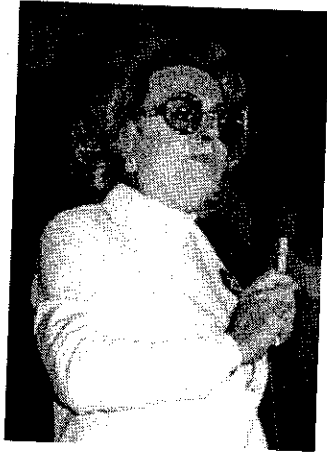


## Christine Jorgensen (1926-1989)

Vern L. Bullough



Courtesy of ONE, Inc.

At the beginning of the 1950s, psychiatric opinion dominated any discussion of homosexuality. It and almost anything else that was not heterosexual was pathological. To change ideas about sexual identity required a major change not only in psychiatric thinking but in public opinion. Instrumental in initiating this process was Christine Jorgensen, ne George Jorgensen, who became an international media sensation in 1952.

Jorgensen, an ex-GI, believed that nature had made a mistake in giving him a male body. Searching for solutions, he planned to go to Sweden where he had heard that some surgical intervention was possible, but he first stopped in Denmark to visit relatives. There he met Christian Ham-

burger, a Copenhagen surgeon, and he told Hamburger he simply could not go on living as a man. He had, before coming to Denmark, secretly acquired women's clothes, often wore them, had shaved his pubic hair to be shaped more like a female's, and in his work as a laboratory technician he had access to estrogen which he had for a time administered to himself. After further examination, Hamburger and his associates decided to treat him with additional female hormones, although in doses much larger than he had given himself, and his body gradually gained more feminine contours, while his behavior, gait, and voice (after some training) became more feminine. As his beard grew sparser, electrolysis was used to removed the remaining facial hair. He was then castrated under provisions of a Danish Sterilization and Castration Act, which permitted castration when the patient's sexuality made him likely to commit crimes or when it involved mental disturbance. In 1952, Jorgensen expressed an ardent wish to have the last visible remains of his detested male sex organs removed, so his penis was amputated one

year after his orchiectomy had been performed. Technically, however, as a castrated man, the patient had not undergone a sex change, and no attempt was made at that time to construct a vagina or other female sex organs; but the hormones had given him a very feminine look, and the U.S. government changed his sex on his passport to female. Later, there were somewhat successful efforts to make a vagina for Jorgensen from her intestines. It was not until much later that the male-to-female transsexual surgery was perfected, which involved using the scrotum and the penis, from which the meatus had been removed, to make a fairly successful vagina and labia.

When the news of what was called a "sex change" reached the media, probably initiated by Jorgensen herself, Jorgensen became famous worldwide. Seizing the opportunity, she sold her story to journalists from the Hearst newspapers and went on the stage. Reading about Jorgensen caused an outpouring of requests to Hamburger by hundreds of others to change their sex—requests which he refused, although a few other operations were done.

Special clinics to deal with transsexualism and similar issues were set up by Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and other institutions, and a number of surgeons began to specialize in the operations in places such as Morocco and in Trinidad, Colorado. Many, but not necessarily the majority, were homosexual in orientation when they presented themselves for treatment. This in some ways was troubling because it seems that many believed that the stigma or sinfulness of homosexuality was so great that they felt they could overcome it only by changing their sex.

Jorgensen herself, however, had contacts with ONE, Inc., in Los Angeles, where she eventually settled down and participated in conferences sponsored by ONE. She considered herself a missionary for changing public attitudes about sex. Her appearance as a speaker always guaranteed an audience, most of whom ended up supporting her and even admiring her. Her case also undermined the psychiatric domination of sexuality and made the public more willing to listen to different views.

Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and even historians had begun to conduct investigations into human sexuality from their own disciplinary interest, and Alfred Kinsey, whatever else he had done, had mounted a full-scale attack on the psychiatric domination. Transsexualism brought surgeons, endocrinologists, and others who were making decisions about sex changes without even consulting psychiatrists and resulted in some turf battles in the medical profession.

Although Christine Jorgensen later deliberately removed herself from the limelight, she never forgot where she had come from and helped out would-be transsexuals, gays, transvestites, lesbians, and others in whatever way she could. By going public as she did, she forced the public as well as

the professionals to rethink standard stereotypes and encouraged many to come out of the closet.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
- Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Biography*. New York: Eriksson, 1967.

## Virginia Prince (1913- )

Vern L. Bullough



Homosexuality was a catchall term for a variety of activities in the first half of the twentieth century, and demarcating differences and emphasizing that there was a variety of behaviors both homosexual and heterosexual was an important task in pre-Stonewall America. Virginia Prince was a major factor in this movement. He, or rather she, since it was by her feminine persona that she was known, was the founder of the transvestite movement in the United States and around the world. Her emphasis on the heterosexuality of what she believed to be the majority of cross-dressers challenged traditional ideas about sex and gender, emphasizing that many behaviors which had

been subsumed under the category of homosexuality were separate and distinct behaviors from a person's sexual orientation. Because the public's tolerance for transgendered persons was closely allied to its acceptance of homosexuality, Prince's "crusade" for a medical and psychiatric reconsideration of cross-dressing was an important factor in a growing public acceptance of same-sex preferences as well as in gender behavior.

Born into an upper middle-class family in Los Angeles in 1913, she began cross-dressing in her teens and collected a wardrobe of women's clothes. By the age of eighteen she was sneaking out of her house cross-dressed, riding the streetcar, and engaging in adventures as a teenaged girl. She reported that on such occasions she often achieved orgasm without masturbating. Both the fear and excitement about being caught and the actual cross-dressing were important to the sexual high. She continued to cross-dress until she married, at which time she went through an event that is standard in transvestite literature: a purge of everything associated with her "feminine self" and an oath not to do it again. Marriage was followed by a move from Los Angeles to the San Francisco area where she earned a doc-