

"Your Grandmother's Transsexuality"

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Christine Jorgensen wasn't the first transsexual, but she was the most famous, according to Susan Stryker, associate professor of gender studies at Indiana University. Stryker, a guest of the [Newcomb College Center for Research on Women](#), gave a lecture on Jorgensen on Monday (April 12) on the Tulane uptown campus.



Gender studies lecturer Susan Stryker remembers transsexual Christine Jorgensen, a media sensation in 1952. (Photo by Tammy C. Barney)

"A lot of people think about transsexuality as a new thing," Stryker said. "Christine Jorgensen was 60 years ago. This is your grandmother's transsexuality."

Stryker, speaking in Freeman Auditorium in the Woldenberg Art Center, described Jorgensen's life and explained how she became a media sensation for a decade. Jorgensen was born George William Jorgensen in 1926 to Danish-American parents and grew up as a "frail, tow-headed, introverted little boy." She went to Denmark for a sex change in the early 1950s. In 1953, Jorgensen developed a nightclub act, working 50 weeks a year, earning \$5,000 per week.

In a 1959 television interview, Jorgensen said she worked behind the camera cutting

film before her surgery because she didn't know how to appear on the other side of the lens. That comment sparked Stryker's desire to make a film about Jorgensen titled *Christine in the Cutting Room*.

"I couldn't help but think of her working in one cutting room and moving into another kind of cutting room," [Stryker](#) said during an interview on Monday afternoon. "She was thinking about her body as an expressive medium. She was the auteur, the director of her own appearing."

"Most people accepted Jorgensen as the woman she presented herself to be," Stryker added. "That's what I find so remarkable."

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