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The Story of Mark Weston: Re-centring Histories and Conceptualising Gender Variance in 1930s International Sport

Abstract

This paper examines the story of Mark Weston, a formerly successful competitor in women's athletics who in 1936 underwent a so-called 'sex change' or 'metamorphosis' to manhood. Shortly after news about this metamorphosis became public, it was recommended that 'physical examinations' be instituted in women's sport to ensure that women athletes were 100% female. This was a precursor of 'gender verification' policies in sport, which have aimed to ascertain that women athletes are 'female enough' to compete as women. Weston's metamorphosis story is, however, missing from most histories of gender verification. When included, Weston has been labelled 'transgender' or 'transsexual', even though these labels were not used by his contemporaries. This paper investigates, firstly, what happens to the history of gender verification when Weston's story is included and, secondly, the relationship between Weston's story and concepts like transgender, transsexual, and intersex.

Key words: Mark Weston; sex change; metamorphosis; sport; gender verification

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I always imagined I was a girl until 1928. Then, competing in the world [athletics] championships at Prague Czechoslovakia, I began to realize that I was not normal and had no right to compete as a woman. But I only had the courage to see a doctor this year, when a London specialist said I ought to undergo two operations. ... In the hospital I was placed in a men's ward. After seven weeks of mingling with men I begun to get the correct atmosphere, now it seems quite natural to be a man. I found the alteration in my life rather difficult at the beginning. When I though myself a girl I used to powder my face. I never used lip stick. Before the operation I always wore women's clothing.¹

These are the words of Mark Weston; a former champion athlete in women's sport from England. In 1936, Weston underwent what his contemporaries called a 'metamorphosis' or 'sex change', which was completed with surgical aid by Lennox Broster, a specialist on the 'clinical study of sex changes'. Weston had previously achieved national and international success in women's athletics, winning several titles, and competing at the Women's World Games and the Olympics. Following his sex change, and other similar cases involving female athletes appearing to be metamorphosing into men, the president of the American Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage, who would later become the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), recommended that all athletes registered to compete as female in international sports be subjected to 'physical examinations' of their sex.

Brundage's recommendation was the first of a series of decisions that resulted in the institutionalisation of policies and practices that have come to be collectively called 'gender verification' in international sports. Since women first entered competitive sports, most sporting events have been divided into binarized, mutually exclusive male and female

categories. The function of gender verification – exclusively applied to athletes competing in women’s sports – has been to police this sex division to ensure through various methods of ‘sex testing’ that athletes registered to compete as female are, actually, ‘female enough’.

The history and origins of gender verification have been widely discussed by scholars.² Yet, the stories of athletes like Weston who underwent ‘sex changes’ and ‘metamorphoses’ in the 1930s are largely absent from historical accounts about why gender verification was first begun, even though Weston and others like him feature prominently in the archival record of the 1930s when the need for ‘physical examinations’ was first formally deliberated. Rather, historical narratives of gender verification are generally centred on so-called ‘gender fraud’ purposefully committed by men who hid their ‘true’ sex and masqueraded as women – a form of cheating that is said to have been the original motivation for the introduction of gender verification.³ When it comes to the few historical accounts into which stories like Weston’s are included, Weston’s embodiment has been subsumed under the titles ‘transgender’ or ‘transsexual’, neither of which were used in the 1930s to describe him. The notion of ‘sex change’ used by Weston’s contemporaries did not have the connotations of ‘trans-’⁴ to which the term attaches in the present, but it was used to describe circumstances where women suddenly developed masculine characteristics, as I will show.⁵

This paper draws from three-years of archival research on the history of gender verification conducted at the IOC central archives,⁶ medical collections of the Universities of Helsinki and Glasgow,⁷ and multiple digitised newspaper archives.⁸ The paper was motivated by my curiosity about the exclusion of Weston from historical narratives about gender verification, as well as the mobilisation of ‘trans-’ as a lens through which to understand his story when he is included. By centring Weston and the 1930s context in which his story is embedded, I seek to examine, firstly, what happens to the history of gender verification when the stories of athletes who ‘changed sex’ in the 1930s are moved from the margins to the centre

of this history, and, secondly, to what extent Weston can be framed as ‘trans-’. I argue that using temporally located concepts like ‘transgender’ or ‘transsexual’ as frameworks through which to interpret past enactments of gender variance delimits the parameters of historical inquiry in ways that can silence important temporal differences in how gender variance has been understood and experienced. I hope to offer historical texture for Weston’s experiences, by exploring the meaning and implications of the concepts of ‘metamorphosis’ and ‘sex change’ that were used to make sense of him. Relatedly, I argue that focusing in on Weston not only provides a different lens for understanding the early history of gender verification, but it also enables one to re-think why gender verification policies were introduced in the first place: when historical attention is directed at the 1930s ‘metamorphosis’ and ‘sex change’ stories that Weston exemplifies, the early history of gender verification looks less like a history of ‘gender fraud’ and more like a history of deeply engrained social anxieties over the instability and breakdown the sex binary.

Telling (hi)stories of gender verification

Sport historians have documented the deeply embedded conflation between athletic superiority and male embodiment.⁹ In international sport where this conflation is especially pronounced, sex segregation has been considered vital to ensuring a ‘level playing field’ for women athletes. Throughout most of the 20th century, gender verification, which has included checking female athletes’ genitals, ‘sex’ chromosomes and hormone levels, has been mobilised to safeguard the sex binary. The history of gender verification has attracted much scholarly interest, including from historians but especially from scholars outside history in other humanities disciplines, the social sciences, medicine and sport sciences, who have published accounts and commentaries about this history.¹⁰

Yet, as Vanessa Heggie has observed,¹¹ due to the sensitive nature of the subject, histories of gender verification are difficult to write and research, and it is not always easy to differentiate history from mythology. Indeed, Heggie argued that the history of gender verification has been reinvented, reimagined, and reconstructed by scholars in ways that follow a particular, widely trodden but problematic ‘narrative path’ that has been built on what she called ‘the canon of gender frauds’.¹² This canon, consisting of illustrative historical cases of gender suspect or outright male athletes who infiltrated into women’s international sports under false pretences in the past, has been commonly accepted and reproduced as the basis for writing the history of gender verification. These cases have been so widely reproduced that they have gained an aura of legend, to the extent that, Heggie argued, the lines between ‘history’ and ‘mythology’ have become blurred.¹³

This raises interesting questions about the function that histories perform, both in relation to how and why stories about the past are told, and how these stories relate to the present context in which they are articulated. Driven by these questions, I reviewed 106 academic journal articles where historical claims about gender verification are made, published between 1969¹⁴ and 2016, and retrieved via key word searches of journal databases and citation tracing without discriminating by discipline. I discovered that the majority of articles documenting gender verification’s history are written, not by historians nor for the purpose of taking the history itself as an object of investigation, but as a ‘prelude’ or background story to contextualize authors’ own particular (mostly non-historical) arguments.¹⁵ A notable characteristic about the early history of gender verification, in particular, is a tendency to disregard primary sources. Some offer no sources whatsoever in support of historical claims and most cite older academic sources, which in turn do not offer sources. This suggests that the widely reproduced narrative about the history of gender verification has been established

as a form of ‘common knowledge’ where reference to primary sources may seem almost unnecessary as ‘everyone knows’ what happened.

Illustrative of the kinds of tropes that are mobilised in historical accounts are the stories of German high-jumper Ratjen and Polish-American track athlete Walsh, both of whom competed in the 1936 Berlin Olympics and are said to have been gender frauds. According to scholars who tell Ratjen’s story, ‘Dora Ratjen (real name Hermann Ratjen) posed as a woman in the women’s event, and then admitted to the ruse’¹⁶ as he later ‘confessed that he was forced under Nazi order to bind his genitals and compete as a woman’.¹⁷ Walsh’s story, on the other hand, begins with her rival Helen Stephens who was subjected to what is often claimed to have been the first recorded gender verification test when she defeated Walsh in 100-meter race, Walsh finishing second. While Stephens passed the test, Walsh’s story ends differently: ‘it would turn out that it was Walsh who would have failed the sex test. Following her death in 1980 ... an autopsy revealed that Walsh had the sex organs of both a man and a woman.’¹⁸ As Heggie argued, these ‘gender fraud’ stories, complemented by a list of other suspected gender frauds,¹⁹ are generally given as the explanation for why gender verification was first begun. The first gender verification policy is usually said to have been introduced, by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), in the late 1960s to put a stop to decades of gender fraud – indeed, the canon of gender frauds seems to provide evidence that ‘sex fraud may have been systematically perpetuated for political gain dating back to the 1936 Berlin Olympics.’²⁰

However, while Ratjen’s and Walsh’s stories have been ‘canonised’ as ‘gender fraud’, neither of them, nor the ‘common sense’ (hi)stories of gender verification that they support, are as simple as they appear. Firstly, documents released after Ratjen’s death, consulted and summarised by an investigative journalist,²¹ suggest that his story is likely to have been, less a conspiracy and more a case of mis-assigned sex at birth. According to the documents, Ratjen was raised as a girl and his gender only re-assigned after the Berlin Olympics (and his name

changed, not to Hermann, but to Heinrich). Secondly, the first IAAF gender verification policy was not introduced in the 1960s but in 1937, as I will show below. Yet, neither Ratjen's nor Walsh's supposed gender conspiracies were known at that time: Ratjen's alleged fraud was first reported in 1957,²² many years after the Berlin Olympics, while Walsh's autopsy and the consequent revelations about her sex characteristics occurred only after her death in 1980. Moreover, Stephens was not even the first athlete to undergo gender verification: a similar sex test had already been conducted eight years earlier during the Amsterdam Olympics.²³

The canon of gender frauds and the 'common knowledge' (hi)stories of gender verification, are interesting, however, less because they are disloyal to primary sources, and more because they illustrate how and why historical accounts are often mobilised in the present: 'we make and remake stories about the past to enable a particular present to gain legitimacy ... which stories predominate or are precluded or marginalized is always a question of power and authority'.²⁴ When 'gender frauds' are centred as the core 'original cause' of gender verification, the key historical 'threat' to the boundaries of the female category in sport appears to be athletes (presumably assigned male at birth) who committed explicit forms of deception (i.e. masquerade, by 'binding their genitals') with dubious motives (of reaping the benefits of success in women's sport). The prospect of these fraudulent subjects then emerges as the rationale for gender verification. As phrased by one scholar, 'historically speaking, the primary justification for gender testing has been to prevent male intruders from fraudulently competing in women's sport'.²⁵ This historical centring of 'gender fraud' side-lines or renders invisible, however, the role occupied by subjects like Weston who changed sex in the 1930s and became, I will argue, a central object of gendered concerns when gender verification was actually first instituted. It also silences the contextual conditions within which gender non-conforming athletes of the 1930s who crossed categorical boundaries navigated their bodies and how their bodies were navigated by others.

While Weston and others like him are absent from most historical accounts, notable exceptions are the histories told by Lindsay Pieper and Heggie.²⁶ In Pieper's account, Weston's story features under the title 'transgender athletes'²⁷ while Heggie places Weston under the label 'sporting transsexuals'.²⁸ These designations, however, not only mobilise 'trans-' as the interpretive frame to understand Weston's story even though this frame was not used by his contemporaries to define him, but they also displace possible alternative frames. In particular, Weston could at least equally well be claimed as part of intersex history: a medical case-study about Weston published by his physician Broster²⁹ indicates that 21st century physicians would diagnose Weston with a 'difference of sex development'.³⁰ And yet, 'intersex' does not seem quite apt either, because Weston's story is not a story of *inter* sex, but a story of 'metamorphosis' – a term which suggests a transformative change or conversion.

'Metamorphosis' tends to denote changing shape, or the outcome of the process of changing shape, of a kind that amounts to a transformation of form or identity.³¹ In Western cultural traditions, it has been a malleable but persistent figure of thought that has been used to depict various conceptions and modalities of change, from mythology, such as Ovid's magical transformations of humans into flora, fauna, inanimate objects and vice versa, to science, including models of the processes that insects and amphibians undergo to transform from an immature to a mature stage. The notion of 'metamorphosis' attaches simultaneously, and sometimes entangles, supernaturally and naturally roused movement across ontological boundaries, in so doing raising questions about the nature and stability of identity: if change from one mode of being to another is possible, it is no longer necessarily the case that one can clearly separate the two modes ontologically, including females from males and women from men.³² The 1930s uses of 'metamorphosis' in relation to Weston and others like him, predating the social and medical models that we use today to understand gender and sex variance,

provided a rich way for Weston's contemporaries to interpret his embodiment and identity in ways that made cultural sense of it at the intersection between science and mythology.

In the 21st century, 'identity' is mobilised in gender identity politics in ways that can accommodate shifts and plurality in gendered modes of being, which is reflected in the politics of language. Today, notions like 'sex change' and, increasingly, 'transsexual' that connote movement across sex and gender binaries to settle on the other side are often positioned as reductive and medicalising when compared to identifications like 'transgender' that connote gender flux and agency, including historically speaking. Indeed, while the 'transgender' term only emerged in popular discourse in the 1990s, it has been applied to produce alternative histories, like Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors* which depicts the history of gender variance as transgender history that cuts across temporal periods, constituting a 'we' with a past above and beyond the boundaries of definition and terminology.³³ Yet, projecting concepts that have only recently been popularised onto the past or using them as a frameworks to understand the past also carries the danger of sealing bodies and narratives of experience into politicised explanatory paradigms located in the present conceptual space. As Henry Rubin has contended, 'all experiences must be situated within the flow of history' and should 'not be taken uncritically and without reflection on the historical terms and conditions that make such experience meaningful to the subjects and to others'.³⁴

The question of how to name and interpret past gender variance as well as how and why it has been policed by authorities like sport governing bodies is perhaps most importantly to do with what is gained when stories like Weston's are interpreted through frames like trans (or intersex), and what is lost. Reading Weston's story as a transgender story, or as an intersex story, despite the temporal and contextual specificities in which the story is embedded, would offer an interpretive lens through which his story can be placed as an 'ancestor' of contemporary transgender or intersex athletes. The existence of such ancestors can be inspiring

and productive, enabling the construction of a collective past through which a historical ‘ancestry’ functions as an empowering force for identification in the present. In the same way, whether Weston’s story is seen as a central or a marginal story in the history of gender verification – whether it is side-lined in relation to stories like those about Ratjen and Walsh, or whether it is emphasised as (more) significant (than the gender fraud stories) – shapes how we come to understand what gender verification was and is for.

The politics of naming, interpretation, centring, and side-lining matter not just for understanding the past but also the present of gender verification: as Lance Wahlert and Auntum Fiester have noted, there has been a ‘reluctance to compare the gender-testing concerns in elite sports for transgender *and* intersex athletes in tandem’,³⁵ which is related to intersex and trans activism often having different priorities despite representing overlapping communities. While much intersex activism has been focused on medical reform to abolish unconsented and unnecessary medical interventions (genital surgery in particular, and in sport, medical intervention as a precondition to compete), much trans activism has been focused on improving access to medical treatment and care (including surgery, and in sport, acceptance of those who have undergone medical gender affirmation to compete).

My aim here, however, is not to make definitive claims about the interpretive lenses that should or should not be applied to Weston, but to say that his story lends itself to multiple readings in ways that trouble the use of all singular lenses. Centring Weston is way to ground differently what is known about both gender variance and gender verification in the 1930s.

Contextualising Weston’s story: women’s sport and sex instability

Notions of female frailty, and feebleness of the medicalised ‘female body’ were the primary frames through which women’s athletic participation and sporting capacity were understood since the beginning of the 19th century. This was intertwined with the close historical

association between sporting prowess and maleness.³⁶ During the first part of the 20th century, these older imaginaries were becoming disputed by some women's sport organisations and women participating in competitive sports in increasing numbers, especially in sports considered more 'feminine' such as swimming.³⁷ Despite the increasing tolerance of women in some sports, deeply engrained suspicions endured and were also intensified by women who not only participated but also excelled in sports seen to represent the 'purest' forms of athleticism, such as athletics, which had a particularly masculine aura. It was seen to require strength and speed unhindered by complex rules or equipment: 'Thinly clad running, throwing, and jumping athletes appeared to demonstrate "naked" athletic prowess as they exhibited their strained faces and muscles for an audience entranced by elemental human exertion', in ways that made athletics seem profoundly 'unnatural' for women.³⁸

Key to this conceptualisation was the notion of physical 'strain', seen as dangerous for 'the female body'. The notion of strain was attached, in particular, to ideas around excessive or 'abnormal' amounts and kinds of physical efforts that were seen to harm female bodies. As phrased by one 1930s observer, 'abnormal exercises of the muscles ... tend to disfigure ... to a more or less permanent degree, according to the length of the competitive career',³⁹ while another made it abundantly clear that 'IF YOU HAVE TO TRY TOO HARD YOU HAVE TO STRAIN. AND STRAIN MEANS DAMAGE'.⁴⁰ Such ideas, combined with the image of athletics as an elemental form of exertion, not only constituted athletics as 'unnatural' for women but also relegated those women who excelled in athletics as gender-suspect: to the extent that athletics was unnatural for 'the female body', female-categorised bodies capable of enduring the physical strains involved, in turn, appeared abnormal and suspiciously 'male-like', which undermined their status as women.

These 1930s sporting imaginaries coincided with the emergence of new endocrinological theories about 'sex' hormones, which unsettled older ideas around binarized sex difference by

introducing a quantitative theory of sex which implied relative (rather than absolute) sex specificity. 'Femininity' and 'masculinity' as binary characteristics of 'female' and 'male' were no longer mutually exclusive, but female bodies could have masculine or male-like characteristics due to hormonal fluctuations.⁴¹ This allowed the emergence of new realities like hormonally 'masculinised' females which were mobilised to explain masculine characteristics on female bodies.

The new hormonal model gave rise to what Lennox Broster called the 'clinical study of sex changes'.⁴² Broster, an expert on the subject, noted that 'it has fallen to my lot as a surgeon to study several cases of women in whom male secondary sexual characteristics have appeared', including broadening of the shoulders and increased muscular development.⁴³ He added that 'the comparative instability of the female sex' meant that 'the masculinization of the female is a far more common event than the femininization of the male', and the fact that sex changes 'more commonly occur after puberty, when the secondary sex characters appear, suggests that the cause remains inherent but latent, and can be activated in later life during times of endocrine stress'.⁴⁴ The clinical study of sex changes and the notion 'sex change' in the 1930s, then, was attached (mostly) to 'latent' embodied masculinity in females that lay dormant, but could be initiated in later life by hormonal 'stresses' that incited a change of sex.

The hormonal sex model was not confined to the scientific context, but it was also popularised and (re)interpreted by the press, including by sports journalists. For example, according to the magazine *Physical Culture*,

All the old landmarks are going, nothing is static, everything flows. Old dreams and old nightmares become realities. ... Sex is no longer immutable. ... No man is 100 percent male, no woman 100 percent female. ... Each sex carries within itself the potentialities of the other.⁴⁵

This, according to the magazine, meant that sex itself was deeply unstable: ‘the slightest variation, the slightest derangement, may, consciously or unconsciously, anatomically or psychically, affect the direction of the sex instinct and constitution’.⁴⁶

Indeed, during the 1930s, a string of news stories appeared in American and British newspapers reporting spectacularised stories of spontaneous sex changes, involving young women suddenly changing into men.⁴⁷ These stories were covered by multiple newspapers, and regularly described as ‘metamorphoses’ in ways that connected the ‘sex changes’ both with narratives of miraculous transformation and with the new endocrinological theories around sex instability, whereby a process of sex metamorphosis arising from the body itself was complemented or completed with medical assistance. The metamorphosis notion enabled 1930s observers to make intelligible the new counterintuitive naturalistic theories of sex instability, and the existence of this instability itself, by drawing from existing cultural and mythological depictions – ‘old dreams and old nightmares’ – of identity instability to make sense of the fact that it might no longer be possible to know, for sure, if a person’s sex is, or will remain, grounded in a single form.

These stories disproportionately involved previously female-categorised athletes, and were sometimes described as concerning ‘the problem of the man-woman athlete’ in sport. While the stories did not draw an explicit causal link between women’s athletic participation and the metamorphoses, they nearly always made reference to the metamorphosing women’s sporting careers, particularly in relation to ‘strenuous’ sports like athletics in ways that offered athletic participation as a contextualising feature of the metamorphoses. For example, in reporting that Sofia Smetkovna from Poland ‘will be a man next week’, *The Daily Mirror* added not only that Smetkovna was ‘woman javelin-throwing champion’ but also that two other ‘cases of sex change in women athletes occurred last week’ involving ‘Zdenka

Koubkova, Czechoslovakian, who became Mr. Zdenka Koubkova, and Mary Edith Louis Weston, ... winner of the British Women's' championships for putting the shot'.⁴⁸ The *Daily Mail* added that Smetkovna had long been 'a great enthusiast of football, and later on went in for other strenuous sports'.⁴⁹ These stories constructed an association between the sex changes, women's sport and athletics in particular, in ways that suggested that the 'stresses' involved in sports might initiate the surfacing of latent masculinity. This, in turn, made sense because women who participated and excelled in 'strenuous' sports were pre-conceived as abnormally 'male-like'.

While Weston's story was only one of several sex change stories, it was perhaps the most widely reported. Several reporters also carried out interviews with Weston, meaning that his own interpretations of the related events are included in the news narratives. Weston's story is significant also because it was brought to sport regulators awareness, and illustrates how broader discourses around sex instability, women's sport, and the metamorphoses influenced regulators ideas about the unstable boundaries of the female category in the 1930s. It is for these reasons that I focus on Weston.

Weston's story

In 1936, several British and American newspapers reported the story of an English athlete Mary Weston who had transformed into a man and changed his name to Mark. Weston had undergone two (unspecified) operations performed by Broster, who had conducted several such operations recently on 'women who find themselves turning into men'.⁵⁰ The operations, it was reported, were performed 'to complete Mary Weston's metamorphosis into masculinity', apparently to supplement a pre-existing sex change process that had already been underway.⁵¹

Several newspaper stories about Weston's metamorphosis were accompanied with pictures of Weston performing athletic feats while competing in women's athletics, showing

his athletic body in full swing. Nearly all news stories made direct reference to his career in women's athletics, including quoting Weston himself, who noted in relation to his metamorphosis that he never cared for 'girlish games' but rather 'liked sports and even trained school boys in cricket and football'.⁵² Broster also considered Weston's sporting prowess significant when diagnosing him. He implied that Weston's masculinity was evidenced not only by his desire to 'play men's games, such as football' but also by Weston having 'competed in the Olympic Games, throwing the discuss'.⁵³

The way in which Weston himself described his metamorphosis is exemplary of the implications of these sex changes in the context of 1930s women's sport. Weston voiced, not only that when 'competing in the world championships ... I began to realize that I was not normal and had no right to compete as a woman', but also that while training to be a masseuse,

my continued studies in anatomy as part of my massage work led me to begin wondering whether I was really a woman. I found that I had to shave regularly, and that was not very feminine. ... I began withdrawing from athletics, feeling it was unfair to women competitors, who undoubtedly were 100 per cent feminine.⁵⁴

Key to understanding his self-description is Weston's reference to percentages of femininity, where his conviction that other women athletes were '100 percent' feminine implied, for Weston, that his own embodiment was 'unfair' compared with his (presumed) wholly feminine opponents. This only makes sense to the extent that femininity (and masculinity) can manifest in degrees across bodies, and Weston's sense of himself as having no right to compete with women was contextualised by this idea, as well as notions of 'normality' in relation to which femininity and womanhood were conceptualised in the 1930s. Indeed, Weston contextualised his failure to be 'normal', in his own words, in relation to other women athletes with reference

to practices like shaving which were not 'feminine'. In the 1930s context, Weston and other sex metamorphosing athletes represented, not only abnormality contrasted against notions of normal (i.e. feminine) female embodiment, but also an 'excessively' high degree of masculinity, surfacing through participation in 'strenuous' sports like athletics to the extent that women actually changed into men.

In addition to Weston's athletic prowess, newspapers and Broster also underlined that shortly after his metamorphosis, Weston married his 'childhood chum' Alberta Bray, 'who for years has been his particular friend'.⁵⁵ Newspaper stories emphasising Weston's marriage to Bray were almost as frequent as stories highlighting his sporting achievements, with several reporters supplementing the news with pictures depicting Weston and Bray together in heteronormative scenes. News stories about Weston's marriage to Bray, her commitment to him, and her normative femininity in particular provided additional evidence and validation of Weston's masculinity and manhood. Reporters emphasised that Bray was a 'normal young woman'⁵⁶ and described her as 'pretty, rosy-cheeked, fair haired girl of 21 who seems completely happy'.⁵⁷

Bray's affirmed normality and the (often visual) contrast between her femininity and Weston's masculinity not only worked to validate Weston's manhood, but were also taken by Broster as evidence of the surfacing of Weston's underlying 'male sexual instinct': Broster considered that Weston becoming 'conscious of the fact that ... he became attracted to girls – in particular one' was important in giving 'an opinion of his sex', and Broster implied that Weston's 'fantasies of having sexual relations with a girl' evidenced that in 'his personality, his psychosexual life ... he was a complete male'.⁵⁸ Such connotations of 'sexual instinct' towards women with 'maleness' were embedded within broader early 20th century discourses which did not distinguish between cross-gender identification and same sex desire, seen as 'inversion' of the sex(ual) instinct. Sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example,

described the female sexual invert as having a ‘masculine soul, heaving within the female bosom’, conceptualising masculine gender and sexuality as co-constitutive.⁵⁹ Notably, the emphasis on Bray’s ‘normality’ in newspaper depictions was possibly intended to dislodge interpretations of Weston’s and Bray’s relationship as ‘inverted’, which also enabled Weston’s masculinity to be represented as appropriately normative in relation to Bray’s complementary femininity. The legitimation of Weston’s masculinity, in turn, had the effect of making his past as a female athlete appear illegitimate, abnormal, or, as Weston himself saw it, unfair.

However, a central characteristic of many news stories about Weston was the mixed way in which his gendered attributes and behaviours were described. While news stories highlighted his masculinity, emphasising that there was ‘little trace of femininity in his looks or carriage’,⁶⁰ many simultaneously described him through a language of feminine and masculine mixture, which foregrounded his metamorphosis as an ongoing process of change. Weston himself portrayed the metamorphosis as a process of learning and adjusting, in ways that constituted his gendered self as a site of ambivalence. For example, reflecting on his life after the sex change, said Weston:

The thing that gives me the greatest start ... is to suddenly look down, or into a mirror, and see myself wearing trousers. Then again, in many little courtesies of life, I sometimes catch myself thinking in terms of a woman rather than of a man.⁶¹

The presence of this ambivalence functioned to remind that Weston’s masculinity was not given, but was, indeed, claimed, and depended upon a metamorphosis, while the notion of ‘metamorphosis’ itself provided an interpretive framework through which gendered ambivalence could be seen as part of the wider mythical as well as natural instability of sex and gender identity in the 1930s.

Weston's story is significant to the history of gender verification in sport because news stories about his metamorphosis reached the awareness of influential sport regulators, the most notable of whom was Avery Brundage. Brundage, who learned about Weston through the press, considered his sex change deeply troubling, to the extent that he used it as justification for the introduction of physical examinations for all athletes competing in women's sport to make sure they were, indeed, 100% female rather than 'man-woman' athletes.

Tackling the 'man-woman' athlete problem

In 1936, Brundage sent a letter to the IOC president Henri de Baillet-Latour to express his concern over 'various female (?)⁶² athletes in several sports' who seemed to have 'apparent characteristics of the opposite sex'.⁶³ Brundage had previously received a letter from an 'interested sports fan' expressing worry over 'borderline' cases in women's sport. The letter argued that if such borderline cases (clearly implying sexed borderlines) were permitted into the US Olympic team, 'the normal American girl will certainly be misrepresented. ... rules should be made to keep the competitive games for normal feminine girls and not monstrosities'.⁶⁴ Brundage concurred, and in his letter to Baillet-Latour, he argued that something should be done about this matter, especially since 'recently considerable publicity was given in the American press to the case of an English athlete who after several years of competition as a girl announced herself (?) a boy'.⁶⁵ Brundage's views also reached the press, with one reporter justifying Brundage by commenting that 'athletes who recently competed in European track events as women were later transformed into men by sex operations', noting that physical examinations of women athletes would 'make sure they were 100% female'.⁶⁶

Brundage was not alone in his concern. The sex change news stories also 'started a controversy on the problem of the "man-woman"' at the Federation Sportive Femina Interantionale (FSFI) conference.⁶⁷ A newspaper reporting on the 'serious sex-discussion'

taking place at the conference noted, in relation to the Berlin Olympics, not only that ‘some of the women in Berlin last week looked more like men’ but also that there had already been ‘cases of women athletes being changed, by a series of operations, into men ... Britain had the case of Mary Weston, ... who was changed into Mark Weston, a young man’.⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that 1930s observers also contextualised the gender verification of Walsh’s rival Helen Stephens during the Berlin Olympics with reference to sex change stories like Weston’s: sports writer Paul Gallico, for example, noted that ‘there had been two cases, one in Czechoslovakia and one in England, where a masculine lady had, with the aid of a surgeon, succeeded in transforming herself into a not too feminine gentleman’.⁶⁹ He added that in accusing ‘Miss Stephens of being Mr. Stephens’, the accusers ‘thought they had spotted number three’.⁷⁰

The concerns expressed by Brundage and the FSFI bring to the fore the significance of the sex change and metamorphosis stories in the 1930s context where physical examinations were first proposed as a means of ensuring that athletes competing in the female sporting category were, indeed, (100%) female. These stories represented, through the simultaneously mythical and natural connotations of ‘metamorphosis’, a foundational destabilisation of sex category boundaries – an especially unsettling prospect for international sports reliant on stable, categorical separation between female and male bodies. Metamorphosis stories suggested, not only that ‘characteristics of the opposite sex’ might appear on female bodies due to ‘slightest variations’ or ‘derangements’ of hormonal balance, but also that the ‘strains’ involved in athletics were a contributing factor especially since athletics participation was perceived to be wholly ‘unnatural’ for ‘the female body’ in the first place. The physical strain associated with athletics, combined with the perceived abnormality of women capable of enduring such strain, and that some such women seemed to be actually becoming so masculine that they were changing to into men, is central to understanding why Weston’s story was cited by sport regulators when they proposed that the boundaries of the female category should be

regulated. The boundaries themselves were erected in relation to 1930s ideas around the ‘nature’ of female bodies’ physical capacity. Sex examinations, as a policy response to the ‘man-woman problem’, in turn, would work to ensure that female athletes’ bodies stayed within the confines of these boundaries.

The 1936 IOC Congress discussed Brundage’s recommendation about physical examinations under the title ‘abnormal women athletes’.⁷¹ While the IOC resolved not to institute examinations for the Olympic Games, they left the problem of how to deal with ‘abnormal women’ to the discretion of each International Sport Federation. Shortly after, newspapers reported that the IAAF, being the regulatory body of athletics where sex changes were most prevalent, decided to tackle the problem by requiring that ‘all women athletes must “submit to competent medical examination” should any protest regarding their sex be made formally’.⁷² Accordingly, the IAAF Rulebook issued the following year was updated with a new rule stating that in cases of a ‘protest concern[ing] questions of a physical nature ... a physical inspection [is] to be made by a medical expert’.⁷³ This rule, amounting to ad hoc physical examinations conducted in response to ‘gender protests’, was the first of many policies in international sports that are today collectively called ‘gender verification’.

The concerns that resulted in the introduction of this rule, including the IOC, IAAF, and FSFI concerns over ‘abnormal women’ and ‘man-woman’ athletes, are, in many ways, embodied by the story of Weston, key to which is the 1930s context where his metamorphosis occurred and was interpreted by contemporary observers. The sex instability that Weston’s metamorphosis represented – instability that was made intelligible via entangling supernatural and natural depictions of ontological boundary instability – incited not only social anxieties over sex category breakdown but also demands for the institution of rules intended to protect sex categories against this breakdown. Weston’s story, and other metamorphosis stories that mirrored his, represented boundary flux in the ‘extreme’.

Conclusion

What, then, happens to the history of gender verification when Weston's story is placed at the centre? Re-thinking the IAAF's decision to institute their first gender verification policy in the 1930s through the story of Weston provides a different lens for thinking about the early history of gender verification. It becomes, less a history of 'gender fraud', and more a history of deep-seated anxieties over sex binary instability and breakdown, carried by female-categorised athletes who crossed sexed borders by metamorphosing and changing sex in the 1930s. Weston did not disguise himself as a woman to win fraudulently – indeed, as one 1930s reporter noted, 'before his transformation, Weston ... believed ... that he was a woman. The medals awarded to him were won in good faith'.⁷⁴ Rather, his metamorphosis represented the masculinising perils of women's athletics that became epitomised by the problem of the 'man-woman' athlete. The notion of 'metamorphosis' enabled Weston's contemporaries to make sense of his changing body and identity in ways that conjured existing cultural and mythological images of epic transformations but simultaneously naturalised his sex change as a human variation, even if an 'abnormal' one, of the kinds of metamorphoses that occur in nature from one stage of life to another. His metamorphosis could be explained, medically managed, and regulated, despite its mythical subtext.

What about Weston's story and its relationship to concepts like 'trans-' or intersex? As I have noted, Weston's story lends itself to multiple readings. One could, indeed, place him into trans history and conceptualise his sex category crossing, for example, as part of the early history medical gender affirmation. Weston's 'sex change' was completed surgically, and his story can be contextualised, as Joanne Meyerowitz has done,⁷⁵ with reference to the appearance of gender affirming surgery as a possibility by the early 20th century, as a part of the building blocks that enabled the emergence of the medico-social category 'transsexual' by the 1950s.

One could also place Weston's story into intersex history and take his reference to being 'not normal', for example, as a signifier of physiological sex ambiguity through which medicalised notions of 'abnormal' sex development shaped both Broster's and his own reading of his body and sex. Yet, while these readings have valuable explanatory power, neither fully captures the nuances of the notions of 'metamorphosis' and 'sex change' that were used by Weston's contemporaries to tell a story about him that made cultural and scientific sense at the time.

Whatever conceptual lens is chosen as the interpretive frame through which to read stories like Weston's inevitably delimits the parameters of inquiry, privileging certain questions and interpretations over others. It also has implications for the 1930s history of gender verification, which, instead of (or in addition to) being framed as a history of anxiety over 'gender fraud', can become framed as a history of anxiety over trans bodies, intersex bodies, or, indeed, bodies who carried temporally and contextually conditioned concerns over sex binary instability. Weston's story lends itself to multiple readings because, in Rita Felski's words, 'the signifier 'history' has more than one referent',⁷⁶ and because of 'the inadequacy of categories to ever fully capture experiences'.⁷⁷ Perhaps most significantly, however, Weston's story illustrates how 'the needs of intersex athletes, transgender athletes, and *all* female athletes are intrinsically and woefully intertwined'⁷⁸ and overlapping when it comes to the policing of sexed and gendered boundaries in sport both in the past and the present.

My aim in centring Weston's story has not been to produce a 'corrective' account of the history of gender verification,⁷⁹ nor to dismiss the claiming of Weston as 'trans'. It has also not been to argue that concerns over 'males binding their genitals to masquerade as women' did not exist or contribute to the introduction of gender verification. Stories and bodies of the past are shifting and contestable locations. My argument is, rather, that centring Weston offers a way to conceptualise differently the early history of gender verification and the IAAF decision to institute the first gender verification policy. My aim in thinking Weston in relation to trans

and intersex as interpretative frameworks has been to remind how frameworks function in the first place to shape how knowledge and histories are produced in the present. It has also been to remind how different frameworks for interpreting gender variance entangle in the past in mutually inclusive ways that enable, not only situated readings of stories like Weston, but also co-ancestral readings that render him a precedent of multiple identity communities in the present. This can have enabling political implications that are worth mobilising when it comes to sex binary policing in sport to which *all* women and other female-categorised athletes are subjected.

Endnotes

1. 'Girl Who Became Man Tells of Metamorphosis', Reading Eagle, 28 May 1936.
2. See, for example: Louis J. Elsas et al., 'Gender Verification of Female Athletes', *Genetics in Medicine* 2 (4) (2000), pp. 249-254; Wiederkehr, Stefan. 'We Shall Never Know the Exact Number of Men Who Have Competed in the Olympics Posing as Women': Sport, Gender Verification and the Cold War', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26 (4) (2009), pp. 556-572; Alison Wrynn, A. 'The Human Factor: Science, Medicine and the International Olympic Committee, 1900-70', *Sport in Society*, 7 (2) (2004), pp. 211-231; Ian Ritchie, John Reynard, and Tom Lewis, 'Intersex and the Olympic Games', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 101 (8) (2008), pp. 395-399; Ian Ritchie, 'Sex Tested, Gender Verified: Controlling Female Sexuality in the Age of Containment', *Sport History Review* 34 (2003), pp. 80-98; Jonathan C. Reeser, 'Gender Identity and Sport: Is the Playing Field Level?' *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 39 (2005), pp. 695-699; Claire Sullivan, 'Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport: Eligibility and 'Fair Play'', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 35 (4) (2011), pp. 400-419; Lindsay P. Pieper, *Sex Testing: Gender Policing in Women's Sport* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2016).
3. Vanessa Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports; Reinventing, Reimagining and Reconstructing Histories', *Endeavour* 34 (4) (2010), pp. 157-163.
4. I use 'trans-' in the sense defined by Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore, 'Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36 (3/4) (2008). The hyphen in 'trans-' connotes openness and resists premature closure of the term via attachment to a single suffix, including '-gender' or '-sexual'.
5. See also: Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002)
6. The IOC central archive is the Olympic Studies Centre archive in Lausanne, where I consulted collections including (but not limited to) all the existing files on women in sport and gender verification; the 1936 Berlin Olympics; IOC medical commission and other medical matters; Executive Board and Session minutes; and relevant files in the Avery Brundage collections, which are digitally available at the Centre.

7. More specifically, the Malcolm Ferguson-Smith and Albert de la Chapelle collections, i.e. collections of key scientists involved in gender verification across the decades.
8. These were ProQuest Historical Newspapers, UK Press Online, Time Magazine Online Archives, the Times Digital Archive, Nexis newspaper archive, and Google Newspaper Archive.
9. Susan Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986)
10. For a starting point, see: Elsas et al. 'Gender Verification of Female Athletes'; Laura Hercher, 'Gender Verification: A Term Whose Time Has Come and Gone', *Journal of Genetic Counselling* 19 (6) (2010), pp. 551-551; Richie et al. 'Intersex and the Olympics'; Sullivan, 'Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport'; Ross Tucker and Malcolm Collins, 'The Science and Management of Sex Verification in Sport', *South African Journal of Sports Medicine* 21 (4) (2009), pp. 147-150; RossTucker and Malcolm Collins, 'The Science of Sex Verification and Athletic Performance', *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance* 5 (2010), pp. 127-139.
11. Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports'
12. Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports', p. 158
13. Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports'
14. The oldest article I found was published in 1969.
15. For this 'preclude' use of history, see Clare Hemmings, 'Telling Feminist Stories', *Feminist Theory* 6 (2) (2005), pp. 115-139.
16. Ritchie, 'Sex Tested, Gender Verified', p. 87
17. Sullivan, 'Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport', p. 403-404
18. A Wrynn, 'The Human Factor: Science, Medicine and the International Olympic Committee, 1900-70', *Sport in Society* 7 (2), p. 217
19. Heggie offers an in-depth account of similar widely-repeated 'gender fraud' cases, and a critique of how they are represented by scholars. See: Heggie, 'Testing Sex and Gender in Sports'
20. J Reeser, 'Gender Identity and Sport: is the Playing Field Level?', *British Journal of Sport Medicine* 39 (10), p. 696
21. Stephan Berg, '1936 Berlin Olympics: How Dora the Man Competed in the Woman's High Jump', *Spiegel Online* (2009). [Accessed December 4, 2014] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/1936-berlin-olympics-how-dora-the-man-competed-in-the-woman-s-high-jump-a-649104.html>.
22. Earliest reports of Ratjen's 'gender fraud' were related to the IAAF belatedly awarding a high-jump world record to Dorothy Tyler: the IAAF 'gave a British woman a world high jump record today – 18 years after the jump – upon finding that the former record holder was a man'. '18-Year Error', *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1957, p. C6.
23. 1936 *Los Angeles Times* article discussed 'a Japanese girl in Amsterdam, where the investigating committee was out two hours before it decided the predominant sex,' almost certainly investigating Kinuye Hitomi; the only Japanese woman competing in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. 'Separate Olympics for Sexes in 1940 Planned', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 1936, p. A9
24. Hemmings, 'Telling Feminist Stories', p. 118
25. Kathryn Henne, 'The Science of Fair Play in Sport: Gender and the Politics of Testing', *Signs* 39 (3) (2014), pp. 787-812, p. 788

26. See Pieper, *Sex Testing* and Vanessa Heggie, 'Subjective Sex: Science, Medicine and Sex Tests in Sports', in Jennifer Hargreaves and Eric Anderson (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014)
27. Pieper, *Sex Testing*, p. 31
28. Heggie, 'Subjective Sex', p. 340
29. Lennox Broster, 'The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Androgenital Syndrome,' in Lennox Broster (ed) *Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1938)
30. Weston is not named, but it is obvious that the case-study refers to him: it includes a picture of Weston (depicted nude in the objectifying fashion common in 1930s medicine) from which he is clearly recognisable. The diagnosis was 'undescended testes'.
31. Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, 'General Introduction – Metamorphosis: a Phenomenology', in Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos (eds) *Transformative Change in Western Thought: A History of Metamorphosis from Homer to Hollywood* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013)
32. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001)
33. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)
34. In mapping historical relationships between gender and sexual identity categories, Rubin shows how gendered selves and identities are made intelligible in the confines of the gender identifications and categories that are available within one's temporal and cultural context. Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003).
35. Lance Wahlert and Autumn Fiester, 'Gender Transports: Privileging the "Natural" in Gender Testing Debates for Intersex and Transgender Athletes', *American Journal of Bioethics* 12 (7) (2012), pp. 19-21, p. 19
36. Cahn, *Coming On Strong*; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*
37. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*
38. Cahn, *Coming On Strong*, p. 114
39. Dorothy Wooldridge, 'Do Athletics Destroy Girlish BEAUTY?' *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1932
40. Andrew Sharpe, 'Babies or Records', *The Daily Mirror*, 1 July 1938, original capitals
41. Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond The Natural Body. An Archaeology of Sex Hormones* (London: Routledge, 1994)
42. Lennox Broster, 'The Surgery of the Adrenal Cortex', *The British Journal of Surgery* 26 (104) (1939), pp. 925-941
43. Lennox Broster, 'A Review of Sex Characteristics with Special Reference to the Adrenal Cortex', *The British Medical Journal* 1 (1931), pp. 743-748, p. 743
44. Broster, 'The Surgery of the Adrenal Cortex', pp. 925-926
45. Donald F. Wickets. 'Can Sex in Humans be Changed?' *Physical Culture*, 1937. The Digital Media Repository, Ball State University.
46. Wickets, 'Can Sex in Humans be Changed?', p. 83
47. See also: Sonja Erikainen, 'Hybrids, Hermaphrodites, and Sex Metamorphoses: Gendered Anxiety and Sex Testing in Elite Sport, 1937-1968', *Advances in Gender Research* 24 (2017), pp. 155-176; Clare Tebbutt, Clare, 'The Spectre of the 'Man-Woman Athlete': Mark Weston, Zdenek Koubek, the 1936 Olympics and the Uncertainty of Sex', *Women's History Review* 24 (5) (2015), pp. 721-73; Alison Oram, 'Farewell to Frocks' – 'Sex Change' in Interwar Britain: Newspaper Stories, Medical

- Technology and Modernity’, in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds) *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present* (Basigstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2011)
48. ‘This Woman Will Be a Man Next Week’, *The Daily Mirror*, 15 April, 1937
 49. ‘Woman Athlete to Change Sex’, *Daily Mail*, 15 April, 1937
 50. ‘Miss Mary is Now Mr. Mark’, *Daily Express*, 29 May 1936
 51. ‘Medicine: Change of Sex’, *Time*, 24 August 1936
 52. ‘Medicine: Change of Sex’, *Time*
 53. Broster, ‘The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Androgenital Syndrome,’ pp. 47-48
 54. Milton Bronner, ‘The Girl Who Became a Bridegroom’, *The Owozzo Argus Press*, 21 August 1936, p. 8
 55. ‘Man Who Was Once a Girl’, *Daily Mirror*, 30 May 1936, p. 20
 56. Wickets, ‘Can Sex in Humans be Changed?’
 57. Bronner, ‘The Girl Who Became a Bridegroom’, p. 8
 58. Broster, ‘The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Androgenital Syndrome,’ pp. 47-48
 59. Melanie Taylor, ‘“The Masculine Soul Heaving in the Female Bosom”: Theories of Inversion and The Well of Loneliness’, *Journal of Gender Studies* 7 (3) (1998), pp. 287-296, p. 187
 60. Bronner, ‘The Girl Who Became a Bridegroom’, p. 8
 61. Bronner, ‘The Girl Who Became a Bridegroom’, p. 8
 62. The parenthesized question marks featured in the original document.
 63. Avery Brundage, ‘Dear Count Baillet-Latour’, 1936 (F-A02-PS-FEMSP/011, SD 4) IOC Historical Archives, Lausanne.
 64. Brundage, ‘Dear Count Baillet-Latour’
 65. Brundage, ‘Dear Count Baillet-Latour’
 66. ‘Sport: Olympic Games’, *Time*, 10 August 1936, p. 7
 67. ‘Sport: Olympic Games’, *Time*, p. 7
 68. ‘Women Athletes Tackle the “Man-Woman” Problem’, *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1936, p. 7
 69. Paul Gallico, *Farewell to Sports* (Evaston: Holtzman Press, 1938), pp. 233-234
 70. Gallico, *Farewell to Sports*, pp. 233
 71. IOC. ‘Congress 1936 Year 1 of the 11th Olympiad Berlin, July 28th to 31st, 1936,’ *Official Bulletin of the International Olympic Committee*. IOC Historical Archives, Lausanne
 72. ‘Man-Woman Athletes Test Decision’ *Daily Mirror*, 11 August 1936
 73. IAAF. *Handbook of the International Amateur Athletic Federation* (1937), pp. 40. Obtained via request from the IAAF Documents Library
 74. Wickets, ‘Can Sex in Humans be Changed?’, p. 16
 75. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*
 76. Rita Felski, ‘Fin de Siecle, Fin de Sexe: Transsexuality, Postmodernism, and the Death of History’, *New Literary History* 27 (2) (1996), pp. 337-349, p. 348
 77. Henry Rubin, Henry, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (Vanerbilt Vanerbilt University Press, 2003), p. 142
 78. Wahlert and Fiester, ‘Gender Transports’, p. 19
 79. See Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge and London: Harward University Press, 1999)