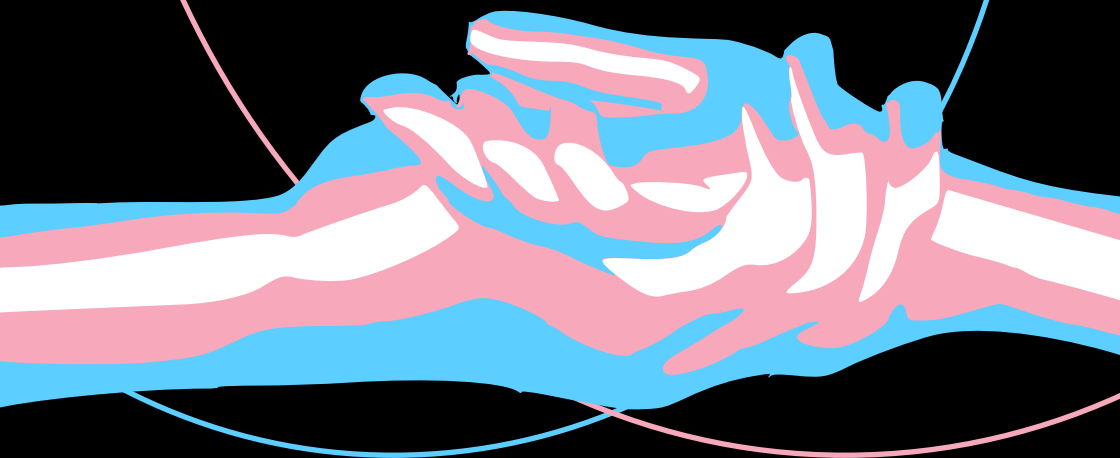
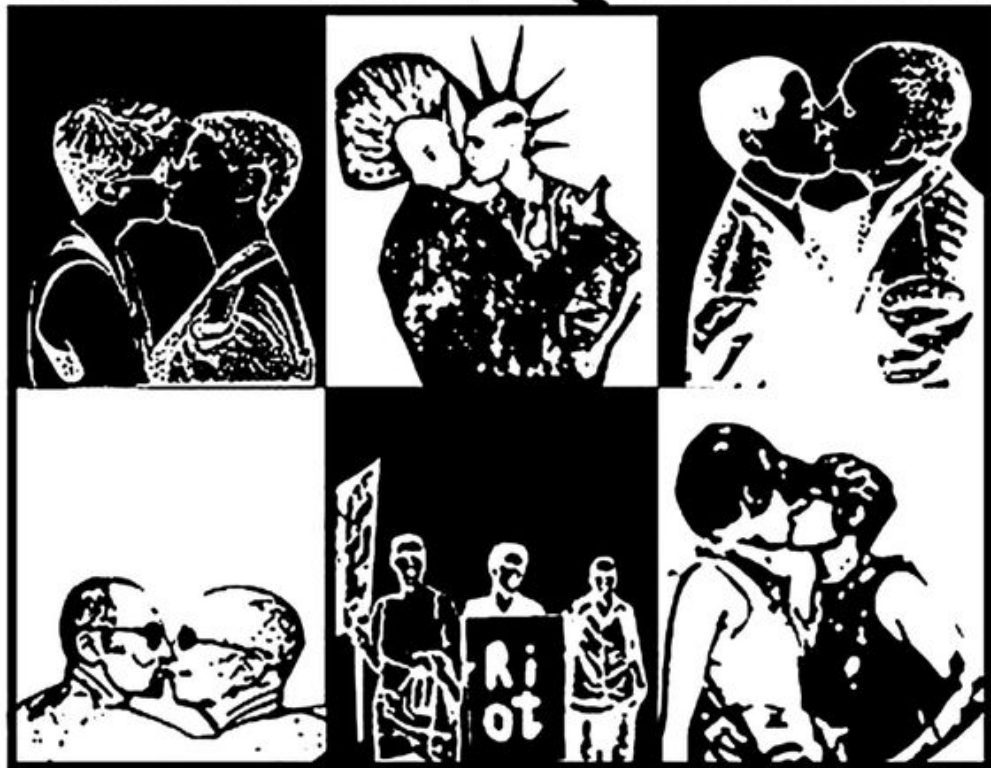


LIVING OUR TRUE SPIRIT



Leslie Feinberg

**WE'RE HERE
WE'RE QUEER**



WE RIOT!



Living Our True Spirit was given by Leslie Feinberg in February, 1997, as the opening speech of True Spirit Conference that aimed to bring together people with a variety of gender expressions in the FTM spectrum. This text, in particular, that we have translated into Turkish is published in the book *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, a collection of talks and writings by Feinberg.

The text was originally translated for an event about the struggle for trans liberation we organized, but we also decided to print it out as a booklet in order to reach wider audiences. Fundamentally, the perspective of the speech about fight for trans liberation is valuable to us since it was given directly by a subject in a conference for people in the FTM spectrum. The struggle of trans-masculines, which gets neglected even in the LGBTI+ community of today, is ignored and forgotten in the mainstream historical narrative. In this context, the speech provides important insights into how FTMs also had to fight for their place in the wider LGBTI+ community. Also, Feinberg in zir speech leverages a perspective on trans liberation's intersectional nature with other struggles for liberation. Lastly, Living Our True Spirit makes important contributions to discussions that last to our day, in a way that includes different experiences and expressions of gender identity by transcending both biological essentialism and strict social determinism.

Even though the text was taken from a talk given in USA 26 years ago, we believe its stance on many issues is still valuable for the struggles of liberation today in this part of the world.

 ANARKA- Team

ABOUT LESLIE FEINBERG

Leslie Feinberg, who identified as an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist, died on November 15, 2014. She/zie participated in organizing anti-racist, anti-war, pro-abortion, pro-labor rallies and action. Zie also was a part of organizing LGBTQ+ self-defense groups called Rainbow Peacekeepers.

Hir last words were:

“Remember me as a revolutionary communist.”

In a statement at the end of hir life, Leslie said zie/she had “never been in search of a common umbrella identity, or even an umbrella term, that brings together people of oppressed sexes, gender expressions, and sexualities” and added that she/zie believed in the right of self-determination for oppressed individuals, communities, groups, and nations.

Leslie preferred to use the pronouns she/zie and her/hir for herself, but also said:

“I care which pronoun is used, but people have been respectful to me with the wrong pronoun and disrespectful with the right one. It matters whether someone is using the pronoun as a bigot, or if they are trying to demonstrate respect.”

*We wrote this section using Feinberg’s own self definition on the hir site: <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net/self/>

LIVING OUR TRUE SPIRIT

As Minnie Bruce and I unpacked in our hotel room in Laurel, Maryland, we heard a k.d. lang song playing so loudly it seemed she was crooning just outside our second-floor room. I pulled back the curtains and looked out the windows that opened above a huge indoor atrium with a swimming pool. Below, I could see organizers hard at work setting up hundreds of chairs in an L-shaped pattern with a podium at the point. In just two hours, the True Spirit Conference would begin.

The call for this regional conference had described the event as open to “people who are themselves, or who are supportive of others who were assigned female gender at birth, but who feel that is not an adequate or accurate description of who they are.” I had no idea how many people would show up. Organizing for the conference had largely taken place in cyberspace. So in my nervousness, I immersed myself in the small tasks of unpacking and getting dressed.

An hour later, I walked into the atrium. More than 300 people were already crowded into the cavernous room. Excited voices echoed. The room was filled to capacity with human beings who represented a spectrum of sexes and genders. Some described themselves as transsexual men or transmen. Of those, some self-identified as female-to-male (FTM). Others defined themselves as male-to-male (MTM) in recognition of the fact that they had not ever felt female in their lives.

Still others in the audience used FTM or F2M as an adjective, rather than a noun, to describe themselves as female-to-male cross-dressers. Masculine females – some of them identified as butches, drag kings, and tomboys – attended. So did intersexuals and people who identified as a third sex. Some Native people self-identified as Two Spirit, others as True Spirit.

Among the trans warriors were those who battled on many fronts because of racism, homophobia, bi-phobia, Deaf and disabled oppressions, sexism and poverty. And parents, lovers, wives, husbands, friends, and allies of trans people – including male-to-female (MTF) transsexual women – packed the audience.

When the moment arrived for me to speak, my legs felt rubbery. This was the first public appearance I'd made since coming off intravenous care. As I stood at the podium, fishing for my reading glasses, I could hear the swoosh of air as the ASL interpreter finished signing my introduction. I signed “Welcome” to the Deaf trans warriors in the front row and began to speak. My voice trembled, registering the toll of illness. The audience grew so quiet that could hear the lapping of the water in the nearby pool.

It is not unusual for a speaker delivering a conference keynote to characterize the event as historic. But it is not always accurate or true. I feel honored to be asked to speak to you all tonight because, without hyperbole, I believe this conference is a historic milestone.

What is so momentous about this event is *who* the organizers called to gather here. And for this, enormous credit is owed to the conference chairperson, Gary Bowen, and to each organizer for breathing life into the call for unity between diverse peoples.

When I received the first call testing interest in such a conference, the event was loosely referred to as “Transman East.” Yet the description of the event included many gender-variant communities. Either conference would make a valuable, but different contribution.

I e-mailed Gary that the call created a question for many of us who are not transmen, but who are part of the F2M spectrum described in the call. I would support a transman conference. But I would not attend out of respect for the right of transmen to their own space to meet and organize. Yet if the conference was striving for a broad reach, but many of us didn't hear that, the resulting conference – sorely needed – would be skewed by our lack of participation.

Gary's immediate response deepened my respect for him as an organizer. Without any defensiveness, he wrote that it was impossible to raise the idea of a conference without calling it something. But that he had indeed envisioned a conference that brought together all the gender variance on what he called the F2M continuum, including our significant others, families, friends, and allies.

Then Gary tackled a problem of language that directly shaped the concept of who was welcome at this conference. Since there's no one word or phrase that is agreed upon for this diverse population, Gary drew on his Apache heritage and offered the creative title for this conference: True to the Spirit Within, or True Spirit.

I'd like to read the call that spelled out who is welcome at this conference, because this inclusion is what makes this event so significant: This conference is open to people “who are themselves, or who are supportive of others who were assigned female gender at birth, but who feel that is not an adequate or accurate description of who they are, which includes but is not limited to: tomboys, butches, female cross-dressers, drag kings, F2Ms, transmen, third sexes, intersexuals, and others, along with partners, friends, family and allies.”

No one call has ever been issued to organize a gathering of so many of our identities in our own names. And the importance of the words “and others” in this call cannot be overstated. Those two words welcome your own unique and hard-fought-for identity to emerge, to find language and representation. In doing so, you enrich us all.

When I was young, I faced two narrow doorways – female and male. I was told these were the only routes to human expression and experience, predetermined by birth. Each of us here, and the trans movement as a whole, is offering trans children today –all children – a roadmap of choices, and the opportunity to speak to us about what we have found on our journeys. With the vital words “and others” we are protecting uncharted territory, to insure that it remains available for exploration.

This conference, and our trans movement as a whole, honors the contributions and strengths, dignity and courage of all of us as trans people. Each of us is a warrior, or we wouldn't be here tonight. And let us honor the warriors who help make our communities and our lives whole, and without whom our struggle would be much more formidable and arduous. Let's give a standing ovation to those who fight shoulder-to-shoulder with us everyday: our significant others, our friends, our families, and our allies. This conference has been enhanced by their inclusion as equal partners in building it.

Our significant others are not observers of “our” oppression. They are not “related” to our movement. All of our significant others are partners in the life-changing experience of trans consciousness and struggle.

We must challenge the misconception that transmen are automatically typecast as masculine and so their partners

must automatically be feminine women. The entire range of gender expression can be found in the transmale population, including androgynous and feminine men, and drag queens. And the transmale community includes many gay and bisexual men, as well as heterosexuals. The courage of gay and bi transmen and their partners to be out and proud and define their sexuality generates a shower of sparks that electrifies the potential of human sexuality.

We also need to defend the rights of transsexual men and their partners to remain active members in other communities. Those of us who bridge the lesbian, gay, bi, women's, and trans communities have a responsibility to educate and agitate for the rights of transmen and their partners who helped build those communities. They deserve the option of retaining their roots and networks of support during periods of changing self-definition, transitions with partners, and sex reassignment. No one who has pitched in to build and defend women's and lesbian, gay, bi liberation is a "traitor" because of who they love, or because they have transitioned from female to male.

And all sexually oppressed communities benefit from the social and personal insights gleaned from supporting the transitions of transmen and transwomen.

Building unity also places the task of fighting sexism on all of us. That statement is not an attack on those of us who were born female, but express ourselves as masculine or male. Sexism is the enemy of every human being. No matter where you place yourself on the sex and gender continua, the degradation, depisal, and unequal treatment of all who are "not male" is an obstacle to solidarity.

Everyone on the F2M spectrum – no matter how you define that term – challenges the narrow definition of male as a

person born with a penis, who has “biologically determined” masculinity and an innate sexual desire for women. Sexism — built into this economic and social system — seeks to narrow how men define and express themselves. Those ideas limit individual potential, and therefore all human potential.

But we are reexamining many social ideas surrounding the modern Western concept of “man.” What does it mean to be a man? How many different ways are there for men to express their gender, their sexuality, their attitudes toward each other, and the ways they relate to those who are not male or masculine? This important contribution by all F2Ms brings insights and new freedom of self-definition and expression to all men — to all people — in our society.

The struggles of those of us at this conference also overlap with the struggles of the women’s liberation movement. We could gain strength by working together, along with all our allies, to fight for sex and gender freedom. That means the rights of people to define their sex, control their own body, and develop their gender expression free from violence, economic barriers, or discrimination — in employment, housing, health care, or any other sector of society.

None of us can ever be free while others are still in chains. That’s the truth underlying the need for solidarity. Trans liberation is inextricably linked to other movements for equality and justice.

For example, when the second wave of the women’s liberation movement in this country challenged the patriarchal ruling class — thereby threatening the profits they extract from women’s inequality — those powers conducted a campaign to discredit the demands of women. Every tool of mass communication delivered a message to men, and to women

not yet drawn into the movement, that these uppity women were trying to destroy the “sacred differences” between men and women.

When women urged passage of such a basic, modest piece of legislation as the Equal Rights Amendment, Phyllis Schlafley tried to scare audiences. She predicted that passage of the bill would force men and women to use unisex toilets. If you ask me, I think most people – especially transgender folk – would feel a lot safer and more comfortable if the signs read “Toilet” and the rooms were single-occupancy, clean, sanitary, and had a lock on the door.

Schlafley also argued that, “Equal rights for women will make homosexual marriages legal.” Wow, that sounds like reason enough to pass the ERA! Our trans communities are still defending our already existing same-sex marriages. And we’re uniting with lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists to win legal and social benefits for all marriages and all families. Whether or not you personally want to get married, this is a progressive fight against blatant discrimination by the state, like the struggles to defeat racist miscegenation laws that banned interracial marriages.

But in recent years, the women’s liberation movement has been slowed by a period of deep reaction, including stepped-up attacks attempting to make a mockery of the gains of the women’s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other progressive movements.

One such perversion of the gains of our movements is the right-wing reversal of the meaning of *politically correct*. When the movements were in full stride, being politically correct was a good thing. It meant confronting racist, sexist, anti-Semitic,

homophobic, anti-disabled, and anti-worker slurs, attitudes, and actions. It meant using language that demonstrated respect and sensitivity for each other's oppression.

George Bush, and later Rush Limbaugh, waged a divisive campaign to use that phrase against the movements as a weapon. Their ilk asks: "Why do we have to all be so 'politically correct'?" What they mean is why can't they publicly repeat the crude, bigoted slurs they used before these movements challenged them. The right wing has characterized these progressive movements as "oppressors." The message from those in power is: Don't blame us, blame the people trying to change the situation. This is an attempt to thwart the formation of new liberation movements. But these movements are potential allies, not enemies.

Of course, revealing the need for solidarity takes patient education. But we have made great strides in a short time. For example, I have seen a substantial current of women across the United States—straight, lesbian, and bisexual—welcome discovering more about trans liberation. They are thrilled at the way our movement is helping revitalize women's liberation by revisiting discussions about what it means to be a woman, and how the reduction of "woman" to one common experience is transphobic, as well as insensitive to racism, poverty, disabilities, and other forms of multiple oppression.

And I hope everyone saw the results of the recent *Advocate* magazine poll. Sixty-four percent of those polled said gay and lesbian civil rights groups should make an effort to support the cause of transgender rights. Thirteen percent said they weren't sure—we've got to reach them!

Not every single person in every movement will be won over to the need for trans solidarity. Movements are made up of people like us, who are set in motion by anger at injustice. Rallies, picket lines, and marches provide the opportunity for individuals who have struggled against their oppression alone – often without language to express their experience – to open up conversations with hundreds, thousands of others who have faced similar experiences. That offers potential for awakening consciousness.

But just because an individual is drawn into the vortex of a movement, it doesn't mean that person will automatically be enlightened on every aspect of other peoples' oppressions – particularly that which they do not directly experience. Each individual still needs to overcome the bigotry that has been instilled in us from an early age. A gay man does not necessarily see the need to fight sexism automatically; a white transperson doesn't automatically see the need to fight racism. But the progressive momentum inherent in movements offers a greater potential for individuals to gain an understanding of the struggles of others – particularly in coalitions.

The movements that came before us offer us a legacy of victories – and valuable lessons to keep us from repeating the same mistakes. For example, the U.S. suffragists did have a wing that took up questions of transgender, particularly cross-dressing. Dr. Mary Walker, a female-to-male cross-dresser, played an important role, as did others.

But all white suffragists did not understand the necessity of uniting against slavery. The great abolitionist, writer, and orator Frederick Douglass did understand the need to weld the power of these two movements. Douglass steadfastly defended

the right of women to vote. He was one of 31 men at the first Women's Rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York. The men who attended were attacked by enemies of women's suffrage as "Aunt Nancy Men" and "Hermaphrodites"—transphobic and anti-intersexual epithets. Douglass was the only man to address that convention. He declared that women's suffrage was a right, and he said, "Our doctrine is that right is of no sex." Those words still hold great truth for the trans and women's movements today.

A few years before he died, Douglass told the International Council of Women, "When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of women, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act." Unfortunately, one of the great mistakes of the dominant current of the nineteenth-century women's liberation movement was that it did not rise to that nobility, did not see the necessity of uniting the fight for women's suffrage with all out combat against slavery and racism. Wings of movements can make mistakes — in this case grievous.

The second wave of women's liberation in the 1970s was made up of many currents, including women of color, socialist feminists, and others, who fought for an understanding that all women don't face identical oppression. Many white women within the movement recognized the necessity to be on the frontlines against racism.

This wave of women's liberation also provided a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which women and men are differently and unequally socialized in society. And the women's movement revealed that many concepts about masculinity and femininity are designed as justifications of

inequality. Masculinity is defined as strong, courageous, and rational. Femininity is defined as the opposite of those characteristics.

Many in the movement who yearned not only for women's liberation, but also for human liberation, embarked on a bold social experiment. They hoped that freeing individuals from femininity and masculinity would help people be viewed on a more equal basis that highlighted each person's qualities and strengths. They hoped that androgyny would replace masculinity and femininity and help do away with gendered expression altogether.

Twenty years after that social experiment, we have the luxury of hindsight. The way in which individuals express themselves is a very important part of who they are. It is not possible to force all people to live outside of femininity and masculinity. Only androgynous people live comfortably in that gender space. There's no social compulsion powerful enough to force anyone else to dwell there. Trans people are an example of the futility of this strategy. Mockery and beatings and unemployment and hunger and threats of rape and institutionalization have not forced us as trans people to conform to narrow norms.

Why would we want to ask anyone to give up their own hard-fought-for place on the gender spectrum? There are no rights or wrongs in the ways people express their own gender style. No one's lipstick or flattop is hurting us. No one's gender expression is any more "liberated" than anyone else's.

Gender freedom – isn't that what we were all fighting for with every breath we take? Well, how are we going to win it if we don't support each other's right to be different from us? Each

person has the right to express their gender in any way that feels most comfortable – masculine or feminine, androgynous, bi- and tri-gender expression, gender fluidity, gender complexity, and gender contradiction. There are many shades of gender that are not even represented in language yet. One could argue that leather people and nuns are their own genders.

People don't have to give up their individuality or their particular manner of gender expression in order to fight sex and gender oppression. It's just the opposite. People won't put their time, energy, and commitment into organizing unless they know that the movement they are building is defending their lives.

By bringing together so many gender-variant people, we will be much more equipped to discuss and expose how many of the social values attached to masculinity and femininity are harmful. Gender expression does not determine the abilities, or lack of abilities, in any individual. Those concepts leave us all in harm's way.

For example, femininity – in females and in males – is despised and oppressed in this misogynist society. We've all heard statements like: "The tighter the skirt the looser the morals. The higher the heels the lower the IQ. No one dressed like that could possibly have any self-pride or consciousness. If she, or he, was going to wear a dress like that they should have known they were inviting rape."

This hatred of everything that is feminine is the distilled essence of anti-woman attitudes.

The women's movement is right – females are socialized very

differently and unequally. But the trans movement reveals a more layered and complex socialization process. Does a masculine girl absorb social education about what it means to be a “girl” in the same way as a feminine girl? Does a feminine boy grow up identifying with, or fearing, the masculine boys learning to swagger and take up space? How does a transsexual child or adult absorb the messages of how a “real” man or woman is supposed to act and relate?

Here we are in a room together – hundreds of trans people and those who love and support us. It’s like a dream come true to those of us who grew up in a cold sweat of terror because we feared we were the only person in the world who was different. We were isolated in this society. We did not see our lives represented in television and the movies – except in the most degrading and dehumanizing fashion. We were isolated by difference in a society that demanded conformity. We longed to find others like ourselves. We yearned for friendship and understanding.

Tonight we are together –some of us for the first time –with others “like ourselves.” And yet, we are not the same. In fact, it took a whole paragraph and the words “and others” to bring us all here tonight. We don’t describe ourselves in the same ways, see ourselves in the same ways. We come from different cultures and backgrounds and experiences. Collectively we reside on a span of identities.

And so if we really want that friendship and that understanding, we have to build it. All of us in this society are wounded. But we don’t always know where each other’s injuries are located. That means we may thoughtlessly hurt each other. Everyone who has ever been treated unjustly or been disrespected in this society is full of justified anger.

I believe we need to take care not to unleash that rage on each other.

Our identities have been reduced to caricatures in the dominant culture. As a result, we all harbor misunderstandings about each other, But I don't think the problems are insurmountable for this reason: We need each other. We each know what it's like to fight back alone. We need each other's strength as allies. And we know what it's like to feel like the only one who's different. When "difference" suddenly comes into focus as diversity it's a healing experience. There are people in this room who are ready to make an effort to understand each other. And that will result in strong bonds of love and friendship.

So let us each begin exploring our relationship as allies carefully, ready to listen, and to defend each other against hurtful criticisms or misconceptions.

I was heartened, for example, to see that transmen and transwomen had created a workshop at this conference to deal with how to work with each other most sensitively. I have heard some non-trans people criticize transsexual women for taking up too much space or being too overbearing because they were socialized as males. It's one thing for transwomen to discuss issues of socialization as an internal discussion in transsexual space. But it's a prejudiced and dangerous formulation for non-transsexuals to make. It's a fast and slippery slide from the rigidity of biological determinism to an equally narrow position of social determinism.

And it too closely parallels transphobic attacks that charge: "Once a man, always a man; once a woman, always a woman." This line of reasoning flies in the face of the fact that

consciousness is determined by *being*. When a man or woman comes out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, they become part of those communities. No one says “once a heterosexual, always a heterosexual.” The consciousness of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people changes and develops while living through the oppression, and working with others to fight back. That is true for transwomen, as well.

I am very wary of labeling people’s energy as “male” or “female.” The infinite and ever-changing ways people express themselves cannot be partitioned into two narrow categories. It’s hazardous to gender the “energy” that people exude. For instance, Ashkenazi Jewish women have faced the anti-Semitic charge that they are guilty of exhibiting “male energy” because of what some non-Jews considered to be aggressive or loud behavior.

There are many factors that determine social behavior and interaction. And people interact differently as they work with many kinds of people. Those of us who grew up very isolated from other people began a process of socialization as we worked in coalitions over the years. We learned important communication skills. All of us came into movements with rough edges. Some raised their hands too often or dominated discussions, others interrupted speakers who had the floor. Those who had been in the movements for some time helped set guidelines and modify inappropriate behavior. Trans activists and organizers new to the movement have had little, if any, of that experience. Yet each person’s contributions are valuable and deserve time to fully develop. Some of us have learned important lessons from some very harsh, angry people. I think most of us are grateful for the gently patient and compassionate lessons. That may offer us the best model for

helping each other adapt to collective work. So let all of us who are not transsexual do everything possible to support transwomen and transmen.

In turn, the ways transsexual women and men characterize our movement can help build a wider basis for unity. I have heard the formulation that “transmen are half of the transgender community.” But that’s not true. Transmen are half of the *transsexual* community. Saying that transsexual men are half of the trans population, and transsexual women are the other half, considerably narrows the scope of our movement. It leaves out everyone who is not transsexual.

What about intersexual activists? What about the gay drag queens and kings who fought against police brutality at Stonewall? It leaves out masculine women and feminine men, cross-dressers, bi-genders, tri-genders, transgenderists, shape-shifters, morphers, bearded females —and many others.

I have heard an argument that transgender people oppress transsexual people because we are trying to tear down the categories of male and female. But isn’t this the same reactionary argument used against transmen and transwomen by those who argue that any challenges to assigned birth sex threaten the categories of man and woman? Transgender people are not dismantling the categories of man and woman. We are opening up a world of possibilities in addition. Each of us has a right to our identities. To claim one group of downtrodden people is oppressing another by their self-identification is to swing your guns away from those who really do oppress us, and to aim them at those who are already under siege.

I remember a middle-class, predominantly white current of the early women's movement that opposed lesbian inclusion. They argued that strong, assertive women were already being lesbian-baited, so lesbian inclusion would just reinforce those attacks. But lesbians brought new strength to the women's movement, demonstrated the sexual diversity among women, and welded a more powerful coalition of allies against the oppression of all women, including lesbians.

There was a similar middle-class, white current in the early gay and lesbian movement that argued the media shouldn't show drag queens at Pride events because gay men and lesbians were already being gender-baited —told that they were not real men and women. But those who said "Don't take pictures of the drag queens, we're not all like that," weakened the movement they themselves depended on for liberation.

That doesn't mean we all have to forge one common self-definition. It means we support the right of each person to define themselves and we don't put down anyone else's identity. Sometimes individuals may not even realize they are putting someone else down. For example, a young transman told me recently, "I'm not like you drag kings. My identity is about more than just what clothes I wear."

Reducing the identities of drag queens and drag kings to the clothing we wear is insulting. We are *transgendered* people. We are in danger wherever we go because of our gender expression. And we have along, proud history of fighting back.

Confusing our gender expression with our sexuality denies the reality of our battles as transgender people. For instance, the dismissal of butch females as "just lesbians" does injury to a very oppressed segment of our trans population. To start with,

the “just” in that formulation is anti-lesbian. And what does the statement mean? Are all lesbians masculine? Do all lesbians face arrest or violence if they use women’s restrooms? Is masculinity in women who desire other women just a sexual advertisement?

I prefer using the term masculine female instead of butch, because butch is assumed to mean lesbian. But what about masculine females who are bisexual? What about those who are heterosexual, some married to men who were attracted to them because of their masculinity, not in spite of it? Aren’t transmen similarly insulted by those who try to dismiss their manhood by arguing that they are “just lesbians” who couldn’t deal with the oppression? Don’t we all have a stake in refusing to let our sex or our gender expression be confused with our sexual desire?

The accusation that masculine females are not “real men” is also a familiar attack. But it’s never succeeded in pushing us out of sight. We have always faced the charge that we are trying to be men and that we have failed miserably. But the muscles and sweat of masculine females helped accelerate the gains of the U.S. trade union movement—in heavy and light industry—particularly from the start of World War II to the end of the war against Vietnam. Today, with the shift to non-union, service industry jobs, we are fighting a battle to survive economically and socially.

We are not trying to be “real men.” We are fighting to survive as masculine females. We face experiences that are differently complicated than those of women or men who are not transgendered. Those experiences develop our lives and our consciousness. And together with transgender males of all sexualities, we are a numerically huge segment of the trans population.

What is the bedrock on which all of our diverse trans populations can build solidarity? The commitment to be the best fighters against each other's oppression. As our activist network grows into marches and rallies of hundreds of thousands, we will hammer out language that demonstrates the sum total of our movement as well as its component communities.

Unity depends on respect for diversity, no matter what tools of language are ultimately used. This is a very early stage for trans peoples with such diverse histories and blends of cultures to form community. Perhaps we don't have to strive to be one community. In reality, there isn't one women's, or lesbian, gay, bi community. What is realistic is the goal to build a coalition between our many strong communities in order to form a movement capable of defending all our lives.

Movements are waves of people demanding redress of their grievances, crashing against those who profit from maintaining the status quo. Which political current will lead this movement? Like white-capped coastal rivers, movements are driven by many political currents. Which currents determine the course of the river for a time is also affected by external factors, like prevailing winds, storms, the inexorable pull of the moon and the resulting tides. And then there are the political storms ruling classes whip up to deflect mass protest —like scapegoating gay and bisexual men and Haitians for the spread of AIDS, or demonizing undocumented immigrant workers and people on welfare. The tides of mass popular reaction to these tempests — good or bad — affect the predominance of some movement currents over others. So do economic cycles —boom or bust —and the storms of bloody territorial wars between capitalist powers, like World War I and II.

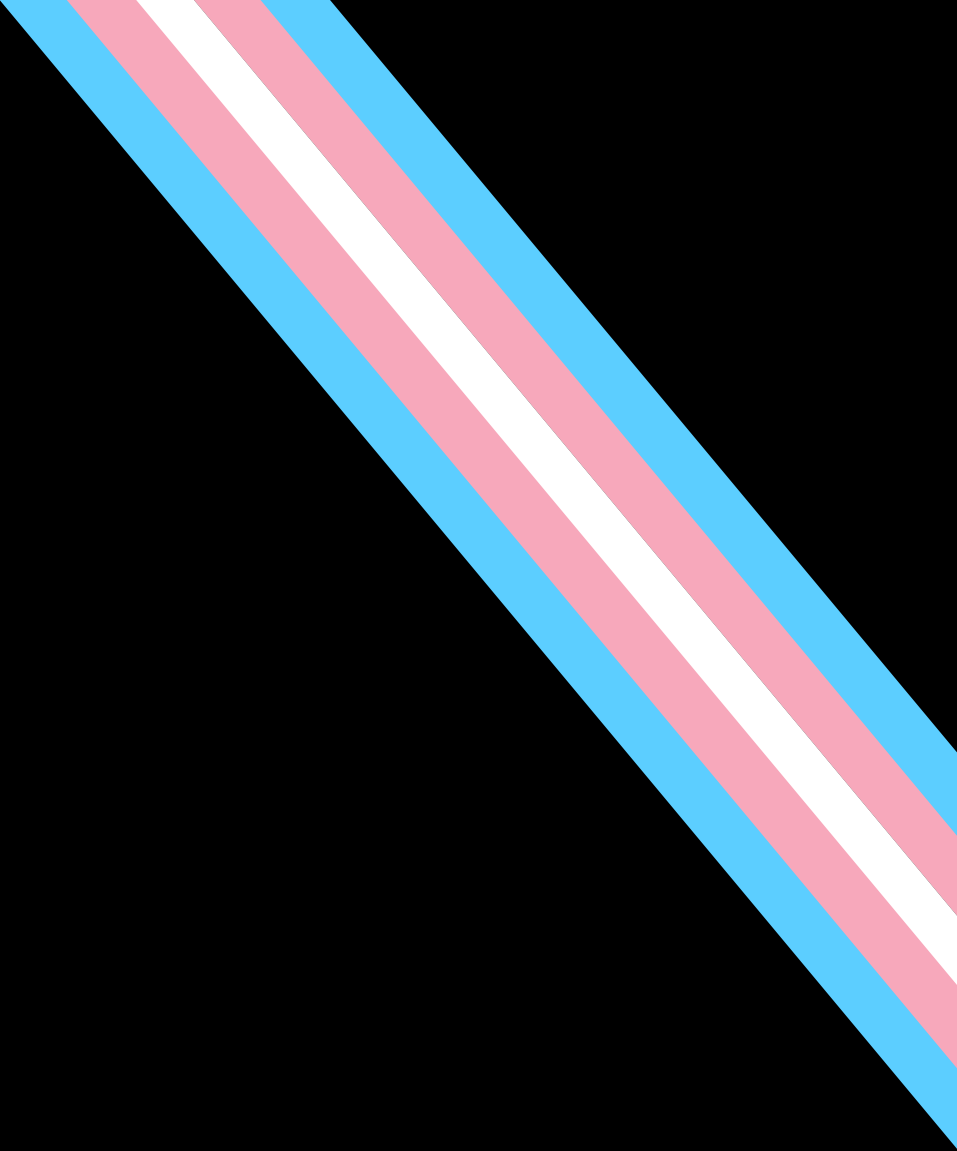
So who will lead our movements today? Recently, many in the trans communities have been discussing “What makes a leader?” We've grown up in a society that places much more value on some human lives than on others, where a few are considered shepherds, and the rest sheep. We have been taught that we have no power to change the most miserable conditions of our lives. But that’s a lie.

Everyone in this room is a leader. Each of us is needed as an organizer, as an activist in the decisive struggles that lie ahead.

There’s a wonderful Chinese proverb that advises “The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.” The people who are making history today are the organizers, the activists, those who are building coalitions, distributing leaflets, making calls, sending out e-mail, mobilizing others out of their despair and into motion. The leaders are the ones who are “doing it.” And the responsibility and role of leadership is to develop leadership in others. In the words of African-American poet June Jordan, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”







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