

Volume 2, No. 2
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New

Woman

Conference

New Woman Conference
P.O. Box 67
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TEL (207) 676-5870

Rites of Passage

The Newsletter of the New Woman Conference

Dallas Denny, Editor

Inclusion? Exclusion? The Issue of Transsexual Participation in Woman-only Events

In 1979, the Feminist Press published *The Transsexual Empire* by Janice R. Raymond, a political manifesto which masqueraded as a work of science. She showed her true colors on the first page of the preface, when she said of Renée Richards, "It takes castrated balls to play women's tennis."

Unfortunately, despite its preposterous thesis (that male-to-female transsexualism is a conspiracy by male physicians to render females obsolete), and despite its vitriolic and hate-filled tone, Raymond's book was taken and continues to be taken seriously by feminist and other scholars.

More than ten years after publication of *The Transsexual Empire*, the issue of whether those persons Raymond called "Male-to-Constructed-Females" are in fact women is still argued. NWC's own Nancy Burkholder was forcibly expelled from the 16th Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1991. And throughout 1992, the controversy raged in San Francisco's *Bay Times*, a gay-oriented newspaper (see excerpts on Page 4). The letters column raged pro and con transsexual exclusion, especially after the appearance of an article by Val C. Phoenix on 21 May, describing the educational action of NWC's own Anne Ogborn and NWC's own Nancy Burkholder at the 17th Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. A letter by Bev Jo on 22 October, echoing Raymond's

Transsexual Empire (see "Transsexuals and Heterosexual Male Arrogance" on pages 2 & 3), accused a transsexual who she had known in high school of sexually harassing her. She was outraged that the woman (Jo deliberately used masculine pronouns to refer to her) was now active in lesbian circles.

The accused person responded anonymously to Bev Jo's allegations on 5 November, aided by the newly formed Transgender Nation. More letters were published, written by transsexual and other persons, both in opposition to and support of Ms. Jo— and then, on 3 December, an article by Kate Bornstein, who is herself post-operative, essentially agreed with Raymond and Bev Jo. Bornstein went even further in her "plan for peace," by writing that transsexual persons are "nothing short of violent if they demand admission into the ranks of 'women born women' lesbian separatists who don't want transsexuals there."

The year ended with a marvelous piece by NWC's own Rachel Pollock, entitled "Transsexual Rights and Others," which appeared on 17 December. Her poem, "Many Things I am Not and a Few Things I Am," is reproduced on page 5. —ROP

NWC 1993

**Negotiations are ongoing. There is a chance the NWC will be held at an alternate site.*

23-26 September

*On the beautiful Russian River
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For information, write NWC
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The NWC is a nonprofit organization which promotes the welfare of postoperative transsexual women. NWC sponsors an annual conference, which is held in the fall of each year, and publishes this newsletter.

NWC will be happy to place you on our exchange list, if you will place us on yours. We will happily exchange ad space with newsletters and magazines. Others can check below for ad rates.

We encourage submissions. Material should be of interest to the new woman, between 500 and 1500 words. Submit to the editor at the Georgia Address.

1992-1993 NWC Facilitators

Wendi Kaiser
Anne Ogborn
Angela Wensley
Christina Young

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A Word From the Editor

Hello, and welcome to the second issue of *Rites of Passage*, the newsletter of the *New Women Conference*. It wasn't easy, but I managed to tear myself away from Stephen King's *Four Past Midnight* long enough to get this issue to press.

We really get our feet wet with this issue. The topic of transsexual persons at woman-only events is one which elicits high feelings in both transsexual persons and in separatist lesbians. We've focused on the controversy as it was recently played out in the pages of San Francisco's *Bay Times*. (And a tip of the Hat to Anne Ogborn, who was good enough to send us full-sized photocopies of the relevant pages). We hope to receive your opinion for issue #3. And Davina Anne Gabriel, thank you for the letter expressing your opinion (see page 3).

Another controversy has been the issue of adding the word "transgender" to the title of the March on Washington (which is going on even as I write this. So why aren't I there? Oh yes. No money). Although the word transgender was added to the various planks, it was left off the title of the march.

My initial reaction to the vote to not include our name was to blow off the march. Not support it. But then, in April, at the IFGE conference, Alison Laing said something which I recognized as Truth, with a capital "T." She said, "Even if we're not included, we should support the march, because it's the right thing to do."

Of course. The right thing to do. So I supported the march, because it was the right thing to do. And turnabout is fair play. The dignity and rights of transsexual people should be supported by gay and lesbian people because it is the right thing to do.

Well, Stephen King beckons. Until next time...

Transsexuals and Heterosexual Male Arrogance

(reprinted from the Bay Times, 10/22/92)

When I was a young, 18-year-old lesbian, without political support and knowing no other lesbians, I met a man at school who wanted me to be his girlfriend. I told him "No" over and over. I was a lesbian and I was not heterosexual. However, with typical male arrogance and the assumption of male ownership rights to all females, he would not take my "No" seriously. In spite of my being a lesbian, he continued to pressure me over many months to be heterosexual with him. I still refused.

Haven't many of you been pressured by a man in such a sexist and heterosexist way? How would you feel to later find out that the same man decided he was a lesbian? How would you feel to read his writings in lesbian and women's publications, writing as a lesbian, including writing about his "lesbian" sexual experiences?

When I said "No" to this man, lesbianism seemed incomprehensible to him. He probably now says that he always felt he was a woman, which is what "transsexuals" commonly say, but he didn't then. He told me about his life and he never thought he was anything other than a man. He certainly never thought he was a lesbian.

Men expect access to females. They don't like taking "No" for an answer. Many men find lesbianism sexually titillating and it is commonly portrayed in male pornography. Some men decide that they want access to lesbians any way they can and decide they will become lesbians. Lesbians are a remarkably loving and tolerant people; but they are also a very hated people, and many have internalized this oppression.

Some lesbians who are harsh and condemning of other lesbians will be warm and accepting of non-lesbians, especially of men who decide they want to be with lesbians. I believe lesbians' acceptance of

men ("transsexuals") as lesbians comes partly because we don't want to reject anyone the way we have been rejected. I think it also comes from self-hatred.

How else can lesbians really believe that men can turn men into females, and that the male medical profession can create lesbians? Are females really just the absence of a penis? Would we so easily believe that European-descended surgeons could turn European-descended people into Native Americans, Africans, Asians, and other peoples oppressed by those of European descent?

If "transsexuals" are women, why don't they understand the need and right of an oppressed group to meet on our own? Instead, "transsexuals" don't want just to be lesbians, but insist, with all the arrogance and presumption of power that men have, on going where they are not wanted and trying to destroy lesbian gatherings (like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival) and getting into power positions in lesbian organizations. (Even while the man who harassed me still had his penis and was "pre-operative," he became vice-president of the Daughters of Bilitis and was an invited performer at one of the first lesbian conferences in 1973.)

I can't believe that after 20 years, we are still being forced to deal with this issue, not just by men but also by women. We have so little left. Males have access to the world in a way that females never do. Now even most "women's" space is open to males. Why is there so much support for males, including "transsexuals," always at the expense of females? Why can't males and their female advocates just let us keep the rare, precious, female-only spaces, including publications?

How would you feel if a man who once sexually harassed you was welcomed as a lesbian at one of the only places you thought were safe from men, or you repeatedly had to read about his "lesbian" sexual experiences in women's publications?

Bev Jo, Oakland

Letter to the Editor

I recently read your column concerning the issue of transsexual inclusion in womyn-only space in *Rites of Passage* Vol. 2, No. 1. This is an issue that is of particular importance to me, and one that I have been actively involved in for the last four years, ever since a group of lesbian separatists attempted to have me expelled from the local lesbian community center. I suspect that you are probably aware of my recent efforts to further raise consciousness about this subject by attending the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. I have written several articles on this subject, and would like to share them with you, even if they are obviously too long for publication in *Rites of Passage*.

Concerning Kate Benedict Arnold's Bornstein's recent plan for appeasement in the *San Francisco Bay Times*: Rarely have I felt so betrayed in my entire life as when I read this piece of sheer claptrap. As far as I am concerned, the entire article is nothing less than a slap in the face to the entire transsexual community. I was so angry and disgusted by it that I spent over three weeks writing a reply to it. I've enclosed a copy of that too, as I thought that you might like to see it.

This is an exciting time to be a transsexual, and one that I never thought that I would see during my lifetime, and I am so gratified to be playing the part that I am in what is happening. When I underwent surgery in 1979, the idea of there being such a thing as a transsexual community or that being out-of-the-closet as a transsexual could be empowering were unimaginable, let alone such ideas as a transsexual movement or transsexual spirituality. I can recall that less than three years ago, even Anne Ogborn said there would never be such a thing as a transsexual movement, yet here she is today at the very forefront of that movement, and all of those other things that likewise become

ineluctable realities. It's all still so utterly amazing to me that it almost seems magical. But then, why shouldn't it? As I have come to appreciate, transsexuality is a kind of inherently magical consciousness.

Unquestionably, there has been a veritable sea change in attitudes toward transsexuals within the local lesbian community since this first became a major controversy here four years ago. The firestorm of controversy that is happening in San Francisco right now is very much reminiscent of what happened in Kansas City in 1989. There are, of course, still some diehard separatists whose opinions about transsexuals are so firmly enmeshed that they probably will never change, but at least transsexuals are no longer actively excluded from any lesbian events here. The conveners of the Kansas City Women's Support Group still refuse to put us on their mailing list, which I interpret to mean that they still officially consider us to be *persona non grata*, but we go to their events anyway, and we don't get thrown out or treated rudely. I wish I could say that discrimination against transsexuals has been totally eliminated here, but this one last obdurate vestige of it seems to remain resolutely entrenched, like it is making some desperate final stance for separatism. But for all practical purposes, active discrimination has been eliminated from Kansas City's lesbian community. Anne gives me all the credit for this, and even though I was actively involved in this particular issue, Anne deserves a great deal of the credit too, as does her former lover and now my best friend, Fran.

But the success here goes far beyond ending discrimination. With the exception of the very small minority of diehard separatists, transsexuals are not only welcomed within the lesbian community, but are considered to be very special and valuable members of it.

Davina Anne Gabriel
Kansas City

Excerpts from the Bay Times, 1992

2 January

Letter from Christine Beatty

I write this letter not for myself, but for the lesbian I am dating. I have told her several times that being seen with me will make her despised by some elements of the gay female community... I am so grateful that this wonderful woman is able to look past my chromosomes and sense the female energy that has driven me to become a woman.

30 January

Letter from Jennifer Farrar

I too am a transsexual lesbian. I too feel frustration and pain... but, my dear (Christine), you are not only fighting your lover's battle, but trying to pry yourself into closed doors and closed mind.

How many dykes think us crazy for throwing away the penis that we detested and that they secretly covet? And how many gay males would give anything if they could do what we did and become the woman they wish they were?

27 February

Letter from Christine Beatty

While Ms. Farrar is another transsexual person, I feel no kinship with her, especially when she plunges into Neanderthal stereotypes about dykes who "secretly covet" a penis and gay men who wish they were women. Give me a break! Ms. Farrar writes like a former hetero male crossdresser who hasn't a clue of what it's like to be gay...

21 May

Val. C. Phoenix: Transsexual Lesbians Urge Boycott of Michigan Festival

Vogel (a festival official) pauses when asked if she thinks Nancy Burkholder is a woman, and then says slowly, "Our feeling is that the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is an event for women, and we feel that it is the community conscience for the working staff that we want it to be for 'womyn born womyn.'

4 June

Letter from Womyn for Womyn

"The issue was processed extensively"—by whom? Festival workers, which excludes any out transsexuals. We at Womyn for Womyn contend that any decision about transsexual issues which omits out transsexual womyn from the discussion is inherently transphobic.

18 June

Letter from Tish Talaszek

Let's get real about this—after 16 years this was the first time this issue has come up. If a large portion of the community feels transsexuals violate women-only space, why can't we respect that?

18 June

Letter from Eric Weaver

I'm not a transsexual and I can hardly imagine what it's like, but I have had experience of homophobia and confusion about my gender directed at me by both the straight world and some queers... I just don't perceive MTF transsexuals as somehow maintaining "male privilege" when they're so harassed all the time.

30 July

Letter from Marie Kochaver

Maybe the recent *SF Bay Times* exchange about expulsions at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival... will encourage us to grow in compassion and understanding.

I am a female-born woman who has frequently experienced the oppression and shame of gender policing. Apparently, just by being myself, I cross too many gender lines.

5 November

Letter from Transgender Nation

We the members of Transgender Nation feel it is incumbent on us to respond to the slanderous, Perotnoid letter from Bev Jo. We strongly protest the irresponsible editorial policy that allowed the *SF Bay Times* to print unsubstantiated allegations of sexual harassment.

We must ask if this publication would have printed a letter that stereotyped African Americans as sexual harassers and unwelcome invaders in the queer community. If it had attacked a more politically powerful group—or one that didn't challenge so many funda-

mental cultural assumptions—the letter would have never seen print.

5 November

Editor's Note

We recognize that this is a tough call. Here's our policy: Occasionally we will publish a letter that is offensive to a minority community within the overall queer community when that letter represents a prejudice or point of view that is widely held in the majority community.

5 November

Letter from "Annie, age 4"

The editor of a biweekly Bay Area gay/lesbian/bisexual/(not transgendered) newspaper is a heterosexual man in drag who sexually harassed me in 1973.

5 November

Letter from Kathy Seeley

Once again, separatism has given lesbianism and feminism a bad name.

To say that some men decide to change their anatomic sex to gain "access to lesbians any way they can" is the epitome of an arrogant fantasy. For transsexuals, the physical, social, emotional and economic turmoil involved in such a decision is only exacerbated by the rejection and hatred of two groups that I can think of: the right wing, and radical separatists.

19 November

Letter from "Shirley Dykewitch"

Like it or not, there are many lesbians (women-born women) who don't believe that science can "create" one sex out of another. Live your lives the way you want and spread your hatred of women while you're at it, if you must, but the fact is we're here, we're dykes and you're not. Deal with it.

I would suggest... that... you should learn to accept who you are. If a man doesn't "feel" like a man, why not accept that you are a *different kind of man*, and help to expand the definition of what it is to be a man, rather than accept a rigid definition of "man" and decide that, if you are not that, then you must be a woman? We are what we are, and no number of operations or rituals or wishes or dreams will change that fact. —ROP

Putting an End to An Employment Myth

by Angela Wensley

As transsexuals, we have created our own mythology concerning employment. We have heard so many sad tales of discrimination, firing, or inability to find work that we consider these as truths instead of the myths they really are. There are myths about the unemployability of transsexuals, or that a transsexual cannot find employment no matter how hard she tries, or that if an employed transsexual loses or quits her job, she will never find employment at the same level. And we all have plenty of "proof" that each of these myths is the truth.

I, too, bought into these myths. I was one of the few who was able to make the transition on the job, where I worked as a professional engineer with MacMillan Bloedel, a large Canadian forest products company. Although acceptance from management and co-workers was heartwarming, I soon began to feel trapped by the myth that I could never leave the job I was in, because no one would ever hire a transsexual. I was in a very senior position in the company, and also feared that even if I could find new employment, it would be at a far lower level of authority or salary.

My making the transition on the job was somewhat like being a solitary goldfish in a small bowl. I was naturally the object of my co-workers' curiosity. While I was able to handle the stares and the whispers and being the number one topic of gossip, I also longed for an opportunity to work elsewhere, where I was me, and not a label. I also perceived that my chances for advancement within the company were at an end (another myth). Ordinarily, had I not been transsexual, I would have been at choice to resign and find more promising employment elsewhere; however, I let myself be trapped by the myth that outside of

the job I held, I was essentially unemployable. I made myself very unhappy in the same job I once found fulfilling!

My situation deteriorated to the point that the stress of remaining in my job led to my having to take a three month leave of absence because of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Yet I clung to my employment, and returned to work as unhappy as when I had left on my leave. Reporting to a new manager did not help; indeed, he let me know from the outset that he did not consider me a woman. It was only a matter of time before my misery would compel me to resign, and "prove" the myth of my unemployability.

My life changed this past summer, when I enrolled in a seven-week workshop at the Ken Keyes Center in Coos Bay, Oregon. The workshop was called TLC!, which stood for "The Life Changing Experience," and it certainly was that. We were taught the methods of the "Science of Happiness," as described in Keyes' books "Handbook to Higher Consciousness," "The Power of Unconditional Love," "How to Enjoy Your Life in Spite of It All," and "Gathering Power Through Insight and Love." Keyes' basic premise is that we already have the ability to be who we are, yet we are programmed by society to believe the opposite. I came to realize that my beliefs about my unemployability were just programming. I also came to understand that I am not my programming, and that I could change my programming.

By the end of the TLC!, I clearly saw myself as the creative cause in my life. Nothing external of me "makes" me happy—I do! I had worked very hard on understanding the nature of my programming, the reasons I had held onto it even when I was ripping myself off, and on changing my programming. All those years of fearing for my own security had resulted only in my being insecure. Without fear, I now felt more secure than at any time in my adult life. Having

done my "inner" work, I was now prepared to stop getting in the way of whatever the Universe had in store for me. I surrendered.

And the Universe acted swiftly on my behalf. On my first day back at work after the TLC!, there was a note from my boss labeling me "self-centered" (hardly a welcome-back-we-missed-you kind of note!). This was my note to freedom. I now fully realized that this job did not make me happy, and that I was at choice to remain or to leave. I chose the latter. The next day, I called my boss into my office, told him I found his behavior unskillful, and said I was going to resign.

The very same day, I received a telephone call from a person representing a forest products company in New Zealand. They needed someone to do a major research project for them, and had been speaking with people all over the world, and my name kept being mentioned. They asked if I would be interested, and I said yes! So, no sooner had I stated my intention to resign than I already had a new job. I was able to leave my previous employment under the most loving of circumstances, without burning bridges. I am my own boss now, and making more money than before. Myth shattered.

I wish it were possible in one short article to convey what took seven weeks to penetrate through my thick skull. We do not have to let ourselves buy into programming that is clearly harmful. The myths about transsexuals and employment are not true. I am not saying it is easy to find work, nor am I saying that the stories we have all heard are untrue. What I am saying is that as long as we believe these myths, we will succeed only in making ourselves unhappy. Our happiness does not come from outside of us. If we believe that a job makes us happy, we are on the path to unhappiness. When we realize that happiness is an inside job, then we will be amazed at now everything around us miraculously "changes." —ROP

Many Things I Am Not and a Few Things I Am

by Rachel Pollock

I am not a male-to-female
I am not a sex change
I am not trapped in the wrong
body
I am not courageous
I am not a victim
I am not a virtue
I am not an invasion
I am not an invitation
I am the daughter of my
mother

I am not a sickness
I am not a joke
I am not a she-male
I am not a tragedy
I am not an invention
I am not a distortion
I am not a metaphor
I am not a mistake
I am the daughter of belief

I am ancient
I am the giver and receiver of
gifts
I am constant desire
I am steady fulfillment
I am the real thing —ROP

Editor's Soapbox: On Hatefulness in Pronoun Usage

by Dallas Denny

A common ploy of writers with axes to grind about transsexual people is to refer to them with inappropriate pronouns. An example is Bev Jo's letter on pp. 2-3, in which "he" refers to a postoperative male-to-female person with masculine pronouns (see how it works?) The practice is unfortunately common in the medical and psychological literature of gender dysphoria. It is common for those who have been living cross-gender for years (and who may even be post-surgical) to be referred to with pronouns which absolutely do not describe their appearance, behavior, self-image, or social role.

Psychotherapists have been among the worst offenders. Leslie Lothstein, in "her" (yes, Lothstein is a male) book, *Male-to-Female Transsexualism*, is a consistent offender: "For the past two years Barbara (age 28) had assumed a male identity, dressing full-time as a male and living and working as a male. She sported a ducktail hairdo, dressed in an exaggerated male style, and related to everyone as a man" (emphasis mine).

Whether or not one believes that it is possible to change one's sex, the use of a pronoun consistent with the individual's self-image is a sign of respect. It does not mean that you are in agreement, but only that you have regard for the individual as a human being.

The deliberate misuse of pronouns is more than an insult; it is the basest, lowest thing that an individual can do to a transsexual person. It is analogous to calling an African-American a nigger. It is hitting below the belt. It is reprehensible. It is transphobic.

Transgendered persons deserve the right to be called by the pronoun they choose, just as they deserve to live as they choose. —ROP

What is the New Woman Conference?

The NWC is a small group of post-operative male-to-female transsexual persons. The NWC's primary function is to conduct an annual retreat at which those who have recently had surgery and those whose surgery was years or decade ago come together. The experience is spiritual—some would say magical—as women from all across the United States enjoy the rustic setting with others who have shared their marvelous journey. (Male & female partners are welcome). The Conference culminates with a ritual in which the attendees celebrate that which they all share—their blood sacrifice.

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Dr. Sheila Kirk is doing a national survey of post-op transsexual persons. Please participate. You can get a copy of her survey by writing her C.O IFGE, P.O. Box 367, Wayland, MA 01778 (or phone her at 617-899-2212).