

# TRANSSEXUALISM IN SOCIETY

## A very brief introduction

LET'S consider a hypothetical situation...

A male psychologist has a book published by one of the most renowned scientific publishers. His fellow psychologists are keen to be associated with this work, pronouncing it "good science" and worthy of publication.

In his work the author pronounces that he has an all-encompassing theory of women based upon his research in which he interviewed 12 women during visits to local brothels. Actually he admits that some of these 12 weren't women but were such good examples of the categories of women he identifies that he included them anyway.

Based on his work he can categorically state that all women fall into one of two groups:

1. sex-crazed whores; or,
2. self-obsessed fantasists.

Women who tell him that this does not match their perception of themselves are dismissed as deluded liars. The author cannot understand how anyone who is a woman might not fall into one of these groups. So it must be so.

Outraged? Feeling pretty upset and ready to march on Parliament? Feel like the clock just got turned back 150 years? Imagine if this was just one more example of a daily battle you have to fight in order to be accepted as a human being with dignity, to be accepted as a person and not defined by someone else's overactive sex-obsessed imagination.

Such is the reality of everyday life for transsexual people. Sadly, the book is real but presents not a theory of women but of transsexual women – or "transsexual men", as J Michael Bailey insists on calling them.

In one slim volume Bailey has dismissed

the collective experiences of thousands of transsexual women, completely ignored transsexual men (female-to-male transsexual people) and reinforced a pernicious sexuality-based theory of transsexualism which will be passed on to another generation of medical professionals as "fact".

Most damaging of all is that transsexual women, after completing their treatment, will be ever more inclined to live a "stealth" existence to escape the stigma of this theory. Meanwhile, those still in treatment will adapt their stated behaviours and feelings to match the current medical

## Transsexualism is a reality of everyday life for some people

"understanding" of transsexualism as the only way to obtain treatment and in doing so, reinforce this absurd theory – until they too can disappear.

Transsexualism is a reality of everyday life for some people. For most trans people (the preferred term), transition (change of gender role) is successful and they are able to get on with perfectly functional and normal lives. There can be great trauma before transition, for most are aware of

their transsexualism at a very early age (pre-school) and spend many years trying to live lives which conflict with their inner sense of self.

After transition trans people may identify as gay/lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual or asexual, just as for any other person in society. For trans people their medical history of transsexualism is one aspect of their life: it is not the sole defining point in life, especially after transition.

In recent years progress has been made to obtain basic rights for trans people. A decision in the European Court of Justice in 1996 established the applicability to trans people of the Equality Directive. Prior to that it was standard practice to argue that since a trans man and trans woman would both be equally discriminated against then there was no case to answer. Since then employment rights have been encapsulated into the Sex Discrimination Act covering direct discrimination in employment and vocational training only.

Despite these advances trans people are still unable to marry in their true gender, change their national insurance number (so potentially informing employers of their past) or alter their birth certificate. They remain legally in the sex assigned at birth. This means that in something as simple as hiring a car a trans person must tell the booking clerk their most intimate medical secret or risk invalidating their insurance cover.

In July 2002, another major European decision concluded that British treatment of trans people was a breach of their right to privacy and the right to marry. The Government has committed to legislate but has made no detailed proposals almost a year later. In the meantime, it continues to oppose challenges in the courts. Most recently, Liz and Mike Bellinger's successful 22-year marriage was declared unlawful by the House of Lords in March 2003.

This has been a very brief introduction to the life of transsexual people. See box, right to find out more.

*Trans Women Advisor*