The Transgendered in the queer community: Gender reactionaries or transcenders?

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Abstract

This paper is the extended version of the seminar given by the authors in the "Melbourne Inter-University Gay and Lesbian studies" series at the La Trobe University Centre for the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, on the 1st of December 1994.

Where we mention the state of laws, and society, we are refering to contemporary Australia, and particularly Victoria, unless otherwise specified.

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This is a "work in progress". We are continually revising and expanding it, thus we welcome your input.

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1 Introduction

There has been a certain amount of tension between the transgendered, lesbians and gays for many years now. In this paper we will attempt to look at the sources of those tensions, what we might do to reduce them and look at the human rights and political implications. .... Ambitious, aren't we?

We will only be discussing male to female transgendered and transsexuals, because that's what we have studied. Some of what we say may also coincidentally apply to female-to- male transsexuals.

Language There is a lot of inconsistency in the use of all the trans.. words. So I believe it is worth describing how we will use them.

"transgendered" describes people who are dissatisfied with their gender and want to change it.

"Transsexual" is used to refer to those who want and often do alter their bodies to fit the gender of their choice. Some seem to really believe they belong to the wrong gender "ature pulled a cruel trick on me" Others pragmatically believe they can express themselves more truthfully and easily, living in a gendered society, by pretending to belong to the other class.

A "transvestite" is a person who wears the clothes of the people of opposite gender.

"tranny" is an Australian term that includes all of the above.

"drag queen" a gay male who on occasionally dresses and behaves in a style that parodies the feminine stereotype. They are sometimes accused of being misogynist.

"MTF" male to female transsexual or transgendered.

2 Descriptions of the Transgendered

2.1 Sociological profiles

Prof Frank Lewins of the Australian National University[13] in a study to be published next year studied 55 male to female transsexuals through the Monash Medical Centre's Gender Dysphoria Clinic so all his sample wanted gender reassignment therapy. He found about half identify as lesbian, they suffered very high unemployment, 2 admitted being involved in the sex industry in the past, half were married, 13% attempted suicide, 13% had a drug dependency, the average age of surgery 33. He believes very many people in our society are uneasy about fitting into the rigid male female dichotomy and transsexuals who seek medical help to deal with their uneasiness are a very small percentage of those who are ill at ease. He makes interesting parallels between the restrictive behavioural practices of racism and sexism.

Roberta Perkins[16] surveyed trannys thought to be at risk of HIV/AIDS infection. She estimated there were about 5000 trannys in Australia. She surveyed 146 whom she contacted through transgender organisations, bars, clubs, brothels, sex-workers support groups and medical professionals and the gay press; about a quarter had had genital surgery, 93 were from NSW; She concluded (the transgendered are) "the most discriminated against class in Australia" The educational level of transgendered is significantly higher than that of the general population, but they have a lot higher unemployment levels. Only one third identify as heterosexual. Transgenders' risky lifestyle, low self esteem, ostracism leads to a desperately lonely existence and so drug addiction, crime, incarceration and suicide. To help the transgendered she urges social education of the general public especially in regard to sexual transmitted disease prevention by men and legislative reforms; anti-discrimination, anti-vilification, birth re-certification and flexible sex-identification.

An aside on sampling: A 1994 Internet straw poll of the transgendered on one particular transgendered mailing list, found that 80% of them had a PhD.

Male to female (MTF) transsexuality is far more prevalent in macho societies. A joint study by Flinders University, South Australia and St Jorgen's Hospital, Gothenburg, Sweden showed that Australia, with it's very rigid conception of sex-rôles compared to Sweden had 4 times the rate of transsexuality. There are also plenty of historical examples. The traditional American Indian[19] tribes that have rigid sex-rôle differentiation, such as the Mojaves and Crow, supported transgenderism as an acceptable social rôle.

2.2 Radical Lesbian Feminist Political description

Janice G. Raymond, is a lesbian feminist, who spoke on "lesbian ethics" in Melbourne recently[1] states her position very clearly in her book, the Transsexual Empire[18]:

> "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit as well. Rape although usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. It is significant that in the case of the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist, often he is able to gain entrance and a dominant position in women's spaces

[1] Raymond was the speaker at a talk on Lesbian Ethics, introduced by Sheila Jeffreys, at the Moviemakers Hall, 2 Napier Street, Fitzroy on July 30th 1994. This was the first of a series of talks conducted by MLIT *Melbourne Lesbian Intellectual Terrorists*, and was an adjunct to the International Feminist Book Fair, held in Melbourne at the same time.

> because the women involved do not know he is a transsexual and he just does not happen to mention it."
>
> "If the stereotypes themselves are not confronted but are only frowned upon when acted out by persons of the "wrong"sex, then the origins of transsexualism will be individualised and psychologised. What will go unexamined is patriarchy's norms of masculinity and femininity and how these norms, if allowed to contain persons within such rigid boundaries, may generate such a phenomenon as transsexualism."

Sheila Jeffreys[10] in "The Failure of Gay Liberation", the fourth chapter of her book "Anticlimax";

> "It is difficult to see how the gender fetishism of transvestites/ transsexuals could do anything but reinforce the construction of the whole of male- supremacist culture around the concept of gender difference. ..... they represent aspects of male sexuality dangerous to women's issues. .... (they are) exaggerated versions of damaging aspects of male sexuality."

2.3 Descriptions in art and popular culture

Chris Berry said there are many feature film that use the transsexual/queer to define monstrous and so police gender rôles. But it can be used quite differently; Dill is portrayed as the only sane one in the "Crying Game"; every one else is so violent; she is the innocent who makes one question sex rôles.

Dax a "trill" character in the television series Star Trek: Deep Space 9, shows a very positive image of one who has transcended gender, a very mature person.

Lisa Tuttle[20] in a short story "The Other Kind", looked at some of the issues by looking at people who wanted to belong to another species. This enabled her to look at power in that culture. And we can see the parallels in gender.

2.4 Religious description

Peter Ackroyd[1] describes many examples of shamanistic cultures in which bi-sexual deities were worshiped and transvestites were regarded as sources of divine authority and given a high status.

Fundamentalist Christians quote Deuteronomy Ch 22 verse 5

> *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a women's garment; for all that do so ARE abomination unto the LORD thy God.*

And there are many liberal Christians who are very caring and supportive of the transgendered.

2.5 Legal description

The law sees sex as binary and immutable. Although full validity passports are issued to transsexuals on production of medical evidence of gender re-assignment.

> "It is important to note that the issue to you a passport indicating your gender as opposite to that in which you were born should not be interpreted as indicating the Government's view of your general legal status. This has been done, as and administrative matter, simply to alleviate unnecessary embarrassment while travelling. ... as a general rule sex is that determined at birth." – *note included with new Australian Passports issued to post-operative transsexuals.*

In Victoria the title on your driver's licence will be changed from Mr to Ms or Miss on production of medical evidence. Both these changes were introduced administratively and were conditional recognitions "for the purpose of travel". The passport handbook goes on to say that it is illegal to marry on such identification. South Australia legislated to allow birth certificates to be changed and protects transsexuals from discrimination. But no other state does.

2.6 Legal Issues

Justice Michael Kirby and Prof Henry Finlay[8] urge legal changes to make the law relevant and humane in a society that allows the medical profession to carry out gender reassignment surgery. The areas of most concern to transsexuals are anti-discrimination, anti-vilification, birth re-certification, the removal of gender restrictions to marriage and for the transgendered flexible sex-identification. We would like to be protected under equal opportunity:

"Civil rights for human beings"

2.7 Medical/Psychiatric description

Cross gender identity has only become a medical condition this century. Medical progress in hormone therapy and surgery advanced to such an extent that for the first time the transgendered have, with a reasonable degree of safety, been able to cosmetically alter their bodies. The term transsexual was first used in 1949, gender dysphoria in 1974 and Gender Identity Disorder in DSM-III[2]

[2] DSM-III refers to the 3rd edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association

in 1980. And all these terms brought with them different diagnosis, causative theories and treatments. Frank Lewins[13] argues that this theoretical fluidity is indicative of not knowing what's going on. Harry Benjamin[3] help shift the emphasis from the 'cure' i.e. prevention of crossgendered behaviour to that of helping with the acceptance and management of gender rôle transition. Benjamin assess whether the client was a "true transsexual" and if so then hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery were indicated.

Walter Bockting and Eli Coleman[4] believe the much used approach of assessing a client's 'true transsexuality' and then approving surgery can lead to tragic results in personal adjustment. The model they propose starts with assessment; treatment for other problems such as manic-depressive, obsessive-compulsive behaviour and social inadequacy. Then they facilitate the healthy formation of identity and if still necessary the management of their sexual identity, with individual, family and group therapy; they encourage diverse and creative solutions and so do not lead the clients to hormones and surgery as a matter of course. Post-operatively they address sexual dysfunction and help consolidate the positive aspects of the change. They candidly admit that many who need their program can't afford it. Australians with gender dysphoria would be much healthier and happier if we were to access the resources necessary to benefit from the very comprehensive, growth encouraging treatment they use in Minnesota. It would be good if their work will have a big influence on our medical, psychological, sociological and political professionals here.

2.8 Medical Issues

There is a growing politicisation of transgender communities, who argue for the removal of GID (Gender Identity Disorder) from, the DSMs much the same way homosexuality was removed in the mid 70's. In 1994 a US group called Transgender Nation disrupted a APA meeting to protest at our inclusion. Ira Pauly MD believes GID is a 'disorder' and argues for it's continued inclusion in the DSM rather than seeing it as an 'alternative lifestyle' He points out some advantages to being included: the consequent education of medicos and so their supply of hormones and surgery and the coverage for these procedures by medical insurance companies. Transsexuals in Australia take all the risks when they have surgery. They have to sign forms releasing the medical/psychiatric staff from the responsibility of misdiagnosis or malpractice.

Janice Raymond[18], says the medical profession are more interested in the financial benefits of increasing medicalisation of gender than in helping the individual or society to grow. Because the medical profession get transsexuals to "prove" they are real transsexuals by passing as "feminine"

> ".... the rôle of the medical-psychiatric establishment in reinforcing sex-rôle stereotypes is significant, .. "

Many transsexuals do dress femininely when they go to see a doctor even when they usually dress more comfortably. Back in the 70's they were worse one friend of mine, who was working as a scientist was told by a psychiatrist that she would have to retrain as a secretary.

The medical profession certainly make a lot of money from "Beauty Myth" surgery from transgendered patients.

Dr Herbert Bower[7] of the Monash Medical Centre's Gender Dysphoria Clinic believes there is a genetic cause of transsexuality and so it is definitely a medical condition.

3 Trannys Speak

3.1 Gender Dysphoria

The opposite of euphoria, is something most people have felt at some time: "Why am I paid less because I'm a woman?", "Why do I have to pay for the dinner because I'm a man?", "Why can't I make love to a woman because I'm a woman?", "Why can't I make love to a man because I'm a man?". All these thoughts are expressing a dissatisfaction with the class system of gender. Some people who are really dissatisfied with gender transgress. Gays and lesbians transgress the rules about who one should love. Some people with extreme dissatisfaction with the gender rôles, they have been allocated, choose a transsexual solution.

What do trannys think a tranny is? The transgendered community is diverse. Some male to female transsexuals would answer "I'm not a transsexual! I'm a woman!" Kate Bornstein[5, page 121] answers "Anyone who admits it" or more politically "Anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself". Aidy Griffin said to me that she thought that anyone who didn't feel comfortable with hetero gender rôles was a tranny. Under these definitions all gays and lesbians would be trannys. Kate calls them the transgressively gendered.

3.2 Discrimination

This is a major issue for many of the transgendered. They face it daily. And nearly all have at least a period in their lives when people pointed at them in the street and laughed.

Roberta Perkins'[16] work shows there is extensive discrimination against trannys. Their risky lifestyle, low self esteem and ostracism they receive often leads to a desperately lonely existence and often drug addiction, crime, incarceration and suicide. The educational level of trannys in significantly higher than the general population, but they have a much lower employment rate. About half of the trannys in most job categories lost them when they announced their transgendered status. Although the number of sex workers increased. Of the

157 surveyed 49 had been raped and 18 pack raped. Roberta asked how many felt they had been discriminated against and by whom; 59 reported discrimination from gay men, 52 from straight men, 50 from police, 58 from their families, 43 from lawyers, 32 from other trannys, 24 from doctors, 20 from lesbians.

The report on the GLAD[9] survey shows the types of discrimination are very similar to those suffered by gays and lesbians: public violence and vilification, in employment, in education, by medical services, by police, they receive inadequate services both public and private, in custody cases, invisibility of those who pass and strong labelling of those who don't pass. They are discriminated against by straight men for being women, and then even more so for not being 'real women'.

The prevailing attitudes toward transsexuals, mean that employers consider it the kiss of death to hire a tranny. In many cases when an employed tranny 'changes over', the boss reaches for the eject button. With no equal opportunity legislation covering trannys, there is nothing to stop trannys being fired for being transsexual, but don't tell your boss that.

"Tranny rights are human rights"

> JANE[12]: *Shortly after my change, and still eminently springable, I stood outside a restaurant on Chapel Street waiting for my dinner companion. In the five minutes I waited, I was berated for soliciting by one man, and another wanted to know how much. In a more embarrassing incident, while walking out to dinner with my father, a nasty young het couple began harassing me, taking me for a prostitute and my father for the client.*
>
> JANE[11]: *In the five years I've lived as a woman I've suffered discrimination on a number of occasions that are directly attributable to my being transsexual.*
>
> *1. When I first changed I worked as a consultant for a prominent importer of musical instruments, my employment was terminated within a fortnight. I was officially told they no longer could afford me, but several employees informed me that the real reason was that the men in management personally could not handle my change of sex. I contacted the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity and was told that I was not covered by the act, so there was nothing they could do.*
>
> *2. In 1988 I worked as a freelance musician/programmer for a band who were beginning to record their first album. After the recording was completed they did not pay my fee ($5500). I commenced legal proceedings against them to recover my money, but was advised to try to settle out of court because although the magistrate would probably find in my favour, I would most likely be awarded only a small fraction of the money due to me because of my 'lifestyle'.*

> *3. In 1989 I began working as a receptionist for a suburban branch of a finance company. During my first week it was remarked by my boss and co-workers that I had picked up the job remarkably well. But at the end of that week when my transsexuality was discovered I was no longer treated as the 'golden girl' but as a problem to be gotten rid of. I was ordered by the regional manager not to wear slacks to work, a restriction that did not apply to other women there. Within two months that same manager had made it impossible for me to remain. I resigned.*
>
> *4. In 1990 I started to work for a large insurance company and made many changes to their accounting procedures in my department, twice being awarded "employee of the month". And when I applied for a job with prospects for advancement, a computer operator, my marks on the aptitude test were the highest ever recorded and I did not get the job.*
>
> *Fortunately some institutions are more understanding. I am in my third year of studying full-time at the University of Melbourne, where I have worked as a demonstrator and am about to start my second summer studentship. In 1992 I was the victim of sexual harassment by other students who made direct reference to my transsexuality. I am proud to say that my university backed me up and took strong action against my harassers. The point of this is that it shouldn't just be the lucky few transsexuals who work or study at enlightened institutions who receive protection from discrimination and/or harassment, it should be the expectation of all transsexuals that they will receive such protection, whenever the need arises.*

Professor H A Finlay[8], Associate Professor of Law, Monash University, in his book 'Sex change - the leal implications of sex reassignment' 1988.

> "There is moreover, it may be thought, a moral obligation upon asociety which allows reassignment operations to proceed, while denying them and their consequences full legal recognition."

The Hon M D Kirby[8], President of the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of New South Wales, from 'Male and female he created them', the foreword to Prof. H A Finlay's book (quoted above).

> "They seek integration in society and the peace that comes from social acceptance, bearing the talisman of radical surgical intervention designed to bring their sexual organs into harmony with their minds. If we can reduce that disharmony, freeing a human being from a feeling of life imprisonment in a body which is perceived as a trick of nature, should not a humane and compassionate legal system facilitate and support the change"

We believe protection under the Equal Opportunity Act is necessary to allow transsexuals to reach their maximum potential. Such an acknowledgment of the place of transsexuals in the community will go far to alleviate the stress of daily living for us, and may free young people who are transsexual, from the harassment, discrimination and self-doubt that has afflicted transsexuals up to now.

3.3 Vilification

The transgendered face a lot of public vilification. One of the most common forms is being called 'men' in a way that calls us freak and denies our transsexuality, our difficult life choices our sacrifices, our growth. Some men call us 'men' because they need to remind themselves you are transgendered, so they won't be attracted to you and call their heterosexuality into question. And ironically some lesbians call us 'men' because they need to remind themselves you are transgendered, so they won't be attracted to you and call their homosexuality into question.

3.4 The queer community?

The types of discrimination we suffer make us natural allies of the lesbian and gay communities.

As a transsexuals with another transsexual as a lover we identify as lesbian. But if you see us as men well you see us as gay. There is an overlap between the transsexual, gay and lesbian communities and we are all discriminated against in similar ways. Kate Bornstein[5] suggests gays and lesbians are "transgendered": she says we are all transgressively gendered.

But I'm not sure that the queer community actually exists in any real way. Even though lesbians, gays and transgendered have many things in common we haven't been at all successful in being supportive. Many transgendered are homophobic. Many women have felt that the men have used their energy to achieve the men's agenda. Sheila Jeffreys in "The Failure of Gay Liberation"[10] says gay liberation became gay men's liberation and the transgendered represent aspects of male sexuality dangerous to women; she also says politically aware gay men seem to be in the minority and the overall gay community don't value women's input and discriminate strongly against the transgendered. Kate Bornstein[5, Page 133] sees the current trannyphobia amongst gays and lesbians as a rush to be included amongst the "normal" (good DINK consumers?).

3.5 Homophobia in transsexuals

As proposed by many people including Janice Raymond[18] and Sheila Jeffreys[10] a number of trannys seem to be homophobic gay men. Men who are who are so desperate not to be seen as gay that instead of admitting they are attracted to men they change their body to fit the rôle of heterosexual women? This is certainly not true for all transsexuals.

Both straights, lesbians and gays also tend to believe that the overwhelming majority of MTF trannys are sexually attracted to men. This heterosexist assumption is not so. Many transsexuals are asexual and many identify as lesbian. Depending on who you get your figures from, somewhere between 30% and 50% identify as lesbian[16]; some stay with ex wives, with lesbian women and other transsexuals.

> JANE: *"According to my, somewhat biased, experience the figure would be around 85%."*

Frank Lewins[13] found that sexual preference usually didn't change after surgery. So that explains why the usual gay/straight ratio is reversed. The homophobic male theory can explain the MTF trannys who are sexually attracted to men, but it can't explain the large proportion of trannys who are attracted to women or are asexual.

An aside on homophobia. A gay friend of mine told me this story.

> *A gay prostitute was called in on a three some. The client wanted a man and a transsexual. I'll leave out most of the detail, but as the night went on the gay guy noticed the client was sucking the penis of the transsexual so he asked if the client wanted to suck his penis too. The client was horrified! "What do you think I am, a poofta?!. I don't suck men's cocks".*

3.6 Sexual preference, sexual identity and gender rôle

Transsexuality is about identity not sexuality. The core gender identity which tells us we are "female" is formed long before any concept of sex. It is about who we are in all aspects of life not just who we relate to sexually. This is very similar to the way Sheila Jeffreys[10] sees lesbianism; that is as an expression of identity rather than as a sexual preference.

Sexual preference *(who we are attracted to)*, sexual identity *(the sex type we feel we belong to)* and gender rôle *(the rôle we believe we need to adhere to)* are assumed to occur together by many people. We can explain the existence of MTF trannys with female lovers by assuming that sexual preference *(attracted to women)*, sexual identity *(identifying with women)* can act separately as in the case of a woman born woman lesbian. The journey we make as transsexuals is to bring our body and our way of life into harmony with our identity, along the way our sexual preference is usually unaltered.

3.7 Gays and trannyphobia

Roberta Perkins'[16] survey of trannys showed that the group that most harassed them was gay men. Why? Trannys do tend to socialise at gay venues and many of the club gays only value transsexuals who are stereotypically attractive the rest are ‘dogs’.

There are other gay men who are trying to distance themselves from the general public’s sissy image of them and they are not at all happy with trannys who bring ill repute.

Some also make that very heterosexist assumption about trannys that “the only reason you’d want your dick cut off is to have sex with men”.

Some just see trannys as women and are simply misogynist.

3.8 Lesbians and trannyphobia

The relationship with the lesbian community is important to the transgendered because many trannys live and socialise around the lesbian community. I know some who have been lesbian for over 20 years. Most are out about their transsexual status to their close friends. These lesbians and trannys are very supportive of each other. They seem to have ended up, from different starting positions, living very similar transgressive life styles. A very small number are out to no one and live in the lesbian community. Some are feminist. This is where the problems start. Some thought they were welcomed by all lesbians. Wrong!

The real disagreements between trannys and lesbians seems to centre around lesbian identifying transsexuals wanting to be included in lesbian activities and entering women’s space. The expulsion of some trannys from the 1994 Brisbane Lesbian Confest[2] has been divisive in both the tranny and lesbian communities. There was a transsexual on the Brisbane organising committee and lesbians coming from Melbourne and Sydney were unprepared and shocked.

Kat Costigan[6]:

> *“After an on-going and often heated debate, this year’s National Lesbian Conference in Brisbane overturned the organising committee’s new policy of including lesbian transgenderists in the program”*
>
> *“In some of the most aggressive and violent scenes witnessed at a lesbian confest, speakers from both sides were booed, heckled and abused.”*
>
> *“The committee still supported the policy of inclusion ... reflecting the diversity of lesbian life”*

Alice Petherbridge[17]:

> *“Rather than wasting any more precious lesbian energy and time on an issue which was created my men, we must look at the way we deal with conflict. We were divided by men in Brisbane. We must look ways ensuring we are not divided like this again”*

I have felt the pain of this exclusion and I believe it is important to support private space for women born women. Some women. e.g. victims of incest, need to spend a lot of time with women born women. They need women's space to grow. Their growth would be severely curtailed if they thought a man was in that space. They at a deep emotional level see trannys as the other side of the binary, men and our presence curtails their growth. We can show empathy for women and maturity as trannys by respecting and encouraging women born women's private space.

Some lesbian transgendered may be driven further underground by hearing this criticism and so by being silent deny themselves a voice. This issue is divisive in many parts of the world.

Some lesbians refer to us as men for political reasons; to create a class of men they are more powerful than, who they can win against and feel they've won over patriarchy. If that is so, it's a pretty shallow victory; very few of the transgendered enjoy any form of male privilege, and are fellow victims of patriarchy.

Calling us men is a powerful weapon; if they can get those around them to accept their arguments for its use. If you accept that term, 'men' then it is very hard to argue for the inclusion of the transgendered in lesbian community activities.

This viewpoint has its basis in the notion of essentialism, that there is some 'essence' of womanhood, possessed only by those born women. As Kate Bornstein[5] points out, "the notion that someone is born a woman is ridiculous. I like everyone else, was born a baby, any notion of gender came later.", The transgendered do not have a 'male' or "female" upbringing, they have a 'transgendered' upbringing. It may have appeared a male upbringing on the surface. But it was an upbringing that was so contrary to the spirit of the child that it severely inhibited normal growth and socialisation. From about the age of 6 on everything they did was effected by a huge fear that they would be found out.

The argument goes that a person once socialised as a male has something called 'male energy', presumably all people born and socialised male possess it, and all people born and socialised as female do not. Male energy, we are told, is an immutable dividing line between the genders, a barrier that cannot be crossed. If socialisation instils some essence of gender in each individual, there must be some experiences that are uniquely male and some that are uniquely female, and these experiences must have a very strong effect if they cannot be ameliorated by a lifetime of diligent effort. It is obvious that most men behave somewhat differently from most women, but to say that there is no overlap and that people may not modify their behaviour outside the 'confines' of their gender, is ridiculous.

Janice Raymond[18]

"One of the primary tenets of the women's movement has been that so-called gender identity differences are not natural or immutable. And as such are amenable to change."

JANE: *The 'male energy' argument is a gotcha, a Chinese finger trap. As a lesbian transsexual, you can either buy it, and accept the oppression and exclusion that go with it as natural. If you deny that you have "male energy" you are automatically assumed to be attempting to subvert lesbian interests, and thus must have a severe case of male energy. Like the finger trap, whether you struggle or whether you relax, you are still caught. Male energy is a furphy, it exists only as an idea that is used to oppress and exclude. I do not possess male energy, because male energy does not exist. Anyone who won't be treated like shit, has male energy.*

The debate on the inclusion or otherwise, of the transgendered in the lesbian community has been notable for the absence of a transsexual voice. The same arguments against inclusion are also used as justifications for not even giving lesbian transsexuals the opportunity to be heard at lesbian events. If this argument is to degenerate to the state of labelling the other side then I would have to say this: when one group of people tries to exercise control over another, by silencing and excluding them, then I call that oppression.

An aside on lesbians and trannys:

JULIE: *One lesbian friend while trying to encourage me not to have the operation said "You're ideal as you are, a woman with a penis".*

There are a growing number of 'out' articulate trannys who see their journey as a flight from patriarchally defined sex-rôles and want to be part of the lesbian and gay community. So possible exclusion from the lesbian community is an important political issue. I would like to see lesbians, trannys and gays as allies against patriarchy, helping each other grow by supporting private spaces for anyone who wants them, engaging in supportive debate, listening and not wasting a lot of time and emotional energy on bickering. And so we will all grow politically, morally and in health.

3.9 Gender apartheid?

The lesbian and gay communities aren't homogeneous; lesbian separatists don't want lipstick lesbians and S and M dykes in there space; leather men don't want drag queens in their hotels. There isn't a solution that includes all the groups that want to be included, so a certain amount of separate development is necessary and advantageous. As well as this separateness I'd like to see these same people involved in some coalition activities; such as this seminar series, AIDS prevention and political activism.

4 The Tranny Biography

Each transgendered is an individual and the reasons they choose a transgendered life are very diverse. We intend to show some of this diversity and how expansive or contractive choices at important turning points can explain some of this diversity. We can learn a lot about the issues around the way the transgendered relate to the lesbian, gay and general communities by examining a generalised biography.

Blissful infancy

I knew nothing of gender, I was very happy.

Loss of innocence

I'll be a lady when I grow up. "This can't be! It's not fair! I want to be a girl" As a child I was robbed! This culture arbitrarily allocated me a sex-rôle because I had XY chromosomes and thought it was training me to behave in a masculine way, no consideration was given to what my spirit craved. I was only allowed to express a very small part of my personality and had to keep very tight control on who I really was.

Keeping secrets; I dream therefore I am

In fear of ostracism, I kept the real me secret. Eighty percent of my life was spent dreaming of who I really was. Not an effective way of living!

Puberty dysphoria/tortured teens

Keeping such a big secret takes a huge amount of energy. This is the secret that you want to subvert the major class system of our culture. This leads to a dysphoria with gender. What is it like to be transsexual? It is feeling a GENDER DYSPHORIA! That is severely ill at ease with the gender assigned me at birth.

Self-abuse

One way of dealing with this dysphoria is to try and hide it. This leads to a general eating away of the soul and suicidal tendencies. These can be actual suicide attempts (and successes?) and slower forms of suicide such as substance abuse.

Denial

Many try the simple expedient of denial. They live competitive, aggressive, angry, macho lifestyles; they become shearers, engineers, join the Army, climb mountains or sail ocean yachts. Some of these have a transvestite hobby.

Feminine Euphoria; fitting in

Some take the blame for genderism; they conclude the fault is with them-selves rather than with society and that they are really women rather than consider that the system of gender might be to blame.

Gender trap

One trap for the naive, which many trannys are, is rather than re-make themselves in their own image they re-make themselves as what our male culture defines as woman. Many transsexuals, at least for a short time, embrace the male defined feminine stereotype. Janice Raymond[18] states "the transsexual only exchanges one stereotype for the other, thus reinforcing the fabric by which a sexist society is held together". Most transsexuals, like most young girls growing up in this culture, do go through a stage when they try and be feminine. Most women grow out of this by their teens. Trannys behave this way in the first few years after they start to live as women. Unfortunately some get stuck here. They believe the propaganda of the cultural beauty myth; "I'll be happy if I could be a beautiful woman".

Living hell

Because of the ravages of 'testosterone poisoning' very few trannys can pass as women when they first change over. Most take a few years of hormone treatment and cultural training before they can walk down the street in daylight without being laughed at. The "change over", which was supposed to lead to gender euphoria, instead leads to vilification in the streets, loss of job, desertion by friends, ostracism from the family and a severe loss of self esteem, because deep down most transgendered are just as tranny phobic as the rest of our culture.

Normalacy

Many trannys say that they are driven by an urge to be normal. There is a huge fear of not belonging; some believe our culture's discourse on gender. And instead of admitting they don't fit into sex-rôles they change their body to fit the rôle; instead of being a male with 'unnatural' urges they are 'normal' women.

There are some trannys who in a desperate attempt to be normal won't acknowledge their tranny status, even to themselves. I'm not suggesting that trannys tattoo "tranny" on their foreheads. Rather our different personal histories mean we have to find our own way of relating in this world. Maybe that's why so many trannys have trannys as partners.

Passing and invisibility

Kate Bornstein[5, page 125]:

> "Most passing is undertaken in response to the cultural imperative to be one gender or the other. In this case, passing becomes the outward manifestation of shame and capitulation. Passing becomes invisibility."

How a tranny looks makes a huge difference in how well they are tolerated and/or accepted in the straight, gay and lesbian communities. Transsexuals who look like women suffer a lot less vilification and discrimination from almost every group they mix with; workmates, family and friends. There is a huge pressure to pass, not passing means you are a monster and suffer ridicule and violence. Passing means you can go to the corner shop and buy a litre of milk without being harassed. It gives you the space to get on with the rest of your life.

So many transgendered invest a huge amount of time, energy and money in the passing skills; make-up, clothing, hair, hormones, voice therapy, breast implants and facial surgery. They dream of being an ordinary woman; some miss the point and become caricatures. For some becoming invisible can become an obsession; they get rid of old friends, who have been supportive, who might blow their cover; they destroy all evidence of their past. The quest for invisibility can become the secret that drives you crazy.

Many of those who are insecure in public, can't pass, nor cope with the pressure of not passing find it easier to live in the ghettos. They avoid daylight, and hang around the gay clubs, where they find it easy to pick up men, which, for some, affirms their "femaleness". They also put a lot of energy into their looks. The show girls have the highest status in this environment. Prostitution is also common. As Roberta Perkins[15] points out, in the early eighties in Sydney many of the street girls were earning $5000/week, most of which was injected into their veins. When the NSW government legislated to limit street prostitution in 1984 a few turned to bank robbery. And in the mid eighties there were 8 trannys in male prisons in NSW, for grand larceny.

> JULIE: *I waited until I could pass without makeup before I lived as a women.*
>
> JANE: *I was too desperate to wait like Julie did. I started to live as a woman 3 months after I admitted to my family and friends I was transsexual, so I suffered a lot more public vilification. I knew*

> *what I wanted (and believed that I needed). So I just went for it. For me, there was no question of waiting to pass, I had decided that if I couldn't live the rest of my life as a woman I would end it as a man. Although I didn't have much support or self- esteem at the time, I got through on raw nerve, living on breakfast cereal and eventually getting up courage to go to Social Security when I had run my savings down to practically nothing. Eventually I got an office job.*

Relationships

One of the major drives in the lives of the transgendered, like most people, is finding a wonderful relationship. Many het trannys will accept poor relationships just to have one. Some of our partners, usually men, put us under huge pressure to pass, to be invisible, to be normal and to have the operation; so they will be seen as heterosexual. Interestingly more and more transgendered, wanting an equal relationship, have women or other transgendered as long term partners and have completely given up on the possibility of having an equal relationship a man.

Castration Envy — The operation?!

For many the operation is about passing; passing when naked or passing in bed with a lover; some dream they will never be vilified again after the operation, because they'll be normal women. There are a growing number of transgendered who say they don't need the operation. For the majority of transsexuals the operation is about asserting their identity as a woman. Madeleine[14]: "I didn't really want a vagina I really just wanted to get rid of my penis."

The medical profession justify the operation on the grounds of irreconcilable differences between body and soul. But as Janice Raymond[18] says

> ".. gender identity differences are not natural or immutable ... they are amenable to change"

Transsexuals are not as radically at odds with their biology as many perceive they are; many who are happy living as women with penises succumb to social pressure; some don't see the operation as necessary but may still choose to have the operation so it will stop obsessing them and they can get on with having a life.

The other person's gender is always greener

If you get to a stage where passing as a woman isn't an issue you can get an ordinary job or go back to school. But then new things become important, you start to emotionally realise the place of women in this culture.

> *If you're going to be a woman you can't do that anymore.*

Many want you to act in stereotypic ways. When this starts to happen you get a really deep seated awareness of both the arbitrariness and constructedness of gender.

> JULIE: After discussing work with a friend, she said: *"You've really made it, Julie. Instead of facing discrimination because You're transsexual. You're being discriminated against as a woman."*
>
> Great? This is making it?

Reinforcing stereotypes?

One of the major criticisms of the transgendered by lesbian feminists such as Janice Raymond and Sheila Jeffreys is that we reinforce the whole construction of gender by passing as women.

Every time a "woman born woman" is kindly or a man assertive; they reinforce sex-rôle stereotypes. But I see these as positive characteristics and don't want them to stop. If we were to act in a truly ungendered way half the things we did would reinforce a stereotype. One has to act how one believes is the correct way and live with the possible side effect of reinforcing a stereotype.

The tranny who doesn't pass disturbs the stereotypes. The tranny who passes and behaves in a non-stereotypical way helps break down stereotypes; I am in a job, in which there are still no born women doing in Australia. The general public who see my credit start to believe women can do this job. I have run courses to get women into my job.

Dressing up

I advocate the wearing of clothing for warmth in cold climates and for protection against ultra violet light in hot climates. But in all human cultures dressing and adornment are also used to designate class, especially gender. I would like to see the breakdown of class, wealth, race and gender and the end of the unhealthy habit of dressing to show membership to a class. And the end of the practice of your identity depending on what you wear. This is especially true if such identification causes any one or class to be hurt. For example women's health can be damaged by certain fashions. I would not like to see a society where only practical clothing existed. I would like to see a society where adornment would be used to express creative artistic individuality.

5 Personal statements

5.1 Jane

> *I worked for a health fund for two years. My department was staffed almost entirely by women. I know about computers, so I introduced*

them to using spreadsheets, this made the whole department more efficient. I have always been ambitious, more so since I changed over. I became something of a guru and rôle model in the department, the women I worked with started to get more empowered and wondered why they had allowed their abilities to be ignored by the organisation for so long. Some may call it "male energy" that I have. It isn't. As a male, I was shy and awkward around most people; what I have is the empowerment that comes with liberating myself, and knowing that I fought and won a battle for my freedom, that most people would be too scared even to contemplate. Some transsexuals reinforce the old stereotypes, but really we are in a position of enormous leverage when it comes to breaking the stereotypes apart. Best of all is knowing how to turn male oppression against itself.

Living as a woman is the closest way I have of living the way I want The real me is best expressed in our culture by living as a woman.

5.2 Julie

Even though I desperately wanted to be a girl from the age of 4 and a woman all my adult life, I waited until I was 41 before I had the operation. I had logical, political and emotional reasons not to. I also wanted to keep my options of being a parent open. My personal politics on this issue were very confused. I was very strongly influenced by Janice Raymond and by a lesbian feminist anarchist lover, who quoted Janice.

I was desperately unhappy. I dealt with my emotions by trying to keep a lid on them. I had to expend a huge amount of energy and time to keep the lid on this boiling cauldron of huge emotions. I wasn't having a life.

I chose to acknowledge my emotions and take the lid off the cauldron. I now realised the emotions weren't so huge. But it was very scary finding out what I felt. I wanted to integrate what I felt with what I thought and my politics.

By being seen as a woman the assumptions people make about me based on gender are closer to the real me. Even though I see gender as an arbitrary social construct, by saying I was a woman, I could at a deep psychological level easily ignore a lot of my cultural programming related to being a male.

By having the operation I was able to remove that potent symbol of patriarchal power and I felt free to re-construct my self in my own image.

I can express who I am. I no longer spend most of my life dreaming. I won't be "cured" because I have found a part of myself that was stolen from me as a child and I'm not about to give it up. I have altered my body to free my spirit.

My politics said it was OK to alter my body, but it wasn't OK to strengthen the patriarchy by reinforcing gender. This is why I believe it is important to be out about my transgender status.

6 Tranny Power! building self-esteem;

[12]

You are not responsible for being down.
You are responsible for getting up.
- Reverend Jesse Jackson

Changing gender generally means that for some time you bare your soul and best kept secrets to a lot of people, your boss, your family, your workmates, the greengrocer, the schoolkids walking down the street, everybody. A lot of these people disapprove, and a lot of them say so. In this delicate time you often hear yourself put down, unless you are very sure of your own self-worth you may start to believe some of this crap.

It is no longer OK for the rest of society to hold us up for ridicule, and exploit, beat, rape and sack us, it is also no longer OK for us just to be hapless victims. We need to remember that in spite of the difficulties of our situation, we still enjoy some rights, we still possess the same talents and abilities as we did before, and we are entitled to our fair go in life. We believe that the way we must put our psychological affairs in order, to effect a successful change, makes being transsexual a kind of blessing. Accordingly, some of our tranny friends are among the most together, psychologically and emotionally healthy people we have ever met!

Many trannys whose achievements have been stifled by their internal conflicts before their change have gone on to achieve highly afterwards. Most of the trannys we know are highly educated, either hold or are about to gain university degrees. Others hold professional jobs and are quite senior within their organisations. It is possible for trannys to hold out and stay with the careers we have worked long years to build. It may not be easy but it is worth doing.

We must remember that being transsexual simply means we are transsexual. It does not mean that we are other peoples disposable sex objects, that we are automatically transformed into vacuous stupid bimbos, that we deserve whatever mistreatment we get, that we are unlovable or weak. Above all we are still people, with rights like everyone else. And those rights that have been wrongly stripped from us when we changed, we must win back.

Let us insist on the rights and respect due to the worthy, lovable, smart, fun and precious people that we are. We must make sure that we do have a choice!

7 Transcending Gender?

> *"Behind the quest for the body and the sex rôle and the identity of the opposite sex is the quest for deeper selfhood." "... the quest for transcendence"* Janice Raymond[18]

Janice goes on to say that transsexual medical intervention violates bodily, personal and social integrity and so makes such transcendence impossible. In the preface to the 1994 edition she says the non-operation seeking transgendered who claim to transcend gender do so more in style than in political substance.

Transsexuality is not an end in itself but a step on the journey towards wholeness, a drastic step to break our gender programming. Transgenderism occurs a lot less frequently in healthier less gendered societies and it certainly can't exist in a genderless society.

> JULIE: *I have a new goal: to transcend gender and to develop as polymorphically as possible. I don't expect to achieve it, but I expect life will be very interesting. Life without gender is a utopian dream for me, I got a taste of it one year at Confest. I was very gender confused at the time. It was wonderful not having to decide which toilet to use; there was only one. I walked naked with breasts and a penis; I felt the whole weight of gender lifted from me, but only shortly.*

The transgendered can all start to take advantage of their abilities to take the best parts of being male and female in our culture and be truly themselves. Those who do grow through these limitations have to transcend gender and grow into wonderful whole people who can offer a unique perspective on the operation of sexism in our culture.

If you claim to have transcended gender and the people you relate to have transcended gender then it makes no sense to claim you are gay, lesbian, straight or bi. These categories no longer exist for such people. They have relationships with people. No transgendered I know of have transcended gender, neither has anyone else. The existence of trannys is a threat to gender. And so to heterosexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality and bisexuality, which all rely on a strong gender system to exist.

8 A rôle?

Many traditional cultures have had shamanistic rôles for the transgendered. Our culture sees things in black and white not in colour, Kate Bornstein[5, Pages 130-132,157], gender outlaw, suggests that our journeys give us an unusual perspective on life. And that we must fight to claim a rôle in this culture; a rôle that promotes inclusion, is consensual, and empowers the individual. The shamans were the healers, the mystics, the channellers of the truth of their time; they were the tricksters, the jokers, the jesters, poets and priestesses. She suggests that because people laugh at us anyway, why not take on a court jester rôle. In court the jester was the only person who could be honest with king, queen and peasant. She suggests we do so using the media of queer theatres in alliance with the lesbians, gays and others.

9 Conclusion

The transgendered can bring advantages to themselves and to our society.

For the individual, transgenderism is not an end in it self it is a journey towards wholeness, via the avenue of gender transcendence. Unfortunately not all transsexuals experience this advantage; many get stuck on the way; in "passing" obsessions, in the beauty myth, in the quest for normality and invisibility. Many fear to act. For some transsexuals living as a woman expands their abilities and perceptions and for others it is contractive, it becomes a huge millstone that stops all growth. The main inhibitor to growth is low self esteem, lack of honesty about your past and fear of it's discovery.

For our society, transgenderism can offer a window through gender via it's transcendence towards social wholeness. This century has seen the most serious questioning of the validity of the gender class system. Transsexuality stems from an individual's extreme dissatisfaction with the gender they were assigned. We are seeing an unprecedented increase in discourse on transsexuality, in all transgender behaviour and in the assertiveness of the transgendered. In the past those who questioned gender were considered sinners and/or insane; they were questioning the very basis of our society. The transgendered are still classified by the American Psychiatric Association as mentally disordered. We, the transgendered, no longer accept the blame. We are not sick; gender is no longer an appropriate class system.

The transgendered who are still trying to fulfil gender stereotypes definitively show us that gender is arbitrary. They, with our commentary, provide a small crack in the wall. The transgressively gendered, lesbians, gays and the transgendered, who are articulate can widen that crack into a chasm. A chasm that will lead to the dismantling of gender. It is important to encourage playing with gender and to be involved in the discourse, which will create our future.

A 12 days on

By Julie Peters — after visiting Janie 12 days on from her operation.

they cut my janie
she is happy
they cut her with sharp knives
my janie is in pain
she walks distorted in pain
she wears pads of paper to absorb her blood
the blood from wounds from knives from doctors
blood spilt on tables
blood spilt in bed
blood spilt in clothes
blood oozes through stiches,
wounds weep clear blood, bright red blood, brown dried blood, blood clots from vagina.
clean!
keep clean!
so many cuts to be infected

why do they cut my janie?
she cried to be cut
she begged and ranted,
she yelled, til her voice was hoarse she yelled

she hated the genitals that said she was male
she hated her maleness
she begged and screamed and cried and shouted to cut off her maleness
i cried and cried and i'm crying

i love her softness, i love her strength, i love her squeamishness,
i love her courage, her sweetness, intelligence, intuition, her fear,
her loving, her sorrow.
i love her joy
        her wonderful immense joy
i love her joy from being cut
        knocked out, cut and sewn for four hours

the man with the big hands, cut, shaped, sewed for hours
item number 6184: penis, radical amputation of.
skin removed, exposed
the time had come to amputate
a slight pause breath in
the whole operating theatre breathed in

they held their breathes:
a naked skinless penis removed with a knife
they cringed
the knife was sharp it came away

she cried to have it gone
such joy

i saw her joy i cried
i saw her wounds i cried
handsome young man of sorrow, of fear, woman of joy

i've seen your joy, smile from ear to ear
i've seen your pain, your bleeding

you had to fight and claw and scream and cry for your womanhood
you were brave and won
you won the body to suit your mind, your soul, your being

you cry no more: i cry
i cry for the pain you spent to win your joy
your joy is infectious
i cry because you had no joy in childhood, youth or manhood
your joy of womanhood fills me

i feel my sorrow in you, my fear in you,
    my hate in you, my love in you
    my love for you
    your love of me
janie ... lover! sister! daughter! mother!

i want a woman's body, i don't want to be cut,
    i don't want my body desecrated,
i don't want a man's body
    why?
it feels like i want a woman's body
        i can't grow anymore unless i'm a woman

i don't want my body cut, my sweet body
i want to be a woman
i am a woman .. my soul is me
my spirit is cheated
    cheated, controlled, inhibited, locked, squashed, imprisoned

she is sore, i am gentle
there is a war
men are fighting
there is war on war on war
our men sell our enemies arms to shoot us

i want to rip my soul from this genital that says i must fight; be male
this genital has formed my life without my consent
my spirit has been ill-formed
i will prune the symbol of my oppression and grow anew in my construction

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