

LA FEMME SILHOUETTE

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A HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO CD'ING

Are CD's just tourists? Diane Frank has more to say regarding this shopworn analogy.

RECENTLY, I learned of someone (A sexologist who on further investigation turned out to be a female-to-male transsexual) comparing crossdressers with tourists. There is a certain amount of appeal in this analogy, and I've used it before myself. But I think extending the analogy is more useful. What other kinds of movement do people undertake that might be considered analogous to the various kinds of trans* people out there? I shared this idea recently on the *My Husband Betty* discussion boards, and I'd like to acknowledge Andrea for a couple of the ideas here.

What got me thinking about this analogy is our experience visiting Maine. In Maine there are four categories of people. The **Natives** or **Mainers** of course and in the context of crossing gender divisions that category is pretty clear. People assigned female at birth. There are also "**Impawhts**" or **Immigrants**. These could be considered the various categories of people who live full time in their target non-birth sex/gender. This part of the analogy can be further extended to **permanent residents** (legally changed names, hormones) versus **naturalized citizens** (sexual reassignment surgery). Depending on the story involved some transsexuals may be like **political refugees** or **displaced persons**, people whose lives would be in danger if they were to stay male, while others are more like **economic refugees** who come seeking a better life. Some might quibble about exactly where those lines are drawn.

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BIOLOGICAL OR CULTURAL OR?

*Elaine: School is back in session and the weeks assignment - read 180 pages of dense material detailing women's *unbelievably miserable* lives in the early modern period (roughly 1500 to 1750). This is Art History 322? Hmmm. The next day I dutifully dig in only find I'm stuck on one paragraph - of the introduction! I read and reread and reread it, synapses alight trying to process the information. Understanding it and yet certainly not completely. I present it here for your rumination.*

BUILDING on studies of women, some historians during the 1980s shifted their focus somewhat to ask questions about gender itself, that is, about how past societies fashioned their notions of what it means to be male or female. They distinguished between sex-physical or biological differences between men and women—and gender-socially constructed differences—noting, as the anthropologist Gayle Rubin put it, “far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities.” Historians studying gender often used and continue to use theories and methodology drawn from sociology, anthropology, and literary studies, and emphasize that gender structures and often contradictory, unstable, and frequently changing. This instability, combined with an emphasis on differences among women, has led a few historians to assert that there is really no category “woman” whose meaning is self-evident and unchanged over time. They note that what are usually described as biological differences between men and women are themselves influenced by ideas about gender, with a single gender polarity (man/woman) so strong in western culture that individuals born with ambiguous genitalia are generally simply assigned to one category or another. In this view, gender determines sex rather than the other way around, or better said, there is no such thing as true sex difference, only gender difference. Most scholars do not go quite this far, though they recognize that the boundaries between what is understood as “biological” sex and what is “cultural” gender are not always clear.

From: *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 2nd Edition* - by Merry E. Wiesner

Keep Transvestism for Transvestites!

By Becky EnVérité

"If you have a reason for doing it, you're not really a transvestite."

—From Becky's About Me

Over the last few months I've noticed an alarming trend. A lot of people, including some of my non-tranny friends, are *turning tranny*. Completely "normal" people with no previous transvestite tendencies are crossing over the borders to transvestism. Some claim they are unhappy and oppressed in their orientations of origin, but many appear to be lured by our nicer clothes, improved job prospects, better parties, and higher educational standards.

Now, I'm not given to prejudice, but I do feel, as a natural-born transvestite, that this influx of newcomers is leading to an inevitable watering down and fragmentation of the tranny community. Many of them don't even have a concept of the values and traditions that transvestites hold dear, such as guilt, purging, and self-delusion. Also, many of them show no desire to learn our language or customs. For example, there are already so-called transvestites living the lifestyle today that have *never been* to the *Way Out Club*.

So I say it's time to take a stand against this influx of Jenni-Come-Latelys! It's time to say enough is enough! It's time to make it clear to them that we've Done Our Bit and that **Transvestism is Full**.

Of course, I'm not proposing a *total* ban on new transvestites. Many

people have a legitimate claim to be a transvestite, and the community can gain from the skills they would bring. I'm just suggesting there should be stricter rules for the people we allow in from now on:

1. Every alternative lifestyle (including transvestism) should only have to accept a quota of *straight* individuals each year. Straight people seeking refuge should be allocated fairly amongst the non-straight communities. I am convinced that many straight refugees would be just as happy becoming (for example) a lesbian, given the right opportunities. It's only the perceived attraction of transvestism from afar that means we've taken an unfairly large share of the load in the past.

2. People who set out to reach transvestite status should be stopped and processed at the *first alternative lifestyle that they reach*. For example, a person who has arrived at "a little bit, you know, poofy" on their way to transvestism should be held there until the proper tests are completed to prove they have legitimate grounds for leaving straight.

3. Once people have proved that they have genuine need to become a transvestite, there should be a compulsory re-education program to integrate them fully into the community. This should incorporate a minimum 10-year closeting period, including at least 4 purge cycles. Only once the necessary levels of guilt have been instilled in the individual should they be allowed full transvestite status.

4. To maintain the transvestite economy at grass-roots level, during the first five years all new transvestites should be *required* to buy all their clothes at *Transformations*.

This may sound a little harsh, but I believe that allowing just anyone to become a transvestite is removing our exclusivity and destroying the one thing that makes transvestism an attractive prospect in the first place. So, please join me in my fight to keep transvestism for transvestites, and display the poster below in your window, at your work-place, or on your web site.

Thank you and good night.

Becky EnVérité. ■



Becky is a thirty-something transvestite living in King's Lynn, Norfolk, U.K.

And of course there are **Tourists**, who come for a few days, gawk and leave. **Tourists** do things like see the sights, stop in for dinner and buy a souvenir or two. They might remember the hotel keeper's name. And of course, the **Natives** can observe them. I think this that this analogy isn't far off in describing the behavior and goals of many crossdressers who leave the house.

But most crossdressers are **Armchair Tourists**, reading about the travels of others and never setting foot outside their native land. The travel of others is something we often provide for the **Armchair Tourist** here in our newsletter.

Andrea added another category of tourist, one we don't like to talk about but clearly is part of the mix - the **Sex Tourist**. From my observations of the internet, a lot of crossdresser's behavior is strongly analogous to the **Sex Tourist**.

There is one more category of people not native to Maine: **Summer Visitors**. **Summer Visitors** stay for extended periods of time. They come back to one place. They know the local residents, patronize local businesses regularly and participate in local civic affairs. They incur obligations to the local community. They do however, have homes and lives elsewhere. They may take working vacations, but their time in Maine isn't the principle focus of their lives. They could perhaps take their extended summer breaks somewhere else.

A similar category (thanks again Andrea), is **Commuter**. **Commuters** have regular schedules on which they shuttle back and forth between one community and another. (Work and home for example) Their stays can be longer or shorter, but they are heavily invested in activities at both ends of the commute and need them in order to survive. Losing the job or a home is often a traumatic disruption of their lives.

Having considered the analogies of **Summer Visitor** and **Commuter**, I'm not entirely sure anymore which I fit into. There is a certain amount of regularity to my visits to *Women's Country*. But I like to think that I could survive without such journeys and not have it be a major disruption in my life. I cherish the relationships I've built in my time spent there. I would not willingly abandon them. But I don't think it would be as bad as losing a house or a job. So I'll stick with **Summer Visitor**, and leave others to describe themselves as **Commuters**.

Diane

[From the Archive]

La Femme Silhouette – July 1998

Elaine: We had a spirited roundtable discussion on female role models - past and present - at our last meeting. As a result I know these words - from our current chair, Gloria, to her spouse, Kathleen - are as true today as they were seven years ago.

THE WIND BENEATH MY WINGS

There probably isn't anyone who knows the depth of my commitment to Alpha Omega any more than Kathy. She knows all about the hours I've spent writing articles and hoping they just might mean something to somebody -- at least once in awhile.

She knows that from the early morning hours until after we get home on a meeting day, that my heart, mind, and soul are so concentrated on doing everything I can to make that particular meeting special for everybody -- even when I haven't been an officer.

She knows that I try to always speak to everybody at a meeting to let them know how glad I am that they are there, because I do care that they took the time to be a part of my life for that moment.

She knows that I try to make myself available to anyone who wants or needs to talk, at any time - because I know what it is to not have somebody to listen.

She knows that I like to have fun and make people smile, because I like to share happiness - there's been far too many sad times in my life.

She knows that I have tried to have others get to know Martin because for a majority of the time, it is he who the world sees. He is a part of my life as I am of his. I want others to know him as a person as they know me. It took too many years to find pride in being Martin and Gloria -- I don't want to lose a moment of that good feeling.

She knows the times I have felt frustrated because I couldn't find words to put on paper, or I felt that somehow I had failed to help someone. I don't like feeling as though I have failed.

Kathy also knows that the things I do, or at least try to do, are not driven by personal ego. What really matters is that the spirit of friendship and understanding that is the "soul" of Alpha Omega remains fresh and alive for everyone who is a part of our group, and also for all those we have yet to meet.

Just as others make it possible for us to find Alpha

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*Elaine: At six feet, bare-footed - and three to four inches taller in heels - I stand out when presenting in public no matter how sedately I dress. Do I get second looks? Yes. Am I self-conscious about it? Very. So I took more than passing interest in this recent New York Times - Style Magazine, presentation titled "Girl Watching - In New York, someone is always making an entrance."
Photographs by Bruce Gliden, Model - not identified.*



Omega, and begin to discover our total being, it is our duty to keep that door open for another.

When I first met Kathy there was just something about her that I knew was special. I can't really describe it, other than to say it was like knowing that if you were a part of her life, that she cared about you. It is a spirit that I, as Gloria, have tried to share with those in my life. Kathy is very much my hero. Without even saying a word, she can look at me and affirm that in spite of all my flaws, that she is proud of me as Martin and as Gloria.

As Alpha Omega was a part of my life when we met, she chose to let it be a part of hers as well, and has given her commitment for the good of others. For nine years now, Kathy has been a part of my growth as Gloria. She has been a foundation to build on, a rock to lean on, and a strength to depend on.

She is the wind beneath my wings so that my life has found meaning. She has been an inspiration for me as Gloria. And, hopefully, maybe there has been something I may have said or done at some time that may have helped another to lift their spirit, and find who they are.

It is something that I must try to do, for as long as I can.

Gloria Sue Fenton

[Last Laugh]

George gets some feedback from a friend



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Outreach ♣ Diane Frank
Newsletter Editor ♣ Elaine Suede

CONTACT INFORMATION

E-MAIL ADDRESS ♣ info@aosoc.org
WEB SITE ♣ <http://www.aosoc.org>
WEB MISTRESS ♣ Diane Frank
dsfrank@hotmail.com

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The Alpha Omega Society is a non-profit social support group for heterosexual crossdressers and their wives or partners. Our membership is open to all who share this focus. Also, members from related organizations, helping professionals, and approved guests are welcome when cleared through Alpha Omega's officers may attend meetings.

Meetings are the second Saturday evening of each month unless a special event is scheduled that takes the place of the regularly scheduled meeting. The location of the meeting or event is only released to members or others with the approval of an officer. Members and visitors must be 18 years of age or older. We will exchange newsletters with any other similar group. Send all correspondence to The Alpha Omega Society, P.O. Box 2053, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054, or email us at officers@aosoc.org