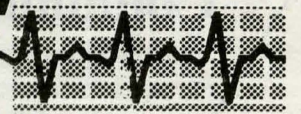


Community Pride Reporter

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TRANSGENDERED: What does it mean?

A presentation by Leslie Feinberg to The Matlovich Society

By: Luke Balboni, Staff Writer

"I grew up with an Ozzie and Harriet view of men and women. There are women and there are men, and women are feminine and men are masculine and that's just the way it is. There are just these two polar opposites and anything else just falls into a void in between. I'm using 'transgender' to mean everyone who falls in between." So spoke Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*, during her riveting presentation at the Matlovich Society on February 10, 1994.

Ms. Feinberg added, "There's a more specific term for 'transgender', and that is for those who talk about 'transsexuals', meaning those who are assigned a sex at birth and redefine by choice their sex later in life. That's what I'm using as being transsexual. There are those who specifically define that as being different from 'transgendered' meaning, 'I'm a woman. I was assigned to be feminine at birth. This

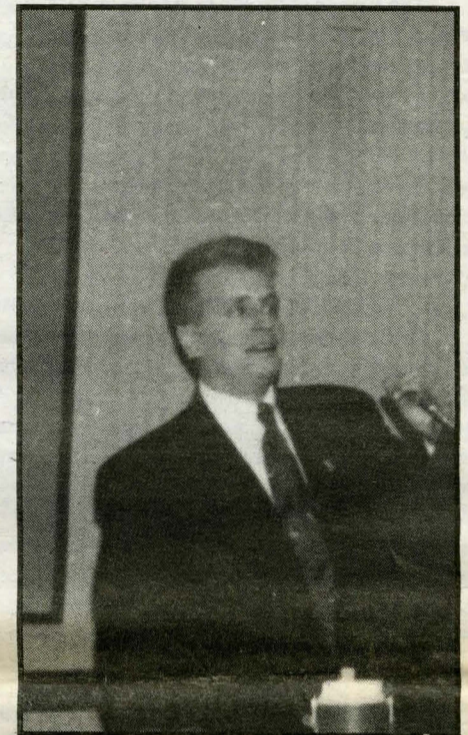
is my gender identity." Why do you think there's a contradiction between the two?

"So there is that specific term. You see, sometimes TS/TG, transsexual 'slash' transgender, that 'slash' is the unity. And 'transgender' is also used by the movement for an umbrella term which unites an entire diverse community of transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, drag kings, androgynies, cross-dressers, bearded women, people who have so many differences in how they identify as opposed to each other. But, when we're at the 7-11 at midnight, or on the D train platform at 3 AM and some group of guys says, 'There's one of them now,' 'transgender' means, 'That's one of them now.' It's that broad umbrella term for people who are considered gender-benders, for people who have defied the man-made boundaries of sex and gender, and it's in that broad umbrella term that I'm using the word 'transgender' to-

night."

While almost all homosexual people fall somewhere between the stereotypical opposites of masculine and feminine, it would seem that the term 'transgendered' is reserved for people who are identifiable as not fitting one of the two societally established gender roles. Whether or not a person "passes" as a different gender than the one assigned at birth is irrelevant because the individual in question knows themselves and is doing what they want and identifying themselves as they choose.

In listening to Ms. Feinberg, and in writing about her (Ms. Feinberg identified to the audience as a lesbian), one comes square up against the limitations of our language. The pronouns especially limit us and, as Ms. Feinberg pointed out, "That's no accident." Language serves to enforce, and reinforce, the predominant power structure, and attempts to define the



Leslie Feinberg

Photo by L. Balboni

relational possibilities between that society's members.

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UM Farmington group threatened

Letters to Gay and Straight People's Educational Alliance prompt rally and show of support

By: Winnie Weir

Hate continues to rear its ugly head, this time on the campus of the University of Maine in the town of Farmington. According to an education major attending UMF, (who feels compelled to stay in the closet for many reasons) the organization, GASPEA (Gay And Straight People's Educational Alliance) has received three hate-letters from a student over the last two months.

The first letter, complete with "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" greetings, talked about a "bad incident with a lesbian" which caused this person to withdraw their "support" for lesbian and gay rights. "Lesbians have to be punished,"

the letter went on.

In subsequent letters and phone messages left on the organizations information line, violent acts were threatened against the organization, individual members, and the two co-advisors, Tony Victor, a resident life staff member, and Dr. Brian Kaufman, an openly gay Assistant Professor of Psychology at Farmington.

The second letter was more explicit in the possible methods to be used in carrying out the violence. The writer indicated a full range of weaponry at his/her disposal from hand guns to rifles, knives, strong hands, [and a closed mind]. The

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Battering in the Lesbian Community... Shhh!!!

By: Tania Hubacher, Special Feature Writer

Abuse in intimate lesbian relationships is a newly discussed issue that has, in the past, been in silenced existence. There are lesbians who have been beaten, raped, tortured, stalked and murdered by their intimate partners. The prevalence of abuse within lesbian relationships is hard to estimate, as no formal, accurate, reliable surveys have been done. Claire M. Renzetti writes in her book, *Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*:

"Colman (1990) studied the prevalence and severity of violence among 90 lesbian couples who were recruited for the research through advertisements, news-

letters, fliers, contacts with psychotherapists, support group facilitators, and community organizations, and by snowballing. Based on participant's responses to a 12 page questionnaire, Coleman characterized 42 couples (46%) as violent and 48 as nonviolent. Loulan (1987) arrived at a considerably lower figure of 17% in her survey of 1,566 lesbians, whereas Lie, Schlitt, Bush, Montagne, and Reyes (1991) in a survey of 169 lesbians, found that 73.4% reported experiencing acts defined as physically, sexually, or verbally/emotionally aggressive in at least one previous lesbian relationship, and 26% reported ex-

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Ms. Feinberg said, "We're taught [that determining] sex is very simple, you hold up a baby, look, and that's the sex. Isn't that the first question anyone asks, 'Oh, what a beautiful baby. Is it a boy or a girl?' Well, I hold with those who would answer, 'We don't know. It hasn't told us yet.'"

Ms. Feinberg cited a study done on female to male transsexuals in the Pacific Northwest. "40% self-identified as gay and bisexual men. That tells us that the whole emergence of this transgender movement is going to rock human consciousness, the way the women's movement did and the way the lesbian-gay movement did. It's going to make us have to separate out sex and gender identity and sexual preference, and not collapse them all in together. Now, if later we want to bring it all together and call it 'queer' and fight back, that's one thing. But first we gotta kinda separate out and respect, and even enjoy, our differences."

Ms. Feinberg moved into a historical discussion of gender in which she declared that the partition of the sexes was a relatively recent development and that in some Native American cultures there were five or more pronouns.

She said, "I grew up being taught, 'women are feminine, men are masculine.' Two polar opposites. If you don't fit either here or there, you're just out of the picture, you're out of the universe. But the way I look at it is, OK, there are women who are feminine, women who are androgynous, women who are masculine; and there are men who are masculine and androgynous and feminine. A circle. On a circle of gender expression, everyone can find their place. You don't have to be one or the other, and you can change...I'm fighting for the concept of a circle of gender freedom as opposed to two polar opposites."

Ms. Feinberg went on to discuss inter and intra movement issues. She said, "The relationship between the lesbian-gay community and the transgender community is a very misunderstood question societally, not just within our own movement. For a long time there has been a misunder-

standing that any woman who veers towards masculinity or any man who veers towards femininity is gay. You even hear people say, 'So and so looks gay.' Looks gay? How do you 'look gay.' Look at this room and how many ways there are to be gay."

She discussed the make up of the bars pre-Stonewall, and the highly stylized forms of gender expression therein. She emphasized that she and others, the tip of an iceberg, were the part of the gay population that was always visible, and that society would make assumptions about their sexuality without knowing with whom they slept. And it was these people who were the majority of the people in the bars at this time, so no wonder that society thought that that's what gay meant. It was also what they themselves thought gay meant.

"But we were also on the front lines of battles that helped mid-wife the modern lesbian-gay movement, and now the coalition with the bisexual movement. And what happened was this whole iceberg began to emerge, and for the first time, historically, we could see how many ways there are to be gay, with gender diversity, racial diversity, and class difference within this whole population of 'gay.' But, there was still a misconception that those of us who are like I do, or are drag queens, were like an embarrassing cusp of the lesbian-gay movement. 'It's the "old way." We don't do that anymore'. It's sort of like Jurassic Park, 'They'll go away after a generation.'"

"Well, when I go to the bars now I see whole new generations of young butches and young drag queens. In fact, there's another earthquake going on. There's another iceberg emerging, and that is this huge gender population, and now what we're beginning to see is how many ways there are to be transgendered, and that being transgendered doesn't determine who you're attracted to. It doesn't determine if you're a top or a bottom. Ninety per cent of cross-dressers are presumed to be heterosexuals, but are they 'straight'? Can we really apply these terms to the gender community? It's really important to define a gay population especially when there is such defined oppression, but we can't really be defined by our sexuality. This really is a queer coalition.

"I see them as two huge circles, these populations. A lesbian-gay population, and a transgender population, and they partially overlap. And I'm one of those people in that overlapping part. I'm one of those people who has a foot in both communities. I feel like a bridge, but I also feel like somebody who has one foot in each of two rowboats. I have an extreme desire for

them not to go in the opposite direction. And I really believe it's not that we have identical oppressions, all of us, but we have common enemies.

"I remember someone who I knew well who was macheted to death in Brooklyn by bashers, a transvestite. And as she died, the guys were yelling, 'Die faggot, die.' And her wife was home cooking dinner, waiting for her. See, to our enemies, we're all queer. And when I hear people say, 'We're not all like that' and they try to tell our opponents, 'We're just like you,' I say, 'No I'm not. I'm not like them. I'm queer. I don't wanna be like them.'"

In these comments, Ms. Feinberg has taken on one of the most divisive and troubling issues of the gay rights struggle. The large, established gay rights groups want to be accepted so badly that they become more mainstream and bourgeois than the society they wish to join. And in the process, these groups are not only willing, but eager, to sacrifice 'marginal' types on the altar of acceptance. They are forgetting that it was the transgendered people who fought back at Stonewall, and in so doing made it safe for 'mainstream' gays and lesbians to have bars to go to. This convolution of identity (and self-hatred) produces the incredible result of the 'gay Republican,' perhaps the most perfect oxymoron.

Ms. Feinberg introduced the slide show, *In Our Own Voices*, by saying, "There are two points I want to make with this slide show. The first is that we have been taught what I consider to be the Fred Flintstone School of Human Anthropology." She told us that this show was a prehistoric cartoon version of the *Honey-mooners* which was really more than a cartoon. It was a way of saying that the way things are now is the way they've always been. "And what's the message in that—don't bother to try and change the world. It's always been this way. Bigotry, racism... that's just human nature. You can't do anything about that.

"Well, there's a wise African proverb that says, 'Until the lions come to power, the hunters will write the history.'" Ms. Feinberg states that digging up our history is a political act. It is activism, and that without it we can't fight oppression.

She continued, "I want to show you tonight [in the slides] that although gender has been expressed differently in diverse historical periods and classes and regions and nationalities, that there has always been gender diversity, and people have always redefined their sex. But, we haven't always been hated, hunted and reviled for it. In fact, there was a time in which we were held in high esteem. I put the onus for

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What next? How can I help? Granite State's lesbians, gays, bi's, and allies ask.

One of the most useful and easy things to do is write or call the three people listed below. This was a crucial factor in the House of Representatives, and now that it's clear we are strong, we will have to balance an expected surge of negative letters from opponents.

Cards or letters are better right now, and a follow-up call later in March would be good. Have some friends and relatives do it too. Nothing fancy is necessary. You only need say that you think HB1432 is fair, moderate, and necessary. If you know there is discrimination, say so. You don't need to come out, but if you are comfortable with that, it can't hurt, and may help. Remember we are trying to persuade, not intimidate or vent.

Who to write: (1) Senator Eleanor Podles, Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee, Legislative Office Building, Concord, NH 03301; (2) Your own Senator (ask your Town Clerk if you don't know); and (3) Governor Merrill, Room 208, Statehouse, Concord, NH 03301.

If you want to volunteer or make a contribution, to the NH Coalition to End Discrimination, write to CED, P.O. Box 74, Concord, NH 03302-0074, or call the Networking contact at 603/536-4011, or the Public Relations contact at 603/622-3749. ...

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the pogroms and the demonization of transgendered people squarely on the shoulders of the European ruling classes. And so tonight's slide show will examine that history...and put the blame squarely where it belongs."

Secondly, Ms. Feinberg stated that she wanted to avoid interpreting oppressed cultures, but did want to show slides that indicated that transgender is a world-wide phenomenon.

The slides proved an acceptance and celebration of transgendered people among Native Americans that was extensive and complete. They show the first Europeans setting dogs on the Berdache (a Native American word for transgendered people), and Ms. Feinberg thinks that the answer to why the Europeans acted this way has to do with the class struggle underway in Europe.

Ancient societies that were communal and had no concept of private property, had no problem with transgendered people. In fact, many of them became the shamans, especially male-to-female people. These cultures were matrilineal, but with the advent of private property and patriarchal society, these attitudes changed.

The parade of images had an overwhelming effect. As Ms. Feinberg stated, every picture here means that there are "tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands" of other stories not known. The slides did indeed show that since before the beginning of recorded history down to the present day and all over the world, there have been transgendered people, sometimes celebrated, sometimes persecuted, but present in every culture and in every time.

One of the slides in the show was a picture of Marsha P. Johnson. Seeing her up there was an especially difficult moment for me because Marsha was a friend of mine from the late seventies in New York. I had read about her death in the Village Voice some time ago and did not believe for a moment that it was a suicide. Marsha was a transvestite or a male-to-female transgendered person, or just a beautiful and loving human being. I don't really know how she defined herself. I do



The three women responsible for bringing Leslie Feinberg to Maine: Naomi Falcone, Penny Rich, and Madeleine Winter.

know that she fought back at Stonewall and that she fought everyday to be herself. I am proud to have known her. She chose her own name. The middle initial "P" stood for "Pay It No Mind."

Ms. Feinberg concluded her presentation with the statement, "I believe that each of us deserves a society in which those of us who do the work of the world can live in dignity and respect, free from poverty and hunger and racism and all forms of bigotry. Isn't that a world worth uniting and fighting for?"

Ms. Feinberg took questions from the audience, the first of which was, "How autobiographical was your book?" She said that she gets this question a lot and answered by saying, "I chose to write a novel because I wanted to tell the whole truth....Stone Butch Blues reflects the spirit of my life, but is not autobiographical. But, everything I want you to know about my life is in that book."

We learned that Ms. Feinberg is writing another novel entitled, Drag King Dreams, and she is working on turning Stone Butch Blues into a screenplay.

In answer to a question about language, Ms. Feinberg stated that for her, language is a tool, but she realizes that she is working with a language that does not recognize her existence. She was skeptical when "Ms." was introduced and is now pleased to see its use. She hopes for future changes in our language to accommodate transgendered people.

Someone asked her to opine on the issue of the "women born women only" policy at the Womyn's Music Festival at Michigan. Ms. Feinberg said that this year five transsexuals were kicked off the land. She distilled the controversy down to, "Are the women there more threatened by five transsexual women in the camp or by a policy in which a security team can confront you and define whether you're

woman enough to be on that space? I really believe that this a question that all women have to take up.

"We're not talking about Clint Eastwood in drag coming into that camp and threatening those women. We're not talking about anyone threatening the women in the camp, and I would argue that there are no men in that camp when those five transsexual women are there. There are no men there and there are no threats to the women there. You don't have to have herbal tea with the women, you don't have to bond. But, if you really are gonna support the security team kicking them out on the basis of defining who is woman and who has male energy, and who is selling out to the patriarchy, you're opening up a Pandora's Box in which a lot of women are going to be hurt." (Applause!)

I taped Ms. Feinberg's presentation, and in listening to it I was overcome by the significance of her life's work, the importance of her message, and by the enormity of her mission. Her talk, including the slide show, was at once history, herstory, personal anecdote, and a call to arms. She is an excellent speaker with the power to inspire, to enrage, to make you laugh and to make you cry, but most importantly, she has the power to uplift. Her courage is awesome and her understanding and love for the community is real. ...

Sonia Johnson

author of

"Going Out of Our Minds"

will be in Maine

September 23 -25, 1994

FMI call Gloria Krellman
(207) 442-7061

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everything. Often we want to believe that lesbian battering is just a misunderstanding, that perhaps the batterer can go to a weekend workshop on communication skills and everything will be all right. I find it helpful to check whether I'm minimizing by asking myself whether I'd say the same things about male batterers.

Of course it's possible for batterers to change, but at this time, there is no evidence that large numbers of female or male batterers are stopping their behavior. In this culture, battering works.

Feminists often use incest, homophobia, or other oppressions to explain women's battering. With different particulars, others explain men's battering similarly. There is often a backwards reasoning process: the worse someone behaves the more oppressed s/he must be, the more terrible her/his childhood must have been. This approach reinforces abusive behavior while being disrespectful to those who are just as oppressed or whose childhoods were just as terrible, and who make clear and conscious decisions to not behave violently and abusively.

Battering is a choice. Oppression and abuse create intense feelings, but an individual still decides how to respond to these feelings. We live in a culture where battering is often an option, but it is never the only one. Making excuses for batterers will not help us create the world we want to live in. Ultimately, it's far more humane to everyone to say that no matter how unfairly people have been treated, they are still capable of choosing their own actions and are still responsible for their behavior. Battering is not acceptable, period. If a person is unable to be in a relationship without being abusive, s/he can and should choose not to be in one.

Feeling sorry for batterers is often misplaced compassion, compassion that is not extended to their victims. I'm not saying that batterers should be "written off," but at the moment, this is happening to the victims, not the batterers. ...

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The Network was initiated in 1989 by formerly battered lesbians to address battering in our communities, to provide support to battered lesbians and bisexual women, and to work toward the elimination of violence against women.

For more information, write The Network, P.O. Box 6011, Boston, MA 02114, or call 617/424-8611 (office) or 617/236-SAFE (Hotline). ...



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