



This is Margo!

By MARGO

Being both a radical Lesbian and a male-to-female transsexual, I find myself at a vortex of conflict between the Lesbian and transsexual communities. In my more pessimistic moments, I sometimes feel as if the whole Lesbian community is down on me for being transsexual, and vice versa; in my more optimistic moments, I feel like writing articles like this one. Although a few people have made Lesbian/transsexual controversies an arena for sheer hatred and bigotry, my hope is that honest misunderstandings between the overlapping Lesbian and transsexual communities are at the root of most problems.

To begin with, I myself as a Lesbian feminist have observed a great deal of sexism and heterosexual chauvinism among male-to-female transsexuals which must be upsetting to any Lesbian or even any straight feminist. For example, Jan Morris (on the Dick Cavett Show) spoke about the "tragic" case of a male-to-female transsexual who desired Lesbian relationships after surgery; Cavett commented that the idea of a transsexual choosing Lesbianism was just too confusing to discuss further. As a Lesbian who considers love between women to be simple and very natural, I was depressed and angry.

Yet often transsexuals on television and other media make Ms. Morris seem feminist. They extol home and family as the essence of femaleness, reject gayness as immoral or unnatural, and define themselves in relationship to men. When I hear such interviews, I find myself virtually crawling up a wall; it does not surprise me that other Lesbian women react in the same way.

At the same time, I have experienced a great deal of pain from the conduct of

some Lesbians toward me as a transsexual. The dilemmas I face are almost identical to those faced by Lesbians in the feminist movement a few years ago. If I proclaim my transsexualism, I will be perceived as separating myself from my natively female Lesbian sisters; if I say nothing unless and until I am asked, I will be judged as hiding some vile secret.

Last year I became involved with a group of Lesbian anarchists; I was immediately accepted as myself, a very freaky Lesbian. Then, at the beginning of the next meeting, everyone froze toward me; I had become a "problem" to them, as Lesbians were a problem for straight feminists not so long ago. "Was it true?," they asked in so many words, as if this were the Fifties and I was rumored to be a former Communist. In the end I won at least temporary acceptance; but I did so by apologizing for rather than celebrating my struggle of 22 years to become the woman I felt was me.

On another occasion I was at a feminist bar, where I met a woman who did not know me but who had put down Lesbian transsexuals in general. We got along well; she related to me simply as a Lesbian woman (which I am), and I discovered that she also was a sensitive human being. Yet I was haunted by the feeling that if she knew my past she would probably have rejected me, even at the same time as I felt that my past should be irrelevant.

It is like being Gay in a job situation where the boss does not know. You are not hiding it, you are just being your natural self; but you wonder how the boss would react if she/he knew. There is a strange closety tension about it all. Can I feel comfortable among other Lesbians who accept me as the real person I am,

but would reject me if they knew how I got there?

At this point in time there are many transsexuals who would throw Lesbians to the patriarchal wolves as long as they could live in their desired submissive "feminine" roles; there are some Lesbians who would ignore or even trample over transsexuals if this served their neat and rigid "revolutionary" plans. I would like to explore why it is that transsexuals ignore or even ridicule Lesbians and vice versa, but first we must deal with some aspects of human sexuality which are often confused.

In discussions of both gayness and transsexualism, there are three concepts which often get tangled or confused. First, there is one's overall feeling of being female or male, which I will refer to as *gender identity*. Secondly, there is one's preference in forming intense love relationships for one or both sexes (or even for a compatible human being regardless of sex), which I will call *sexual preference*, although I might prefer the term "amatory" preference in order to stress the element of *love* whether or not it is genitally expressed (more on this later). Finally, there is one's conformity or defiance (or simple ignoring) of *sex roles*, the arbitrary sexist definitions of what is supposed to be "feminine" or "masculine."

To begin with, many confuse gender identity with sex roles; and such confusion makes it impossible to understand transsexualism. Perhaps I can make the distinction clear by considering a situation which many natively female Lesbians experience.

A radical feminist may challenge all sex roles; she may joyously celebrate her "masculine" strengths; she may repudiate all patriarchal definitions of what it means to be a woman; yet she still feels that she is *female*, and that all *women* are her *sisters*. Let us refer to this total affirmative feeling as *femaleness*.

In contrast, the patriarchal system speaks of *femininity*; this means being submissive, being a sex object, and above all being attractive to men rather than to oneself or one's sisters. Thus radical feminism means celebrating femaleness (sisterhood, women's culture, etc.) *in our own*

terms while rejecting all sex role barriers (e.g. accepting both sensitivity and strength while rejecting both submission and domination).

I have found that living as a woman full-time for the past 16 months, celebrating my femaleness, has made me much stronger and more "masculine" in many ways. Musically, I find myself belting out some very gutsy Blues which border on screaming; I find this one of the heaviest expressions of my femaleness and Lesbianism. Recently a gay male at a coffeehouse called me a diesel dyke; I thanked him for letting me know that I have character!

In other words, as radical feminists we feel a deep sense of being women and sisters, but this feeling is beyond any definition or stereotype. This is true of us whether we are natively female or transsexual. We all face the same paradoxes and dilemmas. Once this is understood, a lot of Lesbian/transsexual tension may suddenly vanish.

Sometimes feminists have asked me why, if I consider sex roles both unjust and ridiculous, do I not just live as a man and express both my "feminine" and my "masculine" qualities in that way? In doing this they are assuming that somehow I have chosen to be a woman so that I can be "feminine." In fact, I have chosen to live as a woman simply because that is what I *am*, and because only by affirming my femaleness and sisterhood with all women can I be *myself*, strong and filled with energy as well as sensitive. How would these feminists feel about living as men? Obviously they would consider it a masquerade, and would demand their right to celebrate their femaleness. So do I.

Moving to another confusion which many Gay people have battled against, gender identity must not be confused with sexual preference. Lesbians (as opposed to female-to-male transsexuals) are not biological females who have a male gender identity; they are simply women who love other women. Gay men (as opposed to male-to-female transsexuals) are not biological males who have female gender identities, but are men who love men.

People who are trapped in the het trip often find it contradictory for me to be



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transsexual and Lesbian, because they assume that to be a woman is to love men and vice versa. Thus my parents alternately would suggest that the main reason I wanted the change was to relate in straight ways to men; or, they would argue that if I were going to relate to women, why do I need to be a woman myself. My parents are two of the best meaning straights I have met, but I guess that they are still a bit confused.

However, there is no reason that my situation need be confusing to Gay people. Regardless of my native genitals, I feel myself to be a woman who loves women, or simply a Lesbian. As I wrote above, I consider love between women to be a natural thing, whether the women are native or transsexual. The problem is that sometimes even Gay people apply het logic to transsexuals; and I would say that a great majority of male-to-female transsexuals apply het logic to themselves and everyone else. For example, I read an interview in which a transsexual defined Lesbians as "women who want to be men." If I had been at that interview, I would have had some interesting comments to make!

Finally, of course, sexual preference is different from any stereotyped adherence to sex roles. We all know that gay and straight people cannot be separated in general on the basis of sex role behavior; even more importantly, we are struggling to get totally away from the butch/femme trip. For me, being a Lesbian woman means being both strong and sensitive, for love requires both qualities.

Unfortunately, my sister Lesbians sometimes hold anti-transsexual attitudes. By anti-transsexual attitudes, I mean prejudices which would exclude from the Lesbian movement those transsexuals who are living full-time as women, and would exclude them for any reason which would

not equally exclude their native sisters. Opposition to sexism in *any* people, including both transsexuals and Lesbians, is of course necessary! Anti-transsexualism does *not* refer to this kind of opposition. Rather it refers to prejudice and exclusion directed against transsexuals as a *category*.

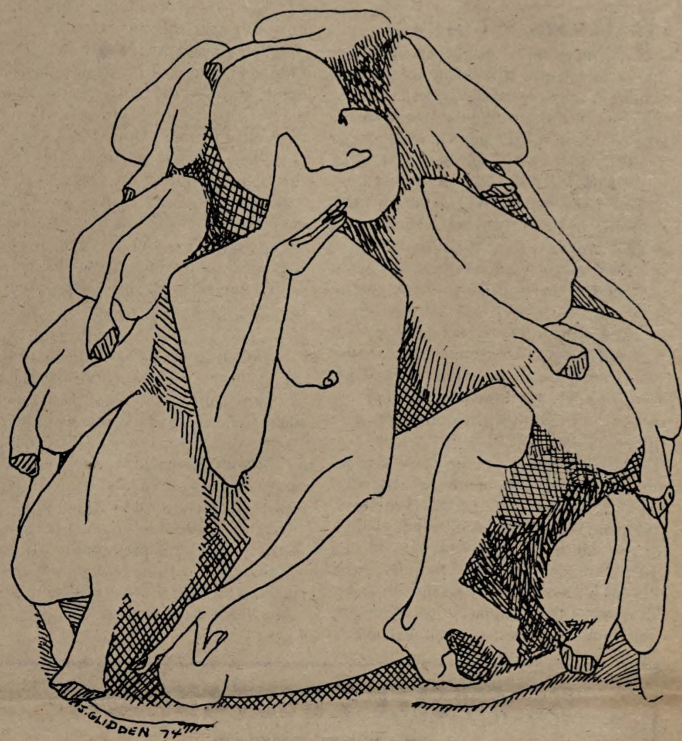
Before analyzing the reasons for anti-transsexualism among Lesbians, I feel it necessary to challenge one argument against even raising this issue: unfortunately, it is an argument which has gained currency in the Gay/feminist press in Boston.

According to this argument, the discussion of transsexualism causes disagreement in the Lesbian movement; and, after all, how many Lesbian transsexuals are there? The conclusion is that the suffering of a few strange people can and should be put safely aside until "after the revolution."

Further, it is sometimes even argued that transsexuals must take the *responsibility* for this dissension among their native Lesbian sisters; to use the favorite macho-radical phrase, transsexuals "are objectively counter-revolutionary" because they are distracting their native sisters from much more important things. I have been given this argument not only in print but in person.

In the year 1862, a number of Blacks met with President Lincoln to demand emancipation of the slaves. Lincoln replied that the important thing was preserving the Union, with or without slavery. Further, he argued that the slaves and Black people generally, were *responsible* for the Civil War, since without them there would be nothing for white people to fight about!

In the early 1960's, during a peace march in the American South, it was argued that segregation should not be raised as an issue, since that would alienate the white population of the region from joining in the struggle against nuclear war. After the world was saved, some people



argued, then Jim Crow could be tackled.

Later in that decade, when women first demanded their rights in the male-dominated Left movements, they were put down: after all, women did not constitute a class or oppressed group, according to the going macho ideological definitions. Little things like feminism could be dealt with after the working class (or Third World or whatever) was liberated. Further, women who demanded their own freedom were accused of being counter-revolutionary, since they were causing division and conflict among their male comrades.

At about the same time, Gay people were also accused of being "bourgeois decadents;" furthermore, they were obviously capitalist agents who would even stoop so low as to challenge the revolutionary government of Cuba for a few minor impositions of homosexual perversities.

Last but not least, around 1969 and 1970 straight feminists attacked Lesbians for "dividing the movement" and for raising issues "irrelevant to the majority of women, irrelevant to the main focus of our movement." Betty Friedan went so far as to call Lesbians "the Lavender Menace," and to suggest that Lesbians were CIA agents sent to disrupt the respectable feminist movement.

Thus it is not surprising that transsexuals should be treated in the same way that Blacks, women, gay people, and Lesbians specifically have been treated, and all in the name of "revolution." We also note that whites, men, and straights find it easier to postpone other people's libera-

tion in the name of radicalism than to confront their own prejudices *now*. All Lesbians (transsexual and native) should reject this logic of slavery and hypocrisy, and all transsexuals who respect themselves should challenge it aggressively and without hesitation or apology.

At the Congress to Unite Women in 1970, the straight feminists in charge blocked a workshop on Lesbianism. About 20 Lesbians staged a nonviolent takeover of the Congress, in which they humorously and effectively presented the justice of their cause. They demanded that women be united by supporting Lesbian liberation rather than by ignoring or denouncing it. The time has come to unite women regardless of native genitals, and to unite them by all nonviolent means necessary.

Now we come to the specific reasons for anti-transsexualism in the Lesbian community. Of course, one reason is the very genuine mood of anti-Lesbianism among many transsexuals. It is important that we as Lesbians, avoid the classic prejudicial practice of judging *all* the members of a group by the actions of *some*.

However, coming to the other reasons, we find that misinformation and outdated sexist attitudes are crucial. The causes are basically: 1. Misinformation about transsexualism; 2. Overly narrow concepts of Lesbianism; 3. Misguided notions of polarization in the Lesbian/feminist struggle; and 4. Clinging to patriarchal definitions of sex and gender.

[This is not the end. Look for more of Margo in future issues.]

## RESOURCES FOR TRANSVESTITES, TRANSSEXUALS CROSS-DRESSERS

By LAURA McMURRY

The following groups provide a social support function for persons who are interested in cross-dressing (transvestites), for those who are exploring both their female and male sides (transgenderists), and for those who feel that the genitals they were born with are not in harmony with their mental/psychological sex, those for whom cross-dressing is a reflection of gender-identity (transsexuals).

Different groups may meet different needs. Most of the people presently involved were born as males; persons born as females and involved in cross-dressing or gender identity questions are welcome.

The Homophile Union of Boston (HUB) offers a Thursday night rap group at 7:30 p.m. The address is 419 Boylston St., Room 509. Don't be confused by the location: this is not a gay rap, but a rap for TV's, TS's, CD's. To talk with a person from this group call HUB on a Thursday evening or on a Monday or Friday evening between 7:00 and 9:00. Come dressed as you wish.

There are monthly social gatherings in

a private home in Reading for sharing a meal and conversation. Unless you pass well, dress after you arrive. Wives and husbands are welcome. Payment of \$4.00 dues brings you a monthly newsletter. Write Frances Craig, P.O. Box 291, M.I.T. Branch, Cambridge, MA 02139.

A third group meets in private homes and also welcomes inquiries. Write to Ariadne Kane, Box 161, Cambridge, MA 02140. Ariadne Kane was involved in organizing presentations at the Alternative Sex and Gender Lifestyles Conference held in Newport, R.I. last December.

For professional counseling you may go to Gender Identity Service. There you can explore your feelings, deal with friends, spouses, etc., or enter their program leading to sex reassignment if this is appropriate. Write to Gender Identity Service, 74 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138 or call 864-8181. Their answering service is not the best, so call again if you don't get a reply.

Readers will hopefully inform us of any group that does not appear in this space.