Transgender History

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TRANSGENDER HISTORY

SUSAN STRYKER

This book is dedicated to all the trans people who lived the lives that made the history I've outlined here, and to the community activists, too numerous to mention, who continue to advance the cause of social justice for transgender people everywhere.

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

THE BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRANSGENDER MOVEMENT in the United States presented in this book has a lot of personal significance for me. Piecing the story together has been the main focus of my professional life as a historian for nearly twenty years. But as a transsexual woman, I've also been a participant in making that history, along with thousands of other people. What I have to say is colored by my own involvement in that movement, by my life experiences, and by the particular ways that I consider myself to be transgendered.

I'm one of those people who, from earliest memory, always felt I was a girl even though I had a male body at birth and everybody considered me to be a boy. I didn't have an explanation for those feelings when I was younger, and after a lifetime of reflection and study I'm still open-minded now about how best to explain them. I hid those feelings from absolutely everybody until I was in my late teens, and I didn't start coming out publicly as transgendered until the late 1980s, when I was almost thirty. I'd never knowingly met another transgender person before that time.

I started living 24/7 as an openly transsexual lesbian woman in San Francisco in 1991–92, just as I was finishing up my PhD in United States history at the University of California—Berkeley. At the time, it wasn't a great career move, just something I needed to do for my own personal sense of well-being. As wonderful as it was for me to finally feel right about how I presented myself to others and how others

perceived me, making the transition from living as a man to living as a woman had some huge negative effects on my life. Like many transgender people, I spent years being marginally employed because of other people's discomfort, ignorance, and prejudice. Transitioning made relationships with many friends and relatives more difficult. It made me more vulnerable to certain kinds of legal discrimination, and it sometimes made me feel unsafe in public.

Because I lived in the world as a well-educated white man before coming out as the woman I always felt myself to be, I have a very clear measuring stick for gauging sexism and misogyny. My transgender experience is a part of the strong commitment I feel to feminist activism that aims to make the world a better place for all women and girls. Because I now live in the world as a woman who loves women, and because there are times (more common in the past than now) when I've been perceived as an effeminate gay man, I also have a direct experience of homophobia. My transgender experience is thus also part of why I feel a strong commitment to lesbian and gay rights. Although I can't claim that being transgendered gives me any special insight into other kinds of discrimination (based on race or national origin, for example), I have experienced the injustice of being the target of irrational hatred, and this has sensitized me to situations where I see other people being treated unjustly. My transgender experience makes me want to be a good ally to other people who experience forms of discrimination different from my own. It makes me want to help build a world that honors many kinds of human differences. My own vision of a transgender social justice movement is one that addresses the specific kinds of problems transgender people can face in the world, by seeing them as structurally related to problems of racism, poverty, and other systemic injustices.

Starting in the early 1990s, I've had the privilege of using my education as part of a transgender movement for social change. I became a community-based historian, theorist, media-maker, and activist who chronicles transgender experience. I've lived for many years in a very stimulating genderqueer community in San Francisco, which has been

exciting intellectually and artistically as well as politically and socially. A lot of my ideas and opinions about gender and politics crystallized there during the first half of the 1990s, so what I have to say is both generationally and geographically specific—though I do try to stay current in my thinking by continually revising what I learned from my own formative experiences in light of more recent trends, ideas, and developments. I travel a lot and talk to a lot of different kinds of transgender people around the world, and I spend way too much time prowling around the Internet.

By the later 1990s, more and more people were beginning to see transgender issues as a cutting-edge topic, and I was fortunate to receive funding from the Ford Foundation/Social Science Research Council to conduct research on transgender history in San Francisco—research that informs what I have to say in this book. Between 1999 and 2003, I worked as executive director of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, which has one of the world's best collections of transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual historical materials; there I had further opportunities to do ongoing archival research and to talk with other scholars and activists in the rapidly expanding field of transgender studies. A few years later, in 2005, a friend and I made a public television documentary about the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot, then a little-known event in transgender history, which I had uncovered during my years of research. Through the years, I also wrote a few books and articles and edited a couple of anthologies and special journal issues on various transgender and queer topics. Now, as the first decade of the twenty-first century is speeding toward its close, I find myself, at least for now, teaching transgender theory and history as a professor of gender and women's studies. Writing this book is a way for me to summarize some of what I've gleaned from the life I've lived during the past twenty years and to pass it along to others who might find it useful or interesting.

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO TRANSGENDER TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Foundations of a Movement

Because "transgender" is a word that has come into widespread use only in the past couple of decades, its meanings are still under construction. I use it in this book to refer to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender. Some people move away from their birth-assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to another gender in which it would be better for them to live; others want to strike out toward some new location, some space not yet clearly defined or concretely occupied; still others simply feel the need to get away from the conventional expectations bound up with the gender that was initially put upon them. In any case, it is *the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place*—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition—that best characterizes the concept of "transgender" that I want to develop here.

Most often, transgender-related topics have been written about as personal issues—something that an individual experiences inwardly and works to bring into social reality by sharing it with others. There are many autobiographies of people who have "changed sex" and an increasing number of self-help guidebooks for people contemplating such a change. There are now a lot of good documentary films and television shows about transgender people—as well as a lot of exploitative or sensationalistic mass media representations—the vast majority of

which focus on the triumphs and tribulations of particular individuals. There is also an extensive medical and psychological literature that treats transgender phenomena as a personal (and pathological) deviation from social norms of healthy gender expression. This book takes a different approach to transgender topics from all those mentioned above. It focuses instead on the collective political history of transgender social change activism in the United States—that is, on efforts to make it easier and safer and more acceptable for the people who need to cross gender boundaries to be able to do so. It's not designed, however, to be a comprehensive account of transgender history. The goals are to provide a basic chronology from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, and to focus on a number of key events or personalities that help link transgender history to the history of minority movements for social change, to the history of sexuality and gender, and to feminist thought and politics.

Back in the 1970s, the feminist movement tossed around the slogan "The personal is political." Most feminists back then were critical of transgender practices such as cross-dressing, taking hormones to change the gendered appearance of the body, having genital or chest surgery, or living as a member of a gender other than one's birth-assigned gender. They considered such practices to be "personal solutions" to the inner experience of distress about experiencing gender-based oppression—that is, they thought that a female-bodied person passing as a man was just trying to escape the poor pay (or no pay) of "women's work" or to move about more safely in a world that was hostile to women; a feminine male-bodied person, they thought, should work for the social acceptability of sissies and be proudly effeminate instead of pretending to be a "normal" woman, or a "real" one. Feminism, on the other hand, aimed to systematically dismantle the social structures that created gender-based oppression in the first place and that made women the "second sex." Mainstream feminism wanted to raise women's consciousnesses about their own private suffering by grounding that experience in a political analysis of the categorical oppression of all women. It wanted to offer men an education in feminist values in order

to eradicate the sexism and misogyny they (knowingly or unknowingly) directed at women. Feminism was, and still is, a movement to change the world for the better.

One of the goals of this book is to situate transgender social change activism within an expanded feminist framework. Doing so requires us to think in different ways about *how* the personal is political, and about what constitutes gender-based oppression. Transgender feminism, though it has its roots in the feminist radicalism of the late 1960s, is part of what is sometimes now known as the third wave of feminism (the first wave of feminism focused on dress reform, access to education, political equality, and, above all, suffrage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the second wave, also known as the women's movement of the 1960s and '70s, addressed a wide range of issues, including equal pay, sexual and reproductive freedom, recognition of women's unpaid work in the household, better media representations of women, and rape and domestic violence). Third wave feminism has been, in part, a generational response to some of the perceived shortcomings of the second wave, particularly the tendency of second wave feminists to overlook differences among women in their eagerness to see "woman" as a unifying political category. Third wave feminism has been more attuned to the intersections of race, class, and sexuality within gender and more receptive to critical and theoretical work in gender studies that calls into question the usefulness of "woman" as the foundation of all feminist politics. Contemporary transgender movements for social change draw on many of the insights and critiques of third wave feminism.

A feminism that makes room for transgender people still fights to dismantle the structures that prop up gender as a system of oppression, but it does so without passing moral judgment on people who feel the need to change their birth-assigned gender. To reevaluate the relationship between transgender and feminist politics, it is essential to acknowledge that how each of us experiences and understands our gender identity—our sense of being a man or a woman or something that resists those terms—really is a very idiosyncratic personal matter. It

A Biological Basis?

Many people believe that gender identity—the subjective sense of being a man or a woman or both or neither—is rooted in biology, although what the biological "cause" of gender identity might be has never been proven. Many other people understand gender to be more like language than like biology; that is, while they understand us humans to have a biological capacity to use language, they point out we are not born with a hard-wired language "preinstalled" in our brains. Likewise, while we have a biological capacity to identify with and to learn to "speak" from a particular location in a cultural gender system, we don't come into the world with a predetermined gender identity.

Evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden suggests a way to blend learned versus innate models of gender identity development. In *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*, she writes:

> *When does gender identity form during development? Gender identity, like other aspects of temperament, presumably awaits the third trimester, when the brain as a whole is growing. . . . The time around birth may be when the brain's gender identity is being organized. . . . I envision gender identity as a cognitive lens. When a baby opens his or her eyes after birth and looks around, whom will the baby emulate and whom will he or she merely notice? Perhaps a male baby will emulate his father or other men, perhaps not, and a female baby her mother or other women, perhaps not. I imagine that a lens in the brain controls who to focus on as a "tutor." Transgender identity is then the acceptance of a tutor from the opposite sex. Degrees of transgender identity, and of gender variance generally, reflect different degrees of single-mindedness in the selection of the tutor's gender. The development of gender identity thus depends on both brain state and early postnatal experience, because brain state indicates what the lens is, and environmental experience supplies the image to be photographed through that lens and ultimately developed immutably into brain circuitry. Once gender identity is set, like other basic aspects of temperament, life proceeds from there.*

Science writer Deborah Rudacille became convinced that environmental factors helped explain the seeming increase in the prevalence of reported transgender phenomena while researching her book *The Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism, and Transgender Rights*. Rudacille draws on the 2001 paper "Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals and Transsexualism," in which author Christine Johnson posits a causal link between the "reproductive, behavioral, and anatomical effects" of exposure to chemicals commonly found in pesticides and food additives and "the expression of gender identity and other disorders such as reproductive failure." Rudacille links transgenderism to falling sperm counts among human males, to rising numbers of alligators with micropenises; hermaphroditic birds, fish, and amphibians; and to other anomalies purportedly associated with endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the environment.

is something prior to, or underlying, our political actions in the world and not in itself a reflection of our political beliefs. Nontransgender people, after all, think of themselves as having a gender, or being a gender, and nobody asks them to defend the political correctness of their "choice" in the matter or thinks that their having a sense of being gendered somehow compromises or invalidates their other values and commitments. Being transgendered is like being gay—some people are just "that way," though most people aren't. We can be curious about *why* some people are gay or transgendered, and we can propose all kinds of theories or tell lots of interesting stories about how it's possible to be transgendered, but ultimately we simply need to accept that some minor fraction of the population (perhaps including ourselves) simply *is* "that way."

Because members of minority groups are, by definition, less common than members of their corresponding majority groups, members of minorities often experience discrimination and prejudice. Society tends to be organized in ways that (either deliberately or unintentionally) favor the majority; ignorance or misinformation about a less common way of being in the world can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and mischaracterizations. People who feel the need to resist

their birth-assigned gender or to live as a member of another gender have tended to encounter significant forms of discrimination and prejudice—even religious condemnation. Because most people have great difficulty recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person's gender, the gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity, or loss of humanness. That gut-level fear can manifest itself as hatred, outrage, panic, or disgust, which may then translate into physical or emotional violence directed against the person who is perceived as not-quite-human. Such people are often shunned and may be denied such basic needs as housing or employment. Within modern bureaucratic society, many kinds of routine administrative procedures make life very difficult for people who cross the social boundaries of their birth-assigned genders. Birth certificates, school and medical records, professional credentials, passports, driver's licenses, and other such documents provide a composite portrait of each of us as a person with a particular gender, and when these records have noticeable discrepancies or omissions, all kinds of problems can result—inability to marry, for example, or to cross national borders, or qualify for jobs, or gain access to needed social services, or secure legal custody of one's children. Because transgender people typically lack the same kind of support that fully accepted members of society automatically expect, they may be more likely to engage in risky or harmful behaviors and consequently may wind up having more health problems or trouble with the law—which only compounds their already considerable difficulties.

In the United States, members of minority groups often try to oppose or change discriminatory practices and prejudicial attitudes by banding together to offer one another mutual support, to voice their issues in public, to raise money to improve their collective lot in life, to form organizations that address their specific unmet needs, or to participate in electoral politics or lobby for the passage of protective legislation. Some engage in more radical or militant kinds of activism. Some members of the minority group make art or write literature that changes the way others think of them and the issues they face.

Some do the intellectual and theoretical work of analyzing the roots of their particular forms of social oppression and devising strategies and policies that will bring about a better future. Others direct their attention toward promoting self-acceptance and a sense of self-worth among members of the minority community who have internalized disempowering attitudes or beliefs about their difference from the dominant majority. In short, a multidimensional activist movement for social change often begins to take shape. Just such a movement to address transgender-related social justice issues developed in the United States in the decades after World War II.

Terms and Definitions

Before moving on to a discussion of that history, however, it would be worthwhile to spend a little time defining some of the common terms, concepts, and assumptions that I will be using throughout this book. Because transgender issues touch on fundamental questions of human existence, they take us into areas that we rarely consider carefully; usually, we simply experience these things without thinking about them too much—as we do with gravity, for example, or breathing. In the everyday course of events, most people have no reason to ask questions such as "What makes a man a man, or a woman a woman?" or "How is my body related to my social role?" or even "How do I know what my gender is?" Rather, we just go about our everyday business without cause to question the unexamined assumptions that form part of our working reality. But gender, like gravity or breathing, is a really complicated topic when you start taking it apart and breaking it down—as the following terms and definitions attest. In offering these handy thumbnail sketches of how I use certain key concepts, I nevertheless hope to complicate how we understand them and to begin introducing some of the arguments that will play themselves out in the chapters ahead.

Sex: Sex is not the same as gender, although many people use the terms interchangeably in everyday speech. Sex is generally considered

biological, and gender is generally considered cultural (although that understanding is changing too). The words "male" and "female" refer to sex. Sex refers to reproductive capacity or potential—whether an individual body produces one or the other of the two specialized cells (egg or sperm) necessary for our species to physically reproduce itself. Sperm producers are said to be of the male sex, and egg producers are said to be of the female sex. This should not be taken to mean that there are only two kinds of bodies (male and female) or that all bodies are either one or the other of only two possible kinds of bodies. Bodies that mix physical characteristics of male or female, of which there are many different varieties, are said to be intersex (defined below). The sex status of any particular body is determined genetically, predominantly by the parts of the genes called the chromosomes (which have been given the identifying labels X and Y). The genetic or chromosomal sex of the body cannot (or at least cannot yet) be changed. In the contemporary United States, it is still widely believed that gender (defined below) is also determined by physical sex—meaning that a person with a male body is automatically considered a man and a person with a female body is automatically considered a woman—hence the common tendency to use the words "sex" and "gender" interchangeably. Some transgender people share this belief and assume that their need to cross gender boundaries has a physical, sex-linked cause. Other transgender people understand their sense of being transgendered to be entirely unrelated to biological sex differences and to be related instead to psychological and cultural processes. As mentioned above, it's possible to spin many different theories about why transgender people exist.

Intersex: Typically, being an egg-producing body or a sperm-producing body carries with it a number of related physical traits. Egg-producing bodies tend to have a uterus where the fused egg/sperm cells grow into new individuals, and they also tend to have milk-producing glands that provide nourishment for the young. Sperm-producing bodies tend to have a penis, which is useful for delivering the sperm to the uterus. These are, however, only the most common ways that natural selection

has organized the reproductive anatomy of human bodies. When an egg and sperm cell come together, their chromosomes can combine in patterns (called "karyotypes") other than the two that result in typical male (XY) or typical female (XX) body types. Some genetic irregularities cause a body that is genetically XY (male) to look female at birth. Some bodies are born with genitals that look like a mixture of typically male and typically female shapes. Some genetically female bodies (XX) are born without vaginas, wombs, or ovaries. All of these variations on the most typical organization of human reproductive anatomy—along with many, many more—are called "intersex" conditions (and used to be called hermaphroditism). Some intersex people now prefer the medical term "DSD" (for Disorders of Sexual Development) to describe their sex status, but others reject this term as unduly pathologizing. Intersex conditions are far more common than most people realize; reliable estimates put the number at about one in two thousand births. Some transgender people who think their desire to cross gender boundaries has a biological cause consider themselves to have an intersex condition (current theories favor sex-linked neurological differences in the brain). Politically and sociologically, however, the transgender and intersex activist communities are quite different. Intersex activism, which will be discussed only tangentially in this book as it touches upon transgender issues, tends to focus on ending the practice of performing "normalization" surgery on infants born with noticeably ambiguous genitals; transgender people are rightly considered to face different kinds of problems with the medical establishment.

Morphology: Unlike genetic sex, a person's morphology, or the shape of the body that we typically associate with being male or female, can be modified in some respects—through surgery, hormones, exercise, clothing, and other methods. A typical adult male body shape is to have external genitalia (penis and testicles), a flat chest (no breasts), and a narrow pelvis. A typical female body shape is to have a vulva, a clitoris, breasts, and a broad pelvis. Morphology also refers to such aspects of body shape as the size of the hips relative to the waist, the

breadth of the shoulders relative to height, the thickness of the limbs, and other gender-signifying features.

Secondary sex characteristics: Certain physical traits tend to be associated with genetic sex or reproductive potential, such as skin texture, body fat distribution, patterns of hair growth, or relative overall body size. Many of these physical traits are the effects of varying levels of hormones, the "chemical messengers" such as estrogen and testosterone that are produced by various endocrine glands throughout the body. Adjusting a person's hormone levels can change some (but not all) sex-linked traits. Secondary sex characteristics constitute perhaps the most socially significant part of morphology—taken together, they are the bodily "signs" that others read to guess at our sex, attribute gender to us, and assign us to the social category they understand to be most appropriate for us. Secondary sex characteristics are the aspect of our bodies that we all manipulate in an attempt to communicate to others our own sense of who we feel we are—whether we wear clothing with a neckline that emphasizes our cleavage, or whether we allow hair stubble to be visible on our faces. In this sense, all human bodies are modified bodies; all are shaped according to cultural practices. Shaping the body to represent oneself to others is such an important part of human culture that it's virtually impossible to practice any kind of body modification without other members of society having an opinion about whether the practice is good or bad, or right or wrong, depending on how or why one does it. Everything from cutting one's nails to cutting off one's leg falls somewhere on a spectrum

Anonymous male cross-dresser at Casa Susanna, a private resort for cross-dressers in New York's Catskill Mountains from the late 1950s until the early 1960s.

of moral or ethical judgment. Consequently, many members of society have strong feelings and opinions about transgender body modification practices.

Gender: Gender is not the same as sex, though the two terms are often used interchangeably, even in technical or scholarly literature, creating a great deal of confusion. Gender is generally considered to be cultural, and sex, biological (though contemporary theories posit sex as a cultural category as well). The words "man" and "woman" refer to gender. No one is born a woman or a man—rather, as the saying goes, "one becomes one" through a complex process of socialization. Gender is the social organization of different kinds of bodies into different categories of people. (The English word "gender" is derived from *genre,* meaning "kind" or "type"). Historically and cross-culturally, there have been many different systems of organizing people into genders. Some cultures, including many Native American cultures, have had three or four social genders. Some attribute social gender to the work people do rather than to the bodies they live in. In some cultures people can change their social gender based on dreams or visions. In some they change it with a scalpel. The important things to bear in mind are that gender is historical (it changes through time), that it varies from place to place and culture to culture, and that it is contingent (it depends on a lot of different and seemingly unrelated things coming together). This takes us into one of the central issues of transgender politics—that the sex of the body does not bear any *necessary* or *deterministic* relationship to the social category in which that body lives. This assertion, drawn from the observation of human social variability, is political precisely because it contradicts the common belief that whether a person is a man or a woman in the social sense is fundamentally determined by the sex of the body. It's political in the additional sense that how a society organizes its members into categories based on their unchosen physical differences is never politically neutral. One of the main points of feminism is that societies tend to be organized in ways that are more exploitative of female bodies than of male bodies. Without

disagreeing with that basic insight, a transgender perspective would also be sensitive to an additional dimension of gender oppression—that our culture today tries to reduce the wide range of livable body types into two and *only* two genders, one of which is subject to greater social control than the other, with both genders being based on genital sex. Lives that do not conform to this dominant pattern are generally treated as human garbage. Breaking apart the forced unity of sex and gender, while increasing the scope of livable lives, is an important goal of transgender feminism and social justice activism.

Gender role: An increasingly outdated term in contemporary society, but one that nevertheless continues to surface in pernicious ways, "gender role" refers to social expectations of proper behavior and activities for a member of a particular gender. It's where stereotypes come from. It is the social script that says a man should be a doctor and a woman should be a nurse, that a woman should be a flight attendant and a man should be a pilot, that mothers should stay at home with their children and fathers should have steady jobs outside the home. While it is certainly possible to live a happy and fulfilled life by choosing to do things that are socially conventional (such as being a stay-at-home mom), gender roles tell us that if we don't perform the prescribed expectations, we are failing to be proper women or men.

Gender comportment: We perform our social gender through our gender comportment, bodily actions such as how we use our voices, cross our legs, hold our heads, wear our clothes, dance around the room, throw a ball, walk in high heels. These are things that each of us learns to do during the course of our lives by watching and mirroring others with whom we identity, as well as by being subtly (or not so subtly) disciplined by other members of our society (particularly by our families) when we perform the "wrong" thing or perform the "right" thing poorly.

Gender identity: Each person has a subjective sense of fit with a particular gender category; this is one's gender identity. For most people, there is a sense of congruence between the category one has been assigned to and trained in, and what one considers oneself to be. Transgender people demonstrate that this is not always the case—that it is possible to form a sense of oneself as *not like* other members of the gender one has been assigned to, or to think of oneself as properly belonging to another gender category. Many people who have never experienced a sense of gender incongruence doubt that transgender people can really experience this, and transgender people who experience it often have a hard time explaining to others what this feels like. One's gender identity could perhaps best be described as how one feels about being referred to by a particular pronoun. How gender identity develops in the first place and how gender identities can be so diverse are hotly debated topics that go straight into the controversies about nature versus nurture and biological determinism versus cultural construction. Some people think that transgender feelings are caused by inborn physical characteristics; others think that they are caused by how children are raised or by the emotional dynamics in their families.

Gender identity disorder: Feelings of unhappiness or distress about the incongruence between the gender-signifying parts of one's body, one's gender identity, and one's social gender (a condition sometimes called "gender dysphoria") are officially classified by medical and psychiatric professionals in the United States as a mental illness known as Gender Identity Disorder, or GID. GID is very controversial within transgender communities. Some people resent having their sense of gender labeled as a sickness, while others take great comfort from believing they have a condition that can be cured with proper treatment. Generally, a person who wants to use hormones and surgery to change his or her gender appearance, or who wants to change his or her legal or bureaucratic sex, has to be diagnosed with GID. This requires a psychological evaluation and a period of living in the desired gender role before access is granted

Gender Identity Disorder

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition*, published in 2000, includes the following diagnostic criteria for gender identity disorder.

302.6 Gender Identity Disorder in Children
302.85 Gender Identity Disorder in Adolescents or Adults

A. A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). In children, the disturbance is manifested by four (or more) of the following:
(1) repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex;
(2) in boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing;
(3) strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex;
(4) intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex;
(5) strong preference for playmates of the other sex. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

to medical treatments, which then allow for a legal change in gender status. Some transgender people question why gender change needs to be medicalized in the first place, while others argue that they should have access to healthcare services without having their need to do so be considered pathological. In spite of its being an official psychopathology, "treatments" for GID are not covered by health insurance in the United States because they are considered "elective,"

B. Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. In children, the disturbance is manifested by any of the following: in boys, assertion that his penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear or assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities; in girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis, or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion toward normative feminine clothing. In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., request for hormones, surgery, or other procedures to physically alter sexual characteristics to simulate the other sex) or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.

C. The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Specify if (for sexually mature individuals):
Sexually Attracted to Males
Sexually Attracted to Females
Sexually Attracted to Both
Sexually Attracted to Neither

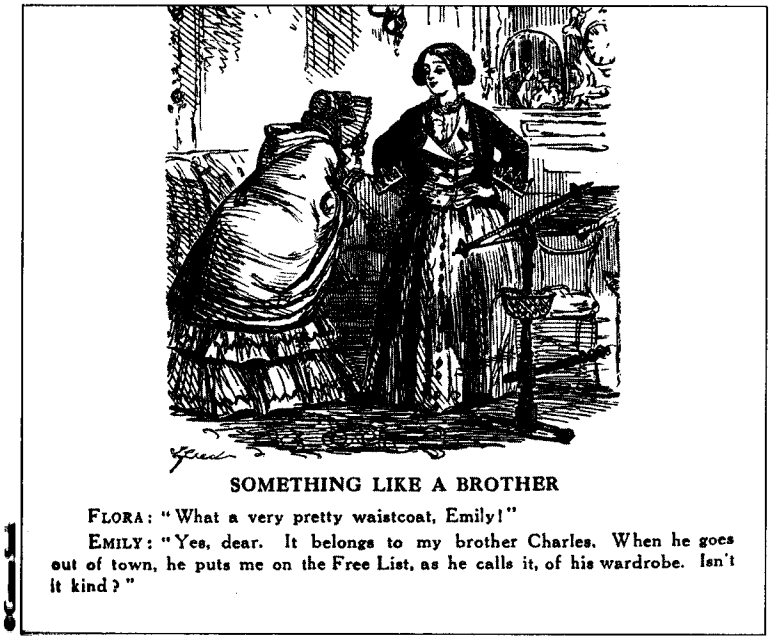
"cosmetic," or even "experimental." This is a truly inexcusable double bind—if being transgendered is not considered psychopathological, it should be delisted as a mental disorder; if it is to be considered psychopathological, its treatment should be covered as a legitimate healthcare need. The status of GID and the rationale for transgender access to healthcare raise important questions about the U.S. healthcare industry more generally, and about the increasingly powerful ways that

medicine and science define our bodies and lives. Struggles revolving around GID form an important part of transgender political history and contemporary activism.

Sexuality: What we find erotic and how we take pleasure in our bodies constitute our sexuality. For most of us, this involves using our sex organs (genitals), but sexuality can involve many body parts or physical activities, as well as the erotic use of objects. Sexuality describes how (and with whom) we act on our erotic desires. Sexuality is analytically distinct from gender but intimately bound with it, like two lines on a graph that have to intersect. The most common terms we use to label or classify our erotic desires depend on identifying the gender of the person toward whom our desire is directed: "heterosexual" (toward a member of another gender), "homosexual" (toward a member of the same gender), "bisexual" (toward a member of any gender). These terms also depend on our understanding of our own gender—*homo-* and *hetero-* make sense only in relation to a gender they are the "same as" or "different from." We can also be "asexual" (not expressing erotic desire for anyone) or "autosexual" (taking pleasure in our own bodies rather than in interacting with others). Because many transgender people don't fit into other people's sexual orientation categories (or because they don't have a clear sense themselves of where they might fit in), there is a relatively high proportion of asexuality and autosexuality in transgender populations. Some people are specifically attracted to transgender people. A transgender person may be of any sexual orientation, just like a nontransgender person.

Transvestite: This is an old word, coined in 1910 by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. He used it to describe "the erotic urge for disguise," which is how he understood the motivation that led some people to wear clothing generally associated with a social gender other than the one assigned to them at birth. For Hirschfeld, "transvestites" were one of many different types of "sexual intermediaries," including homosexuals and hermaphrodites, who occupied a spectrum between

"pure male" and "pure female." Initially, this term was used in much the way that "transgender" (see below) is used now, to convey the sense of a wide range of gender-variant identities and behaviors. During the course of the last century, however, to the extent that it has not fallen entirely out of favor, it refers primarily to people who wear gender-atypical clothing but do not engage in other kinds of body modification. It usually refers to men rather than women and usually carries with it the association of cross-dressing for erotic pleasure.



SOMETHING LIKE A BROTHER

FLORA: "What a very pretty waistcoat, Emily!"

EMILY: "Yes, dear. It belongs to my brother Charles. When he goes out of town, he puts me on the Free List, as he calls it, of his wardrobe. Isn't it kind?"

Popular opinion in the nineteenth century sometimes linked feminist dress reform activism with cross-gender dressing.

Cross-dresser: A term intended as a nonjudgmental replacement for "transvestite," it is usually considered to be neutrally descriptive of the practice of wearing gender-atypical clothing rather than associating that practice with an erotic impulse. The practice of cross-dressing can

have many meanings and motivations: Besides being a way to resist or move away from an assigned social gender, it could be a theatrical practice (either comic or dramatic), part of fashion or politics (such as the practice of women's wearing pants once was), part of religious ceremonies, or part of celebrating public festivals and holidays (such as Mardi Gras, Carnival, or Halloween).

Transsexual: Another term sometimes traced to Magnus Hirschfeld, it typically refers to people who feel a strong desire to change their sexual morphology in order to live entirely as permanent, full-time members of the gender other than the one they were assigned to at birth. The term was used in the title of a 1949 article by D. O. Caldwell, "Psychopathia Transexualis," but it was popularized by Dr. Harry Benjamin in the 1950s and became widely known as a result of the spectacular publicity given to the 1952 surgical "sex change" of Christine Jorgensen, a former photographer and film editor from the Bronx whose genital conversion operation made headlines around the world. The term "transsexual" was introduced to draw a distinction between those "transvestites" who sought medical interventions to change their physical bodies (that is, their "sex") and those who merely wanted to change their gendered clothing (the "vestments" in the root of "transvestite"). Historically, the practice of transsexuality has involved surgical modification of the reproductive organs and chest, hormone use to change secondary sex characteristics, and permanent removal of facial and body hair for individuals moving from male embodiment toward social womanhood. These medical procedures have then been the basis for legal or bureaucratic changes in gender designation. More recently, people who don't consider themselves to be transsexual have increasingly started using these same body modification practices, and they may do so without trying to change their legal gender. (For example, a person born with a female body might use testosterone or have mastectomies but still live legally or socially as a woman with traditionally masculine attributes). The result of such practices is another layer of human-generated complexity added on top of already

complicated biological sex differences and cultural gender categories. The breakdown in familiar distinctions between who is a transsexual and who is not, and who (based on diagnosis with GID) is considered an acceptable recipient of medicalized body modification procedures, is another very hotly debated topic. The rapid evolution of new motives for changing one's embodiment (for example, a woman with a known genetic risk for breast cancer opting for a "preventive" mastectomy, or a professional athlete taking performance-enhancing drugs—neither of whom may consider themselves transgendered, but who do some of the same things to their bodies that transgender people do to theirs), coupled with new biomedical possibilities for doing so, is part of what drives the rapidly developing terminology in the transgender field.

Transgender: The key term around which this book revolves, "transgender" has become widespread only in the last decade, although the word has a longer history (which will be discussed in later chapters). As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the term implies movement away from an initially assigned gender position. It most generally refers to any and all kinds of variation from gender norms and expectations. Of course, given that all gender, as defined above, varies through place and time, defining "transgender" in this way inevitably brings up the related questions of "Which norms and expectations?" and "Whose norms and expectations?" What counts as *trans*gender varies as much as gender itself, and it always depends on historical and cultural context. It seems safe to say that the difference between gender and transgender in any given situation, however, involves the difference between a dominant or common construction of gender and a marginalized or infrequent one. Recently, some people have begun to use the term "transgender" to refer *only* to those who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned to at birth, and to use other terms for people who seek to resist their birth-assigned gender without abandoning it, or who seek to create some kind of new gender location. This book uses "transgender" to refer to the widest imaginable range of gender-variant practices and identities.

Transman or transwoman: In transgender communities, people commonly use the words "transmen," "transgender men," or "transsexual men" when they are talking about people who were born with female bodies but consider themselves to be men and live socially as men. Likewise, the words "transwomen," "transgender women," or "transsexual women" refer to people born with male bodies who consider themselves to be women and live socially as women. The "man" and "woman" refer, in keeping with the definition of gender given above, to the social category the person belongs to, not his or her original biological sex. Pronoun use similarly refers to social gender and gender identity: "she" and "her" are appropriate for transgender women, and "he" and "him" for transgender men. In a lot of medical literature, especially older literature, the reverse is often true. Doctors and psychiatrists tend to use "transsexual male" to refer to transgender women (and will often say "he") and "transsexual female" to refer to transgender men (and often say "she"). In keeping with more general social etiquette, it's considered polite to use the gender terms preferred by the person to whom they refer.

Genderqueer: In the early 1990s, some people started to use the word "queer," which had been a derogatory term for homosexuality, in a positive way. Although it's now often used as a synonym for gay or lesbian, the people who first reappropriated the term were trying to find a way to talk about their opposition to heterosexual social norms without automatically assuming that meant they were gay; "queer" was less a sexual orientation than it was a political one, what the "queer theorists" of the day called being "antiheteronormative" (a term discussed more fully in chapter 5). "Queer" is usually associated with sexuality, but from the beginning a vocal minority insisted on the importance of transgender and gender-variant practices for queer politics. Many such people took to calling themselves "genderqueers." People who use "transgender" to refer only to those kinds of people who want to live in a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth sometimes use "genderqueer" to mean the kinds of people who

resist gender norms without "changing sex," but this is not always the case.

Alphabet soup: A lot of acronyms are used by members of the T section of the LGBTIQQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, and allies) community. MTF and FTM refer, respectively, to "male-to-female" and "female-to-male," indicating the direction of gender crossing; it would be more accurate to talk about "male-to-woman" or "female-to-man," but the fact of the matter is that nobody actually says those things. (Some transgender people resent and resist these "directional" labels, claiming they make about as much sense as calling someone a "heterosexual-to-gay" man or "heterosexual-to-lesbian" woman, and that they serve only to marginalize transmen and transwomen within the larger populations of other men and women.) CD (or sometimes XD) means "cross-dressing." TS refers to a transsexual, who might be pre-op or post-op, or even no-ho /no-op (electing neither hormones nor surgery but still identifying as a member of the gender he or she was not assigned to at birth). A TG is "a transgender," which, when used as an identity label rather than a broadly descriptive term, often refers to those who live permanently in a social gender they were not assigned to at birth, might or might not use hormones, might or might not have chest surgery, but who usually don't have genital surgery. The right term to use in reference to any particular person really isn't in the eye of the beholder—it's determined by the person who applies it to him-, her-, or itself.

Gender-neutral pronouns: Given that the English language doesn't allow us to refer to other individuals without gendering them (we have to choose between "he," "she," or "it," with the latter not considered appropriate for reference to humans precisely because it doesn't indicate a gender), some transgender people favor the use of newly coined, "gender-neutral" pronouns. They might use "ze" or "sie" in place of "he" or "she," or the word "hir" instead of "his" or "her." Sometimes, in writing, people will use the unpronounceable "s/he." Appropriate

use of gender-neutral pronouns can be tricky. The practice often works well within transgender communities, where many people understand what's being said, but it can get confusing for outsiders. Changes in language structure usually happen very slowly and pronouns are among the linguistic elements most resistant to change, so trying to speed up a change of usage can sometimes sound forced or strange. Some transgender people—often those who have worked very hard to attain a gender status other than the one assigned to them at birth—take offense when gender-neutral pronouns, rather than the appropriate gendered ones, are applied to them because they perceive this usage as a way that others fail to acknowledge their attained gender.

Cisgender or cissexual: Two other recently coined words that are gaining a following are "cisgender" and "cissexual," which some people prefer to the words "nontransgendered" or "nontranssexual." The prefix *cis-* means "on the same side as" (that is, the opposite of *trans*). The idea behind the terms is to resist the way that "woman" or "man" can mean "nontransgendered woman" or "nontransgendered man" by default, unless the person's transgender status is explicitly named; it's the same logic that would lead somebody to prefer saying "white woman" and "black woman" rather than simply using "woman" to describe a white woman (thus presenting white as the norm) and "black woman" to indicate a deviation from the norm. Similarly, "cisgendered" or "cissexual" names the usually unstated assumption of nontransgender status contained in the words "man" and "woman."

Subcultural terms: In an important sense, all the terms mentioned in this section on definitions are subcultural terms—words that originate and circulate within a smaller subset of a larger culture. However, the terms listed here are also the ones most often used by cultural elites, or within mass media, or within powerful professions such as science and medicine and academia. They are often derived from the experiences of white transgender people. But there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other specialized words related to the subject matter of this book that could

just as easily be listed in this section on terms and definitions. A number of these words come out of gay and lesbian subcultures—for example, "drag" (clothing associated with a particular gender or activity, often worn in a parodic, self-conscious, or theatrical manner); "drag king" and "drag queen" (people who engage in cross-gender performance, either on the stage or on the street, usually in subcultural spaces such as gay-friendly bars, nightclubs, neighborhoods, or commercial sex zones); "butch" (the expression of traits, mannerisms, or appearances usually associated with masculinity, particularly when expressed by lesbian women or gay men); or "femme" (the expression of traits, mannerisms, or appearances usually associated with femininity, particularly when expressed by lesbian women or gay men). Many terms, such as "bulldagger" for a very butch woman, originate in queer communities of color. The "house" subcultures of many urban African American, Latino, and Asian American communities (such as the ones represented in Jennie Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning*) have large costume balls in which participants "walk the categories," competing for best enactment of a multitude of very highly stylized gender categories. Some words referring to practices or identities that are termed "transgender" in this book are culturally or ethnically specific, such as the *hijra* in India, the Polynesian *mahu*, South American *travesti*, or Native American "two-spirit." The seemingly inexhaustible global catalog of specialized terms for gender variety shows how impossible it really is to group such a wide range of phenomena together under the single term "transgender" without keeping that word's definition very flexible and without paying close attention to who is using it to refer to whom, and for what reasons.

A final note on the use of the words "queer" and "transgender" throughout the text: Oddly enough, for somebody trained as a historian, I sometimes use these words in ways that may sound anachronistic. One reason for doing so is simply stylistic—they are short, easily pronounced, familiar words that can serve as a shorthand for a more complicated idea or identity or way of acting that would be cumbersome to spell out in detail. But the other reason has to do with the kind of intellectual work

that I want these words to do. Sometimes I use "queer" to describe many different kinds of people who come together in the same space or for a common cause—for example, to protest discrimination aimed at drag queens at Compton's Cafeteria in 1966 (described in chapter 3)—because I don't want to say "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, drag, and butch individuals, along with male and female prostitutes who might well be heterosexual" every time I need to refer to the group collectively. The idea I'm trying to get across is that many different kinds of people might in fact have something in common with one another in their opposition to an oppressive situation. I also want to avoid heading down the rabbit hole of historical nit-picking. All of these terms have their histories, which can bog down the storytelling, unless telling those histories is the point of the story. So I have chosen, in some instances, to just use the word "queer" rather than split hairs about precisely which term would be most accurate at any particular time and place.

Likewise, I use the word "transgender" as a shorthand way of talking about a wide range of gender variance and gender atypicality in periods before the word was coined, and I sometimes apply it to people who might not apply it to themselves. Some butch women or queeny men will say that they are not transgender because they do not want to change sex. Some transsexuals will say that they are not transgender because they do. There is no way of using the word that doesn't offend some people by including them where they don't want to be included or excluding them from where they do want to be included. And yet, I still think the term is useful as a simple word for indicating when some practice or identity crosses gender boundaries that are considered socially normative in the contemporary United States. Calling all of these things transgender is a device for telling a story about the political history of gender variance that is not limited to any one particular experience.

Transgender Issues in the Spotlight

Why the current obsession with all things transgender, when transgender phenomena seem to be a pretty persistent part of human cultures across time and around the world? Although the mass media have paid nonstop

attention to transgender issues since at least the 1950s, the past several years certainly have witnessed a steady increase in transgender visibility, and the trend has been toward increasingly positive representation. As of late 2007, Googling "transgender" retrieves roughly 7.3 million hits, while "transsexual" nets 6.4 million, "transvestite" gets 3.1 million, and "drag queen" gets 1.9 million ("drag king" results in only about 200,000 hits, roughly the same as "genderqueer"). Back in the 1950s, Christine Jorgensen could generate millions of words of press coverage simply for *being* transsexual, whereas now the contemporary media are completely saturated with continual references to and representations of transsexuality and other transgender phenomena—everything from a teacher who changes sex on the animated cable television show *South Park* to a Barbara Walters newsmagazine report on children who transition at an early age to a segment of *Larry King Live* devoted to "Transgender World" to a *Newsweek* cover story on transgenderism. What's all the fuss about?

The contingency of gender, mentioned above, has to be taken into consideration when answering that question—a lot of cultural trends, social conditions, and historical circumstances have collided to make "transgender" a hot topic. Some people think that the numbers of transgender people are on the rise. Those who favor biological theories point to environmental factors. Other observers insist that increased transgender visibility is just an artifact of the Internet age—not really a rise in prevalence, just a new way for previously isolated and socially invisible people to link up and disseminate information about themselves. Still others, of a particular religious frame of mind, are keen to interpret rampant transgenderism as a token of the moral debauchery they believe will characterize the last days of humanity on earth before the Apocalypse.

The more secular minded point to the confluence of several other contributing factors. Globalization brings us all into increasingly frequent and extensive contact with people from cultures different from our own—including people who have different experiences of gender and sexuality. Among many politically progressive people, an emerging

transnational perspective has sensitized those of us who live in the United States to be more aware of how our foundational assumptions about what the world is like are just that—assumptions, and not always true for other people. In feminist and gay movements, this trend has led some people to rethink how feminist and gay politics can unwittingly reproduce gender norms. As a result, transgender issues, which call our attention to otherwise invisible complexities of the gender system's operation, have come to be seen as cutting-edge concerns for some gays, lesbians, and feminists. Sociologically, transgender communities have been coming into closer and closer alignment with sexual minority communities. This is due in part to the AIDS/HIV epidemic that began in the 1980s (male-to-female transsexuals of color have one of the highest infection rates of any population in the world) and in part to the queer movement in the 1990s, which worked to break down old divisions between sexual identity communities. It's precisely because transgender phenomena provide meaty evidence for contemporary debates about identity and community that transgender issues have become an increasingly studied topic in the humanities and social sciences.

The current fascination with transgender also probably has something to do with new ideas about how representation works in the age of digital media. Back in the analog era, a representation (word, image, idea) was commonly assumed to point to some real thing, the same way a photograph was an image produced by light bouncing off a physical object and causing a chemical change on a piece of paper, or the way a sound recording was a groove cut in a piece of vinyl by sound waves produced by a musical instrument or a person's voice. A person's social and psychological gender was commonly assumed to point to that person's biological sex in exactly the same way: Gender was considered a representation of a physical sex. But a digital image or sound is something else entirely. It's unclear exactly how it's related to the world of physical objects. It doesn't point to some "real" thing in quite the same way, and it might in fact be a complete fabrication built up pixel by pixel or bit by bit—but a fabrication that nevertheless exists as an image or a sound as real as any other. Transgender gender representation works the same

Religion and Transgender

The Bible says a lot of things about sexuality and gender that even observant Christians and Jews no longer pay much attention to—for example, that if a married couple has intercourse during the woman's menstrual period, both partners should be executed (Leviticus 18:19), or that if a man gets into a fight with another man, and his wife tries to help him out by grabbing the other man's genitals, her hand should be cut off (Deuteronomy 25:11–12). But many people who look for religious justification for their antitransgender views still point to the following verse, Deuteronomy 22:5: "A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."

As transgender religious scholar Virginia Ramey Mollenkott points out in *Omnigender*, her award-winning overview of religious attitudes toward sex/gender variance, many Christian fundamentalists have a deep stake in maintaining the gender binary. Right-wing evangelist Charles Colson, for example (who served time in federal prison as one of the conspirators in the Watergate scandal that brought down President Richard Nixon, and whose "born-again" experience there inspired him to launch a prison ministry), has claimed that intersex babies, born with ambiguous genitalia, must undergo surgery to become unambiguously male or female because all individuals have a duty "to be fruitful and multiply," because sexual activity is permissible only within marriage, and because marriage is legally limited to an exchange of vows between one man and one woman.

As Mollenkott's book makes clear, however, many religious traditions, including many denominations and schools of thought within Christianity, adhere to a more tolerant perspective on transgender issues. One organization that promotes acceptance of gender diversity rather than condemnation is the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and the Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California (http://clgs.[illegible]). The center sponsored a national Transgender Religious Summit in [illegible]7, attracting religiously observant transgender people, ministers, and [illegible]s from all around the country.

way. For the generation that's grown up amid the turn-of-the-century digital media and telecommunications revolution, transgender often just makes sense intuitively. It's not as big a deal as it used to be, especially in the big coastal cities, and thus more people who feel led to follow the transgender path do so, with fewer bad consequences.

Probably half a dozen other things also figure into the equation. The end of the Cold War ushered in an era when it became politically imperative to think outside familiar binaries. It's not just East versus West, communism versus capitalism anymore (however much the right wing tries to create new dichotomies between Islam and the West); transgender reflects a similar shift in thinking beyond the binaries of "man" and "woman." There was also that sense in the 1990s, so hard to remember less than a decade later, that the calendar's millennial rollover into the twenty-first century meant we would soon be living in "the future," when everything would be different. Transgender came to represent part of that future, where new biotechnology and medical science promised to turn us all into human-machine hybrids.

But the reality, quite apart from science fiction fantasies, is that biomedical technology really is fundamentally transforming the conditions of human life on earth. Stop for a moment to reflect on recent developments in reproductive technology: cloning, in vitro fertilization, intrauterine surgeries, sperm and egg banking, neonatal critical care, surrogacy, genetic engineering, gene therapy. As these and other biomedical developments continue to coalesce, it appears that we are on the verge of completely separating biological reproduction (the functional reason for sexual difference) from the status of one's social and psychological gender. That is a future radically different from the whole of past human experience. Contemporary transgender issues offer a window onto that coming world.

On a Personal Note . . .

On a gloriously sunny and unseasonably warm San Francisco afternoon in June 2007, Lynnee Breedlove was onstage and working the crowd gathered in Dolores Park at the Fourth Annual Trans March and

Rally—supposedly the largest public gathering to date of transgender people, and friends, allies, supporters, lovers, and families. "How do you tell the trannies from the genderqueers?" asked the former lead singer of the legendary lesbian punk band Tribe 8 and author of the drug-fueled bike messenger cult-novel-cum-underground movie *Godspeed*. Breedlove waited a beat before delivering his punch line: "When you ask the trannies if they're a boy or girl, they answer 'yes'; when you ask the genderqueers, they answer 'no.'"

Lynnee's joke was right on the money, I thought, as I waited backstage to go on and say a few words myself, and as I looked out over the sea of several thousand faces. Even after being in the transgender scene for so long, I found the crowd a bewitching spectacle: brilliantly tattooed, biologically female queer femme women and the trans guys who used to be their dyke girlfriends; straight-looking male-to-female transsexuals with nail salon manicures sitting side by side with countercultural transsexual women sporting face jewelry, dreadlocks, and thrift-store chic; lithe young people of indeterminate gender; black bulldaggers, white fairies, Asian queens, Native two-spirits; effeminate trannyfags and butch transsexual lesbians; kids of parents who had changed sex and parents who supported their kids' rejection of the labels their society had handed them. Some people walked around in fetish gear, some in chain-store khakis or floral-print sundresses from the discount clothing outlet; most wore the casually androgynous style of clothing that is the cultural norm. *Vive la différence*, I thought as I stepped up to the mike and surveyed the beautiful range of human diversity spread out on the grass before me. *Live and let live.*