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Nick Ellis

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Power and Community: The Queer Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s

Nick Ellis

The 1960s and 1970s are well-known in the American memory as a period of numerous mass social movements: civil rights, labor rights, women's liberation, anti-war, and queer liberation. People belonging to many different groups united to speak up and fight against oppressions experienced for far too long. Through these various movements, many people realized the enormous power in collective action and organizing. The queer liberation movement's general goals were the acceptance of queer people in society and justice for those persecuted for their identities. As part of the larger queer and gay liberation movements, and as their own movement, many transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) individuals worked together to fight for their own and each other's liberation. Transgender and GNC people's increased unification in the 1960s and 1970s provided them with a strong collective voice, paving the way for greater acceptance and queer empowerment in subsequent decades.

The Roots of the Movement

Situating the queer liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s provides essential context for the rest of this paper because it points to an extensive history of queer life and organizing—rather than a sudden and spontaneous appearance in the late-twentieth century. Active queer communities developed across time and space via social groups and events, formal organizations, and community networks.

While the movement of the 1960s and 1970s is widely considered the first major American movement toward queer liberation, there were many actions and even entire movements before then. One of the largest movements was in Germany from

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1869 to 1935, which included efforts to decriminalize homosexuality, conduct sexology research, and educate people on topics regarding sex, sexuality, and gender. Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee conducted much of this research, contributing to the coinage of *transvestite* in 1910 and the conclusion that "sex and gender expression were not automatically linked."¹ However, much of this research was destroyed in 1933 after the Nazis took power. Despite this loss, the work of Dr. Hirschfeld and his *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* paved the way for future sexology research and is an indispensable example of early queer community organizing.

During the 1950s in the United States, conformity to strict gender roles and heterosexuality was emphasized and enforced, often by the police, leaving many queer people closeted, isolated, and unaware of other queer people's existence. Leslie Feinberg, transgender activist and author, describes her experience in the 1950s as "an era marked by rigidly enforced social conformity and fear of difference."² In addition to strict gender roles, trans and GNC people were subject to consumer and employment discrimination, increased violence, and trouble creating legal identities. These problems were often compounded by race and class.³ The often highly visible nature of changing one's gender presentation—and the accompanying discrimination—made openly participating in society incredibly difficult for trans and GNC people. This made it challenging for large communities of trans and GNC people to gather without fear of harassment or violence.

While communities of transgender people have always existed, they could be hard to find in the United States during the stifling 1950s. Outing oneself to another person was an act of trust, and betrayal of that trust could endanger an individual's life and

¹ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 95.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Susan Stryker, "Transgender Activism," *GLBTQ Social Sciences* (2007), 1.

well-being. As a result, many queer people experienced isolation, though some were still driven to find and create community. In 1952, an American trans woman named Christine Jorgensen caught the media's attention after undergoing sex-reassignment surgery.⁴ Despite stirring up some worry about the fate of traditional gender roles, "many transsexual individuals, particularly transsexual women, experienced a tremendous sense of relief."⁵ For many, Jorgensen's highly publicized story was a beacon of hope, proving to many trans people, often for the first time, they were not alone.

Louise Lawrence, a trans woman and author, also helped connect trans people by developing a correspondence network throughout Europe and the United States. Virginia Prince, cross-dresser and activist, used this network in 1952 and again in 1960 to distribute *Transvestia*, a publication covering cross-dressing and transgender issues and questions. The growing community that developed around *Transvestia* is considered one of the "first enduring transgender organization[s] in the United States."⁶ In addition to *Transvestia*, Prince founded the Hose and Heels Club in 1962, which primarily supported cross-dressers and later inspired the creation of similar organizations.⁷ Since Prince believed cross-dressing was only for heterosexual cis men, her organizations often excluded gay and bisexual cross-dressers as well as transsexual women. This made developing a broader, all-inclusive LGBTQ+ coalition difficult during the 1960s and 1970s since many people were excluded. As a result, people who were unwelcome in the Hose and Heels Club formed separate communities aligned more with their sexual identities instead of cross-dressing.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Genny Beemyn, "Transgender History in the United States," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* edited by Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Stryker, "Transgender Activism," 2.

⁸ Beemyn, "Transgender History," 19–20.

As communities like The Hose and Heels Club grew, language to describe the different experiences of one's gendered self also developed. In a 1963 *Transvestia* article titled "The Expression of Femininity in the Male," Prince discussed the difference between sex and gender and tried developing language to describe the different experiences she was writing about.⁹ Prior to and during the 1960s, many people described themselves as transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, or used their own descriptions. These terms described someone who changed their sex or someone who simply wore the clothes associated with another gender. Dr. John Oliven eventually coined the term *transgenderism* in a 1965 medical publication called *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology* to "indicate an 'urge for gender (sex) change.'"¹⁰ Later in 1969, Virginia Prince further popularized the term and used it to describe those who change their gender in society and not their sex.¹¹ These words were created and reinvented by queer people to better define their existence and understand themselves. While self-descriptive language created by queer individuals was positive and empowering, language created by non-queer people was often dehumanizing and inaccurate. The word "queer" itself was a slur used to insult homosexuals as early as 1894.¹² Though reclaimed by some members of the LGBTQ+ community, queer remains a divisive term, especially for those who still view it as an offensive slur or who do not identify with the label. Developing language enabled individuals to effectively share their experiences with one another, building solidarity and

⁹ Virginia Prince, "The Expression of Femininity in the Male," *Transvestia*, no. 24 (1963), 72–84.

¹⁰ KJ Rawson, "What's in a Word? The Challenges of 'Transgender,'" *The Conversation*, 27 May 2015, <<https://theconversation.com/whats-in-a-word-the-challenges-of-transgender-38633>> (3 Dec. 2019).

¹¹ The use of *transgender* has changed since 1969 and is now also used as an umbrella term to describe transsexuals, non-binary people, and some cross-dressers.

¹² Merrill Perlman, "How the Word 'Queer' was adopted by the LGBTQ Community," *Columbia Journalism Review*, 22 Jan. 2019, <https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/queer.php> (4 Dec. 2019).

the power to quite literally speak up as a growing, definable community.

As a result of Jorgensen's shared story and the use of correspondence networks, publications and communities like *Transvestia* and the Hose and Heels Club developed to foster growing queer communities where people could share their experiences, support each other, and develop language to express themselves more than before. The Hose and Heels Club, renamed the Society for the Second Self/Tri-Ess in the 1970s, still exists today and has multiple chapters across the nation.¹³

The precedents set by past organizations and the power derived from developing communities contributed to the growing availability of counseling and medical services. In 1966, Dr. Harry Benjamin, colleague of famous sexologist Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, published *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, which established the first major methodology for the study and treatment of trans people.¹⁴ Soon after, gender/sex clinics opened at Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, and other institutions, often funded by Reed Erickson, a wealthy trans man and a former patient of Dr. Benjamin. Despite the growing availability of medical services for trans people, many of them were turned away, especially trans men, due to overly strict standards for qualifying. Trans people also formed their own organizations like the San Francisco-based Conversion Our Goal (COG) in 1967, the National Transsexual Counseling Unit (NTCU) in 1968, and the New York City-based Labyrinth in 1968, which was the first known organization to focus on trans men.¹⁵ The development of counseling and medical services by and for queer people resulted in many folks moving to cities where these services were located, strengthening hubs of queer organizing throughout the United States.

¹³ Beemyn, *Transgender History*, 19–20.

¹⁴ “Mtf Transgender Activism in the Tenderloin and Beyond, 1966-1975,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 352–3.

¹⁵ Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 16–8.

An early example of queer organizing is the May 1959 riot at Cooper's Donuts, a Los Angeles doughnut shop. Cooper's Donuts was "an all-night coffee-house popular with drag queens and gay male hustlers, many of whom were Latino/a or African American."¹⁶ Police arrived at the doughnut shop one night and began harassing some of the drag queens about their gendered appearances. Tired of the routine harassment by the police, customers began fighting back, forcing the police officers out of the restaurant. Customers and sympathetic passersby continued to riot until police had to flee and return in larger numbers. This event became one of the first queer acts of militant resistance against police harassment and helped set a precedent for resistance against the police.

Another example of community self-defense that is central to the development of the transgender liberation movement is the August 1966 riot at Compton's Cafeteria. Many trans and queer people came to San Francisco's Tenderloin district seeking social and medical services specifically offered for trans and queer people. Local businesses like Compton's Cafeteria became popular gathering places for drag queens and trans folks, though they were not always welcome. One night, Compton's Cafeteria's management called the police to disperse and remove customers for allegedly loitering and hurting business. When the police arrived and began harassing people, fights ensued inside and outside the business, causing the police to retreat. The next day, people picketed Compton's Cafeteria for their discriminatory management practices and complicity in abusive policing.¹⁷ After the riot, activists collaborated with Dr. Benjamin, the Erickson Educational Foundation, religious ministers, and others to create a network for trans people that provided them with social, medical, and vocational services. Some of the opportunities included "city-funded health clinics that provided hormones and federally-funded

¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷ "Mtf Transgender Activism in the Tenderloin and Beyond, 1966–1975," 356.

work training programs,” which were intended to help sex workers (a disproportionate amount of whom were trans) “learn job skills to get off the streets.”¹⁸ The events at Cooper’s Donuts and Compton’s Cafeteria, made possible by growing communities of queer people, set examples for militant resistance to discrimination and persecution. Furthermore, these events helped to establish safer communities for queer people where they had a degree of collective bargaining power and greater freedom to be themselves.

The two riots, the publicity of Christine Jorgensen, the development of inclusive correspondence networks, and publications like *Transvestia* brought trans people into larger community networks where they could share personal experiences and develop a discourse that attempted to capture their lives and identities. New language created by queer people empowered them to better understand themselves and allowed nascent communities to speak up about who they were and what they needed. By creating and utilizing these new platforms and language, LGBTQ+ communities shared medical aid, financial aid, knowledge, and mutual validation, helping them grow powerful enough to begin fighting back against societal and state forces that violently oppressed them.

Stonewall and Its Consequences into the 1970s

As a result of more centralized queer communities and the events at Cooper’s Donuts and Compton’s Cafeteria, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed more militant and collective actions in response to police violence. The Stonewall Riots of 1969, one of the most well-known and largest collective acts of queer militant resistance, encapsulated this development in queer community organizing. The Stonewall Riots also inspired the creation of new gay and transgender liberation organizations, which would fuel the gay and transgender liberation movements throughout and beyond the 1970s.

¹⁸ Stryker, “Transgender Activism,” 2.

The Stonewall Inn was a mafia-run gay bar in New York that drew racially diverse queer patrons. It was routinely raided by the police, but mafia bribes limited the raids to when the bar was not busy. One night, the police began arresting customers, resulting in people taunting the police and protesting the arrests. Some folks resisted arrest while others threw rocks and bottles at the police, resulting in a full-fledged riot involving patrons, police, passersby, and neighbors. The police became overwhelmed and locked themselves inside the bar while the crowd outside tried to remove them. The arrival of the Tactical Patrol Force compounded the anger of the crowd, which escalated the fighting and violence.¹⁹ The conflict continued for multiple nights, showing the rest of the nation that queer people were no longer submitting to social and systemic mistreatment. The police officer who led the raid on the Stonewall Inn said: “For those of us in public morals, things were completely changed... Suddenly [LGBTQ+ people] were not submissive anymore.”²⁰ Previously, broader society saw queer people as weak and yielding to harassment and violence. However, growing communities and collective acts of resistance taught American society that queer people were no longer hiding nor quietly accepting oppression. This realization also changed dynamics within various LGBTQ+ communities as people grew increasingly proud and open about their identities and experiences.

Stonewall participants, some of whom were also involved in the women’s movement, civil rights movement, and anti-Vietnam War movement, began creating formal organizations to fight for LGBTQ+ rights. Within just a month of the Stonewall riots, numerous activist organizations were founded, including the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).²¹ These organizations served primarily to unite gay activists to conduct marches, protest against attacks, and provide support to

¹⁹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2017), 106–9.

²⁰ Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 22.

²¹ Ibid.

queer youths, as well as queer people experiencing homelessness and incarceration. However, some of these activist organizations were not always welcoming of trans people—so, trans folks began forming their own organizations.

To counteract their exclusion from gay/lesbian activist groups, trans and GNC activists formed organizations like the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), Transvestite and Transsexual Activist Organization (TAO), and the Queens' Liberation Front (QLF). Many of these organizations were established by important figures like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and Angela K. Douglas, all of whom were active in other social and political movements. Rivera, a Puerto Rican trans woman and Stonewall Riots participant who was shunned from the GLF and GAA, and Johnson, an African American trans woman and fellow Stonewall Riots participant, formed STAR in 1970 to take care of dispossessed queer youth in Manhattan.²² At STAR, Rivera and Johnson earned money through sex work while their “children” (i.e., STAR members) searched for food. STAR not only advocated for legal protections for gay and trans individuals, but it was also key in providing housing and personal care for unhoused queer youth. Rivera and Johnson acquired an apartment to create STAR House (similar to drag culture's houses or families) as a way of sheltering its members.²³ Although STAR only lasted for about three years, it inspired many similar projects in the following decades, contributing to the strength of the transgender liberation movement.²⁴

Angela K. Douglas, a trans woman and Los Angeles-based activist, was involved in the GLF but left due to transphobia within the organization.²⁵ In 1970 she formed TAO, which was “the first

²² Jessi Gan, “‘Still at the Back of the Bus’: Sylvia Rivera's Struggle,” *Centro Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 133.

²³ Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 21.

²⁴ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 111.

²⁵ Brendan Zachariah O'Donnell, “Definition and Redefinition: Alliance and Antagonism in Homosexual and Trans Communities in the U.S.” (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University, 2014), 69.

truly international grassroots transgender community organization, with a worldwide mailing list.” Through TAO, Douglas distributed issues of the *Moonshadow* and *Mirage* newsletters, which published collections of various art, political writings, and activist news.²⁶ TAO also conducted teach-ins with the Transvestite and Transsexual Social Organization (TSO) where members “spoke with hundreds of...students about transvestism and transsexualism.”²⁷ According to an article Douglas wrote in a 1970 issue of *Transvestia*, “TAO is basically designed for practicing, experienced tvs [transvestites] and transsexuals to eliminate much unnecessary discussion with people not so experienced. TSO is designed to help bring closet tvs out into the sunlight and to provide information about transvestism and transsexualism.”²⁸ Both STAR and TAO actively enabled transgender and GNC people’s ability to fight for their rights and educate people within and outside their communities. This style of outward-reaching community building helped increase allyship, further strengthening the trans and GNC liberation movement.

The QLF and Fantasia Fair were two more critical organizations that emerged from the early post-Stonewall era. The QLF was formed in 1970 by heterosexual cross-dresser Bunny Eisenhower and drag queen Lee Brewster in response to the erasure of drag and transgender people from the queer liberation narrative, particularly at the Christopher Street annual liberation march to commemorate and celebrate the Stonewall Riots. The QLF published a political magazine called *Drag Queen* that covered transgender topics in the United States and served as an informative newsletter.²⁹ It also lobbied for trans and GNC rights and protections, as well as worked with STAR and the GAA.

²⁶ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 112.

²⁷ Angela Douglas, “Transvestites & Transsexuals’ Teach-In,” *Transvestia* 11, no. 62 (1970): 47.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 111.

Fantasia Fair started in 1975 as a socializing and community building opportunity for cross-dressers, though it later grew to include a larger array of folks with diverse gender and sexual identities.³⁰ A 1977 ad for the Fair encouraged attendance by reminding readers, “The closet is a dark lonely miserable place to hide... Won’t you come out and join us?”³¹ This ad described what Fantasia Fair served as for many people: a safe place to be oneself and experience community. Inspired by Fantasia Fair’s success, new ideas for similar gatherings were created that were tailored to communities’ specific needs like communication workshops and events where people learned methods for transitioning, how to dress femme, and how to apply makeup.³² The creation of QLF and Fantasia Fair allowed stronger coalitions to form between drag queens, cross-dressers, transgender people, and transsexual people amidst their erasure from mainstream gay and lesbian liberation movements. These cross-community linkages forged in the early 1970s continued to strengthen trans and GNC communities and promoted solidarity among people of different identities, which proved difficult to replicate in the decade to come.

The gradual “coming out” of trans/GNC communities—Jorgensen’s public transition, *Transvestia*, early organizations like the Hose and Heels Club, and pre-Stonewall militant resistance—gave way to the creation of new transgender/GNC organizations like STAR, TAO, QLF, and Fantasia Fair. As these organizations materialized, they enhanced their ability to achieve their socio-political goals and increase their public visibility. Furthermore, they continued the trend of community growth inspired by the riots at Cooper’s Donuts, Compton’s Cafeteria, and the Stonewall Inn, while also developing platforms from which activists demanded changes to civil and medical treatment. Within this development, it is important to recognize the impact of the Stonewall Riots because

³⁰ Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 28.

³¹ “Fantasia Fair Ltd,” *Digital Reporter* 6, no. 24 (1977): 8.

³² Betty Ann Lind, “Some Thoughts on Dream, Fantasia Fair, and Other Events,” *Phoenix* 1, no. 1 (1981): 11–3.

they inspired a nationwide proliferation of queer organizations that worked to liberate their members from state and societal oppression through varying degrees of militant and legal action.

Despite the significant movement towards trans liberation through the 1960s and early 1970s, the road ahead proved difficult because of the growing divide between the trans/GNC and gay/lesbian liberation movements and attacks from trans-exclusionary radical feminists during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

Backlash Against the Trans and GNC Liberation Movement

During the 1970s, the rifts expanded between the transgender and gay liberation movements. Some trans and GNC people were excluded from the gay liberation movement because they were viewed as inimical toward gay men's and lesbians' social acceptance. Trans and GNC exclusion can also be linked to racism and classism since many of the members of the GAA were middle-class white gay men, and many trans and GNC people were people of lower incomes, people of color, or both.³³ Another reason for the rift between the two movements was the belief that trans women were predatory men pretending to be women and therefore stealing benefits from "real" (i.e., cis) women. According to Genny Beemyn, "one area of agreement between the two groups [lesbian and gay activist organizations] was their rejection of transgender people."³⁴ The 1950s and 1960s saw transgender and gay politics often intersecting and collaborating with each other. Yet the 1970s "represented a watershed moment...when the transgender political movement lost its alliances with gay and feminist communities in ways that did not begin to be repaired until the early 1990s and that, in many ways, have yet to be fully overcome."³⁵ Due to this fractionalization, much of the 1970s was especially difficult for transgender activism.

³³ Beemyn, "Transgender History," 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁵ Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, 118.

A root cause behind trans exclusion from the mainstream gay liberation movement was the difference in people's ability to conform to the gender binary. While many cisgender gay men and lesbians lived within society's expectation of gender expression and gender presentation, the often highly visible nature of transgender people transitioning or GNC people cross-dressing made it difficult for them to be viewed as acceptable in mainstream society. Simply put, gender normative cis gay men and lesbians could pass while some trans and GNC people could not, making them more susceptible to discrimination. During the early 1970s, great emphasis was placed on remaining within one's prescribed gender role, evident in the popularity of the masculine "castro clone" look in gay culture.³⁶ Due to the emphasis on maintaining a "cis look," many gay liberation activists viewed transgender and GNC people as detrimental to gay liberations' appeal to mainstream society.³⁷ By reinforcing heterosexual and cisgender norms, gay liberationists alienated trans and GNC folks and minimized LGBTQ+ people's ability to socialize, organize, and mobilize as a unified community.

In addition to the issues regarding gender norms, "homosexuality was removed from the *DSM* [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*] in 1973," which meant that homosexuality was no longer considered a mental illness.³⁸ While a great victory for the gay liberation movement, transgender people did not experience similar success. The *DSM* pathologized trans people by including Gender Identity Disorder as a mental illness, which further stigmatized trans people and increased restrictions on who could receive medical treatments like hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries.³⁹ The gay liberation movement's increased social acceptance widened the gap between the transgender/GNC and gay liberation movements. As a result of

³⁶ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 120.

³⁷ "Gay Power," *Gay Power* 1, no. 19 (1970): 6.

³⁸ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 122.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

the disparities in acceptance, the rifts between these two communities continued to grow throughout the 1970s.

The transgender liberation movement also faced backlash from many second-wave feminists and lesbian feminists. Many feminists, conservative and liberal, claimed people who transitioned reinforced oppressive gender roles. Many trans women were also viewed as “male infiltrators” and even rapists. Beth Elliot, a trans lesbian, was repeatedly harassed and kicked out of feminist conferences for being trans and thus deemed unwelcome in women’s spaces.⁴⁰ Many trans men and butch lesbians were also criticized by radical feminists for supposedly “mimicking heterosexuality” and attempting to escape female gender oppression.⁴¹ In 1979, Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* accused trans women of being rapists and even attempted to tie transsexuality to Nazism. This text influenced many feminists to see trans people as enemies of women’s liberation and caused many gender clinics to increase restrictions on prospective patients or to simply shut down.⁴² As a result of feminist circles’ animosity toward and unjust stereotyping of transgender and GNC people, the transgender/GNC liberation movement received little help from the second-wave feminist movement and was further weakened and isolated by their attacks.

The gradual erasure of transgender people from Stonewall, discriminatory gay/lesbian organizations, and the demonization of trans identities deeply hurt the trans/GNC liberation movement, forcing trans and GNC activists of the 1970s to primarily rely on their own communities. However, despite being cut off from potential allies like the gay liberation movement and second-wave feminism, the transgender liberation movement was able to still operate thanks to the momentum of the community organizing and collective action of the 1960s and 1970s.

⁴⁰ Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 23.

⁴¹ O’Donnell, “Definition and Redefinition,” 73.

⁴² Beemyn, “Transgender History,” 24–5.

The Modern-Day Legacy of the 1960s and 1970s Movement

The transgender and GNC liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s informed future activists' abilities to garner support and mainstream attention for trans/GNC issues. It is important however, to note that, due to the difficulties of the 1970s and 1980s, many organizations were limited to local grassroots funding and support. Despite this limitation, the widespread availability of the Internet in the 1990s enabled previously scattered communities to easily organize, share information, and maintain a public and accessible platform, which ultimately aided the formation of a more cohesive national transgender movement.⁴³ By combining foundational transgender and GNC communities with the connectivity of the Internet, the trans and GNC liberation movement experienced a drastic boost in power and opportunity. This boost involved the genesis of new lobbying and rights organizations, better public representation, and the development of queer theory at academic conferences.

Many organizations benefited from the Internet because it became easier to access information about different activist groups, events, and communities. Organizations like Queer Nation and Transgender Nation came to prominence during the late 1980s and 1990s as they worked to challenge lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities to be more inclusive of transgender people, illustrated by adding the "T" in LGBT and LGBT+.⁴⁴ The American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), later renamed Gender Education Association (GEA), formed in 1992 to provide online educational resources and to fight against the pathologizing of trans people.⁴⁵ A powerful national-level organization called the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC) was founded to lobby for transgender rights in Washington.⁴⁶ During this time, intersex people also spoke out and developed an intersex political

⁴³ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 153.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

movement alongside the transgender movement. One famous intersex organization is the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), which worked to reform the ways intersex people are treated by the medical community.⁴⁷ Transgender Nation, GEA, Gender PAC, and ISNA are only some of the many influential transgender and intersex rights organizations that emerged from the foundations, communities, and precedents developed in the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to new organizations, the transgender movement gained broader public support after the 1980s AIDS crisis, which disproportionately affected queer communities, particularly queer communities of color. The effects of the AIDS epidemic on multiple communities “required gay liberation politics and feminist public health activism to take transgender issues far more seriously than they had in the past.”⁴⁸ These shifts promoted trans-inclusive AIDS activism, more inclusive medical services, better public representation of trans people and, more broadly, a revival in trans activism.⁴⁹

Another reason the transgender movement was taken more seriously by queer communities and the wider public was the emergence of scholarly work and academic departments dedicated to transgender studies. In 1994, the Queer Studies Conference—one of the first gatherings of transgender scholars—was held. In 1995, the First International Conference on Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender was held, “which brought the new wave of transgender scholarship into face-to-face engagement with old-school researchers.”⁵⁰ These first conferences and their participants pioneered the interdisciplinary field of transgender studies at numerous universities and research institutions so that future scholars could develop, research, and discuss what would eventually be known as “queer theory.” In addition to

⁴⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁹ O’Donnell, “Definition and Redefinition,” 113.

⁵⁰ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 181.

developments in gender theory, many queer historians began researching trans and GNC history worldwide, uncovering queer existence and legacies that extended thousands of years. This vital research helped establish queer presence on an international level and proved that queer identities were not just a product of modern civilization. Overall, the contribution of queer theorists and historians contributed to the trans and GNC communities by documenting and establishing their past, while also attempting to understand and tie together the many multifaceted identities throughout the world.

Thanks to the organizational, social, and academic development during the late 1980s and the 1990s, there were many tangible victories for trans and GNC rights. Successful legal activism made it easier to update one's legal identity papers in places like Colorado, California, Iowa, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Anti-discrimination protections for transgender people were also implemented in municipalities such as Minneapolis and Seattle.⁵¹ In addition to numerous legal battles (many of which ended in victories), Gender Identity Disorder was officially removed from the latest version of the *DSM* in 2013, which witnessed the depathologizing of transgender identities and a growing de-stigmatization of transgender people.⁵²

Without the organizing, community building, and grassroots activism of transgender and GNC people of the 1960s and 1970s, there would not be such a strong foundation for the activism of the 1980s and 1990s. While the 1990s yielded a great number of transgender rights victories, it was the community activism and discussions that took place in the 1960s and 1970s that enabled these victories and let the nation, and the world, know that the transgender and GNC community would not remain in the closet.

⁵¹ Ibid., 152.

⁵² Ibid., 195.

Conclusion

Transgender and GNC people's community building and collective actions during the 1960s and 1970s forged strong foundations for the success of future trans activism. From developing small, secretive communities in the early 1960s, to creating language to describe their experiences, to joining in collective action against police violence, transgender and GNC people learned they were not alone in the world. In the post-Stonewall era, conflict developed between the transgender and gay liberation movement, causing the transgender and GNC movement to suffer from isolation. Despite this, the transgender and GNC community continued to support each other through support groups that maintained interconnectedness and educated people on transgender issues. This collective resilience, well-characterized by leaders like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and Angela K. Douglas, allowed the transgender and GNC community to make it through the politically contentious 1970s and 1980s before experiencing a resurgence of transgender activism in the 1990s. Based on the community-built movement of earlier decades, the 1990s transgender movement experienced numerous legal successes, academic developments, and cultural growth.

In the twenty-first century, the trans liberation movement has received much more mainstream support, both inside and outside of the LGBTQ+ community, though people are still fighting for all transgender and GNC people's rights to openly live as themselves. Under the Obama administration, numerous advances benefitted the transgender community, including different requirements for updating identity documents, anti-discrimination regulations for federal employment, and the ability for trans people to serve openly in the military.⁵³ Unfortunately, the Trump administration reversed this ruling, effectively barring openly trans people from joining the military.⁵⁴ Additionally, many trans and GNC people

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵⁴ Andrew Chung and Jonathan Stempel, "U.S. Court Lets Trump Transgender Military Ban Stand, Orders New Review," *Reuters*, 14 June 2019,

still face violent attacks, discrimination, and demonization. These injustices endanger many trans and GNC folks, especially trans women of color.

Current research from the UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute estimates about half of one percent of the US adult population is transgender. This is about 1.5 million adults. An estimate from 2016 states that about 1.7 percent of youth are transgender or GNC.⁵⁵ In a 2015 survey of 27,715 people, about forty percent of the respondents who are out to their families endured rejection and about thirty-nine percent had attempted suicide. This rate is about ten times the rate of the general population.⁵⁶ Many of these numbers are so high because of how families and society treat these individuals. Relatedly, trans people are also at higher risks for experiencing homelessness, violence, and incarceration.⁵⁷ These statistics are increased when considering trans people of color and trans people with lower incomes. The trans liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s provided a strong foundation for future organizing, and its legacy can teach us quite a lot about how to organize in today's conditions. Today, trans and GNC communities still share educational resources, medical resources, and provide one another safer spaces to be themselves. Legal and queer rights organizations also lobby for transgender legal protections in the workplace, medical fields, and at home. Despite the movements towards trans liberation over the decades, there is still much to be done to achieve justice for transgender and GNC people everywhere and effectively honor their activist legacy.

<<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-transgender/us-court-lets-trump-transgender-military-ban-stand-orders-new-review-idUSKCN1TF1ZM>> (4 Dec. 2019).

⁵⁵ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 198.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

Author Bio:

Nick Ellis is a senior majoring in Mechanical Engineering with a History minor. He enjoys studying Soviet history and LGBTQ+ history.