

Dressing in drag is more than fluff and glitz

by Don Doran

Apparently, some people remain uninformed and underexposed to the nature of drag. Amazing as it may seem, even the most concentrated consumers of nouveau sociology have managed to misinterpret, misunderstand or simply miss this entirely fascinating spectrum of society.

It really is not difficult to comprehend this informational abyss: few discussions of this matter arise objectively and the libraries have a simply frightening scarcity of information. The fact is that drag is almost always categorized with transvestism, transsexualism, and homosexuality. It seems improbable that these four subjects should be considered so closely related.

All homosexual men cross-dress and want to be women. Right? Wrong. In actuality, cross-dressers represent a minority in the gay community and are frequently frowned upon by other homosexuals. Hence, distinctions need to be made amongst the aforementioned categories and drag to show how they all differ.

On the one hand, a transvestite is generally a heterosexual man. He gets sexual satisfaction from wearing women's clothing. A study done by Geer, et al, found that 78% of transvestites were married and 74% of them had children.

On the other hand, a transsexual can be either a man or a woman who feels trapped inside the incorrect anatomy. This often leads to surgery and hormonal adjustments that help that person be who they believe themselves to be.

Homosexuals, on the other hand (the third hand, that is), are simply persons who are sex-

ually attracted to members of their own sex. Most homosexuals, like heterosexuals are entirely satisfied with their sexual orientation.

All gay men, in general, and drag queens in particular, hate women and wish to ridicule them. Right? Wrong. The gay community is somewhat stratified on the basis of gender, but this stratification is a reflection of wider social attitudes. There is, therefore, no more dislike of one gender group by the other in the gay community than there is in the straight community. Rather, because of the gay's position in society, they are more likely to be aware of and sensitive to many issues of discrimination.

Now we come to drag queens. The vast majority of drag queens are homosexual men performing caricatures. What to they characterize? Frankly, they are poking fun at the simplistic and misleading stereotypes that society has imposed upon itself of men, women and, for that matter, homosexuals. While the reasons generally given for doing drag are rarely political, the results usually are. The overblown portrayal of Marilyn Monroe as the typical woman, or John Wayne as the average man, demonstrate the artificial and ridiculous roles that men and women are expected to play.

There are other reasons for doing drag, though. Entertainment is the primary one, also attention getting, making friends, and money. Drag is theatre. Like the actor who takes up the stage and does not really believe that he is King Lear, a drag queen does not really believe that he is Marilyn. Both share the common emotional gratification of having played a truly convincing role. In fact, there is no empirical evidence linking drag to psychological disorder.

Drag provides the opportunity to meet people while playing a different character. A drag queen can become well-known and even popular within the gay sub-culture. Because drag queens are, pardon the understatement, highly visible, they are able to easily find others who share their values and friendship. Most drag queens enjoy very satisfying non-sexual relationships with others who do drag.

Performing drag, like performing theatre, creates a deliberate illusion. A drag performer realizes that the images of "real" men and women in our society are often absurd. Drag queens prove that being female is more than just having bigger breasts than Dolly Parton and that being male is more than simply a matter of being more mindless than Sylvester Stallone.

Drag for charity

by Sherri Ritchie

What do Sissy Spaceout of San Francisco, Cardinal Sin of Calgary, Sofonda Peters of Seattle, and Lulu LaRude of Edmonton have in common? They are all drag artists and all members of the Gay community's oldest and largest charitable organization, The Imperial Court System.

Edmonton's Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose was established in 1976. It is a group of people who raise funds for charity through drag performances in local clubs. The cover charge, as well as any tips the performers receive, goes to the charity of the evening.

"A lot of people see the glitz. They just see guys in dresses," points out Don Doran of the Court. "They don't always see the purpose behind it."

Edmonton's court supports such needy groups as the Youth Emergency Shelter, the AIDS Network, Santa's Anonymous, and more recently Rick Hansen's Man in Motion Tour. "In 1983 Empress VII Mary Mess initiated the John M. Kerr Memorial Scholarship Fund," said Doran. The fund awards an annual cash scholarship to Gay students based on need, academic performance and involvement in the Gay community. "In the last two years three of the four recipients have been students at the U of A," explained Doran.

The Court System of the Americas is a 22 year old humanitarian foundation of dedicated men and women. There are over 50 courts boasting a collective membership in excess of 10,000 people. In Edmonton there are between

40 and 60 performers and between 200 and 400 supporters year round.

Like the other courts, the Edmonton membership annually elects co-chairperson (Emperor and Empress to their executive council at a gala charity affair known as the Coronation Ball. "The Empress must be a drag queen," explained Doran. "The Emperor is often a masculine character but exceptions to this rule are common. The reigning Emperors of Spokane and Edmonton are lesbians." The Executive Council is made up of past monarchs and the Chairpersons are the initiators of primary fundraisers. They perform the duties of good-will ambassadors and representatives to other courts by attending coronations and other special events throughout the two countries.

Any citizen of the city of Edmonton may vote for the monarchs at the Coronation Ball. Doran cited figures between 300 to 500 people in attendance at past balls. "In almost every city with a court, the ball is the largest Gay celebration of the year," claimed Doran.

Doran said the Edmonton court is not a politically active organization. "In the U.S. they do lobby and in Vancouver they are also very political," he said. "In Edmonton and Calgary we're lower key. Just because of the discrimination in these smaller cities."

The Court is different things to different people. The membership not only provides channels of self-esteem within the Gay community, it reaches beyond to the elderly, the handicapped, the hungry and the homeless.

The more we let violence and homosexuality become the norm, the more we'll become such a sick nation that the communists won't have to take over — we'll just give up.

Anita Bryant

I can't understand why more people aren't bisexual — it would double your chances for a date on Saturday night.

Woody Allen

Most homosexuals are child molesters, and that is why they become teachers.

John Briggs, California State Senator

I thought that men like that shot themselves.

King George V

I think the word is 'inconceivable'. Life is inconceivable without him.

Timothy Findley on his husband.

The issue of homosexuality always makes me nervous . . . I don't have any, you know, personal knowledge about homosexuality and I guess being a Baptist, that would contribute to a sense of being uneasy.

Jimmy Carter

Gay myths and realities

by Sidney Lancaster

When the words "gay" or "lesbian" are spoken, a series of associated images and labels are called to mind. James Doyle puts it best in his book *The Male Experience*:

"The caricature of a gay male who talks with an affected lisp, walks with a swishing motion, and gestures exuberantly with a limp wrist and of a lesbian who saunters around in a leather jacket and motorcycle boots are all too common. However, researchers find no evidence that most gay males and lesbians exhibit this presumed effeminate behaviours and "butch" masculinity, respectively."

Further, there is the widely held belief that in gay and lesbian relationships, one partner plays the role of "wife" (passive), while the other plays the role of "husband" (dominant). *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* by Bell and Weinberg shows that in reality, most gay couples' live-in relationships show both partners in full-time paid work (or education) and sharing both household tasks and decision-making fairly equally.

These stereotypes have their foundation in rigid, traditional gender roles — one is either "masculine" or "feminine" in the extreme — there can be no middle ground. Hence, a gay man "must" be "feminine" and a lesbian "must" be "masculine", as their sexual orientation would (stereotypically) lead them to desire and adopt the gender role of the opposite sex. While this absolute definition of gender roles is rarely applied to its fullest extent to the heterosexual population, it is quite readily adopted and applied to the homosexual community as a means to "understand" its dynamics.

Why do these myths and misconceptions persist?

There seem to be two basic reasons for the perpetuation of these stereotypes about homosexual men and women. First, many heterosexuals have never taken the time to question their own feelings about homosexuality — it is much easier to accept a widely held notion as "fact" than to examine one's own ideas and gain more information from reliable sources. Second, many people have never considered the fact that just because a person has a different sexual orientation, that does not mean that he or she is not subject to the same needs, desires, and problems faced by all people. No one person, "gay" or "straight", fits into any category absolutely.

To get past the blanket categorization of gays and lesbians, three very important characteristics of homosexual men and women which are pointed out in William Paul's *Homosexuality* must be considered:

1. Social Invisibility: the great majority of homosexuals, including openly gay men and women, are not easily identifiable.
2. Social Diversity: there are many kinds of homosexuals as there are kinds of heterosexuals.
3. Social and Personal Differentiation: the ways in which people adapt to having a homosexual orientation vary according to the relative tolerance or hostility of their social environment.

By examining how gays and lesbians fit into this society, and how they view themselves and their relationships, homosexual stereotypes will quickly fall by the wayside; it is at this point that we can concentrate on our many similarities, rather than our differences.

