

# transvestite & transsexual liberation

by Angela Douglas

## Definitions

Many transvestites are not homosexual, although the public generally classifies (and oppresses) all transvestites as being such.

Transvestites and transsexuals are actually in quite different categories, but many transsexuals consider transvestism to be a necessary phase of transsexualism — so they are joined together to a certain degree.

A *transvestite* is a male or female who wears the clothing of the opposite gender and usually assumes the voice, habits and manner of the opposite gender. Transvestites are also known as *cross-dressers*. *Female mimics* are usually men who dress as females for purposes of entertainment. *Female impersonator* also applies to such persons, but also covers criminals — such as a bank robber who would disguise himself as a woman. There is some evidence that espionage agencies of various nations train men to be expert female impersonators, and such a character was portrayed in the film "From Russia With Love." Police occasionally use officers dressed as females to attract other homosexuals, and are usually called *drag queens*.

Many transvestites are heterosexual, and are married to females who are either sympathetic to them or find sexual gratification with transvestic males. Some of these females are latent homosexuals.

Laws vary concerning transvestism in public or private, but in California there is no law prohibiting transvestism. In Hawaii, where male transvestites are many, they are required by law to wear buttons with the word "Boy" on them. In the Waikiki area, many transvestites are openly engaged in prostitution. In South Vietnam, male transvestic prostitutes are known as *kai tai* and are quite popular with American servicemen.

A *transsexual* is a male or female who changes their physical sex characteristics usually through cosmetic surgery and female (or male) hormone treatments which are taken in both tablet and injection form. In the case of a male-to-female transsexual, breasts develop, hips spread, the muscular tissue dissolves, there is some loss of facial and body hair, the skin becomes softer, and there are many psychological effects as well. Some transsexuals also get silicone implants for breasts and hips.

In the case of female-to-male transsexuals, an artificial penis is attached to the body, and the breasts are either removed or made smaller. At present, the male-to-female operation is far more advanced than the female-to-male.

There are many *partial* transsexuals. This would be a person who only changes their sex characteristics partially. For example, a male who takes female hor-

mones, develops breasts, etcetera, but does not obtain the cosmetic surgery where the male genitals are rearranged or removed.

There are few doctors who perform such operations, and the cost is rather high. When Christine Jorgensen changed her sex, it cost around \$10,000, seventeen years ago. A similar operation can be obtained in Mexico for \$2500, and in Europe for \$3000-5000. There are several sex change clinics at universities in the U.S.A. where the operations are performed and research is being carried out.

No one really knows how many transsexuals there are.

There are some legal problems involved. In England, a court ruled that a marriage between a transsexual and a male was invalid, that a person's sex was fixed at birth and could not be changed. The ruling is being appealed.

Transsexuals are also called "changelings."

Some transsexuals find relationships with "natural" females satisfying, and could be considered to be engaged in lesbianism.

### Some of the problems:

As the anti-homosexual attitude in the U.S.A. is so harsh and vast, many male homosexual transvestites refuse to accept the reality of their homosexuality and claim, "I am a woman — I'm not a faggot." Of course, they are physically and "legally" males, and engage in homosexual practices with other males. Some males become transsexuals to escape the harshness of the anti-homosexual attitudes.

In most cities, transvestites have no clubs or places in which to meet other transvestites without fear of being exposed or possibly blackmailed. Most clubs that do exist are geared for a homosexual clientele, although there are some which are limited to heterosexuals or mixed.

Transvestites who live in public as females are quite aware of male chauvinism, and some have been raped... by heterosexual males.

## Women's Liberation

There have been and may be male transvestites and transsexuals active in Women's Liberation, usually unknown to the other females. Some of them have been able to attain nominations to high positions, but as far as it is known, none have actually taken office. There are many reasons why a transvestite or a transsexual would want to be involved in Women's Lib — some seek to perfect their feminine role as much as possible; some are sexually attracted to aggressive females; others may be intelligence agents.

When Women's Lib became aware of this problem in California, they contacted the Gay Liberation Front for assistance. Not much could really be done. A Transvestite-transsexual Action Organization was formed and at one of the meetings of this group, several guidelines were proposed:

**Transvestites:** Male transvestites should not participate in Women's Liberation unless they publicly proclaim themselves as male transvestites and agree to any special limitations or conditions which may be imposed upon them by the particular feminist group.

**Transsexuals:** Partial and complete male to female transsexuals should be allowed to participate in Women's Liberation without any discrimination.

The overall consensus of the group seemed to be that transvestites and transsexuals should organize among themselves.

It would be best if the various feminist groups make clear policies concerning active participation by transvestites and transsexuals, as there will be many thousands more in a few years, and many will want to become active in Women's Lib.

### Gay Liberation

In California, Gay Liberation has not been of much help to transvestites and transsexuals, and there are few transvestites or transsexuals involved in Gay Liberation at this time. Part of the reason is that many male homosexuals are extremely chauvinistic, and dislike anything feminine — and a male wearing feminine attire or a male who seeks womanhood is particularly abhorrent to such individuals.

The transvestites and transsexuals who were involved with Gay liberation found that they were used only for confrontation's sake at gay power demonstrations, and that nothing was being done to help their lifestyles.

### Transvestite-Transsexual Liberation

On June 2nd, six persons visited Los Angeles City College and spoke with hundreds of students about transvestism and transsexualism. Four were male transvestites, two were partial transsexuals. Most of us had never been involved in any kind of demonstration before, and it was a unique experience. There was very little trouble from supermasculine Black or Chicano students, as had been expected. We had volunteered our time to help inform the public about ourselves, and felt that education of the youth was of great importance. It was very successful, and several male homosexuals who are in the Gay Liberation Front were miffed. The GLF had sponsored the "Teach-in" as a follow up to a demonstration of police harassment of homosexuals on the campus. However, the students seemed to be far more interested in transvestism and transsexualism than gay liberation.

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watching the news coverage of the day and saw a poster that said, 'Starve a Rat Today.' She turned to her long time spouse and declared her cooking days were over and he could damn well cook for her. A protest from her long time exploiter was answered with a fist on the table and 'Liberation or Separation!' He cooked and he's cooking still.

Reports filtered in through telephones and by word of mouth of women demanding the labor be shared. One man in Pennsylvania came home to find a suitcase packed with all his belongings sitting on the front step. The sister had decided to break her chains rather than burnish them.

Wall Street was the scene of more activity when a group of women leafleted the office workers to unionize. The leafleting was planned as an alternative action to all the middle class pomp and circumstance. These few women have been working for months, a few for years,

to help close the class gap. In desperation they have been forced to stop beating their brains out trying to educate middle class women, and they have begun to organize working class women. These women and a handful of other obscene comments from men—yes, those same austere financiers tend to drop the mask of respectability when it comes to women unionizing their 'shops.' The organizers at Wall St. knew better than to ask for support from the glamour elements of the movement. All the cameras and well dressed women showed up on Fifth Avenue and marched down to Bryant Park. There the thousands cheered to the strains of Betty Friedan's 'we want to walk groups, among them the Third World women and the lesbians, have been the only elements in New York City willing to tackle the problem. There were no TV cameras on Wall St. and Nassau, no crowds of well dressed women singing, 'Liberation Now'...there were hurried exchanges with file clerks and secretaries afraid of losing their jobs. There were hostile and

nand in hand with men.' Gloria Steinham and Kate Millet gave speeches of love and sisterhood. The women were enthusiastic. The only jarring note was when a lesbian grabbed the microphone after being discouraged by the heavies. She told the crowd to stand behind their lesbian sisters who were being arrested and harassed for no reason at all—except of course, that they are lesbians. And the show went on. No cheers for the Wall Street workers, no cheers for the Black sisters thrown into jails, no cheers for the lesbians beaten senseless on the streets. The cheers were all for a future of projected goodies and for the old Equal Rights Amendment, the band-aid to heal the gaping, festering wound of rich, white, American male politics.

But the cheers have stirred new women...women who won't make a mockery of the word Liberation...women who trust deeds, not the promise of them...poor women, Black women, Puerto Rican women, Asian-American women, working women and women who love their sisters...women who will bypass rhetoric and make a revolution.