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Manifesto for GENDER FREEDOM



The Splendor of Gender

by Kimberly L. Westwood, CCE

photography by Leslee M. Anthony

The Splendor of Gender—that phrase denotes a celebration of gender diversity and the first of its kind gender workshop recently offered in Florida's Tampa Bay area. On November 18th & 19th a ten-hour seminar was held at the Marriott Hotel located at Tampa International Airport. The Splendor of Gender Workshop, hosted by Tampa Stress Center and the American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), dealt exclusively with the issues faced by transsexuals, transgenderists, and those who crossdress.

The Splendor Workshop was well past due here in Florida. I was very excited, both as a transsexual woman and as an individual who provides services to our community to see so much offered in the way of education, personal growth, and a sense of community. The Splendor Workshop was designed to provide continuing education to mental health professionals and to allow our own gender community to become informed consumers in the process.

The presenters were a mix of professionals who work with our community. The Tampa Stress Center, a local gender team comprised of psychological, medical and allied professionals, brought together six presenters from differing fields of interest. The presenters included Pascual Bidot, M.D. (hormonal treatment); Carl W. Bushong, Ph.D. (psychotherapy); Dallas Denny, M.A. (director of AEGIS); Eugene A. Schrang, M.D. (sex reassignment surgery); Barbara Warren, Psy.D. (writes extensively on gender issues);

and Kimberly L. Westwood (blend electrology).

As organizer of the Splendor Workshop, the Tampa Stress Center decided to put on a show that would be noticed. We booked our seminar at the posh Marriott Hotel next to the Tampa International Airport. Besides lovely meeting areas and accommodations, the night-time view is glorious! The location was a perfect setting. Attending mental health professionals and the gender community were pleased. As a friend later commented, "The hotel staff accepted us openly . . . and gave us that 'warm and fuzzy feeling.'"

For those of you not familiar with the Tampa Bay area, we're located on the gulf coast—about seventy miles from Orlando and the Disney World complex. Although our gender community is large in number, a sense of openness and inclusion does not seem to be as noticeable here as in other cities with a large gender population. We hoped the Splendor Workshop would provide the necessary setting to bring people together, not only physically, but in spirit as well.

Being the first of its kind, we decided to step out of the closet with a little flare. We shared news of the Splendor Workshop with local support groups and the local media. And the media *did* pay attention. And WOW, Tampa Bay, welcome to the nineties! Yes, we do exist—and not just on Geraldo.

Through local newspaper articles, radio shows and a television

If you have questions about gender issues in our area, or would like to be notified about upcoming events or our conference video, contact:

*Tampa Stress Center
PO Box 273107
Tampa, FL 33688
or call (813)884-783.*



Kimberly Westwood, presenter & Leslee M. Anthony, event staff and photographer.



Left to right: Dallas Denny, M.A., Barbara Warren, Psy.D., Carl W. Bushong, Ph.D., at an open discussion with the audience at the close of Friday's proceedings.

helper and facilitator with other professionals. Of course the best outcomes occur when our therapist is also our teacher and our guide. Dr. Bushong discussed the ways in which we can choose a good therapist—someone who will be an advocate. He also released an important paper, "Multi-dimensionality of Gender." His paper describes five different attributes other practitioners (and their clients) can use to better understand gender. Dr. Bushong plans to write a lay version of this scientific article for the gender community.

Dallas Denny, M.A., director of the American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), set the tone of the transgendered/transsexual experience with her presentation. Even with many past experiences remembered, I was awakened by her slide presentation, "Gender-A Historical Perspective." The portraits shown were of our transgendered ancestry. The people depicted were remarkable in their ability to convey emotion and understanding. I watched and looked into the faces, into the eyes of others who had preceded me. I realized these people helped make my dream a reality. Dallas's narration, her way of showing our community's transition, was beautiful. As the story unfolded, I felt suspense, poignancy, and a

appearance just hours before the beginning of our seminar, Tampa Bay began the process of acknowledging, understanding, and finally accepting our transgendered presence. The *Tampa Tribune* wrote a lengthy and decidedly positive piece on transsexualism and The Splendor of Gender Workshop. Two radio shows discussed the seminar with Dr. Carl Bushong, one of the presenters. And finally the Kathy Fountain Show, a local TV talk show which is also syndicated into other areas, featured Dr. Bushong and Dr. Warren, two of the six presenters. Dr. Warren later commented on the audience's acceptance of transsexualism and other forms of gender diversity.

Seeing others' acceptance was beautiful, but even more important was watching our self-acceptance grow. Sisters who attended were not only from local support groups, some were unaffiliated and others came from out of state. And what a difference! Some who before were timid in their feminine expression seemed to come alive before our eyes. Remember, the setting was not in a small motel room or in an alternate lifestyle bar, but at a major airport hotel complex! And attitude shifts did not stop with a much needed dose of self-esteem. We all left more informed, and much more in control of our lives.

Each presenter made a presentation that grew out of their role in the transgender community.

Dr. Carl Bushong, Ph.D., director of the Tampa Stress Center, is a psychotherapist who deals extensively with transsexuals and crossdressers, and is the central figure on our local gender team. "He is the team leader," as Eugene Schrang, M.D., said. "Carl is like the quarterback, giving the other team professionals the direction needed during the overall treatment process." Dr. Bushong, the workshop's host, gave the opening address to the conference.

Like any good psychotherapist, Dr. Bushong helps his patients with the inevitable adjustments to their chosen gender, and also acts as a



Left to right: Dallas Denny, M.A., Eugene Schrang, M.D., Carl W. Bushong, Ph.D., Kimberly Westwood, C.C.E.



Dr. Carl W. Bushong
delivers the opening address.

happy ending. For many, that happy ending was not so much felt from the on-screen ending as it was displayed in the audience. We, the transgendered men and women present, are succeeding to a great extent because of others' groundwork.

Many have heard of Eugene Schrang, M.D., the Wisconsin-based surgeon specializing in male-to-female gender reassignment. I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Schrang after the seminar. He is very friendly, very accommodating. Dr. Schrang appears to be a man who loves women—their presence, their form—and it shows in his work. Dr. Schrang's slide presentation did justice to the enormous undertaking of turning male into female anatomy. Again, I was interested in looking at the faces. Unlike Dallas's portraits, this time I was fascinated by the audience as much as by the on-screen surgery. Some looked away. Most looked in amazement as the patient, already feminized by hormones, first underwent breast augmentation, and then genital modification. Dr. Schrang ended his presentation with slides of genetic females along with some of his SRS patients. Dr. Schrang needed to let the audience in on which was which!

Barbara Warren, Psy.D., is director of the Mental Health and Social Services Program for the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City. She writes extensively on gender differences and transsexualism. Dr. Warren, a dynamic speaker, caused the transgendered members of the audience to realize a renewed sense of self-worth. She destroyed the false goddess of "passing" through her assertion that femininity, or even femaleness, is no less "real or experienced" for the transsexual/transgendered woman.

Pascual Bidot, M.D., is a board-certified endocrinologist and a specialist in metabolism whose professional interests include the hormonal aspects of transsexualism. Dr. Bidot's slide presentation clearly showed the complexity of readjusting a male metabolism to a female metabolism. In the past, I have seen physicians lambaste us for taking too many hormones, explaining excess hormone doses are like a glass of water—it cannot be filled past the brim. Unfortunately, I never understood the process in real terms, and more importantly, what the alternatives are. Because of Dr. Bidot's detailed discussion, I'm happy to say that hormonal management does offer better and safer solutions. These solutions produce not only better health, but an increased degree of feminization.

Kimberly Westwood, C.C.E., also of Tampa Stress Center, is a blend technique electrologist. Well, enough of referring to myself in the third person. Electrolysis is just a generic term used to describe several methods of permanent hair removal, and treatment technique varies greatly. I discussed these widespread differences and the importance, both practical and psychological, of ridding oneself of facial hair before crossliving. Practical examples were given of how the client can tell if her electrologist is being safe and effective, and how to pass up those

practitioners who may do harm. I discussed my practice, and stated that my best results were seen with blend electrolysis. The blend method, when performed knowledgeably, saves the client time and money—it kills about 50-75% of the hair follicles treated. There is absolutely no reason why the process of permanent hair removal shouldn't leave your skin, your complexion, anything but beautiful.

At the workshop's end, we distributed a questionnaire to give us an idea of what those attending thought of the conference. The general response was absolutely great. Some of the comments noted were, "Fantastic! . . . This [experience] has really opened my eyes, and made me feel proud. . . . Hope you offer more workshops." And, yes, we're planning on it.

We knew this would be an important event, but not all would be able to attend. So we videotaped the conference and are in the process of producing the videotaped highlights of the workshop. Please look for the Splendor of Gender video in the upcoming months.

And a special note of thanks to Yvonne Cook-Riley and IFGE for their kind donation of current and back issues of *Tapestry* which were offered to those attending the Splendor of Gender Workshop. IFGE's presence was certainly felt as several professionals as well as unaffiliated sisters were surprised in seeing the many faces and community events depicted in *Tapestry Journal*.

Prior to the seminar, several sisters asked me, "What can you talk about for ten hours?" Interestingly, at the seminar's close, the typical response heard was, "The seminar was great—but, you know, you really should have made it a full weekend event!"

I think we've started something!

