The concern and grief some femmes and some butches have about the "loss" of butches who are transitioning to live as male/men/boyz (FTM) is a real one, and deserves discussion. However, we need to be very careful, critical, and honest about the way in which this discussion is framed and the standards to which we hold ourselves.

First, I must admit up-front that I individually did exactly what I am urging us collectively not to do. On an individual basis, I oppressed the person I am most committed to, my life partner, for nine years. For nine years, I more than he determined his identity. This is not acceptable on an individual basis, and it's not acceptable on a collective basis. Neither femmes nor butches nor feminist lesbians nor any other group have a right to define or, even, to debate the identity of others. Think about it: how well has it gone down when lesbian feminists have told femmes and butches it is patriarchal, sexist, and regressive for femmes to wear male-designed high heels and butches to wear ties? We need to be careful we do not allow ourselves to be in a position where we are passing judgement on others' identity and/or presentation, or condescending to them by implying that they know not what they do (and we do).

We also need to be aware that while the personal is political, the political is also personal. The debates that we as a community have in the abstract have profound impacts on individual lives. As an example, I have been privy to some lesbians debating the "place" of lesbians who decide to stay with their transitioning or transitioned FTM lovers. Some of these lesbians have decided that such women should not be called lesbians but "allies." That has had a profound impact on me. On good days, I can tell such women, collectively, to go to hell. But on my all-too-human bad days, this erasure of my history, commitments, experience, achievements, sacrifices, rights, and identity has been devastating, resulting in deep depressions and an inability to continue my work. What may be to some of us an abstract, theoretical discussion may be to someone else a very real personal attack.

What we DO need to do, as individuals and as a collective, is rise to the challenges being posed to us by the decisions being made by individual FTMs and butches. Those challenges may well be endless; certainly, I feel I am nowhere near finished identifying and articulating the questions that arise. However, the following are a good start.

- Why is it that masculinity in a body whose owner says she is female feels so different to us when the owner of that body says he is male? When those bodies are one in the same, what, precisely, do we perceive as having changed?
• How well have we, individually and collectively, listened to a range of FTMs' stories and understandings of their identities and bodies and sexual, emotional, and political selves and decisions?
• How well have we tested our theories of what "causes" transsexuality against the stories of individual FTMs? How well have we examined the fact that we are, in fact, coming up with theories about what "causes" an identity not our own?
• FTMs -- and our male children, for that matter -- challenge us to ask how well we distinguish between "male" and "patriarchal" or "oppressive." Do we even see a difference between those terms? Or do we sidestep this question by making a distinction between men who were raised female (FTM) and men who were raised male (bio-boys)? If we do believe that having a childhood as a girl makes that big of a difference, why is there a problem with FTMs in the first place? How are we to think about the butches who say they were raised to be sons? Should such butches be treated the same as bio-boys/men? If not, what is the tipping point that makes the difference between a "male" upbringing and a "female" one? Or is this one of those Supreme Court cases where "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it?"
• If whether one is raised male or female makes the critical difference, what are we to make of men raised female (FTMs) who are oppressively misogynist? What are we to make of misogynist butches?
• Have we been excusing bad butch and bad lesbian behavior because we cut more slack for women than we do for men? If so, who does that serve? What costs might there be to permitting women to behave in oppressive or offensive ways that we would not tolerate if displayed by a man?
• What does it mean about any of our political analyses when we see members of "us" become members of "them"? Is it possible that we've outgrown our conception that "male" and "female," "lesbian" and "straight" are separate, unbridgeable categories? Is it possible we have been way too simplistic about who is for us and who is against us?
• If we have been too simplistic about who is for us and who is against us, how many of "us" have we walked right past and tuned out because they looked too much like "them"? How much more progress could we have made/will we make if we begin seeing and drawing in those who believe in the same things we do, regardless of their appearance or identity? How can we begin identifying like-thinking persons regardless of appearance or identity?
• The concept of "safe space" provides the arena in which many struggles around trans issues happen. If we exclude men or "male energy" from a place in order to protect and support women who have been abused or oppressed by men, are we being comparably protective of women who have been abused or oppressed by women? Or do we believe that women can not and do not abuse or oppress other women? If we have not made a comparable "safe space" for women who have been abused or oppressed by other women to express their pain and be supported, are we collaborating in abuse by silencing these women? Are we suggesting to women who are abused by women that it's their fault they were victimized? And what about men who are abused by women? Do we have any collective responsibility at all for abuse perpetrated by women against other women? Against men? Is it possible many current efforts
to create "safe space" actually create space that's safer for stereotyping and scapegoating (men) than space that's safe for people who have been oppressed and abused?

- If we say that women-only space is not about safety for those who have been abused but is about making the space to define ourselves, what is our justification for even talking about another group's identity? How would we feel if another group used that justification for talking about our identity?
- What does it mean that we believe women are better than men not only according to our own personal, erotic compasses, but emotionally, socially, psychologically and politically? Are we saying oppression is a good thing because it produces better people? How do we create a better future if half the population is inferior to us?
- If we do not believe women are better than men, are we saying we believe men are better than women, and that FTMs are simply embodying this belief?
- If we believe there's an equality between women and men, why does it bother us at all when someone moves from one category to the other?

What I have found as the lesbian-feminist partner of a feminist FTM is that his transition is most useful and instructive to me when I see it as a mirror: A mirror showing me what my internal images are of men and women. His transition, and his subsequent experience as a man among men, have deeply challenged my lesbian feminist understandings of men and both male and female oppression. Coping with these challenges has not been easy, nor am I close to meeting them all. I have preliminary answers to some of the questions I've posed above, but many others remain virtually unexplored. Nevertheless, it is here -- in a loving but hard-nosed challenging of our OWN minds -- that I believe our discussion about FTMs should take place. We do not have the right to define their experience or their identity. But we can -- and should -- incorporate their experience and identity in a testing of the robustness and integrity of our own beliefs, analyses, and actions.

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