

method of punishment for unruly women. Martin Hiraga of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force says, "There is some speculation that Lotter and Nissen did this to 'prove Teena was a woman.'" This is important to note because it speaks directly to the issue of power to self-define. Brandon defined *himself* as a man. The "real men" of Richardson Co., Neb., disagreed with *him*, and got in the last word.

Pat Phalen of Citizens for Equal Protection, says "We are trying to combat the concentration in news reports here on the crossdressing aspect, which is clouding the issue." Sarpy County District Attorney Mike Wellman has said that Brandon's "life of deception" cast doubt on (her) credibility. Crossdressing is not clouding the issue, crossdressing is central to the issue. Brandon did not identify as a lesbian, but as a *man*, and *his* attire was a crucial factor, along with *his* haircut, name and mannerisms, in creating the initially successful impression that *he* was in fact just one of the boys. Again, this speaks directly to the issue of the power to self-define. Brandon is no longer here to tell well-meaning citizens to let him decide for himself what to call *himself*.

Mindy Ridgway, writing for the *SF Bay Times*, a "Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual" free bi-weekly, consistently refers to Brandon as "she," and quotes Terry Person of CUAV saying "Basically, the people down in that county are trying to bury the fact the woman was a lesbian." Ms. Ridgway and Ms. Person, although probably well-intentioned, just don't get it. In insisting on referring to Brandon as "she" and as "the woman," they assume the right to define another person. The "woman" wasn't a lesbian. The "woman" lived full time as a heterosexual *man*, and was passing as just that until *his* genetic femaleness was reported in the local press.

There has been a lot of controversy in the queer community recently over whether the term "transgender" should be included on mastheads in the lesbian/gay/bisexual press (*SF Bay Times*, for instance), and in the official names of freedom day parades. Never mind that these parades commemorate a riot started by a handful of drag queens and a butch dyke in a suit. The NYPD attempted to arrest the butch for not wearing the requisite three articles of gender-coded clothing required by NY state law of the time. Chaos ensued and the Stonewall Riots are now Gay History 101, recognized as the beginning of the modern gay rights movement.

In the women's community, debate has been raging over whether transgendered women qualify as women. Nationally, the brouhaha is over the inclusion of transgendered individuals in the Clinton administration's proposed health plan. Locally, it's in the upcoming decision by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission about whether or not to include us in city-wide protective legislation.

Brandon Teena was not killed because *she* was a lesbian, *he* was killed because *he* was transgendered. This is neither more nor less horrific than if *he* had been killed for lesbianism, but it is different. If the murder of Brandon Teena fuels legislative test cases on human rights, perhaps *his* death will not have been futile. If the queer community makes of Brandon a martyr to a cause, so be it. But if *he* is to be canonized in any way, it should be done in such a way that respects *his* right to self-definition. Brandon's brand of transgenderism actually placed *him* both in and out of the closet. Because *he* passed *he* could assimilate. *His* girlfriends weren't lesbians; *his* pals were "other" guys. *His* death was directly related to other people refusing to let *him* define *himself* for *himself*, and go *his* path in peace. Self-definition as lesbian, as anything, can be empowering, but to have that same definition forced upon you against your will is disempowering and sometimes deadly.

Lotter and Nissen are scheduled to enter pleas at the time of this writing. The Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community is looking to Nebraska, hoping that the courts there will be more astute in disseminating justice than the *Falls City Journal* and the local police were in protecting its minority citizenry. The gay community is looking to Nebraska, but those of us who are transgendered are looking to society in general. Please have respect. Have respect for yourselves. Have respect for the memory of Brandon Teena, and allow *him* posthumously what the thugs in Nebraska would not: *his* right to self-definition.

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### His Right to Self-Determination

On March 17 the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an Associated Press story about a brutal triple murder in Falls City, Nebraska. Brandon Teena (aka Teena Brandon), a "passing" female-to-male transsexual who lived as a man and was popular with the girls, was "outed" as a genetic female in the local press. Brandon was then allegedly raped and beaten on Christmas Day by two men who had known him as a "he" before the outing.

Brandon did all the "right" things after the rape. *He* did not bathe, *he* received documented hospital treatment, *he* filed a police report in which *he* identified *his* attackers by name. Despite having over 100 pages of evidence, the police of Falls City did nothing. They made no arrests, they did not investigate, they did not even question the men Brandon had named until three days after the reports were filed.

One week later Brandon and two of *his* friends were found shot to death in a small farmhouse near Humboldt. The men charged with the murders are the men Brandon named as *his* assailants: John Lotter and Marvin Nissen. Brandon's murder, and its treatment so far in the press, raises questions about the issue of self-definition and the callous and sometimes brutal ways in which "inappropriate" gender identification is dealt with in both heterosexual and homosexual sectors of society.

In Nebraska, two men were so horrified at having their eggshell-thin sense of masculine self threatened by a perceived interloper in all-boy land, they punished the intruder with rape and death. Rape, of course, is the traditional