

On a different note, a few months ago, on the Tomorrow Show, there was a discussion of transexuals. Tom Snyder interviewed several transexuals, including a woman who "became" a man. Listening to this woman was one of the saddest things I've seen on TV. When she was explaining why she got the operation it sounded to me as if she was talking about experiences common to many women. She never fit into the female role - she was a tomboy as a child, a gym teacher as an adult. Because she didn't walk or dress "femininely," people called her "sir" and kids asked her if she was a man or woman. She was made to believe that she was strange, that there was something wrong with her. I felt that rather than question the society that made her feel this way, she decided society was right and the way to fix everything was to surgically become a man.

She explained that she had never been close to anyone during her life. It seemed as if she removed herself from friendships with other women because when she was young her parents had taken her aside and explained what a lesbian was, and how awful they were. She was clearly scared of being thought of as a lesbian - she's definitely not "one of them."

I suppose one way to eliminate strong, independent women, who may or may not be lesbians, is to so totally convince them that there's something wrong with them that they'll resort to anything - including trying to become men. But there's many more differences between a man and a woman than the simple physical characteristics. The reason I chose to love women is definitely not just because I like women's bodies better than men's. There are innumerable qualities that women and men don't share. This person may look like a man now, and even act like a man on the surface, but she'll never be able to erase her life as a woman, and the oppression she lived through. While I don't approve of the discrimination transexuals must face, I have to say that I can't really relate to this person as a man - her choice to try to be a man saddens me, and separates her from me, but I still feel a tie to her womanness. In the same way a man who takes hormones and has an operation may look like a woman, and he may experience oppression for being a transexual, but he can never be a woman. I hate to imagine how many of our lesbian ancestors could have been destroyed by transexual operations, and how many women today may be convinced that if they don't fit society's image of a woman they should try to become men.

Perhaps someday television won't perpetuate society's perverted image of a woman. Maybe seeing realistic portrayals of lesbians will become commonplace. But as it stands now TV is hardly a supportive form of entertainment for us. And I fear that it'll be a long time before the popular lesbian fantasy of Mary and Rhoda getting together ever appears on network TV. --Margy

EDITORS' NOTE: if you're interested in contacting the networks about the two soap operas you can write them at: NBC, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, NY, NY 10020; CBS, 51 W 52nd St, NY, NY 10019.

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