

# THE T IN LGBT

The Creation and Evolution of the Movement for  
Transgender Rights (1960 - 1980)

Master's Thesis

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# Introduction

Over the past few years, the term ‘transgender’ has become increasingly mainstream, and issues affecting transgender people have frequently made headlines. Whether it be the North Carolina bathroom law, which forced transgender people to use the bathroom corresponding to the sex they were assigned at birth and not that of their gender identity<sup>1</sup> Olympic medalist Caitlyn Jenner going through a very public transition, which has been greatly criticized in the transgender community for not representing the struggle most transgender people face,<sup>2</sup> and most recently the ban on transgender people to serve in the military, which the Trump administration claims to have introduced to contain the medical costs transgender people claim.<sup>3</sup> The term ‘transgender’ is considered to be controversial in many conservative political communities and transgenderism is actively repressed in many communities to this day. Nevertheless, transgender people have managed to find a public voice, and have created many online public fora through which they can have their opinions heard, and their issues discussed as well as put on the public agenda.

With these recent and public developments, the history of people who, as Leslie Feinberg described, ‘transverse, bridge, or blur the boundary of the gender expression they were assigned at birth’,<sup>4</sup> has started to become more appreciated by the LGBT community. Current transgender activists tell that transgender people have been at the center of the gay rights movement since the 1950s. As arguably the most successful drag queen in the entertainment industry, and host of popular television show 'RuPaul's Drag Race', RuPaul Charles has said: “For generations drag queens have been on the front lines fighting for our LGBT rights”.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the history of the transgender community is often equated to the greater

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Fausset, ‘North Carolina Strikes a Deal to Repeal Restrictive Bathroom Law’, *The New York Times*. (March 29, 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/29/us/north-carolina-lawmakers-reach-deal-to-repeal-so-called-bathroom-bill.html> Last accessed 05/09/2017

<sup>2</sup> Daniel E. Slotnik, ‘Bruce Jenner Says He’s Transitioning to a Woman’, *The New York Times*. (April 25, 2015) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/25/business/media/bruce-jenner-says-he-identifies-as-a-woman.html> Last accessed 05/09/2017

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Mason, For Reuters. ‘Trump Signs Memo Directing Pentagon to Implement Transgender Ban’ *The New York Times*. (August 25, 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2017/08/25/us/25reuters-usa-trump-transgender.html> Last accessed 05/09/2017

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, x

<sup>5</sup> RuPaul Charles, Season 10 Episode 5 “The Bossy Rossy Show”, *Rupaul’s Drag Race*, 00:05:18

scope of the development of the LGBT movement. However, people often do not realize that the T has only been added to LGBT since 2001.<sup>6</sup> Since homosexual and transgender people were positioned in the margin of society, the homosexual community and transgender community often stood for the same kinds of freedom and rights. Still, the homosexual community began to separate from the transgender community in the 1970s because transgender ideals were deemed too radical and did not overlap with the homosexual ideals of freedom within heteronormative society. This move towards acceptance by the heteronormative society initiated a change and both communities began to shift in values. Only after the AIDS crisis hit both communities particularly hard did the shift towards a collective LGBT community return. Despite the unity in the present, there are still multiple instances where the homosexual community rejects or shows insensitivity to transgender issues.

This thesis will consider the question of sectionality within the early LGBT movement of the 60s and 70s, specifically between the trans rights movement, the homosexual rights and the lesbian feminist movements. It will gauge how this division in interests influenced the development of the transgender community. Sectionality relates to the separation of a greater whole into various sections, focussing specifically on one of these sections. It is often used to describe loyalty to a nation or region, but sectional feelings can also be based on gender, race, politics or any other personal specification. Sectionality separates various experiences into multiple homogenized forms. Sectionality's antonym is intersectionality, which brings together various social categorizations into one entity. This entity could be a person, an experience or a movement.<sup>7</sup> For instance, there is a shared experience for homosexual men and women, Caucasian and of color, as well as for transgender people, who are born into 'straight society' but due to their specific disposition never fully fit in. These people therefore created their own communities in which they could thrive and be themselves. However, when some members of these communities began to thrive in their activism, specifically white homosexual men, the sense of community they shared with transgender people and homosexual women began to wear off, since they did not share the same agenda, nor had the same experiences of being discriminated against based on gender

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<sup>6</sup> Jessi Gan, "'Still at the back of the bus': Sylvia Rivera's Struggle.", *Centro Journal* 19, no.1 (2007), 127

<sup>7</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics.", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (2006), 194

identity or race. To consider the difference between these movements I will consider organizations (e.g., the Gay Activist Alliance and STAR house), specific historical events (e.g., the Compton riots and the Stonewall riots) and key people (e.g., Sylvia Rivera) to gauge how they were considered and reinterpreted by various sides of the movement, as well as external movements which were active at the time.

During the 1960s and 1970s different interest groups managed to claim legitimacy and incite cultural change in the United States. The civil rights movement managed breakthrough change during the 1960s, demanding equal rights for men and women across all races. The second wave of feminism and the anti-war movement sprung up in the early 1960s and shared the desire for liberalism and change of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority culture. The trans movement and the homosexual rights movements stood at the center of many of these activist endeavors and was influenced by various tactics used by other organizations. As Stryker notes in *Transgender History*: “It would be a mistake to think that the African American civil rights struggle simply influenced early gay and transgender activism, for to do so would be to assume that all the gay and transgender people involved were white”.<sup>8</sup> Stryker made this statement in relation to a specific sit-in which happened in Philadelphia in 1965, but the point is applicable to transgender activism as a whole. Transgender people in this period were attributed a myriad of identities, either misgendered as male or female and therefore presenting as female or male. Many were people of color and frequently of lower economic status.<sup>9</sup> The transgender movement was thus fighting for many of the same goals as other social activist organizations during a time when the social climate in the United States was open to cultural change.

There was much overlap between the gay rights movement and the trans movement in the 1960s. However, as the gay rights movement progressed, its misogynist nature began to alienate the trans activists who were involved in these organizations. This specifically happened in 1973 when homosexuality was removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. This event solidified the break between the homosexual community and the transgender community, and transgender people were seen as ‘non-liberated’ by many homosexual rights activists.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in the feminist

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, Berkley: Seal Press, 2008, 63

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 66

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 95

movement, transgender women were rejected, which solidified in 1979 after the publication of Janice G. Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-Male*. Feminists perceived transgender men to be escaping the female position in society and accused transgender women of 'mimicking' women and femininity.<sup>11</sup> This disqualification of transgender issues by other sex and gender related movements made it all the more difficult for the transgender movement to gain traction in mainstream culture and change the way heteronormative culture would look at the difference between being a man or a woman, male or female. I have chosen not to move my research into the 1980s because the discourse in the 80s was vastly different from the preceding decades due to the AIDS crisis. Though I do want to argue that the AIDS crisis brought the homosexual community and the transgender community back together in order to fight for a cure, this is outside the scope of this thesis.

A key aspect which made it more difficult for the trans rights movement to garner legitimacy was the interpretation made of transgender people by medical and psychological science. Homosexual, lesbian and transgender people were all deemed mentally ill until well into the 1960s and transgenderism specifically was seen as a 'personal deviation from social norms'.<sup>12</sup> It was the goal of the gay rights movement as well as of the transgender rights movement to change this characterization. However, the added challenge which the transgender movement faced was the need to gain autonomy over one's own body.<sup>13</sup> Whereas gay men and lesbian women were looking for the freedom to love without the scrutiny of heteronormative society, transgender people also fought for the freedom to have their body match their gender identity in any way they felt comfortable.

The largest hurdle transgender rights activists faced was the scrutiny of heteronormative society which constrained transgender people from living normal lives without the necessity to objectify themselves or their bodies in order to survive. Whereas homosexual men and women were able to hide their sexual orientation relatively easily, and were therefore able to evade a great deal of scrutiny, it was much more difficult for transgender people to hide their disposition and they were therefore forced by

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 1, Ibid, 105

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 97

mainstream society into specific lines of work, such as the entertainment industry or prostitution.<sup>14</sup> This subsequently caused many other issues, such as drug addiction and diseases, which transgender people fell disproportionately victim to, even compared to gay and lesbian people. This made it much more difficult for transgender people to rise up from their predicaments, and manifest themselves in society as a specific interest group which deserved proper recognition. I will argue that, because of the sectionalism of the homosexual rights, and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the transgender rights movement was alienated from meaningful cooperation or development and therefore was overshadowed by the homosexual movement in the historical narrative of the LGBT movement, despite the fact that transgender activists played a decisive role at key moments in the struggle for homosexual rights.

While doing research on the topic of transgender history I started where I assumed the beginning of the LGBT movement was: the Stonewall riots of 1969. As I began my research I soon discovered that the several specific factions in the LGBT movement had existed in their own right long before the Stonewall riots, and that the role transgender people had played during these riots had either been mythologized or written out of the story altogether. I soon came to the realization that the Stonewall riots were almost completely claimed by the gay rights movement, and by historians who only focused on Stonewall from the perspective of the development of gay liberation. Books and articles on the Stonewall riots and the subsequent gay liberation movement, such as *Stonewall* (2004) by David Carter and *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation* (1971) by Dennis Altman are very informative and create a solid base for further research. However, transgender people and the role they played in the movement were rarely a focus of the story, but rather a side-note.

No research considering the transgender experience can be done without the work by Judith Butler. In her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler redefined the relationship between sex and gender and through this, set a new precedent for the definition of both. Her theory on gender performance has served as a clarification for myself in writing this thesis about how gender operates. Butler was the person who first theorized the performative nature of gender. According to her, gender is not 'natural' but

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<sup>14</sup> *Screaming Queens: The Riots at Compton's Cafeteria*, Directed by Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker, San Francisco, CA: Frameline, 2005, 0:15:55

always a matter of performance and cultural conditioning. If a person does not conform to gender norms, they are illegible and therefore often not allowed to exist (e.g., not allowed to use public bathrooms that fit their gender identity, not able to obtain an ID that correctly reflects their gender). The transgender activists in my thesis lived this gender non-conforming life, and without being able to articulate it in terms legible for majoritarian society, were the embodiments of this theory before it was created by Butler.

Being a cis-gendered straight woman myself, I am very aware of my position in conducting this research and I realize there are more sensitivities I need to take into account with every definition and description that I use to write about people who lived and fought 40-50 years ago. These people did not have the luxury of the highly nuanced language we have today. In order to get more advice on the issue I decided to turn to online media, which as I stated before, have provided many important platforms for transgender people to share their experiences and air their grievances on the treatment they face from the mainstream heteronormative cis-gendered world.

I placed a note on the public forum Reddit asking advice from transgender people on the sub-Reddit ‘Ask a Transgender’. I asked if anyone had any advice on the topic of transgender history which I could use for my thesis. For full disclosure I described myself as a Dutch cis-gender female and described the topic of my thesis. I never expected that the tone of the replies I got would be so blaming and denouncing. People explicitly refused to help me, saying they did not want to do ‘your work for you’ and stating that it was a sad reality that a ‘cis-gender female would need to research us’. These comments shook me to my core; when I posted in the sub-Reddit, specifically because of the name, I expected it to be a forum for discussion and an exchange of experiences and ideas. Instead, I was met with hostility and accused of exploiting the transgender community for my own gain, since I would get something out of writing a thesis on this topic. Despite some helpful comments, I decided to reply once more to clarify my intention and then ignore the thread and leave it to disappear. It further proved to me how sensitive the division between the transgender world and the heteronormative cis-gender world still is and how transgender people still perpetually feel discriminated against. It made me question whether or not I should take this topic on and if they were right to say that a cis-gender female was not the person to voice the narrative of the transgender people in the trans rights movement.



However, as my research further developed, I realized that this was not what my thesis would be about. I am not writing about the path of the transgender movement from my own experience, or with the authority of lived memory, but rather about the resistance of the other movements against the agenda of the transgender movement, and how this resistance influenced the transgender movement. Furthermore, it made me all the more aware of the important role transgender voices needed to play in my thesis, and there were some great scholarly studies I was able to use. Susan Stryker, for one, has written one of the most comprehensive books on modern transgender history and highlighted the Compton Riots, which had been forgotten by LGBT historians, through her documentary *Screaming Queens* (2005). Another important voice for the transgender experience is the late Leslie Feinberg, who has written many books on hir<sup>15</sup> own experience as a non-binary transgender person and collected the stories of other people from the same spectrum of gender non-conformity as well.

Highlighting these stories and these voices is what shapes my thesis and creates the transgender narrative against which I will place the treatment of the other movements of the time. As for the question of my cis-gender voice, I would want to say that the story of transgender history is part of human history. I do not mean this in the same way that people say ‘All Lives Matter’ in a reply to ‘Black Lives Matter’, where they try to equalize the social struggle of African American people to any white person’s struggle and therefore dismiss it, but to the contrary that I am a cis-gender person who is trying to highlight the narrative of transgender history as a story that is important to tell.

Before talking about people identifiable within the transgender spectrum there are some definitions which are relevant to go through first. In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker spends most of the first chapter defining several terms important to the transgender community and the way people within the community define themselves. When the term ‘sex’ is used, it is meant to determine a person’s biological state, to put it crudely: what is between a person’s legs. To define a person’s sex, the terms male and female are used. If any of the biological determinations of a person’s singular sex do not fall within the

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<sup>15</sup> I have decided to use the gender-neutral ze/hir pronouns in this instance following Leslie Feinberg’s own definition. Feinberg has stated that ze believes pronouns should be used within context. In a non-trans setting ze prefers the feminine she/her pronouns, and in a trans setting ze prefers the he/him pronouns. When no assumptions should be made about Feinberg’s gender/sex/sexuality, the gender-neutral pronouns are best applicable. [https://web.archive.org/web/20141123060911/http://www.campkc.com/campkc-content.php?Page\\_ID=225](https://web.archive.org/web/20141123060911/http://www.campkc.com/campkc-content.php?Page_ID=225)

medically predetermined norms the relevant category becomes ‘intersex’. Though there are some overlapping matters between transgenderism and intersex, most intersex issues deal with the focus on ‘normalization’ of sex through surgical or other medical means.<sup>16</sup> When I talk about gender I mean the cultural categorization placed upon a person by society, which defines how a person is expected to act. Gender as a cultural expression or definition is something that becomes internalized through a complex process of socialization. The sex of somebody’s body does not bear any necessary or deterministic relationship to the gender in which that body lives.<sup>17</sup> This specification is the key to understanding as well as accepting what transgenderism is and how society may learn to accept it. Though it may seem that gender definitions are binary and set in stone, throughout history and throughout various cultures, the spectrum of gender has been more fluid and will continue to be more fluid in the future.

If we define genitalia as primary sex characteristics, then a person’s secondary sex characteristics would be the signs which a person produces to show their defined sex to others, through clothing, hair, make-up or a lack thereof. Breasts are also included in secondary sex characteristics since they are not a medical necessity for a person to present as a man or a woman. These signs are largely manipulations of ourselves and are virtually always scrutinized by other society members and fall within a spectrum of moral or ethical judgment.<sup>18</sup> Two terms which are often mixed up are transsexual and transgender. Transsexual specifically defines people who wish to live as full-time members of a gender not assigned to them as birth.<sup>19</sup> Transgender explains any and all kinds of variation from gender norms; transgender therefore encapsulates all different forms of gender variation, whether it be cross-dressing, which is done by people who dress as a different gender from time to time, but do not live their lives as another gender full-time, non-binary, who define themselves as neither man nor woman or transsexual.<sup>20</sup> Due to the lack of self-definition on the part of the people which this thesis will research, I will stick to the all-encompassing transgender, unless another definition is more appropriate. For further definitions regarding

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<sup>16</sup> Stryker, 8

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 19

transgender terms and issues, the National Center for Trans Equality has made up a list of terms commonly associated with transgenderism and which provides clarification of what would and would not be part of the broad spectrum that is transgenderism.<sup>21</sup>

The chapters of this thesis are organized chronologically and every chapter considers one specific topic. In the first chapter I will look at the early evolution of the homosexual and transgender rights activism. I will provide a brief history on the existence of the transgender phenomenon and the start of the struggle for acceptance. I will then look at some specific historical events that occurred throughout the United States which became the start of the transgender rights as well as the homosexual rights movements.

In chapter two I will look at the movements that came forward from the activism discussed in the first chapter. I will analyze the strategy of these movements and show how they related to their members. I will also show in this chapter that due to the difference in life experiences between (white) homosexual men and transgender people, the homosexual rights movement and the transgender rights movements each went their own way.

In chapter three I will look more closely at the medical and legal predicates placed on transgender and homosexual people and analyze the implications for their lives. Furthermore I will study the change in relationship between the homosexual rights movement and the transgender movement after homosexuality was removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

In the final chapter I will look further at the separation between the transgender rights movement and other civil rights movements at the time, in particular the feminist movement, which rejected transgender women and alienated them from their fight for equality. Over all, this thesis will analyze how in the course of the 1960s and 1970s the transgender rights movement came into existence and found its feet, initially together with, and later in contrast to other movements that fought for sexual freedom and gender equality.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology> last accessed: 7/7/2017

# Chapter 1: Out of the closet, into the light: the rise of a movement

Before focusing on the movements for gay and transgender rights in the 1960s and 1970s I want to take a step further back in history to say something about the history of transgender issues and existence. Just as gay rights history did not start during the Stonewall riots on the night of the 28th of June 1969 but far earlier, so too was the concept of transgenderism not discovered in July 1966 with the publication of *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. In this chapter I want to introduce the key historic moments which have influenced the transgender rights movement, but which have largely been forgotten by the homosexual historical narrative. Because the discourse of homosexual rights activists had largely claimed the Stonewall riots, the prior activism of the transgender community was eclipsed and subsequently forgotten by the current transgender community.

Throughout world history many cultures have acknowledged the existence of a third sex or people who transcend the gender binary. In North America, many Native American cultures recognized a group of people as being ‘Two-Spirit’, people who bridged the gap between male and female and were held in high regard by their communities. Even in the Native American communities which still exist today, Two-Spirit people are recognized, though their treatment has changed a lot due to the influence of foreign cultures on Native American culture. In fact Two-Spirit people were poorly documented in historical writing and often used to ‘justify’ genocide, theft of land and resources, and destruction of Native American Culture and Religion.<sup>1</sup>

According to Leslie Feinberg in *Transgender Warriors*, the transformation from a matrilineal society, which practiced collective living and was accepting of a diverse society, towards a patriarchal society, where masculinity was celebrated and an elite minority ruled over the laboring majority, caused the separation and alienation of feminine and gender non-conforming practices and people. Feinberg does not describe one specific society to which this narrative is applicable, but rather describes various societies to which some or all signs of this transformation are applicable, from the writing of

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<sup>1</sup> Feinberg, 22

Deuteronomy in the 8th century BC to the influence of Christian culture onto Celtic and Nordic cultures during the Middle Ages. Though the history of this transformation could be the topic of a whole separate research project, according to Feinberg the cause of this switch has to do with the movement from a collectivist society towards a society where a minority held the majority of the wealth, and this wealth could be inherited through the patrilineal line. In order to keep this majority from rising up, a form of alienation was implemented by the ruling class which Feinberg describes as ‘divide and conquer’,<sup>2</sup> to create a sense of supremacy among one part of the population which can be used to alienate the other part of the population, and therefore retain the majority. The first document from which this alienation is prevalent is Deuteronomy; however, Judaism is hardly the only doctrine which has implemented rules against cross-dressing, non-heterosexual acts and femininity, the same tenets were also implemented in Greek antiquity, Ancient Rome, and during the Middle Ages when Christianity became the dominant religion in Europe.<sup>3</sup> But still, despite all these rules and regulations, throughout history there were people who defied the status quo. Cross-dressing or being cross-gendered, which would mean not only to dress as the opposite sex but also take up the persona of the opposite sex, subsequently became a sign of defiance and protest even to this day. In the terms of Butler’s understanding of gender performativity, the very act of crossdressing offends the gender binary which makes bodies legible. When people crossdress they make their bodies illegible to the dominant order, or at least non-conforming, and therefore challenge the status quo.

The definition of transgender as we know it today was developed in the early twentieth century by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician who researched and came up with the concept of ‘sexual intermediaries’, which is a term that was used at the time in a similar way the term transgender is used today. A sexual intermediary could be anyone who occupies the spectrum between male and female.<sup>4</sup> In 1910, he coined the term ‘transvestite’, and set up a research center in Berlin where he worked together with various other physicians, such as Dr. Harry Benjamin, who would become the leading medical

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 52

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 67

<sup>4</sup> Stryker, 38

authority in his field in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> However, his views and research were deemed too progressive and Adolf Hitler himself named Hirschfeld ‘The most dangerous man in Germany’; in 1933 his research center was destroyed by the nazis.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Benjamin took his research to the United States in the 1920s and eventually settled in San Francisco in 1949 after meeting Louise Lawrence and the transgender community which lived on the West Coast. Louise Lawrence had started an international correspondence network in the 1940s with people she met through newspaper ads as well as those whose arrests were reported on in the newspaper and she managed to get in touch with. She put these people in contact with the Langley Porter Psychiatric Clinic at the University of California in San Francisco where Dr. Benjamin and Dr. Karl Bowman conducted their research and where the first transgender treatment center in the United States was developed<sup>7</sup>.

Being part of the first US transgender movement, Lawrence was in touch with many other activists, such as Virginia Prince, who lived as a cross-dressing man until 1968, when she permanently began living as a woman. Prince started the newsletter *Transvestia* and subsequently a magazine of the same name. She also established the Hose and Heels club which transformed into the Foundation for Personality Expression (FPE). Prince believed cross-dressing allowed men to express their ‘full personality’.<sup>8</sup> In 1959, Prince was prosecuted for distributing obscenity through the mail when she got into a correspondence with another person who turned out to be a cross-dressing man who was under surveillance of the government. Their exchange was intercepted by the FBI and since it had been of a sexual nature it was subsequently used against her. She eventually pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and settled the case for five years of probation.<sup>9</sup>

When talking about American transgender history before the 1960s, one name that cannot be forgotten is the name of Christine Jorgensen, who was a former soldier in the US army during the Second

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>6</sup> Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, 28

<sup>7</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, 44

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 55

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 54

World War. In 1952, Jorgensen travelled to Copenhagen and underwent successful sexual reassignment surgery, which upon her return to the United States catapulted her into stardom. Christine never considered herself an activist, but she was aware of her position due to the positive reactions she got from people who looked up to her as a role model.<sup>10</sup> In *Transgender Warriors*, Leslie Feinberg recollects the first time ze became aware of the existence of Christine Jorgensen and how ze felt connected to her. Feinberg remembers how ze asked about Jorgensen to a baby-sitter who replied that Christine was not a man or a woman but a freak. This made Feinberg draw the equation that ze must be a freak as well, since people had been asking hir all hir life whether ze was a boy or a girl.<sup>11</sup> Jorgensen generated a lot of publicity with her transition and through this exposure caused a lot of questions on masculinity and femininity in American culture.<sup>12</sup>

The feeding ground for opposition to homosexuality and transgenderism in the United States is closely tied in with its religious heritage as well as underlying strands of white supremacy.<sup>13</sup> Foucault writes about the change of the discourse of sex in the eighteenth century for these same motives in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. According to him, countries began to realize how a large population would mean riches and power, and understood that this could only be generated by a certain awareness of how people would use their sex.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, this sense of growth and power generated a religious heritage in which homosexuality was considered a sin, while from a practical point of view, marriage and reproduction was a necessity to ensure the growth of the nation and the retention of the majority of the white race over native Americans, African Americans and Latin Americans.<sup>15</sup> It is important to look at all forms of oppression of race, gender and sexual identity individually, for each illuminates a specific social structure. In order for a majority to retain its supremacy, the oppression of the minority is crucial. In the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>11</sup> Feinberg, 7

<sup>12</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, 46

<sup>13</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3. no. 4 (1997), 453. Dennis Altman, *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, New York: Avon Books, 1971, 55

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, 1990, 25

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, 454

case of sexuality, the oppression of any form of ‘queer activity’ was meant to ensure the dominance of heteronormative culture. This supremacy is what Feinberg called the ‘divide and conquer’ approach, and has pushed homosexuals into what Dennis Altman calls the ‘gay world’, since people who identify as homosexual will try to get in touch with other homosexuals in order to find an accepting community that allows them to exist.<sup>16</sup> The same can be seen in the example of Louise Lawrence, who in the most difficult circumstances still managed to create a community of transgender individuals, even if those lived miles away from herself.

Modern LGBT communities have only been able to form since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the growth of industrial cities attracted the migration of working-class people from rural areas. Due to the tight-knit nature of rural communities, there was little freedom for people to explore any self identification or personal development beyond the ‘normal’. Only when these people were able to leave the intimate surveillance through religion and family were they able to freely explore different bonds with other people.<sup>17</sup> This theory only considers those who were willing to leave the familiarity of their childhood home for the luring liberty in the big city. There must certainly have been plenty of boys and girls with similar sexual feelings from various socio-economic backgrounds who were unwilling or unable to move for personal exploration and therefore remained to live a closeted heteronormative life. For men this exploration period came earlier than for women, since the demands of marriage, childcare and care of family kept women constrained until well into the twentieth century. Only when women were able to become independent wage earners did they gain the freedom to move into urban areas.<sup>18</sup> For many homosexual and transgender youngsters as well as adults, moving into inclusive communities in the city, such as Greenwich Village in New York or the Castro in San Francisco, enabled them to surround themselves with like-minded individuals through which activism could ignite.

The first notable uprising by members of an LGBT community was in Los Angeles in May of 1959 at Cooper’s Donuts. This cafe was positioned between two gay bars and was therefore visited by many

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<sup>16</sup> Altman, 21

<sup>17</sup> Stryker, 33

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 34



homosexual and transgender patrons of mixed ethnicity. The police knew about this patronage, which they deemed 'unconventional' and therefore they began targeting the area, randomly asking people for identification and arresting them when their IDs did not match their secondary sex characteristics. On one night in May, the police visited Cooper's Donuts to round up people suspected of homosexuality or cross-dressing. They were met with resistance from various patrons in the cafe. The police were chased out by patrons throwing donuts at them and fighting them in the streets.<sup>19</sup>

Another riot that took place prior to Stonewall happened in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, which was famous for its homeless gay youth and female as well as trans prostitutes. The resident population mostly consisted of people who simply did not have the means to live in other places. They were often unable to rent apartments elsewhere due to gender discrimination by landlords or employers and were forced to live and work in resident hotels. In fact, the name 'Tenderloin' derived from the police corruption in the area. Since there were so many police pay-offs in the district, the officers were able to purchase a choice cut of meat for their families.<sup>20</sup> The police actively collected trans women in this area, directing them to the Tenderloin whenever they were picked up in another part of the city. Once in a while the Tenderloin was subject to a sweep of the criminal organizations, but soon after the usual inhabitants would return and the illegal practices would continue.

The police appeared to be especially harsh on the street queens, who were seen as bottom-of-the-barrel sex workers. Any cross-dressing individual was at risk of getting arrested on suspicion of solicitation when merely walking down the street. Apart from the earnings the police could claim by arresting known 'cross-dressers' and the pay-offs they could claim, another argument for the high surveillance of prostitutes in the Tenderloin was the placement of troops in San Francisco and other large American cities for deployment in the Vietnam war and their subsequent return.<sup>21</sup> It was feared that troops waiting to be deployed might catch and spread sexually transmitted diseases among the corps. For those troops coming back from the war, new neighborhoods had to be created by repurposing old and minority

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>20</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004, 106

<sup>21</sup> Stryker, 67

neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> This repurposing effectively pushed people who were not able to afford to move elsewhere into the Tenderloin, increasing the concentration of the low-income population in that district.

The riots in the Tenderloin district happened on a summer night in 1966, though the exact date is not known since the uprising was not reported by local news agencies. Compton's Cafeteria was a diner at the center of the Tenderloin. It had previously been managed by an older gay man who tolerated the queens that visited the diner despite ordering little.<sup>23</sup> However, when he passed away and management changed, this tolerance was replaced by hostility against the cross-dressing patrons.<sup>24</sup>

One summer night the police was called on a rowdy group of street queens who had ordered very little and hung around too long in the management's opinion. When the police arrived, one of the policemen thought he could end the situation abruptly by pulling away one of the queens from her table. Instead of giving in, the queen resisted and threw her coffee into the policeman's face. This escalated and caused a melee to erupt in which patrons who were supportive of the queens began throwing cups, plates and food at the police who were forced out of the diner and into the streets where the riot continued. The police called for backup, but the damage was already done, and throughout the night street queens fought police officers and hit police cars. On the assumption that the diner was completely packed that night it has been estimated that the number of people who participated in the riot numbered about 50 to 60 patrons, not including the police and passers-by who joined the situation after it moved into the street.<sup>25</sup>

Part of the reason why this riot has been forgotten is the lack of exposure it had in the press, but it was remembered within the community. Susan Stryker produced the documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riots at Compton's Cafeteria* in 2005 in which she highlighted the circumstances of life in the Tenderloin for its transgender inhabitants, the riots itself and the aftermath. In order to properly describe the situation at the time, Stryker managed to interview a number of eyewitnesses who were able to describe their own experiences.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 68

<sup>23</sup> Carter, 109

<sup>24</sup> Stryker, 64

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 65

The circumstances surrounding the Stonewall riots varied a lot from those during the Compton riots. First of all, Greenwich Village may have been the district of New York in which the highest concentration of LGBT people lived, but unlike the Tenderloin, this was not necessarily due to isolation of the community. Greenwich Village had been the most progressive part of New York City for over a century with a reluctance to conformity tracing back to 1817 when the city attempted to implement a new street plan which the inhabitants resisted in favor of the original Native American footpaths.<sup>26</sup> This street plan did not only keep the area unique in the sense of originality, but also made it difficult to reach by car. This changed in 1969 when the subway was extended towards the south of Manhattan.<sup>27</sup> This traffic isolation made Greenwich Village a popular place for people with liberal or bohemian lifestyles. For example, during the time that Franklin D. Roosevelt was governor of New York, Eleanor had her own pied-à-terre in the Village near her friends Elizabeth Read and Esther Lape, who were each other's life partners and lived in Greenwich Village because of its tolerance.<sup>28</sup>

Overlooking Sheridan Square on Christopher Street stood the Stonewall Inn, which was a gay bar run by the Mafia. In 1960 there was a wave of bar closures by the police using the removal of liquor licenses and perceived 'disorderly conduct' by the homosexual patrons. This made it an interesting venture for the Mafia to get into, since they could overcharge their gay clientele without being called out since no gay person wanted to be outed publicly at the risk of being arrested and losing their livelihood. The Mafia created a pay-off system with the police so raids would happen less frequently and be much less invasive. Often, the club could re-open the same night when a raid would be initiated<sup>29</sup>.

The Stonewall Inn was hardly the only gay bar in Greenwich Village, but it was unique because it had a dance floor open to patrons, which was a rarity at the time.<sup>30</sup> Men dancing with men was considered indecent and could be a legitimate reason for the police to raid a bar and shut it down. This was, however, not the reason why the Stonewall Inn got raided that night in June. The best known justification given by

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<sup>26</sup> Carter, 9

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>28</sup> Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Vol. I, 1884–1933*, New York: Penguin, 1992, 39

<sup>29</sup> Carter, 17

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 77

the police was the suspected watering down of alcohol sold in the club, which was a federal offense, but another reason why the Stonewall Inn became the focus of the police department was rumored to have to do with blackmail and other criminal activity going on around the club.

Members of criminal organizations would go after high profile patrons and blackmail them disguised as policemen. One of the most famous blackmailed closeted homosexuals was head of the FBI J Edgar Hoover, who had been photographed in a homosexual act as well as dressed up in female clothing and blackmailed with this footage. This footage eventually protected the criminals from ever being prosecuted, since Hoover feared that the evidence would leak.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, young homosexual men were frequently recruited for criminal activity since they had few other opportunities for work. This included prostitution, either as a boy or in drag, and drug transportation. In fact, a prostitution ring was said to be held on the second floor of the Stonewall Inn.<sup>32</sup>

The story of how the Stonewall riots started and progressed have been told in many different ways, many different times with many focus points. The assumption has been made that the death of Judy Garland was a reason the resistance to the raid was ignited so strongly, though Sylvia Rivera, one of the most famous and most prominent rioters, contradicts this notion. In an article Rivera wrote on her life experiences as a transgender woman, she states that everyone was mourning the death of Judy Garland, but they did this by partying. Rivera notes “Some authors have said that the riot came out of Judy Garland’s death, but that’s not true. Judy had nothing to do with the riot.”<sup>33</sup> Rivera writes that Garland’s death was not a ‘trigger’ for the riot. She felt that the start of the riot and the mourning of the patrons that night was coincidental. In a summarized introduction by Feinberg of Stormé Delarverié, a male impersonator, who started a Vaudeville act in the 1950s in which she travelled the country dressed as a man, Delarverié is quoted as saying that she began fighting back because she was fed up with all the oppression she had suffered throughout her life.<sup>34</sup> It is very plausible that the crowd at Stonewall felt

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 96

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>33</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile, the Forgotten Ones." In *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the Sexual Binary*, Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 2002, 77

<sup>34</sup> Feinberg, 153

collectively fed up by the police oppression they had been suffering for years while at the same time mourning Judy Garland's death.

As to the question 'was it a drag queen who threw the first stone at Stonewall?' it would be blunt to give a yes or no answer. According to her own testimony, Rivera was not the instigator, though this title has been given to her by the LGBT community as a badge of honor. Rivera has been quoted explaining "I have been given the credit for throwing the first Molotov cocktail by many historians but I always like to correct it; I threw the second one, I did not throw the first one!"<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that Rivera is the first one to mention Molotov cocktails, in no other account of the riots are these forms of rioting ever mentioned. Multiple eyewitnesses have recounted the story of a 'butch dyke' being escorted out of the premises to be taken into custody. She attempted to break away from the police officers, and when they began to manhandle her, she yelled out "Why don't you guys do something?", and this call for help truly ignited the riot.<sup>36</sup> This 'butch dyke' has never been identified and therefore there is no way to be certain of her gender identity. Most people arrested during the Stonewall riots were either part of the waiting staff, or people dressed in clothing not deemed appropriate for their sex. At the time, most states had laws against cross-dressing, which stated that people were obliged to wear at least three pieces of clothing which corresponded to their birth sex. This law was originally implemented to protect landowners from tenant farmers who would revolt while cross-dressing, which attests to Feinberg's point that cross-dressing was a form of protest, but was eventually repurposed to oppress transgender people.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore very likely that the 'butch dyke' sources have reported on was arrested for wearing men's clothing, and could very easily have been a transgender man. During an interview with Curve Magazine in 2008, Delarverie claimed to be the unknown 'butch dyke', describing how she was manhandled by the police during the riot and how she saw the crowd erupt as a result of this treatment. When asked why she had kept quiet all these years, she answered "it was never anyone's business".<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gan, 131

<sup>36</sup> Carter, 152

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>38</sup> Grace Chu. "From the Archives: An Interview with Lesbian Stonewall Veteran Stormé DeLarverie." *Afterellen.com*. Accessed April 12, 2018. <http://www.afterellen.com/people/77167-an-interview-with-lesbian-stonewall-veteran-storm-delarverie>. 3

The reason the Stonewall riots are particularly well remembered partially has to do with the high number of protesters and bystanders who joined in the fighting, but is also due to the press coverage the riots received. Two journalists for the *Village Voice*, Howard Smith and Lucian Truscott were in the area when the raid happened and the riot erupted, Smith joined the side of the police inside of the Stonewall, while Truscott remained outside and took note from the point of view of the protesters.<sup>39</sup> During the riots, protesters were calling the press from pay-phones in the area as well, since they were very aware of the importance of publicity for the cause.<sup>40</sup> Although the rioters were not all too happy with the articles that were eventually published, mostly due to the terminology and tone used to describe them, the fact that there was reporting on the riot pushed it into the historical narrative. This strategy had been used by the homophile movement in the 1950s, based in part on a strategy used by the NAACP. Despite the risk of negative coverage, the benefit of reaching like-minded followers outweighed the negatives.<sup>41</sup> Despite the closeted nature of homosexual life, the homophile movement, a gay rights movement established in the 1950s which I will discuss in further detail later, made particular use of any public exposure.<sup>42</sup> This was done by offering to feature special research on homophobia, interviews with homosexual men and touring the night club circuit.<sup>43</sup> The retelling of the riot by participants and eyewitnesses raised the riots at Stonewall to legendary proportions. In contrast, there was very little, if any reporting on the riots at Cooper's Donuts or Compton's which is why the exact date of the latter has been forgotten.<sup>44</sup> If it were not for transgender academics and researchers of queer history, the whole riot would have been lost in historical narrative except for those who were at the scene at the time.

Though these different episodes all happened independently from each other, meaning that there was no greater organization instigating the resistance, there are some similarities between all these

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<sup>39</sup> Carter, 144

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 167

<sup>41</sup> Edward Alwood, "The Role of Public Relations in the Gay Rights Movement, 1950-1969." *Journalism History* 41, no. 1 (2015), 11

<sup>42</sup> The term 'homophile' was derived from the greek word for love (philía) to take the focus away from sex and to contradict the stereotype of sex-obsessed homosexual men.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 13

<sup>44</sup> Stryker, 65

occurrences. All of the riots mentioned happened in what may be considered to be safe spaces for local LGBT youth, Cooper's Donuts in Los Angeles, Compton's in San Francisco and Stonewall in New York City. The patronage of all three of these places was relatively mixed with homosexual men, lesbian women and transgender people. One may have been more mixed than the other, for instance Compton's was visited by more transgender people than Stonewall, but none of the places was exclusive to one group. And finally, all three of the spaces had been invaded by external forces, the police, which caused the community to collectively fight back.

The 1960's saw the creation of many different organizations whose goal it was to support the homosexual and transgender community. However, since there was still a common enemy in heteronormative society through the police, the different communities experienced the same harassment and had the same 'enemy' to push back against. What I will look at in the coming chapter is how this seemingly harmonious cooperation separated due to the difference in life experiences between homosexual cisgender men, lesbian cisgender women and transgender people.

## Chapter 2: Remaining on the fringe: cross dressing within the gay rights movement

Once the drive for gay activism was ignited, the subsequent step was to determine what this activism would mean. What were the tenets the various organizations would adhere to, and how would these organizations deal with people who were suppressed by different forms of discrimination, such as through race, gender or social status? Many different factors were of relevance to the choices made during the first few years of the 1970s. One factor was the internalized insecurity which heteronormative society placed upon some of the trailblazers from the early years, and these insecurities were the dividing factor between conservatism and activism. Some felt that blending into heteronormative society was the best equalizer, and would guarantee inclusion in the future. However, for others, blending in was not a possibility, since they were so marginalized that there would be no authenticity left to their lives if they tried to adjust to heteronormative society. Due to the white privilege Caucasian homosexual men enjoyed, they were able to live a relatively heteronormative life. Though this acceptance by straight society was conditional on the secrecy of their private lives, those people who were not able to blend into general society were condemned to the fringes of society, much like ethnic minorities often were. The only difference was that where race or social class are usually shared within the family, sexual orientation and gender identification are not.

Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen has spearheaded multiple census-like studies on LGBT elderly and their life experiences. In a study from 2013 she mapped out the physical and mental health of transgender elderly. The research suggests that 0.3-0.5% of elderly Americans identify as transgender.<sup>1</sup> Some of the research that has been done on this specific part of the population shows that transgender elderly have a lower average household income and are more likely to be unemployed than cisgender elderly.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they are at an elevated risk of depression, and have a high suicide rate, though these

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<sup>1</sup> Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen, Loree Cook-Daniels, Hyun-Jun Kim, Elena A. Erosheva, Charles A. Emlet, Charles P. Hoy-Ellis, Jayn Goldsen, and Anna Muraco. "Physical and Mental Health of Transgender Older Adults: An At-Risk and Underserved Population." *The Gerontologist* 54, no. 3 (2014), 488

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 493



numbers appear to decrease with age.<sup>3</sup> Fredriksen also uncovered that transgender elderly were more likely to conceal their identity in comparison to non-transgender LGB older adults.<sup>4</sup> Throughout their lives, transgender elderly have had a lot of experience with many different types of victimization, such as verbal insults, threats of physical violence, job discrimination, being provided inferior healthcare, being denied a promotion at work, and police harassment.<sup>5</sup>

This information is particularly important for this thesis, because these older adults are the eyewitnesses who grew up during the period of this research and who lived the history that I analyze. The situation these people are in now has been shaped by their life experiences, which also explains why there are so few eyewitness references to work with. Many have not sought exposure, due to fear of marginalization, lived marginalized lives, or did not survive to tell their story. Sylvia Rivera is one name which keeps coming up due to the exposure she received during her life and after. Multiple studies have been done on her life and the legacy she has left behind after her death in 2002.

This chapter shows the history of gay rights activism during the period surrounding the Stonewall riots in parallel with Rivera's early life. I do not want to try to make Rivera the model for transgender life in the 1960s, however, there are a lot of experiences in her life which many transgender people from that period share. In addition, Rivera was very much at the forefront of transgender activism at the time, and therefore experienced many of negative reactions of the other movements geared towards her, which makes her an interesting case study for this thesis.

The Mattachine Society founded in 1950 was the first movement to actively advocate for the acceptance of homosexuality. Mattachine was founded in Los Angeles, but spread throughout the United States with groups in many different cities. There were many different views and opinions on the place of homosexuals within society in the large organization. Especially the New York faction was conservative. The liberal view at the time was that homosexuals were not criminals, but rather mentally ill people who could be cured if given understanding and extensive therapy. This view was deemed too liberal for some

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 489

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 493

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 494

conservative members, who could not let go of the label of lawbreaker.<sup>6</sup> These conservative homosexual men specifically were the ones who kept their sexual preference hidden and decided to live secluded lives, trying to pass as straight to heteronormative society.<sup>7</sup>

Altman discusses the insecurity he believes many homosexual men felt from living a queer life in straight society as a symptom of internalized oppression. He argues that homosexual men who are secluded into the 'gay world' become compliant with the image that has been placed upon them by the outside world. Altman sees 'camp' as a way to hold oneself in order to more easily integrate into wider society.<sup>8</sup> Because of the secretive characteristic of gay society and, as I have mentioned before, despite people being born gay, there was no shared experience of oppression within the family in the same way that racial minorities do feel. Homosexual men and women as well as transgender people know straight society well, even when hidden away in the gay world.<sup>9</sup> The assertion of the homosexual image by 'camping it up' comes from the influence exerted on the gay world by straight society, which is used as an assimilation approach as to not be threatening to straight society as a homosexual. In "Notes on Camp" Susan Sontag describes camp as an aesthetic which favors the unnatural.<sup>10</sup> Camp is an aesthetic which prefers form over content, though it never annihilated the content. Things which are contentless can never be camp, since the irony would be missing from the dichotomy between the form and the content.<sup>11</sup> It would be wrong to equate camp with homosexuality, since not all homosexual men appreciate camp and camp is not exclusively to be appreciated by homosexual men, but there does appear to be a higher appreciation of camp by homosexual men. For these men, the aesthetic they hold is their way to be integrated into society, to not be seen as something threatening, but as something playful.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in a sense, it represents their position in society, outsiders looking into straight society, but not being able

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<sup>6</sup> Carter, 24

<sup>7</sup> Altman, 26

<sup>8</sup> Altman, 38

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>10</sup> Susan Sontag. "Notes on "Camp"" *Partisan Review* (1964) Accessed June 26, 2018 [https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag\\_Susan\\_1964\\_Notes\\_on\\_Camp.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf), 1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 12

to merge into it. Just as something mainstream cannot be camp, homosexuality during the 1960s seemed an impossibility to every be a societal norm. Camp appreciates the marginalized, the ‘too much’ or the ‘not enough’, that heteronormative society tends to reject in homosexual people.

Due to these relatively conservative stances, former members of Mattachine began to break off to form their own organizations in the second half of the 60s. One of these, the Homophile Youth Movement in Neighborhoods (HYMN), was founded by Craig Rodwell in 1966 in his Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop. Rodwell viewed HYMN as a movement without sellable memberships because he felt that everyone who was gay should be allowed to join. Rodwell created and spread the newsletter “The Hymnal” to inspire political activation which he did after the Stonewall riots by raising awareness among members of the LGBT community that visiting Mafia-owned establishments keeps the community in the criminal atmosphere.

Not long after the foundation of the Mattachine Society, The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was founded specifically for lesbians. Whether it came to social, political or cultural institutions, there were very few places for women to get together, and DOB provided discussion groups and get-togethers for women to meet.

Another movement which appeared in 1962 was the Homosexual League of New York. Its founder, Randy Wicker, participated in a pre-recorded radio broadcast in which he, together with eight other men, discussed his life as a homosexual. The discussion was very controversial and was reported on in various print media, which was the type of exposure Wicker gladly made use of. He took the transcript of the discussion and collected the various articles written on the broadcast and distributed these to media outlets, offering them ‘field trips’ in the underground gay scene of New York.<sup>13</sup> This caused a surge in coverage on homosexuality in the national media following a long period of media silence.

Despite the many different organizations that were formed, a large group of the LGBT community were not active in any organized community, but were activists on the streets. Many of them had tried but failed to find a movement which represented their specific needs. Most of the groups that wanted to represent a homosexual community, consisted for a large part of white middle class men. Even groups

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<sup>13</sup> Carter, 25

such as HYMN, and the Homosexual League of New York catered mostly to this demographic which alienated other possible members would not fall in the white male category. Transgender people often tried to be active in these movements, but were not able to make any significant impact, because they were not understood or accepted by the other members of the movement.<sup>14</sup> There was little shared experience between homosexual white males and transgender females.

Most of these transgender street youths were of a minority background and had run away from abusive families. They were forced to live their lives in specific urban regions, such as the Village or the Tenderloin. Due to their perceived 'feminine' behavior and ethnicity it was much more difficult for them to fit into any legitimate part of mainstream community. This segregation led to a life of hustling on the streets, drug use, disease and death.

In New York, a group of street youths tried to assemble in a youth gang called "the Commando Queens", the members of which were between 11 and 18 years old. The members of the gang were not necessarily activist or political, but important to those who were part of the community. They professed people needed to "be kind to one another, protect each other, not to be dirty and keeping your makeup looking OK".<sup>15</sup>

One of these street youths, Sylvia Rivera, has become one of the most well-known names of the transgender rights movement following the Stonewall riots. Rivera came from Venezuelan and Puerto Rican heritage and was raised by her Venezuelan grandmother after her mother tried to kill her and successfully committed suicide. Rivera showed signs of femininity at the early age, which may have been the reason why her mother stated on her deathbed that she had tried to kill Rivera because she knew Rivera was going to have a difficult life.<sup>16</sup>

Within South American culture, a boy who showed feminine tendencies was automatically assumed to be gay, an assumption which Rivera struggled with her entire life.<sup>17</sup> At an early age she became

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<sup>14</sup> Stryker, 85

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>16</sup> Rivera, 68

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 69

sexually active. At the age of 7 she engaged in sexual activity with her cousin, and at age 10 she was involved with her 5th grade teacher in Catholic school. That same year her uncle took her to turn tricks on Times Square. Here she learned about the underground scene of prostituting cross-dressers on 42nd street. That same year she left home for good to live with the queens on 42nd street.<sup>18</sup>

Much like the lives of the queens in the Tenderloin District, the queens working Times Square and 42nd street were dependent on one another for survival, sleeping on each other's floors and in their hotel rooms. Anyone who had managed to rent an apartment anywhere would hold house parties or rent parties at which the host opened up their home for a party at which the guests would leave money for them to pay rent. This created a mutual agreement that, whenever somebody would be looking for a place to stay, they would always be welcome at the hosts' home. Another meeting place for transgender people was at drag balls, which were held downtown as well as in Harlem. Balls provided a stage to showcase talent, and many performers would prepare for a year in advance to debut themselves at the drag balls. At these drag balls, the street queens, who had to make ends meet since they left home at such an early age, would meet with more affluent cross dressers, who lived their lives as men, and performed as women at night.

Another transgender activist whose name is mentioned often in reference to the aftermath of the Stonewall riots is Marsha P. "Pay it no mind" Johnson. Rivera met Johnson about a year after leaving home, while Johnson was working a corner. Johnson also had a job as a waiter, though later in life she received Social Security Disability following several nervous breakdowns. Part of this mental anguish most certainly had to do with suppression she suffered due to her transgenderism, but Johnson also turned out to have been suffering from progressed stages of syphilis. When Johnson's husband was shot by a policeman, it pushed her over the edge in terms of her mental health. Despite all these factors, Rivera could not believe that Johnson had committed suicide when her body was retrieved from the Hudson River in 1992, especially not since many gay and trans people had been pushed into the Hudson River before.<sup>19</sup>

Rivera had been active in many different movements - the anti-war movement, the feminist movement - but had always felt marginalized. Johnson and Rivera were together during the Stonewall riot

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 70

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 73, Carter, 116

and felt, like many others, that they needed to keep the struggle for gay rights going after the riots. The riots had generated a momentum for new activism, and the people who felt inclined to act turned to the existing organizations. However, many of the younger protesters were unable to affiliate themselves to the sometimes more conservative and old-fashioned practices of the older organizations and its members.<sup>20</sup>

The Mattachine society specifically had been losing the support of the younger revolutionaries for a longer period of time. Since 1965, the movement organized a protest in Philadelphia called the Annual Reminder, where the protesters would call for sexual freedom for homosexuals. Philadelphia was chosen as the place for the picketing to be held since it was the place of birth of the nation, and they wanted to call back to the promise of freedom made by the founding fathers. The organizers of the protest set very strict rules, based on their relatively conservative views on the position of homosexuals in society. Since the goal was for straight people to accept homosexual men and women as no different from themselves, all protesters were ordered to dress up in formal attire with ties and coats. Despite much protest from within the movement against this dress code, the rule was upheld by the organizers.<sup>21</sup> Choices like these alienated transgender people from participating in gay rights movements and activities, because they would run into moral disagreements on the goal of the activism.

The organizers of the Annual Reminder were outraged by Stonewall. In their opinion, the most effective activism was to gain the favor of the establishment, and educating people on what homosexuality was. This stance caused a sense of alienation among more radical activists, who set up their own organizations to fill the void. However, the organizations that were set up after Stonewall fared little better than those prior for the people fighting for transgender liberation.

The first organization established after Stonewall was the Gay Liberation Front, established in 1969, which defined itself as a militant organization and would only focus on gay liberation issues.<sup>22</sup> The main belief of the GLF was that capitalism was an oppressive “system of taboos and institutionalized repressions” with as its main goal to control “sexual expression”. Among these oppressive institutions

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<sup>20</sup> Carter, 214

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 110

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 2

was the institution of marriage, which GLF called “one of the most insidious and basic sustainers of the system”.<sup>23</sup> This anti-heteronormative behavior of the GLF rubbed many members the wrong way, particularly those who viewed their position in society as homosexuals connected to their socio-economic status. Because of their homosexuality and therefore the inability to participate in what would be qualified as heteronormative milestones in life, they would be less able to climb the social ladder and improve their socio-economic position in society. GLF’s activism was mainly pragmatic: they put on dances, held demonstrations and started a newspaper.<sup>24</sup> Their goal was to expose themselves and be visible for mainstream society. Initially, this militant drive helped GLF to get involved in positive ventures for the LGBT community, such as hosting dances for gay youth outside of Mafia control, and questioning politicians on their stances on gay rights. However, the downturn of this militant drive was that it led to the alienation of transgender people. GLF was critical toward gay organizations, gay ventures and their own members as well.<sup>25</sup> This constant criticism made the organization highly inefficient, since they could not stay on course with any decision they made. The dissolution of the organization was triggered by a debate on whether the GLF should donate money to the Black Panther movement. When in one meeting it was decided not to, because the members of the Black Panthers often used homophobic language, during the meeting a week later the case was reopened and the motion passed. During this meeting many members of the GLF walked away from the meeting. This indecisiveness caused a break among the leading members of the organization, and only four months after the establishment of the GLF, the organization split up again.<sup>26</sup>

The Gay Activist Alliance was one of the alternatives. It was founded by former members of the GLF for whom that organization was too frazzled; they wanted an organization which focused exclusively on homosexual rights issues, and would not be distracted by any other social injustices.<sup>27</sup> The GAA wanted to create the freedom for its members to engage in other movements simultaneously, and therefore

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 220

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 220

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 231

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 221

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 233

installed two critical tenets: the organization would not publicly endorse any candidate for public office and in order to keep the organization democratic, every meeting would be held under the guidelines of Robert's Rules of Order, which is the leading manual in parliamentary organization in the United States.<sup>28</sup> The GAA wrote a preamble which summed up what GAA was fighting for and the freedoms it demanded, among which was the 'right to one's own body' in affirmation of transgender people.<sup>29</sup> However, much like the GLF, this democratic foundation made it easy to turn the movement towards a different agenda. Because most of the GAA members were gay men, the democratic aspect of the movement marginalized transgender members. Sylvia Rivera, who was also a part of the GAA for a short time, felt that the organization was not working for the transgender movement at all, but purely focussed on its gay agenda.<sup>30</sup> On the GAA side, there was no love lost either; GAA's Arthur Bell noted that the organization felt that Rivera was a troublemaker and that she scared people.<sup>31</sup>

It was during a sit in at the Weinstein Hall at New York University with the Gay Liberation Front that Rivera came up with the idea to create a place for street youth where they could live and be safe away from the streets.<sup>32</sup> To Rivera it was important that queer street youth remained visible and would be able to attain the same rights, and could join in on the same celebration as the gay and lesbian members of the gay rights movement. Together with Johnson, Rivera established the Street Trans Action Revolutionaries through which they offered housing and help to any youth in need. At first they started off with two rooms they rented in a hotel, but soon they didn't have the space needed to house all the people requesting help. According to some sources they also took refuge in an abandoned trailer for a while, but eventually they managed to settle in a building at 213 East Second Street which they called STAR house. Johnson and Rivera would take care of the people they helped at their own cost. She explains "Marsha and I (...) kept that building going by selling ourselves out on the streets while trying to keep the children off the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 235

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 236

<sup>30</sup> Rivera, 80

<sup>31</sup> Gan, 133

<sup>32</sup> Rivera, 81



streets”.<sup>33</sup> The organization was able to maintain itself relatively successfully until 1973 when critique from external organizations cost them support and forced them to close STAR house due to non-payment of rent.<sup>34</sup>

Both the GAA and GLF, as well as the lesbian feminist movement which I will discuss in the last chapters, were unable to facilitate a place for the transgender agenda within the homosexual rights spectrum. This was mainly due to the makeup of their faction and the democratic culture these organizations adopted. Ironically, for an organization which fought for minority rights, they only cared about the voice of their majority. The issue with a democratic model in these organizations is that it doesn't take into account that the oppressed can be oppressors within their own communities as well.<sup>35</sup> Since most members of the GLF and the GAA were white homosexual men, the transgender agenda automatically became marginalized, and despite some attempted tolerance, when concessions needed to be made, the transgender struggle was the first to be let go of. An example of this can be seen in the passing of the gay rights bill by the New York City Council in 1987, which removed the protection of transgender people against employment discrimination. The bill was originally set up as a protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and included a clause that specifically protected transgender people.<sup>36</sup> However, for the benefit of having this bill pass into law, it was agreed that the transgender rights would be removed.<sup>37</sup> This departure from including the transgender struggle by the homosexual movement was the result of a lack of shared life experiences and a different view on equality. Where the homosexual and lesbian liberation movement wanted to rid itself of the label of mental illness in order to move towards inclusion into heteronormative society, the transgender movement needed to claim their medical position to create the possibility for surgical intervention. Furthermore, there was little to no overlap on the issue of gender ambiguity. Homosexual men may have been accused of being effeminate, but this had nothing to do with their gender identity. In fact, having their gender identity

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 81

<sup>34</sup> Gan, 134

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 134

<sup>36</sup> Stryker, 151

<sup>37</sup> Shepard, 100

called into question due to perceived effeminacy only made these men detach farther away from the transgender agenda. Therefore, transgender issues disappeared into the fringe, or were removed completely from the agenda of the homosexual rights movement for the benefit of the furthering of their own priorities.

## Chapter 3: Born this way: changing medical, political and societal interpretation

Over the past two centuries, medical science has become increasingly important in the forming of modern society. The discoveries made by medical scientists slowly began to take away religious assumptions and dogmas. These developments meant that certain social structures, which caused the misdiagnosis and mistreatment of some ‘diseases’ or defined and then redefined power structures between men and women, were disputed, based on doctors’ assessments and new insights. Therefore, it was the judgment made by medical science whether something was ‘healthy’ or ‘sick’ which would determine what society would deem to be ‘normal’ or ‘unnatural’.<sup>1</sup> Concurrently, there was a development towards a better understanding of sexuality. The progress towards a better sense of what sexuality and its social importance are, managed to remove many dogmas responsible for many forms of oppression. The removal of dogmas, particularly those causing homophobia and transphobia, was for both the gay rights movement as well as the transgender rights movement incredibly important to lose the label of ‘medical illness’ in order to move forward with mainstream acceptance.

As mentioned in the introduction, the transgender phenomenon has existed throughout history, each community or society dealing with transgender people in its own way. When patriarchal culture gained power, any expression of non-heterosexuality or any feminine behavior in men became taboo based on a religious assumption. Therefore, homosexuality as well as transgenderism or any other gender or sexual expression outside of the heteronormative was placed within the scope of ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’ behavior. Since 1952, homosexuality had been listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and defined as being ‘pathological behavior’, for which men and women could be institutionalized in psychiatric treatment facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike homosexuality, which was deemed an actual pathology, the act of crossdressing was not. I want to take a step back to my introduction to reiterate that being transgender is not necessarily the same

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<sup>1</sup> Stryker, 36

<sup>2</sup> Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015, 11

as wanting to live one's life different from the sex assigned at birth. Only when this is the case, a person will be labelled as having Gender Identity Disorder. This label was added to the DSM in the 1980 edition.<sup>3</sup> The first awareness of the transgender phenomenon evolved a long time before the 1960s: a great breakthrough came in 1910 through Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld, who was said to be homosexual and who cross-dressed at times as well, believed that sexuality was rooted in biology and that every person represented a combination of a variety of sexual specifications.<sup>4</sup> Among the people who Hirschfeld worked with at his research center in Berlin was Harry Benjamin, the doctor who would become the leading medical authority on transgenderism in the United States in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

The struggle for acceptance of transgender people and against oppression was, like that of gay and lesbian people, tied in with the assumptions that existed in medical society. The hypothesis that people who were gay, lesbian or transgender were mentally ill, provided specific feeding ground for oppression. For this reason, medical centers that resisted that frame, like the one headed by Harry Benjamin, were a vital source of support for the people concerned.

Unless people wanted to present themselves as being in need of medical or psychiatric help, individuals with transgender feelings were encouraged to construct their identities in isolation and private spaces.<sup>6</sup> Specifically white people who had the class standing and the means to take care of themselves often found themselves secluded among likeminded people and created the first organizations, such as the Foundation for Personality Expression, which Virginia Prince was a part of.

In July of 1966, Dr. Harry Benjamin published his groundbreaking research *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. In this book he argued that a person's gender identity could not change, and in order for a transgender person to lead a more fulfilling life, they should receive treatment. Within a few months after the publication of this study, John Hopkins University Medical School started its first 'sex change' program. Benjamin's research was largely based on patients he had been treating who came from the

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<sup>3</sup> Stryker. 14

<sup>4</sup> Feinberg. 95, Stryker. 39

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 59

Tenderloin district in San Francisco and received funding from the Institute for the Study of Human Resources (ISHR), an institute established by Reed Erickson, who was one of Benjamin's patients.

Erickson was born into a family that owned a successful lead-smelting company located in El Paso, Texas. Erickson was the first woman to graduate from Louisiana State University's Mechanical Engineering Program. After graduating Erickson joined the family business, which he ran successfully and sold at a profit. Erickson started living as a man in 1963 and established the Erickson Educational Foundation in 1964 as well as the Institute for the Study of Human Resources, which funded Dr. Benjamin's research and the publication of *the Transgender Phenomenon*.<sup>7</sup> The work of the ISHR did not only function as a push against medical society to progress on the matter of sexual and gender variance, but also served as a legitimization of the people who were part of this group, and was received as a call to action among community members. For transgender community members their gender identity is what defined them and their struggle for legitimacy in heteronormative society, which was not a focus for homosexual rights activists. Homosexual men in particular had been able to hide their sexual preference for so long that their gender identity was never an issue. Lesbian communities had managed to blend into heteronormative society, or were not taken seriously, to the point that female gender identity was hardly considered at all. This created a complete focus of these two communities on sexual preference and hardly consider gender identity.

Concurrent to the treatment of transgender and homosexual people by the medical and psychiatric community was also the treatment by politics and the law. Although homosexuality itself was not illegal, acts which were associated with homosexuality often were, and it was believed that a group of homosexual people together could only exhibit improper behavior. This improper behavior or public indecency is what most people were arrested for during raids or busts of clubs frequented by homosexual men and women.<sup>8</sup>

For transgender people in the state of New York, the added risk were the rules regarding proper dress for men and women. As stated before, a person was obliged to wear at least 3 pieces of clothing

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>8</sup> Carter, 18

associated with their birth sex. This law stemmed from a time when tenant farmers needed to be prevented from protesting their landowners while being crossdressed.<sup>9</sup> However, this law was reinterpreted by the police to include any person not dressed in articles of clothing associated to their birth sex. If any person was caught dressing improperly according to these regulations, they were at risk to be arrested.

In what way people would adhere to these rules all depended on their way of ‘passing’. Feinberg describes in his book how much trouble he experienced finding a job when applying as a woman, since his secondary sex characteristics so clearly read as ‘male’. Thus, when he applied for typically masculine jobs as a man, or rather omitted his sex identity altogether, suddenly he would be hired.<sup>10</sup> Many other people in the transgender spectrum experienced the same discrimination once the discrepancy of their gender and sex would come to light. In her documentary *Screaming Queens*, Susan Stryker includes an interview of two transgender women who discuss making a living. One of them tells the story of how she tried to find a legitimate job as a man, but was not hired because as a man she looked too ‘effeminate’ and ‘gay’, while she would be hired as a woman. However, as a woman she ran the risk of being outed by another transgender woman, jealous of her legitimacy, which effectively forced her into street work.<sup>11</sup>

This alienation from mainstream society created a disadvantage for transgender community members, collecting them in areas such as the Tenderloin District, and causing a great deal of poverty among them. In San Francisco, a number of grassroots organizations had started to rise in the 1960s to provide the daily needs to the inhabitants of the Tenderloin. One powerful organization which got involved in the transgender cause in San Francisco was the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, which launched the “Council on Religion and the Homosexual”. Glide’s goal was to remove the stigma of sin and sexual deviancy from homosexuality or transgenderism, and to provide support for people who suffered as a result of their societal alienation.<sup>12</sup> Glide helped set up various other organizations, such as Vanguard in 1966, a gay and transgender youth organization, as well as the support group Conversion Our

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>10</sup> Feinberg. 12

<sup>11</sup> Stryker. “*Screaming Queens*” 0:17:52

<sup>12</sup> Stryker. *Transgender History*, 71

Goal (COG) in 1967 in partnership with the San Francisco Public Health Department. COG became a central point of contact for transgender people who were seeking medical services. The organization offered support sessions, psychological council, hormone prescriptions and eventually would refer people for surgery. It also provided people with IDs which matched the person's gender identity, and which stated that they were under treatment for transsexualism, so they would not be arrested by the police. This ID created a form of legitimacy for people and made it easier for people to open bank accounts or find legal employment. Furthermore, the Central City Anti-Poverty Program offered transgender women an opportunity to leave prostitution by teaching them clerical skills through Neighborhood Youth Corps training programs.<sup>13</sup>

These organizations were incredibly important for people in finding a legitimate way of living. There is often the assumption that the choice to identify with a gender other than the one assigned at birth has an 'origin' or a 'motive', which lies in some sort of oppression of any other aspect of a person's life. For instance, it was thought that transgender men were closeted lesbians who were trying to assimilate to heteronormative society. During the 1960s and 1970s there was a growth in programs which facilitated hormone therapy and sexual reassignment surgery. However, transgender people who participated in these programs soon found out that indirectly, the surgeries were restabilizing the balance of the sexual binary instead of blurring the division between what is male and what is female.<sup>14</sup> In the treatment provided to transgender people from the 1980s onward we can still see this specification of the binary, by having people live as their gender identity for at least five years before allowing any surgery. This begs the question; who decides what one's gender identity is, the doctor or the patient?

In 1971 Altman wrote about this binary definition and the freedoms it would provide if the division were to be abolished. He believed transgender people are too conditioned in the female/male dichotomy, so they feel the need to change their sex in order to accept their homosexuality. Therefore, he reasoned, if social norms stop the repression of femininity, so too sexism and transgenderism will disappear.<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 76

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 93

<sup>15</sup> Altman, 160

theory is highly flawed, and has contributed to the misunderstanding of transgender people in the LGB movement. Judith Butler's work has had a key role in redressing this issue, and has paved the way for the further development of queer theory. She argues that "acts, gestures and desire produce the effects of an inner core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body".<sup>16</sup> In other words, according to Butler, the body is just anatomical; gender identity determines what gender this body belongs to and gender performance shows how gender is expressed.

Of course there are many flaws to Altman's theory that the transgender phenomena would disappear once the binary gender identity becomes blurry, starting with the assumption that all transgender people want to be heterosexual. As Feinberg asserts, there is a very large number of transgender people who, after transition, still identify as non-heterosexual, but as homosexual, bisexual, pansexual or any other definition.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, if male-dominated society is oppressive to femininity, and forces women to become men in order to be accepted in a heteronormative way, there is little reason for men to want to give up this male privilege.<sup>18</sup>

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s a case was researched at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. The John/Joan case revolved around a baby boy who was irreparably hurt during a circumcising procedure at eight months old. In order to give the child a somewhat normal life, the parents set out to look for a solution for their child and got in touch with Dr. John Money, a psychologist specializing in gender identity and gender roles. Dr. Money's assertion was that gender identity was a completely taught phenomenon, and therefore advised the parents to take further steps into changing the sex of their child from boy to girl and raise her as a girl. He assumed the child would develop normally as a girl and she would not know any better.<sup>19</sup> Money published articles describing the success of his experiment and the happiness of the child, but in reality his hypothesis was quickly disproven when the young 'girl' began to request to play with guns and trucks, toys usually associated with boys, would try to

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<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge, 2007, 185

<sup>17</sup> Feinberg, 92

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 116

<sup>19</sup> Butler in Stryker, *Transgender Reader*, 184



stand while urinating and hated the growth of 'her' breasts.<sup>20</sup> The John/Joan case was then handed over to another doctor, who offered the reassignment of Joan back to John, which he gladly accepted.

Conclusions drawn from this case began to bend another way. If 'girl' Joan was too focussed on being a boy, there must have been something about 'her' that tied her back to the genitalia which 'she' was born with, and that explained the assertion of her gender identity, which had failed to change through hormones and surgery. Another hypothesis Dr. Diamond, the doctor who took the case from Dr. Money, came to was the idea that the Y chromosome was the dominant chromosome and that any child born intersex was better off being assigned male at birth than female, which is often done due to the relative ease of female reassignment surgery.<sup>21</sup>

It is exactly this discussion which caused, and still causes, the barrier to autonomy of one's own body. One of the important rights transgender people specifically fought for was the freedom to not only dress as they pleased and be acknowledged in their self-determined gender identity, but also the freedom to surgically augment one's body to represent this identity. In order for a person to be qualified for any sort of sexual reassignment surgery, the diagnosis of transgenderism or intersex still needs to be made by a medical professional.

It has been argued that the issue with the John/Joan case in a transgender framework is the fact that John was born a biological boy and wanted to be a biological boy, which was interrupted by the botched surgery. But in Dr. Money's theory the sex of the child ought not to have any effect on the child's gender identity, since according to him, nurture would trump nature, and being raised to like things associated with a girl would therefore make John Joan. The reality of this situation was that Joan was not a girl and despite all the positive reinforcements to instill this gender identity, Joan began to present as a boy. Joan may not specifically have chosen to be a boy, but being told that 'she' was a girl could have given 'her' a binary heteronormative worldview in which 'she' was told that the opposite of what she was supposed to be like was masculine. And since 'she' identified with the male gender identity 'she' began to act out against the people forcing her into this binary experiment.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 185. Butler states in the piece that Joan did not want to take hormones, however due to her age, it is very likely that she was forced by her physician and parents.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 186

When Sylvia Rivera was a little boy she was told men had to be masculine, and since she was feminine, society decided she was gay. Then, when she became a part of the homosexual and transgender community she was deemed a 'bottom' or a woman. It was only after she was able to remove herself from the gender labels placed upon her that she was able to live her life fully as herself. She insisted that she no longer wanted to be defined. When she was in a relationship with her partner Julia, she refused to be defined by the label 'lesbian' or even as 'transgender', but just wanted to define herself as 'Sylvia'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rivera, 77

## Chapter 4: Intersectionality and the Trans Rights Movement

During the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s American culture changed radically due to the end of the Vietnam war. In the 1960s, American youth culture tended to let go of traditional gender roles somewhat. This was particularly manifested in sexual freedom and fashion, as a protest against the conformist mainstream culture of the older generation. It had become acceptable for men as well as women to wear unisex clothing, and many men would grow their hair, which became a sign of opposition against the war in Vietnam, since it is the norm for soldiers to have their hair cut short. When the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973 and the war in Vietnam ended, there was a lull in eagerness to protest the status quo. As a result, fashion receded to the more masculine style of denim, plaid and short hair.<sup>1</sup> Though the anti-war movement disappeared, the gay rights, trans rights and women's rights movement were still active and reshaping themselves in the changing scope of American culture and society.

In 1973 homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, so gay men and lesbian women were at least formally liberated from the burden of psychopathology, which gave them the freedom to focus their agenda on social and political targets. Trans people did not experience this emancipation. Instead they came to be viewed as 'non-liberated'. In the opinion of many gay rights activists, they lacked political sophistication.<sup>2</sup>

According to 'The Woman Identified Woman', a manifesto written by the Radicalesbians in 1970, all women have an understanding of gender oppression, and it is important for women to provide strength to one another in order to break away from the male-given identity, which is the lack of self-appreciation patriarchally defined and placed upon women.<sup>3</sup> This also meant a re-contextualization of lesbian sexual culture, which had traditionally been organized around the binary concepts of 'butch' and 'femme'. Lesbian feminists felt that such roles were too heteronormative, and needed to be replaced by androgynous, gender-neutral coupling. In addition to the distancing of traditional gender roles in

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<sup>1</sup> Stryker, 95

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 95

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 100

relationships, many lesbian feminists were against the objectification of the female figure or female being by men, which is where the animosity between the transgender movement and the feminist movement was generated. Many lesbian feminists viewed transgender women as female impersonators who objectified women. This idea stemmed from the conviction that transgenderism is a mental illness rather than an actual state of being.

This friction caused many clashes throughout the decade, starting with the San Francisco Gay Pride march of 1972. The lesbian feminists refused to participate in a pride event where drag queens and transgender men and women were allowed to walk, causing the organization to split up into two separate pride events for the following year. The event held by the feminists forbade the participation of anybody who they deemed were ‘impersonating women’, and it was eventually this pride event that survived and laid the groundwork for the San Francisco Pride event that is still being held annually. Eventually, in 1995, transgender people were invited to participate in the San Francisco Pride parade again.<sup>4</sup>

The New York Pride event of 1973 did not go forward without resistance either. This event was designed to commemorate the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, but, despite the role transgender and crossdressing people played during the riots, the pride march specifically alienated transgender supporters. Jean O’Leary of GAA even publicly denounced Sylvia Rivera, who was scheduled to address the crowd that day. The Lesbian Feminist Liberation was passing out flyers opposing female impersonators. They were adamant to keep any cross-dresser or drag queen off the stage. Rivera literally had to fight her way up the podium to speak, something she felt to be a major betrayal by the gay community which she always supported so actively.<sup>5</sup> It was this alienation that caused Rivera to pull back from the gay rights and transgender rights movement, and sent her in a downward spiral leading to a suicide attempt in 1974.<sup>6</sup> In the documentary *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* footage is shown of Rivera in the 1990s living on the Hudson River Boulevard which at the time of filming was swept clean of homeless people in order for the area to be rebuilt. Though it is unclear what exactly transpired between 1974 and the 1990s, other than the death of Marsha P. Johnson in 1992, the footage of the sweep

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 141

<sup>5</sup> Gan, 133

<sup>6</sup> Rivera, 82

shows a disheveled Rivera who did not feel safe to turn anywhere else other than her self-built home on the Hudson River.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1970s, within the radical grassroots lesbian feminist movement, the ‘transsexual rapist’ trope, which is still used to this day to argue for legislation, such as the North Carolina Bathroom Bill, began to take hold and circulate as a legitimate fear to have of transgender women. Boston University feminist theologian Mary Paly began labeling transsexuality as a ‘necrophilic invasion’ of women’s spaces, and one of her students, Janice G. Raymond wrote the anti-transgender book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-male* which, according to Susan Stryker, became an “important part of transgender political history”.<sup>8</sup> According to Raymond, transsexuality was comparable to rape in the sense that it reduced the female body and female being into a mere object to be appropriated, which violates women’s sexuality and spirit. Raymond further claimed that transgender women are agents of patriarchal oppression, whom she did not view as women since the removal of any form of male genitalia does not make them ‘un-men’. She constructed many more false analogies, most notably an association between transsexualism and nazism, which compared government funding of research on transgenderism to the research the Nazi’s did during the Second World War, and created unrelated links between German Nazi’s and German doctors who performed sexual reassignment surgery, which Raymond asserted were meant as cures for homosexuality.<sup>9</sup> Raymond’s solution to the ‘transgender problem’ was to limit access to surgeries and to promote regulation against sex-role stereotyping. This rhetoric continued well into the 1980s, when it became common practice to denounce transsexuality as ‘mutilating’, and Raymond even reasserted her views in 1994, when her book was reissued.<sup>10</sup> To this day, the arguments put forward by Raymond are used for anti-transgender rhetoric due to the feeding ground the work had at the time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, Directed by David France, New York, NY: Public Square Films, 2017, 1:18:01

<sup>8</sup> Stryker, 106

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 107

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 111

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 106

A person who fell victim to very specific and targeted actions of the lesbian feminists was Beth Elliot, a transgender lesbian woman who had been active in the anti-war movement, the Daughters of Bilitis and other community activism. In December of 1972 Elliot was removed from the Daughters of Bilitis because of her transgenderism, and in the summer of 1973 she was picketed against when she was scheduled to perform at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference. The charge against Elliot, apart from her transgender identity was that she, and other transgender women, violated women and that their representation was an ‘unwanted penetration’ of female spaces.<sup>12</sup> The transgender rapist trope was completed when a former roommate of Elliot’s, who had joined the Gutter Dykes herself in the 1970s, came forward to accuse Elliot of harassment, which supposedly happened during Elliot’s formative years as a woman. Even if we consider that the harassment did happen, the accusations did not focus on the harassment itself or on Elliot as a person, but rather placed the blame on Elliot’s biological gender as the reason of her abusive behavior, and the reason to exclude her from any female narrative.

These cases show the lack of intersectional cooperation between the different movements which continued throughout the 1970s. In *Deconstructing Trans* Riki Wilchins writes about the reason why the homosexual rights and feminist movements distanced themselves from the gender identity struggle. In the 1960s the black civil rights movements had booked great successes by fighting for the rights of people with ‘immutable characteristics’, such as race, disability or ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> The civil rights struggle made it possible for people with characteristics which they could not change about themselves to be protected under the law. However, gender identity was not deemed an ‘unchangeable characteristic’, and was therefore not protected under the same laws. The homosexual and feminist communities therefore primarily focused on sexual identity being considered an immutable characteristic.

The problem with this strategy is that it places homosexuality and lesbianism completely out of the gender variant discourse. As Wilchins continues sarcastically, “Gay men never act effeminate, don’t wear pastels, don’t brandish limp wrists, and wouldn’t be caught dead lip-synching to Barbra Streisand’s

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<sup>12</sup> Stryker, 102

<sup>13</sup> Riki Wilchins, "Deconstructing Trans." In *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 2002, 55

Broadway album”.<sup>14</sup> The point Wilchins tries to make is that the homosexual and lesbian communities have been so distracted by sexual preference that they completely ignored gender variance. For transgender people it has always been the other way around. For them it is their transgender experience which defines them initially, then secondary to that is their sexual preference, which will most likely be scrutinized, even if this preference could be qualified as heterosexual.

Most people in transgender political history were either homosexual cisgender men or transgender women, while transgender men tended to disappear into mainstream society. This is partially because blending in, or ‘passing’ was easier for transgender men than for transgender women. Because of the difficulty in ‘passing’, transgender women experienced more discrimination and violent crimes geared towards them than transgender men did. Furthermore, transgender men tended to live separate from the larger transgender community, which potentially protected them from being outed. Another aspect which separated transgender men and lesbian women from the tight-knit male dominated gay community was that masculine women were not taken seriously. Despite their own convictions, many homosexual men still believed in the mainstream notion that it only takes one irresistible man to turn any ‘lesbian woman’ straight. The result of this division meant that most transgender services were geared towards transgender women.<sup>15</sup>

Relating to the determination of sexuality, Altman writes about the struggle homosexual men and women faced during the most formative years of the gay rights movement and the hidden nature of homosexuality at the time. When is someone truly homosexual? He asks, does this have to do with the act of being with somebody of the same gender? It seems unlikely, since people who have not yet had a sexual encounter can very well describe their attraction to someone. Also, we cannot determine someone to be homosexual purely on the way a person looks or behaves. Rather, it has to do with a moment of personal identification. This is important when relating to gender identity, since we can also not decide a person’s gender identity purely based on the way a person looks.

In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler relates to this performative aspect of gender identity as a series of actions which determine a person’s gender identity. This ‘performance’ is similar to what Susan Stryker

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 82

called the 'secondary sex characteristics', though in Stryker's case, these have more to do with the clothing one wears, or the way a person wears their hair. But according to Butler, the body itself cannot by definition be gendered, the gendering of the body comes from the way the body gets treated by the person inhabiting it.<sup>16</sup>

Coming out as gay or trans during the 1960s effectively meant choosing to live an authentic though stigmatized life. While we currently live in a world where coming out as gay no longer has to mean living a life without marriage and children, during the 1960s it did not only mean certainty of exclusion from these institutions, but also the fear of persecution and prosecution. Though the laws which would make it possible to prosecute homosexuals were rarely enforced, the knowledge of being lawless would have implications for any person's sense of self.<sup>17</sup> This is also what eventually forced people together into a specific community of like-minded individuals, which on the one hand created a certain communal culture, but at the same time also enforced stereotypes placed upon them from the outside society, such as the above mentioned aesthetic of 'camp'.

Transgender people were prosecuted more often than homosexuals. Part of this was based on the laws prohibiting people to dress in clothing deemed assigned to the opposite sex, but also because many transgender women had no alternatives to prostituting themselves, which put them at risk for, among many other things, prosecution for loitering. It is for this reason that acceptance rather than tolerance by heteronormative society is so important for the whole LGBT community. According to Altman, tolerance still implies a power imbalance between the superior, in this case heteronormative society, 'being tolerant of' the inferior, which is the LGBT community.<sup>18</sup> What tolerance meant in the scope of the 1960s was the difference in the possibility of being prosecuted versus actually being prosecuted for any of the above-mentioned offenses. Despite there being more tolerance towards homosexual men and lesbian women than towards transgender people, both lived under the constant threat of being prosecuted for any number of possible offenses.

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<sup>16</sup> Butler, 187

<sup>17</sup> Altman, 54

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 59



Rivera and Johnson lived their lives within the fringes of any group that supposedly defined them. Whether it was Rivera's Venezuelan heritage which forced her to be a masculine boy or a feminine girl, homosexual culture which claimed any person with male sexual organs who was effeminate to be a 'bottom', or gay rights activism which would not take up the struggle for gender freedom, they were the minority in each of these groups and had to bow to whichever agenda the majority within that group was working for. This meant they had to fight harder to define themselves, but also that they were very much defined by the groups they were excluded from.

## Conclusion

Looking back on these formative years of the transgender rights movement, it is clear that the framework that was created in the 60s and 70s is still relevant to transgender people today. But it was not only a development within the transgender movement that needed to happen, it was the acceptance by the homosexual rights movement which would solidify the legitimacy of both movements, specifically towards heteronormative society. The different lives and stories transgender people were living and shared oppression with the homosexual community would truly set the foundation for the LGBT movement which is still very active today.

The most privileged in a population affected by a particular injustice or social oppression often have the opportunity to organize first. The Foundation for Personality Expression, the first successful transgender rights organization, mostly geared themselves towards what Susan Stryker described as “protecting the privileges of predominantly white middle class men who used their money and access to private property to create a safe space in which they could express a stigmatized aspect of themselves in a way that didn't jeopardize their jobs or social standing”.<sup>1</sup> These people didn't have it easy nor were they immune to prosecution. Virginia Prince, as the head of the FPE has a history to prove that she was not, but as long as they were not in a public space there was relative freedom for gender expression.

Less privileged and poorer groups did not have this option and were part of a more oppressed part of the transgender community. Specifically people of color were dependent on public spaces and therefore much more vulnerable to vilification and prosecution. Due to frequent discrimination in terms of housing and employment, transgender people who did not have the means to take care of themselves were forced into concentrated communities, such as the Tenderloin in San Francisco or Greenwich Village in New York.<sup>2</sup> Here, they were able to find acceptance from people within their own communities, even when heteronormative society rejected them. When the gay rights agenda was formed, assimilation into and replication of dominant institutions was a primary goal. An example of these assimilation practices was an

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<sup>1</sup> Stryker, 55

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 82

annual march that the Mattachine Society held every year to ‘prove’ to mainstream society that gay men were not different from straight men by having them quietly picket dressed in suits.<sup>3</sup>

While this form of protest may have made sense for a group of men who only needed to establish themselves as equal to heteronormative society, this was not possible for people who by definition were placed outside of either one of these communities, due to skin color, socioeconomic status, or gender identity.

Though the 1960s and 1970s were truly formative years for both homosexual and transgender movements, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s generated the urgency which the previous decades had lacked. Where homosexual and transgender men and women felt a kinship and protection in their own communities, the AIDS crisis forced them to seek help in places where they were not widely accepted. And despite AIDS being nicknamed ‘gay-cancer’ initially, it was the transgender community which was hit the hardest by the disease due to its reliance on sex work and wide-spread use of drugs.<sup>4</sup>

In *Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens*, Cathy Cohen discusses the concept of queer politics, which is a political agenda that attempts to redefine sexual expression and definition as fluid categories. Though this term has only been used since the 1990s, the concepts which it deals with describe the same struggle that transgender people have had to deal with during the first decades of the gay rights movement. Cohen describes the difference between what we might call the ‘gay and lesbian agenda’ and the ‘queer agenda’ as the difference between assimilation and transformation. The ‘gay and lesbian agenda’ strives for assimilation into heteronormative society, being accepted into heteronormative practices, such as marriage, having children and serving in the military, while not being discriminated against on the basis of sexual preference. The ‘queer agenda’, however, wants to transform heteronormative society into a society in which the known pillars that hold up the importance of marriage and family get torn down in order to annihilate discrimination on any basis, whether it be sex, sexual preference or gender identity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carter, 110

<sup>4</sup> Stryker, 26

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, 445

In a sense, transgender people are a part of a community built up like a Russian doll, in which the transgender rights movement has to establish itself as a non-normative group within the normative LGBT movement, who are the non-normative ones within greater heteronormative society. 'Queer life' is a much broader concept than just being homosexual, bisexual or transgender. Anyone can be oppressed by heteronormative culture when falling outside the scope of heteronormativity. It is important to note that it is not a given for straight people to fit into heteronormative society, specifically when a person's life choices do not fit in with what is considered to be heteronormative, such as teen mothers, single mothers or any other matriarchal family structure.<sup>6</sup>

What this means for the transgender movement is that it remains important to reflect on the intersectional position which transgender people have held in the past and still hold in society now. The LGBT community may include the T, but does it stand up for the T? Taking Sylvia Rivera as an example, she had high ups when she was declared a living legend during the Gay Pride Parade of 2000 in Bologna, Italy, and deep lows with losing all her belongings while living on the streets. And though Rivera's life may be unique due to her background and her voice, she represented and still is an example for many people who in this day and age work through the same issues she fought against. The lack of support from conservatives is exactly the criticism that was directed towards Caitlyn Jenner when she first transitioned, but still retained her political identity as being a Republican. The theory of queer politics may be widely accepted, but there is still plenty of discussion on the correct way to implement it when the marginalized voices remain marginalized. If value is only attributed to those who still fit into the 'gender normative' ideal, which means those who pass physically as their gender identity in a way expected of cis-gendered people, then there is a risk that people whose gender remains (somewhat) illegible will still be marginalized in the transgender community. Furthermore, placing a higher value on white than on black bodies happens in various communities, heteronormative as well as homosexual, and the transgender community risks becoming part of this greater problem.

Frederik-Goldsen's survey of 2013 uncovered some revelations based on the life experiences of elderly transgender people. To summarize, elderly transgender people were more likely to be in bad

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 455

health, mentally as well as physically, had a lower economic standing and were less likely to come out. Since the 1960s and 1970s many strides have been made by the transgender community in order to make acceptance possible. Unfortunately, when looking at recent statistics, the positive developments made in heteronormative culture have not made it back to the transgender grassroots yet. According to a 2008 study by the New York City Council, the streets of New York are home to about 3800 transgender youths on any given night.<sup>7</sup> This goes to show that from heteronormative society there might be a tolerance for people living a queer lifestyle, but, the acceptance of transgender people still leaves much to be desired. The life experiences of transgender people half a century ago caused the same mental anguish as those of the life experiences of people today.

Thus, there is still a great necessity for organizations geared specifically to the transgender community, which stand up for their civil rights and take care of them at grassroots level if necessary. After Rivera was evicted from her self-built home along the Hudson River she began to visit a home which had been set up by Chelsea Goodwin, one of her former STAR children. Like Rivera before her, Goodwin takes in transgender youths who are 'down and out' and need help in order to be able to find their place again in society. The fact that a group home which was established in the 1970s still finds people to help in this day and age only further supports the argument that the transgender community is still being neglected by the remaining LGB community. There are many examples which show that this neglect is not out of bias or dislike, but rather simply ignorance. In the second season of *Queer Eye* which was released on Netflix in June of 2018 a transgender man gets a makeover from five homosexual men. In a heart-to-heart, fashion specialist Tan France opens up about his ignorance about transgender men. He explains that he considered surgery for transgender people unnecessarily traumatic and didn't understand the desire of transgender people for the self-determination of their own body, but after meeting this transgender man, he realized how important it was for transgender people to be able to be whomever they authentically feel to be.

Recently, Donna Minkowitz, the writer of the article "Love Hurts" published in the *Village Voice* in 1994 on Brandon Teena, which inspired the movie *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), wrote an article apologizing

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Shepard, "From Community Organization to Direct Services: The Street Trans Action Revolutionaries to Sylvia Rivera Law Project." *Journal of Social Service Research* 39, no.1. (2013), 96

for the tone she set at the time. She states that she didn't fully consider Teena as a transgender man, but rather as a lesbian who must have been so traumatized by life experiences that she turned against her own femininity and decided to go through life as a man.<sup>8</sup> Minkowitz asserts that she was so preoccupied with seeing the story from a lesbian angle that she completely overlooked the true story of Brandon Teena. Minkowitz applied almost all the known tropes to discredit Teena's own gender identity. She asserted that Teena was a lesbian who passed as a man in order to have romantic relationships with girls and that Teena's sexual abuse caused such self-loathing that he turned against his own female body. Furthermore, Minkowitz confesses that at the time, for her, transsexualism only existed in the scope of surgery, and that she did not consider that gender identity was a wide tapestry of expression and determination. Look back on the time of her life in which she wrote the article she admits that people such as Leslie Feinberg and Susan Stryker helped her view the Brandon Teena story in a different light, a transgender light.

As I have been working on this thesis, I have fallen from one revelation into another having to do with what it means to be a woman, a man, or neither, what it means to be feminine and masculine, or both, and how people look at themselves and how people look at others. The history of people fighting the status quo and gender specific stereotypes is vast and mostly still hidden since the community who lived this history was forced to be hidden away from mainstream society.

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<sup>8</sup> Minkowitz, Donna. "How I Broke, and Botched, the Brandon Teena Story." *The Village Voice* (2018) Accessed June 26, 2018 <https://www.villagevoice.com/2018/06/20/how-i-broke-and-botched-the-brandon-teena-story/>

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