human body, is also available in many health food stores. Though weaker in strength than conjugated or synthetic estrogens, some members of the transgendered community have reported modest results from these plant-derived products. Vegetarians should be aware, however, that some of these herbal preparations incongruously come in gel-cap form (gelatine is a by-product obtained from boiled animal tissue).

Other herbal preparations can often be found at homeopathic supply houses and Chinese herbal pharmacies. For fresh ingredients, nothing can beat the Chinese herbalists. There is one

catch, though. You have to be willing to take an hour to boil down the herbs and then drink, as a tea, a concoction which probably doesn't taste much better than mare's urine.

In addition to synthetic and plant-derived forms, estrogen also occurs naturally in trace amounts in many soy foods such as tempeh, tofu, and soy milk, as well as in berries and citrus fruits.

After reading the material put out by the animal rights groups, I decided to call Wyeth-Ayerst and see how they've responded to the charges of animal cruelty. Reaching their Customer Service department, I was put in contact with their media representative, Audrey Ashby, a very friendly and helpful woman, who offered to Fed-Ex me a copy of their press release as well as clippings from journals and newspapers supporting their position.

In their media statement, they accuse animal-activist groups with inhibiting important progress in the field of women's health. They also accuse PETA of factual inaccuracies, misleading photographs, and often false allegations and fabrications. Interestingly, in defending themselves, Wyeth-Ayerst claims that when a mare delivers, she and the foal are kept together. Foals wean, they say, as they normally would, over a period of several months and are raised for a variety of purposes including show, riding, work, breeding and "overseas markets." A little further investigation discovered these overseas markets to be the importers and exporters that cater to the European and Japanese taste for horsemeat.

In its Premarin brochure, Wyeth-Ayerst, in opposition to the contentions of PETA, API, and PCR, claims Premarin is consistent in potency and composition from batch to batch. The brochure also claims that the harness the horses wear is a "light-weight, flexible collection pouch, loosely suspended, that allows for a full range of movement within the stall, including lying down comfortably." It does not cause chafing, they claim.

One included newspaper article, uncredited as to source, date, or author, charges that PETA's claims are unfounded and that they have no con-

vincing evidence and have never reported any alleged mistreatment to the authorities. The article claims that the veterinarian who has spoken out on behalf of PETA visited only one farm, and so was not qualified to speak concerning the entire PMU industry. Such a generalization, they argue, is dishonest and misrepresentational. They contend that PETA's concern with the ethical treatment of animals apparently does not extend to the ethics of honest inquiry. The article also claims that the Canadian Farm Animal Care Trust (CFACT) is currently conducting a tour of Canada's PMU farms and is not finding incidences of cruelty. The article claims unbiased evaluators say PMU production is not cruel — it does not disclose, however, who these unbiased evaluators are.

In an article by columnist Dan Geringer which appeared August 4, 1994 in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, he disparagingly refers to PETA as the "Rats have rights" protest group. He also mentions equine veterinarian Dr. Shauna Spurlock's Wyeth-Ayerst sponsored "inspections" of "several" PMU farms. Not surprisingly her report to her bosses was favorable. Mr. Geringer failed to report whether the inspections were arranged or surprise visits, however.

This same Dr. Spurlock later issued a report concerning her inspection tour, entitled *The Care and Management of Horses At PMU Facilities*. In addition to corroborating the high degree of care for the horses that Wyeth-Ayerst also contends, going as far as to say that the ranchers realize that the better they care for their horses, the better the horses will perform for them, Spurlock also claims that the majority of foals are intended for the race track, as quarter horses for the show ring, and for draft foals that may be used for "light, recreational work or cart." Some of the fillies, she says, are kept as future replacement mares. Only a small minority, she claims, are ever sent to slaughter, and that she blames on the thriving market and appetite for horse meat in Europe and Asia. She concludes by saying the entire PMU industry, from the establishment of *The Code of Practice for the*

Care and Handling of horses at PMU Facilities, to the way ranchers tailor the code to best serve the needs of the individual horses in their care, is a model for others in the equine industry to emulate.

Included also was a statement by Frankie L. Trull, President of The Foundation for Biomedical Research, accusing animal activist organizations of being fueled by misinformation and emotion. He accuses them of having the goal of jeopardizing the work of the medical research community, and in particular, those studies focused on advances in women's health care. He goes on to warn the public of these groups' secret agenda to rid the world of meat, seafood and dairy consumption. He also warns that women would suffer because many therapeutic treatments would never exist because they could not be developed without animal testing.

Incongruously, Ms. Ashby also included PETA's compassionate living brochure, which deals with the advantages of a meatless and dairyless diet. Far from dissuading me from PETA's views, it only served to re-enforce my commitment to animal welfare and inspired me to move from vegetarian to vegan.

Also included was an article by Charles Gandee that appeared in the July 1994 issue of *Vogue*, blasting PETA and other animal rights organizations. This was not too surprising a view from a magazine whose major advertising revenue comes from fur manufacturers and cosmetic companies which do animal testing.

Responding to the issue of PMU facilities and treatment, Ms. Ashby included literature on *The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses at PMU Facilities*. This code calls for 5 foot wide stalls for mares over 1700 pounds. It also calls for harnessing that does not cause chafing and allows for a full range of movement. The code also mandates proper ventilation, lighting, disposal of wastes, and even the proper trimming of horses' hooves.

Addressing the question of the amount of water given the mares is a copy of an interview with Kevin Frith,

a North Dakota PMU rancher, which appeared in *Ag-Week* on March 6, 1995 by staff writer Ann Bailey. In it, Mr Frith details an automated watering system for the PMU mares which regulates water to the mares 18 times a day. Each mare gets an average of 1 1/2 quarts per watering for a total of 6 3/4 gallons of water per day. He claims that regulating their water helps mares digest their food better. It is not done, says Frith, to concentrate the mare's urine for bigger profits as PETA had claimed. In checking this point with an equine veterinarian I contacted, I found that the proper water intake for a horse is 12 gallons per day.

In the same article, Frith also turns to the issue of the amount of exercise given the horses, stating that each mare is "turned out" one day per month. He seems to feel this is enough. He disavows any knowledge of foals being sold for slaughter.

It is difficult to know where the truth lies when evaluating such divergent views as those represented by the animal rights groups and Wyeth-Ayerst. Though I'm sure humane PMU farms do exist, and may, in fact, be in the majority, it is an industry that is clearly on the wane, particularly in light of healthier synthetic and herbal alternatives now available. As these can now be manufactured inexpensively, collecting PMU, with even the possibility of cruelty to animals, seems an antiquated and unnecessary method of producing estrogen.

In order to move away from relying on the PMU industry, patients and clients need to be willing to speak up and ask for alternatives. Many doctors and therapists, as well as most patients, have little or no knowledge of how Premarin is made, and upon learning the facts, the majority choose to stop using or prescribing it.

For myself, I have decided not to take a chance of contributing to animal suffering, and so have opted to stop taking Premarin. Though I realize that this is an individual decision that each person must resolve for themselves, I do feel a responsibility to present the facts as they were presented to me as an aid in helping you to make the decision that is right for you. CQ

For More Information

Copies of the PETA article plus a supplemental informational brochure are available from PETA, P.O. Box 42516, Washington, DC, 20015. Or call 301-770-PETA. You can also obtain further information from the Animal Protection Institute. P.O. Box 22505, Sacramento, CA 95822. 2831 Fruitridge Road, Sacramento, CA 95820. 916-731-5521.

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Wyeth-Ayerst Pharmaceuticals, Robert Essner, President; Marc W. Deitch, M.D., Vice President, Medical affairs and Medical Director, can be contacted at: P.O. Box 8299, Philadelphia, PA 19101-8299. Wyeth-Ayerst's toll-free numbers are 800-999-9384 and 800-666-7248, or call 610-971-5500 or 215-971-5823. American Home Products, Wyeth-Ayerst's parent company, can be contacted at 5 Giralda Farm, Madison, NJ 07940; or call (212) 878-5000. The contact is John Stafford, CEO.

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Those wishing further information on the environmental and ecological impact of Wyeth-Ayerst's PMU processing plants in Manitoba and on the proposed expansion of those facilities, and those who wish to protest the funding of Ayerst's expansion, can contact, in the Canadian government: Minister Lloyd Axworthy, Department of Western Diversification, House of Commons, 418-M Center Block, Ottawa, Ontario KIA OA6; and in the Manitoban government: The Honorable Gary Filman, Premier of Manitoba, 450 Broadway, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8.

*Transgendered people...
is the text of a speech
delivered at the Com-
ing Together Confer-
ence of the
International Founda-
tion for Gender Educa-
tion in Atlanta
Georgia, March, 1995.*

Transgendered People At A Certain Time in History

by Callan Williams

This is a very exciting time in history. The iron curtain has fallen, the cold war is over. The information revolution is here, with live pictures in our living room from a coup in Moscow, thanks to Atlanta's CNN. And gender bending? It's out there, bigger and bigger, with Priscilla, Mrs. Doubtfire, Ru Paul, Wong Foo and lots more. The next millennium is fast approaching, and life will be different, different in ways we cannot yet even guess about.

I was talking about this with Leslie Feinberg. The key phrase in our conversation was "We are transgendered people at a certain time in history." Not, as Leslie pointed out, in the past, during the time of the berdache, nor in the future, whatever that's going to look like. We are transgendered at this time.

An old question in history class was "Does the man make the time, or does the time make the man?" While I might change man to person, it is a question worth pondering for each of us. We are transgendered people at a certain time in history.

What does the world look like at this time? It is a world on the precipice of change. Old models are falling of their own weight, models of religion, economics, politics, relationships, of gender, of everything. Many are trying to stop this change, but there is no way the tide of history can be stopped. We can only attempt to shape change, to accommodate it, to ride it.

Myths and Reality

Maybe the biggest changes we will have are in the myths we build our lives on. Myths are the central part of our belief structures, crucial to who we think we are. Shaping the myths at the core of this culture shapes the way that we all act. Joseph Campbell, when asked about myths for the future, replied that our future myths will resemble our older ones, carrying the same essential and eternal wisdom, but will be

told in the style and the symbology of our time. Yes, even myths, tales of humanity, change to accommodate the time. Today's myths come to us in colorful animated pictures directly into our homes, directly into our lives.

I realized how important myths are when I heard Dr. Sheila Kirk talk about the medical advances in understanding the roots of transgender a few years ago at the Southern Comfort Conference. By accepting that certain things are born in us, that humans come with a wide range of predisposition, including sexual orientation, we are changing the creation myth of our culture. This movement, started with monks in the 1600s who were trying to become more godlike by understanding God's handiwork, has led us to a scientific creation myth — a myth that changes to meet new and evolving knowledge — and new and evolving needs, a myth that scares the hell out of fundamentalist Christians, and I mean that literally.

Myths are ways to express what we believe, but cannot quantify. Even that master salesman, Zig Ziglar, has said "Storytelling is the key to learning." The question is, what stories do we hold in common, what shared vision do we keep to connect us? What common threads lie under our diverse individual expression?

Mythic Demons or Mythic Humans?

Most of us grew up in the cold war era where the stories were about "them." We knew that having a common enemy could pull us together. I recently read a great book: *MIA: Mythmaking In America*, talking about how the myth of live POWs was invented by the Nixon administration to sell our actions in Vietnam. This POW myth has been used for years to highlight the moral destruction of America, the shame of leaving our soldiers, or honor in Vietnam. It keeps the legacy of Vietnam, this enormous psychic wound in our history, alive.

Myths with an enemy are classic, and we are in a period where the Right is using them powerfully. Bill Moyers talks about the demonology of Newt and others, who develop lists of words

to demonize their opponents: sick, pathetic, anti-family, and others. The message: "Anyone who disagrees with me is a demon, not a human. I have the right, the perfect answer, and any technique to make it happen is OK. My positive ends justify any negative means." This is bad thinking. Always remember, evil flourishes when good people think they are perfect, when they think they have the only right answer.

The premise of these enemy myths is to create a separation between us and them, to divide people into groups. The only reason to divide people is to gain power over them. Why does Jerry Falwell beat up on queers? To solidify his own power with the scared. He understands that old military maneuver of Divide and Conquer, one where you weaken opposing forces by splitting them, either physically or emotionally. If you get white exploited people to fight with black exploited people, they both are weakened in their challenge to the common power that exploits them. Simple. If you get women to fight with men, then their power to fight the common roots of their oppression is crippled.

If we want to lessen the power of Jerry Falwell, the only way is convince his followers that they have nothing to fear. Change is just change, not the evil trick of the devil. This is something Robert Schuller has already been doing in his ministry, telling his flock that boundaries are changing, and that is not bad, just part of a natural process of growth and opening. To quote him: "It's not Odd. It's God."

We need a new vision, one based on love, not on fear. To fight fear with fear is to let the old paradigms win.

Building On Our Continuous Common Humanity

We must go into the world and announce boldly, there is no them, there is only us. We are all solidly the same at the core, no matter how diverse we are on the surface. We need to learn not to share a common enemy, but rather, to share a common friendship. Anything which divides us is merely flavor, not substance.

This is the growing center of the new myths in this country. We can trace this to the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that was strong right here in Atlanta, whose primary message was simple: We are all the same, and should be treated that way. To listen to Martin Luther King's speeches again today is a revelation, with the messages sounding clear and fresh: Respect all people, remove the arbitrary limits on them.

Martin Luther King had a dream, a dream of freedom and equality that we are all still working for today. Our brothers and sisters in the gay and lesbian movement have that same dream, and over the past 25 years since Stonewall, they have changed a lot of attitudes, gained a lot of acceptance. They came out, stood up for their rights, and through the course of time, they have been winning them, though the challenges are far from over, especially with Cobb County's own Newt in the House.

This is the challenge for transgendered people, to build a dream we all can share, that we can share with society at large. A vision that talks about our continuous common humanity. A vision about how linking sex and gender roles limits everyone in this culture, man or woman, girl or boy, male or female.

The women's movement has already laid the seeds for this, declaring that "Biology is not destiny." Genitals are not destiny. Our goal must be to work with the women's community and with all other communities, building on our shared visions of empowering people to be whoever and whatever they want to be. We must connect, as Leslie Feinberg reminds us, with all the people who are limited by this gender system, whether they call themselves transgendered or not.

Bill W, who many of you may know as the founder of AA, used to recall the words his grandfather shared while walking in the woods near their home in Dorset, Vermont. As a Civil War veteran, he had seen the country ripped apart by a bloody war, one that is vividly remembered here in Atlanta.

On those walks, Bill's grandpa used to tell him: "Democracy only

works when we focus on what we share in common rather than on what divides us.” Focus on what we share in common rather than on what divides us. Simple to say, hard to do.

When anthropologist Anne Bolin says “In cultures that have rigidly bipolar gender systems, rituals of cross-dressing show our continuous common humanity,” our role is clear. We are here to remind people of what we share in common, what we all share in common regardless of race, gender or other social constructs.

Casting Out Shame

To be effective in connecting with other people, we need to focus on the same things our gay brothers and sisters have done. We need to cast out the layers of shame that have been heaped on us because of our transgendered nature, the long tail of shame we carry with us.

Let me take a moment to describe what I mean by shame. Shame is a deep seated feeling that something is wrong with you. It is a feeling that you should be ashamed of who you are, that somehow inside you are not worthy, you are diseased. When you are ashamed inside, when you have internalized the “shoulds” that this heterosexist culture lays on us and believe that somehow you are less of a person, then you are controlled by your shame.

When you are controlled by shame, it is almost impossible to have a happy life. You may think you have to be who others want you to be, say what others want you to say in order for them to like you. You may think you have to manipulate people into liking you. You may try to destroy yourself, try to fail because you think that you deserve it. You may be unable to let people close to you because you are scared if they know who you really are, they will hate you. If you can't let people in, you will always have an empty place inside of yourself that you may try to stuff with food, drugs, rage, sadness.

Codependency, lack of intimacy, destructive behavior. Shame is the root of all of these things, and many, like John Bradshaw and Merle Fossum, have talked about these issues. I encourage you to look at your own shame if you

have not yet done so.

We need to cast off the shame we feel so that the humiliation the gender defenders (as Kate Bornstein calls them) use to control us just doesn't work. We need to unwire the buttons that are connected to our shame, whatever they cause us to do. People can smell shame

Any models that try to get us to fit into society by forcing us to move from one gender box to another are just plain wrong. It doesn't matter if it's the “Now I'm Biff, Now I'm Suzy” model of crossdressing, or the “Are they a he or a she?” model of transsexualism. They are both dead ends, both perpetuating the gender system, not liberating us from it.

at 30 paces, and when they smell it in us, they run. The goal is not to become shameless, but rather to refuse to be ashamed, to let go of our shame.

How have the gays and lesbians refused to be ashamed? They have focused on one of the few things that can cast out shame: Pride. To learn to be proud of their actions, proud of their work, proud of their caring, proud of their honesty, proud of their lives, proud of who they are. We are all God's children. They know that only by living in a way they can be proud of can they stand up without shame and be effective. This is one reason this gathering next year will be called IFGE Minneapolis Pride 1996, dedicated to the ways we can build pride in the gender community.

We all know lots of people in this community who are crippled by shame. They may cover it with a macho swagger, a healthy dose of denial, or bold and brassy behavior, but in any case, it is behavior from shame. As long as we cover for people who come from their own shame and dysfunction, as long as we enable them, we do a disservice to the entire community, perpetuating a model that has oppressed us, held us all back.

Who are our oppressors? I think if you look, you will find that we have been trained to oppress ourselves. Until we break that pattern of internal oppression, oppression that comes from shame, we will always be oppressed. We need to have the gumption to actu-

ally let people agree with us, to be winners, the strength to let people in, see us whole, and love us. This is not simple. I know how much easier it is to talk the talk than to walk the walk, but we all have to try to actually face our fears, and accept our own beauty, strength and power.

Some people accept shame as natural. One leader said “Everyone in the gender community is dysfunctional. It's just the way we are.” While, to the degree that everyone in this culture has some level of dysfunction, that may be true, please do not include me in that generalization, for I am actively working to heal. If we expect to find dysfunction, we will find it. We need to change our expectations to health, and encourage others to come from their inner beauty & strength, not their dysfunction.

Some try to use shame for control. For example, anyone who says “Not in front of the children!” is trying to tell us that our nature is shameful, wrong and should be hidden from the innocent who can't yet handle evil. There are those who have an agenda to limit transgender, to keep it closeted “for our own good.” Those people are perpetuating the dysfunction, the illness, and we must have the strength to stand up to them and claim our own lives and experience.

I have seen so many people who are trying to heal their own shame, but as they expose the wounds of shame, they immediately get attacked in the community. I am not the first person who has wanted to “leave the gender community.” When our choice is to sustain our own shame, enabling others, or to open up our own awareness and then to be assaulted by the things we are trying to walk away from in our life every time we go to a gender event, this

is very difficult. We end up working to create separation from others with shame as we heal, and often we never go back, leaving others in their own shame-laced world.

This overwhelming reaction to the sea of shame we see around us is one of the most difficult things we go through. Too often when we show the pain of this response, we are isolated, cast out, disconnected specifically because we are healing. This is something that must stop if we want to promote healing of ourselves, our gender peers, and our world. We must support each other in healing, not in shame.

Changing Our Models

One of the first steps in abandoning shame is in abandoning the old medical models of transgender. Transsexuals who claim "I have always been a woman, I just had a little birth defect that I fixed" and Crossdressers who claim "We are all just guys in dresses, and that is all any of us will ever be, even if some get their dick bobbed," are both part of the problem. They are taught to deny their essential transgendered status, the status that holds them together, in order to appear as better men or better women. These people all propagate the fear of separation that comes from not being firmly entrenched in the system of gender. They end up supporting a gender system that keeps all of us limited.

We need to understand the bipolar system of gender, intended to be a system of heterosexist pressure, a system that comes naturally to a society where reproduction is the most important thing. We need to understand that this bipolar system is designed to separate and divide us. Being firmly entrenched in the system of gender means that we are already separated from a large group of the population, separated from the "opposite sex."

Any models that try to get us to fit into society by forcing us to move from one gender box to another are just plain wrong. It doesn't matter if it's the "Now I'm Biff, Now I'm Suzy" model of crossdressing, or the "Are they a he or a she?" model of transsexualism. They are both dead ends, both perpetuating

the gender system, not liberating us from it.

Any model that forces us to deny who we are is a dead end, a path to shame and to segregation. There has been discussion on the Internet about the concept that passing as something we are not is passé, and many have seen the parallels in the ends of passing in other movements. On *60 Minutes*, I saw Ed Bradley ask Lena Horne: "Did you ever think of trying to pass as white?" Lena replied, eyes widening "My grandmother would have killed me! It never occurred to me to be anything but what I was!" It never occurred to me to be anything but what I was! How many of us can stand up and say that?

Riki Anne Wilchins asks the same question: Can you imagine gay conferences where they teach gays to pass as straight? While some of us can remember that the original Daughters of Bilitis had a skirts-only dress code, we also know the movement did not take shape until gays could stand up and simply be who they are.

The last 30 years of the Benjamin/Prince model of transgender has been an important start, but it is time to move to new models that acknowledge and celebrate our deep, consistent transgendered nature. Imagine a button, *This is What A Transgendered Person Wears*, and it doesn't matter if you wear it on a suit or a dress. You are transgendered, and that is important, not simply what you wear or how you act.

No Victims

The other thing we have to drop is the fear of victimization. We need to understand that we have responsibility for our own lives, and the only way to change our experience of life is to change the way we choose to see it. If we see ourselves as powerless and dysfunctional, we will be.

If you think you can or if you think you can't, you are right. As long as we think that other people have the power to shape our experience, they will.

This is a very hard lesson for many of us to learn. We are so used to

thinking that somehow it is "their" fault. But in the long run, it doesn't matter whose fault it is, it is your responsibility to create your own happy and productive life. We need to stop blaming "them," stop being victims. While there will still be times when we are victimized, if we reject victimization, we will not be controlled by others, but by ourselves.

In order for terrorists to win, they have only to make you afraid to act in ways that might challenge them. You have to be afraid of being a victim. As long as you act from fear, you let the gender defenders win in their war of terror, controlling you with the terror of separation.

What Is Transgender?

Transgender is a living, breathing thing: you. How you create your life as a transgendered person is an act of personal expression, a work of your own art.

Virginia Prince often reminds us of the invention of the word transgenderist, which is supposed to simply echo the definition of a non-op transsexual, someone living full time in one gender box or another without surgery.

This is a very limited and restrictive view, a sop to the bi-polar heterosexist system of gender we were taught was normal. But as Harry Benjamin said to Christine Jorgensen, "We don't know what normal is. We only know what is customary." We must have a model of transgender that is much more broad and inclusive, bringing in all who actively shape their own gender expression without regard to society's conventions of what is pink and what is blue. We must redefine the customs of this society to allow unique customization. Get the pipes chopped and channeled, or new upholstery, and we are still the same.

Maryann Kirkland knows well that even in her boy clothes she is still seen as transgendered. I know that my staff has seen my feminine side even when I am trying to live at my most macho. I know that the women I am attracted to are women who have embraced their masculinity, just as I have embraced my femininity. They

may not choose to wear glue-on mustaches, but they do see themselves as full and complete people working to build a balance in their lives.

We are always transgendered, always with one foot in each world. Is being forced to choose one gender or the other really a choice? You can be a woman. You can be a man. You can be who you are in this moment.

The Gender Revolution

We are at the edge of a revolution. What kind of revolution will it be? I think it will be a revolution not like the violent revolutions, like the Soviet revolution, but rather a revolution in thought and ideas. Like African-Americans or Gays, we need to first share a vision of our own pride, and take that vision to the public. The public needs to know that encouraging expression of gender variations between individuals will not destroy the world, but will allow freedom for all. The revolution is coming.

The U.S. is struggling with this issue in the post cold war period: how do we pull together in a world without a common enemy? As I have said, I think the answer is simple: we start learning how to be common friends. We come from love, not fear. We have to stand up and start taking responsibility for getting along in our lives, not just pointing fingers at "them." The only way we change "them" is to change the ideas of our neighbors, change our world.

There are those in this room who will say this is a clear point, and that everyone already knows this. I want to say one thing to them: never underestimate the time it takes to educate the American public. Heck, most transgendered people don't even know about our common humanity. We have only scratched the surface of those who are constrained by the gender system.

We know that most transgendered people have never joined the organizations of the gender community, that they are alone and silent. Our messages of how to cope with shame through biphobia or transsexual surgery have not resonated with most transgendered people, for good reasons. I know they

never resonated with me. I wrote a piece, "The Tyranny Of Passing," ten years ago in 1985, soon after I came out into TGIC in Albany.

No, the tools of our revolution will be shared dreams, shared visions, shared stories, and shared myths that we can tell other people in the language and media they understand. This focus on their language may be as uncomfortable as the boring dark suits and ties that all the first Civil Rights leaders wore, but it is a step in our existence. Those dark suits were an understanding that you have to pick your battles carefully, to not reject the entire world, but rather to focus on what must be changed. Change comes one step, one mind at a time.

Terry Murphy said it best when she said "What we need are some sane, healthy, bright transgendered people to be out there telling people why transgender is just another expression of humanity." Others have made the same point. Eve Burchert has noted, "The era of talk shows for transgender people is over. We need to be out in our churches, out in our families, out in our communities, out in our lives." We need to be out.

We have a long history of transgendered clowns, ever the wise and witty fool, and we need to play on that history, not simply play into it. The clown often draws attention, but not respect. We need to merge the fool with the sage, to give our neighbors a message of sharing that they can embrace, not one of shame and shouted demands that will keep us down, keep us isolated.

William Dragoin, who has done work on gynemimetic, or transgendered shamans, notes that the imagination, creativity and spiritual strength of transgendered people has long been an important part of human cultures. Dragoin says: "It's like a baseball team. We all have a part to play. And as long as transgendered people spend so much time dealing with stigma, they won't be able to play their important role, and we will all suffer for it."

As long as we come from our shame, we will always be isolated and apart. Let's face it. The old models of transgender were designed merely to

help us survive in a world of stigma and shame. We must create new models that allow us to thrive, be whole, authentic, healthy and happy. We must not settle for being walking wounded — we must learn to heal ourselves.

Have A Coke and A Smile!

(Drinks from Coke bottle)
Excuse me. I just wanted a sip of Coke. When I am here in Atlanta, I like to go to The World Of Coca Cola museum. Why? Because I think it is the most potent symbol of revolution anyplace in the world, including the Kremlin. The East may have been red for a time, but Coke painted the whole world red, with Drink Coca Cola signs — and people are still clamoring for more.

The revolution of this time in history is the information revolution. What do we call changing ideas, opinions and behaviors through information? Today, we call it marketing. The World Of Coca-Cola is a shrine to the most successful marketing campaign in the history of the world, one that put fizzy flavored sugar water on everyone's lips. If we are looking to change ideas, opinions, and behaviors, we could do far worse than looking at Coke.

One interesting book is *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, by Mark Prendergast, a nice 1993 corporate history of "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Oh, sorry — that's anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of a religion.

Prendergast notes "The most powerful Coca-Cola appeal has not, ultimately, been sexual or psychological, but communal: if you drink Coke, the ads suggest, you will belong to a warm, loving, accepting family, singing in perfect harmony. If we can't quite succeed in finding that stress-free society today, never mind — we'll find it tomorrow. We'll build a better world for you, and me, and everyone. It's a beautifully seductive message, because it's what we all want." Isn't it, though?

Yet even Coke had to deal with gender. Coke had to figure out if their soft drink was masculine or feminine in French. Le Coke/La Coke. Quebec, masculine, France feminine. You figure.

There is much more to be said about how marketing messages are the key to long-lasting revolutions, seductive messages of connection and acceptance. But it is clear to me that anyone who wants to call themselves a revolutionary at this time in history can learn much more by studying Coke than by studying Marx and Lenin.

How about this for a starting slogan: "Always Transgendered."

Healing Our World

Think about this. Can our means be separated from our ends? If we choose to approach things in a dysfunctional way, to reinforce gender stereotypes, to come from our shame, to use the tools of the patriarchy, can we ever transcend the limits we now struggle with?

The answer to this is clear. It is not sufficient to talk the talk of love, acceptance, consensus, compromise, and respect, it is crucial that we live those things everyday. The only way to heal our world is to heal the people in it, and the only one who has the full responsibility of healing is you. You have to clear yourself of the old patterns, or they will continue to recreate the old problems. One definition of insanity is to repeat the same action over and over, expecting a different result.

Change can only come to our world if it comes to us first. Our means are our ends, for what we put out is what we shall receive. Simple. Too many people are trying to heal the world before they heal themselves. That's just impossible.

Action

We do need Action — action on all sorts of fronts, from the political work Sharon Ann Stuart and Phyllis Frye are doing, to the grassroots actions of people like Judy Osborne

and Debbie Davis. We need the coordination of leaders like Dallas Denny & Terry Murphy and the fund raising of Abby Saypen and Laura Caldwell. We need Allison Laing & Ari Kane for all they do. We need the caring professional support of Dick Docter and people like Linda Peacock who act for the wives and partners. We need the organizing of Leslie Feinberg and the writing of Anne Bolin. We need the transgender spirit of Holly Boswell, and the strength of Sandra Cole, who helps us all in so many ways.

Passing On The Dream

But I remind you that this is the conference of the International Foundation For Gender Education. The work we most need is the work of education, of creating and passing an infectious dream, a dream of freedom of gender expression that will free everybody to be the best that they can be. We need to market our vision to the world.

Our primary action must be education. We need to understand our shared vision, and go forth and share it with the world. We need to talk to our family and our friends. We don't need to storm the ramparts, we need to ring the doorbell, show up proud and clear and share our dream. A revolution of Avon ladies. Ding, Dong. Transgender Calling.

Alison Laing says she is educating people "One by one. One on one." That's the way that it works.

The marketing and education revolution won't be instantaneous, but it will be effective and long lasting, and this is crucial.

I recently saw a PBS special on women's suffrage. It's hard to remember that it's only about 75 years ago that women got the vote after a 90 year battle, 1840-1920. That was part of a major change in the way we see gender. Changes in social constructs like race and gender are not speedy, but they are inevitable. We need to change the ways people think, and this takes time.

My all time favorite gender story is simple. James Green was at the APA

with the IFGE, and a big old shrink came up to him, choosing to talk to the "man" at the table. "What's this all about?" he asked. James told him it was about transgender, transsexualism. "I don't need that. I don't believe that God makes mistakes."

James simply replied, "Neither do I." Did the shrink get it? Maybe not. But James said it, and the guy heard it. We are not mistakes, we are all perfect children of God.

Share your vision here. Be proud. Educate each other, invigorate each other to take the most important action of all: opening our hearts and sharing with others the story that all humans are the same. We share 98 percent of DNA in common with chimps! How different can we be? Our race, our history, our gender expression are only flavorings, not substantial differences that can be used to divide us as groups. We need to remember that they is us, and the only way true change comes is when enough people know that it is time for change to occur, and agree on what must come next.

Doris Lessing said "Learning is when you finally understand something you have known all of your life." People know that judging people on any thing but the quality of their individual behavior towards others is wrong, but they may need your help in understanding it. You can help them.

Go out and take some action. Educate someone: a legislator, a talk show host, the local League of Women Voters, your local gay pride committee, your block association, anyone. And suggest something you can do together to help make the world a better, more open, and supportive place for all of us.

Remember that as we heal ourselves, we heal our world. Be healed, be proud, be strong, be open, be compassionate, and share your dreams. You just might find, as some of us in this room have, that there are many who want to help, from all sexes, genders, races and walks of life.

Renounce Shame. Heal Yourself. Take action. Educate. It just may change your life — and change your world — for the better. CQ

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Despite the title of this article, I do not disbelieve in heterosexual cross-dressers. Obviously, many cross-dressers are completely heterosexual. However, I believe the oft-repeated assertion that most crossdressers are heterosexual is a myth. I argue that there are large numbers of gay and bisexual crossdressers who are not part of the "transgender community"—and so are invisible to us.

Some seven years ago, a heterosexual crossdresser only group provided love, support, and encouragement to me as I followed a (transsexual) path which eventually excluded me from full membership. I do not wish to bite the hand that has fed me. I have had personal experience, however, with the agony of members of that group as they have struggled to define themselves within the constraints their group places on their behavior and identity. I've seen more than a few of them make bad choices about their lives and their bodies, as they do the things transsexuals do, but without therapy, without medical monitoring of hormones, without thinking through just what it is they are doing. I have slowly come to realize that their "heterosexual" group does them a tremendous disservice by placing artificial boundaries on sexual behavior and gender expression, which is in fact quite fluid and capable of change over time. These are not people who don't belong in the group; they are its heart and soul. Saturn is devouring his own children.

"Heteropocrisy" is certain to be a controversial article. I would have preferred its tone to have been less strident. I rewrote it any number of times, but it has refused to cooperate. It continues to echo my frustration with an unfortunate set of circumstances. It's bitter medicine, but bitter medicine is often good for us. I just wish I could have sugar-coated it so it would have gone down a bit easier.

Q: What's the difference between a heterosexual crossdresser and a gay crossdresser?

A: About two beers.

— *Transgender Community Joke*

Heteropocrisy

The Myth of the Heterosexual Male Crossdresser

by Dallas Denny

The organized crossdressing movement dates from the 1950's, when Virginia Prince began networking with heterosexual crossdressers throughout the United States. Before long, she had formed the Hose and Heels Club in Los Angeles, to which men would bring — you guessed it — hose and heels in a paper bag, and, at a signal, put them on. Before they left, they would take them off and put them back in the bag and go home.

From such an inauspicious beginning, Virginia founded a national organization for crossdressers (The Foundation for Personality Expression, or FPE), launched a magazine (*Transvestia*) and a publishing house (Chevalier Press), wrote a number of books (including *Understanding Crossdressing*, *The Transvestite and His Wife*, and *How to Be a Woman Though Male*), and did surveys of the characteristics of crossdressers which led to papers which were published in prestigious scientific journals including *The Archives of General Psychiatry*, *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *The Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *Psychological Reports*, *The American Journal of Psychotherapy*, *Sexology*, *The Journal of Sex Research*, and *The Archives of Sexual Behavior*. She also wrote for *Transvestia*, and reprints of her old articles and occasional new articles find their way into print nearly every month in the various publications of the transgender community.

But even more than writing and publishing, Virginia, who is sometimes referred to jokingly by some (and devoutly by others) as The Godmother of Crossdressing, formulated a philosophy which has been carried to the four corners of the world by FPE and its successors, which include The Society for the Second Self (Tri-Ess) in the United States, the Seahorse Clubs of Australia, and the Beaumont Societies in Europe. Virginia's message was that most crossdressers are heterosexual

and crossdress not as a function of their sexuality, but to express feminine aspects of their personality that they do not otherwise feel comfortable expressing because of societal disapproval of feminine behaviors in males. Virginia postulated that the crossdresser has a "woman within" who must be released from time to time. In a society which insists on rigidly defined gender roles, she argued, crossdressing provides a safe release.

This theory acknowledges the sexual arousal which usually accompanies crossdressing in heterosexual men, but relegates it to an early developmental stage; masturbation is the route into the crossdressing experience, but becomes unimportant or disappears altogether once the crossdresser gets in touch with his feminine side.

The world has listened well to Virginia's theories. As a matter of course, the newsletters of the transgender community, the mainstream press, and even the gay press routinely proclaim that most crossdressers are heterosexual. It is taken as gospel. Except for the occasional behind-the-times psychoanalyst who refuses to believe that it is possible that someone who crossdresses could be anything but homosexual, practically everyone, from Geraldo to Dan Rather to Ru-Paul, has heard and come to believe that the majority of crossdressers are heterosexual, just your ordinary straight guy from the corner tavern who likes to put on a frock to express his inner femininity and cavort about town, but who never gets chubbies while doing so, has never had sex with another man and would never, ever even fantasize about doing so, or ever *think* about having sex reassignment.

This is an overly simplistic and quite frankly inaccurate view. The fact is that while many crossdressers are indeed heterosexual, many other crossdressers have lifelong issues with sexuality which go unacknowledged by "feelgood" support groups and transgender community publications. Not only is the autoerotic nature of the crossdressing experience trivialized by the inner woman mythos, but homosexual fantasies and acts are kept private from other crossdressers due to legiti-

mate fear that acknowledging them would lead to disapproval and possible expulsion from heterosexual-only support groups.

One need not spend much time with a group of heterosexual crossdressers to learn that there is something seriously at variance with the notion that one is with a bunch of straight guys who like to dress up on occasion. First,



Francisco Goya (1746 - 1828)
Saturn

a considerable percentage of male crossdressers in fact identify as women and have transsexual inclinations which they keep hidden from the group (and often, with amazing feats of mental gymnastics, even from themselves). Second, once they are in a dress, some of these crossdressers do not act very heterosexual. After a few drinks, they begin to talk in roundabout ways about their sexual urges, and after a few more rounds, they are entirely receptive to advances by other males, if in a setting in which their crossdressing peers are not present—and sometimes when they are. Once sober, they deny such feelings and behavior, and often mask them behind homophobic behaviors and statements.

This is not to say that the majori-

ty of the members of such groups are not in fact completely heterosexual or that they want to be women. But those with serious transsexual issues and those who fantasize about having sex with other men are significant minorities in even the most austere "heterosexual" group. Unfortunately, because of peer pressure, such persons usually feel it important to keep their issues secret, or at least low-key. Their heterosexual-only social groups are not set up to meet their needs, and consequently, those needs often go unmet.

Also, a large number of transgendered persons do not participate in what we call the transgender community, but function wholly outside it. It is only because we have built a club which excludes such persons that we do not see them. We call this club the "transgender community," but in actuality, it is **A** transgender community. There are *other* transgender communities which we often ignore or belittle. I suspect their membership is at least as great as that of "our" community.

The evidence that many crossdressers are not exactly heterosexual does not lie in surveys like Virginia's from the 1960's (which after all, surveyed the readers of her magazine, *Transvestia*, during a time at which those with philosophies which differed significantly from Virginia's were banished to the hinterlands (see Darrell Raynor's *A Year Among the Girls* for a historical record of this). No, the evidence is less direct. It lies not so much in the fact that there is a major problem with illicit use of female hormones in groups for heterosexual crossdressers as in the fact that there is a huge population of gay crossdressers which is largely unacknowledged by the transgender community. It lies in the fact that there is a large population of bisexual crossdressers who are served primarily by transvestite contact magazines which are sold in adult bookstores. It lies in the fact that transvestite phone-sex numbers and escort services do a booming business, and in the fact that there is a strong bisexual theme in a great deal of TV literature. Just as the transgender community is largely invisible to those outside it, these other transgender communities are largely invisible to it.

Virginia's late-1960's survey of readers of her magazines was a great service, for she made it known to the world that all crossdressers were not gay — that, in fact, a considerable percentage of crossdressers were heterosexual. It was very important for the world to realize that. Her study was solid, and just one part of a life work that has ensured her place in history. Her work facilitated communication among a large population of heterosexual crossdressers, and led directly to the transgender community as we know it today. However, her survey, which drew upon readers of a magazine which was of little interest or utility to gay or bisexual crossdressers, came to *define* the transgender community. But because it has rigid boundaries, it is a community which excludes many, and into which many fit only by hiding or denying their true selves — and isn't being and expressing one's true self the very thing the support groups in the transgender community try to facilitate? The simple fact is that large numbers of crossdressers are not heterosexual. They are gay or bisexual.

This does not mean that the majority of people in the transgender community are gay or bisexual (but some are, and deny it, and others are, and feel it necessary to hide it). But I submit that there are entire communities of transgendered persons which *our* transgender community does not recognize, or chooses not to recognize, and that it represses them by ignoring them and denying them. Every time someone in the community claims that most crossdressers are heterosexual; every time it is claimed that gay men dress only to attract other men; every time someone laments the fact that someone they have considered a crossdresser has begun to identify as transsexual; every time someone feels uncomfortable expressing their bisexuality or transsexualism at a support group meeting; every time a crossdresser says "We're not gay," these other communities are being repressed in the same manner that our transgender community is repressed by the mainstream community.

Where are these alternative communities? They are all around us. What form do they take? That depends

upon which of the communities you are talking about.

Gay Crossdressers

Atlanta, like other major cities, has a large and active gay community. A primary form of entertainment in this community is and always has been female impersonation. More than a dozen of Atlanta's gay bars have regular or occasional drag shows. But for every gay male who wears women's clothing for money or to attract men, there are many others who dress for pleasure. On any Friday or Saturday night at BackStreet Atlanta, an all-night bar, it is possible to count more gay crossdressers than have ever attended a meeting of Atlanta's support group for heterosexual crossdressers, which draws members from throughout the Southeast.

Our transgender community tends to denigrate gay crossdressers by calling them "drag queens" and by claiming that they dress only for money or to attract men. Ignoring the homophobia inherent in such a statement, it is incredibly naive, like saying that heterosexual crossdressers dress only to facilitate masturbation. The fact is that many gay crossdressers are significantly transgendered. Proof that they are transgendered is easy to come by: just talk to some of them. They'll tell you that they don't dress just to attract men; they dress because it pleases them, or because they feel a need to express an inner femininity.

Feminine expression, while certainly not universal among gay men, is common. Most of the subjects in Richard Green's longitudinal study of extremely feminine boys (he thought they were pre-transsexual) grew up to be gay. Researchers hotly debate the theory that all gay males are feminine in their youth. The need of some gay men to express their feminine side often surfaces as crossdressing. Drag shows constitute a socially sanctioned reason to crossdress — and certainly sometimes crossdressing can lead to romance or at least a sexual liaison, or a salary and tips as a female impersonator — but the real reasons most gay men crossdress are often — and I would submit usually —

private. Many, I would imagine, dress *only* in private.

The transgender community often laments the absence of gay crossdressers at its events, but the fact is there is nothing there to particularly attract them. Rigidly enforced dress codes, anti-gay remarks, class issues (many gay crossdressers cannot afford to travel hundreds of miles and stay in an expensive hotel) and the matronly appearance of some of the attendees are of little interest to gay crossdressers, many of whom have a flamboyance that makes the more stolid in the transgender community cringe. They want to do the things they want to do; most of all, they want to feel comfortable about expressing themselves in a feminine manner, and about being gay — and this is not possible in the transgender community as it now exists.

Gay crossdressers have a community of their own; it just takes a different form. The bar scene is certainly one facet of that community. Another is the popularity of large meetings to which gay crossdressers travel from all over the country in order to dress up. There are scores of gay beauty pageants, the winning of which results in money, fame, a crown, and a title. Most are extravagant affairs, with dozens of beautifully gowned and coiffed, and often stunningly beautiful contestants. In the fall of 1994, for instance, Atlanta hosted a national pageant to elect Miss Gay-USA-at-Large. The event was held in one of the city's most prestigious hotels (in fact, the success of such pageants, which have been held in four-star hotels since the 1970's, doubtless paved the way for the conventions of the transgender community). There are many contestants and a large audience, and there are organizers, stage hands, lighting and sound technicians, and a master of ceremonies. Many of these people correspond and socialize throughout the year. There is also an Imperial Court, with chapters in many cities, which consists of gay crossdressers who stage benefits to raise money for AIDS organizations and charities. Is this community? Certainly it is. And although it is different in form from what those in the transgen-

From A to Zeta: The Alpha Zeta Tri-Ess Membership Survey (Or, Why Tri-Ess is Bouncing its Reality Checks)

In the January, 1996 issue of *Renaissance News*, Dina Amberle reported that Alpha Zeta, the Tempe, Arizona chapter of Tri-Ess, the Society for the Second Self (an organization which restricts its membership to heterosexual crossdressers) gave a survey to its members. Amberle writes, "The survey results were pretty interesting, and represented the answers of 70% of the Zeta-girls' 47 members . . .

"To the question how often would they dress as women if they lived in an ideal universe, 36% of our Tempe Sun-goddesses answered 'all the time.' When asked if they would take a hypothetical pill that would transform them into women without surgery, a whopping 64% said, 'Gimme that pill, girlfriend.' On the converse, only 27% would take a hypothetical pill that would 'cure' them of the desire to crossdress.

"On more reality-based questions, the number of members who have had some electrolysis was 24%. That's close to one in four for your mathphobes. And 21%, or one in five, have used female hormones at some time. The survey upped the ante in a series of questions that follows . . . 'Fantasied about having sex reassignment surgery' got a 73% positive answer . . . 'Seriously considered SRS' got a 21% positive response . . . 'presently planning on SRS' was answered 'yes' 9% of the time."

Amberle continues, "I always take survey results with a grain of salt,

but I find it remarkable that a Tri-Ess chapter has 64% of its membership who would like to magically transform themselves into women; 36% who would like to live full-time if circumstances were perfect; 21-24% who have experimented with female hormones or electrolysis; and a huge 73% who have even fantasied about TS surgery. That's a helluva lot of real and fantasized transforming going on in an organization devoted to the ideal of heterosexual crossdressing without a taint of transsexualism in its ranks. A less diplomatic person than myself might even say this particular sorority of Tri-Ess girls are a bunch of secret transsexuals."

I regret having to be that "less diplomatic" person, but someone must say something about the consensual denial in many heterosexual crossdressing groups. My best guess is the Alpha Zeta group is probably representative of heterosexual-only support groups, and not an anomaly.

Unfortunately, there is a tremendous amount of dissembling around this issue. I recently read a newsletter which interpreted the Alpha-Zeta survey as a vindication of the hetero-only membership of such groups: after all, only one in four of the members had experimented with hormones, and only one in ten was definitely planning on SRS!

My issue with restrictive criteria of heterosexual only groups is that they are *not* in fact heterosexual-only. They

are filled with persons with gender identity and sexual issues who, because of peer pressure, behave surreptitiously, and are not caught by the net of support which exists for them. They cannot get the support they need in their hetero-only groups, and are afraid to go to open or transsexual groups. Consequently, they operate in the dark, frequently making bad decisions. They take hormones without having prior therapy. They are at medical risk while on hormones because they do not have their blood chemistry monitored, and they are at psychological risk because they secretly pursue a transsexual path recklessly, bypassing all the safeguards. This directly interferes with AEGIS' mission, which is to provide such people with information so they can make good decisions. We cannot provide them with information if they are so afraid of not being heterosexual that they won't contact us.

I fully understand the fear of many crossdressers and their wives, which keeps them away from open groups. I appreciate the dilemma: if the group were not heterosexual only, many of the people it was created to serve would stay away. However, the groups should be a place where those fears are shown for what they are—false. They should not be places to nurture and harden those fears. But most importantly, the groups should serve the actual needs of their members, and not the needs of an idealized but nonexistent membership.

Survey Sez . . . The Categories are Collapsing!

Things MTF transsexuals used to do (and crossdressers didn't): Wish to become women, take hormones, have electrolysis, fantasize about SRS, seriously consider SRS, plan on having SRS.

	<i>Percent Yes</i>	
Would dress as woman all the time in an ideal environment	36	
Would take magic pill to become woman	64	
Have had electrolysis	24	
Have taken female hormones	21	
Fantasized about SRS	73	
Seriously considered SRS	21	
Presently planning on SRS	9	<i>n = 33 (70% of total membership)</i>

Collapsing Categories: Two Examples

What is a heterosexual crossdresser? Several years ago, perhaps that question would have been answerable. But nowadays . . .

Mandy*

Mandy is an officer in a heterosexual-only crossdressing group which aggressively enforces its policy of “no gays, no transsexuals.” She is one of the more vocal supporters of the policy.

Although she does not identify as transsexual, but as a heterosexual crossdresser, Mandy struggles with her desire to be a woman. She is a member of a fundamentalist religious sect and experiences intense guilt feelings about crossdressing which have resulted in long periods of severe depression.

A little over a year ago, Mandy began a rigorous course of electrolysis and had surgery to feminize her face, with the result that most people began to view her as female, regardless of how she was dressed. Six months ago, she decided that taking hormones could be justified under her system of religious beliefs and asked her therapist for a referral letter for hormones. She carried the letter around for months before visiting an endocrinologist.

Mandy has slowly slipped across the line into full-time crossliving. She recently became very depressed when she and her wife were mistaken for lesbians in public; she claims she finds lesbians and gay men “disgusting.”

Lately, Mandy has experienced a recurrent desire to have sex

reassignment surgery, which has resulted in more depression, as it is something which she cannot allow herself. Recently, she brought the matter up with her therapist, who told her he would consider giving her a referral letter if she would work through some of her issues. She has heard of a surgeon in Mexico who requires no letters or evidence of real-life test. She has even wondered if it would be possible to have the surgery and conceal it from the members of her support group, and even her wife.

Despite all this, Mandy continues to consider herself a heterosexual crossdresser. Recently, she led a drive to expel a group member who had told another group member that she thought she might be transsexual.

Alesha*

Alesha is the prototypical heterosexual crossdresser, but for one thing. In her femme mode, Alesha is as aggressively “heterosexual” as is her male counterpart, Alex. She likes men. Alex is swaggering and macho, and more than a bit homophobic, to the point that he once called another crossdresser a faggot when he attempted to greet him with a hug. Alesha frequently tells those she encounters when out with other group members, “We’re heterosexual. We’re not gay or anything like that.” After a few drinks, however, Alesha will flounce into the room and ask “Where are the men?” She is a habituée of the bars, where she

meets men with whom she has unprotected sex. Group members recently had a good laugh when they discovered a photo of Alesha in a sexual contact magazine for TVs. When an officer mentioned it to her, she claimed that a relationship with another crossdresser would qualify as a heterosexual relationship if she thought of the other crossdresser as a woman.

At a recent steering committee meeting, Alesha poo-pooed the suggestion that AIDS be the topic at a monthly meeting. “That’s a gay disease,” she said. “We’re not gay.”

Whatever Mandy’s self-identification, her needs for counseling, peer support, and medical supervision are no different than those of any transsexual person. And however heterosexual Alesha believes she is, her need to understand and practice safe sex techniques is the same as that of any gay man. Mandy and Alesha have nothing to gain and everything to lose by hiding behind a facade of heterosexuality in their support group. In fact, their group encourages such heteropocracy. The officers smile knowingly at Alesha’s late-night shenanigans, and ignore Mandy’s increasing femization, while purging those who are honest about their issues.

It’s time for the transgender community to begin to care more about the real human needs of its members than it does about protective labels like heterosexuality!

** The names have been changed to protect the insolent. “Mandy” and “Alicia” are based on real heterosexual crossdressers the author has known. You know who you are, dahlinks!*

der community usually think about, it is just as valid as the transgender community we usually think about.

Bisexual Crossdressers

For some reason, many men who otherwise would never consider having sex with another man find their thoughts turning to the possibility once they are in skirts. Some never act upon their fantasies, but others do. Bisexual crossdressers with whom I have spoken report that attraction to men is a significant part of their feminine experience. Many, in fact, have sex with other men only when crossdressed. The fiction of the transgender community is rampant with such themes.

The magazines of the transgender community are printed in small runs of several hundred, or at best several thousand copies. The tabloid cross-dressing magazines, on the other hand, which feature pictures of scantily clad and sometimes unclad crossdressers in suggestive postures and explicit descriptions of what they want from other men and where they want to put it, have circulations in the tens of thousands. The late Alicia Lichy, publisher of Alicia's *TV Girl Talk*, boasted in print about a circulation of 40,000 copies — and that only a year or so after starting her business. There are certainly as many of these magazines (which are often in tabloid format) as there are nationally circulated non-sexual transgender publications. There is no way to determine their actual readership, but it is apparently quite large. One of the co-owners of Brushstrokes, an alternative bookstore in Atlanta, told me that the store typically moves between 50 and 100 copies of a new issue of one of these tabloids in a week— far fewer than the serious gender magazines.

Even IFGE's *Transgender* (formerly *TV-TS Tapestry*), the largest-circulation publication in the transgender community, prints only about 10,000 copies. And this large circulation is due in large part to *Transgender's* contact ads, which enable the magazine to be placed in fetish boutiques and adult bookstores around the world (in other

words, *Transgender's* large circulation results from its attraction to the hidden bisexual community).

Of course, not everybody buying sexual contact magazines is doing so because they desire to have sexual contact with another man. Some are no doubt grasping for any legitimate source of information they can find. But if this is the case, if a significant percentage of the purchasers are in search of information rather than phone numbers and addresses, why then, do they pass up *Transgender*, with its restrained personal ads and *Chrysalis* (which contains a great deal of factual transgender information, but no contact ads) for the tabloids, which feature bare asses and

When is a crossdresser a cross-dresser? When does he become a transgenderist? A transsexual? Bisexual? Homosexual? These are issues that the transgender community needs to confront, but which it has heretofore avoided.

exposed private parts? The reason is simple: the magazines are being purchased by bisexual men because of the personal ads.

Is this community? Perhaps not yet, but I believe it is the *beginning* of community. The bisexual community is only starting to emerge on a national level. Many bisexuals are closeted in the same way as transgendered males. The portion of that community interested in crossdressing is in the same place as Virginia's readership was back in the 1960s. They do not yet have national meetings, but they correspond with each other and meet on an informal basis. They have not even reached the bisexual equivalent of the Hose and Heels Club. But make no mistake about it: bisexual crossdressers (and their aficionados) are there in large numbers. They may be having sex with one another in private, but they are there nonetheless, and one of these days will manifest themselves in an organiza-

tion which will let them stand proudly in public.

Transgendered & Transsexual "Crossdressers"

A certain percentage of any support group for heterosexual crossdressers is likely to have transgender issues — that is, maleness and manhood are not valued, but are traits which are to be done away with, if circumstances permit, and endured, if circumstances do not. Some closed heterosexual crossdressing groups do a more thorough job of genderpolicing (i.e., excluding) such individuals than others, but every heterosexual crossdressing group of any size, I dare to say, has people with such feelings, even if, for obvious reasons, they keep them private.

Gender euphoria is a term used to describe the ecstatic state of many crossdressers when they finally come "out." Oftentimes, they become so preoccupied with crossdressing that their judgment lapses and they make decisions which they come to regret. The problem with "gender euphoric" crossdressers has been acknowledged in *The Femme Forum*, the official magazine of Tri-Ess, In Boulton & Park Society's *Gender Euphoria*, and in other crossdressing magazines — but gender euphoria is often a sign of a gender identity as a woman. Once the excitement of entry into the transgender community dies, such individuals may be better able to control these feelings (and it may in fact be in their best interest to control them), but it would be foolish to assume that they would suddenly become happy to be men. Many transgendered persons transition into the new role, but many others do not, and for any number of reasons besides not really wanting to — out of a sense of duty or obligation to employers, wives, children, parents, and friends; because of physical factors which would make crossliving difficult; because of fear; because of financial problems; because of the difficulties of overcoming the inertia of life as a male. Many others transition partially, using electrolysis, hormonal therapy, facial plastic

surgery, breast implants, and other medical techniques to make them more viable in the female role, but retaining some semblance of their lives as men. Some of these slip over the line into full-time crossliving. Virginia herself did. But are such people heterosexual crossdressers?

I would argue that they are not. When a person is living full time, or even part time in a new gender role, when a person is living in the original role, but has altered his body with hormones, and even when a person is desperately unhappy with being a man but has not taken action on it, and especially, when an individual is living full-time as a woman, it seems beyond reason to refer to him as a crossdresser. A crossdresser is someone who bottom line, may enjoy dressing as a woman on occasion, but who enjoys being a man. If the second part of the equation is missing, if the person reverts to being a man because he must, or feels he must, or if he feels he is somewhere between the two genders commonly acknowledged by our society, he is not a crossdresser, at least not by my definition. He much better fits the emerging category of transgenderist (transgenderists blend the characteristics of both sexes).

What is a heterosexual crossdresser? For that matter, what constitutes heterosexuality? And when is a cross-

dresser a crossdresser? When does he become a transgenderist? A transsexual? Bisexual? Homosexual? These are issues that the transgender community needs to confront, but which it has heretofore avoided. Support organizations for heterosexual crossdressers

As we come as a community to realize that heterosexuality and homosexuality are artificial distinctions placed on sexuality and that manhood and womanhood are artificial distinctions placed on our gender expression, heterosexual-only support groups seem more and more like fortresses which exist primarily to protect their members from the winds of change.

attempt to escape culpability by not strictly defining their membership criteria, relying instead upon peer pressure to police their membership roster. Consequently, their membership includes men who would rather be women, men who are on female hormones, men who sometimes have sex with other men, and men who fantasize about having sex with other men. And some are not men at all. In fact, many organizations of heterosexual crossdressers may be composed primarily of transgenderists who are sexually attracted to women, rather than crossdressers, who are happy and proud to be men. But these things are not usually acknowledged.

Members of groups for heterosex-

the new members from such "scary" people as homosexuals — who, by the

ual crossdressers, and sometimes the groups themselves, are often subtly, and sometimes blatantly, anti-gay. Those with sexual interest in men quickly learn to keep their sexuality to themselves, and openly gay crossdressers become the subjects of rude,

homophobic remarks. At one recent meeting of a support group for heterosexual crossdressers — a group which, by the way, has made valiant attempts to confront and overcome its homophobia — a gay man who had referred many heterosexual crossdressers to the group, attended, crossdressed. One of the members asked him, "Don't you feel uncomfortable here?" I'll guarantee you that he did after that! Homophobic statements appear with alarming regularity in the various newsletters of the transgender community, and crossdressers are quick with statements like "Sure, we dress like this, but we're not gay or anything," (implying that it's just fine to have erotic feelings toward a pair of panties,

other words, to open membership to any and all who support the organiza-

No Easy Solutions

How can we reach the closeted crossdresser who is scared to death of making contact with a support group? And how can we convince his wife he's not transsexual and not gay? That's a tremendous challenge, not only for groups which specifically focus on heterosexual crossdressers, but for all of us.

Quite understandably, the abrupt introduction of a newcomer into a meeting with all sorts of gender folk might prove to be more than a bit unnerving, not only to the first-time crossdresser, but to his wife who has reluctantly accompanied him. And certainly, open groups can be very diverse. But a philosophy that the best way to deal with this problem is to form a milieu which will permanently insulate

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way, are much more palatable to the average American than are crossdressers — is ultimately a bad one. A much more productive approach would be to form a safe, supportive setting in which newcomers could gradually learn their fears are groundless, and from which they could be weaned into the larger community.

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tion's goals. After all, if the National Association for Women finds its agenda advanced by allowing men to join; if the NAACP finds itself more effective for having European-Americans and Asian-American members; if the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force gladly accepts heterosexual members, how can we claim that it is anything but our prejudice which causes us to practice the politics of exclusion in our support groups? How can we be all that we can be if we push away those who would support us?

but really fucked up to be attracted to another sentient being who happens to be of the same sex).

There is also a great deal of transphobia in these groups. Members who acknowledge their transsexualism are often taken aside in private by other members and told they are making a big mistake with their lives. Sometimes, though, it's not so private. Several people have been publicly put through the wringer on a local gender-based bulletin board (by other callers, and not necessarily because of any anti-transsexual policy of the board). Not so long ago, one hetero-only support group instituted a "no transsexual talk" rule at their meetings, ostensibly to protect the tender sensibilities of their wives.

Unfortunately, although it has not been officially defined, the dividing line between crossdresser and transsexual seems to be considered by many to be genital surgery, and the dividing line between crossdresser and homosexual seems to be an open and honest acknowledgement of one's feelings toward other men, rather than by the frequency with which one actually acts upon those feelings. Those who live as women but haven't had surgery are in the club, and those who live as women and have had surgery are out. Those who pick up men and blow them in parking lots of bars — but deny it — are in the club, and those in monogamous gay relationships are out. This is, quite frankly, a sign of the insanity of our community. I don't understand why a three-hour surgical procedure, the results of which does not show in public, results in loss of full membership eligibility in a hetero crossdressing organization I will not name, while living as a woman — as the founder, at least one of the board members, and many of the members do — is not. Nor do I understand why acknowledging one's sexual attraction for men excludes one from full membership, while denying it (but doing it, with everyone knowing you are doing it) does not.

I have another observation, and that is that unfortunately, the female partners of crossdressers are often used to justify homophobia and transphobia. The reasoning is that wives, who are

often unknowledgeable about crossdressing and may suspect that their husband is bisexual, gay, or transsexual, will have their worst fears confirmed if bi, gay, or transsexual persons are part of the community. This is based on assumptions that women must be protected. It is at bottom misogynistic. If women are homophobic, if women are transphobic, then they, just like their men, have problems with their perceptions which they need to overcome. If their husbands were secure in their identity as heterosexuals and as crossdressers, they would not have a problem freely interacting with gay and bisexual males and transsexual people, for the differences would be for the most part apparent, and would serve to assuage the fears of their female partners. On the other hand, if there is something to hide (like a consensual denial of reality in such groups), then it makes perfect sense to keep the wives in the dark about what is really going on. Of course, the wives are interacting with transsexual and gay persons in the support groups anyway, even if the prevailing climate keeps them undercover.

The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy of some groups of heterosexual crossdressers is due to local and national leaders who aren't willing to face the fact that some of their members are having sex with other men, that some are fantasizing about having sex with other men, and that others will eventually wind up living full-time as women and may eventually find themselves in Brussels or Neenah, Wisconsin for sex reassignment surgery. Because of their steadfast denial of the true nature of their members, many organizations for heterosexual crossdressers are at bottom hypocritical organizations— heterophobic organizations, I would say. Their mission statements are at considerable variance with the actual nature and needs of their members. They exist to serve heterosexual crossdressers, but many of their members identify as something other than heterosexual males. They serve only by turning a blind eye to the needs of a significant portion of their members.

Support groups for heterosexual crossdressers have been an important

part of our history, but their very success has made them anachronisms. They are bastions of old-fashioned sensibility in an age of pan-gender and pan-sexual sensibilities. As we come as a community to realize that heterosexuality and homosexuality are artificial distinctions placed on sexuality and that manhood and womanhood are artificial distinctions placed on our gender expression, heterosexual-only support groups seem more and more like fortresses which exist primarily to protect their members from the winds of change.

I believe that it is time for organizations for heterosexual crossdressers to face the changing reality of the transgender community, and acknowledge in their mission statements the fact that some of their members are exploring full-time living in women's roles, experimenting with electrolysis, hormones, and plastic surgery, and experimenting with their sexuality — that some of their members are not in fact heterosexual, some are not in fact crossdressers, some are not in fact, even men. It is time for them to stop their heteropocrisy and offer full membership to anyone interested in serving their target population, which is heterosexual crossdressers and their partners. In this way, they will nurture those who are entering the community, yet also give them room to grow. So long as they turn a blind eye to the actual nature of their membership, so long as they profess to serve heterosexual crossdressers rather than their actual membership, they will, despite their best efforts to help their members and to contribute positively to social change, be responsible for artificially dividing the community. CQ

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Homophobia Hurts Us All

by Terry Murphy

At the meeting last month I went out Saturday night with a few of the girls and we went downtown to one of them gay bars? There was all kinds of men in there and they were kissin' each other and dancing together. I mean, it just made me uncomfortable. Hey, I'm all for everyone doing what they want and all, but damn, I mean there was two of them in the corner of this bar? And they were really going at it. You know, making out like? God, I couldn't stand it.... You know, I don't like it when all those crossdressers are always goin' into the gay bars. I mean, they're givin' people the wrong impression. They might think we're gay."

This was part of a real conversation I had with a member of Sigma Epsilon, the Atlanta chapter of Tri-ess. And I've been privy to any number of similar conversations with professed hetero crossdressers in my years as an out member of the gender community.

The prevalence of homophobia within Sig Ep and the larger gender community is disturbing to me. It's wrong and contrary to our own best interests. I think we need to evaluate our collective attitude towards homosexuality.

Here's a news flash for all of you who concur with the above sentiments: The overwhelming majority of people — whether straight, bi or gay themselves — assume that any person they perceive to be a man in drag is gay. Get used to it.

In my humble opinion, I'd like all you male-to-female transgenders (and that includes everyone who considers him or herself to be a straight crossdresser) to consider the idea that being taken for gay because you are wearing a dress isn't a tragedy. If you think otherwise, you might want to re-examine your attitudes, especially regarding

your comfort level with your own sexuality. Heterosexuals who are confident in their sexual orientation, whether crossdressers or not, are not consumed with fear that they will be mistaken for gay by strangers.

On the other hand, mental health professionals, never mind the average gay man or lesbian, will confirm that those who are most paranoid about being mistaken for gay are very often confused about their own sexuality. Frequently, such a person becomes defensive in the extreme when their orientation is called into question. I wince every time I hear a Sig Ep girl insecurely and defensively hammer away at the "We're-all-straight" party line throughout a conversation. I've heard members heartily assure their outreach conversation partner that they'd deck any man who even tried to put the moves on them.

I wince a lot.

One Saturday evening during a Sigma Epsilon meeting weekend, I was engaged in conversation with a very cute born female in the bar of the hotel at which the group was meeting. She was there with an older woman who, she explained, was her mother, a semi-regular at the bar. During a very glib and interesting conversation, she revealed herself to be lesbian. Naturally our chat got around to gender bending in general and the Sig Ep group in particular. She was curious and I enjoyed answering her questions. I explained that Sig Ep was a support group for hetero crossdressers. She cut me off, saying, "I know. My mom was telling me she's met a bunch of y'all and every time she has a conversation with one of you, the first thing out of their mouth is, 'I'm straight.'" She laughed, as did I, and she continued with a wink, "Methinks the lady doth protest too much!"

Indeed. The standard refrain amongst many Tri-Ess crossdressers doing outreach with straight and gay people zeros in on the assertion that crossdressers are OK and not to be feared or shunned because "the overwhelming majority of crossdressers are straight." The implication, and it's none too subtle, is that anyone who is not straight is not OK.

First of all, this is deeply offensive to any gay person and there's a fairly good chance that any overweight, slightly ruffled salesman or cheerful,

vacationing woman that you might meet in the hotel lobby bar on any given weekend night might be gay. Something to think about.

More importantly, I'd like to suggest there are two evils at work when we defensively insist upon the heterosexual purity of crossdressers: 1. It's homophobic and supports the fear and oppression of gay people, and therefore the oppression of all transgenders as well; and 2. It's not strictly true and thereby undermines the credibility of the gender community in our efforts to win full civil rights.

As to the first, our otherness, our deviation from the norm in dress, puts all transgenders squarely in solidarity with homosexuals. As we all know, much of the public unhesitatingly lumps us in with them anyway, and, in all honesty, transgenders have much in common with gays that has nothing whatever to do with sexuality per se.

We're born in the closet, just as gay people are. Many of us live in mortal fear that our loved ones, neighbors and coworkers might discover our secret nature and reject us, just as many gay people live the same way. We struggle to understand of our own nature and search for the courage to emerge into society and be accepted for ourselves, just as gay people do. And we are sometimes the subject of public scorn, beatings, murder and other hate crimes, just as gay people are.

Our struggle for acceptance parallels the gay civil rights movement and we need to stand with that movement, not against it. When being gay is unremarkable, then, and only then, will being a crossdresser — straight, bi or gay — also be unremarkable. Constant attempts to differentiate crossdressers or other transgenders from gay people does conscious harm to homosexuals and unconscious harm to ourselves.

My second point addresses the key question: Who is gay? I would like to suggest that the answer is not an entirely simple one.

The simple truth is that within the community of transgendered people, there are those male crossdressers who are exclusively attracted to women as sexual partners. Tri-Ess was founded to serve their specific needs, and I think that's great.

It is also true that are people who

identify as members of both the transgendered and gay community and, for the most part, they must find their comfort and support outside a Tri-Ess chapter.

More to the point here, there are also people in Tri-Ess groups, often popular and active members, whose understanding of their own sexuality is clouded by their gender conflict. Still others belong to that hetero-only slice of the gender community but remain in the closet regarding their real sexual orientation. It is folly to pretend otherwise; there are many crossdressers who profess to be straight (or simply allow it to be so assumed) who are physically attracted to men and/or other transgenders.

Crossdressers are out of the ordinary. Being extraordinary in this way is something to celebrate. It's also something that causes the average Joe on the street to make some assumptions about with whom a crossdress sleeps (or with whom they desire to sleep). If you are assumed to be gay, how wrong is that assumption?

Another anecdote. As a Sig Ep meeting was breaking up one weekend, myself, a Sig Ep member and an out-of-town visitor were saying our Sunday good byes in a deserted parking lot. We were dressed as men. Hugs were the order of the moment and as the visitor started to embrace the other Sig Ep member, the intended recipient reacted physically. He pushed the would-be hugger, darted glances in all directions and acidly spat out this verbal defense, "Hey! None of that. No!"

Recovering somewhat, brushing imaginary fairy dust from his jacket, he elaborated, "Someone might think we're gay." The scene now shifts... it's a month later in the bar of the hotel, Saturday night. The homophobic member sashays in dressed to the nines and looking great. I'm sitting at a table with some friends and compliment her on her appearance as she approaches. "Maybe I'll catch me a man tonight," she drawled, passing by and disappearing into the crowd.

In that moment, did she so completely give in to the fantasy of being a woman that the pursuit of a man made her, in the gender hall of mirrors, a heterosexual woman? Did she follow through? Does it matter?

Op-Ed

When Heteropocrisy Comes Home to Roost

by Dallas Denny

There is a longstanding tradition of "making nice" in the transgender community. Disagreements and differences of opinion often don't make it into print. Commendably, the leaders of the various national and local organizations are interested in building community, and wish to present a positive face in their newsletters and magazines. I have played this game as much as anyone else, even when I have had to bite my tongue to keep from opening my big mouth.

Sometimes, however, holding one's silence is morally indefensible. For the good of the community, for the welfare of the individuals who comprise it, and to keep one's own integrity, something must be said. This is one of those times.

In June, 1995, I flew to Houston for the ICTLEP Law Conference. That evening, when I called home to check my messages, the very first one was from a frantic counselor who had called me about one of her clients, who had tried to kill herself with a gun which misfired.

I spent the longest few minutes of my life listening to the rest of the messages to see if the therapist had called back. Fortunately, the emergency was over; my friend had been hospitalized.

It was when this woman (who identified as transsexual, but who enjoyed attending the meetings of the Sigma Epsilon group and was getting support from them) was told she was not welcome that I knew I could no longer avoid discussing this issue.

Sigma Epsilon is the Atlanta Chapter of Tri-Ess, the Society for the Second Self, an organization for heterosexual crossdressers. Since the departure of Linda Peacock, the chapter's wonderful president several years ago, I have watched Sigma Ep go from an open, vibrant organization to its present closeted, exclusionary state.

Terry Murphy fought valiantly to preserve the Sigma Epsilon she loved, but ultimately lost it.

Like a turtle withdrawing into its shell, Sigma Epsilon has pulled back from the larger gender community and purged itself of members who identify as bisexual, gay, or transsexual (except for a select few, like myself, who, as "Friends of Sigma Epsilon," have been allowed to retain our membership. One officer, who came out as transsexual, was told that she could stay because she wasn't "really" transsexual because she remained in a loving relationship with her spouse. Besides, they said, the group really needed her. She resigned in disgust.

In what I can only characterize as arrogant heteropocrisy, Sigma Epsilon has denied that there was a purge; to prove it, the *Southern Belle*, Sigma Ep's newsletter, carried a letter from a transsexual woman who wrote that she had never experienced discrimination at Sigma Epsilon meetings. She has since had SRS, and promptly was informed that she would no longer be welcome at meetings.

What I find almost beyond belief is that at least two of the driving forces in Sigma Epsilon's "reinvention" have serious transgender and sexuality issues. One told me privately that she was planning to live full-time as a woman. She has also propositioned several pre-op transsexual women. It would be all right, she said to one of them, because it would be a heterosexual relationship. "I think of you as a woman."

In the past six years, member after member of the Sigma Epsilon group have come to me privately for advice about hormones, electrolysis, and surgery. More than a dozen members or ex-members are living full-time as women, and some have had SRS. Some have been Sigma Epsilon officers. Two of the members of the Board of

Directors of Tri-Ess National live full-time as women. What is going on here? How can moral, sensitive people delude themselves to the extent that they think they are "heterosexual crossdressers" while wanting and in some cases having what is essentially a sex change?

I've heard and read the rhetoric put out by Tri-Ess and its chapters in an effort to justify their exclusionary position. It's hollow and patently self-deluding, at best, and psychotic at worst, a desperate attempt to rationalize what is ultimately an unjustifiable position.

If no one was being hurt by all the verbiage, I could and would keep my silence. But lives have been and are being affected, and the community is being split because of the action of people who just are not facing up to who they are and what their organization is. I hope that my status as a friend of Tri-Ess and Sigma Epsilon does not require my continued participation in the delusion.

Tri-Ess is not really an organization of and for heterosexual crossdressers. It is an organization with a membership and a leadership which contains a significant number of underground transsexuals and bisexuals. Those who are willing to lie about their gender and sexual issues and those who for all practical purposes have a sex change but describe themselves with the words "heterosexual crossdresser" are welcome; while those who are honest about their issues or use other terms to describe themselves are shown the revolving door. The organization is based on a fundamental deceit.

It's high time for Tri-Ess to stop proclaiming loudly that it is what it is not and that it is not what it is. It must either open its ranks to all who would support its goals or enforce its present membership criteria honestly and impartially. I'm hoping for the former.

If a self-professed crossdresser has had sex with one man, does that make you gay? Three? Six? If you've never had sex with a man, ever, and yet you sometimes fantasize about it, are you gay? If as a teenager searching for your identity and some intimacy, you had sex with a couple of men, but never again over decades of married life, are you gay? If, when you are dressed, you enjoy flirting with men, seek their compliments upon your appearance and joke about dating them, yet never actually have sex with them, does that make you gay? Does the simple act of putting on a dress and placing yourself in the role of a woman make you gay?

Besides childbearing, a romantic relationship with a man may be the ultimate expression of heterosexual femininity; does pursuing every aspect of that femininity up to but excluding that final act make us gay? A little gay? Can you be a little gay? And what about unconventional sexual activity and intimacy?

If you commonly kiss other crossdressers hello and good-bye, does that make you gay? (From the many firm handshakes I've been offered at Sig Ep meetings, apparently there is something unsettling here.) What about kisses from openly gay admirers? Does dancing with a gay man at a bar make you gay? What about that one time you went out to the parked car (or wherever) with a man and he got his hand up under your skirt as you kissed him? Does that make you gay? Does the thrilling memory of that encounter and the sexual arousal it stimulates make you gay?

What about transvestite pornography? Lords knows it's widely available throughout the community (in fact, some of it is written, published and sold by icons of heterosexist crossdressing). If you masturbate while reading overtly (or even subtly) homoerotic TV porn, does that make you gay?

Well, in this world of identity politics, the short answer is, No. Politically speaking, the only people who are gay are those who say they are or who are identified as such by some untoward official procedure.

For instance, the married country-western singer is straight until the day he is arrested for soliciting sex in a gay cruising area. (And, if he performs a

reasonably tearful confession to alcohol abuse on the Nashville Network while professing a new-found closeness to Jesus, purported heterosexuality can be restored.) Similarly, the Republican congressman is presumed to be straight until the day he is busted for performing fellatio on a House page in a Capitol men's room.

Thus, since the majority of gay men and lesbians are perfectly ordinary in appearance, they are assumed to be straight and many allow that assumption to work in their favor on the job and in other life situations, even if they are completely openly gay in their private life. After all, it's fairly awkward to bust into the casual heterosexism of everyday encounters by asserting one's homosexuality. Some out gay people do it with subtle language cues or jewelry, or more overtly with blunt assertions.

Conversely, transgendered people, for the most part, are visibly queer and most people assume us to be "gay" on sight because we don't look like other "straight" people.

Thus, ironically, a born male crossdresser who is exclusively attracted to born females can be judged to be a self-loathing homosexual in denial about his attraction to men by the smirking habitué of a gay bar who himself is exclusively homosexual in orientation but who carefully nutures a facade of heterosexuality in his business life.

What a strange world we live in! It is a place full of irony and paradox produced by our cultural bent toward bi-polar thinking. One is either liberal or conservative, black or white, gay or straight.

There seems little room in this bi-polar scheme for those who are in between; transgenders, bisexuals, asexuals and the intersexed chief amongst the left-outs. And, when it comes to identity politics, it is quite difficult to claim that you are in-between or not sure or that your sexuality is fluid. The undecided are the most disrespected of all, by gays and straights alike.

Nevertheless, this is where we all fall. Regardless of who floats our boat sexually, we are in the middle; men, women and others of shifting or uncertain gender and therefore, by definition, uncertain sexuality.

It is my modest proposal that we abandon the spurious Tri-Ess "overwhelming majority" party line. It's not true and no one believes it.

We are far better served, I believe, by owning up to our differentness, regardless of with whom we have sex and with whom we partner ourselves for life. It's healthier, more honest and builds credibility for the entire community to place ourselves in that wide middle ground.

The next time the male-to-female transgenders among us are asked about their sexuality (and we all know how quickly that comes up in any outreach conversation), I suggest that they respond truthfully.

If it's true, say, "Well, I'm exclusively attracted to women, but obviously I'm transgressing gender and I realize that makes others question whether I'm repressing a desire for men or have created some sort of part-time lesbian identity, but I'm comfortable with my sexuality and I'm also OK being associated with the queer (or alternative) community.

If it's true say, "Well, I'm married to (or partnered with) a woman. I love her and I love our life together and I'm monogamous, but I've had experiences with men in the past and I'm comfortable with that."

If it's true, say, "Well, I'm attracted to women and to men. In fact, I'm sort of partial to other crossdressers (or transsexuals or whatever). I guess that makes me a bisexual, or a trisexual. What do you think about that?"

And, if it's true, say, "Why yes, I am gay. How about buying me a drink?"

The point is that all of us are in this together. Linked as we are by our extraordinary behavior, regardless of our sexual orientation, all of us—intersexed people, FTM transsexuals, gay men, hetero crossdressers, bisexual women, gay drag queens, exclusive lesbians, bisexual MTT transsexuals, whomever—are all best served by working for a world that welcomes gay people to table. Don't be mistaken, when the gender community calls ahead to confirm its own spot at the same table, the reservation will be listed under "the Queer party" and we'll be seated right next to our gay brothers and sisters.

Right this way, folks... CQ

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Out of the Broom Closet, Up, Up, & Away

by Diana Chase-Hunt

The night Superman and Lois Lane returned from their honeymoon, the night before Lois resumed her *Daily Planet* duties, the happy couple decided to spend a quiet evening curled together on their Kryptonian Super-bed, happy just to be home in their plush apartment atop the Baxter building. "Honey," purred the bride, "will you do something for me?"

"Anything, Puss. Want another diamond?" He grabbed a piece of coal from the bucket beside the bed.

"No, nothing like that." She paused. "It's just a ... question."

"Sure," said Superman. But his hand no longer roved her back.

She smiled. "What's your secret identity?" The Man of Steel stiffened. Did I do something bad? thought Lois.

Her husband's forefinger straightened the spicurl on his forehead. "I'm really Clark Kent," he said.

"What?"

"Clark Kent," repeated Superman.

"No, said Lois. "No, you're not Clark Kent." She shook her head.

"But Honey, you've suspected for years." He touched her shoulder; she twisted away. "What's wrong?"

Lois swallowed. "Nothing."

"Don't tell me nothing. Something's wrong. What is it?"

"You can't be Clark Kent," she blurted. "He's such a creep." Now Superman pulled away and sat very still, his hands together. "Everyone laughs at him behind his back. Didn't you know that?"

"No, I didn't know that."

Lois squinted. "You're not upset?"

"Well, how would you feel if your wife just told you everyone laughed at you behind your back?"

"Not you," said Lois, feeling desperation climb her throat. "Clark Kent."

"That's me!" shouted Superman.

"You're Superman!" shouted Lois. She looked and saw her husband huddled against the bedboard like a spanked child. "Let's forget about it," she said. He just sat there. She moved closer to press his head against her breasts. "Come on," she said, "it's not important. This is still our honeymoon."

His voice drifted up. "You like Clark Kent, don't you?"

"Of course," she blinked. "I've always liked Clark Kent."

The next morning, when Lois woke up, she discovered herself alone. A note taped to the medicine cabinet said, "You-know-who has to be seen leaving his apartment. See you later. I love you madly, Superman."

When she arrived at the Daily Planet, the whole gang — Perry White, Jimmy Olson, hugged her, squeezed her, kissed her cheeks. "Hey," cried Jimmy, "kiss the bride, me first." He winked. "I can say that, you know, 'cause I'm his pal."

Perry wiped away her tears. "Come on, kid, none of that."

Suddenly, a high tenor slapped her ears. "Lois! Good to see you can still stand. How's the ..." he chuckled. "Rod of Steel?"

"Oh, Christ," Jimmy muttered.

Lois focused on the owlish face. "Hello, Clark," she said, in a flat voice.

"How's Krypton rubber, Lois?"

Perry made a face, as if to say, what can we do?

"Hey," said Clark, "you better make sure there's no Kryptonite in the feminine hygiene spray."

"Clark, will you shut up?" snapped a secretary.

"All right, all right," Clark muttered. He sulked away. Panic hurried Lois through the crowd; it clamped her lungs until she gained the ladies' room, where she could hover over the sink as she let out her breath. "It's okay," she whispered. She wished they had a soundproofed stall so she could scream.

That night, in bed, writhing to her husband's mighty thrusts, Lois felt the world slide right-side-up again. She didn't even mind that he never took off his cape, for the red material shielded them like a canopy. "It's okay," she told herself when Superman went off to piss.

"He's my husband, and I'll stick up for him." Later, they flew to Hong Kong for fried duck and water cress.

For the next few weeks, life bubbled happily. At work, her busy schedule helped her avoid Clark. And at home, her new husband would be waiting for her. All those years of lonely masturbation, while she pictured Super's hidden marvels— now she had the real thing, and if Supertool wasn't quite as overpowering as she'd always assumed, she did find his unexpected tenderness so comforting. Besides, there were so many things they could do. Once, they made love while flying backwards 'round the television. Another time, Super brought her off just by heat vision tingling her nipples, and super breath twiddling her labia majora.

As for Superman, he felt proper for the first time in years. At last, he was using his indestructible glands the way a man was meant to do. No more furtive fantasies. Sometimes he thought about the night before the wedding, when he'd masturbated while changing back and forth from Clark Kent to Superman. He'd been so scared he'd drain himself. All that was over now. Now he had a real live lover, not just as suit of clothes. Those times during the honeymoon, when only Clark thoughts could bring an erection— they were just the final fetish traces oozing out of him.

Weeks passed. Then one day Metropolis Bridge collapsed and an urgent call went out for Superman. Seeing Clark slide towards the broom closet, Lois scampered after him. "Take me with you," she whispered. "I want that story."

"What are you talking about?" gasped Clark. "I'm not going anywhere. I feel so faint." He moved away. "I'd better sit down."

Lois bolted from the office. Downstairs, desperately seeking a cab, she watched the man-like form streak across the sky. Someone laughed. "It's a bird, it's a plane ..." Lois thought, "It's my son-of-a-bitch husband." Still, she did get there, she did witness Superman saving several hundred lives by holding up the bridge and welding the beams with X-ray vision. However,

when she tried to interview the bridge-workers picketing the rescue, they only sneered, "It's Superscab's wife," and turned their backs.

Lois dashed back and slammed her pocketbook down on Perry's desk. "Here it is, Chief," she said. "The whole rescue."

"Forget it, Lois," said the boss. "Clark beat you to it." Surprised, he watched her gouge her palms. "Just 'cause he's your husband, you can't get all the scoops."

Next door, Clark was eating an egg sandwich. Lois thought, I ought to shove it up your nose. "So you felt faint," she said.

"I guess I just perked up," smirked the timid journalist.

That night, despite Superman's fear that Lois would lock him out of the apartment, the newlyweds spent a quiet evening on the couch, cuddled together while Superman showed slides of Krypton's explosion. Later, in bed, the little finger of steel curled a tiny S on Lois' mons veneris.

But now the bride looked distracted, and even uncomfortable.

Superman dropped his hand. "Is something wrong?"

"No," sighed Lois. However, when he husband began a slow oozing kiss, her lips curled away and she offered him her cheek. "Honey?" she probed.

"Yes, lover," cooed Superman.

"Sometimes ..." she hesitated. "Sometimes I wish you'd be more ..." Now she stopped completely.

"More what?" snapped Superman, surprised at the resentment that bittered his voice.

"Well, more forceful." Superman sat up; he watched the cage across the room where Kryptonian hermaphrodite monkeys squirted green semen at each others' facial orifices. Lois continued, "A woman likes to feel overpowered sometimes. Not all the time."

Now she wished she hadn't said anything, the way he just sat there.

Christ, thought Superman, fingering his flaccid whimwham. What did I do? Christ. He felt so scared she'd leave. Then he'd be all alone, just him and Clark. He thought about Clark's closets full of crumpled suits, the drawers

of baggy BVDs. Immediately, a huge erection jabbed the air. His hand reached out automatically, while glasses, capes, BVDs and telephone booths shimmered in the monkey sperm. No, he thought, it's not natural. The Tower of Steel toppled. He thought, I'll have to tell her.

He turned around to see Lois hunched on the bed, her hands between her knees. "I'm sorry," she said.

This is my chance, he thought. Maybe I can turn her on to it. That's it, he realized. She just sees the unnatural part. She doesn't realize how much fun it is.

"Honey?" He stroked her leg.

"Yes?" She didn't look up.

"Did you ever think about how much fun it could be? I mean my having two identities." Lois' teeth were chattering; when she clamped her mouth, her whole body shivered, and Superman wrapped his cape around her. "Just think of me putting on regular pants over my tights and a shirt and tie on over my cape. Then I go around town and everyone despises me and says how weak I am, such a scarred rabbit, but then I sneak off and take a deep breath and pow, off come the Clark clothes, and I'm Superman! The Man of Steel." Lois said nothing. "Isn't it sexy?"

"Sexy?" She turned to scrutinize his face, then quickly turned away.

"Sure, two people completely different, but the same body."

"But it's just a change of clothes."

"That's the whole idea. And nobody in the whole world knows but you and me." That's not true, he thought. Batman knows. In fact, Superman had often fantasized about Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne changing clothes together. But I'm not a faggot, he thought. And besides, Batman lately gave him the creeps, all that "Creature of the Night" stuff, skulking in the shadows with his cloak wrapped around his tights like some filthy exhibitionist. I may not be normal, thought Superman, but Batman's really sick.

"I just don't understand," whined Lois. "I waited so many years to marry you. Why can't we just be happy?"

"But we can. Just try it." He ran to get Clark's clothes from where he'd

hidden them above the shower. While Lois stared, he jerked on the soggy pants — and stopped. "I've got a great idea," he said. "You wait here."

Lois sat nearly paralyzed on the bed, until a moment later she heard the doorbell ring. When she opened it, feeling like a robot Lois, Clark Kent was there.

"Hi, Lois. Thought I'd drop in and see the happy couple." His eyes were glazed behind the glasses.

"Come in," she croaked, staring at the huge erection pushing his fly.

After a moment of standing in the living room, he whispered, "Now you scream, 'Help, a monster!' or something like that."

"Help. A monster."

Clark whispered. "This is a job for Superman." Out loud, he said, "A monster? Oh, I'm scared. Oh, I've got cramps. Where's the bathroom, Lois?" She fluttered an arm and he hobbled off.

A moment later the indestructible penis punched a hole in the bathroom door. Suddenly, Lois was on the living room rug with her husband madly kissing and licking her naked body.

Afterwards, while they drank orange juice and smoked Turkish cigarettes, Superman said, "See? It's not so horrible. It's sexy."

"I guess so," said Lois. "Do we have to do it that way all the time?"

"Of course not. It's not like I have to make love that way. Just sometimes. When we feel like it."

Lois, of course, never did feel like it, and Superman compelled her only every other week or so. With silent agreements, they worked out an uneasy routine. At work, Lois resumed an outwardly normal friendship with her husband's alter ego; she even managed to laugh along with everyone else at cowardly Clark. After a while, she didn't even care; as long as people admired her real husband, they could say what they liked about Clark Kent.

But of course, the whole while the couple pursued domestic complacency, they each felt it slipping faster and faster away. Superman made more and more excuses when Lois thrust her body at him. Once, terrified of impotence, he claimed he smelled Kryptonite gas in

the air conditioning and leaped out the bedroom window.

At the same time, Lois was sure Superman could give it up if only she could make him understand that Clark just wasn't necessary. "Look at all the superheroes who get by without a secret identity. Look at Aquaman."

"Listen, Lois," sneered the Action Ace, "if you knew about Aquaman's sex life, you wouldn't talk." Lois sighed.

The day they were married seven months, Lois raced home early from work. While Superman's favorite dish, Kryptonian bean curd, simmered on the stove, Lois bathed and sprayed herself with fragrant Vietnamese perfumes. Quickly, she donned her most gossamer black negligee and her best Fredericks of Hollywood open-crotch panties.

Just in time. Her hair spray was hardly dried when she heard the front door open and close. Humming "That's Why the Lady Is a Tramp," she glided into the living room.

"Hi, Lois," said Clark Kent. "Oops. Hey, sorry, I didn't mean ... Old Supe gave me the key, you know, said I should drop in."

Lois screamed, "You creep!" She threw a vase at his indestructible face. "Creep! Creep!"

"Hey, I said I was sorry," Clark said, dodging 'round the couch.

"Get out!" screeched Lois. "Creep! Jellyfish! Get out!"

"I'm going, I'm going," shouted Clark. He bolted out the door, and Lois ran to kick it shut behind him.

As he flew in the window, Superman saw his wife crying on the couch. Tenderly, he wrapped his mighty arms around her.

"Get away, you creep," she snapped.

The Action Ace jumped up. "It's me, Lois, it's not Clark."

"I don't care. You're still a creep. Why did you do that?"

"I thought it would be fun."

"Fun!"

"All right, all right, I'm sorry," said the Man of Steel.

"But this is our anniversary," Lois sobbed.

"Well, it's my anniversary, too."

Lois stared at him. "What does that mean?"

"Well, why does it always have to be what you want?"

Right then the special radio above the mantle beeped. "Calling Superman! Calling Superman! Justice League of America calling Superman! Urgent!"

"Christ," said Superman. "Listen, Lois, I gotta scram." He pecked her on the cheek. "Up, up, and away!"

Bleakly, she watched him disappear.

The Justice League mission, which concerned extraditing Flash from a land swindle, lasted three days. Before the gang broke up, Superman called Wonder Woman aside. His face hopefully mask-like so the others wouldn't notice, the Man of Steel told the Amazon, "I wonder if I could speak to you in private."

"Merciful Minerva," said Wonder Woman. "Sure. We could have my robot plane circle the Himalayas." Her hard nails stroked his arm.

While the plane described tricky Immelmans, Superman, haltingly at first, described his marital difficulties. "And I figured," he finished, "you know more about pleasing women than anyone I know. So I was hoping maybe you could give me some advice. I just don't know what to do. I mean, I know it's unnatural, but the more I try to hold Clark down, the more I think about him."

"Sufferin' Sappho!" exclaimed Wonder Woman. "What does 'unnatural' mean, anyway?" Superman stared at her.

"You've met my mother, right?" she asked.

"Your mother said that?"

"Uh, hun, couldn't hack it at all. So one day I sat her down and I said to her, 'This word unnatural. It doesn't mean anything. It's just a word.' I told her to stop worrying about a word and just enjoy herself."

"I tried to tell Lois how much fun it is. She won't listen."

"Leapin' Lebos. That's because she's hung up on that stupid word. You, too. Forget about natural and unnatural."

"You really think it would work?"

She playfully punched his arm. "Sure. She loves you, doesn't she? You just tell her if she really loves you, she'll

take you the way you are."

Superman nodded grimly.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Superman was also seeking advice from the only person she could really trust. Standing before the full-length mirror in the bedroom, Lois said, "It's really much simpler than it seems. He's just got to realize how unnecessary it is. It's probably his parents' fault, his foster parents. They didn't want their child to be a freak, so they raised him as a normal boy. But now they're dead. He's probably never thought about it before. Probably, he just needs a shock, some good jolt that will make him see how ridiculous it all is." She moved closer to examine the lines below her eyes. "It's for his own good," she pleaded.

Before he went home, Superman spent the night at his Fortress of Solitude, where he paced 'round and 'round his trophy display. Finally, he flew back to Metropolis, arriving just in time to slip behind the Daily Planet building, where he changed to Clark behind some garbage cans, then entered through the cellar.

The moment Clark stepped out of the elevator onto the twenty-eighth floor, a shrill voice screamed, "There he is!" A great mass, the whole Planet staff, it seemed, pressed him against the wall.

"Leave me alone," squeaked the timid journalist. "Let go of me, you'll hurt me." The mob burst into such uproarious laughter that, in fact, they did back off, just to throw back their heads and clutch their sides.

"What a gag," someone said. "Us hurt him. What a joke."

"Just like Old Jellyfish," Jimmy Olson laughed. "No wonder he kept us fooled so many years."

Beyond the crowd, Clark spotted Lois, standing like a stiff old tree. Her arms hung limply, and one hand clutched a copy of the Daily Planet. As he stepped towards her, the crowd drew back.

"Lois," said Clark, "What's going on? What did I do? All those people—"

Then he saw the paper, the huge banner headline: "Clark Kent the Man of Steel: Mrs. Superman tells all."

"No!" whispered Clark. "No, you didn't!" The crowd fell silent; embarrassed looks passed back and forth.

"It's for your own good," said

Lois. "Really it is."

"NO!"

"Hey, Jimmy," said Perry White. "You're his pal. You better do something."

"Right, Chief," nodded the cub reporter manfully. He walked gingerly over to Clark, who stood staring at the newspaper. "Take it easy, Supe," he said. He touched Clark's shoulder.

The hand of Steel slapped Jimmy's freckled face. "Don't touch me!"

"Hey, you chipped my tooth."

"Oh, my god," said Lois.

A crafty smile twisted Clark's mouth. "I didn't do that," he said. "I'm just a weakling. Must have been the wind. Or an earthquake. That's it — an earthquake."

"Honey," said Lois, "let's go home."

"An earthquake," cried Clark. "This is a job for Superman." He spun around. "A closet, a closet, where's a closet?"

Lois took a deep breath. "Over here, Clark," she called. "Behind this desk." She bent down behind a reporter's metal desk. "No one will see." Clark crouched down beside her. Very slowly, his stiff fingers fumbled off his clothes. At the end, Lois took of his glasses and combed the spicurl down his forehead.

The Action Ace leaped to his feet. "Hi, folks," he said, striding out to meet his friends, the Daily Planet staff. "Where's the little woman?"

"I'm here, honey," said Lois. She stepped beside him, and he put his arm around her.

"Well," said Superman, "I guess everything's in hand around here." His keen vision spotted the blood flecks staining Jimmy's mouth. "Hey, little buddy, had a scrap, huh?"

It's okay," Jimmy mumbled.

Affectionately, Jimmy squeezed his wife, who braced herself against the pain. "What do you say we head for home, kid?"

"Sure."

He cradled her in his arms. "Maybe Clark Kent can drop in for a visit."

"Yes," said Lois. "Maybe he will."

"Up, up, and away!" shrieked the Man of Steel. And the happy couple flew out the window. CQ

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I grew up knowing I was different from all the other little boys. My parents bought me trucks and sports stuff, but I desperately wanted to play with dolls. I loved dressing up in my mother's wigs and hats. My family thought I'd grow out of it. When I was five, I really hated being a boy. I was mad that I couldn't wear dresses or play with dolls.

"When people would come over, I'd want to brush their hair. By age seven, I'd stay home when my family went out and raid my mom's closet. I'd cry myself to sleep, praying that I'd wake up a girl. It was awful."

The above is a composite taken from the tabloid paper Weekly World News, which frequently features sex-change stories. It certainly bears little resemblance to my story, or the stories of many other transsexuals. I have no recollection of wanting to be a girl before about age eleven or twelve. I didn't particularly want to be a girl, or think I was one, when I was a small child. I didn't play with dolls, but rather liked my guns and trucks. I didn't look naturally like a girl; I had to work at it. I never attempted suicide, or even seriously considered it. I didn't particularly hate my genitals, although I found them inappropriate. I was attracted to women, and rarely to males. All in all, I have little in common with the transsexuals in the articles from which I constructed the composite. And yet I am years post-transition and post-surgery, passable, with no regrets, and one of the individuals on which the above composite was based has stated that she made a terrible mistake.

What is a "true" transsexual? Does anyone really know? Is there some sort of specialness about "real" transsexuals which differentiates them from others who merely change their sex? Was transsexualism discovered, or invented? Is it a condition of ancient origin, or, as Sandy Stone (1991) has implied, an identity, a script which can be learned, studied, and conformed to? — Ed.

Q: What's the difference between a terrorist and a transsexual?

A: You can always negotiate with a terrorist.

— Transgender Community Joke

In Search of the "True" Transsexual

by Dallas Denny

Although transsexualism and crossdressing have been widely viewed as mental disorders in contemporary Western society, transgendered (i.e., transgressively gendered, what we might today call transsexual or crossdressing) people in any number of cultures other than our own have filled established social roles in which they were viewed sometimes with scorn, sometimes with awe and respect, and sometimes with a mixture of emotions— but not as mentally ill or perverted. Evidence of this can be found in sources as scattered as a seventeenth-century sketch by Theodor de Vrie (reproduced in Williams, 1986), which shows transgendered Tinemuca Indians serving as stretcher bearers; a historical study by Roscoe (1994), in which he shows that emasculated gallas served as priestesses of the goddess Magna Mater throughout the Middle East and Eastern Europe; a Paleolithic cave drawing of a transgendered shaman (Dragoin, 1995); and cross-cultural Nanda, 1989, 1994) and historical (Roscoe, 1990; Williams, 1986) studies.

In Western societies, transgendered persons have not fared well since their socially accepted roles were repressed by early Christians and others (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Roscoe, 1994). For two thousand years, crossdressing has frequently resulted in prosecution, persecution, and even execution (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). With a few notable public exceptions such as the Chevalier d'Eon (Kates, 1995), those with transgender natures either lived quietly and probably unhappily in the gender and clothing of original assignment or as "passing men and women" (Dekker & van de Pol, 1989). Only in the past several decades have transgendered persons felt free to crossdress or crosslive openly, but even in the 1990s, it can be dangerous and even fatal to do so (cf Minkowitz, 1994; Bowles, 1996).

In the nineteenth century, transgendered persons began to come under the scrutiny of Western science; they and homosexuals were

initially characterized as “sexual inverts” (Uhlrichs, 1994). As Richard Ekins points out (Ekins, 1993), transgendered persons were not adequately differentiated from homosexuals until early in this century (Hirschfeld, 1910), and it was not until 1953, when details of Christine Jorgensen’s case were published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, that transsexualism was defined as a clinically diagnosable “syndrome” (Hamburger, Stürup, & Dahl-Iversen, 1953).

The publication of Benjamin’s book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966 legitimized the mid-twentieth century category and identity of transsexualism, in which individuals with a presumed mental disorder called (at least initially) transsexualism use or wish to use medical technologies in order to change their bodies to resemble those of the other sex. [1] Within this framework, sex reassignment came to be seen not as an option that a reasonable individual might choose in order to have a body and gender role more to his or her liking, but rather as a medical treatment, a way to give relief to the suffering of the individual by altering the body because he or she had a mental condition which could not be “cured” by psychotherapy or other traditional means. Even those who dissented did not argue that transsexuals did not have a mental disorder. Their disagreement was in regard to the use of medical technology to modify the body. They contended that the proper way to treat a mental illness was by altering the mind, and not the body; they considered sex reassignment “collusion with delusion” or “collaboration with psychosis,” and argued against it (cf Ostow, 1953; Socarides, 1976; and Wiedeman, 1953).

Considering that the initial center of academic interest in the United States was Johns Hopkins Hospital, where John Money had been working with intersexed persons since the 1950’s (Money, 1991), it is not surprising that the treatment system which arose to meet the needs of transsexual persons and the concomitant terminology which arose to describe them followed this medical model. Under the medical model, transsexual people became not merely presumably competent individu-

als who sought medical intervention to change aspects of their bodies and social roles which displeased them, but, because of the clinical and general societal zeitgeists of the time, patients with a mental disorder; it was incumbent upon medical and psychological caregivers to determine who would and would not benefit from sex reassignment, in which the individual’s body, behavior, and social role were modified as much as was feasible to mimic that of the other sex.

In *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment* (1969), Richard Green and John Money of Johns Hopkins presented a variety of clinical perspectives on the phenomenon of sex reassignment. A number of viewpoints were represented in their book, but later clinicians and researchers narrowed rather than expanded Green & Money’s focus, with the result that the literature came to consist almost solely of papers based on the medical model; other viewpoints rarely if ever made it into print.

During the 1960’s and 1970’s, the process of sex reassignment was viewed as fraught with peril, and was considered best done in a highly restrictive setting under the guidance of an interdisciplinary team which made treatment decisions in the supposed best interest of the patient (Lothstein, 1979a). In actuality, these teams usually actively dissuaded individuals— and especially those who did not fit the characteristics of transsexual people as depicted in the emerging literature— from pursuing sex reassignment; only those most persistent and who most closely fit the clinics’ models of what a transsexual was were offered sex reassignment (Denny, 1992). To this day, many gender clinics continue to place needless and often sexist (Bolin, 1984) requirements on their patients. In a survey of gender programs, Petersen & Dickey (1995) found that some clinics still withhold hormonal and surgical procedures for such things as the “wrong” (i.e. post-transition gay or lesbian) sexual orientation; for inability or unwillingness to pass as a nontranssexual member of the nonnatal sex; and for refusal to adopt a stereotypical cross-gender role and mode of dress (i.e., those who fail the “Barbie” and “Ken” tests). Not uncom-

monly, all treatment is withheld if the individual does not desire (or profess to desire) surgical sex reassignment (SRS) (cf Dickey, 1990)— this despite the commonly acknowledged fact that most transsexual people who transition (i.e., permanently cross gender roles) never, for one reason or another, have surgery.

In 1979, the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) put into place minimal Standards of Care for hormonal and surgical sex reassignment (Walker, et al., 1984). Standardization of treatment was in fact badly needed, but the Standards of Care placed mental health professionals in the unenviable position of having the ultimate say-so about whether the applicant for sex reassignment procedures actually obtained them. A number of writers (Bolin, 1988; Denny, 1992; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stone, 1991) have commented on the unfortunate effect this “gatekeeping” function has had on the therapeutic relationship. The power dynamics inherent when one party (the transsexual) is dependent upon “permission” from another (the therapist) for a highly desired commodity (medical treatment) is hardly conducive to honest communication. The therapist may use this access as a tool for motivating the transsexual client to deal with other issues, or to entice the client into continuing with therapy. The client, on the other hand, will say or do whatever he or she thinks will maximize the chance of obtaining permission for hormonal therapy and surgery.

In my earlier examination of the literature (Denny, 1994), I was struck by the fact that it reflected a curious tunnel-blindness. Despite the fact that as early as 1978, studies by sociologists and anthropologists clearly indicated problems with the medical model (Kessler & McKenna, 1978), the model itself has never been seriously questioned by clinicians. Nor have clinicians, before this decade at least, seemed to really listen to the things transsexual people have been telling them about their lives— their sexuality, their developmental histories, their views of masculinity and femininity (see Devor, 1994, for some interesting data on transgender sexuality which arose

from a sociological study). No one seriously questioned a literature which depicted transsexual people in various unflattering ways which were in actuality reflections of the power struggle which centered around access to medical technology: as untrustworthy and manipulative (Stone, 1977), as inventing their early histories (Knorr, Wolf, & Meyer, 1968), as having highly stereotyped notions of masculinity and femi-

ine appearance, as had been widely reported (cf Althof & Keller, 1980; Kando, 1973). Instead, Bolin found a diversity of personal styles and sexual orientations which paralleled those of a group of nontranssexual women.

But Bolin's most important contribution was her analysis of the client-caregiver interaction. She confirmed the findings of Kessler & McKenna (1978) that the cultural assumptions of

researchers, and transsexual people themselves, much of the clinical literature of the sixties, seventies, and eighties is colored by unfair and untrue assumptions about the nature of transsexual people; by power dynamics in the treatment settings which generated the literature; and by selection criteria which washed out all subjects except the ones who filled the expectations of the authors (Denny, 1992).

It is time to re-examine the basic tenets of the medical model of transsexualism. Should medical technologies continue to be available only to a narrowly defined class of persons called transsexuals, with mental health professionals having the responsibility and privilege of deciding who does and does not qualify to receive it? Should the technology continue to be available only in an all-or-none fashion, with the invariable goal being to produce picture-perfect males with neophalluses and females with neovaginas? Or should it be available, as are other body-sculpting medical technologies, in piecemeal fashion to those who can give informed consent?

ninity (Althof & Keller, 1980; Kando, 1973), as having various characterological and personality disorders (Levine & Lothstein, 1981; Lothstein, 1983), and even as having a propensity for violence (Lothstein, 1979b) and murder (Milliken, 1982). Baker (1969) characterized much of what was said in the literature about transsexual people as "psychiatric name-calling." I myself have noted that the literature is "full of countertransference, which surfaces as name-calling, inaccuracy, misperceptions, opinion posing as fact, humor at the expense of transsexual people, and perhaps even some lies" (Denny, 1993).

Not surprisingly, it was not until someone not directly involved in the patient/caregiver cycle took a careful look at transsexualism that this clinical microcosm was put into perspective. Anne Bolin, a cultural anthropologist, building upon the theories and observations of Kessler & McKenna (1978), studied a group of transsexual women outside the clinical setting. Her doctoral thesis, which was published in 1988 with the title *In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage*, was a participant-observation study of a small group of transsexual women in a city in the Midwest.

Bolin found that many of the clinical truisms did not apply to her subjects. They did not, for instance, have highly stereotyped and exaggerated fem-

caregivers affected the way they viewed and reacted toward their transsexual clients. Bolin charged that:

... inherent in the Standards of Care and in the policy relations of caretaker to client is an inequity in power relations such that the recommendation for surgery is completely dependent on the caretaker's evaluation. This results in a situation in which the psychological evaluation may be, and often is, wielded like a club over the head of the transsexual who so desperately wants the surgery. Such power dynamics often breed hostility on the part of transsexual clients. (p. 51).

The imbalance of power germane to transsexual-caretaker interaction along with transsexual resentment of psychiatric classification as a mental illness has culminated in transsexual hostility and distrust towards caretakers, particularly psychiatrists. Such feelings unfortunately override, and in some ways offset, the great concern and advocacy efforts of many psychiatrists and psychologists. (p. 55).

Bolin's work has had little direct impact on the clinical literature, which continues to rely heavily upon a pathology model. However, by placing the clinical literature in context, she has had an immense impact by pointing out that there are alternative ways to view it. Consequently, to many clinicians,

Science lurches drunkenly onwards, often stumbling, sometimes heading in the wrong direction, but always moving forward. The literature of transsexualism and crossdressing has slowly begun to reflect changing ideas about the nature of transgendered persons. The ideas of social constructionists, who believe that transsexualism is an invention, rather than a discovery (see Birrell & Cole, 1990; Ekins & King, 1995; Hubbard, in press); the criticisms of Janice Raymond (1979, 1994); and most importantly, the emerging voices of transsexual and transgendered scholars (see Boswell, Cromwell, Denny, and J. Green, in press) have resulted in a new zeitgeist, a paradigm shift, if you will, much as happened with homosexuality (Bayer, 1987). As gay men and lesbians have assumed prestigious roles in politics, business, and science with no objective evidence of dysfunction, it has become impossible to portray them as pathetic and mentally ill. Those, like Charles Socarides, who continue to maintain against all reason that homosexuals are seriously disturbed, begin to look seriously disturbed themselves (Socarides, 1996). Similarly, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discount or pathologize transsexuals as they—I should say we—begin the same slow climb to social equality.

In dealing with my own transsex-

The Medical Model

Clinicians from Benjamin onward have noticed that transsexual people are a diverse lot and have looked for ways to distinguish between types. Most commonly, they have differentiated between *primary* and *secondary* transsexualism. The fictitious transsexual at the start of this article would meet the criteria for what has been called in the clinical literature primary transsexualism (Person & Ovesey, 1979a). Secondary transsexuals were considered to be those who gradually develop a transsexual identity in adulthood, after a period of fetishistic crossdressing" (Person & Ovesey, 1979b). Primary transsexuals were attracted to males as sexual partners; secondary transsexuals had a heterosexual history and had often been married and had children. Clinical wisdom held that primary transsexuals were more "naturally feminine" than secondary transsexuals, and made better candidates for sex reassignment (Stoller, 1975). Consequently, those who presented with histories suggestive of primary transsexualism were more likely to be accepted by gender programs than others, as they were considered to be more likely to have successful postsurgical adjustment.

Although men and women had been slipping "across the sex border" (Turtle, 1963) since time immemorial, transsexualism as we know it began only in the 1950's, after the news of Christine Jorgensen's sex reassignment rocked the world. Suddenly, people realized, it was possible to "change sex." Large numbers of men and women began to approach medical professionals, requesting medical treatment to do just that. Before, most had known only that something was going on within them-

selves, but they had no name for their problem; now, there was a new script to follow, and many auditioned for the part.

The publication, in 1966, of Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* formally codified the "syndrome" and its method of treatment:

There is hardly a person so constantly unhappy (before sex change) as the transsexual. Only for short periods of his (or her) life, such as those rare moments of hope when a conversion operation seems attainable or when, successfully assuming the identity of a woman in name, dress and social acceptance, is he able to forget his misery (Benjamin, 1966, p. 66).

Benjamin saw relief for this unhappiness in medical intervention:

Now, it is possible for this desperate human being to be helped. Through surgery and hormonal techniques, transsexuals can be transformed into normally functioning members of the opposite sex. Dr. Harry Benjamin, long-recognized as an expert on sexology and a leader in transsexual treatment, tells you how it can be done (Benjamin, 1966, endplate).

But sex reassignment, as it came to be called, was only for those patients who had been appropriately evaluated, who were mentally stable, and who could pass in the new gender—and, most importantly, for those who were terribly unhappy (pp. 136-137). After surgery, the presumption was one "was" a woman or man, and life would be fabulously improved:

I have found happiness that I never dreamed possible. I adore being a girl and I would go thru 10 operations, if

I had to, to be what I am now. A girl's life is so wonderful. The whole world looks so beautifully different ("H," in Benjamin, 1966, p. 85).

For transsexual people, this process had come to represent the only possible way of achieving happiness. One had but one real choice: to make an 180° change from man to woman, or from woman to man. If one did, if one was "really" transsexual, then everything was fine forever after, as one had "become" a woman or a man. Otherwise, the script called for a miserable life in the original gender, and possibly suicide. And the more the process was popularized, the more transsexuals there were to read for a part in the play.

Very seldom did the transsexuals we interviewed refer to themselves as "transsexual" ... in other words, although they may at one time have been seen as one gender and were not seen as the other, they were never outside one of the two gender categories... they are not changing gender, only correcting a mistake ... (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, pp. 121-122).

This is the medical model of transsexualism, as formalized by Benjamin. One has a *birth defect* and grows up feeling *trapped in the wrong body*. The recognition that one is "really" a girl or "really" a boy comes at a very early age. Childhood is unhappy, adolescence is miserable, and adulthood is a travesty. Eventually, there comes a time when the individual must either *transition or die*. He or she then seeks help from the medical profession, which recognizes his or her misery and grants relief in the form of hormonal therapy and eventual sex reassignment surgery. The results are marvelously successful, unless the individual is not "really" a transsexual, in which case

a *horrible mistake* has been made, For this reason, it is important to rigorously screen candidates for sex reassignment to wash out those who are not *really* transsexual.

Transsexuals quickly learned to give histories which maximized their chance of acceptance (Bolin, 1988; Denny, 1992; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stone, 1991):

It took a surprisingly long time — several years — for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates' behavioral profiles matched Benjamin's so well was the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery (Stone, 1991, p. 281).

Thus, every transsexual was a primary or "true" transsexual. This created an undefined category of wannabees, who were presumably "not-true" transsexuals, unable to benefit from the dramatic life change made possible by the surgery. A number of professional papers were written to help clinicians to screen out these "unsuitable" patients (cf Abel, 1979).

Occasionally a transsexual said something that suggested that he/she was not concerned with displaying some aspect of the natural attitude toward gender. We then found ourselves questioning the "reality" of that person's gender. In other words, we found ourselves wondering whether that person was "really" a transsexual, and "really" a member of of the gender to which he/she claimed to belong. (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 124).

This construction of transsexualism enabled some transsexual people to obtain medical treatment, but at a terrible price to their peers; for every applicant accepted for sex

reassignment, many more were rejected, turned away from their only source of help with instructions to live their life in the original gender. And the ones who were most often accepted were those most willing to falsify their histories to conform to the script provided by Harry Benjamin and his disciples. Those who said they "wanted to be a woman" or "wanted to be a man" were suspect; those who said they *were* women, or *were* men, were acceptable. The thinking was that

Transsexualism is not about adherence to stereotyped notions of masculinity of femininity, or sexual orientation. It is not about passing, and it is not about being dysfunctional, whether that dysfunction manifests as suicidal thoughts, hatred of one's genitalia, or withdrawal from life in general.

the former did not have gender identities which were sufficiently feminine; in actuality, it had much more to do with following the medical model script. Those who were passable because of fortuitous biology, who were skilled with makeup application and hair, who happened to have sparse beard growth, who acted in a highly camp manner, who were attracted exclusively to the same biological sex, who were unable or unwilling to function in the assigned gender role, were much more likely to receive treatment than those who did not look like women or men to the clinicians. Those who were accepted tended to play out, in dress and demeanor, the stereotyped roles of men and women. Internal feelings took a back seat to skill with makeup and other artifice.

It is this "Biff and Buffy" or, as Wendy Parker puts it, "Rambo/Bimbo" dichotomy to which feminists like Mary Daly (1966) and Janice Raymond (1979, 1994) objected. They noted, and rightly, that the medical model of transsexualism perpetuated the

binary gender norms they were working so hard to destroy.

The truth is, there are many ways of being transsexual. Transsexualism is not about adherence to stereotyped notions of masculinity of femininity, or sexual orientation. It is not about passing, and it is not about being dysfunctional, whether that dysfunction manifests as suicidal thoughts, hatred of one's genitalia, or withdrawal from life in general. It is not about going into the woodwork

after transition. And it is not about actually finding the wherewithal to go through with sex reassignment. It is, quite simply, about steadfastly desiring (or identifying with, if you will) the social role and physical characteristics of the "other" sex, whatever one's characteristics or history, and regardless of whether one's physical characteristics and social obligations make transition a reasonable life choice.

Certainly, many transsexual people *do* fit Benjamin's model. But many others don't, and they are no less transsexual than those who do. What they have in common is the fact that their bodies are not to their liking. Whether they choose to interpret their internal feelings as being due to a "birth defect" or as a "desire;" whether they decide to transition; and whether they choose to woodwork or to become political activists makes them no less transsexual. The differences are purely due to politics, and transsexualism, so far as internal feelings are concerned, is not about politics. Transsexualism is, in the last analysis, about identity. CQ

ualism, and in working with hundreds of other transsexual people, it has become clear to me that transsexualism, as conceptualized by Benjamin (1966), is an invented way of looking at a much larger transgender phenomenon, and that the process of sex reassignment, as outlined in Green & Money's 1969 *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*, is but one way of dealing with that phenomenon. Transsexualism has a set of convenient diagnostic characteristics and its treatment (sex reassignment) gives only two choices: remaining in the sex of original assignment or doing everything possible to "change one's sex." There is no middle ground.

Raymond (1979, 1994) and others have criticized transsexual people for perpetuating what she sees as an inherently evil bipolar man/woman-male/female gender system, but her criticism would more appropriately have been directed at the treatment system which insisted that they move from a social role as a man to a narrowly defined role as a woman, rather than taking whatever steps they found necessary to feel comfortable in their own skins.

During the 1990's, and even before, transgendered people have begun to claim this middle ground. Prince (1978) was the first to ask just why it is important for transgendered people to have or claim to want SRS in order to live productively in the desired gender role. Her 1978 talk, given at The Fourth International Conference on Gender Identity, went virtually unremarked. When Boswell (1991) raised the question again, Prince had been living successfully as a woman for more than 15 years, without surgery.

While many transgendered people identify as "men trapped in women's" and "women trapped in men's" bodies and seek sex reassignment, as classically defined, others claim an essential transgender nature, and seek a level of comfort and personal satisfaction which may or may not involve genital surgery or hormonal therapy, and in which they may or may not attempt to "pass" as members of the other sex. For the first time, post-operative transsexual men and women are not disappearing into

the closet of assimilation, but being open about their transsexual status, and adopting appearances and identities which are far from the stereotypes the clinical literature has claimed that they inevitably portray.

It is time to re-examine the basic tenets of the medical model of transsexualism. Should medical technologies continue to be available only to a narrowly defined class of persons called transsexuals, with mental health professionals having the responsibility and privilege of deciding who does and does not qualify to receive it? Should the technology continue to be available only in an all-or-none fashion, with the invariable goal being to produce picture-perfect males with neophalluses and females with neovaginas? Or should it be available, as are other body-sculpting medical technologies, in piecemeal fashion to those who can give informed consent? Must the inevitable result of masculinizing or feminizing surgical and hormonal procedures be to produce a member of the "other" sex with "appropriate" genitalia who will disappear into the greater society, or is it acceptable to produce persons who identify as neither or both sexes, or as a third or fourth sex, or who function in society as men with vaginas or women with penises? Is it necessary or desirable or accurate to continue to depict those who desire the application of such technologies, or who wish to change their social roles from male to female or vice-versa as dysfunctional, pathetic, and unfortunate?

Neither I nor anyone else has definitive answers to these questions, as data have not yet begun to accumulate. But my belief is the Benjamin model of transsexualism has had its day as the sole way to view persons with gender identity issues, and sex reassignment will in the future be but one of many options for them. CQ

Note

[1] Today, transsexualism is lumped with similar "conditions" and classified in DSM-IV as "Gender Identity Disorder" (see Pauly, in press).

See References on Inside Back Cover

Respecting Choice

Feelings can run high (and often do) when identities are built on ideologies. Those for whom the medical model seems appropriate view themselves as women or men with an unfortunate birth defect; sex reassignment offers an opportunity to live a normal life. Those who have undergone a life full of self-doubt and persecution from others — a common lot for transsexual people—cannot be faulted for wanting to find happiness by disappearing into the larger society. Neither should those who acknowledge or are proud of their transsexual status be faulted, or those who desire sex reassignment but make the difficult choice not to seek it. No one has legitimate claim to being more authentic, more "real," more appropriate, more transsexual, than anyone else. What separates the people who make these choices is the way they construct their transsexualism; the force that drives them to change their sex is the same.

It's permissible and appropriate to undergo sex reassignment and put one's past behind oneself. But it's entirely as appropriate to be visible and out. Both are valid choices which can lead to productive lives. Neither choice is "better," except as it affects the individual. Every individual has the right to make one of these choices, or the choice not to seek sex reassignment, or any of an increasing palette of choices which include non-operative status, androgyny, or gender blending.

Those who are undercover will inevitably become frustrated with those who are politically active, for fear that their own security may be compromised. Those who are out will doubtless become frustrated with those who do not help them in their struggle for political change. Those who choose not to have surgery may be frustrated by those who do, and those who have surgery may not understand those who don't. But we all can, and should, respect each other and the choices we make.

What is a gender support group?

Does a support group require its members to adhere to a particular political or ideological agenda?

Does a support group require its members to follow a particular timeline, or move in a predetermined direction?

Does a support group require its members to adopt a particular label?

Does a support group rigidly police its membership, casting out those who are politically or ideologically "incorrect"?

Does a support group define itself according to what its members are not? (i.e., "We are not gay;" or "We are not crossdressers;")

Does a support group stand by its members when they are making difficult decisions? Does it support them in the decisions that are right for them, rather than in the best interest of the support group?

Does a support group stand by its members who are having hard luck or difficult times?

Does the support group make no effort to increase its diversity, refusing to reach out to racial minorities, the poor, the disabled, women, men, straights, gays?

If the answers to any of the above are "YES," then I would assert the group is not a support group, but something else— a place for the sharing of mutual delusions; or a place for the reinforcement of mutual prejudices and dislikes; or a gathering place for the rich, beautiful, social advantaged, and/or passing. IT IS NOT A SUPPORT GROUP.

Support groups help individuals make sense of their lives. They are not places which require particular life decisions.

Exclusions like Sarah's happen every day in "support groups" around the country. Those with sexuality or gender issues are cast out of heterosexual-only groups, those who are not "transsexual enough" are cast out of TS groups.

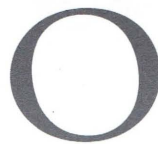
It is a crying, bleeding shame.

I never knew anyone who got fucked up by going through their transition too slowly.

— Sean Marvel, on hearing of what happened to Sarah Wade Smith

A Cup of Bitter Yaupon

by Sarah Wade Smith



Once upon a time, the Creek Nation would prepare a ceremonial "black drink" from the leaves of the Yaupon plant. The purpose of this drink was to purge and purify the tribes' warriors by causing them to empty their stomachs and bowels.

At the moment, I feel like I have had such a drink, for I, too, have been purged.

You see, I recently received a darling note from the president of the transsexual support group I used to belong to, informing me that the group's new membership committee had voted to expel me because I was not, in their opinion, committed enough to my gender change.

In other words, I was not woman enough to associate with them.

I can't say I am alone or unique. At least three other members were expelled at the same time. I also can't say I wasn't expecting it. Three months ago, I went by the house of a friend I had introduced to the group. To my shock, she greeted me by informing me I was longer welcome to visit her because she considered me not transsexual, but a transvestite. Though she insisted she still loved me as a sister, she could now see me only as an obstacle on her own path to complete womanhood.

Ironically, she was one of the others expelled from the group. In her case, since she was living full time, her purging had more to do with the loss of her job and imminent loss of her house; she did not have "stable housing."

On a rational level, when I am being the East Tennessean from Vulcan, I can say that this is laughable. On the emotional level, I am

TSG

6020 Penn Circle South
Pittsburgh, PA 15206

February 29, 1996

Dear Sarah Wade,

At the last meeting of TSG those members present voted to elect a Membership Committee. The purpose of this committee is to set the standards and requirements for membership, as well as evaluate persons applying for new membership. Further discussion on the standards and requirements led to a vote on the appropriateness of several members. It is felt that some members may not be ready for, or may not be at the appropriate level in their transition to fit TSG's mission criteria of, "providing the specialized emotional support needed when a transsexual commits to transitioning to their appropriate gender role."

Those members who are voted to be inappropriate or not ready at this time are now being asked to withdraw from TSG for a period of at least three months. After that time they may apply to the Membership Committee for reinstatement as a member. It is hoped that this action will serve to improve TSG's part in the overall process of transition by encouraging progress and growth, and discouraging excuses and inappropriate levels of change and transition.

It is my unpleasant task to inform you that you are one of the members affected by this vote, and your membership is being suspended until such time as you demonstrate to the Membership Committee that you are ready to rejoin TSG. Your reinstatement will not be considered for a minimum of three months, and we ask that when you do reapply you provide some evidence of renewed commitment to achieving your personal goals in your gender change. Examples of this may be; stable housing; a job or a volunteer position in your new gender; hormone approval; etc. What we are asking is for you to demonstrate a firmer commitment toward your target gender.

This is a BIG commitment, but one which we all must make in order to be a part of TSG meetings and functions. We want people to explore their transgendered feelings, but a setting must be maintained where members may progress, and their progress is not diminished by those not yet having a strong commitment. Progress for all depends on all members being committed to making progress and solving problems for ourselves and each other.

We all wish you success in meeting these minimum criteria for TSG membership.

Sincerely,



not laughing at all. This hurts. Down in the pit of my stomach, it hurts.

There is a scene in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* in which her hero, Jess, makes her first visit to a gay bar and prays, "Please, God, let me fit in here, because it's the only place left I can fit." Right now, I feel like I am Jess and I've just been told, "No, you can't fit here, either." My family feels they don't deserve to have to deal with my gender issue, my ex-lover feels that I am an embarrassment because of my "weirdness," which, she never fails to remind me, will condemn me to a life of loneliness. And now even my fellow transsexuals are telling me they can't stand me, either.

Maybe more shocking than the purge is the remembrance that we formed this group on the wake of a community tragedy. Lauren had had her surgery. Everyone thought that she was all settled into her new life as a woman. However, she had suffered a cruel rejection from her family, was alienated from her former supporters, and had serious money troubles. Her solution was to end her life. If we had one single motive for starting the group, it was "No more Laurens!" Somehow, the group has moved from that ringing affirmation of community to the belief that only the elect are worthy of consideration.

This not a new phenomenon, nor one confined to the gender community. Indeed, the Bible records that when Jesus enjoined his followers to "Love thy neighbor as thyself," the immediate response was "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' reply to this question was to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan; the Samaritans were the most detested of heretics.

Those who adhere to what I have come to call the "Me Jane, you Meathead" mindset would not hesitate to answer the questions, "Who is My brother?" "Who is my sister?" with "Only the primary transsexual who is living full time in her/his chosen gender role. Anyone else is my enemy!" By this definition, any transgendered person who is not actively seeking surgical reassignment is not simply denied a place in the community, but is cast in

the role of an obstacle to those who have the "proper" commitment.

If you think that I exaggerate, I assure you, I have heard those exact words from a transsexual friend on the occasion of her ending forever our friendship. My crime? In order to get medical insurance for my then-wife, who had a heart condition, I had taken a job that involved cutting my hair.

To be honest, to get Guinevere good medical care, I would have sold my soul, let alone my hair. I have no regrets. But, to my friend, the retreat from femininity was unforgivable. If I was not going gung-ho for SRS, then I was holding her back, and that was worth casting me out over.

Of course, by this standard, Virginia Prince, who has lived full-time as a woman for over 30 years, yet has never sought or desired SRS, is the enemy of transsexuals. So is *Cross-Talk* publisher Kimberleigh Richards, and so is Andy Warhol's former superstar, Holly Woodlawn, who once backed out of having surgery. So is Lee Brewster of Lee's Mardi Gras, who fought for transgender rights to dress as they wished, so is JoAnn Roberts of Creative Design Service, and so are Alison Laing and Paula Jordan Sinclair of Renaissance, and so is any poor man or woman who does not have the money to pay for surgery or therapy or hormones.

Suddenly, being transgendered becomes a competitive event. If you are not rich enough or pretty enough or passable enough; if you are making it through transition with your marriage intact; or if you are hesitating because of your love for your girlfriend or boyfriend, then you are not worthy of belonging to our community.

This scares me, and I am not alone in my fear. On page 36 of *Lesbians Talk Transgender*, author Pat Califia notes she is "afraid that the visibility of FTMs will change the definition of what's butch until women will feel that they have to take male hormones to make them masculine enough to be butch... Labels are important to us and we stigmatize women who don't meet our expectations of the roles we have assigned them... I am afraid of not qualifying, not counting, being second rate."

So am I. One of the women kicked out with me had been living in a halfway house where she was not allowed to crossdress. Another had been criticized because she is balding and could afford only a wig, and not hair transplants. All three either lost work or were having trouble locating jobs because of their gender. Now, I cannot recall anyone in the group suggesting where they might apply for work or finding inexpensive ways for them to get their electrolysis. They were judged as second rate because of their failures to solve their problems by themselves.

Frankly, the concept of setting up some litmus test for who is or is not a "real transsexual" strikes me as a tremendously male way of thinking. This is setting up a hierarchy based on who has the most TS points. "Nyah, nyah, I've got more TS points than you do, so I'm more of a woman (or man) and a better person than you are!" Oh, really!

The result of this attitude is that members whose spouses have stuck with them through their gender change do not participate in the group because their lovers are not welcome, while they themselves are pressured to "behave appropriately" by divorcing those they love. Another result is that those members who are most in need of support are cast out in their time of despair, while those who remain find themselves compelled to play out a role or risk rejection themselves.

In her *Transsexual Survival Guide*, JoAnn Altman Stringer notes that only a minority of those who seek surgery will actually have it. Of those who do not, some will live full time as women (or men), but will either not feel the need for sex reassignment surgery or will never have the money to pay for it. Others will discover that as much as they may celebrate their femininity or masculinity, a full-time transition is not really what they need or want in their lives. This is why there is a one-year real-life test before we can get surgery— not to compel us to prove our dedication to being women or men, but to give us the time and experience to be sure that this is not an impulse, and to be sure of what we truly want to do with our lives.

When transsexuals must prove themselves by getting surgery within a specified time, then we create a situation in which it not possible to voice any doubts. To express doubt is, in effect, to exile oneself from the group. If the group is the only supportive force in our lives, then it becomes 'way too dangerous to openly acknowledge any feelings that are "inappropriate." And so we feel pushed into making decisions that may be wrong for us in order to be Transsexually Correct.

Aside from the I hope obvious inhumanity of such rigidity, does it not also seem politically fatuous? We are at best a small minority in a world which seeks to marginalize and even destroy us. What profit is there in taking what little strength we have as a community and splintering it into ideologically pure shards consumed with internal squabbles instead of using it to build coalitions with other oppressed and marginalized communities such as women, gays, Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans? Together, we might have enough strength to actually stop our real enemies.

The Song "The Yew Tree" notes that "When the poor hunt the poor across mountain and moor, the rich man can keep them in chains." When a national transvestite group refuses after thirty years to admit gay crossdressers or transsexuals, no one benefits but Jesse Helms. When gay liberation groups dump the drag queens who have raised so much money for gay causes in order

to protect their image, the only image that gets burnished is Pat Buchanan's. When a lesbian event expels a lesbian woman simply because ten years ago she was a man, only Rush Limbaugh benefits. And when transsexuals hold themselves superior to and do not deign to mingle with mere crossdressers, it's another vote for Pat Robertson.

A well-known Talmudic proverb asks, "If I am not for myself who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what good am I?" Now, I am a feminist and I believe fervently in the sisterhood of womanhood and of MTF transsexuals. How can I call myself a woman and not be for the rights of women? How can I call myself a transsexual and not support the rights of all my brothers and sisters?

We do not build a community by casting out the weak and homely among us. We do not earn respect by sacrificing the outrageous upon the altar of public opinion. We do not strengthen ourselves by walling ourselves off from other minority communities, or by balkanizing our own community into a dozen mutually exclusive ghettos.

Of course, we are a community of very diverse individuals. Many of us have little in common beyond the fact of our gender issue. It is not to be expected that we will all get along well, or even like each other very much. I do not hold myself guiltless in this. On the other hand, I acknowledge that my dislike for certain factions in the com-

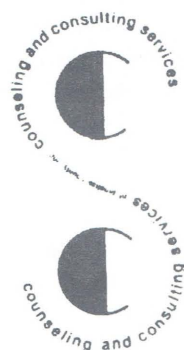
munity is my problem. My not liking someone else's sense of fashion does not give me the right to expel them from a group, nor to define who they are. Everyone is entitled the respect for their personal dignity and their individual needs and tastes.

I believe in trying to help my brothers and sisters in any way I am able. I do not believe it helps anyone when a transsexual who hasn't completed electrolysis or started hormones, who has a great deal of difficulty in passing, is told to prove her transsexuality by going full-time right now and loses her employment and family as a result. Yes, there are transsexuals who have done exactly that and are living fulfilled, happy lives. There are a lot more who have tried doing it that way and are not living happily. Some of them aren't even living at all.

It may be that you feel that those who expelled me are right: that I am a crossdresser, and not transsexual. I don't agree, but you certainly have the right to hold that opinion. Whether you do or don't, remember this: What we struggle for is the right to be who WE say we are, to be who WE feel we are. That is not a license to be indifferent to other people— it is the right to define yourself. When you give anyone, even your transsexual brothers and sisters, the right to define who you are, you give up the right to be true to yourself.

Whatever else, I will be my own woman. CQ

Dr. Judith Meisner, Ph.D., LCSW, LMFT



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- Marital & Sex Therapist
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Gail Sondegaard is the publisher and editor of *Transsexual News Telegraph*. The following is excerpted from her *Voices of Childhood*, another transsexual autobiography.

Q: What's the difference between a crossdresser and a transsexual?

A: About five years.

— Transgender Community Joke

Transsexuals and homosexuals frighten crossdressers. Transsexuals frighten transgenderists. Crossdressers frighten transsexuals. And so it goes.

Do these groups pose a danger to one another? No, they do not. It is, however, human nature to overlook the many ways in which we are similar to others in favor of the small ways in which we differ. We magnify these differences until they seem huge. I think it is a primate thing, a mammal thing, something rooted deep within our DNA.

When someone has an irrational and unreasonable fear of others, there is only one reason— insecurity in their identity. When heterosexual crossdresser groups police their applicants to keep out suspected gays or transsexuals, it is because those in charge have issues in those areas. When transsexuals loudly proclaim that they are different from crossdressers, it is because at a deep level, they know they aren't. When transgenderists who choose not to have surgery argue loudly against those who do have it, it is because at their deepest level, they desire it. When transsexuals insist that only "real" transsexuals have surgery, it is because way down deep, they fear having it or regret having had it — Ed.

Starting to Cross-Live

by Gail Sondegaard

*d*ream last night: I am a woman in my apartment. Outside my door I hear Skyler barking; I also hear Lynn, my downstairs neighbor. "Well, I have to do it eventually," I think to myself. "Lynn," I call out, and open the door. I introduce myself and tell her my name is Gail. We talk for a few minutes. An old woman is walking a small dog in the hallway. She passes us by. Lynn says that the old woman needs a push in the noosh (meaning butt). We laugh like two women sharing a joke. end of dream. (3/29/86)

dream last night: I am in an apartment at night with Martin. I am dressed the way I am at work now, hair pulled back and wearing green sweater vest. I am happily telling Martin how I am going to change my sex. end of dream. (4/1/86)

dream two days ago: I am a woman, driving a car down a country road at night. Another woman, who is in shadows and has the same hairstyle as me, sits in the back, silent. We drive up to a farmhouse with tall trees. It is deathly silent, no wind, still. end of dream. (4/2/86)

By spring, 1986, I lived as a woman all the time except for work. I needed to talk with others about this experience. I wanted the insights that could come only from other transsexuals. I wanted to hear how they coped with living in the world as transsexual women, how they dealt with the problems and harassments, as well as the good times.

There was only one support group in San Francisco at this time. It met once a week at a new age storefront church in the outer Richmond district, eight blocks from the ocean. There was a core group of five people with 10-12 people usually attending each meeting. Some of the people in the group I already knew. Some were post-op. But mainly the group was made up of people like me: young and not-so-young MTF's just starting their transition to living full time as women.

I had not had good experiences in other support groups. No one ever spoke about the troubles we faced, the way the medical establishment jerked us around, the pros and cons of surgery, the problems of passing and the problems of not passing. I was hoping this one would be different.

I was soon disappointed. Everyone tried to paint the sunniest picture possible of their lives, but there was a jarring dissonance between the events described and the way each person said they felt about them. People spoke of families who no longer talked to them or friends who now pointedly ignored them, but invariably described such painful occurrences as insignificant, even laughable. When a woman named Janice cheerfully told how a once-friendly co-worker had turned her desk around so she wouldn't look at her, I had to say something.

"That sounds awful," I timidly said.

"Oh no, it's really funny," Janice replied. She had a happy grin frozen on her face and looked like she was about to cry. "Really, it is." Everyone else in the group smiled at her in support. I said nothing more, but I didn't believe her.

There was a widely held viewpoint at this time that any complaints, criticisms or acknowledgement of bad times meant one shouldn't be cross-living or, at the extreme edge of opinion, that one wasn't transsexual. This pernicious belief was held not only by transsexuals but by many "helping professionals" as well. I knew the world could be quite cruel from the hatred that many people carried for transsexuals. Everyone else knew it, too. But no one talked about this. It left me experiencing emotional pain in isolation, with cold comfort coming only from the ridiculous notion that talking about the difficulties of being transsexual was something to be ashamed of. It made the honest expression of emotional experience so necessary for mental health impossible.

And I was no better than anyone else in the group. I might vent my frustration about this state of affairs in my diary, but never spoke about these feelings when I had the chance. I didn't want to alienate myself from everyone,

as contact with other transsexuals was too important to me.

Most of the talk was about surgery—how soon a person was going to have it, who their surgeon would be, and how, after surgery, each person would no longer need to come to the group. Anyone who still came to the group after surgery was seen as a failure.

My own feelings about surgery were sharply divided. My dreams were alternately filled with positive hermaphroditic images and feelings of anguish about my genitals. I didn't try to reconcile these disparate feelings in waking life. It was easy not to think of them. The long-stifled feelings about my family forced every other thought out of my mind.

I knew enough post-ops to know that the outcome of surgery wasn't always successful. While many of the pre-ops spoke enthusiastically about The Big Surgery Date on their one year anniversary of cross-living full time, almost all of the post-ops I knew, even the ones who had been gung-ho for the surgery as pre-ops, were now subdued when the subject came up. None of my post-op friends actively discouraged me from having surgery, but no one pushed it with their former fervor, either.

I had been lovers with a post-op transsexual woman for about a year. One night, while we lay in bed, Colleen spoke frankly about her surgery.

"I'm lucky," she said. "I can have orgasms, but it just as easily could have gone the other way. The odds of getting a good result are no better than flipping a coin—just 50%. It's a doorway you go through only once, and you can't know what's on the other side until you get there."

"Then why did you do it, if it's that risky?" I asked.

Colleen reached out and put her hand on my cheek. "When you're like us," she said, "it's almost inevitable."

The uncertainty of the outcome of surgery didn't bother me. There were so many variables to consider—how good was the surgeon, for one, or which method one chose, or the differences in each individual's post-surgical care and healing capacities. What did bother me was that no one talked about the uncertainties of surgery or even acknowl-

edged that there was a risk. The surgery was regularly spoken of as if it was no more complicated than setting a broken arm. Whenever the reality of bad surgery came up, it was always someone else's, and dismissed with the remark, "So-and-so just wasn't transsexual."

Some of my feelings about surgery surfaced at one meeting when one lady said she wouldn't be living as a woman if she couldn't have surgery.

"I would," I said. Everyone turned and looked at me. I nervously continued. "If I couldn't have surgery, I'd still live as a woman." This was greeted with shrugs. I have always wondered if I was written off as someone who wasn't "real" in her transsexuality.

But I believed that being a transsexual was more than having your dick cut off. Being a woman sprang from one's nerve endings and muscles. It was a way of being, thinking, and feeling in the world. Being TS was what you were inside, not what surgical procedures you had done to your body. I would always be transsexual and live as a woman until I died, whether I had surgery or not. Hearing someone say they wouldn't live as a woman if they couldn't have surgery made me wonder: if you could live as a man and have your genitals removed, would you still want to live as a woman? What was more important—having your genitals removed, or being a woman?

Achieving surgery as fast as possible was openly encouraged by other transsexuals and, in a more subtle way, by gender therapists and helping professionals. Getting on the surgery treadmill, we called it, because the desire for surgery defined a person as transsexual, and any ambivalence meant you weren't. If you didn't tell the shrink you had a surgery date already scheduled when you started cross-living, you were liable to get your hormones yanked, something I personally could not have lived with. The shrinks had a great racket going: if you wanted a surgery approval letter, you had to see the shrink for a year. At a minimum of \$75 a session for 52 weeks, it amounted to a \$4000 bribe, paid on the installment plan.

I was bothered that many people in the group approached being a

woman as something to be accomplished through money and technology. "Once I've had the surgery, there'll be no going back and I'll have to make this work!" was a common statement, as though being a woman was accomplished by making it impossible to back out. More frequently, surgery was seen as magical transformation: "After the surgery, then I'll feel like a woman, then I'll be feminine, then I'll pass." But if you weren't like a woman before the surgery, you wouldn't be like one afterwards. All the hormones and surgery in the world wouldn't give you an identity you didn't already have.

Transsexuals approached surgery from many different perspectives. Some approached surgery as though it was the ultimate macho trip. Their attitude seemed to say, "I'm so macho I'll even cut my balls off!" while others seemed to encourage surgery out of a spirit of malice, as if they regretted their choice and wanted others to make the same mistake.

Surgery could also be an act of repression. After the surgery, it became irrelevant how you felt about your genitals. The only approach that resonated for me was Colleen's expression of the inevitability of surgery.

A story made the rounds once of a woman who passed quite convincingly to her psychiatrist. At the end of a year he wrote a letter approving her for surgery. What he didn't know was that she only lived as a woman when she went to see him. The other 167 hours of the week she lived male. She apparently believed that after the surgery she would automatically adapt to living as a woman full-time. Cross-living full-time for the very first time was a big shock to her, and rumor had it that she almost checked out. I later heard that she had been sincere in her woman-feelings, but way off on her execution.

But I wasn't even living full-time as a woman yet, and had nothing even close to the amount of money needed for surgery. Most of my thoughts now were

of how to break the news of what I was to my mother, and what I was going to do.

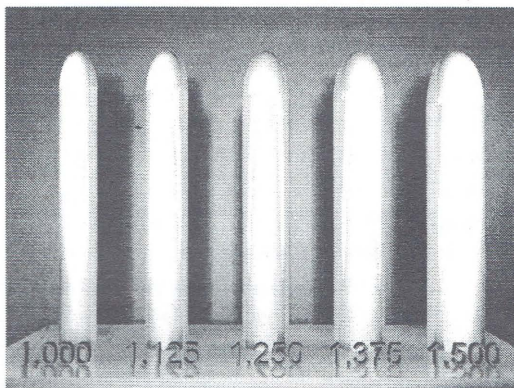
two dreams last night: In the first I am fighting with my mom and dad. It ends when I tell them they are only a dream. In the second, I am in my apartment and every possible opening is blocked— windows, doors are shut, blocked with chairs and tables. There is even a stepladder shoved up a chimney! end of dream. (4/14/86)

dream last night: I am Gail, but feeling lousy-male, trying to get a job in a restaurant. The owner hires me, straight cash, but I can't take the job because I can't put myself out there as Gail. Then the dream shifted. People from work are involved— Agnes, Ed, Malcolm. I am trying to tell Agnes about myself when Ed and Malcolm somehow "know" I'm TS. I freak, become angry, walk out. Ed and Malcolm both call for me to come back but I keep walking. Then I realize I have no place to go, or hide. end of dream. (6/14/86) CQ

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Bits n Pieces

Alice in Genderland

By Kim Elizabeth Stuart

Have any of you taken notice of some ads in recent publications aimed at people interested in gender issues? They read something like this:

Straight male looking for beautiful M-F TS who is very passable. I'll treat you like a lady!

Attractive, Pre-op M-F transsexual looking for an understanding man who will take care of me.

Obviously, some of us still believe in the powers of the Wizard lurking behind the screen; Sleeping Beauty awakens from the prince's kiss, and Winnie-the-Pooh still tries to get at the honey high in the tree by holding onto a balloon and pretending he is just a passing cloud.

I see these ads more and more frequently in print and on the net. What does it all mean? Maybe it means that a lot of male-to-female transsexuals are riding around on the back of the Prince Charming myth. Many a young girl experiences the kind of fantasy I'm talking about. A handsome young man will come riding into her life, sweep her away, and shield her in a cloud of ecstasy from the burden of being responsible for her life.

Unfortunately, too many young girls still become adult women and hang onto these childhood fantasies of a never-never land. The result is rather predictable: A struggling single parent with a broken heart and shattered dreams.

Far too often, male-to-female transsexuals have shared the same fantasies of a make-believe world with their would-be sisters who grew up without the burden of gender dysphoria. Often, the reality of what daylight reveals is more shattering to transsexuals than it is to young genetic women. Transsexuals usually do not have the counsel or parents, other adults, or their peers to temper the childish fantasies, because they know that any sharing of their secrets would probably lead to rejection and ridicule.

As a teenager, I used to love to ride waves at the beach. Fantasies remind me of riding the good waves. They can be full and thrilling and bring us pleasure. But we need to stop short of trying to translate them into real life.

Perhaps the lessons the feminist movement has provided us with in the last few decades sometimes get swept away in the waves that transsexuals are trying to ride.

Many years ago, I fell in love with Charles. He had many of the qualities I longed for in a man. He was bright, well-educated, and I thought he was good-looking as well; we were very attracted to each other, physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

I loved to do things for Charles. I didn't even mind chores such as doing his laundry. His clothes smelled sweet, just like he did. He loved good food, and I loved to cook it for him and see him enjoy it. My goodness! What more could a woman ask for?

Well, considerably more, when it comes right down to it. I was trying to live out the fantasy of a very stereotypical woman in a very changed real world. I knew better, intellectually, but that didn't stop me from trying.

Charles was a very needy man, and I wanted to take care of those needs. Of course, I never could take care of them except in a very superficial way. Charles had never learned to be responsible for his own needs, so he constantly looked to women to do those things for him. My needs, I guess, were to try to live the mythological fantasy that women exist to comfort men when they seek refuge from battling the world—the quiet sanctum of a home with a white picket fence, 2.5 children and a dog named Spot. That's what most young women thought it was all about when I went to college in the late 1940's. The war was over, and people wanted to build families and lives.

When it was all over, a friend suggested I read a book by Robin Norwood entitled *Women Who Love Too Much*. I read it and I seemed to fit most of the stereotypes the author talked about.

The book helped me get over Charles, but I think Ms. Norwood had the wrong title. Perhaps she should have called it *Women Who Need to Learn How to Love*.

All too often, we mistake taking care of someone's needs — someone we are attracted to — for love. What we need to be thinking about instead are healthy adult relationships. Healthy relationships are not about taking care of needs — they are about caring. And if we are caring, we want our mates to be able to stand on their own feet emotionally so that we can respect them. It's very difficult to love someone unless we can respect them. Healthy relationships are constructed from the mortar of respect and affection, not from taking care of needs and interpreting that as love. If we love someone and respect them, then we can start filling in the gaps.

Sexism seems to be following some transsexuals through the front door and out the back door of the operating room. I think it helps to be aware that good relationships are most likely to germinate and flourish in a healthy environment of maturity, and that fantasies are to be enjoyed, not lived. I now try to keep the world of fantasy separate from what it means to have a healthy and mutually satisfying adult relationship with a man. That means caring about him, not for him.

Remembrances

By Delia Van Maris

Sometimes my mind will suddenly snap a picture. It happens only occasionally. It may seem at the time to be an unimportant event, but I have learned that this is usually not the case. The picture remains with me and is usually meaningful.

An example relates to my childhood and gender issues. One of my earliest remembrances is playing with my aunt. We would play "dress-up." She was a college student at the time, and I was the only grandchild. The garb of the day included veiled hats, gloves, purses, and those wonderful high heels. I remember vividly the tremendous feeling of warmth and security.

Some years later, my aunt discarded a pair of open-toed, sling-back platform high heels so common to the late forties. I kept them and secreted them away. When I was in grade school, I tried them on again. They were a per-

fect fit! Exhilarating! Snap. Another picture of a specific point in time.

Of course, now I can understand why such events are so important to me, and why my mind chooses to record and remember the incident. In later years, as gender issues came bubbling to the surface, I needed these pieces of data to sort through feelings, emotions, and compulsions.

I mention this because another snapshot was taken, completely by surprise, this past week-end. My wife and I were at the beach, and it had been a beautiful day. We had spent the afternoon sailing and in the surf, and enjoying each other's company. A late afternoon rain forced a retreat to an open air bar with an extended awning. We sipped a drink and watched the rain. It was drenching and cooling, and welcome after the warm day.

I became aware of the television suspended from the ceiling. They were reporting on "extreme sports," and the subject was bungee jumping. The contestants not only leapt from a platform into space, but with the recoil of the cord, they twisted and turned and flipped, and vaulted up again for another descent.

I have often used the bungee jumper as an analogy to describe my own assessment of gender issues. During my life I have built a platform: a male professional, a husband, a father, a teacher, and a host of other components. In my middle age, I began to explore the gender issues that remained hidden. Whereas during my teen years and early adult life, I had gathered only simple pieces of female clothing, now I went for the whole package. I had been satisfied with heels, underwear, and a few other items, and these were always worn in secrecy. Nobody else knew. Then I became like the jumper artists, with the twisting and turning, and began inventing new combinations.

Soon I was into hair and make-up, padding and primping. I shared this compulsion with my wife and lived through the resulting anxiety. I went out in public, sought out other people like myself, and became more comfortable with the feminine side of my personality. In the analogy that I used, I was the bungee jumper, leaping into

another side of my personality and essence, and enjoying the exhilaration of the jump and the gyrations. The recoil always brought me back to my base, the one that I had worked so hard to establish and to show to the world.

But sitting at the beach that rainy afternoon, I realized that the analogy no longer applied. Hence, the reason for the picture that my brain took and stored away, both as an instant revelation, and as reason for contemplation.

I thought back to a similar visit to the beach almost twenty years ago. It was a different beach, a different time, and I was a different person. I had been negotiating a difficult time in my life. In my daily professional life there was increased stress for a variety of reasons. I had reacted by working on my maleness. I was big, brawny, and hairy, the quintessential aggressive male. I actually have photographs to prove it. I looked like Arnold; it was a result of lifting very heavy weights, very often, and with a vengeance. This demeanor saw me through some very tough times. I was an imposing figure peering out over a heavy mustache.

Ten years before that, shortly after being released from the military, there is another picture of me at the beach, holding my infant son. I was hairy then, but slim. During that time, I had been running very long distances, trying to forget some of the details of the dehumanizing experience of the military. In the photograph, as I look at my son, I am soft, gentle, loving, with hair down to my shoulders (God, I wish I still had all that hair!), and full-bearded. It is one of the pictures I kept and cherished all these years. That son is now a man — a good and productive man. I still look at him with the same eyes.

But now I look different — not like I did during either of these other trips to the beach. I have yet another and variant physiognomy.

As I have settled on my own place and my own center, I have become more androgynous. During these times, and being middle-aged, the overbearing male image is no longer necessary. My accomplishments speak for themselves. I have cultivated this androgynous look. Early on, I realized

that I did not wish to change my sex, or even much of my life. I wanted to enhance it and give expression to a part of me that had been buried.

In our society, as we all know, this is difficult. There is a fanatical devotion to binarism: one must be male or female, black or white, straight or gay. There are no in-betweens.

Sitting at the beach, beardless, with shaven legs, a slimmer (yet muscular) profile, and no real devotion to presenting either a male or female image, it came to me that I am no longer a bungee jumper. I would not or could not have appeared this way in public during either of those previous trips to the beach. To be sure, the male identity is not really an issue. I am still obviously a male. But with some work and effort, I could have been sitting in the same chair several hours later and been given a female approbation by the other beachgoers. I have done it. In fact, when nobody gives a second look, there is a bit of a disappointment. I wonder if I could have done a better job with the transformation.

Now I have two bungee cords fastened to a belt around my waist. I am in the center of the two polar extremes defined by our society, what I call the hypermale (Arnold) and the hyperfemale (Marilyn). If I relax and meditate, I find myself coming to rest in a position exactly between the two points. At times I can energize myself and consciously move toward either extreme, and enjoy the motion and the experience.

I am very comfortable with this position. At my age, I don't need to be leaping off things and flying around. Being centered physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally is not a bad place to be. I hope I can stay there. I further hope that all my brothers and sisters find their own center, realizing that what is the center for me may not be the center for them.

And I hope and pray that as my life continues, this brain of mine does not fail me. I am grateful for these pictures. I need them for continued happiness and insights. I will store them, treasure them, sort them, and analyze them. Most of all, I will enjoy them,

since they affirm my philosophy that my life and my life's work is a process and not a destination

Male-to-Female Transitioning And the Physically Challenged

By Phillida Charlene Hutcheson

I did not realize I was doing anything special other than trying to be myself, but other people in the transgendered community have pointed out that I really am. Riki Anne Wilchins suggested I write this because there might be other people who are telling themselves "I can't transition because of my physical condition." I am becoming the woman I always knew I was and I have used a wheelchair for twenty-six years.

While I have not completed my gender journey, this is not something I just plan to do and it is not a fantasy. I am transitioning.

If you asked me in August of 1993 where I would be in January 1995, I would not have believed I would have been able to do what I have. Now I am taking hormones, have almost finished electrolysis, and am working on the same job I have had for the past seventeen years (but as a woman). My relatives know about me. Most important, though, I am living twenty-four hours a day as the woman I should have been. I have not had surgery yet, but I am considering it for the future. Maybe that is not the path for you, but even that is possible.

It's hard enough for most able-bodied people to realize they are transgendered. Physically Challenged people will find it more difficult. Some situations are similar to the regular transsexual path — whatever that is. Others will be different. I will describe what I did in some of the different circumstances I encountered, and hopefully will give others some ideas on how to handle similar situations.

Before you can even enter the gender closet, you have to come out of the disability closet. There is a ready made excuse to tell yourself why you are different. It is so easy to tell yourself you

do not like the same things men do because you cannot do them. Getting out of the disability closet took me much longer than leaving the gender closet. Once I got out of the disability closet, getting out of the gender closet seemed fairly easy. I knew how good it felt to come out of a closet. I sure did not want to stay in another one.

One thing coming out of the disability closet will teach you is to be honest with yourself. I think that's probably also the hardest thing to do when you kick down the doors of the gender closet. You will already have experience!

If you are a young married adult, as I was, and end up losing both your physical abilities and your marriage, you will hang on tenaciously to what you have left. Gender identity is not one of the things that changed, so I kept a firm grip on it. I even got married again after I became disabled to try to prove to myself that I was a man. It didn't work that time, either. (This doesn't sound that unusual for a transsexual, does it?)

One question I am almost always asked when I come out to non-transgendered people is whether my physical condition has something to do with my gender situation. That's a question I asked myself at first, too. I know I haven't felt like a man at any time in my life. It says something about us that a transgendered person has never asked me that question. I'm sure some people still think that it did make a difference, but I know it did not.

Some of the details of even getting dressed are going to be different. I know I have quite a time trying to put on eyeliner with my unsteady hands. Feminine clothes are more delicate, so watch what you wear. Wheelchairs also make growing and keeping fingernails in good shape very hard. There are women that use wheelchairs. You are just one of them.

That first time leaving the house dressed is going to be nerve-racking. It was pretty clear to the neighbors that the woman with the long brown hair in the wheelchair was me. They probably think you are odd anyway, so does it really matter? The fears were really in

my own mind, and after a while trying to hide things became a real bother. I have only had one of my neighbors say anything, and it was "You are a good-looking woman."

Going out in public dressed is going to be another unique time. Is that person staring at you because they are reading you, or because of the wheelchair? I never have figured that one out. After a while, I stopped really caring. In some ways, it's the same as if you are tall or overweight. Someone notices you. So what?!

You probably already feel vulnerable. Here, there is a nice plus. Women look out for each other, and that is going to include you. It will not be too hard to shed that masculine facade of invulnerability. It was never that strong a feeling in me, anyway. It was nice to have some women insist they go out to my van in the parking lot with me when I went home so I would not have to go into the parking lot alone.

A big question for me was whether I could take hormones. Would my physical differences mean hormones were out? It was not an easy decision to make. It took me months of soul-searching to decide that yes, it was worth the extra risk for me. I liked the changes in my life, and I did not want to chance losing them by wrecking my health. But I wanted more than I had, so I chose to risk the hormones. I am doing it carefully, having myself tested by an endocrinologist and watching myself closely. It's going to be an individual decision that you must make the choice yourself.

Is surgery out of the question? It's the same as with hormones. Yes, there are extra risks. Weigh the risks and benefits and decide if it is right for you. Do I really want to take the additional risks when I am already living as a woman? I really don't know. Maybe something other than full sex reassignment surgery will be enough. I do know that SRS or something else is probable in my future. Physically Challenged people have had the surgery. Don't just appear one day, though, and expect to have surgery the next. Let your surgeon know before hand what your physical situation is.

If you have a job, do all you can to keep it. It's hard enough for a physical-

ly challenged male to get a job. For a physically challenged female, it will be even harder.

For me, telling my supervisor was very nervewracking. I told myself that I was prepared to lose my job. Thank the Goddess, I did not. What I think helped was to have carefully thought through and planned everything. Be sure to have a plan even for bathroom arrangements. What I have is a red light which I turn on when I am using the ladies' room. That gives the other women an option of whether to come in or not. Of course it doesn't matter to me.

Getting out of the disability closet took me much longer than leaving the gender closet. Once I got out of the disability closet, getting out of the gender closet seemed fairly easy. I knew how good it felt to come out of a closet. I sure did not want to stay in another one.

Be sure to know what you will do before you come out to your supervisor. Bring the subject up yourself. I found the people at work to be empathetic, particularly the women.

Some things will be easier because you are in a wheelchair. I can speak softly, and people automatically assume it's because of my physical condition. Also, I never had to develop a feminine walk. Some funny (that is, they will seem funny later) things are going to happen to you; don't let them bother you. About two months before I came out at work, I was going through the line in the cafeteria. I had changed my name and had a driver's license with my feminine name and picture. I opened my wallet to pay, and realized that I had forgotten to cover up the picture. So there I was, dressed as a male but with a picture of Phillida on my driver's license staring up so everyone could see. I hoped no one had noticed, but the cashier started calling me honey.

Don't expect that your reactions will always be similar to other transsexuals. Some things are the same, but unexpected things are going to happen. Before I started to take hormones, I felt no physical attraction to anyone. According to what I had heard, my libido would go through the floor on

hormones, so I thought nothing would really be that different. Wrong! Now, I find I'm attracted to women as a woman. What am I going to do about it? I don't know. I'm still trying to figure it out. It does complicate any future choices, though.

Physically challenged people have limited contact with other people. Sometimes it's because it's just too physically difficult to do something. In most cases, though, other people assume it will be too difficult for you and will not even give you the choice. I think some people even assume that what is different about you is catching

and you are really not quite human since you are not a "complete" human being. People assume that you do not hurt, have desires, and feel like everyone else. But the fact that your body is different does not mean that your emotions are different.

Something that was a pleasant surprise to me is that this discrimination is much less in the transgendered community. Since transgendered people experience discrimination themselves, they are less likely to display it toward you. You will find people who treat you almost like everyone else. That's something I enjoy about the transgender community. For the first time in my life, I almost have peers.

No matter what you do, you will always seem different. I used the words "almost" and "less" deliberately. Because of the actual process you have gone through, some will think of you as Super Crip. To others, you will not quite be a transgendered person. You do not hurt, or cry, or feel lonely, or even enjoy the same things as other transgendered people. In some ways, this is similar to the Super Mom.

Don't let your physical disabilities (I never liked that word but it is politically correct) keep you in closets—either the disability closet or the gen-

der closet. There is a whole big wide wonderful world out there, and it's a lot of fun. This is your life. It's too precious to waste hiding in the dark. Explore and find out about yourself. You'll find that you are a pretty neat person. I did, and I am sure not going back into another closet. I'm proud of who I am!

A Tribute to the Gender Gifted

By Peggy Rudd, Ph.D.

The world has provided accolades for the musically gifted. The name Beethoven is etched upon social history even as the musical compositions from this great musician linger in our hearts. Special schools are operated for gifted children, and these educational institutions become the catalysts for creativity and intellectual growth. Theaters, television and the motion picture industry regularly honor the gifted in the entertainment field. This article is my tribute to a group which rarely receives such praise: the gender gifted— that rare and wonderful group of people who have touched the total of human life, both masculine and feminine, and have the potential to enrich their own lives and the lives of others.

The Meaning of Gender Gifted

The word "gifted" literally means "having natural ability or special talents." Thus, gender gifted people could be defined as those persons who have a special range of gender expression and the unique ability to experience the feelings and emotions which traditionally are associated with the opposite sex. Gender gifted individuals are able to break away from role expectations, experience the totality of human life, and move across the lines which usually separate men from women.

While society has relaxed some of these lines, to a large degree we still live in a male-dominated society. Gender gifted people have the ability to draw upon the dominance needed to make power decisions and the sensitivity to foster effectiveness. It is the feminine side that gives people an ability to direct and handle people in a more compas-

sionate manner. To be gender gifted means having the sensitivity to tune into human nature with an appreciation for people, while demonstrating the qualities of masculine strength. Our founding fathers were right when they wrote, "All men are created equal." The challenge of being gender gifted is to "outgrow" the equality and move into the "gift."

Finding the Balance

Balance and integration will be vital in the quest for this gender gift. These qualities will follow an understanding of two key words. First the word "organization" has a masculine connotation, since men tend to "make things work." The word "organism" has a feminine connotation, since this word is synonymous with life. Women, as real or potential mothers, possess the creativity which fosters the growth process. They nurture life and allow growth to follow its own mysterious law of becoming. Gender gifted people who draw upon all aspects of their nature can organize and provide life for the organization, family, or individual.

Care must be taken to draw out the best gender qualities and forsake the negative ones. Organizational expertise should be allowed to flourish, but it must be tempered with the life blood which comes with feminine expression. As Emerson wrote, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

As the search continues for balance and integration, there must always be an effort to prevent the wide pendulum swings which could be described as a neurotic glorification of either the masculine or the feminine personality. A strong glorification of the masculine may result in a devaluation of femininity, and a distorted emphasis upon power. Men tend to gain power by taking it away from others. The feminine nature would desire to gain reputation and a position of leadership by sharing and nurturing others.

People who let their femininity flourish have power which is available to others. On the other end of the continuum are those who are fearful of any

sign of feminine nature. Such fear breeds contempt and the tendency to denounce feminine expression. In George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Don Juan was feeling this form of contempt when he stated, "My ear practiced on a thousand songs and symphonies; my eye exercised on a thousand paintings; tore her voice, her feathers, her color to shreds."

Strong contempt does not arise from ideology, but from an innate need to avoid guilt and anxiety. Many men have an uneasy truce between the mind and the body— a truce implanted by society. Michael McGriff, M.D., sees flexibility as one answer: "Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape."

Sex and Gender

Before we can understand the term gender gifted, we must clarify the difference between sex and gender. In the most simple explanation, Virginia Prince has said, "Gender lies between the ears; sex lies between the legs." Or to say the same thing in another way, sex is biological, while gender is behavioral. From the moment of birth, our bodies identify us as either male or female. Almost immediately, a set of behaviors are assigned to us, and these behaviors are expected to flourish in a line parallel to the developmental stages of life. Thus, many people perceive gender to be a set of social expectations. Perhaps even as small children we had preferences that were not in line with gender expectations, but most of us have moved through life doing what we are "supposed" to do. Kaplan said this in a rather humorous way: "I like chocolate ice cream; but when I go fishing, I use worms because fish like worms." We bend our form to agree with the preferences of others. Then we file those imposed preferences in our minds until they become perceived to be a factual dictate.

Traditionally, men were supposed to act, think, and move like men, and any hint of the feminine was feared and soon became a catalyst for guilt and remorse. Quentin Crisp wrote about the negative aspects of men who possess feminine behaviors. According to

Crisp, "The men searched themselves for the vestiges of effeminacy as though for lice."

In recent years, some diversion from the expected gender norms has met with acceptance. An example would be the movie "Tootsie." Marjorie Garber believes this public acceptance came because gender itself became a category for analysis. According to Garber, "The movie was slick, it was not threatening, and it was mainstream. In the movie, Dorothy successfully 'passes' and gains both the secret pleasures and the effect."

The Social Mold

Margaret Mead also describes the role assumed by men and women as dependent upon ideas implanted at an early age. But according to Doug Lawson, the problem with experiential learning is that you never graduate. The outcomes of cultural and social constellations continue to evolve. This evolution has uncovered many myths. The fact that sex and gender should and will match is a myth, and the fact that ideas about sex and gender are set and established is also a myth. Erickson concluded after extensive observation that psychological trends are determined primarily biologically and secondarily by the expectation of a social role. There are many shades of gray and degrees of variance between the two. Perhaps Freud was unaware of the gray areas when he wrote, "When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male or female,' and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty."

The Key to Unity

The duality of the sexes could be perceived as an antithesis at the very heart of creation, an antithesis crying for synthesis. Gender gifted individuals have found the key to restitution and unity. In Taoism, the feminine Yin is calm and receptive. Don Juan said, "I came to believe that in her voice was all the music of the song, in her face all the beauty of the painting, and in her soul all the emotion of the poem."

The masculine Yang, on the other

hand, is portrayed in literature as active and generative. But there is a higher power, available when individuals draw from the best of both gender. In psychological terms, this is the path toward self-actualization, reaching the potential for doing the best that can be achieved within the range of available options. Gender gifted individuals believe in living the total of humanity. One person with a belief is greater than 99 with only an interest.

The Primary Unity

Plato describes man and women in an embrace as symbolic of the primary unity of the human person in its fullness. Thus, God is shown to be as big as man and woman when they unite. Perhaps it is time to challenge the Leo Durocher concept that "nice guys finish last." While Leo was talking about the New York Giants, this could surely extend to include the tendency to subdue the more gentle side of the personality. These irate individuals should make a deliberate choice to combine the best of all genders. Charles Schultz said, "Life is like a ten-speed. Most of us have gears we never use." Try on some new gears; you might like them.

A popular television show asks the question, "How do they do that?" Many, including the people who possess the gift, have asked this question about those individuals that are truly gender gifted. Stoller quotes a question from a transvestite: "When I am like a female, dressed in her clothes and appearing to be like her... am I still a male?" Stoller answered, "Yes, you are still intact. You are a male, no matter how many feminine clothes you put on." Most gender gifted individuals really do not understand how they are able to be in touch with a full range of emotional expression, but as James Thurber once said, "It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers." Perhaps the answers to our myriad of questions will fade into the realization of self-actualization.

*He beheld a vision,
and eroded the thing he saw.
Arabian fiction never filled the world.*

Transgender Studies in Recent Academic History

By Marisa Richmond, Ph.D.

The 1995 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians included *What a Drag: Women, Transvestism, and Gender Identity in the West*, a paper by Evelyn Schlatter, a graduate student at the University of New Mexico. Ms. Schlatter's paper is a study of transgendered behavior among genetic women living in the American West in the late 19th Century. It was part of a broader panel called *Re(ed)ifying the Other: Gendered Discourses and Social Identity From the Outside In*. This paper is not a part of her dissertation, which concerns women and aviation in the 1920's.

There are numerous images in popular culture of crossdressed women living in the old West. Sharon Stone's character in "The Quick and the Dead" lives openly as a woman dressed as a man, while "Bad Girls" features Madeleine Stowe and Andie McDowell dressed in traditionally male clothing: blue jeans. These images are fictional, but as Schlatter states, are based on historical reality. In her acknowledgment that society treats "clothing as a purveyor of gender," she notes that many women crossdressed in order to survive or even prosper in the "testosterone dominated" West.

Unlike the characters in the two movies mentioned previously, many women who crossdressed were forced to abandon their former selves. This was certainly true of those who served in the U.S. Army. They enlisted for numerous reasons: to be patriotic, to be financially self sufficient, or even to be near a male lover, but regardless of rationale, they could not live openly as women.

In many of the mining and cattle ranching boom towns of the West, which were often as much as 80 to 90 per cent male, women who lived as men generally found it easier to blend in. Living as men, they were protected from physical abuse and prostitution. In a few instances, they could even live with or marry a female partner. Of

course, while male impersonation was tolerated on the stage in the West, it was confined there and was not permitted on the streets. It was not until 1974 that Denver's local ordinance against crossdressing was finally repealed.

One of the best examples of such a life is Idaho rancher Joe Monaghan, who was depicted in the film "The Ballad of Little Jo." Unable to find acceptance as a single mother in the East, and unwilling to submit to violent male sexual advances in the West, Monaghan assumed male roles— first as a prospector and eventually as a cattle rancher—and his female body was not discovered until he died.

Schlatter points out that Western novels set in the late 19th Century did often show crossdressed women, but they were often vengeful and violent, and, playing upon racial stereotypes, were often Hispanic. These images were employed to encourage women to remain in, or return to, the kitchen or bedroom. According to Schlatter, women could not be presented in these novels as men because there was a "hierarchy of status" present in the West. Living as a transgendered person, they challenged and upset concepts of social evolution, since lower groups were not permitted to rise above their class.

In most cases, as happened with Joe Monaghan, the genetic identity of these passing women was usually discovered at death, and societal reactions were almost always negative. Schlatter believes that men were angry at being deceived by someone who was supposedly an intellectual inferior. Women, however, were often just as upset for fear that these transgendered men, who "upset the apple cart" could actually make the status for genetic women even lower. Schlatter did suggest that some people may have felt threatened by the potential loss of family, but she admitted that she could not document this idea.

Although Schlatter's paper did not specifically address transgendered Westerners who went from male to female, she stated in the question and answer session that they did exist, most notably in the silver mining town of Cripple Creek, Colorado, but that she believes few were ever actually caught.

Among male-to-female transgendered Westerners, she said they cut across ethnic lines, but most of those documented among ethnic minorities were Hispanic like Babe Bean. She had found little evidence of transgendered behavior among Asians or African Americans, but that could certainly be due to a lack of documentation, since those groups were generally treated as outcasts anyway.

In general, I found Schlatter's paper an excellent contribution to the growing body of work on the history of the transgender community. Schlatter obviously concentrates her work on one particular segment that has often been ignored or misunderstood. The number of transgendered men living in the West in the 19th Century was obviously quite large, as many of them worked and settled there, usually living anonymously, for various reasons. There is still much to be done in this area, especially if individual letters and diaries can be uncovered and made available. It is my hope that Schlatter's paper will open the door to other works in the expanding library covering this very diverse community.

Soliloquy

By Trilby Pilgrim

See how the tummy curves outward ever so slightly! Defined ... firmly rounded from a deep-set navel shadow. Fading ... arcing gently downward and around in perfect symmetry to the roundness of soft-skinned hips— not a muscle shows. Soft ... soft ... soft ... a shallow downy covering of soft she-stuff makes the difference.

The hips are real, the waist well-formed, and above, are subtle curves of late-blooming teen-girl. Slight breasts so dear, far too round to be masculine, hold sweet promise of not too distant future fullness.

A flush of happy-warmth surges upward ... enriching, as fine vintage wine further enhances even the most beautiful crystal goblet ... sparkling. Overflowing pure-life nectar blurred through little, darling little teardrops ... nepenthe of time ... life ... of soul eternal.

But all for nought without the

promise ... oh, cherished promise ... promise found ... promise denied ... promise recaptured ... promise held ... sweet then ... sweet now ... sweet tomorrow ... hurry ... hurry ... hurry the red-waked scalpel. Time itself holds the key. Set back ticking-time. Reverse it. Ticking time ... go back. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, ticking-time ... go back, turn back ... tock-tick, tock-tick ... tock-tick ... oh, hands ... turn back to pre-dawn nothing-hours and there let Nature restart Her confounded recipe. Then new release ... then to bound forth once again on life's lush meadow ... gamboling happily along a different path... a proper path ... plotted ... charted ... ordered ... offending none.

This foul condition of body ... this ... this maleness! Foreign to my heart and to my mind. Oh, to have never known the turgid rise of rut ... vile impulse ... irresistible ...! Such damnable demands this usurper made of me. His detested call, once followed for society's sake, striving ... out of weakness ... or strength perhaps ... not to offend ... could my mind have been wrong! I think not! Would it not have been best to conform to the need at that early time! To fulfill the need and conform to the wish of the tears ... pure ... pristine ... to conform to the pervasive gentle need rather than to the crotch! Phutt ...! Damn this tenacious morbid shaft and ornaments two ... demonic gargoyle, useless save to spout unwanted body sap and amuse under playful childhood direction. Domed quill ... pinched twixt thumb and icy finger ... streaming, steaming, arcing, inscribing in amber script ... four-lettered boy-words in virgin snowdrifts! Fearfully praying for a wind to obliterate incriminating homebound footprints before the prying eyes of dawn. I'd mourn that demon's loss not one iota! Lop this intrusive obelisk, topple this alien spire, roll it away to fade, wither, blended, turned inward to useful purpose ... grant me an unobstructed view over Veneris.

Madness ... mind askew...! How do you describe it; you who have never known the need? How lucky you are! A need; a pressing, being, feeling, sweet unending need ... not a mere wish or fantasy as some would assert. Hidden behind my laughing, joking, cursing, fathering facade, this need lies curled in

arch awaiting— succored by the sore paps of promise; of bright tomorrows! 'Tis as much a need as food or air or love! Oh, wait, I'm told ... it's all fantasy ... here, lay this broad ... forget the need ... curse ... spit ... chug-a-lug a Bud ... floor your Corvette's hammer ... have another Scotch ... and another, and another, and another ... the need goes away, doesn't it! But no, the need remains, the need is now, now ... now ... now ... not tomorrow, as much now as it has ever been or ever will be! See, my time ... see how future shrinks ... disappears as time falls ever lower through life's glass. Time lessens, but the need remains constant, its sweet truth remains sweet truth ... like the soul ... unchanged. Sweetness more apparent with every passing day ...

Even now, as I drape my body ... oddly, to unveil my own sweet self ... to un-deceive ... my mind runs free— clear as the deep dark bottomless streams of spring. My soul flies as a dove— but higher, higher and even closer to the sun ... perhaps to synthesize my betterness ... a wispy cloud. Yet I can reason well ... mind not dimmed by impossible flight. I stand here, the fashionable manifestation of my real-being ... un-deceitful ... un-hiding ... me ... me ... my soul ... un-false ... my mind open ... my need ... my life ... see how the tummy curves outward. 'Tis me, none other! I am the honey Sampson found, my body the desert lion— so very dead yet open wide to hands of men starved of knowledge ... take of my sweet need ... take of me ... learn ...

enrich ... save

Thus I often think before I fall asleep to dream my unsoiled girl-dreams— sometimes to be awakened from night-times episodes of clear unfettered self; a cold hand grips my shoulder: here, wake up, your dream is but fantasy amuck!

I stand still ... beneath my toes, the deep stream runs dark, black, cold, but not impersonal, not inviting and not rejecting. Its sound is like the lapping of a thousand thirsty kittens' tongues, and the slight wind adds music through the reeds and trees along the bank bringing the smells of summer; fresh mown hay, buttercups. Stars stand still along with me; their reflections in the passing river are still— nothing flows away ... least of all the need. CQ

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I would like to work more with transgendered people. I really enjoyed meeting many of you at the International Congress in L.A. in February, 1995. I am a clinical social worker-psychotherapist in private practice. I have taught sexuality to the health professions for years and am still an Adjunct Professor, University of Miami School of Medicine. I am AASECT-certified sex therapist and sex educator; a member of SSSS, Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, and newly joined AEGIS also.

I have worked with many transgendered people throughout the 25 years that I have worked in this sexuality field, but I would like to increase this aspect of my work. Please give my name to any persons in South Florida who might need my services.

Medtalk

By Shiela Kirk, M.D.

Why do some individuals take estrogen and progesterone while some take only estrogen, and some use estrogen with antiandrogen?

Some physicians have prescribing habits based on previous success in their therapy with patients. They don't abandon those habits easily. Some don't know that certain combinations may accomplish more for one patient than for another, and some don't realize that regimens and dosages can be altered, depending on the patient's progress and comfort level. Some use progesterone because that hormone was used in days past on the advice of Dr. Harry Benjamin, the foremost authority in transsexual medicine. In his day, it was known that progesterone was a mild testosterone antagonist and that it enhanced breast development.

With the passage of time and with patience and good tissue response, the patient will experience the full measure of feminization with estrogen only. However, the best regimen is a combination of an estrogen and an antiandrogen. The antiandrogen will lower the testosterone in the blood, acting particularly on the portion contributed by the adrenal gland. This potentiates the estrogen being used, and allows feminization to take place more efficiently, with lower doses in shorter periods of time. Many physicians have little or no experience with this approach and need to read the medical literature to realize the benefits of this combination.

What can I expect if I use contraceptive or birth control pills as a way to feminize?

Birth control pills contain progesterone and sometimes estrogen as ingredients. The progesterone is the active part of the contraceptive, as it blocks pregnancy. Its concentration is much greater than that of estrogen. The estrogen is present to limit the unpleasant side effect of "breakthrough" uterine bleeding.

Birth control pills are not ideal for the feminization process. While mild changes do take place on birth control pills, the effects are limited. Estrogen, and not progesterone, is needed to produce the desired changes.

I'm a 48-year-old male-to-female transsexual. Since I began my hormonal therapy, I've gained 15 pounds. What do I do about it?

Weight gain occurs for two reasons. The first has to do with water retention. Swelling of the lower extremities (edema), especially, may be quite evident. Ways to control this include salt

restriction, control hosiery, leg elevation, and even diuretics, when the problem is severe. But the usual reason for weight gain is increased caloric intake. Virtually everyone on estrogens can be more healthy and comfortable if they watch their food intake while on an exercise program.

I'm very interested in being able to produce breast milk. Is it possible? If so, what must I do accomplish this?

Lactation is possible in the genetic male on estrogen, but the process is a complex one. Even new mothers may have difficulty producing milk. In brief, a hormone called prolactin, which is found in both males and females, will increase during a pregnancy, and especially after delivery of a baby. This hormone stimulates the glandular structure of the breast to produce milk. Another hormone, an oxytocic, is needed for the actual production and secretion of milk. This hormone occurs naturally, but can be given by injection, or via a nasal spray.

Genetic males have prolactin in their blood streams; with estrogen use, the levels increase. Most male-to-female transsexuals do not develop high levels of prolactin, but a few do, and this may result in production of moderate amounts of milk. If this happens, testing must be done to be sure that there is not a tumor of the pituitary gland.

I am on hormones. Why is testing of my blood so important? What blood tests are really necessary?

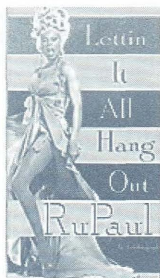
Hormones influence many different physiological systems. The liver is involved with hormonal breakdown; hence the integrity of that organ must be evaluated periodically via blood tests. Cholesterol levels may be influenced by hormonal therapy, and must be measured by laboratory tests. Measurement of serum prolactin is necessary because of the possibility of pituitary growth or tumor. Thyroid gland dysfunction can develop, or, in a diabetic, blood sugar levels may be changed.

In the female-to-male, testosterone can change the numbers and ratios of red blood cells, producing a condition called polycythemia. In the male-to-female transsexual, it's important to measure serum testosterone levels in order to assess the adequacy of the dosage of estrogen. The goal is to bring the blood level of testosterone into the female range.

The blood tests reflect healthy or non-healthy reactions of the body to hormonal influence. Although there is some expense to this monitoring, it really is very important.

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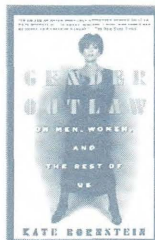
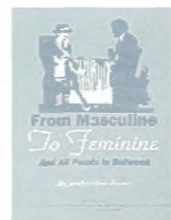


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