

**Body and Gender Expressed by the Cross-Dressing of Hannah Snell
in Eighteenth-century Naval Culture
in *The Female Soldier; Or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell***

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Abstract

Hannah Snell is arguably considered the most famous woman who embarked on warships as a marine in men's clothes. Astonishingly, she was able to be involved with missions as a seaman for more than four years without anyone discovering her true identity. Although her experiences were portrayed in some magazines, such as *Gentlemen's Magazine* and *Scots Magazine*, and books published in Holland and England, her life entered history as fact through *The Female Soldier; Or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* by Robert Walker, a London newspaper printer. This paper addresses Walker's first edition as a primary source because it was written after hearing directly from Hannah Snell, which means it can be recognized as being closer to the truth than the expanded edition. I examine the significance of female cross-dressing aboard male-dominated naval ships by analyzing the body of Hannah Snell as depicted in *The Female Soldier*.

Keywords: Hannah Snell, cross-dressing, naval vessels, masculinity, femininity, women marines

Introduction

Hannah Snell can be considered the most famous woman to embark on warships as a marine dressed in men's clothes. Amazingly, she took part in missions as a seaman for more than four years without her true identity being discovered. Although her experiences appeared in *Gentlemen's Magazine* and *Scots Magazine*, and books published in Holland and England, her life entered history as fact through *The Female Soldier; Or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (hereafter referred to as *The Female Soldier*) by Robert Walker, a London newspaper printer. The first edition of Walker's biography of Snell was published in 1750: a booklet of 46 pages rather than a book. However, a revised edition was published several months later, which was expanded to a 187-page book. While Robert Walker recorded Snell's testimonies so that most of her episodes can be recognized as historical facts, we cannot declare Walker's book a historical document because of the potential for her overstatements and Walker's overdrawing in order to provide added excitement to his book. However, Snell's episodes in *The Female Soldier* should be considered to approximate her real-life experiences as the only source telling us accurately about Snell's life. Having said that, I can mention *Hannah Snell: The Secret Life of a Female Marine 1723–1792* by Matthew Stephens as Snell's biography, published in 1997, which was informed by Walker's text.

This paper addresses Walker's first edition as a primary source because it was based directly on Hannah Snell's testimony, and thus may be interpreted as more of a valid version of the truth." I examined the significance of female cross-dressing aboard male-dominated naval ships by analyzing the body of Hannah Snell as expressed in *The Female Soldier or the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell*.

Cross-dressing in Feminist Thought

Cross-dressing indicates that a person clothes him- or herself in the clothes of the opposite sex as generally understood in a given culture. Most cultures determine clothing rules depending on gender, and if a person fails to conform to these rules, he or she may be called a "cross-dresser." Cross-dressing is most commonly confused with a sexual proclivity. Certainly, from the viewpoint of fetishism, cross-dressing may be broadly interpreted as a sexual preference because some people are sexually aroused by cross-dressing. However, this paper argues that cross-dressing may be seen not only as a sexual preference, but also a phenomenon resulting from social, economic, and cultural environments.

The tradition of women's cross-dressing can be traced back as far as medieval times, but it was in the sixteenth century that there appeared a definitive notion of cross-dressing (Dekker & Pol, 1989). Dekker and Pol point out that it was not uncommon for women to disguise themselves as men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and present as many as 119 examples of women who lived as men in Holland (ibid., p. 2). Moreover, they indicate that numbers of cross-dressing English women are comparable to those in Holland, corroborated by 50 examples from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (loc. cit.). Dekker and Pol state in their book *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* that

such women should not be categorised as incidental human curiosities, but that their cross-dressing was part of a deeply rooted tradition. In the early modern era passing oneself off as a man was a real and viable option for women who had fallen into bad times and were struggling to overcome their difficult circumstances. (ibid., pp. 1–2)

Furthermore, in *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (1993), Vern and Bonnie Bullough define cross-dressing as an aggressive means to invade enemy territory, as it were, which has been detached from gender bias, and trace the history of cross-dressing men and women from various countries, times, cultures, and societies. Additionally, they reveal that cross-dressing is necessary to avoid the restrictive status of women in all periods of history (ibid., p. 116).

That is to say, women's cross-dressing enables social mobility, providing the ability to gain greater freedom and the opportunity to start something new. Therefore, while cross-dressing has the surface characteristics of a fetishism, it can extend far beyond sexual preference, showing a person's principles—that is, a sense of sufficiency gained by playing the role of the opposite sex.

When cross-dressing is mentioned as a means to play the role of the opposite sex, behind it we can notice how women were subjected to sexual discrimination during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To understand the advantages gained by women disguised as men, it is necessary to examine how women were restricted at that time. Whatever their class, women were confined to a domestic setting and were not permitted to be educated other than being trained in domestic duties. Women were not permitted to conduct trade, and, if they held jobs, their wage could be substantially lower than men's. Suzanne J. Stark (1998) declares that "it was beyond the imagination of most eighteenth-century men to think of a woman as a

responsible adult, capable of managing her own life” (pp. 94–95). For women, taking on a masculine role by cross-dressing meant improvement of their economic situation. As I have mentioned, women were controlled by men ashore, and they could not freely spend money, but through cross-dressing they could free themselves of such disadvantages. Even if such a manly role were hard work, women could carry on living on an equal footing with men by cross-dressing. For women at that time, cross-dressing was a sort of experiential policy to escape from social constraints, and it was an effective option to liberate them from being females.

Hannah Snell as a Marine in the Navy

a. Social and personal background of cross-dressing on naval vessels

As I mentioned in the previous section, in feminist thought, cross-dressing may be interpreted as a way of asserting that women ought to have the same rights which have been imparted only to men. In this context, Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing is one of many striking examples. Snell was born in Worcester on the 23rd of April, 1723. Her parents passed away when she was twenty years old, and, after that, she moved to London (Walker, 1989, pp. 3–4). She met James Summs, a Dutchman, and they married in 1744. Soon their marriage ended, when she became pregnant. She gave his daughter the name of Susanna, but she died just seven months after being born (*ibid.*, p. 6). After her daughter’s death, woman though she was, Snell went to sea as a marine in men’s clothes in 1745. The reason was not just to play a manly role but as a kind of revenge on her ex-husband, who left her and made her and her daughter miserable. Understandably, it was impossible for women to join the crew of naval vessels, which meant that she had to rid herself of the cultural signals of her womanhood in order to be a “man.” She referred to herself as James Gray, the name of her brother-in-law (*ibid.*, pp. 6–7).¹ Hannah Snell as James Gray joined Colonel Guise’s 6th Regiment of Foot in Coventry in 1745, the year after her husband died. In 1747, she enlisted in Colonel Fraser’s regiment of marines in Portsmouth and boarded the sloop *Swallow* (*ibid.*, pp. 6–9).

Dekker and Pol (1989) state that many cross-dressed women in Holland became soldiers, especially in the marines, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

¹ Snell’s revenge was not satisfied in the sense that her husband remained ignorant of it until his death: she was informed by an Englishman in Lisbon that her husband was in jail on a murder charge (Snell, Lacy & Talbot, 2010, p. 5).

Of the 93 women we know had their professions as men, eighty-three were—or had at one time been—sailors or soldiers. Many of the soldiers were marines or were transported overseas to serve with the East or West India Company; a majority served with the navy. So more than half of the disguised women practiced a trade at sea. (p. 9)

The same is true of England. Stark (1998) points out that many disguised women were aboard warships, such as Anne Chamberlyne, William Prothro, and William Brown.² Interestingly, although male seamen tried to escape from warships if the opportunity arose, female marines in men's clothing never left ships of their own accord despite the hard labor and adverse environment aboard. At that time, it was not so difficult for young women to join naval ships in men's clothing. European countries, including England, were at war, and always short of marines in the Royal Navy. Higher officers did not examine the young volunteers' history in a careful manner because they grasped that most of them were people from the bottom of the social strata (Stark, 1998, p. 88). Stark states that "it is difficult for us today to appreciate how casually recruits were accepted into the navy. There was seldom any physical examination upon entry, nor was proof of identity required. Neither volunteers nor impressed men were 'sworn in' or 'signed on'; many were illiterate and unable to sign their names" (ibid, p. 89).

Needless to say, it was impossible for women to masquerade as men by cross-dressing and changing names in the communities where their identities had been revealed. The navy never required proof of identity and proved an ideal place to which women could escape. As the examples of William Prothro and William Brown as well as Hannah Snell indicate, when cross-dressed women tried to board naval ships, they used fictitious names, and it was because of the lax checks that most of them could succeed without discovery.

² Here I should briefly mention the other women marines cited. Anne Chamberlyne is the earliest-known woman marine. She joined her brother's ship and fought with the French in 1690. Although most women marines were from the lower classes, she came from the nobility. William Prothro served on the thirty-two-gun *Amazon* from 1760 to 1761. Her name as a marine appeared in the captain's log, the ship's muster, and a personal journal only with her male alias. The captain's log dated 20th of April, 1761, states that "one of the marines going by the name of Wm. Protherow was discovered to be a woman. She had done her duty on board nine months." William Brown was a black woman who served in the navy for over 12 years during the Napoleonic Wars. Her true name was unknown. She joined the navy around 1804 and left in 1816 or later. At that time, most black seamen were slaves and taken aboard naval vessels by slaveholders, but Brown was not a slave and voluntarily went to sea in consequence of a quarrel with her husband. After 1826, when she left the navy, she was never heard from again (Stark, 1998, pp. 8–88).

b. Paradoxes embodied in cross-dressed Hannah Snell's body on naval vessels

Beyond doubt, cross-dressed women were not always able to board warships and be qualified to work as marines. Such women's cross-dressing was always accompanied by risks of discovery. It is needless to say that their figure and other physical features exerted a significant influence on the effect they were able to achieve. Dekker and Pol point out that, while boarding ships was considered a perfect method of escape for women who were in men's clothes and performing manly jobs, at the same time, shipping was full of the risk of discovery:

So more than half of the disguised women practiced a trade at sea—precisely where, in fact, the chance of discovery was greatest. Privacy was at a minimum on ships and one lived for extended periods of time with the same group of about 150 to 400 men in a crowded forecabin.... The risks to a woman in disguise were many and varied: lack of privacy, illness, punishment, or an inadvertently bad performance could easily mean the end of the cross-dressing.³ (pp. 19–20)

On the other hand, Stark's interpretation is the opposite of Dekker and Pol's with regard to the risk of discovery. Dekker and Pol are negative and Stark is positive about the limited risk of discovery on board.

Once a woman had taken her place among the crew on the lower deck of her ship, there was no routine situation in which she was required to undress. Seamen seldom bathed, and they slept in their day clothes.... Reports of women seamen do not tell how they managed to deal with urination and menstruation, but it was not as difficult as it might seem. To urinate a woman could go to the "head" (the toilet facilities at the bow of the ship overhanging the water) when no one else was there.... The very fact that a ship was so crowded, and crowded with such a motley collection of people having various physical complaints, meant that the men tended to keep a psychological distance from one another. Their philosophy was to live and let live. They ignored, if they could, any strange behavior or evidence of sickness in their mates. Such circumstances aided a woman in hiding her menstrual periods. If someone noticed that a woman seaman was menstruating, he probably assumed that she was suffering from venereal disease, a common complaint of seamen. It is also possible that in some cases a woman's periods stopped because of the bad diet and strenuous physical activity on board. (Stark, 1998, pp. 89–90)

³ The few cases show how women sailors disguised as men were discovered as females as follows: "Watched by a boatswain" in the case of Anne Jans; "seen sleeping nude in her bunk by the cook's mate" in the case of Annetje Barents; "detected by a sailor while pissing, drunk" in the case of Claus Bensen (Dekker & Pol, 1989, pp. 21–22).

Above all, Stark interprets crowded conditions on ships as advantageous for disguised women, unlike Dekker and Pol. While the latter argue that one's privacy in crowded places is virtually non-existent, the former insists that the very fact that a ship was so crowded meant that the men tended to keep a psychological distance from one another. This could keep disguised women safe from discovery.

Although we can grasp from the existing historical documents some examples of cross-dressed women on warships who were discovered in the end, we have no means of determining whether the number is large or small. However, considering the fact that judicial records or newspaper accounts were the media that informed us that many women in men's clothes went to sea, it is logical to think that Dekker and Pol's interpretation must be rational: in modern times we could not have known that many disguised women had been aboard warships if their true identities were not discovered during their duties. As Dekker and Pol (1989) mention that "this relatively great risk of discovery may have led to an overrepresentation of seafaring women" (p. 9), we can observe the paradox that a high risk of discovery onboard let us know that cross-dressed women went to sea.

It was not only daily activities, such as menstruation or urination, or carelessness, that expose disguised women's true identities. As mentioned in the previous section, there is a wide divergence of opinion about the risk of discovery, but commentators are in agreement about the risk of discovery in extreme situations. These include cases of being flogged or injured in combat, which could produce a fatal result for women marines in men's clothes, and, thus, their identity being discovered. Also, when they were wounded in combat women were also discovered during treatment (Dekker & Pol, 1989, p. 21; Stark, 1998, p. 89). That is, it matters little whether the odds were high or low that they were discovered to be a woman in daily life onboard. What is important here is the discovery in emergency situations. It could be important the extent to which they mentally identified with manly characteristics rather than simply the appearance of men's clothes. When women were aboard warships in men's clothes in the hope of avoiding disadvantages ashore, such as gender discrimination and poverty, it was requisite for them to have substantial qualifications for success as a marine: that is, to be equal to men in strength and bravery. In this sense, it was indeed extraordinary for Hannah Snell, who embarked on a naval ship in men's clothes, to risk death to show her strength and bravery.

There are two interesting episodes in *The Female Soldier* by Robert Walker which underscore Snell's masculinity: her experiences of flogging and of being wounded in combat,

in both of which cases most cross-dressed women marines could not have avoided being discovered. In 1746, a sergeant, who belonged to the same regiment as Snell's, tried to make sexual advances on a young woman during his embarkation, for which he ordered Snell to help him (unaware of her sex). However, she warned the woman of his plot, and Snell's action became known to him. The sergeant made a false charge by accusing her of neglect of duty as his revenge against Snell, which resulted in her being sentenced to receive 500 lashes (Walker, 1989, p. 8).

According to *The Female Soldier*, an example was made of her, with her arm extended and tied to the city gates and the lashes being administered on her bare back (ibid, p. 10). David Cordingly suggests that it should be fatal to receive only 200 or 300 lashes even for a man with a strong body (2007, p. 71). Despite his suggestion, Snell endured the 500 lashes, and she avoided discovery of her sex, which means that she possessed extraordinary bravery and strength in the same way as a man. Snell's masculinity shown by the flogging was to be further highlighted by her wounds in combat:

This Wound being so extreme painful, it almost drove her to the Precipice of Despair; she often thought of discovering herself, that by that Means she might be freed from the unspeakable Pain she endured, by having the Ball taken out by one of the Surgeons; but that Resolution was soon banished, and she resolved to run all Risques, even at the hazard of her Life, rather than that her sex should be known ... and her Pain being so very great, that she was unable to endure it much longer, she intended to try an Experiment upon herself, which was, to endeavour to extract the Ball out of that Wound.... She prob'd the Wound with her Finger till she came where the Ball lay, and then upon feeling it, thrust in both her Finger and Thumb, and pulled it out. (Walker, 1989, pp. 35–36)

In 1747, she joined the sloop *Swallow* as a marine and set off for India. In 1748, she took part in the siege of Pondicherry, where “she received six shot in her right leg, five shot in her left, and another shot in the groin” (Cordingly, 2007, p. 71). Not only did she bear these dreadful wounds, but, more amazingly, while the male wounded would have seen doctors, she did not allow them to treat the wound in her groin because she wished to avoid discovery of her sex, and she managed to extract the musket ball by herself. In the eighteenth century, when medical technology was still underdeveloped, such a serious injury may have been fatal. Yet Snell was able to recover enough to return to the naval ship as a marine in only three months.

The account of her wounds should be considered true because the Royal Hospital admission book contains a brief entry on the 21st of November, 1750, from which we can grasp the fact that Hannah Snell was “[w]ounded at Pondicherry in the thigh of both legs” (Cordingly, 2007, p. 71).⁴ Moreover, it is also described in the diary of Reverend James Woodforde as follows:

I walked up to the White Hart with Mr. Lewis and Bill to see a famous Woman in Men’s Cloths, by name Hannah Snell, who was 21 years as a common soldier in the Army, and not discovered by any as a woman.... The forefinger of her right hand was cut off by a sword at the taking of Pondicherry. (Woodforde, 1981, p. 224)

According to Reverend Woodford’s account, Snell was not only wounded by musket balls but also lost her right forefinger. Since his diary has been recognized as a well-authenticated historical document, we should be able to assume that the amputation of her forefinger was not fictitious.

Both of these accounts of injuries, along with the story of her flogging, show her remarkable strong body and emotional strength. Although such emergency occurrences could easily expose the true identities of disguised women onboard, in the case of Hannah Snell, the musket ball injury and the finger amputation rather served to highlight her masculinity instead of revealing her true gender.

Judging from the above, Snell’s masculinity is expressed not only by her cross-dressing but by her extraordinary strength and bravery, through which she could achieve success in playing the role of a man onboard. However, this leads on to another interesting question: whether she could “be” a man through her cross-dressing and her strength and bravery. Naturally, cross-dressing cannot enable an individual to transcend biological barriers of gender, but it seems that Hannah Snell was able to maintain a masculine persona, and her avoidance of her original identity to the end made her masculinity appear genuine. There is, however, more to it than this. A careful scrutiny of her strength and bravery leads to the conclusion that, behind her masculinity, we catch a glimpse of the secret purpose in concealing her true sex. Elizabeth Wilson (2003) offers her interpretation of cross-dressing as follows:

⁴ The Royal Hospital was founded by King Charles II in 1682 for treatment of veteran soldiers. Hannah Snell is one of two women who received a pension from this institution. The other was Christian Davis, who was also disguised as a man and fought in Marlborough’s campaigns as a foot soldier.

For one thing, women remain unequal, so while the trouser for women might symbolize a myth in western societies that women have achieved emancipation, it can hardly be interpreted as unproblematic of their status. If it were interpreted in this literal way it would certainly lead us to believe what many feminists believe is the case, that in so far as women have made progress in the public sphere of paid work, this has been on male terms and within the parameter of masculine values. (p. 165)

We can see a paradox behind Snell's strength and bravery that Wilson points out. Wilson insists that no woman could have success in breaking into the male-dominant world through their cross-dressing, emphasizing that they had no choice but to receive masculine values. Furthermore, Ackroyd (1979) also suggests that "female cross-dressing actually enhances the putative superiority of male culture" (p. 77).

The important point to note here concerns Hannah Snell's body as expressed in *The Female Soldier*, where we should not overlook the paradox that she could never escape her true sex however strong and brave she might be. She made many efforts to avoid her sex being discovered other than through her appearance, efforts described as punishing and torturing her body to its utmost limits. The more she shows her strength and bravery, the more her true sex became prominent. Herein lies a paradox, which is, as mentioned above, her masculinity as means to conceal her true sex should be rather considered to be highlighting it.

Although the principles of all feminist thought have the same goal, complete equality between men and women, feminists have evolved into webs tracing two contradictory attitudes: the sameness and difference of the sexes. In feminist thought, while it is orthodox attitudes that claim absolute sameness between men and women as a prerequisite to attaining complete gender equality, there is another stance that strongly stresses the characteristics of each sex—the difference between men and women—for gender equality (Firestone, 1970, pp. 6–15). These attitudes are seemingly in conflict with each other, but can be viewed as actually two sides of the same coin. Hannah Snell's cross-dressing onboard shows the two attitudes contained in feminism thought. Projecting "sameness attitudes," Snell was disguised as a man, behaved with bravery, and rejected all of her feminine characteristics in order to serve on naval ships, a male-dominated world, which can symbolize an assertion of the sameness between men and women in feminist thought. This sameness thus becomes an ideological ground for minimizing sexual difference. On the other hand, however masculine she seemed to be, she only masqueraded as a man through cross-dressing, so that it is self-evident that she was not

the same as a man, which can symbolize an assertion of the difference between men and women. That is, cross-dressing to eliminate gender difference resulted in highlighting it. Therefore, while cross-dressing for women was used as a means to acquire advantages permitted only to men, it simultaneously illuminates cross-dressers as females. This contradiction is embodied in Snell's cross-dressing, serving as a reminder of the two attitudes in feminist thought.

Hannah Snell in Her True Gender after Disembarkation

Interestingly, women disguised as men were judged completely differently from men passing as women. While men dressing as women were often subjected to criminal action, viewed as they were as displaying outrageous conduct demeaning men's dignity, women disguised as men were looked on with tolerance up to a point. The same is true of the naval ships. Above all, in England, the public tended to ignore women joining the navy in men's clothes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with some exceptions, and, even when the women were discovered, most of them were not found guilty of criminal action.⁵ Even if it was unavoidable for them to leave a ship after their discovery, their courage was sometimes praised in newspapers after their disembarkation (Stark, 1998).

As already mentioned in the previous section, Hannah Snell's cross-dressed identity was not discovered for more than four years. According to *The Female Soldier*, she voluntarily revealed her secret to a fellow marine around 1750:

Now upon receiving her Pay, and all her fellow Adventurers then present, she thought that was the most proper Opportunity she ever could have, for disclosing her Sex, seeing they could then testify the Truth of all the Fatigues, Dangers and other Incidents of her Adventures, and that her Sex was never discovered, which if then omitted, she might never have an Opportunity of seeing them all together again, and by that

⁵ Charles Wadall traveled from Hull to London after her lover. She got information that he was onboard the Oxford in Chatham, which made her decide to embark on the same ship in men's clothes. However, she was informed that he had fled. After that, she also tried to escape but failed and was ordered to be flogged. When she was discovered to be a woman, her sentence was rescinded. Moreover, surprisingly, she even received admiration and money from her superior. Margaret Thompson was disguised as a man under the name of George Thompson and was on board a warship in Deptford. There was a robbery aboard, and she was suspected of it because women's clothes were found in her sea chest, resulting in the ordering of a punishment of thirty-six lashes. She was able to escape the flogging by confessing her true gender (Stark, 1998, pp. 111–12). On the other hand, in the Netherlands, when women in men's clothing were discovered on warships, they were harshly punished. Dekker and Pol (1989) state that "the sentence for women who inadvertently betrayed themselves soon after actually entering service varied from some weeks to a year in a workhouse or prison, or they were condemned to exile, the pillory, or whipping" (p. 77).

Means, the Account of her Adventures as aforesaid, might be looked upon by the Public as fictitious. (Walker, 1989, pp. 38–39)

Additionally, *The Penny London Post* on the 27th of June, 1750, reported that she appealed to the Duke of Cumberland, her Naval Commander, for her pension as a marine, which was granted at £30 per month (Cordingly, 2007).

Now upon the Discovery of her Sex, her Relations, and some of her intimate Friends, advised her to apply by a Petition to his Royal Highness the Duke of *Cumberland*, not doubting but that his highness would make some proper Provision for her, as she had received so many Wounds. Upon which a Petition was drawn up, setting forth her Adventures, and the Hardships she underwent, together with the many Wounds she received, which she was the Bearer of herself, and coming where his Royal Highness then was in his *Laudau*, accompanied by Colonel *Napier*, she delivered her Petition to his Royal Highness, and upon his perusing it, gave it to the Colonel, desiring him to enquire into the Merits. So that it is not doubted but his Royal Highness will make her some handsome Allowance, exclusive of *Chelsea* College, to which she is entitled. (Walker, 1989, p. 40, original emphasis)

It is recorded that Snell was admitted as a veteran receiving a pension in an account of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. It seems strange that Snell was permitted to receive a pension rather than punishment, since she cheated her superiors and colleague marines by assuming a false name and misrepresented her gender to be aboard the naval ships. However, her case supports Stark's position that disguised women onboard were not charged even if they were discovered. Furthermore, some newspapers reported that Hannah Snell appeared in theaters, commencing with the New Wells Theatre in London, as a singer after her retirement, through which she was catapulted into fame, especially by her sales point—"a woman marine in men's clothes"—and her fame spread throughout London (Cordingly, 2007).

However, what we should notice here is that, even if she was met with applause from the public, it does not always mean that she was welcomed as a hero. Stark's suggestion that although the public was interested in cross-dressed women marines they did not seriously respect them could be valid in the case of Snell. They decided that disguised women could not be equal with men, believing that the inferior were just imitating the superior (Stark, 1998). We can notice a sense of security behind the notion that the public did not feel threatened by disguised women. In other words, they liked to believe that disguised women would revert to

their “true” gender in the end. Indeed, almost all disguised women had no choice but to revert to their biological sex despite whether they exposed their identity by choice, like Snell, or were discovered against their will.

Snell reverted to her true gender after her retirement, which is indicated via two of her marriages. According to *The Universal Chronicle*, on the 3rd of November, 1759, she married Richard Elyse, a carpenter, and had sons George and Thomas with him. It was rumored that she was widowed by his death, but there is no historical record. After that, she re-married Richard Habgood on the 6th of November, 1772. Her second marriage can be recognized as a historical fact because Reverend James Woodforde was an observer at it, noting it in his diary (Cordingly, 2007). Even if Hannah Snell temporarily identified with males onboard, her two, later marriages suggest that she embraced her “natural” gender as female. As mentioned in the previous section, we can notice her purpose in concealing her femininity behind her cross-dressing, strength, and bravery, which became more apparent when she signaled herself as female through her marriages. The temporary admiration she received as a marine can function as an analogy for her temporary male identity. The scene where the public gives applause to a temporarily disguised women reminds us of an audience clapping a monkey’s performance. Because of the lack of threat to social norms, cross-dressed women were not abominated as were cross-dressed men, who were to be harshly punished as a threat to men’s dignity.

It was to be proved in her twilight years that Hannah Snell’s life as a marine and her seeming masculine nature were affirmed by her thorough commitment to concealing her true gender. She was taken to the Bethlem Royal Hospital, a notorious lunatic asylum, in August of 1791.⁶ We have no way to know exactly what affliction led to her being taken to the asylum, but, undoubtedly, she suffered from a psychiatric disorder. Finally, she ended her eventful life there on the 8th of February, 1792. Considering her spectacular life as a cross-dressed woman marine, it was a miserable end. Given her stressful life as a “pretend” marine, in which she was constantly obsessed with the possibility of having her identity discovered, it seems that there is a causal relationship between her cross-dressing and her psychiatric disease in her later years.

⁶ David Cordingly (2007) gives his explanation that her disease was syphilis. According to him, she picked up syphilis from her first husband, Jame Summs, who had many sexual encounters. Syphilis was supposed to be particularly infectious among the population, so it was the most feared disease of all in the days of no antibiotics. Cordingly explains that it incubates for twenty to thirty years, and, when it becomes symptomatic, it destroys the brain and nervous system uncontrollably (p. 75). However, as mentioned in this paper, it is more reasonable to suppose that she did not catch her disease from someone other than her husband, but she suffered from it as a result of terrible stress caused by the tension of cross-dressing and straining her body.

It is not Hannah Snell alone who lost mental her stability after being discovered. For example, Christian Davis, who disguised herself as a soldier to search for her missing husband, also was taken with illnesses such as scurvy and rheumatism through straining herself body and soul, and died in the end. In the Netherlands, Dekker and Pol's (1989) research states that not a few disguised women suffered from mental diseases or committed suicide, and they mentioned Maria van Antwerpen as the most eminent example. It seems that Maria suffered from neurasthenia, also known as melancholia. Dekker and Pol analyze that her hidden apprehension over the years after being disguised as a man caused a resulting misery (*ibid*, p. 24). Of course, their analysis resonates with the life of Snell. It can be interpreted that, like Maria, Snell's mental disease resulted from her fear and psychological burden during her cross-dressing.

It is easy to imagine that cross-dressed women experienced stress from fear of discovery, and the longer they were disguised as men, the more they needed their strength, bravery, and acting ability. Moreover, as stated in the previous section, no matter how skillfully they could play a role of a man, they could never be a man. As far as Hannah Snell's later years are concerned, her abuse of her body and soul made it difficult for her even to spend her life as a woman in her later years. Viewed in this light, it is apparent that women's cross-dressing complicates matters other than appearance.

Conclusion

In some forms of communication, it is impossible for a person to communicate with another without recognizing the other's gender. In other words, sex, male or female, is first acknowledged prior to every such communication and provides a foundation. In this sense, sex is the fundamental meaning of human existence. However, it can be said that sex should be understood more intricately than we expect. That is to say, it seems to be common sense that we tend to judge sexual difference by surface appearance, but the nature of sex is importantly related to inner qualities rather than appearance. If sex in appearance is everything, disguised women would equate to being men. But this is not true. Although Hannah Snell tried to be a man, she could not escape her true sex. In her case, we can see a paradox that the radical intention to achieve sexual equality expressed by cross-dressing instead highlighted the femininity of the cross-dresser. And considering their returning to their "true" sex after being exposed, this paradox must be true of almost all cross-dressing women of the period in question, not only for Hannah Snell. We should face the simple fact that—putting aside the issues of

transgender and gender fluidity that help define present-day discussions of gender—when a woman is “disguised as a man,” this woman is not a man but just pretends to be a man. This is why sexual nature is irrelevant to appearance.

To put it another way, if a woman is born with a “masculine” nature, it is not necessary for her to be disguised as a man. For example, because Bonny and Read were in women’s clothes in their daily lives onboard, they did not need to conceal their sex, and wore men’s clothes when needed in emergency situations. For them, the most important thing was their individual qualities, not cross-dressing, which was just a means to partake in combat. On the other hand, for Hannah Snell, her appearance as a man through cross-dressing took precedence over everything else, and her qualities of strength and bravery were nothing more than a means to conceal her sex. Comparing the cases of Bonny and Read with that of Snell, we must notice that there is a gendered nature within regardless of biological sex. If Hannah Snell had been born with a masculine nature, like Bonny and Read, she might not have suffered from an emotional illness caused by the stress of cross-dressing in her later years.

Bonny and Read were recognized as leaders of their pirate ship despite being women, so they could conquer the gender bias in pirate ships and become a model of liberal feminism. However, Hannah Snell was far from gender-free at the time of her intention to conceal her sex. Rather, she indicated that the naval ships were completely male-dominated and part of a gendered world. The case of Bonny and Read and that of Snell function as contrasting examples of gender consciousness on pirate ships and warships.

However, there is not an entirely negative aspect to the paradox in Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing. Ironically, Snell’s femininity demonstrates that some women were qualified to act as marines on warships, and the fact that the Navy was dominated by men was nothing more than prejudice against women. In this sense, Hannah Snell’s cross-dressing critically raises a fundamental doubt about gendered warships.

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