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Transsituated Publics:

From Christine Jorgensen to Holly Woodlawn

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Transsituated Publics:

From Christine Jorgensen to Holly Woodlawn

by

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Thesis

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"Holly came from Miami F-L-A,
hitchhiked her way across the U.S.A.
plucked her eyebrows on the way.
shaved her legs and then he was a she,
she says, "Hey babe take a walk on the Wild Side" ..."-Lou Reed

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At last, I am extremely grateful to the many transgender warriors and allies who give me continued strength to move over and beyond barriers, allowing me to smile in the face of continuing adversity.

**Transsituated Publics:
From Christine Jorgensen to Holly Woodlawn**

by:

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

SUPERVISOR: Matt Richardson

The single most recognized transgender woman in the 1950s and throughout much of the 1960s, Christine Jorgensen symbolized in many ways the quintessential white, upper-middle-class woman and the medicalized standard by which other transgender women were measured, including poor transgender women and transgender women of color. In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, a new class of transgender women would come to denounce such an image. Holly Woodlawn, a cult icon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, viewed Christine as outdated and out-of-sync with her own gendered desires for expression. Holly gained notoriety for her outrageous role in Andy Warhol's film *Trash* (1970). In the film, she plays the glamorous and co-dependent role of the counter-culture sex addicted welfare queen. In the film, she denounces traditional transsexual women narratives and engenders instead new forms of gendered expressions unencumbered by sex change anxieties. Christine and Holly are but two historical transgender icons, who, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s suggested new possibilities for gendered expressions. Their public personas historicize the construction of transgender identity, making visible the classed and racialized privileging of sex change surgery and the alternative expressions embodied by poor transgender women and transgender women of color. Although unable to afford sex change surgery, poor transgender women, in particular, transgender women of color, embodied new models of gender identity beyond the gendered constructs of whiteness.

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Introduction

On December 1, 1952, Christine Jorgensen arrived at New York's Idlewild Airport following sex reassignment surgery in Denmark. Dressed to impress, she asserted herself to the American media as a full-fledged American woman and when asked whether she was happy to be back in America, she gracefully replied, "Of course, what American wouldn't be?"¹ Though stated in passing, her reply reflects not simply a personal attempt to gain public legitimacy as a woman, but as a particular American woman. Her posture in the Idlewild Airport that day reflects in some ways the hyper-nationalization of sex and gender in the U.S. following WWII. Marked by global uncertainty and rampant McCarthyism, the 1950s engendered a new era of surveillance that may help to explain the public's overwhelming response to Christine's arrival. "Fur collar, pearl earrings set off her beauty," and "Christine, by George!"² are but some of the headlines that greeted newspaper stands in the weeks following Christine's return to New York.

According to historian Susan Stryker, "in the following 18 months after news of her surgery broke, more than half a million words about Christine Jorgensen rolled off the world's presses."³ Such notoriety catapulted Christine into the limelight making her an instant hit as the world's first international transgender icon. Though she faced some setbacks in life, in general, Christine benefited from her race and class in ways that poor

¹ Universal-International News. Film Reel. *Christine Comes Home*. December, 1952. Fred Maness

² Ibid. pp 175, Jorgensen, Christine. 1967

³ Ibid. Introduction to *Christine Jorgensen!: A Personal Autobiography* by Susan Stryker. May 2000.

transgender women and transgender women of color often did not. In a 1979 interview, she revealed to one reporter, “Even the bad publicity wasn't altogether too bad. It enabled me to make an awful lot of money.” In 1989, Christine passed away from lung cancer. However, until this day, she remains the first international public transgender icon.

Twenty years later, however, a new class of transgender women would come to complement, challenge or outright reject such an image. Holly Woodlawn, one of Andy Warhol's superstars, received considerable notoriety in the 1970s for her outrageous roles in films like *Trash* (1970) and *Women in Revolt* (1971). In these films she moves from desperate, enabling welfare queen to model turned feminist alcoholic. Tangentially similar to events in her off-camera life, these films depict not merely her ability to perform as a woman but as a transgender woman unencumbered by sex change anxieties, a role very different from that reflective of Christine’s public personality. Christine and Holly are but two historical transgender icons that in the 1950s, 60s and 70s engendered new possibilities for visibility in the public sphere. This paper traces the complex pathways forged by both Christine and Holly, while placing critical focus on Holly’s experiences at the intersections of race, class and transgender identity.

While Christine receives almost universal recognition in the historical canon of transgender literature, Holly remains an almost invisible contributor; indeed, her arrival on the mainstream stage arose in part as a response to the wholesome white American image reflective of Christine's persona. The relative placement of these two women in the canonical transgender history itself reflects aspects of the complexities of race and

class and the role that these two often play in the formation and development of transgender identity in the public sphere. While in many ways Christine came to represent herself as the face of the transgender woman, in reality she certainly did not represent all transgender women— in particular, transgender women of color and those living in poverty often face a range of additional issues and social barriers that would hardly have affected her. Thus Holly's historical contribution is of particular import not simply because of her race and class but because of the ways in which her race and class shaped her particular experiences as a transgender woman in the public sphere.

Relying on biographical and print works in conjunction with archival audio and film resources past and present, this paper aims to unravel some of the complexities of mainstreaming transgender identity, giving theoretic focus to the ways in which both Holly and Christine came to represent themselves in the public sphere. Though they both lived as young boys and transitioned to womanhood later in life, the nuance of Christine and Holly's stories speak to the complexities of transgender identity. It is worth noting from the outset that, while often viewed in monolithic terms, transgender identity in reality encompasses a wide range of evolving identities and expressions.

Terminology & Historical Context

The term *transgender* was popularized in the 1960s by pioneering transgenderist, Virginia Prince. At that time, the term described people who lived in cross-gender worlds without undergoing sex reassignment surgery.⁴ By the 1990s, however, the term was expanded and popularized as a way to unite all those whose gender identity changed over time from that assigned at birth. Under the umbrella of *transgender* exists a variety of sub-identities including: *transsexuals*, those who seek medical intervention in the construction of their gender identity; *gender queers*, those who prefer gender neutral self identifications; *queens*, typically gay identified female impersonators who may or may not live in this role and *cross-dressers*, *cissexual* (non-op), typically straight-identified men who wear gender-atypical clothing.⁵ Though relatively new, *transgender* is a useful term, specifically for the purposes of historicizing gender non-conforming people like Holly and Christine, who, at different times in their lives, fit into one or more of the aforementioned sub-categories. Though typically associated with the attendant psychological diagnosis, Gender Identity Disorder (GID), the *transgender* term basically includes anyone seeking to live in a non-normative gender role.

In the decades following Christine's iconic arrival in the public eye, medical professionals headed by Dr. Harry Benjamin developed new objective standards for those seeking a change of sex or to live in some kind of a cross-gender role with formal support

⁴ Whittle, Stephen. *Adam and Eve? Virginia Prince the first Transgender Person*. Sixth International Congress on Sex and Gender Diversity. The School of Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, 10th to 12th September, 2004

⁵ Pp. 7-13, Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. San Francisco, CA: Seal Press. 2008

from the medical community. A relatively unknown phenomenon in the US in the 1950s and 60s, the gradual emergence of transgenderism into public discourse engendered lively discussions within various medical circles and eventually led to the formal development and implementation of the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care (HBSC) for transsexuals and the attendant diagnosis of GID. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), GID is a mental disorder characterized by “a strong and persistent cross-gender identification” (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). Appearing in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1979, GID remains to this day a hotly contested diagnosis. Opponents of GID argue that the diagnosis assumes a gender norm and thus marks perceived gender non-conforming people with an aura of deviancy whereas proponents generally view it as simply a safety net for all those involved in the medical side of transgender treatment.

Ironically perhaps, in 1973 the APA removed the diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental disorder.⁶ This point and the on-going debates surrounding the GID diagnosis (manifested presently in revisions that the APA is considering for the upcoming DSM V) speak to the fact that gender and sexual identity are still evolving concepts in our society. In this piece, I historicize transgender icons Holly Woodlawn and Christine Jorgensen in order to contribute to larger discussions on the evolution of transgender identity and the public perception of that identity.

⁶ This is not to say, however, that homosexuality was in any way de-stigmatized or that it didn't take on other variant forms in the DSM. I use this example only to illuminate the ways in which the mere placement of differently gendered behaviors/practices/identities in the DSM fueled ongoing disjunctions within the larger movement for sexual and gender freedom.

We focus on Christine and Holly as their personal experiences speak to the ways in which transgender women constructed themselves in the 1950s, 60s and 70s—formative decades in the evolution of the modern understanding of transgender identity. Portrayed by some as reactionary subjects of science and sexual revolution while attacked and degraded by others for deconstructing traditional gender and sexual boundaries, they overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to recreate themselves as the women they saw themselves to be and in the process engendered wider movements for civil and social rights, primarily the right to determine one's own individual sex and gender. Furthermore, we situate Holly's story and those of other transgender women of color in relation to the medical and political ideals embodied by Christine in order to situate the forces of whiteness in relation to the lives of transgender women of color. Within this trajectory, we look to the emergence of transgender women of color in the public sphere of the 1960s, their particular challenges and attendant survival strategies.

From George to Christine

In 1945, seven years before Christine's return to New York from Denmark following sex reassignment surgery, and the media firestorm that ensued, a shy and timid George Jorgensen worked as a clerical GI in New Jersey, filing thousands of discharge papers for returning US soldiers at the end of WWII.⁷ Like many young people in the US in the 1940s, he found his way into military service. However in his case, George noticed considerable gendered differences between himself and other men in his company during these 14 months of service. This confirmed in his mind what he had long thought about himself: that he was in fact fundamentally different from most men.

Though unsure whether to place himself squarely in the “male” or “female” categorization at this time, it was the intensity of military life with other men that provided George with a clearer sense of not only his physical differences from other men but his psychological and emotional differences as well, which eventually aided in his identifying as female.⁸ Interestingly, while George would eventually come to identify as a transsexual female, this period of uncertainty— in which George made no clear identification within the traditional gender binary system— could arguably reflect upon the later emergence of the more nuanced transgender identity spectrum. This notion may receive some measure of support by acknowledging that late in life, Jorgenson would come to identify as transgender as well as transsexual.

⁷ Jorgensen, Christine. *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*. San Francisco, The Cleis Press. 1967

⁸ *Ibid* pp 10-15. Christine Jorgensen. 1967

At the time of his military service, George internally understood himself to be different from other men; however, it wasn't until several years following his honorable discharge from the army that he would actually work towards a change of sex. After enrolling in college, George pursued academic interests in the medical field— this enabled him to further understand his own condition and gave him his first exposure to the world of medical technology, which would one day be able to address his own problem of sexual discomfort by “transforming” him into a woman. Hoping to conduct more research on sex reassignment surgery in Europe, George eventually found himself under the care of Dr. Christian Hamburger, a Danish endocrinologist, who would eventually use surgical technology to transform him physically into Christine.

Amidst an emergent sexual revolution engendered by the unprecedented number of women joining the military and increased technological advancement due to the war effort, gender non-conforming people (gay and transgender people) began to define a new movement for themselves based on individual rights for sexual freedom. Historian Allan Bérubé points out that during WWII gay men and women in the military, though forced to keep their sexual identities hidden, found opportunities for sexual experimentation and communal interaction in ways different from that of the civilian world.⁹ Likewise, transgender people found surprisingly unique ways to express themselves while serving in the military. For example, cross-dressing troupes developed during the early years of WWII; though primarily intended to keep soldiers entertained, this performance art ironically provided safe spaces for men looking to express their

⁹ Allan Bérubé. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*. New York, NY. The Free Press. 1990

“femininity” through dress. Such performance troupes were so commonplace in the military that in 1944, at Bergstrom Airfield, in Austin, Texas, a large group of drag dressed GI men performed as backup singers for the infamous United Service Organization (USO) performer, Gypsy Rose Lee.¹⁰

By the end of the war, however, psychological concerns for unit cohesion engendered new containment measures that sought to expel gender non-conforming people, particularly men, from the military. These measures eventually brought an end to GI drag troupes, encouraged numerous anti-gay witch-hunts and engendered a new era of draconian surveillance initiatives. In fact, Christine would experience first hand the hostilities resulting from these initiatives during her career as a showgirl. Despite having served in the army herself, in 1959, Christine was permanently banned from performing on military bases in the US and abroad.¹¹ Interestingly, while higher ranked military officials attempted to contain Christine's influence, many soldiers continued to purchase Christine-featured magazines.

Such bans reflect larger governmental attempts to surround Christine and other gender non-conforming persons with an “aura of immorality”¹² and provide some idea as to the ways in which gender stereotypes move from making life tolerable to uncomfortable.

Thus despite these ongoing hostilities and other roadblocks throughout her career, Christine continued to capitalize on her notoriety as the world's first public transgender

¹⁰ Ibid pp 79. Allan Bérubé. 1990

¹¹ Ibid pp xv-xvi, Christine Jorgensen. *Preface*. 1967.

¹² Ibid pp xvi

icon and by the 1960s came to own her own production company as well as property in California and New York.

Being banned from military performances was but one setback on a complicated road to success for Christine. Christine did eventually attain financial success in her career, while she also continued to receive support from both her family and community. In fact on March 7, 1953, the Scandinavian Societies of Greater New York honored her as Woman of the Year, and later that same year she received the key to the city.¹³ However, only a couple of years later she was “banned from Boston, refused to entertain troops in the Philippines, criticized for an inept performance in Los Angeles, and badgered by a nervous Las Vegas club owner who wanted to cancel a contract.”¹⁴

Though these events weighed heavily on her career, Christine found continued success in the theatre, which for the better half of the 1960s, allowed Christine to carve out a relatively comfortable lifestyle. In the early 1960s, encouraging reviews of her roles in such plays as: *Oh, Dad* and *Tom Jones* signaled a turning point in her career and provided her with the confidence needed to overcome the injustices and adversities she experienced.

However, though she achieved significant financial success, certainly more than any other transgender woman of the time period, Christine remained marginalized due to her transgender identity. As the first transgender woman to bring transsexual issues into the mainstream of public discourse, Christine on one hand received fan mail and garnered considerable fame and fortune, inspiring others to follow in her footsteps, and yet on the

¹³ Ibid, pp 172-174

¹⁴ Ibid, pp xv

other hand was looked upon with a kind of suspicion that rendered her in many ways to a lower social status. Though an exceptionally talented actress and writer, Christine never really achieved full acceptance as a woman or as a citizen. Nonetheless, her activism for transsexual rights paved the way for a new kind of sexual revolution, one in which people could literally self construct their own sex using the advantages of medical technology.

This movement would set the stage for other revolutions as well, including a more generalized campaign for transgender rights that made room more explicitly for those that identified with a gender other than that which they were assigned at birth, but chose not to undergo sex reassignment surgery.

Newsreels and newspapers from the 1950s portrayed Christine as an elegant and cultured American woman, which in part reflects the political concerns of the post war era. In fact, questions regarding her national identity followed Christine well into the 1960s. On one hand the public received her as a beautiful American woman, but on the other hand, to some, she represented a threat to national security and the unraveling of America's attendant heteronormative and nuclear family structure.

Unresolved post WWII conflicts with the Soviet Union initiated new cultural concerns and new covert warfare techniques under the guise of a Cold War. These concomitant measures, characterized by global espionage and surveillance, engendered new conceptions of national citizenship. Under this new regime, sex roles were not merely mediums for human expression but rather hotly contested political sites. Consequently, one's national allegiance was strongly informed by one's sexual behavior; thus homosexuality (or any perceived gender transgressive behavior) was received in the

same vein as Communism. The resulting project to define an entire American citizenry under a solid banner of heteronormative and nationalist pride aimed to expel cultural deviants, specifically those engaged in non-heteronormative sexual behaviors. Gender non-conforming people were particularly targeted, viewed as threats not only to military cohesion and the civilian nuclear family, but, by the mid 1950s, were viewed by many as threats to national security. In this social context, it was as if an individual were expected to wear a heteronormative gender and sexual identity almost as a nationalist uniform.

Televised images of the white middle class, nuclear family of the 1950s illuminates the underlying political projects that sought to define an essential American citizenry, one that conformed to racialized norms of whiteness and its attendant rigid expectations of sexual behavior. Such television shows as *Leave it to Beaver* and *Lassie*, classic shows from the 1950s, provide visual evidence of such sociopolitical projects.

However, according to Elaine Tyler May, in her work, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988) television offered not only a medium for the construction and promulgation of rigid heteronormative family values but furthermore provided citizens with a conduit for privacy and escape from larger political anxieties. Accordingly, the nuclear family took on symbolic meaning for security; specifically, security from the ever encroaching “other”.¹⁵ Though conciliatory and somewhat abstract, May's understanding of the nuclear family during the Cold War era offers a useful vantage point from which to observe and further understand the political, social and nationalistic project of the time period to not only define and uphold heterosexuality

¹⁵ Elaine Tyler May. Introduction to *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. NY, New York, Basic Books. 2008

as the national standard but to demonize people who did not fit the script. Though Christine Jorgensen, herself, appears in the 1950s as a physically gender conforming woman (both, in appearance, mannerisms and sexual orientation), her ideas on gender and sexuality and the fact that she had changed sex were considered particularly subversive to national security officials and thus posed irreconcilable challenges to the conventional models of sex and gender.

Rigid sex constructs conspired through the propagandist image of the happy, white, middle-class nuclear family encouraged rigorous citizen policing tactics around notions of sex and worked to encourage a sense of continuity between the politics of sex and sexuality and those of nationhood. Thus, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, literature depicting non-heteronormative images such as underground homoerotic and transgender publications were targeted by the CIA and viewed as harmful to national security. If caught producing and/or distributing such materials, publishers faced draconian penalties including exorbitant fines and even imprisonment.¹⁶ Around the same time, public ordinances in a number of cities including Los Angeles and San Francisco prohibited public cross-dressing. If caught, cross-dressers risked jail time and hefty fines.¹⁷

As Gayle Rubin points out in her polemical work, *Thinking Sex* (1984), “Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity”.¹⁸ Thus, in the late 1950s and throughout much of the 1960s, publications with the words “homosexual” or “transvestite” were

¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 52-53, Stryker. 2001

¹⁷ Michael Gorman. *The Empress is a Man: Stories from the Life of José Sarria*. Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 1998.

¹⁸ Pp 1-3. Gayle Rubin. *Thinking Sex: Notes for the Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. Henry Abelove u.a. (Ed.): *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York (Routledge). 1993. (1st Ed. 1984).

received as threats to national security.¹⁹ Likewise, if a born male openly self-identified as gay or expressed himself through cross-dressing, such a person was typically criminalized, viewed as a traitor to both his manhood and nation.

However, as greater numbers of women entered the workforce following WWII they demanded more inclusive women-friendly policies and concomitantly engendered a sexual revolution defined in part by an epistemological shift in sex role expectations. A study by Susan Leighow (1994) demonstrates that women who had become nurses during the war effort later established part-time work, maternity leave, and employer-sponsored childcare during the postwar era. These achievements in turn ushered in new sex roles for women within the spaces of both work and home.²⁰ Hence, Leighow's revisionist study illustrates how women both in the home and in the workplace took initiative to define for themselves a sense of their own roles as women, thus altering the androcentric expectations placed on their sex. In the process, they fostered related goals set forth by gender non-conforming people who sought not only to define their own role within their assigned sex, but further aspired to assign their own sex category; indeed Christine employed modern medicine of the era to construct sex itself. These movements in turn would provide fertile ground for the ensuing position that gender may also be self-constructed, even apart from the question of auto-sex construction.

¹⁹ Susan Stryker. *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*. Film. 2005

²⁰ Jo Anne Meyerowitz. Susan Leighow's Introduction to *Not June Clever: Women in Postwar America 1946-1960*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press. 1994.

Complicating Sex and Gender

As Meyerowitz points out in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States (2001)*, the distinction between “sex” and “gender” initiated a new dialectical basis for understanding notions of biological “sex” and cultural “gender.” The former determined by nature, the latter by nurture. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, provides a critical philosophical segue into this discussion. Working from the existentialist notion that “*existence precedes essence*” Beauvoir examined the socially constituted elements of womanhood. Her main claim, that women are not only born but also socially produced, sought to disrupt the status quo of women's presumed subordination to men. De Beauvoir argued that the project to subvert women's equal status to men was developed through a “false aura of mystification” that simultaneously reified women's “Otherness,” while serving to naturalize this “Otherness” as an inherent subordinated status.²¹ Subsequently, Beauvoir encouraged women to move beyond the historical narrative of male supremacy and to define themselves for themselves as new women, women emboldened by the promise of self-determination. Similarly, anthropologist Margaret Mead and sexologist Alfred Kinsey both used terminology to distinguish biological sex from the culturally constructed behaviors expected of men and women.²²

²¹ Margaret A. Simons. *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race and the Origins of Existentialism*. Oxford, England, Rowan and Littlefield Publishers. 1999

²² Margaret Mead, *Male and Female : A Study of Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: William Morrow, 1949); Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948).

However, unlike Beauvoir, Kinsey emphasized the spectral nature of human sexual psychology, which subsequently resided in biology and psychology rather than sociology. An empirical scientist himself, Dr. Kinsey worked to substantiate his “diversity-is-the-norm” notion by observing human sex behaviors that he claimed were the result of biology and therefore could be objectively understood and measured through science. His work, along with that of fellow sexologist Dr. Harry Benjamin, set out to challenge the moral imperative belying the state of nature, claiming that the state of nature, itself, was revealed only through an objective lens and the scientific method and not by the moral whims of human judgment and social interpretation. While Kinsey observed human sex practices, Benjamin employed the scientific method to further understand gender identity and expression, specifically with regards to transgender people.²³

Following WWII, sexologists like Kinsey and Benjamin continued their research on human psychological behavior and human biology in order to substantiate their theory that the nature of sex and gender were in fact varied and not binarily fixed. Arguably the single most respected doctor among transsexuals in the mid twentieth century, Dr. Harry Benjamin not only capitalized on his work with transgender people but also published extensively on the subject of transsexualism, providing the medicalized frameworks for those treating transsexual patients. Even to this day, psychiatrists and doctors around the world use his standards of care routinely.

²³ Pp. 16, Dr. Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York, NY: The Julian Press, 1966). According to Dr. Benjamin, as a general rule, sex is more applicable where there is the implication of sex, libido, and of sexuality. Subsequently, he claims that gender is the nonsexual side of sex.

Centered around both the psychological and biological factors behind the human desire to change sex, his research subjects included: men desiring physical alteration of their assigned natal sex (*pre-op transsexual women*), men who underwent a sex change operation to become women (*post-op transsexuals*) and straight-identified biological men desiring to occasionally wear women's clothing (*male transvestites or cross dressers*). Yielding a wealth of information, his work supported the idea that both sex and gender existed along a spectrum and more importantly, that a biological explanation was imminent.

Borrowing from the research of other scientists, primarily German scientists, as a means to supplement his own findings, Dr. Benjamin criticized the American medical model that, in his mind, sought to reify binary views and demonize transgender desires rather than find a substantiated scientific solution to assuage discomfort.²⁴ He argued in favor of the European scientific model, which, in his mind, allowed more room for a biological explanation to understand the persistent desire to change sex. He conceded that genetic evidence of the time period failed to conclusively substantiate a biological explanation for the desire to change sex, but he also understood the limitations of genetic testing, citing the investigative tools for genetic research as “crude in comparison to possible future methods.”²⁵ Despite the many challenges he faced working in the US, Benjamin did achieve some success with his practice in New York and California, becoming the single most important medical proponent for transsexual rights to physical self-deconstruction.

²⁴ Pp 93-95. Dr. Benjamin. 1966

²⁵ Pp 15. Dr. Benjamin. 1966

The epistemological notion of medical science for Benjamin and like-minded scientists of that era were based not only on the personal belief that the medical field should help people lead healthier and more fulfilling lives but that in order to fulfill this mission, medical science sometimes had to challenge the moralizing scrutiny that sought to prevent such progress:

Only when conservatism becomes unchanging and rigid and when caution deteriorates into mere self-interest do they become negative forces, retarding, blocking, and preventing progress, neither to the benefit of science nor to that of the patient. More power, therefore, to those brave and true scientists, surgeons, and doctors who let the patient's interest and their own conscience be their sole guides.²⁶

However, behind this bravado of scientific progress, Dr. Benjamin worked to reify the same class-based systems he sought to deconstruct. Indeed, while his medical practice provided much needed care to many transsexuals, ironically it also worked to exploit brooding divisions within the larger transgender community. For instance, transgender people unable to comply with his rigid standards of care or who could not afford his care were simply turned away. Moreover, ideas about who deserved treatment and who did not, stemmed from the very racialized and gendered stereotypes he sought to deconstruct. Though he is often cited as the “godfather” of modern transsexual treatment, he served the interests of a predominantly white, upper-class transgender oligarchy, thus ostracizing a number of poor transgender people and transgender people of color.

By the late 1950s, Christine was not only the most visible and wealthy American transsexual woman of her era but subsequently her case shaped the medical standards

²⁶ Ibid. pp 2-3. Preface and Acknowledgments. Dr. Benjamin. 1966.

according to which future patients would be treated and the standards by which to measure their candidacy for surgical intervention. Dr. Benjamin, at the time, referred to Christine as a success story, citing her throughout his own works as a perfect example of the kinds of successes emerging from transsexual medical treatment. As a result of his work and the accompanying public persona engendered by Christine, many transgender people turned to sex change surgery to address the issue of gender dysphoria. However, in reality, many were not only unable to receive support from the medical community but were often explicitly denied such treatment.

Holly Woodlawn's story, for example, speaks to the fact that poor transgender women, particularly transgender women of color, lacked the privileges afforded to transgender women like Christine, transgender women whose race and high socioeconomic class bore advantageous results in the quest for medical treatment and public reception. In the early years of the 1960s, after struggling to secure the cash for the surgery, Holly was refused treatment by John Hopkins Medical Center. Consequently, she was labeled as unfit for sex reassignment surgery.²⁷ Thus, while sex change operations came to represent technological achievements in the field of medicine and worked to relieve gender dysphoria of select members of the transgender community, the medical standards in which they were embedded worked to inflame divisions within the transgender community, divisions marked in complex ways by race and class.

Additionally, the fact that transgender women of color to this day remain largely nameless in the literary canon on transgender history speaks to the ways in which race,

²⁷ Pp 94-95. Copeland, Jeff. *The Holly Woodlawn Story: A low Life in High Heels*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. 1991

class, and gender identity/gender expression bifurcate valuation relative to whose stories get told and whose stories remain silent. Excluded from the canon on transgender history, Holly's life story, for example, highlights structural challenges at the level of race and class and provides further insight into survival strategies particular to transgender women of color working to establish themselves within public spaces. We focus on their experiences, not only as survivors, but also as visible agents of historical importance. In this vein and in the spirit of third world feminism, Holly's story helps to situate what Cherry Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua call "a theory of the flesh":

Where the physical realities of our lives-our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politics born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience: We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.²⁸

Like many other young people in the 1960s, Holly resisted the suburban lifestyle and eventually made her way to the urban life of New York City in 1962. In an interview she describes her trip to New York:

I was 15 years old and failing at high school in Miami Beach because I was too busy partying. I was supposed to go to summer school to catch up and really didn't want to, so I joined some of these Cuban queens to go to New York.²⁹

Though fraught with challenges, Holly's adventurous journey to New York reflected in many ways the emerging counterculture of the 1960s. After arriving in Queens, New York, within a decade Holly lived on the streets, (later) moved in with her

²⁸ This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color : Aunt Lute Press, 1981

²⁹ Patterson, 2007.

first boyfriend, modeled for Saks Fifth and became a Warhol superstar.³⁰ Immortalized today in Lou Reed's hit *Walk on the Wild Side* and Warhol's films *Trash* (1970) and *Women in Revolt* (1971), by the early 1970s, Holly's cult status as a transgender Warhol superstar challenged not only conventional notions of sex and gender but in turn subverted the popularized transgender image then embodied by Christine Jorgensen.

³⁰ Patterson. 2007

Holly and the Warhol Factory

Andy Warhol rose to popularity in the 1950s and 60s following notable national success in the world of commercial art. During these formative years, he created the factory, a countercultural space for New York's avant-garde artists. In part as a response and complement to Hollywood, Warhol envisioned a utopian world in which celebrated personalities, from top celebrities to starving artists could mingle. For Warhol, the factory served this purpose and as such, utilized popular culture to connect socially disjointed segments of the population through the specter of American consumerism. His commentary on coke provides insight into this philosophical positioning:

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coca-Cola, Liz Taylor drinks Coca-Cola, and just think, you can drink Coca-Cola, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the cokes are the same and all the cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.³¹

In this queering of popular culture through factory art, film and music, Warhol effectively pushed heteronormative mainstream boundaries towards an inclusive consumerist utopia, while simultaneously embedding these changes within the exclusive forces of whiteness. Research on Holly's experiences in the Warhol scene thus provides new ways of thinking about Warhol's role in policing the boundaries of representation, accessibility and visibility. While advocating inclusion, Warhol simultaneously enflamed race, gender and class divisions. While her light skin, soft features and magnetic

³¹ Pp. 10-12. Warhol, Andy. *The philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B and back again*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1975

personality helped to secure her placement in the factory, the fact that Holly remained a struggling Puerto Rican street queen exacerbated an already shaky relationship with Warhol. Looking back, Holly sometimes reflects melancholically on Warhol's betrayal. She states, "Every now and then, I do get a bit irritated by the fact that *Trash* did make zillions of dollars and that I was left in the gutter."³²

In line with transgender legal scholar, Shannon Price Minter, we focus on Holly's particular story as a means to situate broader discussions on transgender inclusions and exclusions as well as related controversies over "the place for people of color, working-class people, and others who have been marginalized within the gay and transgender mainstream."³³

Following the success of her featured film role in Warhol's *Trash*, Holly secured new financial support systems that propelled her beyond the typical struggles of street life.³⁴ Though this marked some success, unlike Christine, even at the apex of superstardom, Holly remained materially and culturally disenfranchised, at times struggling to overcome the imposing sting of homelessness and incarceration that so commonly blanketed the lives of New York's marginalized queens. We concentrate on these discrepancies to uncover the disparate ways in which poor queens, more specifically; poor queens of color struggled to not only alter the marginal material conditions of their lives but also the external social conditions that produced and sustained them.

³² Pp 23. Copeland, Jeff. 1991

³³ pp 143. Eds. Currah, Juang, Minter. Transgender Rights. 2006

³⁴ Pp 2, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

Aptly entitled, *Walk on the Wild Side*, Reed's iconic song, written for several of Warhol's factory superstars from the late Sixties, highlights critical moments from Holly's complex life story, mainly, her adventurous move from Florida to New York and attendant transition from man to woman. However, what I find most interesting about Reed's retelling is not Holly's gender transition nor her adventurous journey to New York, but rather what is not revealed in the text, for example, what happens to race when Holly plucks her eyebrows and shaves her legs to become a "she"? By focusing on Holly's racialized gender trajectory—from life on the streets as a homeless, Puerto Rican queen³⁵ to life on the silver screen as a Warhol superstar, we situate the various techniques employed by transgender women of color to attain visibility in the public sphere.

Born Haroldo Santiago Franceschi Rodriguez Danhakl on October 26, 1946, to parents of Jewish and Puerto Rican heritage, Holly Woodlawn gained cultural significance in the 1960s and 70s as a cutting edge performer, becoming one of Andy Warhol's last superstars. In the early 1960s, she hitchhiked her way from Miami to New York, during which time she not only underwent a name change but also a change of gender. On the origins of her name change,³⁶ Holly states, "The name "Holly" was inspired by the Holly Golightly character in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, because we shared the

³⁵ "Queens" is simply a condensed way to say drag queen. It is important to point out that the term transgender woman is used interchangeably with "queen" at times to provide a more nuanced depiction of transgender women in the 1960s whose historical contributions were often subsumed under the banner of "gay liberation".

³⁶ Pp 2, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

same ear-piercing whistle for hailing cabs.”³⁷ Though seemingly innocent, by anglicizing her name, Holly maps out for us some of the strategic ways transgender women of color actively negotiated self-representation in New York’s white dominated public culture of the 1960s. The fact that anglicizing her name and persona gave Holly access to Warhol’s white dominated space, speaks to the importance of situating the experiences of transgender women of color at the intersections of race, class and transgender identity in public culture.³⁸ Like other queens of color in New York at the time, queens who never quite achieved the kind of social and material standing reflective of their mostly white celebrity role models, in surviving public racism, Holly’s story encourages us to examine the ways in which transgender women of color, in particular, situate survival strategies in the public sphere; and more specifically, the working out of identity categorizations and attendant struggles to resist invisibility through whiteness.

Visibility politics has served as a critical medium for attaining rights and other forms of public accommodations and has entailed among other things, assimilatory calls for normative representation of queer people, often to the exclusion of certain bodies and identities considered outside of normative parameters. According to Eric Clarke:

In its quest to secure inclusion, mainstream lesbian and gay politics in the United States has largely sought to reassure straight America that queers are "just like everyone else," and thus has restricted itself to a phantom normalcy.³⁹

³⁸ “Whitening up” for Holly entailed a range of marked changes including but not limited to: name change, change of friends, change of clothing style, etc.

³⁹ Pp 1. Clarke, Eric O. *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere*. Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2000

Within this phantom normalcy, we observe how embedded notions of whiteness and heteronormativity reified valuative formulas for ideal representation. Clarke writes:

Visibility politics has demanded more "positive" lesbian and gay characters on television programming and in Hollywood films, promoted the election of lesbians and gay men to legislative bodies, agitated for gay affirmative curricula within educational institutions, called for public figures who may be gay to declare themselves as such, and staged actions, such as shopping mall "kiss-ins," within the more mundane realms of the everyday. Each of these aspects of visibility politics, as well as many others, aims for both a quantitative and qualitative public representation. And each in its own way has helped to diminish the debilitating effects of homophobia, challenge intolerance where it simply went unquestioned, and gain familiarity and understanding in the face of sanctioned ignorance. A barometer as well of more directly political goals such as juridical protection and civil rights, visibility signifies lesbian and gay efforts toward social enfranchisement in the largest sense. The quest for public visibility, however, has raised important concerns about the terms on which this visibility will be offered, and the terms on which lesbians and gay men themselves attempt to achieve it. By what processes of valuation does homoeroticism gain a visible public legitimacy?⁴⁰

Expanding on Clarke's assessment here, we focus on the particular experiences of Holly Woodlawn in the public sphere to situate the valuative limitations of queer identity politics at the level of representation and visibility and also to observe the ways in which racially normalized gender roles and identities pushed transgender women, in particular, transgender women of color further to the margins. However, perhaps more importantly, by focusing on the experiences of Holly Woodlawn, this work situates some of the subtle techniques employed by transgender women of color to resist such measures.

When Holly first arrived in New York City in 1962, she was unemployed and homeless.⁴¹ However, within a few months, she would eventually catch a break, meeting her first boyfriend (Jack) who not only paid her way off the streets but also paid for her

⁴⁰ Pp 29. Clarke, Eric O. 2000

⁴¹ Patterson. *The Guardian*. 2007

hormones, which, at this point in time, was central to her gender presentation. She asserts, “Looking real was very important in my mind, because if there was any question that I was a man in drag, I could be arrested and worse yet, I could be killed by homophobic hoodlums!”⁴²

The hormones helped Holly to not only develop female breasts while inhibiting the effects of testosterone, hence restricting further male development, but further enabled her survival in a world particularly hostile to her existence as a gender nonconforming, racialized subject. Set on living as a woman and hoping to one day undergo a sex change operation like Christine Jorgensen, Holly committed herself to attaining this goal.⁴³ However, as an unemployed transgender woman of color, she encountered many difficulties in this process; in particular the 3,500 dollars required for the procedure presented on almost insurmountable stumbling block that rendered the sex change goal more of a dream than an attainable reality. Though after some time, Holly secured the 3,500 from Jack, she was eventually turned away from John Hopkins Hospital for treatment for failure to follow Dr. Harry Benjamin’s now routine Standards of Care for transsexuals, which included rigorous psychological examinations and at least one mediated year of living in the “opposite” gender role.

In line with other poor transgender women in New York in the 1960s,⁴⁴ Holly found it difficult to abide by the strict medical model for sex transition. This perhaps

⁴² Pp 111, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁴³ Pp 93, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁴⁴ Sylvia Rivera, a transgender woman cited as one of the original Stonewall agitators that kick-started the Gay Rights Movement in Martin Duberman's historiography, *Stonewall (1993)* may be viewed as another Puerto Rican queen from the 1960s who also suffered similar setbacks on account of racialized gender discrimination.

helps to explain in part why much of her young-adult life revolved around securing financial and emotional reciprocity with like-minded individuals who offered relief from the monotony of conventional gender norms. She found these communities in the form of street hustlers and drug dealers, a community of outcasts with whom she found more liberating mediums for creativity, economic attainment and self-expression. Holly flourished in these enclaves as they provided her with the needed conduit through which the more popularized transsexual pathway proscribed by such icons as Christine Jorgensen was eventually called into question.

Though she yearned for acceptance and material wealth, Holly realized by 1968, after being refused by John Hopkins, that such acceptance would have to come by way of the families and communities she maintained rather than the bodies and identities she longed to forget. In need of a supporting family support system, Holly ran away from home. In a short time, she met her first live-in boyfriend Jack (who she called her husband), and her close transgender friends (who she called her sisters). As revealed in a 2007 interview describing her transition from the streets, “I met this guy who fell in love with me and asked me to be his girlfriend. I started taking hormones for a sex-change and lived as his wife.”⁴⁵ Though these spaces provided a haven from the strict gendered boundaries of mainstream society, in concert with other poor transgender women in the mid to late 1960s, Holly’s gender trajectory was fraught with triumphs and failures.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Patterson, 2007

⁴⁶ For more details on drag families and the queering of traditional family models see Jenni Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* (1989)

While later in life Holly found resolve by going against the traditional transsexual narrative, eventually opting out of the sex reassignment surgery mentality, in her earlier development she was not unlike many other transgender women who looked to Christine as an inspirational model for a change of sex. Like many poor transgender women searching for a way out of the slums in the early 1960's, Holly viewed sex reassignment surgery as a way out of poverty. In the early to mid-Sixties, sex change operations were still somewhat novel, and many transgender women conferred upon them a kind of mystical power that could somehow alleviate not only the struggles of gender confusion but also other negative life circumstances born of racial and class oppressions.⁴⁷ While for some it might provide a gateway out of poverty, for others it provided a way out of isolation, a way to some kind of gender normalcy. Hence, the sex change operation symbolized not merely a rite of passage among transgender women but a sign of privilege and prestige, one imbued with the tripartite imaginings of wealth, heteronormativity and whiteness; indeed, one might further note that most of the available post-operative role-models for struggling trans women of color were in fact white and upper-class.

Before entering Warhol's factory scene, homelessness, poverty and abandonment had become cyclical realities for Holly. In this vein, she describes the mid-Sixties as a time of intense personal and political struggle:

Well, there I was, like a rat in the gutter, sweating out the blistering fever of summer. Out of a house, out of a husband, and out on the street! I thought I'd never be homeless again, but as I soon came to discover, life can be unpredictable. And so are husbands! Jack discarded me like a worn out rag.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See story on Delisa Newton, billed as "the first Negro sex change," from *Sepia*, an African American magazine, 1966, detailed in *how sex changed: A History of Transsexual History in the United States* by Joanne Meyerowitz (2002)

⁴⁸ Pp 108-109, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

At this stage in her life, Holly turned to the only system of supporters she knew she could depend on, other transgender women. At first, she solicited the help of her then closest friend, Candy Darling (who she would later join in the ranks of Warhol superstardom). Unfortunately, this connection failed to extend any viable solutions to assuage the difficulties of Holly's particular situation. According to Holly, Candy failed miserably at being a friend:

Candy's brain had been pickled by peroxide and filled with notions that she was the next blond goddess to rule filmdom...She was far too busy to acknowledge my pleas, and didn't even offer to take me in for the night! After all the times I took her in during the weekends? After all the encouragement I gave her to get a job? After all the times she borrowed my clothes, ate my food, and turned my home into a filthy sty, she had the nerve to turn me away?! I should've smacked the blond right out of her hair!⁴⁹

Holly's experience here speaks to the limitations of categorical solidarities at the level of transgender identity and exemplifies how race further exacerbated class disparities within Holly's network of transgender friends. With a hint of disappointment, she recalls,

She (Jackie Curtis) and Candy Darling were both very much into devoting their souls to the art of acting, and both were trying to prove to the Warhol crowd that they were worthy of Superstardom.⁵⁰

The fact that two, racially unmarked queens, Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis,⁵¹ despite living in poverty, themselves, still managed to carve out acting careers at a time when queens of color struggled to attain visibility in the public sphere, speaks in some ways to the experiences of differently situated groups within the transgender community as a result of racialization. Holly's experiences, for example, situates the ways in which

⁴⁹ Pp. 109-110, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁵⁰ Pp110, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁵¹ Jackie Curtis and Candy Darling would later become Warhol's two favorite transgender superstars, whereas Warhol looked upon Woodlawn with relentless suspicion.

whiteness served as a tool of privilege both outside of and in relation to class differences. Though seemingly indicative of dire socio-economic conditions, racial differences did not in themselves prevent solidarities between racially marked and unmarked transgender women, however, indeed structured the parameters by which their bodies and identities received public value. None-the-less, Holly would eventually come to consider Jackie Curtis one of her truest sisters.⁵² In this vein, race was not deterministic but rather worked in complex ways to structure various social and material relationships. Of particular interest are Holly's relationships to other Puerto Rican queens.

Before establishing her friendship with Jackie Curtis, Holly found a group of transgender women of color to help her off the streets. During this time, she lived in a cheap motel in the Village, near the Stonewall Inn, New York. She notes:

Usually, all the "girls" would pool their pennies to pay the rent. Sometimes I had money, sometimes I didn't, but we all looked out for one another and made sure no one was stuck out in the street. It was back to the same old routine of living hand-to-mouth, and too often the hand was empty.⁵³

Though seemingly romantic and ideal, Holly's relationship to queens of color was often fraught with controversy and contention. Her relationships to other Puerto Rican queens, for example, speaks to the ways in which racial categories, like gendered categories, map out endemic differences in addition to similarities. Accordingly, Puerto Rican queens, for Holly, represented the cruelest bunch of New York's criminals and were figures to be avoided at all costs. She notes:

⁵² Jackie Curtis and Holly Woodlawn became particularly close friends after Curtis helped to secure Holly's early release from jail just in time to attend the public screening of *Trash (1969)*

⁵³ Pp 112, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

They were very sly these Puerto Rican queens. They would not take shit from anyone...I never messed with these psycho queens, and stayed as far away from them as possible. It was strange. All of us queens were walking the same path in life. Who would've expected such rivalries? But our living conditions were wretched. We were all living like rats on top of each other. And rats have to protect themselves and their territory. And so the Puerto Ricans formed these little gangettes that terrorized the gutter.⁵⁴

Holly's ambivalence towards Puerto Rican queens illustrates in part how complex mappings of race structure not only social perceptions without communities but also within communities. These social distinctions illustrate divisions within identity groups and provide impetus to Holly's anglicized trajectory going into Warhol's factory. By 1969, Holly eventually made her way into Warhol's factory family, joining in with a list of celebrated icons like Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin and Yoko Ono who huddled around such hot spots as Max's Kansas City.⁵⁵

In 1969, Paul Morrissey (Warhol's friend and director) invited Holly to play the role of Ms Santiago in *Trash*, a down and out welfare queen whose sole goal in life was to get laid by her impotent, junkie boyfriend (played by Joe Dellasandro). Though she gained substantial publicity and popularity owing to her role in this film, Holly received little money from Warhol and, in fact, even at the apex of her career struggled to make rent let alone money for hormones and, by this point, an excessive drug habit. Her survival typically relied on the kindness of her rich friends. Like all three Warhol Superstars, including Jackie Curtis and Candy Darling, Holly fell into the deep recesses of the 1960's drug and escape culture that gave her a role in the party scene but at the same time left her completely dependent on friends to get by on a day-to-day basis.

⁵⁴ Pp 113, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁵⁵ Patterson. 2007

By the end of the 1970's, Holly was not only out of work but also in deep depression. During this time, she even briefly reverted to living as a man, which she recounts as a moment of discontent. Holly's story speaks to not only the complexities of life as a transgender woman but also the ways in which notions of race and class may further complicate transgender identity. Additionally, Holly's particular reversion experience back to "manhood" illuminates how feelings of discontent can, themselves, be gendered. Because Holly did not have the available funds to support her own transition, she became dependent on the support of others early in her life. Owing to this, she experienced life on the streets where she was vulnerable to addiction and exploitation by others, including supposed friends such as Warhol.

Situating Christine and Holly

Convinced at one point that she, too, would follow in Christine's footsteps through sex reassignment surgery, Holly realized later in life that the commitment and costs were simply out of her reach and eventually came to embrace a non-surgical transgender identity.⁵⁶ In other words, though both Christine and Holly transcended traditional sex role expectations to reveal common identity elements, their relative difference in race and class exposed nuanced complexities in the formation of transgender identity.

Interestingly, though they were from quite different backgrounds, both played a role in the complex realm of transgender identity construction in the early days of the modern transgender liberation movement. While Christine played a major role in the establishment of the now mainstream medicalization pathway to gender construction for trans women, Holly gave a public face to one of the responses to that pathway; that is, she played a role in the formation of an alternative approach that may be more appropriate to trans women in less privileged circumstances.

The near absence of women of color celebrities in the public sphere in the 1960s in conjunction with Warhol's racialized policing of representational boundaries embodied within an American penchant to conflate whiteness, wealth and citizenship helps in part to explain why Holly modeled herself after famous white actresses as an adult.

Interestingly, in her childhood in Puerto Rico, she idolized Latina actresses: Lola Flores,

⁵⁶ Pp 98, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

Maria Felix and Libertad Lamarque.⁵⁷ As she grew older (moving first to Florida then to New York), however, like other transgender women of color, she turned to white celebrities as inspirational, ideal role models. As Pepper LaBeija, black and legendary drag queen icon, points out in an episode of the Joan Rivers show in 1989, “When I first started going to the balls that’s what it was all about, we wanted to look like Marilyn Monroe or Elizabeth Taylor.”⁵⁸ Here, Pepper, articulates how images from 1960s mainstream reified racialized valuation. Furthermore, she points to strategies employed by transgender women of color to queer this exclusive public arena.

In *White on White: The Overbearing Whiteness of Warhol Being* (2004), Taro Nettleton claims that Warhol’s desire to create a counterpublic to Hollywood, while maintaining whiteness as the unmarked standard, enabled Warhol to reproduce racialized exclusivities while simultaneously policing the parameters by which racialized subjects entered the factory sphere. Insistent that one day “everyone” would have his or her 15 minutes of fame Warhol worked to bring about a futuristic *oeuvre* through which traditional “outsiders” (including: queers, queens, junkies, outcasts) became “insiders”, a status traditionally restricted to white, heteronormative men and women.⁵⁹ Still, even as he worked to cultivate this utopian vision of inclusion, his policing of representational boundaries reified rather than challenged endemic notions of white supremacy and exclusion. Accordingly, the maintenance of power to define representational boundaries at the level of color, allowed Warhol to reproduce palatable, reductive images of people

⁵⁷ Pp 27. Copeland, Jeff. 1991.

⁵⁸ Joan Rivers Show. Paris is Burning [episode]. 1989.

⁵⁹ Pp 102. Flatley, Jonathan. Warhol Gives Good Face: Publicity and the Politics of Prosopopoeia

of color.

According to performance and critical race studies professor, José Esteban

Muñoz:

Representations of people of color are scarce and, more often than not, worn-out stereotypes. Warhol's work is no exception: one need only think of the portrait of a Native American, which is titled *American Indian*, the drag queens of *Ladies and Gentlemen*, and the Mammy from the *Myths* series. The paintings reproduce images that are ingrained in the North American racist imagination. There is no challenge or complication of these constructs on the level of title or image.⁶⁰

In line with Muñoz, I view the reduction of racialized and gendered bodies to the level of stereotype in Warhol's factory as reflective of larger political and cultural anxieties regarding race. Holly's particular story helps to illustrate these relative nuances, allowing for a more contextual reading of the factory through the political specter of national identity and positionality. Hence, even as Warhol's image and label catapulted her career into superstardom, such benefits were indeed tethered to particularly racialized ideas about representation such that in order to truly benefit, Holly abandoned her Latina name in exchange for one more "American" sounding. By policing representational boundaries, Warhol effectively maintained a seemingly avant-garde utopia by using whiteness as common denominator, providing factory subjects publicity in exchange for ownership and control of the means by which they attained that publicity. As Holly points out, "Andy was big on facades, but then so was I. Like my cohorts

⁶⁰ Pp 146. Muñoz, Jose. *Famous and Dandy like B. 'N' Andy: Race, Pop, and Basquiat in Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, 1996.

Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis, I went all out to put up a front and hide my true self from the world.”⁶¹

Racial elisions in the form of a “glittering” facade marked a salient reality for a number of people of color working in Warhol’s factory.⁶² Holly’s film roles, for example, illustrate how Warhol’s racial ambivalence in theory moved to reify racial stereotyping in practice. In the film *Trash* (1970), for example, Holly plays the role of an enabling Latina welfare queen who uses welfare in part to support her common law husband (played by Joe Dellasandro). Throughout the film, Ms. Santiago (Holly’s character) moves between two particularly racially gendered tropes, that of “welfare queen” and “desperate, hypersexual transsexual Latina.” Thus, as Warhol and film director, Paul Morrissey worked to “neutralize” racial disparities by selecting an almost all white cast, reductive stereotypes particular to women of color received salient depiction in the film.

In one scene, a white, male caseworker agrees to file Holly’s welfare claim for money (agreeing to overlook her boyfriend’s drug usage in the home), in exchange for the shoes on her feet. Holly, baffled by the unusual request refuses to participate in the exchange, asserting entitlement to welfare as a pregnant woman. Following this, the caseworker verbally attacks Holly, connecting her pregnancy and attendant need for welfare to broader stereotypical images specific to pregnant “negro” women exploiting the welfare system. Surprised and shocked by the racist comment, Holly recalls:

⁶¹ Pp 2, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁶² There were very few people of color taking part in Warhol’s factory functions. Dorothy Dean, an African American woman is one of them. Her positionality in the Warhol scene as a particularly racialized factory regular is well articulated in *White on White: The Overbearing Whiteness of Warhol Being* (Nettleton, 2004).

Michael was a very funny guy. When we weren't filming, we would be yukking it up in the back, but when we did the scene, he suddenly became this pain-in-the-ass welfare worker who didn't like me at all. I was so intimidated and at a loss for words, until Michael made a crack about the Negroes cranking out babies ever nine months to get on welfare. Well, honey, I was livid!...I became so upset by this racial slur that I actually began to take him personally. I was no longer Holly Woodlawn playing Holly Santiago in a movie. I had made the transition, and this was real.⁶³

Though seemingly full of contradictions, *Trash* is a triumph. While Holly ultimately loses the battle with the caseworker (by losing welfare assistance), her refusal to comply with his undue demands and racist stereotypes, gives voice to her own personal convictions and resistance to racism. It is in this scene that Holly challenges larger assumptions regarding women of color on welfare. On one hand, she fakes pregnancy to attain welfare and on the other hand, refuses to be complicit in the state worker's demands. By refusing to relinquish her shoes, Holly situates an uncompromising resistance to an intrusive, racist state system, one that utilizes welfare to further condemn and exploit women of color.

By "working on and against dominant ideology," Holly embodies what Muñoz terms *disidentification*.⁶⁴ In line with Judith Butler's claim that, "the failure of identification is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference,"⁶⁵ Muñoz articulates the process of survival for those marginalized in the public sphere as one riddled with contradiction. Writing on iconic artist Jean-Michel Basquiat's evolution from lowbrow, unknown street artist to world famous contemporary artist, Muñoz summarizes the impetus behind Basquiat's relationship to Warhol in the

⁶³ Pp 145, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

⁶⁴ Pp 147, Muñoz, Jose. 1996

⁶⁵ Pp 147, Muñoz, Jose. 1996

1980s (which helped to catapult Basquiat's overwhelming popularity in the high art world): "Sometimes a subject needs something to identify with, sometimes a subject needs heroes to mimic and in which to invest all sorts of energies."⁶⁶ In many ways, Basquiat's relationship to Warhol relays theoretical support to our understanding of Holly's relationship to Christine, particularly at the level of iconography and racial exclusivity. For example, though Christine's public image enabled Holly to imagine a world wherein boys could become girls, it also worked to politicize the parameters of ideal representation, leaving poor transgender women and transgender women of color such as Holly at the margins of identity and visibility politics.

In this vein, Holly's performance can be read on one hand, as an alignment with whiteness and heteronormativity and on the other hand, against the reductive stereotypes. I argue that such contention works to unsettle reductionist stereotyping. Additionally, her performance speaks to the ways in which notions of class and race intersect with transgender identity. Like Christine, Holly's performance speaks to the strategic ways in which transgender women conform to certain dominant expectations reflective of cultural trends in order to maintain some form of legitimacy as performance artists. However, Holly's story deviates from the transgender narrative proposed by Christine's legacy in this regard for a number of reasons, including Holly's complex and evolving relationships to notions of race, class and transgender identity. Throughout her autobiography, Holly recalls in detail the ways in which she and other queens of color navigated state violence. In one particular passage, she recalls:

⁶⁶ Pp 145, Muñoz, Jose. 1996

With our T-shirts tied into halters and our hair tied in rags, we'd flip through magazines and rip out the most colorful pages. Then we'd spit on the page and rub its color onto our cheeks, eyes and lips. It wasn't easy being beautiful behind bars.⁶⁷

Here, Holly provides a rich account of one survival strategy employed by incarcerated queens of color resisting institutional forms of racialized gender violence performed through carceral prescriptions for gendered forms of dress and performativity. While somewhat anomalous, this scene highlights the different coping strategies employed by queens of color not only as a technique of survival but as a means to move beyond mere survivorship, to turn seemingly unlivable situations into manageable and ironically, at times, reflexively enjoyable experiences. We focus on these experiences not to group queens into bifurcated camps of victims and agents, but rather to investigate how certain performative aspects enabled transgender women of color to extrapolate new and invariably different imaginings in the public worlds that continually sought to deny them materially and socially, worlds that complicated and destroyed their lives through complex systems of discrimination and erasure.

Moving simultaneously, and at times working in parallel, the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation struggle, the Gay Rights movement and the campaign to end the war in Vietnam, galvanized unprecedented numbers of young people to action, engendering new political and social consciousness in the context of free love and counter-culture. Hence, new articulations around notions of race, class, gender and sexuality prompted new forms of public resistance that more pointedly addressed issues of diversity and difference in the public sphere. Within this tumultuous period of socio-

⁶⁷ Pp 9, Copeland, Jeff. 1991

political shifting transgender women pushed the limits of public gender expression. As some remained loyal to the more mainstream standards of care initiated by Dr. Benjamin, others defined themselves via alternative forms of self-expression outside of the medicalized transsexual paradigm (which by this time was fairly legitimized). Typically unconcerned with fitting into the conventional binary sex/gender mold, these transgender counter-publics incorporated camp and critique into their embodied expressions and, in turn, subverted the white and privileged transsexual narrative that had become dominant in the late 1960s.

Conclusion

Holly viewed Christine as a nice lady, but hardly a role model for herself. She explains, “[Christine Jorgensen] was such a nice lady and an inspiration to many, but I wanted to be notorious and gorgeous, not prim and proper.”⁶⁸ By the late 1960s, Holly settled on the idea that she would remain a non-surgical transgender woman, reflecting not only a personal aversion to the medicalization practices of sex construction but also the class associations of sex reassignment surgery. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, sex change surgeries were primarily accessible to white, middle and upper class transgender persons while impoverished transgender people and transgender people of color created alternative forms of gender construction and transgender expression.

Christine and Holly reflect larger cultural narratives of their respective eras, however, more than that, they embody the possibilities of sex and gender expressions. Though born and raised as boys, both transitioned to womanhood. However, the nuance of their stories reveals something about the historical complexities of race and national identity and, importantly, how these notions intersect with transgender identity itself. Viewed in monolithic terms, transgender identity encompasses a wide range of attendant gender identities and expressions that may be further affected by notions of race and class. It should be noted that while historical texts on transgender identity may offer a more general understanding of transgender identity, these texts typically fail to historicize the issues of race and class specifically.

⁶⁸ Pp 93, Copeland, Jeff. 1991.

Perhaps most importantly, Christine and Holly demonstrate through their own personal experiences the various ways in which transgender women discovered their own identities and constructed themselves in the early era of modern transgender possibilities. Despite being portrayed as reactionary subjects of science and sexual revolution, as well as facing complex individual obstacles, these two transgender women overcame the odds to construct themselves as the women that they saw themselves to be. And in the process, not only did they help to propel a new civil and social movement for the right to determine one's own individual sex and gender, they further helped to create multiple paths for diverse gender expression and gender construction *within* (and perhaps beyond) that movement.

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