

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

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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-

torate in biochemistry. She soon began cross-dressing again. While participating in grand rounds in the medical school affiliated with the university, she attended a session featuring a man who had recently changed his name to Barbara Wilson and was living as a woman. Other cross-dressers were presented and Charles, a male pseudonym Virginia adopted, contacted them. Charles also had a private session with Karl Bowman, a psychiatrist knowledgeable about cross-dressing and who, unlike other psychiatrists he had consulted, told him that there were thousands of others like him out there and to accept himself as he was and to enjoy it.

Charles, in the meantime, had become a father and after completing a research project in San Francisco returned to Los Angeles and told his physician father about his cross-dressing and even dressed for him. His father's advice was to visit an endocrinologist, implying that additional male hormones might help him. After that, he refused to talk with his son about cross-dressing and never reconciled himself to his son's behavior. Charles, who had adopted the name of Virginia for his feminine persona, had also told his wife about his activities while they still lived in northern California. She was upset but reluctantly agreed to let him do so as long as she did not see him. In Los Angeles, unable to cope with Virginia's cross-dressing, she began seeing a psychiatrist who convinced her that her husband was a homosexual and concluded that the only solution was for her to get a divorce. The divorce provided a media bonanza, and the story of Charles/Virginia was featured in lurid newspaper stories. One effect of the stories was that Virginia was contacted by other transvestites and they began meeting together and publishing a newsletter. Virginia soon emerged as a dominant figure in the group and began publishing a magazine, *Transvestia*, on her own. She soon had a variety of publications and out of these came organized groups. Her activities soon came to the attention of the U.S. Post Office and she was charged with mailing obscene material. The charges grew out of some personal correspondence from Virginia to an individual whom she thought was a woman sympathetic to cross-dressing and in which Virginia let her fantasies go wild. The person turned out to be a man who himself was under investigation by postal officials for illicit activities, of which Virginia was believed to be a part. Although admitting she wrote the letter, Virginia was successful in the court in separating this activity from her publishing activities. Pleading guilty to writing the letter, she was given a three-year sentence in a federal penitentiary, which was suspended providing she avoid any illegal conduct for a five-year probationary period. If she was arrested for any reason, she would automatically go to prison. Since cross-dressing in public was prohibited by the Los Angeles criminal code of the time, this meant she would be subject to arrest if she cross-dressed publicly. To get around this prohibition, her attorney persuaded the court to allow part of her

probation to be served in educating the public about cross-dressing. The court agreed, and the result was a number of public appearances as a woman before service clubs and other groups where she talked about gender differences and in the end revealed that she was a man. She also took great pains to distinguish cross-dressing from homosexuality, although she emphasized that both were unfairly persecuted. In the mid-1960s, she began living full-time as a woman, traveling around the country and the world, establishing transvestite clubs and groups along the way.

As the movement spread and other groups appeared, different views of transvestism appeared as did other publishers. Many groups welcomed homosexual cross-dressers and would-be transsexuals; other factions associated transvestism with bondage and domination and various fetishes. Many transvestite groups made coalitions with the gay and lesbian groups in their community, and the homophobia so prevalent in Virginia's early writings was not accepted by large segments of what came to be called the "transgender community." Increasingly Virginia herself recognized her antihomosexual bias and ultimately even went on a cruise with a gay man who pretended to be her husband.

An important incidental result of Prince's early efforts and of the club movement that ensued was that it gave researchers opportunities to study populations of transvestites who were not necessarily clients of a psychiatrist or psychologist and who had not been drawn from a criminal population. This significantly broadened the focus of the research on both cross-dressing and homosexuality. Prince was one of the first to take advantage of this and did a pioneering study of 504 subjects. Many people who identified as homosexual were found in the study, and there were probably more than entered the literature since often researchers excluded them from their reported data, giving a skewed view of the topic.

Transvestites, similar to homosexuals, were burdened by the psychiatric definitions of homosexuality and transvestism. As the definitions of homosexuality changed and it was eventually removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, so were those of transvestism. Magnus Hirschfeld, in his pioneering work on both homosexuality and transvestism published early in the twentieth century, had attempted to distinguish similarities and differences between the two phenomena, but much of his research was ignored by the English-speaking world. One of Hirschfeld's basic points was that although there were differences between homosexuals and transvestites, he felt that the two had to be allies in trying to change misleading public perceptions. This was ultimately the contribution of Virginia Prince to the movement, bringing a different group into the struggle for individual rights.

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José Sarria (1923-)

Vern L. Bullough



José Sarria early on recognized that he was a homosexual, and brags he screwed his way into the U.S. Army after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Turned down by the Navy and Marines because he was slightly under five feet tall and weighed only ninety pounds, he vowed to get into the Army even if he did not meet the height minimum. He believed he had found a way to do so when he became acquainted with an Army major whom he had met at several gay gatherings he had attended in San Francisco. The major had been interested in Sarria, but José had only flirted with him until he found out that the officer was assigned to the recruiting station. Knowing what he had to do, Sarria contacted the major; the two had lunch together and then went to a nearby hotel on the condition that the major would approve him for enlistment. Sarria soon found himself in the Army, where he was sent to attend classes to be a cook and baker. Eventually he ended up as an aide to a high-ranking officer and from there became the operator of an officers' dining hall in occupied Germany. He also became an expert in dealing with the black market and throwing parties. Although there was a lot of gossip about his possible sexual orientation, he was accepted by most of his colleagues.

Born to an unmarried woman, Maria Dolores Maldonado, and fathered by Julio Sarria late in 1922 or early 1923, Sarria was brought up by Jessorina and Charles Millen, while his mother lived with another family as a full-time maid. In fact, she used her wages to buy a house and to move the Millen family into it. José's mother tolerated his early cross-dressing and encouraged his artistic development by having him take lessons in dancing, violin, and voice, and the young boy had dreams of becoming an opera star. His adult voice was a high tenor, and he could reach high C in his normal voice and so he never