THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

The history of sexuality has attracted the interest of more and more historians in recent years, but research in this field has proven difficult with results emerging slowly. Much energy has been expended on problems of terminology – and not without reason, if we are to avoid the danger of using modern sexological terminology in an anachronistic way. This especially holds for words like ‘homosexuality’, ‘lesbianism’, and ‘transsexuality’, which not only have no early synonyms, but include meanings and connotations which simply did not exist at the time.

Furthermore, historians disagree on general trends in the history of sexuality. Some sketch a process of increasing prudery from the end of the Middle Ages that eventually led to an ‘antisexual syndrome’ in the nineteenth century. Others describe a swing from repression in the seventeenth century to permissiveness in the eighteenth century and back to repression in the nineteenth century.

Research into the history of sexuality has until recently concentrated on ideas and attitudes. The works of Vern Bullough serve as examples. The sources for this kind of study are mostly printed works, often by physicians or clergymen, and incidental remarks of the less-than-representative male members of the upper strata of the population. But in the last ten or fifteen years, the study of the practice of sexuality and the use of archival sources have become more important. Peter Laslett and others have proven the significance for this subject of quantitative demographic research. Lawrence Stone tried to reconstruct sexual practices with the help of diaries. Jean-Louis Flandrin and G. R. Quaife made use of judicial archives to study sexual life, the former for France, the latter for England. All these historians concentrate on the pre-industrial period.

The study of sexual practices, especially of the common people, has proven the most difficult subject of all. Sources are scarce and
often pose problems of interpretation. As yet, no generally accepted picture exists. An intriguing aspect of lower-class sexual life in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western Europe is the fact that men and women did not marry before their mid- to late twenties, whereas illegitimacy rates were fairly low. Does that mean that young people lived chaste lives in the ten years from puberty to marriage? Flandrin denies this, and points to the alternatives of masturbation, petting, and for men the visiting of prostitutes. Edward Shorter, on the other hand, considers it more likely that young people demonstrated very strict behaviour, at least until the second half of the eighteenth century.6

Our knowledge of sexual attitudes and practices of the lower classes in the Dutch Republic is very limited, but archival evidence suggests that there existed a strong repugnance among most people for any practices which diverged from the ‘normal’ manner of sexual contact between men and women. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, freedom of choice of sexual partner, tolerance of pre-marital sexual contact among betrothed persons and outspokenness concerning sexual matters and sexual pleasures are found, but among the same people there was a genuine abhorrence of undressing, variations of sexual positions, and especially of sodomy. Prudery increased in the eighteenth century; for example, we came across horrified lower-class prostitutes who refused sexual acts like manual masturbation and fellatio, requested by upper-class clients, who would have had no difficulties persuading higher class courtesans.7

An important characteristic of the sexual mentality of this period was the fact that the heterosexual genital sexual act, face to face, between a married couple was the absolute standard of sexual behaviour. Furthermore, human sexuality was seen as purely phallicentric. There was, all in all, a sharp distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, or rather permitted and forbidden sexual behaviour, a distinction the church and the law courts also upheld. We will see that this greatly influenced the female crossdressers and how they were treated.

Not only historians, but also biologists, physicians, psychologists and sociologists have paid much attention to the subject of sexuality in recent years. They usually make a distinction between biological sex, indicated by ‘sex’, and socio-cultural sex, indicated by ‘gender’. One’s sex is determined by physical characteristics; one’s gender is determined by clothing, behaviour, speech and all
1. Print from c. 1700. Portrait of the Dutch Geertruid ter Brugge, who served as a dragoon in the Dutch army.
2. Illustration from a book of anecdotes published in Amsterdam in 1659. It depicts a soldier discovered on the battlefield in 1589, found killed together with her lover. Both soldiers in the Dutch army during the Revolt against Spain.

3. Illustration, after a portrait from 1630, of Catalina de Erauso, a Spanish 'conquista dor' around 1600.
4. Title-page from a play (1739) about Kenau Simons Hasselaer, the sixteenth-century heroine who defended Haarlem against the Spanish enemy.

5. Title-page from the biography of 'Claartje', a woman who worked as a stable-boy and coachman for twelve years in Amsterdam. The book was published immediately after her death and subsequent discovery in 1743. The book, however, granted her a happy end, and depicted her alive and married to a rich gentleman.
6. Title-page from the Dutch translation of *L'Héroïne Mousquetaire* by Jean de Préchac (1679). This is a fictionalised biography of Christine de Meyrak, a French female soldier.

7. Illustration from a biography of the French Geneviève Prémoy, who as ‘Chevalier Balthazar’ was decorated and was admitted in the order of St. Louis by Louis XIV.
8 and 9. Anne Bonney and Mary Read, as depicted in the Dutch translation of *A General History of the Pyrates* (1725).
11 and 12. Hannah Snell, as she performed on stage in her male guise. In this way she exploited the publicity following the discovery of her sex. Illustrations from the Dutch translation (1750) of her biography *The Female Soldier.*
Some account of **Hannah Snell**, the Female Soldier.

**Hannah Snell**, was born in Fosse Street, Worcester, April 4, 1723. Her father was a butcher and dyer, and son to a surgeon. Snell, who was at the taking of Mannor in the reign of King William, and afterwards served in Queen Anne's wars.

When her father and mother, who by their industry brought up 3 sons and 6 daughters, died, Hannah set out for London, where she arrived on Christmas Day, 1740, and resided some time with her sister, who had married one Gray, a carpenter, and lived in Wapping. Here she became acquainted with James Smales, a Dutch tailor, to whom she was married in 1743; but he treated her with great inhumanity, and left her when seven months with child, which dying at six months old, she decently buried it. She put on a suit of her brother-in-law's apparel, on Nov. 29, 1743, left her father without communicating her design, and went to Coventry, where she enlisted herself in Guise's regiment of foot, and marched with it to Carlisle. Here her servant, whose name was Dunn, having

Uytrechtsche Hylickmakers, ofte Amsterdamse Kermis-koeck.

Een Nieuw eerstigheid Liedecken van Monfr. Split-nuyer, die haer eenige Ja- ren, in Mans kledinge op syn Frans gekleed heeft onthouden, en onder-trout is gettoet met fêker Juffrou binnen Am- sterdam, en daer over aldaer in 't Tucht-huys sit, en te sien is in 't felve habiſt.

Sten: Soeven Engelin.

Hij oorde eens wat dat' er voor lastigheid dagen
Amsterdam is gefulst/
Wanneer het niet naar hove ondertragen/
Want diu sit in dit Nijl
Alles theer kloer en waarlicent sien bescheiden
Wat dat een Duy-nuys heeft bedeeld
Door het bieden als de mans/
Na de nieuwe mode op syn Frans.
Binnen Amsterdam is hij geboren/
En haer naam is wel bekend/
Soe als een peeter wel tol hoeren/
Want men zich keert of wint/
Soe des en geen ja by't er eigen bijhouden/
Soe blijft haer het minnelyck bijhouden/

Soe in weefen als in dracht/
Cot een schaat en stenat van haar Geslacht.
Soe heeft haer jaren langh onthouden/
Soedr dat siert onterecht/
Cot dat si uitbond om te toonlijven/
Doen de Tucht haar bond bekeert/
On ter dat er niet en wap geelck het houtje/
Wam si bont'er niets dat haer behoede/
Doen het streek'en en 't gebeet/
Daar het de Tucht om wongte te becn/
Want toen de Tucht haer gingh verstoorten

15. A Dutch ballad from c. 1690, which essentially tells the story of Trijn Jurriaens.
16. Title-page of the Kloekmoedige Land- en Zee Heldin ('The stout-hearted heroine of the land and the sea') (1720).

17. During the first three interrogations of her trial in 1769 Maria van Antwerpen insisted that she was a man, and she signed as 'Maggiel van Handwerpen'. At the fourth interrogation she admitted that she was a woman, and signed as Maria van Antwerpen.

19. 'Mother Ross' who fought around 1700 as an English soldier on Dutch territory.
Illustration from a Dutch biography of the German Antoinette Berg, who fought as a soldier in the English army on Dutch territory in 1799. Afterwards, she served in the British navy in the Caribbean.
GESCHIEDENIS
VAN
RENÉE BORDEREAU,
GENOEMD LANGEVIN,
BETREKKINGEEN WITSLAARSE LEVEN IN DE VENDÉE:
OPGEFLED DOOR HAAR ELEVE.
TE GENOEMD LANGEVIN.

21 and 22. Title-page and illustration from the Dutch translation of the memoirs (1815) of the French Renée Bordereau, who fought in the counter-revolutionary army during the French Revolution.
Hier draagt de Vrouw de Manne Pri
En gordt den Degen op de zy,
Ja schynt den Man als uyt te dagen,
Ech Sul-oom, ang en bang voor flagen,
Verdraagt dit leer, en neemt gedult,
Wat sal hy doen? het is zyu schult.

23. Illustration from the Narinnen-spiegel ('Mirror of female fools'): 'Here the woman wears the man's attire/ and puts on the sword/ yes, seems to defy the man/ but that doit, afraid of blows/ bears this suffering, and has patience/ what can he do? It is his fault.'
24, 25, 26 and 27. Details from Dutch eighteenth-century children’s prints with the theme of 'The world turned upside down'.
24, 25 and 26: 'The woman goes to war'.
27: 'The girl, of weak and tender nature, carried away with arrogance; here we see in a soldier’s uniform; I think this is foolish'.
28. Painted canvas used by a nineteenth-century German street singer, illustrating a song about a female soldier in the American Civil War. The theme is the ancient one of a woman who dressed as a man to follow her lover into the army and dies together with him on the battlefield (compare ill. no. 2).
the other external characteristics. Genes and hormones determine the sex to which one belongs; one’s upbringing and social environment are, on the other hand, decisive in determining one’s gender.

Modern sexological research has paid surprisingly little attention to the subject of female cross-dressing. Still, this literature offers us, in theory, four different bases of explanation: first, biological intersexuality, second transvestism, third, homosexuality, and fourth, transsexuality.

BIOLOGICAL INTERSEXUALITY

Biological intersexuality is a matter of sex, not of gender. Many varieties of this biological divergence exist, roughly divisible into hermaphroditism and pseudohermaphroditism. Hermaphroditism, whereby a person is genetically mixed male and female, demonstrating characteristics, albeit never completely developed, of both sexes, is a very rare phenomenon. This variation is usually observable at birth and a choice must be made whether to raise the child as a boy or as a girl. In puberty, however, secondary sexual characteristics can develop and become obvious which do not suit the original determination made of the child’s sex. Under the rubric ‘pseudohermaphroditism’ medical science has classified a number of characteristics comparable with hermaphroditism, but resulting from other causes. It refers to people who are genetically male or female but who, for example, because of a disturbance in hormone balance have (partly) the appearance of the opposite sex. A number of syndromes have been distinguished, but most of these cannot, for purely medical reasons, be applied to the women we are concerned with here. The only exception is the syndrome of androgen insensitivity, whereby in genetic males the external sexual organs are not or only partly developed. These boys are sometimes considered girls at birth and are brought up as such.

It is possible that some of our cross-dressers were in reality intersexual. However, in most cases hermaphrodites and pseudohermaphrodites who have been brought up as women feel themselves to be women, even after their bodies begin to show male characteristics. They do not desire to change their gender, and they do not spontaneously begin to feel male in their later lives. The same holds true, mutatis mutandis, for those intersexuals who
were brought up as men. Apparently, the acquired gender identity which is established within the first two or three years of life outweighs the biological sex.

Much confusion and grief generally results when a child appears to be a boy or a girl at birth, but develops the secondary sexual characteristics of the other sex in puberty. Nowadays, surgery and hormone treatment can counter such a change of sex. In the past, it was thought necessary to reconsider the judgement made regarding the child's sex. The tragedy of being forced to change gender is evident in a number of published autobiographical works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; for example, that of the Frenchman Hercule Barbin, who ended by committing suicide, and of the German who wrote under the revealing pseudonym, N. O. Body.¹⁸

Hermaphrodites who were brought up as women, but in later life lived as men, can be regarded as female cross-dressers. Although hermaphroditism is rare, the phenomenon was known from antiquity and it drew much attention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much was written about it, and people with aberrant, androgynous sexual appearance were frequently mentioned as attractions at fairs.⁹ The authorities also took an interest in these cases. When problems emerged after christening regarding the sex of a child or adult, they usually stepped in and had the 'true' sex determined. When this was not clear, they dictated the sex arbitrarily. This occurred elsewhere in Europe as well.

We found only one probable case of hermaphroditism in our sources. In 1675, Anne Jacobs told the magistrate of Harderwijk 'that she was more a man than a woman'. She was thereupon ordered to dress as a man. The chronicler who informs us of this history writes that she was a hermaphrodite. That information and the magistrate's decision probably mean that she was medically examined before being allowed to switch gender.

In other cases we simply do not have enough information. In one contemporary source, Marytje van den Hove, one of whose nicknames was 'Alemondus Half-man-half-woman', was called a hermaphrodite, but no details are given and the other sources are silent on this point. Anna Maria Everts had de kwae as a nickname. Kwae is an old Dutch word for a hermaphroditic cow that cannot have young; it is, in fact, the only original Dutch word with the same meaning as hermaphrodite. The German-born Lumke Thoole chose 'Schwitters' for her male surname; in itself not
Sexuality

unusual as a surname, but a telling detail is that Schwitter is also the original German word for a hermaphrodite. However, this conjecture is not confirmed by other sources.

Relatively speaking, a great deal is known about Cornelis Wijngaerdf, a vagabond, who in 1732 was apprehended in The Hague and brought before the court. During his interrogation his remarkable past emerged. He told the court that at birth he was ascribed the female sex and christened Lijsbeth. When she was only fourteen, she was married, but her husband discovered that sexual intercourse with her was impossible. Thereupon her parents had her shut up in the ‘Blauwhuis’, a lunatic asylum annex prison at Schiedam. After she had been there for six months, she was medically examined by the official town surgeon at the request of the bailiff. As a result she was discharged, with the instruction to wear men’s clothing ever after. Free, she – or from now on, he – left for England and there had himself christened Cornelis Wijngaerdf. Later, he returned to the Republic and married a woman. But his affairs apparently did not run smoothly, and it was because of beggary and vagrancy that he was arrested.

The file does not contain a sentence, so probably Cornelis was let off with a warning only. Searching for more details regarding his past, we found that Cornelis had told only half of his history. The judicial archives of Schiedam and Brielle tell other, more unpleasant details. It was true that he had been born and brought up a girl, named Elisabeth, and that as such he had married an English soldier. She – as we will call her for this period of her life – often quarrelled with her husband, and in one of their domestic fights she wounded him severely with a knife. She tried to bribe the witness of this scene into silence, but was nevertheless arrested for her violence against her husband. The court of Brielle sentenced her to ten years confinement in prison, followed by banishment. This she had to serve in Schiedam, as Brielle was too small a town to have a prison of its own.

In prison she fell in love and initiated a sexual relationship with another female prisoner. She told her beloved that she was in reality a man, and gave her a written promise of marriage, signed with her blood with the name of Carolus Wijngaerdf. When all this was discovered, the magistrate had her medically examined by the town surgeon, who concluded ‘that she was more a man than a woman’. As a man obviously could not be confined in a women’s prison, she was sent back to Brielle. The magistrate of Brielle, a
small town without a prison, did not agree and ordered a new medical examination, by three qualified doctors. This learned committee concluded that the examined 'is constituted as any other female . . . no parts or members have been found contrary to this'.

On the basis of this information we cannot decide who was right, but we opt for the latter committee, which consisted of three professionals and which gave a more detailed account. The town surgeon of Schiedam, moreover, may well have been led to his conclusion by the wish of the magistrate to get rid of this troublemaker.

Pseudohermaphroditism is more common than hermaphroditism, but it is also more difficult to determine. In a still classic study, in which a few thousand cases of hermaphroditism and pseudohermaphroditism are described, Franz Ludwig Neugebauer included a Dutch woman of the seventeenth century whom he classes as a pseudohermaphrodite. This is Hendrickje Lamberts van der Schuyr, who has been cited in medical literature for centuries. She owes her international fame to Nicolaas Tulp, who gave a detailed, first-hand account of her case in his Observationum Medicarum of 1641. Tulp was a prominent physician and was depicted as a society doctor in Rembrandt's 'Anatomy Lesson'. He was also a member of the Amsterdam regent patriciate, holding several offices in the Amsterdam government. In 1641 he was a member of the magistrate's court directly involved in the case against the 27-year old Hendrickje, who was on trial for having had relations with other women, first as a woman and later dressed as a man. Along with this, she had served two years in the past as a soldier under the Stadhouder Frederik-Hendrik, after which she apparently had reverted to wearing women's clothes.

Neugebauer based himself upon Tulp's book, but we could go back to the more extensive original trial records which have been preserved. Hendrickje lived in Amsterdam and had a steady relationship with 42-year-old Trijntje Barents, a widow who had six children, three of whom were still living at the time. Trijntje was questioned extensively about their sexual relations, and she declared that Hendrickje 'sometimes had carnal knowledge of her two or three times a night, just as her late husband had – yes, and sometimes more arduous than he'. Trijntje also declared – possibly to make herself appear less guilty – that 'this traffic was usually the desire of Hendrickje Lamberts, who is lustful and ever eager for sex'. Trijntje told the court that she had once handed her lover the
chamberpot and had seen that Hendrickje 'pissed through a shaft half as long and as wide as my small finger'. This shaft came out of her woman's parts and disappeared again as soon as she had done, so that it could be seen no more'.

This last statement suggests pseudohermaphroditism. Hendrickje could have been genetically a male who suffered from androgen insensitivity; in that case the shaft would be a not fully developed penis. However, the court questioned three other women who had been cited as Hendrickje's former lovers. All of them denied having had sex with her, despite admitting having slept with her in the same bed. All three explicitly stated that Hendrickje had 'ordinary cycles as every woman has' that is that she menstruated. Finally, the court had Hendrickje examined by three midwives, whose observations supported Trijntje's statement. In the labia near the urethra, they had found a hard part, formed like the penis of a young boy, but thicker. When touched, this 'penis' withdrew so that they could no longer observe it.

The information derived from the trial is detailed but contradictory. If Hendrickje menstruated, she cannot have been a pseudo-hermaphrodite: menstruation does not appear in cases of the androgen insensitivity syndrome. Also Hendrickje did not value her female gender identity in which she was raised, which pseudohermaphrodites usually do. At any rate, the court viewed Hendrickje as a woman, and condemned her as a 'tribade', that is to say a female sodomite, a woman who has sex with other women, which was also Tulp's conclusion.

We conclude that biological reasons will explain very few of our cases of female cross-dressing, and even then the information is hardly conclusive. No source tells of sudden biological changes, such as the growing of beards and moustaches. Moreover, the gender identity which a child acquires in infancy with very few exceptions determines the later gender identity, a serious consideration in view of the fact that we are concerned here with women who repudiated that identity.

TRANSVESTISM

'Transvestism', as used in modern psychology, has no biological origins, but is psychological in character. The term was coined in
1910 by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, and denotes an irresistible tendency to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{10} Transvestites are practically always men. The urge to dress as women is episodic, and at all times they remain quite conscious of their true sex. They are also usually heterosexuals. And however meticulously the manner and speech of women are mimicked and even exaggerated, it is often not difficult for the world to see through the performance.

The fact that at present transvestism is associated with men, and among women rare or lacking altogether, is a complete contrast to the situation before 1800, when men dressing as women were seldom found, whereas there did exist a tradition of cross-dressing among women. Modern male transvestism, however, is an essentially different phenomenon from female cross-dressing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The former is episodic, undertaken for a short time and meant to satisfy personal desires. We do not know if there ever existed a similar longing among women who dressed as men for very short periods of time only. Cases like Johanna van der Meer who liked to go out dressed in men's clothing, and the married Maritjen Pieters of whom we know only that she was arrested in the street in Amsterdam while wearing men's clothes, could in theory be attributed to an irrepresible urge to dress as a man, but in fact our information is totally insufficient.

We do know of cases where female cross-dressing was undertaken for the purposes of sexual arousal. There were prostitutes who received their clients while wearing men's clothing. It also appears from the literature and stories about mistresses and courtesans from the higher classes that attractive young women dressed as men. The fact that it was just possible to see through their masculine appearance was considered erotically titillating. In the theatre and in novels, male disguise by women was used to create piquant situations. But all these were meant primarily for the sexual pleasure of the men present, not necessarily for the women themselves.

Male transvestism certainly occurred far less frequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than it does today. In our sources we encountered only a few cases of male transvestism. One example is Jan Snoeck, born in Brussels, who in 1703 was arrested in female dress in the middle of the night in Amsterdam. Eight years later, he was condemned for burglary and begging in Breda.
At that time, he confessed before the court that he was 'steeped in evil, in heart and soul', and that he longed for a death sentence, desiring to be released as quickly as possible from his sufferings.\textsuperscript{11}

To be sure, before the seventeenth century no women were permitted on the stage, so men played the female roles. After the introduction of actresses, however, men cross-dressing as a woman remained a popular element on the stage until the eighteenth century. But they were a burlesque element only, considered to be ridiculous, and not at all attractive, as the women disguised as male were. There was obviously a great difference in the perception of cross-dressing of men and women. Transvestism of men was considered much more objectionable than that of women. The man was demeaned, while the woman strove for something higher. An extremely negative opinion of men who took on a female role is also clear from the many popular prints ridiculing and censoring married couples who did not keep within the proper gender boundaries. Transvestism in men must therefore have been more strongly suppressed than in our time, when the gap between the genders has diminished. The explanation for the absence of modern female transvestism could correspondingly be found in the fact that women may dress in trousers and jackets in normal life. In short, we do not think that the modern notion of transvestism contributes much to explain why women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries decided to cross-dress.

HOMOSEXUALITY: THE PHALLOCENTRIC VIEW

Nowadays, female homosexuality is not a self-evident reason for changing one's sex, because women who sexually prefer women to men do not usually reject their female identity. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dressing and living as a man made it possible to legitimise a sexual relationship with another woman. We will argue that this transvestism must not be seen as a disguise for the world, but as a step that psychologically enabled a woman to court another woman. In other words, while nowadays lesbianism is not felt as a problem of gender, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was.

The history of homosexuality is a recent, but productive, discipline which, however, concentrates on male homosexuality. In this field terminology poses real problems. The word 'homosex-
uality' dates from the late nineteenth century and the present content and understanding of the word is still more recent. In the Middle Ages and early modern period, the word 'sodomy' was used. In the Netherlands this word was first found in the sixteenth century. At first it was a rather broad term meant to denote sexual contact between two men, and, less often, between two women or between a human being and an animal. In practice it could even be used for every sexual act that was disapproved of. In the course of time the term was narrowed: in the eighteenth-century judicial sources it was nearly exclusively meant to denote anal copulation. Sodomy was considered a very serious sin and a crime that should be—and was—punished by death. But a great difference between this and the later notion of homosexuality is that sodomy was thought to concern incidental acts, and not one's permanent sexual nature.

In the eighteenth century a male homosexual subculture emerged in the Netherlands with fixed codes and meeting points. In 1730, during a series of spectacular trials, networks of sodomites surfaced that led to harsh persecutions. Precisely because of the discovery of these networks and subculture, the authorities no longer saw sodomy as an activity of individual sinners, but as a real danger to public order and morality, comparable to criminal gangs.\(^\text{12}\)

In 1811, when the Netherlands were annexed to Napoleon's Empire, the introduction of the Code Pénal meant that sodomy disappeared from the books of criminal law. In the late nineteenth century, the designation 'sodomy' was replaced by 'homosexuality' and was increasingly seen as an element of one's character, a permanent aspect of the personality, rather than as an activity someone might occasionally indulge in. It was also increasingly seen more as an illness, a deviation in a physical or spiritual sense, than as a crime and a mortal sin.

The paragraphs above concern male homosexuality: of female homosexuality little is known. It had, however, a term of its own: *tribadie* ('tribady'). In Dutch this is used for the first time in 1650, in the translation of Nicolaas Tulp's book *Observationum Medicarum*. The Dutch translator simply used the Latin word from the Latin version of the book which was published nine years before. The reason is simple: no original Dutch term for homosexuality existed, neither for female nor for male homosexuality. The use of the word *tribady* in later texts, however, remained rare.\(^\text{13}\)
Tribery shared the fate of 'sodomy' and was in the nineteenth century replaced by the more general term homosexuality. The history of the meaning of the terms is similar. The change from deed to character, from crime to illness, can also be seen in the history of lesbian love. The word 'lesbian', however, was introduced only in the twentieth century.

Tribery was considered just as bad and liable to criminal persecution as sodomy. However, only a very few legal proceedings are known where the sole indictment was for tribery between two women living as women. The number of cases of lesbian relationships we know of in Europe before the nineteenth century is very small indeed, and most of these concerned couples where one of the women dressed as a man. From the negligence of the courts, the general silence of the sources, and the absence of adequate terminology, much can be inferred. Until the end of the eighteenth century love affairs between women were not taken seriously, and perhaps often not even noticed at all. Presumably no one suspected two women living together of sexual relations. And in fact such relationships probably were exceptional. Most people at the time were ignorant of the existence of the phenomenon of tribery. No lesbian networks or subculture existed; tribery was far less known than sodomy; and the taboo on it was at least as great. Practically no woman did know any examples of sexual relations between women and few, at any rate of the common people, had even heard of them. Sexual desire and love was thought of as something that could only be experienced with a male. We can therefore assume that most women who fell in love with other women could not place or identify these feelings. Therefore, it is logical that those women would think: if I covet a woman, I must be a man.

That in the past lesbian love was inconceivable has recently been emphasised by Judith Brown in her book Immodest Acts. She writes: ' . . . Europeans had long found it difficult to accept that women could actually be attracted to other women. Their view of human sexuality was phallocentric . . . .' Brown in this way explains the curious behaviour of an Italian nun who around 1600 seduced another nun into having sexual contact. She did so while in a state of religious ecstasy, telling her beloved that she was temporarily changed into a male angel, and speaking in a low, male voice. For both of them, this legitimised the lovemaking.

Lesbian feelings could also express themselves in other ways. Lilian Faderman described exalted, but non-sexual friendships
between women from the middle and upper classes, which were quite usual since the Renaissance. In Dutch literary history there is a famous example of such a friendship, between the eighteenth-century writers Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken. Their life-long relationship was close enough to be called love, and a recent biographer classified it as lesbian, although it was certainly not expressed sexually.\textsuperscript{13}

Lower-class women had a means of dealing with sexual feelings for another woman via the tradition of cross-dressing, whereby women took up lives as men. Once transformed into a man, one's sexual feelings for another woman fell into place. The fact that some women who fell in love with other women transformed themselves into men and even officially married the objects of their affections should therefore not be seen as an unnecessarily risky sort of deception, but rather as the logical consequence of, on the one hand, the absence of a social role for lesbians and the existence of, on the other hand, a tradition of women in men’s clothing. In many of the life histories described below the confusion of gender identity caused by feelings of love for another woman is evident. A telling case is that of Cornelia Gerrits, who came to dislike her male attire so intensely that in spite of her official marriage with another woman, she changed back into a woman.

THE WOMEN WHO AS ‘MEN’ COURTED AND MARRIED WOMEN

Of course none of our cross-dressers formulated these ideas, but numerous details and statements point to this interpretation. Hendrickje Lamberts and Trijntje Barents began their affair as two women, but at a certain moment, Hendrickje decided to dress as a man. During her hearing, Trijntje remarked that their sexual life improved perceptibly afterwards. This must have been a psychological effect brought about by the fact that their affair then conformed more closely to an acceptable heterosexual relationship.

The logical sequence ‘if I love a woman I must be a man’ obviously demanded confirmation in the form of a legal marriage. We have seen how Elisabeth Wijgraaff gave her prison love a written promise of marriage. This sequence is also clearly demonstrated in the following amorous histories, both of which took
place in Leiden in the seventeenth century. The first is the story of Maeyken Joosten. Maeyken Joosten had been married for thirteen years and had borne four children, two of whom were still living, when she fell in love with a young girl named Bertelmina Wale. She plied Bertelmina with love letters, which she had signed as ‘Pieter Verburgh’ (she herself could not write). After a short time, she told Bertelmina ‘that it was not Pieter Verburgh... but she who had those letters written and who was in love with her’. She told her that she was in reality a man and eventually, as we read in the argumentation of the verdict, ‘her vows, oaths, and sinister persuasions made Bertelmina believe this, and they were betrothed’. ‘Yes’, the verdict continues, ‘and worse, she (....) had had sexual contact with Bertelmina in every manner as if she were a man.’

Despite her having a husband and children, Maeyken successfully convinced her beloved that she was really a man, extracted a promise of marriage from her and got her into bed. Maeyken left her husband, travelled to Zeeland, and returned to Leiden in men’s clothing, where she told Bertelmina that the clergy could verify that she had been rechristened Abraham Joosten and that she had official permission to marry. This was of course not true, but Bertelmina believed her and the couple were married in the city hall in Leiden on 8 March 1606. What happened after this is not known, but in October Maeyken was on trial for sodomy. (The term ‘tribady’ was not yet used.) The death penalty was demanded, but the sentence was exile for life.

Also in 1688 two women who had been married to one another, one as the husband, the other as the wife, stood trial in Leiden. This is a clear example of a lesbian relationship that drew attention to itself unnecessarily. Cornelia Gerrits van Breugel, who had married ten years before but soon after the marriage had separated from her husband, and Elisabeth Boleyn, a spinster, had already been living together as women for a year. Then they came up with a plan which would permit them to marry officially. Cornelia instructed Elisabeth to buy men’s clothing for her, to leave Leiden and go to live in Amsterdam temporarily. Cornelia followed her, dressed as a man, and as ‘Cornelis Brugh’ married Elisabeth in the Reformed Church of Amsterdam. They went back to Leiden as man and wife, but two and a half years later, they were discovered, because Cornelia took a dislike to men’s garments and began to live as a woman again. It was the change back from man to woman
that caused people to talk. They were arrested and tried, but despite the fact that the lesbian implications were clear to the court, the punishment was light: 12 years’ exile and a prohibition against their living together again.

In these examples the women shared the secret, and the lovers actually had sexual relations. But this was not the rule: often the 'wife' did not know the truth. In Amsterdam in 1645, for example, an unsuspecting widow married the navvy ‘Johannes Kok’. After the wedding, she discovered that ‘Johannes’ was a woman. ‘Johannes’ begged his wife to let him flee before the situation became a matter for the court and she let him go. We owe this information to the discovery of a brief notarial declaration required to invalidate the marriage, but we never found another trace of ‘Johannes Kok’.

We know much more about Barbara Adriaens, whose unhappy childhood we have described above. Her family had had her incarcerated for drunkenness at the age of thirteen, and after her release she had worked as a linen seamstress and maidservant for different employers. When she was 18, she dressed in men’s clothing and became a soldier. In 1632 she found herself a municipal soldier in Amsterdam, calling herself ‘Willem Adriaens’. Willem’s courtship and marriage can be followed in the extensive trial records.

Willem’s landlady noticed at a certain point that he was interested in women and that he went to dancing places where prostitutes could be found. This gave her the idea that she might practise a little matchmaking and she introduced Willem to her younger sister, Hilletje Jans, who made her living by peddling vegetables on the street. Hilletje was eager for the match and gave Willem money, stockings, and other presents, which were meant to confirm the promises of marriage they exchanged very soon after they had been introduced. Only fourteen days after their first acquaintance, their banns were published, and a few weeks later they were married in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. But Willem was soon unmasked.

Before the marriage, Willem testified later, he had shown affection to Hilletje to some degree, but had never ‘indecently touched or kissed her, but only kissed her simply, as betrothed persons do’. Hilletje also kept her hands to herself. She stated that ‘Willem (...) sometimes put his hands on her breasts or body, but without passion, and he did not persevere, because she (Hilletje) struck away the hand that touched her.’ On the wedding night,
Willem told her that he wanted to have sex with her, but he had drunk too much to live up to his promises.

The consummation of the marriage continued to be postponed night after night. Willem pretended to be ill, and even alleged that he had 'the pox' – meaning syphilis. Hilletje believed this, and, she told the court, she was willing to wait for a year or two. But she was not happy. She complained to her sister, who in turn pressed Willem with reproaches concerning his neglected conjugal duties. Nor did Hilletje remain completely passive in bed. One night she began to explore her husband's body with her hands, but 'after she had felt what she did' she still doubted whether she had indeed felt anything or not, as she did not know if she had touched too high or too low. Hilletje's knowledge of male anatomy was clearly not great. But the seed of doubt had been sown, and she finally realised the truth when a woman in her neighbourhood told Hilletje that Willem was really a woman. This woman had herself slept with Barbara when the latter still lived as a woman.

Hilletje did not dare make this discovery public, out of fear of embarrassment and other unpleasant social consequences involved. But the marriage was also not a happy one for other reasons. Willem drank heavily, and that led to domestic quarrels. One evening Hilletje came home, looked for her husband and found him drinking in an inn. In reply to Hilletje's remark that she was also thirsty, Willem answered, 'Give me nine farthings and then you may drink as well.' Hilletje thanked Willem for the honour and left the inn. Willem cried out 'For shame!', and followed Hilletje, hitting her on the back with his hat. 'You will repent that blow', Hilletje retorted and she shouted, making a great deal of noise, and revealing that Willem was a woman.

A nineteenth-century historian, Jan ter Gouw, reported without citing sources, that a disturbance then occurred during which Barbara was the victim of the maling, which meant that she was made sport of and roughly treated by the by-standers. Hilletje's old father then reported the deception to the city hall. This is quite possible, although we cannot confirm this from our sources. In any event, the court of Amsterdam took her crime seriously, and condemned her to 24 years' exile from the city. According to ter Gouw, Barbara's send-off from the city was also accompanied by a row in the streets.

In most cases, after a sentence of exile, the person in question disappears from sight and only by coincidence do we learn anything about his or her life thereafter. In the case of Barbara
Adriaens, we know from a court sentence which unfortunately does not give more details that she went north to Friesland and Groningen, where she again dressed in men’s clothing and even married a woman for the second time.

During her trial for her first marriage, Barbara Adriaens declared that she ‘regretted her deed as soon as the marriage vows were spoken’. She barely escaped a heavy sentence – perhaps even the death penalty. But within four years she did the same thing again. The urge to do so must have been very strong. In her Amsterdam trial she said that ‘she had never lusted after men’, and her landlady suggested that she visited prostitutes.

A last example of a woman in men’s clothing who tried to marry another woman is that of Francina Gunning, whose adventurous life reflects many of the themes we have encountered in preceding chapters. During Napoleon’s reign she accompanied a French captain’s widow to Paris as a maidservant. On her way back to Holland she was advised by a female innkeeper to dress in men’s clothing for safety reasons. On her way she was stopped by the police, and as she could not show any papers, she was judged to be a deserter, and pressed into service with the French army. She managed to escape and fled to Germany, where she voluntarily enlisted as a soldier to fight the French. Wounded in battle, she was taken to hospital and then discovered and discharged. She resumed her male attire, however, and went back to Holland, where in 1813 in Zwolle she was arrested as a thief and imprisoned for three months. Her real sex remained undiscovered. Free again, she enlisted in the Dutch army. In her lodging house, she courted the maidservant Alida Landeel, in order, she said, to get better treatment there. She promised to marry Alida. After the war, Francina did not abandon her betrothed. They went together to Apeldoorn, where a parent of Alida’s lived. There they had their banns published, Francina giving her name as ‘Frans Gunningh Sloet Junior, Lord of Amerongen, 26 years old, born in Alkmaar’. This self-assumed noble birth was clearly overdone, and may have been what exposed her as a fraud: in any case, she could show no papers of identification and she was arrested. She escaped from prison, but was still thought to be a man, as appears from the description given by the police. Caught and brought before the court, the public prosecutor became suspicious and ordered a medical examination. She was sentenced to three years in prison for her deception.
As mentioned above, no form of sexual love was conceivable other than heterosexual love, no sex act other than penetration by a penis. This latter criterion made the notion of lesbian love especially difficult, and caused confusion over the definition of 'tribady' in juridical and medical writings. In his influential treatise *De delictis et poenis*, dating from 1700, Luigi Maria Sinistrati concluded that a sexual relationship between women can only be defined as tribady when one of the partners has the capacity of penetrating the other, by means of an exceptionally developed clitoris. Women who are accused of tribady, he advises, should therefore be medically examined. This was already common practice: in many of our cases the first reaction of the authorities was to order a medical examination, to see if the private parts of the ‘husband’ or ‘lover’ were those of a normal female. Related to these notions was the idea that women could only make love with another woman with the aid of an artificial penis. We should probably view the imputation against Cornelia Gerrits van Breugel and Elisabeth Boleyn, that they used to have sex with a dog, as related to this idea. A similar gender confusion was noticeable among male homosexuals, although to a much more limited degree. Sodomites were often described as affecting female ways of talking and walking; in Dutch (*mietje*) as in English there exist special words for an effeminate male homosexual. But even those *mietjes* did not actually dress as a woman, and never decided to change their identity completely. An exception was a man called Dirk, alias Tobias, arrested in 1767 while begging dressed in women’s clothes. He was given the heavy sentence of whipping and an imprisonment of 61 years; 40 years later he was mentioned again in the archives as being unfit for release, as his ‘inclinations’ still were suspected. But this is the only case of a male homosexual who disguised himself as a woman for any length of time. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, therefore, a complete gender change constituted a solution for women, but not for men, who felt the need to express homosexual feelings.

**TRANSSEXUALITY: THE STORY OF MARIA VAN ANTWERPEN**

Transsexuals consider themselves to be people ‘in the skin of the wrong sex’. They are the rare exceptions to the rule that one's
gender identity is settled by upbringing and is fixed in early infancy. Transsexuality concerns men who consider themselves women, or women who feel themselves to be men, without any identifiable biological reason. This concept was introduced in 1949 by D. Cauldwell and popularised by Harry Benjamin in the 1960s. Research into the phenomenon has produced a stream of publications, but has not resulted in an acceptable, definitive explanation of the causes. As the publicity surrounding transsexuality has escalated, so has the number of people who apply for sex-change operations. Although until recently the vast majority of known transsexuals were male-to-female, the female-to-males are catching up in numbers, and recent figures and theories suggest that there may now be as many female-to-male as male-to-female transsexuals. It is possible that some of our women were transsexuals. In only one case, however, do we have rather clear indications of it: Maria van Antwerpen.

We have introduced Maria while discussing other topics above, but we will outline here the complete story of her unusual and fascinating life. She was born in Breda in 1719, became an orphan in her early teens, and was brought up chiefly by an aunt who treated her badly. Her life is well-documented until 1769. Curiously enough, we know nothing of the years between 1732 and 1740, and it is remarkable how cleverly she evaded this period in her autobiography and during questioning at her trial. This suggests that she had experiences she did not wish to be reminded of or did not wish to see raked up.

In 1740 she lived in Breda, working as a maidservant. She changed employers a number of times, in itself not unusual, and in 1746, when she was 27 years old, she left with the family she was serving at the time for Wageningen. There she was dismissed because she had stayed away longer on a Christmas visit to her family in Breda than had been agreed. In mid-winter in Wageningen, which is situated in a poor, rural area in the East of the country, there was no work available. She had no friends or relatives there. Something had to be done.

Maria was afraid of being compelled to become a prostitute, and she had heard of women who had gone into the army: those were the reasons she gave for her decision to don men’s clothing and become a soldier. After her change of dress she left Wageningen in the middle of the night and was approached the next day on a
country road by a recruiter for the army. She let herself be led away to a pub and, once drunk, signed a contract as 'Jan van Ant, 16 years old'. In this manner she embarked upon a wandering life. Her unit was constantly on the march and encamped in different locations, in part because of the war against France. By chance, Maria never did active service in a battle, a fact which she regretted.

'Jan van Ant' quickly adapted to the soldiers' life, although the fear of discovery never left her. As soldiers have always had a reputation as lovers of women, Maria said in her autobiography that Jan too courted servant girls and widows to remove all suspicions – and quite successfully too. Moreover, courting a servant girl often meant scraps from her master's table and even presents out of her savings for the badly paid soldiers. When Jan's unit was encamped in Coevorden, he met the daughter of a sergeant, Johanna Kramers, with whom the flirtation quickly became serious. They were officially married in August 1748. The bride did not know that her husband was a woman, so Maria took a great risk. But there were real advantages too, which could rationalise the step. A common soldier had no privacy, but a soldier who married could set up his own household and was thus liberated from communal life. In a pre-industrial society, married existence gave more economic security and comfort than bachelorshood, provided the marriage was not encumbered with too many children, a risk Jan could well afford to take. After his marriage Jan began to work as a tailor in his considerable free time, whereas his wife took in washing and looked after foster children. Financially they did very well. To the outside world, Jan's role as a man was complete. A practising soldier, a tailor, a (foster) father, who is described as a pipe-smoking patriarch, fond of fishing.

Nonetheless, Maria created more problems than she solved. At night the man's role was harder to perform. Jan succeeded in avoiding sexual contact by continually feigning moodiness and illness. Her wife resigned herself to this, but it made her unhappy and she was saddened by her childlessness. In three years of marriage, she never discovered Jan's true sex.

Jan's discovery in Breda in 1751 by a member of the family she had served was a heavy blow for Jan and Johanna. Maria's ordeal we have encountered before, but Johanna's shock and humiliation
must have been worse. She was shouted at and joked at in the streets, and in all probability, after Maria's trial and banishment they never met again.

After her discovery, exiled from Breda and other garrison towns, Maria wandered around for a time in women's clothing, but within a year she went to live in Gouda, where one of her brothers worked. She earned her living by sewing. There she befriended a young girl named Jansje van Ooijen, the niece of her landlady. They went to live together in Rotterdam while Maria earned a living as a seamstress. After three and a half years, Maria brought Jansje back to her aunt, because, in her own words, she had too little work to be able to maintain her. This statement, and other details, suggests the role of a husband. Did she have a love affair with her protégée? That was also what the court wanted to know, and in answer to the question 'whether she had debauched or seduced the said Jansje van Ooijen', Maria replied, somewhat mysteriously, that it 'had been with the consent of Jansje van Ooijen's aunt'. The court did not press their questions on this point further.

The year 1761 found Maria again living in Gouda, still in woman's clothing, but occasionally dressed as an 'amazon', which probably meant that she wore trousers, but was nonetheless recognisable as a woman. In this period, she met Cornelia Swartensberg. Maria made the first advances and the infatuation came from her side as well. Cornelia, who apparently knew of Maria's past, needed a man because she was pregnant. She persuaded Maria to live as a man again and to marry her. This time, Maria chose the name 'Machiel van Handtwerpen'.

In 1762, the two women entered into wedlock officially in Zwolle, where another member of Maria's family lived. The child that had been the immediate stimulus for the marriage was born dead, but Cornelia became pregnant twice more. One pregnancy ended in a stillbirth, but the second in the birth of a boy who was baptised Willibrord van Hantwerpen. One of Maria's brothers and his wife were present as godparents at the baptismal ceremony. For some time Maria maintained to the court that she had begotten these children herself, even after she had admitted to being a woman. Thereafter, she said that Cornelia, who was a washerwoman, had been raped when she was delivering washing. The judges, however, suggested instead that Cornelia was a
prostitute and that Maria had shared in the profits of her trade. Maria denied this, and there are no further indications supporting this notion. It seems much more probable that Cornelia lived a profligate life and in fact took advantage of Maria.

After her second transformation, Maria went into service as a soldier in Zwolle. Maria said that Cornelia urged her to do so in order to ensure that there was bread on the table. After only a few months, she left the army again because of a conflict over her period of service. The couple left for Amsterdam. There Maria – or rather Machiel – earned a living by making clothing, selling orange ribbons to Orangists, dealing in second-hand goods, and curing skin diseases. In 1764, Maria entered service as a soldier for the third time, as a municipal soldier in Amsterdam, but at the end of 1768, she was discharged because of her ‘quarrelsome nature’.

Shortly after her dismissal she went with Cornelia to Gouda to visit old acquaintances. There she was recognised by someone at an inn. It was Cornelia, however, who made such a disturbance that the bailiff was summoned. Cornelia succeeded in eluding the hand of justice. She went back to Amsterdam and then disappeared, while Maria bore the brunt of the consequences, even protecting her friend by lying about Cornelia’s possible whereabouts. After an extended trial during which the bailiff had inquiries made in other cities, Maria was sentenced a second time to exile. We know little about the lives of the women after this. Maria was turned out of Gouda; Cornelia returned there to live, but later left for Turnhout in the Southern Netherlands. Finally, we know that Maria died in her birthplace, Breda, in 1781 and was buried in a pauper’s grave.

Both times Maria took up a life as a man, she did so for reasons that are already familiar: the threat of impending poverty and the awareness that other women had done so – the second time her own experience. In her case other factors are clearly visible. There is one indication of a biological explanation for Maria’s cross-dressing, coming from the description of a remarkable experience she had during puberty. When she was about seventeen years old, she told the court, she noticed that ‘something like a shaft shot out of her body whenever nature demanded the discharge of seed’. This could have been an indication of (pseudo)hermaphroditism, certainly in combination with the fact that she had a rather male appearance. But Maria was twice medically examined, in 1751
and 1769, and both times the conclusion was that she was anatomically female. There are no other indications of intersexuality.

In her case, transsexuality is arguable. Maria certainly preferred women to men, but her first decision to dress as a man was not caused by love for another woman. Maria always denied having had sexual contact with either of her spouses, instead stating that they had always lived 'like sisters together'. This was of course true for her first marriage, and although it can have been said out of fear of a conviction for tribady, it could equally have been true for her second marriage. Modern sexological theory holds that some transsexuals are oriented toward external acceptance as a member of the opposite sex only, and in such cases, sexuality plays no role or only a limited one. Maria's relation with Jansje van Ooijen may have been less platonic, however, although the wording here is not clear.

Transsexuality is definitively suggested by several statements made by her during her trial in 1769. At a certain point in the interrogation, the magistrates, confused by Maria's answers and appearance, asked her if she was a man or a woman. Maria answered, 'By nature and character, a man, but in appearance, a woman.' In her autobiography, we find this expressed in a more literary manner: 'It often made me wrathful that Mother Nature treated me with so little compassion against my inclinations and the passions of my heart. These remarks may be compared to that often heard from transsexuals, that they feel 'trapped in the body of the wrong sex'.

Another declaration she made at her trial in 1769, that even during the time when she dressed as a woman, she 'always wore men's dress underneath', confirms this. Wearing men's underwear must have been for her an expression of her belief that she was really a man. This occurs more often among transsexuals nowadays, when a complete change of gender is not yet undertaken. Also the statement concerning the 'shaft' which shot outward can indicate transsexuality. The psychologist Robert Stoller observed the irrational conviction of having a penis among modern transsexual women. Maria's insistence, for some time after she admitted to being a woman, of having fathered the children of Cornelia, is to be seen in the same light.

It is furthermore remarkable how completely at home Maria felt in her role as a man. She was so convincing that the magistrates of
Gouda continued to refer to her as 'him' and 'Machiel' until the fourth hearing. During her second marriage, her 'fatherhood' made such an impression on Maria that five years later she was still able to tell the magistrates precisely how long the little Willibrord lived, to the day and to the hour. As a maidservant, she spent her savings on a silver snuff-box, a rather male item to which she was much attached.

Transsexuality is a much discussed problem, for which neither cause nor cure has been found. Some writers even suggest that it recently has been 'invented', which would mean that the term cannot be applied to earlier times. Lothstein, a psychiatrist who has treated many female-to-male transsexuals, judges it to be a severe disorder caused by a distorted upbringing that failed to give the girl in question a stable gender identity. His case studies show extremely unhappy family lives. Moreover, he states that many transsexuals do not really feel themselves to be men, but are lesbians who dare not admit this to themselves out of abhorrence of 'unnatural' sexuality.

In our opinion, Maria van Antwerpen certainly makes a case for the existence of transsexuality before the introduction of the word by modern science. At least 17 of the 21 points of a much-used checklist drafted by Sorensen and Hertoft to diagnose female-to-male transsexuality, readily apply to her. It is possible that this conclusion may also be drawn for some of the other women we studied; however, only in this case do we have sufficient information to establish a certain degree of probability.

FROM TRIBADES TO LESBIANS: A THEORY

Rather unexpectedly, the study of female cross-dressing in early modern Europe gave us new ideas and insights in the history of female homosexuality. Starting from our findings on the seventeenth and eighteenth century, we argue that lesbian love has for the last four centuries passed roughly through three stages. Until the end of the eighteenth century the existence of sexual feelings of women for other women was nearly inconceivable. Sex was seen as an exclusively heterosexual act, for which the penis was indispensable. Women who fell in love with other women therefore often doubted their gender, and the tradition of female cross-dressing
offered them the solution of 'changing into a man', a choice which also brought other social and financial advantages.

For male homosexuals, the situation was different. As both men possessed a penis and love for a man was, given the hierarchy of the sexes, more logical than love for a woman, sexual relationships between men were far better conceivable than between women. Still, among male homosexuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gender confusion was not uncommon, either. But for men, to change sex completely meant a great social and psychological degradation. In spite of frequent effeminate behaviour and female nicknames, homosexual men did not pass as women for any length of time.

Around 1800 the situation seemed to be changing. The sensation and publicity that surrounded the persecutions of male sodomites from 1730 onwards undermined the notion of sex as only possible between a man and a woman. Napoleon's law reforms made sodomy disappear from the books of criminal law, and on the continent no homosexual faced the death penalty anymore. It was at the end of the eighteenth century, in 1792, that in the Netherlands lesbian relationships came to the surface where none of the concerned dressed as a man. In that year, Elisabeth Wiebes and Bartha Schuurman were arrested in Amsterdam and charged with having murdered another woman. Elisabeth and Bartha were lovers, but when the former befriended another woman, Bartha, in a fit of jealousy, killed her rival with a knife. This sensational case was followed by some ten other arrests of women in Amsterdam in the next six years, who were accused of 'dirty caresses of one another'. The accused were all very poor, marginal women.\footnote{\textit{We have no proof that such lovemaking between women as women did not occur earlier, but they are the first to be mentioned in Dutch sources, whereas to our knowledge Francina Gunningh Sloet, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the last Dutch cross-dressing woman who courted other women.}}

In other countries examples of lesbians who passed as men in all respects were also becoming very rare in the nineteenth century. In this era sexology as a science developed, ideas on sexual behaviour became less fixed, and sexological knowledge spread. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, did female homosexuality begin to attract scientific attention. The idea that two women could have a sexual relationship became gradually
more conceivable. But it was still impossible to see and describe
lesbian relations other than in terms of the married couple, with
heterosexuality and strict gender division firmly established.

In 1869 the German psychiatrist Carl von Westphal published
an influential case study about what he called a 'congenital invert',
a young woman who from childhood on preferred to dress as a boy,
and had always been attracted to women. This woman behaved
like a man, but she did not completely change her identity.
Westphal's description and diagnosis was the first of a whole series
of articles in medical journals on the phenomenon of a woman who
loved women. Such a one was declared to be a pervert, an 'homme
manqué', even when she dressed and lived as a woman, as was now
usually the case. She who was the willing subject of these attentions
was considered a normal woman.

This image of lesbian couples, one an unnatural human being,
the other her victim, was popularised in the writings of the time.
On the one hand a lesbian couple was judged a 'perversity', but on
the other hand the 'butch-femme' pattern described agreed very
well with the social norms, as it perfectly mirrored the accepted
idea of what a married couple should be. This 'butch-femme' type
of female homosexual relationships was only partly an invention
of the medical science of the time. In the nineteenth century, these
descriptions, however ideologically coloured, were probably in
accordance with reality. Like the sexologists, the lesbians of
the nineteenth century must have found it easier to conceptualise love
between women in terms of the dominant ideas on sexuality and
marriage. Again we can make here a comparison with male
homosexual couples of the time, where it was also common that
one partner took on the male role, and the other the female role.²³

Only in the 1960s did homosexuals free themselves from the model
of the traditional, gender-divided couple. The right was claimed to
give love between two women or two men a place and a style of its
own. Among young lesbians, the butch-femme type of relationship
fell into discredit, and masculine behaviour was rejected as being still
influenced by the heterosexual norm. Of course, this development
had its counterpart in heterosexual relations, which have shed
much of the rigidity of gender role divisions during the same
period.

Within current lesbian subcultures, it is emphasised that
homosexuality does not mean a rejection of one's gender identity.
This means that lesbian women have now arrived at a position that is the very opposite of the cross-dressing tribades of two and three centuries ago. The former cultivate a gender identity that is emphatically female, maybe more so than heterosexual women, while the latter conformed to the male gender role, and, to judge from the frequent stories of heavy drinking, swearing, and fighting, even exaggerated their masculine behaviour.