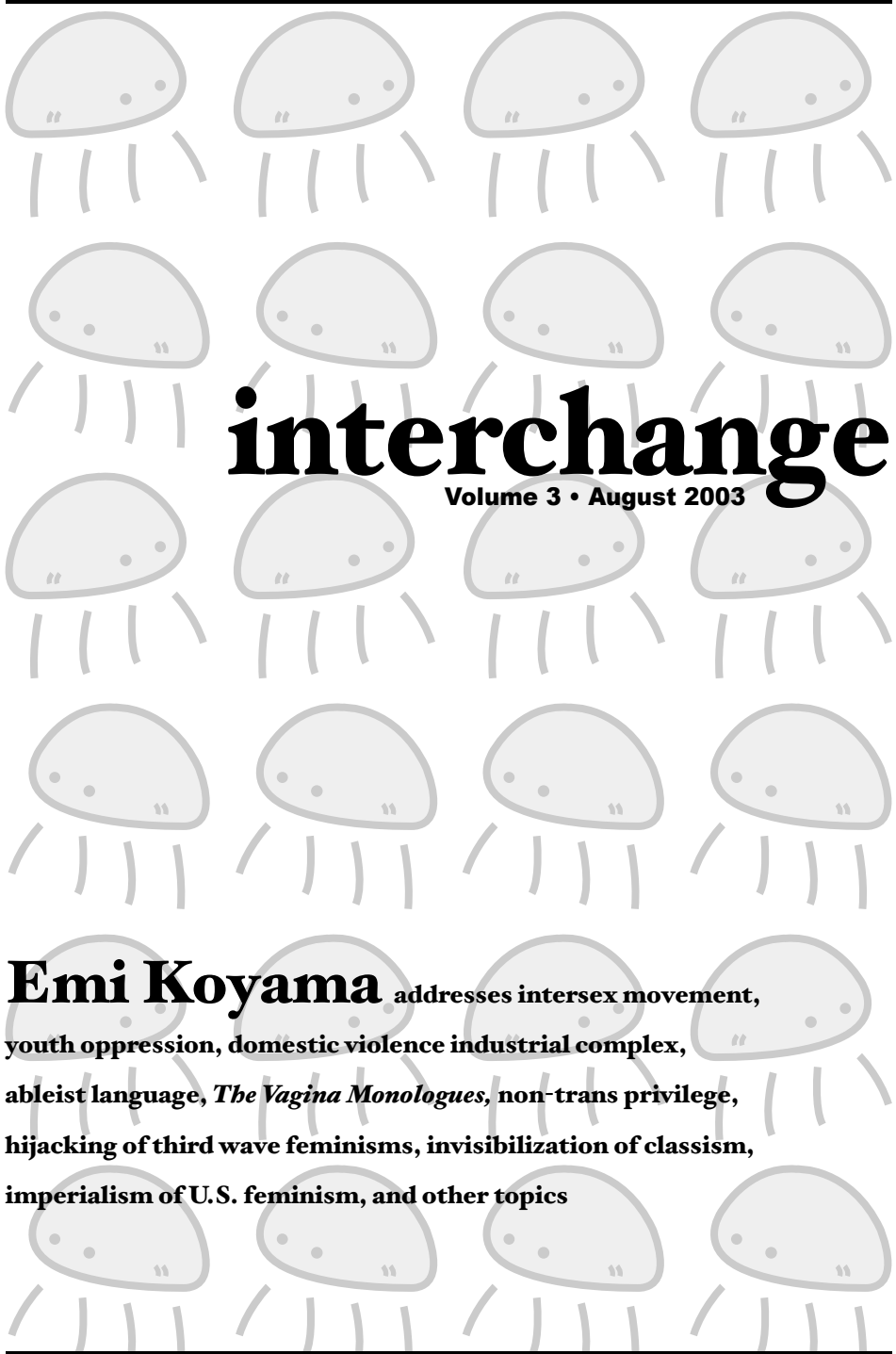


All the Online Flame War That's Fit to Print. Well, Almost.



interchange

Volume 3 • August 2003

Emi Koyama addresses intersex movement, youth oppression, domestic violence industrial complex, ableist language, *The Vagina Monologues*, non-trans privilege, hijacking of third wave feminisms, invisibilization of classism, imperialism of U.S. feminism, and other topics

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Cover illustration by Emi Koyama, featuring Bubble the Jellyfish

Special thanks to the following email lists and message boards, from which articles compiled in this 'zine came:

Trans-Academic ML
<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/trans-academic.html>

WMST-L
http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/wmst-l_index.html

CNRG
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CNRG>

Sexual Realities
<http://pub72.ezboard.com/bsexualrealities>

Strap-On.org
<http://www.strap-on.org>

chora (chora-l)
<http://www.thirdspace.ca/chora/chora.htm>

tg poc
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/tgpoc>

QueerDisability
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/QueerDisability>

Intersexed_Society
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Intersexed_Society

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 1

What is this ‘Zine about? 2

Who’s this Emi Chick? 2

#41: Feminism or Bigotry? (Trans-Academic ML) 3

#42: Abusive Power & Control within the Shelter Systems (NCADV) 4

#43: Media, Stereotype & Young Women’s Feminisms (WMST-L) 5

#44: Construction of the Palatable “Young Women’s Voices” (WMST-L). . 6

#45: Is Colorado Trans-Friendly? (WMST-L) 7

#46: The Vagina Monologues & ISNA (FAB-List) 9

#47: Cisgender/Cissexual (WMST-L) 11

#48: Anti-Youth Attitudes at Social Service for Youth (CNRG) 12

#49: Eli Clare’s “Exile and Pride” (WMST-L) 15

#50: If I Can’t Dance to Bob Marley’s “Get Up, Stand Up”... (WMST-L). . 16

#51: Transsexuality is Just Life (Sexual Realities) 17

#52: Transmen at Dyke March (Strap-On.org) 18

#53: Doing Away with the Safety of “Women of Color” (chora-l). 19

#54: Japanese Transsexuals Divided Over the New Law (tgpoec). 20

#55: “X” Gender in Passports (WMST-L) 21

#56: “Othering” of Non-Western Women (QueerDisability) 22

#57: Intersex Brain, Trans Brain (Intersexed_Society) 24

#58: Japanese Feminism Written Out of History (WENews) 27

Subject Index 28

What is this ‘zine about?

Interchange is originally a section within **Eminism.org**, the online propaganda center created by **Emi Koyama** (that’s me!). Interchange basically archives some of the most interesting postings Emi made to various electronic mailing lists and message boards, although sometimes I include things that don’t fit into this criteria. This ‘zine is the “best of” collection of the online version, so to speak.

You can find the entire Interchange archive online at:
<http://eminism.org/interchange/>

Who is this Emi chick?

Emi Koyama is a multi-issue social justice slut who synthesizes feminist, Asian, survivor, dyke, queer, sex worker, intersex, genderqueer and crip politics. Emi is the founding director of **Intersex Initiative Portland** (www.ipdx.org) and has presented extensively on intersex activism, working-class sex worker feminisms, and the domestic violence “industry” around the country.

Emi is also the founder of **Confluere** (www.confluere.com), an “alternative speaker’s bureau without the (centralized) bureau” and is responsible for putting the “emi” back in feminism via **Eminism.org**.

Emi can be contacted at emi@eminism.org.

#41: Feminism or Bigotry?

Date: April 11, 2002

Forum: Trans-Academic ML

[in response to the discussion about Sheila Jeffrey's anti-transsexual article in the book *The Whole Woman*]

Hi everyone,

I agree with Jill and Reid that Sheila Jeffrey's politics, including her transphobic politics, are most likely to have derived not from a sophisticated analysis of social realities but from an existential need – but locating the roots of her transphobia in some trans-specific incident or history (a la Sam's suggestion) misses the point. Her anti-trans politics needs to be understood within the context of lesbian-feminism and its politics around other issues, such as pornography, prostitution, reproductive choice (many lesbian-feminists are anti-choice; see Janice Raymond's "Women as Womb"), and sexuality.

"Dialogues" are not likely to bring about reconciliation, as she would have to give up her fundamental beliefs in lesbian-feminist positions in other areas before she can give up transphobia. If we were to address anti-trans politics within lesbian-feminism, we need to fundamentally critique lesbian-feminism for its paternalism, false universalism, ranking of oppressions, and sexual hierarchies, rather than treating its transphobia in isolation.

On 4/10/02 8:01 PM, "Ben Singer" wrote:

- > Actually, I would argue she might be lesbian, but she's hardly
- > feminist. Her actions are not based on any feminist principles
- > I have heard of.

Her actions are based on radical lesbian feminism – in fact, she is pretty predictable once you know where she's coming from.

- > They seem more in line with religious fundamentalists and other
- > hate-mongers.

Who said feminists can't be also religious fundamentalists or hate-mongers?

Emi K.

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#42: Abusive Power & Control within the Shelter System

To: National Coaligion Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)

Date: 05/29/2002

Hello NCADV,

I have just received a “conference information guide” for the upcoming NCADV conference in August, and noticed that the proposal I wrote, “Implementing Survivor-Centered Mechanisms to Hold Service Providers Accountable,” apparently did not make the cut. Needless to say, I was very disappointed.

As I further investigated the list of all workshops, I noticed that there are exactly zero workshops that deal with the issue of holding service providers (i.e. ourselves) accountable to the actual needs of survivors seeking services. There are many workshops that deal with the unique needs of specific populations or those that may challenge the direction of the anti-domestic violence movement, but nothing that recognizes the power imbalance between the service provider and the client and attempts to implement structures to prevent abuse of power within our shelters and services.

Does this mean that NCADV does not think that abuse of power happen within anti-domestic violence movement? Or that the problem is minimal? Based on my own observation while working at DV shelters and the preliminary interviews I have conducted with survivors over the last year, I feel that this is a significant problem facing our movement to end violence—one that cannot be resolved simply through more sensitivity trainings or our own feminist consciousness, but requires structural changes.

The workshop I proposed would draw wisdoms and strategies from various other movements that have successfully incorporated client-controlled social service model in areas such as homeless advocacy, HIV/HepC prevention, among others. I have presented on this topic in several occasions in the past (Color of Violence 2002, keynote for New York University’s Women’s Herstory Month, and a national meeting on DV in queer Asian communities held by Family Violence Prevention Fund), and feel that it is essential for NCADV to include this discussion if it were to truly empower survivors of domestic violence.

I ask you to once again consider including my proposed workshop or at least someone else’s that address this very real issue facing our movements.

Emi Koyama

Community Board Member, Survivor Project

#43: Media, Stereotype & Young Women's Feminisms

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 05/22/2002

On 05/22/02 09:38 am, "silver_ak" wrote:

- > Since someone mentioned the Oprah show on "second" and
- > "third" generation feminists, I'd like to know if this video is
- > available.

I find it problematic to insinuate the relationship between second and third waves of feminism as solely generational, as it would privilege the dominant group's experience of being in any particular "generation." The term "third wave" was used first by women of color in the 1970s to position themselves outside of the second wave - a tone somewhat adhered to in earlier "third wave" anthologies like *Third Wave Agenda* and *To Be Real* but almost entirely whitewashed in *Manifesta*.

Last year I coordinated a "research cafe" on third wave feminisms at NWSA, in which I made the following proposal: re-define third wave feminism as the feminism "outside of" or "beside" the second wave rather than "after," and as the feminism that starts from the realization that there are many power imbalances among women that are as serious and important as the power imbalance between women and men. If you are interested in continuing this conversation, please come to Third Wave Feminisms + Bisexual/Transgender Interest Area Groups' joint meeting in Las Vegas.

- > I didn't see it and so can't comment on the discussions, but a
- > couple of my WGS students were very downhearted about what
- > they perceived to be the insular individualism of the younger
- > feminists and a sense that the younger feminists had lost a vision
- > of social justice for all women.

It is interesting that second wave feminists who have consistently complained about how *they* were depicted by the mainstream media would wholeheartedly accept anything the same media report about young women or feminists with all of its anti-youth, anti-feminist distortions. And then they accuse young women of buying into the media stereotypes about the second wave feminism. Sigh.

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

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#44: Constructing the Palatable “Young Women’s Voices”

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 06/05/2002

On 06/04/02 09:09 am, “Hannah Miyamoto” wrote:

- > We were discussing [...] that what the Third Wave lacks is cogent
- > political theory to go with its counter-cultural aspects.
- > [...] The Third Wave, however, seems to have gone to the other
- > extreme—ignoring the past.

It was Gloria Steinem, the architypal second wave feminist, who not only groomed Amy Richards but also presented her as *the* “young feminist” to the media. It is the second wave feminists who run Seal Press who select which “young feminist” they will promote as part of their “Live Girls” series, and edit out any element they find dangerous. It is the second wave feminists of Ms. magazine who picked 21 “young feminists” for the twenty-first century. It is no surprising that they are coming up with the list of “young feminist” leaders who do not threaten the second wave feminists, who are somewhat palpable.

Meanwhile, those young feminists who have sound political analyses or doing serious scholarship are finding it hard to be taken seriously, either in activism or in academia, by those feminists who run feminist activist organizations, feminist publications, or Women’s Studies department. They are bombarded with administrative and teaching responsibilities that discourage them from pursuing scholarship or theorizing. They are dismissed as whining and denied opportunities to publish or present their ideas when they present serious critiques of the second wave theories, and accused of “ignoring the past” when they attempt to historicize the second wave, when in fact many second wave feminists’ inability to position their own movement within the historical context *is* a greater offense against its history.

In addition, many second wave feminists are betraying their own analysis of the system under which certain people’s theories are legitimized (men’s theory about women, white people’s theory about race, etc.) while others not by uncritically perpetuating it against young women, as they have in the past against women of color (e.g. UC Santa Cruz’s History of Consciousness program viewing Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* as not “theoretical” enough) and others. I see this dynamic in how Linda Wayne’s theoretical arguments are dismissed, complete with the use of a hysterical (misogynist language, I know) example, much the same way earlier feminist critiques of the “patriarchy” has been dismissed as “political correctness run amok,” except this time it’s “deconstructionism run amok.”

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

#45: Is Colorado Trans-Friendly?

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 06/07/2002

On 06/04/02 12:23 pm, "Eileen Bresnahan" wrote:

- > I live in Colorado, where a transsexual who is doing everything
- > possible to pass as the gender that is not congruent with her
- > or his biological sex [...] but who has NOT had any sort of "sex
- > reassignment" surgery—can get a driver's license that says they
- > are the sex they are performing

[snip]

- > What this State-sanction indicates is what is obvious: crossing
- > gender lines only in order to perform the same only dreary
- > bullshit in the same old dreary guise destabilizes nothing.

State of Colorado does not protect trans people from the discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodation, nor does it have hate crimes legislation that specifically targets bias-motivated crimes committed against trans people. In your very state, Fred Martinez Jr., a transgender and gay-identified Dineh Two Spirit youth, was brutally murdered less than a year ago - and yet, the legislature once again voted down the hate crimes bill. To suggest that trans people's rights are sanctioned by the State of Colorado is a wild mischaracterization.

- > Why do you suppose the patriarchal, conservative, Republican-
- > controlled, State is willing to do that—enabling transsexuals to
- > marry (I guess) and whatever—to legally "be" the other gender?
- > While it is not willing to let little old (imperfectly) feminine-
- > appearing me do the same and marry my partner of 26 years?

The assumption that all transsexuals are heterosexual (or that the potential partners of transsexual people are not transsexual) is incorrect, heterosexual, and cissexist (that is, anti-transsexual).

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

Date: 06/06/2002

On 06/06/02 09:49 am, "Eileen Bresnahan" wrote:

- > Many people today like to paint transsexuality as "subversive"
- > because it "undermines" gender.

Duh. Transsexualism is not any more "subversive" than, say, woman-loving-woman. People are just trying to survive, running through the barbed wire sometimes like Fred Martinez Jr. did moments before his death in Cortez, Colorado.

- > But if it is so subversive, why is the patriarchal State so willing
- > to authorize it, allowing legal sex reassignment for any transsexual

> willing to live as the “other” sex?

How many states and cities have civil rights statutes that protect people from discrimination on the basis of “sexual orientation,” and how many also have “gender identity”? How many states and cities have hate crimes legislations that include crimes motivated by homophobia or biphobia, and how many of them also include transphobia? How many states and cities provide same-sex partner benefit to their employees, and how many of them provide insurance coverage for hormones and surgery for transsexual people? How many elected officials are out as gay or lesbians, and how many out as transsexuals? How many gays and lesbians are beaten by the police officers on a regular basis, and how many transsexuals? By using an arbitrary measure to make an argument about who is more oppressed or sanctioned by the state, you are engaging in a decades-old pattern (within radical feminism) of ranking of the oppressions, which has been criticized by Cherrie Moraga, Patricia Hill Collins, and many others.

> While the State is not equally willing to provide the same
> imprimatur to women-loving-women?

Did the State of Colorado issue you a driver’s license that does not match how you feel comfortable living as? By describing transsexual people as having more rights than you because of a remedial policy that you did not need in the first place thanks to your cissexual privilege, you are making the same argument as the religious right when they claim gay and lesbian activists want “special rights” beyond those enjoyed by heterosexuals. It makes me sad that in a state where the majority of voters are willing to label gays and lesbians as sick and abnormal, even a self-identified feminist like yourself perpetuate such a “special rights” rhetoric when it is about the issue where you have the privilege.

As I pointed out in the last post, the fact is that transsexual people do not have the right to marry more than anyone else: it’s only the heterosexual people who get the right, whether they are transsexual or not.

> In fact, transsexuality is not progressive or subversive of the
> existing order of gender, it is profoundly conservative.

It is not any more conservative than everyone else who identify with a gender. Why do you assume that transsexuals have more responsibility to subvert “the existing order of gender” than anyone else? I see this as shifting of responsibility from the privileged group (cissexuals) to the marginalized one (transsexuals), like how people of color are often expected to do more work to dismantle racism than whites.

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

#46: The Vagina Monologues & Intersex Society of N. America

Note: In January 2002, Hilde Nelson forwarded a press release from Intersex Society of North America on its actions to challenge V-Day, an organization founded by *The Vagina Monologues* author Eve Ensler, to the “Feminist Approaches to Bioethics” list. Nelson added, “ISNA is a reputable organization that does good work, though I am sorry to see it go after a piece of feminist theatre. Feminists really aren’t the enemy.” Below is an email I sent on June 5 (when I became aware of this interaction) to Ms. Nelson.

Forum: Feminist Approach to Bioethics List

Date: 06/05/2002

Hello Hilde,

I came across the discussion between two of you in regards to my and other intersex activists’ response to “The Vagina Monologues,” and felt that you might benefit from additional background information. I know it’s an old discussion, but I wanted to clear some misunderstandings if there are any.

1) There was a long history of individual intersex people and our friends trying to communicate with Eve Ensler and V-Day, to no avail. For example, Esther Morris (the author of “The Missing Vagina Monologues,” published in *Sojourner* in March 2001) sent Eve her article along with an invitation for a dialogue; she received a three-line letter back that basically said “thanks for the info, but I’m not interested in any dialogues.” Thea Hillman (a board member of ISNA) sent Eve a copy of “Hermaphrodites Speak!,” a documentary film produced by ISNA, along with a letter; she received no reply. I know of at least a dozen others who attempted to contact Eve individually and privately, but none except Esther received any reply at all. In addition, ISNA activists and allies made at least two attempts to speak to Eve directly at her shows (in Boston and in Ann Arbor) but both times Eve refused to speak with us. Like Audre Lourde who was forced to publish her famous letter to Mary Daly because of Daly’s refusal to privately respond to her concerns as a Black woman, we felt that we needed to make our concerns public to gain any attention.

2) If “The Vagina Monologues” was just an off-broadway play or even a national tour, it would not have been such a big problem. However, it was being used as a centerpiece for 800+ V-Day festivities all over the world every year, and we simply could not allow it to continue spreading misinformation about intersexuality. The damage was too large to ignore.

3) While Eve has the perfect freedom to write whatever she pleases, V-Day is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which is accountable to its mission statement, part of which is to end genital mutilation on women and girls. Any tax-exempt organization whose actions contradict its mission

statement needs to be challenged. We never asked Eve to modify any portion of her play in our organized response, although we took V-Day the non-profit organization to task.

4) A day after we kicked off our public campaign, the executive director of V-Day contacted us, expressing her organization's (and Eve's) support toward our mission to end shame, secrecy and unwanted genital surgeries on intersex children. We asked them to issue a joint press release with us to make their support public, which they complied. We feel that this could not have happened without making our responses public, as individual and private responses had failed until this point.

I hope that this would give you a clearer picture of what actually took place behind the scenes.

As for my feminist credential—I think my involvement with National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and National Women's Studies Association, as well as publication in such periodicals as *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Fireweed*, *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, and others would speak for themselves.

Thank you both for your support for ISNA's work to end shame, secrecy and unwanted genital surgeries.

Emi Koyama
Program Assistant
Intersex Society of North America

#47: Cisgender/Cissexual

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 06/07/2002

Since several people emailed me to inquire about the words “cissexual” and “cissexism,” I thought I’d make a public clarification.

“cis-” is a prefix for “on this side of” rooted in Latin. Common words that use this prefix include:

- > cislunar (situated between the earth and the moon)
- > cisatlantic (situated on this side of the Atlantic Ocean)
- > cismontane (situated on this side of the mountains)

There are also many scientific words that use the prefix “cis-” in its second definition, which is “having a pair of identical atoms or groups on the same side of a plane that passes through two carbon atoms linked by a double bond.” (all definitions are taken from American Heritage Dictionary on my computer).

According to Donna Lynn Matthews, the term “cisgender” was first coined by Carl Buijs, a transsexual man, in 1995 (source: http://cydathria.com/ms_donna/tg_def.html). “Cissexual” probably came from that, in reference to “transgender” vs. “transsexual.” You might want to search for the terms “cissexual” and “cisgender” on the web to find their actual usage.

I learned the words “cissexual,” “cissexist,” and “cisgender,” from trans activists who wanted to turn the table and define the words that describe non-transsexuals and non-transgenders rather than always being defined and described by them. By using the term “cissexual” and “cisgender,” they de-centralize the dominant group, exposing it as merely one possible alternative rather than the “norm” against which trans people are defined. I don’t expect the word to come into common usage anytime soon, but I felt it was an interesting concept – a feminist one, in fact – which is why I am using it.

In Cisterhood (borrowing from J.N.),

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

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#48: Anti-Youth Attitudes at Social Service for the Youth

Forum: CNRG (Community Nonprofit Resource Group) list

Date: 06/07/2002

On 06/07/02 10:32 am, "Tina"(forward from Kathy) wrote:

- > I just met with Maria Rojo DeSteffey, who is one of the
- > County Commissioners. She wants SMYRC to get money. She is
- > very supportive and she said what we NEED to do is get youth
- > to come to this meeting on Tuesday and make a brief statement.
- > I can help you with what to say. PLEASE, send this to everyone
- > you know who loves SMYRC and wants it to stay open.

While I appreciate Kathy's work on behalf of the youth and her effort to save this valuable resource for them, I can't get over this anti-youth attitude seeping through her choice of language. "We" need to "get youth to come," when we could be saying "County Commissioners need to hear from the youth" instead? She could help with "what to say," rather than giving opportunities and support for youth to speak their own minds? I feel that these languages are antithetical to the work SMYRC is supposed to be doing.

Emi Koyama

Date: 06/07/2002

Hello everyone,

1) In response to my criticism of adults who run social services for youth, who dominate and paternalize youth rather than truly empowering them to speak their own minds, MCScottD suggested that I might be "somebody with some preconceived ideas about SMYRC... or perhaps even some personal issues with the staff there" which by his/her own admission is a pure speculation.

2) In addition, MCScottD made the statement that it annoyed him/her to see people criticize "others who are trying to help people."

3) In response, I clarified why I dare to criticize "others who are trying to help people," such as adults who make statements that are fundamentally antithetical to the empowerment of youth even as they purport to support them.

4) Further, I criticized the sentiment expressed by MCScottD, which mistakenly substitute intention for accountability. "Good intention" is not an excuse for abusive, controlling or oppressive (in this particular case, anti-youth) behaviors, and progressive activists' inability to acknowledge

that we are capable of seriously harming those we are trying to protect needs to be confronted. Unless we are willing to hold ourselves accountable for the implications of our actions and statements regardless of what our intentions were, we will not be able to criticize bombing Afghanistan to “liberate” women from Taliban, jailing prostitutes and junkies to “save” them, “compassionate conservatism” kicking single mothers off welfare so they can seek out happy marriage, and so on.

5) My response to MCScottD in which I addressed 3) and 4) was *rejected* by the list moderator as inappropriate because it was not “constructive” (I suppose that MCScottD’s characterization of me was appropriate and constructive, although it had no substance whatsoever). I disagree; all of my criticisms (unlike those by MCScottD) were based on the actual statements and situations that need to be confronted and adjusted, and none of it was baseless speculation.

6) I sent in another post to CNRG to explain the situation to other subscribers, and was also rejected by the same moderator. The moderator sent me an email that seemed very confused: at one point, she apologized for skimming MCScottD’s post and not noticing his/her attack on me (which is strange, because his/her post contained no information or opinion whatsoever except for the attack), and yet in the end she maintained that there was no mistake on the part of the moderator.

7) Then the moderator suggested that I need to understand how the list is run, describing how she is a volunteer who spends many hours moderating this list. Not to disrespect the work done by her and the other moderator, this again shows the pervasiveness of this tendency to use one’s intention or honest effort as a way to absolve accountability.

8) It is important that we make distinctions between personal attacks that are based on speculation or unsupported allegations or biases, and criticisms directed toward specific comments or actions that are racist, sexist, homophobic, and yes, anti-youth. I do not expect the moderators to weed out every statement that is offensive or oppressive, but I expect them to allow other participants to confront any such comments if they appear on this list.

Emi Koyama

Date: 06/12/2002

Okay, folks: because several people (including the former Executive Director of Phoenix Rising, the parent organization of SMYRC during her tenure) have asked to put an end to this discussion, and also because I’ve already made my points as clear as I could make it, I’ll make these final comments and observations and drop the topic for now.

1) As an adult ally who is committed to the self-determination and self-representation of the youth, by the youth, I believe that it is my

responsibility to challenge comments and actions by other adults that, regardless of their intentions, reinforce paternalism directed toward them. If I failed to interrupt the original public statement coming from SMYRC, which I viewed as anti-youth, I would be complicit in its disregard of the centrality of youth is youth organizing.

2) It is possible that I was too quick to determine the original statement as “anti-youth,” or that the particular way I chose to interrupt it was not effective. Here, I would like to leave the judgment to the youth themselves (not that all youth think the same way, of course), rather than some former Executive Director or parent or anonymous AOL user who just sent me a nasty email privately.

3) When I criticized a couple of statements coming from an adult SMYRC staffer as antithetical to the empowerment of youth, I was immediately accused by some of attacking SMYRC as a whole or not understanding/ appreciating their work enough. Not only are those characterizations false, they reproduce a common initial reaction whenever someone challenges any progressive movement on their problems: feminists who criticized sexism within the New Left movements, women of color who criticized racism within the feminist movement, trans activists who criticized transphobia within the queer movement, etc. We need to recognize and move beyond this pattern.

4) The reaction expressed by some, “please stop this discussion because this is not the appropriate space to discuss your grievances” is also one of the common ways the privileged group respond when others challenge them.

5) Thank you and congratulations to everybody who is working to save the funding for SMYRC.

Emi Koyama

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#49: Eli Clare's "Exile and Pride"

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 06/10/2002

On 06/10/02, "Kimberly Simmons" wrote:

- > Eli Clare's book *Exile and Pride* is an excellent example of
- > theorizing intersections between queer, feminist and disability
- > rights.

It's more than that: Eli's book is also about the contradiction of coming from and identifying with the rural working-class white culture that is often blatantly racist as well as homophobic and is sustained through the logging industry - and being among largely middle-class, urban environmentalists and queer activists. I just worry that some people would view *Exile and Pride* as a book about disability and queerness only, and miss its deeply working-class, anti-racist analyses, just like how the television movie version of *Bastard Out of Carolina* gutted the working-class realities Dorothy Allison described so eloquently in the book.

Also, Eli's discussion of disability extends beyond "disability rights" (a term that presumes an identifiable class of "the disabled" who would organize for more rights) - he looks into the social construction of his disability as well as his sexuality and gender, locating himself among the tradition of circus freaks who survived through the display of their exotic anatomy, who strived for dignity in extremely tight places.

I used a small portion from *Exile and Pride* in my class about intersexuality (which I'm going to present at NWSA about) this term because some of my students were saying things like "I can't believe doctors do such a horrible thing to intersex children; they would never have done it to anyone else!" or "It's wrong for doctors to treat intersex children as if being intersex is a disability." I also used "Public Stripping" by Lisa Blumberg, which is quoted by Clare. I used these writings from the disability theory/studies in a class about intersex because I wanted my students to understand that the erasure of intersex existence does not happen in a vacuum, and that there is a larger context to what was being done to intersex children. After class, at least three students (out of only 10) fell in love with Clare's writings (as I have!), went out and bought the book. It's really powerfully and beautifully written.

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

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#50: If I Can't Dance to Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up"...

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 06/11/2002

On 06/11/02, "Daphne Patai" wrote:

- > I attended a feminist workshop at which a speaker used the
- > classic metaphor of "seeing" for "understanding," and a woman
- > in the audience interrupted her to point out that she'd used an
- > "ablist" metaphor. The speaker apologized abjectly. I myself
- > thought this a rather embarrassing example of an inability
- > within feminism to distinguish serious and insignificant issues.

Actually, I feel that it is an embarrassing example of an inability within feminism to recognize our own inevitable complicity in the communication that is ableist as well as sexist, racist, etc. I do not think that the fact we say "see" when we mean "understand" and "blind" when we mean "unaware" in English language is insignificant; a blind person who rightfully registers her or his objection to this use and its implication deserves to be taken seriously. I do not feel good that the word "lame" is used in a derogatory context either. However I think it's more important to build an awareness of how our language inevitably reflects ableist (sexist, racist, etc.) culture which it came from, and that we are inevitably complicit in the linguistic construction of social order - than altering any specific term deemed ableist.

An anecdote: I was at the queer disability conference at San Francisco State University (Eli Clare was one of the conference chairs; I was one of the featured speakers), and after a long day of conferencing there was a dance for the participants. The music selection was not very good, and it was slow — until they started playing Bob Marley: "Get up, stand up — stand up for your rights!" Now, that's definitely an ableist song — and yet we all just danced, crips of all kinds. It is one thing to be aware that using "stand up" as a metaphor for political resistance has ableist ramifications — but if we can't dance, why be part of the revolution?

Emi Koyama <emi@eminism.org>

--

<http://eminism.org/> * Putting the Emi back in Feminism since 1975.

#51: Transsexuality is Just Life

Forum: Sexual Realities Forum

Date: 06/27/2002

- > Some people do say that gender-reassignment surgery implies
- > an embracing of gender essentialism, by demanding the need
- > for a particular body type to be consistent with one's inner
- > feelings. In other words, that you're giving in to standard
- > conceptions of what is a man, what is a woman, rather than
- > just living out your life as a really butch dyke or a flaming queen.

For many transsexual people I know, having the surgery means that they have a much better chance of getting out of a rape—or a first date—alive. That they have a much better chance that they won't be beaten while using the restroom, locker room, and other gender-segregated facilities, or put in the wrong jail where they could be severely abused. Or, in some states, they won't be able to get a driver's license that correspond with their performed gender (and yes, **everyone** performs gender, not just trannies), putting them at a much greater risk of being brutalized by the police or discriminated on the job. Or marry their heterosexual partner—who could be someone who needs health insurance or immigrant who needs a family-sponsored visa. Trans people are real people, a group of severely marginalized and abused people in fact, and not a theoretical point to be made.

Emigrl

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#52: Transmen at Dyke March

Forum: Strap-On.org Forum

Date: 06/28/2002

rileypup wrote:

- > I totally agree. So, now your a tranny boy. Stop whining
- > about not having access to women only space.

tranzdyke wrote:

- > i think that if people expect to be taken seriously they have to
- > act predictably, in the sense that i say "i am a woman" and i'm
- > not going to attend a promise keepers event, except perhaps
- > to fuck it up.

rileypup wrote:

- > Yeah, ditto that. I don't see how anyone is ever going to start
- > taking transmen/boys seriously, actually call us the right
- > pronouns and not keep referring to us as "just really butch
- > lesbians" or whatever if we keep on protesting for our right
- > to be included in women only spaces on the basis that "well,
- > we used to be dykes and we still have connections to that
- > community."

hey guys (and girls, and others), people's identities are often much more complex than just being a man or a woman. if you are a transman who feel that dyke march is not your place that's fine, just don't attend (and cheer at us from the sidewalk!) - but there are lots of trans people who may not necessarily identify as women who are dyke-identified, and how can a "dyke march" exclude a large number of "dykes"?

and what is this "we need to act predictably to be taken seriously" shit—how is this sentiment different from log cabin type gays who tell drag queens and queers of other kinds to act straight for the gay people to be "taken seriously"? don't trans and genderqueer people of mixed, hybrid, incongruent, and contradictory identities also deserve to be taken seriously?

i don't even see the point of dyke march having any policy regarding trans people in the first place, but if they must have one why don't they include dykes of all genders and sexualities?

Date: 06/28/2002

- > Well, I still say that if you accept the label "dyke," you're
- > also accepting the label "woman."

Why are you deciding what labels "dyke" and "woman" should mean if you don't even identify with either? Why do you believe that while it is not appropriate for you to participate in a dyke- and women-only event,

and yet feel perfectly appropriate to define what it means to be a dyke or a woman? This statement reminds me of Janice Raymond's suggestion to mandate transsexuals out of existence.

- > No one's managed to tell me what exactly makes anyone who is
- > not a woman (or at least willing to sometimes put themselves
- > under that label) a dyke yet.

They do not have the responsibility to prove their identities to you any more than you do to non-transsexuals. It is an unquestionable fact that there are many dykes who do not identify as "women" for one reason or another, some of which do not even have anything to do with trans- or genderqueer-ness (cf. Monique Wittig's argument that lesbians are not women).

#53: Doing Away With the Safety of "Women of Color"

Forum: chora-l

Date: 10/20/2002

<< Gloria Anzaldúa has recently paired up with another woman (whose name escapes me right now) in an anthology called: *This Bridge We Call Home*. It is of a similar genre to the earlier one, but includes white women, men, Jewish women, etc. It tries to "bridge" feminisms and recognizes that any woman can identify as a "woman of color" in terms of her politics, etc. >>

As far as I can tell, Anzaldúa's and Keating's decision to include men/whites is *not* meant to suggest that men/whites can "identify as 'women of color' in terms of her politics" as someone said. It is more about refusing to accept "women of color" as a natural, stable identity category from which to formulate political theory than about including men/whites/etc. per se. Anzaldúa wrote:

Many women of color are possessive of *This Bridge Called My Back* and view it as a safe space, as "home." But there are no safe spaces... Staying "home" and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth. (p.3)

A bridge, such as this book [is] about doing away with demarcations like "ours" and "theirs." It's about honoring people's otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view, belief system, skin color, or spiritual practice... To include whites is not an attempt to restore the privilege of white writers, scholars, and activists; it is a refusal to continue walking the color line. These inclusions challenge conventional identities and promote more expansive configurations of identities—some of which will soon become cages and have to be dismantled. (p.4)

These “more expansive configurations of identities” do not refer to men/whites being able to “identify” as “women of color,” but rather to question the naturalness of conventional identities such as “white,” and “of color,” “men,” and “women.” The editors’ decision to go beyond the presumed “safety” of staying within our own “boundaries” is timely, in the era in which our basic liberties and equalities, not to mention lives of innocent people, are taken away in the supposed pursuit of “security” in the scale unprecedented in recent history.

As some of you may know, I did a debate in the latest issue of *Bitch* magazine over the trans exclusion policies at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. Invoking Anzaldúa’s frontera theory, I argued that any attempt to establish clear, unambiguous boundaries where none could naturally exist is inherently flawed. In other words, I did not simply argue that transsexual women be included, but that any borders kept ambiguous and de-militarized. I also argued that the “safety” of women-only space is an illusion that must be challenged. I’m glad to see that my interpretation of Gloria’s earlier work in terms of discussing boundaries and safety is reflected back to me in her new writing.

#54: Japanese Transsexuals Divided Over the New Law

From: tgpoc list

Date: 07/02/2003

On 7/2/03 10:52 AM, “DionHM” wrote:

- > This is so wonderful! Japan approved gender change on
- > identification! I have a good friend in Japan who transitioned
- > over a decade ago and for example, could not go into a bank
- > to withdrawl money due to his gender on his identification
- > being female. Masae Torai is quoted in this article and has
- > written for FTMI Newsletter many years, he is to be saluted!

The new Japanese regulation requires that a trans person is 1) not married, 2) has never had any children, and 3) has had genital surgery as the condition for changing gender identification. The bill was initially promoted by trans activists and liberal politicians, but was hijacked by conservatives who wanted to ensure that the existence of trans people would not threaten the traditional family structures.

As a result, some Japanese trans activists have denounced this bill because it creates a hierarchy among transsexual people (e.g. people who are legally able to change their gender versus those who can never do so because they have had children), and also sanctions and reinforces the discrimination against same-sex couples. The more radical trans activists (who are rarely quoted in the media) are calling for the abolition of family register system, which they believe to be the root of various forms of discrimination, in addition to those against trans people.

#55: “X” Gender in Passports

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 01/19/2003

On 01/19/2003 09:12 am, “Hannah Miyamoto” wrote:

- > Since many members teach a course about gender, I decided
- > to share this new development from Australia

[snip]

- > The Australian state of Victoria was persuaded a while ago
- > to issue birth certificates to adults of “Indeterminate”
- > sex, and now Australia has issued a passport listing for
- > a person of “indeterminate” sex.

[snip]

- > Incidentally, one of my intersexed friends (46XX, Congenital
- > Adrenal Hyperplasia) was once told by the EEOC that “he” (as
- > he identifies himself) could not bring a sexual harassment
- > complaint against a male co-worker because he had no sex!
- > If you don’t have a sex, the reasoning went, you aren’t human!

If this is the case I’m thinking about, which I’m pretty sure it is, your description is inaccurate. He claimed that he was harassed on the job after coming out as “intersexed” — although his co-workers may have viewed him simply as transgendered since he transitioned from female to male — and attempted to bring a sexual harassment case on the basis of sex discrimination, arguing that his intersexuality made him a member of the third sex which is protected from discrimination on the basis of sex. EEOC rejected the argument, since U.S. laws only recognise males and females, and as such one is not protected from discrimination on the basis of sex simply for claiming to be neither.

However, he was able to bring the charge under “disability.” I concur with the EEOC’s interpretation on this matter: CAH clearly qualifies as a disability under the ADA — which excludes transsexuality (“gender identity disorder”), thanks to the Helmes Amendment, but does not exclude intersexuality. As I understand it, he later dropped the case.

In the future, I would like to see the laws changed to allow “X” designation on IDs, if not the abolishing of “sex” on them altogether. But such designations need to be made on the basis of one’s identity, rather than his biological status. Somehow I do not feel that giving intersex people (and not others) the option of having “X” on their ID does very much to challenge the idea that we are what our genitals tell us what we are.

Emi Koyama

Intersex Initiative Portland

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#56: “Othering” of Non-Western Women in The V-Monologues

Forum: QueerDisability list

Date: 03/10/2003

On 3/9/03 12:55 AM, “Leah Gardner” wrote:

- > The play was constructed of hundreds of interviews of women
- > from diverse backgrounds, ethnic groups, age groups and social
- > and economic experiences. This was one of the most inclusive
- > gatherings of varied perspective I have ever seen.

Not so fast. The “Oklahoma Interlude” problem (which I discussed before) aside, the play suffers from the same problem that Audre Lorde famously pointed out in Mary Daly’s “Gyn/Ecology” when it came out: the “othering” of women of colour and “third world” women, which depicts non-white, non-Western women as nothing but victims of evil non-white, non-Western men.

The only “monologues” about women from non-Western cultures – “My Vagina Was My Village” (Bosnian women) and “Under the Burqa” (Afghan women), as well as the play’s discussion of the treatment of African women within their traditional communities, reproduce the same exact pattern of Western feminists “othering” women of colour and non-Western women as one-dimensional victims, while often vilifying men of colour and non-Western men as well as non-Western cultures.

It’s one thing if it were simply a play that is flawed. However, it’s more than that: it’s a centerpiece for V-Day, an international organisation designed to confront violence against girls and women – and the lack of analysis exhibited in the play seriously damages the ability of the organisation to address violence against women of colour and non-Western women. This casts Western women and governments as the rescuers of non-Western women, which often is used to justify Western imperialism and aggression against non-Western cultures and nations (remember Laura Bush’s plea to support a war on Afghanistan to “help” Afghan women?).

For example:

V-Day is putting a “spotlight on Native American and First Nations women” this year and has launched “Indian Country Project,” but it does not seem to put the violence against Native women in the context of massive imperial violence against their people. The Indian Country Project web site states:

- > Violence against women and girls in Indian Country is at epidemic
- > proportions. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the rate
- > of rape and sexual assault of Native American women is 3.5 times
- > higher than for any other race in the United States. The rate
- > continues to rise while Indian women and girls remain invisible

> as an at risk population.

URL: <http://www.vday.org/contents/vcampaigns/indiancountry>

Of course, this “Bureau of Justice Statistics” is part of the same U.S. Department of Justice, which is now using “protection of Native American women battered by their husbands” as an excuse to illegally (that is, in violation of tribal treaties) expand federal government’s authority into the sovereign tribal lands, further perpetuating the imperial violence against Native peoples.

As V-Day expands its focus to include Afghanistan, Palestine, and now Iraq (for its credit, V-Day publicly opposes the war on Iraq), an awareness about the multiple layers of violence and oppressions, especially the violence of Western imperialisms and neoimperialisms becomes crucially important.

So anyway, I’m not saying that “The Vagina Monologues” or V-DAY is all bad. For one thing, it raises a huge amount of money for local, national and international anti-violence groups that accomplish concrete things, which is more than what we can say about the most brilliantly written books about critical race theory or postcolonialism. I’m just saying that it has many flaws, and that we need to be aware of beyond just saying “why doesn’t the play include women like me?”

#57: Intersex Brain, Trans Brain

Forum: Intersexed_Society list

Date: 04/02/2003

On 4/2/03 6:56 AM, "prophecyspirit" wrote:

> As my prior post indicated, a TS brain is different from an IS brain.

There's no such thing as "TS brain" or "IS brain," as there are many ways to be trans, and there are many ways to be intersex. You wouldn't suggest that all intersex people have similar brain structure that is discreet from "male" and "female" brains, do you? Perhaps people who have the same condition do indeed have a similar brain structure, but I just can't accept that there is such a thing as "intersex brain."

> And ISs who understand themselves quit IDing as TS. Some ISs
> temporarily ID as TS to get surgery, then reject it afterwards.

Actually, lots of transsexual people do the same: they don't really feel like they want to identify as "transsexual," but do so anyway just to get what they want.

> I'd IDed as female from babyhood to no avail. Just becace some
> ISs as adults get surgery of some kind doesn't make them TSs!

In general, someone who has been raised as one gender and wants to live as another gender, whether or not s/he requests surgery to help achieve this, are called transsexuals.

That said, a couple of clarifications:

- Not all people who could be described as transsexual accept that as part of their identity. Among them are some intersex people who think they can't be transsexual if they are born intersex. Their identifying as non-transsexual is no more or less valid than non-intersex people who reject the label also.

- Under the medical taxonomy, "gender identity disorder" excludes people who are born with intersex conditions. That doesn't mean that intersex people can't be transsexual: the same medical taxonomy provides "Gender Identity Disorder Not Otherwise Specified" to be used to diagnose such persons.

To say that intersex people who transition gender or sex has a more legitimate claim to being non-transsexual than non-intersex people doing the same is wrong. And not only is it wrong, it encourages non-intersex people to "wish they were intersex," which annoys the hell out of me.

Intersex people as a group are not part of "transgender," but of course one can be intersex and trans. You can "identify" as whatever you want: if you don't identify as transgender, I respect that—but I do the same for non-

intersex people doing the same, simply out of courtesy, and not because there is a scientific evidence that they are different from other transsexuals.

Emi K.
Intersex Initiative Portland
<http://www.ipdx.org/>

Date: 04/03/2003

Hi everyone,

On 4/2/03 4:02 PM, "prophecyspirit" wrote:

- > In 1995 a study was made of M2F transsexuals brains. It was
- > found they were virtually female brains, but not exactly. So
- > they had M2F TS brains.

I believe that the study you are referring to is this:

Zhou JN, Hofman MA, Gooren LJG, Swaab DF (1995). "A sex difference in the human brain and its relation to transsexuality." *Nature*, 378:68-70.

Their research was also published here:

Kruijver FPM, Zhou JN, Pool CW, Hofman MA, Gooren LJG, Swaab DF (2000). "Male-to-female transsexuals have female neuron numbers in a limbic nucleus." *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 85(5): 2034-2041.

In the latter paper, Kruijver et al. wrote:

Taking into account the aforementioned limitations of our studies, the present study of SOM neurons in the human BSTc provides unequivocal new data supporting the view that transsexualism may reflect a form of brain hermaphroditism such that this limbic nucleus itself is structurally sexually differentiated opposite to the transsexual's genetic and genital sex.

So is transsexuality biologically determined? Not so fast. The same research group reported in 2002 an evidence that questions this theory:

To determine at what age the BSTc becomes sexually dimorphic, the BSTc volume in males and females was studied from midgestation into adulthood. Using vasoactive intestinal polypeptide and somatostatin immunocytochemical staining as markers, we found that the BSTc was larger and contains more neurons in men than in women. However, this difference became significant only in adulthood, showing that sexual differentiation of the human brain may extend into the adulthood.

Here's the citation for this article:

Chung WCJ, De Vries GJ, Swaab DF (2002). "Sexual Differentiation of the Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis in Humans May Extend into Adulthood." *Journal of Neuroscience*, 22(3):1027-1033.

In other words, while it is true that there are sex differences in brain structure, and male-to-female transsexuals have brain structures similar to females, but it has not been determined that any of these differences are determined at birth. It could well be that gender identity caused the sexual differentiation, rather than the other way around. There is also a chance that a third factor influenced both gender identity and the size of BSTc in the brain. Any of these is far from conclusive.

- > But, since IS have characteristics of both sexes in their
- > bodies and plumbing,

Not necessarily. Intersex bodies are different from the standard male or female, which is not to say that they are somewhere in the middle. But I suppose that depends on what you consider male and female: for example, I don't consider a mildly large clit to be between a "normal female clit" and "normal male penis"; it's just a large clit. Nor do I view absence of vagina in otherwise female body as a "male" thing; it's just a female body that doesn't have a vagina.

- > the same goes for their brains, as their choices and thinking
- > processes prove. So their brains have to be IS brains.

If you know of any studies analyzing "choices and thinking processes" of intersex people in general, please give me the citation.

- >> In general, someone who has been raised as one gender and
- >> wants to live as another gender, whether or not s/he requests
- >> surgery to help achieve this, are called transsexuals.
- >
- > A pure thoroughbred TS has a normal body and plumbing.
- > Only their brain is different. So it's wholly inaccurate
- > to call ISs TSs! Or visa versa.

So, are you suggesting that person with disabilities or "deformities" can't be transsexual because their bodies aren't "normal"? Surely, you aren't saying that. If one can have a differently shaped body parts and still be transsexual, then why can't that differently shaped body parts be reproductive organs? It doesn't make any sense.

Sure, it's wrong to call intersex people transsexuals or vice versa—but why can't there be people who are both? That, of course, is not to say that you must identify as such; I respect your identity however you choose, again, out of public courtesy and not because of some scientific evidence.

Emi Koyama
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#58: Japanese Feminism Written Out of History by U.S. Feminism

Forum: Letter to Women's eNews

Date: 04/17/2003

Hello WeNews Editors,

My name is Emi Koyama and I am on the Community Board of Survivor Project, a Portland, Oregon based organization. I also started the first Japanese language web site about sexual assault, which started in 1994.

April 17, 2003 edition of Women's eNews stated:

Yanagishita discovered the counseling services offered by JUST, Japanese Union for Survivors of Trauma, a nongovernmental organization offering support for women who have been raped or sexually abused. The group, which began operating in 1997, this year became the first organization in Japan to offer an advocacy service for victims of sexual violence.

Actually, there have been many (okay, not that many, but some) feminist organizations offering such services for a long time in Japan. For example, the Tokyo Rape Crisis Center was founded in 1983 and has been operating the crisis line since. Looking through JUST's web site, I was unable to find any claim of being the first in Japan either.

I am however pretty sure the cause for this particular miscommunication. Within Japanese feminist circles, the word "advocacy" is defined SPECIFICALLY and ONLY to court advocacy, in which members of the group would accompany a woman to the court. In other words, crisis lines, counselors, shelters, support groups, and other services (while important) are not called "advocacy" in Japan. I became aware of this fact because one of my papers about domestic violence is currently being translated into Japanese for publication there, and I was puzzled that my translators consistently mis-translated the word "advocacy" when I used it outside of this specific definition (I can read Japanese). So perhaps JUST is the first organization to provide this specific kind of advocacy--but it is definitely not the case that it is the first to provide advocacy services in general.

You might also want to note another aspect that JUST is unique on: it is a male-dominated organization, unlike other anti-rape groups that existed in Japan. JUST is founded by a male psychiatrist, with the board of directors consisting of eight men and just one woman. It is sad to see that this male-run organization get all the attention even in a feminist newswire, while all the feminist organizing in the past two decades get written out of history.

Best,

Emi Koyama

Subject Index

ableism: in language, 16;
discrimination, 21

Anzaldúa, Gloria, 6, 19-20

"brain sex," 24-26

Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture, 10, 20

Clare, Eli, 15

classism, 15

deconstructionism, 6

disability, 15, 16, 21, 26

domestic violence, 4; shelter, 4; Non-Western women and, 22; advocacy in Japan, 27

Dyke March, 18

frontera, 20

fundamentalism, 3

hate crimes, 7-8, 17

ID card: for trans people, 8, 17; of intermediate gender, 21

imperialism, 22-23; of U.S. feminism, 22-23, 27

intersex, 9-10, 15, 21, 24-26

Japan, 20, 27

Jeffrey, Sheila, 3

Manifesta, 5

Martinez, Fred, 7

media, 5, 20, 27

Ms. magazine, 6

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), 4, 10

National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), 5, 10, 15

privilege: non-trans, 8, 11, 17; adult, 13-14; white, 19-20; male, 27

Raymond, Janice, 3

radical feminism, 3

safety: as entitlement, 20

"special rights," 8

Vagina Monologues (The), 9-10, 22-23

third wave feminisms, 5, 6

transgender/transsexual, 7-8, 11, 17, 20, 21, 24-26

Wittig, Monique, 19

youth: anti-youth sentiment, 5, 12-14; voice of, 6, 12;

...yes, I'm dorky like that.

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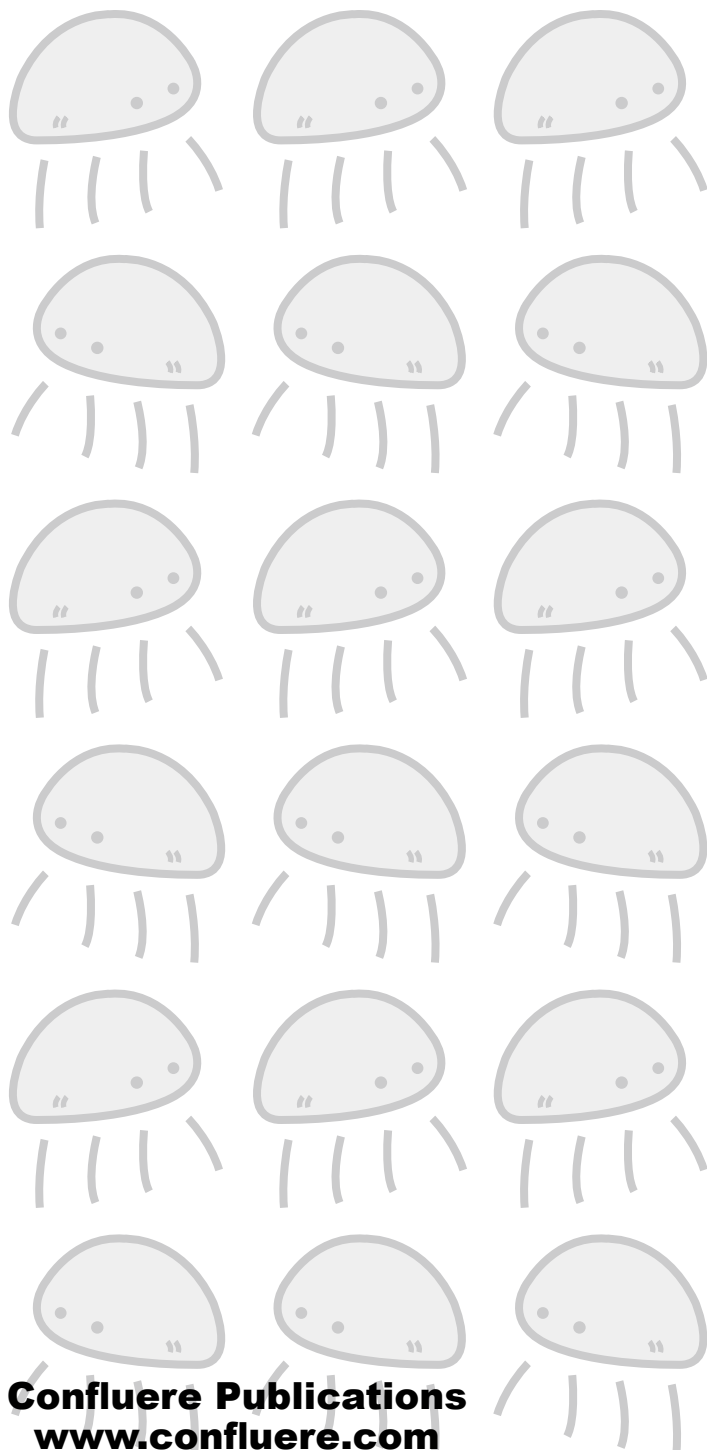
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