



OXFORD

# Transgender History in the United States

A special unabridged version  
of a book chapter from *Trans  
Bodies, Trans Selves*, edited by  
Laura Erickson-Schroth

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# TRANSGENDER HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

by Genny Beemyn  
part of *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*  
edited by Laura Erickson-Schroth

## ABOUT THIS E-BOOK

The history of transgender and gender nonconforming people in the United States is one of struggle, but also of self-determination and community building. Transgender groups have participated in activism and education around many issues, including gender expectations, depathologization, poverty, and discrimination. Like many other marginalized people, our history is not always preserved, and we have few places to turn to learn the stories of our predecessors.

This chapter is an unabridged version of the United States History chapter of *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, a resource guide by and for transgender communities. Despite limiting its focus to the United States, this chapter still contained so much important information that would need to be cut to meet the book's length requirements that a decision was made to publish it separately in its original form. We cannot possibly tell the stories of the many diverse people who together make up our history, but we hope that this is a beginning.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Genny Beemyn has published and spoken extensively on the experiences and needs of trans people, particularly the lives of gender nonconforming students. They have written or edited many books/journal issues, including *The Lives of Transgender People* (with Sue Rankin; Columbia University Press, 2011) and special issues of the *Journal of LGBT Youth* on "Trans Youth" and "Supporting Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Children and Youth" and a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* on "LGBTQ Campus Experiences." Genny's most recent work is *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (Routledge, 2014). They are currently working on a book entitled *Campus Queer: The Experiences and Needs of LGBTQ College Students*. In addition to being the director of the Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Genny is the Trans Policy Clearinghouse coordinator for Campus Pride ([www.campuspride.org/tpc](http://www.campuspride.org/tpc)) and an editorial board member and trans article reviewer for the *Journal of LGBT Youth*, the *Journal of Bisexuality*, the *Journal of Homosexuality*, and the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*. Genny has a Ph.D. in African American Studies and Master's degrees in African American Studies, American Studies, and Higher Education Administration.

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# TRANSGENDER HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

Genny Beemyn

## INTRODUCTION

Can there be said to be a “transgender history,” when “transgender” is a contemporary term and when individuals in past centuries who would perhaps appear to be transgender from our vantage point might not have conceptualized their lives in such a way? And what about individuals today who have the ability to describe themselves as transgender, but choose not to for a variety of reasons, including the perception that it is a White, middle-class Western term and the belief that it implies transitioning from one gender to another? Should they be left out of “transgender history” because they do not specifically identify as transgender?

These questions complicate any attempt to write a history of individuals who would have been perceived as gender nonconforming in their eras and cultures. While it would be inappropriate to limit this chapter to people who lived at a time and place when the concept of “transgender” was available and used by them, it would also be inappropriate to assume that people who are “transgender,” as we currently understand the term, existed throughout history. For this reason, we cannot claim that gender nonconforming individuals were “transgender” or “transsexual” if these categories were not yet named or yet to be embraced. However, where possible, we can seek to distinguish between individuals whose actions would seem to indicate that they would be what we would call “transgender,” “transsexual,” or a “crossdresser” today and those who might have presented as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth for reasons other than a sense of gender difference (such as to escape narrow gender roles or pursue same-sex sexual relationships). While all these can admittedly be fine lines, the distinctions are worth trying to make clear when presenting any specific “transgender history.”

## FRAMING GENDER NONCONFORMITY IN THE PAST: TWO STORIES

From the earliest days of the American colonies, violations of established gender systems and attempts to prevent and contain such transgressions have been a part of life in what would become the United States. One of the first recorded examples involved a servant in the Virginia colony in the 1620s who claimed to be both a man and a woman and, at different times, adopted the traditional roles and clothing of men and women and variously went by the names of Thomas and Thomasine Hall. Unable to establish Hall’s “true” gender, despite repeated physical examinations, and unsure of whether to punish him/her for wearing men’s or women’s apparel, local citizens asked the court at Jamestown to resolve the issue. Perhaps because it too was unable to make a conclusive determination, or perhaps because it took Hall at his/her word that Hall was bi-gendered or what would be known today as intersexed, the court ordered Hall in 1629 to wear both a man’s breeches and a woman’s apron and cap. This unique ruling affirmed Hall’s dual nature and subverted traditional gender categories, but by fixing Hall’s gender and denying him/her the freedom to switch between male and female identities, the decision simultaneously punished Hall

and reinforced gender boundaries. It also forever marked Hall publicly as an oddity in the Virginia settlement, and likely made him/her the subject of ridicule and pity (Brown, 1995; Reis, 2007; Rupp, 1999).

Reflecting how dominant gender expectations had changed little in the intervening three hundred years, another individual named Hall would confound authorities at the turn of the twentieth century. Murray Hall lived as a man for thirty years, becoming a prominent New York City politician, operating a commercial “intelligence office,” and marrying twice. Hall was not discovered to have been assigned female at birth until his death in 1901 from breast cancer, for which he had avoided medical treatment for several years, seemingly out of a fear that the gender assigned to him at birth would become public. His wives apparently were aware of Hall’s secret and respected how he expressed his gender. No one else knew, including the daughter he raised, and his friends and colleagues were shocked at the revelation. While some officials and a coroner’s jury subsequently chose to see Hall as female, his daughter, friends, and political colleagues continued to recognize him as a man. Said an aide to a New York State Senator, “If he was a woman he ought to have been born a man, for he lived and looked like one,” (Cromwell, 1999; Katz, 1976: 234).

### READING GENDER NONCONFORMITY

The experiences of Thomas/Thomasine Hall and Murray Hall demonstrate the diversity of gender expression and identity over time, the multiple ways that these societies have read gender, and the efforts of the judicial system to regulate and simplify it in response. But it is not just legal authorities that have had trouble understanding and addressing the complexities of gendered lives. Historians have often ignored or dismissed instances of non-normative gender expression, especially among individuals assigned female at birth, who they regarded as simply seeking male privilege if they lived as men. It was not until lesbian and gay historians in the 1970s and 1980s sought to identify and celebrate individuals from the past who had had same-sex relationships that their gender nonconformity began to receive more than cursory attention.

In seeking to normalize same-sex sexuality by showing that people attracted to others of the same sex existed across time and cultures, lesbian and gay historians, especially those who wrote before transgender people began calling attention to their own histories, have frequently considered all individuals who crossdressed or who lived as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth to have done so in order to pursue same-sex relationships, even when evidence suggests that their actions were not principally motivated by same-sex attraction (Califa, 1997). Thus, ironically, some lesbian and gay historians have engaged in a process of erasure that is little different from the silencing practiced by the heterosexist historians whose work they were challenging and revising. For example, Jonathan Ned Katz (1976) includes Murray Hall in his documentary history, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA*, as part of a section on “Passing Women,” and referring to him by female pronouns, states that “reports of Hall’s two ‘marriages’ and her being ‘sweet on women’ suggest Lesbianism” (232). Other historians, including Jeffrey Escoffier (2004), John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988), and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (1998), have likewise considered Hall to have been a passing woman and a lesbian.

But such authors ignore significant contradictions. If Hall was simply passing, then why did he present so completely as a male that even his adopted daughter did not know? Why did the individuals who were closest to him continue to insist that he was a man after his death? And if being with a woman was his only motivation, then why did he avoid medical treatment that would have likely saved his life in order to prevent anyone from finding out that he had been assigned female at birth? These questions complicate a simplistic explanation of Hall as a lesbian who sought to avoid social condemnation by presenting as a man.

## READING CONTEMPORARY GENDER NONCONFORMITY: THE EXAMPLE OF BILLY TIPTON

The experiences of Billy Tipton, a jazz musician who lived as a man for more than fifty years and who was not discovered to have been assigned female until his death in 1989, are reminiscent of those of Murray Hall. Similarly, Tipton avoided doctors and died from a treatable medical condition, rather than risk disclosure. He also apparently had to turn away from what could have been his big break in the music industry, for fear that the exposure would “out” him. In later years, he chose to live in poverty, rather than claim Social Security benefits, seemingly for the same reason (Middlebrook, 1998).

Tipton, like Hall, kept knowledge of his anatomy from even his family members. He was apparently able to prevent several women with whom he had long-term relationships and his three adopted sons from discovering that he had been assigned female at birth by dressing and bathing behind a locked door and by using a prosthetic device that enabled him to simulate having a penis during sexual activities. In addition, Tipton kept his chest bound with a bandage, stating that he had suffered permanent injuries in a car accident. With his last partner, he also used this story to explain why he could not have sex.

Also similar to Hall, Tipton, who did not leave behind any documentation of how he identified or explain his choices to anyone, has been the subject of competing gender narratives. Literary critic Marjorie Garber (1992), for example, treats Tipton as a “transvestite” and lesbian historian Lillian Faderman (1991) considers him to have been a woman who felt compelled to pass as a man in order to succeed as a musician in the 1930s. A biography of Tipton by Diane Wood Middlebrook (1998) creates an even more muddled portrait. Arbitrarily employing both male and female pronouns, Middlebrook admits that Tipton may have seen himself as a man or may have been a transgender person, even stating that at least two of his partners, his sons, and some of his former band members continue to think of him as a man, but she never seriously explores these possibilities. Instead, Middlebrook conjectures that Tipton was engaging in a performance, “playing the role of Billy,” and once in that role, could not escape it (217).

But other authors respect Tipton’s apparent identity. Anthropologist Jason Cromwell (1999), an FTM (female-to-male) person himself, criticizes Middlebrook and other writers who consider Tipton to be either a closeted lesbian or a prime example of the extent to which women have gone to make a living in a male bastion like the music industry. He states:

Billy Tipton’s life speaks for itself. The male privileges that accrue from living as a man do not justify spending fifty years living in fear, hiding from loved ones, taking extreme measures to make sure that no one knows what their body is or looks like, and then dying from a treatable medical condition (a bleeding ulcer). When someone like Tipton dies or is discovered, they are discounted as having been “not real men” or “unreal men.” Despite having lived for years as men, the motivations of these individuals are read as being wrought of socio-economic necessity or the individuals are considered to be lesbians. Does this mean that “anatomy is not destiny” while one is alive but “anatomy is destiny” after death? (89-90).

According to all the information we have available, Tipton sought to live his life as a man and to die as one. To characterize him otherwise implies that this history does not matter or, worse, that it is a lie. Not only does this view deny Tipton’s agency, but it also negates the experiences of all transgender people, for it means that regardless of how someone might express or identify their gender, only the gender assigned to that individual at birth matters. Ironically, many of the lesbian individuals and communities that have claimed Tipton, Murray Hall, and other female-assigned men as one of their own after their deaths may have rejected and sought to exclude Tipton and Hall from “women’s space” while they were alive (Cromwell, 1998).

## A FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING A TRANSGENDER HISTORY

While evidence strongly suggests that Tipton and Hall saw themselves as men, it can sometimes be difficult to determine how someone may have identified, especially given the absence of autobiographical accounts. In contemplating whether female-assigned individuals from the past who presented as male might have been what we would call transsexual today, Cromwell (1999) offers three questions to consider: if the individuals indicated that they were men, if they attempted to modify their bodies to look more traditionally male, and if they tried to live their lives as men, keeping the knowledge of their female bodies a secret, even if it meant dying rather than seeking necessary medical care (81). Using this framework, Tipton and Hall would be best categorized from a contemporary perspective as transgender men.

Cromwell's questions can apply equally as well to individuals assigned male at birth who presented as female. Such instances are significantly less documented in Western cultures, perhaps because of the difficulty of being read as female before the advent of hormones and hair-removal techniques. One well-known example is Jenny Savalette de Lange, a member of Parisian high society who lived as a woman for at least fifty years and who was not discovered to have been assigned male at birth until her death in 1858. She had obtained a new birth certificate that designated her as female and had been engaged to men six times, but never married, seemingly to avoid her birth gender from being discovered (Bullough, 1975).

Cromwell helps us distinguish individuals like Tipton, Hall, and de Lange, who we would now presumably call transsexual because they saw their identities as a gender other than that assigned at birth, from cisgender people who presented as a gender other than that assigned at birth for economic, social, or sexual reasons, but who did not identify as that other gender or seek to permanently alter their gender. But his questions do not speak to the differences between transsexual people and individuals we now refer to as crossdressers. To make this distinction in regards to historical figures, two other questions can be added: if the individuals continued to crossdress when it was publicly known that they crossdressed or if they crossdressed consistently but only in private, so that no one else knew, except perhaps their families. In either case, the important demarcation is that the people who crossdressed did not receive any privilege or benefit from doing so, other than their own comfort and satisfaction.

One individual who seems to fit the label of crossdresser is Hannah Snell/James Gray. Snell, a resident of Worcester, England, began dressing as a man in 1745 to search for her husband, a Dutch sailor who had deserted her while she was pregnant (Anonymous, 1989 [1750]). For the next five years, Snell served under the name of James Gray in both the British navy and army, working variously as a servant, watchman, and deckhand, and was wounded in battle in India. After learning from another sailor that her husband had been executed for murder, Snell/Gray returned to England, at which point she disclosed her assigned gender to her shocked but ultimately supportive shipmates. The "female soldier" became a sensation after her story was published, and Snell/Gray took advantage of her fame to earn an income by appearing on the stage in her military uniform. Upon retiring, Snell/Gray continued to wear traditionally male apparel and purchased a "public house . . . for which [she] had a signboard painted with a British tar on one side and a brave marine on the other, while beneath was inscribed: The Widow in Masquerade or the Female Warrior," (Thompson, 1974: 105). Though Snell/Gray initially presented as male for personal gain (to be able to look for her husband), she seems to best be referred to as a crossdresser because Snell/Gray did not identify as a man, but continued to cross-dress even after her birth gender was known.

An example of a female-presenting crossdresser is a thirty-three-year-old US journalist who was a patient of German physician Magnus Hirschfeld, the leading authority on crossdressers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Included as "Case 14" in Hirschfeld's 1910 *The Transvestites*, the journalist stated: "From my earliest youth

I had the urge to step forth in women's clothing, and whenever the opportunity presented itself, I procured for myself elegant underclothing, silk petticoats, and whatever was in fashion." He experienced "a certain discomfort" in "men's clothing," but felt "a feeling of peace" when he could dress as female. His wife knew about his crossdressing and decided to remain with him (94).

## NON-BINARY GENDERS IN NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES

These examples of individuals who might be considered a part of transgender history all come from European and European-American cultures that rejected and often punished gender nonconformity. Some non-Western societies, though, welcomed and had recognized roles for individuals who assumed behaviors and identities different from those of the gender assigned to them at birth. Many Native American cultures at the time of European conquest enabled male-assigned individuals and, to a lesser extent, female-assigned individuals to dress, work, and live, either partially or completely, as a different gender.

One of the earliest known descriptions of non-binary genders in a Native American society was recorded by Spanish conquistador Cabeza de Vaca, who wrote about seeing "effeminate, impotent men" who are married to other men and "go about covered-up like women and they do the work of women, and they draw the bow and they carry very heavy load" among a group of Coahuiltecan Indians in what is today Southern Texas in the 1530s (Lang, 1998: 67). As with de Vaca's account, most of the subsequent reports of gender diversity in Native American cultures were by Europeans—whether conquistadors, explorers, missionaries, or traders—whose worldviews were shaped by Christian doctrines that espoused adherence to strict gender roles and condemned any expressions of sexuality outside of married male-female relationships. Consequently, they reacted to instances of non-binary genders, in the words of gay scholar Will Roscoe (1998), "with amazement, dismay, disgust, and occasionally, when they weren't dependent on the natives' goodwill, with violence," (4).

Among the extreme reactions was that of Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa. In his trek across the Isthmus of Panama in 1513, de Balboa set his troop's dogs on forty male-assigned Cueva Indians for being "sodomites," as they had assumed the roles of women. The murders were subsequently depicted in an engraving by Theodore de Bry. Another Spanish conquistador, Nuño de Guzmán, burned alive a male-assigned individual who presented as female—considering the person to be a male prostitute—while traveling through Mexico in the 1530s (Saslow, 1999).

In one of the less judgmental accounts, Edwin T. Denig, a fur trader in present day Montana in the mid-nineteenth century, expressed astonishment at the Crow Indians' acceptance of a "neuter" gender. "Strange country this," he stated, "where males assume the dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn men and mate with their own sex!" (Roscoe, 1998: 3). Another matter-of-fact narrative was provided by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, an artist who accompanied a French expedition to Florida in 1564, who noted that what he referred to as "hermaphrodites" were "quite common" among the Timucua Indians (Katz, 1976: 287).

As these different accounts indicate, Europeans did not agree on what to make of cultures that recognized non-binary genders. Lacking comparable institutional roles in their own societies, they labeled the aspects that seemed familiar to them: male-assigned individuals engaged in same-sex sexual behavior ("sodomites") or individuals that combined male and female elements ("hermaphrodites"). Anthropologists and historians in the twentieth century would repeat the same mistake, interpreting these individuals as "homosexuals" or "transvestites," or as "berdaches," a French adaptation of the Arabic word for a male prostitute or a young male slave used for sexual purposes (Roscoe, 1987).

By failing to see beyond their own Eurocentric biases and prejudices, these observers take the recognition of gender diversity by many Native American societies out of

their specific cultural contexts. While male-assigned individuals who assumed female roles often married other male-assigned individuals, these other men presented as masculine and the relationships were generally not viewed in Native American cultures as involving two people of the same gender. The same was true of female-assigned individuals who assumed male roles and married other female-assigned individuals. Because many Native American groups recognized genders beyond male and female, these relationships would best be categorized as what anthropologist Sabine Lang (1999: 98) calls “hetero-gender” relationships, and not as “same-sex” relationships, as they were often described by European and Euro-American writers from the seventeenth through the late twentieth century.

The ways that the Native American societies that accepted gender diversity characterized non-binary genders varied by culture and by time. Within most of these cultures, male- and female-assigned individuals who assumed different genders were not considered to be women or men; rather, they constituted separate genders that combined female and male elements. This fact is reflected in the words that Native American groups developed to describe multiple genders. For example, the terms for male-assigned individuals who took on female roles used by the Cheyenne (*heemaneh*), the Ojibwa (*agokwa*), and the Yuki (*i-wa-musp*) translate as “half men, half women” or “men-women.” Other Native American groups referred to male-assigned individuals who “dress as a woman,” “act like a woman,” “imitate a woman,” or were a “would-be woman,” (Lang, 1998). Similarly, the Zuni called a female-assigned individual who took on male roles a *katsotse*, or “boy-girl” (Lang, 1999).

The exact number of Native American cultures that recognized non-binary genders is a subject of debate among contemporary historians and anthropologists, as data remains limited, especially regarding female-assigned individuals who presented as male, and scholars differ on what should count as gender diversity. Figures range from 113 Native American groups in North America that had female roles for male-assigned individuals and thirty that had male roles for female-assigned individuals to 131 and 63, respectively. Lang identifies sixty Native American cultures in North America that had additional genders for female-assigned individuals, including eleven that had recognized roles for female-assigned but not male-assigned individuals.

Writers also disagree on how these individuals lived their lives and the statuses that they held. Among gay male scholars, there has been a tendency to invoke a timeless and universally revered position for male-assigned individuals who assumed female roles, envisioning them as “gay” predecessors from a past when people who pursued same-sex relationships were accepted and a valued part of their societies. For example, Roscoe (1988) calls the Zuni “berdache” a “traditional gay role” (57), and anthropologist Walter Williams (1986) states that a view of the “berdache” as a “sacred people” was “widespread among the aboriginal peoples of the New World,” (31). Williams also creates a mythology around female-assigned individuals who assumed male roles. He refers to them as “amazons,” which denies the status they held in many Native American cultures as belonging to genders other than female.

Some transgender authors, even such pioneering writers as Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg, similarly romanticize Native American societies that recognized non-binary genders and look to the individuals who assumed different genders as “transgender” precursors (Towle & Morgan, 2006). In a sense, like Williams and Roscoe, they see what they want to see. In her autobiographical work *Gender Outlaw*, Bornstein (1994), a writer and performance artist, places herself within an eternal, unchanging transgender history. “My ancestors were performers,” she states, for “[t]he earliest shamanic rituals involved women and men exchanging genders. Old, old rituals. . . . We’re talking cross-cultural here,” (143). While Feinberg (1996), a leading activist and writer, notes the dangers of such cultural appropriation, she nevertheless creates a reductionist narrative in her book *Transgender Warriors*, which, as the title indicates, focuses on “courageous



trans warriors of every sex and gender – those who led battles and rebellions throughout history,” (xi).

Contrary to the depiction of individuals who assumed different genders as holding a highly esteemed, sacred position across culture and history, available evidence suggests that while they were apparently accepted in most Native American societies in which they have been known to exist, their statuses and roles differed from group to group and over time. Some Native American cultures considered them to possess supernatural powers and afforded them special ceremonial roles; in other cultures, they were less revered and viewed more secularly (Lang 1998). In these societies, the status of individuals who assumed different genders seems to have reflected their gender role, rather than a special gender status. If women predominated in particular occupations, such as being healers, shamans, and handcrafters, then male-assigned individuals who took on female roles engaged in the same professions. In a similar way, the female-assigned individuals who took on male roles became hunters and warriors (Lang, 1999).

In at least a few Native American cultures, individuals who assumed different genders appear to have been denigrated or even despised. According to historian Richard Trexler (1995), male-assigned individuals who presented as female in parts of the Inca Empire and among the Aztecs and Pueblos were forced to be the sexual subordinates of local lords or were relegated to the most subservient duties. While data is limited, it seems to have been a common practice for Native American societies to give young people a choice about assuming a different gender role. But in some areas, families that had many sons but no daughters might have required a male child to take on a female role, which could have been a lifelong change.

Just as the cultural status of individuals who assumed different genders seems to have varied greatly, so too did the extent to which they took on these roles. Some adopted their roles completely, others only partly or part of the time. In some cases, dressing as a different gender was central to assuming the gender role; in others it was not. Marrying or having relationships with other male-assigned or other female-assigned individuals was likewise common in some cultures, but less so in others. “Gender variance is as diverse as Native American cultures themselves,” states Sabine Lang (1999). “About the only common denominator is that in many Native American tribal cultures systems of multiple genders existed,” (95-96).

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF DRAG COMMUNITIES IN THE US**

The cultural inclusion of individuals who assumed different genders in some Native American societies stands in contrast to the general lack of recognition within the White-dominated American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To the extent to which such individuals were acknowledged in the colonies, it was largely to condemn their behavior as unnatural and sinful. For example, the charges filed in Middlesex County, Massachusetts in 1692 against a female-assigned individual named Mary Henly for wearing “men’s clothing” stated that such behavior was “seeming to confound the course of nature,” (Reis, 2007: 152).

Relatively few instances of gender nonconformity are documented in the colonial and post-colonial periods. A number of the cases that became known involved female-assigned individuals who were discovered to be living as a different gender only when their bodies were examined following an injury or death, like Murray Hall and Billy Tipton of later times. Many male-assigned individuals seemingly had less ability to present effectively in public as female because of their facial hair and physiques, so likely presented as female mostly in private.

The lack of a public presence for individuals who assumed different genders began to change in the mid nineteenth century as a growing number of single people left their communities of origin to earn a living, gain greater freedom, or simply see the world. Able to take advantage of the anonymity afforded by new surroundings, these

migrants had greater opportunities to fashion their own lives, which included engaging in same-sex relationships and presenting as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth.

Some headed out West, where, according to historian Peter Boag (2012), “cross-dressers were not simply ubiquitous, but were very much a part of daily life on the frontier,” (1-2). Others moved from rural to urban areas, primarily to pursue wage labor. In a groundbreaking 1983 article, gay historian John D’Emilio argues that the industrialization of US cities in the nineteenth century made it possible for the emergence of same-sex sexual communities; transgender historian Susan Stryker (2008) suggests that similar circumstances likely benefited individuals who lived different gendered lives, enabling them to meet and socialize with others like themselves.

The two groups were often not separate or distinguished from each other, and they created and frequented some of the same social spaces. The most popular of these gathering places were masquerade balls, or “drags” as they were commonly known. Adapting the tradition of costume balls from the larger society, individuals who would be referred to today as gay men, transsexual women, and female-presenting crossdressers all began to organize drags in large cities in the late nineteenth century (Chauncey, 1994). One of the earliest known drags took place in Washington, D.C. on New Year’s Eve in 1885. The event was documented by the Washington *Evening Star* because a participant, “Miss Maud,” was arrested while returning home the following morning. Dressed in “a pink dress trimmed with white lace, with stockings and undergarments to match,” the male-assigned, thirty-year-old Black defendant was charged with vagrancy and sentenced to three months in jail, even though the judge, the newspaper reported, “admired his stylish appearance” (Roscoe, 1991: 240).

The growing visibility of male-assigned individuals who presented as female at drags in the late nineteenth century was not limited to Washington. By the 1890s, they and non-crossdressing men who were attracted to other men had also begun organizing their own drag events in New York City. According to historian George Chauncey (1994), these drags drew enormous numbers of Black and White participants and spectators, especially during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when at least a half dozen events were staged each year in some of the city’s largest and most respectable halls including Madison Square Garden and Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom. By 1930, public drag balls were also being held in Chicago, New Orleans, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other US cities, bringing together hundreds of crossdressing individuals and their escorts, and often an equal or greater number of curious onlookers (Anonymous, 1933; Drexel, 1997; Matthews, 1927). Organizers would typically obtain a license from the police to prevent participants from being arrested for violating ordinances against crossdressing, and uniformed officers would even provide crowd control outside the halls and help ensure order inside.

While female-assigned individuals who presented as male did not hold drag balls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were by no means invisible in society. Some performed as male impersonators, while others crossdressed both on and off stage but did not seek to be read as men. One of the most notable in the latter group was Gladys Bentley, a Black blues singer and pianist who became well-known during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Bentley, an open lesbian, performed in a white tuxedo and top hat in some of Harlem’s most popular bars and regularly wore “men’s” clothing out in public with her female partner (Garber, 1988).

The enactment of laws in many US cities beginning in the 1850s that made it a crime for a person to appear in public “in a dress not belonging to his or her sex” reflected the increasing visibility of crossdressers and the resulting efforts to contain them (Stryker, 2008: 32). Another indication of the growing presence in the late nineteenth century of individuals who assumed gender behaviors and identities different from the gender assigned to them at birth was the interest that US and European physicians began to show in their experiences. Like the drag balls themselves, the research conducted by these

doctors did not make clear distinctions between gender nonconformity and same-sex sexuality.

## SEXOLOGY CONSIDERS GENDER NONCONFORMITY

The sexologists, as they came to be known, characterized attraction to others of the same sex as merely a sign of “gender inversion”—that is, having a gender inverted or opposite of the gender assigned at birth. A separate category did not initially exist for gender-normative women and men who pursued same-sex relationships; only gender nonconforming individuals were recognized as possessing what was considered to be a deviant sexuality (Rupp, 1999; Rupp, 2009). One of the leading advocates of this theory was Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German lawyer who explained his own interest in other men as stemming from having “a female soul enclosed within a male body.” Anticipating descriptions of transsexuality a century later, Ulrichs argued in the 1860s that men who desired other men, whom he called “urnings,” might be male by birth, but identified as female to varying degrees (Meyerowitz, 2002; Stryker, 2008: 37).

Other nineteenth-century writers followed Ulrichs’s lead in separating physical from mental sex. The sexologist who had the greatest influence on the Western medical profession’s views toward sexual and gender difference in the late nineteenth century was Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. In his widely-cited study, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which was first published in 1886, Krafft-Ebing defined and sought to distinguish between what he saw as types of psychosexual disorders, including a number of categories that incorporate aspects of what we would now refer to as cross-dressing and transsexuality. Like Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing considered same-sex attraction to be a manifestation of an inner sense of gender difference, and he created a framework of increasing severity of cross-gender identification (and, in his view, increasing pathology), from individuals who had a strong preference for clothing of the “other sex,” to individuals whose feelings and inclinations became those of the “other sex,” to individuals who believed themselves to be the “other sex” and who claimed that the sex assigned to them at birth was wrong. Krafft-Ebing characterized this last group as especially disturbed and saw their “delusion of transformation of sex” as a form of psychosis (Heidenreich, 1997: 270; Stryker, 2008; von Krafft-Ebing, 2006).

Not until the pioneering work of German physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in the early twentieth century did gender difference start to be less pathologized by the medical profession and considered a separate phenomenon from same-sex sexuality. In his epic 1910 work *Transvestites*, Hirschfeld coined the word “transvestite”—from the Latin “trans” or “across” and “vestis” or “clothing”—to refer to individuals who are overcome with a “feeling of peace, security and exaltation, happiness and well-being... when in the clothing of the other sex,” (125). A hundred years later, this description remains one of the most insightful explanations of what we now call crossdressing. Although Hirschfeld “readily admit[ted] that this name [“transvestite”] indicate[d] only the most obvious aspect,” he recognized that how they expressed their sense of gender was what set them apart from other “sexual intermediaries,” including individuals with same-sex desires (Cromwell, 1999: 21).

Hirschfeld (1991 [1910]) saw transvestism as completely distinct from “homosexuality,” a term that began to be commonly used in the medical literature in the early twentieth century to categorize individuals who were attracted to others of the same sex but who were still thought to be gender inverted in different ways. Through his research, Hirschfeld, who was homosexual himself, not only found that transvestites could be of any sexual orientation (including asexual), but also that most were heterosexual from the standpoint of their gender assigned at birth. In his study of seventeen individuals who crossdressed, he considered none to be homosexual from the standpoint of their assigned gender and “at the most” one—the lone female-assigned person in his sample—to be bisexual. Some of his male-assigned research subjects had experimented with relationships with men; however, they realized over time that their desire to present as feminine

women did not include partnering with men. Ten of the participants were married, and Hirschfeld had met six of the wives, who had “adapt[ed] to their special kind of husbands, in spite of their initial opposition, finally even meeting them half-way,” (130).

It is significant that Hirschfeld included a female-assigned person in his study, as most subsequent researchers would consider crossdressing to be an exclusively male phenomenon. Also contrary to ensuing studies, especially those by psychoanalysts, Hirschfeld recognized that transvestites were not suffering from a form of psychopathology, nor were they masochists or fetishists. While some of them derived erotic pleasure from crossdressing, not all did, and Hirschfeld was not convinced that it was a necessary part of transvestism.

Despite being ahead of his time in many ways, Hirschfeld did not distinguish between individuals who crossdressed but who identified as their birth gender (people who would be referred to today as crossdressers) and individuals who identified as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth and who lived cross-gendered lives, which included crossdressing (today’s transsexual individuals). Among the seventeen people in his study, four had lived part of their lives as a different gender, including the female-assigned participant, and would now likely be thought of as transsexual. Hirschfeld did coin the term *seelischen Transsexualismus* or “spiritual transsexualism” in the 1920s, but he used it to refer to an aspect of “inversion,” rather than considering it a specific gender identity (Meyerowitz, 2002: 19).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERIES AND HORMONE THERAPY

Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science, the world’s first institute devoted to sexology, also performed the earliest recorded genital transformation surgeries. The first documented case was that of Dorchen Richter, a male-assigned individual from a poor German family who had desired to be female since early childhood, lived as a woman when she could, and hated her male anatomy. She underwent castration in 1922 and had her penis removed and a vagina constructed in 1931. Following her first surgery, Richter was given a job at the institute as a domestic worker and served as an example for other patients (Meyerowitz, 2002: 19).

The institute’s most well-known patient was Einar Wegener, a Dutch painter who began to present and identify as Lili Elbe in the 1920s, and after being evaluated by Hirschfeld, underwent a series of male-to-female surgeries. In addition to castration and the construction of a vagina, she had ovaries inserted into her abdomen, which at a time before the synthesis of hormones, was the only way that doctors knew to try to change estrogen levels. It is extremely doubtful that the operation had any real effect, but Elbe felt that it made her both a woman and young again and proceeded with a final operation to create a uterus in an attempt to be a mother and no different from other women (Hoyer, 1953; Kennedy, 2007). She died from heart failure in 1931 in the aftermath of the surgery. Before her death, though, Elbe requested that her friend Ernst Ludwig Hathorn Jacobson develop a book based on her diary entries, letters, and dictated material. Jacobson published the resulting work, *A Man Changes His Sex*, in Dutch and German in 1932 under the pseudonym Niels Hoyer. It was translated into English a year later as *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* and is the first known book-length account of a gender transition (Meyerowitz, 2002).

Elbe was one of Hirschfeld’s last patients. With the rise of Nazism, Hirschfeld’s ability to do his work became increasingly difficult and then impossible after Adolph Hitler personally called Hirschfeld “the most dangerous Jew in Germany,” (Stryker 2008, 40). Fearing for his life, Hirschfeld left the country. In his absence, the Nazis destroyed the Institute in 1933, holding a public bonfire of its contents. Hirschfeld died in exile in France two years later.

Although opportunities for surgical transition diminished with the destruction of Hirschfeld’s Institute, two breakthroughs in hormonal research in the 1930s gave new

hope to gender-nonconforming individuals. First, the discovery by endocrinologists that “male” hormones occurred naturally in women and that “female” hormones occurred naturally in men challenged the dominant scientific thinking that there were two separate and mutually exclusive biological sexes. The findings refuted the medical profession’s assumption that only men could be given “male” hormones and women given “female” hormones, making cross-gender medical treatments possible (Rubin, 2006). At the same time, the development of synthetic testosterone and estrogen enabled hormone therapy to become more affordable and, over time, more widely available. In the 1930s and 1940s, few European and US physicians were willing to provide hormones to patients seeking to physically transition, but a small number of gender nonconforming individuals found ways to obtain them (Kennedy, 2007).

The first female-assigned individual known to have taken testosterone for the purpose of transforming his body was Michael Dillon, a doctor from an aristocratic British family, who had entered medicine in order to better understand his own masculine identity and how he could change his body to be like other men. In 1939, he began taking hormones that he received from a physician, and within a few months was readily seen as a man by strangers. For Dillon, though, it was just the beginning of his efforts to masculinize his appearance. He had a double mastectomy in 1942 and underwent more than a dozen operations to construct a penis beginning in 1946. His were the first recorded female-to-male genital surgeries performed on a non-intersex person (Kennedy, 2007; Shapiro, 2010).

The same year that Dillon began his phalloplasty, he also published a book on the treatment of gender nonconforming individuals, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*. Despite its title, *Self* did not include a discussion of Dillon’s own experiences. Instead, his focus was on the need for society to understand people who, like himself, felt that they were a gender different from that assigned to them at birth. Dillon argued that such individuals were not mentally unbalanced, but “would develop naturally enough if only [they] belonged to the other sex.” He was especially critical of the psychologists who believed that they could change the sense of self of gender nonconforming individuals through therapy, when what their clients really needed was access to hormones and genital surgeries. Making an argument that would become commonplace in the years that followed, Dillon reasoned that “where the mind cannot be made to fit the body, the body should be made to fit, approximately, at any rate to the mind, despite the prejudices of those who have not suffered these things” (53). *Self*, though, was not widely circulated, and Dillon himself sought to avoid public attention, even taking the extraordinary step of going into exile in India in 1958, when the media discovered his secret and ran stories about a transsexual being the heir to a British title.

## THE RISE OF THE CONCEPT OF TRANSEXUALITY

Instead of Dillon, the leading advocate in the 1950s and 1960s for “adjust[ing] the body to the mind” of gender nonconforming people through hormones and surgeries became Harry Benjamin, a German-born, US endocrinologist. Benjamin (1966), like Dillon, saw attempts to “cure” such individuals by psychotherapy as “a useless undertaking” (91), and began prescribing hormones to them and suggesting surgeons abroad, as no physician in the United States at that time would openly perform gender transition operations. Along with US physician David O. Cauldwell, Benjamin referred to those who desired to change their sex as “transsexuals” in order to distinguish them from “transvestites.” The difference between the groups, according to Benjamin, was that “true transsexuals feel that they *belong* to the other sex, they want to *be* and *function* as members of the opposite sex, not only to appear as such. For them, their sex organs . . . are disgusting deformities that must be changed by the surgeon’s knife,” (13-14).

Cauldwell was apparently the first medical professional to use the word “transsexual” (which he initially spelled “transexual”) in its contemporary sense. In a 1949 article in *Sexology* magazine entitled “Psychopathia Transexualis” (playing off of Krafft-Ebing’s

*Psychopathia Sexualis*), Cauldwell (2006) presented the case history of “Earl,” a “psychopathic transexual” who “grew up thinking of herself [sic] as a boy” and “was desperate to become a male” (41-42). Earl had approached Cauldwell, who was known for writing approvingly about operations on intersex individuals, to seek his help in finding a surgeon who would remove Earl’s breasts and ovaries and create a penis in place of his vagina. But as Cauldwell related in the article, he refused to assist Earl. In sharp contrast to Benjamin, Cauldwell believed that transsexuals were mentally ill and considered surgery for individuals like Earl to be mutilation and a criminal action.

The opposing attitudes on gender-affirming surgeries between Benjamin and Cauldwell reflected fundamental differences in how sex and gender were viewed by the medical profession in the mid twentieth century. Most physicians supported Cauldwell’s position that biological sex was the defining aspect of someone’s gender and was immutable, outside of cases of intersex individuals, where the “true” sex of the person may not be immediately known. Increasingly, though, this belief was challenged by doctors and researchers like Benjamin who distinguished between biological sex and “psychological sex,” or as it came to be known, “gender identity.” As more and more transsexual individuals were acknowledged and studied, these physicians and scientists developed the evidence to begin to gradually shift the dominant medical view to the contrary argument: that gender identity and not biological sex was the critical element of someone’s gender and was immutable. Transsexual individuals thus needed to be able to change the sex of their bodies to match their sense of self (Meyerowitz, 2002).

#### **The Stories We Tell: Historical Dialogues About Transgender Identity**

Trans people spend a lot of time helping others to understand what it’s like to be trans. In my research, I’ve found there are three primary narratives trans people have turned to in order to share their stories. Not every trans person relies exclusively on these ways of explaining themselves, nor do they necessarily follow only one plot - but these narratives show us how our history has influenced the ways we talk about sex and gender.

The “hermaphroditic narrative” emerged in Germany with the story of Lili Elbe, one of the first transgender people to record her story. In 1922, Elbe was castrated, and in 1931 she had her penis removed and a vagina constructed. Elbe’s autobiography was translated into English in 1933, and her story spread in the United States. Elbe said she was a female “personality” born into a hermaphroditic (or what today would be called intersex) body, a body with both male and female reproductive organs. The hermaphroditic narrative – having a hermaphroditic body and a desire for men -- allowed Elbe to receive a vagina reconstruction operation in the West.

The hermaphroditic narrative began to wane in the years following World War II, and the “sex-gender misalignment” narrative took hold. In 1949, psychiatrist David Cauldwell defined “trans-sexual” people as those who are physically of one sex and psychologically of the opposite sex. Harry Benjamin, an endocrinologist, helped spread this “born in the wrong body” narrative. In the early 1950s he diagnosed as transsexual only those who explained themselves using a narrative along the lines of: “I am a woman born into the wrong (male) body; this causes me extreme psychological duress. After you help me acquire a female body, I will be returned to my true self and live as a happy and productive, heterosexual citizen.” (Not much mention was made of female-to-male trans people, yet.) In order to be diagnosed as transsexual by doctors like Benjamin, one had to use this narrative; and because only those with the diagnosis could access sex reassignment surgery, trans people felt pressure to use it. This narrative perpetuated a limited understanding of what it meant to be transsexual that persists today.

The “queer narrative” began in the 1960s, when the assumed norms of binary gender and heterosexuality came under scrutiny. People started telling stories of who they were that did not align with the hetero-norm. LGB psychiatrists worked to remove “homosexual” from *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III* (DSM-III), and transgender activists began working to remove “transsexual” from the *DSM-IV*. The “queer narrative” hit academia

when writer Sandy Stone called for posttranssexuality, or the acceptance of a wider range of expressions of sex and gender. After Stone's article, the lines between academia and social activism began to blur, and many people started working in both arenas: Kate Bornstein called for gender play, Judith Halberstam suggested we all live the fiction of gender, and Riki Wilchins advocated for the right to choose gender and body meaning.

Over time, the ways in which we talk about transsexual identity and experience have changed. Each narrative has had personal and political significance, offering possibilities and limitations; for instance, the "sex-gender misalignment" narrative aided in gaining medical assistance for transitioning but also reinforced heteronormative ways of thinking about sex and gender. There is no single narrative that fits every trans body and no narrative that remains free from political and personal limitations. It is critical to be aware of how we share and listen to experiences of sex and gender, because the narratives we use can have powerful consequences.

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## **CHRISTINE JORGENSEN: THE TRANSSEXUAL PHENOMENON**

Although Harry Benjamin was referring to the issue of transsexuality in general and not to Christine Jorgensen in particular with the title of his pioneering 1966 work *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, it would not be an exaggeration to characterize her as such. Through the publicity given to her transition, she brought the concept of "sex change" into everyday conversations in the United States, served as a role model for many other transsexual individuals to understand themselves and pursue medical treatment, and transformed the debate about the efficacy of providing hormones and gender-affirming surgeries to individuals who identified as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth. Following the media frenzy over Jorgensen, much of the US public began to recognize that "sex change" was indeed possible.

Jorgensen herself had spent many years questioning her sense of gender difference before realizing that an answer could be found through science and medicine. Born in 1926 to Danish-American parents in New York City, Jorgensen struggled with an intense feeling that she should have been born female. Among the childhood experiences that she recounts in her 1967 autobiography were preferring to play with girls, wishing that she had been sent to a girls' camp rather than one for boys, and having "a small piece of needlepoint" that she cherished taken away by an unsympathetic elementary school teacher. The teacher called in Jorgensen's mother and asked her confrontationally, "do you think that this is anything for a red-blooded boy to have in his desk as a keepsake?" (18).

Although not mentioned in her autobiography, Jorgensen also apparently began wearing her sister's clothing in secret when she was young and, by her teens, had acquired her own small wardrobe of "women's" clothing. Many transsexual individuals dress as the gender with which they identify from a young age, but Jorgensen may have been concerned that readers would confuse her for a "transvestite" or an effeminate "homosexual." She did indicate being attracted to men in her autobiography, and acknowledged years later having had "a couple" of same-sex sexual encounters in her youth (Meyerowitz, 2002: 57). However, by her early 20s, Jorgensen gradually became aware that she was a heterosexual woman, rather than a crossdresser or gay man, and began to look for all she could find about "sex changes."

Jorgensen read about the first studies to examine the effects of hormone treatments and about "various conversion experiments in Sweden," which led her to obtain commercially synthesized female hormones and to travel "first to Denmark, where [she] had relatives, and then to Stockholm, where [she] hoped [she] would find doctors who would be willing to handle [her] case," (81, 94). While in Denmark, though, Jorgensen learned that doctors in that country could help her, and came under the care of leading endocrinologist

Christian Hamburger, who treated her with increasingly higher doses of female hormones for two years, beginning in 1950. Hamburger also arranged for her to have operations to remove her testicles and penis and to reshape her scrotum into labia.

While recovering in December 1952, Jorgensen went from being an unknown American abroad to “the most talked-about girl in the world.” A trade magazine for the publishing industry announced in 1954 that Jorgensen’s story over the previous year “had received the largest worldwide coverage in the history of newspaper publishing.” Looking back years later on the media’s obsession, Jorgensen (1967) remained incredulous: “A tragic war was still raging in Korea, George VI died and Britain had a new queen, sophisticated guided missiles were going off in New Mexico, Jonas Salk was working on a vaccine for infantile paralysis. . . . [yet] Christine Jorgensen was on page one,” (249, 144).

Given that Jorgensen was by no means the first person to undergo a gender transition and that some cases had been widely covered in the media, it would seem surprising that she would be the subject of so much attention. Part of the reason Jorgensen became such a sensation was that she had been a US serviceman, the epitome of masculinity in post-World War II America (though Jorgensen served in the US and never saw combat), and had been reborn into a “blonde bombshell,” the symbol of 1950s White feminine sexiness (Meyerowitz, 2002: 62). The initial newspaper story, published in *The New York Daily News* on December 1, 1952, highlighted this dramatic transformation, with its headline, “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty,” and its accompanying “before” and “after” photographs. A grainy Army picture of a nerdish-looking, male-bodied Jorgensen in uniform is contrasted with a professionally taken profile picture of a feminine Jorgensen looking like Grace Kelly.

Subsequent news stories also fixated on Jorgensen’s appearance, as journalists sought to judge the extent to which she had truly “become female.” In most of the initial accounts, she was not only described as looking like a woman, but as an extremely attractive one. The press marveled at her movie-star qualities, including a male reporter who indicated in a story published a year after the news of her transition broke that he “Could Have Gone for the He-She Girl.” Readers were likewise captivated; the more the media reported, the more people wanted to know about her and “how she managed to become such a beautiful woman” (Docter, 2008: 115; Meyerowitz, 2002: 63).

The tremendous attention that Jorgensen’s transition received also reflected the public’s newfound fascination with the power of science. A tidal wave of remarkable inventions—from television and the transistor radio to the atomic bomb—had made scientists in the 1950s seem capable of anything, so why not the ability to turn a man into a woman? However, in the aftermath of the first use of nuclear weapons, Jorgensen’s “sex change” was also pointed to as evidence that science had gone too far in its efforts to alter the natural environment. Jorgensen thus served as a symbol for both scientific progress and a fear that science was attempting to play God. By being at the center of postwar debates over technological advancement, she remained in the spotlight well after the initial reports of her transition and was able to have a successful stage career based on her celebrity status (Meyerowitz, 2002).

Anxieties over changing gender roles were another factor that contributed to Jorgensen’s celebrity. At a time when millions of US women who had been recruited to work in factories during the war were being pushed back into the home in order to make way for returning servicemen, gender expectations for both women and men were in a state of flux. Suddenly, the assumed naturalness of what it meant to be male and female was being called into question. Not only could women do “men’s” work, but men could become women. As historian Susan Stryker argues, “Jorgensen’s notoriety in the 1950s was undoubtedly fueled by the pervasive unease felt in some quarters that American manhood, already under siege, could quite literally be undone and refashioned into its seeming opposite through the power of modern science,” (Stryker, 2000: viii).



### Transsexuality in 1950s Taiwan

The first case of transsexuality in Chinese-speaking communities was reported in post-World War II Taiwan. In 1953, four years after Mao Zedong's political regime took over mainland China and the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek was forced to relocate its base, news of the success of native doctors in converting a man into a woman made headlines in Taiwan. On August 14 that year, the *United Daily News (Lianhebao)* surprised the public by announcing the discovery of an intersex soldier, Xie Jianshun, in Tainan, Taiwan. Within a week, the paper adopted a radically different rhetoric, now with a headline claiming that "Christine Will Not Be America's Exclusive: Soldier Destined to Become a Lady." Considered by many to be the "first" Chinese transsexual, Xie was frequently dubbed the "Chinese Christine." This allusion to the contemporaneous American ex-G.I. celebrity Christine Jorgensen, who had traveled to Denmark for her sex reassignment surgery and became a worldwide household name immediately after due to her personality and glamorous looks, reflected the growing influence of American culture on the Republic of China at the peak of the Cold War.

Within days, the characterization of Xie in the Taiwanese press changed from an average citizen whose ambiguous sex provoked uncertainty and anxiety throughout the nation, to a transsexual cultural icon whose fate would indisputably contribute to the global staging of Taiwan on par with the United States. The publicity surrounding Xie's transition worked as a pivotal fulcrum in shifting common understandings of transsexuality (including its gradual separation from intersexuality), the role of medical science, and their evolving relation to the popular press in mid-twentieth century Chinese-speaking culture.

Dripping with national and trans-Pacific significance, Xie's experience made *bianxingren* (transsexual) a household term in the 1950s. She served as a focal point for numerous new stories that broached the topics of changing sex and human intersexuality. People who wrote about her debated whether she qualified as a woman, whether medical technology could transform sex, and whether the "two Christines" were more similar or different. These questions led to persistent comparisons of Taiwan with the United States, but Xie never presented herself as a duplicate of Jorgensen. As Xie knew, her story highlighted issues that pervaded postwar Taiwanese society: the censorship of public culture by the state, the unique social status of men serving in the armed forces, the limit of individualism, the promise and pitfalls of science, the normative behaviors of men and women, and the boundaries of acceptable sexual expression. Her story attracted the press, but the public's avid interest in sex and its plasticity prompted reporters to dig deeply. As the press coverage escalated, new names and previously unheard of medical conditions grabbed the attention of journalists and their readers.

The wide-ranging debates on sex transformation that preoccupied Republican-era (1912-49) sexologists and popular writers in mainland China were transferred to the island of Taiwan along with the Nationalist government's migration. The saga of Xie Jianshun and other "sex change" reports that sprung up in the Taiwanese press exemplify the emergence of transsexuality as a form of modern sexual embodiment in Chinese society. Xie's story, in particular, became a lightning rod for many post-WWII anxieties about gender and sexuality, and called dramatic attention to issues that would later drive the feminist and gay and lesbian movements in the decades ahead.

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### THE POST-CHRISTINE ERA

While many in 1950s America were deeply troubled by what Jorgensen's transition meant for traditional gender roles, many transsexual individuals, particularly transsexual women, experienced a tremendous sense of relief. They finally had a name for the sense of gender difference that most had felt from early childhood and recognized that their feelings were shared by others.

*"[Coverage surrounding Jorgensen's return to the US was] a true lifesaving event... [t]he only thing that kept me from suicide at 12 was the publicity of*

*Christine Jorgensen. It was the first time I found out that there were others like me—I was no longer alone,”* (Trans Bodies, Trans Selves online survey, 2013).

*“[I remember feeling] ‘giddy’... because for the first time ever I realized it was possible,”* (Trans Bodies, Trans Selves online survey, 2013).

Many other transsexual individuals also saw themselves in Jorgensen and hoped to gain access to hormones and surgical procedures. In the months following her return to the United States, Jorgensen received “hundreds of tragic letters... from men and women who also had experienced the deep frustrations of lives lived in sexual twilight.” Doctor Hamburger was likewise inundated with requests from individuals seeking to transition; in the ten and a half months following his treatment of Jorgensen, he received more than 1,100 letters from transsexual people, many of whom sought to be his patients (Jorgensen, 1967: 149-50).

While hearing about Jorgensen helped many transsexual individuals understand themselves and offered a sense of hope that they too could change their sex, few were able to obtain immediate relief. Deluged with a flood of requests from people throughout the world, the Danish government banned such procedures for non-citizens. In the United States, many physicians simply dismissed the rapidly growing number of individuals seeking gender-affirming surgeries as being mentally ill. Other, more sympathetic doctors were reluctant to operate because of a fear that they would be criminally prosecuted for destroying healthy tissue under state “mayhem” statutes or sued by patients unsatisfied with the surgical outcomes. Thus, despite the tremendous demand, only a few dozen, mostly secretive “sex changes” were performed in the US in the years after Jorgensen first made headlines (Stryker, 2008).

Not until the mid 1960s, when the dominant US medical paradigm related to transsexuality began to shift, did gender-affirming surgery become more available. The constant mainstream media coverage in the decade following the disclosure of Jorgensen’s transition made it increasingly difficult for the medical establishment to characterize transsexual people as a few psychologically disordered individuals. That mental health professionals could not point to even one transsexual person who had been “cured” of a desire to change sex further discredited a psychological disorder explanation. At the same time, the first published studies of the effects of gender-affirming surgery demonstrated the benefits of medical intervention. Harry Benjamin, who worked with more transsexual individuals than any other physician in the United States, found that among fifty-one of his MTF (male-to-female) patients who underwent surgery, 86 percent had “good” or “satisfactory” lives afterward. He concluded: “I have become convinced from what I have seen that a miserable, unhappy male [assigned at birth] transsexual can, with the help of surgery and endocrinology, attain a happier future as a woman,” (Benjamin, 1966: 135; Meyerowitz, 2002). The smaller number of FTM (female-to-male) patients he saw likewise felt better about themselves and were more psychologically well-adjusted following surgery.

Despite Benjamin’s efforts to find surgeons in the United States for his MTF patients, most were forced to travel to other countries for gender-affirming surgery through the mid 1960s. However, within months of the publication of Benjamin’s *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966, the Johns Hopkins University opened the first gender identity clinic in the US to diagnose and treat transsexual individuals and to conduct research related to transsexuality. Similar programs were soon established at the University of Minnesota, Stanford University, the University of Oregon, and Case Western University, and within ten years, more than forty university-affiliated gender clinics existed throughout the United States (Bullough & Bullough, 1998; Denny, 2006; Stryker, 2008).

The sudden proliferation of health care services for transsexual individuals reflected not only the effect of Benjamin’s work and the influence of a prestigious university like Hopkins on other institutions, but also the behind-the-scenes involvement of millionaire philanthropist Reed Erickson. A transsexual man and a patient of Benjamin, Erickson

created a foundation that paid for Benjamin's research and helped fund the Hopkins program and other gender identity clinics. The agency also disseminated information related to transsexuality and served as an indispensable resource for individuals who were coming out as transsexual (Stryker, 2008).

The establishment of gender identity clinics at leading universities called attention to the health care needs of transsexual people and helped to legitimize gender-affirming surgery. At the same time, though, the clinics also institutionalized a model of transsexuality that excluded many from the definition of "transsexual" and denied them access to hormones and surgery. This model had its roots in Benjamin's (1966) concept of a "true transsexual"—someone who has felt themselves to be in the "wrong" body from their earliest memories and who is attracted to individuals of the same birth sex but as a member of the "other" sex (i.e., someone who is heterosexual after transition). As detailed by writer Dallas Denny (2006), the gender identity clinics adopted this presumption of heterosexuality and a binary understanding of gender that expected transsexual people to conform to stereotypical gender norms. Denny states:

To qualify for treatment, it was important that applicants report that their gender dysphorias manifested at an early age; that they have a history of playing with dolls as a child, if born male, or trucks and guns, if born female; that their sexual attractions were exclusively to the same biological sex; that they have a history of failure at endeavors undertaken while in the original gender role; and that they pass or had potential to pass successfully as a member of the desired sex (177).

Unable to meet these narrow and biased criteria, the vast majority of transsexual people were turned away from the gender identity clinics. In its first two and half years, Johns Hopkins received almost 2,000 requests for gender-affirming surgery, but performed operations on only 24 individuals (Meyerowitz, 2002).

Transsexual men especially encountered difficulties. In the aftermath of the extraordinary publicity given to Jorgensen and the transsexual women who followed her in the spotlight in the 1950s and 1960s, transsexuality became seen as a primarily male-to-female phenomenon. The medical establishment gave little consideration to transsexual men, and in the late 1960s, physicians at one of the country's leading programs, UCLA's Gender Identity Research Clinic, debated whether trans men should even be considered transsexuals (Meyerowitz, 2002).

Admittedly, many trans men did not recognize themselves as transsexual either. While they may have known about Jorgensen and other transsexual women, they did not know anyone who had transitioned from female-to-male or that such a transition was even possible. This sense of being "the only one" was especially common among the transsexual men who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

The transsexual men who did transition often did not pursue surgery to construct a penis because the process was expensive, involved multiple surgeries, and produced imperfect results. Moreover, few doctors were skilled in performing phalloplasties. In the United States, the first "bottom surgeries" for trans men were apparently not undertaken until the early 1960s, and even when the gender identity clinics opened, the programs did only a handful of such operations (Meyerowitz, 2002). The vast majority of transsexual men had to be satisfied with hormone therapy and the removal of their breasts and internal reproductive organs, which surgeons already commonly performed on women. However, since the effects of hormones (especially increased facial hair and lower voices) and "top surgery" enabled trans men to be seen more readily by others as men, these steps were considered more critical by most transsexual men.

The likelihood of passing as one's desired sex was a main criterion in gaining access to gender-affirming surgery. Physicians also counseled or sometimes required their patients to avoid socializing with other transsexual individuals and expected that they

would consider themselves “normal” women and men and blend into society following surgery (Denny, 2006). In order to fit in, they were encouraged to hide and lie about their transsexual pasts. They were told to invent a boyhood or girlhood for themselves matching their post-transition gender, to sever ties whenever possible with old acquaintances and develop new friendships with individuals who were unaware of their personal histories, and even to change jobs and move to another city to avoid the possibility of being outed. Given the extreme social stigma against transsexual people, many did not need much encouragement to “disappear” if they could.

Some transsexual individuals did organize in the late 1960s to assist others in finding support and gaining access to services, but most of these efforts were small and short-lived. In 1967, transgender people in San Francisco formed Conversion Our Goal, or COG, the first known transsexual support group in the United States. However, within a year, the organization had disintegrated into two competing groups, neither of which existed for very long. More successful was the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, a San Francisco-based social service agency established in 1968 with funding from Reed Erickson. That same year in New York City, Mario Martino, a female-to-male transsexual and registered nurse, and his wife founded Labyrinth, a counseling service for trans men. It was the first known organization in the United States to focus on the needs of transsexual men and worked with upwards of one hundred transitioning individuals (Martino, 1977; Stryker, 2008).

## ORGANIZING AMONG CROSSDRESSING INDIVIDUALS

The first enduring transgender organization in the United States was started by female-presenting crossdressers or “transvestites,” as they were then known. In 1952, the year that Jorgensen became an international media phenomenon, a group of crossdressers in the Los Angeles area led by Virginia Prince quietly created a mimeographed newsletter, *Transvestia: The Journal of the American Society for Equity in Dress*. Although its distribution was limited to a small number of crossdressers on the group’s mailing list and it lasted just two issues, *Transvestia* was apparently the first specifically transgender publication in the United States and served as a trial run for wider organizing among crossdressers.

In 1960, Prince relaunched *Transvestia* as a bi-monthly magazine with twenty-five subscribers, who contributed four dollars each to provide start-up capital. Sold through adult bookstores and by word of mouth, *Transvestia* grew to several hundred subscribers within two years and to more than one thousand from across the country by the mid 1960s (Ekins & King, 2005; Prince, 1962; Prince & Bentler, 1972). Prince wrote regular columns for the magazine but relied on readers for much of the content, which included life stories, fiction, letters to the editor, personal photographs, and advice on crossdressing. The involvement of its subscribers, many of whom came out publicly for the first time on the magazine’s pages, had the effect of creating a loyal fan base and contributed to its longevity. Prince’s commitment also sustained *Transvestia*; she served as its editor and publisher for twenty years, retiring after its one hundredth issue in 1979 (Hill, 2007).

Through *Transvestia*, Prince was able to form a transgender organization that continues more than fifty years later. A year after starting the magazine, she invited several Los Angeles subscribers to a clandestine meeting in a local hotel room. The female-presenting crossdressers were requested to bring stockings and high heels, but were not told that the others would be there. When the meeting began, Prince had them don the female apparel, thus outing themselves to each other and forcing them to maintain their shared secret. Initially known as the Hose and Heels Club, the group was renamed the Foundation for Personality Expression (FPE or Phi Pi Epsilon) the following year by Prince, who envisioned it as the Alpha Chapter of a sorority-like organization that would have chapters throughout the country. By the mid 1960s, several other chapters had been chartered by Prince, who set strict membership requirements. Only individuals who had subscribed to

and read at least five issues of *Transvestia* could join, and then they had to have their application personally approved by Prince and be interviewed by her or an area representative. Prince kept control over the membership through the mid 1970s, when FPE merged with a Southern California crossdressing group, Mamselle, to become the Society for the Second Self or Tri-Ess, the name by which it is known today (Ekins & King, 2005; Stryker, 2008). Continuing the practice of FPE, Tri-Ess is modeled on the sorority system and currently has more than twenty-five chapters throughout the country.

### **Crossdressing for Success**

At about the age of 5, I began to recognize myself as being different somehow from boys. As a child growing up in the 1950s I had no clue as to what was going on inside. I began to do research secretly in the mid 1960s, when I was in my early teens, to try to figure out what was going on, but what I found only said that my condition was an illness and curable. I finally discovered Masters and Johnson's research, which spoke of "transvestism" in a more humane and positive light. The term still felt clinical, but I saw myself reflected enough in the description to think "maybe that's what I am." I no longer felt fearful, and a sense of freedom to explore this inexplicable "gift" took over. No sense of guilt or remorse remained.

While attending UC Berkeley, I would secretly dress as female and go out. Via literature and sordid sex-shop glossy magazines, I found out that there were indeed others, past and present, who had dealt or were dealing with their own gender identities. The first person I met whom I felt some affinity or commonality with was a drag queen in San Francisco. She clocked me right off and took me aside. She was kind, and the education awarded by her kindness was that we are all the same deep down. I carry and try to share that message to this day.

My now ex-partner was my support system for many years, and she learned about Tri-Ess on the Internet. There was a chapter, Sigma Rho Delta (SRD), near me in Raleigh, North Carolina. I wasn't looking for support or understanding, just simple camaraderie, and SRD provided that for me. It was fun.

The group began with a handful of members, but soon grew exponentially as word got out via the street and the Internet. We went from three to forty members. I served as vice president of membership and later as president.

Tri-Ess was founded as an organization for heterosexual male crossdressers and their significant others. But the group's guidelines did not prevent us from being more inclusive, and our chapter decided to welcome people of all gender presentations and sexual proclivities into our young organization.

All persuasions and ages passed through our door. Twenty-somethings to people over 70 years young. Timid, garden-variety crossdressers in hiding from years of accumulated fear. Bold and boisterous politicians. Fetish practitioners. The white glove and party manner set. Those in transition or considering it. Musical and artistic types. Truck drivers and doctors. Computer geeks and business owners. Individuals with disabilities or who were physically ailing. They and more came and went. It was a revolving door, which we kept open for over ten years.

We landed in restaurants, clubs, and at theatres. We played music together and laughed a lot at ourselves. We had picnics. Members who were so inclined bravely attended events of a political nature, such as lobby days at the state legislature, where we asked our elected officials their positions on the pending ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act) and LGBT-inclusive hate crimes bill. We even crashed a high-dollar-per-plate Human Rights Campaign fundraiser that featured Representative Barney Frank and confronted him about his stance on transgender inclusion in the aforementioned legislation. We had a sense of strength within our own diversity. We had some kind of insight that told us this time would not come again, that it was time to act. We were kicked out of some meeting places because of prejudice, but we never succumbed to failure. Like a cat, we always landed on our feet.

Although membership declined and the group eventually disbanded, our lasting impressions and friendships have carried on past the decade of Sigma Rho Delta's existence. We still stay in touch and visit one another. We are proud of our unique heritage and the challenges that we met together and as individuals. We found pride in ourselves.

*Angelika Van Ashley*

*Transvestia* and FPE/Tri-Ess reflected Prince's narrow beliefs about crossdressing. In her view, the "true transvestite" is "exclusively heterosexual," "frequently . . . married and often fathers," and "values his male organs, enjoys using them and does not desire them removed," (Ekins & King, 2005: 9). She not only excluded admittedly gay and bisexual male crossdressers and transsexual women, but also was scornful of them; she openly expressed anti-gay sentiment and was a leading opponent of gender-affirming surgery. By making sharp distinctions between "real transvestites" and other groups, Prince addressed the two main fears of the wives and female partners of heterosexual male crossdressers: that their husbands and boyfriends will leave them for men or that their partners would become women. In addition, she sought to downplay the erotic and sexual aspects of crossdressing for some people in order to lessen the stigma commonly associated with transvestism and to normalize the one way in which White, middle-class heterosexual male crossdressers like herself were not privileged in society. In the mid 1960s, *Transvestia* was promoted as being "dedicated to the needs of the sexually (that's heterosexual) normal individual," (Ekins & King, 2005: 7; Stryker, 2008).

Prince further attempted to dissociate transvestism from sexual activity through the creation of the term "femmiphile"—literally "lover of the feminine." "Femmiphile" did not catch on, but the word "crossdresser" slowly replaced "transvestite" as the preferred term among most transgender people and supporters. As gay and bisexual men who presented as female increasingly referred to themselves as drag queens, "crossdresser" began to be applied only to heterosexual men—achieving the separation that Prince desired.

Prince deserves a tremendous amount of credit for bringing formerly isolated crossdressers together, helping this segment of the community recognize that they are not pathological or immoral, creating a national organization that has provided support to tens of thousands of members and their partners, and increasing the visibility of heterosexual male crossdressers. At the same time, by preventing gay and bisexual crossdressers from joining her organizations, she helped ensure that they would identify more with the gay community than with the crossdressing community and form their own groups; thus Prince's prejudice and divisiveness foreclosed the possible development of a broad transgender or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) political coalition in the 1960s.

The largest and oldest continuing organization consisting primarily of gay male crossdressers or drag queens, the Imperial Court System, was founded by José Sarria in San Francisco in 1965. Beginning with other chapters (known as "realms") in Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles, the court system has grown today to more than 65 local groups in the United States, Canada, and Mexico; reflecting this expansion, its name is now the International Court System (2010). The primary mission of each chapter is to raise money for LGBT, HIV/AIDS, and other charities through annual costume balls and other fundraising events. Involvement often pays personal dividends as well. According to Steven Schacht (2002), a sociologist who has participated in the group, "courts also serve as an important conduit for gay and lesbian individuals to do drag and as a venue for formal affiliation and personal esteem (largely in the form of various drag titles; i.e. Empress, Emperor, Princess, and Prince) often unavailable to such individuals in the dominant culture," (164).

In the 1950s and 1960s, lesbian, gay, and bisexual crossdressers also found a home in bars, restaurants, and other venues that catered to (or at least tolerated) such a clientele. Sarria, for example, performed in drag at San Francisco's Black Cat Bar in the 1950s and early 1960s and helped turn it into a social and cultural center for the city's gay community until harassment from law enforcement and local authorities forced the bar to close (Boyd, 2003). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals—both those who did drag and those who did not—similarly carved out spaces in other US cities, despite regular police crackdowns against them.

By the late 1960s, Black drag queens were also organizing their own events. Growing out of the drag balls held in New York City earlier in the century, these gatherings began in Harlem and initially focused on extravagant feminine drag performances. As word

spread about the balls, they attracted larger and larger audiences and the competitions became fiercer and more varied. The drag performers “walked” (competed) for trophies and prizes in a growing number of categories beyond most feminine (known as “femme realness”) or most glamorous, including categories for “butch queens”—gay and sometimes trans men who look “real” as different class-based male archetypes, such as “business executive,” “school boy,” and “thug.”

The many individuals seeking to participate in ball culture led to the establishment of “houses,” groups of Black and Latino “children” who gathered around a “house mother” or less often a “house father,” in the mid 1970s. These houses were often named after their leaders, such as Crystal LaBeija’s House of LaBeija, Avis Pendavis’s House of Pendavis, and Dorian Corey’s House of Corey, or took their names from leading fashion designers like the House of Chanel or the House of St. Laurent. The children, consisting of less experienced drag performers, walked in the balls under their house name, seeking to win trophies for the glory of the house and to achieve “legendary” status for themselves. Given that many of the competitors were poor youth who came from broken homes or who had been thrown out of their homes for being gay or transgender, the houses provided a surrogate family and a space where they could be accepted and have a sense of belonging (Cunningham, 1995; Trebay, 2000).

The ball culture spread to other cities in the 1980s and 1990s and achieved mainstream visibility in 1990 through Jennie Livingston’s documentary *Paris Is Burning* and Madonna’s mega-hit song and video “Vogue.” In recent years, many of the New York balls have moved out of Harlem, but continue to include dozens of local houses and groups from other cities competing in a wide array of categories. Reflecting changes in the wider Black and Latino cultures, hip hop and R & B have become more prominent in the ball scene, and a growing number of performers are butch queens who imitate rap musicians (Cunningham, 1995; Trebay, 2000).

## **TRANSGENDER POWER!**

The 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City were not a unique event but the culmination of more than a decade of militant opposition by poor and working-class LGBT people in response to discriminatory treatment and police brutality. Much of this resistance took the form of spontaneous, everyday acts of defiance that received little attention at the time, even in LGBT communities. Susan Stryker, for example, recounts two confrontations with the police that, until recently, were largely unknown. One night in May of 1959, two Los Angeles police officers went into Cooper’s Donuts—an all-night coffee-house popular with drag queens and gay male hustlers, many of whom were Latino/a or African American—and began harassing and arresting the patrons in drag. The customers responded by fighting back, first by throwing doughnuts and ultimately by engaging in skirmishes with the officers that led the police to retreat and to call in backup. In the melee, the drag queens who had been arrested were able to escape (Faderman & Timmons, 2006; Stryker, 2008).

A similar incident occurred in San Francisco in 1966 at the Tenderloin location of Gene Compton’s Cafeteria—a twenty-four-hour restaurant that, like Cooper’s, was frequented by drag queens and male hustlers, as well as the people looking to pick them up. According to Stryker, the management called the police one August night, as it had done in the past, to get rid of a group of young drag queens who were seen as loitering. When a police officer tried to remove one of the queens forcibly, she threw a cup of coffee in his face and a riot ensued. Patrons pelted the officers with everything at their disposal, including chairs, sugar shakers, plates, and cups, and wrecked the cafeteria and its plate-glass windows. Vastly outnumbered, the police ran outside to call for reinforcements, only to have the drag queens chase after them, beating the officers with their purses and kicking them with their high heels. The incident served to empower the city’s drag community and motivated many to begin to organize for their rights.

Three years later, the riots at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City inspired gender nonconforming people across the country to activism on an even greater scale. As with the earlier confrontations in Los Angeles and San Francisco, the immediate impetus for the Stonewall uprising was oppression by the local police. But the events that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969 and continued on and off for six days also reflected long-simmering anger. “Back then we were beat up by the police, by everybody. . . . You get tired of being just pushed around,” recalls Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican transgender woman who was a leader in the riots and the LGBT organizing that occurred afterward. “We were not taking any more of this shit” (Carter, 2004; Feinberg, 1998: 107; Stryker, 2006).

Rivera and many of the other Stonewall participants were active in the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and recognized that they would have to demand their rights as LGBT people too. Rivera states: “We had done so much for other movements. It was time. . . . I always believed that we would have [to] fight back. I just knew that we would fight back. I just didn’t know it would be that night” (Feinberg, 1998: 107, 109).

The police raided the Stonewall Inn and as usual began arresting the bar’s workers, customers who did not have identification, and those who were crossdressed. Unlike in the past, the other patrons did not scatter, but instead congregated outside and, with other LGBT people from the neighborhood, taunted the police as they tried to place the arrestees into a patrol wagon.

Accounts differ as to what incited the onlookers to violence; it is likely that events happened so fast that there was not one single precipitating incident. As the crowd grew, so did their anger toward the police for their rough treatment of the drag queens and at least one butch lesbian whom they had arrested. People began to throw coins at the officers, and when this failed to halt the brutality, they hurled whatever they could find—cans, bottles, cobblestones, and bricks from a construction site on the next block. Unaccustomed to LGBT people resisting police brutality and fearful for their safety, the eight police officers retreated and barricaded themselves into the bar. In a reversal of roles, the LGBT crowd then tried to break in after them, while at least one person attempted to set the bar on fire. The arrival of police reinforcements likely kept those inside the bar from firing on the protesters. However, even the additional officers, who were members of an elite riot-control unit, could not immediately quell the uprising. The police would scatter people by wading into the crowd swinging their billy clubs, but rather than flee the area, the demonstrators simply ran around the block and, regrouping behind the riot squad, continued to jeer and throw objects. At one point, the police turned around to a situation for which their training undoubtedly did not prepare them: a chorus line of drag queens, calling themselves the “Stonewall girls,” kicked up their heels—a la the Rockettes—and sang mockingly at the officers. Eventually, the police succeeded in dispersing the crowd, but only for the night. The rioting was similarly violent the following evening—some witnesses say more so—and sporadic and less combative demonstrations continued for the next several days (Duberman, 1993).

The effects of the Stonewall Riots were both immediate and far-reaching. Among the first to notice a change in the LGBT community was Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine, the police officer who led the raid on the bar that night. “For those of us in public morals, things were completely changed,” Pine stated after the rebellion. “Suddenly [LGBT people] were not submissive anymore,” (Duberman, 1993: 203).

LGBT youth, in particular, felt a sense of empowerment and were unwilling to remain in the closet. At the time of the Stonewall Riots, gay rights groups—often chapters of the Student Homophile League—existed at just six colleges in the United States, almost all of which were large universities in the Northeast. By 1971, groups had been formed at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the country (Beemyn, 2003). Reflecting the sense of militancy that had fueled the uprising, many of the new groups named themselves after the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) that was



formed in New York City a month after the riots, and typically had a more radical political agenda than the earlier student organizations. Many of these groups were also initially more welcoming to crossdressers, drag queens, and transsexuals than the pre-Stonewall groups, and a number of transgender people helped form Gay Liberation Fronts.

Transgender people also established their own organizations in the immediate aftermath of the Stonewall Riots. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, an African American transgender woman who had likewise been involved in the riots, founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in New York City in 1970 to support and to fight for the rights of the many young transgender people who were living on the city's streets. Rivera and Johnson hustled to open STAR House, a place where the youth could receive shelter, clothing, and food without needing to hustle themselves. The house remained open for two or three years and inspired similar efforts in Chicago, California, and England. Also in New York City in 1970, Lee Brewster and Bunny Eisenhower founded the Queens Liberation Front and led a campaign that decriminalized crossdressing in New York. Brewster also began *Drag*, one of the first politically oriented trans publications, in 1970 (Feinberg, 1998; Zagria, 2009). During this same time, trans man Jude Patton, along with Sister Mary Elizabeth Clark (formerly known as Joanna Clark), used funding from Erickson to start disseminating information to trans people (Moonhawk River Stone, personal communication, May 12, 2013; Jamison Green, personal communication, June 6, 2013).

## **FROM A PHENOMENON TO AN EMPIRE: THE ANTI-TRANSGENDER BACKLASH**

Despite the central role of gender nonconforming people in the Stonewall Riots and their involvement in the initial political organizing that followed, much of the broader movement soon abandoned them in an attempt to appear more acceptable to mainstream society. Six months after the riots, a group comprised mostly of White middle-class gay men formed the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) in New York City to work “completely and solely” for their own equal rights (Duberman, 1993: 232). The group did not consider transgender people to be relevant to its mission; GAA would not even provide a loan to pay the rent to keep STAR House open or support a dance to raise the funds. Transgender people also did not feel welcomed in the group. Marsha P. Johnson remembered that she and Rivera were stared at when they attended GAA meetings, being the only people in drag and sometimes the only people of color there (Jay & Young, 1972). Similar gay groups that excluded transgender people subsequently formed in other cities.

Transgender women often faced rejection in the 1970s from members of lesbian organizations as well, many of whom viewed them not as “real women” but as “male infiltrators.” One of the most well-known victims of such prejudice was Beth Elliott, an openly transsexual lesbian activist and singer who joined the San Francisco chapter of the groundbreaking lesbian group the Daughters of Bilitis in 1971 and became its vice president and the editor of its newsletter. Although Elliott had been accepted for membership, she was forced out the following year as part of a campaign in opposition to her involvement in the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference. Elliott was on the conference's planning committee and a scheduled performer, but when she took the stage, some audience members attempted to shout her down, saying that she was a man. Others defended her. Elliott managed to get through her performance, but the controversy continued. In the keynote speech, feminist Robin Morgan viciously attacked Elliott, referring to her as a “male transvestite” who was “leeching off women who have spent entire lives *as women* in women's bodies.” Morgan concluded her diatribe by declaring: “I charge him as an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer—with the mentality of a rapist,” (Gallo, 2006; Stryker, 2008: 104-05). Morgan called on the conference attendees to vote to eject Elliott. Although more than two-thirds reportedly

chose to allow her to remain, Elliot was emotionally traumatized by the experience and decided to leave anyway.

The campaign against Elliott marked the start of the exclusionist policing of “women’s spaces” by some lesbian separatists. Another target was Sandy Stone, a sound engineer who, as part of the all-women Olivia Records, helped create the genre of women’s music in the mid 1970s. Stone had disclosed her transsexuality to the record collective and had its support, but when her gender history became widely known, Olivia was deluged with hate mail from lesbians—some threatening violence, others threatening a boycott, if Stone was not fired. The collective initially defended her, but fearing that they would be put out of business, they reluctantly asked Stone to resign, which she did in 1979 (Califia, 1997; Devor & Matte, 2006).

Many lesbians had left activist organizations like GLF and GAA in the early and mid 1970s because of the sexism of gay men, but one area of agreement between the two groups was their rejection of transgender people. In 1973, lesbian separatists and more conservative gay men in San Francisco organized an alternative Pride parade that banned transgender people and individuals in drag; in subsequent years, this event became the city’s main Pride celebration. At the New York City Pride rally in 1973, Jean O’Leary of Lesbian Feminist Liberation read a statement that denounced drag queens as an insult to women, which nearly provoked a riot and further marked the exclusion of transgender people from the “lesbian and gay” rights movement (Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999; Stryker, 2008).

Arguably the most vitriolic and influential attack on transgender people was Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, published in 1979 and reissued in 1994. Raymond, a leading scholar in women’s studies, fomented the witch hunt against Sandy Stone and effectively made transsexual women pariahs in many lesbian feminist communities. Whereas Robin Morgan argued that transsexual women who entered “women’s spaces” had “the mentality of a rapist,” Raymond went further, stating that they *are* rapists. In one of the most infamous passages, she claims: “All [female] transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves.” She also contends that their supposedly secretive presence in lesbian feminist spaces constitutes an act of forced penetration that “violates women’s sexuality and spirit” (104).

For Raymond, transsexual women are not women but “castrated” and “deviant” men who were a creation of the medical and psychological specialties that arose in support of gender-affirming surgeries—“the transsexual empire” to which her title refers. Ignoring centuries of gender nonconformity in cultures around the world, she erroneously considers transsexuality to be a recent phenomenon stemming from the development of genital surgeries.

In an attempt to discredit transsexuality, Raymond repeatedly seeks to link it with Nazism. Based on dubious evidence, she initially insists that “at least one transsexual operation was done in the camps,” but seemingly anticipating being challenged on the accuracy of this statement, she then becomes less definitive, claiming that “some transsexual research and technology may well have been initiated and developed in the camps,” (152). Still, a lack of proof does not deter her from comparing the gender identity clinics to the Nazi eugenics movement and the extermination of millions of people in the Holocaust: “What we are witnessing in the transsexual context is a science at the service of a patriarchal ideology of sex-role conformity in the same way that breeding for blond hair and blue eyes became a so-called science at the service of Nordic racial conformity,” (149).

This association fits in with Raymond’s paranoid conspiracy theory that male medical doctors were using transsexual women to create docile, male-identified “artificial” women—a la *The Stepford Wives*—in order to infiltrate lesbian communities and undermine feminism. She even seriously suggests that feminists who speak out against transsexuality might one day be sent for brainwashing: “It is not inconceivable that gender

identity clinics, again in the name of therapy, could become centers of sex-role control for nontranssexuals,” (Califia, 1997: 97; Raymond, 2006). To resist being taken over by the evil “transsexual empire,” Raymond advocates for a drastic reduction in the availability of gender-affirming surgery and recommends that transsexual individuals instead undergo “gender reorientation” (Stryker, 2008: 110).

Raymond’s inflammatory rhetoric and false allegations had a significant effect, not just within lesbian communities, but also within the medical profession. Despite being portrayed as part of the “transsexual empire,” the medical establishment largely opposed the gender identity clinics because of the same anti-transgender prejudice. Moreover, as stated above, the clinics performed only a small number of surgeries, turning away thousands of applicants. Influenced in part by Raymond’s anti-transsexual attacks, the clinics performed even fewer surgeries and began to shut down altogether, starting with the Johns Hopkins program in 1979—the same year that *The Transsexual Empire* was published.

Another factor in the closing of the Hopkins program and other gender identity clinics was the publication of a study in 1979 by its director, Jon Meyer, and his secretary, Donna Reter, that purportedly showed “no objective improvement” among individuals who had undergone gender-affirming surgery at Hopkins as compared to a group of transsexuals who had been turned down for surgery or had changed their mind (Denny, 2006: 176). Meyer and Reter’s study has been widely criticized for the arbitrary nature of its rating scale, as well as for its value judgments: individuals who did not improve their socio-economic standing, who continued to see a therapist, or who were unmarried or with a same-sex partner were deemed to be less well-adjusted. In addition, noticeably absent was any measure of the participants’ satisfaction or happiness, despite Meyer and Reter admitting that only one of the individuals who underwent gender-affirming surgery expressed any regrets at having done so (and in this person’s case, because the surgery had been performed poorly). Other studies from the period found much more positive outcomes from surgery (Bullough & Bullough, 1998; Rudacille, 2005).

The bias of Meyer and Reter’s study was confirmed by a subsequent investigative report, which concluded that “the ending of surgery at the GIC [gender identity clinic] now appears to have been orchestrated by certain figures at Hopkins who, for personal rather than scientific reasons, staunchly opposed any form of sex reassignment,” (Denny, 2006: 176). One of these figures was Paul McHugh, the chair of the Psychiatry Department at Hopkins and the doctor who oversaw the clinic. After ending the program, McHugh admitted that this had been his intention since being hired in 1975. In a subsequent interview, he stated, “my personal feeling is that surgery is not a proper treatment for a psychiatric disorder, and it’s clear to me that these patients have severe psychological problems that don’t go away following surgery,” (Zagria, 2010).

McHugh’s position that transsexual people were mentally disordered was a widespread belief among psychiatrists in the 1970s, despite the decades-long history of physicians successfully treating transsexuality as a physical concern. In 1980, this illness model was codified into the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, which defined “transsexualism” as a “disorder” characterized by “a persistent sense of discomfort and inappropriateness about one’s anatomic sex and a persistent wish to be rid of one’s genitals and to live as a member of the other sex,” (261-62). Despite the efforts of some transgender activists and allies to remove the diagnosis (just as “homosexuality” had been removed before the third edition), transsexuality continued to be listed as a psychological disorder in subsequent editions. The 1994 version of the *DSM* replaced the category “transsexualism” with “gender identity disorder,” but the diagnostic criteria remained largely unchanged. “A strong and persistent cross-gender identification” was evidence of a psychopathology (532). The 2013 edition of the *DSM* makes significant progress in destigmatizing transsexuality by replacing “gender identity disorder” with “gender dysphoria,” which is described as emotional distress resulting from “a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed

gender and assigned gender.” However, the latest version still largely pathologizes gender nonconformity among children and includes a category of “Transvestic Disorder,” which, according to trans activist Kelley Winters (2010, 2012), “labels gender expression not stereotypically associated with assigned birth sex as inherently pathological and sexually deviant.”

### **Feminism and Trans Identity Over Time**

It may seem obvious that feminist and trans politics go together like peanut butter and jelly. In both feminist and trans politics, there is a concern with gender oppression, so there appears to be a common cause. Trans women not only experience transphobia but also sexism; many trans *men* have had first-hand experience with sexism prior to transition (and even after transition if they are transphobically viewed as “really women”). So it might be surprising to learn that some (non-trans) feminists have viewed trans people in hostile, transphobic ways.

In the 1970s and 1980s, influential “second wave” (non-trans) feminists such as Robin Morgan, Mary Daly, and Janice Raymond represented trans women as rapists and boundary-violators trying to invade women’s space. Trans men were disregarded as mere tokens used to hide the patriarchal nature of the phenomenon of transsexuality. Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* systemizes these hostile views and in trans circles it is widely regarded as a “classic” of transphobic literature. Raymond’s overall claim is that transsexuality ought to be “morally mandated” out of existence. In her view, transsexuality arises as a consequence of unhappiness with existing “sex-roles.” So to her, the problem is not medical in nature – it is social. And the social problem is *sexism*. By treating transsexuality as a medical problem, the sex-role system is maintained rather than destroyed, and what needs to be done, instead, according to Raymond, is to eradicate the sex-role system and this can be done only through education. For Raymond the goal is to completely get away from sex-roles. And because of this, she thinks that trans people who undergo medical transformation violate their own bodily integrity.

Things have changed quite a bit since then. While there are still non-trans feminists with these types of views, they are now in the minority. Much of this has to do with the emergence of so-called “third wave feminism.” Queer theory, which developed in the nineties, played an important role in the development of trans theory and transgender politics (also during the nineties). Indeed, it has become a central tenet that transgender people are those who challenge the existing categories of “woman” and “man” – that is, those who are “beyond the binary.” One of the most important consequences of this development is that it became possible to view trans people as oppressed in a way that was not reduced to sexism. *Other* forms of gender oppression besides sexism were recognized.

Perhaps the most important strand of “third wave feminism” is the view that one cannot focus on only one kind of oppression (sexism) to the exclusion of others (racism). Women of color critiqued the early (“second wave”) feminism as racially biased. The core idea is that kinds of oppression (e.g. sexism) cannot be understood and opposed without focusing on *other* kinds of oppression (such as racism) (The Combahee River Collective is one group that wrote about this). A woman of color not only has to confront sexism, she has to confront racism. And sometimes racism and sexism can be experienced as inseparable. This means that the attempt to focus *only* on sexism is something that would only ever make sense to somebody who never had to deal with racism in the first place. It would only make sense to someone who had White privilege.

This leads to the rejection of the view that there is a common universal experience of womanhood. Women of color who experience racism and sexism bound up together have different experiences of womanhood than do White women who experience White privilege and sexism bound up together. And this provides an important framework for “trans/feminism” which focuses on the *intersections* of trans and sexist oppression. One important lesson of Emi Koyama’s work is that any form of trans/feminism which marginalizes other forms of oppression, such as racism, does so at its own peril.

Despite these positive developments, there remains an important challenge for “trans/feminism.” Many trans people simply don’t identify as “beyond the binary” at all – they identify as plain men and women. Obviously the “beyond the binary” idea doesn’t provide much help

to those trans people who, in this view, are regarded as “gender conservative.” If trans oppression and resistance are not framed in terms of the dreaded binary, then how should they be understood? How do we understand trans oppression/resistance if *both* “beyond the binary” and “trapped in the wrong body” are found to be inadequate?

We might need a completely new theory.

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## TRANSGENDER ACTIVISM IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The 1970s to the early 1980s can be considered the contemporary nadir for transgender people. However, the period did have a few bright spots. Except for Jorgensen’s autobiography, the stories of transsexual women that were published in the 1960s and early 1970s were lurid exposés of female impersonators, strippers, and prostitutes with tabloid titles like “*I Changed My Sex!*” and “*I Want to Be a Woman!*” (Sherman, 1964; Star, 1963). But the 1970s marked the beginning of a steady stream of non-sensational transsexual books, mostly by individuals who had been successful in society as men before transitioning to female. More transgender people also began to turn to activism at this time to counter the stigma and hostility they experienced.

This new wave of transsexual autobiographies began with the 1974 publications of Jan Morris’s *Conundrum* and Canary Conn’s *Canary*. Morris, a renowned British author and travel writer who had accompanied the first known expedition to reach the summit of Mount Everest in 1953, describes how she sublimated her sense of herself as female through constant travel before undergoing gender-affirming surgery in 1972. Conn, a rising teenage rock star, transitioned in her early 20s, which seems to have led to the end of her singing career, whereas Morris continued to be a successful writer. Another autobiography, *Mirror Image*, written in 1978 by award-winning *Chicago Tribune* newspaper reporter Nancy Hunt, did not receive as much publicity, but more than other writers, Hunt discusses how transitioning affected her romantic relationships.

The most well-known autobiography of the era was Renée Richards’ *Second Serve*, published in 1983. Richards achieved international notoriety for successfully suing the Women’s Tennis Association when it barred her from competing in the 1976 US Women’s Open under a newly introduced “women-born women” policy. The court decision was groundbreaking and opened the door for other transsexual athletes. Surprisingly, Richards devotes relatively few pages to the case or her tennis career. Instead, she dedicates the majority of her memoir to describing her struggle to accept herself as female, which came only after three failed attempts to go back to living as a man.

While the best-selling autobiographies by Jorgensen, Morris, and Richards, and to a lesser extent the memoirs by Conn and Hunt, drew significant attention to the lives of transsexual women, the lack of autobiographies by transsexual men contributed to their invisibility. The only full-length narrative by a trans man published in the United States prior to the 1990s was Mario Martino’s 1977 book *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (Stryker, 2008). Just as Morris, Hunt, and Richards pursued traditionally male careers in order to conform to societal gender expectations and to try to convince themselves and others of their masculinity, Martino entered a convent school, hoping to suppress his feelings and be more feminine. Not surprisingly, he was unsuccessful, and after transitioning, began to provide support to other transsexual men.

Shortly before Martino’s book was published, Steve Dain became the first public trans man. Dain was a high school girls’ physical education teacher who fought to retain his job after transitioning in 1976, appearing on talk shows across the country. Although he ultimately won the right to teach again, he could not find a school that would hire him, so became a chiropractor with his own business. He died in 2007 of metastatic breast cancer at age 68 (Jamison Green, personal communication, June 6, 2013).

As discussed above, another high point for transgender people in the 1970s and early 1980s was the expansion of organizing efforts by heterosexual, as well as bisexual and gay male crossdressers, which transformed local groups into national organizations. Crossdressers also started Fantasia Fair (2011), a weeklong series of social, entertainment, and education events in Provincetown, Massachusetts. First held in 1975, “The Fair” has become the oldest continuing transgender event in the United States. Transsexual women likewise established many more support groups—sometimes inclusive of heterosexual male crossdressers who chose not to affiliate with Tri-Ess, and other times inclusive of transsexual men. But few trans men joined these groups, as they were dominated by transsexual women and, with meetings focused on topics such as female make-up and clothing tips, failed to address the needs of transsexual men.

A few trans male support groups were started in the 1970s and early 1980s, including groups in Los Angeles, New York City, and Toronto (Green, 2004). The first trans male educational and support organization in the United States, which was called simply “FTM,” was begun in San Francisco in 1986 by Lou Sullivan, a gay transsexual man. The group published the quarterly *FTM Newsletter*, which became the leading source of information related to trans men and had hundreds of subscribers from around the world. In 1990, Sullivan also compiled the first guide for trans men, *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual*, and wrote the first book explicitly about a trans male individual—a biography of Jack Bee Garland, a female-assigned journalist and social worker who lived as a man for 40 years in San Francisco in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Stryker, 2008). Sullivan died from complications from AIDS at the age of 39 in 1991.

Under the subsequent leadership of Jamison Green (2004), FTM, which changed its name to FTM International in 1994, became the largest trans male organization in the world. Green went on to become a more public figure than Sullivan had been, convening the first trans male conference in 1995 (thanks to a grant from Dallas Denny), educating police officers and lawmakers, and working to reform the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care. Following in the footsteps of Stephen Whittle, Green was elected as the second trans President of WPATH.

A larger rights movement also grew significantly in the 1990s, facilitated by the increasing use of the term “transgender” to encompass all individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from the social norms of the gender assigned to them at birth. This wider application of “transgender” developed among writers and activists beginning in the mid 1980s and started to catch on more widely in the early 1990s. In her groundbreaking article “The Transgender Alternative,” published in the trans community journals *Chrysalis Quarterly* and *Tapstry* in 1991, Holly Boswell suggested that “transgender” is a term that “encompasses the whole spectrum” of gender diversity and brings together all gender nonconforming people (Stryker, 2008: 123). This understanding became most strongly associated with socialist writer and activist Leslie Feinberg, who called on all people who face discrimination for not conforming to gender norms to organize around their shared oppression in his 1992 pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* and in his subsequent books, *Transgender Warriors* and *Trans Liberation*. The expansive meaning of the term was further popularized by writers such as Kate Bornstein and Martine Rothblatt, and this usage became commonplace by the late 1990s (Bornstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1992, 1996, 1998; Rothblatt, 1994).

The broad-based political movement that Feinberg envisioned came to fruition in response to continued acts of discrimination and violence against transgender people. Reflecting the persistence of anti-transgender bias among some lesbian feminists, transsexual women were banned from the National Lesbian Conference in 1991 and a postoperative transsexual woman, Nancy Jean Burkholder, was expelled that same year from the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. The festival, an annual weeklong women’s outdoor music and cultural event, has been a pilgrimage for thousands of lesbians since it began in 1976. While the event had always been for “womyn only,” Burkholder’s removal was the

first known exclusion of a transsexual woman; afterward, festival organizers articulated a policy limiting attendance to “womyn-born womyn” (Rubin, 2006).

The growth of an out transgender community over the course of little more than a decade is demonstrated by the different responses to the expulsions of Stone and Burkholder from lesbian-feminist cultural institutions. While few spoke publicly in Stone’s defense in 1979, the ouster of Burkholder in 1991 was widely denounced and led to protests at “Michigan” itself. Transgender activists passed out thousands of “I might be transsexual” buttons to festival goers the next year, and following the removal of four more transsexual women in 1993, they created what became known as “Camp Trans” across from the entrance to the festival.

The initial Camp Trans consisted of several dozen transsexual women and supporters who leafleted Michigan attendees and held workshops and readings that attracted hundreds of women from the other side of the road. The significance of this protest was noted by Riki Wilchins, one of the main organizers: “Camp Trans was the first time transpeople ever coordinated and pulled off a national event. Not only that, it was the first time that significant numbers of the hard-core lesbian-feminist community backed us,” (Boyd, 2006; Califia, 1997: 227; Denny, 2006). The organizers of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, though, refused to change their policy, leading transgender activists to re-establish Camp Trans in 1999. The festival leadership finally gave in to the pressure in the mid 2000s and now no longer actively enforces their policy, while continuing to insist that only womyn-born womyn should attend. The situation today is “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”: the festival organizers do not press the issue, and a number of transsexual women have attended the festival without calling significant attention to themselves. Camp Trans (2011) continues to be held to advocate, as their slogan states, for “room for all kinds of womyn.”

It was not only lesbian feminists who discriminated against transgender people in the early 1990s. When lesbian and gay leaders were planning to hold a March on Washington in 1993, transgender activists, with the support of bisexual allies, sought to have the word “transgender” added to the name of the event. Although some local organizing committees supported transgender inclusion, the march’s national steering committee voted by a significant margin to have the name be the “March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation.” Like their banishment from the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, their exclusion from the title of the march prompted many transgender people to become more politically active and for the transgender community to become more organized.

Another major incident that mobilized a large number of transgender people was the murder of twenty-one-year-old Brandon Teena near Falls City, Nebraska in the early hours of New Year’s Day in 1994. Teena lived as a man, but was outed as being assigned female at birth when the county sheriff’s office reported his arrest on a misdemeanor to the local newspaper. Following the disclosure, two men whom Teena thought to be friends, John Lotter and Tom Nissen, beat and raped him, and a week after he reported the sexual assault to the sheriff, the two killed Teena and two others. Transgender people and allies were incensed not only by the horrific murders and the bias of the police for failing to arrest Lotter and Nissen after the rape, but also by the initial media coverage, in which Teena was often portrayed as a butch lesbian and referred to as “her” (Califia, 1997).

Teena’s murder touched off a series of important protests. In response to the particularly transgender-insensitive reporting of the *Village Voice*, members of Transsexual Menace, a direct action group that Riki Wilchins and Denise Norris had just started in New York City, picketed outside of the newspaper’s offices. The group and other transgender activists also held a vigil outside of the Nebraska courthouse where Lotter was standing trial in 1995. Wilchins called the event “a turning point for trans activism,” because it was the first highly visible national demonstration organized by transgender people and helped draw unprecedented media attention to an anti-transgender

hate crime (Califia, 1997: 232). Teena's life and death became the subject of news stories, books, and movies, including Kimberly Peirce's 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*, in which Hilary Swank played Teena and won an Academy Award for Best Actress. What also made this case different was that Teena's killers received significant sentences—Nissen was given life imprisonment without the possibility of parole and Lotter the death penalty.

In addition to Camp Trans and Transexual Menace, a number of other transgender institutions and groups were established in the early and mid 1990s. Dallas Denny created the American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS) in Decatur, Georgia in 1990 to disseminate information about transgender people, which included publishing *Chrysalis Quarterly* and *The Transgender Treatment Bulletin* (AEGIS, 1999). One of the largest annual transgender events, the Southern Comfort conference, began in Atlanta in 1991, and the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, a yearly meeting to discuss strategies for creating transgender-supportive laws, was convened by attorney Phyllis Frye in Houston from 1992-1997 (Frye, 2001; Stryker, 2008). Also in 1992, Bet Power founded the East Coast FTM Group, the first FTM-only support group in the Eastern United States, in Northampton, Massachusetts. Today, it is the second oldest continuing transmasculine organization in the world (B. Power, personal communication, June 15, 2011). In 1995, Riki Wilchins began the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC), a national organization whose accomplishments included producing some of the first reports on hate crimes against gender nonconforming people and holding an annual National Gender Lobby Day to urge members of Congress to address gender-based violence and discrimination.

The 1990s also saw the highly visible, direct-action tactics pioneered by radical groups like ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation begin to infuse the transgender movement. The first transgender organization to reflect this new queer activism was Transgender Nation, a subgroup of San Francisco's Queer Nation chapter, which was formed in 1992 by Anne Ogborn to fight anti-trans prejudice within the chapter and within society (Stryker, 2008). Soon, Transgender Nation chapters were established in several other cities, most notably in Washington, D.C., where the group helped lead the response to the death of Tyra Hunter, a transsexual woman who died in 1995 after D.C. paramedics denied her medical treatment following the discovery that she was transgender. Although Transgender Nation was short-lived, it inspired the creation of two other chapter-based transgender activist groups, Transexual Menace and It's Time America!, and led the transgender movement to become more visible and confrontational.

But the most significant factor in the development of a national transgender movement may have been the rise of the Internet in the mid 1990s. As sociologist Eve Shapiro (2010) states, the Internet revolutionized the movement by "allow[ing] transgender people to connect with one another more easily, especially those who live in geographically isolated places," and by "giv[ing] individuals ways to experiment with defining their gender;" (132). Shapiro shows how online activism mobilized large numbers of people and generated substantial media attention in the debate over the American Psychiatric Association's pathologizing of transgender people in the *DSM*.

A 2006 national transgender study by Genny Beemyn and Sue Rankin also documented the importance of the Internet, especially for the participants under fifty years old, for whom the Web was their primary method of meeting others like themselves and accessing resources. The older participants less commonly socialized virtually, but many first recognized themselves as transgender and realized that they were not alone through exploring the Web. The study respondents in their forties or older often described feeling isolated or being in denial about their identities for decades—until they discovered online resources. Tina, an interviewee who had crossdressed for forty years, captured the sentiments of many participants: "I learned from reading, but I was *liberated* by the Internet!" (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011: 57-58).



The Internet also helped to give voice to trans people of color. Monica Roberts, a Black trans woman from Houston who transitioned in 1994, started the award-winning blog TransGriot, which has become one of the most well-known hubs for news and information about trans people of color (Roberts, n.d.).

Like the growth of the Internet, the development of queer studies in the early 1990s helped create a space for transgender people. Texts by queer theorists, such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Diana Fuss (1989), Judith Butler (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), and Teresa de Lauretis (1991), laid the groundwork for transgender scholarship and greatly influenced how gender and sexuality were considered in academia. Transgender studies emerged as its own discipline in the late 1990s and early 2000s through conferences, academic listservs, special journal issues, and articles and books by the first generation of scholars whose primary area of research was transgender people. These scholars included Susan Stryker (1994), C. Jacob Hale (1996), Aaron Devor (1997), Judith Halberstam (1998), Jay Prosser (1998), Jason Cromwell (1999), Viviane Namaste (2000), and Stephen Whittle (2002).

### **The Start of Trans-Activism, 1994-1995**

It started, as serious things often do, with a murder and a fight. The fight was the simple part. An attendee at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was stopped by two women from Security and asked if she was really a man. She refused to affirm or deny. So, asserting that they thought she was a man, Nancy Jean Burkholder was forcibly evicted from the event. Afterward, the Festival quietly and retroactively announced a new policy it called "womyn-born-womyn"—a weird, supposedly feminist-y sounding neologism which everyone concerned understood to mean "no trannies allowed." Janis Walworth, a friend who had accompanied Nancy, reached out to several activists about coming to the next year's Festival to raise awareness - few people even knew what had happened or were aware of the policy.

Four of us showed up that year. We camped out across the road from the main gate in the National Forest. Not to miss a beat, Festival Security was soon talking with Park Rangers and asking them to throw us out, but fortunately there were no grounds for doing so. We planned several workshops, distributed a few fliers to surprised attendees driving and walking by, and sat back to see what would happen next. What happened was that hundreds of women walked miles out of the Festival to attend our workshops, hang out, and offer support. A few even came to stay. Our little campground became crowded every evening. It became obvious that this was something that could scale, and we began laying plans for a bigger, better presence the next year. Transgender people were pushing back.

In fact, the idea of transgender protest had been circulating in the community. Transgender Nation, modeled on (and some said a reaction to transphobia in) Queer Nation, had been launched by Anne Ogborn in San Francisco. It had some early successes, but hadn't really caught on. This was still at a time when many if not most of us still hoped to "pass." There were relatively few public transgender activists. Susan Stryker had written a manifesto just a few years earlier in which she pointed to trans-visibility as a critical factor in launching transgender advocacy. But transgender people organizing politically and in public to confront cisgender bigotry (as opposed to coming together socially inside hotel conferences) was rare.

Some of us decided to print up a batch of "Transsexual Menace" T-shirts, modeled on a combination of the Lavender Menace (who confronted NOW over its exclusion of lesbians) and the genderfuck of Rocky Horror Picture Show. We began handing them out any time we came together politically for events. They were visible, cheeky, and determinedly tongue-in-cheek, both outing ourselves but also mocking straights for their fear and loathing of transsexuals... and an instant hit. Being "out, loud, and proud" was new for transpeople used to being very closeted.

I announced I was going to take a carload of T-shirts to the Southern Comfort conference in Atlanta with some of the NY Menace to see how they would play on a larger stage. This immediately launched widespread rumors that the Menace was coming to "disrupt" the conference and ruin the event. That was okay - the more hysteria the better. We could mock trans-paranoia as well as cis paranoia. When I arrived every one of the dozens of T-shirts was gone within 24

hours. Not just transsexuals, but academics, and even straight male crossdressers (and their wives!) who had been closeted all their lives wore the black, blood-dripping red T-shirts... *over their dresses...* out of the hotel, all over Atlanta.

This was entirely new. Clearly, something was shifting in trans political consciousness. Pride was challenging, if not entirely replacing, passing. Within two years activists had started Menace chapters in 39 cities. Shifting, indeed.

Around this time, the Village Voice published a piece about the 1994 murder of FTM Brandon Teena, rubbing salt in the wound by positioning Brandon as a “hot butch,” a lesbian dreamboat, and referring to him as “Teena” and “she” and “her” throughout. The Menace promptly picketed both the Voice and the piece’s author. Many other gay and lesbian media outlets ignored the murder entirely because he wasn’t (wait for it...) gay or lesbian.

The murder trial of Brandon’s assailants, John Lotter and Tom Nissen, was set to start in Falls City, NE. We decided there needed to be a visible, public response from the community. With Boston’s Nancy Nangeroni and Tony Baretto-Neto, a transgender deputy sheriff from Florida (who provided security), we announced a Memorial Vigil outside the courthouse on the first day of the trial. We didn’t know what would happen or if anyone would show. Forty-two people showed up, including Leslie Feinberg (author of *Stone Butch Blues*) and a quiet unknown filmmaker named Kimberly Pierce working on a script tentatively titled *Boys Don’t Cry*.

Apparently, transsexuals in black Menace T-shirts was not a common sight in Falls City, Nebraska. By noon, the local neo-Nazis showed up, spitting at us out of the windows of their trucks and trying to run us off the sidewalks. Tony had liaised with the Sheriff’s office beforehand and when a group of the skinheads advanced toward us on foot, a line of Deputy Sheriffs was all that stood between us and serious violence. It was chilling, knowing we were depending on the same Sheriff’s office that had outed Brandon and led to his death, perhaps even some of the same officers. Afterward, Tony founded Transgender Officers Protect & Serve (TOPS).

Back in Michigan, plans were forming for what was inevitably becoming known as “Camp Trans.” That year, 30 of us showed up, again camping out across from the main gate. This time, instead of a few workshops, we had scheduled three solid days of workshops, musical events, and teach-ins, with a special speak-out by Leslie Feinberg. We drew almost a thousand attendees over three days, many of whom went back in wearing Menace T-shirts; even supportive members of Security wore them openly. Then, on the last day, a group of leather-clad Lesbian Avengers asked why we didn’t just come inside. Kidding, I asked them why they didn’t just send an escort. To my shock, they agreed instantly. That evening, four dozen of them showed up and escorted Leslie Feinberg, myself, and 10 other members of Camp Trans into the Festival and to a presentation attended by hundreds of waiting fans and supporters. The trans-discrimination policy, while still official policy, was for all intents broken.

Alas, the train of trans murders was not. Brandon’s death was a wake-up call. Once we started paying attention to and tracking transgender murders, it was shocking how many there were. Deborah Forte, Channelle Pickett, Christian Paige, James Percy Rivers, Tarayon Corbitt, Quincy Taylor, Tyra Hunter—and that was just 1995.

This was not as immediately obvious as it seems. The Internet was new, there was no Google (that was three years in the future), and many people still didn’t have or use email. Finding out about new victims meant calling activists in different cities or looking for local news that began with the vague and stigmatizing words: “*The body of man wearing women’s clothing...*”

Nancy, Tony, and I decided whenever a transgender person was murdered, we would fly in to coordinate another memorial vigil. Transgender people from the local community always came out to support the events, and it created fresh media coverage and attention that had been absent.

Yet it quickly became apparent that we couldn’t expect to wage a struggle against violence and discrimination from a psychiatric category. We could portray ourselves in media as patients suffering from a medical disorder, or as an oppressed minority demanding their political and civil rights, but it was very difficult to do both simultaneously. The American Psychiatric Association was conveniently holding their annual conference in New York that year. With signboards declaring “Keep Your Diagnoses OFF our Bodies!” and accusing them of “GenderPathoPhilia” (defined “as an unnatural need or desire to pathologize any kind of gender that makes you feel uncomfortable”), the NYC Menace picketed the APA. Our list of

demands was brief: depathologize transsexuality, just as long ago they had depathologized homosexuality.

It soon became apparent that you couldn't stop the war from a M\*A\*S\*H tent. Transpeople kept dying with regularity – one every few months. We needed to be on the front lines, or at least put transgender issues onto the national agenda. All our actions had been local—one event, one city. I asked New York's Lynn Walker how we could start a more national movement and she answered (quite brilliantly, in retrospect), “start doing things at the national level.” Out of that comment came two developments. First was GenderPAC, the first national organization devoted to political advocacy for the right to *gender identity and expression*. It was formalized at a meeting of the community held outside Philadelphia in 1995. The second was National Gender Lobby Day, with activist Jane Fee and Phyllis Frye (now Texas' first transgender judge).

One hundred and four transgender activists and their partners showed up. The *New York Times* led their national news with us. Strangely titled “Shunning *He* and *She* They Fight for Respect,” it was accompanied by the picture of a bearded Jamison Green sitting quietly in a suit on the D.C. METRO (which no doubt confused many readers). It was our first real print coverage of transgender political activism. Today you can't pick up the *Times*, *Washington Post*, *TIME*, *Slate* or any other major outlet without reading trans news. But that was the first big piece.

Street activism was all about being insubordinate and loud; it was serious theater, to compel media attention. Capitol Hill was a different game. This was being *professionally trans*, sitting in a business suit in Congressional offices and patiently explaining our community's needs. It was new and intimidating, but also tremendously validating and exhilarating. We were no longer Kate Bornstein's *gender outlaws*; we were citizens, voters, taxpayers. We were legitimate. In spite of that, I frankly expected us all to get arrested on Capitol Hill when we inevitably had to use the women's rooms, especially the many male cross-dressers who had (bravely) shown up. But that didn't happen. And that morning, as the sun rose over the Capitol dome, all of us stood together nervously before a bank of microphones and media cameras, taking turns answering questions before marching off to our first Congressional appointments. It was a sight: 100 transgender people walking off together to meet their elected representatives. A doorway had opened. A community was on the move. Something new had begun.

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## LGB AND T

The work of transgender activists, writers, and scholars led a growing number of lesbian and gay individuals and groups to become supportive of the rights of transgender people and to consider them a part of what became known as the LGBT community. While many lesbian feminists in the 1970s and 1980s were influenced by *The Transsexual Empire*, many young lesbians in the mid and late 1990s—some of whom had yet to be born when Raymond's book was published—had their attitude toward transgender people shaped by Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*. Feinberg's semi-autobiographical 1993 novel tells the moving story of Jess Goldberg, an individual who journeys from being a butch lesbian in the years before the Stonewall Riots, to passing as a man in order to survive the economic recession of the 1970s, to living outside of a gender binary in the 1980s. Bornstein's 1994 work combines memoir, performance, and commentary to offer insights into how society constructs gender. Many young queer women activists, as well as transgender individuals, considered these books necessary reading, and many instructors in LGBT and sexuality studies assigned them in courses in the 1990s.

Another point of connection between trans men and young queer women that resulted in the latter becoming more supportive of transgender people was involvement in drag king culture. Individuals assigned female at birth have long experimented with gender and sought to blur gender lines by performing in “men's” clothing. The contemporary

phenomenon of drag king performances emerged in the mid 1980s in London and San Francisco, and within a decade, drag king shows and competitions involving both transgender men and cisgender lesbians were regularly held in major cities in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia (Ashburn 2010). “In the last fifteen years, drag king culture has created a rope bridge of intellectual dialogue between the lesbian and transgender communities,” states Sile Singleton, an African American transgender person who organizes and performs as Luster/Lustivious de la Virgion in drag king shows. “Because drag kinging by its very nature invites self-exploration into gender, it has nurtured a noticeably less negative backlash toward transgendered bodies” (S. Singleton, personal communication, July 18, 2011). The first international event, the International Drag King Extravaganza, took place in Columbus, Ohio in 1999. It brought together many drag king performers and troupes, as well as individuals who studied, filmed, and photographed drag kings, for the first time (Troka, 2003).

#### **Male, Female, or Otherwise**

I was born in 1961, and grew up during the cresting height of the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, the Black Panthers, the hippie movement, and anti-Vietnam war protests. Sitting at the dinner table, my formative years were filled with the background noise of Walter Cronkite’s reports on social unrest and the demands for equality sweeping, not just the good old US of A, but the world. In every newspaper, there were headlines about people demanding to be seen and treated fairly.

However, the reality of my situation was not about personal freedom. My staunchly democratic and liberal mother was terrified by my “mannishness.” Her usual re-programming tactics included several verbal assaults referencing my walk and stance (like a peacock), my sweating and smell (like a football player), and my voice and laughter (like Barry White). While I will admit that her unabashed disappointment in the way her “first born turned out” did smart a bit—well a lot—that’s another tale. I actually only pretended to be bothered by her attempts to “save me.” Secretly, I was relieved that I was recognizable as male, because somewhere I have always known, regardless of an anatomically correct appendage (or, in my case, lack thereof) on the heavenly chart, I am male. Now I won’t say it is as simple as that, because for all the soul brother energy I ooze, I am most comfortable when packing in hot pants and 10-inch-high, matching lime pleather go-go boots. I couldn’t feel more he than when the bangs of my circa 1971 magenta “Geraldine Jones”-styled wig begin to fall into my 3-inch-long “Patti Labelle”-styled eyelashes, with my chest bound tight into a 36-inch wall of pectoral bulk. Even if I opted for a sensible pair of Cinderella slippers and something unassuming from Casual Corner, there is no wholeness without Mr. Softie. What is most amazing about all of this is that I had little conscious knowledge of these facts, prior to my 1992 involvement with a little historical Midwestern phenom that became known as the H.I.S. Kings Show.

H.I.S. Kings, a female-to-male, crossdressing, gender-bending, lip-synching, and entertainment troupe, was one of the country’s first drag king ensembles when it formed in Columbus, Ohio in 1992. The troupe was the accidental brainchild of a couple of bored women’s studies graduate students and three in-your-face rad-ass lesbians named Helen, Ivett, and Sue (hence, “H.I.S.”). We had no idea that the wardrobe we decided to explore would be so critical to whom we see ourselves as now in terms of sex, sexuality, and gender identity. Personally, I was just trying to shake an overall image, of my “gay and second-wave feminist” self in a lavender batik moo moo playing co-opted ceremonial drums and pushing tofu at placenta parties. This is not to say that we brain-children did not appreciate that ultra-Gaia space. But it was the 1990s. We just wanted to capture some of the fun, high energy, and sexy explorations of the gay-boy-club settings. We wanted to dance dripping hot, sexual, and wild. We were purposefully invested in creating acts that not only pushed beyond conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, but that also disrupted expected depictions of lesbian and gay behavior. On a basic level, we didn’t see why gay men “owned” pop culture and gay entertainment. The cathartic nature of the spaces the H.I.S. Kings Show fostered opened up a plane where performers, crew, staff, Kings Courts, and our audiences could be whatever they needed and wanted to be with far less

questioning as to whether it was “appropriate behavior” for a girl or a lesbian. After all, in the previous decade, the proponents of third-wave feminism had blazed a path that embraced contradiction and conflict as they worked to include multiculturalism and change.

What I wanted was to be a “queen.” Not the Cleopatra-type, per se—although I must admit that the idea of four sets of bulky muscles careening me around to my appointments on an overstuffed, chenille-covered chaise lounge did have a certain appeal. I was more inspired to attain the beauty, grace, ultra-femininity, and pure chutzpah of Flip Wilson’s Geraldine, disco-soul entertainer extraordinaire Sylvester, and Columbus, Ohio’s favorite circa ’80s and ’90s female impersonator, the fabulous Miss Georgia Jackson. At the time, it never occurred to me that they were all, at the very least, born males who enjoyed the art of passable crossdressing. I never thought about that. What I tuned into was their energy and womanish-ways or, more accurately, their approach to softening squared bones and hip-wide stances. I would practice to emulate perfectly their movements—the slow swivel of their chin-to-shoulder demur look, their toe-to-heel tip-tap walk, and the rush of air that entwined with their speech, lifting it away from any telltale baritone in their voices.

The first show opened at a dyke bar named Summit Station in Columbus on September 13, 1992. That night five scared “kids,” including a birthday girl, a brand new DJ, and three budding drag kings, took the stage with no real idea of what they were doing. However, when the light bulb lit and the opportunity arrived to share all of me as the show’s premiere “Hostess with the Mostest,” Lustivious Dela Virgion, with the audiences of what, by the second show, would be christened The H.I.S. King Show, I did not hesitate. All I knew was that for 7-20 hours a week, I was surrounded by people who were similar in their chemistry to me. When would I ever again be able to hang out with folks who were open to and accepting “beings” who exhibited multiple genders? There was no turning back. At its height, the experience was exhilarating. At its close, exasperating. All in all, it was a fantastic “coming of gender” trip. And now nearly 20 years later, I know I experienced freedom, as we dared to celebrate masculinity: male, female, and otherwise.

*Sile Singleton*

The efforts of transgender activists and allies resulted in many national, state, and local organizations in the United States that had focused primarily on the rights of lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men to begin to address gender identity issues. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force added transgender people to its mission statement in 1997, and PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) did so the following year. Other national organizations were initially more hesitant to include transgender people in their work. The largest lesbian and gay rights group, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), amended its mission statement in 2001 and GLAAD (formerly the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) only did so in 2013. On the state and local level, most of the organizations established since the mid 1990s have included transgender people in their names and missions. Cases in point are the professionally staffed offices and centers that have been founded at US and Canadian colleges and universities to further sexual and gender diversity. Among the 26 offices and centers created before 1995, all but three had names indicating that their constituencies were “gay and lesbian” or “gay, lesbian, and bisexual” individuals. Today there are more than 150 such centers and offices, and all are transgender inclusive in both their names and mission statements (Beemyn, 2002; Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2011).

However, the proliferation of LGBT organizations has not always resulted in greater attention to the needs of transgender people; in some cases, the “T” seems to stand for “token,” rather than “transgender.” The most infamous example of transgender inclusion being little more than rhetoric involved the Human Rights Campaign. In 1994, the organization drafted and had allies in Congress introduce the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a bill to protect workers based on their sexual orientation. Transgender

leaders were incensed by the exclusion of “gender identity” and lobbied Congress and the public for it to be added—only to have HRC work to thwart their efforts. Following the failure of the bill by one vote in the Senate, HRC continued to insist on shutting out transgender people when the legislation was reintroduced the next year, fearing that a more inclusive bill would lose votes. In response, transgender activists and allies picketed fourteen of the organization’s fundraising events, until HRC agreed to support an amendment to add “gender identity” as a protected class (Califia, 1997). Neither the amendment nor the original bill was approved by Congress, and the legislation was stalled for the next decade.

In 2006, ENDA was revived by openly gay Representative Barney Frank, who, after deciding that the transgender-inclusive version would not readily pass, put forward a measure without transgender protection. Despite the Human Rights Campaign’s promise that it would support only transgender-inclusive legislation, the organization endorsed Frank’s bill. HRC’s about-face showed that some within the mostly older, more conservative lesbian and gay establishment continued to see transgender people as dispensable. However, nearly 400 LGBT groups—virtually every major LGBT organization other than HRC—formed a coalition called United ENDA (2010) to advocate for the restoration of gender identity protection. Although the effort failed to change the bill (which passed the House of Representatives in 2007 but died in the Senate), it represented an unprecedented level of support for transgender rights, and the coalition succeeded in having gender identity language included in ENDA thereafter, demonstrating that much had changed since the movement first abandoned transgender people in the 1970s.

#### **The Forerunners: The Our Trans Bodies Ourselves Collective**

Before transgender health care was a vibrant, multifaceted, comprehensive movement within both the transgender community and in the various arenas of health care, there was the National Coalition for LGBT Health (NCLGBTH), begun in late 2000. In 2003, the all-volunteer Eliminating Disparities Committee of the Coalition quickly became the (unnamed) Transgender Health Care Committee. In December 2005 the committee concluded its work as the NCLGBTH and changed its working format. Over that short time, many trans individuals and some allies, notably, the late Hutson W. Inniss, joined our efforts. People dropped on or off as their lives and work permitted.

The Eliminating Disparities Committee, along with some other work being done at the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, ignited the transgender health care movement in the United States. In 2004, we issued a finalized report entitled, “An Overview of US Trans Health Priorities, A Report by the Eliminating Disparities Working Group, August 2004 Update.” This report instantly became an enduring cornerstone around which the community organized its health care advocacy. The contributors and reviewers were Jessica Xavier, Donald Hitchcock, Susan Hollinshead, Mara Keisling, Yoseñio Lewis, Emilia Lombardi, Samuel Lurie, Diego Sanchez, Ben Singer, Moonhawk River Stone, and Bobbi Williams. The document was introduced at the LGBT Health Summit in 2004 in Boston.

Shortly after the 2003 NCLGBTH annual meeting where there had been a major focus on transgender health, the Committee created the first of their kind fact sheets, one for trans men’s health and one for trans women’s health, for the NCLGBTH Health Awareness Week in March, 2004. Those fact sheets are largely still relevant to transgender health today, nine years later.

At that time, some of us had contact with the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, the women who produced the ground-breaking feminist work, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (OBOS). The Boston Women’s Health Collective was a long-standing feminist collective devoted to empowering women in their knowledge of their bodies and their care. Both Heather Stephenson, managing editor of OBOS’ Book Collective and Judy Norsigian, editorial collective member, offered Hawk Stone (along with other trans identified individuals) the opportunity to review the groundbreaking inclusion of transgender issues in the 5th edition of OBOS, which came out in May 2005. We were simply ecstatic at this inclusion and respect. Stone was an invited panelist to the debut event and book signing of the new OBOS in Boston on May 5, 2005.

The respectful, inquisitive discussion that evening became inspiring to us on the Eliminating Disparities Committee.

We began discussions about doing an analogous book like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for transgender people. Donald Hitchcock, field director of the Coalition, fully supported our work and discussions. He gave us free rein on their conference call number to meet to discuss this possibility.

Under the temporary aegis of the Coalition, in November 2005, Yoseñio Lewis, Jessica Xavier, and Hawk Stone formed the initial exploratory group for what was to become the Our Trans Bodies Ourselves (OTBO) Collective. We created a closed yahoo group for communication (still a sort of new idea in 2006), and sought to invite as diverse a group of trans identified individuals as we could at that time in our history (January 2006). Heather Stephenson and Judy Norsigian freely offered OBOS' logistical and technical support and made a commitment to our work through a series of phone meetings where we engaged in a dialogue to increase our knowledge by the sharing of their expertise at OBOS, and their assistance was invaluable.

Our OTBO Collective lived but a short thirteen months, January 2006 to February 2007. Although we never convened an in-person meeting, we sought to build the collective through phone conferencing, since we were scattered all over the country. That, combined with the practical difficulties all of us had (full time work or school, full time activist work, and/or caregiving for loved ones), proved our undoing. We also could not find funding beyond the Coalition's phone support to continue our work.

During our tenure, however, we entered into a groundbreaking and exciting endeavor. We created a conference call structure based upon a formal consensus process for all decision-making. It worked very well, and though it was time consuming, the results made the work we did authentic and powerful. Our archives contain those procedures and structures in great detail.

The OTBO Collective developed an elemental strategic plan for the book moving through 2009 to give our work form, structure, and guidance. We created subcommittees for the different areas of work and began the process of becoming our own nonprofit entity. We identified chapter areas and began some initial work on those chapters through what was then a brand new process: a wiki page (which is still up!). The best surviving rough draft of the chapter titles in no particular order includes these ideas (remember this is in a 2006 perspective): socialization/ resocialization, our bodies, preventive health, relationships (with partners, families), sex and sexuality and sexual health, hormones and hormone blockers, surgeries, other forms of body modifications, legal and social transition, health activism, post transition, youth, elders and aging, gender identity and sexual orientation, a whole section on taking care of ourselves, emotional well being, violence and abuse, and parenting. These were most of the topics the Collective considered including.

Like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, OTBO's vision was to have a document where all trans identified people could become more knowledgeable about their bodies and better advocates for their own health care, with the long range goal of gaining access to care they would not have been able to get otherwise. As we all know, there has been a huge positive change in trans health care since 2006, from increased research on our community's health to access to care to health insurance coverage increasing in 2013. While things are markedly better, very deep disparities still exist for trans people of color, for community members who are young, poor, elderly, and those without employment or health care insurance. Public insurance such as Medicare and Medicaid still do not cover much trans related care. Trans people with other comorbid conditions (medical, mental health, disability) still have a markedly more difficult time accessing basic trans health care, sometimes even basic non trans-related health care. There is much to be done.

Since 2006, though the twelve of us in the OTBO Collective have each gone in our own direction, we still carry the memory of what it was like to have our health, our politics, our activism, our values and vision come together in the service of making the world safer and healthier for transgender people. We cherish the work we did. Everywhere we go, those dual experiences of the Eliminating Disparities Committee and the OTBO Collective go with us.

Shortly after the 2004 publication of the Top Priorities Document, Dr. Becky Allison joined the Eliminating Disparities Committee. During one phone call she volunteered at her own considerable personal expense to join the American Medical Association (AMA) and work

within their existing structure to help them become more trans affirmative. She did that because the Eliminating Disparities Committee asked her to do so, to stand up and step out and she took that professional risk. Her membership and volunteer work within the AMA was directly instrumental to the passing of the AMA's historic resolutions #114, 115, and 122 on ending transgender health disparities in April 2008. Very shortly this led to her being the first transgender board member of GLMA and a few years later their President. In October 2008 she facilitated a meeting between AMA President, Dr. Nancy Nielsen, André Wilson, and Hawk Stone where we spent an invigorating forty minutes advocating for transgender health care.

The OTBO Collective's most enduring sadness is that our book never came to be, and never came to be given to this transgender community. In the ensuing years, all of us have gone on to do fabulous things in the service of transgender health and our trans community. Our most enduring joy is that by banging on doors, pushing and pulling endlessly everywhere we could to find any opening, and by building relationships, we set in motion an entire movement. We gave the transgender health care movement the shove and momentum it needed to blossom. Not bad at all for a "failed" Collective!

May our story exemplify this quote from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

This volume, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, is the next generation of our work--the blossom of the seeds we cast. Maybe it is just what we need to empower Our Many Selves forward into an increasingly welcoming and healthy world for all trans people.

*Yoseño V. Lewis, Black/Latino FTM and long-term social justice activist and artist, and Rev. Moonhawk River Stone. MS, LMHC.*

## CONTEMPORARY TRANSGENDER ACTIVISM AND VISIBILITY

While federal legislation banning discrimination based on gender identity and expression has been stalled in Congress, activists and allies have made significant progress on state and local levels. Prior to 2000, only Minnesota had passed a nondiscrimination law that included gender identity/expression; by 2013, seventeen states and the District of Columbia had done so. Similarly, the number of cities and counties with transgender rights ordinances has grown from three in the 1980s to more than 150 in 2012, so that more than forty-five percent of the US population is now covered by a transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination law (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2012, 2013). More than 720 college and university campuses have added "gender identity/expression" to their nondiscrimination policies in the last seventeen years, and many have begun to implement other transgender-supportive policies, such as providing gender-inclusive housing, bathrooms, and locker rooms; covering transgender-related counseling, hormone therapy, and gender-affirming surgeries under student health insurance; and enabling transitioning students to change their name and gender on campus records and documents without having legally done so (Beemyn, 2013).

This tremendous increase in transgender rights laws and policies reflects the successful advocacy of many national transgender organizations, including the National Center for Transgender Equality, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and the Transgender Law Center. In addition, a number of national LGBT organizations have extensively worked on transgender issues, including the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Lambda Legal, the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, and Campus Pride. These and other groups have called attention to the widespread mistreatment of transgender people and have sought to change public perception and the political and legal climate.

One visible response to anti-transgender violence and discrimination is the Transgender Day of Remembrance, an event held every November 20th to memorialize those who have been killed in the past year because of their gender identity or expression. Begun as a



candlelight vigil in San Francisco in 1999 to honor Rita Hester, an African American woman murdered in Allston, Massachusetts, the Day of Remembrance is marked today in hundreds of cities around the world by high school, college, and community transgender and LGBT groups. The 2013 event memorialized 238 individuals known to have been murdered in 26 countries, almost all of whom, as in previous years, were poor transsexual women of color (Trans Respect Versus Transphobia Worldwide, 2013).

The pervasiveness of hostility against transgender people was substantiated by *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, the largest study to date of transgender and gender nonconforming people in the United States. Among the horrifying findings of the report, 63% of the respondents “had experienced a serious act of discrimination” and “41% reported attempting suicide, compared to 1.6% of the general population, with rates rising for those who lost a job due to bias (55%), were harassed/bullied in school (51%), had low household income, or were the victim of physical assault (61%) or sexual assault (64%),” (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2010: 2).

The participants who were people of color, especially poor Latina and Black transsexual women, generally experienced the highest rates of discrimination because of the combined effects of racism, classism, sexism, and genderism. But despite the prevalence of harassment and violence against Black and Latina transgender people, the predominantly White transgender movement has largely failed to address issues of race and the critical concerns of many transgender people of color, such as poverty, unemployment, police brutality, the criminal (in)justice system, and disparities in healthcare access.

*“Conversations about race, ethnicity, and their social connotations are rarely had in the LGBTQ, etc. community...”* (Trans Bodies, Trans Selves online survey, 2013).

*“Mainstream queer activism is so white-centric these days... I can be in a room full of beautiful white trans people, but still feel like my cultural background and skin color make me sort of invisible.”* (Trans Bodies, Trans Selves online survey, 2013).

In recent years, activism has greatly increased among transgender people of all races, including among individuals who are choosing to be out after they transition. Challenging the traditional medical paradigm that we “disappear” into society following surgery and not associate with other trans individuals, “growing numbers of transsexual people are refusing to conceal their personal histories or to consider transsexualism a shameful secret that should be hidden at all costs,” states leading transgender rights attorney Shannon Minter (2006: 153). This visibility has contributed to the tremendous growth of the transgender movement and has resulted in more frequent coverage by the mainstream media—beyond the news stories of murders and the sensationalizing of tabloid talk shows. The last decade has also witnessed a boom in transsexual autobiographies, with more than a dozen published by major presses, including Jennifer Finney Boylan’s *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) and *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* (2013), Jamison Green’s *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004), Matt Kailey’s *Just Add Hormones: An Insider’s Guide to the Transsexual Experience* (2005), Nick Krieger’s *Nina Here Nor There: My Journey Beyond Gender* (2011), and Joy Ladin’s *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders* (2012).

In addition to rejecting the expectation that we identify strictly as women or men, many transsexual individuals today are also dismissing the idea of a gender binary. The research of cultural anthropologist Anne Bolin demonstrates this change. In studying a Midwestern trans female transgender support group in the early 1980s, Bolin (1988) found that newcomers were expected to announce whether they were crossdressers or transsexuals and to adhere strictly to the social script for that identity. If potential members

were not entirely certain about wanting gender-affirming surgery, they were automatically considered to be crossdressers by the transsexual participants because, in their minds, a transsexual person would aspire to transition to the fullest extent possible. When Bolin (1994, 1997) revisited the group about a decade later, she discovered that the transsexual members no longer drew such a sharp dichotomy, and the group was inclusive of individuals who were not pursuing surgery.

#### **Genderqueer: "C. None of the Above"**

"Are you a boy or a girl?" This is a sincere question i get sometimes when i leave home, and it comes both from people i know and from people i don't - but those people are always children or young teens. It's not that adults don't wonder, too; they've just learned that such questions are inappropriate in Western culture. And the answer is "i'm neither." i was labeled female at birth, but that gender assignment hardly determines how any of us experiences ourselves.

The term "genderqueer" first appeared in the mid-late 1990s and describes a wide range of identities: there are probably as many definitions of "genderqueer" as there are genderqueers. If there is any commonality among us, it is that we reject the "binary sex/gender system" – the assumptions that there are only two sexes and genders; that male genitals mean one must be a man and masculine, while female genitals mean that one must be a woman and feminine; and that neither gender nor sex is changeable.

Some genderqueers see themselves as a combination of feminine and masculine. Others (like me) see themselves as neither masculine nor feminine, and still others define their identities in completely different ways. Some genderqueers consider themselves both trans and genderqueer, and others (including me) see themselves as genderqueer but not trans. Nevertheless, we are all increasingly considered a part of the larger trans community.

In 2010, there were approximately 6.9 billion people on Earth. We are incredibly diverse in many ways, like height and eye and hair color. And there are other, more politicized ways that we differ, such as race, sexual orientation, body shape, and physical and mental ability. In none of those realms do we expect either/ors. Why should gender be any less diverse?

As to why those of us who are genderqueer identify as outside the binary, there are probably also as many reasons for that as there are genderqueers. For me, it was a combination of factors, including my increasingly androgynous gender expression, a growing exposure to the trans community, my intellectual and political development, and rethinking my own gender socialization (how i was taught to be a girl). Identifying personally as genderqueer makes sense to me in a way that is hard to articulate.

How do i live as neither a man nor a woman? That is probably the most challenging aspect of being genderqueer in a world that insists we be either/or. But that difficulty isn't within me; it comes from interacting with other people or with the larger systems that shape our society, like the government and schools.

I'm fortunate to be surrounded by friends and coworkers who are, for the most part, politically progressive. They have a lot of practice questioning many of our culture's assumptions. My life partner is pansexual, so being with a genderqueer is easy for her. My parents had a harder time with my identity. And while my father has since died, my mother supports and loves me unconditionally, even though she still doesn't fully understand. Other genderqueers are not so lucky and face the harassment, discrimination, abuse, and assault that many trans folks experience from their families, friends, coworkers, and other community members.

Dealing with institutions is another matter entirely. Everywhere we are faced with "M" and "F" choices. If possible, i will add a "Genderqueer" option on forms. Other times, however, i cannot put in my own box. In those instances, if i must select either "M" or "F," i have to choose between not completing the questionnaire or marking "F," my assigned sex. With sex-segregated bathrooms, i use the women's room because i don't fear physical or sexual assault there – although that is hardly a comfortable place, since, in choosing, i must still shoehorn myself into a gender binary and sometimes find myself stared at. It would be so much easier if forms added categories such as "Other," "Trans," and "Gender Nonconforming," and if there were single-occupancy bathrooms available.

Genderqueers will continue to be at the forefront of the gender rights movement. We are educating both LGBTQ and straight folks about non-binary genders, joining our trans sisters and brothers in the fight for trans rights, advocating for the celebration of gender diversity, and encouraging discussions about how the binary sex/gender system limits the lives of both trans individuals and cissexual people.

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Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) study likewise found that a growing number of transsexual people are separating gender identity from the desire to change one's body and are rejecting the idea that genitalia should be a signifier of gender. Historically, few transmasculine-spectrum individuals have sought bottom surgery because of the tremendous cost, the typically poor functional and aesthetic results, and the belief that they do not need a penis to be men. In the last two decades, many transfeminine-spectrum individuals have also been opting not to have surgery because they too do not feel that they have to undergo medical procedures in order to feel complete. Many of the study's transfeminine interviewees indicated that they did not consider themselves less "real" or less "whole" because of being different from other women (137).

A number of factors have contributed to the expansion of what it means to be trans today. Bolin (1994, 1997) suggests three sociocultural influences: the greater access to a broad range of more client-centered and LGBTQ-sensitive transition-related healthcare options with the closing of the restrictive university-affiliated gender identity clinics, the rise of the transgender rights movement, and the increasing acceptance of a nonsurgical transsexual identity as a permanent state of being. The Internet has also played a critical role by enabling people to try out different gender possibilities anonymously and to connect with individuals who identify and express their gender in myriad ways (Denny, 1997; Shapiro, 2010).

As a result of these developments, a multiplicity of transgender identities—besides the traditional categories of transsexual, crossdresser, and drag queen and king—have emerged in the early twenty-first century (Boswell, 1998). In the Beemyn and Rankin (2011) study, survey respondents provided more than a hundred different descriptions of their gender identity, including "fluid," "gender neutral," "feminine in every way except physical," "two-spirit," "somewhere between transsexual and cross-dresser," "orange (not man or woman or on 'spectrum')," "FTM TG stone butch drag king," and "no easy definition, some other kind of man." Lacking adequate words to describe themselves, some participants gave percentages (e.g., "49 percent masculine, 51 percent feminine" and "male 85 percent, cross-dresser 15 percent") or simply said that there was no language yet available that captured who they were—they were just themselves (165-66).

#### **Posthuman Bodies, Posthuman Selves**

*"We know what we are, but know not what we may become."*

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene 5

Human identity has been intertwined with technology since the harnessing of fire. The applied science of transportation has changed how we move about, electricity has restructured our daily routines, food production has altered our diets, education has enhanced our cognitive abilities, and medicine has prolonged our lives. Yet for most trans and gender nonconforming individuals the association is still more explicit; hormones and surgeries transform our bodies while telecommunications and psychotherapy enable us to engage in dialogue that helps fashion our selves. And this relationship will propel us into our futures.

The historical narrative of trans identity – "born in the wrong body" – was a narrative of brokenness and victimization. Whether the mismatch was attributed to biology, genetics, or a

deity, such language positioned us as powerless, laboring to rectify a fault outside our control. It reinforced binaries in which “men” were to appear “masculine” and be intimate with “women,” while “women” were to appear “feminine” and be intimate with “men.” Trans people were understood to have been mistakenly placed in the incorrect category.

Believing they were “meant to be the other” and drawing on Karl Ulrichs’ 1860 idea of being “a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body” (in Kennedy, 1988), early trans people adopted these narratives, and related them to providers who codified such notions into diagnoses and treatments; the stories were repeated to others who reiterated them once more, reinforcing the narratives yet again. Transition was understood as a means to remedy dysfunction, but this process restricted achievable identities to only those that fit within binary social norms. To access services, no other narratives were acceptable.

We are witnessing the breakdown of this framework. Many consider themselves androgynous, two-spirited, bigendered, genderqueer, genderfluid, or otherwise nonconforming, dissatisfied with that dated narrative. Also increasingly common is the ability to transition in ways unrestricted by “male/female” dichotomies. With the emergence of client-centered treatment models like Informed Consent, people can undergo any of a range of interventions and design for themselves bodies that may or may not be easily labeled. All these represent innovative attempts to craft identity and to destabilize entrenched cultural constructions, and are wonderful expansions of possibility.

Perhaps we can reinterpret trans identity as a call to explore through gender. Instead of insisting we *must* be one gender because we *cannot* be the opposite, or that we must be any particular gender because it most accurately represents an inner “true self,” perhaps we can engage in open-ended investigation, without judgment or predetermined conclusion, fashioning our genders in empowered choice and artistic self-creation. We need no longer justify our changes by victimization and we need not feel compelled to align our bodies and selves with preexisting norms. We can approach gender as an arena to examine questions of meaning within the human experience.

And the deterioration of existing gender categories will only accelerate.

As technology further impacts the body, gender will likely be less associated with “male/female” binaries or even a spectrum. Prosthetics are already available for individuals branded “disabled,” for athletics, or for sexuality, in forms both naturalistic and unorthodox, unions of mechanization and living tissue becoming sensate, restoring or enhancing an individual’s abilities. Surgery and genetic modification will not solely repair biological structures but also invent new ones. We will be liberated from the “two arms-two legs-genitals-torso-head” outline we have at present.

Simultaneously, advancements in cybernetics and virtual reality will enable us to exist in online worlds via direct linkages to the brain. Initially these arenas will be simplistic representations of external reality in which we can act as ourselves or as alternate personae, but these immersive environments will not be bound by material laws such as gravity or three-dimensional reality and the embodiments we assume will be rapidly more abstract. Within such universes we may exist as pure intelligences, occupying nonfigurative bodies as desired for any given moment. Today’s chatrooms and cartoonish avatars will be passé.

Ultimately on both the terrestrial and virtual planes there will be an abandonment of traditional gender expression and the breakdown of gender dimorphism. Genitalia and self will no longer be based on “penis/vagina,” “masculine/feminine” ideals, and transition will not be a shift from one gender to another but from the original human figure to something entirely novel. There will be a countless array of human manifestations; people will be multi-limbed with alternate sensory organs, numerous and interchangeable genitalia, genders that are context dependent and ever varying. Our identities will be unlike anything currently conceivable. Gender itself may become infinite.

Hopefully, progress will not be limited to the privileged few.

Trans and gender nonconforming people, those of us who perceive our transitions as imaginative constructions of body, identity, and relationship to society, can be at the forefront of this revolution. We can be among the first to evolve toward the posthuman.

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Many gender nonconforming individuals use the umbrella term “genderqueer,” characterizing themselves as neither female nor male, as both, or as somewhere in between. Genderqueer individuals vary widely in how they describe and express their identities, with some rejecting the label “transgender” because they consider it to be applicable only to people who have transitioned or are moving from one predefined and culturally normative gender to another. Despite these differences, genderqueer individuals commonly understand themselves in ways that challenge social constructions of gender and the traditional image of a gender nonconforming person as someone who is transsexual or a crossdresser.

Another way genderqueer individuals are confronting binary gender constructions is through rejecting traditional gendered language. Many want to be identified by gender-inclusive pronouns—typically “ze” or “sie” instead of “he”/“she” and “zir” or “hir” instead of “her”/“him,” or “they” and “them” used as singular pronouns. Others seek to dispense with pronouns altogether, preferring to be called only by their first names. A number of genderqueer people also adopt an androgynous first name, combine traditionally male and female names, or assume a name more typical for someone of a gender different from the gender assigned to them at birth (Beemyn, 2008).

As the number of individuals who come out as trans or gender nonconforming in various ways continues to grow, it is likely that the crossing and blurring of gender lines will become even more common and accepted. The increasing visibility is also likely to lead to much greater support for transgender rights, as many cisgender people will find that individuals they care about—friends, co-workers, and family members—are trans or gender nonconforming. In the last two decades, transgender activists and allies in the US have succeeded in advocating for transgender-supportive laws and policies in a growing number of states, municipalities, schools, and corporations; the years ahead should see even more progress made toward the recognition and full inclusion of people of all genders.

## CONCLUSION

We know less than we would like to about transgender history in the United States, especially about non-binary genders in many Native American cultures before and following European conquest, the lives of gender nonconforming individuals in other communities of color, and the experiences of all people who transgressed gender norms prior to the twentieth century. We do know that gender nonconforming individuals have been documented in communities and cultures in what would become the United States since the sixteenth century. The efforts of transgender people over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first to achieve visibility and justice are adding rich, vibrant chapters to this history.

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