

Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism

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Author: Pat Califia

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Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism is Califia's meticulously researched book based on an astute reading of the available literature and in-depth interviews with gender transgressors who "opened their lives, minds, hearts, and bedrooms to the gaze of strangers." Writing about both male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, Califia examines the lives of early transgender pioneers like Christine Jorgenson, Jan Morris, Renee Richards and Mark Rees, contemporary transgender activists like Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein, and partners of transgendered people like Minnie Bruce Pratt. Califia scrutinizes feminist resistance to transsexuals occupying women's space, the Christian Right's backlash against transsexuals, and the appropriation of the berdache and other differently-gendered by gay historians to prove the universal existence of homosexuality. Finally, Sex Changes explores the future of gender.

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About the Author

Pat Califia needs no introduction for lesbian and gay readers. Her writings on sexuality, pornography, censorship, S/M, and other controversial topics have earned her the reputation of a fearless defender of the rights of perverts - and a fearless intellectual adversary. Pat Califia is well-known as a long-time activist for gay rights and the right to free sexual expression, and a sharp critic of repressive American attitudes toward sexuality and pornography. She lectures widely on university campuses and at the invitation of community-sponsored conferences, workshops and other gatherings. Among her best-loved books are Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism, Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex, The Advocate Advisor, Macho Sluts and Melting Point. Her numerous articles and essays have appeared in The Journal of Homosexuality, The Advocate, Co-Evolution Quarterly, High Times, Brat Attack, Taste of Latex, Skin Two, Invert: The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Sensibility, On Our Backs, Drummer, and The Spectator. She received her M.A. in counseling psychology from University of San Francisco. She lives in San Francisco where she writes and works as a therapist intern serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities. Pat Califia was born in 1954 in Corpus Christi, Texas. She came out as a lesbian in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the early 1970s. She was a member of the first local feminist consciousness-raising group and helped start the first women's center in Salt Lake City. Pat has said many times that she chose writing as her preferred mode of political activism because writing could go where she could not. Having grown up in Texas and Utah, she certainly experienced the pain of isolation as a future butch lesbian and genderbender. Perhaps this is why Pat has been so dogged in her insistence on sexual freedom for everyone - and so relentless in her criticism of sexual censorship, both from the feminist movement and from the Right. In 1973, Pat moved to San Francisco, where she was active in Daughters of Bilitis, the first national organization for lesbians. In the mid-1970s, she began educating herself about lesbian sex. She took volunteer training at San Francisco's Sex Information hotline, led a lesbian sexuality discussion group, worked as a research associate at the Center for Homosexual Education, Evaluation and Research at San Francisco State University under the direction of John De Cecco - and began writing Saphistry (Naiad Press, 1979) the book that sparked the famous lesbian sex wars of Reagan years. In the early 1980s, Pat was busy organizing in the lesbian S/M community, beginning with Samois. She helped produce What Color Is Your Handkerchief?, the first pamphlet on lesbian S/M in the English language, and helped edit Coming to Power, an anthology of work by S/M lesbians. In 1983, she moved to New York City and joined the Lesbian Sex Mafia. Throughout the 1980s - while S/M was viciously contested as a legitimate avenue of sexual expression for upstanding righteous feminist lesbians - Pat wrote, edited, lectured, taught, attended meetings and conferences, sat on boards, judged contests, cranked out honest, no-bullshit sex advice for The Advocate, and set the standard for heart-pounding, risk-taking, literate lesbian erotic fiction. For more than two decades, Pat Califia has been "fuming and fussing" about censorship and the rights of perverts in America. Whether she's writing about lesbian relationships, S/M and "leather sex," sex between lesbians and gay men, eroticizing latex and safe sex, role-playing and genderbending, sex with youth, prostitution, sex in public, or the politics of transgenderism in Western culture, Califia - always clear, provocative and eminently reasonable - sets the standard for writing about sex. Califia's dedication to sexual, political and informational freedom has earned her the admiration of activists everywhere. She provided key testimony in Little Sisters' censorship case against the Canadian Government. There she was put in the unenviable position of defending to a room full of government prosecutors, customs officials and bureaucrats "The Surprise Party," a story full of rough sex and bondage, in which a lesbian is "raped" by a cadre of gay men dressed up as cops. Califia wrote in the introduction to Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada, "Until the last page of this story, the reader has every reason to believe that it is a description of three cops sexually assaulting a lesbian. Then it is revealed that it was in fact a complicated, staged S/M scene produced as a labor of love for the heroine's birthday (hence, the title) I had forgotten just how twisted sexual politics can be. When liberals become censors, they come up with some novel rationales. 'The Surprise Party' was under

suspicion for potentially instigating antigay violence. The state was attempting to censor a piece of gay writing under the guise of protecting us from homophobic assaults. At one point, I believe I commented to the court that heterosexual policemen were apparently telling me as a lesbian author that I did not have the right to have sexual fantasies about cops. Nobody laughed." Since the broad consequences of sexual repression (and repression in general) are never far from Califia's mind, Califia sees sexuality where we didn't think it mattered and provides a wealth of information for concerned folks addressing seemingly non-sexual issues. Writing of proposed Internet regulations in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, she observes, "The U.S. Government has used the pretext of looking for kiddy porn to institute a wide-ranging campaign of on-line surveillance and entrapment. And Great Britain has proposed to prevent all Internet newsgroups in the 'alt' category from being transmitted into that country. These groups include discussions of kinky sex, but they also include medical information, rock 'n' roll fandom, sci-fi readers, and a bunch of other interesting conversations. If this effort succeeds, an antiporn rationale will have been used to cut off British citizens from a rich culture capable of generating many kinds of social change." Pat Califia is available for print, on-line and broadcast interviews, and for lectures and workshops on university campuses. From the Back Cover

Who would you be if you had never been punished for gender-inappropriate behavior? What would it be like to grow up in a society where gender was truly consensual? If the rite of passage was to name your own gender at adolescence, or upon your transition into adulthood? What would it be like to walk down the street, go to work, or attend a party and take it for granted that the gender of the people you met would not be the first thing you ascertained about them? If you could change your sex as effortlessly in reality as you can in virtual reality, and change it back again, wouldn't you like to try it at least once? What would it be like to live in a society where you could take a vacation from gender? Or, even more importantly, from other people's gender? What if we all helped each other to manifest our most beautiful, sexy, intelligent, creative, and adventurous inner selves, instead of cooperating to suppress them? If these questions frighten, offend, or annoy you, you are one of the people who stand to benefit from transactivism-although it probably doesn't feel like your benefactor. And if these questions amuse, engage, and challenge you, you're probably a transactivist already. Welcome to the genderrevolution. - *Pat Califia Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* is Pat Califia's meticulously researched analysis of the contemporary history of transsexuality. Based on in-depth interviews with gender transgressors who "opened their lives, minds, hearts, and bedrooms to the gaze of strangers," *Sex Changes* demonstrates Pat Califia's hallmark candor and insight. Writing about both male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, Califia examines the lives of early transgender pioneers like Christine Jorgenson, Jan Morris, Rene Richards and Mark Rees; partners of transgendered people like Minnie Bruce Pratt; and contemporary transgender activists like Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein. Includes bibliography, resources, index. Pat Califia is well-known as a sharp critic of repressive American attitudes toward gender, sexuality and pornography. She is the author of many books, including *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*. Reviews

Common sense has dictated that there are two genders - female and male. But this perspective is becoming less accepted and making less sense for many people. Pat Califia's *Sex Changes* is a frank, forthright, and sometimes funny challenge to the traditional ideas about gender and sexuality. Transgenderism is the term used to describe people who feel they belong to both, or neither, traditional genders. Califia - a vocal sex radical as well as a therapist - explores the worlds of biology, sociology, psychology, and politics and comes to the conclusion that life and personal experience is far more complicated than most people believe and that the simple two-gender system most people accept is more harmful than helpful. Clear-headed writing and enormous empathy for everyone who exists outside of "the norm" make *Sex Changes* challenging and vital reading.

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"only Califia writes with such explicitness and honesty as to make gays and lesbians as well as straights squirm in their chairs. But while Califia can make you embarrassed, angry, indignant, afraid, or aroused, it is not without higher purpose. Highly recommended."

Library Journal

"The first major work published by a gay and lesbian press that takes transsexual and transgendered concerns seriously..."

Gail Sondegaard, San Francisco Bay Times