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by Alex Bakker, Rainer Herrn,
Michael Thomas Taylor, and Annette F. Timm

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Historicizing Transgender Terminology

Annette F. Timm with Michael Thomas Taylor

The stories this book tells span from the late nineteenth century to the early 1960s. Within these seven decades, terminology referencing individuals who disagreed with the gender they were assigned at birth or who wished to play with or challenge norms of gender comportment went through several dramatic transformations. While recognizing that these linguistic transformations are still underway and that we cannot hope to represent a true consensus on current usage, we have been very self-conscious about choosing terms and phrases and about formulating our historical descriptions in ways that at least contain and contextualize the painful effects of terms that are today often used to denigrate rather than to empower trans individuals. Although we have raised this issue at key points in this book, we would like to also provide a general discussion of the terminological landscape and our efforts to navigate it.

Our decisions about terminology were grounded in a resolutely historical perspective. While recognizing that we are writing to and must therefore respect the sensibilities of present-day readers, we insist upon *also* respecting the identities, experiences, and self-understandings of our

Our decisions about terminology were grounded in a resolutely historical perspective.

historical actors. We therefore reject the argument that being sensitive entails linguistic sanitation of historical realities that cannot be fully understood without appreciating how and why people used the words they did to describe themselves during the period under investigation. Particularly in the first half of the period we analyze in this book, trans individuals had *no* words to describe themselves. In the book *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, Jack Halberstam introduces a discussion of how alienating it can be to lack identification with a very personal reflection: “If I had known the term ‘transgender’ when I was a teenager in the 1970s, I’m sure I would have grabbed hold of it like a life jacket on rough seas, but there were no such words in my world.”¹ Socially marginalized or living in self-imposed silence about their deepest fears and longings, transgender people were often relieved to be provided with terminology – any terminology – that might validate their experiences as something shared with others. The passive construction – “to be provided with” – is intentional. Explaining how we arrived at our present-day usage requires us to acknowledge that, aside from localized slang, trans people were not initially in control of the terms that they eventually adopted to achieve a sense of belonging and self-understanding. That this is no longer true today – that there is a vibrant academic field of transgender studies and an international proliferation of trans activist groups, whose members are adamantly asserting their rights to self-definition – does not obliterate the

historical reality that linguistic shifts from terms like “transvestite” to “transsexual” and, to a lesser extent, to “transgender” were often orchestrated not by trans people themselves but by physicians, sexologists, and psychiatrists – self-declared experts seeking to categorize and treat conditions that they viewed as primarily pathological.² One of our key aims in this book, however, has been to explain how previous histories have placed too much emphasis on the agency of medical experts and not enough on the influence and actions of trans people themselves. As George Chauncey has argued for the word “homosexuality” in the late nineteenth century, it “would be wrong to assume ... that people uncritically internalized the new medical models.”³ Even the taxonomical shifts occurred primarily because trans people themselves actively sought out medical expertise and because they often (if not always) viewed the new terminology as empowering.

To understand precisely how this could be true, we must become etymologists, meaning that we must appreciate the meanings of words as they were originally used in different national contexts. Rather than providing a glossary, which, as Julia Serano argues, “gives the impression that all of these transgender-related words and phrases are somehow written in stone, indelibly passed down from generation to generation,”⁴ we have chosen to contextualize our terminology and to add this note to explain our general philosophy of word choice in more detail.

A key problem has always been *whose* words are being used. The overarching word that we rely on – “transgender” – is

a case in point. Although the precise person to have originally coined it remains disputed, Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah emphasize that it came into common use in the 1960s and that some of the first to employ it were members of “self-organized communities of predominantly white, middle-class, male-bodied individuals who persistently expressed feminine comportment, identities, and dress.”⁵ Even though medical experts such as Harry Benjamin claimed ownership through their publications, the essential point, Stryker and Currah emphasize, is that the goal in adopting the term was to resist medical, psychiatric, or sexological labelling either as “transvestites,” which connoted episodic cross-dressing primarily for reasons of erotic gratification, or as “transsexuals,” which implied medicalized bodily transformations of sex-signifying physical attributes through which a permanent legal change of social gender could be accomplished. “Transgender,” on the other hand, was meant to convey a nonpathological sense that one could live in a social gender not typically associated with one’s biological sex or that a single individual should be able to combine elements of different gender styles and presentations. Thus, from the beginning, the category “transgender” represented a resistance to medicalization, to pathologization, and to the many mechanisms whereby the administrative state and its associated medico-legal-psychiatric institutions sought to contain and delimit the socially disruptive potentials of sex/gender atypicality, incongruence, and nonnormativity.⁶

For precisely these reasons, we chose to use the words “transgender” or “trans” (fairly interchangeably) whenever we are discussing the experiences of transgender people from a point of historical remove. These are *our* words to describe *their* experience, though we believe that they are respectful and appropriate. However, we also use words like “transvestite” and “transsexual” in cases where we are paraphrasing our historical actors, because these words were also used by trans people themselves and thus helped to form their sense of self. The fact that this book tracks a transatlantic and multilingual history complicates (or enriches) the etymological project, since usage varies geographically *and* over time in the three primary sites we explore: Germany, the United States, and the Netherlands. To demonstrate the dilemmas, let us take the example of the word “transvestite.”

The German physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld coined the word “transvestite” in his 1910 book *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb* (The transvestites: an investigation of the erotic drive to cross-dress).⁷ Note first of all that the German word *Verkleidungstrieb* cannot be easily translated and literally means something closer to “instinct,” “drive,” or “desire” to clothe – or even, as Michael has argued, to disguise oneself. Along with “transvestite,” it is a Hirschfeldian neologism – an attempt to corner the market on terminology by replacing psychiatrist Carl Westphal’s 1870 term “konträre Sexualempfinden” (“contrary sexual feeling”) with a term

that deemphasized the pathological while distinguishing cross-dressers from homosexuals. This was a new perspective on Hirschfeld's part, and his growing conviction that cross-dressing was not the same thing as homosexuality had slowly formed after years of angry exchanges with the cross-dressers themselves.⁸ Although these people then adopted the term "transvestite," most of them also insisted that their drive to cross-dress had nothing to do with erotic desire but was rather motivated by the need to adequately present themselves in the clothing that matched their own sense of gender. Nonetheless, Hirschfeld's word caught on (despite the fact that his book was not translated into English until 1991), and by the 1920s it had won out over alternative suggestions from cross-dressers themselves, and from other sexologists, such as Havelock Ellis's "eonism" (after the eighteenth-century French diplomat known as the Chevalier d'Éon, who is profiled in a gallery and in Michael's essay in this volume).⁹ For instance, the popular magazine about which Rainer Herrn writes in this book, which was published in Germany between 1930 and 1932, was explicitly aimed at and for *Transvestiten*. Hirschfeld overcame his initial surprise in discovering that cross-dressers were not necessarily homosexuals, and he described one particular variant as belonging more or less to the domain of what he termed *sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (sexual intermediaries – this could also be translated as "variations," "interstages," or "in-betweens").¹⁰ He later elaborated on how these people fit into the wide spectrum of gender identities in various works, including

Geschlechts-Übergänge (a variation of the term "sexual intermediaries" that translates into something like "gender transitions") and *Geschlechtskunde* (the study of gender, or sexual knowledge), which included many images of transvestites in one of its five thick volumes. Hirschfeld viewed those who wished to live out their lives in a different sex from the one assigned to them at birth as extreme variants within a broader transvestite scene, which also included those who lived fundamentally heterosexual lives but enjoyed cross-dressing in private or as a public performance. The emphasis on erotic gratification created by the book's title was thus a bit misplaced; Hirschfeld's own awkward writing style contributed to misreadings that continue to haunt his legacy.

Finally, it should be noted in passing that there is no German equivalent for the term "cross-dresser," which has garnered more acceptance as a less derogatory term in historical literature about the phenomenon in English-speaking contexts. One could argue that we could simply translate the German word *Transvestit* into "cross-dresser," but this would deny our historical actors' possession of a word that they adopted as their own.

English readings of Hirschfeld's terminology are also complicated by the fact that there really is also no direct equivalent for the word "gender" in German, which is why the English term has been used in discussions of gender theory and social analysis since the explosion of scholarly interest in gender theory at the end of the twentieth century.¹¹ While the word "gender" now implies the

social construction of a gender identity (as opposed to biological/anatomical sex) in both German and English usage, the German word “Geschlecht” cannot be so easily separated from biology. The most basic translation might be “genus,” and the history of the word marks intersections between biology and social reproduction: the word “Geschlecht” is used to denote groups of ethnically homogenous people, aristocratic dynasties, or even the human race (*das menschliche Geschlecht*).¹² *Geschlecht* as Hirschfeld used it must also be understood as related to anatomy (it is not a translation for “gender”), as is clear in the German word for genitals: *Geschlechtsorgane*. These fine distinctions are often missed in translation, since the lines between what is biological and what is socially/psychologically perceived is much more blurred in German usage than it is in present-day English. In the post-First World War years, Hirschfeld and his followers came to speak of the “true transvestite,” a concept that was gradually replaced by the word “transsexual” (“seelischer Transsexualismus,” “psychological transsexualism”), which Hirschfeld first used in a 1923 lecture titled “Die intersexuelle Konstitution” (The intersexual constitution).¹³

This last point raises another problem of terminology: Hirschfeld also used the word “intersexuality” in a very different way than we would today. What he meant can most easily be demonstrated in a graphic produced for his article on the intersexual constitution:

With this schema, Hirschfeld was seeking to depathologize conditions of

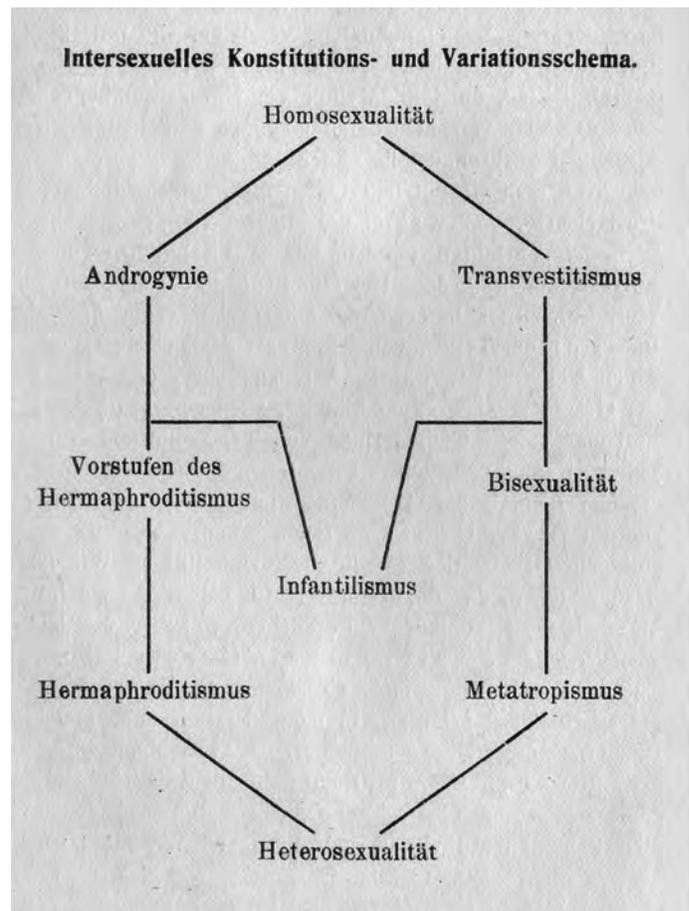


FIGURE 8.1: Intersexual and Constitution and Variation Schema. Originally printed in Magnus Hirschfeld, “Die intersexuelle Konstitution,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 23 (1923): 3–27. Clockwise from the top: homosexuality, transvestism, bisexuality, metatropism (the reversal of active and passive gendered qualities), heterosexuality, hermaphroditism, early stages of hermaphroditism, androgyny.

sexual anatomy and behaviour that did not conform to heteronormative standards, and he used the term “intersexuality” to describe the entire spectrum of naturally occurring sexual variation. “For a biologist trained in Darwin’s theories,” he wrote in 1910, it was an “untenable position” to

pathologize sexually intermediary stages. He argued that “all of these intermediary sexes” should be recognized as “sexual varieties” similar to the diversity of species. Hirschfeld was thus breaking with the majority of sexologists of the era and with public opinion in refusing to distinguish more clearly between “pathological” and “healthy” sexual characteristics. He uses the word “intersexual” in a much broader way than we would today to describe all of this naturally occurring variation. This does not mean, however, that Hirschfeld was entirely consistent in his attitude toward depathologization or that he always accepted individual self-assessments of gender. When he helped people whom he called pseudo-hermaphrodites and whom we would call intersex, he insisted that it was his anatomical findings (the presence or absence of sperm, for example), rather than the individual’s self-perception, that should determine the legal gender.¹⁴ Hirschfeld’s taxonomical practices were peculiar, and not all of his neologisms gained the acceptance of “transvestite.” His use of “intersexuality” is a case in point.¹⁵ We have therefore not adopted this definition of “intersex” in this volume, and, for other reasons, we have also chosen to not use the word “hermaphrodite” uncritically, even though it was commonly used in the period under investigation in this book by individuals with genitalia that did not conform to expectations of a clear line between male and female bodies. Our justification for this exception to the practice of respecting historical individuals’ own word choices is that “hermaphrodite” has a long history of

allusion to monsters and freaks, and it is anatomically misleading.¹⁶ As the story of Carla Erskine in Annette’s chapter demonstrates, terminology surrounding intersex conditions was both disputed and obscure to those diagnosed throughout the first seven decades of the twentieth century.

It would seem that problems of translation and Hirschfeld’s tendencies towards constantly coining new terms and defining them in convoluted German has defeated American readers, who are less familiar with the fact that he was involved in the world’s first cases of gender affirming surgery, such as that of Lili Elbe, whose story we describe in a gallery in chapter 4. That Hirschfeld was also quite keen to sell books (with which he funded his Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin) and thus often chose titillating titles, did not help. All of this explains why English-speakers have misread Hirschfeld’s use of the word “transvestite” and why they have generally missed that he did indeed also coin the word “transsexual” to refer to those people who were seeking to change both the anatomy with which they were born and their social presentation/recognition.¹⁷ Most English-speaking authors attribute its first use either to Harry Benjamin or to a 1949 article by David Oliver Cauldwell, editor of the American *Sexology* magazine and author of many popular books about sexual health and education.¹⁸ Although we would grant Hirschfeld the credit for first using the term, the fact that Hirschfeld died in 1935, two years after the Nazis had attempted to obliterate his legacy by destroying his institute, makes it unsurprising that the later American

introductions of the term “transsexuality” received more attention in the post-Second World War period.¹⁹ The term is still in use today (perhaps most notably in the title of Julie Serano’s pathbreaking book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*),²⁰ although it now more often takes a back seat to the umbrella term “transgender.” How Serano uses the term actually conforms to a short-lived usage coined by the Dutch psychiatrist Coen van Emde Boas, who used “transsexist” as a replacement for “transvestite” instead of “transsexual.” Van Emde Boas wanted to emphasize that what was being described was not primarily a matter of clothing or biological sex but the individual’s sexuality. Benjamin agreed but found “transsexist” awkward in English. He briefly used the term “transexualist,” which also failed to catch on.²¹

The word “transsexuality” remained the most frequently used term for almost fifty years after its re-popularization by Benjamin and Cauldwell, and it was meant to identify people who wished to undergo sex-affirming hormonal treatment and/or surgery. Within the broad spectrum of trans identities, transsexuals were those who could not avoid seeking the help of others – they required medical help to live the lives they wanted to lead. Yet, for much of the period under investigation in this book, very few doctors were willing to prescribe hormone treatment or to perform transgender surgery of any kind. Those who were willing quickly became central to the lives and well-being of trans people. Today the word “transsexual” can offend, primarily because it presumes that all trans

people have or want to undergo surgical modification or that medical treatment defines what it means to be transgender.²²

But just as we must be sensitive to the violence that words can do today, we are equally sensitive to the self-definition and need for self-validation of our historical actors. As Gillian Frank and Lauren Guttermann put it in a recent episode of their *Sexing History* podcast, we need to pay attention to “how trans folks calibrated their personal arguments for sex change in response to the shifting medical criteria of doctors and psychiatrists.” Even in our use of terminology, we must not paint trans people as “simply the victims of an oppressive medical gaze” but point out how “they also helped to shape medical opinion.”²³ In other words, the fact that trans people themselves have used the term “transsexual” as a form of empowerment cannot be easily erased from the historical record without denying these people their own linguistic agency. There are discomforts involved in this recognition. For example, the Texas-born recording artist, Canary Conn, who transitioned in the early 1970s after having been married and fathering a child, insisted that she was a “true” transsexual, “comparing herself to others whom she perceived as less authentically trans and therefore undeserving of medical treatment.”²⁴ Even these judgemental self-categorizations are part of trans history.

They are also, it must be stated, part of the trans present. Not all trans people accept that “transgender” should replace “transsexual” (though most are happy to see the death of “transvestite”). As the poet,

essayist and actor Max Wolf Valerio has put it in describing his transition,

I did not change my core gender identity, I changed my biological sex ... I dislike the use of the word transgender because it increasingly lumps me in with any number of other people who might be transgressing gender boundaries, people who might actually have very little in common with me. While I'm not against these people expressing their gender, I do have a real fear: The word transgender has the potential to entirely erase who I am. ... Finally, transgender doesn't connect me decisively to my spiritual ancestors, the other transsexuals of the latter half of the twentieth century, who have endured ostracism, loneliness and intensive struggle to transform their bodies and lives. Transgender ignores the medical aspects of my transition that have enabled me to create my life. I have made use of the medical tools available to me, against all the odds and the voices that told me I couldn't do it – and that I shouldn't want to.²⁵

The lesson here is that it is essential to name people *as they wish to be named* and to use categories that respect *their* sense of self rather than our socio-political sensibilities, whether they live in the present or lived in the past. That “transgender” has gained wide acceptance does not make it the most appropriate term in all cases.

“Transgender” is of relatively recent (if somewhat disputed) origin, but the

term had achieved acceptance within trans communities by the 1990s. As K. J. Rawson has argued, it is now commonly accepted as “a broad category encompassing many gender identities and expressions, including transsexual, genderqueer and cross-dresser, among many other.”²⁶ We would argue that the word “transgender” can be deployed without the implication of prejudice as an umbrella term to describe all individuals who wish to live within a gender that does not conform to the one they were involuntarily assigned at birth, whether or not they are seeking physical transition or acceptance on either side of a male/female binary. However, as Viviane Namaste has noted (echoing Valerio's fears), such umbrella terminology can also go too far, risking what she calls “queer theory's erasure of transgender subjectivity.”²⁷

In sum, there simply is no perfect solution to the debates about terminology, and, as in other books on the subject, the decisions we have made here represent a snapshot in time rather than the final word on how historians should deal with such issues. Whenever possible, we use the terms that the individuals we describe have used themselves. And we must admit that, historical accuracy aside, we do need to find present-day language with which we are comfortable – with which we can describe a past from the perspective of our own values. When we are speaking in more general, descriptive ways in this book, we therefore very often use the term “trans,” mostly because it implies the least (about the specifics of identity and/or surgery) while still conforming to present-day usage.

We have also chosen to stick primarily to North American English usage. For

example, the term “transgenders,” as a noun, is accepted in some countries, including India and the Netherlands.²⁸ But we here stick with “trans individuals” and “trans persons,” or – when we are referencing an individual as a historical actor in our narrative, “trans subjects” – in order to avoid any connotations of a slur. We are aware of the bind described by Julia Serano in writing of the “Activist Language Merry-Go Round,” which dictates constantly shifting terminology; “because trans people are highly stigmatized and face undue scrutiny in our culture, all of the language associated with us will also eventually face similar stigma and scrutiny.”²⁹

And again, as we noted earlier, the meanings of all the terms we are using, and of “transvestite” in particular, can easily get lost in translation. Highlighting these moments of cultural difference and asking about how terms and ideas are translated between languages and between historical and cultural contexts is crucial to our project. And, of course, what is most interesting about this history is precisely the shifts and differences in what this word, “transvestite,” meant to different people. The term “transvestite” marked contested terrain – precisely because it was so widely used. We would argue adamantly that explaining these distinctions rather than erasing them is our responsibility as historians. This does not deny but only contextualizes the obvious fact that it is no longer appropriate to use the word “transvestite” as a general term to describe people who would themselves never use the word.

Our choices were more difficult when it came to other terms. Should it be “trans women” and “trans men” or “transwomen” and “transmen.” Experts on the subject differ. Julia Serano follows the former practice, while Jack Halberstam prefers the compound-noun version. We have somewhat arbitrarily chosen the former. Some scholars reject terms like “female-to-male” (FTM) or “male-to-female” (MTF) transition. Given that the author of an important new textbook, Ardel Haefele-Thomas, has argued that these terms should be avoided (because “it is crucial not to assume that the person has necessarily had any hormones or surgery”), we suspect that these terms will increasingly be rejected by a new generation.³⁰ Once again, our decisions have been based on the historical context. The individuals whose lives we will describe lived in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, a period during which the social and legal consequences of attempting to thwart heterosexist and cissexist norms were significantly more dire than they are in the democracies of our present. Laws against “masquerading” in the clothing of the other gender or against creating a public nuisance could be, and often were, used to repress and punish trans people, who literally lived under the threat of being asked to display their genitals to police. In this context, the distinction between gender comportment and anatomical configuration could be existential. To point this out by discussing whether these individuals had been successful in their quest for surgery is not, in other words, simply a matter of sensitive labelling; it is an essential part of the story

of their marginalized and threatened existence.³¹

Moreover, elders such as Kate Bornstein point out that the empowerment of trans women to claim a fully female identity without surgery is a recent development. Even in the early 1980s, Bornstein writes, “I knew for a fact that I could never be a woman so long as I had a penis. So I transitioned from male to female by means of gender confirmation surgery – it was the only way I could possibly live as the woman I believed myself to be. In Denmark some fifty years earlier, Lili Elbe knew for a fact that she could never be a woman so long as she had no uterus.”³² Bornstein follows this statement with a convincing justification for replacing many terms that she used in the original 1994 edition of her book with more current usage. The two perspectives are not, we think, self-contradictory. They simply require nuanced and thoughtful wording. As historians it is our responsibility to find terminology that is respectful of our readers while still avoiding any exaggeration of social choices available to our historical actors.

Having said this, we follow Eric Plemons and Chris Straayer in being aware that any discussion of surgery can play into “lurid and voyeuristic concerns with dissected body parts” and can thus overshadow “extraclinical and never-clinical trans ways of being.”³³ For this reason, it seems self-evident to us that older terms such as “sex change operation” or even “sex reassignment surgery” are unnecessarily disrespectful of the lifelong self-understandings of trans people and should be avoided. We therefore chose to

use “gender-affirming surgeries” whenever we are not directly quoting historical sources. Since this book has discussed the quest for surgery in many different contexts, it is important to acknowledge, as Plemons and Straayer point out, that surgical outcomes varied enormously in both physical and psychological terms, “resulting in self-actualizing triumph” in some cases and “crushing disappointment and lifelong chronic health problems” in others.³⁴ Although our cast of characters in this book almost all sought hormonal or surgical transformation, however, we do not consider medical treatment or its successes and failures as a criterion to define or describe them. Instead, whenever possible, we have used the words that they would have used to describe themselves.

In some cases, unfortunately, calling our historical subjects by the names they would have chosen is impossible, because we have no record of those names. Given the dangers of being discovered as trans in societies with legal sanctions against changing one’s gender, trans lives were shrouded in secrecy and often left few archival traces. The only way that we could avoid deadnaming these people – using the gendered names that they actually did or would have rejected if they had had the choice – would be to not name them at all, a solution we found even more problematic. It also does not help the cause of tolerance to fail to acknowledge that in certain historical circumstances it has in fact been impossible for individuals to safely socially transition. In sum, both naming and labels matter for transgender histories because they determine what is historically

visible or recognizable at all. This is a point that the editors of a special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* on “Archives and Archiving,” K. J. Rawson and Aaron Devor, underline by choosing articles that highlight challenges of researching a field full of silences, taxonomical debates, and ethical challenges.³⁵ We have, however, replaced deadnames with those chosen by our historical subjects wherever possible, placing the new name in square brackets when it appears in quotations or archival citations.

As historians, we are sensitive to the legal and social contexts in which our specific historical subjects lived, and we are cognizant of the fact that their bodily integrity and their own self-understandings depended on their abilities to pass. We therefore use the pronouns that we believe they would have chosen themselves, as far as we have been able to determine. In cases where we know that it was never possible for the person to live in their true gender in any social setting outside of the home (and particularly where we know only their birth names), we have chosen to use the only pronouns that they were able to expect in public – the ones they were assigned at birth. To do otherwise would be to make implicit and false claims about the degree of social acceptance they were able to achieve. For similar reasons, we have generally eschewed the use of more modern gender-neutral variants, such as “they” or the various neologisms with which trans individuals are today raising awareness and pushing the boundaries of tolerance in our societies. We certainly have used “they” as a gender-neutral singular designation of

individuals about whom our knowledge of gender self-identification is completely uncertain, such as interwar transvestites for whom we have photographs but no biographies. But with all due respect to the linguistic practices of contemporary trans individuals who justifiably seek to be described as they see themselves, we feel that directly imposing modern terminology onto historical subjects – putting words in their mouths that they would never themselves have used – would be disrespectful to their self-understandings and their existential struggles and would constitute a distortion of the historical record.

To reiterate then, our guiding principle throughout has been to make the voices of trans subjects of the past heard, while also acknowledging the difficult balance between the desires that some of them had for privacy and what we feel is a need to tell these histories. We wanted to represent them literally as subjects: as agents in their own stories whose self-definitions must be respected and whose actions are at the core of our narrative. This will certainly create dissonance for readers unaccustomed to reading about trans people in the past and who are understandably uncomfortable with words that have become slurs. But we expect this dissonance to be productive rather than offensive, and we are convinced that a sustained engagement with the historical creation of “transgender” will provide hope for further transformations in the future.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

- 1 Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 1.
- 2 For a summary of the origins of the field of transgender studies, see Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, "Introduction," in "Post-posttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies," ed. Susan Stryker and Paisely Currah, special issue, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1–18. Stryker and Paisely are not alone in dating the beginning of transgender studies as an academic field to the publication of Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10, no. 2 (1 May 1992): 150–76.
- 3 George Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance," *Salmagundi*, no. 58/59 (1982): 114–46.
- 4 Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2016), 23. Evidence of how rapidly contemporary usage for terms in gender and sexuality is shifting, requiring contemporary arbiters of meaning and style to react, can be found (to give one example) in the new style guide made available on the Associated Press website in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York City. "Stonewall 50th Anniversary Topical Guide," *Associated Press Stylebook*, accessed 28 Jan 2020, <https://www.apstylebook.com/topicals/topicals-stonewall-50th-anniversary-topical-guide-stonewall-50th-anniversary-topical-guide>.
- 5 Stryker and Currah, "Introduction," 5.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Note that there is a (much later) English translation of this book, but it does not contain the subtitle. This is therefore our translation of the original German title. The English edition is: Magnus Hirschfeld, *Transvestites*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Buffalo, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1991).
- 8 For an early example of Hirschfeld's contact with cross-dressers, see the autobiographical essay he published in his journal: "Mitgeteilt von Lehrer J. G. F., 'Ein Fall von Effemination mit Fetischismus,'" *Jahrbuch für Sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 2 (1900): 324–44.
- 9 For more detailed description of these developments and the discussions between sexologists and cross-dressers about terminology, see Rainer Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts: Transvestitismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* (Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2005), esp. 36.
- 10 Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb* (Berlin: Alfred Pulvermacher & Co., 1910), 4–5. He defined sexual intermediaries like this: "All of these sexual varieties form a complete circle, in which a given type of intermediary simply represents one notable point, between which, however, there are unbroken lines of connection." Magnus Hirschfeld, *Geschlechtskunde*, vol. II. Bilderteil. Folgen und Folgerungen (Stuttgart: Julius Püttmann, 1930), 599.
- 11 The seminal scholarly article in the field of gender history, which explains the deployment of "gender" as being distinct from "sex" while still related to sexuality is Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.
- 12 The historical Zedlers *Unviersallexicon*, for instance, defines it as "genus, famille, maison; die Abkunft, das Abstammen und das Herkommen eines Menschen von dem andern" ("genus, famille, maison: the descent, origination, and coming from of a person from another"); Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, vol. 10 G-Gl, "Geschlecht," column 1222 (Halle and Leipzig, 1735).
- 13 Magnus Hirschfeld, "Die intersexuelle Konstitution," *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 23 (1923): 3–27.
- 14 In some cases, of course, the anatomical findings matched the self-perception. This

- was the case for Karl M. Baer, who had lived his childhood as a girl and his early life as a mannish woman, before finding Hirschfeld, having surgery, and being able to legally become a man and marry his female lover. See N. O. Body, *Memoirs of a Man's Maiden Years*, trans. Deborah Simon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), and Sander L. Gilman's helpful preface: "Whose Body Is It, Anyway? Hermaphrodites, Gays, and Jews in N. O. Body's Germany," vii-xxiv. In other cases, such as for the intersex woman Friederike Schmidt, Hirschfeld's advice met resistance. Schmidt continued to live as a woman, even though Hirschfeld's examination uncovered functioning testes. For longer discussions of the case of Friederike Schmidt see the following sections of Michael Thomas Taylor, Annette F. Timm, and Rainer Herrn, eds, *Not Straight from Germany: Sexual Publics and Sexual Citizenship since Magnus Hirschfeld* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 2017): Michael Thomas Taylor, "Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science as Archive, Museum, and Exhibition," 25–9; Rainer Herrn, Michael Thomas Taylor, and Annette F. Timm, "Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science: A Visual Sourcebook," 42; and Sabine Kriebel, "Sexology's Beholders: The Exhibition PopSex! In Calgary," 80–2.
- 15 As Geertje Mak has demonstrated, European doctors specializing in intersex conditions slowly began to relinquish their insistence that sex could be diagnosed – seen – in the body and started seeing themselves as surgeons who could help individuals transform their bodies to match the "inner truth" of their self-perceptions. The internationally recognized expert on what was called pseudo-hermaphroditism was not Hirschfeld but Franz Ludwig von Neugebauer (born in Poland as Franciszek Ludwik Neugebauer, who published a survey of 1,100 cases from all over the world in 1908, and who developed surgical procedures to change appearance and improve function). See Geertje Mak, *Doubting Sex: Inscriptions, Bodies and Selves in Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite Case Histories* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 232; and Geertje Mak, "Conflicting Heterosexualities. Hermaphroditism and the Emergence of Surgery around 1900," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015): 402–27.
- 16 As the Intersex Society of North America puts it on their web site, "the terms fail to reflect modern scientific understandings of intersex conditions, confuse clinicians, harm patients, and panic parents." See: "Is a Person Who Is Intersex a Hermaphrodite?," Intersex Society of North America, accessed 27 June 2019, <http://www.isna.org/faq/hermaphrodite>. For a discussion of the history of these debates see Elizabeth Reis, "Divergence or Disorder?: The Politics of Naming Intersex," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2007): 535–43.
- 17 Hirschfeld was involved in several cases of individuals seeking surgery, including Lili Elbe, about whom we have included a gallery in this book.
- 18 David Oliver Cauldwell, "Psychopathia Transsexualis," *Sexology*, Dec 1949. Even the English Wikipedia entry for Cauldwell asserts that he "coined the term transsexual as used in its current definition." The entry does cite Hirschfeld's 1923 article but implies that he did not use it to suggest the desire to change one's sex ("David Oliver Cauldwell," *Wikipedia*, accessed 26 June 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Oliver_Cauldwell), contradicting the following German-language Wikipedia entry on transsexuality: "Transsexualität," *Wikipedia*, accessed 26 June 2019, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transsexualit%C3%A4t>. This fact makes Joanne Meyerowitz's simultaneous assertion that Hirschfeld used the word transsexualism, but that the "word did not enter the medical parlance or connote a desire for sex-change surgery until 1949," rather self-contradictory. Joanne J. Meyerowitz, "Sex Research at the Borders of Gender: Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Alfred C. Kinsey," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75, no. 1 (2001): 72–90. For another discussion of the disputed origins of the word "transsexual" see: Michael Thomas Taylor, "Review of *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts: Transvestitismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* by Rainer Herrn," *Journal of Homosexuality* 55, no. 2 (2008): 312–15. More evidence that the word originated in Germany is provided by the fact that Alfred

- Kinsey cited it in 1948 (so before Cauldwell) in a context that makes it seem clear he was inspired by Hirschfeld's work. (He uses terms still uncommon in American English, such as "third sex.") See Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell R. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948), 612; and my longer discussion of Kinsey in this book.
- 19 As Friedemann Pfaefflin notes, German speakers are far less likely to make this mistake, and credit Hirschfeld with first using the word. See Friedemann Pfaefflin, "Sex Reassignment, Harry Benjamin, and Some European Roots" *The International Journal of Transgenderism* 1, no. 2 (1997). <https://cdn.atria.nl/eazines/web/IJT/97-03/numbers/symposion/ijtc0202.htm>.
 - 20 Serano, *Whipping Girl*. Serano discusses her terminological choices in a reflective preface to the second edition of her book.
 - 21 Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon: A Scientific Report on Transsexualism and Sex Conversion in the Human Male and Female* (New York: The Julian Press, 1966), 30.
 - 22 Julian Gill-Peterson has argued that the word "explicitly mark[s] a *medical* discourse and biopolitical apparatus, a colonial form of knowledge with racializing and disenfranchising effects ... transsexuality arrogantly pretends to know and seize trans life as an object, making it a difficult concept to write with and against ... [It] is an artifact of a dominant knowledge system to be constantly questioned and undermined from the inside." Without wishing to deny the power of medical authority or the influence of biopolitical thinking on the gender norms that governed treatment for trans people, we find this formulation overstated. It fails to capture how the trans people whose memoirs we cite and whose history we are exploring used the term, including, for example, those whom Alex Bakker has interviewed. Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 9.
 - 23 Gillian Frank and Lauren Gutterman, "Canary," *Sexing History*, accessed 1 July 2019, <https://www.sexinghistory.com/episode-24>.
 - 24 Frank and Gutterman, "Canary."
 - 25 Max Wolf Valerio, "'Why I'm Not Transgender' by Max Wolf Valerio," *Making Our Lives Easier LLC* (blog), 9 Feb 2014, <http://makingourliveseasier.org/why-im-not-transgender-by-max-wolf-valerio/>. See also his memoir: *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006).
 - 26 For a concise discussion of etymological origins, see K. J. Rawson, "Debunking the Origin behind the Word 'Transgender,'" *News Minute*, 27 May 2015, accessed 28 June 2019, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/debunking-origin-behind-word-transgender>. Rawson credits the American psychiatrist John F. Oliven with first using the word in 1965 to denote the "urge for gender ('sex') change." The trans activist Virginia Prince, however, insisted that she first used the word (though in the form "transgenderal") to distinguish herself from transsexuals, because she considered herself female but had no wish to alter her body with hormones or surgery.
 - 27 Viviane Namaste, "'Tragic Misreadings': Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity," in *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions & Imperialism*, (Toronto: Women's Press, 2011), 205–38.
 - 28 Stryker and Currah, "Introduction," 7. An example that might well foretell the future of this usage can be found in India, where the word "transgenders" is frequently being used to describe how the 2018 decriminalization of homosexuality will affect trans citizens. For example: Express News Service, "Section 377 Verdict: For Transgenders, Battle for Respect, Dignity, Acceptance in Society Bigger, Far from Over," *Indian Express*, 7 Sept 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/section-377-verdict-for-transgenders-supreme-court-5343983/>.
 - 29 Julia Serano, "A Personal History of the 'T-Word' (and Some More General Reflections on Language and Activism)," *Whipping Girl* (blog), 28 Apr 2014, accessed 26 June 2019, <http://juliaserano.blogspot.com/2014/04/a-personal-history-of-t-word-and-some.html>.
 - 30 Ardel Haeefele-Thomas, *Introduction to Transgender Studies* (New York: Harrington Park Press, LLC, 2019), 20. This argument is

- certainly not universal. Several prominent transgender studies scholars, such as Genny Beemyn, Susan Rank, and Aaron Devor continue to use FTM and MTF. See Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin, *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and Aaron Devor, *FTM: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).
- 31 We also decided against the practice of using an asterisk to write “trans.*” Halberstam notes, for instance: “I have selected the term ‘trans*’ for this book precisely to open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. As we will see, the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transitions in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations ... This terminology, trans*, stands at odds with the history of gender variance, which has been collapsed into concise definitions, sure medical pronouncements, and fierce exclusions” (*Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 4–5). In Germany, the asterisk (borrowed from English) has even entered general usage – it is known as the *Gendersternchen*, or “little gender star” – as a means of breaking away from the binary implications of grammatical/social gender. (The word was chosen as “Anglicism of the year in 2018” by the Leibniz Institut für deutsche Sprache.) It does not denote trans identity but is used in combinations such as “Kolleg*innen” to replace the usual masculine or feminine forms (“Kollegen/Kolleginnen”) or the existing option of denoting male and female (KollegInnen) with a form that is meant to be less gender specific. However, we felt using an asterisk was in fact too contemporary – tied to usages and meanings that are too anchored in our present moment – for our historical perspective.
- 32 Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vintage, 2016), xii. On Lili Elbe, see Sabine Meyer, “*Wie Lili zu einem richtigen Mädchen wurde*”: Lili Elbe: Zur Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Identität zwischen Medialisierung, Regulierung und Subjektivierung (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015); and Rainer Herrn and Annette F. Timm, “Elbe, Lili (1882–1931),” in *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBTQ) History*, vol. 3 (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner & Sons, 2019), 500–502..
- 33 Eric Plemons and Chris Straayer, “Introduction: Reframing the Surgical,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1 May 2018): 165.
- 34 Plemons and Straayer, “Introduction,” 166.
- 35 As the general editors of the journal, Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, put it: “the editors [of this special issue] call our attention not only to pragmatic problems encountered by archival practitioners when they try to collect, preserve, describe, and render accessible the material traces of transgender actions in the world but also to equally vexing taxonomic, evidentiary, and semiotic questions about what counts as ‘trans,’ what counts as evidence, and how we make sense and meaning of what we encounter through transgender archiving and archives. They grapple with the fragmentary nature of surviving documentation, the conscious and unconscious biases and selection criteria that determine what records are saved, and the unequal accessibility of those records that are available for study and inspiration.” Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, “General Editors’ Introduction,” in “Archives and Archiving,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 541.