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Despite the title of this article, I do not disbelieve in heterosexual cross-dressers. Obviously, many cross-dressers are completely heterosexual. However, I believe the oft-repeated assertion that most crossdressers are heterosexual is a myth. I argue that there are large numbers of gay and bisexual crossdressers who are not part of the "transgender community"—and so are invisible to us.

Some seven years ago, a heterosexual crossdresser only group provided love, support, and encouragement to me as I followed a (transsexual) path which eventually excluded me from full membership. I do not wish to bite the hand that has fed me. I have had personal experience, however, with the agony of members of that group as they have struggled to define themselves within the constraints their group places on their behavior and identity. I've seen more than a few of them make bad choices about their lives and their bodies, as they do the things transsexuals do, but without therapy, without medical monitoring of hormones, without thinking through just what it is they are doing. I have slowly come to realize that their "heterosexual" group does them a tremendous disservice by placing artificial boundaries on sexual behavior and gender expression, which is in fact quite fluid and capable of change over time. These are not people who don't belong in the group; they are its heart and soul. Saturn is devouring his own children.

"Heteropocrisy" is certain to be a controversial article. I would have preferred its tone to have been less strident. I rewrote it any number of times, but it has refused to cooperate. It continues to echo my frustration with an unfortunate set of circumstances. It's bitter medicine, but bitter medicine is often good for us. I just wish I could have sugar-coated it so it would have gone down a bit easier.

Q: *What's the difference between a heterosexual crossdresser and a gay crossdresser?*

A: *About two beers.*

— *Transgender Community Joke*

Heteropocrisy

The Myth of the Heterosexual Male Crossdresser

by Dallas Denny

The organized crossdressing movement dates from the 1950's, when Virginia Prince began networking with heterosexual crossdressers throughout the United States. Before long, she had formed the Hose and Heels Club in Los Angeles, to which men would bring — you guessed it — hose and heels in a paper bag, and, at a signal, put them on. Before they left, they would take them off and put them back in the bag and go home.

From such an inauspicious beginning, Virginia founded a national organization for crossdressers (The Foundation for Personality Expression, or FPE), launched a magazine (*Transvestia*) and a publishing house (Chevalier Press), wrote a number of books (including *Understanding Crossdressing*, *The Transvestite and His Wife*, and *How to Be a Woman Though Male*), and did surveys of the characteristics of crossdressers which led to papers which were published in prestigious scientific journals including *The Archives of General Psychiatry*, *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *The Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *Psychological Reports*, *The American Journal of Psychotherapy*, *Sexology*, *The Journal of Sex Research*, and *The Archives of Sexual Behavior*. She also wrote for *Transvestia*, and reprints of her old articles and occasional new articles find their way into print nearly every month in the various publications of the transgender community.

But even more than writing and publishing, Virginia, who is sometimes referred to jokingly by some (and devoutly by others) as The Godmother of Crossdressing, formulated a philosophy which has been carried to the four corners of the world by FPE and its successors, which include The Society for the Second Self (Tri-Ess) in the United States, the Seahorse Clubs of Australia, and the Beaumont Societies in Europe. Virginia's message was that most crossdressers are heterosexual

and crossdress not as a function of their sexuality, but to express feminine aspects of their personality that they do not otherwise feel comfortable expressing because of societal disapproval of feminine behaviors in males. Virginia postulated that the crossdresser has a "woman within" who must be released from time to time. In a society which insists on rigidly defined gender roles, she argued, crossdressing provides a safe release.

This theory acknowledges the sexual arousal which usually accompanies crossdressing in heterosexual men, but relegates it to an early developmental stage; masturbation is the route into the crossdressing experience, but becomes unimportant or disappears altogether once the crossdresser gets in touch with his feminine side.

The world has listened well to Virginia's theories. As a matter of course, the newsletters of the transgender community, the mainstream press, and even the gay press routinely proclaim that most crossdressers are heterosexual. It is taken as gospel. Except for the occasional behind-the-times psychoanalyst who refuses to believe that it is possible that someone who crossdresses could be anything but homosexual, practically everyone, from Geraldo to Dan Rather to Ru-Paul, has heard and come to believe that the majority of crossdressers are heterosexual, just your ordinary straight guy from the corner tavern who likes to put on a frock to express his inner femininity and cavort about town, but who never gets chubbies while doing so, has never had sex with another man and would never, ever even fantasize about doing so, or ever *think* about having sex reassignment.

This is an overly simplistic and quite frankly inaccurate view. The fact is that while many crossdressers are indeed heterosexual, many other crossdressers have lifelong issues with sexuality which go unacknowledged by "feelgood" support groups and transgender community publications. Not only is the autoerotic nature of the crossdressing experience trivialized by the inner woman mythos, but homosexual fantasies and acts are kept private from other crossdressers due to legiti-

mate fear that acknowledging them would lead to disapproval and possible expulsion from heterosexual-only support groups.

One need not spend much time with a group of heterosexual crossdressers to learn that there is something seriously at variance with the notion that one is with a bunch of straight guys who like to dress up on occasion. First,



Francisco Goya (1746 - 1828)
Saturn

a considerable percentage of male crossdressers in fact identify as women and have transsexual inclinations which they keep hidden from the group (and often, with amazing feats of mental gymnastics, even from themselves). Second, once they are in a dress, some of these crossdressers do not act very heterosexual. After a few drinks, they begin to talk in roundabout ways about their sexual urges, and after a few more rounds, they are entirely receptive to advances by other males, if in a setting in which their crossdressing peers are not present—and sometimes when they are. Once sober, they deny such feelings and behavior, and often mask them behind homophobic behaviors and statements.

This is not to say that the majori-

ty of the members of such groups are not in fact completely heterosexual or that they want to be women. But those with serious transsexual issues and those who fantasize about having sex with other men are significant minorities in even the most austere "heterosexual" group. Unfortunately, because of peer pressure, such persons usually feel it important to keep their issues secret, or at least low-key. Their heterosexual-only social groups are not set up to meet their needs, and consequently, those needs often go unmet.

Also, a large number of transgendered persons do not participate in what we call the transgender community, but function wholly outside it. It is only because we have built a club which excludes such persons that we do not see them. We call this club the "transgender community," but in actuality, it is **A** transgender community. There are *other* transgender communities which we often ignore or belittle. I suspect their membership is at least as great as that of "our" community.

The evidence that many crossdressers are not exactly heterosexual does not lie in surveys like Virginia's from the 1960's (which after all, surveyed the readers of her magazine, *Transvestia*, during a time at which those with philosophies which differed significantly from Virginia's were banished to the hinterlands (see Darrell Raynor's *A Year Among the Girls* for a historical record of this). No, the evidence is less direct. It lies not so much in the fact that there is a major problem with illicit use of female hormones in groups for heterosexual crossdressers as in the fact that there is a huge population of gay crossdressers which is largely unacknowledged by the transgender community. It lies in the fact that there is a large population of bisexual crossdressers who are served primarily by transvestite contact magazines which are sold in adult bookstores. It lies in the fact that transvestite phone-sex numbers and escort services do a booming business, and in the fact that there is a strong bisexual theme in a great deal of TV literature. Just as the transgender community is largely invisible to those outside it, these other transgender communities are largely invisible to it.

Virginia's late-1960's survey of readers of her magazines was a great service, for she made it known to the world that all crossdressers were not gay — that, in fact, a considerable percentage of crossdressers were heterosexual. It was very important for the world to realize that. Her study was solid, and just one part of a life work that has ensured her place in history. Her work facilitated communication among a large population of heterosexual crossdressers, and led directly to the transgender community as we know it today. However, her survey, which drew upon readers of a magazine which was of little interest or utility to gay or bisexual crossdressers, came to *define* the transgender community. But because it has rigid boundaries, it is a community which excludes many, and into which many fit only by hiding or denying their true selves — and isn't being and expressing one's true self the very thing the support groups in the transgender community try to facilitate? The simple fact is that large numbers of crossdressers are not heterosexual. They are gay or bisexual.

This does not mean that the majority of people in the transgender community are gay or bisexual (but some are, and deny it, and others are, and feel it necessary to hide it). But I submit that there are entire communities of transgendered persons which *our* transgender community does not recognize, or chooses not to recognize, and that it represses them by ignoring them and denying them. Every time someone in the community claims that most crossdressers are heterosexual; every time it is claimed that gay men dress only to attract other men; every time someone laments the fact that someone they have considered a crossdresser has begun to identify as transsexual; every time someone feels uncomfortable expressing their bisexuality or transsexualism at a support group meeting; every time a crossdresser says "We're not gay," these other communities are being repressed in the same manner that our transgender community is repressed by the mainstream community.

Where are these alternative communities? They are all around us. What form do they take? That depends

upon which of the communities you are talking about.

Gay Crossdressers

Atlanta, like other major cities, has a large and active gay community. A primary form of entertainment in this community is and always has been female impersonation. More than a dozen of Atlanta's gay bars have regular or occasional drag shows. But for every gay male who wears women's clothing for money or to attract men, there are many others who dress for pleasure. On any Friday or Saturday night at BackStreet Atlanta, an all-night bar, it is possible to count more gay crossdressers than have ever attended a meeting of Atlanta's support group for heterosexual crossdressers, which draws members from throughout the Southeast.

Our transgender community tends to denigrate gay crossdressers by calling them "drag queens" and by claiming that they dress only for money or to attract men. Ignoring the homophobia inherent in such a statement, it is incredibly naive, like saying that heterosexual crossdressers dress only to facilitate masturbation. The fact is that many gay crossdressers are significantly transgendered. Proof that they are transgendered is easy to come by: just talk to some of them. They'll tell you that they don't dress just to attract men; they dress because it pleases them, or because they feel a need to express an inner femininity.

Feminine expression, while certainly not universal among gay men, is common. Most of the subjects in Richard Green's longitudinal study of extremely feminine boys (he thought they were pre-transsexual) grew up to be gay. Researchers hotly debate the theory that all gay males are feminine in their youth. The need of some gay men to express their feminine side often surfaces as crossdressing. Drag shows constitute a socially sanctioned reason to crossdress — and certainly sometimes crossdressing can lead to romance or at least a sexual liaison, or a salary and tips as a female impersonator — but the real reasons most gay men crossdress are often — and I would submit usually —

private. Many, I would imagine, dress *only* in private.

The transgender community often laments the absence of gay crossdressers at its events, but the fact is there is nothing there to particularly attract them. Rigidly enforced dress codes, anti-gay remarks, class issues (many gay crossdressers cannot afford to travel hundreds of miles and stay in an expensive hotel) and the matronly appearance of some of the attendees are of little interest to gay crossdressers, many of whom have a flamboyance that makes the more stolid in the transgender community cringe. They want to do the things they want to do; most of all, they want to feel comfortable about expressing themselves in a feminine manner, and about being gay — and this is not possible in the transgender community as it now exists.

Gay crossdressers have a community of their own; it just takes a different form. The bar scene is certainly one facet of that community. Another is the popularity of large meetings to which gay crossdressers travel from all over the country in order to dress up. There are scores of gay beauty pageants, the winning of which results in money, fame, a crown, and a title. Most are extravagant affairs, with dozens of beautifully gowned and coiffed, and often stunningly beautiful contestants. In the fall of 1994, for instance, Atlanta hosted a national pageant to elect Miss Gay-USA-at-Large. The event was held in one of the city's most prestigious hotels (in fact, the success of such pageants, which have been held in four-star hotels since the 1970's, doubtless paved the way for the conventions of the transgender community). There are many contestants and a large audience, and there are organizers, stage hands, lighting and sound technicians, and a master of ceremonies. Many of these people correspond and socialize throughout the year. There is also an Imperial Court, with chapters in many cities, which consists of gay crossdressers who stage benefits to raise money for AIDS organizations and charities. Is this community? Certainly it is. And although it is different in form from what those in the transgen-

From A to Zeta: The Alpha Zeta Tri-Ess Membership Survey (Or, Why Tri-Ess is Bouncing its Reality Checks)

In the January, 1996 issue of *Renaissance News*, Dina Amberle reported that Alpha Zeta, the Tempe, Arizona chapter of Tri-Ess, the Society for the Second Self (an organization which restricts its membership to heterosexual crossdressers) gave a survey to its members. Amberle writes, "The survey results were pretty interesting, and represented the answers of 70% of the Zeta-girls' 47 members . . .

"To the question how often would they dress as women if they lived in an ideal universe, 36% of our Tempe Sun-goddesses answered 'all the time.' When asked if they would take a hypothetical pill that would transform them into women without surgery, a whopping 64% said, 'Gimme that pill, girlfriend.' On the converse, only 27% would take a hypothetical pill that would 'cure' them of the desire to crossdress.

"On more reality-based questions, the number of members who have had some electrolysis was 24%. That's close to one in four for your mathphobes. And 21%, or one in five, have used female hormones at some time. The survey upped the ante in a series of questions that follows . . . 'Fantasied about having sex reassignment surgery' got a 73% positive answer . . . 'Seriously considered SRS' got a 21% positive response . . . 'presently planning on SRS' was answered 'yes' 9% of the time."

Amberle continues, "I always take survey results with a grain of salt,

but I find it remarkable that a Tri-Ess chapter has 64% of its membership who would like to magically transform themselves into women; 36% who would like to live full-time if circumstances were perfect; 21-24% who have experimented with female hormones or electrolysis; and a huge 73% who have even fantasied about TS surgery. That's a helluva lot of real and fantasized transforming going on in an organization devoted to the ideal of heterosexual crossdressing without a taint of transsexualism in its ranks. A less diplomatic person than myself might even say this particular sorority of Tri-Ess girls are a bunch of secret transsexuals."

I regret having to be that "less diplomatic" person, but someone must say something about the consensual denial in many heterosexual crossdressing groups. My best guess is the Alpha Zeta group is probably representative of heterosexual-only support groups, and not an anomaly.

Unfortunately, there is a tremendous amount of dissembling around this issue. I recently read a newsletter which interpreted the Alpha-Zeta survey as a vindication of the hetero-only membership of such groups: after all, only one in four of the members had experimented with hormones, and only one in ten was definitely planning on SRS!

My issue with restrictive criteria of heterosexual only groups is that they are *not* in fact heterosexual-only. They

are filled with persons with gender identity and sexual issues who, because of peer pressure, behave surreptitiously, and are not caught by the net of support which exists for them. They cannot get the support they need in their hetero-only groups, and are afraid to go to open or transsexual groups. Consequently, they operate in the dark, frequently making bad decisions. They take hormones without having prior therapy. They are at medical risk while on hormones because they do not have their blood chemistry monitored, and they are at psychological risk because they secretly pursue a transsexual path recklessly, bypassing all the safeguards. This directly interferes with AEGIS' mission, which is to provide such people with information so they can make good decisions. We cannot provide them with information if they are so afraid of not being heterosexual that they won't contact us.

I fully understand the fear of many crossdressers and their wives, which keeps them away from open groups. I appreciate the dilemma: if the group were not heterosexual only, many of the people it was created to serve would stay away. However, the groups should be a place where those fears are shown for what they are—false. They should not be places to nurture and harden those fears. But most importantly, the groups should serve the actual needs of their members, and not the needs of an idealized but nonexistent membership.

Survey Sez . . . The Categories are Collapsing!

Things MTF transsexuals used to do (and crossdressers didn't): Wish to become women, take hormones, have electrolysis, fantasize about SRS, seriously consider SRS, plan on having SRS.

	<i>Percent Yes</i>	
Would dress as woman all the time in an ideal environment	36	
Would take magic pill to become woman	64	
Have had electrolysis	24	
Have taken female hormones	21	
Fantasized about SRS	73	
Seriously considered SRS	21	
Presently planning on SRS	9	<i>n = 33 (70% of total membership)</i>

Collapsing Categories: Two Examples

What is a heterosexual crossdresser? Several years ago, perhaps that question would have been answerable. But nowadays . . .

Mandy*

Mandy is an officer in a heterosexual-only crossdressing group which aggressively enforces its policy of "no gays, no transsexuals." She is one of the more vocal supporters of the policy.

Although she does not identify as transsexual, but as a heterosexual crossdresser, Mandy struggles with her desire to be a woman. She is a member of a fundamentalist religious sect and experiences intense guilt feelings about crossdressing which have resulted in long periods of severe depression.

A little over a year ago, Mandy began a rigorous course of electrolysis and had surgery to feminize her face, with the result that most people began to view her as female, regardless of how she was dressed. Six months ago, she decided that taking hormones could be justified under her system of religious beliefs and asked her therapist for a referral letter for hormones. She carried the letter around for months before visiting an endocrinologist.

Mandy has slowly slipped across the line into full-time crossliving. She recently became very depressed when she and her wife were mistaken for lesbians in public; she claims she finds lesbians and gay men "disgusting."

Lately, Mandy has experienced a recurrent desire to have sex

reassignment surgery, which has resulted in more depression, as it is something which she cannot allow herself. Recently, she brought the matter up with her therapist, who told her he would consider giving her a referral letter if she would work through some of her issues. She has heard of a surgeon in Mexico who requires no letters or evidence of real-life test. She has even wondered if it would be possible to have the surgery and conceal it from the members of her support group, and even her wife.

Despite all this, Mandy continues to consider herself a heterosexual crossdresser. Recently, she led a drive to expel a group member who had told another group member that she thought she might be transsexual.

Alesha*

Alesha is the prototypical heterosexual crossdresser, but for one thing. In her femme mode, Alesha is as aggressively "heterosexual" as is her male counterpart, Alex. She likes men. Alex is swaggering and macho, and more than a bit homophobic, to the point that he once called another crossdresser a faggot when he attempted to greet him with a hug. Alesha frequently tells those she encounters when out with other group members, "We're heterosexual. We're not gay or anything like that." After a few drinks, however, Alesha will flounce into the room and ask "Where are the men?" She is a habituée of the bars, where she

meets men with whom she has unprotected sex. Group members recently had a good laugh when they discovered a photo of Alesha in a sexual contact magazine for TVs. When an officer mentioned it to her, she claimed that a relationship with another crossdresser would qualify as a heterosexual relationship if she thought of the other crossdresser as a woman.

At a recent steering committee meeting, Alesha poo-pooed the suggestion that AIDS be the topic at a monthly meeting. "That's a gay disease," she said. "We're not gay."

Whatever Mandy's self-identification, her needs for counseling, peer support, and medical supervision are no different than those of any transsexual person. And however heterosexual Alesha believes she is, her need to understand and practice safe sex techniques is the same as that of any gay man. Mandy and Alesha have nothing to gain and everything to lose by hiding behind a facade of heterosexuality in their support group. In fact, their group encourages such heteropocracy. The officers smile knowingly at Alesha's late-night shenanigans, and ignore Mandy's increasing femization, while purging those who are honest about their issues.

It's time for the transgender community to begin to care more about the real human needs of its members than it does about protective labels like heterosexuality!

** The names have been changed to protect the insolent. "Mandy" and "Alicia" are based on real heterosexual crossdressers the author has known. You know who you are, dablins!*

der community usually think about, it is just as valid as the transgender community we usually think about.

Bisexual Crossdressers

For some reason, many men who otherwise would never consider having sex with another man find their thoughts turning to the possibility once they are in skirts. Some never act upon their fantasies, but others do. Bisexual crossdressers with whom I have spoken report that attraction to men is a significant part of their feminine experience. Many, in fact, have sex with other men only when crossdressed. The fiction of the transgender community is rampant with such themes.

The magazines of the transgender community are printed in small runs of several hundred, or at best several thousand copies. The tabloid cross-dressing magazines, on the other hand, which feature pictures of scantily clad and sometimes unclad crossdressers in suggestive postures and explicit descriptions of what they want from other men and where they want to put it, have circulations in the tens of thousands. The late Alicia Lichy, publisher of Alicia's *TV Girl Talk*, boasted in print about a circulation of 40,000 copies — and that only a year or so after starting her business. There are certainly as many of these magazines (which are often in tabloid format) as there are nationally circulated non-sexual transgender publications. There is no way to determine their actual readership, but it is apparently quite large. One of the co-owners of Brushstrokes, an alternative bookstore in Atlanta, told me that the store typically moves between 50 and 100 copies of a new issue of one of these tabloids in a week— far fewer than the serious gender magazines.

Even IFGE's *Transgender* (formerly *TV-TS Tapestry*), the largest-circulation publication in the transgender community, prints only about 10,000 copies. And this large circulation is due in large part to *Transgender's* contact ads, which enable the magazine to be placed in fetish boutiques and adult bookstores around the world (in other

words, *Transgender's* large circulation results from its attraction to the hidden bisexual community).

Of course, not everybody buying sexual contact magazines is doing so because they desire to have sexual contact with another man. Some are no doubt grasping for any legitimate source of information they can find. But if this is the case, if a significant percentage of the purchasers are in search of information rather than phone numbers and addresses, why then, do they pass up *Transgender*, with its restrained personal ads and *Chrysalis* (which contains a great deal of factual transgender information, but no contact ads) for the tabloids, which feature bare asses and

When is a crossdresser a cross-dresser? When does he become a transgenderist? A transsexual? Bisexual? Homosexual? These are issues that the transgender community needs to confront, but which it has heretofore avoided.

exposed private parts? The reason is simple: the magazines are being purchased by bisexual men because of the personal ads.

Is this community? Perhaps not yet, but I believe it is the *beginning* of community. The bisexual community is only starting to emerge on a national level. Many bisexuals are closeted in the same way as transgendered males. The portion of that community interested in crossdressing is in the same place as Virginia's readership was back in the 1960s. They do not yet have national meetings, but they correspond with each other and meet on an informal basis. They have not even reached the bisexual equivalent of the Hose and Heels Club. But make no mistake about it: bisexual crossdressers (and their aficionados) are there in large numbers. They may be having sex with one another in private, but they are there nonetheless, and one of these days will manifest themselves in an organiza-

tion which will let them stand proudly in public.

Transgendered & Transsexual "Crossdressers"

A certain percentage of any support group for heterosexual crossdressers is likely to have transgender issues — that is, maleness and manhood are not valued, but are traits which are to be done away with, if circumstances permit, and endured, if circumstances do not. Some closed heterosexual crossdressing groups do a more thorough job of genderpolicing (i.e., excluding) such individuals than others, but every heterosexual crossdressing group of any size, I dare to say, has people with such feelings, even if, for obvious reasons, they keep them private.

Gender euphoria is a term used to describe the ecstatic state of many crossdressers when they finally come "out." Oftentimes, they become so preoccupied with crossdressing that their judgment lapses and they make decisions which they come to regret. The problem with "gender euphoric" crossdressers has been acknowledged in *The Femme Forum*, the official magazine of Tri-Ess, In Boulton & Park Society's *Gender Euphoria*, and in other crossdressing magazines — but gender euphoria is often a sign of a gender identity as a woman. Once the excitement of entry into the transgender community dies, such individuals may be better able to control these feelings (and it may in fact be in their best interest to control them), but it would be foolish to assume that they would suddenly become happy to be men. Many transgendered persons transition into the new role, but many others do not, and for any number of reasons besides not really wanting to — out of a sense of duty or obligation to employers, wives, children, parents, and friends; because of physical factors which would make crossliving difficult; because of fear; because of financial problems; because of the difficulties of overcoming the inertia of life as a male. Many others transition partially, using electrolysis, hormonal therapy, facial plastic

surgery, breast implants, and other medical techniques to make them more viable in the female role, but retaining some semblance of their lives as men. Some of these slip over the line into full-time crossliving. Virginia herself did. But are such people heterosexual crossdressers?

I would argue that they are not. When a person is living full time, or even part time in a new gender role, when a person is living in the original role, but has altered his body with hormones, and even when a person is desperately unhappy with being a man but has not taken action on it, and especially, when an individual is living full-time as a woman, it seems beyond reason to refer to him as a crossdresser. A crossdresser is someone who bottom line, may enjoy dressing as a woman on occasion, but who enjoys being a man. If the second part of the equation is missing, if the person reverts to being a man because he must, or feels he must, or if he feels he is somewhere between the two genders commonly acknowledged by our society, he is not a crossdresser, at least not by my definition. He much better fits the emerging category of transgenderist (transgenderists blend the characteristics of both sexes).

What is a heterosexual crossdresser? For that matter, what constitutes heterosexuality? And when is a cross-

dresser a crossdresser? When does he become a transgenderist? A transsexual? Bisexual? Homosexual? These are issues that the transgender community needs to confront, but which it has heretofore avoided. Support organizations for heterosexual crossdressers

As we come as a community to realize that heterosexuality and homosexuality are artificial distinctions placed on sexuality and that manhood and womanhood are artificial distinctions placed on our gender expression, heterosexual-only support groups seem more and more like fortresses which exist primarily to protect their members from the winds of change.

attempt to escape culpability by not strictly defining their membership criteria, relying instead upon peer pressure to police their membership roster. Consequently, their membership includes men who would rather be women, men who are on female hormones, men who sometimes have sex with other men, and men who fantasize about having sex with other men. And some are not men at all. In fact, many organizations of heterosexual crossdressers may be composed primarily of transgenderists who are sexually attracted to women, rather than crossdressers, who are happy and proud to be men. But these things are not usually acknowledged.

Members of groups for heterosex-

ual crossdressers, and sometimes the groups themselves, are often subtly, and sometimes blatantly, anti-gay. Those with sexual interest in men quickly learn to keep their sexuality to themselves, and openly gay crossdressers become the subjects of rude,

homophobic remarks. At one recent meeting of a support group for heterosexual crossdressers — a group which, by the way, has made valiant attempts to confront and overcome its homophobia — a gay man who had referred many heterosexual crossdressers to the group, attended, crossdressed. One of the members asked him, "Don't you feel uncomfortable here?" I'll guarantee you that he did after that! Homophobic statements appear with alarming regularity in the various newsletters of the transgender community, and crossdressers are quick with statements like "Sure, we dress like this, but we're not gay or anything," (implying that it's just fine to have erotic feelings toward a pair of panties,

No Easy Solutions

How can we reach the closeted crossdresser who is scared to death of making contact with a support group? And how can we convince his wife he's not transsexual and not gay? That's a tremendous challenge, not only for groups which specifically focus on heterosexual crossdressers, but for all of us.

Quite understandably, the abrupt introduction of a newcomer into a meeting with all sorts of gender folk might prove to be more than a bit unnerving, not only to the first-time crossdresser, but to his wife who has reluctantly accompanied him. And certainly, open groups can be very diverse. But a philosophy that the best way to deal with this problem is to form a milieu which will permanently insulate

the new members from such "scary" people as homosexuals — who, by the

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way, are much more palatable to the average American than are crossdressers — is ultimately a bad one. A much more productive approach would be to form a safe, supportive setting in which newcomers could gradually learn their fears are groundless, and from which they could be weaned into the larger community.

I believe that the challenge of support groups for heterosexual crossdressers is to maintain a focus on the target group — heterosexual crossdressers — without succumbing to fear — in

other words, to open membership to any and all who support the organiza-

tion's goals. After all, if the National Association for Women finds its agenda advanced by allowing men to join; if the NAACP finds itself more effective for having European-Americans and Asian-American members; if the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force gladly accepts heterosexual members, how can we claim that it is anything but our prejudice which causes us to practice the politics of exclusion in our support groups? How can we be all that we can be if we push away those who would support us?

but really fucked up to be attracted to another sentient being who happens to be of the same sex).

There is also a great deal of transphobia in these groups. Members who acknowledge their transsexualism are often taken aside in private by other members and told they are making a big mistake with their lives. Sometimes, though, it's not so private. Several people have been publicly put through the wringer on a local gender-based bulletin board (by other callers, and not necessarily because of any anti-transsexual policy of the board). Not so long ago, one hetero-only support group instituted a "no transsexual talk" rule at their meetings, ostensibly to protect the tender sensibilities of their wives.

Unfortunately, although it has not been officially defined, the dividing line between crossdresser and transsexual seems to be considered by many to be genital surgery, and the dividing line between crossdresser and homosexual seems to be an open and honest acknowledgement of one's feelings toward other men, rather than by the frequency with which one actually acts upon those feelings. Those who live as women but haven't had surgery are in the club, and those who live as women and have had surgery are out. Those who pick up men and blow them in parking lots of bars — but deny it — are in the club, and those in monogamous gay relationships are out. This is, quite frankly, a sign of the insanity of our community. I don't understand why a three-hour surgical procedure, the results of which does not show in public, results in loss of full membership eligibility in a hetero crossdressing organization I will not name, while living as a woman — as the founder, at least one of the board members, and many of the members do — is not. Nor do I understand why acknowledging one's sexual attraction for men excludes one from full membership, while denying it (but doing it, with everyone knowing you are doing it) does not.

I have another observation, and that is that unfortunately, the female partners of crossdressers are often used to justify homophobia and transphobia. The reasoning is that wives, who are

often unknowledgeable about crossdressing and may suspect that their husband is bisexual, gay, or transsexual, will have their worst fears confirmed if bi, gay, or transsexual persons are part of the community. This is based on assumptions that women must be protected. It is at bottom misogynistic. If women are homophobic, if women are transphobic, then they, just like their men, have problems with their perceptions which they need to overcome. If their husbands were secure in their identity as heterosexuals and as crossdressers, they would not have a problem freely interacting with gay and bisexual males and transsexual people, for the differences would be for the most part apparent, and would serve to assuage the fears of their female partners. On the other hand, if there is something to hide (like a consensual denial of reality in such groups), then it makes perfect sense to keep the wives in the dark about what is really going on. Of course, the wives are interacting with transsexual and gay persons in the support groups anyway, even if the prevailing climate keeps them undercover.

The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy of some groups of heterosexual crossdressers is due to local and national leaders who aren't willing to face the fact that some of their members are having sex with other men, that some are fantasizing about having sex with other men, and that others will eventually wind up living full-time as women and may eventually find themselves in Brussels or Neenah, Wisconsin for sex reassignment surgery. Because of their steadfast denial of the true nature of their members, many organizations for heterosexual crossdressers are at bottom hypocritical organizations— heterophobic organizations, I would say. Their mission statements are at considerable variance with the actual nature and needs of their members. They exist to serve heterosexual crossdressers, but many of their members identify as something other than heterosexual males. They serve only by turning a blind eye to the needs of a significant portion of their members.

Support groups for heterosexual crossdressers have been an important

part of our history, but their very success has made them anachronisms. They are bastions of old-fashioned sensibility in an age of pan-gender and pan-sexual sensibilities. As we come as a community to realize that heterosexuality and homosexuality are artificial distinctions placed on sexuality and that manhood and womanhood are artificial distinctions placed on our gender expression, heterosexual-only support groups seem more and more like fortresses which exist primarily to protect their members from the winds of change.

I believe that it is time for organizations for heterosexual crossdressers to face the changing reality of the transgender community, and acknowledge in their mission statements the fact that some of their members are exploring full-time living in women's roles, experimenting with electrolysis, hormones, and plastic surgery, and experimenting with their sexuality — that some of their members are not in fact heterosexual, some are not in fact crossdressers, some are not in fact, even men. It is time for them to stop their heteropocrysis and offer full membership to anyone interested in serving their target population, which is heterosexual crossdressers and their partners. In this way, they will nurture those who are entering the community, yet also give them room to grow. So long as they turn a blind eye to the actual nature of their membership, so long as they profess to serve heterosexual crossdressers rather than their actual membership, they will, despite their best efforts to help their members and to contribute positively to social change, be responsible for artificially dividing the community. CQ

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Terry Murphy is happily omnisexual and works as the managing editor of Southern Voice, the U/g/b/t weekly newspaper of the Southeastern U.S. This article previously appeared in Southern Belle, the newsletter of the Sigma Epsilon chapter of Tri-Ess.

Homophobia Hurts Us All

by Terry Murphy

At the meeting last month I went out Saturday night with a few of the girls and we went downtown to one of them gay bars? There was all kinds of men in there and they were kissin' each other and dancing together. I mean, it just made me uncomfortable. Hey, I'm all for everyone doing what they want and all, but damn, I mean there was two of them in the corner of this bar? And they were really going at it. You know, making out like? God, I couldn't stand it.... You know, I don't like it when all those crossdressers are always goin' into the gay bars. I mean, they're givin' people the wrong impression. They might think we're gay."

This was part of a real conversation I had with a member of Sigma Epsilon, the Atlanta chapter of Tri-ess. And I've been privy to any number of similar conversations with professed hetero crossdressers in my years as an out member of the gender community.

The prevalence of homophobia within Sig Ep and the larger gender community is disturbing to me. It's wrong and contrary to our own best interests. I think we need to evaluate our collective attitude towards homosexuality.

Here's a news flash for all of you who concur with the above sentiments: The overwhelming majority of people — whether straight, bi or gay themselves — assume that any person they perceive to be a man in drag is gay. Get used to it.

In my humble opinion, I'd like all you male-to-female transgenders (and that includes everyone who considers him or herself to be a straight crossdresser) to consider the idea that being taken for gay because you are wearing a dress isn't a tragedy. If you think otherwise, you might want to re-examine your attitudes, especially regarding

your comfort level with your own sexuality. Heterosexuals who are confident in their sexual orientation, whether crossdressers or not, are not consumed with fear that they will be mistaken for gay by strangers.

On the other hand, mental health professionals, never mind the average gay man or lesbian, will confirm that those who are most paranoid about being mistaken for gay are very often confused about their own sexuality. Frequently, such a person becomes defensive in the extreme when their orientation is called into question. I wince every time I hear a Sig Ep girl insecurely and defensively hammer away at the "We're-all-straight" party line throughout a conversation. I've heard members heartily assure their outreach conversation partner that they'd deck any man who even tried to put the moves on them.

I wince a lot.

One Saturday evening during a Sigma Epsilon meeting weekend, I was engaged in conversation with a very cute born female in the bar of the hotel at which the group was meeting. She was there with an older woman who, she explained, was her mother, a semi-regular at the bar. During a very glib and interesting conversation, she revealed herself to be lesbian. Naturally our chat got around to gender bending in general and the Sig Ep group in particular. She was curious and I enjoyed answering her questions. I explained that Sig Ep was a support group for hetero crossdressers. She cut me off, saying, "I know. My mom was telling me she's met a bunch of y'all and every time she has a conversation with one of you, the first thing out of their mouth is, 'I'm straight.'" She laughed, as did I, and she continued with a wink, "Methinks the lady doth protest too much!"

Indeed. The standard refrain amongst many Tri-Ess crossdressers doing outreach with straight and gay people zeros in on the assertion that crossdressers are OK and not to be feared or shunned because "the overwhelming majority of crossdressers are straight." The implication, and it's none too subtle, is that anyone who is not straight is not OK.

First of all, this is deeply offensive to any gay person and there's a fairly good chance that any overweight, slightly ruffled salesman or cheerful,

vacationing woman that you might meet in the hotel lobby bar on any given weekend night might be gay. Something to think about.

More importantly, I'd like to suggest there are two evils at work when we defensively insist upon the heterosexual purity of crossdressers: 1. It's homophobic and supports the fear and oppression of gay people, and therefore the oppression of all transgenders as well; and 2. It's not strictly true and thereby undermines the credibility of the gender community in our efforts to win full civil rights.

As to the first, our otherness, our deviation from the norm in dress, puts all transgenders squarely in solidarity with homosexuals. As we all know, much of the public unhesitatingly lumps us in with them anyway, and, in all honesty, transgenders have much in common with gays that has nothing whatever to do with sexuality per se.

We're born in the closet, just as gay people are. Many of us live in mortal fear that our loved ones, neighbors and coworkers might discover our secret nature and reject us, just as many gay people live the same way. We struggle to understand of our own nature and search for the courage to emerge into society and be accepted for ourselves, just as gay people do. And we are sometimes the subject of public scorn, beatings, murder and other hate crimes, just as gay people are.

Our struggle for acceptance parallels the gay civil rights movement and we need to stand with that movement, not against it. When being gay is unremarkable, then, and only then, will being a crossdresser — straight, bi or gay — also be unremarkable. Constant attempts to differentiate crossdressers or other transgenders from gay people does conscious harm to homosexuals and unconscious harm to ourselves.

My second point addresses the key question: Who is gay? I would like to suggest that the answer is not an entirely simple one.

The simple truth is that within the community of transgendered people, there are those male crossdressers who are exclusively attracted to women as sexual partners. Tri-Ess was founded to serve their specific needs, and I think that's great.

It is also true that are people who

identify as members of both the transgendered and gay community and, for the most part, they must find their comfort and support outside a Tri-Ess chapter.

More to the point here, there are also people in Tri-Ess groups, often popular and active members, whose understanding of their own sexuality is clouded by their gender conflict. Still others belong to that hetero-only slice of the gender community but remain in the closet regarding their real sexual orientation. It is folly to pretend otherwise; there are many crossdressers who profess to be straight (or simply allow it to be so assumed) who are physically attracted to men and/or other transgenders.

Crossdressers are out of the ordinary. Being extraordinary in this way is something to celebrate. It's also something that causes the average Joe on the street to make some assumptions about with whom a crossdress sleeps (or with whom they desire to sleep). If you are assumed to be gay, how wrong is that assumption?

Another anecdote. As a Sig Ep meeting was breaking up one weekend, myself, a Sig Ep member and an out-of-town visitor were saying our Sunday good byes in a deserted parking lot. We were dressed as men. Hugs were the order of the moment and as the visitor started to embrace the other Sig Ep member, the intended recipient reacted physically. He pushed the would-be hugger, darted glances in all directions and acidly spat out this verbal defense, "Hey! None of that. No!"

Recovering somewhat, brushing imaginary fairy dust from his jacket, he elaborated, "Someone might think we're gay." The scene now shifts... it's a month later in the bar of the hotel, Saturday night. The homophobic member sashays in dressed to the nines and looking great. I'm sitting at a table with some friends and compliment her on her appearance as she approaches. "Maybe I'll catch me a man tonight," she drawled, passing by and disappearing into the crowd.

In that moment, did she so completely give in to the fantasy of being a woman that the pursuit of a man made her, in the gender hall of mirrors, a heterosexual woman? Did she follow through? Does it matter?

Op-Ed

When Heteropocrisy Comes Home to Roost

by Dallas Denny

There is a longstanding tradition of "making nice" in the transgender community. Disagreements and differences of opinion often don't make it into print. Commendably, the leaders of the various national and local organizations are interested in building community, and wish to present a positive face in their newsletters and magazines. I have played this game as much as anyone else, even when I have had to bite my tongue to keep from opening my big mouth.

Sometimes, however, holding one's silence is morally indefensible. For the good of the community, for the welfare of the individuals who comprise it, and to keep one's own integrity, something must be said. This is one of those times.

In June, 1995, I flew to Houston for the ICTLEP Law Conference. That evening, when I called home to check my messages, the very first one was from a frantic counselor who had called me about one of her clients, who had tried to kill herself with a gun which misfired.

I spent the longest few minutes of my life listening to the rest of the messages to see if the therapist had called back. Fortunately, the emergency was over; my friend had been hospitalized.

It was when this woman (who identified as transsexual, but who enjoyed attending the meetings of the Sigma Epsilon group and was getting support from them) was told she was not welcome that I knew I could no longer avoid discussing this issue.

Sigma Epsilon is the Atlanta Chapter of Tri-Ess, the Society for the Second Self, an organization for heterosexual crossdressers. Since the departure of Linda Peacock, the chapter's wonderful president several years ago, I have watched Sigma Ep go from an open, vibrant organization to its present closeted, exclusionary state.

Terry Murphy fought valiantly to preserve the Sigma Epsilon she loved, but ultimately lost it.

Like a turtle withdrawing into its shell, Sigma Epsilon has pulled back from the larger gender community and purged itself of members who identify as bisexual, gay, or transsexual (except for a select few, like myself, who, as "Friends of Sigma Epsilon," have been allowed to retain our membership. One officer, who came out as transsexual, was told that she could stay because she wasn't "really" transsexual because she remained in a loving relationship with her spouse. Besides, they said, the group really needed her. She resigned in disgust.

In what I can only characterize as arrogant heteropocrisy, Sigma Epsilon has denied that there was a purge; to prove it, the *Southern Belle*, Sigma Ep's newsletter, carried a letter from a transsexual woman who wrote that she had never experienced discrimination at Sigma Epsilon meetings. She has since had SRS, and promptly was informed that she would no longer be welcome at meetings.

What I find almost beyond belief is that at least two of the driving forces in Sigma Epsilon's "reinvention" have serious transgender and sexuality issues. One told me privately that she was planning to live full-time as a woman. She has also propositioned several pre-op transsexual women. It would be all right, she said to one of them, because it would be a heterosexual relationship. "I think of you as a woman."

In the past six years, member after member of the Sigma Epsilon group have come to me privately for advice about hormones, electrolysis, and surgery. More than a dozen members or ex-members are living full-time as women, and some have had SRS. Some have been Sigma Epsilon officers. Two of the members of the Board of

Directors of Tri-Ess National live full-time as women. What is going on here? How can moral, sensitive people delude themselves to the extent that they think they are "heterosexual crossdressers" while wanting and in some cases having what is essentially a sex change?

I've heard and read the rhetoric put out by Tri-Ess and its chapters in an effort to justify their exclusionary position. It's hollow and patently self-deluding, at best, and psychotic at worst, a desperate attempt to rationalize what is ultimately an unjustifiable position.

If no one was being hurt by all the verbiage, I could and would keep my silence. But lives have been and are being affected, and the community is being split because of the action of people who just are not facing up to who they are and what their organization is. I hope that my status as a friend of Tri-Ess and Sigma Epsilon does not require my continued participation in the delusion.

Tri-Ess is not really an organization of and for heterosexual crossdressers. It is an organization with a membership and a leadership which contains a significant number of underground transsexuals and bisexuals. Those who are willing to lie about their gender and sexual issues and those who for all practical purposes have a sex change but describe themselves with the words "heterosexual crossdresser" are welcome; while those who are honest about their issues or use other terms to describe themselves are shown the revolving door. The organization is based on a fundamental deceit.

It's high time for Tri-Ess to stop proclaiming loudly that it is what it is not and that it is not what it is. It must either open its ranks to all who would support its goals or enforce its present membership criteria honestly and impartially. I'm hoping for the former.

If a self-professed crossdresser has had sex with one man, does that make you gay? Three? Six? If you've never had sex with a man, ever, and yet you sometimes fantasize about it, are you gay? If as a teenager searching for your identity and some intimacy, you had sex with a couple of men, but never again over decades of married life, are you gay? If, when you are dressed, you enjoy flirting with men, seek their compliments upon your appearance and joke about dating them, yet never actually have sex with them, does that make you gay? Does the simple act of putting on a dress and placing yourself in the role of a woman make you gay?

Besides childbearing, a romantic relationship with a man may be the ultimate expression of heterosexual femininity; does pursuing every aspect of that femininity up to but excluding that final act make us gay? A little gay? Can you be a little gay? And what about unconventional sexual activity and intimacy?

If you commonly kiss other crossdressers hello and good-bye, does that make you gay? (From the many firm handshakes I've been offered at Sig Ep meetings, apparently there is something unsettling here.) What about kisses from openly gay admirers? Does dancing with a gay man at a bar make you gay? What about that one time you went out to the parked car (or wherever) with a man and he got his hand up under your skirt as you kissed him? Does that make you gay? Does the thrilling memory of that encounter and the sexual arousal it stimulates make you gay?

What about transvestite pornography? Lords knows it's widely available throughout the community (in fact, some of it is written, published and sold by icons of heterosexist crossdressing). If you masturbate while reading overtly (or even subtly) homoerotic TV porn, does that make you gay?

Well, in this world of identity politics, the short answer is, No. Politically speaking, the only people who are gay are those who say they are or who are identified as such by some untoward official procedure.

For instance, the married country-western singer is straight until the day he is arrested for soliciting sex in a gay cruising area. (And, if he performs a

reasonably tearful confession to alcohol abuse on the Nashville Network while professing a new-found closeness to Jesus, purported heterosexuality can be restored.) Similarly, the Republican congressman is presumed to be straight until the day he is busted for performing fellatio on a House page in a Capitol men's room.

Thus, since the majority of gay men and lesbians are perfectly ordinary in appearance, they are assumed to be straight and many allow that assumption to work in their favor on the job and in other life situations, even if they are completely openly gay in their private life. After all, it's fairly awkward to bust into the casual heterosexism of everyday encounters by asserting one's homosexuality. Some out gay people do it with subtle language cues or jewelry, or more overtly with blunt assertions.

Conversely, transgendered people, for the most part, are visibly queer and most people assume us to be "gay" on sight because we don't look like other "straight" people.

Thus, ironically, a born male crossdresser who is exclusively attracted to born females can be judged to be a self-loathing homosexual in denial about his attraction to men by the smirking habitué of a gay bar who himself is exclusively homosexual in orientation but who carefully nutures a facade of heterosexuality in his business life.

What a strange world we live in! It is a place full of irony and paradox produced by our cultural bent toward bi-polar thinking. One is either liberal or conservative, black or white, gay or straight.

There seems little room in this bi-polar scheme for those who are in between; transgenders, bisexuals, asexuals and the intersexed chief amongst the left-outs. And, when it comes to identity politics, it is quite difficult to claim that you are in-between or not sure or that your sexuality is fluid. The undecided are the most disrespected of all, by gays and straights alike.

Nevertheless, this is where we all fall. Regardless of who floats our boat sexually, we are in the middle; men, women and others of shifting or uncertain gender and therefore, by definition, uncertain sexuality.

It is my modest proposal that we abandon the spurious Tri-Ess "overwhelming majority" party line. It's not true and no one believes it.

We are far better served, I believe, by owning up to our differentness, regardless of with whom we have sex and with whom we partner ourselves for life. It's healthier, more honest and builds credibility for the entire community to place ourselves in that wide middle ground.

The next time the male-to-female transgenders among us are asked about their sexuality (and we all know how quickly that comes up in any outreach conversation), I suggest that they respond truthfully.

If it's true, say, "Well, I'm exclusively attracted to women, but obviously I'm transgressing gender and I realize that makes others question whether I'm repressing a desire for men or have created some sort of part-time lesbian identity, but I'm comfortable with my sexuality and I'm also OK being associated with the queer (or alternative) community.

If it's true say, "Well, I'm married to (or partnered with) a woman. I love her and I love our life together and I'm monogamous, but I've had experiences with men in the past and I'm comfortable with that."

If it's true, say, "Well, I'm attracted to women and to men. In fact, I'm sort of partial to other crossdressers (or transsexuals or whatever). I guess that makes me a bisexual, or a trisexual. What do you think about that?"

And, if it's true, say, "Why yes, I am gay. How about buying me a drink?"

The point is that all of us are in this together. Linked as we are by our extraordinary behavior, regardless of our sexual orientation, all of us—intersexed people, FTM transsexuals, gay men, hetero crossdressers, bisexual women, gay drag queens, exclusive lesbians, bisexual MTT transsexuals, whomever—are all best served by working for a world that welcomes gay people to table. Don't be mistaken, when the gender community calls ahead to confirm its own spot at the same table, the reservation will be listed under "the Queer party" and we'll be seated right next to our gay brothers and sisters.

Right this way, folks... CQ