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Christine Jorgensen and the Media: Identity Politics in the Early 1950s Press

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Christine Jorgensen's name was splashed across numerous headlines throughout the early 1950s. She had done the seemingly impossible: she had altered her sex, something that was supposed to be as immutable as it was unthinkable. Consequently, by the end of 1952 her "obscure personal triumph" was transformed "into mass media sensation," according to historian Joanne Meyerowitz. She thus assumed a celebrity status and "raised questions that resonated with force in the 1950s," questions that are still relevant: "who is male and who is female, and why do we care?"¹

As stated by historian Susan Stryker, Jorgensen generated "millions of words of press coverage" merely because she was a transgender person.² Despite the media's fascination with and sometimes celebratory coverage of Jorgensen, however, her portrayal in the press was often marked by skepticism and ambivalence. News outlets, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, seemingly struggled with whether or not they accepted her identity as a woman. These contradictory attitudes are particularly evident when considering the great feat it was that Jorgensen was able to perform in the entertainment capital that is and was Las Vegas in November 1953, and that she managed to earn excellent reviews.³ Jorgensen's turn to show business was perhaps a way for her to salvage her reputation in the eyes of the press.

Christine Jorgensen rose to fame in the 1950s for a multitude of reasons. First and foremost, the climate of the 1950s was not simply a decade of postwar conformity. Meyerowitz argued that Jorgensen "embodied tensions central to the postwar culture."⁴ During World War II, women had taken on jobs and responsibilities traditionally reserved for men, something which

¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1-2.

² Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 25.

³ Dennis McBride, from *Out of the Neon Closet: Queer Community in the Silver State*, forthcoming.

⁴ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 67.

bothered many observers.⁵ Consequently, “millions of women... [were] being steered back toward feminine domesticity,” while “millions of demobilized military men” tried to readjust to “civilian social order,” according to Stryker. Thus, gender roles and what it was to be a man or woman “were very much up for debate.”⁶ Although Meyerowitz argued that there was “an attempt to reestablish gender,” with many critical authors demanding a return to traditional gender roles, Jorgensen’s story undermined such efforts.⁷ Therefore, gender roles were in flux, with Jorgensen serving as a figurehead for such strain on the home front.

Furthermore, Meyerowitz claimed that Jorgensen’s story was one “of individual striving, success, and upward mobility,” given special significance because her claim to a new identity made her an antithesis to the Cold War-inspired myth “of conformist imperatives in ‘totalitarian’ societies.” In other words, Jorgensen had defied biology and social norms by challenging “the demands that she conform to... masculinity.”⁸ Hers was a different story of individual success, but it was still a tale of self-determination and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Making Waves Before Jorgensen

Christine Jorgensen was hardly the first person in the press who questioned a binary system of gender. For example, in 1912, *The Macon [Georgia] Daily Telegraph* published an article that proclaimed, “German Baron is Now Countess, Rules Court.” This article gives insight into the early fascination that existed with what was merely labeled “transvestism,” in which a man “wears female clothing,” while a woman desires to wear male attire. The article continued to cite “Nero, Joan of Arc, Empress Elizabeth of Russia, Murray Hall, [and] Rosa Bonheur” as “[w]ell-[k]nown [e]xamples of [t]ransvestism,” apparently revealing an interest in – and

⁵ Meyerowitz, “Transforming Sex: Christine Jorgensen in the Postwar U.S.,” *OAH Magazine of History* 20 (March 2006), 16-20, JSTOR, 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162028> (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁶ Stryker, 48.

⁷ Meyerowitz, “Transforming Sex,” 19.

⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 67.

knowledge of – historical figures who deviated from their assigned genders. However, this fascination did not equal understanding. The newly-recognized Countess was “[a] pretty young woman” who was dismissively regarded as “[j]ust a transvestite” after she gave “a stinging Berlin retort” to a man who wanted to assist her. Thus, the article portrayed the Countess in a humorous light, focusing on aspects about her that reflected her masculinity, as opposed to her femininity. The article cited Dr. Magnus Hirschfield, the renowned founder of sexology, and his assessment of the Countess. Hirschfield noted that “[t]ransvestism... is common,” marked by “an instinctive desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex.”⁹ Thus, Hirschfield made the early argument that such cases were natural and instinctive.

Another example of the press’s fascination with gender nonconforming people before Christine Jorgensen became a household name is apparent in the 1937 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Montana Girl Becomes Man by Sex Change and Weds,” in which “a sex transformation had occurred to make the husband a male.” The article used masculine pronouns throughout, revealing an acceptance of the man’s identity, though the taboo nature of such a phenomenon was acknowledged: the matter was being investigated by a Sheriff Palagi.¹⁰ Five years later, the 1941 *Los Angeles Times* article “Sex Change Victim Wed” used striking language to discuss the “metamorphosis” of Barbara Anne Richards, “who believed herself to be a male until recently.” The headline utilized the strong word “victim” to seemingly display that a sort of crime against

⁹ “German Baron is Now Countess, Rules Court: Has Official Permission to be a ‘Transvestite,’” *The Macon Daily Telegraph*, August 11, 1912, America’s Historical Newspapers, 8, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p_product=EANX&p_action=timeframes&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=V64J55PRMTMzMjA0NjQ2OC41MDMxOTg6MToxNDoxMzEuMjE2LjE2Mi40MA&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=EANX& (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹⁰ “Montana Girl Becomes Man by Sex Change and Weds,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), March 6, 1937, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/164688987?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

nature had occurred, robbing a man of his masculinity. However, it was even more startling to the press that Richards eloped with a woman, signifying a deep discomfort with homosexuality.¹¹ A later article about Richards was even less flattering in regards to her “[s]ex [c]hange [c]ase,” with the presiding judge Emmet H. Wilson of the Superior Court demanding proof that Richards “will stick to the *Ladies’ Home Journal* instead of the *Esquire* ‘she’ read when she fancied she was a man” before he granted her a “legal change of name.”¹²

Thus, it is clear that these prior sex changes were hardly news to the press. It is noteworthy, however, that none of these figures were able to generate the same amount of headlines that Christine Jorgensen did and, when they did make the news, they were met with less-than-subtle disapproval. Jorgensen, on the other hand, “made *sex change* a household term” in the 1950s, according to Meyerowitz.¹³ As Stryker pointed out, “the procedures she underwent in Copenhagen” were legal and almost routine, yet she became an “instant and worldwide celebrity” and “the most written-about topic in the media” during a year that included news about hydrogen bomb testing and the Korean War.¹⁴ What was it about Jorgensen, and the 1950s, that allowed her to rise to fame?

From Anonymity to Fame

Christine Jorgensen was born George Jorgensen in the Bronx in 1926.¹⁵ As a child, Jorgensen recalled her “feminine qualities,” noting that it was her sister Dorothy “who later

¹¹ “Sex Change Victim Wed: Angeleno Undergoing Metamorphosis Admits Ceremony in Arizona,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), July 4, 1941, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), A2, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/165203901?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹² “Action in Sex Change Case Delayed by Superior Court: Judge Withholds Authorization to Alter Name From Man's to Woman's Until Further Inquiries,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), August 13, 1941, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), A12, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/165246930?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹³ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 51.

¹⁴ Stryker, 47.

¹⁵ Ibid.

analyzed [her] girlish ways.”¹⁶ As she grew older, Jorgensen “found that the longer [she] lived in the male role of George,” the more her mental anguish accumulated.¹⁷ According to Stryker, while Jorgensen had served in the military and was unsuccessfully pursuing photography and film editing, she discovered in 1949 “that hormonal and surgical ‘sex change’ was possible – in Europe.”¹⁸

On December 1, 1952, the *New York Daily News* released a front-page story with the headline, “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty,” igniting the media firestorm centering on Christine Jorgensen. Although the article was written by the reporter Ben White, “how [he] uncovered the story is still not clear,” according to Meyerowitz. Although some newspapers declared that a friend of White’s told him about Jorgensen, there is also speculation that Jorgensen told the media herself, as historian Vern Bullough, who knew Jorgensen, confirmed.¹⁹ Jorgensen, however, denied this, claiming that as she stared at the coverage, she “became fully aware of the magnitude of [her] betrayal.”²⁰ Regardless, her story was not one that would be easily forgotten.

Christine Jorgensen’s personal characteristics helped propel the frenzy of media coverage surrounding her. She was touted as a former G.I. who had served in World War II before being honorably discharged, making her a source of patriotic pride.²¹ This, however, was incorrect – as Jorgensen herself noted, she “entered the service after the war ended.”²² Regardless, this coverage attests to the popularity of the “soldier’s story,” which, according to historian David Serlin, “never really disappeared from the cultural imagination” and was thus revered as national

¹⁶ Christine Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 1, *The American Weekly*, February 15, 1953, 7.

¹⁷ Christine Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 3, *The American Weekly*, March 1, 1953, 15.

¹⁸ Stryker, 47.

¹⁹ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 62.

²⁰ Christine Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000), 133.

²¹ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 2, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1987), A7.
<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178456970?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

²² Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 245.

mythology.²³ Indeed, the 1952 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article “Parents Praise Bravery” likened Jorgensen’s transition to a heroic, soldier-like feat: Jorgensen’s father declared that his daughter “deserve[d] an award higher than the congressional medal of honor” for volunteering “to undergo... guinea pig treatment.”²⁴ The language used in this article seemingly paralleled popular news stories of soldiers returning home from war.²⁵ Her transition was apparently viewed as a feat as heroic as her reported service in World War II.

Furthermore, because of the recent scrutiny toward gay men and lesbians serving in the military during World War II, some believed that a potential solution to this supposed problem was changing one's gender.²⁶ In other words, perhaps Jorgensen was believed to be a hero for taking proactive steps to rid herself of homosexuality. Thus, the press gushed about Jorgensen’s bravery and determination, emphasizing her G.I. status to draw parallels between her courage on and off the battlefield. As Serlin argued, in the age of McCarthyism, her story was widely circulated because she was linked with “nationalistic values and a modern American identity.”²⁷

Christine Jorgensen’s transformation also made her a figurehead for American scientific progress. For example, the abovementioned “Parents Praise Bravery” article also noted that Jorgensen’s determination, combined “with the help of medical science,” made her a woman.²⁸ In other words, ultimately it was scientific progress that was credited for her success. According to Stryker, Jorgensen represented “the mid-twentieth-century awe for scientific technology,” technology which could now seemingly “turn a man into a woman.”²⁹ As a matter of fact, two days after Jorgensen’s appearance in the media spotlight, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article

²³ David Harley Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 165.

²⁴ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

²⁵ Serlin, 165.

²⁶ Stryker, 48.

²⁷ Serlin, 162.

²⁸ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

²⁹ Stryker, 47.

that declared, “Sex Change Isn’t Too Rare, Doctors Assert.” It went on to describe “that 10 similar cases presently are being treated in one New York hospital.”³⁰ *Newsweek*, a widely circulating news magazine, mentioned that “Danish tabloids ate [Jorgensen’s transition] up... only for three days,” largely because “the ‘transformation’ into a woman” by artist Lily Erbe had been covered in the 1920’s. Furthermore, the magazine argued that “the [Jorgensen] story was plugged for all (and perhaps more than) it was worth” in the United States, despite the fact that “doctors explained that the case was no great medical phenomenon.”³¹ In other words, Jorgensen’s case – and the spread of such groundbreaking technology – was hardly that uncommon, especially in Denmark. However, the coverage of Jorgensen raged on in the U.S.

Due to the fact that Jorgensen was a United States citizen, she was also a source of national pride for a reason other than her G.I. status. According to Stryker, the U.S. “had risen to a new level of international... importance” after WWII, and because Jorgensen was an American who was believed to have fought in the War, she was seen not only as the beneficiary of such science, but as a contribution to her country.³² For example, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that Jorgensen was “[a]n American man who became a woman,” not simply a man who took steps to become a woman.³³ Thus, Jorgensen’s transition was widely touted by the American press in part because she was a United States citizen.

Christine Jorgensen’s classy appearance, refined mannerisms, and heterosexuality also made her a marketable media target. Jorgensen was a prototype of 1950s sophisticated beauty

³⁰ “Cases Being Treated: Sex Change Isn’t Too Rare, Doctors Assert,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), December 3, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), 26, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166409630?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

³¹ “Christine and the News,” *Newsweek*, December 15, 1952, 64.

³² Stryker, 47.

³³ “Very Glad She’s a Woman, Says Blonde Ex-Man: May Write a Book About Her Sex Change,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 2, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), A7, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178456916?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

and sex appeal: as argued by Meyerowitz, she epitomized “white feminine glamour,” bearing a resemblance to actresses Grace Kelly and Deborah Kerr.³⁴ There was an emphasis on her appearance, such as the fact that she was a twenty-six-year-old, “five foot 7 inch blonde, 125 pounds, with a melodious, rather deep alto voice,” according to a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article.³⁵ She was known for her glamorous fashion sense, with one article reporting on her “[d]ark blue tailored outfit... pearl cluster brooch, long dark gloves, high heeled blue suede shoes and... perfume.”³⁶ Thus, Jorgensen crafted her image after feminine archetypes, “structuring the way she dressed and what she said in public” to best suit her position “[a]s a media star,” as Serlin argued.³⁷ Unsurprisingly, “[a]t the beginning the journalists’ key concern” was with Jorgensen’s physical appearance and whether or not she “looked and sounded like a woman,” according to Meyerowitz.³⁸ Although she rose to the occasion in the eyes of many journalists, Jorgensen’s heterosexuality made her especially sought-after.

The homosexuality taboo was very much alive during the 1950s. As mentioned previously, there were concerns about gay men and lesbians in the military during WWII, and some believed that transformations like Jorgensen’s were a cure of sorts.³⁹ Seemingly as a result of these beliefs, the media pounced at the opportunity to parade Jorgensen’s rumored romance with Sergeant Bill Calhoun. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, for example, reported Calhoun’s infatuation with Jorgensen: “[s]he’s got a personality that’s hard to beat... and best figure of any girl I ever met.” However, the same article reported that Calhoun had received “a ribbing from

³⁴ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 62.

³⁵ “Very Glad She’s a Woman, Says Blonde Ex-Man,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

³⁶ “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 12, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 14, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178491182?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

³⁷ Serlin, 175.

³⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 63.

³⁹ Stryker, 48.

the boys on the base” for his involvement with Jorgensen, presumably because Jorgensen had been a man at one point.⁴⁰ This treatment occurred despite the press’s outward celebration of her womanhood, noting the pervasiveness of homophobia in the 1950s.

Another article detailed Jorgensen’s hope to “get married if the right person came along,” linking the story to Calhoun once again.⁴¹ Thus, the press widely espoused Jorgensen’s heterosexuality, though she later discredited the romance as being a fabrication by the press; according to Jorgensen, she “had dinner with [Calhoun] on one occasion,” a meeting that was “sociable, pleasant, and impersonal.”⁴² As pointed out by Serlin, Jorgensen also took great steps to distance herself from her birth sex, with “the perpetual performance of her femininity” partly serving as “material proof of... redemption from her former life as a man.”⁴³ Furthermore, according to Jorgensen’s autobiography, homosexuality “was a thing deeply alien” to her and in contrast with her religious and moral beliefs prior to her transition.⁴⁴ In the article “Parents Praise Bravery,” Jorgensen’s mother reassured the public that Christine had been a “normal” boy, because “he dated girls.”⁴⁵ In other words, Jorgensen and her family worked to separate her from homosexuality, while the press diligently emphasized her heterosexuality.

An Image Tarnished

Although Christine Jorgensen did experience a surge of positive press coverage, it is important to analyze the language used in early articles about her. Such language arguably

⁴⁰ “U. S. Sergeant Calls Ex-Boy ‘Girl Friend,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 5, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178375647?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁴¹ “Woman Who was Man Admits She Hopes to Marry,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 6, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 11, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178476323?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁴² Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 144-145.

⁴³ Serlin, 183.

⁴⁴ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 33.

⁴⁵ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

precipitated the trend of sullyng her image, for it reveals the press's early skepticism and ambivalence toward her identity as woman. Jorgensen herself referred to the onslaught of press coverage as "[c]ruel limelight,"⁴⁶ noting that her family had "been victimized and courted by an occasionally friendly and sometimes threatening press."⁴⁷ Her use of the phrase 'occasionally friendly' is telling because it suggests that, despite the seemingly benevolent press coverage Jorgensen received early on, the motives behind the press were perhaps not so benign.

Indeed, many of the headlines generated about Christine were sensationalistic, with the press soliciting "public interest in order to sell newspapers and magazines," as Meyerowitz argued.⁴⁸ For example, a December 1, 1952 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article ran the headline, "Surgery Makes Him a Woman, Ex-GI Writes." The article used masculine pronouns and references throughout, referring to Jorgensen as "him," "George," and "son."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the title suggested disbelief that Jorgensen was really a woman; by including the afterthought of "Ex-GI Writes" in the headline, the article insinuated that the transformation was an implausible claim.

The next day, however, the same newspaper ran an article espousing Jorgensen's courage and provided an expert's testimony regarding the difference between "pseudo-hermaphrodites" and "true hermaphrodites," who "[have] sex glands of both male and female."⁵⁰ According to Meyerowitz, this article represents reporters' consultations of doctors "[a]s soon as the... story broke," in which most physicians believed Jorgensen to be "a pseudo-hermaphrodite (with

⁴⁶ Jorgensen, "The Story of My Life," part 1, *The American Weekly*, 7.

⁴⁷ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 152.

⁴⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 66.

⁴⁹ "Surgery Makes Him a Woman," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 1, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178426186?accountid=3611>, (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁵⁰ "Parents Praise Bravery," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

masculine genitals but female organs inside).”⁵¹ For example, the weekly news magazine *Quick*, in a December 15, 1952 article titled “Lost Sex,” cited the testimony of a “gland expert,” who ruled that Jorgensen was a “pseudo-hermaphrodite” who “can now have sexual relations, but can’t be a mother.”⁵² Thus, reports such as these preceded later coverage that claimed “Jorgensen was not actually a *real* woman,” but a mentally ill transvestite, due to her lack of “a vagina, a menstrual cycle, or productive ovaries,” as claimed by Serlin.⁵³

Additionally, many articles concerning Jorgensen pertained to her vanished maleness. For example, “Blonde Ex-Man,”⁵⁴ “Ex-Boy,”⁵⁵ “Ex-GI,”⁵⁶ and “Man-Turned-Woman”⁵⁷ were variations of some of the headlines Christine Jorgensen generated. By associating Jorgensen’s transition with lost masculinity, these articles were hardly celebratory and instead bore negative connotations associated with a forfeited masculine identity, as opposed to newfound femininity.

Language aside, it is also important to take note of what words were confined to quotation marks in the headlines about Jorgensen. The *New York Times*’ coverage of Jorgensen’s transition ran the headline, “Bronx ‘Boy’ is Now a Girl.”⁵⁸ In other words, the state of Jorgensen’s boyhood was debatable, whereas her identity as a girl did not need to be qualified. Approving of the *New York Times*’ coverage, Jorgensen later commended the newspaper for

⁵¹ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 69.

⁵² “Health: The Lost Sex,” *Quick Magazine*, December 15, 1952, <http://www.christinejorgensen.org> (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁵³ Serlin, 162.

⁵⁴ “Very Glad She’s a Woman, Says Blonde Ex-Man,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

⁵⁵ “U. S. Sergeant Calls Ex-Boy ‘Girl Friend’,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, 1.

⁵⁶ “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, 14.

⁵⁷ “Man-Turned-Woman Deluged by Show Offers: Fabulous Contracts Held Out for Appearances No Matter if She Can’t Sing, Dance or Act,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, December 1, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 43, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166363600?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

⁵⁸ “Bronx ‘Boy’ is Now a Girl: Danish Treatments Change Sex of Former Army Clerk,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, December 2, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2008), 18, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/112347271?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

being the only one to cover her subsequent return to the United States “with any degree of conservatism.”⁵⁹ In contrast, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* ran the headline, “Air Force Sergeant Tells of Love for ‘Christine,’” while the article itself referred to her as “Christine (ex-George) Jorgensen.”⁶⁰ In other words, by placing Jorgensen’s chosen name in quotation marks, and then referring to her as “ex-George,” the veracity of her identity as Christine was being questioned and debated. However, the *RJ* at least managed to spell her name correctly in that article. In a subsequent *RJ* publication, Christine Jorgensen was referred to as “Publicity-Shy ‘Christina,’” in which both her identity – and the spelling of her name – were questioned.⁶¹

Further, the press coverage by *Time* was hardly flattering and was far more straightforward with its suspicions of Jorgensen. *Time*, a nationally circulating magazine with a wide readership, declared on December 15, 1952 that the “parents of George and/or Christine” were “fast learning the sweet uses of publicity,” and that her parents were going to sell her “life story for \$30,000,” while Jorgensen would profit from a documentary film she had been shooting in Denmark.⁶² Jorgensen, who had been about to start writing her own article for the *American Weekly* when she read the coverage, “exhaled explosively in anger,” purely because the Jorgensen family – and herself – had been accused of exploiting her transition for money.⁶³ Further indicating confusion with Jorgensen’s identity after the outwardly unfriendly coverage in *Time*, a reader declared, “Christine Jorgensen... for Man and/or Woman of the year,” seemingly paralleling *Time*’s aforementioned language of referring to Jorgensen as “George and/or

⁵⁹ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 176.

⁶⁰ “Air Force Sergeant Tells of Love for ‘Christine,’” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (morning edition), December 5, 1952, 1, UNLV Microfilms.

⁶¹ Louella O. Parsons, “Publicity-Shy ‘Christina’ Prefers Hollywood Instead of Romance,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (morning edition), December 10, 1952, 1, UNLV Microfilms.

⁶² “The Press: The Great Transformation,” *Time*, December 15, 1952, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,820503,00.html#ixzz1lgSDky5l> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁶³ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 148.

Christine.”⁶⁴

The *Los Angeles Times*’ coverage of another transgender person also reflected deep-seated discomfort with those who had transitioned. The *LA Times* reported the following headline on December 14, 1952: “German Girl Athlete’s Sex Change Told.” The article mentioned that “17-year-old... Helga Cordes had apparently changed sex over a period of years.” The article continued to discuss his mother’s subsequent suicide due to brooding “for years over her husky ‘daughter.’”⁶⁵

It is striking to notice that the headline for Cordes was extraordinarily different from Jorgensen’s coverage, suggesting that there was gender bias present in the coverage of transgender men. For example, many articles referred to Jorgensen’s femininity in conjunction with the masculinity she appeared to have given up. Cordes’ article, however, unquestioningly labeled him a girl and used feminine pronouns throughout, even though he had transitioned into “Mr. Cordes.” The article also highlighted his mother’s depression and subsequent suicide, seemingly drawing a parallel between transitions and mental disturbances. Thus, by denying the athlete the right to his own identity, the *LA Times* made an argument against the validity of “sex change[s].”⁶⁶ Attitudes like these – whether subtly made or declared openly – perhaps indicate that Jorgensen’s transition was met with skepticism by some media outlets as soon as she appeared in the national spotlight, though her transition appears to have been given more credibility than Mr. Cordes’. Regardless, Jorgensen had to steel herself against sensationalistic headlines when the media first caught wind of her story, headlines she “later had to face without

⁶⁴ “Letters: Letters, Dec. 22, 1952,” *Time*, December 22, 1952, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889523,00.html#ixzz1lgV9KZGP> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁶⁵ “German Girl Athlete’s Sex Change Told,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, December 14, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), 4, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166421904?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

shuddering,” according to her *American Weekly* story.⁶⁷ Despite her resolve, the preexisting skepticism in many news outlets likely set the framework for the subsequently widespread negative press she received.

The Souring of the Press

When Jorgensen returned to the U.S. from Denmark, her story was rumored to be a fraud.⁶⁸ For example, despite the outwardly benevolent portrayal of Jorgensen in the February 13, 1953 *Chicago Daily Tribune* headline “Christine Arrives Back Home a New Woman and with Mink,” there were satirical undertones in the description of Jorgensen. The article noted that “Christine was wrapped in furs” of “nutria – the pelts of a South American aquatic rodent.” However, Jorgensen wrongly declared that the furs were mink, “as though she had worn it all her life.”⁶⁹ The underlying joke? Jorgensen hadn’t worn mink her entire life; thus, she couldn’t distinguish between the fur of an aquatic rodent and that of the more luxurious mink. The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* also skeptically claimed, “Chris Jorgensen returns to U.S. As A ‘Woman,’” with Jorgensen’s female identity delicately questioned with strategically-placed quotation marks.⁷⁰

These were hardly the only articles Jorgensen had to endure. According to her autobiography, she “was making headlines,” with her arrival in the States “fully reported, sometimes in a friendly and sometimes in a hostile way.” The reports hint at an underlying ambivalence in regards to Jorgensen’s womanliness: “Christine, by George!” contrasted with, “Chris back home, perfect little lady,” which in turn differed from, “Christine teeters on high

⁶⁷ Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 1, *The American Weekly*, 4.

⁶⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 70.

⁶⁹ “Christine Arrives Back Home a New Woman and with Mink,” *New York Times* (1923-1963), February 13, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), A14, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178534991?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁷⁰ “Chris Jorgensen Returns to U.S. As a ‘Woman,’” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (morning edition), February 13, 1953, 1, UNLV Microfilms.

heels, leaving the plane.”⁷¹ On February 19, 1953, the *Los Angeles Times* added further fuel to the fire with the headline, “Total Sex Change Called Impossible.”⁷² Six days later, on February 23, 1953, *Time* reported that Jorgensen’s homecoming had received more attention from the press than a “sideshow mermaid” would. Jorgensen was reported to have “husked ‘Hello’ and tossed off a Bloody Mary like guy,” had poor technique with high heels, spoke in “a husky, masculine contralto,” and had a flat, hard face. *Time* again proceeded to question Jorgensen’s motives in selling her story to Hearst’s *American Weekly*.⁷³ Thus, the headlines towards Jorgensen in February 1953 were hardly flattering, despite the comparatively kind headlines she had received in December 1952.

The continuously incredulous portrayals of Jorgensen were widely attributable to the publication of the *American Weekly* series, a weekly newspaper supplement that printed numerous sensationalist articles, which, according to Meyerowitz, “casted more doubt on the nature of Jorgensen’s condition.” The publication’s article, which first appeared February 15, 1953, situated her within the context of transvestitism in its March 8, 1953 story.⁷⁴ According to Jorgensen, this created an enduring “gross misconception in the minds of many readers” who opened their dictionaries and saw, “transvestite, a person obsessed with the desire to wear clothes of the opposite sex.”⁷⁵

The dictionary definition of “transvestite,” however, was medically insufficient. According to Meyerowitz, Jorgensen’s doctor, Christian Hamburger, “suspected that

⁷¹ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 175.

⁷² “Total Sex Change Called Impossible: Stanford Cancer Expert Comments on Former GI Turned Into Woman,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), February 19, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), 4, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166450212?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁷³ “Manners and Morals: Homecoming,” *Time*, February 23, 1953, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889911,00.html#ixzz1lgR68YwA> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁷⁴ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 71.

⁷⁵ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 162.

‘transvestitism,’ as he defined it in *American Weekly* and elsewhere,” had a physical basis. Regardless, Americans in the 1950s associated transvestitism with cross-dressing, which was believed to be a psychological disorder and “perversion,” separate from physiology.⁷⁶ Thus, the damage was done, as the series “was translated into fourteen languages and distributed throughout seventy countries;”⁷⁷ according to Jorgensen’s autobiography, she “was to suffer considerably” due to the popular definition of “transvestite.”⁷⁸ Ironically, although Dr. Hirschfield had defended the transgender woman in the 1912 “German Baron is Now Countess” article, the Countess was laughably deemed to be “just a transvestite.” Similarly, Jorgensen was faced with similar consequences four decades later, despite Dr. Hamburger’s defense.⁷⁹

The confusion regarding Jorgensen’s sex seemingly trickled down to some American readers. One reader wrote to the editor of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on behalf of his 13-year-old daughter, “[w]ould or could the clerk... issue a marriage license to Christine?”⁸⁰ A *Time* reader, apparently desensitized to the onslaught of Jorgensen press coverage, noted that her “colloquial vocabulary” did not “encompass a Bloody Mary.”⁸¹ Regardless of the Jorgensen debate rising in the media – and the confusion arguably generated among readers – transitions continued to attract media attention.

On March 19, 1953, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that “a 20 year old Japanese

⁷⁶ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 71.

⁷⁷ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 177.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁷⁹ “German Baron is Now Countess,” *The Macon Daily Telegraph*, 8.

⁸⁰ Ed Milligan, “Legal Question,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), March 12, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 16, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178429478?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁸¹ “Letters: Letters, Mar. 23, 1953,” *Time*, March 23, 1953, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,806583,00.html#ixzz1lgUs7xRn> (accessed March 18, 2012).

girl” became a man “after three operations” and now hoped to find work in Tokyo.⁸² An article in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, published the same day, claimed, “Christine in Reverse Is Now a Happy Father” after transitioning in New Orleans. The transgender man in the *RJ* article was quoted as saying that he wanted to “avoid ‘any unpleasant publicity.’”⁸³ In both of these articles, Jorgensen’s name was used – and thus compared to – the transitions of others, showcasing her celebrity and renown despite the press’s suspicions. However, the man featured in the *RJ* article was seemingly well-aware of the negative attention Jorgensen was attracting, as evidenced by his decision to remain anonymous. Unfortunately for Jorgensen, the adverse media attention only worsened.

On April 6, 1953, the *New York Post* published an exposé detailing that “‘Christine’ Jorgensen [was] a woman in name only”⁸⁴ after following several leads, such as Danish doctors confirming that Jorgensen had “no vestiges of female organs,” according to Meyerowitz.⁸⁵ On April 9, 1953, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, “Christine’s Sex Isn’t Changed.”⁸⁶ On April 20, 1953, *Time* claimed that Jorgensen “was... only an altered male.” The article continued to mention that “[t]his was no surprise to U.S. psychiatrists... or to careful readers of Jorgensen’s own story” in *American Weekly*. Thus, it was widely reported that Jorgensen was not a woman, but simply a male recipient of Denmark’s “program of voluntary emasculation.”⁸⁷

⁸² “Girl Reverses Christine Case – Becomes a Man,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), March 19, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 4, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166450212?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012). ”

⁸³ “Christine in Reverse is Now a Happy Father,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), March 19, 1953, 1, UNLV Microfilms.

⁸⁴ Alvin Davis, “The Truth About ‘Christine’ Jorgensen,” part 1, *The New York Post*, April 6, 1953, 2.

⁸⁵ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 72.

⁸⁶ “Christine’s Sex Isn’t Changed Doctor Admits,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), April 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 7, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178488980?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁸⁷ “Medicine: The Case of Christine,” *Time*, April 20, 1953, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,822780,00.html#ixzz1lgS0ggyw> (accessed March 18, 2012).

The unflattering articles continued to pour in. For example, it was heralded that a lobotomy could be seen as “Aid for Christine” in the *Los Angeles Times*;⁸⁸ doctors had to justify that “they did right for Christine” in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*;⁸⁹ and it was espoused that “Christine is No Lady” by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.⁹⁰ These articles reported largely on the medical and psychological state of Jorgensen and in turn pathologized her. Thus, they arguably reflected the press’s view that Jorgensen had betrayed the notion of scientific and medical progress that had helped propel her to fame in the first place. However, the increase in mean-spirited press coverage was not confined to April-May of 1953.

On March 8, 1954, *Time* referred to Jorgensen with male pronouns, noting that “Christine” had been “George Jorgensen” prior to her “emasculat[i]on.” *Time* went on to say that “another fugitive U.S. male made his way into the women’s lines,” noting that 28-year-old Charles McLeod, who had also served in the military, was “henceforth to be known as Charlotte.”⁹¹ The two were not medical marvels, or honorable Americans, but were, on the contrary, “fugitive[s].” Interestingly, “fugitive” is synonymous with “deserter.” Thus, *Time* played upon both women’s statuses as former military personnel to highlight that they had gone AWOL in regards to their masculinity. Jorgensen was consequently viewed to have betrayed not only notions of scientific progress, but her manhood.

⁸⁸ William Barton, “Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine: Psychiatrists Told of Success With Lobotomy Operation Christine Case,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), May 6, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988), A1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166496959?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁸⁹ “Doctors Claim They Did Right for Christine,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), May 28, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 7, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178501933?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁰ “Christine Is No Lady, Danish Doctors Admit,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), May 29, 1953, 12, UNLV Microfilms.

⁹¹ “Medicine: In Christine's Footsteps,” *Time*, March 8, 1954, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889911,00.html#ixzz1lgR68YwA> (accessed March 18, 2012).

Struggle for the Sahara

Despite Jorgensen's image seemingly declining in the press, "the news stories... did little to damage [her] popularity," according to Meyerowitz. She made headlines because "she remained controversial," despite her refusal to pigeon-hole herself as a "pervert." The press maintained its coverage "of her everyday life" in order to satisfy "a public whose curiosity had not yet been allayed."⁹² This in part seems to explain why there was sustained ambivalence in certain media outlets regarding her portrayal, even after the brutal *New York Post* exposé. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* used these three contrasting headlines in the month of May: "Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine,"⁹³ "Christine's Femininity Charms Interviewer,"⁹⁴ and "Christine Not Woman."⁹⁵ Thus, some newspapers were seemingly hesitant to completely renounce Jorgensen, and this flip-flopping of opinions presumably reflected disillusionment warring with captivation, both of which could potentially garner a profit.

Jorgensen remained just as active as the press. She channeled the media attention in order to spark a career "that kept her in the news and heightened her claim to fame," as pointed out by Meyerowitz. For example, shortly after returning to the United States from Denmark, she started making public appearances and was even awarded "Woman of the Year" by the Scandinavian Societies of Greater New York.⁹⁶ A few weeks after Jorgensen's return to the U.S., she met

⁹² Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 73.

⁹³ William Barton, "Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine," A1.

⁹⁴ Fay Hammond, "Christine's Femininity Charms Interviewer: She Appears Glamorous and Beautiful at 'Woman and Clothes Chat' in Hotel," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988), A1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166488409?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁵ "Christine Not Woman, Danish Doctors Hint," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988), 4, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166474706?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁹⁶ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 73.

Charlie Yates, who would change her life.⁹⁷ In late-April of 1953, Yates became her manager, adding Jorgensen to a list of celebrity clientele that included Bob Hope.⁹⁸ Yates informed Jorgensen that she was “a world-famous personality” who couldn’t “leave the limelight” due to the press’s fascination with her, whether she liked the attention or not.⁹⁹

Yates became instrumental in Jorgensen’s life, explaining to Jorgensen that she had few opportunities left. She recognized the limitations fame had brought her; according to her autobiography, she “had many offers from various enterprises” and “was perfectly aware” that they wanted her not for her talents, “but for the notoriety surrounding [her] name.” Yates convinced her that a nightclub act would make money and satisfy her “immediate problem of making a living.” Jorgensen, however, told Yates that she couldn’t sing, dance, or “give out the snappy chatter,” and that she was “a photographer, not an entertainer.” She also had misgivings about the “low moral tone” of nightclubs. Regardless, she agreed to “an engagement at the Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles,” set to open in early May.¹⁰⁰

Jorgensen’s decision to enter the entertainment business largely contradicted her earlier goal of avoiding the stage altogether. For example, an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on December 11, 1952 that “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress” and that Jorgensen had “no intention to profit commercially from her situation.”¹⁰¹ Despite early offers she received to give appearances and performances, Jorgensen claimed that she “had absolutely no interest or inclination for the entertainment world,” save for her desire to be a photographer,¹⁰² as she originally believed that “the nightclub circuit” would represent “the

⁹⁷ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 186, 190.

⁹⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 74.

⁹⁹ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 191.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

¹⁰¹ “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14.

¹⁰² Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 135.

sacrifice of [her] self-respect,” as well as the “crucifixion of others who would follow [her].”¹⁰³

Yet, less than a year later, she had been courted by Yates to enter stage business. This seemingly represented an increased sense of desperation on Jorgensen’s part: because she had “little money left and no job in sight,” she was prompted to reassess her prospects,” according to Meyerowitz.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, show business was arguably a way for Jorgensen to salvage her name in the press. She had been hurt by the *New York Post* article, which had manipulated facts that she had already divulged in her *American Weekly* series. The paper’s perspective “that no transformation had taken place,” suggesting that she had propagated lies, irritated Jorgensen.¹⁰⁵ Yates had offered Jorgensen a way to make money, a way to martial her fame into a career that could sustain her, a career she reluctantly pursued. However, she had been opposed to going into show business in early December 1952, when much of the press had not been outwardly skeptical of her transition. It is likely that Jorgensen perceived a threat to her name, and thus her financial status, which also motivated her to reconsider her original stance.

Regardless of Jorgensen’s early prejudices against the night life scene, or her motives for going into show business, she ultimately agreed to a performance at the Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles, after a successful test run in Connecticut.¹⁰⁶ On April 24, 1953, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Christine Scheduled to Open Revue Here,” noting that her name would “appear as ‘Miss Christine Jorgensen’ in all billings” – as if there was any question otherwise.¹⁰⁷

On March 7, 1953, a day after the *LA Times* ran the aforementioned, odious article

¹⁰³ Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 1, *The American Weekly*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 193, 195.

¹⁰⁶ McBride.

¹⁰⁷ “Songs and Dances: Christine Scheduled to Open Revue Here,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, April 24, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988), 2, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166447462?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

advocating for Christine to have brain surgery, the paper switched gears to understated rhetoric. The newspaper reported that Christine had arrived in L.A. “[c]ool and [s]elf-[a]ssured” and had informed reporters that after a week-long performance in California, she would “make one or two appearances in Las Vegas.” The article was subtly critical, stating that Jorgensen “claim[ed] surgery in Denmark changed her,” again questioning her credibility; it went on to state that she had “just misse[d] being statuesque,” making fun of her appearance. Further, she was accused of being “prepared to capitalize on her change of sex experience,” mirroring *Time* sentiment by citing her supposed self-exploitation.¹⁰⁸ After her performance, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on May 9, 1953, “Christine Gets Applause at Theater Debut.” Despite this seemingly positive coverage, Jorgensen claimed that Los Angeles reviewers, who were “[l]ess prejudiced in [her] favor,” reacted to her show mercilessly. She lamented that she “had just laid one of the largest eggs in show-business history.”¹⁰⁹

Jorgensen’s despondency grew when her subsequent Las Vegas contract was threatened. Yates had secured Jorgensen an engagement at the Sahara Hotel within two months of her L.A. performance. However, after seeing one of her performances, the management at the Sahara wanted nothing to do with her.¹¹⁰ On June 4, 1953, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* ran an article headlined, “Sahara Cancels Christine Because He’s No Woman,” and it detailed how the contract had been cancelled because “the ex-soldier was ‘not now and never can be a woman.’”¹¹¹ The following day, the *RJ* reported that Jorgensen was challenging the Sahara “on

¹⁰⁸ “Christine Arrives... Cool and Self-Assured: Ex-GI Has Aplomb of Movie Queen as Curiosity Seekers Eye Her at Airport,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), May 7, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988), 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166486441?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 201.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Sahara Cancels Christine Because He’s No Woman,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), June 4, 1953, 6, UNLV Special Collections.

[s]ex [m]isrepresentation,”¹¹² and Yates “instituted a lawsuit to hold the club to its original contract.”¹¹³ The theme of Jorgensen misrepresenting herself and lying, then, was given legal weight, which she and Yates contested.

Regardless, Jorgensen continued performing. According to her autobiography, she had “two exciting and rewarding weeks” at Pittsburgh’s Copa Club and was beginning to feel “nothing but enthusiasm” in regards to her new career in show business. Although several clubs refused to host her due to “immorality,” the reviews generated by her performance at the Copa Club were fantastic. These reviews sat well with Las Vegas promoters, who “no longer seemed to have any public objections to [her] womanhood.” Thus, the lawsuit was dropped, and her show was set for November. Interestingly enough, Jorgensen’s name appeared to be something to attack or celebrate depending on which was more profitable at the time. For example, only after Jorgensen “had proven that [she] could make money for [her] employers” was she welcomed back to Las Vegas.¹¹⁴ Thus, Jorgensen’s identity was a commodity that could be spun a myriad of ways for economic benefit.

Once Jorgensen arrived in Nevada, the press hardly ceased its coverage of one of Vegas’ “[o]ff beat attractions,” as *Billboard* magazine, an entertainment newsweekly, labeled Jorgensen in a March 1953 article.¹¹⁵ For example, *Billboard* published the article, “Chris May Be a Fem, But – ” on November 14, 1953. The article detailed “[a] backstage rebellion” against Jorgensen by the Sa-Harem chorus girls accompanying her in her performance, who were apparently

¹¹² “Christine Challenges Sahara on Sex Misrepresentation,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), June 5, 1953, 9, UNLV Microfilms.

¹¹³ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 211.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 213-214, 216, 222.

¹¹⁵ “Talent Buying War Breaks Out in Full at Las Vegas Spots,” *Billboard*, March 14, 1953, 16, <http://www.billboard.com/archive#/archive/read?id=RAseAAAAAMBAJ&pg=16&query=Talent+Buying+War+Breaks+Out+in+Full+At+Las+Vegas+Spots&date=1953-03-14> (accessed March 18, 2012).

concerned that Jorgensen “might be a Peeping Tom.”¹¹⁶ However, the dancers sent Jorgensen a letter shortly after, detailing their “deep admiration for [her] as a performer” and as a person, according to Jorgensen’s autobiography.¹¹⁷ Paralleling the early press Jorgensen received, in which certain details, such as her service in WWII, were fabricated to suit the needs of the press, it appeared that Jorgensen had yet to escape such lies. Thus, *Billboard* was but one news source reporting with sensationalistic verve rather than with objective accuracy, advancing its own agenda. In essence, the Sa-Harem article was one of many stories about Jorgensen that was “meant only to harass and harm,” as pointed out by McBride.¹¹⁸

Despite the coverage surrounding Jorgensen, or the struggle for the Sahara that had ensued well before her performance, Jorgensen’s two-week engagement was a hit; the press trailed her around Vegas and described her outfits, outings, and other details, such as the celebrities who came to her performances.¹¹⁹ She also had to quell engagement rumors, hinting that the press coverage in Vegas had shifted – at least temporarily – from intrusive questions about her sex, to benign, idle gossip about her daily happenings.

In an interview with December’s *Magazine Las Vegas*, Jorgensen raved about her experience in Vegas, not touching upon the controversies aroused before she even arrived. She claimed that her opening performance “was a never-to-be-forgotten episode” in her show business career, as her audiences had responded warmly to her, making her “heart swell.” In addressing rumors of her a marriage proposal, she conceded that although she “received flowers daily from a very dear friend,” she was “not engaged.” Lastly, in remembering her “wonderful

¹¹⁶ “Chris May Be a Fem, But--” *Billboard*, November 21, 1953, 1, <http://www.billboard.com/archive#/archive/read?id=aAoEAAAAMBAJ&pg=1&query=Chris+May+Be+a+Fem,+But&date=1953-11-21> (accessed March 18, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 223.

¹¹⁸ McBride.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

engagement at the Sahara,” she concluded courteously with the question, “[j]ust when can I come back to this fabulous Las Vegas?”¹²⁰

An Immortal Legacy

Regardless of Jorgensen’s ambivalent portrayal in the press, it is important to remember that she was an inspiration to many other transgender people. For example, Leslie Feinberg, author of *Transgender Warriors*, wrote that “[b]eing different in the 1950s was no small matter.” While Feinberg’s baby-sitter giggled that Jorgensen was “a freak,” Feinberg noted that both ze and Jorgensen “had a special bond.”¹²¹ Furthermore, as early as March 15, 1953, Jorgensen had already received “hundreds of appealing letters” from those who had also been helped by her story.¹²² Although Christine Jorgensen never saw herself as a political activist, “she was well aware of the historic role” she played as an “advocate for the issues that were central to her own life,” according to Stryker.¹²³

Christine Jorgensen was able to generate national headlines and become an apparently celebrated figure in the early 1950s for a myriad of reasons. However, in the eyes of much of the press, she ultimately represented a betrayal of scientific progress, a disavowal of masculinity, and a subversion of sexual norms in the age of McCarthyism. Regardless, there was perhaps not an abrupt souring of the press after her initial appearance in the media, but rather the presence of both early skepticism and ambivalence toward Jorgensen that exacerbated the subsequent tarnishing of her image. Jorgensen’s turn to the entertainment industry, and the sheer significance of her being able to perform in Las Vegas in the first place, hint at the contradictory coverage Jorgensen received, as well as her likely attempt to salvage her reputation. Despite the

¹²⁰ “Christine Jorgensen Speaks,” *Magazine Las Vegas*, December 1953, 1, UNLV Special Collections.

¹²¹ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 4, 7. Note: “Ze” is Feinberg’s chosen personal pronoun.

¹²² Christine Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 5, *The American Weekly*, March 15, 1953, 15.

¹²³ Stryker, 48.

often negative press she faced, Jorgensen's overall resilience, combined with her commitment to garnering good publicity on behalf of those she represented and inspired, make her truly newsworthy.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Stryker, 49.

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