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TransSisters

The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

Issue # 1

September / October 1993



Leslie Feinberg

photo by Ardie Viet

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

also:

**March on
Washington
Trans
Contingent**

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From the Editor

Welcome to *TransSisters, the Journal of Transsexual Feminism*. It is the purpose of this publication to provide a forum dealing specifically with issues of transsexuality from a feminist perspective.

For many years, transsexuality and feminism have been considered by many individuals to be antithetical. In fact, there have been numerous instances of feminist-identified transsexuals who have encountered animosity, exclusion and even violence directed toward them because of their transsexuality. One feminist author, Janice G. Raymond, published a book in 1979 called *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male*, the thesis of which was that transsexuality is inherently anti-feminist. This perception of transsexuality dominated feminist theory for many years afterward.

However, a distinctively feminist perspective of transsexuality has begun to emerge within the last several years, and to find its own unique voice. Attitudes toward transsexuals within the feminist community have also altered radically since this controversy first emerged in the early 1970s, and feminist-identified transsexuals have found remarkably greater acceptance. However, misunderstanding of the nature of transsexuality is still widespread within the feminist community, and transsexuals still find themselves subject to rejection, harassment and maligning from many quarters of the feminist community. Similarly, many transsexuals have not yet progressed beyond a pre-feminist consciousness.

I decided to start this publication because I saw a need for a transsexual publication that presented a specifically feminist perspective, so as to create greater understanding and co-operation between the transsexual and feminist communities, as well as to increase feminist consciousness among transsexuals, and to foster understanding of the phenomenon of transsexuality among non-transsexual feminists.

In her 1991 essay, *The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto*, Sandy Stone stated that the definition of transsexuality has heretofore largely been shaped on one hand by a male-dominated patriarchal medical establishment, and on the other hand by the radical fringe of the feminist movement which views transsexuality as inherently anti-feminist, and that transsexuals themselves have been complicit in this construction by

their failure to create counter-discourse to these two perspectives.

It is also the purpose of this publication to be one step in that direction of creating that much needed counter-discourse rather than to continue to allow ourselves to be defined by the patriarchal medical establishment and the radical anti-transsexual fringe of the feminist movement. I believe that the transsexual movement can only continue to evolve if it is informed by feminist principles, and that an understanding of transsexuality can only likewise further enrich the feminist movement. I also believe that a forum dealing with the specific intersection of transsexual and feminist issues is necessary to further that process, as there is still not enough dialogue between the feminist and transsexual communities taking place.

I am a forty year old, fourteen years post-operative transsexual lesbian feminist. I have defined myself as a feminist for over twenty years, and was actively involved in the feminist movement in the late 1970s. In fact, my feminist identification was among the major factors in my decision to undergo transsexual surgery. I have been actively involved in the lesbian and gay civil rights movement for the last five years, and have become active in the newly-emergent transsexual rights movement within the last four years. My involvement in transsexual rights issues came about largely as a result of animosity and exclusion which I experienced within the lesbian-feminist community.

I hope that this publication serves as a means of fostering dialogue between the feminist and transsexual communities and that it fosters a process of reconciliation between them.

I am interested in hearing from both transsexuals and non-transsexuals who are interested in this subject and furthering this process. I want to know what your perspective is, and what insights you may have to offer. I will appreciate receiving any news items or any other information that relates to transsexuality and feminism, as well as to receive submissions on this topic from anyone.

—*Davina Anne Gabriel*, editor,
July, 1993

Leslie Feinberg has been called a "he-she," a "drag king," a "full time female transvestite," a "passing woman," a "stone butch lesbian," a "gender outlaw," and "transgendered," among other descriptions. They are all titles which she proudly embraces.

Leslie has spent half of her life working as a political organizer for social change. She has described herself as an "old Jewish butch woman who grew up and came out in the plants, mills and bars of Buffalo, New York." It was her experience of working in factories in Buffalo during the 1960s and 70s that led to her involvement in the labor movement as a member of the Workers' World Party.

Not fitting established gender roles, she identified as a transsexual at one time, and actually lived as a man for a period of four years during the 1970s. Though no longer identifying as a transsexual, Leslie still identifies as transgendered. As such, Leslie has experienced not only the same oppression that gay men, lesbians and other gender non-conformists generally experience from mainstream society, but has likewise experienced oppression within the gay and lesbian community itself because of being transgendered. Referring to her oppression, she has stated: "Being gay before Stonewall, it never occurred to me that the movement that would develop from the

Rebellion would not encompass working class stone butch women, just as it never occurred to me that the industrial town I was raised in would someday shut its factories."

Her experience as a transgendered person led her to spend the last several years researching the history of transgendered oppression. Her pamphlet, *Transgender Liberation: a Movement Whose Time Has Come*, published in June 1992 by World View Forum, and which presents a Marxist analysis of why transgender oppression arose, was the outcome of her research. In addition, she has developed a slide show on the history of transgender oppression, which she has presented in cities throughout the United States.

Leslie's first novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, was published in February 1993 by Firebrand Books. *Stone Butch Blues* is the story of Jess Goldberg, who grows up differently gendered in the blue collar industrial towns of the 1950s and 1960s. Left without a job or community in the 1970s, she decides to live as a man in order to survive, but eventually learns to accept the complexities of living as a transgendered person in a world that demands gender conformity.

The following interview with Leslie Feinberg was conducted during her visit to Kansas City, Missouri on Thursday, 24 June 1993:

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

by *Davina Anne Gabriel*

Davina: You were born a woman, and you identify as a woman, but you also identify as transgendered, which indicates to me that you have a broader definition of transgendered than do most people. So, exactly how do you define the term "transgendered?"

Leslie: I think that the mass movement will shape the definition of the word "transgendered." I see the transgender community in a world that defines men as masculine and women as feminine, the two sexes polar opposites, the two genders assigned, I see all of us who fall in between that -- transsexuals, transvestites, androgynes, people who are intersexed, drag queens, drag kings, female illusionists -- I would define as transgender.

Davina: So you would consider anyone who crosses established gender boundaries in any way to be transgendered?

Leslie: Yes, but I see the gender community more as defining itself. I would never tell anyone whether I thought they were or were not transgendered. But who I see defining themselves as transgendered, and who I see forging a transgender community, are yes, exactly those people that you're referring to.

Davina: Would you consider anyone who is a butch woman or an effeminate man to be transgendered?

Leslie: I think the point is not whether I would, but whether they would. What I think is that the gender community is forming a movement and starting to be visible and that more and more people will decide whether they are or are not gender oppressed.

Davina: Do you consider someone who passes as the opposite sex for purely economic reasons and not for reasons of self-expression to be transgendered?

Leslie: I think that the passing population is by virtue of its definition an underground population, and rendered invisible because of oppression. So it's very hard to exactly sort out all of the conditions that make people pass. I think that if we'd examine the lives of a lot of other passing people we'd, first of all, find that there were very strong gender reasons why they even could pass, even if they would describe it as solely for economic or social reasons. Not everyone who goes through economic or social oppression can pass as the other sex. And I think that once people do pass that they go through a very transgendered experience in this society.

Davina: Some transsexuals regard being transsexual and being transgendered as being very different from each other and don't really consider the term "transgendered" as being appropriate to their situation. Do you see there being a fundamental difference between being transgendered and being transsexual?

Leslie: Well, in the very literal sense, we're talking about either people crossing the lines of the sex they were mandated at birth and people who are crossing the lines of gender. So, of course, I do think there's a very real difference between the lives of transsexuals and those who are transgendered, but that's in the very literal sense of the word. I also think that transsexuals who are read very easily on the street have very different lives than those who aren't, but there's becoming another use of the word "transgender" which is not so literal, which seems to me to be a kind of umbrella term to unite a very diverse population, and that's the sense in which I use "transgendered."

Now, I'm also very aware that language changes and that struggle shapes language, but it may be that there will be specific terms -- the "transsexual/transgender" community or a term that we haven't even heard yet, maybe "trans people" will come to mean anyone who crosses any sex or gender lines. So what I like about uniting us under this broad umbrella term

is that it unites a group of people who share more in common than we differ.

Davina: I agree that there needs to be an umbrella term for all of us, but the reason that some transsexuals don't like that term -- and I tend to agree with this -- is that it at least has the implication that transsexuals don't really change sex. So, do you acknowledge that that term at least has the potential to be used in that way?

Leslie: Certainly I'm not using the term to define anybody for themselves or to impose upon them a term that strips them of an important part of their identity. I think that frequently language doesn't suit the needs of all the individuals of a community. I remember after the Stonewall Rebellion when the word "gay" first came into use that a lot of people were very angered because they felt it trivializes our oppression. Now the word "gay" has become very accepted. For some of us the word "lesbian" was very difficult to say because it sounded so close to slurs that had been used against us. So I think that the more

that we grow as a movement and mature, the more our language will reflect accuracy and more of what each group within that community feels most expresses their identities.

Davina: Some people, lesbian separatists for example, have claimed that transsexuals do not actually change sex. How do you feel about that assertion?

Leslie: Oh, you mean like the "wolf-in-sheep's clothing" argument? Oh, no, no, I don't believe that at all, not at all. But



Leslie Feinberg with members of the Kansas City transsexual community (l. to r.) Fran Windler, Leslie, Angelica Dawn, Davina, Hannah Blackwell

Photo by Artie Viet

then there are also transsexuals who identify as a third sex, and that being born as a transsexual woman gave them a different set of life experiences because they had to fight for people to understand their transsexuality. So I would even question whether you could say that a male-to-female transsexual ever really was a man.

Davina: Do you still identify yourself as a passing woman?

Leslie: Well, let me talk about the crisis of language. I have been referred to in my life as a butch, as a he-she, as a passing woman, as a drag king. None of those words were words that I chose. At different times they may have more accurately explained my proximity to other groups, but it's not language that I've chosen. In the transgender community a lot of my friends refer to me as "he," and it's out of respect for my transgender spirit; it's a way of honoring me. So I don't feel that there is language that really adequately describes my experience in society or how I honor myself, but I'll accept the language that best conveys to a large group of people who I am and what I'm

arguing for.

Davina: Didn't you once identify as a transsexual?

Leslie: Well, I was part of a transsexual experimentation in Buffalo, but I think that the period of time in the early 1970s when I would have used the word "transsexual" was a time when there was no word for transgendered at all. It was not even believed that there was such a thing as transvestism among women. You would hear it argued in the transsexual program that there was only a male sexual fetishism with female clothing, and that that was transvestism. And then there was transsexual, and what it meant was something between woman and man, as it was first identified. Transsexual became like a bridge term for people who were gender different and I think many of us who were transgendered had no other language to say what our lives were about, so we said, "Well, I'm not a woman like you're a woman, I'm transsexual." The emergence of the gender community has shown not only how much diversity there is, but how it has created more language.

Davina: When you were in that transsexual program, was it your intention to change sex eventually?

Leslie: No, the sex change programs were really the only way to deal with the immediacy of survival in a world in which I could no longer survive, in which I really didn't know if I could last another week. It was very clear how to define yourself to get in the program.

Also, growing up in the fifties and sixties, it was a differ-

someone who is proud and transsexual and says, "I am not a woman, I'm a man," or "I'm not a man, I'm a woman." It was the judgment of a world saying, "You don't do it right. If you're not one you must be the other." And so I think for many of us too, we felt that if we weren't women, and clearly weren't doing that right, then perhaps it was true that we were transsexual.

Davina: What were some of the insights that you gained as a result of living as a man?

Leslie: It certainly gave me a period in my life to be able to compare and contrast the experiences I had gone through of being openly recognized as being a he-she. I didn't grow up the way other girls and other women did because I was transgendered, so I can't say, "This is what it was like to be a woman and this is what it was like to be a man." What I can say is that I found out what it was like to be transgendered growing up in the political nightmare of the fifties, and I live through what it was like not be able to work or live because of being transgendered. And then I saw how someone who had been as demonized as I was in society suddenly became a very respectable, nice, clean-cut young man. And it certainly allowed me to look at everything I had been taught about myself was an absolute, and to begin to see how really relative it was. I also saw that what didn't change, for example, was my class, which in a blue collar town like Buffalo becomes very apparent. I began to see then, what did change and what didn't, and what did

change is almost too complex to sum up in a sentence or two.

Davina: Did living as a man also provide you with any insight into how men are also oppressed by the patriarchy?

Leslie: Oh, very much so. I think that living as a he-she it would have been very difficult for me to cross that line and to see men on their own terms, and to be able to see that masculinity is not the problem -- if masculinity were the problem I would be indicting myself -- that masculinity and femininity aren't oppressive in and of themselves, but that it's a very institutionalized oppression. And so I really began to see the way too that the men of my own class were not profit-

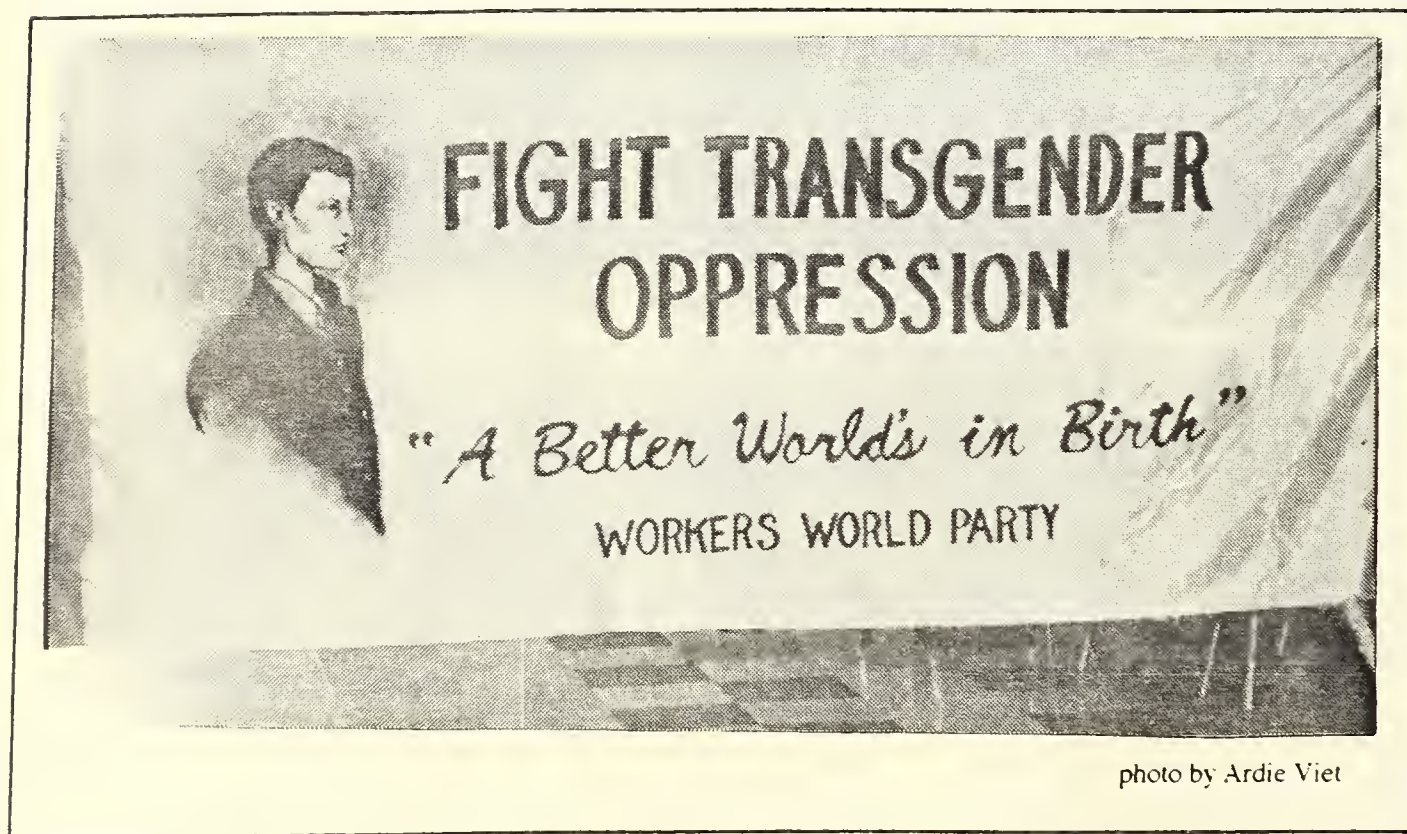


photo by Ardie Viet

ent period to reference, and I think it now may be hard for some people to remember that growing up in the fifties if you weren't a woman, what were you except a man? And if you weren't going about being a man the right way, what were you except a woman? And rather than that having the dignity of a transsexual identity, it was instead the judgment of a world that was hostile to transgender. This was not the definition of

ing in any way from sexism. I began to see how much brainwashing we all went through. It was just incredible to me to see a group that I always thought of as being the source of all my problems be themselves so weighted down with problems.

Davina: You've said that being a gender outlaw, at least at the time that you were living as a man, required keeping a low profile. Do you still think that that's true, and if so, do you see

that situation changing?

Leslie: Well, I think that we are still gender outlaws in this society. I mean, any laws that could potentially protect our rights are specifically restated so that they don't. We haven't won any broad civil rights for transgender people, although I think that transsexuals have fought enormous battles that have moved forward employment rights particularly and other rights as well. And we've fought some of the crossdressing laws in some of the states. So I don't want to minimize what has been won, but on the other hand, our status in society is still very much outlaw or is very much diagnosed from a psychiatric standpoint. It's the same thing that was true for lesbians and gays before the movement, which was you were declared either illegal or sick. But I think that this movement is saying "neither."

Davina: How did you first become aware of the history of transgendered people?

Leslie: Well, the party that I was in had put out a pamphlet on the origins of lesbian and gay oppression, and I began to look at communal societies and to wonder if there had always been people who are gender different, whether there had always been two sexes and two genders assigned to them. I began to search back as far as I could find, and I did find so much information about what we would now call transgender in pre-class society. Certainly they had their own concepts of gender, and I'm not trying to impose ours on theirs, but I found gender diversity and gender variance in so many communal societies, so many references to it in anthropological studies that I was *furious*. I thought I would be so thrilled to find the information, but social scientists knew for a long time that this was not an immutable fact of human history. And so I began to see that just like African-Americans or women or lesbians and gays being systematically written out of history that the history of transgender was, quite literally, being purposely suppressed. So I decided to start my own digging expedition.

Davina: What are some of the more interesting discoveries that you've made in the course of your research into transgender oppression?

Leslie: I think, particularly, the role of transgender leadership in peasant rebellions, anti-colonial insurrections and early labor battles on the European continent. I think that the number of peasants who cross-dressed and took the names and familial relationships of another sex in order to lead rebellions because this was viewed as a badge of class militancy was one of the things that most surprised me.

Davina: Do you see transgender oppression as being based entirely on economics or do you see other factors being involved as well?

Leslie: I would say that I see the origin of transgender oppression as being in the division of society into classes and the necessity for the tiny owning class to pit the larger laboring class against itself in the same way that racism and sexism and all sorts of bigotry are used to make people fight with each other, so that as long as they're fighting with one another they won't notice what's going on. I do think there have been specific po-

groms against transgendered people historically, specifically as I've gone into on the European continent both because of the role of transgenders being sacred to the beliefs of the communal peasantry, who the feudal ruling class, and before them the slave owners, were looking to seize their lands and their resources and their labor, and it was necessary to go after their belief system and replace it with another one. I think there were specific economic campaigns to consolidate class rule on the European continent that led to these actual pogroms against transgendered people. But once that was over, once those communal lands had been seized and divided up and privatized, centuries later we still see the need of a ruling class to pit people against one another using these forms of bigotry.

Davina: You have pointed out that even some socialists have characterized trans people as a "product of decadent patriarchal capitalism that will disappear when true equality is won." And it's also apparent that even in socialist societies that trans people have continued to be oppressed. So, given that, do you think that socialism alone is sufficient to bring about an end to the oppression of trans people?

Leslie: I don't think that we've yet seen socialism in human history. I think that the real definition of socialism requires a world system. It requires a cooperation of production for human need and that just like imperialists trade and interact on a profit basis it requires being able to raise the productive levels of humanity to beyond what they are now. I think that the revolutions that have occurred in technologically underdeveloped countries, and they've been encircled, so that makes people hold onto what they have, and what they have is a legacy of hundred of years of class divisions, of bigotry imposed on them, and predominately the role of the church. And I think that revolutions are not a single act, they're a process. All of the poison that's being sown now by the ultra-right, by the media, by the schools will be our legacy when we liberate ourselves. That's what we'll start with. But it's only by liberating ourselves that we'll be able to start to deal with it. The role of trans people in a revolutionary process, the role of those of us who are merging as a gender community and joining together to fight for change or fight for justice, then shapes the future, that what we're doing today will leave its imprint on the struggle so that whereas you might not have had trans people fighting in their own names as part of some revolutions, that it will be impossible for this one not to have the imprints of the gender community.

Davina: Some transsexuals feel as though gay & lesbian culture is appropriating their history by portraying people who would more accurately be characterized as transsexual or transgendered simply as homosexual, such as the way that Joan of Arc is portrayed in Arthur Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* or the way that the berdache are portrayed in Walter Williams's *The Spirit and the Flesh*. Do you agree with this assessment?

Leslie: I think that there is a great deal of overlap in our histories, but I also think that there's been a societal collapsing of gender oppression and the oppression of lesbians and gays to

become almost synonymous. I really think that for the two communities to be most effective as allies, that we need to understand and to separate out the oppression of the trans community and the oppression of the lesbian and gay community to see that collapsing our history into lesbian and gay history doesn't help lesbians and gays or trans people at all. In fact, we need to be able to respect our differences and to define our communities in order, then, to find a common ground to coalesce on.

Davina: What is your response to feminist writers such as Mary Daly who has described transsexuals as "Frankenstenian" or Janice Raymond who has stated that transsexuality should be "morally mandated out of existence?"

Leslie: I haven't read those specific references, but I think that gender phobia is rampant in this society and it needs to be fought, and any time a whole people who are oppressed are maligned it's divisive and it's antithetical to the kind of movement that we're talking about building, and it's cruel and it's thoughtless and it's filled with an unexamined prejudice. The women's movement has a great deal to gain from seeing its common struggle with the transgender population. My own experience is that there has really been a change going on. A great many women in the community are really examining their relationship to transgendered people, and seeing themselves as part of a larger sexually oppressed community, and I think it's a wonderful development.

Davina: What's your opinion of women's organizations or activities such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival that have "women-born women" only policies?

Leslie: When I first heard about Nancy Burkholder getting kicked out of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, I was really upset, but then I was so thrilled to hear that people actually had the courage to go back there and to poll the women there and to see if that really reflected the feelings of the women's movement as a whole or was that just a policy imposed by the security forces at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, which to my knowledge, might not even have labor unions among the women who work there. So, where did that policy come from? Is it a spontaneous policy of women wherever they gather, that they don't want male-to-female transsexuals there? If so, it would be a whole different scenario, but when I heard that seventy-three percent of the women polled -- three to one -- responded that the policy was wrong, I thought, "Good for the people who went back. Good for you for having the courage to go to the rank and file of the women's movement and to ask, 'Do you think this is the right thing to do?'" Who would have ever known how many women would wear buttons that said "I Might Be Transsexual?" I think frequently that it can reflect a class policy, and I also feel that the policy of dividing women along the lines of "woman-born women" and male-to-female transsexuals is an essentialist position. I was really very, very encouraged by that seventy-three percent poll. And that's without even the benefit of a lot of dialogue and education. That was the gut-level response of seventy-three percent of the women, all of whom live in a male supremacist

class society in which they really want to be with other women. They really want to be in a space where they don't feel threatened, and even within that context, seventy-three percent supported the right of our transsexual sisters to be there, and I thought, "Good, this is really showing this is a new day."

Davina: Do you see any parallels between your experience of being excluded from the women's community because of your being a stone butch and that of male-to-female transsexuals who continue to be excluded from the women's community because of their being born anatomically male?

Leslie: Well, sure, absolutely. I feel absolute solidarity with my male-to-female transsexual sisters and my female-to-male brothers. Both to my sisters and brothers who are transsexual, as well as transvestites or crossdressers -- again those words are very limiting -- because I really feel that women really will be more powerful when sexual oppression is looked at in a broad way societally, that excluding male-to-female or female-to-male transgendered people, and I don't just mean transsexuals, but all transgendered or transsexual people, from the category of "woman" is in fact hiding the depth of sexual oppression in this country. Now that term may change. It may become sexual and gender oppression. I'm not trying to define how that oppression will be termed. But women need to see how strong the transgendered community can be as an ally against sexual oppression in this society and how deeply institutionalized it is, and to really develop beyond the concept of masculinity or femininity, and really looking clearly at the institutionalization of sexual oppression and who it benefits, who is *really* privileged, who is profiting from pitting people against one another. I think it's an enormous step forward that we're going to take together. I think the gender community really challenges human consciousness on the questions of the relationship between sex and gender expression and sexual orientation in a way that's really going to reveal a great deal more about who are the real oppressors in this society, and enlarge our view of who is oppressed, and therefore who are our allies in a common struggle.

Davina: You've called for greater understanding and unity between trans people and the non-trans queer community. What are some of the ways in which you think that this understanding and unity can be promoted?

Leslie: Well, partly through dialogue. I know somebody who was very viciously, viciously beaten by bashers with baseball bats who were referring to this person as "faggot." And this person's wife was waiting at home with dinner, worried sick. The very fact that our enemies, both on that street scale, but also in a larger societal sense, identify all that is not straight as "queer" mean that we really need to dialogue as communities and to discuss how we define ourselves to be able to clear up some of the misunderstandings and frictions which I feel have in many ways been imposed from without, not necessarily have come up from within, the more we can get down to linking arms and fighting back. I think it's really essential. I don't think any one group of people can liberate itself. I really don't believe that any one of us can be free until all of us are, and I

really think that the more that we don't talk to each other, the more we will never understand each other, and I don't think we have to be afraid to open up any dialogues right now. Let's throw it all out on the table, let's discuss all of it. Let's rehash who we are, what our misunderstandings and preconceptions are, how we want to be respected, what our demands are, how we can best be allies for each other's communities, and I think that on some scale it's beginning to happen.

Davina: What is your response to gay men and lesbians who regard us as somewhat of an embarrassment and try to distance themselves from us?

Leslie: It weakens the movement. The lesbian and gay community gets gender-baited by the right wing, and the strongest position is to not say, "We're not all like that," but to say, "Some of us are like that, and of course we're going to stand together against that, and that's bigotry, and you're not going to divide us on that." And also I think that many in the gender community have been told when they were growing up, "Oh, you're really just gay, and why can't you just admit it instead of trying to act heterosexual?" And it's a painful thing to have your identity so misunderstood. I have heard transgender people say, "I am not gay," but in an anti-gay world saying that sounds loaded. So there's got to be a way that we as a gender community can say, "Yes, many of us are gay, but not all of us are." I think the gender community needs to be good strong fighters against lesbian and gay oppression. The lesbian and gay community

needs to stand strong against gender oppression, and that in the long run is going to win the most solidarity.

Davina: How do you feel about the term "transgender" not being included in the title of the March on Washington?

Leslie: Well, I think it was a mistake by some in the leadership of the march. I know that I and many other people worked very hard to win an understanding of why the march would be even more powerful if it included "transgender" in the title. I think that what we did do was to win a lot more understanding among many who were involved in the march who might not have even thought about the question of transgender if there had not been a struggle. I think that we won an enormously progressive platform in which transgender was in many of the planks. And I, myself, and a number of other transgender people went to the march and were very visible in it. And I feel

like, well, we won a lot and we're going to win more next time and we're not going to stop. It was an enormously progressive march and including "transgender" can only make it more progressive.

Davina: Are you familiar with an organization called Transgender Nation?

Leslie: Yes.

Davina: They practice a kind of confrontationalist -- some might even say radical -- kind of political activism. What do you think of the tactics that they practice?

Leslie: Well, I don't want to in any way counterpose my own beliefs to TG Nation. I think we're all in this trying to push things forward. We're all up against the same system. The women's movement, the lesbian and gay movement and all the



(l. to r.) Fran, Angelica, Michael, Leslie, Davina, Hannah

photo by Ardie Viet

different currents of the transgender movement, we're all really suffering, and we're all trying the best way we know how to move things forward, and that's all I can say.

Davina: There seems to be more fascination with gender issues right now than at any time that I can ever remember. There's certainly more being written about it in the queer media than I can ever remember, but there also seems to be more interest in gender issues in mainstream society than ever before, as the popularity of such films as *The Crying Game* and *Orlando* indicates. Why do you think that there is such a fascination with gender issues at this particular time?

Leslie: Well, I'm not sure if I can answer that. I don't know exactly. Anything I said would just be speculating, but what is true is that what you just said is true. What you just said is absolutely a fact, there is enormous interest in it at this time, and I

think that that gives us an avenue to travel with the demands of the transgender community. Different groups in the transgender community will have different demands and we can put them all forward and fight for them all and be heard in a much wider way and win much more understanding and acceptance because I think there are people watching and listening and asking questions, and so it's easier to get in there and speak for ourselves, instead of having people who are not transgendered, such as people who are academics or doctors or psychiatrists or whatever, speak for us.

Davina: Where do you see all of this interest in gender issues leading?

Leslie: Well, I don't think that our future is fixed, and that's part of what makes me work so hard as an activist. I really think that what's going to come out of all of this is not just what we make it be, because clearly we're not the only side of this fight. We have other forces arrayed against us that we've been fighting, but I really think that no one knows exactly where this is going, and that's what makes it so exciting. We'll just take it as far as we can.

Davina: You've said that transpersons can really shake up this society's way of thinking. What are some of the ways that you think that we can do that?

Leslie: Well, like I said, the societal misunderstanding that women and men are polar opposites, that you can just look at someone's genitals at birth and determine their sex and the case is closed, the belief that if someone's gender doesn't appear to be appropriately fixed to their sex, that automatically you can determine their sexual orientation by watching them walk down the street, the social penalties for crossing sex or gender lines that have impacted on everyone's form of expression -- everyone's form of expression is affected by knowing somewhere deep down unconsciously that you know that if you veer away from your assigned sex and gender that you will suffer enormous penalties -- means that we can really now open up the questions of the relationship between sex and gender expression and sexual orientation in a whole new way and to be able to look at human beings and the way that we've been taught about them -- that women are feminine and straight, that men are masculine and straight, that people's genitals determine their sex and their feelings about their own bodies -- all of these things have been accepted as givens for a long time. And the gender community -- and I'm glad its a huge, diverse and complex population because it's shaking it all up -- it's going to make people re-examine those things and to really look at people as they are, not as we've been taught they must be. And really, the more complexity, the more that we can see the gender

diversity and other forms of diversity within the human population that is being so shoehorned by laws and social norms that have been imposed and penalties on the street, the more clear it will be that it's all oppression. There are a lot of ways for women and men to be, but there are not a lot of ways that women and men are allowed to be very easily. So I think it takes a lot of courage for a gender community to come out and say, "look at us." We are challenging all of those things that we have been taught are part of human nature, and the more that people challenge that, then the more the population has to look around and say, "Well, where did I get those ideas to begin with? Who taught me that? And why?"

Davina: I'm going to mention to you a couple of criticisms that I have read of you and of your slide show that I read in a review, which was incidentally written by a transsexual, and I'd like you to respond to them. First of all, how do you respond to the charge that your are appropriating the history and spirituality of Native American people for your own purposes?

Leslie: Well, I certainly have gone to great lengths to show two things

in the slide show. The slide show deals a great deal with European history, not out of some unexamined Eurocentrism, but because I'm placing the blame for a great many of the attitudes around the world about transgender on the European ruling classes. And secondly, it shows that societies around the world have accepted gender diversity in a very different way than we've been taught. But I haven't read that particular review, and I'm sorry to hear that, but it's a tightrope that I've been walking to show both internationalism or a cross-cultural look without trying to interpret other people's beliefs, and all of it has been credited to the Native sources that it has come from. For instance, it's been GAI (Gay American Indians) or Wewha Barcheeampe in New York City that has brought so much of this to light, and on the other hand, to expose the role of the European ruling classes in all of this, so I'm just doing the best I can on it.

Davina: How do you respond to the criticism that you're "jumping on the gender bandwagon," that is, that you're just taking advantage of something that happens to be a trendy issue right now?

Leslie: Well, I don't know who the person is, so I'm not addressing it to that review. But I've been arguing about this, raising these issue, talking about it in the movement now for more than twenty years, and I'm glad so many people are listening now, but it's pretty hard to accuse me of jumping on any bandwagon after I've been doing this for as long as I have.



photo by Kris Kleindienst

Building Bridges

by Leslie Feinberg

I am a transgendered activist; I am a lesbian. I am the way I am; I love who I love -- I have a right to be whole. Trying to choose one identity over the other would be as untenable as standing with a foot in each of two rowboats drifting apart.

So this question has great urgency for me: What is the relationship between the lesbian/gay and the transgendered communities? I believe the answer has enormous importance for the forward direction of both movements.

When I came out as a young butch in Niagara Falls and Buffalo, New York I found those pre-Stonewall bars filled with women like myself, femmes and drag queens on a weekend night. On weekdays, in the factories, butches like myself were referred to as "he-shes" much as our drag queen sisters were labeled as "she-males."

People used to say we "looked gay" but in fact, unless we were holding hands with our lovers or walking out of a gay bar, it was not our sexual preference that made us visible, it was our *gender expression*. We were transgendered -- there was no closet big enough to hide us.

So for a long time it was the transgendered lesbian and gay community that was the observable tip of the iceberg of a huge submerged population. We fought the battles resulting from our intertwined oppressions and those struggles ignited the four day uprising in 1969 -- the Stonewall Rebellion -- which birthed the contemporary lesbian and gay liberation movement.

The erroneous belief that being lesbian or gay meant you were automatically transgendered was challenged, but a new misconception arose. Butches, femmes and drag queens were believed to be merely an embarrassing cusp of the lesbian and gay community and viewed as an "outdated stereotype."

The young women's and lesbian and gay movements were striving to develop theory that could help to explain the world and become a tool for fight-back. But strictly dividing our allies and enemies into women/men or gay/straight was not an effective tool and it served to limit the movement and its understanding of its own history.

Butches were referred to as male chauvinist pigs; femmes were accused of not being "real" lesbians and selling out to the patriarchy. Drag queens were charged with "mocking women's oppression." We were labeled *oppressors*. We didn't have the language to explain that we are in fact an integral part of the oppressed.

We didn't have the history at our fingertips to prove that transgender has always been a part of human self-expression but it has not always been hated and reviled, that we were once held in high-esteem by communal societies. We weren't able to provide the evidence that transvestism predates women's oppression.

Pogroms set in motion by the chattel slave owners and feudal landlords that targeted transgender arose in historical tandem with the debasement of women and same-sex love. It was our common enemies who declared all that was once considered natural to be its opposite.

But today, almost a quarter century after the Stonewall Rebellion rocked the world, a new movement is rising -- the movement for transgender liberation. The coalescing of this young community, organizing and fighting back, is enabling another previously hidden social iceberg to emerge. Now the world can see how diverse we are, how many ways there are to express gender. And for the first time historically the wide range of sexual preference in our transgendered community is clear.

The struggle for gender freedom also enriches human consciousness with a fuller understanding of the relationship between sex, gender expression and sexual preference.

I view the transgender community as a broad circle embracing a rich diversity of gender expression and sexual preference. The lesbian, gay and bi communities are another large circle which include a wide spectrum of gender variance. These two circles, in my view, partially overlap. I am one of the people who has a foot in each of those communities. I hope those of us who do can serve as a bridge because I think our communities are natural allies and that all our strength would be magnified by bonds of solidarity.

In order to do so, the lesbian, gay and bi communities must be on the front lines fighting gender phobia and the transgender community needs to close ranks in the fight against homophobia.

The lesbian and gay community is subject to a steady stream of transgender-baiting attacks by the establishment. For example, whenever a gay rights bill was pending before the New York City Council, the *New York Times* ran an editorial asking if the lesbian and gay community was calling for men in high heels to be firefighters.

The correct answer would be that any transvestite would wear sensible shoes on such a job. Why can't transgendered people fight fires or teach school?

The timid denial from a handful of prominent lesbians and gays that "We're not all like that," only serves to weaken the fight-back movement. We need to defend all the most op-

pressed segments of the lesbian and gay community from attack -- that will enhance our strength. I believe that the vast majority of the grassroots lesbian/gay/bi communities would agree.

As a long-time lesbian activist I urge my lesbian, gay and bi sisters and brothers to take the initiative in reaching out to the transgender community to form a lasting coalition.

As a transgender activist, I call on my TS/TG brothers and sisters to actively fight homophobia.

I know that many straight transvestites and transsexuals have been justly angered by a lifetime of accusations that their gender expression was merely a reflection of being stuck in the closet. No one wants the identity they are willing to live for or to die for to be collapsed or invalidated or misunderstood.

But "differently" gendered people always face a barrage of anti-gay bigotry. Distancing ourselves from lesbians and gay men is not the answer. Fighting the oppression head-on is. There are legions of straight and bisexual people in this country who stand in opposition to anti-gay bigotry. We must be in the lead.

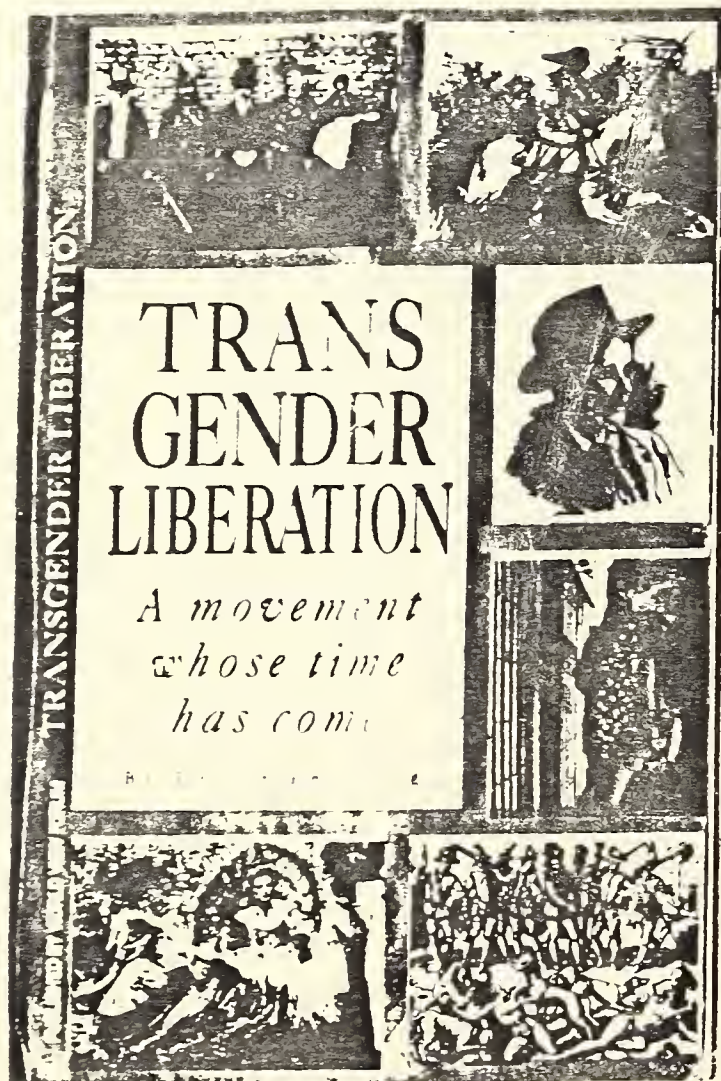
The trade unions in this country were built on the truth that "An injury to one is an injury to all."

But forging bonds of unity between these two embattled and mighty segments of the population can and must be built on understanding and respecting our differences. That is the

same spirit in which we fight racism in this society. Our daily lives were not identical but we face a common enemy -- the sneering employer refusing our job application, the landlord slamming the door in our face, the right-wing politician filibustering against our rights, the basher wielding a baseball bat at our heads.

I deeply believe that diverse peoples who are downtrodden can unite and win crucial battles together. That is the spirit of Stonewall -- a battle fought by Black, Latino and white women and men who, like myself, could not choose between their sexual preference and their gender identity.

*Leslie Feinberg is an activist and author of the newly released transgender novel **Stone Butch Blues**, published by Firebrand and available in local bookstores. Her pamphlet entitled **Transgender Liberation: a Movement Whose Time Has Come**, published by World View Forum, is based on a slide show she is currently touring the country with. The pamphlet can be ordered for \$3.00 (includes postage) from: World View Forum, 46 West 21st. Street; New York, New York 10010. Both books can be ordered from the same address for \$15.00.*



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“We’re Queer Too!:)” Trans Community Demands Inclusion

by Davina Anne Gabriel

There were several different contingents that I could have marched with in the March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, but I didn't have any trouble deciding which one it would be. I marched with what was perhaps the smallest contingent in the march, consisting of only about forty persons; that is, the Transgender contingent. I did not choose to march with this contingent because it is as a transsexual that I most define my identity. Quite the contrary, actually. As a matter of fact, if I were to delineate all of the various attributes that I identify as in descending order of importance, “transsexual” would rate pretty far down that list, most certainly far below that of “lesbian.” I can think of at least a dozen other ways that I identify myself that are far more central to my identity than that of “transsexual.”

But it is as a transsexual that I have experienced the greatest amount of oppression in my life, and ironically, it has been within the lesbian and gay community that I have experienced

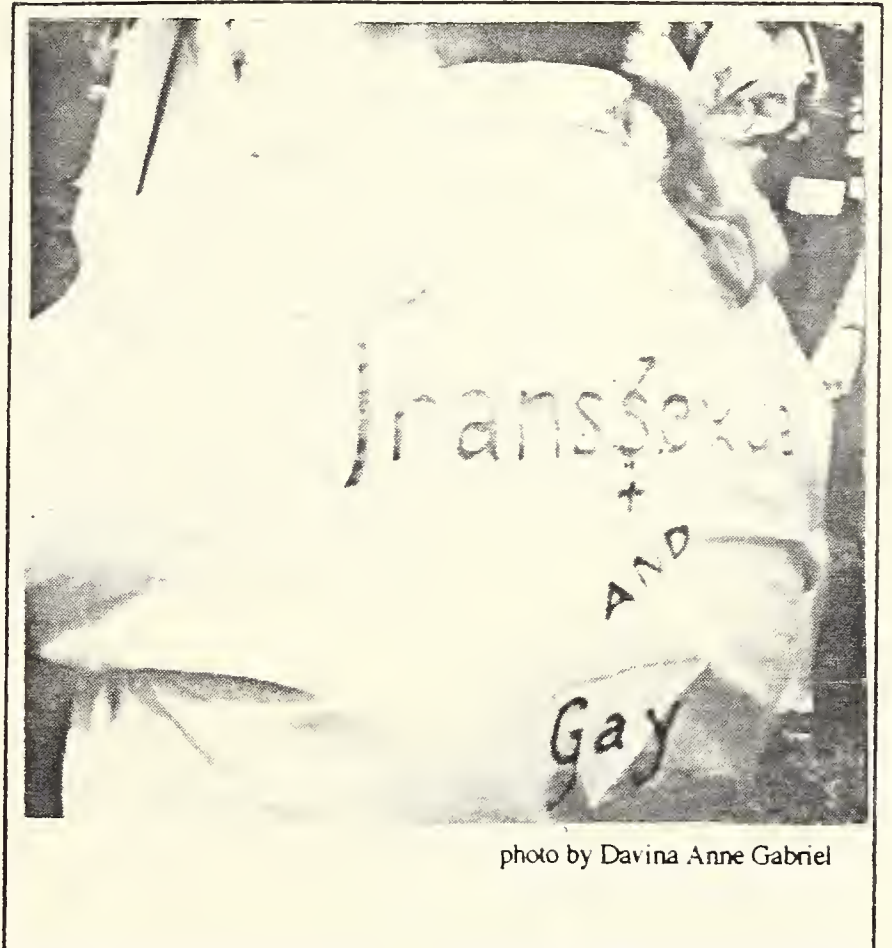


photo by Davina Anne Gabriel



Davina Anne Gabriel & Nancy Jean Burkholder

photo by Janis Walworth

the greatest amount of that oppression. Likewise, it is my transsexuality that has most defined my own personal struggle for dignity and equality, and it has been that particular struggle, over and above all of my activism on behalf of lesbian and gay rights, which has provided me with the greatest sense of personal satisfaction and empowerment.

Just as the MOW marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement, so did it mark a significant turning point in the newly emergent transgender movement, which has only begun to really find its voice and to make its presence known in the last several years. The MOW marked the greatest amount of recognition and inclusion ever accorded to the trans community by the gay, lesbian and bisexual community.

Unbeknownst to the overwhelming majority of that community, and probably to the overwhelming majority of the trans community as well, there was quite a concerted effort to have the word “transgender” included in the title of the march. The one individual who was most instrumental in that effort was my friend Anne Ogborn, a former Kansas City resident who now lives in San Francisco, where she founded an organization called Transgender Nation, which is a focus group of Queer Nation, and has already formed chapters in several other cities

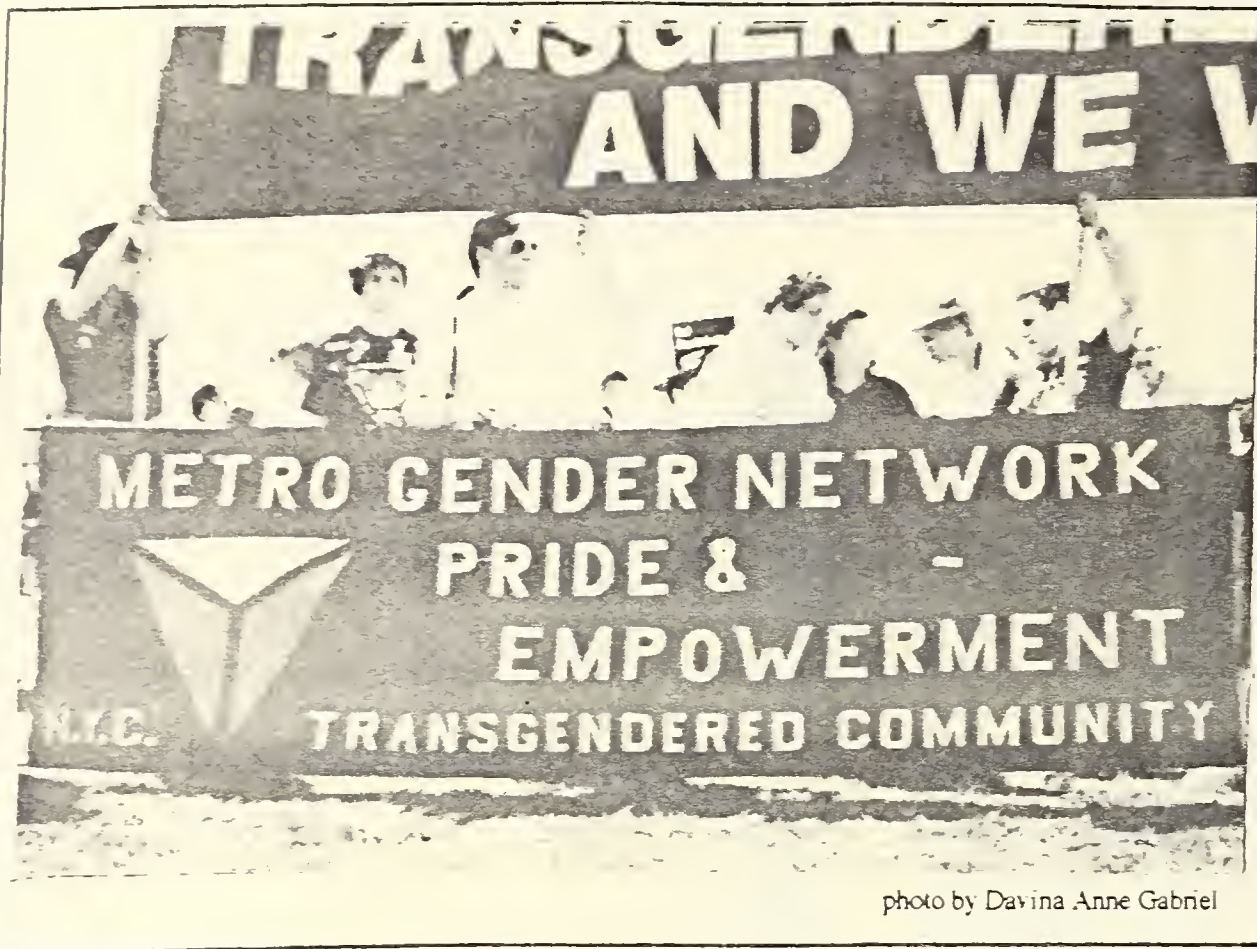


photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

was speaking as a representative of Queer Nation/SF, read a list of pre-arranged questions as to why transgenders were not in the title and literature and concluded, 'When is it going to be fixed? ...

The tension level rose perceptibly when, finding the answers unacceptable, Ogborn and others began blowing whistles . . . 'Without the inclusion of 'transgender' in the title, it's not my march' she said."

Even though Transgender Nation was unsuccessful in having the word "transgender" included in the title of the march, the Transgender Caucus of the MOW achieved at least one enormously significant victory, one which I regard as even more important than the inclusion of "transgender" in the title, and that is that the MOW National Steering Committee did resolve to include the word "transgender" wherever possible in the body of march literature.

Most significantly, the steering committee resolved that the MOW platform, which consisted of seven major planks, would include "transgender" in every plank that mentioned "lesbian,

across the country.

When she still lived in Kansas City, Anne was one of the founding members, as well as one of the hardest working members, of the Human Rights Project, and continued to work tirelessly on behalf of an anti-discrimination ordinance for gays, lesbians and bisexuals even after transsexuality was dropped from the original definition of sexual orientation in the proposed ordinance.

I haven't always regarded Anne's various political activities as wise or efficacious, but in this particular instance, I have to give her the credit she deserves. The tangible results of her activism on behalf of trans persons were highly evident, even if she was not successful in achieving her ultimate goal. In fact, a majority of the delegates on the MOW National Steering Committee did vote in favor of adding "transgender" to the official title of the march, but the proposal to do so fell short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage.

Anne's unmistakable style of activism was described in an article by Val C. Phoenix in the 17 December 1992 issue of *The San Francisco Bay Times* entitled *Merrily We Eat Our Own: March on Washington Comes to Grips With Transgender Issues*:

"At a March on Washington Town Meeting at the Eureka Valley Recreation Center on Nov. 21, a contingent of transgendered people and their supporters confronted local organizers, charging exclusion from march planning, and promised to disrupt the march if their demands were not met . . . At issue was not just the omission of the word 'transgender' from the title, but the feeling that the march might be trying to keep out 'fringe' elements of the community in order to seem more acceptable to straight society . . . Anne Ogborn, a transsexual who



Davina Anne Gabriel

photo by Janis Walworth

gay and bisexual." In addition, a longer document spelling out details of these planks included several specific transgender demands, including the repeal of all laws prohibiting cross-dressing or other cross-gender expression, classification of sex-change surgery as medical, rather than cosmetic for the purposes of insurance, Medicare, Medicaid and the proposed universal health care plan; appropriate medical care for all transgendered people in prisons, hospitals or other institutions, and removal of gender dysphoria from the list of medical disorders.

In a statement from the Transgender Constituency on the MOW Platform, the Transgender Caucus of the MOW congratulated the lesbian, gay & bisexual movement for its long overdue recognition of transpersons and for "opening up to the question of transgender oppression." That historic document stated: "Where once this movement was gender-baited into ignoring or denouncing us, they are beginning to see that our communities have a lot in common. All of us are ridiculed, hated and humiliated because of who we are. All of us have had to discover our unique identities in a hostile society. All of us can be discriminated against, harassed and attacked. And all of us need each other to fight together for liberation."

To those who do not realize the extent of marginalization of trans persons within the queer community or who were unaware of the concerted behind-the-scenes struggle that trans persons waged for full inclusion in the march, the gains achieved by trans persons might not seem like all that much. Yet to those of us for whom these issues constitute the substance of our daily lives, the importance of our accomplishment could not be understated; we were enormously

aware of how much had been accomplished.

So for me, the march represented not only how much the gay, lesbian & bisexual civil rights movement has achieved over the last several years, but the extent to which trans persons have succeeded in gaining recognition, acceptance and respect within that movement.

This achievement carried with it a great deal of personal significance for me as well, as I have personally been involved in a long and difficult struggle here in my own community of Kansas City to gain greater acceptance and recognition of trans persons, and within the last year, I have, like Anne, shifted the focus of my activism from a local to a national level. Though Anne and I had focused our energies differently and had pursued different strategies, both of us have been at the forefront of the struggle of transpersons to gain acceptance and recognition within the queer community.

So seeing Anne (wearing one of her omnipresent "Sex Change" t-shirts, of course) again for the first time in over two years and together savoring the fruits of our labors ranks among the most significantly empowering experiences of my lifetime.

Similarly exhilarating and empowering was meeting and marching with Nancy Jean Burkholder whose expulsion from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1991 had managed to bring the issue of transsexual exclusion within the lesbian community to national attention

and had inspired me to challenge that event's exclusionary policy by attending the festival myself and undertaking a variety of consciousness-raising activities there last year. Although I had not actually met Nancy before, I had spoken to her by tele-



Anne Ogborn

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel



Nancy Burkholder

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

phone and had exchanged letters with her.

Attending the MOW along with Nancy was her (non-transsexual) friend Janis Walworth, with whom I had attended MWMF last year, and who actually planned and organized all of the various consciousness-raising activities that we performed there. And along with Janis and Nancy was Janis's transsexual lover Wendy Kaiser, wearing her Navy uniform (she is on inactive duty), who proudly came out to a *Washington Post* reporter as both a transsexual and a lesbian. Already having begun planning for this year's MWMF consciousness-raising events, Janis and Nancy distributed fliers describing Nancy's expulsion and alerting potential festival goers to the festival's exclusionary policy.

The Transgender contingent, though small, reflected the diversity of the march as a whole, including every possible variety of trans person imaginable: pre- and post-operative male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, transvestites, transgenderists, drag queens and kings, gender benders, all of every possible sexual orientation from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual and everything in between, and of course, at least one very supportive non-trans person.

I carried a sign that read "Proud Transsexual Lesbian" that I had created myself. I was the only person in the march to carry such a sign. And of course, I wore my 1992 MWMF t-shirt, which for me is a symbol of my refusal to allow myself to be excluded from the lesbian community. And I truly never



Janis Walworth

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

been surpassed once in my life, and that is when I attended MWMF last year and came out as a transsexual on the last day of the festival.

The degree of our success in gaining inclusion and respect for trans persons was evident to us in the number of speakers who specifically included the word "transgender" along with every mention of the terms "gay," "lesbian" and "bisexual," as it seemed nearly every speaker who addressed the march at its beginning seemed to do. We erupted into cheers every time that we were acknowledged, and my voice was hoarse even before we actually began marching.

Yet, the tangible degree of our success went beyond even that. Definitely the most exhilarating moment came for us when Phyllis Frye, co-ordinator of the upcoming Second Annual International Conference of Transgender Law and Employment Policy, addressed the marchers as they waited to leave the assembly area.

Much to our surprise and delight, what we had expected to be a gracious thank-you to the queer community for the newfound recognition that it had given us, turned into an admonishment of the community for its continued transphobia and exclusion of trans persons, and a demand for an immediate end to it. Even more surprisingly, this sentiment seemed to meet with the overwhelming approval of the crowd as well. We were utterly ecstatic.

Our contingent, which was number fifty of the ninety-eight contingents, did not leave the parade assembly area until about 3:30 p.m, three-and-a-half hours after the first contingent began marching.

Marching directly behind us was the Illinois contingent. We let out a roar of approval for them as they assembled be-



Wendi Kaiser

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

had felt more pride in the position that I occupy within the queer community. I received dozens of compliments for that sign and dozens of other people photographed me carrying it. The sense of empowerment I felt carrying that sign has only

hind us and we noticed that they had included the word "transgender" on their banner. Then we were off.

From time to time throughout the march, the Illinois contingent, which was led by the Chicago contingent, would chant: "We've got Oprah!" Every time that they would do so, we would respond with "We're ON Oprah!"

The other slogans that we chanted as we marched were likewise directed as much to the other marchers as to the spectators as to the elected officials whom we had come to petition. Among them: "We're here: we're queer, and we won't be excluded!"; "Our bodies, our selves, our lives!"; "Change now!"; "It's not too late to change!"; "The change will do you good!"; "No more exclusion!" and "We're queer too!" But my favorite moment of the entire march occurred when we passed a group of women wearing t-shirts proclaiming "Seps rule!" and we began chanting "We're all going to Michigan!"

Since I've returned from the march, one person has told me that she read that there had been some negative reaction to the Transgender contingent from the spectators, but if there was any, I did not notice it. I neither experienced or witnessed any of the negativity that is frequently directed at trans persons within the queer community. I felt nothing but an overwhelming sense of acceptance from everyone whom I came in contact with. However, Anne did tell me that she did experience some such negativity from some people before the march.

Of course, it would be incredibly naive for me to think that everyone there was accepting of trans persons or that we have gained anything even remotely resembling full inclusion

and recognition within the queer community. As the fact that several speakers made remarks to the effect that homosexuals remain the last group of people in our society whom it is legitimate to discriminate against demonstrates, there are still plenty of queer activists who are altogether quite willing to slam the door behind them once they have acquired their civil rights. And of course, one has only to look at who gays & lesbians feel it is legitimate to stigmatize to realize that they are certainly not the last people in society whom it is still acceptable to discriminate against.

And there are even those in positions of power in the queer community who are not in the least bit reluctant to allow transsexual to be their sacrificial lambs or to use transsexuals as "bargaining chips" in their struggle for civil rights. I have actually had queer activists openly discuss using transsexuals as "bargaining chips" in their struggle for civil rights, and then not be able to understand why I would be offended at such a suggestion.

And of course, there remains the most blatant example of transsexual exclusion, the still widespread acceptance of "women-born women" only events in the lesbian community.

So we may still be sitting at the back of the queer bus, but at least it's not still trying to run us over like it sometimes has in the past. But the spirit of diversity and acceptance to emerge from the MOW gives me confidence that five or six years hence, when the next March on Washington is held that we will be included in the title of the march, and that there will be ten times as many of us in our contingent.



photo by Jeff Klenovic

Video Tape

by Riki Anne Wilchins

(The following was read at a transsexual speak-out at New York's Lesbian & Gay Community Center, held in honor of the fortieth anniversary of Christine Jorgenson's sex-change surgery.)

Rewind

"It's beautiful," I exclaim. It is, in fact, a particularly fine watch my father has just bought for my birthday, the jeweled face throwing back at me the summer's sunlight. "It's . . . it's . . ." I hesitate, searching for just the right word, "it's divine," I breathe happily. My father's face comes up sharply, his pupils narrowing. "Boys don't say divine." And he watches me, his head cocked slightly to one side. I open my mouth to question this unfathomable statement, as if certain dictionary words were colored blue for boys and pink for girls, but there is something hard in his voice and eyes and suddenly, my pleasure evaporates and is replaced entirely by fear, I know if I question him I'll probably get the palm of his hand. You know, when a six foot, two-and-a-half inch, two hundred pound man hits you in the face with his open hand, it's like being hit in the head with a ham. And so mumbling something to my feet like "Well, it *is* very nice," I make a small mental note to avoid this particular word in the future.

Fast Forward

The woman sitting across from me is so butch that she is often mistaken for a man and we have, in fact, been discussing the pros and cons of her beginning testosterone treatments. But at the moment, she is lecturing me on being more feminine. "You sometimes . . . I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you sit crosslegged in meetings and sometimes it takes up some of the space of the woman next to you. Some of the women in the group are upset with you. As a woman, I just wouldn't do that. We don't do things like that. It's your male training, like the men on the subway who have to spread their legs and take up two seats: You don't understand how intimidating to women male behavior can be."

Quick Rewind

I have been invited as a guest panelist at the LUST conference for women. When I'm done speaking, I sit, and there's

this pressure built up in the room and the women start applauding and it just goes on and on and on. I sit, I can't even look at this stunning validation, this unbelievable, unsought welcome back into some kind of women's community, after I left all that behind twelve years ago in Cleveland. Speaking later in response to an audience question, I remark how strange it is to be an honored guest at an event that probably would have tossed my white ass out ten years ago. It's like riding the crest of a wave: what a strange thing, to be on the edge of a coming change, a change you have waited for, hungered for and worked for, that suddenly begins to happen all around you.

Forward, Normal Speed

One of the exciting things to come out of the LUST conference is that a woman is planning a dinner and sex party for 100 women. Oh boy, does this sound hot or what? I've been waiting about a decade for something like this to happen here in New York City. I find one of the fliers at the Center. As I go to take the brochure home I see on the bottom of the last page: "no men, no transvestites, and no transsexuals." Riding the crest of a wave indeed: the board has just flipped and I have a mouthful of saltwater. For once, I've got to confront someone who is discriminating against me, if only to talk. I call, just asking for a dialogue, a chance to at least explore our differences. After a few minutes she tells me that I'm simply a transvestite who has mutilated himself, and hangs up.

Rewind

Eighth grade, math class. I cannot hear what the teacher is saying. In fact, I don't care what she's saying. I am totally mesmerized by the sight of Darlene Rosenblatt's new young breast disappearing into the cup of her new young bra, something I can just barely see as she sits across from me in her sleeveless dress. Worse, I am torn between wanting desperately to touch that soft breast and wanting desperately to have that soft breast.

Fast Forward

I am on the new trading floor at Republic National Bank. It is the third day of my nine month consulting contract. One of the block traders far down the floor is taking down everyone's name and phone extension and when he gets to me, he calls for me to spell my name. I do, and he yells back, "Riki Anne, that's cute. Where'd that come from?" "Well," I yell

back, "You know it used to be Richard." The heads of two block traders down the floor, intently tracking the DOW movement on their monitors, swivel up sharply and around as if on soundless ball bearings. They stare briefly at me before returning to the DOW. My boss sitting next to me, who has come to Wall Street from a very gay twelve-year career in musical theatre, chuckles softly without even looking up from his screen. He is having more fun with this than a pig in shit.

Forward, Normal Speed

My new boss, a twenty-five year old NYU finance graduate, is staring intently at my chest. Actually, not my chest, but the area on my coat over my chest. Just about over my heart, on the left side. I've been a little intimidated here at J.P. Morgan. I've spent a year and half trying to get a consulting contract here and I'm finally in. I look down, knowing helplessly I'm probably wearing some of my breakfast or something: Just what I need. But I am not. What I am wearing, however, is my "Take a Transsexual to Lunch" button, which I wear everywhere *but* into work and which this morning of all morning I have neglected to remove.

Rewind

My friend Deborah has offered to stay over with me, and since it's my first night back home from surgery, I gratefully accept. We lie quietly in bed together, she's just holding me gently. "Can I feel?" she asks after a minute. Yes, but I have a dilator in so you can't really go inside. She puts her hand between my legs anyway. "Can I move it?" she asks. Sure, why not? I have no thought on this subject, just a kind of curiosity and a small, flaming desire to lose whatever kind of virginity this is, after losing so many others. She pushes gently, firmly on the dilator as her body leans towards mine and for the first time in my twenty-eight year old life, I feel a woman moving inside me, in my vagina.

Fast Forward

I am at a private, very underground, lesbian women's S/M night at "Paddles" here in New York, invited by Pat Califia, who by many accounts, began this movement. This is, at best, a completely super-marginalized minority within a minority, which New York's Finest can raid at any time they choose during the evening with complete impunity. A woman approaches me, dressed entirely in shining black leather from neck to toe and holding a rather substantial riding crop which she flexes as we talk. After a few minutes, she confides she find me very attractive, and wonders do I enjoy being whipped, because she would very much like to whip me. And as we continue talking, and I mention I am transsexual, she freezes, stares intently, and looking a bit green around the gills, excuses herself hurriedly to stalk across the room, where she and several of her non-transsexual, leather-clad, lesbian-feminist, sado-masochistic (I'm

running out of hyphens here) friends can stand and giggle and point at someone as strange and unique as me.

Rewind

Dad is climbing through the fence, which is made of barbed wire strands, strung from fence posts all over this farm where we are hunting pheasant. It is freezing cold with a half foot of snow on the ground, but we are both heavily, bulkily dressed and shod against the weather and the wind that gathers speed blowing down across the open fields. To get through the fence, to separate and hold the rusted barbed wire, he has to hand me his big twelve guage shotgun, which I hold along with my smaller, lighter twenty guage. As he climbs through, I can see the only thing around us, the clubhouse, far over his shoulder in the lonely distance, a single black silhouette against the gathering sky, and I tell myself, I can do it: I can say I dropped it and it went off, and inside my head a little pounding begins and small quivers are starting to knot my stomach and shoulders. You wouldn't really, I tell myself, but already I can see the look of surprise, that final, complete grasp of fact, as the shotgun goes off, blowing a hole in that bastard that only a twelve guage shotgun at very close range can make, a hole you could put your entire thirteen-year old fist through, the sound echoing off the clubhouse and back at us, and me knowing I am free, finally, at least. They'll believe me if I cry, if I withdraw into myself, I know how to do months of silent, strained shock to hide from people: he has at least taught me that. And then I imagine the devastation to my mother and our lives, and the years of questions and forms and police and authorities and while I am thinking of all this he finishes climbing through the fence and reaches for me to hand him his gun with no thought in his head but that I obey instantly as usual and like a puff of quick air the single moment of safety and freedom hits me and is gone.

Fast Forward

Jaye Davidson is going to pull the trigger, she is absolutely going to pop that non-transsexual IRA bitch. I am sitting watching *The Crying Game*, which every non-transsexual friend and acquaintance has told me I *must* see, and I'm remembering being in that final, pre-surgical meeting at the Cleveland Clinic, sitting in tears surrounded by about eight doctors and a dozen perky young nurses, trying desperately to convince these sodden bastards that, yes, I am a transsexual, and yes, I want them to make sure I have a functioning clit when they're done carving up my groin like a Thanksgiving turkey because, yes, I do still get hot for women and I look forward to them going down on me, and one doctor has asked me with barely suppressed disgust how I would feel if I couldn't have an orgasm (and how would you feel if your sorry-assed wienie-roasted limp dick couldn't have an orgasm?) and another has pointed to his impossibly feminine, delicate WASP nurse explaining patiently that I understand, of course, I won't come

out looking like *her*, and I am thinking of all the women telling me that I can never be a *real woman*, presumably like *them*, and now phrases like "women-born women only," "biological women only," "genetic women only" and "no dogs allowed" or whatever exclusionary formula is in vogue with our very best lesbian thinkers this year, these phrases start tumbling over and over each other in my head like a bunch of manic puppies, and I am thinking about all those feminine, self-satisfied dismissive young Jewish girls I grew up with, went to synagogue with, hated and lusted for and lost sleep over and I swear I am practically coming in my pants here on the theatre seat as Jaye finally pulls the trigger on that non-transsexual bitch, not just once, the first shot echoing out and the surprise registering on those small, delicate, well-spaced features just like I knew it would on my father's larger, heavier European ones; no Jaye, my hero of the moment, my trans-savior, she pulls again and again and again and again and five, six, seven, how many shots are in an automatic? until that non-transsexually beautiful woman, the kind that if we look like them they tell us how well we pass, she's down for count and I'm telling myself frantically after four years of twelve-step programs that I'm not about violence and I've given up fighting anyone or anything but the anger and tears rise in my throat with the bitterness of bile and stick there like some kind of demonic fishbone and I know helplessly and a little guiltily that I'll rent this video, not for the directing which is nearly perfect, nor the storyline which is brilliant, but just to see Jaye pull that trigger in this scene again and again and again.

The problem with transsexual women is not that we are trapped in the wrong bodies. The truth is, that is a fairly trivial affair corrected with doctors and sharp scalpels. The problem is that we are trapped in a society which alternates between hating and ignoring or tolerating and exploiting us and our experience, and more importantly, we are trapped in the wrong minds. We have, too many of us for too long, been trapped in too much self-hate: The hate reflected back at us by others who unwilling to look at the complexity of our lives, dismiss our femaleness, our femininity, and our sense of gender itself and our erotic choices as merely imitative or simply derivative. Wanting desperately to be accepted, and unable to take on the who world alone, we have too often listened to these voices that were not our own, and forgotten what Alice Walker says when she declares:

"...no person is your friend (or kin) who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow and be perceived as fully blossomed as you were intended. Or who belittles in any fashion the gifts you labor so to bring into the world."

And our lesson is not new or unique. From Lyndall MacCowan:

"It means knowing I'm a freak. It means knowing that I am not a woman. It means falling in love with girls and, at the same time, despising their femininity, their obsession with makeup and boys, their lack of strength and brains. It means knowing that both the kind of woman I want and the kind of

woman I am don't exist, do not have names...If it does not someday make me kill myself, it's something that can get me killed."

Transsexuality? No, she speaking about being a self-identified lesbian femme in the 70s and 80s, in *The Persistent Desire, a Butch-Femme Reader*. There are no new changes, just new faces.

In closing, let me tell you about one transsexual. After ten years of hiding and passing and sucking up to non-transsexual women, strung out and totally desperate, she started a transsexual group. She started talking with them and hanging out with them and being seen with them, although at first she hated it. She started wearing buttons and coming out at every appropriate and inappropriate moment, just as if her life, that life God had given her, why, it was just as normal and natural as anyone else's, which of course, it was. And she learned that although she might hate herself, she could not hate the 50 or 100 or 150 other transsexuals she met, and whose stories she heard, whose tears of frustration and rage she saw, whose everyday, one day at a time courage to survive she witnessed. And she understood, at last, the redemptive power of community, and how it can only be stifled by self-hate and silence. And community, my friends and transsexual kin, is what we build here today, by coming together to claim our own, our history, and our Christine; Christine who, standing all alone in God's own light in a way none of us have had to since, made all of this and all of us possible.

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



Riki Anne Wilchins

photo by Davina Anne Gabriel

Poetry

by Robyn

Senses

Tears cloud the vision.
 Silence enshrouds the ears.
 Touching is denied.
 Taste and smell are dulled.
 Pain pierces the heart.
 Lonliness hammers at the brain.
 This is how a friendship ends.

Unfinished Woman

Some assembly required.
 Includes non-factory equipment.
 Read instructions completely before beginning.
 Mistakes are not correctable.
 Insert tab A into slot B.
 Batteries are not included.

Is There a Place for Me?

Is there a place for me
 Among the beings of light?
 Or must I grow like a fungus
 Alone in the musty dark?

Am I like a wildflower
 Providing beauty in the wilderness?
 Or am I like a weed
 That needs to be removed from a lawn?

Can I find someone
 Who will love me as I am?
 Or am I to be doomed
 To a life of loneliness?

Is there a place for me
 Where I can thrive and provide beauty?
 Or am I forever condemned
 To the dark ugliness of society's cellar?

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_____ Enclosed is \$3.00 (USA) or \$4.00 (Canada) for a sample issue of *TransSisters*.

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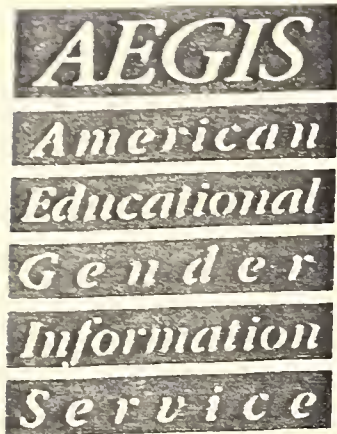
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Press Release

June, 1993

Questionnaire on HBIGDA Standards of Care

Since 1979, the Standards of Care of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc. (HBIGDA) have served as minimal guidelines for the hormonal and surgical sex reassignment of persons with gender dysphoria. They are the only such standards in existence, and are widely accepted by professionals around the world.

The Standards of Care are regularly revised (the last revision was 1/90).

AEGIS is conducting a survey of the Standards of Care in order to provide HBIGDA with feedback from transgendered persons. We plan to present initial results at the HBIGDA conference in October, 1993, so we are requesting that as many surveys as possible be returned to us by 15 September, 1993.

We would appreciate it if you would distribute the enclosed questionnaire to the transgendered persons in your organization, either directly or through your publications. You may make as many copies as you wish, or write us, and we will send you copies.

We are excited at this opportunity to provide HBIGDA and its members with feedback from transgendered consumers. We appreciate your help.

aegis (e'jis), n. 1. in Greek mythology, a shield or breastplate used by Zeus and later, by his daughter Athena; hence, 2. a protection. 3. sponsorship; auspices

The following survey is being conducted by the American Educational Gender Information Service, Inc.
Please return it to AEGIS, P. O. Box 33724, Decatur, GA 30033-0724.

Instructions: There is no need to identify yourself by name, but you may do so if you wish. Please complete all items legibly. If you want to editorialize, do so, but please answer the question as asked. Do not leave any items blank. You may mark N/A (not applicable) for items which do not apply to you.

Results of this survey will be presented at the October, 1993 meeting of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc. Results will be published in *Cbrysalis Quarterly*, AEGIS' magazine, in the first half of 1994.

-
1. Please write today's date: (mm/dd/yy)
____/____/____
 2. What is your date of birth? (mm/dd/yy)
____/____/____
 3. What is your age in years?

 4. What was your sex of assignment at birth?
MALE: _____ FEMALE: _____
 5. In what gender are you living now?
MALE: _____ FEMALE: _____
If crossliving, for how long? _____
 6. Have you ever taken hormones?
YES: _____ NO: _____
 7. Have you had genital sex reassignment surgery?
YES: _____ NO: _____
 8. Do you plan to have sex reassignment surgery?
YES: _____ NO: _____
 9. Have you had breast reduction/chest reconstruction surgery?
YES: _____ NO: _____ (N/A if MTF)
 10. Do you consider yourself:
Transsexual: _____ Transgenderist: _____
Crossdresser: _____ Other (Specify): _____
 11. Have you ever heard about the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA)?
YES: _____ NO: _____
 12. Have you ever heard of the HBIGDA Standards of Care for Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons?
YES: _____ NO: _____ (If NO, go to #15)
 13. When did you first hear of the Standards of Care? (mm/dd/yy)
____/____/____
 14. From whom or where did you first learn of the Standards?

 15. Have you ever been to a gender clinic?
YES: _____ NO: _____ (If NO, go to #17)
If YES, what year? _____
 16. Did anyone at the clinic tell you about the Standards of Care?
YES: _____ NO: _____
 17. Have you ever consulted a therapist (specify psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor, etc.) about your gender dysphoria?
YES: _____ NO: _____ (If NO, go to #21)
 18. Did he or she tell you about the Standards of Care?
Therapist #1: YES: _____ NO: _____
Psychologist: _____ Psychiatrist: _____
Counselor: _____ Other (Specify): _____
Therapist #2: YES: _____ NO: _____
Psychologist: _____ Psychiatrist: _____
Counselor: _____ Other (Specify): _____
 19. Did you tell your therapist about the Standards of Care?
Therapist #1: YES: _____ NO: _____
Therapist #2: YES: _____ NO: _____

20. Did you know about the Standards of Care when you entered therapy the first time?

YES: _____ NO: _____

21. Have you ever consulted a physician for hormones?

YES: _____ NO: _____

22. Did the physician tell you about the Standards of Care?

YES: _____ NO: _____ (If NO, go to #24)

23. Did you tell the physician about the Standards of Care?

YES: _____ NO: _____

24. Have you ever joined a support group?

YES: _____ NO: _____ (If NO, go to #26)

25. Did anyone at the support group tell you about the Standards?

YES: _____ NO: _____

26. Did another transgendered person tell you about them?

YES: _____ NO: _____

27. Have you ever told another transgendered person about the Standards of Care?

YES: _____ NO: _____

28. The Standards of Care require a 90 day evaluation period by a therapist before referral for hormonal therapy. Did you follow this standard?

YES: _____ NO: _____

29. Do you think this standard is a good idea?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

30. The Standards of Care require a one-year (minimum) period of full-time living in the new gender role before sex reassignment surgery. Did you follow this standard?

YES: _____ NO: _____

31. Do you think this standard is a good idea?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

32. The Standards of Care require a letter from a therapist for authorization of hormonal therapy and two letters from therapists for sex reassignment surgery. Did you follow this standard?

YES: _____ NO: _____

33. Do you think this standard is a good idea?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

34. Do you think that the Standards of Care serve a useful purpose?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

35. The Standards of Care require that the individual wish to be rid of the genitals in order to receive hormonal therapy. Do you agree with this standard?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

36. Do you believe that breast reduction surgery/contouring of a male chest in genetic females should be considered genital sex reassignment surgery (i.e. should require approval letters)?

YES: _____ NO: _____

Why or why not? _____

If you wish, you may address these or other issues on separate pages.