Alienation and Alliances:

Transgender Coalition-Building from the 1970s through the 1990s

Julia Grafstein

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Introduction

At the Gay Pride Gala in New York City in June 1973, transgender activist Sylvia Rivera was greeted by boos and slurs from a crowd comprised largely of members from the lesbian and gay community, their allies, and feminists as she took the stage to speak. Undeterred, Rivera spoke about the brutality and ostracism transgender and gender-nonconforming people faced every day, not only by the police but also by purported allies in the gay and lesbian communities. She called for unity and collaboration in the struggle for equal rights. By the conclusion of her speech, she had won over the crowd who began chanting "Gay Power" along with Rivera. A speech that started with anti-transgender slurs and hateful rhetoric from the audience concluded with a moment of unity within the LGBTQ community.[1]

Rivera's speech embodied both key tensions in LGBTQ organizing and central themes in queer history. As transgender activism began to become more visible in the 1970s, the LGBTQ movement was driven apart by tensions between gay, lesbian, and transgender people, often inhibiting collaboration and leading to the ostracism of trans people. In all too many cases, transgender people were left out of both the story of gay and lesbian activism and the activism itself. The commonly adopted acronym "LGBTQ" implies a kind of unity. This familiar moniker, however, has brushed over the ways that the queer community has been divided for decades. The implicit unity in "LGBTQ" disguised how often gay rights were prioritized over trans rights by queer activists and erased the prejudice within the community that sometimes hindered potential coalitions.

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[1] Sylvia Rivera, *"Y'all Better Quiet Down" Original Authorized Video, 1973 Gay Pride Rally NYC*, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o.

The LGBTQ label also suggests that all members in the community shared a history even as it implicitly prioritized gay and lesbian experiences. Transgender people have long been an active group with a profound history of activism and organizing; by recovering the lost history of transgender activism, we can not only better understand the relationships within the LGBTQ community, but also make more informed policy decisions and address stigma marking the trans community, allowing people to become better educated and understanding of trans activism today. This thesis examines the extent to which transgender activists collaborated (or failed to collaborate) with other activist groups–from feminists to lesbian and gay rights activists–and how they were viewed by these communities from the 1970s until the 1990s. In addition, this project considers trans activism conducted without allies.

The years between the 1970s through the 1990s represented a critical period in trans activism, as trans people built new organizations and identified key areas of reform. Such work grew out of notable events in the 1950s and 1960s that increased the visibility of transgender people in the media and the medical community. In 1952, Christine Jorgensen made her debut as the "Blonde Bombshell," the first woman to publicly undergo gender confirmation surgery. Jorgensen's story was the subject of numerous news stories on gender affirmation surgery and the topic of being transgender, and her story highlighted issues that pervaded post-World War II American culture, such as the limits of individualism and appropriate gender norms.[2] Her transition from a symbol of masculinity, a US serviceman, to a "blonde beauty," a symbol of white femininity, exemplified the possibilities of gender-affirming care and made her more

[2] Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000). For more information on Jorgensen's life, see Richard Docter, *Becoming a Woman: A Biography of Christine Jorgensen* (New York City: Routledge, 2008) and Jonathan Ames, *Sexual Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Transsexual Memoirs* (New York City, Vintage Books, 2005). Jorgensen was also the subject of the 1970 film "The Christine Jorgensen Story," whose tagline was "I Couldn't Live in a Man's Body."

acceptable to the public.[3] She increased visibility for transgender people by demonstrating that surgery offered an option for gender confirmation. Jorgensen's story was merely the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to the increasing visibility of transgender people like Jorgensen, transgender activism moved into the public consciousness in the 1950s and 1960s. A series of conflicts with the police in cities across the country made clear the growing strength of trans organizing. In Los Angeles, trans and gender non-conforming people confronted the police over entrapment issues at Cooper Do-nuts in 1966. In the same year, the Compton's Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco witnessed crossdressers and trans people resisting arrest. The fighting broke out of the diner and spilled into the streets, a visible demonstration of the police losing their grip on the street life in San Francisco.[4] In Philadelphia, Dewey's Famous, a diner known to host drag queens and other queer people, became the site of a lunch counter sit-in with patrons intentionally dressed in "wrong gender" clothing.[5] This series of clashes between the police and gender non-conforming people, mostly transgender people and drag queens, came to a head at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969. As in the Compton's Riot, the police raided the Stonewall and were met with resistance. What happened next was a riot that drew in LGBTQ people from the surrounding neighborhood, who started throwing what they could find at the police in an attempt to stop the arrests. The police, fearful for their safety, blockaded themselves in the bar and called in an elite

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[3]Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 52; Emily Skidmore, "Constructing the 'Good Transsexual': Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth Century Press," *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 270-300.

[4] Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 229.

[5] Marc Stein, *City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Marc Stein, "Dewey's Sit-In in Philadelphia, 1965," https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/deweys-sit-in/intro; Aaron Devor and Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Transgender: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 29.

riot squad for backup. Eventually, the riot squad was able to disband the crowd, but they returned to demonstrate sporadically for the next few days.[6] The Stonewall Rebellion was a turning point in LGBT resistance, resulting in a surge of the creation of activist organizations and community building and visibility for the transgender, gay, and lesbian communities. Unfortunately, it also marked a divide in this community, as gays and lesbians chose to focus on procuring their own rights and split from transgender people. This split is the context in which I approach transgender activism in the 1970s until the 1990s and sets the stage for numerous coalitions and disconnects within the LGBTQ movement.

As these incidents brought visibility to trans life in the postwar period, the scientific and medical communities expanded their services to trans people. In the years between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s, myriad universities and hospitals opened sex assignment surgery clinics to "treat" transgenderism, making physical sex change more widely available in the United States.[7] These clinics, however, provided services to only a limited number of patients and established strict requirements for determining if someone "deserved" surgery—including meeting a psychologic profile that would allow them to live as a member of the opposite sex and insisting that they lived as a member of that sex for at least one year prior to surgery.[8] Most of the people who sought help from these clinics were male-to-female transgender people, in part due to the difficulties in performing female-to-male surgeries with accurate results.[9] The

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[6] Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 22. The literature on the Stonewall riots is extensive. Among the most important accounts that include a discussion of trans people is Jason Baumann, ed., *The Stonewall Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019) and Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).
[7] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History (*Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 93.
[8] Don Lucas, "Don Lucas Interview Transcript - Digital Transgender Archive," by Susan Stryker, 9.
[9] Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 16; George Chauncy, Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance," *Salmagundi* no. 58/59 (Fall 1982/Winter 1983): 114-146.

architect of these programs was Harry Benjamin, a pioneer of transgender studies in science who created the first treatment plan for transgender people in his book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*.[10] Most of the clinics were short-lived; many closed down in the 1970s because of anti-trans prejudice in the medical community.[11] The response of the medical community to transgender people becoming more visible was over-pathologization of what was viewed as "gender deviancy." What resulted was a complex relationship between the transgender community and the medical establishment that still persists, as the transgender community struggles to find a balance between pathologization and access to care, which often only comes when associated with a disease that must be treated.[12]

Studies of transgender history tend to intersect with the histories of three topics: the gay and lesbian rights movement, feminism, and medicine. In the postwar period and later, transgender activists often worked in conjunction with gay and lesbian activists, in part because their demands sometimes overlapped and in part because they occupied similar places in American society. There is, however, often relatively little mention of transgender activists and their struggles in scholarly work on gay and lesbian activism, as these communities get more attention. There was also overlap of ideas, demands, and organizing between the feminist and transgender movements, despite the apathy with which trans people were met by many in the feminist movement. Both groups sought equal rights and experienced gender-based discrimination. Scholars within feminist literature often highlight the coalitions and divides within the feminist movement but exclude any mention of trans people. Finally, transgender

[10] Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966).
[11] Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 25.
[12] Mark Gevisser, *The Pink Line: Journeys Across the World's Queer Frontiers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 13.

studies have been linked to the histories of medicine because of an intrinsic connection between identity, sexuality, and health that has been fostered by society and scientific research.

Scholars in transgender history generally argue that the transgender movement has its own history separate from the gay and lesbian movements which has not been studied thoroughly. In *Transgender Warriors*, Leslie Feinberg elucidates the persecution trans people faced throughout history and argues that while the trans movement should not be left out of the gay and women's movements, it should also be studied as its own field of inquiry. Contending that trans history deserves to be considered on its own terms, Feinberg roots hir/her research in personal experience.[13] While Feinberg briefly touches on the interaction between trans, lesbian, and gay groups, zie/she did not offer an in-depth analysis of how these activist groups interacted. Other scholars have sought to analyze transgender history to elucidate the complex relations in the LGBTQ community and the history of the transgender activist movement. In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker delineates an overview of recent transgender history that links key events in transgender history to the history of minority movements, sexuality and gender, and feminist thought, and argues that transgender history is an important field because it can elucidate the many misconceptions about transgender identity and the long history of discrimination trans people face.[14] Her book provided one of the first scholarly works on transgender history, as most publications to that point had consisted largely of autobiographies or books on medicine and psychology that treated being transgender as an illness or as deviations from binary gender expression. Like Feinberg, Stryker drew extensively from and was motivated by her own

[13] Leslie Feinberg's pronouns reflected the fluidity with which zie expressed hir gender. They used zie/she and hir/her pronouns to express hir/her identity as a transgender, lesbian, and female. Feinberg is an example of the ways in which different identities intersect and how pronouns can be used to reflect this and communicate to others one's gender identity.
[14] Stryker, *Transgender History,* 2.

experience as a transgender person, revealing the personal nature of transgender history to many of those who write about it. Riki Wilchins's book *TRANS/gressive: How Transgender Activists Took on Gay Rights, Feminism, the Media and Congress and Won!* expanded on Stryker's analysis of transgender activism and its relationship with gay activism and feminist activism by detailing her role in the transgender rights and gender rights movements.[15] Wilchins was an influential activist, playing large roles in the Michigan Womyn's Festival incident and working in many key activist organizations. She argues against the erasure of trans people in history and rigid gender norms hurt both people who conform and those who do not, despite this point serving as a source of division within the transgender rights movement. This thesis expands on these works by offering an in-depth analysis of transgender activism and the coalitions formed both within the transgender movement and between the trans movement and gay and lesbian activists. I will examine the points of agreement and of divergence between gay and lesbian activists and transgender activists by drawing on the experiences of activists such as Wilchins.

While much scholarly work has been done on gay and lesbian activism in the 1970s and into the 1990s, the work on transgender activism alone is more limited. Within gay and lesbian activist literature, many scholars have failed to adequately address the roles of transgender people. Instead, they often concentrate on the impacts of gay and lesbian activism on gay rights and how the gay and lesbian movements have changed over time in terms of what they seek and how they operate. Marc Stein's *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, for example, aims to synthesize information about the lesbian and gay movements with a national scope and comprehensive chronology. His goal was to provide lesbian and gay history with respect to many other movements, both in the past and present, that will allow readers to reflect on what has been

[15] Riki Wilchins, *Trans/gressive: How Transgender Activists Took on Gay Rights, Feminism, the Media, and Congress and Won!* (Riverdale: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2017), 19.

accomplished and what is left to do.[16] Lillian Faderman's work *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* documents the growth of the gay revolution by examining gay participation in mainstream politics as well as how gay and lesbian people organized and made decisions. Notably, Faderman devotes equal attention to gay and lesbian politics.[17] Stein's and Faderman's books capture important narratives about gay and lesbian organizing but both only briefly document the ways in which transgender people helped the movement and interacted with gay and lesbian organizations.

Although there was a great deal of overlap between transgender and feminist activism, historians of the feminist movement mention transgender activists only in passing, if at all. In the last decade, many scholars have acknowledged shortcomings in the historiography of the women's movement, pointing to the ways that such work had too often captured only the stories of straight, white, middle-class women. Scholars have worked to complicate the narrative of the women's movement by considering how working-class women and women of color participated or how they felt that their concerns were left unaddressed.[18] Other scholars of feminist activism have begun to examine coalition work in the movement and to document the activism of the women who have often been left out of the narrative. For example, Stephanie Gilmore's book *Feminist Coalitions* explores the coalitions within the feminist movement, shedding light on the intersectionality of identities within the movement and how this intersectionality impacted the coalitions formed. The stated goal of the book was to "explore the range of feminist activisms and coalitions that took place in the United States" during second-wave feminism and consider

[16] Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012).
[17] Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).
[18] See, for example, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York City: New York University Press, 2003); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

feminist activism in the context of other social justice movements.[19] The book underscores the breadth of feminism, as it applies to many different people and cultures. Similarly, Benita Roth's book *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* examines how race and ethnicity influenced the experiences of feminist activists. She argues that the divisions within the feminist movement reflected overall social inequality in the United States, as they were mainly shaped by race and class dynamics, not major shifts in ideology. She did this by examining the inner workings of each sector of the movement, as well as their coalitions with other sectors.[20] In *Feminism Unfinished,* historians Dorothy Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry argue that feminism has a continuous history by analyzing how the movement changed from the 1920s to 2014. Like Gilmore and Roth, they seek to highlight the many faces of feminism, as "there has never been a single feminist agenda."[21] They challenge the idea that there is one type of feminism that is only reflective of the views and priorities of upper-middle-class white women by analyzing key coalitions, figures, and incidents that shaped the movement. Despite these trends in the historiography, scholars fail to address the interaction between the feminist movement and the transgender movement. They also pay limited attention to the intersection of feminist and lesbian activism, instead focusing most of their research on how racial identity affected the feminist movement and the different groups that arose.

The literature on the history of medicine and its intersection with trans history is also limited. Transgender history and medicine are closely intertwined; this intersection has been of

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[19] Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives in Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008) 3.
[20] Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[21] Astrid Henry, Linda Gordon, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements* (New York: Liverright, 2014), XV.

great interest to transgender history scholars and medical scholars alike but few have examined how trans activists responded to and helped other trans people navigate the challenges imposed on trans people by the medical community. This thesis will expand on how activists viewed and interacted with the medical establishment, as trans access to healthcare was a significant goal of the movement for many years, many activists were dealing with the medical community, and there are still relevant debates relating to this today. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz's *How Sex Changed* details the transgender struggle in the twentieth century to redefine sex, gender, and sexuality by analyzing transgender activism and the complex relationship between the transgender community and the medical establishment. Meyerowitz's book challenges the mainstream cisgender view of trans people of her time, which presented transgender people as "deficient and dangerous if not diseased."[22] She takes a holistic approach to her analysis by examining transgender activist organizations, the courts' role in supporting the redefinition of sex, and the leading doctors in transgender medicine in the twentieth century, such as Alfred Kinsey and Harry Benjamin. In exploring the specific interactions between the medical establishment and the trans community. Meyerowitz offers an in-depth consideration of influential trans activist groups such as the Transsexual Action Organization, but does not delve into how these groups interacted with one another or with outsiders. Her book offers only minimal analysis of how trans groups interacted with the gay and lesbian communities and the feminist movement. Like Meyerowitz, Bob Ostertag examines the relationship between the medical establishment and gender identity. In *Sex, Science, Self,* he argues that the biological basis of gender identity has been sought after and defined many times throughout history, and yet has remained elusive. He warns against accepting any drugs without extensive study, especially

[22] Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed,* 11.

when they are easily connected to identity and woven into public life. His work conveys the significance of gender in American society and the degree to which gender norms are ingrained in society and medicine.[23] My work will build on the ideas presented by Ostertag about the power of the medical industry to define cultural gender norms by detailing resistance to the medical establishment by transgender activists. The social context under which scientists, doctors, and psychiatrists operated is a key historical question. In *The History of Contemporary Science*, notable scholars such as Ronald Doel and Thomas Soderqvist, detail the challenges of writing about contemporary science and re-examining science of the past from a modern lens.[24] These essays offer analyses especially relevant to transgender historians, as trans people have had a complex relationship with the medical community and scientists' views on being transgender have changed a great deal in the past forty years.

My work expands on this literature by discussing the efforts of transgender activists to gain equal rights and opportunities. I used archival collections, newspapers and magazines, speeches and personal testimonies, oral histories, and investigative reports to illustrate this history. Most of the sources I used were from newspapers, radio shows, or magazines geared toward lesbians, gays, and trans people, but I also utilized oral histories with activists who were active in the 1970s, 1980s, and/or 1990s in a variety of organizations. Additionally, I analyzed transgender organization articles, flier, and newsletters that detailed the demands of activists as well as trans experiences with police, poverty, and lack of access to healthcare. While some of these sources were from organizations with national or international reach, most were for a local

[23] Bob Ostertag, *Sex, Science, Self: A Social History of Estrogen, Testosterone, and Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).
[24] Thomas Söderqvist and International Workshop on the Historiography of Contemporary Science, Technology, and Medicine (1994 : Göteborg University), *The Historiography of Contemporary Science and Technology*. Studies in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine, V. 4. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997.

audience and were produced in cities on both coasts of the United States. This is in part because these areas were home to liberal political opinion.[25] Overall, this thesis draws from a wide variety of sources to capture the range of opinions of people in the transgender, gay, lesbian, and feminist movements.

This thesis analyzes transgender activism in the 1970s through the 1990s both within the transgender community and with feminist activists and gay and lesbian activists. In each chapter, I seek to highlight transgender voices and stories, which have not been given the attention they deserve. Cisgender people often discriminated against transgender people, forcing trans people to overcome prejudices held by members of the medical community, law enforcement officers, and judges in order to access gender-affirming care and express themselves how they saw fit. Within the transgender community, trans people had to overcome their own biases about what it meant to be transgender and unite to form a consolidated community in order to advance their fight for equal treatment and equal rights. Transgender activists also began advocating for a united gender community to increase their political strength in advocating against gender oppression in the 1990s. Uniting the gender community—which consisted of cross-dressers, trans people, and drag queens—proved difficult, however, as some trans people viewed themselves as distinct from these other groups due to their desire to assimilate in non-queer/straight communities. Trans activists also attempted to ally with feminists on the grounds of facing gender oppression similar

[25] In addition, many white middle- and upper-class gays and lesbians moved to the cities and displaced people of color and lower-class people, giving the homophile movement an urban character and explaining why many of the sources I draw from were produced in cities. This is why the coastal elite played the largest role in the conversation, and also contributed to the relative absence of sources illustrating the perspectives of people of color and lower classes. A National Center for Biotechnology Information journal article states that trans people are more likely to be non-white and below the poverty line. Thus, race and class are an important part of this conversation, but due to the dearth of sources, I was not able to incorporate as much diversity as I would have liked. Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (London: Taylor & Francis Group), 2012. H. P. Crissman, M. B. Berger, L. F. Graham, & V. K. Dalton, "Transgender Demographics: A Household Probability Sample of US Adults, 2014," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 2 (2017), 213-215. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303571

to that which feminists struggled against. They were, however, often rejected from the feminist movement because feminists saw trans women as male invaders trying to pass female struggles and gender oppression off as their own experiences. Similarly, trans people were categorically excluded from the lesbian and gay movement because lesbian and gay people believed trans people could not relate to their oppression and jeopardized their efforts to assimilate. Altogether, my work demonstrates that, despite ostracization by feminists, gays, and lesbians, transgender activists made great progress in the latter part of the 20th century in creating organizations and defending their quest for equal rights.

The first chapter details transgender activism alone, examining what the activists were fighting for and the ways in which they fought for equal access to healthcare, equal employment opportunities, and equal treatment by law enforcement. The transgender population experienced high rates of poverty and constant discrimination. Many transgender people, especially women, were sex workers who lived in impoverished areas of the cities in which they resided. Their demands included equal access to employment, freedom of expression, and a major focus on healthcare. While this was not a period of immense growth in transgender autonomy or rights, the 1970s through the 1990s witnessed increasing transgender visibility, the overturning of discriminatory laws, and the formation of transgender support networks.

The second chapter examines the struggles within the trans community as activists sought to create a united movement and a supportive gender community. Despite the work of many activists, transgender people struggled to form long-lasting organizations because of internal differences in opinion on activist strategies and because of personal conflicts. Many trans people also harbored disparate ideas about what it meant to be transgender, which limited their ability to organize with one another. By the 1990s, trans people were overall more tolerant of each other

and other members of the newly formed gender community, including cross-dressers and drag queens.

The third chapter discusses the relationship between feminist activists and transgender activists, including their shared goals despite the adversarial stance taken by feminists toward transgender people, especially women. Many feminists saw transgender women as invaders of the female sphere who sought to undermine the feminist movement and female liberation. Several key figures in the lesbian feminist movement argued that transgender women "raped" female bodies by masquerading as women. These views manifested in the exclusionary use of language in many feminist publications and the firing of a transgender woman from a lesbian feminist organization. Despite these conflicts, transgender activists (particularly trans women) remained motivated to join the feminist movement, as they saw their shared oppression as women and gender nonconformists under the patriarchy as cause for them to band together. For example, both women and transgender people experienced intense discrimination in housing, employment, and healthcare. Ultimately, trans activists would have to wait for the onset of third-wave feminism in the 1990s to find allies within the feminist community.

Finally, the fourth chapter explores the relationship between transgender activists and gay and lesbian activists, specifically considering the AIDS crisis and the responses to different groups needing care. Despite not having always been a unified community, gay and lesbian activism has always been closely intertwined with trans activism because they share many of the same goals. Gay and lesbian activists were not only exclusive of trans people and the trans cause, they were hostile towards them. Stemming from a desire to be accepted by society, gay and lesbian activists dismissed trans activists so as not to seem too extreme in what they were asking for. During the height of the AIDS crisis, trans people, women especially, were denied services

and access to healthcare despite alarmingly high rates of HIV/AIDS infection. These infection rates were tied to risk factors that stem from transphobia and the marginalization of the trans community. Although they were virtually thrown out of the gay and lesbian movements, trans activists insisted on equal rights for all in their campaigns and argued for their inclusion in the movements from which they were excluded.

Taken together, this thesis argues that trans activism in the period between 1970 and the end of the 1990s was multifarious, fractious, and inconsistent. But it also demonstrates that trans activists worked to build coalitions with potential allies in the women's movement and the gay and lesbian rights movement whenever possible. Such coalitions held the promise of greater influence and of shared values. By questioning the unity of "LGBTQ" organizing, this thesis suggests both the limits and possibilities of queer activism.

A Note on Language:

Over the last fifty years, the vocabulary of the transgender movement has evolved to become more inclusive and sensitive to the terms it applies to people. This dissertation uses the most sensitive and accurate terminology whenever possible. When citing primary sources from the past, however, original language has been maintained. In cases that may present confusion, explanatory notes are included.

In the 1970s, the term "transsexual" was a generic way of referring to people who identified as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth. Over time, this term became contentious within the community, as it was associated primarily with members of the medical community who used the term to label trans people as mentally ill or sexually deviant. Some people still identify with this term, but it has become less common and given way to the

term "transgender" or simply "trans." These terms do not only apply to people who have undergone medical changes to change sex, as "transsexual" first did, but are used to refer to anyone who bridges or blurs the boundary of gender expression they were assigned at birth.[26] "Transgender" and "trans" were only popularized in the 1990s to encompass the gender diversity we associate with them today.[27] Thus, "transsexual" and "transgender" were interchangeable in the 1970s and 1980s, but they are no longer. Using the gender neutral pronouns they/their/themselves has also become a powerful way to not only refer to someone whose gender is unknown or cannot be classified but also to acknowledge that "gender is "a set of practices" that contains and defines what is possible for any given individual," as historian Jen Manion declared.[28] In addition, the terms "crossdresser" and "transvestite" referred to people who dressed in clothes socially associated with the other sex. Such sartorial choices did not necessarily indicate an identification with the other sex. Drag involves dressing in clothes associated with the opposite sex as a form of performance and entertainment. It is often performed in gay-friendly bars, nightclubs, or neighborhoods.[29] Crossdressing is a more personal phenomenon and involves unique motivations for every individual. The practice relates to gender expression, rather than gender identity.[30] Finally, the term "queer" is used as an umbrella term for transgender, gay and lesbian people, as well as everyone else who identifies with the term.[31]

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[26] Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), X.
[27] Aaron Devor, Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Transgender: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2019), 4.
[28] Jen Manion, *Female Husbands* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 14.
[29] Stryker, *Transgender History*, 23.
[30] Stryker, *Transgender History,* 18.
[31] Ostertag, *Sex, Science, Self*, xi.

The terminology of the gender community has changed to reflect the breadth of identities present in the community.[32]

[32] Some other definitions that may be helpful to know when discussing gender are: Gender: The cultural construction of characteristics associated with each sex, which are enforced through socialization. Sex is generally thought to be the biological characteristics one possesses when they are born, which society has grouped into either being male or female. Gender Identity: Each person's subjective identification with a particular gender category. Cisgender: Names the usually unstated assumption of someone being "nontransgendered," or identifying with the sex they were assigned at birth. It was coined as a way to upend the norm of saying "woman" and meaning someone who isn't transgender. Stryker, *Transgender History*, 11. For more information on the complex relationship between the terms "sexuality" and "gender," see David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Getting Together: The Formation of a Gender Community

"The pressure point between pride, shame and confidentiality is one that will likely be bearing down on more of us in the coming months and years… as each of us comes to realize that we don't ever lead really normal lives, as our networking brings us closer, as our economic, artistic, and political struggles bring us more attention," claimed trans rights activist James Green in 1994.[33] Green's comments reflected the difficulties and the potential joys of building the transgender movement. This essay examines the trans movement in a key moment—the decades between 1970 and 1995—as trans activists and organizations worked to build a visible and supportive community, even as they sometimes disagreed about tactics and goals. Even more complicated were debates about whom to include in the movement. Were cross-dressers to be included? What about drag queens or kings? What about trans people who sought to assimilate into cis society and no longer identified as transgender? Because assimilation was a major priority for many trans people, keeping them involved in the movement long-term was an onerous task, as trans people sometimes abandoned the movement once they assimilated into mainstream society.[34] As this essay demonstrates, by the 1990s, many in the trans movement came to accept the concept of a gender community that included trans people, cross-dressers, and drag queens, but this came as the result of internal debates and painstaking coalition work. Such partnerships, activists hoped increased the potential of the movement to effect political change. Transgender activism from the 1970s to the 1990s was disjointed in terms of activist strategies and a lack of consensus on who the transgender movement should represent. While outsiders found little difference between trans activists, drag queens and kings, and cross-dressers, those in

[33] James Green, "Pride vs. Desire For Confidentiality," *FTM Newsletter*, July 1994, 1. Green was the director of FTM (Female to Male) International, a leading trans rights organization.
[34] Dallas Denny, "On the Future of the TG Community," AEGIS News, April 1998.

the community struggled to build an alliance. This essay explores a pivotal era of trans activism as leading figures in the movement and everyday people wrestled with questions about belonging and identity.

Scholars in transgender history generally argue that the transgender movement has its own history separate from the gay and lesbian movements; this history has received relatively less scholarly attention. In *Transgender Warriors*, the activist and writer Leslie Feinberg describes the persecution trans people faced throughout history and argues that while the trans movement should not be left out of the gay and women's movements, it should also be studied as its own field of inquiry. Contending that trans history deserves to be considered on its own terms, Feinberg roots hir/her research in personal experience.[35] Other scholars have sought to analyze transgender history to elucidate the complex relations in the LGBTQ community and the history of the transgender activist movement. In *Transgender History*, for example, Susan Stryker delineates an overview of recent transgender history that links key events in transgender history to the history of minority movements, sexuality and gender, and feminist thought, and argues that transgender history is an important field because it can elucidate the many misconceptions about transgender identity and the long history of discrimination trans people face.[36] Like Feinberg, Stryker drew extensively from and was motivated by her own experience as a transgender person, revealing the personal nature of transgender history to many of those who write about it. Riki Wilchins's book *TRANS/gressive: How Transgender Activists Took on Gay Rights, Feminism, the Media and Congress and Won!* expanded on Stryker's analysis of

[35] Leslie Feinberg's pronouns reflected the fluidity with which zie expressed hir gender. They used zie/she and hir/her pronouns to express hir/her identity as a transgender, lesbian, and female. Feinberg is an example of the ways in which different identities intersect and how pronouns can be used to reflect this and communicate to others one's gender identity.
[36] Stryker, *Transgender History,* 2.

transgender activism and its relationship with gay activism and feminist activism by detailing her role in the transgender rights and gender rights movements.[37] Wilchins was an influential activist, playing key roles in the Michigan Womyn's Festival incident and working in many activist organizations. She argues against the erasure of trans people in history and contends that rigid gender norms hurt both people who conform and those who do not. This essay expands on these works by offering an in-depth analysis of transgender activism and the coalitions formed both within the transgender movement and between other activists in the gender community.

As the transgender movement was becoming more focused on effecting political change, uniting all parts of the transgender community became a central focus of many activists who sought to build political strength. Lou Sullivan was one of the most influential transgender activists because of his dedication to helping gay trans people get gender-affirming care and giving FTMs their own spaces within the transgender community. In 1986, Lou Sullivan, a gay transgender man and influential activist, founded FTM, the first trans male educational and support organization in the United States.[38] The organization published a quarterly newsletter called *FTM Newsletter*, which acquired subscribers from around the world and became the leading news source on issues pertaining to trans men. In addition to running FTM, Sullivan published the first guide for trans men called *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual* and wrote the first book explicitly about a transgender man.[39] Sullivan was also active as a transgender historian and edited his twenty-four years of diaries into an autobiography. In 1991, Sullivan died of AIDS-related complications at the age of thirty-nine.

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[37] Riki Wilchins, *Trans/gressive: How Transgender Activists Took on Gay Rights, Feminism, the Media, and Congress and Won!* (Riverdale: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2017), 19.
[38] Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 28.
[39] Sullivan's book *From Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland* was published in 1990. His book was one of the first to feature the discourse on female-crossdressing and trans men before hormone therapy and gender-affirmation surgery.

His death was a great loss for the transgender community, as he encouraged openness and understanding between trans people, cross-dressers, friends and family, and members of the lesbian and gay communities. Sullivan founded FTM because "we all remember our first steps during our transitions, our need to talk to others who felt the same way, and the joy of learning we weren't the 'only ones.' The FTM Get-Togethers [and Newsletter] give us an opportunity to meet and learn from others who understand, and to be there for those who seek answers and advice."[40] His successor at FTM, Jamison Green, emerged "as the most vocal and influential FTM activist in the United States," according to historian Susan Stryker, as he turned FTM into FTM International and increased its engagement with the international transgender community.[41]

Making visible the diversity of the transgender community through improving access to gender-affirming care for transhomosexuals was an imperative step in uniting the movement. Sullivan was instrumental in securing care for transgender individuals who identified as gay or lesbian in their "preferred social genders."[42] Medical professionals had been hesitant to provide gender-affirming care to gay transgender people because they viewed gender-affirmation surgery as a way to rectify "sexual deviancy" and preserve heteronormative roles. In 1980, for example, Sullivan was rejected by the Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program for phalloplasty because he did not fit the image "of persons who, in our program, have made successful adjustments with gender reorientation," according to the surgeon's assistant.[43] Before 1987, sexologists had dismissed their run-ins with gay trans people, excluding them from research and, thus, perpetuating the idea that gay trans people were a small minority of the trans population.[44] After

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[40] Lou Sullivan, "Female-to-Male Get-Together #3," *FTM*, September 1987.
[41] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Activism," glbtq, inc., 2004.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Next Generation," *How Sex Changed*, 2002, 238.
[44] Susan Stryker, "Portrait of a Transfag Drag Hag as a Young Man: The Activist Career of Louis G. Sullivan," *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*, ed. Kate More and Stephen Whittle, (London: Cassell, 1999), 76.

they began attending support groups, gay trans people came into the view of the gender dysphoria research community. Sullivan increased the "field sightings" of gay trans people by recommending gay FTMs go to gender dysphoria professionals and documenting the existence of gay FTMs. The increased visibility of gay trans people, per Susan Stryker, "called into question dominant theories of gender transposition and the development of homosexuality."[45] They demonstrated that sexual orientation and gender identity were not inextricably linked, paving the way for the queer movement of the 1990s by changing how medical professionals conceptualized transgender identity and thereby increasing the accessibility of gender-affirming care for transhomosexuals.

Transgender organizations existed in dense clusters, often popping up in certain hubs of trans and gay and lesbian activism, such as New York and San Francisco. Operating out of the same cities created a cohesiveness among trans people and many activists attempted to create an ongoing discourse about activism between people in the community by hosting conferences, such as ICTLEP, and educational gatherings, such as FTM's Get-Togethers. FTM's Get-Togethers were geared toward not only educating the community but also fostering connection and openness between individuals who often felt alone in society.[46] These gatherings were important especially before the development of the internet because people usually had to deliberately seek out transgender and/or cross-dresser gatherings in order to find people similar to them, which could be intimidating for someone new to the community. Sullivan underscored the importance of having spaces where everyone felt comfortable in his private journals when he

[45] Susan Stryker, "Portrait of a Transfag Drag Hag as a Young Man: The Activist Career of Louis G. Sullivan," *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siecle*, ed. Kate More and Stephen Whittle, (London: Cassell, 1999), 77.
[46] Lou Sullivan, "FTM Male Box," *FTM*, April 1991, 2.

claimed "there's just so much I can't say in a M-F group."[47] Since groups for trans women predominated, Sullivan's creation of FTM fostered a much-needed space for trans men to connect with one another and share their distinctly trans-male experiences.

Transgender activists also sought to create an overarching gender community in the 1990s to increase their political strength in advocating for political change in relation to issues pertaining to gender expression. This was a difficult task, as they had to overcome a long history of prejudice in the trans community towards cross-dressers and drag queens. Many in the transgender community were unwilling to be associated with other groups in the gender community, including cross-dressers and drag queens, for several decades. Going back as far as the 1950s and 1960s, transgender activist Major recollected that "girls who wanted to be women thought that the queens drew far too much attention to them."[48] Trans people desired to assimilate and being associated with people who were direct about their gender identity and often wore flamboyant outfits would not have allowed them to fully assimilate and forget their transgender past. Such sentiments continued into the 1970s and 1980s. Elliot Blackstone remembered that "a lot of transsexuals [*sic*] resented being called drag queens, because [they'd say] "this is not me… I'm a woman, you know, so let me be a woman. Let them dress however they want to dress, but they're not me.""[49] In a letter to *FTM* magazine in 1991, Jeff, a member of the FTM community, maintained that cross-dressers and trans people were very different and should not organize together, as "crossdressers "play" at being men" while the "TS IS a man."[50] Jeff's opinion encapsulated the prejudices in the trans community and the distinction between

[47] Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Liberal Moment," *How Sex Changed*, 2002, 276.
[48] Major is the chosen name of this trans woman, who chose it because she identified with both sexes. Major, "Major Interview," interview by Susan Stryker, GLBT Historical Society, January 29, 1998, 6.
[49] Elliot Blackstone, "Elliot Blackstone Interview," interview by Susan Stryker, GLBT Historical Society, November 6, 1996, 33.
[50] Jeff, "FTM Male Box," *FTM*, April 1991, 2.

identities that they maintained. Cross-dressers were defined by the fluidity in their identities, while trans people emphasized permanent physical change as a hallmark of the transgender experience; Jeff suggested that the impermanence of cross-dressing meant that female cross-dressers' identities as men were less salient or impactful than those of trans men. These prejudices inhibited partnerships between trans people and cross-dressers. Carol Beecroft, the Director of the Beverly Hills Society for the Second Self (a cross-dressing organization), attested to this when she remembered once having "a great interest in helping TSs but when I and other TVs would go out of our way to help these people, we received a distinct feeling that they considered themselves better and that we were only an imitation while they were the real thing."[51] Thus, the anti-cross-dresser biases stemmed from trans people desiring to prove they were "real" men or women by separating themselves from people who did not express themselves as male or female full-time. The fundamental questions inhibiting a united community related to the nature of identity and hinged on the prejudices of people in these communities. Thus, the activists who began to advocate for a united gender community continuously met resistance in expanding to a larger "gender community," inhibiting the progress they were able to make and reducing the number of people they could rely on for support.

While their prejudices were difficult to overcome, beginning in the 1990s, people in the transgender community increasingly advocated for a more inclusive gender community, rather than exclusion based on labels and smaller groups. People who were persecuted for their gender expression started to band together to create a united gender community and challenge the

[51] "Public Platform: The Oppressed as Oppressor," *Gender Review: The FACTual Newsletter*, December 1978, 2.

gender identification binary.[52] Activist Dallas Denny attributed this shift to "once-distinct identities [having] blurred," as "many trans people identify as queer" and "crossdressers take hormones and live full time cross-gender lives and transsexual-identified [*sic*] people eschew genital surgery."[53] As people in the transgender and cross-dresser communities began to see identity and gender expression as more of a spectrum and in less starkly defined terms, they recognized similarities between their identities and groups, leading to greater levels of collaboration. Before the 1990s, some activists engaged in various efforts to unite a community of people persecuted for their gender expression, including drag queens, transgender people, and cross-dressers. The Transvestite-Transsexual Activist Organization was one group that advocated a joint movement between cross-dressers and transgender people. FTM Get-Togethers also provided opportunities for the transgender and cross-dressing communities to interact and bond. Kymberleigh Richards, the editor and publisher of *Cross-Talk* magazine, asserted that the "gender community" should include two smaller communities, a transgender community and a cross-dresser community, "both of whom have different perspectives, both valid within the scope of the larger community."[54] By the 1990s, the idea of a "true" trans person was also dissipating, as the community became more coherent. FTM Jeff argued that there was no "TS hierarchy," as there "are simply men who are at varying stages of a transition from the anatomy of a female to that of a male."[55] Jeff's sentiment captures the transgender movement's transition out of the medical establishment's control, as it deprioritized getting surgery and deemphasized surgery's importance in affirming one's transgender identity. "My hope," wrote trans activist Wendy Parker in an issue of *Cross-Talk*, "is that the discussion will also include common goals of the

[52] Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Next Generation," in *How Sex Changed*, 284.
[53] Dallas Denny, "On the Future of the TG Community," *AEGIS News*, April 1998, 5.
[54] Kymberleigh Richards, "Sex, Gender and Terminology," *Cross-Talk*, August 1991, 5.
[55] Jeff, "FTM Male Box," *FTM*, April 1991, 2.

Gay, Lesbian, D&S, TV, TG, and TS community and how we can all work together instead of working at opposite ends, diluting the strength that we do have."[56] Activists started to advocate for uniting the gender community to strengthen their voices in their common fight to stop gender-based discrimination. A united gender community increased the political power of all of the groups and fostered a wider support network and connection between members of these groups.

Even when the community united, however, activists had different views on how to best achieve their goals, which led to fractures in the movement. Angela Douglas, for example, emerged as a controversial activist because of the militant tactics she adopted. In 1970, Douglas founded the Transsexual/Transvestite Action Organization (TAO), which published two newsletters, *Moonshadow* and *Mirage,* concerning developments in transgender activism and created a space for members of the trans community to discuss art, poetry, and photography. The group called for confrontational protests and demonstrations, was outspoken against the medical model of being transgender, and "protested when Los Angeles welfare officials refused to continue aid to men who dressed as women."[57] TAO epitomized a new type of trans activist organization, one that went beyond the support group and educational model of earlier organizations in favor of challenging doctors and demanding social and legal change through a civil rights framework.[58] In 1972, Douglas moved TAO from the West Coast to Miami, where it developed into an international transgender organization and shifted its focus to center more on police harassment.[59] It had several chapters across the United States and at its peak in the mid-1970s, Douglas claimed it had a thousand members.

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[56] Wendy Parker, "The Gender Community: A Political and Social Discussion," *Cross-Talk*, June 1991, 23.
[57] Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Liberal Moment," *How Sex Changed*, 2002, 238.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Activism," glbtq, inc., 2004.

Although she made a number of connections in straight media and successfully focused a lot of her efforts on educating the cis public on trans issues, Douglas was not popular within the trans community because of her personality and militant ideas. According to Rev. Ray Broshears, the head of San Francisco's Gay Activist Alliance, and Elliot Blackstone, "Douglas has a well established reputation for sowing seeds of dissension both in [San Francisco] and Miami."[60] She played an integral role in exposing activist Beth Elliot's transgender identity to the members of the lesbian organization the Daughters of Bilitis. Some members of DOB knew Elliot was a transgender woman, but when a greater part of the organization found out, she was asked to leave the organization permanently. This was a major controversy in the feminist lesbian and transgender communities and caused a great deal of stress and sadness for Elliot.[61] Activist Suzan Cooke described Douglas as "funny" but noted that she could also be "offensive," and regarded her with little respect.[62] Cooke "just didn't much care for [Douglas]," and, like others, was put off by Douglas's "second wave" radicalism.[63] The transgender community, like every other community, was susceptible to personal disagreements that hindered collaboration between groups.

Disagreements in the movement also stemmed from what the activists should be lending their focus and resources to. A particularly contentious issue was whether or not "transsexualism [*sic*]" should have been removed from the DSM.[64] In this fight, there were two main mindsets

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[60] Jennifer Thompson, "Transexuals' Dilemma," *Berkeley Barb*, 1974.
[61] The controversy surrounding Beth Elliot's forced removal from DOB will receive more attention in chapter three.
[62] Suzan Cooke, "Suzan Cooke Interview," interview by Susan Stryker, GLBT Historical Society, January 10, 1998, 53.
[63] Ibid. Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Liberal Moment," *How Sex Changed*, 2002, 240.
[64] According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Version IIIR, "transsexualism [*sic*]" was a type of "gender identity disorder" in which the trans person "not only is uncomfortable with the assigned sex but has the sense of belonging to the opposite sex," which may cause mental distress. Martine Aliana Rothblatt, "Appendix C: Health Law Standards," 1993 International Conference for Transgender Law and Policy, 3.

people fell into. One mindset entailed the argument that depathologizing Gender Identity Disorder (GID) would remove the stigma of being trans and also remove trans people from the medical practitioners' authoritarian regime over their bodily autonomy and their medical choices. Because it was in the DSM as a disorder, doctors used GID as justification for considering trans people ill and thus subjecting them to the medical treatment they saw fit to "cure" the disease. In the *Los Angeles Free Press* article "Transsexual [*sic*] Liberation: Confronting Suppression," activists Anita Douglas, Tisha Goudie and Brandy Elliott explained that surgeons viewed their trans patients as "nonhuman examples of the surgeon's artistic abilities," which is why "surgery upon demand and freedom from control and abuse by the medical establishment" became one of the basic goals of the transgender movement.[65] The importance of this issue was illustrated by the fact that third on the QLF's list of demands for the transgender movement was an "end to exploitative practices of doctors and psychiatrists who work in the fields of transvestitism and transsexualism [*sic*]" and that "hormone treatment and transsexual [*sic*] surgery should be provided free upon demand by the state."[66] "Transsexualism [*sic*]" being in the DSM legitimized the power doctors had over trans people and made doctors feel entitled to decisions about trans bodies because they were the ones who could decide whether or not to grant trans people gender-affirming care. Advocates for the removal from the DSM argued that they should be able to "live their life in whatever gender role they are most comfortable in" and not have to submit to doctors' patriarchal ideas of gender to secure care.[67] Activist Wendy Parker hoped to destigmatize being trans by having "transvestitism [*sic*] and transsexualism [*sic*]" removed from

[65] Anita Douglas, Brandy Elliott, Tisha Goudie, "Transsexual Liberation: Confronting Suppression," *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 1975, 10.
[66] Pat Maxwell, "The Emperor's New Clothes," *Detroit Gay Liberator*, January 1, 1971.
[67] Emilio Lombardi, "Appendix H: A Network Explanation of the Transgender Movement in Relation to the Homosexual Rights Movement," Third International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, August 1994, 8.

the DSM, as its presence in the DSM led people to believe it was an illness.[68] This led to stigma marking the transgender identity, as cispeople saw trans people as having something wrong with them and needing to be cured. The movement to remove GID from the DSM was part of "a growing movement to challenge psychiatry's gatekeeping power over access to hormones and surgery by redefining transsexualism [*sic*] as a medical rather than psychiatric condition."[69] Defining "transsexualism [*sic*]" as a medical condition justified access to gender-affirming care without classifying it as an illness that needed to be cured. This would have placed the decision-making power in the hands of trans people as opposed to trans people needing to appeal to psychiatrists to be deemed a trans person worthy of gender-affirming care.

Pro-depathologization trans activists contended that medical professionals abused GID to prevent children from becoming gay or trans and institute discriminatory policies.[70] In a speech on the report of the health and insurance law workshop at the fifth International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, activist Shannon Minter asserted mental health professionals "[viewed] gender nonconformity in children as a deviant pathological condition" and continue to focus their treatment on "forcing children to identify with and conform to their assigned gender no matter what damage is caused to that child."[71] Doctors utilized diagnosing a child early on as having GID to try to prevent them from developing into having what the doctor deemed an undesirable identity; this was yet another way in which doctors inflicted their beliefs on gender-nonconforming individuals. Thus, many trans activists believed more harm than good was being done by the existence of GID listed as a mental health disorder. Pro-depathologization

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[68] Wendy Parker, "The Gender Community: A Political and Social Discussion," *Cross-Talk: The Transgendered Community's Newsletter*, June, 1991, 23.
[69] Shannon Minter, "Appendix A: GID and the Transgender Movement," Fifth International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, July 1996, 4.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Shannon Minter, "Report from the Workshop, Health and Insurance Law," Fifth International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, July 1996, 2.

trans activists also argued that the prerequisites doctors imposed on people desiring gender-affirming care were unreasonable and discriminatory. The standards of care called for an "independently confirmed belief that the patient has wanted to change their sex for at least two years," which was necessary, according to the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, because taking hormones may have had some irreversible effects pertaining to a person's fertility.[72] This was an unnecessary regulation, which was not applied to other cosmetic drugs that could have irreversible effects, imposed simply because of the value society placed on one's ability to procreate. Trans people understood the effects that gender-affirming care could have had on their fertility, yet they desired the ability to make the decision for themselves of whether or not they wanted to move forward with hormonal and/or surgical intervention anyway. Doctors, however, prioritized the trans person's ability to have children over enabling them to adequately express their gender because the doctors desired to enforce heteronormative gender norms. It was this divergence, as well as trans people's overall desire for autonomy, that spurred trans activists' crusade to remove power from the doctors and put it in their own hands. Depathologization was equated with self-determination and freedom of gender expression, as freedom from psychiatric diagnosis meant the right to control and change one's own body without having to tailor one's gender expression to what the doctor thought was feminine or masculine in order to secure gender-affirming care.

The difficulty of accessing gender-affirming care was the main reason other trans activists opposed removing "transsexualism [*sic*]" from the DSM. Some trans activists believed criticizing GID would "endanger access to hormones and surgery and undermine the argument that transsexuals [*sic*] should be included in laws that prohibit discrimination against people with

[72] Martine Aliana Rothblatt, "Appendix C: Health Law Standards," Second International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, August 1993, 6.

psychiatric disabilities."[73] This argument was made despite federal laws "prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability explicitly [excluding] gender identity disorder from protection."[74] The 1993 ICTLEP (International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy) called for the categorization of trans medical treatment as cosmetic rather than medically necessary and recognized that this would "result in the loss of medical insurance coverage for such treatment," but proposed the solution to this was "working for recognition that society would obtain net benefits from requiring medical insurance coverage of cosmetic surgery."[75] Pro-depathologization activists recognized the challenges removing GID from the DSM posed, but valued autonomy over the routes to care that were available because GID was in the DSM. This difference in opinion on depathologization consumed activists in the 1990s and beyond.

In addition to disagreements about tactics and the foci of the movement, the transgender community was further fractured based on ideas of what a "true" trans person looked like. The definition of a "true" trans person often hinged on one's medical status, specifically whether one had had gender-affirmation surgery. In her article "Freedom from the Scalpel: Genital Surgery NOT Required for Legal Change of Sex," Phyllis Frye argued that genital surgery should not be required to change legal documents, as it forced people who may not want genital surgery into getting it. This pressure to have surgery was compounded by intense peer pressure within the trans community to have surgery.[76] When journalist Jennifer Thompson interviewed Angela Douglas in 1974 about the state of the trans liberation movement for her article "Transexuals'

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[73] Shannon Minter, "Appendix A: GID and the Transgender Movement," Fifth International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, July 1996, 4.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Martine Aliana Rothblatt, "Appendix C: Health Law Standards," Second International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, August 1993, 2.
[76] Phyllis Frye, "Freedom from the Scalpel: Genital Surgery NOT Required for Legal Change of Sex," *Transgender Tapestry*, 1999, 32.

[*sic*] Dilemma," she diminished Douglas's credibility by explaining that "although Ms. Douglas did assure me that she would have a sex operation in the near future, in the next breath she told me she is bisexual."[77] Thompson's language of needing Douglas's assurance that she would be getting the surgery illustrated how deeply the medical model of being transgender pervaded mainstream society, as surgery was the only way for Douglas to validate her experience as a trans person and her authority as an activist. Douglas's credibility as a transgender activist was further impaired by her bisexuality, as the medical community affirmed the idea that "true" trans people were not gay by not allowing gay trans people to have gender-affirming surgery. Thompson reminded her readers about the permanence of surgery, "which is not to negate the fact that true transexuals should be able to have the operation, and for free if need be."[78] Her categorization of the "true" trans person also relied on the idea that some people may have gone through with the surgery because of social pressure, which inherently contradicted her earlier statement. Douglas's choice to not have surgery and not succumb to peer pressure should have legitimized her position as a trans person, according to Thompson, because she still identified as trans without having surgery. Thompson, however, saw Douglas's surgical status as detracting from her trans identity.

For many trans people, the definition of a "true" trans person hinged on one's relationship with activist organizations after transitioning, as trans people expected to leave the movement after transitioning. Douglas and her colleague and fellow activist at TAO, Wendy Davidson, played into the idea of a "true" trans person. According to them, the most "important thing to remember is that true transexuals don't want to be connected with the transexual

[77] Jennifer Thompson, "Transexuals' Dilemma," *Berkeley Barb*, 1974.
[78] Ibid.

movement after their operation. These people want to fit into society as men or women."[79] Suzan Cooke summarized this phenomenon in the trans community, as she reflected that she "was always faced with the expectation that after [her] surgery [she] would move on-that the trans portion of [her] life would be past history, that this was just what was expected of you."[80] Cooke was extremely involved in the trans movement and played an integral role in running the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, yet expected to be done organizing once she transitioned. Thus, trans people felt that the movement reflected only their needs before and during their transition, but once assimilated, being transgender became a less salient identity. It was extremely common for people to abandon transgender activism once they successfully integrated into society after their surgery. Trans activist and creator of the newsletter *The Transsexual Voice* Phoebe Smith gave the advice "give what you can, take what you need – then get on with your life (and don't look back)" when asked about people disappearing from the movement over time.[81] On the gay radio show "Stonewall Nation," Peggie Ames, a transgender woman and activist, claimed that many trans people sought anonymity and wanted to "forget the past" after gender-affirmation surgery. Many of them were "apolitical" because they chose to leave transgender politics after their transition.[82] This led to challenges for the activist movement because there were fewer people to donate to the organizations, making them difficult to adequately fund. Transgender rights advocate and former executive director of AEGIS Dallas Denny claimed that "disappearance [was] still a valid option," but more trans people were staying involved with the movement after transitioning in the 1990s, indicating that it was

[79] Ibid.
[80] Suzan Cooke, "Suzan Cooke Interview," interview by Susan Stryker, GLBT Historical Society, January 10, 1998, 56.
[81] Phoebe Smith, "Changes in Our World," *The Transsexual Voice*, February 1992, 1.
[82] Peggie Ames, interviewee, Stonewall Nation Radio Program, "25: Gay Politics and Transexualism/Peggie Ames," August 1, 1973, WBFO.

common practice for trans people to step out of the movement after transitioning before then.[83] Denny specified that "the voices most frequently raised against political action come from those who have chosen to assimilate… they fear, and with some justification, that backlash against the transgender political movement will result in people becoming less tolerant rather than more."[84] Denny recounted the story of one trans woman named Georgette who disassociated from her support group after transitioning, reportedly calling those who stayed in the group "pathetic" and "not true transsexuals [*sic*]."[85] Some trans people actively judged others for visibly staying in the transgender movement after transitioning, as they expected that "true" trans people would leave the movement in order to fully assimilate into society after transitioning.

Shame surrounding the transgender identity, which was perpetuated by the medical model of being transgender, led to many post-operative trans people prioritizing assimilation and leaving the movement. Privacy played a big part in this, as people were especially hesitant to engage in publicized activism. For example, "precedents are virtually nonexistent in many areas, and often ambiguous where they do exist," leading to increased opportunities for trans activists to challenge discriminatory practices in the courts.[86] Precedent-making, however, was difficult because most trans people at this time desired to stay anonymous due to intense discrimination.[87] Intense discrimination was a product of the medical model of seeing the transgender identity as a disease or mental illness. Thus, trans people were constantly told by society there was something wrong with them, leading them to hide their transgender identity when they could. Transgender activist and scholar Jessica Xavier claimed that "the greatest part of the hidden majority,

[83] Dallas Denny, "Is There a Price for Political Activism?" *AEGIS News*, September 1996, 9.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Dallas Denny, "How Soon They Forget!" *AEGIS News*, April 1998, 7.
[86] "Avoiding the Legal Pitfalls: A Taped Interview of Richard D. Levidow," *GPU News*, November 1976, 42.
[87] Ibid.

composed of crossdressers *and* transitioned transsexuals [*sic*] and transgenderists who have assimilated, has sought in varying ways to distance themselves from their shame and thus their community."[88] She elaborated that "to commit oneself to the movement either by personal involvement or financially is an overt reminder of that shame, with which most would rather not deal."[89] Stigma created by the medical community penetrated the transgender community and reduced the number of people who were willing to be publicly associated with the movement or wanted to remind themselves of their transgender past. FTM activist Lou Sullivan captured these sentiments, as he explained that finding where people lie on the gender identity spectrum "is a long and hard road and oftentimes those of us who crossed that line find it painful to witness the struggle of others to decide for themselves where they fit in."[90] The trauma sometimes associated with figuring out one's identity combined with the shame of being transgender discouraged trans people from remaining in the movement for extended periods of time, especially once they had already transitioned. The success of the movement, Xavier argued, was dependent on "our ability to teach pride within our own community, to establish the transgender identity as one without shame."[91] By instilling pride in trans people and teaching them to embrace their transgender identity as opposed to seeing it as a defect and something to hide, Xavier's argument emphasized, trans people would be freed to work openly as a part of the transgender movement and would not be ashamed to visibly and vociferously advocate for equal rights.

The unconsolidated nature of trans activism was partially due to many of its members having yet to develop a sense of pride in the transgender identity or to prioritize autonomy over

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[88] Jessica Xavier, "So You Wanna Be in Politics: A Realistic Assessment of Transgender Political Involvement," *AEGIS News*, April 1996, 6.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Sullivan, "FTM Male Box."
[91] Jessica Xavier, "So You Wanna Be in Politics: A Realistic Assessment of Transgender Political Involvement," *AEGIS News*, April 1996, 6.

anything else. The specificity of labels for different people with minority gender identities divided the trans community, as did the desire to assimilate once a trans person obtained surgery. Retaining members in the transgender movement was difficult because people often disregarded their transgender identities after obtaining gender-affirmation surgery and assimilating into mainstream society.[92] Jessica Xavier attributed this phenomenon to the idea that "most of us within the transgender community are still hiding our shame under a blanket of heterosexuality, refusing to admit our minority status, and thus our vulnerability."[93] In her article in the *TV-TS Tapestry*, Rachel Tortolini suggested that the shame trans people had in their identities had been imparted to them by society since an early age. "The transsexual during maturation has been silently colonized by society's prejudices that he/she is a "pervert" or worse," she contended. Only once trans people took pride in their transgender identity could they bond as a minority group and effect political change. Trans activist Tere Frederickson asserted "we must bring about a cultural revolution **AND** we can't do it hiding in the closet!" in order to impart the importance of widespread participation in the transgender movement in dispelling negative stereotypes, educating people, and challenging unjust laws.[94] Forming a unified transgender movement proved to be difficult because of not only internal conflicts about tactics but about larger questions regarding the nature of identity and belonging.

[92] Emilio Lombardi, "Appendix H: A Network Explanation of the Transgender Movement in Relation to the Homosexual Rights Movement," Third International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, August 1994, 10.
[93] Jessica Xavier, "So You Wanna Be in Politics: A Realistic Assessment of Transgender Political Involvement," *AEGIS News*, April 1996, 6.
[94] Tere Frederickson, "Your Dignity: Choose to Have It or Not," *TV-TS Tapestry*, 1993, 70.

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