

Culture Watch

BY STEPHEN H. MILLER

Exceptions to the Rule

Gender Benders

What is the measure of a man—or woman? Is it possible that the fundamental dichotomy of gender, the archetypal dualism of male and female, is actually verified rather than weakened by the “violation” we now call transgenderism (as in that newest of novelties, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered—or LGBT—Community)?

These questions might pose themselves to anyone who reads John Taylor’s fascinating report on the transgender gap in the April *Esquire* (the one with the shirtless Johnny Depp—no transsexual he).

In exploring the “transgender revolution,” Taylor makes some startling findings. For instance, despite the embrace of transgender rights by LGBT activists—particularly in San Francisco, where discrimination against the transgendered is now illegal—many feminists expressed utter contempt toward male-to-female transsexuals.

“Transsexuals, in the view of many feminists, are nothing more than ‘surgically castrated males’ who symbolically rape women by appropriating the female form,” Taylor writes. They have been barred from the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, since although biologically female (thanks to the wonders of surgery), they are not “womyn born womyn.” Instead, “they’re deviant males,” in the words of Janice Raymond, a professor of women’s studies at the University of Massachusetts.

As Taylor points out, this represents something of a contradiction in feminist theory, for “while feminism was founded on the notion that biology is not destiny, many feminists will insist, at least when it comes to transsexuals, that biology *is* destiny; a man can never *really* become a woman. But that contradicts another central tenet

of feminism: that gender is socially constructed.”

And there’s more theoretical queasiness. Feminist-inspired “gender theorists” (much, I might add, like many academic “queer theorists”) argue that gender and sex roles are nothing but a “social masquerade” that results from male oppression of females, and that the anatomical differences between men and women are, at best, minor and superficial.

But if this is so, why would transsexuals bother with surgery in the first place? In fact, as Taylor notes, instead of trying to be somehow “gender-free,” many male-to-female transsexuals, for instance, adopt mannerisms that are almost a caricature of femininity—becoming more feminine than most naturally born women.

A sidebar to the piece focuses on Jahna Steele, a male-to-female transsexual and Las Vegas show girl. “I just love glamour and glitz,” Jahna says. “And I have no problem with men. It’s women who seem threatened by my glamour. A lot of times I’ll get derogatory comments from women.

“And I don’t believe that a woman can do everything a man can do,” she adds. “And I’ve seen some pretty burly dykes. There should be male and female things.”

In today’s world, that’s heresy. But Jahna Steele feels that gender is intrinsic, even when it conflicts with the bodies with which we’re born. “All the surgery in the world isn’t gonna make you feminine if you can’t feel it inside,” she says. “And I always felt like a woman.”

Taylor also gives the other side a voice, and it belongs to Martine Rothblatt, who sees things quite differently. In fact, she’s somewhat of a gender-war transsexual who advocates eliminating the categories of male and female from official documents, getting

rid of sex-segregated bathrooms, and “replacing words such as *he* and *she* with gender-neutral neologism such as *hessh*.”

That attack on gender won’t wash, and it’s a minority view even among transsexuals (although certain LGBT leftists are now advocating that businesses make their restrooms unisex). Contrary to what Martine Rothblatt maintains, for most people—both straight and gay—gender isn’t just a lifestyle option. And while gender may interact with sexual orientation in ways that aren’t always clear, most gay men and lesbians don’t share with transsexuals a feeling that they are opposite-sex souls trapped in the wrong biological bodies.

For most people, then, gender is deeply ingrained into our physical and psychological programming. In fact, a flurry of recent studies has pointed to differences in the way male and female brains process information, which suggests the reason the sexes excel in different areas is not simply due to sexist stereotypes. The fact that most pre-operative transsexuals feel a conflict between the gender of their physical bodies and their psychic selves suggests that unisex androgyny is *not* the natural human condition once “patriarchal” cultural conditioning is removed from the mix.

If trendy LGBT leftists, combining the most extreme feminist gender theory with the politics espoused by a minority of radical transgendered activists, put forth the misguided notion that the lesbian movement must adopt anti-gender unisexuality as a guiding philosophy, the gay movement will become even more marginalized in the eyes of the majority than it is now. Let’s celebrate diversity, but recognize that transgenderism is the relatively rare exception that proves the rule.