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Trans-Atlantic History of Sexualities

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Challenging the Cramped Binary Ideations of Sexual Identification

Although the time that LGBTQ history has been recorded and researched is relatively short in comparison to other areas, what is available and known paints a colorful picture of the community and is embedded with the strength that has persisted throughout time. As it turns out, the Trans-Atlantic LGBTQ memory is as similar as it is diverse. Opinions vary by time and space, but the one thing that will always remain will be the strength and conviction embedded within the community. The consensus for LGBTQ rights advocates and allies is that there is nothing that is any more wrong with any person who identifies as LGBTQ than there is for anyone else. Unfortunately, there is a deep history in the world at large of fear of difference and the notion that there is an absolutely "right" way to live and an absolutely "wrong" way to live. During the time that is tracked, predominantly from the 20th century to the present, there were similar developments in the United States, the Netherlands, and France.

We know that queerness has been around since ancient times — for example, ancient Greek citizens were known to sleep with young,



Figure 1: Photo of an ancient Greek thinker as opposed to a modern thinker; this was in the French Museum of Eroticism (personal collection).

adolescent males¹. Since then, opinion has changed drastically. Overall, queerness has persisted and transcended above being labeled as sin, deviance, and pathology to becoming more *normalized* (in the sense that there is nothing wrong with it in the first place), increasing acceptance, and being offered legal rights and protections . As a result of discrimination and ignorance, much of the LGBTQ community remained seemingly invisible for the reason of protecting themselves and additionally as a result of heternormalizing, in which queerness and its notable persons are subject to whitewashing and sanitation in order to make queerness more accessible to the heteronormative world, therefore "acceptable." Of course, such a notion is nonsense; while *who's sleeping with who* is a great subject for gossip, to deny a notable figure's very clear, queer influence and identity is essentially rewriting their identity and providing a false history. In a word, it is dehumanizing. In fact, in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, we saw Jasper Johns' and Robert Rauschenberg's work placed next to each other, but there was no mention of their queer identities, their involvement as lovers, or how their involvement as lovers and identification as queer influenced their work— the same for Andy Warhol, who is well known as a queer icon.

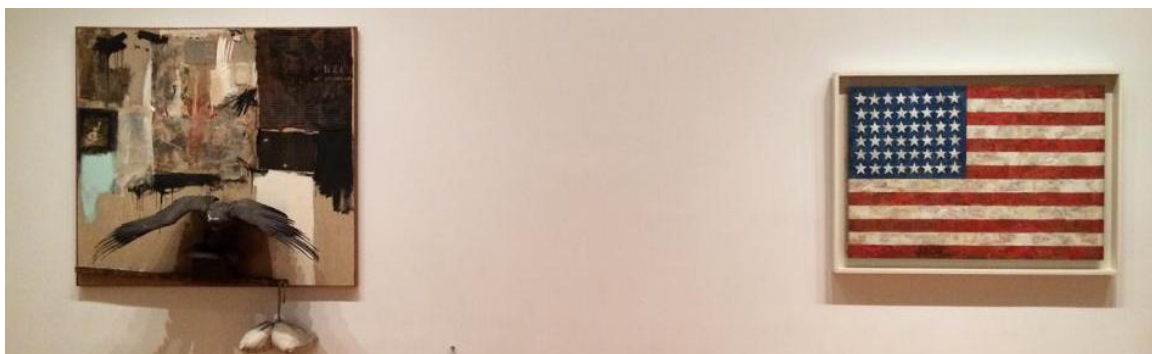


Figure 2: Photo of Johns' and Rauschenberg's work together, but no mention of their sexuality. Photo courtesy of colleague Lowell Kane.

¹ For more information on the History of Sexuality, see Halperin, D.M. "Is There a History of Sexuality?"

We saw direct evidence of ignoring queerness in art in the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam as well:



Figure 3: Photo of a St. Sebastian sculpture, taken at the Rijks Museum. Notice the rouge on his cheeks and the suggestive pose (personal collection).

In Paris, at the Louvre, we saw a mural on a ceiling that was very clearly queer, although there is no mention of it:



Figure 4: Photo of a ceiling mural taken at the Louvre. This is very clearly homoerotic, but was not mentioned by plaque nor by our tour guide (personal collection).

The struggle for LGBTQ rights, acceptance, and visibility is still strong today. The LGBTQ community continues to fight as they have in the past. In all 3 cities we visited, same-sex marriage had been legalized, although we quickly learned that there are still more issues affecting the community and that intolerance is still very prevalent, as is the forced "normalization" of LGBTQ identities. Despite the odds, it is because of the strength and conviction of LGBTQ leaders that have allowed us to come as far as we have; however, we cannot truly appreciate that unless *we know the journey we've taken* — where we've been and how we even got the point we are at today.

The Past

Much of the available history places us in early 20th century New York City, where we encounter drag queens, limp wrists, and bath houses. We see the necessity for which to create safe queer spaces, especially because at the time, homosexuality, then a form of deviance, was not well received by most people — men who slept with other men were called *male degenerates*². Drag queens and fairies (an intermediate sex in which gay males adopted the gender identity and mannerisms attributed to women) were quite the spectacle, delighting the gay community and horrifying others³, although I must point out that others could not help but notice, pay attention, and make their own ideations of a spectacle out of them. At this point, gayness is visible, particularly in reference to the effeminacy of a man, but it is not yet respected or accepted. In 1902, we see an early account of another form of (then) deviance in which the question of gender identity is raised as well as early attempts at sexual surgery through the story of New Yorker Earl Lind, a fairy who successfully petitioned a doctor to castrate his much hated genitalia because he "lived as a man but saw himself as a woman"⁴. It is important to note that he was not necessarily seeking to have complete sex-reassignment surgery, but rather, to live his life with a body that better matched his gender identity⁵.

² pp. 33 of Chauncey, G. *Gay New York*: Basic Books, 1994. Book.

³ *ibid.* Chauncey, pp. 33-63

⁴ pp. 17 Meyerowitz, J. *How Sex Changed : A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Book.

⁵ *ibid.* Meyerowitz

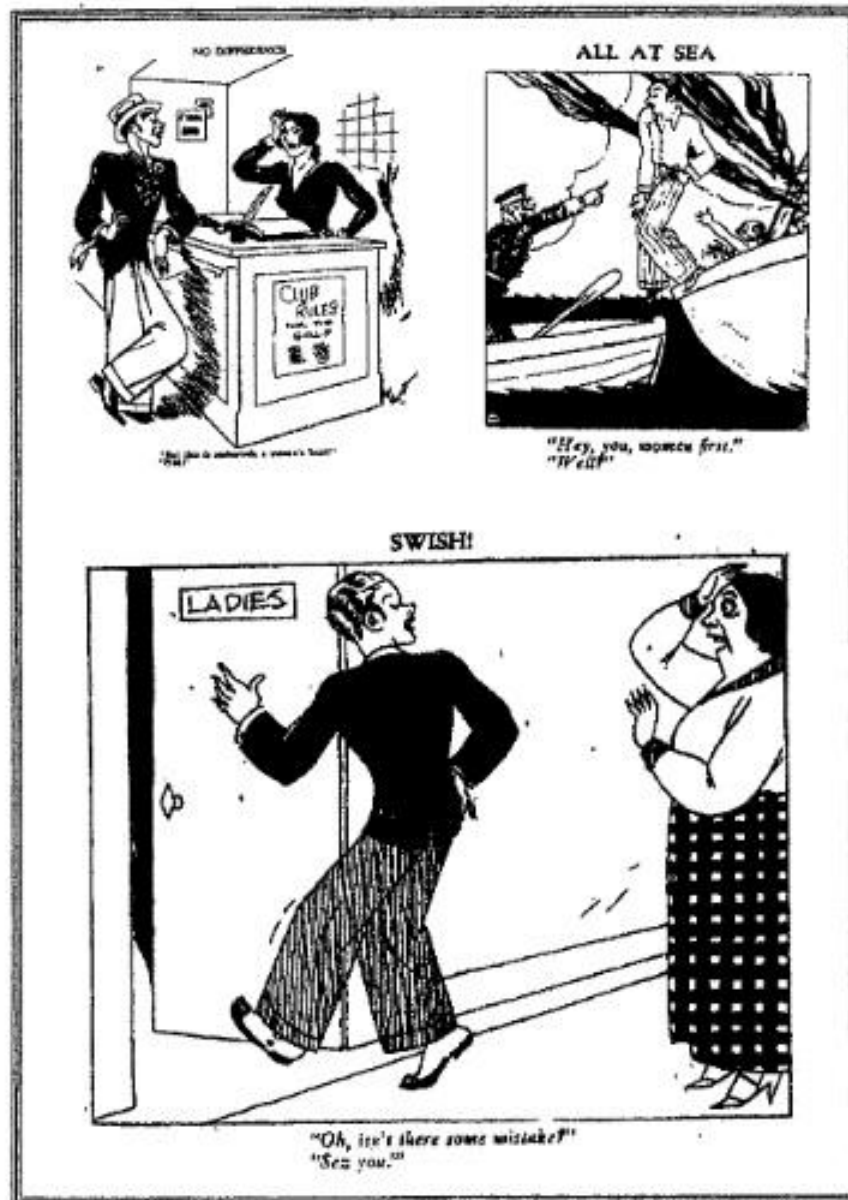


Figure 2.1. Three cartoons published in a New York tabloid in the early 1930s illustrate the prevailing conception of fairies as men who thought they were women. (From Broadway Brevities: "No Difference," December 14, 1931; "All at Sea," February 29, 1932; "Swish!" June 6, 1932.)

Figure 5: Page 46 from *Gay New York*; comics illustrating the fairies of New York City.

Imagine flying across the Atlantic Ocean to Paris, circa 1940, where the young transgender icon Coccinelle (Jacqueline Charlotte Dufresnoy, then Jacques-Charles Dufresnoy) was forced to quit her job as a hairdresser because her father thought it would turn his [then] *son* into a woman, but little did he know, Coccinelle's new job at the theatre was not that of a busboy, but rather, as a drag performer. However, Coccinelle was not a man who dressed as a woman, but rather, Coccinelle was a woman. Whereas other performers would get dressed at work, she would come to work already dressed, "[b]ut private life was not supposed to influence the transgender aspect of their performance"⁶ For Coccinelle, clearly her private life permeated every part of her performance. She would come to be regarded as the mother of the French transgender movement, inspiring many of her friends to undergo the transition as well. As a woman who managed to get identity papers affirming her femaleness before World War II (WWII), she was able to escape going off to war and instead rose to prominence as an openly transsexual performer.



Figure 6: Coccinelle. Photo courtesy of <http://www.belelu.com/>

⁶ Foerster, Maxime. "On the History of Transsexuals in France." *Transgender Experience: Place, Ethnicity, and Visibility*. Ed. Zabus, Chantal and Coad, David. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013. 19-30. *Ebook Library: Purdue University*.

Around the same time (through WWII) in Amsterdam, the Dutch population is predominantly Protestant or Catholic and renounce homosexuality as a sin [Oosterhuis]. Amsterdam, which was able to remain neutral in the first World War, was not able to do so in the second and was invaded by the Nazis, who persecuted the homosexuals as well as the Jews. In fact, in the Dutch Resistance Museum, there is an exhibit which features the identity card of a young, Jewish male who went into hiding by adopting the female gender and acquiring new identity papers to reflect such. Although there is not much literature available in terms of gender expression or identification in the Netherlands for the time period of WWII, the willingness to essentially transition to the female gender from the male gender, even only as an appearance, suggests that there is a willingness to consider adopting a different gender as well as provides testimony regarding the sad reality of repression and denial of the true self, a sentiment that is well understood by the global transgender community in the present time.



Figure 7: Photo of a young man who went into hiding as a woman. Photo courtesy of colleague Beth Hartman.

It is important to understand that the idea that any kind of sexual deviance, whether it is homosexual practice or cross-dressing, has pervasively been thought of as a problem that affects the out-group, i.e. those who are not actively engaging in the behavior but seem to have some sort of opinion (usually unfavorable) about it. What this means is that deviance is labeled as deviance because those who disagree assume that they speak for everyone rather than just themselves, which creates divisions in society. Those who are oppressed are not allowed to speak for themselves, but rather, are represented, as it were, by people or groups who may not fully understand their issues. This is illustrated in WWII Netherlands by the notion that homosexuals were "deficient in free will" by the religious and mental health sectors; the most favorable evolution of thought at the time occurs by the transfer of the "issue" from religion to psychology and psychiatry, which transformed homosexuality into pathology rather than sin⁷; however, the result is that homosexuality is viewed as both deviance and a psychological issue that can be cured with good psychotherapy, which is just not true. It isn't until the later 1950s-60s that mental health professionals and clergymen, although divided amongst themselves as well, come to understand marriage as more about love and less about procreation, thus are better able to understand homosexuality, although it is still seen pathologically in that homosexuality is still believed to be due to a lack of inner freedom⁸.

Although there is little known history for transgender people in Amsterdam during the 1950s, two pivotal sex-reassignment surgeries took place, ushering in a new era of possibility for transgender people who wished to make the transition. In New York, the 1952 emergence of Christine Jorgensen (born as George William Jorgensen, Jr.) as an openly, fully transsexual

⁷ Oosterhuis, H. "Christian Social Policy and Homosexuality in The Netherlands, 1900-1970." *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1996: 95-112. Document.

⁸ *ibid.* Oosterhuis

woman made headlines as "the ex-G.I. turned Blonde Beauty"⁹. Then, across the Atlantic Ocean in 1958 Paris, Coccinelle revealed her new, female body, courtesy of Dr. Georges Burou in Morocco (at the time, sex reassignment surgery was seen as genital mutilation and as such was illegal in France, those desiring the surgery went to Morocco). Christine Jorgenson and Coccinelle, both very outspoken and proud of their female bodies, were strong advocates for transgender rights as well and raising awareness towards issues pertaining to the transgender community. They forced the transgender identity to be recognized and received by the public eye, whereby increasing pressure to accept transpeople as they truly are increased.



Figure 8: Photo of Christine Jorgensen, courtesy of Huffington Post.

In 1960, Amsterdam (for the most part) came to understand homosexual relationships as normal as heterosexual relationships, i.e. marriage, and were deemed more as love rather than as a sign of underlying pathology¹⁰. A similar movement was happening in the United States and Paris with the foundation of organizations dedicated to promoting transgender rights and improving their overall sense of community and connection. In 1964, American transman Reed

⁹ *ibid.* Meyerowitz, pp. 53

¹⁰ *ibid.* Oosterhuis, pp. 110

Erickson founded the Erickson Educational Foundation, an organization dedicated to the advocacy of gay and transgender rights and equality. Marie-André Schwindenhammer founded the *Association des Malades Hormonaux* (essentially: Association for those who have the Wrong Hormones), or, AMAHO for short, in 1965. AMAHO was the first transgender organization in France. Additionally, in the 1960s, transpeople were noted for taking part in the 1966 Compton Cafeteria Riots as well as the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion¹¹; it is worth noting that such notoriety and participation of transpeople in rebelling against oppressive anti-LGBTQ sentiments occurs relatively shortly after the founding of the earliest known trans interest organizations and the emergence of outspoken role models, as the transgender identity at this point in time was more misunderstood than the homosexual identity; however, although not as prominent an identity yet, it is becoming more and more visible; there are pictures taken by Christer Strömholm of transsexual woman in 1960s France.



Figure 9: Belinda • 1967 (© Christer Strömholm/Strömholm Estate). photo courtesy of ABC News.

¹¹ Information discovered courtesy of Townsend, M. "Timeline:A Look Vack at the History of Transgender Visibility". GLAAD.org: 2012. Web <http://www.glaad.org/blog/timeline-look-back-history-transgender-visibility>

View more of Strömholm's gallery here: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/04/les-amies-de-place-blanche-transvestites-of-1960s-paris/>

By the time the 1970s came around, there were few judges in the United States who supported sex-reassignment surgery. Similar to how Amsterdam came to become more understanding and accepting of homosexuals in 1960, Judge Francis Pecora argued for the individual right to define one's own gender: "Is the gender of a given individual . . . that which society says it is, or is it, rather, that which the individual claims it to be? . . . Should a person's identity be limited by the results of mere histological section or by biochemical analysis . . . ? I think not"¹². By the mid-1970s, more and more there is more interest in understanding conceptions of gender in the medical and mental health fields in America. The legal definition of gender changed from a hard focus on anatomy and physiology to consider what gender the person, themselves, identified as in order to determine legal sex¹³. However, the transgender movement would come under attack by the lesbian and gay communities, as well as the feminists of time between the late 1970s - early 1980s for being "invasive" and "out of style"¹⁴, mostly due to perceived conceptions of gender held by each group, e.g. for gay men it was being clearly male and attracted to other men who were also clearly male. Luckily, the fight for equality and respect was far from over, or given up; in 1976 Paris, Pastor Joseph Doucé, an openly gay Christian minister, founded *Le Centre du Christ Libérateur* (The Center for the Liberating Christ) in response to the need for safe spaces. Pastor Doucé believed that his mission was to love all sexual minorities, but he became best known for his passion for transgender activism and advocacy of transgender rights and awareness.

¹² ibid. Meyerowitz, pp. 208

¹³ ibid. Meyerowitz, pp. 251

¹⁴ ibid. Meyerowitz, pp. 258

Pastor Doucé lobbied intensely for the promotion of transgender rights and awareness during the 1980s. In 1981, similar to some of the homosexual groups in America at the time, French President François Mitterand passed legislation favoring the equality and respect of homosexuals but not for transgender people, which created a divide between the homosexual and transgender community in France¹⁵. Pastor Doucé utilized all literary sources he had available in order to further the cause—he published a monthly Christian review (the *Ilia*) which served multiple functions in terms of his faith and activism, but notably for his inclusion of transgender issues in the publication; additionally, he founded a book store and publishing house as well. He networked with those in academia to change the focus of transgender understanding to a political / cultural issue¹⁶. To that end, in 1986, he published *La Question Transsexuelle* (The Transsexual Question) as a means to provide a non-oppressive understanding of the transgender identity and offer a point of view in the name of the transgender community rather than against them, as a medical or mental health professional would have likely done¹⁷.

The year before Pastor Doucé published *La Question Transsexuelle*, Amsterdam finally made visible history regarding transgender people. In 1985, Article 1:28 was passed, which allowed transgender people to legally change their gender; however there were three major stipulations that a transgender person had to go through in order to be granted the correct gender identity: (1) forced permanent sterilization; (2) forced hormone therapy, for the period of at least one year; and (3), forced sex-reassignment surgery¹⁸. Additionally, they had endure a "real-life test," in which they had to live exclusively as their desired gender for at least 6 months before

¹⁵ *ibid.* Foerster

¹⁶ *ibid.* Foerster

¹⁷ *ibid.* Foerster

¹⁸ see Human Rights Watch. "Controlling Bodies, Denying Identities". 2013. Web: <http://www.hrw.org/node/101483/section/5>

beginning hormone therapy¹⁹ Only after enduring the processes described above were Dutch transpeople allowed to begin to apply for gender reassignment; even then, they still had to go through a hearing and choose a name that "fit" their gender and the name would be approved if and only if the applicant had satisfied all three requirements and presented the appropriate signatures²⁰. This law is still technically in effect at the time of this writing, but as of July 1, 2014, Dutch transgender people of 16 years of age and older will no longer be forced to undergo permanent sterilization, take hormones, or endure intrusive surgery in order to change their legal gender; however, they are still requirement to present an expert statement affirming their commitment to their preferred gender.²¹

Read "[*Controlling Bodies, Denying Identities*](#)" and "[*Europe: Progress for Transgender Rights*](#)"

In 1990, Pastor Doucé is assassinated, but the transgender movement was still strong, if a bit shaken. The *Centre d'Aide, de Recherche, et d'Information sur la Transsexualité et l'Indentité de Genre* (the Center of Aid, Research, and Information on Transsexuality and Gender Identity, also known as CARITIG) was founded around the same time that sociologist Marie-Hélène Bourcier conducted a seminar pertaining to queer theory and transgender issues²². Both promoted the use of activism in transgender studies. Back in the United States, the transgender community had formed several of their own groups, such as the Transgender Nation and the American Educational Gender information Service (AEGIS), and have been re-accepted by the lesbian and gay community, who start to include transgender issues and support in their

¹⁹ *ibid.* Human Rights Watch (2013).

²⁰ *ibid.* Human Rights Watch

²¹ see Human Rights Watch. "Europe: Progress for Transgender Rights". 2014. Web: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/24/europe-progress-transgender-rights>

²² *ibid.* Foerster.

campaigns as well²³. The 1990s were marked by a necessity to act and fight for transgender rights and recognition across the Atlantic ocean; activist groups were active in both the United States and in Europe. In 1999, the first international Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) was held.

In 2000, one of France's most notable trans activist groups, the *Groupe Activiste Trans* (Trans Activist Group, or GAT) was formed. GAT was known for coining catchy slogans, such as "RésisTrans" (a play on the word resistance) and their radical activism. They explicitly stated that it was "time to speak for themselves"²⁴, meaning that they were tired of the pathological point of views attributed to the transgender community. In the United States, the National Center for Transgender Equality was founded in 2003. For much of the decade, transgender people became more visible, more respected, and better understood. In 2009, at the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT), the transgender identity was no longer considered a mental disease, which is also reflected in the latest version of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5): "DSM-5 aims to avoid stigma and ensure clinical care for individuals who see and feel themselves to be a different gender than their assigned gender".²⁵ It is important to note that a professional diagnosis is required in order to help individuals get the care they need mentally and physically, which seems to be the case across the ocean as well. In the present time (2014), although there is still much work to be done regarding transgender rights and issues, particularly with paperwork, health care, and the continuing fight for equality and respect, we are in a much better position to fight for and advocate change.

²³ *ibid.* Meyerowitz, pp. 283

²⁴ *ibid.* Foerster, pp. 27

²⁵ American Psychiatric Association. "Gender Dysphoria". Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Document: <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Gender%20Dysphoria%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

View the [Gender Dysphoria Fact Sheet](#) and a timeline of the history of [Transgender Visibility in the United States](#), courtesy of [GLAAD.org](#).

While in New York City, our group had the opportunity to attend and participate in a rally for homeless youth, for which current facts and figures estimate that approximately 40% of those individuals identify themselves as queer²⁶. However, contained within the struggle to obtain beds for all homeless youths is the additional struggle of fighting for LGBTQ rights and recognition. The fact that nearly half of New York City's homeless youth identify as queer is significant in that it illuminates the social inequality attached to those who identify as queer as well as a certain sense of willingness to ignore the

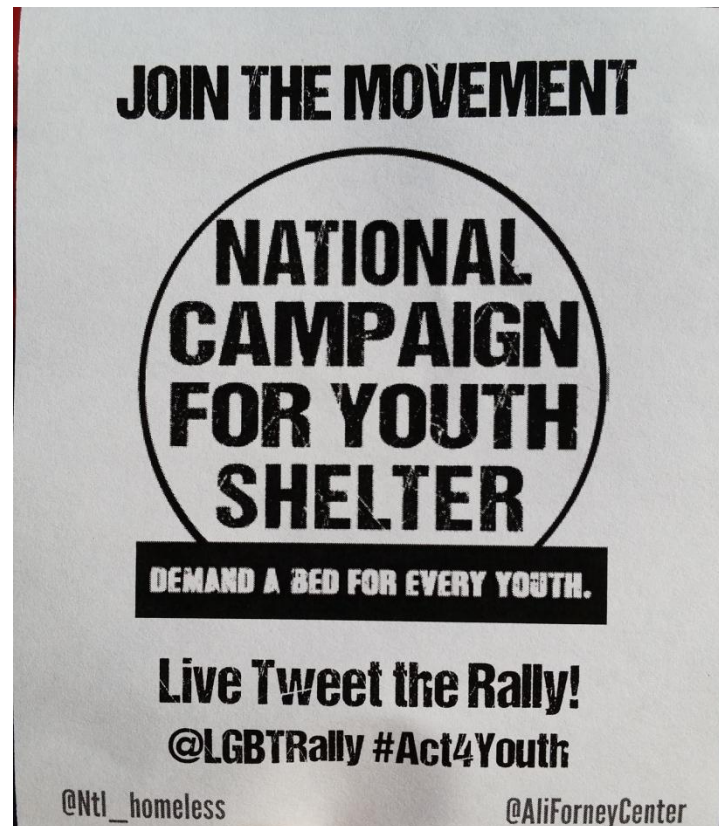


Figure 10: Flyer passed out at the rally to encourage activism via social media. (personal collection)

increase of queer persons in the current given statistics. It is completely unacceptable that figures of authority, who have the power and ability to speak out against such a travesty and be heard as well as act to help improve the situation and provide solutions are not doing more to address the

²⁶ For more information on homeless youth in New York City, see: Safe Horizon. "Streetwork: Homeless Youth Facts". New York: Safe Horizon, 2014. Web page: <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/streetwork-homeless-youth-facts-69.html>

issues of social inequality or aid homeless youth. It is a violation of the very basic rights that we all share as fellow human beings—the right to a safe, warm place to sleep *free of discrimination*.

Acclaimed transgender rights advocate and proud transwoman, Jennifer Louise Lopez, who was formerly homeless herself, spoke passionately at the rally about the problem of homelessness, particularly for LTBTQ persons and challenged current Mayor Bill de Blasio to take action immediately.



Figure 11: Trans rights advocate Jennifer Louis Lopez speaking to the crowd about the problem of homelessness amongst youth, particularly with reference to the discrimination queer homeless youth are currently facing (personal collection).

A Personal Reflection

I came into this class as a young, queer cisgender woman who happens to be in a committed relationship with a cisgender male. I feel that my own queerness is invisible to most people as I am not immediately recognized as much more than an ally due to the ever-present heteronormativity in society. It is a sentiment worth noting; similar to how people are forced to "prove their sex" in order to change their gender, or even their name, that part of my identity is essentially invisible and denied by others. I, myself, have been victim to whitewashing and sanitization of my queer identity because I am exclusively committed to the man whom I love. More so, my personal history and relationship with my gender identity is invisible; mostly because I have never really shared it with anyone, but I can empathize with feeling as if I were in the wrong body.

When I was younger, I so



Figure 12 Photo of me in which my relationship to my gender is exemplified, and at the same time my sexuality is muted. This was taken by colleague Allan Summers at the base of the Sacre Cœur (personal collection).

desperately wanted to feel like a little girl but thought that my body was supposed to be a male body; I was relieved when puberty confirmed that I did have the correct body. Since then, I have experienced similar relief in reference to my gender identification in affirming my femaleness, for which I am eternally grateful to have been born with a female body. I am now in a better position to understand both my sexuality and gender identification.

As much evidence of heteronormalization as I saw during our travels, I saw more evidence of hidden struggle, attempts to obscure the truth, and voices fighting to be heard. We must ask ourselves the question, *Why is there this societal pressure insistence on color-coding sexuality as black and white?* Why are people so afraid of difference and resistant to understanding the world as it is? Unfortunately, ignorance has lessened with time, but it has not completely disappeared. There is still a lot of hate and opposition towards equal rights and protections for the LGBTQ community. It is really such a shame that lack of acceptance for the LGBTQ community is existent in my own backyard. Clearly, no amount of persecution has successfully stopped the LGBTQ community, past and present, from expressing themselves or from loving and engaging in sexual activities with their preferred partners; it's time to break down heteronormativity and accept people as they are. We must challenge the idea of sexual binaries that poison our communities and societies. The LGBTQ community will not (and never will) stop fighting for equality, respect, and acceptance as long as hate and intolerance are around.

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