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**Keepers of Womanhood: Missed Opportunities for Feminist and Transgender Coalition  
Building from the 1970s through the 1990s**

*Julia Grafstein*<sup>1</sup>

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In bold, eye-catching letters, a flier distributed by transgender activist Riki Wilchins asserted, “The heart of feminist politics is the struggle against gender oppression... We’re [asking the National Organization for Women] to begin the process of addressing the needs and concerns of its transgender and transexual [*sic*] members.”<sup>2</sup> By the time this flier was published in 1995, trans women had engaged in a fight to be included in the feminist movement for over twenty years. Although it is unclear when trans women started being allowed to join NOW, one trans woman claimed to be a part of the organization in 1984.<sup>3</sup> It was not until 1997 that NOW explicitly recognized transgender oppression and advocated for “education on the rights of transgender people.”<sup>4</sup> As the flier suggested, trans people turned to feminists as allies because they saw the potential to unite against gender oppression. In this article, I argue that instead, a great deal of cisgender feminists excluded trans people, especially women, because they did not see them as suffering from gender oppression but as agents of gender oppression.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Grafstein graduated from the University of Maryland in 2024 with a degree in History. Upon graduating, she started a clinical research position with the Undiagnosed Diseases Program at the National Institutes of Health.

<sup>2</sup> As language has evolved immensely in the transgender movement over the last fifty years, certain terms that were once interchangeable, such as “transgender” and “transexual,” are no longer. “Transexual” used to be a way to refer to people who identified as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth. This term became contentious within the community because it became associated with the medicalization of trans people. “Transgender” is now used to refer to people who blur the boundary of gender expression. In this article, I seek to use the most sensitive language while preserving the original language when citing primary sources. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), X. Riki Anne Wilchins, “Ask N.O.W. to Begin the Process of Addressing the Needs and Concerns of Its Transgender and Transexual Members Flyer,” 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Tortolini, “Sexual Reassignment Process: Social and Political Dangers, and Solutions,” *The TV-TS Tapestry*, 1984, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> About NOW, “Highlights,” National Organization for Women, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> The term “cisgender” dates to 1997 according to the Oxford English Dictionary, however its origins may be traced to Dr. Ernst Burchard’s use of the term in his 1914 book *Lexikon des gesamtem Sexuallebens*. I use it as a method of historical analysis, although this may not be how the people I discuss would have identified themselves. Ernst Burchard, *Lexikon des gesamtem Sexuallebens*, 1914.

Thus, it took over two decades since the birth of the transgender movement for most feminists to recognize trans women as allies and welcome them into their movement.

To analyze attempted coalition-building between trans people and feminists and the attitudes that hindered such partnerships, I utilized a wide variety of sources. These sources included archival collections, newspapers and magazines, speeches and personal testimonies, oral histories, and investigative reports. Most were from newspapers, radio shows, or magazines geared toward lesbians, trans people, and feminists. The oral histories I analyzed were of activists active in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s in many organizations. Although some of these sources were from organizations with national or international reach, most had local audiences. In addition, while I did not limit my search for sources based on geography inside the United States, most of the sources were produced in cities based on the coasts of the United States.

From an outside perspective in the 2020s, an alliance between transgender activists and feminists in the United States seems to be a natural evolution because of shared goals and shared struggles, including gender-based discrimination, access to employment, and gender violence, as sociologist Raewyn Connell has explored.<sup>6</sup> However, as investigated in this essay, it was these common struggles that served as a source of division, centering around what it meant to be a woman and to experience gender oppression. In a 1975 editorial in *Gay Community News*, Margo, a transgender lesbian, asserted that “society oppresses transsexuals in the same way it oppresses native women, through psychiatry, through social ridicule, and through physical intimidation.”<sup>7</sup> Margo’s list conveyed how the plights of transgender people and women were intimately connected and showed the common goals of each movement. Thus, she demonstrated that an alliance between the two groups would be beneficial because they could help each other achieve their shared goals. A combined movement would lead to greater political power and more resources. Many goals of the transgender movement were similar to or the same as goals of the gay and feminist movements, including equal rights, equal opportunities, and an end to discrimination. In addition, sexual harassment and police brutality were also large issues facing both the transgender and gay communities. Despite these shared struggles, many feminists in the 1970s through the 1990s harbored intense biases about trans women, which inhibited coalition-building between the two movements. These biases centered on trans womanhood and the way trans women expressed their femininity.

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Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “cisgender (adj. and n.),” accessed 12 May, 2024, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cisgender\\_adj?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use&tl=true#1171044060](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cisgender_adj?tab=meaning_and_use&tl=true#1171044060).

<sup>6</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Transsexual Women and Feminist Thought: Toward New Understanding and New Politics,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2012): pp. 857-881.

<sup>7</sup> Margo, “The Transsexual / Lesbian Misunderstanding” Clipping, 1975, *Digital Transgender Archive*.

As transgender women sought to secure greater rights and opportunities from the 1970s through the 1990s, many came to see activists in the women's movement as natural allies. However, building and sustaining such a partnership was not as straightforward as they may have hoped. Many of the leaders and grassroots activists in the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s opposed the inclusion of transgender women in their work.<sup>8</sup> These alliances were made even more complicated by issues related to sexual orientation. Some lesbian transgender women considered cis lesbians to be their natural allies. Many cis lesbians, on the other hand, were suspicious of trans lesbians and questioned their gender identities.<sup>9</sup>

These struggles over coalition work were rooted in debates over the definition of womanhood and in questions of identity. Their division centered largely on the questions of "what constitutes a woman?" and "could trans women claim the feminist struggles as their own?" These questions produced vastly different answers. The question of "who has the right to decide what happens to each of our bodies," however, produced similar answers, indicating that these movements were connected by a desire for self-determination.<sup>10</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, transgender activists and feminists were divided in their organizational affiliations and in their activist work, despite what seemed to be common goals. Much of this division could be explained by trans-exclusionary feminists' views on womanhood and male-to-female (or MTF) trans people.

The transgender movement and the feminist movement were in very different places in the 1970s through the 1990s, as the feminist movement had accomplished great things while the trans movement was still in its nascent stage. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the feminist movement made great strides with the passing of laws that prohibited sex-based wage and employment discrimination, secured the right to abortion, and guaranteed access to equal credit and education.<sup>11</sup> Women gained influence in the public sphere, becoming astronauts, Supreme Court justices, and professional athletes. Many of these women understood the role they could play in the women's

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Evans's *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979) analyzed the origins of women's liberation in the sexist civil rights and New Left movements, which functioned as training grounds for feminist activists in the women's movement. Ruth Rosen's book *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York and London: Penguin, 2000) detailed a generational history of liberal and radical feminism and the public's reaction to the changes feminism introduced. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) by Alice Echols chronicled the rise of radical feminism in America.

movement with their newfound following and publicity. A *New York Times* editorial claimed that “in a single tennis match, Billie Jean King was able to do more for the cause of women than most feminists can achieve in a lifetime,” speaking of King’s tennis match against Bobby Riggs.<sup>12</sup> However, in the same time period, the transgender movement remained comparatively stagnant. Although underground communities and organizations within the movement grew rapidly and many new support groups, such as Ingersoll Gender Center, and activist organizations, such as International Foundation for Gender Education, were founded in this time period, transgender people still experienced intense discrimination, both within and outside of the LGB movement. They gained few legal rights and made little advancements in how heterosexual society viewed them. In fact, by some measures, they lost ground. The diagnosis of ‘Transsexualism’ entered the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in the third version in 1980, contributing to and validating the view that being transgender was a disorder, a disease that needed “curing.”<sup>13</sup>

The journey of trans and cisgender feminist collaboration was complex not only because many cisgender women were not accepting of trans women or trans men, but also because of how trans women adjusted to their newfound physical anatomy and how trans men understood their masculinity in relation to womanhood. Female-to-male trans people (or simply FTM) were in a unique position as they experienced both sides of the “cultural sexism coin.” FTMs who were raised as girls had experienced the sexism and social stereotypes that were afforded to women in society. After they transitioned, however, many trans men attested they were able to experience male privilege and the benefits given to men in society.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, some trans women found it difficult to adjust to their roles in the workplace as women, due to lower pay and the lack of respect they experienced in the workplace.<sup>15</sup> This allowed them to offer a unique perspective on gender relations and cultural sexism. For some trans women, the sexism they experienced was enough to dissuade them from pursuing permanent gender-affirming care. Bill presented his account of cross-dressing as a woman to the Erickson Educational Foundation in its *Guidelines for Transsexuals*. He explained that he “couldn’t get used to that condescending manner most men have toward women...and of course living on so much less than I was used to and counting pennies was hard to take,” leading him to conclude that “surgery would have been a terrible mistake for me.”<sup>16</sup> Feminists often viewed trans men as traitors and did not

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<sup>12</sup> “The Troubles, and Triumph, of Billie Jean,” *New York Times*, 6 May, 1981, A30.

<sup>13</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, “Gender Dysphoria Diagnosis,” American Psychiatric Association, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Alter, “Trans Men Confirm All Your Worst Fears About Sexism,” *TIME.com*, <https://time.com/transgender-men-sexism/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Guidelines for Transsexuals,” Erickson Educational Foundation, 1976, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> “Guidelines for Transsexuals,” Erickson Educational Foundation, 1976, p. 4.

regard them highly. In the 1970s and 1980s, lesbian feminists such as Robin Morgan and Janice Raymond considered trans men to be “tokens used to hide the patriarchal nature of the phenomenon of being transgender.”<sup>17</sup> Because Western society viewed gender in binary terms, trans people had to appeal to the physicians and psychiatrists who decided whether or not they could access gender-affirming care in a way that upheld heteronormative and binary gender roles. Morgan and Raymond thus decided that because trans people had to appeal to patriarchal gender oppressors who reinforced the gender binary, trans people themselves were agents of oppression. According to them, trans women in particular were oppressors and invaders of women’s spaces, while trans men were used to hide this invasion by showing that women also transitioned.<sup>18</sup>

Gender oppression was an overarching issue facing transgender and women’s communities, even if feminists did not always recognize this shared experience. Transgender activist Angela Douglas criticized the feminist movement for failing “to familiarize themselves with transsexualism beyond the superficial, readily recognizable aspects concerning sexism and antiquated sex roles, which, we again emphasize, are thrust upon transsexuals [*sic*] not only by society but by many surgeons.”<sup>19</sup> Douglas contended that had feminists taken the time to learn about the process of surgically transitioning from trans activists, they would have realized the gender oppression trans people faced. Thus, feminists’ inability to overcome their initial biases inhibited coalition-building between the two movements. Trans activists pointed to patriarchal institutions such as the medical community as sites of shared oppression. A 1975 article in the *LA Free Press* claimed that “the basic goal of transsexual liberation at the present moment concerns the transfer of power and development of the ability to determine their own lives.”<sup>20</sup> Trans activists sought self-determination by taking the authority away from physicians and psychiatrists who were gatekeepers of gender-affirming care by only allowing access to those who reflected their patriarchal ideals of gender. Many feminist activists in the 1970s and the 1980s also sought to challenge the male-dominated healthcare system that denied them agency and knowledge of their bodies.<sup>21</sup> This demand was central to the overarching goal of the women’s movement, which was

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<sup>17</sup> Genny Beemyn, “Transgender History in the United States,” in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Genny Beemyn, “Transgender History in the United States,” in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Angela Douglas, Brandy Elliott, Tisha Goudie, “Transsexual Liberation: Confronting Suppression,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 1975, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Anita Douglas, Elliott Brandy, Tisha Goudie, “Transsexual Liberation: Confronting Suppression,” *Los Angeles Free Press* 12, no. 581 (5 September, 1975). <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28040158>.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Kline detailed the ways in which women’s health issues were centered in second wave feminism.



to “start a *mass movement of women* to put an end to the barriers of segregation and discrimination based on sex,” as prominent feminist Kathie Sarachild claimed.<sup>22</sup> However, many lesbian feminists in the 1970s through the 1990s did not acknowledge the oppression of trans people, especially as women. They believed that because trans women had not experienced sex discrimination their whole lives, they could not understand the oppression women faced.<sup>23</sup>

While trans women challenged the assertion that they could not comprehend or relate to intense and prolonged gender discrimination in the same way people assigned female at birth could, lesbians and feminists grappled with what it meant to be a woman. Margo, a transgender lesbian feminist, contended “when lesbians and other feminists treat transsexuals in a simplistic way (e.g. ‘no one born a man can really be a woman’), they are clinging to these patriarchal definitions.”<sup>24</sup> She referred to two-genderist attitudes as patriarchal definitions of gender. These included classifying people as either one sex or the other and the idea that one’s gender identity always matched one’s physical sex. A spectrum of gender identity, she contended, would more accurately describe what people experience, especially trans people. In a 1977 special issue of *DYKE* magazine, a quarterly magazine geared toward lesbians published in New York City, some lesbian women discussed the “transgender question” in response to the controversy surrounding a trans woman working at an all-woman record company, Olivia Records. The women concluded that a male-to-female trans person (MTF) must “earn her womanhood” by coming “down to a woman’s level” and renouncing her male privilege. One woman went as far as to say that “by living as an oppressed transsexual he has become a woman,” to which another responded by defining a woman as “someone who is oppressed.”<sup>25</sup> While this statement was self-contradictory, as the same women had previously asserted that trans women are not women and men cannot simply unlearn their male privilege, it was a statement that many women came to agree with in the years to come. It was also quite progressive in its definition of gender as something unrelated to biology.

Some feminists did not believe trans people experienced sexism as cisgender women did and upheld the gender binary by using the same sexist definitions of gender to discriminate against trans

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<sup>22</sup> Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” *Redstockings*, 1973, p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Penny House, Liza Cowan, “Can Men Be Women? Some Lesbians Think So!,” Clipping, 1977, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/w6634380k> (accessed 02 May, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Margo, “The Transsexual / Lesbian Misunderstanding,” Clipping, 1975, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/db78tc24x> (accessed 2 May, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> Penny House, Liza Cowan, “Can Men Be Women? Some Lesbians Think So!,” Clipping, 1977, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/w6634380k> (accessed 2 May, 2022).

people. Cis people brutalized trans people for identifying as a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth and feminists perpetuated this phenomenon while not recognizing the disadvantage trans people were put at because of this discrimination. In a 1973 speech to the West Coast Feminist Conference held in Los Angeles, California, Robin Morgan declared “I will not call a male ‘she’; thirty-two years of suffering in this androcentric society, and of surviving, have earned me the title ‘woman’; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of his being hassled (which he may enjoy), and then he dares, he *dares* to think he understands our pain? No, in our mothers’ names and in our own, we must not call him sister.”<sup>26</sup> Morgan failed to understand the oppression transgender people faced, going as far as to say that they enjoyed being discriminated against. She also used a stereotypical understanding of gender, defining “male” based on biology rather than gender expression, illustrating her reliance on the patriarchal definitions of gender that feminists desired to eliminate.

The words of Morgan, both a radical lesbian and an anti-trans feminist, highlight the lack of understanding between the lesbian and transgender communities. Lesbians faced a great deal of sexism, even within the gay community, as did transgender people.<sup>27</sup> For example, many lesbians felt gay men in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) did not prioritize issues important to them and that men dominated the group without leaving space for women to speak.<sup>28</sup> Men mostly dominated GLF’s coed dances, which Radicalesbian co-founder Ellen Shumsky described as an “oppressive atmosphere [which was] a simulated gay men’s bar.”<sup>29</sup> Because “there were so many men at each event that the women felt lost to each other,” the women decided they needed an all-women’s dance.<sup>30</sup> The connection the dance fostered between the women spurred them to meet independently of GLF and ultimately create their own space in Radicalesbians, a lesbian feminist group centered on women’s issues. Transgender activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson also felt hostility in GLF. Historian

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<sup>26</sup> Robin Morgan, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?,” Speech, West Coast Feminist Conference, April 14, 1973, One Archives, <https://www.onearchives.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Lesbianism-and-Feminism-Synonyms-or-Contradictions-by-Robin-Morgan-April-14-1973.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Leila J. Rupp, Verta Taylor, and Benita Roth, “Women in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Movement,” in *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women’s Social Movement Activism* (online edition: Oxford Academic, 2017), p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Linda Rapp, “Radicalesbians,” *GLBTQ*, Inc., 2015, 1. Ellen Shumsky, “GLF and Sexism.mov,” YouTube video, 1:11, March 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJJdp-qzb6I>.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen Shumsky, “The Radicalesbian Story: An Evolution of Consciousness,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!*, ed, Tommi Avicolti Mecca (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen Shumsky, “The Radicalesbian Story: An Evolution of Consciousness,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!*, ed, Tommi Avicolti Mecca (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), p. 208.

Martin Duberman described Rivera's position in the GLF: "If someone was not shunning [Sylvia's] darker skin or sniggering at her passionate, fractured English, they were deploring her rude anarchism as inimical to order or denouncing her sashaying ways as offensive to womanhood."<sup>31</sup> Their outspoken roles in the Gay Activists Alliance also left the membership of that group "frightened by street people."<sup>32</sup> As Sylvia and Marsha's experiences illustrated, gay organizations greatly resisted transgender integration into the movement. Therefore, both lesbian and transgender people felt belittled or ostracized within the community that they had expected to accept and encourage them. This could have served as a source of unity, but lesbians' focus on their own oppression and their opposition to male privilege blinded them to the potential benefits of an alliance with transgender people.

Some lesbians rejected transgender people as political allies because they saw gender affirmation surgery as a submission to patriarchal definitions of gender, especially when they transitioned to women who exhibited stereotypically feminine features. With this attitude, lesbians failed to recognize that members of the medical establishment were the ones truly responsible for this phenomenon, as trans women are reconstructed to fit what those mostly male doctors view as a woman, i.e. someone with delicate features who was soft spoken and sensitive. In the 1970s the majority of people were only chosen if they were classically attractive and could pass easily as a member of the sex with which they identified.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the people undergoing surgery had little say in the matter of their surgery. In the *Los Angeles Free Press*, the author of the article "Transsexual Liberation: Confronting Suppression" explained that "in the eyes of some surgeons, post-ops who continue to view themselves as transsexuals or retain ties with the transsexual culture are "failures," and this works against the development of transsexual liberation."<sup>34</sup> Some doctors sincerely sought only to help patients and meet their needs. But more common were gender affirmation clinics— established to research and treat transgenderism— that saw surgery as a way to "fix" someone's "gender dysphoria," so that their bodies no longer presented a sex different from the one with which the transgender person identifies.<sup>35</sup> Thus, someone who still identified with the trans movement after transitioning failed to fit in with the heteronormative gender binary and was seen as mentally unwell. This illustrated that trans people

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<sup>31</sup> Ehn Nothing, "Queens Against Society," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ehn Nothing, "Queens Against Society," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, "The Liberal Moment," in *How Sex Changed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> Anita Douglas, Elliott Brandy, Tisha Goudie, "Transsexual Liberation: Confronting Suppression," *Los Angeles Free Press* 12, no. 581 (5 September, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> Beemyn, *Trans bodies, Trans Selves*, p. 17.

could only access gender-affirming care by submitting to members of the medical establishment's patriarchal views of gender, while trans people themselves did not necessarily subscribe to the same views.

This medical paternalism was not limited to trans women. Cis women had long struggled with a male medical establishment that too often infantilized or ignored them.<sup>36</sup> Women had been overlooked in medical research for centuries, and the medical establishment reinforced stereotypes about women and female submission. A group of women in Boston recognized this issue and, in 1970, published the book *Women and Their Bodies*, which later became *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and challenged male medical dominance while encouraging women to take control of their health.<sup>37</sup> The book touched on issues from anatomy to sexuality to myths about women and detailed the sexist ways in which the medical community presented information about women's bodies.<sup>38</sup> Opposition to and consciousness-raising about sexism in the medical community became increasingly popular within women's liberation. In a 1972 article in the Iowa-based newspaper *Ain't I a Woman*, the author highlighted the prejudice in *Novak's Textbook of Gynecology*. First, the author pointed to a section in the chapter "patient's Complaint," in which the textbook asserted the patient's complaint "may not always be precise, or even literate."<sup>39</sup> This conveyed that the condescending attitude of doctors towards women was taught to them as a result of the belief that women were not educated enough to speak about their own bodies. Next, in a section on "The Premarital Consultation," the textbook emphasized that "the frequency of intercourse depends entirely upon the male sex drive... the bride should be advised to allow her husband's sex drive to set their pace and should attempt to gear hers satisfactorily to his."<sup>40</sup> The textbook actively promoted dependence on and deference to the husband and physician by defining what a "real problem" is to exclude female satisfaction and prioritizing the husband's desires over the wife's. Thus, many feminists came to understand that women had long been treated as inferior by the medical establishment. What they did not grasp was the parallels to the experiences of transgender people, as both communities' understanding of their bodies originated from prejudiced medical practitioners who presented female and transgender medical knowledge in ways that confirmed their biases about women and trans people. Both communities also confronted sexism in the medical community in an effort to gain autonomy over their own bodies. Equal access to

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<sup>36</sup> Joan Ditzion, "Founder Joan Ditzion Interview," interview by Kathy Davis, 28 October, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Jenny Douglas, "Feminist Women's Health Activism Across the Globe: Tracing the History and Impact of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*," Review of *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders*, by Kathy Davis, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 16, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>38</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, *Women and Their Bodies: A Course*, 1970.

<sup>39</sup> "The Doctor is Instructed to Mess You Over!" *Ain't I A Woman*, 18 August, 1972, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> "The Doctor is Instructed to Mess You Over!" *Ain't I A Woman*, 18 August, 1972, p. 2.

medical care and increased quality of treatment were important in both the trans and feminist movements because of the biased medical care they received.<sup>41</sup> Despite these shared struggles with the medical establishment in the United States, many trans women and ciswomen did not find common ground in their activism.

Instead, many feminists felt as though trans women could not lay claim to the same struggles as cisgender women because they were not “real women.” One popular anti-trans argument adopted by many lesbian feminists in the 1970s and 1980s was that trans women were just men in women’s clothing. Influential radical feminist lesbians saw transgender women as men attempting to take over the female sphere by inserting themselves into women’s only spaces. Janice Raymond’s 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, for example, offered a criticism of transgenderism through a feminist lens. Raymond herself was a lesbian, anti-trans activist whose book influenced many lesbians and medical professionals to oppose transgenderism.<sup>42</sup> *The Transsexual Empire* was one of the most prominent books that offered a constructionist view of being transgender and catalyzed the formation of a transgender response to anti-transgender prejudice from the feminist community.<sup>43</sup> Her work emphasized the idea that male-to-female trans women were still men at heart, having grown up as men and with male privilege. Raymond asserted that “all transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves.”<sup>44</sup> This “rape” could be accomplished through deception, which Raymond connected to the many trans women who do not openly disclose they are transgender. Her work invalidated being transgender and the transgender experience. She claimed the patriarchy used MTFs as a tool for subjugating feminism by infiltrating women’s spaces, which negated the MTFs’ experiences and reduced them to a tool for the patriarchy. Equating MTF trans people to eunuchs because they were men who merely had their “members” removed, Raymond argued that “there is a long tradition of eunuchs who were used... as keepers of women.”<sup>45</sup> She defined MTF transgenderism as the ultimate form of fetishism and the “logical

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<sup>41</sup> “The Doctor is Instructed to Mess You Over!” *Ain’t I A Woman*, 18 August, 1972.

<sup>42</sup> Beemyn, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Jack Hixson-Vulpe, “A Spark of Transsexual Embodiment: Responses to Janice G. Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire*,” *Queer Theory and Embodiment* 1 (2008). In this context, a constructionist view is one which contends that the transgender identity is the product of human interpretation and culture, as opposed to being biological and immutable. “Social Constructionism,” UmassAmherst, accessed 2 April, 2023, <https://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/chapter/social-constructionism/>.

<sup>44</sup> Janice Raymond, *Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), p. 104.

<sup>45</sup> Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, p. 105.

conclusion of male possession of women in a patriarchal society.”<sup>46</sup> This resonated with many women because they felt as though the identity society forced onto them was rooted in reproduction and the male gaze. The Radicalesbians’s influential essay, “The Woman Identified Woman,” explained the significance of lesbians to women’s liberation as women who overcame society’s expectations of women as a secondary class to men to be used as men’s sex objects. The Radicalesbians asserted that “until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status.”<sup>47</sup> The Radicalesbians argued that, by denying lesbians a role in women’s liberation and disparaging women loving women, women loving men continued to define themselves in relation to men and therefore could never truly be liberated from the shackles of the female role society has defined. “For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow,” the Radicalesbians declared, “if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.”<sup>48</sup> By defining womanhood based on women’s roles in men’s lives, society would forever subjugate women and see them as second-class citizens. Thus, the Radicalesbians, and those who identified with their essay’s claims, especially resented transgender people for submitting to the heteronormative gender norms that society put in place because they were attempting to break the framework and validate women loving women.<sup>49</sup>

Lesbian feminists attacked gender-affirming surgery and the stereotypical physical representation of women that trans people embodied in order to explain the trans person’s role as a puppet of the patriarchy. In her highly influential book the *Transsexual Empire*, Raymond claimed that it was the “patriarchal society, which generates norms of masculinity and femininity,” and the trans person’s body must be adjusted to his/her mind if s/he fails to adjust to his/her native body and role in society.<sup>50</sup> This, Raymond believed, was the way in which the medical and psychiatric authorities reinforced sex-role stereotypes. Her belief was that trans women played into heteronormative roles that society outlined for them by changing their bodies to “match” the gender with which they identify

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<sup>46</sup> Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman Identified Woman,” Know, Inc., 1970, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman Identified Woman,” Know, Inc., 1970, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Beemyn, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*.

<sup>50</sup> The *Transsexual Empire* remains one of the most prominent books about conceptualizing trans women in the feminist community. Although her ideas do not represent modern mainstream feminist views of trans people, Raymond’s works are still cited and her ideas and the impact they have had on trans-feminist relationships have far from disappeared from modern consciousness. Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, 70. Jack Hixson-Vulpe, “A Spark of Transsexual Embodiment: Responses to Janice G. Raymond’s The Transsexual Empire,” *Queer Theory and Embodiment* 1 (2008).

more closely. Thus, according to feminists, transgender people reinforced that gender roles were biologically constructed because they desired to surgically alter their bodies to reflect their gender identities. Many feminists also argued, however, that trans women could not truly relate to the female experience because they were not assigned female at birth, which reinforced that gender was based on biology and contradicted the popular feminist argument that “biology is not destiny.” This idea of gender roles being socially constructed meant that women could be more than vessels for reproduction, and no longer had to be defined by their role as potential mothers and wives, which men had enforced as their primary roles in society for so long and used to keep women in the domestic sphere. “By virtue of having been brought up in a male society,” argued the Radicalesbians, “[women] have internalized the male culture’s definition of ourselves.”<sup>51</sup> Lesbian feminists saw trans people as submitting to the framework of society that had imprisoned them for so long, reinforcing the gender binary and the idea that men should be with women and women with men.

One example of “perceived men” infiltrating a women’s only space was Sandy Stone’s employment at Olivia Records, an all-female music record label. Sandy Stone was Olivia’s sound engineer until she was forced to resign in 1978 after she was outed as a trans woman in 1977. Olivia wanted to keep her on, but Stone resigned because of the extreme amount of hate mail from lesbians and criticism that she was “not a real woman.” Raymond quoted one woman as saying that she felt “raped when Olivia passes off Sandy, a transsexual, as a real woman. After all his male privilege, is he going to cash in on lesbian feminist culture too?”<sup>52</sup> In a note to Olivia Records, lesbian Candace Margulies defined womanhood as growing up female and Sandy Stone did not grow up in the eyes of society as a female, explaining that “we are women because we grew up female, perceiving and being perceived female.”<sup>53</sup> She claimed Stone was “afforded a great deal of privilege... he [*sic*] was expected and permitted to take his mind seriously, to feel his potential, to grow in a greater, fuller way than females.”<sup>54</sup> Lesbians saw trans women like Stone as invading their spaces and trying to take possession of female culture and oppression when it was not the trans experience.

The Sandy Stone incident prompted discussions about transgender womanhood in lesbian feminist circles but did not inspire lesbian feminists’ understanding of trans women or permission of trans women to join the women’s movement. In response to the Sandy Stone incident, *DYKE* magazine, a magazine of lesbian culture, printed a conversation between a psychologist who used to counsel and test trans people who had transitioned and several lesbian feminist activists. In the article’s introduction, the author claimed that the people at *DYKE* did not “think that cutting off his genitals

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<sup>51</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman Identified Woman,” 1970, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, p. 103.

<sup>53</sup> Candace Margulies, “An Open Letter to Olivia Records,” *Lesbian Connection*, November 1977.

<sup>54</sup> Candace Margulies, “An Open Letter to Olivia Records,” *Lesbian Connection*, November 1977.

makes a man a woman, and we do not believe that a woman can be born into a man's body."<sup>55</sup> This captured the sentiments that Janice Raymond put forth in her book, demonstrating the widespread nature of these feelings. Many women did not understand the biological basis of being transgender and rejected the idea that gender oppression applied not only to cisgender women who experienced sexism but also to women and men who did not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Lesbians, however, also did not believe the medical establishment's idea that some women could be "born in men's bodies." The psychologist claimed that she thought "you have to be crazier as a woman to want to be physically a man, than a man has to be to want to be a woman."<sup>56</sup> Believing that one must be "crazy" to want gender affirmation surgery was consistent with what the medical establishment put forth, especially with the inclusion of gender dysphoria in the DSM.<sup>57</sup> It was a major reason that lesbians and feminists excluded trans women from their cause. She also argued that "quite a number of [transsexuals] are homosexuals who cannot integrate their homosexuality in any way" because "that sort of substrate of the masculine" came back when she was interviewing post-operative MTFs. Her evidence for this was the women's voices sinking throughout their interviews, their vocabulary changing, and their orienting themselves in "masculine" fields or jobs, such as working with computers. This also reflected the idea that many women held that men could never truly become women and abandon the privilege they had experienced their entire lives. By defining certain language or fields of employment as masculine, she not only utilized the patriarchal gender binary to categorize the MTFs as false women. Thus, her definition of womanhood relied on the gender norms feminists claimed to want to invalidate.

The resentment cis women felt for MTFs who had experienced male privilege and then suddenly, it seemed, wanted to band together with women under the guise of shared oppression was widespread. Beth Elliott was an openly transgender lesbian activist and singer who became the vice president and editor of the newspaper of the San Francisco chapter of Daughters of Bilitis, a large lesbian organization, in 1971.<sup>58</sup> In 1972, Elliott was forced out of the organization due to many

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<sup>55</sup> Penny House, Liza Cowan, "Can Men Be Women? Some Lesbians Think So!," Clipping, 1977, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/w6634380k> (accessed 2 May, 2022).

<sup>56</sup> Penny House, Liza Cowan, "Can Men Be Women? Some Lesbians Think So!," Clipping, 1977, *Digital Transgender Archive*, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of the history of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual and its connections to social change, see Allan Horwitz, *DSM: A History of Psychiatry's Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> On the Daughters of Bilitis, see Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007).



lesbians feeling as though she did not belong in the organization because she was not a “real” woman.<sup>59</sup> Despite this rejection, Elliott’s continued activism with feminist groups suggested how she saw the value in partnerships with activist women’s groups. In 1973, for example, Elliott served on the organizing committee of the West Coast Feminist Conference, where she had also been asked to perform as a singer. Some women involved in radical lesbian feminist groups viewed Elliott as a male infiltrator and handed out fliers protesting her presence. Elliott still performed even after the lesbian feminist protests, which she described as “an emotionally abusive ‘trashing’ attack that nearly derailed the conference.”<sup>60</sup> Keynote speaker Robin Morgan expanded her speech to address the controversy. In her speech “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?,” mentioned earlier, Morgan referred to the “male supremacist... obscenity of male transvestitism” and asked “how many of us will try to explain away— or permit into our organizations, even, men who deliberately reemphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering as “camp.””<sup>61</sup> Morgan prompted the audience to take responsibility for excluding transgender women who she viewed as mocking the plight of women. “We know what’s at work when whites wear blackface,” she asserted, “the same thing is at work when men wear drag.” She felt that trans women were men masquerading as women because they could not understand the struggles ciswomen faced nor could they abandon the male mentality and privilege they had experienced all their lives. In her 2011 book *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, Elliott challenged multiple assertions Morgan made about her in her speech, including that Elliott had “been ‘begged’ to not attend the conference,” which Elliott claimed took place over the phone earlier in the week of the conference and ended with a death threat.<sup>62</sup> “Transsexual [*sic*] women may participate in women’s community,” Elliott asserted, “we may build and nurture women’s community, we may be beloved figures (as was I) in our local women’s communities, but the meme is that we are unwelcome intruders.”<sup>63</sup> Some lesbians had accepted Elliott into the lesbian community, yet, despite being a devoted activist, people such as Robin Morgan still branded her as a “male intruder” and sowed hate for trans people within the feminist community.

The Morgan-Elliott controversy was the first time many women had encountered the “transgender question” and Morgan’s actions affected women’s opinions nationwide, as the twelve

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<sup>59</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), p. 102.

<sup>60</sup> Beth Elliott, *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Robin Morgan, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?,” (speech, West Coast Feminist Conference, April 14, 1973), One Archives, <https://www.onearchives.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Lesbianism-and-Feminism-Synonyms-or-Contradictions-by-Robin-Morgan-April-14-1973.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Beth Elliott, *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, p. 439.

<sup>63</sup> Beth Elliott, *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, p. 443.

hundred women at the conference spread what had transpired as they dispersed to their homes across the country.<sup>64</sup> Although the majority of people voted for Elliott to stay when Elliott's inclusion at the event was put up to a vote, the anti-trans group continued to protest and pledged to disrupt the conference if she was not removed. The group was spurred on by Morgan's comments, as she ended her criticism of Elliott by calling her an "opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer— with the mentality of a rapist."<sup>65</sup> These sentiments of trans women as rapists and male infiltrators were echoed at the end of the decade in Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* and became one of the major tropes of anti-trans sentiment at the time.

As word of the incident between Morgan and Elliott spread around the country, several women's groups and newspapers commented on it or featured editorials in which their supporters revealed their thoughts. One such feature was in the Berkeley feminist newsletter *Dykes and Gorgons* in the spring of 1973. In this letter, the author wrote about "supposed male 'transsexuality'" and referred to Beth Elliott as "Beth," using quotation marks to avoid acknowledging that Elliott was a real woman and that female trans people can indeed be women.<sup>66</sup> She accused the conference organizers of deliberately being disruptive by inviting an MTF to the conference because the conference was for women only. Another 1973 article in the *LA Free Press* echoed the sentiments of the *Dykes and Gorgons* article, praising Morgan's speech and emphasizing the fact that Beth Elliott's gender assigned at birth was male.<sup>67</sup> However, the article referred to Beth Elliott as Beth, sans quotation marks, and as a "former man," indicating a level of acceptance of her transition. Although not all lesbian feminist responses to the Elliott incident were negative and anti-trans, many were and these feelings only grew throughout the decade.

In June 1973, two major events in the transgender movement occurred that revealed the tension between trans people and feminists over issues that would seemingly unite them. One was a setback that lasted decades and one increased the visibility of trans oppression and discrimination. The setback was the evolution of a trans-exclusionary Pride Parade in San Francisco. The predecessor to the Pride Parade was the Fourth of July Reminder Day Demonstration, which was aimed at highlighting the gay and lesbian communities' lack of equal rights. The Reminder Day Demonstration, which began in 1965, evolved into the Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day March, which commemorated the 1969 Stonewall Riots. Originally, these demonstrations were restrictive in the expression they allowed. The dress code was strictly enforced and called for people to reinforce gender norms by

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<sup>64</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 106.

<sup>65</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> Lebrón Collective, "Same Old Shit," *Dykes and Gorgons*, 1, no. 1 (May-June 1973).

<sup>67</sup> Helen Koblin, "1500 Women at UCLA Hold Lesbian Conference," *Los Angeles Free Press* (20 April, 1973).

wearing heteronormative clothes that fit with the gender binary.<sup>68</sup> One 1965 flier titled “Rules for Picketing” explained that “picketing is not an occasion for an individual to express his individuality” because, in order to gain acceptance, “new ideas must be clothed in familiar garb.”<sup>69</sup> The flier continued to specify regulations for signs, the order of marchers, and details that men should wear suits while women should wear dresses. Instead of attempting to reconstruct how cisgender and heterosexual society viewed gender, the organizers of this march reinforced the gender binary through strict dress codes. The obsession with ensuring the homophile movement appealed to general society through limiting expression was one cause for strife between gay and lesbian activists and trans activists. Beginning in 1950-51, the homophile movement campaigned for gay and lesbian rights, first promoting assimilation and then moving toward liberation in the 1960s.<sup>70</sup> The homophile movement often put trans issues on the back burner in order to seem more appealing to the straight public and prioritize gay and lesbian issues. It seemed natural that when faced with gender oppression, trans people, who saw themselves as rebelling against the gender binary, could rely on the feminist movement, which also sought to dismantle the gender binary and resist gender oppression.

Many lesbian feminists of second-wave feminism, however, were not willing to be allied with trans people against gender oppression because they objected to trans women and drag queens expressing their femininity in what seemed to be stereotypically “feminine” ways.<sup>71</sup> Many drag queens and trans women viewed themselves as challenging the gender binary because they positioned themselves outside of heteronormative gender ideals expected of men. For example, in her 1970 article “Only a Man Can Be a Woman,” Pat Maxwell argued that the queen “is not oppressing women, she is threatening men! The queen is the lavender menace to the male chauvinist.”<sup>72</sup> Maxwell’s remarks encapsulated the view of drag queens and trans women that their gender expression was open defiance to the gender binary because they did not submit to patriarchal definitions of masculinity. Feminists, however, were skeptical of this view of trans women and drag queens’ gender expression. In 1972, the

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<sup>68</sup> This policing of gender expression was reflective of the tendency of 1950s homophile organizations to downplay the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals as part of their plan to assimilate into heterosexual society. Marc Stein’s book *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2012) examined homophile activism in great detail.

<sup>69</sup> Committee on Picketing and Lawful Demonstrations, “Rules For Picketing,” (Outhistory, 1965), <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/50th-ann/item/2942>.

<sup>70</sup> Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Drag involves dressing in clothes associated with the opposite sex. It is often a form of performance and entertainment and relates to gender expression, whereas identifying as transgender is related to gender identity. Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Pat Maxwell, “Only a Man Can Be a Woman,” *Come Out!*, October 1970.

San Francisco Gay Pride Parade, which welcomed drag queens, erupted into violence when one of its gay male organizers, Reverend Raymond Broshears, punched members of a radical lesbian group who carried anti-male signs.<sup>73</sup> After this incident, feminists gathered to denounce the fight and vowed to never again participate in a pride event organized by Broshears or one that permitted drag queens to participate because the fight was an example of “stereotypical gender roles and patriarchal oppression of women.”<sup>74</sup> To the feminists, not only was Broshears’ violence an incident of what would later become known as toxic masculinity, but the drag queens represented an affront to the feminist movement by idolizing the rigid hyper-femininity that feminists tried so hard to dismantle. In 1973, Broshears attempted to organize another parade, but the event organized by anti-drag gays and lesbians who forbade transgender people from participating drew the biggest crowd. This trans-exclusionist event was the predecessor to the current San Francisco LGBT Pride celebration.

The protest against trans people through opposition to crossdressing by the women’s movement continued across the country in Washington Square Park in New York City. In New York, however, the conflict between trans people and feminists culminated in increased visibility of the plight of trans people. At the June 1973 Gay Pride Gala, the rally that came after the Pride March, lesbian feminists once again clashed with transgender activists, namely Sylvia Rivera, a speaker at the rally, a Hispanic non-operative trans woman, and a founding member of STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries).<sup>75</sup> Rivera had been a notable participant in the recent Stonewall riots. Her organization, STAR, offered support to struggling trans youth. The lesbian feminists, led by Lesbian Feminist Liberation founder Jean O’Leary, opposed drag being used as entertainment for the rally and drag’s inclusion in the movement in general. O’Leary made a speech about how “men who impersonate women for profit insult women.”<sup>76</sup> In an interview many years later, O’Leary explained she saw drag queens as degrading women by dressing up in the stereotypical clothing that society had forced women to wear for so many years. Drag queens were contributing to the narrow definition of what a woman could be, which is what the lesbian feminists were fighting against. O’Leary later came

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<sup>73</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 102.

<sup>74</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, p. 102.

<sup>75</sup> A non-operative trans person was one who decided that s/he did not need or want gender-affirming surgery to adequately express his/her gender.

<sup>76</sup> Jean O’Leary, “Jean O’Leary,” interview by Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History*, podcast audio, <https://makinggayhistory.com/podcast/episode-14-jean-oleary-part-1/>.

to regret her speech, but at the time her position was common among feminists.<sup>77</sup> After O’Leary’s speech moved the crowd to hostility against Rivera, Rivera took the stage to passionately decry the treatment trans people faced not only by those in the gay and lesbian rights movements but also the brutality they endured at the hands of the police. Her speech culminated in calls for unity in the struggle for equal rights and with the whole crowd chanting “Gay Power” in unison.<sup>78</sup> Although the crowd was initially opposed to Rivera, her heartfelt appeal for collaboration led to hundreds of people coming away from the march with a new understanding of the trans experience.<sup>79</sup> By explicitly connecting trans oppression to that of gays and lesbians, Rivera was able to rally support for the trans cause and make a step toward a united movement.

Despite the hostility towards trans women in the lesbian women’s movement, many MTFs identified as lesbians and took part in both the lesbian feminist movement and the transgender movement. In a 1975 editorial in *Gay Community News*, Margo, a trans woman and lesbian, offered her view on the divide between lesbians and trans people. She asserted that “an understanding of transsexualism as a deep and life-long identity crisis concerning one’s most basic gender identity will distinguish it from the kinds of impersonations which Lesbians reject... as a basis of female identity.”<sup>80</sup> Margo defined what it meant to be transgender in hopes of elucidating its complexity and striking down popular beliefs within the lesbian community that MTFs are gay men who cannot accept their sexuality or transition as a means of oppressing women. She defined lesbianism as a woman, any woman, loving another woman, so that it could be extended to transgender women, not only native women.<sup>81</sup> She attributed a large cause of the divide between the two groups to overly narrow concepts

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<sup>77</sup> Jean O’Leary, “Jean O’Leary,” interview by Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History*, podcast audio, <https://makinggayhistory.com/podcast/episode-14-jean-oleary-part-1/>. For more information on how drag queens challenge and enforce traditional gender norms, see Laurie A. Greene, *Drag Queens and Beauty Queens: Contesting Femininity in the World’s Playground* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

<sup>78</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “Y’all Better Quiet Down” Original Authorized Video, 1973 Gay Pride Rally NYC, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o>.

<sup>79</sup> John Darnton, “Homosexuals March Down 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue,” *The New York Times*, 25 June, 1973.

<sup>80</sup> Margo, “The Transsexual / Lesbian Misunderstanding,” Clipping, 1975, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/db78tc24x> (accessed 2 May, 2022).

<sup>81</sup> The definition of “lesbian” was a matter of great debate in feminist circles in the 1970s. Dell Richards encapsulated the range of definitions in her book *Lesbian Lists: A Look at Lesbian Culture, History, and Personalities*. Some of the definitions she contemplated using were “a lesbian as a woman who was sexually attracted to other women” or “women who were women-identified.” Dell Richards, *Lesbian Lists: A Look at Lesbian Culture, History, and Personalities* (New York City : Alyson Publications, 1990).

of lesbianism and lesbians adopting patriarchal views of gender, which aided the sexism they are trying to fight. Margo advocated for all women to be drawn together and included in the feminist movement to fight against the perpetuation of male definitions of sex and gender and “liberate their own feelings and lives from the ball and chain of patriarchy.”<sup>82</sup> Margo’s essay demonstrated the potential value in a partnership between transgender people and lesbians. The unknown author of “Public Platform: The Oppressed as Oppressor” advocated for trans people “[broadening] our minds and [opening] our hearts to one another, regardless of sex.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, many members of the trans community called for an alliance with the feminist community because they recognized the benefits of uniting to fight gender oppression.

With the development of queer theory and third-wave feminism in the 1990s came a shift in the feminist community toward being more open to collaboration with trans people. Queer theory embodied the newfound rejection of assimilationism and binary gender and the reinvigorated struggle for equal rights and sexual freedom in the lesbian, gay and transgender movements.<sup>84</sup> Queer theory and the celebration of gender transgression that accompanied it were imperative to the development of trans theory and transgender activists’ alliances with gay and lesbian activists in the 1990s.<sup>85</sup> Trans people were understood to be those who challenged the gender binary, opening the door for the crucial recognition of forms of gender expression other than sexism. The emphasis of queer theory on celebrating gender transgression and denouncing the gender binary, coupled with the focus of third-wave feminism on intersectional identities, led to more ciswomen and lesbian feminists being open to allying with trans women to overcome shared struggles.<sup>86</sup> Despite the major changes in many cis women’s attitudes about trans people, trans-exclusionary feminists of the 1990s used the same arguments as Robin Morgan and Janice Raymond to justify barring trans women from certain

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<sup>82</sup> Margo, “The Transsexual / Lesbian Misunderstanding,” Clipping, 1975, *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/db78tc24x> (accessed 2 May, 2022).

<sup>83</sup> “Public Platform: The Oppressed as Oppressor,” *Gender Review: The FACTual Newsletter*, December 1978.

<sup>84</sup> Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), p. 184.

<sup>85</sup> Genny Beemyn, “Transgender History in the United States,” in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 26.

<sup>86</sup> I refer to intersectionality as Kimberlé Crenshaw defines it in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989). Claire R. Snyder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008), p. 175. Genny Beemyn, “Transgender History in the United States,” in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 26.

women's only spaces. Even so, conceptualizing the intersectionality of trans identities and understanding different lenses into gender oppression spurred trans-feminist partnerships that ushered in a new era of collaboration between the two movements.

In the 1970s and 1980s, trans women sought out coalitions with ciswomen and lesbian feminists, who all too often rejected collaboration with trans people in their fight against gender oppression because of significant prejudices against them. Feminists viewed trans women as invaders of women's-only spaces and agents of patriarchal oppression because feminists thought they were promoting the gender binary and patriarchal gender norms with their feminine gender presentation. It was only with the onset of third-wave feminism and queer theory in the 1990s that feminist-transgender alliances flourished. In the years since, while many feminists have overcome their prejudices about trans people and mainstream feminism is no longer trans-exclusionary, the legacy of this period lives on in trans-exclusionary feminists, who hold onto second-wave feminist views of trans people.