

Transsexuality: Rap Response

On Saturday, March 11, the Amazon Collective sponsored the first in a series of open raps for womyn in the Milwaukee Community. The topic was 'Transsexuality and Feminism'. The purpose of the rap was to provide an open forum to explore this polarizing and controversial issue within our community. The discussion evolved into three parts; 1.) Educational, 2.) Personal Experience, and 3.) Political.

It was attended by more than fifty womyn and lasted four hours.

We would like to give special thanks to Anna Campbell and Lee Alvarez, who answered questions and provided us with the educational aspects of Transsexuality, and to Jude Micheals who did a fine job of facilitating. Also to Kristin and Meredith who worked in childcare and finally to all the womyn who attended. Suggestions for future raps can be sent to Amazon: 2211 E. Kenwood, Mil. The following are feedback we received about the rap.

I attended - and reacted to - the Amazon-sponsored rap on transsexuality and feminism. I felt my usual frustration at not being verbal enough to make clear my views. I also felt anger at those who attended with no intent to listen/learn, and those who attended to use the evening as a platform for their own non-related agendas. But basically, the evening went as I expected, and I didn't plan to react in the columns of Amazon.

However, after reading the one written reaction given to Amazon- I felt it was necessary to give another womyn's perspective on both the rap and the issues involved. The other reaction and my reaction are so different it's as though we attended different raps.

I don't feel "threatened" by transsexuals. I don't feel lesbianism - or any other sexual preference of transsexuals - was the issue. I spent time that week both at the abortion demonstration and at the transsexuality rap. (Are my priorities in order?) I didn't hear the reported interchange on humanism - only a transsexual using that old defensive line "But feminism is humanism," followed by my sisters' exasperated "no's." I for one don't need to have my womyn-oriented/focused politics defined by a transsexual.

The issue for me goes beyond the role one transsexual should play in Milwaukee's feminist community. The issue is who gets to define womyn. If a male can go to a male physician and decide that removal of this organ and addition of that hormone will produce a womyn -- I'm angry. We're right back to letting the patriarchy define who, what and how a womyn should be. If an orange paints itself red and calls itself an apple -- it just ain't true.

If males are unhappy in their societally defined roles, let them find new ways to live comfortably -- let them change an oppressive society. If males change their genitalia but not their sexual preference -- don't tell me they're lesbians. It's a lot easier to change physical aspects of a male body than to change ingrained male ways of thinking/relating. Darkening my skin might allow me to look like a Black -- I can't conceive that it would change me internally and culturally to make me be a Black.

I have just as much trouble with "womyn" who see a solution in constructed male genitals. What a tribute to the patriarchy -- if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. My womyn self/identity is precious to me -- not something to be mutilated in the hope that then the patriarchy will let me join its boys' clubs. The story told by one transsexual of having to save \$1280 to buy a hydraulic pump to maintain erection would be funny if it weren't so symbolic of transsexuals' focus on physical genitalia as the be-all and end-all of problem solving and gender definition. The rap was good in that it provided a forum for discussion of a current issue. I'd hope that Amazon would sponsor more along the same lines- a place for feminists who've been through CR and Feminism 101 to share feelings and ideas. If other womyn prefer to be picketing at the Marc Plaza, or whatever, that's fine with me. I just want the next rap to be political and issue oriented -- a place to grow strong in our commonality as well as our differences.

Steff

Transsexuality for me is an extremely touchy, confusing subject. While the open rap provided a chance for transsexuals to discuss why they wanted to go through sex changes, it is still very difficult for me if not impossible to accept sex change operations as a viable weapon for breaking down rigid societal sex roles. Just changing the body and sexual characteristics reinforces the rigid sex roles, it does nothing to change the structure of society. I prefer and will continue to use political struggle to smash our current sexist society. The mere thought of going through a female-to-male sex change to gain male privilege sickens me.

by Patty Snake

Forty to fifty womyn who attended the transsexual-ity rap carried doubts, hostility, naiveteas, and even support. Jude did an excellent job moderating and her statement: "If anyone shows a lack of respect for anyone else here, they will be asked to leave.", I'm sure saved the evening. Many attending were noncommittal (like myself). It's an extremely touchy, fine line area. Of course I question why the transsexual (male or female) would not be a homosexual or try to change this sexist society but in a couple of hours, we cannot overturn their entire way of thinking and feeling. I felt at times that the questioning (of those about to have sex change surgery) was very dangerous. I worried about the impact of the rap on those with doubts arising in their heads at this point in their lives after years and years of therapy and saving money. Depression and suicide were on my mind. None of us would be there the next day to pick up the pieces till an appointment could be made with a therapist. I empathize with all oppressed people. I do not have to say they're right or that I support them all the way but they are underdogs and having been one all my life I do feel badly for them and have not learned to reject them on a one to one basis.

i came to the community rap with months of frustrations, my energy blocked in isolation over this issue. i was able to use the forum as a good stimulating place to be consciously in touch with my own process of clearing---

the movement in me was intriguing---as tho a capsule version in four hours that represents some major changes in my living within the past few years--- from initial sadness thru hearing pain in the transsexuals as they shared their stories---the confusion-sense of loss-the anger and bitterness-the isolation-some sense of personal pride and hopes-often empty sounding----sadness that they found themselves so unacceptable to live with---sadness that they found it necessary to so totally deny their individuality in this world---

then anger---that these women/men have refused to join on their own behalf in the action toward major social change--confronting systems that oppress us all uniquely-and rage-that they can invade my safe space with women---incognito---soliciting my confidence and support---

to an end result: making some definite decisions for myself---i have opened to learn and to understand--- and feel good about that-i have put myself through the whole gamut of emotions in response-i no longer will use my energy toward either kind of support-a celebration for me- of the process of my getting clear and of making changes as i build a new life--learning to take care of myself first--and of sharing my energy very selectively--with my sisters---

i am thankful for another opportunity to be actively involved in that process-the community rap forum was a stimulating vehicle to use-and i appreciate Amazon for having seen that this needed to be brought out into the open and dealt with as a community issue--at a political level---

again- i am re-energized thru involvement with my community of fine wimmin.

Some thoughts on Amazon's Open Rap:

On humanism: In defending transsexuality, someone said that since feminism is a humanistic philosophy, feminists should support an individual's right to choose whatever role or lifestyle they feel most comfortable in. The resounding answer from the group was a loud, "No! No! Feminism is not humanism!" At that early point, things seemed a bit awry.

On lesbian insecurity: The basic reason for belittling another group or person is insecurity. By successfully criticizing or putting someone down, we prove our superiority and power over them. How sad that we "woman-identified" women must resort to this old patriarchal tactic of oppression. Also, one woman from the farm said she did not want transsexuals speaking for her or "leading the movement." Is this what we're afraid of? How pathetic that the one known transsexual in our community and the three of four well published cases around the country could have such an unsettling affect on us. Interesting too, that such supposedly strong and dynamic women could be so easily threatened.

On lesbianism and transsexuality: Funny that an Open Rap on "Transsexuals and Feminism" would more or less become an Open Rap on "Transsexuals and Lesbianism." Again, I think this shows the doubts and searching going on within the lesbian community as to its own purpose and direction. Although I personally disagree with many of the ideas expressed, within that context of lesbian self-definition and purpose, the Open Rap was a positive development.

On priorities and "trashing": I was personally criticized for questioning the priorities of the women present. I asked where people had been in the past weeks when AB 321 was in danger of passage and why they were having this four hour meeting when we could have been picketing that same night at the Marc Plaza against 321. Everyone was outraged that I would dare to question their priorities, and my voice of protest was soundly drowned out. Yet, not 15 minutes later, Ginny Ray eloquently defended the idea (and I agree with her) that we all have the right to question the feminist motives and values of transsexuals and indeed, anyone considering themselves a part of our movement. This questioning and searching is an essential part of our continual growing process as feminists and lesbians. It is not something we should be afraid of or threatened by--unless of course, we have something to hide and feel guilty about.

And a note about that lovely little word "trashing". I define "trashing" as the deliberate denunciation and hounding out of individuals or groups from the movement. I have never done this. My anger, often my frustration and my challenges have been aimed at the movement and our community as a whole. When the Women's Coalition Retreat Collective was seeking the acceptance of the women's community, Karen Snider explained, "If we had not begun this agitation, things would not have started moving." I agree with this statement totally. People continually need to be prodded out of their listlessness! Ergo, I will continue to question and challenge.

On the real threat to our movement---government intervention (no one ever accused me of being subtle): Some feminists don't want transsexuals in the movement. Some feminists don't want socialists in the movement. Many activists don't want men in the movement and some separatists refuse to work with straight women. Likewise, some straight women despise and distrust lesbians. These divisions create separate hostile camps within our own movement and exemplify the frightening technique of "divide and conquer" that the government has consistently used against all powerful movements for social change. Although we must expect that all groups and organizations will experience internal conflicts from time to time, we must also be mindful of the greater implications of the constant pettiness and infighting that has stagnated our movement for the last two or three years. I would submit that it is no coincidence that abortion rights and the ERA are being lost while we argue among ourselves about the threat from socialists, transsexuals, separatists and other assorted bogeymen. I would submit that it is no coincidence that our energies are being deflected by pettiness and infighting while our rights are being taken away.

It is in this context that I questioned the validity of a four hour meeting on transsexuality.

Jamakaya

Saturday evening--fifty-plus women and guests gathered at the Coalition to discuss transsexuality--tension and uncertainty--how would it go?

As the rap progressed, some of the tension was dispelled as the tone of the discussion stayed away from personalities. The rap got heated, with women sharing how they had arrived where they were, and with the transsexuals sharing their journeys too. No conclusions were reached by the group, but all had a chance to be heard.

How did the rap affect me? I went with a distinct bias, since I am a separatist philosophically. While I heard nothing to change my mind about that, I did learn why transsexuals seem to perceive it necessary to have sex changes. Each of the five transsexuals who were there seemed to have accepted the societally defined expectations of male and female "roles". That is, none of them seemed willing/able to work to change the view society has of sex-role stereotyping. Instead of being nurturing, caring men, or strong, assured women, they opted for changing to the opposite sex. Only one of them seemed to understand fully where women are coming from and the kinds of oppression we have experienced; in fact, this one appeared to be the only one of the five who had really thought out a position on feminism and what it means to be a woman.

For the most part, it sounded to me as if each of the five had some mythical perception of "female", a perception that does not agree with the reality of being born female. I got the distinct impression that most of them felt that "female" was not, somehow, as equal as "male".

As a lesbian/feminist, a totally woman identified woman, I will never accept a surgically transformed woman as my sister. We come from totally different worlds, we have experienced reality in such totally different ways, that we can never truly come together. I accept their right to become surgically transformed, but I also insist on my right to choose which women I wish to accept as sisters.

Carole

I was frustrated and angry and my own wrath got in the way of my reactions.

In a society where the man can have anything he points his finger (or his prick) at, I saw the male to female transsexual as just another ploy to destroy womynspace. It seems men will go very far to destroy our solidarity, so much that he will try to become us- is there nothing we have that they cannot???

Yet, I couldn't say that- I couldn't find the "right" words in a room of humanists and pseudo women, and just as well- if I had had the verbal skill, would I have been heard?

From the graffiti sheet:

All women are beautiful no matter how they got that way!

Define women, please.

Biological from birth: XX not XY ←defective "X" chromosome

Having a cunt didn't shape my mind. Having a cunt does not mean you are a special human being. Do something constructive and destroy your bitterness.

We say down with men, up with women.

NOT down with anybody!!!

Along side of men we can liberate us and them. UP with people! (Some of us love men and we love ourselves- not a mutually exclusive proposition.)

It's only when women love all people and all living things---can we truly love ourselves!

Not loving my oppressor was the healthiest thing I ever did---FIGHT BACK!!!!

