

Support

Gender Support in the Computer Age

by Stephanie Rose

The gender community is in the midst of two revolutions right now. The first is more an evolution than a revolution. Support groups are springing up all over the country, and new T-peoples are seemingly coming out of the woodwork into a world they never knew existed—into the gender community. But we are also involved, more covertly, in another revolution—the computer revolution.

While we are by no means the leaders of this revolution (though I am sure some of our fellow T-people are), we stand to gain more from it than any other social groups out there. More and more, computers are being used for communication, for information exchange, and now, even for support. I'm talking about the increasing number and popularity of computer bulletin board services, or BBSs.

A BBS, for the layperson, is a computer connected to a phone line for the express purpose of receiving calls from other computers. All you need to hook up to one is a computer, a modem, a phone line, and telecommunication software. Once your computer is connected to a BBS, you can send (upload) and receive (download)

files, messages, chat with others on the same BBS, etc. And the real beauty behind it all, is it is completely safe. Everyone uses handles and private passwords. Only the System Operator (Sysop) has access to your more private information, and they take your security very seriously. It is a simple concept, but it has broad implications.

Today, there are well over a dozen BBSs across the country serving our community. The amount of information and help available on these boards is staggering. You can get lists of support groups, lists of retailers who cater to our community, original fiction stories by other T-peoples, hints on makeup, passing, and much, much more. All those are available as files you can download and look at.

However, the real benefits from these BBSs are found in the message sections, where a wide variety of topics are discussed. Some recent topics discussed on the Tri-Ess BBS (See *Getting Access to a BBS*) included how to tell your wife about CDing, whether or not to tell children, TV shows involving gender issues, homemade breast forms, the effects of hormones, etc.

When each of us first began that voyage of self discovery, the first question we had was "Are there others like me?" Finding and talking to others like ourselves gives us strength. We feel more comfortable when we know we are not alone. The message sections of BBSs give us that sense of community. Most messages are public, or rather, they are addressed to one

Getting Access to a BBS

The following is an example of how to gain access to the Tri-Ess BBS in Atlanta, though the general process applies to all BBSs.

Start by dialing the number, using either the dial command of your terminal program or by using the AT command set directly. The number for the Tri-Ess BBS is (404) 922-2414.

ATDT404-922-2414.

After a ring or two, the BBS will answer, and the two modems will make a connection. Your screen will display the word **Connect** followed by the speed at which your modem is set.

Connect 2400

Soon, text will start appearing on your screen, and eventually, you will be asked to log on. For a new user on the Tri-Ess BBS, enter

Sigma Epsilon as your name. Other BBSs will have a different name for first time callers.

Enter your full name: Sigma Epsilon

In future calls, you will use your own name, or handle to log on.

Now you will be prompted for a password. This is to keep strangers out, and to protect your security. For Tri-Ess, enter **triess** as your password.

Password: triess

Again, in future calls, you will enter your own private password.

You should now have new user access to the Tri-Ess BBS. New users are generally pretty restricted, though just how restricted will depend on the board you are calling. You will continue to have restricted access until you fill out a questionnaire which is required by almost all BBSs. To do this, enter **Q** at the main menu prompt.

Here, you will be given a brief

introduction to the BBS, and asked a variety of questions, usually including your name, the handle you would like to use, your personal password, where you are calling from, etc. You must answer these questions truthfully! Don't worry, only the Sysop has access to this information, and they are trustworthy. The Tri-Ess BBS is free of charge, but some others require a donation to get full access.

Once you have filled out the questionnaire, select **log off** from the menu to disconnect. Generally, you will be granted full access within a few days, at which time you can start taking advantage of some of the wonderful features of the BBS. Most new users spend their full time allotment each day downloading fantasy and fiction stories written by other users. Eventually, they will start reading the messages, and before you know it, they are pros.

or more individuals, but everyone is allowed to read and respond to them. Other messages are tagged as private, meaning only the person the message is being sent too can read it.

The whole purpose of these messages is communication and support. In reading the messages, you see and learn about others just like yourself. You see the problems they are facing, the successes they have had, and what special people they are. By responding to mes-

sages, you let others know what you have learned, what problems you are having, and also how special you are. Messages go back and forth, others throw in their points of view, and everyone benefits.

If you become hooked on these BBSs, like so many of us have, you soon find you have a whole bunch of new friends, who in many cases know you better than your non-gender friends, just as you come to know them. All this is because you are free to be yourself. The

anonymity of your handle guarantees that.

For many CDs and transsexual peoples in recent years, the first contact with another has been through a BBS. The open, yet secure nature of BBSs make them an ideal place to start the voyage of self discovery. As the use of BBSs continues to increase, we will continue to see our community grow by record numbers. As it does, our goal of public acceptance will continue to get closer and closer. ☺

