ON “TSs” AND “CDs” – ARE SOME TRANS GIRLS MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS? An essay by Monica Miller

There are many things we can all easily agree about. The decision to pursue a transition is an incredibly important personal milestone to any individual. And pursuing a transition does require courage, and a massive prolonged effort, and a girl pursuing her transition should be supported and encouraged by the community.

But what about those of us who are part-time, and comprise the vast majority of the “T” community? To be candid, this may include a few very casual weekend warriors who toss on a wig and go to a gay or trans bar every now and then. But it also includes many who, like myself, do just about everything that a full-time girl does and work tirelessly to be as passable as they can, while bearing the additional burdens of living a double life. Are we second class citizens?

There is a time-honored tgirl social hierarchy, and I am hardly the first to write about this (see, e.g. http://www.crossdressers.com/forums/showthread.php?69957-I-can-pass-better-than-you...). – TSs rank higher than CDs; passable girls rank higher than non-passable girls, pretty girls rank higher than ugly girls, etc. GGs do the same thing to each other (and they start in pre-school, as my daughter has discovered), so I suppose we’re not much different.

The first problem with the hierarchy is that the line between the so-called “CD” and “TS” is illusory. Take these examples:

Case No. 1: Presents en femme once every three months. Does not do any HRT, hair removal or voice training. Will never undergo FFS, much less SRS. Looks presentable, and goes to the mall and to TG events, but does not pass.

Case No. 2: Spends 55% of her life en femme. Is somewhat androgynous, 5’7”, and sometimes passes for a woman, but usually does not. But has no plans to go full-time, will never go on HRT, and will never consider FFS or SRS.

Case No. 3: Spends 10% of her life en femme. Is naturally quite feminine, passes almost seamlessly, and is actually quite stunning (I really want to strangle her). No plans to do laser, voice training, SRS, HRT or FFS.

Case No. 4: Spends 20% of her life en femme. Is on HRT, is doing laser hair removal, is doing voice training, will undergo FFS. Has no immediate plans to go full-time or do SRS, but may do so in the future. Is tall, has some masculine features, and, at present, does not pass.

Case No. 5: Spends 20% of her life en femme. Has completed laser hair removal, and will undergo FFS. Has not done voice training, has not yet started HRT and will never do SRS. But will go full-time within the next year. At present, does not pass.

Case No. 6: Spends 20% of her life en femme. Is on HRT, is doing laser hair removal, is doing voice training, will undergo FFS. Has plans to go full-time in three months, and will do SRS in
the next two years. Is tall (roughly the same height and weight as No. 4), but has androgynous facial features, and usually passes.

Case No. 7: Spends 100% of her life en femme. Has done HRT for five years. But cannot afford FFS. Has undergone SRS. She is an absolutely lovely person, but has a very masculine body and masculine facial features, and does not pass.

Case No. 8: Spends 100% of her life en femme. Passes with complete stealth. Will undergo SRS in approximately two years.

I think all of you will conclude that No. 1 is a “CD,” and Nos. 7-8 are “TS” as those terms are conventionally used. But Nos. 2 through 6 are all ambiguous. All of them, other than No. 8, are actual people I know.

What is the point of this exercise? It is impossible to delineate who is a “TS” and who is a “CD,” and, at the end of the day, the labels do not mean very much. In my view, Nos. 1 through 8 are all simply transgendered, even the casual weekend warrior.

I realize that these labels provide comfort to many.

Self-identified “CDs” may take comfort in the notion that this is just a hobby. But, no matter what they might tell their wives or themselves, this is not a hobby, and “regular straight guys” (http://aliceingenderland.com/7greatmythsamongus.html) simply do not wear dresses. They are transgendered.

Self-identified “TSs” also like to differentiate themselves. Yes, those who self-identify as “TS” often have expended a considerable effort and deserve respect for that effort, and resent any association with the part-time girls – but they do not present with a different condition just because they have responded to that condition by going full-time or pursuing surgical options. They are transgendered.

We cannot draw a line because there is no line. We all present with the same condition, albeit with different intensities – we just respond to it in different ways – some are part-time and some are full-time, some are pre-op, some are post-op and some are non-op, some will do laser hair removal, voice training, HRT or FFS, others won’t. What is an appropriate response to the condition will vary by individual. But a course of treatment is just that – a treatment - and is not, in and of itself a condition.

The second problem with the hierarchy is that it is unfair to confer a higher status on those who are passable or pretty. Of course, we should all strive to be passable, regardless of whether we are full-time or part-time. But there are physical and practical limits to what we can achieve, and we should be judged for our efforts much more than our results. Martin Luther King famously stated that we should be judged by the “content of our character.” Isn’t this true for trans women? Who is more worthy of respect, a 5’3” girl with naturally feminine facial features who puts on some make up and is instantly passable, or a six foot tall girl with unfortunately
masculine facial features who works tirelessly to be passable but never quite gets there, but is nonetheless presentable and self-assured? Don’t get me wrong, there is a place for both of them, and they both deserve our respect and our love, but who has really worked to earn that respect?

And if it is not particularly fair to confer higher status on passable girls, it is even more cruel to confer higher status on those who have had more success romantically. Pre-op and post-op dating is incredibly difficult. Full-time girls have a very difficult time finding a husband (or wife, depending on what they are seeking). Is a pre-op or post-op girl with a steady SO worthy of more respect than one who is all alone? Of course not, and I would expect that a part-time or full-time girl would not expect more respect from her peers just because she is fortunate enough to have found a SO. They both deserve our respect, but the ones who are alone really need our support.

But what about leadership? Should we assume that full-time girls are more qualified to lead us than mere part-time girls, or that passable girls are more qualified to lead than non-passable girls? No, and I give two examples. One is a part-time girl who is a licensed therapist who works tirelessly to organize events and gather useful information for our community. Another part-time girl is like a walking encyclopedia of TG knowledge, having read virtually every title on TGs (I am fairly well informed, but this girl has read EVERYTHING), is a true culture vulture who keeps us all apprised of cultural events relating to our community, is the first TG person I ever spoke to (on my second time dressing in public) who gave me very reassuring and meaningful advice on that very important evening in my life, and is far too modest to take the credit she deserves as a resource in the community. These are true leaders. Leaders lead by leading, and this is leadership, and it has nothing to do with treatment status or passability. Being pretty and passable is wonderful, and I will do what I can to get there, but it is not, in and of itself and with nothing more, a qualification for leadership.

And, finally, what about girls who never transition? Should part-time girls be scolded for not having the courage to transition? Or should they also be admired and respected in their own way?

I may ultimately transition, but transitioning will not necessarily require any more courage than my present part-time existence – perhaps quite the opposite. I know many part time girls in our community who have been dressing for decades, painfully repressing their desire to transition, and sacrificing themselves for the economic and psychological well-being of their families. Are these cowards? No, to the contrary, they are making a selfless sacrifice, one that I am not sure I can make because I like being a girl just a little too much. It is a painful decision either way, and I cry every day of my life when I think about either option (which is, basically, every day of my life). I will likely regret whichever path I choose, and I hope that I receive the same amount of respect and compassion either way.

And, in the meantime, part-time life is no picnic. Changing genders in a car three times a week, and hiding my gender identity from most of my family, most of my co-workers and many of my friends is stressful, tiring and time consuming. I would love nothing more than to merge my two lives into one. Every day I dream of walking down the hall in my office in a skirt and heels –
doing so would be liberating and make my life easier, not harder. Transitioning is hard, but not transitioning is even harder, at least for me. Is this type of daily sacrifice not worthy of some quantum of respect?

But, as unfulfilling as life can be for a part-timer living a split life, it does not mean that we cannot have meaningful experiences en femme, and try to make the most of our femme time.

So what is a part-time girl “supposed” to do? Is it wrong to be “proud” of being a non-passable but self-confident transwoman? Should we hide in the closet at home, or in the corner of a gay bar until, and unless, we achieve some requisite level of passability and are able to assimilate, seamlessly and with complete stealth, as women?

Many of us go to trans-specific events (Keystone, Southern Comfort, First Event, Raven, Triangles, Angela’s, TDoR, TransPride, and please do not forget tgirlnation.com). Some of us also venture out into the straight world notwithstanding our varying levels of passability, whether that means going to the mall, or sipping on a cocktail in a hotel lounge. But is it wrong?

Of course not. We can be proud of being trans -- we will always be trans regardless of whether or not we transition and regardless of how passable we are -- there is nothing to be ashamed of. And, yes, we can even be beautiful, and desirable, with or without being passable. That’s a pretty uplifting message, isn’t it?

Fortunately, the vast majority of full-time girls I know are quite respectful of us part-timers. Many remain active participants in our community. Others go off into the sunset, rarely to be seen or heard from in tgirl-land, which is their prerogative, and is completely understandable. If they do go off into the sunset, they should be warmly welcomed back with hugs on their occasional social visits, but they should not expect to be given special deference or automatically appointed as our leaders.