

Historicizing The Emergence of Trans Medicine

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TRANS MEDICINE

**The Emergence
and Practice of
Treating Gender**

Shuster, Stef M. 2021. *Trans Medicine: The Emergence and Practice of Treating Gender*. New York: New York University.

Tracing Ideas, Assumptions, and Theories
from one era to the next

Eugene Steinach

Research on hormones, 1930s





Christine Jorgensen (1952)

- Identifying as trans was understood as starting early in childhood.
 - Child development theories of 1950s implicated mothers as partially responsible for trans youth (i.e., socialization theories)
- Traces to theories from early 1900s related to homosexuality and intersex people.

Messy Theories of Origins (1950s-60s)

Gender Normativity as The Goal

I do not forget their families. In several instances the suffering of the parents of an abnormal son also has been alleviated; they were able to reunite with a normal-appearing daughter instead of being affronted by an ostensible son whose effeminate behavior and dress was, by friends and neighbors, judged either as immoral and perverse or bizarre and freakish, or both. (John Money, 1969)



Gender Normativity as The Goal

The outcome of such operations should be viewed from producing a reasonably successful “woman.” In this respect, the physical structure and appearance of the patient is of importance. If this appearance is unchangeably masculine, the outcome is, of course, not only problematic, but definitely doubtful if not unfavorable. (Surgeon, 1960)



Pathways to care for trans youth in mid- 20th century

Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2018. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1. Use psychotherapy to dissuade/convert people

“[psychological] treatment of the transsexual boy may be the only way to prohibit adult transsexualism” (Robert Stoller, as quoted in Gill-Peterson, 2018, p.146).

2. Use youth as test cases for building scientific and medical knowledge about gender

1. Trans people
assumed to be
mentally unstable

2. Could create a
test to verify claim
to being trans

3. Trans people
should not have
agency

Assumptions of Medical Establishment

Trans People Assumed to be Mentally Unstable

- Psychologists stereotyped trans people as “disturbed, neurotic, selfish, and pathetic” (Benjamin, 1967).
- Medical community labeled trans people as “sick, bad, and perverted” (Stryker, 2008).



Benjamin, Harry. 1967. “Transvestism and Transsexualism in the Male and Female.”
Journal of Sex Research 3(2): 107–127.

Stryker, Susan. 2008. *Transgender History*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Sorting People: The “real life test”

Living full time in the new role for at least two years, so as to become socially, economically, and emotionally rehabilitated in that role. During this period of rehabilitation, hormone therapy is begun, along with transexual counseling. At the conclusion of this period, a complete evaluation is made: psychological, psychiatric, endocrine, and surgical are all prerequisites of the actual surgery



Sorting People: The “real life test”

Generally patients are operated on who have been on hormones for a full year and have completely lived, cross-dressed and been employed as a member of their choice for the same period of time. This is a necessary prerequisite so that the patients prove to themselves that they are female by obtaining the self confidence of functioning completely in the female role (Stanford Gender Identity Clinic, 1979)



Infantilizing Trans People

When [patient name] first came to see me he told me that he was unmarried. A little later he asked me to write his insurance company and ask them what part of his hospital and surgical expenses they would pay. They wrote me a surprised letter stating that this man was married and his history didn't seem to correspond with what they knew about him, and that he even had one child.

Naturally, I cancelled my arrangements for surgery and told this boy I wouldn't have anything more to do with him from a surgical standpoint, that if he had deceived me in these important points I felt that he would go on doing so and whose revelation proves his unreliability

(Surgeon, 1957)



Infantilizing Trans People

I am not surprised, having had similar experiences before. They simply illustrate the immaturity of many of these people, but I fully agree with you not to have anything further to do with such utterly unreliable girls. (Benjamin's response to Surgeon, 1957)



History Repeating...



Referring to trans medicine as “experimental” or trans people as “new” is historically inaccurate



Infantilization has carried over into contemporary times



Attacks on providers and trans and nonbinary people have persisted

References

- Benjamin, Harry. 1967. "Transvestism and Transsexualism in the Male and Female."
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Thank you!

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