

Dr. Anne Lawrence

On Transsexualism and Sexuality

17 Things You DON'T Say to a Transsexual

By Riki Anne Wilchins

DON'T #1 - "I was just talking to A CHANGE the other day and..."

To me, this suggests that you are having strange conversations with your pocket money. No one IS a change. One can ask for change, own change, ex-change, change tires, change clothes, change sides, change to a minor key and change of life, but one cannot BE a change.

DON'T #2 - "You look just as good as I do."

Of course I do. And this is precisely the state of grace to which we all aspire. But more than likely you do both of us an injustice.

DON'T #3 - "Well I want you to know I certainly consider you a woman."

It is a never-ending source of wonderment that well-intentioned, and otherwise very well brought-up people say this to me, with a light of total sincerity shining from their eyes for which any self-respecting cocker spaniel would kill. Unfortunately, this assurance turns on at least four assumptions which, upon closer inspection, prove to be entirely unfounded: a) my gender is a subject about which reasonable people might be expected to reasonably differ; b) my gender is a topic that is currently open for discussion; c) my gender and your perception of it, is something about which I suffer rather a great deal of anxiety and about which I am seeking some reassurance; d) you, since you are a nontranssexual, are in just the providential position of providing me with this reassurance I so desperately seek.

DON'T #4 - "I consider you as much a woman as ANY of my friends."

What a treat for them; especially your male friends.

DON'T #5 - "I would NEVER have guessed you were a transsexual."

This phrase is usually accompanied by a look of the utmost incredulity, followed closely by a searching, penetrating, and largely sotto voice reappraisal of all the things you thought you knew about me (or perhaps only all the times we slept together). Unfortunately, this utterance assumes that your credulity, no doubt a topic of endless fascination to you, is of equal interest to me. Since there are tens of thousands of us (perhaps in your building alone!), the fact that some of us can "pass" (a nasty concept if ever there was one)

as nontranssexuals only prophesies that, wedded to the entirely fragile notion that you should be capable of identifying all of us on sight, you are destined for a life of more or less unending private humiliations.

DON'T #6 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

Yes, but only when I'm asked this question.

DON'T #7 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

DON'T #8 - "Can you have an orgasm?"

DON'T #9 - "You must have had a lot of courage to face surgery."

To have the actual surgery, I just had to be able to breathe deeply, count at least partway backwards from 100, and fall asleep with some semblance of dignity. In all of these tasks I was reliably aided by enough I.V. anesthetic to subdue a small water buffalo. It would also have helped, had I \$10-20,000 in spare change (See #1 above) about my person. Unfortunately, while I was thus drifting majestically off to sleep, I found I also had to be able to watch my friends, most of my lovers, all of my family, and any lesbian who used the term "politically correct" in any context other than a Lily Tomlin joke, fade out of my existence forever. Also, I found that I woke up to endless refrains of DON'Ts #1 - 7, above. That is the hard part; the surgery I could probably do again before breakfast.

DON'T #10 - "I don't think it's anyone's concern what's between your legs, unless they're sleeping with you."

Well, yes. But you, like me, might be surprised at the profound lack of fastidiousness some people display to even this tender area, as my weekly trips to the accoutrement racks at The Pleasure Chest and Eve's Garden confirm. In any case, I'm quite certain that whatever is between your legs, even during those hot, sticky, yucky days of summer, is totally above reproach and perfectly charming, while what's between mine, even on the very best of days, is, well, let's just not talk about it.

DON'T #11 - "I think transsexuals are just men in drag."

Of course you do, and you're entitled, even justifiably proud, to think so. Do not, however, voice this sentiment while surrounded by a full room of men who really are in drag, (for instance, the next Fantasy Ball). Also, be certain to note the exception to this rule, which is, of course, female-to-male transsexuals, who are really, well, just women in drag. We all know how naturally distasteful it is when men wear dresses or women wear pants. Do not, however, voice this sentiment while surrounded by a room of S/M dykes in full leather and studs.

DON'T #12 - "I hear you're a transsexual. When did you have surgery?"

Yes, and I hear you're a homosexual; when did you first suck cock? Ohhhh -- it's not about sex.

DON'T #13 - "I think of transsexuality as a kind of birth defect."

So do I. I was born into the wrong culture.

DON'T #14 - "How did you know you're a woman?"

Well, how did *you* know you were a woman? Ah-humm: breasts and vagina. Well, I can introduce you to some very handsome, bearded, muscular young men of my acquaintance who began life with the very same

equipment, so that's not particularly compelling evidence, is it? . . . I see, inside YOU just know. . . Call me sometime, we'll have lunch.

DON'T #15 - "Is it true that transsexuals are 'women trapped in men's bodies'?"

Yes, that's right. In my own case, they had to call in both the Fire Department and the EMS and even then it took them hours to cut me out. Luckily I had my Walkman and some wonderful Judy Garland tapes, so it wasn't too awful a wait.

DON'T #16 - "You look just like a REAL woman."

How splendid, especially when you recall I'm composed almost entirely of compressed soy by-products. And you look just like a REAL transsexual. Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize that was an insult.

DON'T #17 - "Isn't it AMAZING you're the ONLY transsexual I know."

Yes, and isn't it amazing, when you came out to your mother, you were the only homosexual she knew. Hum. The fact that I am the only transsexual you know only emphasizes that: a) you probably know a few hundred of us, but you don't know you know us, and we won't tell you that you do; b) there are tens of thousands of us, and more all the time; c) we are secretly plotting to take over the planet earth, and infiltrating your prevailing nontranssexual culture is just the first step; and d) while we are waiting to take over your planet, we are amusing ourselves at your expense by seeing just how much we can fuck with your heads.

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