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TRANSGENDER BY SARAH FLYNN

The Quest for Integrity of Body and Soul

The Need for A Trans Support Group in Burlington

WITHIN THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY, TRANSGENDER/transsexual people still encounter problems somewhat unique from that of other queer folk. For us, it is often not simply a problem of nonconformity to gender stereotypical roles or appearance. Appearing "butch" if you are a female, or "too soft" or effeminate if you are male, will indeed create problems for you; but if you still think of yourself as essentially your birth gender with rough or soft edges to it, you

Confidentiality is assured. No last names needed. No one-way only solutions offered.

can check the appropriate box on the application forms when needed and still get by.

For those folks who deep in their souls feel a compelling need to change their birth gender and their physical anatomy, there is a much more difficult road to travel. Coming out in this case is really a twofold event. The first part has to do with one's sense of personal identity in terms of gender. The second part of coming out has to do with affectional or sexual orientation. Fixing one does not necessarily solve the other. Often, dealing with sexual orientation is a delayed second step; taken only later in life after having gotten to a place where one is at ease with one's new gender identity and body.

When sexual orientation is sorted out and the need for intimacy becomes more pressing, the problem then becomes "will a non-trans person accept and fall in love with a person like me?" Fearing rejection, I suspect many my age did as I did, and simply didn't take the risks to find out. Transitioning in 1978, there was abundant evidence that I, as a transwoman, would not be welcome among lesbian women. I eventually left the gay and lesbian worlds and made my friends among the straight community. I gave up on the idea of intimate relationships for 15 years.

Much has changed since my first coming out as a trans person, so that finding a same-sex partner is a little less difficult in this time of gender queerness. Still, beneath the more accepting climate in the queer community, those who cross the gender lines by hormonal and anatomical changes still encounter a certain amount of misunderstanding in the form of "is that physical change really necessary?"

Well, if being gender queer is thought to be basically a head-trip in which one legitimately objects to forced roles and appearances; then yes, these physical interventions will seem like capitulation to internalized oppressive social standards. But if what is going on in trans people is not simply a



Sarah Flynn

political decision, but one that arises from a fundamental emotional need for personal integrity and psychic integration, then this is not a matter of fitting into the external world and its expectations. It is first and foremost a matter of being honest with oneself and seeking to express that self honestly and openly as a whole human being.

I remember the prayer of a trans friend of mine. "O God," she prayed, "make me one way or the other, I don't care which, just make me whole." She wanted an end to the inner turmoil and could live with the social consequences.

The R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center provides a safe space and supportive environment for those exploring these kinds of in-depth questions. The Trans Support Group meets the first Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 8 pm at R.U.1.2?. More frequent meetings may be an option as needed. These are exploratory sessions, a time of sharing our personal stories, listening to each other, and giving feedback with the hope of providing helpful information and emotional support. Not everyone who comes decides that this is their path to follow, but we are here to help those testing the waters. Confidentiality is assured. No last names needed. No one-way only solutions offered. Feel free to call R.U.1.2? for a call back if you have questions before coming to the group. ▼

➔ The Trans Support Group meets the first Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 8 pm at R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center, 34 Elmwood Ave. in Burlington. Contact the center at 860-7812 for a call back if you have questions before coming to the group.

➔ Sarah Flynn is the Trans Support Group's facilitator.

PHOTO PROVIDED