Mixed Doubles: Renée Richards and the Perpetuation of the Gender Binary in Athletics

Thesis

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By

Lindsay Parks Pieper, B.A.
Graduate Program in History

The Ohio State University

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Master’s Committee:
Professor Judy Wu, Advisor
Professor Birgitte Soland
Professor Sarah K. Fields
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Abstract

This paper uses the life of Renée Richards to analyze the gender binary in athletics. Richards, a male-to-female transsexual, sued for access to the women’s professional tennis circuit in 1976. Her internalization of gender roles, embodiment of gender stereotypes and campaign for inclusion, along with the resistance she received from other female athletes, illustrate the continued importance of gender segregation in sport.

In addition, rather than provide blanket acceptance for transsexuals in professional sports, the 1976 court ruling pertained only to her and women’s tennis. Not until 2003 did a multi-sport institution raise the issue. For the 2004 Athens Summer Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee created the Stockholm Consensus which outlined the policies for transsexual athletic inclusion. Paralleling Richards’s court decision, the IOC adjusted gender definitions enough to include transsexual participants, yet set the qualifications so that these athletes fit into one of two gender divisions.

As demonstrated by Richards’s legal inclusion in women’s tennis and the Olympic transsexual policy, the possibility of gender malleability embodied by transgendered athletes raised concerns, resulting in decisions that sought to underline the separation between male and female. This paper argues that both rulings necessitated gender segregation in competition and consequently created remolded gender dichotomies for competition.
Vita

June 2003 ........................................ Columbia High School, New York

May 2007 .......................................... B.A. History, Virginia Tech

May 2007 .......................................... B.A., Communication, Virginia Tech

2008 to Present ................................ Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of History, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: History
   Concentration in Women’s History

Minor Fields: Modern United States History
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In 1976, an inquisitive reporter covering a local California tennis tournament watched with awe as the impressive 6’2 rookie Renee Clarke effortlessly defeated her opponents. Dick Carlson, a journalist from San Diego, was amazed by the ease of her volleys and the precision of her baseline shots. While both her height and wingspan proved notable, Carlson found himself most astounded by Clarke’s powerful serve. Intrigued by the sudden emergence of this previously unknown star, he dug for background information.

At the same tournament, a “tennis buff” intently watched Clarke from the stands. After a few sets, this spectator recognized the rookie as a past acquaintance from a former time. She excitedly whispered her piece of gossip to random people scattered in the bleachers. Her remarks reached Carlson. At first he had simply wanted to create a fluff piece about an aspiring local standout. Instead, he produced a revealing expose that forced the national spotlight onto the California tennis tournament and its new star.¹

Without pause, Carlson identified Renee Clarke as Renée Richards, the former male professional tennis player Richard Raskind.² The discovery of a male-to-female transsexual in women’s tennis immediately gained attention and inevitably generated confusion and protest. At first, Richards’s abrupt unmasking merely complicated the rules of the local competition. The California tournament had divided the players into the traditional male and female categories. Organizers questioned if Richards should be allowed to continue playing in the women’s bracket.

² Richards registered under the name Renee Clarke to avoid discovery.
As she participated in other tennis tournaments, however, she challenged more than basic policy. Her presence in women’s divisions threatened the long-standing gender binary in athletics; men and women have traditionally competed in different divisions in sports. This fundamental organization of sport was based on differences attributed to biological sex and reflective of socially constructed understandings of masculinity and femininity. Yet Richards did not “fit” into either of the two segregated spaces circumscribed by athletics.

Therefore, after a victory in California, Richards’s public declaration of her plans to participate in the 1976 U.S. Open raised difficult questions. In particular, Richards complicated the organizational blueprints of tennis tournaments as designed by the governing bodies of tennis in America, the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) and the United States Tennis Association (USTA). To maintain traditional gender categories and consciously bar Richards, the WTA and USTA implemented the controversial Barr body test – a test which identifies sex on the basis of chromosomal makeup – for all 1976 U.S. Open participants. Incensed by her exclusion, Richards sued the USTA and WTA. In 1977, the New York Supreme Court ruled in her favor and mandated her inclusion on the women’s tennis circuit. The case, Richards v. USTA Assn. established a definition of male and female for athletics which disallowed the use of only one test as the criterion for sex identification. While the court extended the classification to include Richards, the ruling nonetheless preserved the two-gender model in athletics. With the Court’s authorization, Richards competed in the 1977 U.S. Open, where she lost in the first round.

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3 Because the English language requires gendered pronouns, I have opted to use the feminine when referring to Richards because of her self-identification as female.
4 Equestrian and sailing are the only Olympic sport where men and women compete against each other, side-by-side. In other sports, like doubles figure skating and badminton, men and women compete in pairs.
to Virginia Wade, 6-1, 6-4. Richards continued to compete professionally until retirement in 1981.

Richards’s story serves as a valuable case study illustrating the importance of gender segregation in sport. Against the backdrop of the women’s liberation movement, Richards blatantly challenged the binary of athletics and forced change. Her very presence disrupted the biological conceptions of male and female in sports and raised questions about the determinants of gender. At the same time, however, Richards simultaneously embraced and reproduced traditional understandings of gender differences to argue for her inclusion as a woman. By looking at her public presentation of self, the necessity of feminine appearance becomes apparent. The supreme court’s ruling – along with general social approval – depended largely upon Richards’s willingness to embody stereotypical expressions of femininity. Her quest for access, embodiment of femininity and eventual legal inclusion all underlined the societal dependence on gender categories.

In addition, rather than provide blanket acceptance for transsexuals in professional sports, the ruling pertained only to Richards and women’s tennis. The idea of an overarching transsexual policy in athletics remained largely ignored for the following three decades. Not until 2003 did a multi-sport institution raise the issue. In a proactive maneuver, prompted by the appearance of a few international transsexual

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5 Certain sports did institute policies as a result of individual transsexual athletes. For example, the Canadian Cycling Association permitted male-to-female cyclist Michelle Dumaresq inclusion in female competition in 2002 because legal documents indicated her status as “female.” Conversely, the Ladies Professional Golf Association instituted a “female at birth” policy in 1991 as a result of male-to-female Charlotte Wood’s success in the Senior Women’s Amateur division. The IOC decision thus serves as the first multi-sport policy.
athletes, the International Olympic Committee held hearings about the possible inclusion of transsexual competitors in the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics. After listening to reports from a spectrum of medical experts, the IOC Medical Commission similarly maintained gender divisions in sport by establishing strict rules stipulating biological separation. Tellingly, this IOC decision did not include a policy for “intersexed” competitors. Paralleling the New York Supreme Court decision, the IOC adjusted gender definitions enough to include transsexual participants, yet set the qualifications so that these athletes fit into one of two gender divisions.

As demonstrated by Richards’s legal inclusion in women’s tennis and the Olympic transsexual policy, the possibility of gender malleability embodied by transgendered athletes raised concerns, resulting in decisions that sought to underline the separation between male and female. Both rulings necessitated gender segregation in competition and consequently created remolded gender dichotomies for competition.

Although she retired in 1981, Richards remained active on the tennis circuit as the coach of Martina Navratilova, the first out lesbian player. Richards coached Navratilova to two Wimbledon victories before returning to her ophthalmology practice in 1983. Thirty years after a court granted her access to the women’s circuit, Richards vehemently opposed the IOC transsexual decision as unfair. Her reaction shows the lasting influence of an assumption of male athletic superiority as well as a belief in the need for a clear division of gender separation.

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8 Doctors believe that approximately one of every 1,000 babies are born “intersexed” -- a condition which refers to chromosomal abnormalities. In the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, eight females failed the required female sex test; seven were found to be intersexed. After appeal, all eight were cleared to compete. Emine Saner, “The Gender Trap,” The Guardian, July 30, 2008.
An analysis of Richards’s life demonstrates the significance of the perpetuation of the gender binary in athletics, and the angry protests which result from challenges to the dichotomy. Her internalized gender ideals, fight for the right to compete as a female and negative reaction to contemporary transsexual athletic policies underline the complications of a sport system which requires absolute gender separation.

“Separate but Equal may be the Best Answer in Athletics”
*The History of the Gender Binary in Sport*

The cultural belief in athletic gender segregation -- founded on the assumption of male biological advantage -- developed long before Richards picked up her first tennis racquet. During the ancient Olympic Games in Greece, only men were allowed to participate. To avoid the possibility of female infiltration, male athletes competed naked. This requirement of nudity served as the first method of gender separation in sport; ironically this type of test would be later used to prohibit men from female competitions. Yet, not only did the ancient games forbid female participation, a woman discovered spectating would be thrown off the cliffs of Typhaion, a mountain near Olympia. Women, specifically unmarried virgins, could however participate in separate competitions. The Heraean Games, the female-only version of the Olympic Games, consisted of one event, the footrace, in which women ran on the same track as the men, but over a distance one-sixth shorter -- an indication of the societal belief in women’s lesser athletic status.\(^7\)

When Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the games in 1896, he also adamantly opposed female participation. Not until the 1900 games in Paris did nineteen women officially

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compete in the Olympics, still separate from the men. The gender binary was firmly in place.

In the United States, sport developed as a strictly masculine space. Similar to the ancient Olympics, the connection between masculinity and athletics proved irreversible in America. Proponents of sport at the end of the nineteenth century believed exercise could renew middle-class manhood, promote class solidarity and simultaneously serve as a training ground for war. Embodied by President Theodore Roosevelt, this notion of “muscular Christianity” looked to athletics as a way to define and express masculinity at a time when American men faced the stresses of non-Protestant immigration, rapid industrialization and mass urbanization. Women, on the other hand, were expected to embrace frailty, act daintily, wear corsets -- which restricted breathing, hence also any sort of exercise -- and attract a husband. Societal beliefs held that female athleticism not only harmed a woman’s chances at marriage, but notably impaired childbirth. “Until the middle of the twentieth century,” explained journalist Welch Suggs, “a common myth was that being athletic could cause a woman’s uterus to fall out.” Therefore when females, liberated by the freedoms of the 1920s, demanded increased athletic opportunities, men balked. For “if women were no longer a fragile, timid group in need of protection,” noted historian Susan Cahn, “men could not be assured of their own role as powerful protectors, and consequently relations between the sexes would have to be reconsidered” -- a change of which most men greatly disproved.

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Relations between the sexes in athletics therefore remained largely the same for the first part of the twentieth century. Instead of promoting change and diminishing the importance placed on the gender dichotomy, educators insisted on female separatism. “Girls are not suited for the same athletic program as boys,” wrote Ethel Perrin, a board member of the Women’s Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation, in 1928. “Under prolonged and intense physical strain, a girl goes to pieces nervously.”

Consequently women physical education teachers proclaimed the virtues of modified, less strenuous versions of the male games for female students. Basketball, for example, emerged as a popular sport for women, but as a very different game from the men’s. Started at Smith College, Senda Berenson altered founder Dr. James Naismith’s rules to eliminate some of the physical stresses of the original game. To avoid over-exertion, Berenson shortened the court and divided it into three areas with three players limited to each section. Women’s basketball, said Cahn, thus “strengthened gender distinctions -- emphasizing the difference between femininity and masculinity in matters of philosophy and policy, as well as at more mundane levels of rules, court dimensions, uniforms, and gymnasium design.”

Not surprisingly, women’s basketball grew as a sport not only separate from men’s basketball, but one deemed inferior. The modified version of sport for women created a dualistic relationship -- a cycle which continuously forced and simultaneously justified women’s inferior athletic position.

11 Welch Suggs, A Place on the Team, 23.
13 Men’s collegiate and professional basketball receives more media coverage than women’s basketball, and male player salaries remain much higher than female counterparts. http://personalmoneystore.com/moneyblog/2009/04/09/wnba-salaries-fall-short-male-counterparts. Perhaps more notable, however, is the fact that men compete in the National Basketball Association and women in the Women’s National Basketball Association. The lack of “Men’s” from the NBA title makes the WNBA appear as a lesser subset.
World War II and softball further promoted gendered categorical division. Baseball in the U.S. had working class roots which created the sport’s tough, masculine image. Softball subsequently obtained a similar reputation, albeit as a game with modified rules. In 1943, businessman Philip K. Wrigley founded the All-American Girls Softball League (AAGSL) to fill the void of male baseball players created by the war.\textsuperscript{14} At this time, only eleven of the forty one minor league teams were able to fill rosters and shortages threatened to dismantle the major league franchises.\textsuperscript{15} While the AAGSL granted women access into the traditionally masculine baseball space, the League’s “femininity principles” forced female athletes to abide by culturally-defined feminine rules. Wrigley and the other male organizers sought to promote the players’ athleticism while simultaneously avoid a masculine stigma. Examples from the “All American Girls Baseball League Rules of Conduct” provide evidence of the league’s solutions to female athletic masculinity:

1. ALWAYS appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball. This regulation continues through the playoffs for all even though your team is not participating. AT NO TIME MAY A PLAYER APPEAR IN THE STANDS IN HER UNIFORM, OR WEAR SLACKS OR SHORTS IN PUBLIC.
2. Boyish bobs are not permissible and in general your hair should be well groomed and at all times with longer hair preferable to short hair cuts. Lipstick should always be on.
3. Smoking or drinking is not permissible in public places. Liquor drinking will not be permissible under any circumstances. Other intoxicating drinks in limited portions with after-game meals only, will be allowed. Obscene language will not be allowed at any time.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} The league was founded as the All-American Girls Softball League (AAGSL), but the name was changed shortly thereafter to the All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL). From 1949-1950 the league adopted the name the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), and finally from 1951-1954 was labeled the American Girls’ Baseball League (AGBL).
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 48-49.
To assuage societal fears of powerful, strong women, league rules thus required players to participate in charm classes, wear makeup and don skirts. As Cahn explained “league officials believed that by highlighting this gender contrast they could offer fans an exciting, novel brand of baseball while avoiding the mannish image of softball and other women’s sports.”17 Highlighting the contrasts between masculinity and femininity -- and thus between men and women -- served to further promote the gender binary not only in softball, but in other sports as well.

As women refused to relinquish the new power and visibility earned during WWII -- access to professional softball, for example -- Cold War fears slowly infiltrated both culture and athletics. In particular, anxieties over masculinized, “unnatural” Eastern European women led to policies which strengthened the gender binary in sport. Images of large, muscular and unapologetic female athletes flooded the United States and generated fears about the loss of femininity, the end of fairness in athletics and the invasion of male masqueraders in women’s competition. To deter male inclusion in female categories, in 1966 the European Championships in Track & Field implemented the first sex test to scientifically validate a categorical gender binary. As applied health sciences professor Ian Ritchie has pointed out, “it was track and field in particular that female Soviet athletes had been most successful, most visible, and most derided.”18 Western bias and national pride thus led to the physical examination test which required all female competitors to march naked in front of a panel of physicians. Interestingly, transsexual athletes like Richards would have passed this type of test. Humiliated by public nudity -- but not by the unwarranted fears of male infiltration or the required

17 Susan K. Cahn, Coming on Strong, 149
adherence to cultural ideas of femininity -- female athletes demanded a different gender examination.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) consequently adopted the first chromatin test in 1968. Sport authorities again sought to implement a control to separate men and women, founded on the fear of a masculine biological advantage. At the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, 3,500 female athletes underwent gender testing to ensure correct placement within the competitor categories. Not a single male went through a similar check. The complete lack of a parallel test for the men demonstrates the assumption of normality of masculine superiority. Furthermore, the idea of a simple gendered binary proved naïve. Sociologist Sheila L. Cavanagh and curriculum, teaching & learning professor Heather Sykes argued that the IOC utilized sex tests to locate and justify a gender binary, but repeatedly failed. “The IOC tried to make a categorical gender binary self-evident through medical technologies,” they explained, “but each version of the test revealed subtle differences between male and female genders, as opposed to clearly delineated ‘opposite’ sexes.” Biological anomalies, like Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, caused individuals to fail the chromosome tests. While the reasoning behind the sex tests stemmed from an assumption of a clear division between men and women, the chromatin identifiers actually demonstrated a gender spectrum. Nevertheless, the tests did perpetuate the gender binary, for authorities dismissed any athlete who fell in between the two categories.20

20 The IOC continued gender testing until the 2000 Sydney Olympics.
At the same time as the IOC attempted to separate genders medically, the women’s liberation movement was working for gender fairness. With the 1970s movement, female encroachment into traditional male spaces increased. Pioneers demanded an end to employment discrimination, improved control over reproduction and equality in public spaces. One of the most volatile clashes occurred when women demanded access to athletics on equal terms to men. While Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments -- which forbids sex discrimination in any educational institution that receives federal funding -- threw the doors open for female participation in sport, the legislation perhaps most influentially forced gender segregation in U.S. athletics.

In the early stages of Title IX’s development, the question of how to ensure female equality in athletics dominated discussions. Lawyer Gwen Gregory, who worked in the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, was charged with creating a policy that would end gender-based discrimination in sport. In a 1973 *Sports Illustrated* article Gregory discussed two possible trajectories for the legislation. She explained that one plan reflected a push for “straight equality.” Backed by “more active women’s groups” and most male coaches, this policy would terminate the gender binary and require co-ed sports, teams, coaches and facilities. Gregory noted that the immediate problem with “straight equality” was that men dominated sports in the 1970s. “Straight equality” would not force athletic authorities to promote female inclusion. Rather than progress, she believed, women’s participation would stagnate. In addition, Gregory reasoned that “many people are opposed to this plan because there seems to be a real difference in physical abilities between men and women,” again
demonstrating the belief of a masculine biological advantage.\textsuperscript{21} This assumption of unquestionable masculine supremacy heavily influenced the creation of Title IX. The other policy plan, which eventually passed, embraced the notion of separate but equal. Gregory justified this policy as the most reasonable solution for the time. “One of the big hangups in this is that ‘separate but equal’ is a dirty phrase to anyone involved in civil rights,” she said. “Realistically, separate but equal may be the best answer in athletics.”\textsuperscript{22}

When the legislation passed, the act primarily pertained to schools. But Title IX eventually pervaded all forms of athletic competition and opened the doors for female inclusion. Yet the legislation also cemented the gender binary in sport and framed women’s sports as secondary to men’s. As baseball historian Marilyn Cohen noted, “Title IX legislation both draws more females into sports and explicitly permits and encourages sex-segregated sports. The law allows for both the development and expression of female athleticism while it simultaneously reinforces assumptions of female athletic inferiority.”\textsuperscript{23}

With Title IX, women’s participation drastically increased, female leagues flourished, individual players attained star status, and separation based on sex in athletics continued with minimal opposition. Yet the confidence society held in this validity of athletic “separate but equal” faltered when Richards appeared on a tennis court in California one sunny day.

Although Richards crossed gender boundaries, she mirrored societal views and personally maintained a belief in the correctness of two distinct categories. Her faith in

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid, sportsillustrated.cnn.com.
\textsuperscript{23}Marilyn Cohen, \textit{No Girls in the Clubhouse}, 14.
the legitimacy of the gender binary started during her childhood. She believed that the years following her miraculous birth fostered her transsexuality.

“Richard the Lion Hearted”
Richards’s Childhood Gender Development

On the night of August 19, 1934, Richards’s mother, Dr. Sadie Muriel Bishop, refused to call her neighbors for help. Although she had suffered a massive hemorrhage and was bleeding profusely, Bishop grabbed her keys, shuffled to the car, and drove the bumpy roads from Queens to Manhattan -- an agonizing hour drive. Once she reached her destination, the Infirmary for Women and Children in New York, Bishop flatly refused to accept service from any of the male doctors. For her entire life Bishop had fought to counter the societal assumption of masculine supremacy; she wanted a female doctor to deliver her child. Although still bleeding and quickly growing faint, Bishop demanded a women obstetrician.

The female doctor Bishop eventually deemed suitable ran some tests before she abruptly halted. She hesitated, double-checking the data, then softly informed Bishop that in addition to the hemorrhage, she was suffering from placenta previa. Placenta previa is a pregnancy complication where the placenta locates under the fetus’s head and severely restricts the labor. The doctor quietly explained that in order to save Bishop’s life, the unborn child needed to be sacrificed.

24 In both Second Serve and No Way Renée: The Second Half of my Notorious Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), Richards changes the names of private people whenever possible, including those of her family members. Second Serve notes that “with the exception of the author, her father, and well-known personalities and institutions, the names and descriptions of living individuals and of establishments have been changed.” Similarly, in No Way Renée Richards explains that she “disguised private people who might be embarrassed by my remarks. Their names, origins, places of residence, and other details of their lives have been changed.” The names differ in each book. I have therefore opted to implement the names that Richards uses in Second Serve.
Following an initial moment of shock, Bishop regained her composure and loudly declined. Instead she insisted upon a caesarian section, an incredibly risky procedure in the 1930s. Although the obstetrician attempted to dissuade her, Bishop would not budge. Thus after hours of precarious surgery, on the morning of August 19, 1934, Richard Raskind was born. “I was named Richard Henry Raskind after King Richard the Lion Hearted,” Richards said in reflection, “though it was my mother who had shown the courage. Perhaps I’ve been running to catch up ever since.”

In her 1983 autobiography Second Serve: The Renée Richards Story, Richards cited her mother’s fierce stubbornness as a major cause of her gender confusion. Moreover, she claimed her father’s and sister’s untraditional performances of gendered norms served as additional catalysts in her transgressions. The culture of the 1940s also presented strident notions of appropriate gender behavior, which Richards felt further underlined the collective abnormality of the family. Images of male breadwinner and female homemaker dominated popular culture, while convictions of female subservience and passivity swirled throughout society. Consequently, Richards claimed she grew up confused, yet her writing shows that she nonetheless internalized the validity of a gender division which placed men above women.

The information about Richards’s childhood comes primarily from her two autobiographies, Second Serve and No Way Renée: The Second Half of my Notorious Life (2007). Richards presented certain images in her books and recalled specific memories not only to describe her life, but to elicit compassion from readers.

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25 Renée Richards, Second Serve, 1-3
26 Autobiographies as historical sources obviously present problems as self-authored descriptions for public consumption; The typically provide censored information and selective anecdotes, and more importantly, aim to further personal agendas.
Furthermore, with over two decades of separation between each autobiography, her ideas and beliefs changed, as did U.S. political culture. In the early 1980s, transsexuals faced widespread rejection and institutionalized discrimination; by the 2000s transsexuals fared better as more noteworthy transgender figures emerged and some states prohibited discrimination based on gender. Furthermore, Richards’s personal ideals altered. Second Serve, written immediately after retirement, describes her childhood, adolescence and reasons she fought for athletic inclusion. No Way Renee was penned in retrospect. The autobiography outlines Richards’s time as female, focusing on the ill treatment and misfortunes she encountered. Nonetheless, although both were constructed with different purposes, the two autobiographies provide important insight into Richards’s life and views. In particular, the works show her belief in the naturalness of gender categories and constructed understanding of self.

According to Richards, her mother countered societal norms with a bitter resolve. As the favored child of an alcoholic and womanizing father, Bishop felt the dual emotions of responsibility and disgust. Her simultaneous need for approval from and lack of respect for her father bred in her a harsh distrust of all men. Bishop later practiced psychiatry at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center’s Neurological Institute, an achievement Richards described as uncommon for a female in the 1940s. Even more unusual for the time, Richards felt, was that Bishop rose to the top of her profession – much to the chagrin of her male coworkers. Richards believed that because her mother struggled against the condescending attitudes of male doctors and patients, Bishop dominated her household with steely discipline. She was the authoritative head of
the family, something Richards interpreted as a severe oddity in the 1940s. Although throughout history women -- like Dr. Bishop -- repeatedly resisted gender norms, Richards illustrated her mother’s behavior as abnormal.

The autobiographies suggest that Richards personally embraced the stereotypical gendered expectations of the late 1940s. During this time, society sought a return to the traditional relationships of the years prior to World War II. The necessities of the war had previously opened the door for females and resultantly disrupted gender roles. Notably, women had again entered the workforce and shrugged off the limitations of domesticity. After an Allied victory, however, many people feared these recent changes in female behaviors -- those that had been required for the war effort -- and started to urge women back into home-centered positions. Career girls and autonomous women, like Bishop, were viewed with particular suspicion. Historian Nancy Cott explained that “men and women alike were expected to relinquish their emergency roles and settle into domestic life -- men as breadwinners, women as homemakers.” Furthermore, “In this vision, there was no room for the independent single woman, nor the married career woman.”

Not all women at the time willingly accepted a return to domesticity. Yet Richards’s opinion that Bishop was a strange, bitter anomaly of the 1940s culture and not a strong, independent exception shows her belief in the correctness of societal gender norms. According to Richards, her mother wrongly disrupted -- not rightfully challenged -- the authoritative gender expectations of the time.

Additionally, Richards described her father, Dr. David Raskind, as inconsistent with the 1940s societal norms. Growing up, she remembered him as largely absent.

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during her childhood. She later justified her father’s dedication to work as a “defense mechanism.” Staying at the office was “his way of escaping the smothering control of his wife, a woman who utterly dominated the household and with whom he never won an argument.”

Richards matured in an environment with models she described as deviant to the male breadwinner and female housewife standard. Her depiction of the family household as different again illustrates her belief in the appropriateness of male authority.

For Richards, her older sister Michael added further confusion to the already culturally deviant family. Prior to Raskind’s birth, because Bishop desperately wanted a male child -- for reasons Richards does not make clear -- she treated her daughter Michael as such. “While Michael’s femaleness was grudgingly accepted in practical matters,” Richards recalled, “the emotional climate of the family reflected disappointment and encouraged her to be masculine. She grew up as a flagrant tomboy.”

According to Richards, to adhere to her mother’s desired behavior, “Mike” presented masculinity through violence against her baby brother. Roughhousing dictated a majority of their childhood relations, with Mike aggressively dominating most situations. When not fighting, however, the two played “dress up.” From the time when Richards was two, Mike dressed her as a girl, which Richards remembered as a very formative activity. Bishop also occasionally participated in these play performances of crossing gender boundaries. When attired as a female, Richards remembered “my mother, ordinarily so stern, treated me as if I was a delicate fairy child, a changeling who

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28 Renée Richards, Second Serve, 6.
29 Ibid, 11.
couldn’t be blamed for the shortcomings of my other self.” Moreover, “when I was a
girl, Mommy loved me.”

When asked later in life about her transsexual roots, Richards frequently pointed
to these early childhood memories. Her family did not subscribe to the prevailing
gender norms, which she claimed caused her confusion. Richards described a repeated
incident at the Raskind family dinner table in her autobiography to illustrate what she felt
were the influential contradictions.

The sources of this friction were the endless contradictions in our
household. My father, apparently the elegant master of the house
presiding over his table, was actually more the argumentative wife who
never won an argument. My mother, seemingly the refined lady of the
house, was more dictatorial husband. My sister, clearly a girl, just as
clearly wished herself a boy. And then there was me, a little boy trying to
figure out what was what.

Although confused, Richards remained steadfast in the belief that her family members’
performances of gender strayed from the cultural standard. She recognized the different
socially appropriate characteristics reserved for men and women. Richards’s ideas about
femininity, learned as a child, shaped her appearance and behavior later in life as a
woman. By illustrating her childhood as unusual, Richards portrays her acceptance of the
culturally constructed notions of gender. Her long-lasting ideas of appropriate gender
thus included subservience, athletic inferiority and domesticity for females, and power,
athletic prowess and chivalry for males.

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30 Ibid, 13-16.
31 Richards described her early family life as a reason for her transsexuality, yet she also acknowledged the
contrived nature of the story. “If I sat down to write a case history of an imaginary transsexual, I could not
come up with a more provocative set of circumstances than that of my childhood,” she said. Renée
Richards, Second Serve, 5.
2007), 9.
“A Man from a Foreign Country Trying to Blend in with the Population”
Richards’s Adolescent Gendered Ideals

Marlon Brando appeared on screen in the 1950s as confident, suave and physically empowering. Richards admired the movie star’s undeniable masculinity. Confused by her family’s gender transgressions and thus forced to look elsewhere to ascertain socially acceptable forms of male behavior, Richards internalized the gender expectations projected by popular culture. To her, Brando served as both the epitome of manliness and also as the model to mirror.

In 1951 Brando rose to stardom for his domineering, animalistic performance in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The part quickly launched his career and set the masculine tone for his future roles. Richards, however, favored his award-winning performance in *The Wild One* as rebel biker Johnny Strabler. At the time of the film’s release, as an internally tormented first-year medical intern, she saw his stoic, tortured performance as the absolute embodiment of masculinity. In her autobiography, Richards not only referenced Brando’s celebrity sway but also described her desire to emulate his macho persona. To mimic Brando and simultaneously appear masculine, Richards rode a motorcycle and named it the “Golden Flash.” Additionally, she purchased specific accessories to match those Brando wore. “Along with the Golden Flash,” Richards wrote, “I bought another piece of indispensable equipment: a black leather jacket that supported about sixteen zippers.” She further noted that the reason for the purchase was because Brando had “made a big splash” in the movie and “had worn such a jacket.”

Yet Richards’s imitation efforts extended beyond Brando. She described her time as an adolescent male -- as Dick Raskind -- as a period in which she consciously

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attempted to present overt masculinity. These forced attempts, Richards explained, were to mask her inner feelings of femininity.\textsuperscript{34}

As Dick Raskind, Richards readily admitted she copied other men’s mannerisms and conduct. “My feeling for appropriate masculine behavior came from more observation and impersonation than it did from any internal mechanism,” she explained. “A lot of times I was like a man from a foreign country trying to blend in with the population.”\textsuperscript{35} In addition, Richards titled the chapter devoted to her male past in \textit{Second Serve} “Masquerades,” in which she discussed her emulation of masculinity and also described the women she dated to uphold the guise. More important than these masculine attempts, however, was Richards’s adherence to the cultural norms which forced her to put forward a constructed persona. From the people she befriended to the women she dated, Richards continuously adhered to societal expectations of gender. For someone who did not fit neatly into one of the two gender categories cast by society, Richards’s failure to question the system proves noteworthy. Similar to her notion of appropriate familial gender roles, Richards’s belief in the necessity of stereotypical masculine behaviors demonstrates her acceptance of the gender binary. She embraced the system which separated maleness and femaleness, and resultantly strove to place herself on one side of the divide. By mirroring Brando, driving fast cars and dating women, Richards concurrently showed her support of and need for a system of gender distinction.

\textsuperscript{34} As already noted, autobiographies present contrived accounts of history and memory, and can never be free from author interpretation and censorship. Nonetheless Richards’s books prove useful as a noticeable theme of gender performance emerges in both \textit{Second Serve} and \textit{No Way Renée}.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 111.
After growing up in a family environment Richards found abnormal, she graduated high school and enrolled at Yale University. As a Bulldog, Richards excelled on the tennis court. With her impressive talents, she won the Eastern Indoor Championship and eventually captained the varsity tennis team. For Richards, however, the friends she made on the team proved more significant than her personal successes. In particular, she enjoyed the company of Len and Joel, two teammates who she described as possessing “strong masculinity.” When in the company of the two, Richards explained that she felt a “new surge of masculine energy” and fell “under their powerful masculine influence.”\(^\text{36}\) She continuously looked to Len and Joel to imitate the behaviors the two exhibited. “Thoroughly masculine, uncomplicated, and sometimes a little crude,” Richards wrote in *No Way Renée*, “they provided a strong aura of testosterone that helped counteract Renée’s influence.”\(^\text{37}\) She also mentioned in *Second Serve* that “Their strong masculinity set the tone for a sympathetic response in me. During the days we played tennis, and during the evenings we drank beer and drove our cars recklessly.”\(^\text{38}\) As a result, Richards tagged crudeness, alcohol consumption and reckless driving as masculine ventures. In both works she noted that later in life she continued to drive fast cars but additionally added a motorcycle to her vehicle repertoire. She claimed the motorcycle in particular helped her establish her masculinity and diminish her femininity. “I enjoyed everything about the motorcycle,” she said. “I took it for long rides at high-speed. The strong feel of the wind and the blur of passing landmarks made me feel liberated. The claustrophobic secretiveness that characterized so much of my life did not intrude when I

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\(^{36}\) Ibid, 77 and 103.  
\(^{38}\) Renée Richards, *Second Serve*, 77.
was driving the bike.”

Through her friends Richards learned the stereotypical characteristics of masculinity. Her attempts to mimic the traits thus further fostered her belief in a gender divide.

Along with fast cars and motorcycles, Richards attempted several relationships with different women to display masculinity. Although she admitted the contrived nature of these relationships, Richards did not seem to recognize the similarities between the different girlfriends. As a man, Richards only dated women who subscribed to traditional gender norms. She does acknowledge that as Dick Raskind, she was not attracted to strong, independent women -- women who resembled her mother’s and sister’s gender ambiguity. “(Dick Raskind) simply could not bear to be around a woman who reminded him of his mother or sister,” Richards explained. “However intolerant it may seem, he was obsessed with not tying himself down to a woman who might turn into a domineering force.”

This once again suggests that although she personally transgressed gender boundaries, Richards still believed in the importance of two distinct categories, each which held very specific characteristics. She felt women should not exhibit dominant qualities.

Consequently, Richards’s first girlfriend, Denise, met her feminine standards. With Denise, Richards explained that Dick Raskind made all the decisions. “As my relationship with Denise developed it began to appear to the world at large that I was rather domineering myself;” she later recalled. “Denise accepted my judgment as final; she preferred it that way.” Richards furthermore conceded that the authoritarian persona served as a shield. “To the outside world I may have looked like a dictator, but Denise

39 Ibid, 102.
40 Ibid, 80.
understood that this was a defense. Underneath that swagger was a soft center.”\textsuperscript{41} Once more, Richards’s description illustrates her reliance on and support of gender categories. As demonstrated in the relationship with Denise, Richards felt that by outwardly exhibiting masculine characteristics, she could quiet her inner feelings of femininity. The two could not, however, coexist.

The next relationship -- with a woman named Gwen -- developed when Richards interned at the New York City Lenox Hill Hospital. Upon first meeting Gwen, Richards immediately noticed her overt femininity. “Beyond her physical beauty was an intangible soft quality that struck me as purely feminine,” Richards explained. “Of all the important women in my life, she was the most retiring and the most devoted to me. In groups of people she could hardly be prompted to speak, yet when we were alone she was talkative, even kittenish.”\textsuperscript{42} Similar to Denise, Gwen remained within the bounds of traditional femininity. After breaking up with Gwen, Richards dated Heidi. Like the two prior relationships, Richards used Heidi to promote masculinity and lessen femininity. According to Richards, Heidi also allowed Dick Raskind to make all decisions, something Raskind liked.

After the relationship with Heidi fizzled, Richards assumed the role of the bachelor. Without a girlfriend, Richards let her work as a resident at Bellevue Hospital consume her free time and dictate her masculine persona. As a resident, Richards explained that she consciously tried to appear smart, confident and competitive -- traits she assigned to men. “At work,” she explained, “I became a dedicated and aggressive resident.” Specifically, she followed the lead of masculine role model Ben Casey, a

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 119.
fictitious medical doctor in the 1960s television series *Ben Casey*. Played by Vince Edward, Ben Casey was a young surgeon at County General Hospital known for both his intensity and idealism. Richards explained that, “I radiated the confident masculine image promoted on the popular medical television shows of the time; ‘Ben Casey’ typified the world’s idea of a young doctor, and I came pretty close to that macho image yet sensitive ideal.”

Similar to Richards’s reference to Marlon Brando, her use of a television character again shows the contrived nature of her ideal masculinity. The media influence furthermore demonstrates Richards’s belief in the separation between male and female.

Eventually, Richards succeeded in the ultimate rite of manhood; she married a woman and fathered a son. Yet Richards’s description of his wife posits her as another check in his list of masculine elements to attempt.

She turned me on, and the feeling was mutual. By June we were married. My friends were flabbergasted. It seemed that one week I was sashaying around in a frock, and the next I was smoking a pipe and wearing a tweed jacket with elbow patches. Richards illustrated her wife flippantly and without much detail. “Sashaying,” a form of walk involving showy flouncing, is typically associated with homosexuality; Richards’s use suggests disdain. Similar to this description, Richards hardly mentions the birth of his son. Despite the outward masculine appearance and the acceptance of husband and father roles, she continued to feel internally tormented. In Richards’s words,

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43 Ibid, 124.
45 The minimal information about her son may also be a way to ensure his safety and protect his privacy. When Richards was discovered in California, she and her ex-wife sent him out of the country to avoid the potential harm of media attention.
“unfortunately, though the show was good, Renèe’s personality was breaking through more violently.”

“A picture of Sigmund Freud hung high on the wall. With an unchanging expression, the “Father of Psychoanalysis” glared accusingly down at the obviously uncomfortable patients, something to which Richards could never grow accustomed. After three years of therapy at the New York City clinic, she sat in the small waiting room for the last time. In this visit, Richards planned to terminate her psychoanalytical sessions with Dr. Robert Bak and say goodbye to the ever-condemning Freud forever. Her faith in psychoanalysis had completely dissolved.

Richards’s relationship with Bak had started when she was an intern at New York City’s Lenox Hill Hospital. In the late 1950s, she lived and worked as a man during the days, but visited bars and clubs as a woman at night. Richards not only contacted Bak because of his reputation as the city’s top psychoanalyst -- he was the head of the New York Psychoanalytic Society -- but also because her female urges were increasingly growing stronger. At the time, transsexualism remained an under-researched topic in the US, although scientific studies had been conducted in Europe since the mid-19th century. In the US, the desire to alter one’s biological sex was at best dismissed as a mental

46 Renèe Richards, Second Serve, 127.
47 Ibid, 120. Prior to her sessions with Dr. Bak, Richards engaged in psychoanalysis with Dr. Alfred Clark. Richards sought Clark to help uncover past traumatic events, however, she quickly realized Clark knew little about transsexuality. Although Clark did not “cure” Richards’s inner turmoil, he did lead Richards to blame her parents for her transsexualism. (100). After six years in psychoanalysis, Richards considered surgical options.
handicap, and at worst, a cause for violent treatment. Richards thus feared that exposure in female attire would end her medical career. Or worse.

Psychoanalysis controlled the scientific study of sexuality for almost half a century. Freud first presented his revolutionary psychological views on the topic in the late 1880s, and eventually launched psychoanalysis, explaining “perverse” behavior by looking at infantile incidences and childhood experiences. Bak followed Freud’s example, and in regard to gender confusion helped his “transvestite” patients recall early accounts which potentially sparked the transgressions. Richards’s appointments with Bak, however, occurred at a time when other explanations of sexuality -- and particularly explanations of transsexuality -- were chipping away at psychoanalytic dominance.

Instead of exploring early memories, Dr. Harry Benjamin spearheaded a movement in the 1960s which treated transgender patients with hormones and surgery. Richards’s time with both Bak and Benjamin illustrate the differences in the medical opinions. While psychoanalytical therapy viewed transgenderism as a psychological problem, Benjamin recognized the mental anguish of his transgender patients and faulted social expectations. Yet each relied on specific gender-based conceptions; Bak strove to help his patients back to his/her birth gender-category while Benjamin sought to help his patients into the category opposite of his/her birth. Richards’s views about both scientific fields again show her reliance on the gender binary. She wanted surgery to align her anatomy with her feelings of femininity.

Richards spent over two years on Bak’s couch. Under his counsel, she worked to understand her unconscious desires and unearth the causes of her gender perversion. Bak
hailed from the Hungarian School of psychoanalysis, which played an important role in the exploration of child-mother relationships. After his immigration to the U.S. in 1941, Bak served on the New York Psychoanalytical Society from 1957 to 1959 before leaving for academic tours and private practice. In Richards’s words, “he wore a beard and spoke with an accent that sounded appropriate.”

Bak, as a devoted Freudian psychoanalyst, claimed that Richards did not actually want to be female. She actually feared losing her penis and acted out “symbolic castration.” According to Bak, the pleasure Richards derived from cross-dressing did not stem from a womanly appearance and feminine performances, but rather came from the relief of changing back into a man.

Freudian psychoanalysis during the second half of the twentieth-century posited that gender role confusion typically developed from “castration anxiety.” Castration anxiety occurred during the phallic stage of sexual development when the infantile boy recognized the differences in male and female anatomy, and assumed the female genitalia had been castrated in punishment. This awareness resulted in a fear of similar castigation. In a 1978 essay titled “Transvestism: New Perspectives,” clinical psychiatry professor Ethel Person and psychoanalyst Lionel Ovesey explained that castration anxiety occurred when “the boy responded to the discovery of the woman’s ‘castration’ and the implicit danger to himself in that discovery by a split in the ego… Such splitting has been viewed as the predominant defensive maneuver in the perversions,” including transvestism.

The essay further notes the ideas of formative classical theorists, notably referencing Bak.

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48 Ibid, 121.
Bak positioned infantile occurrences as the most significant component of abnormal sexual development. An expert in the field of psychotherapy, he believed “perversions” -- including transvestitism -- stemmed from traumatic and over-stimulating childhood experiences. In the *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, he co-authored the chapter “Fetishism, Transvestitism, and Voyeurism: A Psychoanalytic Approach” which describes various reasons for the three perversions. The chapter defines perversion as “a symptom or mode of sexual adaptation in which the essential element is the dramatic denial of castration” (Bak’s italics). Castration anxiety therefore resulted in a splitting of self-representation and a failure to achieve a clear gender identification.

Due to Bak’s authoritative credentials and his foreign-yet-academic demeanor, Richards at first accepted the psychoanalytical solutions. Bak enforced strict adherence to societal gender norms, coaxing Richards into heterosexual relationships. As Richards reached deep into her subconscious for childhood trauma, Bak required she sport a beard and engage in casual sex. Above all, he prohibited cross-dressing.

The remedies, however, proved futile. Unable to shake her inner feelings, Richards asked for Bak’s assessment of a surgical solution. “I brought up the subject of transsexual surgery. The idea had been in the back of my head since I had first heard of Christine Jorgensen in the early fifties.” According to Richards, Bak did not respond positively. “(He) would fly off the handle when I brought this up. He would stand over me like a great prophet and predict utter doom if I ever had my penis done away with.”

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51 Renée Richards, *Second Serve*, 158.
52 Ibid, 139.
When Richards left psychoanalysis for the newly publicized practice of Dr. Harry
Benjamin, Bak offered one word – “quack.”

Dr. Harry Benjamin is known in the U.S. as the “father of transsexualism.” Born
in Berlin in 1884, he immigrated to the U.S. in the beginning of the twentieth-century and
started a private practice a few years later in 1916. Benjamin, however, did not receive
recognition until he treated Christine Jorgensen, the first famous American male-to-
female transsexual. Jorgensen gained notoriety due to her former masculine status as a
World War II veteran. In the wake of the war, she forced recognition of both Benjamin
and transsexuality.

A pioneer in the U.S. transgender movement, Benjamin was one of the few
doctors who originally approved of sex-change operations. He started seeing patients
with gender-related issues in the early 1950s, and opted for hormone treatment and
surgical consultations rather than the psychoanalysis, lobotomy, electro-therapy and
institutionalization methods used by the contemporary medical establishments.53
Jorgensen brought him national attention in 1952, which opened the floodgates for his
transsexual activism. In 1966 Benjamin published The Transsexual Phenomenon, the
first work dedicated to describing affirmative treatments for transsexuals, complete with
case studies from his patients.

Although viewed as a caring and compassionate doctor, Benjamin did consider
certain physical requirements necessary for socially acceptable male-to-female
transsexuals. “For a ‘successful woman,’” he said, “I had in mind particularly the
outward appearance and the impression of total personality.” Benjamin continued that “a

53 Benjamin met Freud sometime between 1928 and 1930. In the meeting, Benjamin revealed his
impotence, resulting in Freud calling him a latent homosexual. “Benjamin forever after deplored
heavy masculine build, a height of six feet or more, and a strong, dark beard were causes for worry and doubt.\textsuperscript{54} Although he preferred surgery for small, effeminate men, Benjamin nonetheless recognized the dire need for mental relief in certain situations and permitted surgery for those who did not completely fit into gendered classifications. Richards did not share this opinion.

The first time Richards walked into Benjamin’s office she was shocked. Unlike the patients who anxiously waited for Bak under Freud’s steely gaze, Benjamin’s patients comprised an outwardly unusual group.

I surveyed the room and found it full of creatures who were neither fish nor fowl. There were women who were dressed as men and men who were dressed as women. There were also some women who looked like women but only one man dressed as a man – me. A lot of them looked as if they had lost their senses. For example, what did that black giant with the fiber wig think he was up to? Six-feet six was out of the question! I was six feet one and considered that just barely acceptable... At any rate, he ought to have been ruled out on the grounds of bad taste. That miniskirt was terrible!\textsuperscript{55}

The spectrum of people Benjamin treated on a regular basis did not abide by the same stringent gender rules that Richards followed, both as a male and as a female. Although she worked with Benjamin for several years, and befriended several transsexuals of all builds and backgrounds as a result, Richards never adapted her physician’s open-minded attitude about the relative necessity of certain physical traits for being a “successful woman.” Rather, she maintained her own strict idea about the acceptability of transsexuals. This idea stemmed from the gendered beliefs she had learned in the 1940s. For Richards, transsexuals needed to follow the norms dictated by the gender binary and fit completely into either the male role or the female role. There could be no middle ground.

\textsuperscript{55} Renée Richards, \textit{Second Serve}, 163.
Richards defined her requirements for transsexuals as “somatic compliance.” The term originated as a psychoanalytical term, one that involves the body in the expression of neurotic disorders. She explained that her meaning of somatic compliance “simply refers to whether or not an individual can be made into a socially acceptable woman.”

To Richards, “socially acceptable” referred to the ability of a body to appear unambiguously as one gender. For example, transgendered men who desired to be female, according to Richards, needed to possess the culturally normative biological attributes of a woman – small stature, minimal body hair and delicate features. In her personal situation, she realized “I was lucky because, in spite of being tall, I had several physical features in my favor: good skin and complexion, high cheekbones, good legs, and a face that aged slowly. My head was not too large, and my facial bones and the muscles connected to them were not extremely prominent as in some males.”

Richards, as well as Benjamin, understood that the success of passing, and therefore the chances of avoiding social criticism and even social violence, related to a person’s somatic compliance. Yet Richards prized gender aesthetical conformity over the concerns of others’ well-being.

In contrast, Benjamin considered the mental torment of individuals. In dire circumstances, he overlooked “handicaps” – such as masculine features – and consented in the creation of “eccentric” women. Richards conceded that “I dislike saying this because it is judgmental and may be arbitrary, and it precludes some very distressed people from seeking happiness, but I am convinced that no matter what the psyche

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56 Ibid, 165-166.
57 Renée Richards, No Way Renée, 232.
58 Harry Benjamin, Transsexual Phenomenon, 110.
desires, some men should not try to live as women.”59  She presented her views regarding who was and was not qualified for transsexual surgery in a rather callous and condescending way. For example, she showed her insensitivity when describing one of Benjamin’s other patients Johnnie:

(Johnnie) preferred the idea of being a woman. Unfortunately, she made a poor one: her teeth were bad, and her skin was heavily pitted. Worse than those factors was Johnnie’s generally unfeminine effect. Her gestures, walk, carriage, and voice were all masculine. She looked less convincing than Milton Berle in drag. Even hormone therapy didn’t seem to be helping; Johnie just didn’t have any feel for femininity… I soon decided that she was not a true transsexual but a paranoid schizophrenic attempting to escape into the world of womanhood.60

While the need for transsexuals to pass can not be overestimated, the need for mental contentment can also not be overlooked. As demonstrated in her encounters with other male-to-female transsexuals, Richards trumpeted the culturally defined characteristics of femininity. Rather than consider a middle ground for gender, she adhered unwaveringly to the male/female binary. Richards’s rejection of psychoanalysis and of her biological sex, along with her reasons for transsexual surgical standards indicated a desire for female gender conformity.

Her need for gender regulation, however, occurred during the women’s liberation movement; a time when females sought release from these gender restrictions.

“A New Breed of Career Women”
*The Women’s Liberation Movement and Women’s Tennis*

While Richards personally felt committed to a gendered dichotomy, female tennis star Billie Jean King prepared to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of the very same divide.

On the evening of September 20, 1973, she waited nervously in the Houston Astros guest

locker room. Around her, the Astrodome surged with energy. A crowd of 30,472 milled through the hallways and anxiously awaited the start of the decade’s most highly publicized tennis match. Excited children begged their parents for money to purchase the tournament’s souvenirs, adorned either with the biological symbol of woman or man. From sweatbands to tennis racquet covers, all items featured the event title: “Battle of the Sexes.” 61

Billie Jean King entered the main arena aboard a feathered litter. Dressed as Cleopatra in a blue-and-green rhinestone ensemble, she was carried by four bare-chested muscular men dressed as slaves. In the opposite corner, Bobby Riggs appeared in a Chinese rickshaw complete with gold wheels. A gaggle of girls, “Bobby’s Bosom Buddies,” pulled him down the aisle. When the two stood face-to-face, a nervous hush filled the air. “It’s the fight crowd. It’s ancient Rome,” an event coordinator commented. “It’s the closest I’ve come to getting a woman and a man in the ring together.” 62 Indeed, the Battle of the Sexes served a greater purpose than just media hoopla. The match served as a symbolic representation of the women’s liberation movement’s demands for equality, white racialized privilege and the steadfast male desire to maintain gendered hierarchal separation.

The women’s liberation movement’s relationship with tennis started rather precariously. A majority of the women players initially shied away from proclaiming themselves feminists as they already had to defend against the culturally stigmatized

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labels of “masculine” and “lesbian.” As the movement gained credence, however, tennis became a viable activity in which to push forward the ideals of equality. White women found they could push for equality on the courts. King was among first to embrace the cause. “I’m interested in the women’s movement, but from an action point of view, not just an intellectual one,” King explained. “Tennis helps the women’s movement just by doing.” Led by the vocal King, female tennis players began to work for equality in tennis. Their demands unintentionally buttressed the women’s movement and provided a strong symbol of successful female encroachment into traditionally masculine realms. “I viewed Billie Jean King and her colleagues as true pioneers of the women’s movement,” said Grace Lichtenstein, a female sportswriter. “They were a new breed of career women, who were carving a place for themselves in what, throughout history, has been strictly a man’s world – that of the sports superstar.”

When King started her tennis career, she was identified as an amateur. Because no professional circuit existed for women in the early 1960s, females who wanted to compete settled for second-class status. While male professionals received paychecks and stipends, female amateurs earned under-the-table payments and typically had to fund all travel and boarding expenses. Regardless of talent, a woman could not earn a living as a tennis player. In 1969, however, four women stepped forward to start chipping away at the long-standing structures of inequality. King, Rosie Casals, Francoise Durr and Ann

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64 Grace Lichtenstein, A Long Way, Baby, 151.

65 Ibid, 11-12.
Haydon Jones joined the women’s auxiliary of the National Tennis League (NTL), a temporary professional circuit. The move for equality occurred in traditional male athletic spaces, and thus aroused male animosity. Yet, several female tennis players also resented the achievement. “From the beginning the four of us were treated almost like outcasts by the other women players,” King explained. “The idea that a woman could be contract professionals outside the control of their national associations was outrageous, even to many of the other woman players.”66 After only one year, the auxiliary collapsed.

Although short-lived, the NTL women’s component sparked a more widespread campaign for equality in tennis. Motivated by the NTL and unhappy with the lower pay of female competitors, Ceci Martinez and Esmé Emanuel took a stand at the US Open in 1970. The two demanded that Jack Kramer, executive of the Pacific Southwest Championships, provide equal prize money. When he refused, eight top players, including King, signed with Gladys Heldman and in 1971 formed an all-women professional circuit – the Virginia Slims Tour. The tensions caused by the Virginia Slims Tour highlighted the unwillingness of men to concede athletic equality. “As tennis staggered toward professionalism, however, it became pretty clear that it was a sport controlled by men who were unwilling to even think about giving women a fair shake when it came down to the nitty-gritty – money,” King reasoned. “Nearly everywhere, except at Wimbledon, women were given second-class treatment.”67

Nonetheless, that same year King earned $117,000, becoming the first female athlete to breach the 100-grand mark. For the duration of the decade, she worked

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tirelessly to promote equality in tennis. Led by King, by 1976 women had made incredible strides in women’s tennis. Her easy defeat of Riggs in three sets, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, seemed to provide justification. Yet, the discovery of a male-to-female transsexual in women’s tennis once again raised questions of masculine biological superiority.

“To Lose a Spot in a Draw to a Man”
The USTA and WTA Resistance

Dick Carlson called Richards the eve before the story’s release. He sought to verify his research which had linked her to former Yale tennis star Richard Raskind. Richards wrote that she refused to comment and politely requested that the story be dropped. When Carlson brushed aside her courteous pleas, Richards begged. She explained the detrimental effects publicity would have on her son, her ophthalmologist practice and her personal privacy. He again denied the request. Desperate, Richards recalled that she angrily threatened him with everything from a lawsuit to bodily harm. With that, Carlson calmly thanked Richards for her time and told her the story would air at 8 pm the next day.

Bewildered, Richards immediately phoned the tournament headquarters to announce her withdrawal. Andrea Glazier, a prominent black tennis official, answered the call. Through sobs, Richards explained the situation and her resolution to drop out of the tournament. Unexpectedly, Glazier refused to honor Richards’s decision. “Renée,” Richards recounted her saying, “I don’t want you to withdraw. I am a member of a

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68 Some people argue that Billie Jean King was at the height of her career at the time of Battle of the Sexes while Riggs was much older and not in as good of shape. While this may be true, King’s victory still undermines the argument that men are unquestionably better than women in sport.
minority myself.” She added, “you won’t be doing yourself a favor if you run away from this tournament. You’ll just be giving in to stupidity.” ⁶⁹

The conversation with Glazier altered Richards’s outlook. Rather than withdraw from the tournament and attempt to piece together her life away from the public eye, Richards continued to participate. After winning the California tournament, she refused to yield to the USTA and WTA. Faced with her acceptance into major competitions determinant upon the Barr body test, Richards denied compliance on the grounds of a civil rights violation. In interviews at the time and in Second Serve, she described her campaign as a quest to break down social barriers and advance transsexual rights. Later in life, as explained in No Way Renée, Richards said the activism was forced upon her. Regardless, in a very public fashion, Richards’s presence challenged the biologically-based dichotomy in athletics.

As all skilled athletes do, Richards wanted to compete against top-level competition. She therefore looked to the US Open, a prominent Grand Slam Tournament. After Richards announced her decision to participate in the tournament, the USTA took an oppositional stance founded upon the common gendered ideologies of athletics. The organization denied Richards access, claiming that “entry into women’s events at the U.S. Open, the leading international tennis tournament, of persons not genetically female would introduce an element of inequality and unfairness into the championships.” ⁷⁰ Taking up the same position, the WTA explained that “it’s damn unfair to be a woman who has devoted her whole life to tennis to lose a spot in a draw to

⁶⁹ Renée Richards, Second Serve, 317.
a man.”71 Both organizations appear to have refused acceptance on the grounds of an
impermeable gendered boundary, one which posited males as superior in athletics.
Together, the USTA and WTA ordered the Barr body test for all female competitors in
the 1976 U.S. Open – the test had been available for ten years and never previously
required – as a way to remove Richards from competition. “The U.S. Open Committee
had decided that I could play if I could pass a chromosome test,” Richards explained.
“They knew in all likelihood I could never pass such a test though it is not infallible proof
of sexual identity.”72

Although the Barr body test provided a controversial obstacle, Richards vowed to
continue to work for inclusion. She claimed her fight was on behalf of both
transgendered people and minority groups. “They told me I couldn’t play,” she said,
“and all of a sudden I became the world’s activist for the sexually disenfranchised.”73
Richards received letters from an array of groups, not just those with a discriminated-
against sexuality. Blacks, convicts, Chicanos, hippies, homosexuals, the disabled and
transsexuals all contacted her as a leader. Although Richards accepted her plight as that
of a minority, she connected more to the transgender cause. Richards understood that her
situation not only allowed for the complication of the gendered dichotomy in sports, but
also for the overall societal acceptance of transgender people. The stories of violence and
assault she received from transsexuals proved the pivotal force. “I chose not to turn
back,” she said in a 1976 New York Times interview, “because I started getting really
incredulous letters from other transsexuals. I realized this was more than just a tennis
question. A transsexual is not somebody with two heads or who minces down a

72 Renée Richards, Second Serve, 343.
sidewalk. So I have become a spokeswoman for these people.” Unlike other examples of culturally construed sexually-deviant figures -- like GI Christine Jorgensen -- Richards believed her reputation as an ophthalmologist and background as a father would help people see transsexualism in a new light. She wanted to change the image of transsexuals from just “perverts dancing in sleazy bars” and resultantly viewed her case as a step in the “social evolution of transsexuality.” Although Richards’s never explicitly voiced the idea, her white, upper-class status separated her from the majority of transsexuals.

She therefore refused to take the Barr body test. Richards claimed the test violated her civil rights and inaccurately based gender on one criterion. In addition, her desire to play tennis represented the need for an overall readjustment in the debilitating categorizations of gender. “The issue specifically is that of an individual’s right to be and do what that person feels is right for them,” she explained. “To be and do, free of social pressure.” Richards’s cause remained in the headlines for several months, yet her absolute refusal to take the test forced her to the sidelines during the 1976 U.S. Open. After a year of exclusion, Richards refused to miss the 1977 tournament and consequentially looked to the law for help. In August 1977, she sued the USTA for overt discrimination and the deprivation of civil rights, the right to earn a livelihood and the right to equal opportunity. A *New York Times* article explained, “as a New York ophthalmologist, Richard Raskind played tennis for fun. As a transsexual, Renée Richards is playing tennis for a sociological progress.”

Prior to Richards’s legal action against the tennis governmental bodies, she competed in several small, unsanctioned tournaments. In her first competition as an exposed transsexual, she faced a task perhaps more daunting than any tennis match – an interview with Howard Cosell. Cosell, the notorious host of ABC’s Wide World of Sports and a sports-broadcasting legend, first earned recognition for his colorful blow-by-blow reports of Muhammad Ali’s early matches. As his career gained momentum, Cosell became increasingly known for his colorful diatribes, intellectual candor and “tell it like it is” style. His tendency to ask provocative questions both won him fans and created enemies. Richards, as the first transsexual athlete seeking acceptance into a woman’s sport, had some reservations about the interview. Cosell would not have to dig deep to uncover problematic issues. “I’ll admit that I was intimidated,” she said, “after all, he was not known for tact.” Unbeknownst to her at the time, a friend of Richards’s confronted Cosell in an act of chivalry. He explained the precariousness of the situation and described Richards to the Wide World of Sports host as quiet and not in it for the fame. He requested Cosell not be abrasive and provocative. As a result, Cosell remained polite throughout, maintained a courteous tone and kept the interview from focusing too heavily on scandalous material. “Amazingly, Howard Cosell was both sensitive and supportive,” Richards recalls. “His manner was respectful, and the information he
requested was reasonable.” She adds that although “Cosell is remembered by many as an obnoxious character, he treated me respectfully and like a lady.”

Richards clearly liked being outwardly perceived and treated as a woman. Her reaction to the Cosell interview shows her elation when acknowledged in a manner culturally applauded – “like a lady.” Because to Richards, being recognized as a “lady” signified social acceptance. To earn and then maintain this recognition, she therefore embraced all tenets of traditional femininity, from dresses to domesticity. In addition, Richards simultaneously bowed to the gendered stereotypes in athletics. She emphasized her post-operative, hormone-treated female build as physically inferior to her former male stature as a tactic to gain the approval of sports authorities and other players. Thus, Richards donned pink nail polish for public confirmation, repeatedly described her depleted strength for athletic inclusion, and eventually learned the graciousness of losing to exemplify her womanhood.

When in public, Richards was a picture of femininity. Whether playing on the tennis court, eating in a restaurant, or speaking in a post-match press conference, she subscribed completely to the culturally constructed images of a woman, in a way her mother had not. From the small details like wearing a petite bracelet, to the larger details like adopting a delicate walk, Richards always put forward a feminine image to aid in her societal acceptance as a woman. In an interview, for example, a reporter noted Richards’s “high cheekbones, shapely legs, graceful gold pierced earrings and peach nail

79 Renée Richards, Second Serve, 337.
80 Renée Richards, No Way Renée, 31.
polish to match her Kochini sweater are distinctly female.” Similarly, in an overview of a tournament match, a sportswriter found Richards’s womanly attire worthy of an explanation. He described her as “stylish and statuesque in a light blue tennis dress with a flared skirt and large loop earrings.” The public also approved of Richards’s carefully assembled appearance. When asked her opinion of Richards, a tennis spectator explained “she looks like a woman, plays like a woman. She is a woman.” Another person similarly added “a person’s commitment to being a man or a woman seems to have an impact on which one he or she is.” While Richards’s public embodiment of femininity helped her attain social acceptance, her private internalization of cultural stereotypes served as a measure of self-affirmation.

Off the tennis court and out of the public eye, Richards also maintained a strict adherence to femininity. While her unreserved acceptance of gender stereotypes stemmed from the need to pass, she also wanted complete societal acceptance. “For me, and I think for most true transsexuals,” she said, “the goal is normalcy, the fullest possible playing out of the new gender role.” The act of passing and the demand for “normalcy,” however, often perpetuated the male/female binary upon which the division in sport was founded. For example, Richards “thankfully” did not subscribe to the “traits” associated with “real men.” “I don’t spit. I don’t curse. I don’t belch. I don’t smoke cigars. I don’t pick fights, but I might try to stop one.” Although these “traits” are masculine generalizations rather than biological qualities, Richards upheld the

83 Neil Amdur, “Dr. Richards Beats Miss Beene in Tennis Week Open, 6-0, 6-2” *New York Times*, August 22, 1976, 149.
85 Renée Richards, *No Way Renée*, 249.
86 Ibid, 288-289.
division between culturally approved acts for different genders. Along the same lines, she adhered to the stereotypical caricature of the emotional female, particularly when in the company of other women. Richards claimed hormone treatments altered her demeanor toward compassion and understanding.

The hormones seemed to induce in me an uncharacteristic sense of well-being, even though my emotional swings increased markedly. I had laughing fits and crying jags, but they seemed natural and even therapeutic... I also experienced a notable increase in my level of personal interest in the people around me, which was quite a change in demeanor. Additionally, similar to her “change in demeanor,” Richards’s abided by the regulations of separate spheres, a historical framework which placed women in the constraints of domesticity. After her surgery, Richards felt that “domestic details seemed somehow more worthy of my attention.” Her outward femininity served to assist with societal confirmation, yet Richards also internalized traditional roles.

Richards furthermore took advantage of the cultural norms of femininity to ensure inclusion into the women’s professional circuit. To abide by the cultural standard of female inferiority in athletics, Richards overtly degraded her skills and emphasized her weakness. Born a biological male, she needed to prove to other competitors, the USTA and the WTA that she did not possess an unfair advantage. Thus, as she curled her hair and put on her makeup, Richards also described her drastic weight loss, reduction of mobility, increased lethargy and lessening of muscle mass – elements she believed signified her womanhood. While Richards publicly belittled her strength for the sake of access, she also embraced inferiority as a sign of her successful transition, and equated losing with being female. In a friendly match with male players, Richards illustrated this reasoning:

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87 Ibid, 235.
88 Ibid, 235.
My tennis partners there were a very chauvinistic bunch. They were amazed at my skills and enjoyed playing with me, but, when I missed a ball, they were quick to blame it on my being a woman. I didn't mind these jibes because they affirmed my womanliness. At that time, even the putdowns were welcomed reinforcements.

Richards not only accepted the condescending remarks, but viewed them as a sign of her feminine achievement. In a similar situation, she was happy with her mixed-doubles partner’s, NBA star John Lucas’s, superior left-hand swing and tremendous height. Because Richards was a left-handed player, she tended to play the ad or left half of the court, especially when she competed in women’s doubles, but also at times in mixed doubles. With Lucas, however, “I never played the ad court, which made me feel quite feminine,” she explained. Richards’s sense of contentment with her proper gender role also stemmed from “the wonderful fact that with John, I was not taller than my male partner.” In her mind, Richards’ lesser capabilities as a woman justified her access to the women’s circuit, and showed that the reservations of the USTA and WTA were ridiculous. “If I was allowed to play, she said, the USTA and WTA believed “the floodgates would be opened and through them would come tumbling an endless stream of made-over Neanderthals who would brutalize Chris Evert and Evonne Goolagong. Of course, this was sheer nonsense.” Richards publicly downplayed her talent and embraced the inferior position of femininity in athletics for acceptance.

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89 Renée Richards, Second Serve, 238.
90 Ibid, 139.
91 Renée Richards, No Way Renée & Second Serve.
“The Criterion of Womanhood”  
*Richards’s Case against the USTA and WTA*

One night in 1977, Richards timidly knocked on the door of a brownstone apartment located just off Madison Avenue in New York City. She had spent the previous evening practicing a speech to help her outline several specific demands. On the way to the apartment, Richards reread her notes and rehearsed. She decided to start with some personal background information, review her career to date, then move into the reasons why she should be allowed to play professional women’s tennis. Even though she was prepared, Richards still felt nervous. After a few minutes with no answer, she knocked again, this time a little louder. Slowly, a man cracked the door and peered through the slit. After looking Richards over, he opened the door entirely and revealed a frayed bathrobe covering a slouching stature. Before she could utter a word, he said he knew what she wanted and yes, he would take her case. Although she was taken aback by his attire and directness, Richards was thrilled that the famed lawyer, Roy Cohn, agreed to help.

Cohn had achieved national prominence in the 1950s with the assistance of the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy. As McCarthy’s chief council of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations during the initial stages of the Cold War, Cohn interrogated suspected communists, often in a controversial manner. As he gained national prominence, allegations of homosexuality surfaced. Yet, a non-related disagreement with the Red Scare Senator forced Cohn to resign, and he quickly moved to New York City to establish a private practice firm. That’s where Richards found him and requested his council.
Richards approached Cohn because she was fed up. Her name still appeared in tabloid headlines with surprising frequency, female tennis players cruelly ignored her in forced social situations, her son had started to feel the harmful affects of his father’s publicity, and her decision to give up medicine to focus solely on tennis had depleted her savings. Yet most frustrating to Richards was her continued rejection by the USTA and WTA. Reaching her breaking point, she decided to take legal action. After her initial encounter with Cohn, Richards met him in a more professional environment where he agreed to oversee the case, but handed off primary responsibility to his partner, Mike Rosen. Rosen filed suit against the USTA, WTA, and the U.S. Open Committee (USOP), claiming that their refusal to allow Richards access as a woman violated her civil rights. In the case, Richards v. United States Tennis Assn., Justice Alfred M. Ascione ruled in favor of the plaintiff and opened the door for Richards into the female tennis circuit. Although the announcement was as a victory for her, the decision did not establish a precedent for future transsexual athletes; Ascione limited his ruling to Richards and women’s tennis. Instead of challenging gendered barriers in sports, the New York Supreme Court readjusted the criterion for female athletic involvement.

In the courtroom, three main issues surfaced. The first involved the reliability and correctness of the Barr body test in the determination of gender. Rosen argued that the test was “insufficient, grossly unfair, inaccurate, faulty and inequitable.” Furthermore, Richards’s doctors offered the results of a Phenotype test – a test based on primary and secondary sexual characteristics – which Richards easily passed as female. To counter,  

92 I use “father” here because that is how Richards’s son addresses her.  
the USTA pointed to the Olympic use of the Barr body test as the international standard “to assure fairness and equality of competition.” In addition, the defendants described a concern that removing the test would lead to a flood of male imposters, particularly from Eastern European countries. The Cold War shaped the defense’s argument, but the widespread cultural assumption of masculine athletic advantage also underlined the complaints.

The second issue related to the definition of a woman in athletic spaces. Rosen called upon Dr. John Money, a well-known sexologist and psychologist who studied gender identity. Money argued that sex depended upon a spectrum of factors – internal anatomy, external genital appearance, endocrine balance, somatic structure, psychology, and chromosomes – and not just the chromosomal makeup as required by the Barr body test. Along with Richards’s gynecologist, Money asserted that Richards should be classified as female. For the USTA, Dr. Daniel Federman, the chair of the Department of Medicine at Stanford Medical School, explained that the appearance of the Y chromosome served as the sole determining factor of the male gender. He therefore stressed that certain aspects of sexual identity remain forever immutable, and postoperative transsexuals thus possess fundamental differences from women.

In the final matter, both sides submitted affidavits from prominent tennis players as evidence. Francoise Durr, Janet Newberry, Kristien K. Shaw, and Vicki Berner all argued that a male-to-female transsexual possessed an inherent biological advantage. The players noted Richards’s height, strength and psychological background as unfair assets in tennis. Billie Jean King, on the other side, supported Richards’s right to compete. She explained that based on her experiences, Richards “does not enjoy physical advantages.”

superiority or strength so as to have an advantage over women competitors in the sport of tennis.”

On August 16, 1976 Justice Ascione ruled in favor of the plaintiff. His decision required the USTA and the WTA to accept Richards as female and allow her to participate in women’s tournaments, including the U.S. Open. Ascione explained that the use of the Barr body test as the sole determinant of sex was “grossly unfair, discriminatory and inequitable, and violative of plaintiff’s rights.” He did not, however, dismiss the credibility of the test outright. The Barr body test could be used to identify sex, just not in isolation, showing Ascione’s belief in the need for a divide between genders. In addition, the New York Supreme Court ruled Richards legally female. The decision stated that “by all other known indicators of sex, plaintiff is female.” Here the court utilized a variety of sex determinants. “In that her external genital appearance is that of a female, her internal sex is that of a female who has been hysterectomized and ovariectomized, she is psychologically a woman, and, as the result of the administration of female hormones, she has the muscular and fat composition of a female.” Ascione dismissed the defendants’ concerns of Richards’s supposed biological advantage on the grounds that she fit into a new category of woman. He argued that “the unfounded fears and misconceptions of defendants must give way to the overwhelming medical evidence that this person is now female.”

The decision demonstrates the court’s perception of the inflexibility of the gender dichotomy in athletics and in society. Instead of breaking down boundaries, the ruling modified the stipulations for womanhood in athletics. And because the decision did not

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95 Ibid, 6.
96 Ibid, 1.
extend to all transsexuals, Ascione avoided setting legal precedent. Nonetheless, his ruling described the characteristics required of male-to-female transsexual athletes, and thus created an altered definition of womanhood. The ruling demanded that female athletes possess a weaker physical stature, reduced either by hormones, biology or self-infliction. In addition, the criterion for a transsexual required surgery, thus highlighting the importance of certain anatomical features for females. Without a blanket decision, Ascione essentially ruled that future judgments would be made on a case-by-case basis whereas the proper authorities could determine the person’s adherence to the culturally outlined rules of femininity.

Thus Richards’s legal victory did not force dramatic change beyond the tennis courts. Her public campaign and isolated success sheds light on the court’s -- and thus an important component of society’s -- unwavering determination to continue the rigid boundaries in athletics. As the New York Times reporter Robin Herman accurately explained of the situation in 1976, “sports organizations lack the flexibility to cope with the widening spectrum of sexual identities that society is learning to accept.”

Yet, the heads of sport organizations were not the only people concerned about the addition of a male-to-female transsexual to the women’s professional tennis circuit.

“Gold Hoop Earrings and Masculine Impulses”

Female Player Opposition

In the midst of a 1977 women’s professional tennis tournament in Phoenix, Arizona, Kerry Reid abruptly walked off the court. Reid, the no. 5 seed and recent

winner of the Australian Open, faced a 6-7, 2-4 deficit when her husband, who also filled the role of manager, called the game. He literally threw in the towel, blatantly aiming it at Reid’s opponent, Richards. With her head bowed, Reid obediently unlaced her sneakers, quickly packed her racquets, and stalked to the locker rooms without mumbling a word. Her husband, however, was not as compliant or composed. “She’ll never play Renèe again,” he venomously declared. “We don’t believe Renèe is a woman.”

The Reid walkout unleashed yet another wave of protest against the inclusion of Renèe Richards in women’s tennis. The women who opposed her believed that although Richards had legally earned the right from the New York Supreme Court to participate, she still nonetheless possessed an unfair biological advantage. Other female competitors, however, interpreted the backlash against Richards as detrimental to both the quest for gender equality and the plight of women’s tennis. For these women, to demand complete equality to men and then to deny a person inclusion was hypocritical and wrong.

Richards’s legal success thus forced the question of masculine biological advantage into the public consciousness and resultantly divided female tennis players. The women adverse to Richards’s career often cited “unfairness” and unchangeable “advantages,” while those in support rejected supposed biological restraints. In addition, the two groups split over the expectations and fulfillment of gender roles. The players who accepted Richards held more non-normative views of gender. For example, Billie Jean King, “The Women’s Lib Symbol,” not only publicly demonstrated her ability to beat a man -- Bobby Riggs -- but also supported Richards and adamantly argued she did not possess any innate edge. Those adverse to the inclusion of a transsexual adhered

100 Grace Lichenstein, A Long way Baby, 150.
more to the societal notions of male and female. Notably Chris Evert, the Floridian “Golden Girl,” came out in opposition of Richards at first, due to questions of fairness. Interestingly, Evert later embraced Richards, with her acceptance of Richards coinciding with her acceptance of weight-lifting and muscle mass, spawned by their necessity to remain competitive with Martina Navratilova. Nonetheless in 1976 Evert was ambivalent about Richards’s right to play. For this group -- who remained steadfast in protest -- to beat a man, or a former man, would obliterate their femininity. By rejecting Richards they reconciled their extraordinary (masculine) athletic talents with society’s construction of femininity. As New York Times reporter Janice Kaplan realized, “Renée Richards, the transsexual tennis player, has infuriated women athletes because she symbolizes what they secretly fear – women in professional sports are seen as slightly tainted and, gold hoop earrings or not, have masculine impulses.”101

The resentment displayed by Kerry Reid in 1977 was not novel. As soon as Carlson exposed Richards as a former male, volatile outcry ensued. After her first victory in the 1976 California tournament as an uncovered transsexual, Richards’s opponent, 20-year-old Robyn Harris, said Richards’s victory was due to an innate male advantage. In a post-match interview Harris explained that she was “psyched out” and very aware that a man possessed a superior strength to hit the ball harder than a woman, particularly on the serve.102 In Richards’s next tournament, Tennis Week Open held in New Jersey, twelve women dropped from the competition in objection over her presence. “We all feel she’s still a man and it’s just not fair,” said Anna Kiyomura, the no. 2 seed

before withdrawing. Janet Newberry, the 1973 Wimbledon runner-up, echoed similar complaints. On behalf of the protestors, she explained that “we are not prepared to commit ourselves to a woman’s tournament in which a man is playing,” and that “it might set an unfavorable precedent and comprise women’s tennis in the future.”

Even though a portion of the participants withdrew from the competition – and the WTA organized a separate tournament to emphasize the injustices of allowing a transsexual to perform – Richards played, albeit not without experiencing hostility. Caroline Stoll, a 15-year-old newcomer to the tennis circuit, lost to Richards and voiced the similar concerns of biological differences. In a Chicago Tribune interview she pointed out that “she’s just too strong and too tall to be a woman… And being that she was born a man and everything, she still has that strength. You can’t get rid of that.” Furthermore, she told Sports Illustrated to assess Richards’s muscles. “Did you see those forearms?” she exclaimed. “That’s where she gets all that power and spin on her serves. It’s unfair.” The biological edge, however, appeared to falter. Richards lost Tennis Week Open to Lea Antonoplis 6-7, 6-3, 6-0 in the finals.

Although the courts recognized Richards’s right to play in 1977, and more importantly she proved beatable within the first months of competition and therefore not armed with advantage, a contingent of players continued to resist her inclusion based on the argument of fairness. Weeks after the Reid incident, two British Wightman Cup players appeared at a tournament wearing T-shirts with “I Am A Real Woman” boldly emblazoned on the front. In Atlanta, Dianne Fromholtz defeated Richards and then called her a “freak” and “a sideshow” in a post-match press conference. She added that

her transsexuality was “against human nature,” and when asked what she would have
done if she had lost, Fromholtz quickly retorted, “drowned myself.” Also, two other
players followed Reid’s example and walked off court mid-match when forced to play
Richards.106

All these women pointed to the asymmetrical biological characteristics of men
and women. They pointed to Richards’s 6-foot-1 build, supposed superior muscle
composition and a general psychological advantage. These women, resentful of the
addition of a male-to-female transsexual in the tennis world, held firm to the cultural
ideology that in athletics, men reigned supreme. Players also feared that a victory over a
male-to-female transsexual would result in a loss of femininity.

Evert -- the Associated Press “Female Athlete of the Year” in 1975, 1977 and
1980, World No. 1 female for five years, and winner of four straight U.S. Opens --
conveyed concern and ambivalence about Richards’s legal inclusion.107 Although Evert
suggested the possibility of masculine superiority, she did not protest against Richards as
cruelly or adamantly as the other players. She did, however, stress about dominating on
the court and while remaining the perfect image of femininity. Evert’s concern over
competing against a former man -- concern about beating a former man -- most likely
stemmed from her obsession with preserving femininity.

Because Evert approved of different behaviors for men and women, she sought to
diminish the appearance of certain characteristics she possessed -- competitiveness,
aggression and physical skills -- particularly when she competed. Evert described her
refusal to appear awkward or masculine while playing tennis in a 1978 World Tennis

interview. “When I was young and impressionable, I knew I was playing a man’s game,” she explained. “But I wanted to be like everyone else, so I tried my hardest to be feminine on the court.” Evert therefore sought to rectify the masculine nature of her athleticism by unwaveringly subscribing to the cultural projections of femininity. Grace Lichtenstein, a reporter who followed several top female tennis players in 1974, remembers that “Chris never went out for a match without putting on full makeup, earrings, a pretty ribbon on her ponytail.” Evert’s unyielding adherence extended beyond her appearance and into performances. Lichtenstein further recalls an informative encounter.

I was especially curious about her feelings on femininity on the court, since she was now its leading exponent. “No point is worth falling down over,” she had told Peter Range, a Time magazine correspondent… “That’s the one thing women’s tennis has, is femininity” she said, picking her eyebrows over a small hand mirror as she spoke. “If women looked like men or played like men, it would be boring. I know some women who lift weights… But even if it would make me stronger I’d never to it. It’s important to look feminine – for self-confidence. I want to be known as a woman, not just a tennis player.”

Evert’s balance of femininity and extraordinary athleticism worked until Martina Navratilova arrived on the tennis scene. Navratilova, born in Prague, disregarded masculine labels and incorporated weight lifting and strength building into her workouts. After she defeated Evert in Wimbledon in 1978 and took over the World No. 1 ranking, Navratilova forced the Floridian “Golden Girl” to alter her beliefs in order to resume dominance. Evert’s feelings prior to her defeat, however, demonstrate the tensions female athletes experienced as a result of the gender boundaries mandated in athletics. In

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109 Grace Lichenstein, A Long Way Baby, 85-86.
110 Ibid, 85-86.
order to be socially acceptable, women competitors had to adhere to a strict notion of gender. But, to embrace femininity forced an acceptance of the superior nature of masculinity, as Evert showed. When asked about women playing against men, she responded “I hope it never comes… Everyone knows that the Number 1 woman can’t beat the Number 30 man. That would be the battle of the sexes and everybody would become masculine.”\footnote{Ibid, 87} This comment adds further support to her fears of athletic masculization. As a result of attitudes like this, Richards continued to face antagonism and resentment until she retired.

While the female opposition proved more vocal at first, players who supported Richards eventually stepped forward with equal vigor. Cathy Been, who lost to Richards in Tennis Week Open 0-6, 2-6, hinted early on at the errors of a generalized conception of male dominance in athletics. She explained after the match that “she’s not as strong or powerful as I anticipated.”\footnote{“Renée Wins Debut at Tennis Week,” Chicago Tribune, Aug 22, 1976, B3.} Florece Guédy, a French competitor, came to a similar conclusion. “I do admire her,” she said. “She has a lot of courage and it does take guts. She isn’t even embarrassed. By the way, I thought she would be a much stronger player than she was.”\footnote{“Renée Richards takes day off,” Chicago Tribune, August 23, 1976, E6.} As Richards continued to compete in tournaments – those not sanctioned by the USTA or the WTA in the first year – and continued to lose, many players also recognized the flaws. As Richards recalled, “one of the ironies of these repeated rebuffs was that most of the women they were supposedly protecting didn’t want to be protected. In fact, they were on my side. The courageous women who had
played against me in the Orange tournament were just the beginning: more came to my support as time passed.”

Billie Jean King served as one of the first professional female tennis players to support Richards, and also as the most important. King, the first *Sports Illustrated* “Sportswoman of the Year,” provided important testimony in the New York Supreme Court case, solidifying Richards’s right to inclusion. In court, King argued that Richards did not possess physical superiority or a masculine advantage, which weighed heavily in the final ruling. Her approach to femininity and masculinity existed as almost a complete foil to Evert. While Evert contemplated appropriate lipstick and nail polish color, King focused on winning. The different attitudes about femininity provide evidence into the different attitude about Richards’s access.

As both a leader in the women’s liberation movement and one of the most prominent figures in women’s tennis, King concerned herself with equality on and off the court. As already noted, she served as a pioneering member of the women’s auxiliary of the National Tennis League, was the first female tennis player to earn over $100,000 and defeated Bobby Riggs in a highly publicized event. She also won six Wimbledon singles championships and four U.S. Open titles, was ranked No. 1 in the world for five years, and established a women’s sport magazine and a women’s sports foundation. Throughout her successes, King dismissed accusations of the masculine attributes of her elite athleticism. Lichtenstein wrote in a *New York Times* article that King expressed frustration with the implications of gender and society’s difficulty accepting athletic

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115 Richards v. USTA, 6.
women. “Billie Jean once said herself that the words *masculine* and *feminine* should be deleted from the language because ‘all women tennis players are jocks.’”

In fact, a different *New York Times* article noted that “she is never offended by people who tell her she plays tennis just like a man. But she has become increasingly irritated by people who ask her when she’s going to settle down and attend to a home and family.”

Along those lines, King had an abortion in 1971 with her decision stemming at least partly from the desire to progress her career. In addition, King transgressed heteronormative boundaries with her 1981 announcement of a lesbian relationship. King clearly defied societal restriction.

Unlike Evert, King played tennis unapologetically, competitively and without the baggage of fear-inspired femininity. She wanted to receive the same treatment as her male counterparts, and wanted to beat all her female counterparts. “Winning, for Billie Jean, was a more potent drug than any chemist could devise, a more inspirational gospel than any scripture could preach,” described Lichtenstein. Furthermore, King realized that until female competitors dismissed society’s fears of female-masculinization, women’s sports would remain second class. “She was a jock who had spent her career discovering that she was a pioneer,” explained Lichtenstein. King knew “that no one was ready to delete the terms for gender from the sports vocabulary, (and) that women would still be second-class sports champions until they fought for the right to be classed in the same league as Joe Namath or a Wilt Chamberlain.”

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118 Grace Lichtenstein, “The Women’s Tennis Tour,” 220.
119 Ibid, 220.
As a result of her off-court efforts and on-court triumphs, King paved the way for female athletes to embrace competitiveness, aggressiveness and physical strength. A commemorative article written for ESPN by Larry Schwartz explained that “she was instrumental in making it acceptable for American women to exert themselves in pursuits other than childbirth.”¹²⁰ Along those lines, King’s disregard for outward femininity prompted several other players to follow her lead and accept Richards.

When Richards did eventually appear on the tennis circuit, these female players typically supported her for two reasons. On the forefront, they embraced Richards’s cries for freedom of choice and believed in the necessity of her surgical transformation. The players who supported Richards interpreted transsexuality as a solution to a societal problem, and denial of athletic inclusion as a breach of civil rights.

In addition, the advocates of Richards’s career saw that the protests claiming male-to-female transsexuals possessed inherent advantage detracted from their calls for equal treatment. After the Reid walkout, reception to Richards altered. People outside the circuit increasingly questioned the legitimacy of the campaign for female equality in athletics when it was women who opposed the rights of a transsexual. Sports Illustrated wondered how the WTA, “the foremost champions of equal rights in sports,” could change their message from “You’ve come a long way, baby to You’ve gone too far, Renée?“¹²¹

Red Smith, one of America’s most widely read sportswriters at the time, voiced a similar concern over this contradiction in a column, “So Long, Doctor”:

¹²¹ Ray Kennedy, “She’d Rather Switch,” Sports Illustrated.
The sex change would not have become a matter of journalistic and public concern if Dr. Richards had not attempted to enter tennis tournaments as a woman. This sent the girls scurrying into the weeds sobbing, “No, no! She’s a man in disguise. She will make us fragile, loveable darlings look bad!” In their panic they betrayed the fact that in their hearts they didn’t believe the arguments they had been making about the quality of women’s tennis… If the women had believed in their own ability and their own arguments, they would have said “Let her in. We’ll knock the spots off him or her or him or whatever. Instead, they hollered copper.”

Robert Markus, a sportswriter for the *Chicago Tribune*, also noted the discrepancy between women’s liberation’s fight for equality and the treatment of Richards. His analysis in 1978, however, presented a more chauvinistically condescending perspective. He reported that “I don’t know of any woman who’s been so shabbily treated since Edith Bunker started standing up for her rights. To hear the other girls wail about it, Richards is the biggest threat to womanhood since Valentino learned how to make his eyes smolder.” The article continues with a direct attack on the female protestors. “All the girls are doing by their constant railing against Richards is reinforcing the notion that women’s tennis is light years removed from men’s… At the age of 43, and after a sex-change surgery, the former Raskind is scaring the best women players in the world. The same women players, I might add, who think they should be paid just as much as men stars.”

Although Markus’s words raise the issue of male sports figures attempting to cut down women to regain authority, he nonetheless outlined several important points.

Thus advocacy for Richards grew, largely due to the connections drawn between transgender rights and the Women’s Liberation Movement. These women shrugged aside the notion of athletic inadequacy and set out to disprove supposed female inferiority. Billie Jean King explained the position succinctly. “Renée Richards is a

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human being, another tennis player and I want to beat her like anyone else.”

Following King’s lead, these women understood that to dispute Richards’s acceptance would signify adherence to the cultural ideology of male superiority in athletics, and thus counter their claims that female competitors deserved equality.

Richards’s fight to play in the U.S. Open occurred during this time of incredible female advancement, both on the court and off. Therefore, because women’s tennis was making progress both publicly and financially, along with this female competitor opposition, some members of the women’s liberation movement viewed Richards’s campaign for inclusion with skepticism and doubt. Feminists in particular split over the placement of male-to-female transsexuals within the movement, and debated the boundaries of gender.

“Hitting the Benefits of Sex Discrimination Back into the Male Half of the Court”
*The Women’s Liberation Movement and the Transgender Movement*

On a warm Southern Californian spring day, fifteen hundred women congregated on the UCLA campus. Some donned leather jackets and excitedly walked the grasses. Others proudly wore clothing emblazoned with feminist messages. A number of females opted for less ostentatious garb and patiently sat on blankets. All, however, anxiously waited for the start of the West Coast Lesbian Conference. Sponsored by the Daughters of Bilitis (D.O.B.) -- the first lesbian rights organization in the US -- the 1973 Los Angeles conference sought to gather an assortment of women, united in homosexuality and feminist ideology, to create a “women’s space.”

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Trouble started when former D.O.B. Vice President Beth Elliott took the stage. Elliott, a male-to-female transsexual and self-identified lesbian-feminist, visibly split the attendees. When she shouldered a guitar and grabbed the microphone, half the conference tried to shout her off the stage. The other half rose in approval and applauded in defense.

The scene at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference paralleled the division within the women’s liberation movement over transsexuality. Similar to the culture at-large, the D.O.B. and the lesbian conference participants did not know how to determine the boundaries of sex and the constituents of gender.

The transgender movement evolved alongside the gay and lesbian movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, on the heels of the women’s liberation movement. Publicized transsexual figures, like Elliott and Richards, gained notoriety concurrent with the advances made by feminists. As a result, some feminists embraced male-to-female transsexuals as women, while others questioned the motives behind surgery and argued that their inclusion diminished the achievements of the movement. The feminist protest against Elliott’s inclusion at the music festival, and later against Richards’s inclusion in women’s tennis, illustrates the ambiguity of how to determine gender separation. Radical lesbian-feminists, in particular, relied upon a strict interpretation of categories of biological difference to exclude transsexuals.

Second wave feminism -- developed in the late 1960s and most prominent in the 1970s -- sought to end de facto inequalities, uphold reproductive rights and also established women’s history. Radical feminism, a component of the women’s liberation
movement, also demanded important change, albeit more drastic. This group argued that various foundational institutions, such as the nuclear family and marriage, perpetuated harmful patriarchy. Radical feminists wanted autonomy of women from men, stressing the need for complete separation.

Individuals in both groups, at first, were uneasy about the introduction of male-to-female transsexuals in the women’s liberation movement. Second wave feminists often found inclusion troubling because transsexuals typically adhered to problematic gender stereotypes. In order to pass, male-to-female transsexuals subscribed to traditional gender norms. “Feminists are right to feel uncomfortable about the need for transsexualism,” argued Gloria Steinem, a prominent second wave feminist and co-founder of Ms. magazine. “Even while we protect the right of an informed individual to make that decision… we have to make clear that this is not a long-term feminist goal.” In an article written in 1977, she further explained that “transsexuals are paying an extreme tribute to the power of sex roles.”

Along with Steinem’s concerns about the reproduction of gender roles, she feared transsexuals drew focus away from the problems of gender inequality. She said Richards, in particular, diminished the achievements and goals of the women’s liberation movement.

Ever since a tennis-playing ophthalmologist named Richard Raskind had genital surgery, hormone therapy, a change of wardrobe, and became a tennis-playing ophthalmologist named Renee Richards, transsexualism has been a fact in the public consciousness. Unlike Jorgensen… Richards arrived in the midst of a national wave of feminist activity that is challenging both the justice and the biological basis of sex roles. Unlike Jorgensen, therefore, Richards was and is treated not only as a bizarre exception, an individual choice, but also as an example of sex-role change.

(and thus a frightening instance of what feminism could lead to), or as living proof that feminism isn’t necessary. Similarly, she argued that Richards’s inclusion demeaned the achievements of women’s tennis. “The questions about tennis had a certain glee in them,” she argued, “as if Richards had changed identity only to prove that any man, even a former one, could beat any woman. In a similar vein, Steinem asserted that Richards made a mockery of women’s tennis. Because she visibly split the female participants, Steinem asserted that Richards caricatured previous female advancement. “Why should the hard-won seriousness of women’s tennis be turned into a sensational circus by one transsexual?” she asked. Years later, after a long career as a public feminist, Steinem recanted these written proclamations and claimed she was taken out of context. Nonetheless, her comment that “if the shoe doesn’t fit, must we change the foot” received national attention and served as a slogan for feminist opposition to transsexuality.

The resistance from radical feminists, however, proved more severe. Janice Raymond, a self-identified radical feminist, expressed venomous opposition to the possibility of transgender inclusion. She emerged as the leading voice in the debate and in 1979 outlined her beliefs in the book The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male. In the words of gender and sexuality professor Cressida J. Heyes, The Transsexual Empire became “the archetypal articulation of radical feminist hostility to transsexuality.”

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127 Ibid, 224.
128 Ibid, 226.
129 In 2008, in a Weekday radio interview, Steinem claimed people falsely accused her of “condemning transsexualism, which I absolutely had never done.” KUOW.org, http://www.kuow.org/program.php?id=15524
130 Gloria Steinem, Outrageous Acts, 228.
Raymond, an assistant professor of women’s studies and medical ethics at Hampshire College at the time of the book’s publication, started the project under advisor Mary Daly. Also a self-identified radical second wave feminist, Daly is remembered not only for her work in philosophy and theology, but also for her forced resignation from Boston College for refusing to allow male students in her women’s studies class. \(^{132}\)

Influenced by Daly’s disdain of men, Raymond wrote her book in the midst of the women’s liberation movement, from a radical feminist viewpoint. “Raymond’s work on transsexuality thus emerges from a paradigm in which dissociation from men and masculinity, combined with self-definition and control of women’s identity, are prime political values,” explained Heyes. \(^{133}\) Raymond therefore argued that transsexuals were men reconstructed in the guise of femininity who wanted to gain female power in an attempt to maintain patriarchy. According to Raymond, male-to-female transsexuals served as the male solution to women’s liberation.

Richards therefore, in Raymond’s view, tried to dismantle the triumphs of women’s tennis.

The latest transsexual notable has been Renèe Richards who has succeeded in hitting the benefits of sex discrimination back into the male half of the court. The public recognition and success that it took Billie Jean King and women’s tennis years to get, Renèe Richards has achieved in one set. The new bumper stickers might well read: “It takes castrated balls to play women’s tennis.”\(^{134}\)

Raymond believed Richards earned fame and attained success because of her biological birth. Furthermore, she posited that Richards’s fought for entrance to the women’s tour as an attempt to weaken women’s liberation and dilute the advancements of female


\(^{133}\) Cressida J. Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity,” 1099.

tennis. Raymond believed that male-to-female transsexuals like Richards desired female power, sought an expansion of “empire,” reinforced gender expectations and strove to divide women.

Raymond’s first argument focused on a male desire for female power. Foremost, she believed men envied women’s ability to conceive. Male-to-female transsexuals understood that fertility could not be recreated, but sex-reassignment could, however, mimic female biology and thus provide a semblance of power. “Simply put,” Raymond explained, “it is that men recognize the power that women have by virtue of female biology and the fact that this power, symbolized in giving birth, is not only procreative but multidimensionally creative.”

Because Raymond believed that women were superior to men, and not equals, she feared transsexuals longed for female power.

Raymond also claimed that male-to-females aimed to expand the male “empire.” She defined empire as “a political unit having territory of great extent, or a number of territories under a single sovereign authority” and the “transsexual empire” as the group of male scientists, doctors and transsexuals who plotted to “colonize” women’s space.

The analogy claimed that all the participants in the transsexual movement -- endocrinologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, biologists, chemists and transsexuals -- comprised the empire, and following the Western colonization model, pillaged and occupied women’s bodies. According to Raymond, similar to the Western imperialistic goal of spreading ideals and gaining authority, the transsexual empire sought to spread patriarchy and preserve power.

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135 Ibid, 28-29.
136 Ibid, xv.
Furthermore, Raymond believed the transsexual empire reified gender stereotypes which perpetuated female inferiority. Yet her assertions create the same problematic dichotomy. According to Raymond, the male leaders of the transsexual empire dictated gender expectations and decided for patients which gender norms to follow. She described the gender identity clinics, where transsexuals received counseling and evaluation, as the most influential supporter of gender roles. In addition, she noted that male-to-female transsexuals “must ‘prove’ they are ‘real’ transsexuals by ‘passing’ as masculine or feminine,” thus “transsexual candidates are judged on the basis of what a man’s view of a ‘real woman’ is.” Her argument, however, demonstrates the radical feminist platform of complete separation of gender based on biological birth. “It assumes that biology is destiny, despite all that feminism seems to say in opposition to this” explained professor of law Stephen Whittle. “What is anatomically observable -- the possession of a penis or a vagina at the birth of a child, what is viewed as natural -- becomes the dictator of the socially constructed gender role.”

After dominating women’s space and bodies, Raymond explained that the transsexual empire moved into feminist circles. “The transsexual empire initially colonized women’s bodies.” she asserted. “Now it has extended to colonize feminist identification, culture, politics, and sexuality.” The inclusion of male-to-females who self-identified as lesbian-feminists, she claimed, was an effort to infiltrate the feminist movement and attain male authority. In her eyes, male-to-female transsexual demands for acceptance into feminism stemmed from a masculine background. This move for

137 Ibid, 70 & 92.
139 Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, xx.
power in feminist circles thus revealed masculine-driven behavior. Transsexual lesbian-feminists purposefully invaded feminism, according to Raymond, to divide women and pave the way for continued patriarchy.

Published at the end of the 1970s, Raymond’s work held lasting influence, and the issues she raised about feminism and transsexuality shaped the debate for years. In addition, the fears she described extended beyond the realm of feminism. Concerns over Richards’s participation forced the USTA and WTA to try to define the location of the gender binary. Furthermore, the emergence of several international transsexual athletes has forced the International Olympic Committee to act in a similar fashion.

“Any Sport may be Touched by this Problem”
The IOC 2004 Decision

In 2003, almost three decades after Richards won her lawsuit, the IOC attempted to cope with a widening spectrum of gender and finalize a policy in athletics. A year before the Athens Olympic Games, the IOC Medical Commission congregated to create a framework for transsexual athletic inclusion. The committee -- comprised of seven world-leading professors and doctors -- discussed human rights, fairness, doping and performance equality. IOC Medical Director Patrick Schamasch explained that although no transsexual athlete had yet attempted to compete in the Olympic Games, the IOC needed to establish rules and regulations because “any sport may be touched by this problem.”

140 Raymond republished her book in 1993 with an added epilogue, presenting the same views.
Schamasch’s description of transsexuality as a potential “problem” for sport stemmed from an assortment of concerns. Foremost, the IOC committee feared that the unrestricted inclusion of transsexual athletes would create an unfair athletic environment. The debate of fairness focused on male-to-female participants and was shaped by the assumption of biological masculine superiority. Secondly, transsexual athletes raised questions about hormone levels and doping. Finally, and perhaps of most concern to the IOC, transgendered bodies demonstrate gender fluidity. Transsexual athletes therefore possess the ability to disrupt the binary, the fundamental organizational framework of not only the Olympics, but of sport in general. As a result, in a preemptive strike the IOC Medical Commission outlined the Stockholm Consensus and established regulations for transsexual inclusion in the Olympics. The resultant legislation diminished the possibility for gender malleability and instead created definitions which forced transsexual athletes into a specific gender category. In attempting to solve the “problem” of transsexual athletes, the Stockholm Consensus reified the gender binary.

The Stockholm Consensus divides transsexual athletes into two groups. One set of stipulations refer to individuals who undergo sex-reassignment surgery pre-puberty. For these individuals, the Stockholm Consensus stipulates they can compete in the resultant gender division without restriction or prohibition. This applies to both male-to-female and female-to-male athletes. For the other group, individuals who undergo sex-reassignment surgery post-puberty, the IOC established a narrow set of regulations. The Stockholm Consensus requires these individuals to follow three rules. First, the Stockholm Consensus explains that the individual must undergo sex-reassignment
surgery and change external genitalia. The second requirement varies upon country of residency, but all transsexual participants must receive legal recognition of assigned sex by “appropriate official authorities.” Finally, transsexual athletes must administer hormone therapy “appropriate for the assigned sex… in a verifiable manner and for a sufficient length of time to minimise gender-related advantages in competitive sport competitions.” In addition, the Stockholm Consensus stipulates that each transsexual athlete undergo investigation prior to competition.

Although the Olympic Games strive for international unity, the Stockholm Consensus demonstrates a Western, elite bias. The decision discriminates against transgendered individuals from poorer, less-industrialized nations. In the words of sociologist Sheila L. Cavanagh and curriculum, teaching & learning professor Heather Sykes, the Stockholm Consensus provides a “very narrow definition of transsexuality which… excludes a large segment of the international transsexual community.” For several transgendered athletes, surgery remains an impossibility. Sex-reassignment surgery is expensive, making it attainable for only affluent athletes. In addition, several countries do not have the medical background or scientific technology to perform the operations and sex-reassignment for female-to-male transsexuals has yet to be perfected. Furthermore, the status of genitals in sport holds no significance other than for classification purposes. Legal recognition by “appropriate official authorities” is also problematic. Transsexuals outside of the U.S. and Europe have difficulty changing legal status. Even in the U.S., recognition varies state-by-state. Finally, hormone levels “appropriate for the assigned sex” is disputable as no one standard exists. The use of

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143 Sheila L. Cavanagh and Heather Sykes, “Transsexual Bodies,” 78.
conservative medical criteria diminishes accessibility for many transsexual athletes, and completely excludes intersexed competitors.

To police gender, the Stockholm Consensus forces transsexual athletes into culturally defined gender spaces. Like Ascione’s decision, the policy forbids gender variability and eliminates the possibility of a gendered spectrum. Cavanagh and Sykes explained that these attempts to control gender “is indicative of a refusal to accept the changeability of bodies.”

Sykes further argued in a different article that “there continues to be tremendous resistance to any changes to the normative gender binary in many different sporting communities... and “this resistance indicates a pervasive anxiety about the instability of gender categories in various sporting contexts.” Although scientific evidence points to a gender continuum, sport authorities remain steadfast in the belief of a dichotomy. Similar to the requirements for Richards’s inclusion, the Stockholm Consensus shifted the definition of male and female to prohibit gendered variety. Both decisions force transgendered people into a culturally created category and maintain segregation in athletics.

“An Unmistakable Air of Sadness”
*Richards’s Opposition to the IOC Decision*

Three decades after Richards successfully earned legal entrance into the world of women’s tennis, she hesitates to applaud her efforts and celebrate her triumphs. Currently, Richards resides in Upstate New York with a platonic employee. Although she attempted intimate relationships, all have failed. Richards’s relationship with her son

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144 Sheila L. Cavanagh and Heather Sykes, “Transsexual Bodies,” 77.
since her transition has been far from loving and remains rocky at best. In her 2007 memoir, *No Way Renée*, she describes her futile attempts at love, her deeply problematic relationship with her son, and her lament of joining a campaign which forced her into a critical national spotlight. Due to these obstacles, Richards refuses to speak publicly to transgendered people. And to the people grappling with sex-change surgery who seek her counsel, she steadfastly says no. Perhaps most surprising -- at first glance -- is the fact that Richards opposes the Stockholm Consensus. Why would she protest a policy which would have allowed for her inclusion?

Richards’s unhappiness seems to stem from her inability to ever really achieve “true womanhood” and her long-standing belief in a concrete gender binary. Although Richards tried to embody femininity, she feels she failed. Richards now negatively labels herself a female “facsimile,” a fake woman. “Surgery cannot undo that Y chromosome or insert functional ovaries – not yet, anyway,” she said. “What the future holds is anybody’s guess, and I must admit that I would not know whether to cheer or boo if such adjustments were possible. The mind boggles at the degree of control and the ethical questions it raises.”

In her view, femininity is an all-or-nothing category, achieved only through birth.

Because of that thought, Richards refuses to serve as an advocate for transsexual operations. When people write to her for advice, she always responds in the negative. Richards also does not offer particularly inspiring alternatives. “If you’re a forty-five-year-old man and you’re an airline pilot and you have an ex-wife and three adolescent kids,” she said, “you better get on Thorazine or Zoloft or Prozac or get locked up or do

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whatever it takes to keep you from being allowed to do something like this.” As a leader who pioneered for transsexual rights, Richards’s opposition to the sex-change surgery surprises many.

Similarly, her later-in-life dismissal of her activist role for transsexual civil liberties causes anger. In a 2007 interview, she denied her part in the movement for transsexual rights. “I’m essentially a pretty passive person,” she explained. “A tennis player and a doctor. I’m not politically or socially what ordinary people would call an activist.” In a different 2007 interview, Richards did not refute her crucial part in drawing attention to the transsexual plight, but described it disapprovingly. With what author Belinda Goldsmith called “an unmistakable air of sadness,” Richards said “I made the fateful decision to go and fight the legal battle and be able to play as a woman and stay in the public eye and become this symbol… I could have lived a more private life but I chose not to.” Her “air of sadness” seems to come from the very idea she strove to avoid – sole recognition for her transsexuality. Sole recognition for not “fitting” into either the male or female category. Sole recognition for being labeled a social “other.” For someone who so unwaveringly believes in a dichotomy, her unhappiness is not surprising. In 1976, Richards pitied Christine Jorgenson for her one dimensional fame. Now, Richards fears her obituary will read: “Transsexual Tennis Player Dies,” and make no indication of her other feats.

While her despair over incomplete gender and a livelihood based on sexual-disenfranchisement appears justified, her rejection of the IOC’s recent decision about

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transsexuals seems hypocritical. Richards determinedly fought for legal access to the professional women’s tennis circuit. When the New York Supreme Court granted her inclusion, she then strove for acceptance from the other competitors. Yet, today she believes the IOC’s ruling to allow transsexuals access is “a particularly stupid decision,” and references a masculine biological advantage in sport. Richards has also voiced hurtful protests against transgender females like Canadian mountain biker Michelle Dumaresq and Danish golfer Mianne Bagger, suggesting that the two compete at the club level rather than nationally. “The U.S. Olympic Committee has decreed in all of its great glory and intelligence that transsexuals can play in the Olympics,” she said. “I think that’s going to come back and haunt them.”

Richards’s outright rejection of the Stockholm Consensus appears to undermine everything she worked for in the seventies. An examination of Richards’s opposition, however, might be due to the fact that she grew miserable after her surgery. Although she refuses to openly admit it, her interviews seem to point to the inability of a sex-change to solve her identity problems. Richards despises her position as a fake woman, but does not deny the correct choice she made in surgery. Incongruously then, Richards protests the IOC decision on the grounds that it is “better to be an intact man functioning at 100 percent capacity for everything than to be a transsexual woman who is an imperfect woman.” Furthermore, it seems as though she never escaped the childhood gender roles learned in the 1940s and 1950s. Because of these stereotypes, Richards believes that biologically-born males hold an advantage over biologically-born females in sport. To justify her inclusion in women’s tennis, Richards often points out that she was

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151 Ibid, “The Lady Regrets.”
152 Michael Giltz, “Second Set.”
153 Joyce Walder, “The Lady Regrets.”
41 when competing on the women’s professional tennis tour, not 21. “I wasn’t going to overwhelm Chris Evert and Tracy Austin, who were 20 years old,” she explained.154

In the end, however, Richards is a 75-year-old woman. A 75-year-old woman with established ideas and beliefs she cultivated for over seven decades. Her thinning copper hair and broad, hunched shoulders, are typical of any grandmother. Her past is not.

As demonstrated through Richards’s life, sport remains an inflexible cultural arena where gendered dichotomies ameliorate. Although societal expectations of men and women have greatly changed from the 1940s to the 2000s, certain ideologies still remain firmly intact. Richards’s childhood, adolescence, campaign for inclusion and eventual rejection of activism demonstrate the continued presence of gender role stereotypes which paint women as passive, weak and overtly feminine. As an adolescent, Richards firmly believed in the validity of cultural gender roles. In particular, she mirrored the stereotypes granted credence by popular media. Images of Marlon Brando’s masculinity dominated her frame of mind, as did the representations of a male breadwinner and female housewife. Although a large portion of women did not fit neatly into this gender categorization and several examples of women transgressing boundaries existed, including Richards’s mother, she nonetheless internalized and embraced the roles. Richards’s view that her mother was a negative anomaly coupled with her attempts to copy masculinity as an adolescent illustrates Richards’s ideals and society’s stereotypes.

154 Ibid, “The Lady Regrets.”
Along with images of male breadwinners and female housewives in popular culture, social norms similarly pervaded sport. Gender regulation in sport dictated and hinged upon a masculine biological advantage. This unwavering belief in male superiority forced successful female to undermine athletic achievement with overt demonstrations of femininity. Athletes like Chris Evert refused to appear too athletic and focused on presenting an image of docile femininity. Richards also embraced subservient femininity to indicate her womanhood. Her adherence to gender roles aided in both the court’s ruling and allowed for acceptance among female tennis players. As demonstrated in Richards’s story, subscriptions to masculinity and femininity played a large role in sport, with masculinity continuing to dominate the athletic space.

As Richards campaigned for inclusion and acceptance, adhering to cultural definitions of femininity, she also embraced femininity to attain personal normalcy. Her public embodiment of more traditional gender roles -- passivity, subservience and domesticity -- placed her in direct opposition of feminism. Second wave feminists, particularly radical feminists, fighting to disarm harmful gender roles largely disproved of the transsexual embracement of traditional gender norms. Richards emerged at the height of the women’s liberation movement, which allowed some to use her as the icon of anti-feminism and continued male domination.

Finally, legal and sport authorities’ transsexual policies point to society’s commitment to a two-gender system. The New York Supreme Court ruled against discrimination, but upheld division in athletics. More importantly, instead of setting precedence and offering a widespread policy in 1976, the court decision pertained only to Richards and women’s tennis. Along the same lines, the Stockholm Consensus stipulated
transsexual athletic access, forcing transgender figures into only one of two categories. Notably, the International Olympic Committee still has no policy for the inclusion of intersex athletes. The appearance of transsexual figures and the resultant athletic policies illustrate the sport federation’s refusal to accept the deconstruction of gendered boundaries. By perpetuating this binary, sport continues to encourage societal gender norms.
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