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to

Feb 14, 1999, 3:00:00 AM

TRANSGENDERED WOMEN AND LESBIANS

DEFINITIONS

Cross Dresser
If I use the word "cross dresser" in a sentence, most people will assume I am referring to a man who enjoys wearing female attire. That assumption is most often correct, but not always correct. Why? Because there are also women who cross dress. We tend to ascribe the word to males, because the image of a man wearing a dress tends to shock us more than the image of a woman wearing a pair of male trousers. The reason is that in Western culture there is considerably more tolerance extended to women wearing masculine attire than to men wearing feminine attire.

Furthermore, female cross dressers comprise a proportionally smaller ratio. In other words, for every ten male cross dressers, there might only be one female cross dresser.
Another misconception is that most cross dressers are gay or homosexual. The statistical evidence is that most cross dressers are heterosexual. Furthermore, most cross dressers are accepting of the gender usually ascribed to their anatomy. Male cross dressers are happy to be men. Female cross dressers are happy to be women. Their actions are simply a desire to occasionally express themselves as the opposite gender.

It is a harmless activity. The fact that our society makes so much of it says more about our society than it does about the cross dresser. When examined objectively, society's preoccupation with this harmless fetish is nothing more than petty.

Transgendered
If I use the word "transgendered" in a sentence, most people have no clear idea what it means. There is even confusion within the gender community, because we use the word so many different ways.

Virginia Prince first used the term. He used the word to define a man who felt more comfortable living as a woman.

Virginia had taken estrogen. After a few years, he developed fully feminine breasts. He also dressed as a woman on a full-time basis.

The fact that Mr. Prince ingested estrogen long enough to develop breasts suggests that he possessed a passion that was greater than a mere desire to cross dress. It suggested, very strongly, that anatomy and gender could be at odds, and that an individual could be anatomically male while being psychologically and emotionally female.
Virginia Prince introduced the term 'transgendered' sometime around 1960. In doing so, he still referred to himself as a man. Furthermore, he distinguished himself from a male-to-female transsexual, such as Christine Jorgenson, who had her penis removed.

The fact that Virginia Prince distinguished himself from a transsexual is important. The act marks a sort of benchmark, at least in the Western world. Since the emergence of Christine Jorgenson, it has been fixed in the minds of most people that the only way for a man to become a woman is through surgery. It even spurred the legal prerequisites. A man had to be willing to subject himself to a surgeon's scalpel, if he were ever to be considered a woman.

The idea was simple enough, but it failed to satisfy the publics' understanding of what constitutes a man and what constitutes a woman. After all, there were other men who had lost their penis. Could we now call them women? Could we even say that the removal of a man's penis could always make him a woman?

The answer was, and will always be, "no!" Why? - Because sex and gender are not always the same. Sex is anatomical. Physical attributes can be surgically altered, but psychological attributes are likely to remain the same.

Television talk shows made this case more clearly in the minds of the public than had any scientific study. We observed male-to-female transsexuals who were post-operative but who still looked and talked like men. And they still expressed what has come to be know as male privilege.

Feminists were quick to argue that male-to-female transsexuals had never been socially conditioned as women. They had never been oppressed as women. Therefore, they could not comprehend all that it meant to be a woman in Western society. It was an argument not very different than the argument expressed by the Christian Coalition: We don't condemn homosexuals and queers. We simply condemn what homosexuals and queers do.

A similar argument has been used by white supremacist towards African Americans: We don't condemn a man or woman for being African American. We simply condemn the idea that they should hold an equal place or have an equal voice in society.

Regrettably, I've encountered similar arguments on most of the lesbian and transgendered Internet mailing lists. I find that I am accepted as an African American transgendered woman, so long as I do not assert what it means to be African American in America, or assert my particular vies on being transgendered or transsexual. I argue that the position held by the list administrators and a few of its members is racist and bigoted. They argue it is "something else." I, however, have had a difficult time defining "something else."

TRANSGENDERED WOMEN
I continue to be good friends with Virginia Prince. However, we disagree on what it means to be transgendered. And, as early as 1965, I began writing articles about being transgendered but also a woman.

For me, it was not my anatomy that defined me. I was defined by the condition of my heart, mind, and soul.

Sex is anatomical. It identifies the organ between my legs. It identifies my reproductive and skeletal systems. It does not identify how I define myself, nor the gender I embrace as a human being.

So, what have I been saying for the past 35 years? Have I been saying that I could be anatomically male but psychologically female? Absolutely! I am a woman because my heart, mind and soul are the heart, mind and soul of a woman. Who we are is determined by our state of mind - not by our internal or external organs.

Many agree with my idea. They call themselves male-to-female transgendered women, or female-to-male transgendered men. They do not dispute their anatomical sex. They simply assert that their sex does not define their gender. And, I believe they are totally correct.

TRANSGENDERED LESBIANS / TRANSSEXUAL LESBIANS
Within the lesbian community, the term transgendered is used more to the liking of Virginia Prince. Some lesbians use "transgendered" to refer to the butch lesbian who takes on a masculine and male persona without identifying with being a man. S/he wants to be addressed as a male while still maintaining her (or hir) status as a woman. S/he wants to exhibit the physical and cosmetic characteristics of manhood but has no desire to be a man. In some instances, s/he might even assert that her gender is neither male, nor female. It is simply butch.

So, when a male-to-female transgendered woman announces that she is a woman-loving woman, and therefore a lesbian, she is not always accepted as such within the lesbian community. Why? - Because lesbians define woman and transgendered differently that it is defined within the community of transgendered women.

Transgendered butch "men" continue to identify as women, and they remain within the lesbian community. Conversely, male-to-female transgendered women leave the community of men and dare to venture into every community of women that exists. Unfortunately, some transgendered (and transsexual) women continue to carry a demeanor characteristic of one who once held male social privilege. Genetically female women naturally resent this behavior.

Remember that the phrase "woman-born womyn" originated in the lesbian community. And its sole purpose was to distinguish genetically female women from any other group professing to be comprised of women. It was intended to exclude transgendered, but also transsexual, women.

Lesbians, many of whom were also feminists, worked consciously and decisively to exclude transgendered and transsexual women from lesbian activities, as well as their social and cultural functions. The phrase "woman-born" meant quite emphatically that unless you were born genetically female, you had no right to call yourself a woman.
Older lesbians were even more insistent. Many - whether outwardly or secretly gay - knew all too well how oppressive society could be towards a woman identified as lesbian. They harbored many painful memories, and much resented former "men" professing to be lesbian as a result of hormones, cosmetic surgery, or both.

Lesbians raised yet another argument - this one directed specifically at transgendered women. They argued that many lesbians had been abused or molested by men, and had come to identify the male sex organ as the primary physical instrument of their abuse. And because transgendered women had retained their male sex organ, they carried the instrument that created the most painful of memories in the mind of a substantial number of lesbians. And, in this instance, they argue that they do not condemn transgendered women or transgendered lesbians; they simply condemn their anatomy.

CONCLUSIONS
All the obstacles between our various communities exist because many of us continue to judge others based on their physical attributes - whether skin color or reproductive systems. Somehow, we must learn to accept our enormous diversity, and to rid ourselves of the prejudices born from an earlier time or an earlier experience. If we do not, we will carry these prejudices into the next century. We will continue to be divided and, as a result of our division, we will continue to be less than effective politically and socially.
The exclusion of transgendered and transsexual lesbians from lesbian communities does not make the lesbian community stronger. It makes it weaker, and sends a message of intolerance from a group that seeks nothing more than tolerance for itself.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Roberta Angela Dee is a transgendered woman. She welcomes your comments and opinions regarding her articles, and can be reached at Dian...@aol.com.

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