

## BAY AREA REPORTER

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# When labeling is a drag

by Christine Beatty

Words can only feebly express the excitement and pride I felt as I strode down Market Street with the other members of the first Drag March on the Friday of Pride Weekend. As we strutted down San Francisco's main thoroughfare, escorted by the police and cheered on by thousands of onlookers from the Castro to Polk Gulch, I realized with no small thrill that I was taking part in History! This was the First One of hopefully many to follow. One of the greatest moments happened when at least 50 of us broke off from the procession and stormed the steps of City Hall, standing together at the top. I can imagine how the marchers in the first Pride Parade and the first Dyke March must have felt: validated, alive, joyous, and powerful.

There is something about solidarity, about turning out in numbers and making your presence known that empowers, that instills a sense of Community. And it is that All for One for All spirit that the transgender community needs to embrace. We are doubtless one of the most splintered groups in the LGBT rainbow. We range the far-flung gamut of sexual orientation, identity and expression, and many of us are quite attached to our labels. We call ourselves: transsexual, crossdresser, transvestite, queen, drag queen, drag king, passing woman, or some other other-gendered title. I know I've probably missed a few, so I apologize to anyone whose feathers have been ruffled by the unintentional exclusion. The point is that the specific label doesn't matter to the fearful bigots who would deprive

us our rights, health, and even our lives. And trust me, those folks have their own names for us.

With such a diversity of identity, it is advantageous that we already have a banner under which we can rally. That banner is the word "transgender," an appropriate term when you consider that the prefix "trans" literally means "to cross." Because that's what we do: we cross gender barriers, either temporarily or, in the case of transsexuals, permanently. (In a sense, this is an over-simplification, but an illustrative one.)

Equally important, the Transgender-as-a-group concept already has widespread acceptance. Our fair City has a law that prohibits *Transgender* discrimination. And that "T" in LGBT stands for *Transgender*. Savvy politicians, public speakers, and journalists are learning to include the word in their vocabulary. Certainly some people don't like that word for a variety of reasons, but what do we stand to gain by sequestering ourselves in our label-of-choice? There is strength in numbers, and we disadvantage ourselves when we refuse to associate with "those people" who don't identify the same as us.

I suspect it was a sense of exclusion that led to the turnout of comparatively few transsexuals at that Friday march. The phrase "Drag March" is an unfortunate choice of words that, while being fun and campy, tends to exclude. Transsexual women (such as myself) do not consider female apparel as drag. Neither do FTMs so regard men's clothes. While some of us were

able to look past labels and showed up, I imagine that the word "drag" kept a few of us away. Drag suggests travesty, which our lives are not. I'm not implying there is anything wrong with drag; it's just not what a transsexual does when donning the apparel of their identified gender.

The "Drag March" title has already had some effect at reducing visibility for the other members of the transgender community, even those who did participate. Television news broadcasts kept referring to it as the "Drag Queen March." And since the

*B.A.R.* received no information about it by deadline, the march was reported an event for "drag queens and kings." What else was to be inferred from a name like "drag march?" Had the *Chronicle* not reported that transsexuals would be part of the

march, I doubt many of us would have shown up for it.

Frankly, the lack of a sizable turnout of transsexuals and others who don't identify with the "drag" label poignantly underscores the need for a name change of the event. I implore the organizers to adopt a new title: Transgender March. Or Trans March. This would bring new purpose to the event beyond the celebration, that of unification and education. And that's what it's really is all about, isn't it? My contention is that a march such as this one has a lot of political and social potential, one that all of us who transgress gender barriers could benefit from. By giving it a more inclusive name we increase the good it can do for all members of our community. ▼

