

*Essay Award Winner 2002*

The Man Who Played Well for a Woman: Billy Tipton's Life as a Passing Woman



**by Danielle Picard**

Billy Tipton performed in a number of jazz and swing bands from the early 1930s onward as a vocalist and pianist, and according to a bandmate from the early days of Tipton's career, "Billy was a fair sax man too, played very well for a woman."<sup>[i][1]</sup> Some of the members of Tipton's various bands, as well as some of the women who were considered his wives, never knew the secret revealed in this comment. Many of the people who knew and loved Tipton only learned on the occasion of his death in 1989 that he had been born female.<sup>[ii][2]</sup> Tipton is one of a large number of women in history who are now called "passing women" -- women who lived much of their lives as men.<sup>[iii][3]</sup> As in Billy's case, the birth sex of these individuals was often a secret revealed only when they died. The lives of these women and of Billy Tipton in particular raise many questions about identity, gender, and sexuality, and these questions are not easily answered. Some historians have claimed Tipton and passing women in general as part of lesbian history while others see them as part of transsexual or transgender history; ultimately, it is impossible to determine which categorization is correct.

Dorothy Lucille Tipton was born on December 29, 1914, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; BillyLee Tipton died in Spokane, Washington, on January 21, 1989. Dorothy began passing as man when she was nineteen years old in order to join a band that would not hire women. From then on, Billy Tipton built a career as a jazz musician that achieved its greatest success in the mid-1950s. He traveled with various bands throughout the western United States and parts of western Canada and even made two records at the peak of his career. However, when stardom was just within reach, Tipton passed on the opportunity, choosing instead to settle in Washington State and allow a job as an entertainment booking agent to take priority over his musical career. No one can be sure, but his biographer Diane Wood Middlebrook concludes that this decision was based on Tipton's fear that greater exposure would result in the discovery of his secret.<sup>[iv][4]</sup> The same fear kept Tipton from seeking medical attention when he was suffering from a bleeding ulcer, which eventually killed him. Tipton wanted at all costs to continue to pass successfully. The choice that began, at least in part, as a way to succeed eventually became the cause of his demise.

Tipton's passing developed over time from something he did only for work to a full-time lifestyle. At the age of nineteen, Dorothy Tipton disguised herself as a man and got a job in a traveling band. For some time, she went to auditions as Billy and if no one questioned her sex, she did not mention it.[v][5] Meanwhile, in her personal life, Dorothy did not claim to be a man; according to a friend, she merely wore men's clothes in order to "be in uniform" when performing.[vi][6] In 1935, the leader of a band in which Tipton was playing asked the players to wear T-shirts that would reveal Tipton's bound chest, so Tipton refused. He was forced to reveal the fact that he was passing to his bandmates. Surprised that the person whose maleness they had never questioned was actually a woman, Tipton's bandmates soon accepted that he was passing and continued to treat him like a man.[vii][7] From then on, throughout the 1930s, the information was common knowledge in the bands with which he played.[viii][8] Tipton was wearing men's clothing at home as well by 1940, but "it was not until Billy left Oklahoma City [the following year] that he left off cross-dressing and adopted a masculine identity in all relationships." [ix][9] In the 1940s and afterward, Tipton passed full-time both on the job and off, although some of the people who were closest to him did know that he had been born and raised a female.

In order to be accepted as a man by the rest of the world, Tipton had to conform to the physical parameters of manhood. He bound his chest, dressed in men's clothes, and had a man's haircut. In a photograph taken in 1935, Tipton embodies men's fashions of the time period: he is wearing a double-breasted blazer and has his hair slicked back.[x][10] He later began sporting a thin mustache; Middlebrook conjectures that it was created with the aid of hair dye and eyebrow pencil.[xi][11] He also wore what Middlebrook calls a "pants-filler," which made his trousers hang the way a biological male's would.[xii][12] Not only his appearance but also his mannerisms had to conform to conventional masculine standards, so "[h]is walk, his speech, his attitude, all conveyed the socialization of a male. He never crossed his legs or fumbled with his hair." [xiii][13] His singing voice was tenor, within the men's range, though somewhat high for a man. On audio recordings made in 1949 and 1958, Tipton sings and speaks with a somewhat androgynous-sounding voice.[xiv][14] However, fellow musicians never questioned that it was a man's voice.[xv][15] In general, Tipton's gender expression was masculine enough to convince others that he was a biological male.

On occasions when doubt surfaced as to Tipton's sex, he employed various cover stories to convince his friends and associates of his authenticity. In the 1940s, people who had known Dorothy Tipton sometimes crossed paths with people who only knew Billy. A rumor began to spread that there was something "funny" about Billy Tipton. He quickly devised "a socially acceptable explanation for the rumor. He told [his current show business partner] George Mayer and others that his mother had dressed him as a girl when he was a little child." At the time, it was not particularly uncommon for middle-class families to do this with young sons.[xvi][16] Although Tipton's sex was rarely questioned once he moved away from the area in which Dorothy was raised, customers at the clubs he played "occasionally made disparaging remarks about Billy's 'femininity.'" [xvii][17] During the 1950s especially, gender roles were very rigid and any variance toward the characteristics of the other sex was suspect. Therefore, Tipton

was always careful to control whatever aspects of his gender expression he could. He claimed that he bound his chest to support ribs that had been crushed in an accident. Sometimes he claimed that his pelvic region had been injured in the accident as well.[xviii][18] These various falsehoods were used to explain any problems caused by his passing as a man.

Middlebrook makes an interesting point when she points out that the “finishing touch” to Tipton’s male “disguise” was a woman. Western society’s understanding of the world relies heavily on dualisms, and gender is no exception. Thus, relationships with women solidified Tipton’s maleness in the eyes of those around him. Middlebrook notes that “the presence of a female partner who played a role ‘opposite’ to Billy’s . . . confirmed Billy’s heterosexual masculinity” by completing the picture, so to speak.[xix][19] Various women filled this role of complimentary other throughout Tipton’s life, each one unconsciously strengthening his ability to pass.

At least two of the women who lived as Tipton’s wife did not know his biological sex until his death in 1989; he passed with them as well. Many people wonder how they could have remained ignorant of his “true” sex within such an intimate relationship. One of them, Kitty, says that she and Tipton never had sexual intercourse in the twenty years they were together.[xx][20] Another woman, Betty, did have sexual relations with Tipton but always did so in the dark; Billy never removed his underwear or let Betty touch him below the waist.[xxi][21] By keeping his body covered and untouched, and with the aid of a dildo, Tipton was able to engage in heterosexual intercourse without his female genitals being discovered. The fact that Tipton was passing meant that his “marriages” to these women were never legal. He generally avoided creating any official records, even going so far as to avoid medical attention during his final illness.[xxii][22] Passing as a man involving keeping many secrets and telling many lies, which is why Middlebrook characterizes it as a disguise or illusion Tipton maintained.

Tipton’s decision to live as a man is most commonly explained as a survival tactic which allowed him to have a career in a male-dominated business. Middlebrook describes Tipton’s passing as “one woman’s bold solution to gaining a certain amount of recognition in what was largely a man’s world.”[xxiii][23] As the bandmate’s comment quoted above illustrates, male jazz musicians believed that women played differently than -- that is, not as well as -- men. Playing music professionally was “considered a ‘man’s job,’ and . . . if [women did] the job well, they [were] said to be good ‘for girls,’ or that they ‘play like men.’”[xxiv][24] There was also a “widespread public perception” of “women on the stage as sexually excessive.”[xxv][25] Dorothy Tipton encountered these perceptions when she first began to seek employment in the jazz industry in the early 1930s. She got a job playing the piano at a club but it did not last long because the management did not want a “girl” in the position.[xxvi][26] Soon afterwards, Tipton began passing as a man. A cousin describes this decision as Dorothy’s reaction to the standards of the business:

Back in those days you know they didn’t have girls traveling with bands -- it was just frowned on. Anyway, she wasn’t helpless and appealing-looking like you’d expect a

woman to be. So she said, “Well, if I can’t go as a woman, maybe they’ll take me as a young man!”[xxvii][27]

As this relative remembers it, Dorothy became Billy to further her career, because she was not as feminine as the music industry expected women to be, and because the kinds of jobs Dorothy wanted were not available to her as a female.

However, there was work for women in the business at that time, if they were willing to make some sacrifices. There were numerous all-female bands that achieved moderate success in the 1930s and 1940s, such as the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and the Darlings of Rhythm.[xxviii][28] It may have been possible for Dorothy Tipton to find work in an all-female band, but instead she chose to compete with male musicians for positions traditionally reserved for men. Her choice is understandable given that, as her cousin testifies, Dorothy was not an extremely feminine woman. Middlebrook notes that “women musicians were enlisted almost solely for their sex appeal.” An ad for one of Tipton’s performances in the 1950s illustrates this by picturing Tipton and his male bandmates from the shoulders up and describing them in the caption as “clever” musicians. The Pheby Sisters, a female act that performed along with the Billy Tipton Trio that night, are shown “three-quarter-length in a shot emphasizing the businesslike corsetry of their strapless gowns” and are described as “attractively wardrobed” and beautiful.[xxix][29] Clearly, women musicians were not held in the same respect as men were; they were appreciated for their beauty while the men were appreciated for their musical talent. In light of the expectations for female players, Tipton’s decision to play as a man was more than just a disguise necessary to pay the bills. If Tipton had merely wanted to play jazz, Dorothy could have taken the jobs available to women in the business, no matter how degrading. Yet she did not, because Tipton did not just want to play jazz; he wanted to play jazz as a man. His motivations for passing are more complex than the simple explanations of financial necessity and musical ambition.

By passing, Tipton gained access to power and privileges normally reserved for men in a sexist society. Middlebrook asserts that, through the transformation into Billy, “Dorothy bestowed on herself the privileges of men.”[xxx][30] By casting off the second-class status of a woman, Tipton acquired the ability not only to play in bands the way men did, but also to relate to others the way men did. Middlebrook believes that the transformation was partly an act of defiance. In the Tipton extended family, women were often abandoned by their male partners, but Billy Tipton “would never need a man.”[xxxi][31] He would be independent and in control of his own life. In his relationships with women who did not know his birth sex, like Betty, Tipton was often “the dominant partner.”[xxxii][32] He was active in their sexual relations[xxxiii][33]; Betty “put her whole life at his disposal.”[xxxiv][34] Furthermore, Tipton managed his professional relationships so that he could be in charge as much as possible. He preferred to lead a band rather than just play in one. In his Billy Tipton Trio, formed in 1951, he included two musicians “willing to take the role of younger sibling,” thereby allowing Tipton to make all the decisions.[xxxv][35] Thus, Middlebrook argues, in addition to financial and career-related reasons, Tipton became a man in order to claim the power and control associated with masculinity.

Tipton was not the first or last woman to live as a man. Given the lower status of women for much of history, it is easy to see why many women chose to pass the way Tipton did. In 1946, a poll conducted by *Fortune* magazine stated that twenty-five percent of women would, if given a choice, rather be men. Only slightly more than three percent of men said they would choose to be a woman.[xxxvi][36] The large difference in numbers reflects the disparity in the status of each sex in American society in this era. Many women wanted to escape the restrictions imposed by femininity and claim male social privileges, and some women did so by passing. Julie Wheelwright notes that “male power still resided in ties, trousers, short hair-cuts and, of course, officer’s uniforms.”[xxxvii][37] Sometimes financial inequality motivated women to pose as men, as Middlebrook claims Tipton passed in order to further his career. Often women became men to join the army, either to fight for their country or to be with a male lover or spouse who had enlisted. Sometimes a woman merely had “a desire for adventure beyond the narrow limits that [she] could enjoy” as a woman.[xxxviii][38] Passing women had a variety of occupations and experiences, but many of their lives were similar to Tipton’s in a number of ways.

Murray Hall’s was one such life. Hall, born Mary Anderson, died in New York City in 1901 of breast cancer. Like Tipton, he left a serious illness untreated in order to keep his secret; by the time Hall allowed a doctor to examine him, it was too late.[xxxix][39] During his life as Murray Hall, he “married” twice, and he and his second wife adopted a daughter. His daughter claimed to be ignorant of her father’s biological sex, but the *New York Times*, reporting on Hall’s death, alleged that his wives must have known Hall was passing.[xli][40] Like Tipton, Hall’s build was “not particularly masculine” and his voice was quite high for a man, but his “mannerisms were so masculine that no one ever questioned” his sex.[xli][41] Hall managed to pass successfully in the same way that Tipton did, by conforming to conventional masculinity. Hall is remembered as a man who “played poker . . . drank whiskey and wine and smoked the regulation ‘big black cigar.’”[xlii][42] He also “liked to associate with pretty girls and was almost jealously protective of them.”[xliii][43] Thus, both Hall’s and Tipton’s lives as men reveal the construction of gender in their society. Masculinity is shown to reside in the clothes a man wears, the amusements he enjoys, and the way he relates to women.

Tipton himself knew a woman, Mary Louise Thomason, who sometimes passed as a man named Buck. Thomason was a radio programmer who helped Tipton’s career in its early days by giving one of his bands radio exposure.[xliv][44] Thomason’s life casts doubt on the theory that passing was simply a way to gain opportunities unavailable to women. As a woman, Mary Louise was loud and outspoken, and she held a job; she refused to conform to the dictates of proper womanhood.[xlv][45] She did not need to pass to support herself or to express herself in ways that were more acceptable for men. The fact that, like Tipton and Hall, Buck Thomason was romantically involved with women further complicates the issue. There must have been more to Thomason’s, Tipton’s, and Hall’s motives than financial necessity or dissatisfaction with the female gender role.

Some scholars theorize that issues of sexuality were often involved in a passing woman’s choice to live as a man. Martha Vicinus suggests that the financial explanation may be

prevalent because most of “the example of passing women that have survived . . . are of working-class and peasant women who sought more job opportunities, better pay and greater freedom.”[xlvi][46] Deeming these motivations insufficient to explain why women of the middle class passed as men, Vicinus and others who study gay and lesbian history argue that many passing women were lesbians, or would have identified as lesbians if that word had been available to them when they were alive.

For much of history, living as a man may have been the only way a woman could have sexual relationships with other women. Sexual attraction to the female sex has been considered a masculine trait under the binary gender system, and thus heterosexuality has been seen as the only valid sexuality. While relationships between women were so socially unacceptable, many women passed as men in order to love other women without risking repercussions. Wheelwright notes that in the case of a notorious British passing woman, Valerie Arkell-Smith, the woman’s relationship to a female lover gained “financial security and social legitimacy” because Arkell-Smith lived as a man and the two were a heterosexual couple in the eyes of the rest of the world.[xlvii][47] Thus, one of the reasons women like Hall and Thomason passed as men may have been their sexual attraction to other women; they took on the socially acceptable gender role that allowed them to act on that attraction.

Being a lesbian was far more difficult during the first half of the twentieth century than it is today. By the 1920s, thanks to the writings of sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, to be a lesbian was to be an anomaly, a victim of a terrible sexual dysfunction, or a simple pervert.[xlviii][48] This medical model was popularized in the United States by Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness*, which was notorious due to charges of obscenity both in Britain and the United States.[xlix][49] While these factors also helped to make more women aware of the potential for same-sex relationships, they also made lesbian life more difficult. Lillian Faderman notes that:

[n]ot only would a woman have considerable difficulty in supporting herself, but also she would have to brave the increasing hostility toward independent females that intensified in the midst of the depression, and the continued spread of medical opinion regarding the abnormality of love between women.[l][50]

Police harassment of lesbians was not common in the 1930s as it would later become, but there was always the potential for violent attack from homophobic people.[li][51] The social climate for lesbians in the 1930s was decidedly harsh.

Furthermore, while more people may have been aware that lesbians existed, there was not yet a visible community to which young lesbians could turn for support. Lesbian historians Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis believe that “community is key to the development of twentieth-century lesbian identity and consciousness.”[lii][52] During the 1920s and 1930s, however, homosexuality was not “frequently or publicly discussed, nor were lesbians and gay men a visible population. The topic maintained a centuries-old ‘not-to-be-mentioned’ status except in the professional circles of medicine and psychology.”[liii][53] Without a visible, accessible community, it was difficult to come

to terms with one's own feelings or even to understand that one was a lesbian. There were no role models to observe; lesbians and gay men "grew up with the male/female couple as their only model of intimate erotic relationships. Unaware of sexual alternatives, they found no encouragement for same-sex eroticism." [liv][54] Thus, it is possible that some women, lacking any access to a lesbian community, could not imagine the possibility of sexual relationships between women and found that the only way to act on their desires was to become men. They were, as Judith Halberstam describes them, "proto-lesbian[s] awaiting a common community." [lv][55]

Billy Tipton was attracted to women, so perhaps his decision to pass was in part based on the difficulty of living as a lesbian in the time when he was coming of age. Middlebrook notes that "Billy's attraction to her own sex goes back as early as anyone's memory takes us into her life as an independent woman." [lvi][56] Oklahoma City, where Dorothy Tipton spent her childhood and her later teenage years, did have a homosexual subculture, but a very undercover one. There were clubs "on both sides of the color line" but it was easier for black women to find other "like-minded women." [lvii][57] It is not known whether Dorothy ever tried to connect with that community, but she did live with a woman named Non Earl during the period in which she was only passing at work. Some people, including Middlebrook, regard that relationship as a lesbian one, while others, such as Tipton's brother William, claim that the two women were simply roommates. [lviii][58] Non Earl may have been the last of Tipton's "wives" to know that he was passing; by the late 1940s, when he moved in with a woman named Maryann, Tipton no longer shared his secret with his intimate partners. Middlebrook concludes that "for Billy it was easier to be happy as a man than as a lesbian." [lix][59] For reasons that are not entirely clear, Tipton only felt comfortable expressing love for women as a man. The question of whether or not he would have chosen a lesbian identity, if conditions for homosexuals had been different at the time, cannot be answered.

Although scholars like Faderman and Jonathan Katz attribute desire for women on the part of passing women to hidden lesbian tendencies, other scholars such as Leslie Feinberg argue that passing women were the forebears of today's transgendered and transsexual people. Under this theory, which has existed since the 1950s, [lx][60] if people like Murray Hall and Billy Tipton had been born in the latter half of the twentieth century, they may not have passed as men. Instead, they may have had sex changes to become biological males, and would be known as female-to-male transsexuals. On the other hand, they may have seen themselves as transgendered, which Kate Bornstein defines as "living in another gender identity" while having "little or no intention of having genital surgery." [lxi][61] Feinberg's argument is that the other explanations for passing -- economic inequality and other forms of oppression against women, as well as oppression against lesbians -- are insufficient to explain fully the lives of passing women. Feinberg states that without hormones or surgery to make them male, these women must have been masculine enough to pass, and therefore they were transgendered: "[t]he point is that their gender expression allowed them to transition." [lxii][62] In Feinberg's view, many passing women who have been claimed by lesbian history would more appropriately be included in transgender history.

Consequently, some scholars have placed Tipton in the history of transgendered and transsexual individuals. Middlebrook acknowledges this possibility at the end of her biography with this statement:

[L]ooking at Billy Tipton in terms available in the late twentieth century, we see someone who fits the profile of the female-to-male transgenderist or female ‘gender blender,’ that is, a person with a female body but an indeterminate gender identity, a blend of traits that is not simply a femininity in disguise and is not a lesbian identity.[lxiii][63]

Yet Middlebrook consistently refers to Tipton’s passing as a disguise and to his gender expression as the “illusion of masculinity” rather than the real thing. The narrative she constructs places Tipton firmly in the category of lesbian history.

Middlebrook also relates Tipton’s passing to his love of performance, claiming that “Billy Tipton, male jazz musician” was a role which Dorothy Tipton, a female, performed. As a child, Dorothy enjoyed acting as well as playing musical instruments.[lxiv][64] Later, Billy Tipton’s career included not only music but also novelty acts and comedy routines. In these non-musical performances, Middlebrook asserts that “Billy was acting the role and acting the actor who played it.”[lxv][65] Middlebrook unquestionably sees Tipton as a woman impersonating a man: “she was the actor, he was the role.”[lxvi][66] However, some transgendered and transsexual people of today would take offense to this claim. When Kate Bornstein told her mother that she was going to have sex reassignment surgery, her mother noted that Bornstein had always been an actor and wondered if Kate, the woman her son was becoming, was just another role he wanted to play. Bornstein was offended since she believed herself to be a “real woman” and the surgery was intended to correct the contradiction between her male body and her gender expression.[lxvii][67] Perhaps Tipton would have been offended in the same way by Middlebrook’s conclusion about his own choice.

Jason Cromwell makes a more convincing case for Tipton’s transgenderism or transsexuality. In his view, it is likely that many passing women, including Tipton, actually thought of themselves as men. This would explain why they conformed so strongly to prevalent masculine ideals and why they kept the secret of their biological sex from people who probably could have been trusted not to expose them. Furthermore, the women whom Tipton “married” were not lesbians but considered themselves and their relationships with Tipton heterosexual. Rather than impersonating a man, Cromwell suggests that Tipton identified not as cross-dresser or as a lesbian in disguise, but as a man. Moreover, to ignore that possibility is to dismiss any meaning Tipton’s life may have had. Living as a man was a choice that involved more than his career or his sexuality.

The life of Billy Tipton reveals the difficulty inherent in attempting to place individuals in historical categories. He has been claimed for two different timelines, which, as Halberstam notes, were one and the same until the invention of sex reassignment surgery allowed people to conceive of transsexuality.[lxviii][68] The boundaries of each category are still blurred; as Yolanda Chávez Leyva notes, “[t]he question of who can or should be



classified historically as a lesbian . . . is an ongoing debate within lesbian studies.”[lxi][69] Similarly, transgender and transsexual history is a debated field. In Halberstam’s words, the result is extreme “definitional confusion.”[lxx][70] There is evidence that Tipton was a lesbian who passed as a man, but there is also evidence that he was what Halberstam refers to as cross-identified, meaning he was born female but identified as the other sex. The historical evidence offered by the scholars discussed above is insufficient to determine to which category Tipton really belongs.

The only evidence that would conclusively prove whether a passing woman was a lesbian or transgendered is that woman’s subjective opinion, but that is often unavailable or unreliable. Historians note that the reasons a passing woman gives for her decision to live as a man are not always to be believed, given that the women often continue to pass long after the reason has ceased to be valid.[lxxi][71] In addition, personal accounts can “continue the pattern of discretion created during a lifetime of ‘never talking’” about one’s identity and sexuality.[lxxii][72] This pattern of discretion means that conclusive evidence is never left behind. As Bryan Tully puts it, “[a]utobiographies of those who might have been transsexuals, but did not become so, are usually not written.”[lxxiii][73] Therefore, a passing woman’s own feelings about her choice to live as a man may be inaccessible to history.

Such is the case with Billy Tipton. He left “no personal account of his motivations” on paper[lxxiv][74], but Middlebrook reports that he continued to tell people he chose to pass for career-related reasons, even into his final years. He also told a cousin that he was not a lesbian and that he did not sleep with his “wives.”[lxxv][75] The wives all say otherwise, leading one to believe that Tipton was hiding the truth from his relatives. Middlebrook acknowledges that she does not know why Tipton lived as a man and that she has “substituted imagination for the absent documentation.”[lxxvi][76] Other historians have done so as well, drawing conclusions about Tipton’s identity based on the information that is available. However, without access to his own thoughts, no one can know for certain which side of the debate is right.

Billy Tipton’s life demonstrates that it is ultimately impossible to decide if passing women belong in lesbian history or transgender and transsexual history. In the end, this group can be seen as the point at which these two categories continue to intersect and produce meaning. Passing women like Tipton reveal much about gender and sexuality in modern society. For instance, they blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity and show that these traits are not biologically based but rather are socially constructed. Yet they also reveal how firmly entrenched the binary gender system is. Gender once again comes down to a choice between two alternatives. In Tipton’s life, the choice was far from simple, since the decision to pass as a man affected every other choice he made for the rest of his life

## **Bibliography**

- Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bullough, Vern L., and Bonnie Bullough. *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
- Comstock, Gary David. *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Cromwell, Jason. *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: a History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* New York: Meridian, 1992.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky. "'But We Would Never Talk about It': The Structures of Lesbian Discretion in South Dakota, 1928-1933." In *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. Edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois. New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 409-25.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Leyva, Yolanda Chávez. "Breaking the Silence: Latina Lesbian History at the Center." In *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. Edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois. New York: Routledge, 2000, pp.403-8.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936." In *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. Edited by Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey. New York: New American Library, 1989, pp. 264-80.

Tucker, Sherrie. "Telling Performances: Jazz History Remembered and Remade by the Women in the Band." In *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. Edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois. New York: Routledge, 2000, pp.466-77.

Vicinus, Martha. "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity." In *Lesbianism: Studies in Homosexuality Volume 7*. Edited by Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson. New York: Garland, 1992, pp.285-312.

Wheelwright, Julie. *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness*. London: Pandora, 1989

### **Endnotes**

[lxxvii][1]Diane Wood Middlebrook, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p.100.

[lxxviii][2]This essay uses female pronouns to refer to Dorothy Tipton only when she lived as a woman. Male pronouns are used whenever Tipton was living as a man.

[lxxix][3]Some literature refers to these women as "cross-dressers" or "transvestites"; however, it is far more appropriate to use the term "passing." As Jonathan Katz explains in *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A* ([New York: Meridian, 1992], p.210), "[w]hile the adoption of the costume of the 'opposite' sex is certainly important in these passing women's lives, their adoption of the occupation, vocabulary, tone of voice, gesture, walk, sports, and aspirations of the 'other' sex are equally significant." Clothing is unquestionably a very important signifier of gender, but an individual who intends to live their life as the other sex must necessarily express other gender attributes as well in order to pass successfully.

[lxxx][4]Middlebrook, pp.203-5. Tipton was aware that he was, as Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg understand themselves to be, a gender outlaw. If he had been discovered, he could have faced legal repercussions as well as whatever social consequences he feared.

[lxxxi][5]*ibid.*, p.62.

[lxxxii][6]*ibid.*, p.65.

[lxxxiii][7]ibid., p.83.

[lxxxiv][8]ibid., p.92.

[lxxxv][9]ibid., p.105.

[lxxxvi][10]ibid., p.56.

[lxxxvii][11]ibid., p.122. During a discussion of possible biological reasons for Tipton's masculinity, Middlebrook also speculates that the mustache could have been "the result of elevated levels of androgens" -- a male hormone -- in Tipton's female body (p.138).

[lxxxviii][12]ibid., p.58.

[lxxxix][13]ibid.

[xc][14]These audio recordings are available online at Diane Wood Middlebrook's web site at <http://www.dianemiddlebrook.com/tipton/btaudio.html>.

[1][15]Middlebrook, p.111.

[xci][16]ibid., p.116.

[xcii][17]ibid., p.174.

[xciii][18]ibid., p.118.

[xciv][19]ibid., p.79.

[xcv][20]ibid., p.10.

[xcvi][21]ibid., p.147.

[xcvii][22]ibid., p.8.

[xcviii][23]ibid., p.9.

[xcix][24]Sherrie Tucker, "Telling Performances: Jazz History Remembered and Remade by the Women in the Band," in *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.471.

[c][25]ibid., p.476.

[ci][26]Middlebrook, p.55.

[cii][27]ibid.

[ciii][28]Tucker, p.473.

[civ][29]Middlebrook, p.184.

[cv][30]ibid., p.60.

[cvi][31]ibid.

[cvii][32]ibid., p.148.

[cviii][33]ibid., p.147.

[cix][34]ibid., p.144.

[cx][35]ibid., p.170. Middlebrook also points out that “managing his own group made Billy less vulnerable to accidental encounters that put the masculine identity at risk.” (p.152)

[cxi][36]ibid., p.149.

[1][37]Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989), p.6.

[cxii][38]Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: a History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.43.

[cxiii][39]Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Meridian, 1992), p.233.

[cxiv][40]ibid., p.236.

[cxv][41]Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.164.

[cxvi][42]Katz, p.233.

[cxvii][43]Bullough and Bullough, p.164.

[cxviii][44]Middlebrook, p.85.

[cxix][45]ibid.

[cxx][46]Martha Vicinus, “‘They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong’: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity,” in *Lesbianism: Studies in Homosexuality Volume 7*, edited by Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson (New York: Garland, 1992), p.293.

[cxxi][47]Wheelwright, p.6.

[cxxii][48]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936,” in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, edited by Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989) pp. 269-71.

[cxxiii][49]John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.21.

[cxxiv][50]Faderman, pp.93-4.

[cxxv][51]ibid., p.108.

[cxxvi][52]Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.3.

[cxxvii][53]Gary David Comstock, *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.9.

[1][54]D’Emilio, p.20.

[cxxviii][55]Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p.46.

[cxxix][56]Middlebrook, p.74.

[cxxx][57]ibid., pp.72-3.

[cxxxi][58]ibid., p.74.

[cxxxii][59]ibid., p.138.

[cxxxiii][60]Halberstam, p.95.

[cxxxiv][61]Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.68.

[cxxxv][62]Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*(Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), pp.84-85.

[cxxxvi][63]Middlebrook, p.217.

[cxxxvii][64]ibid., pp.24-5.

[cxxxviii][65]ibid., p.10.

[cxxxix][66]ibid., p.11.

[cxl][67]Bornstein, p.89.

[cxli][68]Halberstam, p.85.

[cxlii][69]Yolanda Chávez Leyva, “Breaking the Silence: Latina Lesbian History at the Center,” in *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.404.

[cxliii][70]Halberstam, p.143.

[cxliv][71]Bullough and Bullough, p.157.

[cxlv][72]Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, “‘But We Would Never Talk AboutIt’: The Structures of Lesbian Discretion in South Dakota, 1928-1933,” in *Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.410.

[1][73]Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*(New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p.177.

[cxlvi] [74]Middlebrook, p.xiii.

[cxlvii][75]ibid., p.248.

[cxlviii][76]ibid., p.50.