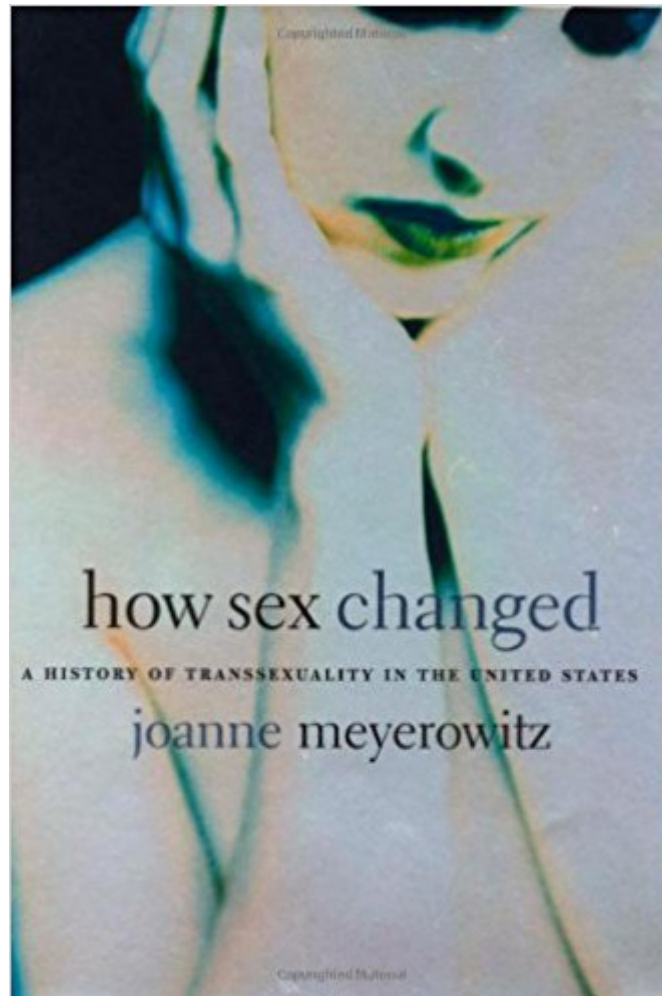




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# How Sex Changed: A History Of Transsexuality In The United States



## Synopsis

How Sex Changed is a fascinating social, cultural, and medical history of transsexuality in the United States. Joanne Meyerowitz tells a powerful human story about people who had a deep and unshakable desire to transform their bodily sex. In the last century when many challenged the social categories and hierarchies of race, class, and gender, transsexuals questioned biological sex itself, the category that seemed most fundamental and fixed of all. From early twentieth-century sex experiments in Europe, to the saga of Christine Jorgensen, whose sex-change surgery made headlines in 1952, to today's growing transgender movement, Meyerowitz gives us the first serious history of transsexuality. She focuses on the stories of transsexual men and women themselves, as well as a large supporting cast of doctors, scientists, journalists, lawyers, judges, feminists, and gay liberationists, as they debated the big questions of medical ethics, nature versus nurture, self and society, and the scope of human rights. In this story of transsexuality, Meyerowitz shows how new definitions of sex circulated in popular culture, science, medicine, and the law, and she elucidates the tidal shifts in our social, moral, and medical beliefs over the twentieth century, away from sex as an evident biological certainty and toward an understanding of sex as something malleable and complex. How Sex Changed is an intimate history that illuminates the very changes that shape our understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When ex-GI George Jorgensen changed his sex and took on a new identity as Christine in 1952, the lurid journalism that followed focused on questions of Jorgensen's genitals, her sexual performance and her sexual availability set the tone for how U.S. media understood and discussed

transsexuality. So argues Meyerowitz, professor of history at the Indiana University, at the beginning of this first complete history of American transsexualism. Carefully tracing the next 50 years of science and public attitudes surrounding transsexuality, Meyerowitz charts a number of fascinating historical moments: the complicated relationship between the gay rights movement and transsexuals in the mid-'60s; the deeply negative response that transsexuals had to Gore Vidal's Myra Breckenridge (Jorgensen thought of suing him); the complex battles to grant transsexuals a different legal sexual identity; how transsexuality became "sexy" through the careers of performers such as Coccinelle. While the book is scholarly in orientation, Meyerowitz's easy, readable style makes her thorough research in a wide range of fields accessible and enjoyable, even when she is detailing such subjects as internecine fighting among psychiatrists over the merits of sex-change operations. Meyerowitz thinks we have a much broader appreciation of gender and much more tolerance of gender variance these days, but she also sees that media visibility is not entirely positive, since most portrayals show transgender people as "freaks" or comic oddballs. On the whole, the book is an invaluable introduction to how ideas about gender and sexuality have evolved. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Christine Jorgenson wasn't the first person to undergo sex-change surgery, but her media-savvy personality and glamorous looks made her a household name in the 1950s. Historian Meyerowitz chronicles the saga of transsexuals themselves, including their struggles for access to sex transformation and their continued problems with discrimination both from the conservative Right and from gays and feminists who saw them as "infiltrators." She also shows how the phenomenon of transsexuality led physicians and academics to make elaborate distinctions between gender and sex and to ponder the origins of both in nature and nurture and how these ideas slowly entered common discourse. Although this book is accessibly written and is the first book to treat transsexuality exclusively, the narrowness of the subjects recommends it primarily for academic and research libraries. Smaller public libraries need a less specialized text such as John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. Mary Ann Hughes, Neill P.L., Pullman, WA Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I will finish my own MTF transition in less than three weeks, but as I have undergone this amazing process, I got very curious about the people who went before me. This book was the answer to

most of my questions. I realize that I owe the people in this book a huge debt which I can never repay, so let me try by saying that this book is an amazing piece of history. It is very well written and, while at times a little repetetive, puts the history of transexuality clearly in perspective. Using Christine Jorgenson as an anchor, the author then lays out very clearly what came before and and what followed. I was particularly amused at some of the comments about the sixties; "The doctors didn't trust the patients, and the patients didn't trust the doctors"! Fortunately that isn't the case anymore. If you are part of the transexual community or merely curious, give this a try. An excellent look at a piece of history seldom touched on by others, this is very well done and well worth a read.

Interesting, but not the easiest to follow. Makes some questionable decisions stylistically, and organizationally. Content is great. It's a history of Transsexuals, which is defined in the book as people who want a sex change operation.

This book is very well researched and sourced. If you want a history of transsexuality then this is your book. But it is tough to read, kind of dry, like reading the dictionary or something.

I knew that Christine Jorgenson was not the first nor the only "sex change" but only the most well known. This book is a fascinating account of the heartbreaking struggles that transsexuals faced in the early and mid 20th century to find medical treatment. The research is amazing, I found the stories of the early surgeons to be particularly interesting, often they weren't really that interested in helping patients, they just wanted to show their bravado at doing technically difficult surgeries that other surgeons were afraid to take on. The stories of the early transitioners are also thoroughly covered. Just a great book.

This book is dated now, but it does give a good overview of the history of how transsexuals have been treated in this country during the last century

A very well written and informative book. A lot of info on Christine Jorgensen and the earlier doctors that fought for the rights of Transsexuals. Also, it was nice to read a more "up-to-date" book on the subject too (copyright 2002). The only negative was that some info was overly repetitive and was a little jumpy in a historical time line. But, do not let that stop you from reading it, I highly recommend this book.

Well researched and annotated this is a great source if you want to understand how we got to where we are today

This is another book that should be on every Trans\* persons book shelf. Couple this with Strikers book on trans\* history and you will have a very good reference set.

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