

Why I Love Cross-Dressers

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Abstract

Photo by: Mariette Pathy Allen Readers of this Blog may remember a while back that I did a post called Why I Love Fat People. In simple 1-10 list form, it catalogued many of the reasons why I love Fat Folks. In this post, I am going to discuss why I love Cross-Dressers, primarily because [...]

Article

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Readers of this Blog may remember a while back that I did a post called Why I Love Fat People. In simple 1-10 list form, it catalogued many of the reasons why I love Fat Folks. In this post, I am going to discuss why I love Cross-Dressers, primarily because I am incredibly sick of the Cross-Dresser bashing I have seen all over the Internet in recent months.

1. I love Cross-Dressers because I love the diversity of gender expression in the human population. People assigned male at birth who express themselves in a feminine manner on a part-time basis constitute one vital component of that gender diversity. It is just as valid as transsexualism, as drag kings and queens, as genderqueers, and as transgenderists. Those who cast aspersions on Cross-Dressers are devaluing a vital component of human diversity and gender expression. As someone who delights in diversity, I feel love and support for my Cross-Dressing sisters.
2. Cross-Dressers have been, are, and always will be a vital and numerous constituency under the Transgender Umbrella Community. Cross-Dressers are part of OUR transgender community. And if you don't like that, YOU are the one with the problem. I understand that there are complaints about the nomenclature of "Transgender" because some people feel erased or invisibilized by it. There is a place for claiming the specificity of your own identity. But Transgender was coined primarily as a way to UNITE our diverse community and to foment political change and political strategizing. And guess what? For the most part, it has been remarkably successful. Despite a few vociferous Internet blowhards who exist in a perpetual echo chamber, sex and gender diverse people have joined together to fight for ourselves and each other. If Transsexual Separatists want nothing to do with the "Transgender Borg" and want off the "Transgender Reservation" (but ironically enough can't seem to stay away from us to let us know their militant views), so be it. The Transgender Movement, Cross-Dressers included, will go on all the better without your bitterness, divisiveness and me-me-me theatrics.
3. Cross-Dressers help to liberate men from the shackles of patriarchal masculinity. Feminism has gone a long way to liberate women and men in this society. But it is incomplete because men are still so heavily policed from cradle to grave based on their placement in the category "male." People assigned male have

every right to explore all of the permutations of gender expression, including all those things deemed “feminine.” Cross-Dressers are in the front-lines of the gender liberationist army to remind those assigned male that they can express themselves however they wish. How brave and how wonderful! Remember just recently how much brouhaha was created about the advert where a woman exclaimed joy in painting her son’s toenails neon pink (pundit John Stuart dubbed it “Toe-mageddon”)? This is just one small example of how unbelievably freaked out this society still gets about male femininity. This needs to change, and the visibility of all trans feminine people, Cross-Dressers, Drag Queens, and Transgender and Transsexual Women help to show society that we refuse to be put solely in the boxes labeled “male” and “masculine.” In being who we are, without shame, guilt or apology, we helped to liberate others, and build a society where people feel pride in being who they are. We all owe Cross-Dressers a huge debt of gratitude for helping to do just that!

4. Because the fetish community is also part of our community--deal with it! Now let me be clear: not all Cross-Dressers consider their activity a fetish (in fact most probably don’t) and some receive sexual gratification from cross-dressing and some don’t. But here’s the thing: I stand in complete support of Cross-Dressers who do so solely or primarily for sexual gratification. What on earth is wrong with that? I have been so tired of reading the thinly disguised hatred of late in the Transosphere for those “fetish transvestites.” Umm excuse me--but for a consenting adult individual to get off on different clothes--who exactly does that hurt? As a deeply oppressed and marginalized community, aren’t we supposed to lead the way in terms of supporting and standing up for others who are also scorned and demonized? Even some Cross-Dressers may look askance at their fetishistic sisters who dress en femme primarily for sexual purposes. But why? Is it to put their spike heel down on somebody who may be perceived as even further down the social hierarchy than themselves? I think we all experience the temptation of doing this, and we must resist it with all our strength. Either we are one community, united and strong, or we are not. In a puritanical society like ours, it is still awfully easy to get very judgmental about other’s sexual tastes, behaviors and predilections. We must resist these judgmental behaviors and support solidarity and community.

5. Because the wives, partners, girlfriends and significant others (SO) of the cross-dressing community are some of the staunchest allies of the larger transgender community. At convention after convention, I have been bowled over by the commitment of SOs to support their trans spouses and the larger trans community. I have also been personally inspired by the incredible love shown by these women for their partners, and their acceptance of an activity that so much of dominant society continues to find repulsive or immoral. Due to the organizing efforts of the trans community going back many decades now, there has always been a place carved out for partners and families, as we always knew we could not separate families but needed to unify in order to stand stronger together. SOs have been some of the primary movers and shakers in the community, from Helen Boyd to Peggy Rudd to the late Dotty Laing. Given the ubiquitous bigotry from so many cisgender people against trans folks, this support has been life-sustaining. In addition, trans-feminine people of all stripes benefit so much from the love, kindness and support of our cisgender sisters. I love CDs because so many of their partners are absolutely fabulous! They make our community exponentially stronger.

6. I love Cross-Dressers because it is vitally ESSENTIAL that we as a community stand united in our fight against bigotry, hatred, violence and discrimination. Do you really think that a potential hate-monger, before committing an assault against one of us, scratches his head and says: “Wait,

before I beat the heck out of you, I need to determine if you are a drag queen, a genderqueer, a cross-dresser, a pre-op transsexual, a post-op transsexual, or a woman of trans history” ? I can assure you that they don’t. They put every last one of us in the same wretched freak bin, in the same lot labeled “expendable trash.” Many have said it before, but since some in the community don’t seem to be listening, I am going to say it again: we can ill afford to split hairs in our community and judge others simply because they have a different identity than us under the trans umbrella. Given the reality of the violence, hate and oppression directed against ALL gender-variant people, we must stand shoulder-to-shoulder and be the first people to show up for all of our brothers and sisters in the gender community. By fragmenting ourselves and becoming engaged in internecine warfare, we are doing the job of the oppressor for them! Heck, they can move on to harming other groups, because we pretty much have got it covered ourselves by our constant brow beating of one another. We can bring each other down or we can lift each other up. I choose to lift each other up and I hope you do, too.

7. Because, when it is all said and done, identity categories are not as hard and fast as many make them out to be. There is a well-known joke in the gender community that says: “What’s the difference between a cross-dresser and a transsexual? About six months.” The lines between the sub-categories under the trans umbrella are not iron-clad, they are permeable. And, this is, I believe, a good thing! Just as “queer” allows people some wiggling room to explore the diverse permutations of sex, gender and sexuality, transgender is a sufficiently imprecise identity category to allow lots of different types of gender-variant people to explore who they are. Go to a trans community gathering some time and try to correctly “ID” the cross-dressers from the transgender folks from the genderqueers from the transsexuals. I guarantee you will not be able to exhaustively do so! This is NOT to say or imply that people’s individual identities are not incredibly important, or to deny that there are significant differences between the sub-categories under the trans umbrella. It is simply to say that within the trans community, we have many similarities and we need to stress those commonalities in our collective work for liberation.

8. Because Cross-Dressers have helped to build the infrastructure of the transgender community that we currently enjoy. From creating organizations, to running support groups, to speaking in campus classrooms, answering hotlines, to leading political lobbying efforts, to donating money, to writing publications and Blogs and building websites, Cross-Dressers, along with every other group under the trans umbrella, have been in the front lines building our community, educating the public, offering support to newbies, and fighting for legal, social and policy change. I am indebted especially to all those sisters who came before me, be they cross-dressers, transgenderists or transsexuals, who paved the way for the next generation of trans activists. It is still challenging, but you can be sure it is just a little bit easier because of their courageous efforts. The same goes for their spouses and children, who are truly some of the most unsung heroes of the trans community and movement.

9. Because cross-dressers help to show us the complexity of gender. They shine a light on the fact that gender is not static; it is constantly in motion. Many people, including some in the trans community, believes strongly in the gender binary. They believe that you are one or the other. If you were wrongly assigned, you move completely to the other category and correct a birth defect. But for some folks it is much more complex: they have a sense of themselves as two genders or three genders, or many more. Their gender expression may change from year to year, from month to month, from week to week, or from day to day. Like genderqueer people and some transgender people, Cross-Dressers help to remind all

people of the vibrant possibilities for gender expressions and behaviors. And yes, I am one of those militant transgender activists who believes that non-discrimination policies on the basis of gender identity/expression SHOULD cover people who come in dressed as Robert on Monday, as Roberta on Tuesday, and as an androgyne on Wednesday. Why not? How does it interfere with the ability to do their work? Either we are going to cover people's civil rights, or we aren't. And it is high time that we got over our second grade notions of gender and stepped up to graduate school to see that acknowledging, accepting and celebrating the diversity and complexity of gender experiences will help society to thrive.

10. Finally, I love cross-dressers because they remind cisgender people that dressing in clothing associated with a gender different from the one assigned to you is fun, healthy, fabulous and empowering. While I pour a lot of energy into the transgender movement and securing our civil rights, I never want to lose sight of a much bigger battle: the entrenchment of conservative gender roles and the cultural policing of people based on their arbitrary placement in a category due to their genital status. What we have in our underwear does not determine anything about us, and yet society tries to turn it into a huge predictor of behavior, interests, hobbies, choice in profession, who we will love, clothing choices, and so much more. The time is now to liberate all people from the tyranny of enforced gender norms--and cross-dressers, along with their other trans comrades--are leading the way in that struggle.

I want to stress here that I do not identify as a Cross-Dresser or as Bi-Gender and therefore do not wish to give the impression that I speak FOR these groups. I write here as a trans-identified woman who is an ally to Cross-Dressers and who considers them my sisters in the Trans Community. I have written this in the spirit of positive affirmation, but if I got anything wrong, I apologize and would love your feedback in the Comments section. I hope to see more Cross-Dressers and Allies fight back in the coming months as the attacks against certain sub-categories in the trans community continue. I'd like to close with a quote from the amazing Transgender Warrior Leslie Feinberg: "A timid denial that 'We're not all like that' only serves to weaken the entire fight-back movement. We can never throw enough people overboard to win approval from our enemies." Amen, Leslie! May we grow in unity and strength as we continue the long battle of fighting for our lives.

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