

Divided Sisterhood

A Critical Review of Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*

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CAROL RIDDELL'S CRITIQUE OF JANICE RAYMOND'S *The Transsexual Empire*, published in pamphlet form within a year of the appearance of Raymond's book, is an important early expression of transgender feminism. It helps demonstrate to both transgender and nontransgender audiences that feminism, rather than being inescapably hostile to transgenderism, can support a broad range of positions.

Riddell's title, *Divided Sisterhood*, effectively turns on its head one of Raymond's central accusations—that male-to-female transsexuals “divide” feminist women with unproductive squabbles over the question of who is, and who is not, a woman—by suggesting that Raymond herself is guilty of creating this division by making an issue of transgender inclusion in lesbian, feminist, and women's groups.

Riddell faults Raymond for presenting a picture of transsexualism that is empirically false; as, for example, when Raymond contends that power-mad male doctors at Gender Identity Clinics are desperate to perform “sex change” surgery on zombie-like transsexuals who will be programmed to infiltrate women's culture. Riddell, citing her own experience, counters that most physicians at gender clinics are very uncomfortable with transsexual requests for surgery. It is in writing cogently about her own experiences, in her own voice, that Riddell makes her greatest contribution to the literature on transgenderism—she demonstrates, at a time when transsexualism was considered by most people to be both politically reactionary and emotionally disturbed, that a transsexual point of view can be both progressive and rational.

1. INTRODUCTION

I began hearing rumours of a book published in the United States attacking trans-sexuals. Oh, no, not another... A friend saw it in a bookstore in San Francisco; ‘horrible’, she said on the phone. Some feminists in this country started to talk of it, and extracts were published in the ‘Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter’. I ordered a copy from the States. Better the devil you know. A brilliant and detailed critical review from the Feminist Review section of the *New Women's Times* came my way (1). At last the local Mersey-side Women's Paper gave me the book for review. Can I bear to touch it? But it is highly recommended—the cover and title page have eulogies from a well-known male sociologist. At the back are praises from intellectual feminists. Now I've read the book, and I think it is as my friend in America described. I feel, however, that the discrepancies between our views and those of the authorities need some explaining. The problem is not just the complete misconception of the causes of trans-sexualism that Ms. Raymond demonstrates, but of her whole method of approach

to feminist analysis. This I believe has implications of concern to all feminists. In exposing such a method, it is difficult not to be tempted to score points against the book's many contradictions, or to descend into the mire of linguistic philosophizing with which Ms. Raymond is involved in chapter 6 and elsewhere. In the interests of communication, and because I think forms of expression themselves are influenced by a patriarchal system, I've tried to avoid the temptations as far as I can.

To begin with, it's useful to get some perspective on the problem of trans-sexualism in numerical terms. As a specific problem, it gets much more attention than it deserves, because of its very rarity. In the United States live some 205,000,000 people. Among them are perhaps 4,000 post-operative trans-sexual women and men (2), and perhaps as many more who want the operation but who haven't the money or the information to get it. That is, one trans-sexual for every 25,625 people who are not seeking sex 'change'. In Britain, there are 55,000,000 people, and a few hundred trans-sexuals. In the British women's movement, there seem to be 2 trans-sexuals, in the United States, maybe a dozen or so. It's important to remember this when considering Ms. Raymond's more fantastic scenarios, 'One hypothesis that is being tested in the trans-sexual laboratories is whether or not it is possible for men to diminish the number of women and/or to create a new 'breed' of females', scenarios that are not only the result of a mis-formulation of the problem, but reveal a state of paranoia about the situation with which I refuse to associate my own fears. Trans-sexuals are not a major social problem. We have some curiosity value to the media as freaks. This occasionally results in incredibly naive statements from trans-sexuals conned by publicity, which can be incredibly irritating to feminists, but trans-sexual women are not now, nor ever will be, a threat to the female sex's existence (3).

In the first section I have tried to outline, without comment, Ms. Raymond's main lines of argument, so readers who haven't read her book can have an idea of what I'm talking about, and so those who have can judge if I've understood it as they do. In the second, I've tried to show why she is wrong. In the third, I've sketched a few features of the trans-sexual *experience*, as I and other trans-sexuals I've known have lived it. This is to try to provide an antidote to Ms. Raymond's method, which denies not only any validity to the trans-sexual experience, but also to the experience of people who know and accept trans-sexuals for what we are. Finally, I've criticised the methods Ms. Raymond uses in a more general way, as representing a frightening and dangerous trend in feminism.

I know that in publishing this critique I make myself publicly visible. Ms. Raymond denies my existence as a woman, and believes that the aim of trans-sexual feminists is to seek publicity and, as agents of the patriarchy infiltrated into the women's movement, to sow dissension into it. As a trans-sexual woman and a feminist, I neither seek publicity, nor am I an agent of patriarchy. But my right, and that of other trans-sexual women and men to exist is threatened by this book. Also, the uncontested use of elitist and dogmatist methods, which in themselves reveal internalised maleness, is a threat to the feminist movement, as more and more groups of women are singled out as 'inadequate' by the standards the dogmatists propose. I have to try to answer the book.

2. AN OUTLINE OF THE MAIN ARGUMENTS OF 'THE TRANS-SEXUAL EMPIRE'

Ms. Raymond makes her position absolutely clear. Trans-sexual women 'are not women. They are *deviant males*.' Trans-sexual men are not men, but women. The first, basic underlying cause of trans-sexualism is the sex stereotyping system in a patriarchy, '... a patriarchal society and its social currents of masculinity and femininity is the First Cause of trans-sexualism.' Thus trans-sexuals exhibit one form of response to the same problems that women face in a patriarchal society. 'Like trans-sexuals, many women have felt hatred of their bodies and (sic) its functions, and have found themselves in a psychically disjointed state because they could not accept their role... feminists have become social critics and have organized, as feminists, around issues of sexism and sex-role oppression.'

The major secondary cause of trans-sexualism, it is argued, is the medical speciality which has grown up around the performance of trans-sexual operations. This is the trans-sexual empire. Not only surgeons, but psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, deportment instructors, speech therapists, electrologists and the like have formed powerful teams, sometimes using national funds, which enable the fulfillment of the wish. Trans-sexualism is, apart from scattered historical myths, a new phenomenon, dating from the growth of the trans-sexual operators in the fifties. These medical specialists, since they cannot create real women, attempt to create pastiches, which are characterized by being trained into being models of the kind of women men would like to see. The gender identity clinics therefore act as reinforcers of patriarchally defined stereotypes. They are already beginning to 'treat' children in some places, attempting to cure them of 'incipient' trans-sexual leanings, i.e. to get them to conform to existing, prescribed ways of behaviour. They may develop to become 'gender enforcers' for the re-adjustment of those who deviate, quite apart from trans-sexuals. The apparent existence of trans-sexual *men* is, in fact, a subterfuge, for the real purpose is to subordinate women. Trans-sexual men are 'the tokens that save face for the trans-sexual empire' (p. 27). They make it appear that a universal problem is involved, when there is actually a problem of control. Furthermore, trans-sexually operated men could potentially have been woman-identified women, and are thus lost to feminism. (Woman-identified women are women who are committed to women in every way)

Biologically, the basic indicator of sex is the chromosomal pattern, XX (female), XY (male). Since these cannot be changed, no person can change sex in reality. All that can be done is various procedures to simulate a biological state that is chromosomally denied. If there were no stereotypical behaviours prescribed by patriarchy for either sex, trans-sexuals could behave as they liked (subject to some general morality, of course), and would not have to have operations. Thus a moral (I would say, political) problem is created within our society, and transformed by the gender identity clinics into a medical one, one of 'adjustment', in this case physical as well as social. These medical procedures are used for patriarchy as a means of social control of gender stereotypes, which act in the interests of men.

Ms. Raymond outlines the various theories that have been put forward by the sex researchers to account for trans-sexualism. They fall into two categories, ante-natal—inadequate hormonal stimulation of the foetus has led to the brain being 'predisposed' towards female or male behaviour in opposition to male or female biology—and post-natal. These argue that abnormal features of early socialization are responsible. Typically, the responsibility for creating both male and female trans-sexuals is laid on the shoulders of the mother. The sex researchers always phrase the problem in terms of the trans-sexuals' need. They assert that gender identity is immutably fixed by the age of 18 months. They then argue that it is therefore right to accept a person's belief as to their gender identity. In Ms. Raymond's view, what such arguments actually allow is the legitimization of medical experimentation to produce 'synthetic' females, geared to male conceptions of 'proper' femaleness. Add to this the possibility of extra-natal conception, and Ms. Raymond has a nightmarish vision of a future in which biological women might become redundant.

In the present time, the people 'created' by what Ms. Raymond calls a process of 'male mothering' are unfortunate hybrids, neither female, nor male, dependent on the male medical establishment for their existence. When interviewed (Ms. Raymond talked with thirteen trans-sexual women and mentions a book by Thomas Kando who interviewed seventeen others), trans-sexual women present highly stereotypical notions of female behaviour, nor do those interviewed appear to experience the 'role-strain' of normal women (4). This indicates that they are not really women, but propagandists for male-defined images of women, not only in their words, but in their very existence. Trans-sexual women writers demonstrate this as well, particularly Jan Morris, whose 'female' self is a mirror image of a stereotypical male (5).

However, some few transsexual women have attempted to escape this stereotyping by becoming involved, as lesbian=feminists, in the women's movement. In Ms. Raymond's view, their position is even worse than that of other trans-sexuals. No trans-sexual woman has had the full experience of socialization as a woman, which other women have. She is chromosomally XY. There can be no question of her being accepted as a woman and allowed access to feminist spaces. Trans-sexual lesbian-feminists can only 'play the part' (p. 103). But the trans-sexual woman in the women's movement has an even more sinister role. 'As the (trans-sexual woman) exhibits the attempt to possess women in a bodily sense while acting out the images into which men have moulded women, the (trans-sexual woman) who claims to be a lesbian feminist attempts to possess women at a deeper level, this time under the guise of challenging rather than conforming to the role and behaviour of stereotyped femininity' (p. 99). Although the trans-sexual woman has no penis, in the feminist movement 'her whole presence becomes a 'member' invading women's presence and dividing us once more from each other' (p. 104). When real men decide that the women's movement needs containing, they will be able to use these pseudo-women as their agents (p. 106). Thus it is a matter of important principle that trans-sexual women are excluded from feminist spaces. Women who don't accept this—for instance the collective of Olivia, the women's record company, who have a trans-sexual woman among them—are exhibiting some or all of the following confusions. Liberalism, in not wanting to be intolerant; gratitude, that one of the ruling sex has renounced privileges; naiveté, in not realizing what is going on as Ms. Raymond sees it: still retaining elements of male identification by being fearful of being called man-haters, and still subject to the attraction of the male persona (p. 112–3). Not only does the trans-sexual feminist 'perform total rape' (p. 112), but lesbian feminists who accept trans-sexually constructed lesbian feminists as other selves are mutilating their own reality (p. 119).

By allowing trans-sexuals to resolve their problems by medical means, the sex researchers are denying them the right to challenge the patriarchal stereotyping system which ultimately creates them. Trans-sexual surgery is a form of behaviour modification and control which is allowed conditionally, an trans-sexuals accepting and learning to present themselves in terms of patriarchally approved stereotypes. It follows typical male patterns in that it fetishises forms, artificial vaginas, removed organs. The trans-sexual is inherently masochistic, and the 're-birth' experience reported by some trans-sexuals after operation is equivalent to total orgasm, and irresistibly tempting when offered (p. 139, 144). Reports of greater happiness by 90% of trans-sexuals after operation are quite superficial, and cannot be set against the drug dependency, stereotyped personality, and physical health risks involved. The practice of trans-sexual surgery, in its blindness to the wider human ethics of the trans-sexual problem, has parallels to the Nazi experimentation in concentration camps, as Ms. Raymond describes at some length, where people were subjected to barbaric tortures in the name of 'medical science'. She notes at the end that the practices are not equivalent.

Finally, the problem is presented by Ms. Raymond in more philosophical terms. The trans-sexual state after operation is an inadequate mode of being. It substitutes a superficial integration for a total human integrity, which would accept the body-mind unity, and alter the conditions giving rise to conflict, rather than mutilating the body. Trans-sexualism operates at best on a principle of *androgeny*. This merely adds up qualities thought to be masculine and feminine. Trans-sexuals therefore combine bits and pieces of physical and social qualities that maleness and femaleness are supposed to have in patriarchy. The ways they do this in no way transcend the problem of dis-satisfaction with one's gender, but makes trans-sexuals unsatisfactory pastiches, even if they feel themselves to be satisfied with the result. Ms. Raymond lists seven rhetorical questions to give the essence of these arguments:

1. Is the price of individual satisfaction individual role conformity and the enforcement of social role stereotypes?

2. Is trans-sexuals' capacity for social protest and criticism restricted by their operations, and other treatment?
3. Are false opposites integrated to create a sense of trans-sexual well-being?
4. Are larger possibilities of being restricted by defining well-being in terms of bodily features?
5. Are trans-sexuals violating their bodily eco-systems so that they damage themselves physically? (e.g. by being liable to cancers)
6. Is trans-sexual surgery creating medically dependent people?
7. Is trans-sexual surgery a male conception of happiness, an attempt by men to bypass the creative energies of women by artificial means?

I believe the answer to all these questions is, in fact, no, and I have tried to explain why in the second and third sections, without dealing with them one by one.

In spite of her arguments, Ms. Raymond does not feel that trans-sexual operations should automatically be legislated out of existence. The first thing is to legislate against sex role stereotyping, the real cause of trans-sexualism. The proliferation of gender-identity clinics should be stopped; counselling and consciousness raising techniques should be used, which focus upon the restrictive aspects of trans-sexualism for true integrity in human personhood. Ms. Raymond does not wish to be regarded as treating the 'anguish and existential plight' of trans-sexuals unsympathetically (6).

No short summary can do total justice to any complex presentation of views, but I have tried to outline the major arguments she presents in reasonable terms.

Misgendering

*How can I blame you for
for mistrusting me?
Strive as I may
to adopt the symbols that legitimate your own oppressed existence
I am a poor imitation.*

*The surface of your mind
accepts me — sister, she;
it is from the deeper reaches that rebellion comes.
Intuitively
at unguarded moments
the tongue forms the pronoun of mistrust —
'He is there; I'll call him.'
Stabbing, stiletto, sharp.*

*How can I blame her?
An insidious enemy, man.
Omnipresent,
in my form
he is a spy, an outpost of the counterblows to come.
How many forms have men assumed?
How many ruses?*

*And yet,
there may be another truth yet.
Could it be that that identity is yours
years caught up in a facade, a screen of self protection?
Learning the oppressor's role.*

*your outpost in his camp;
home, strange, from afar at last.*

*There is no way to tell.
But since the surgeon's liberating knife
defies return, with multiple interventions in the brain,
your choice defines me —
Sister? Alien?*

1974.

3. A CRITIQUE OF 'THE TRANS-SEXUAL EMPIRE'

As I read through Ms. Raymond's book, I experienced anger, constant irritation, and a lot of bitterness. I scribbled pages of critical notes. Reading it doesn't seem at the moment to hurt me personally, because it is all so far removed from who I am and what I'm about in this world. But I know that its publication will make my personal space in the women's movement more problematic, make it less easy for me to trust women who don't know me well, and vice versa, as well as making things harder for pre-operative and post-operative trans-sexuals in general. It is this knowledge that causes my bitterness. It makes me feel that, in spite of Ms. Raymond's claims of sympathy to the 'existential plight' of trans-sexuals, and her use of the conventional model of formal scholarship, which enables her not to present her emotions clearly, she actually experiences hatred and fear when thinking about trans-sexuals. These feelings are closest to the surface when she writes of the minuscule number of trans-sexuals who are involved in the women's movement.

How to order the innumerable points of disagreement which spin in my head? I think it's best to start by considering the method that she uses. Janice Raymond's proposition that the first cause of trans-sexualism is the patriarchal gender system, which she states again and again throughout the book, has the force of an axiom. The possibility that trans-sexualism might have other background causes is unacceptable, and unconsidered by her. The method of the book is thus dogmatic; theological in the worst sense. When one believes firmly, without the possibility of doubt, that a particular explanation is responsible, then there is no way that what we actually experience as happening, as human beings, can challenge that explanation. Actual experience has to be denied, distorted or ignored in order to fit in with the theory. Having started in this way, it is easy to present more and more arguments that seem to follow logically from the first. Each of them is equally unchallengeable. Ms. Raymond sees the patriarchal gender role system as responsible for her oppression as a woman, and extends that explanation to cover trans-sexualism as well. I tend to think that the *structure* of patriarchy is the crucial factor in women's oppression, i.e. the sexual division of labour which centres women's primary existence around the bringing up of children and the servicing of people, and men's about the production of things. The sex role system is a consequence of this (7). But the difference isn't central here (see section 4). Ms. Raymond further defines trans-sexualism as a creation of the sexist medical establishment. I think that in order to establish or refute these propositions, it would be valuable to look at; the history of trans-sexualism prior to the 1950s, and its cultural extent, which Ms. Raymond *defines* out of existence; something of the background of the development of the gender identity clinics themselves, which Ms. Raymond ignores and the significance of trans-sexual men which she has to deny, for their existence refutes her axiom that trans-sexualism is a creation of man, for 'men'. Her arguments remind me of some Marxists, who, accepting hetero-sexuality as 'given', define homo-sexuality as an aberration of class society, which will wither away in the new, socially-just state. Similarly, in a gender role free society, Janice Raymond argues that trans-sexualism would not exist, because anybody's behavioural desires could be expressed in whatever way they wanted, so changing sex wouldn't matter.

Ms. Raymond's method also makes criticism impossible, except on matters of detail. Since, by definition, trans-sexual women are not women, and trans-sexual men are not men, our arguments, which are based on the fact that we *are* women or men, are invalidated from the start. Sex researchers who attack her are trying to uphold patriarchy, so their arguments are invalid. Women who have lived with, and experienced trans-sexual women as the women they are, are, by definition, deluded. Since the writer of this pamphlet is not me, but someone defined away as a male excrescence, raping the women's movement, with the purpose of sowing dissent, no arguments I present need be considered (p. 112). The implications of this kind of axiomatic, dogmatic thinking for the women's movement as a whole are really terrible, and are discussed in the final section.

A second criticism on the level of method is that, while attacking the particular aims of the sex researchers, general propositions of patriarchal scientific ideology are quite uncritically adopted. So the boundaries of existence are rigidly defined by biological criteria of body and cell structure, or by learned behaviour derived from social interaction. In other words, we are only what male science tells us that we may be. Women as a whole have never accepted that rational male scientism, ideological product of 18th and 19th century capitalist development, told the whole truth about existence. We are still discussing now women's own more unified knowledge, which, in the west, was destroyed with the witch hunts (8). Now, even male writers from within science are challenging the assumptions of their disciplines, which are seen as restricting enquiry, and arguing that subtle energy forces exist which are at levels behind biology (9). Ms. Raymond attacks the sex researchers for assuming that biology and socialization are destiny (ch. 2), but she assumes just that herself. 'It is biologically impossible to change chromosomal sex, and *thus* the trans-sexual is not really trans-sexed' (p. 126). 'Women take on the self-definition of feminist and or lesbian because that definition truly proceeds from not only the chromosomal fact of being born XX, but also from the whole history of what being born with those chromosomes means in this society' (p. 116), i.e., biology plus socialization equals destiny. By abandoning this kind of determinism, other causes of trans-sexualism become feasible. The past life experiences of trans-sexual women are not the same as those of men. Nor are they the same as those of other women. But responsible feminists with political credentials at least as good as Ms. Raymond's, do not find this a bar to accepting us. These aspects are discussed further in the next section.

The third problem of Ms. Raymond's method is that she uncritically accepts the male academic establishment's separation of personal feelings and factual presentation. I do not believe that people's feelings can or ought to be ignored in understanding the things they write about. At least they influence the manner in which things are presented. I think it is possible to divine from the text that Janice Raymond feels deeply threatened and scared by the idea of trans-sexualism. This comes out most clearly in her chapter on trans-sexual women in the women's movement, who are trashed in the bitterest terms as rapists and energy stealers, male agents who sow dissention among women. In fact, the very tiny number of trans-sexual women in the women's movement are quite well integrated into their women's groups, sharing energy with other sisters, and being accused of nothing by the women who associate with them. We only become visible as a result of attacks from women who see trans-sexualism as an abstract problem which they can abstractly, regard as an extension of patriarchy. The opposition to Sandy Stone, for instance, a trans-sexual woman in the Olivia women's record collective, did not come from the women who worked with her, lived with her, knew her and loved her, but from women who did not know her at all. I want to know where Janice Raymond is *coming from* about trans-sexuals. If one compares 'The Trans-sexual Empire', say with, 'Of Woman Born', Adrienne Rich uses poetry and personal experience as an integral part of her arguments, whereas Janice Raymond does not admit to any feelings. This attitude just follows the false male division between reason and emotion. If Ms. Raymond sorted out her feelings about trans-sexuals, it might lead her to want to write in a different way.

So the Trans-sexual Empire sets out to 'prove' something which it has already assumed, allows nothing but male scientific limits for its determination of gender identity, and uses a method which denies us the right to know what she is really feeling.

Janice Raymond attacks the sex researchers as evil-intentioned instruments of patriarchal sex role coercion. While I agree with everything she says in attacking the attitudes they adopt, she gives them too much importance. I personally, from experience of the London 'gender identity clinic', cannot accept her idea that they are the experimental precursors of a new artificial replacement of biological women (e.g. p. 168), as being anything more than a paranoid fantasy. The fact of the matter is that the Gender identity clinics were not regarded with favour by most of the medical patriarchy. They were established and exist against the opposition of the most patriarchal and respectable elements of the medical profession, men who regard trans-sexualism as an even more disgusting aberration than Janice Raymond does, if possible. Their reasons, however, are diametrically opposed to Ms. Raymond's, since for them, trans-sexualism seems to threaten the natural order of things. The clinics developed under the intense and unremitting pressure of trans-sexuals, who would go to any length to obtain an operation, and for whom no treatment was satisfactory, other than operation. They did *not* develop as a natural extension of the patriarchy, but, like all marginal institutions, they strove to justify themselves by their conformity—hence all the ghastly gender—amendment training which trans-sexuals have to suffer. In Britain a few years ago, there were at least three centres doing operations under the national health service. Now there is only one. In the States, they form a *tiny* part of the medical establishment. However horrific their gender conformity programmes are to trans-sexuals, I think they are quite insignificant when compared to the thousands of gynaecologists, with equally sexist opinions, who are mutilating women with breast inserts (500,000), hysterectomies, caesarian sections (50% in some Los Angeles hospitals, apparently) and performing other atrocities on women's personhood. Further, what about the psychiatric patriarchs, who, when they are not relating to human distress by pumping patients full of drugs, and excoriating them with electric shocks, are wheeling round the make-up trays, encouraging women to that conformity to male-defined conceptions of female 'nature' that were responsible for most of them arriving in the hospitals in the first place (10). The real empire is the whole patriarchal medical establishment. To call the trans-sexual medics an 'empire', is to inflate their significance.

Janice Raymond denies a significant history for trans-sexualism before the 1950s, since her theory demands that. But such a history does exist, and a brief outline is available in a book she cites from, *The Trans-sexual Phenomenon* (11). This demonstrates clearly enough that trans-sexuals, *of both sexes*, have existed in all historical periods, and in cultures from all continents. When something has that range of time and culture spread, I think it is important to accept the possibility that explanations other than sex-role disorientation of deviant males are at work. Trans-sexual men are smaller in numbers than trans-sexual women, but they exist, they are equally determined about themselves, and they are not the token creation of the patriarchy's representatives in gender identity clinics. To say that they are is to deny them any humanness, any sense of personal identity at all, and to turn them into the passive agents of sexist manipulators. A trans-sexual man I know used to be in the women's movement and talked about his situation there. He received tremendous encouragement to go on living as a woman, and every opportunity to adopt non-sex stereo typed behaviour within the limits of his biological sex. He has now come out as the man he always knew himself to be, and is active in the men's movement. On Janice Raymond's terms he has no right there. The fact that there appear to be smaller numbers of trans-sexual men than trans-sexual women is not really relevant, since they are in no way tokens of the male medical establishment, as Ms. Raymond has to assume them to be. But there are many possible reasons, some of which have been pointed out by Karen Hagberg (note 1). The female state is generically primary, so possibly more anomalies occur in the differentiation process to maleness. The

operation is more costly and complex and less satisfactory. In addition, aspects of the socialization of women involve learning acceptance. Trans-sexual men have been conditioned as women. This makes it that much more difficult to take the active steps necessary to realize their true identity (12).

Nowhere in her book does Ms. Raymond give any accounts of trans-sexual life experience. She interviewed 15 trans-sexuals, two of them men, the rest women. The only place she gives any information about these individuals is in the section which shows that trans-sexual women conform to sexual stereotypes. None of them emerges as a real person with a biography. No sensitive or caring collective account of the life experience of trans-sexuals, either pre-operative or post-operative, is presented. Instead, the most damning quotations possible are put together. Sometimes totally irrelevant information is presented as if it made a point. In order to 'demonstrate' that trans-sexuals in the women's movement commit total mind-body rape, Ms. Raymond quotes at length from an obviously cynical and meant-to-be-funny story in, of all places, *Penthouse* magazine. I consider that to be dishonest, and her individualised attacks on trans-sexual women in the women's movement morally indefensible. (13). It is little wonder that the picture of the trans-sexual that emerges is a static caricature. There is no suggestion that people's attitudes might change. It is clear that pre- and immediately postoperative trans-sexuals show highly stereotyped attitudes about how they, as women or men, ought to be. I will deal with the case of trans-sexual women. Because of our biology, we were, usually, brought up as male children, forced to live as men in order to survive, and therefore developed ideas of what the actuality of women's existence is, that were seen through male identity blinkers. This distorted view was reinforced in many cases, by obligatory sexist counselling in order to be able to get operations, and demands that we conform if we were to get an operation. No wonder a lot of disturbed people emerge at the end. Pre- and immediately post-operative trans-sexuals are often very confused, and not easy to get on with. But women's oppression is not merely the consequence of a set of historical experiences. It is an existential condition, an oppression that is re-created from day to day by the lives that women have to lead, the opportunities open to us, the attitudes presented to us. This is as true for trans-sexual women as for any others. Excited from the achievement of something that involved a lifetime's struggle unaware of the male stereotypes that have formed their ideas of femaleness reinforced in those stereotypes by crudely patriarchal gender identity clinics—it is hardly to be expected that women like these will present a challenge to male sexist ideology about women's existence. Ms. Raymond cites extensively from Thomas Kando's study, *Sex Change*. None of the trans-sexual women interviewed there were operated more than two years previously. Jan Morris' embarrassing book, *Conundrum*, was published within two years of her operation (she was operated on at the same time as me, in the same clinic). At least *Conundrum* demonstrates that lack of success in the state of maleness has nothing to do with trans-sexualism. Jan was almost classically successful in her presentation as male before she came out. The important thing for trans-sexuals is on-going experience. Every woman's history of oppression is re-created in her day to day experience. In having the same experience, the trans-sexual woman is giving real meaning to her suppressed past. I'd predict that after several years of actual female existence, trans-sexual women would show, on average, just as much uneasiness about sexual expectations of women's identity as other women round them; no more, no less. But it is not only immediate post-operative trans-sexuals who seem satisfied with a tinsel notion of women's existence many born women publicly and vociferously urge these roles upon us, through the media, books and the innumerable pages of women's magazines. We, and not trans-sexual women, are our own keepers. To single out the small number of trans-sexual women as being particularly significant in the struggle against crippling sex-role stereotypes, deflects energy from real causes—primarily the patriarchal system and secondarily the agents who peddle conformity through the media.

I find that behind Ms. Raymond's arguments that sexual difference (biology apart) is exclusively a product of male-defined values of a patriarchy, she shows an absolutism about sex difference. This expresses itself most clearly in the horror and revulsion at the thought of the lesbian feminist-trans-sexual. On page 101, she asserts that trans-sexuals in the women's movement have 'renounced femininity, but not masculinity and masculinist behaviour.' Since such trans-sexual women behave characteristically as other lesbian feminists behave, this is equivalent to saying that such behaviour is masculine. We all carry a baggage of maleness, expressed in attitudes, modes of thought and behaviour, attitudes which are very much part of Ms. Raymond's approach to the subject. But lesbian feminist behaviour is not 'masculine'. It searches for a cultural identity which transcends the stereotypes of gender with which we are all conditioned in this society. The trans-sexual feminist's search is exactly the same, and not a demonstration of masculinity. That is an empirical statement, subject to verification by other feminists. Ms. Raymond denies it totally and refuses to admit any evidence to the contrary. In our behaviour and attitudes we are all, not just trans-sexuals, products of learning conditioned by our existence in a patriarchy. In trying to develop the condition of female humanness, all of us have to renounce much powerful cultural learning we have been subjected to, and have internalized. Its content varies widely from woman to woman. For us to be successful, other human beings have to be involved in the same personal struggle, trans-sexual woman as well. The separation adopted by some women to undertake this struggle is a result of the degree of sexual oppression, intentional and unintentional, shown by men in our societies. But trans-sexual women's transformation in the same way is not on compatible with that of other women, who, as separatists, are able to accept, and work with transsexual feminists. For example, I was accepted and integrated into an ongoing consciousness-raising group which met weekly for nearly a year. According to Ms. Raymond's definition of me as personalized phallus, rapist, and agent of patriarchal oppression, this would hardly have been expected to be the case. In order to cope with the fact that trans-sexual women can be, and are, integrated into women's spaces, Ms. Raymond is forced to deny the experience of the other women involved as well, thus setting herself up as a judge of their feminist credentials (see the final section for further discussion).

Finally, it is perhaps necessary to discuss briefly the philosophical section of Ms. Raymond's book, if only because her use of such language cloaks bad argument, distortion and suppression of fact in academic respectability. In fact, the philosophical content is mystification, playing with words in a way that obscures the ethical absolutism which Ms. Raymond demands. She sets as her standard of measurement, the term 'integrity'. In this context, androgeny represents an adding up of qualities which derive from an immoral state—a patriarchal definition of sexual identity. It is necessary to transcend such a situation, to pass from integration, the aim of the trans-sexers, to a higher integrity of the human spirit, where physical mutilation is not involved. In a general sense, I can accept the concept of integrity as a legitimate aim of human endeavour, though I'm uneasy about it because it is too individualised. (People may feel it necessary to deny the integrity of their own existence for some wider goal of benefit to humanity.) But what is the content of integrity? How do we determine whether an act contributes to our integrity, and has anyone else the right to determine it for us; if so, to what degree, and in what respects? All these questions are at the heart of ethics. Most of us, in our lives, are faced with contradictory alternatives for action. The choice of one alternative, which may contribute to our perceived integrity, may reduce it in another respect. It is perfectly possible to argue, and often is argued, that the withdrawal from one half of the human race, implied by separatist feminism is a denial of an existent human reality, denying *integrity* in the interests of *integration* of certain aspects of human experience. But we reply that the terms of interaction demanded of us by men are so harsh, that only through withdrawal from such experience can we begin to realize an integrity that provides a model for all human behaviour to be patterned upon. Ms. Raymond's conception of integrity is

partly based upon biological naturalism. Thus, the trans-sexual woman violates the integrity of her male biology (and the trans-sexual man, vice versa), by submitting to hormones, operations. But the alteration of the body is surely not an issue of absolutes. Do we deny the limbless artificial limbs? Is all transplant surgery unethical? Should one not wear glasses because one is born with defective vision, in order to preserve bodily integrity? Should a woman whose uterus has developed an incurable infection be denied the possibility of an operation for hysterectomy? If there is really no other course, her bodily integrity is violated, for the continuance and development of her *total* integrity-potential as a human being. As a result of a total hysterectomy, incidentally, she also becomes dependant on external hormonal medication in order to be able to realize her 'integrity potential'. Or is a person denied the use of the artificial supports, really realizing their true integrity as a human person, their death or disablement exemplifying it?

Who judges such questions? Who dares to set themselves up as such an absolute arbiter of human experience? Janice Raymond does, in regard to trans-sexuals at least. We violate our chromosomal identity by having operations. But is this identity to be the ultimate determinant of human action? It is perfectly legitimate to argue to the contrary if the evidence of its violation is positive. 90% of post-operative trans-sexuals experience their operations as positive in their results, a high figure, surely, for medical intervention. Ms. Raymond says that this positiveness is superficial. Who is she to say so? Even to begin to talk about it would involve a long investigation of before, and after, living patterns, with follow ups. Even though trans-sexuals do not become biologically identical with other women or men as a result of operations, enough can be done to allow the development of potential integrity, so deeply denied before, when so much of our energy was taken up trying to comprehend a fundamental fault in our identity construction. Are we dependent on medication for our survival? Yes, but no more so than many others. My father had, for many years, to take pills to control his blood pressure. Without them he would have died. Taking such pills did not make him inadequate, a slavish dependent of the medical establishment, but enabled him to develop his integrity in his later years. I also need to take some pills, 22 days out of 28, but neither am I fairly obviously, very beholden to patriarchal medicine. An endocrinologist assures me I run no greater risk of cancer than other periodless women on hormonal treatment, but even if I were at risk, the risk would be insignificant compared to the value for me of what I have done.

Ms. Raymond also says that integrity is denied by the creation of creatures who are satisfied to exist within the limitations of the current sexual stereotypes. Now, these stereotypes damage all of us, all the time, but most women do not *consciously* challenge them to any fundamental extent. Much present existential unhappiness comes from that. But why should trans-sexual women be singled out, and *forced* to experience on-going hell in order supposedly to make them revolutionaries in the sexual struggle. Not only would it not have such an effect, but it would deny us any element of autonomy. Is a person who just does what she is told, really changing anything? It sounds to me like a theological press gang for revolution. The stereotypes do not cause trans-sexualism, they confuse trans-sexuals, and the rest of us, and we have to find our own way out, through our own judgement of arguments and our own experiences of living, not by having them denied us.

Thus, there is no *prima facie* case for arguing that the trans-sexual situation is one that denies integrity for the trans-sexual, either on humanistic or medical grounds. Trans-sexuals, like all of us, are caught in a net of oppressive gender expectations, which we have to sort out as best we can, in situations where the social agencies to which we may refer only make our problem worse. But it is not trans-sexualism which is the problem, but the way we are pressured to live in the world. Another attack on our potential for integrity comes from individuals such as Ms. Raymond, projecting their own hatred and fear in spurious philosophical arguments. I cannot find any section of Ms. Raymond's

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book which does not bristle with half truth, distortion, suppressed information—all passed over with a sugar coat of scientific veneer. Above all, and uniquely, perhaps, Ms. Raymond has written a book concerning a group of people, of human beings, without apparently the slightest insight into any of our life histories, the problems of our existence as we see it, our own perceptions of the world. Trans-sexuals are given no validity as human beings with volitions of our own; no picture of the trans-sexual experience as a human condition emerges from her pages. We are merely the manipulated tools of the patriarchal establishment, monstrosities or tokens, hollow shells to be arranged in this or that parody. One might expect that a person writing about a group of human beings would present them to us as human beings, but perhaps that is just the naive liberalism which Ms. Raymond accuses other women who have come to know trans-sexuals of having.

The trans-sexual experience is neither greater nor lesser than that of any other human being. It is very special, and has its own special problems; it defies explanation in any terms of current rationality or medical expertise. In the society, drawn from feminist ideas, which one day will replace patriarchy, there will still be trans-sexuals, unless cosmic energy stops fucking things up occasionally, but, because there will be no limitations on their behaviour by oppressive gender roles, all they will need is an operation, since physical differences will perhaps be the only mark of sexual distinction (I am not absolutely certain of the latter, but am prepared to accept it as a working proposition). By then, I expect, wise women will be able to divine the energy patterns involved, and correct biology at birth, as can now be done with various hermaphroditic conditions. Who knows? But now we are here, and our voice needs occasionally—not too often—to be heard, lest we become the new scapegoats of the latest witch hunts emerging from within the feminist movement itself.

5. DIVIDED SISTERHOOD. 'THE TRANS-SEXUAL EMPIRE' AND FEMINISM

'The Trans-sexual Empire' is a dangerous book. It is dangerous to trans-sexuals because it does not treat us as human beings at all, merely as the tools of a theory; because its arguments may make things more difficult for trans-sexual women and men as they strive to come out; and because it seeks to create hostility towards us among women who have no actual experience of trans-sexual people, find the subject disturbing, and want some simple, straight-forward answer that allays their unease. I think trans-sexualism is frightening to many of us because, in an unstable, insecure world, basic sexual identity, male or female, is one of the few fairly firm constructs we have. However much we wish to modify our behaviour, our sense of our sex is very deep, and trans-sexuals seem to bring it into question. Yet, as I have tried to show, we do not seek to change sex, but to modify a biological anomaly, so that genuine human existence as the women or men we are already, is possible.

I think that the Trans-sexual Empire has relevance to a wider group than trans-sexuals. I see its negativity as three-fold. Firstly, I mistrust its attitude to feminist culture, though this is the most difficult objection to establish. Secondly, its emphases deflect attention from the most immediate problems, and tend to lead to scapegoating. Thirdly, its ideological dogmatism and anti-experiential viewpoint lead right back into the methods of patriarchy.

Ms. Raymond believes that every trans-sexual man was a potential woman-identified woman. Although this is not true, reading it began to make me ask myself, in what way does Ms. Raymond look at feminism? The book does not make the answer clear. The main line of argument is that male and female cultures are the creation of a male-defined sex role system. Overthrowing this system would enable human beings of integrity to behave in all the morally legitimate ways available to humans to behave, irrespective of sex. Sexual differences would be merely biological—the ability of women to give birth, chromosomal difference, physical differences in anatomy. However, at another point, she talks of the 'multi-dimensional female creative power, bearing culture, harmony and true inventiveness.'

Trans-sexual women are supposed to covet this (p. 107). Where do these characteristics come from? They cannot be biological in origin, because she had already ruled out this kind of explanation in attacking John Money's theory that hormones feminize or masculinize foetal brains (p. 48-9). There are two other alternatives. Perhaps there is some 'woman-spirit', or 'woman energy', underlying biology, which has the above characteristics. But if so, then trans-sexual women may have it, though they have a male biology. If this is the case, we are women, and Ms. Raymond's assertions that we are not, would be false. Alternatively, these characteristics are social in origin. But if sexual differences are defined by the *negative*, patriarchally-imposed sex stereotyping system, where do these *positive* characteristics come from? In the terms of the way she looks at things, there is no clear answer, but from the text of the chapter on trans-sexuals in the women's movement, it seems that a lot of emphasis is placed on the lesbian-feminist. She is the most significant challenger, not only of male dominance in society, but also of female compliance in it. This follows the arguments in the famous article by the Radicalesbians, the Woman-Identified Woman (16).

It is possible to look at things in a different way. Suppose we don't focus on sex stereotyping, but on the *position* of women in the structure of patriarchy. From this perspective, women's position in patriarchal structure gives rise to a female culture, which is potentially and partly in continual conflict with male culture. Women's position means that we ensure the continuance of the human race, and develop personal qualities in keeping with this task, while men threaten it, in conflicts over production and allocation of human resources (17). Men do not only try to contain this conflict between female life energy and male death energy by imposing notions of the feminine. They also control intellectual systems and thought processes, and educate us to internalise them. The separatist lesbian feminist who does not challenge herself about these things as well, may retain important elements of male identification, in spite of her separatism. These elements can internally damage the women's movement.

The female culture of resistance emphasizes caringness, respect for others' identity, the ability to share and grow from the experience of a common and allied oppression, the essential acceptance of another as equal, the integration of intellect and feeling, and an experiential attitude to knowledge, which men contemptuously refer to as 'being closer to nature'. Men, on the other hand, exist in a world of *exclusion*, each group is seen as exclusive of others, and each individual feels himself in a potential competition with his fellows in every aspect of his behaviour. It has long been so. To adopt this kind of exclusiveness within the women's movement, however physically separate a woman keeps herself from men, however much she professes to hate them, actually demands of us the same kinds of destructive divisions that men use. If, on the other hand, we have a certainty of the *positiveness* of female culture, in spite of its distortion and deformation by patriarchal attempts to control it, the *inclusion* of marginals is not a threat, when it is genuine. Karen Hagberg makes a similar point, 'It does not seem prudent for feminists to perpetuate a strict male/female dichotomy in a patriarchal atmosphere which both fears and loathes sexual ambiguity of any kind.' Janice Raymond's book exudes hatred and exclusion. An academic intellectual, I fear she has been infested by another aspect of the patriarchal culture she professes to attack (18).

Secondly, the tactic of *deflection*, attempting to deflect attention from the source of a problem to a relatively innocent and defenceless party onto whom resentment can be channelled, is very old. It is a very basic tactic of patriarchal divisiveness. Find a scapegoat, and patriarchal power is safe. Witches were not responsible for the social evils of the mediaeval form of patriarchy; they attempted to alleviate them. But because wise women seemed a little different, it was possible to single them out and whip up a campaign against them, leaving the main cause untouched. Nazism used the same method, projecting blame on to Jews and homosexuals. McCarthyism channeled social discontent against those who were attempting to find the causes of social unease, by labelling them communist,

and manipulating public opinion against them. Women have experienced this method all too often to our detriment. The effect of Janice Raymond's book is the same, in two respects. She gives a much more central role to the gender identity clinics than they deserve, when they are really the 'poor relations' of patriarchal medicine, to whose sexist, exploitative structure and organization they kow tow. It is like trying to excise a monster by focussing on his little toe. And she encourages the deflection of energy and anger which needs to go outwards, against the male system, *inwards*, against a small group of vulnerable women, by labelling them rapists, personifications of male organs and such nonsense. This is not merely incitement to hate, but totally destructive. Such energies, when directed inwards, will soon find new groups to feed against, as witch hunts proliferate, and Ms. Raymond encourages this, too: 'Lesbian—feminists who accept trans-sexually constructed lesbian feminists as other selves are mutilating their own reality' (p. 119). Or perhaps women with male children should be the next target? These methods of approaching problems are those of our enemies. We take them up ourselves at our peril.

Thirdly, a major weapon which men have used against women is the power to define our situation by their ideology. Central to the women's movement is the challenge to the ideological definition of reality. By accepting male definitions presented in terms of abstractions, our own feelings, experiences and personal understanding of reality can be denied. I remember it particularly from a left group, where women's almost constant dis-satisfaction with what was going on was never allowed any validity, since it did not seem to fit in with Marxist-Leninist method or theory. But it is also happening every time a man exclaims, for instance, 'Women are so emotional'. The whole consciousness-raising practice, fundamental to the women's movement, has been a basic alternative of our oppositional culture to such methods. It is based upon respecting another woman's understanding of her situation, giving validity to her experience, not judging her inadequate if she did not see her situation in the same way as you, not defining the answers to problems beforehand. It recognizes that we all have something to learn from each other, we all have valid experience of the struggle that belonging to our oppositional culture demands, we can share and develop collectively. I believe that it has been this refusal to define and demean that has enabled woman strength to be so powerfully developed in the women's movement. Anything which threatens it in the name of some ideological purity, is an imported threat which can undermine us, turn us against ourselves. Janice Raymond's book is the most explicit example of this ideological, dogmatic approach that I remember reading. She thinks she has the answer to trans-sexualism. Trans-sexual experience is invalid by definition. Any woman who dares to assert her own experience to the contrary is guilty of self-mutilation, of 'liberalism', of 'naiveté', of 'gratitude', of 'fear of being labelled a man-hater', of 'attraction to masculine presence' (p. 113, 119).

The women of the Olivia Records collective, lesbians and feminists, who had struggled to develop the world's first (I think) all woman feminist recording company, wrote, in relation to the trans-sexual woman who was a member of their collective, 'Day to day interaction with Sandy Stone has convinced us that she is a woman we can relate to with comfort and trust.' According to Ms. Raymond if they had been more honest, they'd have said they needed a man around' (p. 103). The same, presumably, applies to the women who accept and relate to the few other trans-sexuals in the women's movement, including myself. They are deluded. This is what Elizabeth Rose is talking about when she writes, of another article by Janice Raymond, in *Chrysalis*, 'I am upset that a magazine of 'women's culture'... is basically encouraging the elitist/separatist attitude that self-definition (is)... subject to the scrutiny and judgements of those who, in the name of political purity, claim the power to define who is allowed entry into the feminist community... and, now, who is, or is not female' (quoted abbreviated, p. 109). What is an alternative method, which recognizes women's experience, and does not invalidate it? Janice Raymond could have gone and talked to the women of Olivia, and to Sandy. She could have

gone and talked to Christy Barsky (another feminist trans-sexual she identifies) and her friends. She could have shared experience with them and reported what they said, communicating the different experiences, to give women who have no access to trans-sexuals some means of making provisional judgement. Instead, she argues that all women who have such experience are inadequately feminist. Yes, we have heard that kind of ideological divisiveness before, from men, and are hearing it again now in the British women's movement from small numbers of women who arrogate themselves the right to be the custodians of feminist purity, and who are beginning to take Janice Raymond and her methods as their mentor. Patriarchal invasion is insidious. The denial of female experience in the name of ideological purity is not a product of, nor a contribution to, feminist culture. As trans-sexual women, we must claim the integrity of our own life experience, and other women who know us, are also asserting that their right to their own experience is fundamental. When we have to assert this right against other women, for whatever reason, confusion reigns, and patriarchy gains. Following the dogmatists will come the enforcers of the 'law'.

My living space is threatened by this book. Although I have had to challenge it in its particular content, as a trans-sexual woman, its dogmatic approach and denial that female experience is our basic starting point are a danger signal for the whole women's movement.

NOTES

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1. Karen A. Hagberg: Trans-sexualism: is gender absolute? *New Women's Times Feminist Review*, Aug. Sept. 1979, p.10-12.
2. In this pamphlet, I have used the correct gender references to trans-sexual people. Trans-sexual women are women born with a male biology and mistakenly socialized as males, who have to undergo physical conversion operations (and years of re-learning to realize their sexual identity). Trans-sexual men are men born with a female biology and mistakenly socialized as females. In quotations from Ms. Raymond's book, I have used her terms sometimes, which are oppressive and insulting to trans-sexuals, in inverted commas. Otherwise I have used correct terms in brackets.
3. Ms. Raymond quotes (twice, so no-one will miss it) the following statement by an American trans-sexual. 'Free from the chains of menstruation and child-bearing, trans-sexual women are obviously far superior to Gennys in many ways. Genetic women are becoming quite obsolete, which is obvious, and the future belongs to trans-sexual 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' (cited, p.xvii & 117). In the context in which it appeared—feminist controversy about trans-sexualism, this foul arrogance was obviously designed to provoke rather than express a serious viewpoint. It makes furious anger understandable. But to consider it as representative of trans-sexual views, is as unreasonable as taking Margaret Thatcher's views to represent feminism.
4. Thomas Kando, *Sex Change*, Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, 1973.
5. Jan Morris, *Conundrum*, London, Signet, 1974.
6. Neither, I am forcibly reminded, does Dr. Acker, in Marge Piercy's recent classic, 'Woman on the edge of Time', feel he is inhumane in meting out to Connie, the treatment that he does. (pub. Women's Press, 1979)
7. C.f. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, California U.P. 1978.
8. Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, Compendium, London, 1974.
9. E.g. Fritz of Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, London, Fontana 1976. Lyall Watson, *Supernature*, London, Coronet, 1974. Lawrence Blair, *Rhythms of Vision*, London, Paladin, 1977.
10. C.f. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, New York, Avon, 1973. Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, *For Her Own Good*, London, Pluto, 1979 p.282f.
11. Harry Benjamin, *The Trans-sexual Phenomenon*, New York, Julian Press, 1966.
12. C.f. Raymond, p.26.
13. She also uses this method in her discussion of the behaviour of eunuchs in history (p.105-6), and of Nazi medical experiments (p.148-153).
14. C.f. Harry Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethno-methodology*.
15. From a novel in progress.
16. *Radicalesbians*, *Woman-Identified Woman*, In *Notes from the 3rd Year*, New York, 1971
17. E.g., Barbara Burris, *The Fourth World Manifesto*, also in *Notes from the 3rd Year*. Barbara Starrett, *I Dream in Female*. 1976 U.S. Pamphlet.
18. This is not to say that the only ways that women can be oppressive are by internalizing male ways of thinking. I don't think classism and racism, etc. can be reduced to this, though the ultimate 'First Cause' of such oppressions may be a patriarchal system.

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