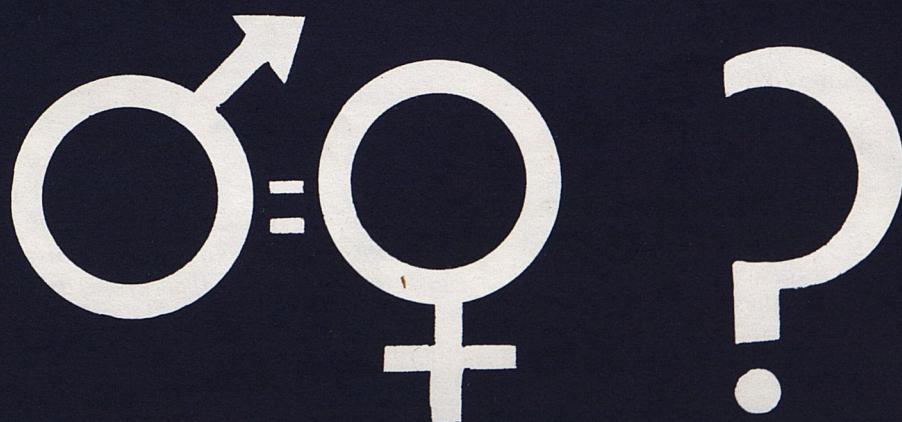


Can Men Be Women?

Some Lesbians Think So!

TRANSSEXUALS IN
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT



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TRANSSEXUALS IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

When we heard that Olivia Records had hired a transsexual to be their recording engineer, and we began to hear of more and more male transsexuals invading the women's movement, our reaction was repugnance. We don't think that cutting off his genitals makes a man a woman, and we do not believe that a woman can be born into a man's body.

We thought at first that the doctors in the gender identity and transsexual field believed that women could accidentally be born into male bodies, and that by operating on them they could correct this mistake of nature. This is the line that is being used by transsexuals and being bought by the straight press and some Lesbians. We read several books by well known "authorities" in the gender and transsexual field: Sex and Gender Vol. 2, The Transsexual Experiment by Dr. Robert J. Stoller was the one we found most enlightening. Stoller, along with most of the other "authorities," does not believe or ever state that male to female transsexuals have been, or ever can be, women. Most doctors define the "true transsexual" as a male who from infancy conceived of himself as a girl. His stereotypical feminine behavior and tastes were almost always encouraged and reinforced by the family and labeled as feminine. It's not that the family felt it was alright for the little boy to play with dolls, for example, but rather that this child who plays with dolls and puts on mommy's high-heeled shoes is a girl. As this child grows up, he continues to think of himself as a girl, that is, he has a feminine gender identity that cannot be changed by psychoanalysis or any other treatments. The doctors say that usually the only resolution to his conflict is to change him genitally and hormonally. But this does not make even these woman-fearing doctors think that transsexuals are really women. It becomes clear reading the case histories of transsexuals that they themselves know that they are really men, unless they have completely gone off the deep end.

The issue has become confused because of being only partially explained in the media. The law and some people now recognize and accept transsexuals as women. The New York Times, even, which refuses to

call women Ms, refers to transsexual tennis player Renee Richards as she and her. The difference between having a feminine gender identity and actually being a woman is not generally understood. The issues of gender identity and transsexualism are much more complex than is usually discussed. Volumes and volumes have been written about transsexualism and gender identity: the development of gender identity, the etiology of transsexualism, etc. They are almost entirely put forth by men, reflecting men's perceptions or lack thereof.

What we are presenting here is a sketchy, but, we hope, a thought provoking introduction to the issues. Some women have told us that they are already sick of reading and thinking about transsexuals. We, too, wish that we could stop thinking about it. It is painful in the same way that it is painful to think about women in prison, battered wives, genetic control and rape, but we recognize that it is vital for the community at large to deal with these issues. Now that male transsexuals are tresspassing in Lesbian communities, we must deal with them before a trickle becomes an avalanche.

We think that every Lesbian group or community should read Stoller or any other of the books about transsexuals. Although these men have distorted ideas of masculine and feminine and, of course, of women. they are the ones defining transsexualism and creating treatment techniques.

Stoller talks about and cites examples of dozens of gender identity clinics and hundreds of doctors willing to perform transsexual surgery, doctors who will perform surgery on anyone who can pay the fee. There are thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of male to "female" transsexuals around today.

We need to develop more than just a gut reaction. We need information about transsexuals which, until now, in the women's movement, has been given to us by self-serving transsexuals and their all too sympathetic Lesbian supporters.

We are presenting here two conversations about transsexuals. One is a conversation between Liza and Edna Lerner, a psychologist who used to do counselling and testing of pre- and post-operative transsexuals. Although she is not a Lesbian, we decided to run this interview because we feel that it is important for Lesbians to be informed about the motives and methods of the medical establishment. Edna has strong views about transsexuals, many of which differ from those of her male colleagues. Although she shows a conventional acceptance of superficial and culture-bound sex-role stereotyping, her sense of women as being profoundly different from men is strikingly similar to our own.

We listened to the Edna tape with Janet Meyers and Alix Dobkin, after which we recorded the second conversation. Both conversations are edited. The tapes were transcribed by Connie Jasiewicz.

Interview

Edna: What I know about transsexuals is based on the fact that I tested quite a few of them. I tested more of them than anyone else, I think, at Payne Whitney. (A psychiatric hospital in NYC). That does not amount to so many. It amounts to, I would say, about thirteen or fourteen.

Liza: *That's all? I thought it was your full time job.*

Edna: Heavens, no. This is just one little pocket that turned up for a couple of years. A place gets a name for something and then a group comes, but transsexuals do not turn up by and large, and they do not get tested by and large. So this is quite a large group compared to most people.

I think the fascinating thing about it is that the ratio of males wanting the sex transformation to females wanting the sex transformation is about seven to one. And that is interesting and I think it is quite understandable because I do believe that women are more rooted in their bodies than men are. I think you have to be crazier as a woman to want to be physically a man, than a man has to be to want to be a woman, and I found that to be true. As a matter of fact I tested only one woman to man, and she was absolutely psychotic. Most of the things I know are about the males. Males to females. Have you read any of the literature?

Liza: *Only Dr. Money.*

Edna: Read Stoller, or Larry Kubie. Most of them believe that to be called a transsexual you have to know from the beginning that you are in the wrong body, that you are a woman trapped in a male body, and have to get out. There was one young man who castrated himself twice, they would just sew him up and send him home, and he would castrate himself again because he felt his testicles were poisoning him. I do not know if he ever got the operation because *who* gets the operation is so chancy.

There are good places, Johns Hopkins, which I think has given it up now, had for years a quite substantial program and a very careful program. What they did was to take very authentic case histories and they wanted to confine themselves to these men who knew from the beginning that they were in the wrong bodies. They

gave them psychological testing so that they could spot cross gender identity, men who really had a female identity.

Liza: *What did they consider a female identity?*

Edna: When you give them Rorschach tests and when you give them the whole battery of tests you can tell when people have this cross identity.

Liza: *What is the female identity according to these tests?*

Edna: According to these tests—for example: pronouns, they get their pronouns all scrambled. In the Rorschach they will see differences where there are no differences; likenesses where there are no likenesses. Most of us see our own sex as an identity first, transsexuals will almost always see the female sex. They will identify something that is ambiguous as a woman instead of a man, as most men do.

There are a group of men who are very sophisticated, aesthetic, who also use some of the things we *grossly* think of as feminine, but when it goes quite far, when they are constantly using words which describe textures, colors, perfumes and things like that, it is very unusual in a male in our culture.

Liza: *I think that if you accept that it means that you are a woman if you describe things in terms of colors or feelings, that means you are accepting sex role stereotypes.*

“ . . . I believe that people who think they can change their gender have an encapsulated delusional system.”

Edna: Men do see color, I did not say that men do not see color, color is affect. But if they describe lacy things and the sheen on satin and things that men are not ordinarily concerned with, you may consider it a stereotype but it is also true. If you took five hundred men, you would find that very few had that kind of response.

Liza: *But does that mean that they should have an operation to turn them into women?*

Edna: No, I'm not saying that they should ever have an operation. The ones who get the operation are the ones who feel they cannot live without it, and they are extremely depressed and desperate people.

So the first thing at Johns Hopkins,

they took the people who desperately wanted this, and who continued to want it over time, to whom it was not just some impulse where they thought it would solve their problems. They tested them and they singled out the ones they thought had a feminine identity.

Liza: *Do they still have to wear forms?*

Edna: Very often they do unless they are very active sexually. The ones I got either had had the operation and were coming for some other problem, often depression, or they were candidates just desperate to do anything to get it. And of the ones I saw, I only saw a couple who had known since they were young that they wanted to be women, and felt they were women in a masculine body, and only one of those seemed to me to be really legitimate. That was a young man who behaved exactly like an adolescent, hysterical girl. He cried when he was being tested and the tears would spurt out of his eyes and he had sort of an hysterical profile, which is more common with women than with men, and he was built very much like a woman. He was convincing as a woman. He was having a hard time getting it because he had no money. He was convincing to me, and he was in his lifestyle a homosexual, living with a man and he was committing himself to being totally exploited by a man. I found him an extremely touching man

who was not going to be any better off after the operation, but he felt that he was. But a number of the men I tested, some of them were functioning very well. And you would have to say they were not psychotic, except that I believe that people who think that they can change their gender have an encapsulated delusional system. That means that they are not psychotic the way most people whose reality testing is bad, whose judgment is bad and who are sort of across the board crazier, crazy in many ways. The transsexual's craziness is in this little narrowly defined place where they think that if they get rid of their penises and have the operation, they will be women, and I tested a number of those. Some of them were

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very convincing, but they did funny things and I meant to bring you one psychological on a 'woman' I found most interesting.

Liza: *A man or a woman?*

Edna: A man who became a 'woman.' This 'woman' really thought 'she' was a woman and 'she' looked like a woman. 'She' was a little younger than I am, but 'she' was an aging 'woman' and 'she' looked like one. 'She' did not have what many of them have, many of them are very narcissistic and look like *Vogue* models, and they have gotten up and

female activities. This person tried to be a librarian but 'her' striving was so great that 'she' rose to the top. 'She' found 'herself' put in charge of men whom 'she' had to fire, which made 'her' uncomfortable indeed, because there 'she' was back being in charge of men and doing things 'she' did not want to do.

'She' wanted to be in the conventional feminine role. 'She' wanted to be the kind of person who was told what to do, but in the end 'she' ended up an expert in some kind of very

Edna: No, I do not. I know psychiatrists who deal with them and who are called in to try to make the decision. These days some parents bring children in or young men in to try to make the decision. If you have a suicidal child who says this is the solution you would probably begin to consider it because there are people who live a reasonably decent life.

But this person I was talking about, for example, would say to me, "I've slept with more men than most women have. I've gone out with one hundred men, and I've slept with fifty." That is not the way women talk. Women are not quantitative, most women are not quantitative. On intelligence tests, here, too, people do not agree with me, but I know that it is true, even very bright women are apt to fail some of the quantitative questions, like how far is it from Paris to New York and what is the population of the United States. You can get Ph.D.s who cannot answer these questions. Numbers do not mean as much to women as the quality of an experience. So, I thought 'she' reflected 'her' essential masculinity here, too, by this emphasis, and by the fact that 'she' kept saying how bright 'she' was, what 'her' IQ score was, and what 'her' best friend's IQ score was, and how they were both members of Mensa, which is an organization that takes only high IQ people. It isn't the kind of thing that most women are preoccupied with.

The other group of them were very narcissistic, one of whom was very beautiful, absolutely striking, and very very crazy. 'She' had several operations, because 'she' was messed up on 'her' first operation and when I saw 'her,' 'she' had really moved into the psychotic realm, 'she' really thought that 'she' would have a baby. And at that point you are dealing with a group that is completely different. 'She' said to

"I can understand them invading the women's movement because I think this would be their equivalent to belonging to a women's club or identifying themselves as clearly and intensely as they could with a woman's world."

they spend all their time on their eyelashes and their clothes, and they are preoccupied to the point of obsession with how they look and how they come across as 'women.'

But this one was not, 'she' was like a woman woman. 'Her' head was beginning to stick forward like aging women do. 'She' was a little untidy and harried. 'She' had been extremely successful as a male. 'She' had been an extremely successful stockbroker, married and had three children and this did not hit 'her' until 'she' was almost thirty. I think it is the point at which many homosexuals realize that they are really homosexuals. They are living the wrong lives for themselves. I think that this was what this 'woman' was basically. I think that 'she' had tried to be a very conventional man and suddenly found it impossible, but was too constricted and too conventional and too old-fashioned in a way to be able to accept 'her' homosexuality and live a decent life, and therefore 'she' had to think 'she' really was a woman. So 'she' got this transformation and 'she' functioned very successfully. 'She' tried to enter a field which was as far away from stockbroking and male activities as 'she' could. That may account for some of the things these transsexuals you're talking about do (trying to become part of the Lesbian community). Because underneath, unless they are totally cracked they know this, so they throw themselves into these

masculine field of literature, computer expert or something like that. 'She' flew all over addressing these vast numbers of men. The masculinity was creeping back in a funny way. When 'she' started talking to me 'she' was very baby like, very genteel. At the end of two hours 'her' vocabulary had changed, 'she' was very much tougher and 'her' voice sank. That sort of substrate of the masculine was coming back again. I think that happens quite often. Therefore, I think that quite a large group of them, here is where I really disagree with Stoller and most of the analytic group, I think quite a number of them are homosexuals who cannot integrate their homosexuality in any way.

Liza: *But most of the doctors do not agree?*

Edna: No, they do not.

Liza: *What do they think?*

Edna: They think just what I told you.

" 'She' said to me, 'I have something for everyone, men fall in love with me and the women are attracted to me and don't know why.' "

What Stoller thinks. These are people who from the beginning feel trapped in the wrong body. That they are women trying to escape from this accidental masculine body.

Liza: *Do you know any of the doctors who have performed the operation?*

me, "I have something for everyone, men fall in love with me and the women are attracted to me and don't know why." 'She' killed herself eventually. I think if we kept track of it we would find that quite a number of them do because they pin their hopes on this.

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They feel, if only they could become women. This may be fed by all kinds of needs: 1) they are attracted to men and cannot accept it, 2) they want to be narcissistic and be taken care of. They cannot cope enough in the masculine world, they cannot manage it and their idea is if they are 'women', life is going to be easy. As we very well know that is not true, but they think it is and when they become "women" they find life is just as difficult as it was as a man, they get very depressed.

Liza: *Do they want more and more operations?*

Edna: No, after they have had the operation, if the operation is a success, they do not need more operations, but it so often does not work for them. They are not all beautiful women, after all. It is hard enough for women to find partners and for some of these really

“ . . . these days parents bring children in or young men in to try to make the decision.”

mixed up people if must be very difficult indeed. I can understand them invading the women's movement because I think this would be their equivalent to belonging to a woman's club, identifying as clearly and as intensely as they could with a woman's world. But to hear that they are attracted to women I find bizarre.

Liza: *Well, not only are the post operative ones calling themselves Lesbians, but it has reached such contortions that pre-operative transsexuals, who still have a penis, who have not had the operation, are calling themselves "women," calling themselves "Lesbians," and have lovers, but they are still really men.*

Edna: Do they have genital intercourse?

Liza: *That's what I am told.*

Edna: These people may have a feminine gender identity . . .

Liza: *I believe that they might think that they are women genuinely, and that they might have what we superficially consider feminine qualities, but I do not think that a man can be a woman. I think men and women are very different.*

Edna: So do I. I think one of the words you can use in describing this kind of thing is "discontinuities." Most of us have a kind of cohesiveness of physiological attributes and interest

and functions. The people you talk about are separating the two in a really peculiar way.

Liza: *Could you explain that?*

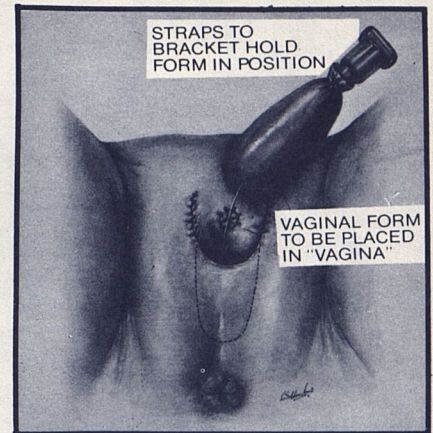
Edna: Well, you know a transsexual who feels that he is a "woman" and has a feminine gender identity, then moves to try to give himself a feminine body. In my mind that is psychotic but at least it is consistent. It is less psychotic than saying "I am a Woman" and waltzing around with a penis. Which is truly bizarre.

Liza: *They say they are pre-operatives and they have either not got the money or they have not passed the tests.*

Edna: Or they might not be going to do it. It is irreversible, and it is a scary thing. They may want the life and embeddedness of a female community without paying that final price.

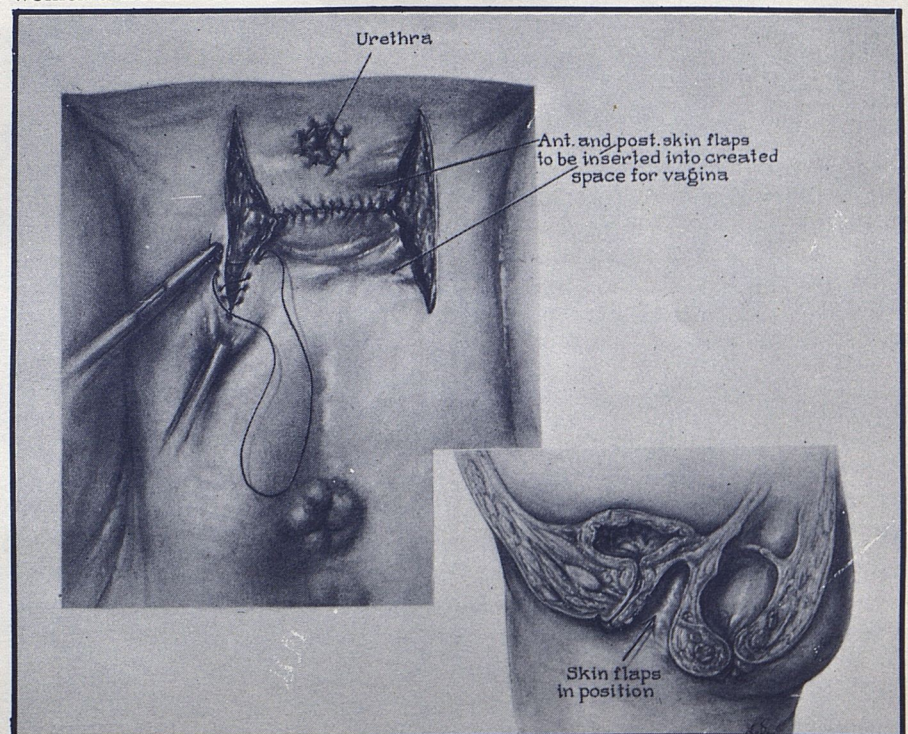
Liza: *It horrifies me that there are women who think that a woman is a man who calls himself a "woman" and does not have a penis. I think that it is shocking, it is frightening.*

Edna: I agree with you and I feel that I would have expected myself to be a big women's libber but I am not at all,



The preservation of the "vaginal" cavity is assured by the use of a suitable vaginal form.

because it took the wrong turn for me. I really believe women are different and that we have very special gifts that men do not have I think we are more intuitive, we have more connectedness, more relatedness to human beings and more relatedness to the root and blood of life. I think that men are spending their time building things and counting. The dumbest woman has some kind of tap into the root of life and that is what I really believe about women.



The skin flaps are sutured and placed in position in the "vaginal" cavity.

Conversation

Janet: What is so incredible is that a lot of Lesbians seem to be saying to transsexuals, "If this is the way you want to think about yourself, I guess I am obligated to participate in that illusion, because far be it from me to get on anyone's case, to make a judgment about the self-deception that you are involved in." That is what is so weird to me, what I find so scary about the way a lot of Lesbians have reacted to the transsexual issue. The attitude seems to be that however someone presents themselves, that is the way you are supposed to see them. You are supposed to suspend your perceptions of that person and completely accept, in some kind of mindless way, that person's evaluation of who they are. It seems to me that this is a very dangerous way of looking at the world and a very passive way of looking at the world. No distinction is made between respecting someone else and suspending your own perceptions. It is always tempting to be passive.

Liza: It is also very tempting to be generous. I think that a lot of Lesbians say they have gone through such a hard time being accepted as Lesbians and now these poor transsexuals are having such a hard time and here we are in the same boat, both oppressed by the same culture. If we recognize them as our sisters it helps everybody. It is very generous and I appreciate that in women, but it is really shortsighted.

Penny: It is misguided. The fact is that you have always in life to make distinctions and judgments. It is not in itself destructive to make a judgment, to make distinctions, to have a conception of right and wrong. Not just right and wrong, but to have any kind of values.

Liza: Especially in the women's movement, to have an understanding of what is male and what is female seems so basic an issue.

Alix: And yet some Lesbians accept transsexuals as women.

Janet: Most Lesbians come to the women's movement because they understand that there is something intrinsically *other* about being a woman and that is necessary for women to get together in order to understand what that means. To go from that,

which is the basis of your life, the basis of your politics, and say OK, I guess that's true, but there are these men who have somehow, by osmosis or something, have somehow absorbed what it means to be a woman, even though they have never been women.

Liza: But they say that they were born women.

Penny: The line is, "a woman's soul in a man's body."

Liza: What galls me so much is that we are just beginning to understand what it means to be a woman, really just beginning to be able to understand that

Phew!!

Dear Sister,

In regards to the Sandy Stone controversy: genetic women—Gennys—have never had to suffer the discrimination, self-hatred or fear that a transsexual must endure and survive in their lives. Genetic women are not ridiculed as severely, killed, tortured and arrested simply because they are transsexual, as are transsexuals. Genetic women have many rights, in comparison to transsexuals, who have none.

Genetic women cannot possess the very special courage, brilliance, sensitivity and compassion—and overview—that derives from the transsexual experience. Free from the chains of menstruation and child-bearing, transsexual women are obviously far superior to Gennys in many ways.

As some of you have discovered, because of the severity of the genocidal attitudes we must deal with all of our lives, many transsexuals have learned how to fight without giving any quarter or showing any mercy.

Genetic women are becoming quite obsolete, which is obvious, and the future belongs to transsexual women. We know this, and perhaps some of you suspect it. All you have left is your "ability" to bear children, and in a world which will groan to feed 6 billion by the year 2000, that's a negative asset.

Transsexual and very proud,
Angela Douglas
Berkeley

Reprinted from *Sister* August-September, 1977.

there is something different that we are not fully conscious of yet about what it means to be a woman, and these *men* say that *they* are women, meaning that they know what it means to be a woman, and they are it. And now they want to participate in defining and creating women's culture.

Janet: I think there is probably something to the point that this is preparatory to dispensing with women entirely. In that sense the transsexual issue concerns me but as far as whether they think they are women or not, or if they should be allowed to have the operation or not, I don't really care. I think that women, Lesbians, should be very clear about whether we really are willing to say that a man can go to another man, that some sort of technological exchange can go on between them, and then one of them will walk out of the room as a woman. If women are willing to say that these sort of hospital frat parties can produce sisters, I think that is really nuts. I can't believe that there is that response from Lesbians, even though I understand that it comes out of generous impulses.

Alix: Plus the unwillingness to make a stink about something, to be unpopular, to make enemies.

Liza: Very few feminist newspapers or magazines have said anything about it. It seems to be a closed issue. We know there are women all over the country who are very upset about it, but few say anything in public.

Janet: Men have gotten to the position where they are in the world, and the whole sexual equation that exists, has happened because women have, at least on some level, acquiesced, and have allowed men to control things. Transsexual operations are going to happen, whether women want them to or not, because they are transactions between two men. We have no control over male transactions at this point, but the issue of transsexuals in the Lesbian community exists completely because Lesbians have allowed it to.

Liza: There are lots of Lesbians who genuinely do not understand why this is a problem. The idea is, who cares? What is the difference if these men want to come in and say they are women? So what, it does not hurt us. It seems to me that the reason it is bad is that then it means you do not have an

understanding of what is male and what is female, and you don't understand that you have the right to be in a group that is all women. If somebody wants to have a friend who is a transsexual, that is her business but if she wants to hold an event for women only and have transsexuals come, then I object.

Alix: It makes one wonder about their basic assumptions. Maybe they think that women are totally a product of their environment and once women are treated equally we will be the same as men. I guess that's the analysis.

Liza: The Olivia analysis is that this man has given up his privileges, has cut off his penis and has a woman's soul, and so therefore is a woman.

Penny: But any man can say he has a woman's soul. There's no way to prove or disprove it.

Liza: To my mind the next logical step would be to say that what a woman is, is a man with no privileges and no penis. So where does that leave us but right back to what men tell us, that women are "inferior" men.

Janet: It is a very liberal idea. It is the accepted, reformist, feminist idea that it is really a question of conditioning.

Liza: It is also that somebody has renounced something, therefore he is equal to you.

Penny: He has come down. A man who has come down to a woman's level. All that prevents women from being men is being given the privilege of being men. If we had the privilege that men have, would we be men? No!

Liza: One of the reasons Olivia gave for working with Sandy Stone, their transsexual engineer, is that he has

If This Had Been a Woman They Would Have Locked Her Up

"... he appeared, ashen, looking in shock. He had just incised the base of his penis in the bathroom across the hall. When the emergency was resolved, he told of planning this exploit for weeks, having studied the anatomy of the genitals so as not to bleed to death inadvertently. He had hoped to force me—and thus our Medical Center—to provide him with an operation, although we do not have a program for such surgery.

Since he and I had always had a good relationship, I felt comfortable telling him I would not be blackmailed in this matter. He apologized for having done so but added that without the operation he would, regretfully, either blow up an airplane or poison the water supply of Los Angeles, both of which he may have been technically equipped to do. He also could barely resist running girls down in the street as they crossed to school. Not forgetting his paranoid propensities, I told him that on further consideration I could be blackmailed. This consisted in my condoning his dressing more in women's clothes, prescribing a progesterone derivative (with minimal feminizing effects), and standing aside benignly as he worked to save money and then, recently, arranged with a private surgeon for genital surgery."

from *Sex and Gender Vol. II, The Transsexual Experiment*
by Dr. Robert J. Stoller

renounced his privilege.

Penny: Because he has renounced being a man.

Liza: Therefore they trust him as a woman.

Alix: He has earned his womanhood.

Penny: By living as an oppressed transsexual he has become a woman.

Liza: And therefore the definition of a woman is someone who is oppressed. You understand each other through your oppression and that is the sum total of who you are, that you are oppressed. I think that this is very common in the Lesbian movement. You are so oppressed you must be a woman.

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