

An Intro: “Transgender” During the 1990s

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Abstract

For the past few months, I’ve made available a number of never-before-considered documents that reviewed the true roots of the word “transgender”. The Myth The term “transgender” was coined by a heterosexual crossdresser chauvinist who hated transsexual people, Virginia Prince. The term was explicitly created to refer to other heterosexual crossdressers like Prince. Therefore, if [...]

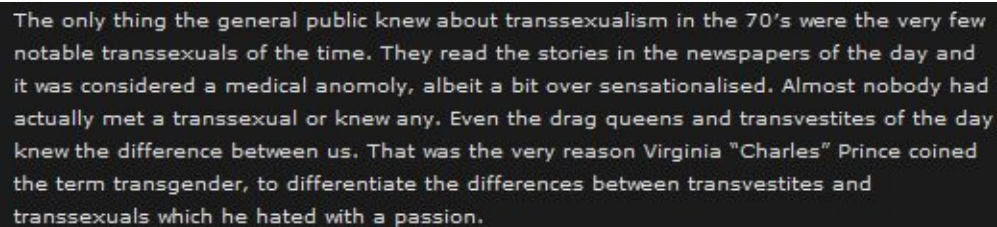
Article

For the past few months, I’ve made available a number of never-before-considered documents that reviewed the true roots of the word “transgender”.

The Myth

The term “transgender” was coined by a heterosexual crossdresser chauvinist who hated transsexual people, Virginia Prince. The term was explicitly created to refer to other heterosexual crossdressers like Prince. Therefore, if you refer to a transsexual person as being a “transgender” person, you are literally calling that transsexual person a crossdresser - which is offensive!

Some examples of these sentiments from TS Separatists:



The only thing the general public knew about transsexualism in the 70's were the very few notable transsexuals of the time. They read the stories in the newspapers of the day and it was considered a medical anomaly, albeit a bit over sensationalised. Almost nobody had actually met a transsexual or knew any. Even the drag queens and transvestites of the day knew the difference between us. That was the very reason Virginia "Charles" Prince coined the term transgender, to differentiate the differences between transvestites and transsexuals which he hated with a passion.

Figure 1. image_thumb3

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- Leigh, contributor to TGNonsense

The term transgender is actually fruit from a poisoned seed. First coined by the misogynistic Virginia Prince in the early 1970s it became the term of choice for those involved in cross dressing/heterosexual transvestite groups such as Tri-Ess and the group descended from the days of Transvestia. Those who went full time some going on to get SRS and others to simply live full time created the organization IFGE [N3] as well as its publication *Tapestry* that furthered the ideas behind and usage of the term transgender as an umbrella.

Figure 2. image_thumb5

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- Suzan Cooke for TS-SI

First of all, the term transgender was coined by a transsexual-hating crossdressing male named Charles Prince who wanted to separate himself from transsexuals. That fact alone sends shivers up our spines.

GLAAD defines transgender as:

- Transsexuals
- Cross-dressers
- Other gender variant people
- In other words "other"

In their media reference guide they tell the media to address the TS/TG/IS person in the article according to how they identify, but then they violate their own guide by using the word transgender instead of transsexual.

Figure 3. image_thumb7

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- Dana Lane Taylor for TS-IS-Liberation

Here's a little dose of reality. Transgendereds don't have the right to self definition when they have insisted on the right to deny it to other for years and years using the most abusive and silencing methods to do so. Let me spell it out, forcing WOMEN (as in bodied and identified without modifiers) of trans or intersexed history under an umbrella term coined by someone who hated them with a passion, "transgender" is an act of violence. It is defamation in the legal sense, it is extremely insulting and it serves as a method of denial of womanhood to these women by forcing them completely against their wishes, into a "third" category.

Figure 4. image_thumb9

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with a passion, "transgender" is an act of violence.
- Catkisser for RadicalBitch

The Truth

Virginia Prince coined the term "transgenderist" in 1978 to refer to full-time crossdressers like herself. The term "transgender" was being used throughout the 1970s to refer to transsexual people (1, 2). The 1970s closed out by the transsexual woman, Christine Jorgensen, publicly rejecting the term "transsexual" in favor of the term "transgender" because she felt the "sexual" in "transsexual" confused the issue she was dealing with. In the 1970s, "transgender" meant transsexual and "transgenderist" meant full-time heterosexual crossdresser.

In the 1980s the term was used in various ways: In 1984, the term "transgender community" was first used in its modern context: A diverse community of constituent groupings. Additionally, the term was used as a synonym for "transgenderist" (especially the term "transgenderism" 3, 4) while it was simultaneously used as a synonym for "transsexual" (5, 6, 7, 8, 9) .

Additionally, non-trans people had used the term since the 1970s to refer to non-stereotypical gender behavior and language. (10, 11, 12)

Thus far, I've only examined the early etymology of the term as it pertains to the 1970s and 1980s. Recently, Bilerico published an interview with one of the founders of the modern transgender community, Yvonne Cook-Riley. The interview is a good primer for what I'm about to begin publishing: the historical record as it pertains to the way the term became consistently used during the 1990s.

We already have Cook-Riley's account and I will be adding to that two other major players in what happened to the term in the 1990s: Tere Frederickson and Phyllis Frye.

While the term "transgender" was used much earlier, I think it was the Prince debate that resurfaced it at the time when "T" activism began to bubble up. To this day the great terminology debate continues to rage on; although Phyllis adopted "transgender" for the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy Conference, and it was the term used in the original effort for "T" inclusion in the then LG community and HRC. Phyllis and I were two of the small group of folks at the core of the effort battling Elizabeth Burch and the HRC. Phyllis led the effort in Houston and I worked it in San Antonio.
- Tere Frederickson, August 2011

Many do not perhaps know that South Texas was significantly involved in forming what became known as the modern "transgender community".

Since the 1970s, the gender program at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston, TX distributed most of the information booklets on trans issues. Galveston, TX is where 2nd Gender Treatment Program in our nation was formed and it is also where HBGDA (now WPATH) was formed. From the 1970 up until the mid-1990s, the Houston/Galveston area was one of the top destinations in America for accessing transsexual medical and psychological care.

During the early 1990s South Texas was home to a number of large national and international trans

conventions (Texas T Party, Fantasy Adventure Weekend, International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy Conference [ICLEPT]). Through ICLEPT, the national and international field of "transgender law" was born and thus those fighting trans rights battles officially took up the term "transgender".

While all of this was going on, a large-scale word war was raging in the community. Central to this war was the definition of the term, "transgender".

On one side was Virginia Prince and those who supported Prince's separatist views and on the other were those like Frederickson, Cook-Riley, Frye and JoAnne Roberts who pushed for what the term became. Represented in these early efforts were crossdressers, intersex people and transsexuals.

Here's a taste of what you'll soon be able to research for yourself:

Said another way, you trashed grannie [Virginia Prince]! You stole her linguistic contribution to the community from the community and ran down the road laughing. Lordy, lordy, lordy, you incorrigible Texans. Shame, shame shame.

I support the usage of the term "transgenderist" to mean a person living full time in a cultural gender role opposite their biological sex classification, without having altered their anatomy through SRS; "transgendered" to mean having crossed a cultural gender role perhaps permanently without SRS; and other forms of the term to be consistent with those meanings.

- Billie Jean Jones, Publisher of TV Guise, Sacramento, California, 1991

Note: Jones was working on a trans dictionary at this time.

And here's the very Texan response:

We only used the terms "transgender" and "transgendered" as they are most commonly used (yup, they really are etymologically correct) today, despite the reservations and acknowledgement of the term "transgenderist" to coinage by Virginia. You will find those terms used in the same manner as we used them in just about all publications in our community. It's those publications that should be used as a basis of usage to arrive at the definitions for your dictionary effort; after all, dictionaries are only written based on common usage terms. By the way, your "definition" of "transgender" (quite literally) is just about the way we used it and the "community" uses it with one exception, it is inclusive of those opting for SRS - "transgender" meaning anyone who crosses "cultural" gender roles in any manner or form.

- Tere Frederickson, Publisher of Gender Euphoria, San Antonio, Texas, 1991

Note: Frederickson was organizing ICLEPT and the Texas T Party with Phyllis Frye during this time.

Does any of this sound familiar? Now, 20 years later, TS Separatists have unwittingly resurrected the same arguments made by Virginia Prince and her supporters and made them their own.

Over the next few weeks as I post the historical record this particular post concerns itself with, you will see a Separatists group led by Virginia Prince make statements echoed by modern TS Separatists. Additionally, you will see inclusionists led by folks like Frederickson, Frye and Cook-Riley make statements echoed by modern inclusionists. Some of what both sides have to say will seem strange and quaint. Conversely, some of what both sides have to say will seem insightful, cutting edge and radical.

Whatever side of the debate you're on, I'm sure you'll find something interesting, validating and infuriating in the documents I'll be posting over the coming weeks at my research blog.

Enjoy!

cross-posted from Ehipassiko

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