Doll Tomorrow's Parties: The Origin of Transsexual Glamour in Balls and Fashion and the Adoption of the Doll

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

University of Victoria

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Abstract

Black and Latine femme queens and transsexual women have had a vital role in forming contemporary transsexual culture across race and class. One example of this vital role they have had can be observed through the concept of the "doll." The doll is a type of transsexual woman interested in high fashion, nightlife, and glamour that emerged out of the predominantly Black and Latine ball culture. The doll, through its creation in ball culture and initial popularization by trans women involved in the fashion industry in the late 1980s, has become a concept of feminine empowerment among transsexual women. The continuing popularization of the doll has been mediated by the involvement of transsexual women involved in the twenty-first century fashion press. Specifically, the Spanish trans-focused niche fashion magazine of *Candy* and the New York style magazines of *Paper* and *Interview* have been significant in introducing the doll to the next generation of transsexuals interested in high fashion, nightlife, and glamour. The importance of the doll for transsexuals is demonstrative of the continuing influence that Black and Latine LGBT life has on the linguistics and culture of the wider LGBT community and the importance of ball culture to contemporary transsexual culture.

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Dedication and Acknowledgement

This thesis is dedicated to all of those femme queens and trans women who came before and lived their lives to the fullest in the face of a society explicitly hostile to transsexual women.

I want to express my greatest of thanks to my advisors who have dedicated their valuable time to helping me improve and complete my thesis, Georgia Sitara and Rachel Hope Cleves. I also wish to express my gratitude to my third reader for the thesis, Helga Thorson.

I also wish to express my thanks to my friends and cohort who have helped me and provided me with support throughout the thesis writing process, namely: Rosa, Liv, IJ, Magda, Ocean, Whitney, Vanessa, Aya, Jamey, Chris, Ruth, and the numerous others whose names I cannot remember right now. Without your help, I would not have made it through the writing process.

I also want to thank my mom and dad for providing me with such great support throughout my time in Victoria. I love both of you so much.

Introduction: The Doll's Place in Society

Transsexual women are a subjugated class in the academy. We are stripped of our womanhood, referred to as "trans feminine" rather than as women by supposed allies and other trans people, all in an attempt to include us with non-transsexual individuals under the deeply flawed umbrella of "transness," a term popularized by a cadre of activists with little first-hand knowledge of the travails transsexuals experience in our daily lives.[1] We are treated as pariahs among "queers" by queer theory, with academics like Judith Butler[2] claiming that transsexuals "offer 'an uncritical miming of the hegemonic [sex/gender system]'" because we dare to be feminine women.[3] We are tokenized by that same queer theory, who despite its distaste of transsexuals, still makes use of transsexual suffering and death to justify flawed ideas, as Viviane Namaste demonstrates via Butler's unwillingness (in the 1990s) to acknowledge how *Paris is Burning* star Venus Xtravaganza's transsexual status was one of the two reasons she was murdered (the other being her work as a prostitute).[4] While scholars I will return to, like Namaste and Julia Serano have put up a valiant fight in pushing back against transmisogynistic writing and behaviors in the academy, they are sailing against an extremely strong current in LGBT and feminist studies that ignores, erases, and bashes transsexual women.

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[1] Alex Alvina Chamberlin, "Femininity in Transgender Studies," *Lambda Nordica* 1, no. 2 (2016): 123; David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 36-37.

[2] It is important to note that Butler regrets their earlier writings about trans women, especially around non-white trans women. However, Butler's arguments that they made in the early 1990s are still influential in the academy today, therefore, I consider it fair game to mention them within the context of queer theory's anti-transsexual bias.

[3] Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 131. Quoted in Viviane Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14; Cristan Williams and Judith Butler, "Judith Butler on gender and the trans experience: "One should be free to determine the course of one's gendered life"," *Verso*, May 26, 2015, n.p., https://www.versobooks.com/en-ca/blogs/news/2009-judith-butler-on-gender-and-the-trans-experience-one-should-be-free-to-determine-the-course-of-one-s-gendered-life.

[4] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 13.

Maybe in an ill-intentioned rage against the dying light of transsexual agency and inclusion in the academy, maybe in a foolish hope that I can somehow change the dynamics causing transsexual subjugation in the first place, I seek to treat transsexual women as women; no more, no less.[5] In an echo to and adaption of the preface of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America*, published in 1935, where Du Bois argues that the Civil War and Reconstruction represented a positive revolutionary and transformative role for the lives of African Americans in the United States from 1860 until 1880, it is my assertion that if you believe transsexual women live their existence as women and understand their cultural and social position as equal to that of cissexual women, but influenced by their transsexuality, you shall find the existence and continuing presence of "the doll" no different than other women's subcultures.[6] However, if you see transsexuals not as women, but instead as tokens to be used to argue that drag is more "gender non-conforming" than getting a sex change or that transsexuals are mean for insulting the "true" vanguard of queerness (seemingly according to the academy): cissexual drag performers, then you will find every word and concept in this thesis distasteful. I am writing for the first group of readers, not the second. Ball culture and the archetype of the doll that emerged from it, both in its manifestations within balls and its cooption by those not directly involved in balls, lie outside of this queer theory-based hegemony that characterizes the academy. That is why ball culture and dolls matter so much.

[5] From hence forth, transsexual women will be referred to as either "transsexuals" or as "women." References to transsexual men or cissexual women will explicitly be flagged as such.
[6] W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), -3.

Why the Doll?

Before understanding *why* the doll is important as a figure in transsexual history, it is necessary to understand how the "doll" is understood within contemporary transsexual discourses. Over the past decade as transsexual women have become more prominent in media and popular culture, academics have started to (inadequately) consider topics important to transsexuals. One of the writers who has started to discuss the "doll" is Situationist scholar and trans woman McKenzie Wark, in her 2023 book *Raving*. For Wark, the doll is a subcategory of trans women who are "high-femme, might do sex work, are more likely to be attracted to men," and "have nowhere but the night" (i.e. they are excluded from formal daytime work and leisure because of transphobic discrimination and harassment).[7] From her description and my own personal experiences as a transsexual woman, Wark's understanding of the "doll" in trans parlance is generally correct, if imprecise about the exact type of transsexual she is discussing. Other than Wark, the only other scholar to my knowledge, as of early April 2024, who has broached the academic question of what "doll" means in a trans context is Quinn J. Troia, in their 2023 senior thesis at the University of Kentucky, where they explore trans women musicians' use of cyborg imagery in their lyrics and music videos. Troia's definition of doll, given within the context of their analysis of the lyrics of trans pop singer Chase Icon's music, describes the word as "an in-group term used to refer to trans-feminine people."[8] In their examination of Chase Icon's lyrics, Troia argues that the word "doll," beyond being a term of self-reference for trans women, demonstrates that Chase Icon, by passing, makes use of the terminology of the doll " to perform femininity 'in the right way'" and "assert

[7] McKenzie Wark, *Raving* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 12.
[8] Quinn J. Troia, "Cyborgs, Dolls, and Passsing Narratives: Trans-feminity in Popular Music" (Distinction of University Honors University of Kentucky, 2023), 16.

her higher social status" within the trans community.[9] Troia's definition, much like Wark's, places an emphasis on the perceived femininity of the doll, however what the doll signifies to either scholar is a polar opposite. Wark's definition sees the doll as being the heir to a long history of trans women living on the margins of society, laboring in sex work, and living outside the formal economy. The doll, by applying Wark's definition beyond *Raving*, can be considered a successor to black trans sex worker Mary Jones in nineteenth-century New York and the street queens hustling on 42nd Street and in Times Square from the 1960s to the 1990s.[10] However, in Troia's definition, the doll takes a position of social privilege among trans women due to her ability to pass as a cissexual woman compared to the unnamed non-doll who struggles to pass. These two academic definitions, while agreeing with the centrality of femininity to being a doll, differ based on Wark's and Troia's perceptions of how dolls experience the world. Neither of these definitions are particularly useful within the context of my research nor are they based on the authors' experiences as transsexual women who have an interest in high fashion, glamour, or nightlife that dolls do. Wark explicitly considers herself and her friends as not dolls and Troia makes use of they/them pronouns, removing themselves from the "high-femme" identity of the doll.[11]

However, analyses of the contemporary use of the word "doll" among trans women have not principally been the purview of the traditional academy. With the release of *Barbie*, a 2023 film based on the Mattel property, and the associated hype cycle leading up to the release of the film, "dolls" as both an abstract and material concept re-entered the popular imagination in a significant manner, with numerous writers declaring 2022 and 2023 the "Age of the Doll" or the

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[9] Troia, "Cyborgs, Dolls, and Passsing Narratives: Trans-feminity in Popular Music," 16.
[10] Jules Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Transmisogyny* (London: Verso, 2024), 130; Kristen Lovell and Zackery Drucker, *The Stroll*, ed. Matt Wolf (United States: HBO, 2023).
[11] Wark, *Raving*, 12; Nate Lucas, "College Democrats host on-campus rally," *Kentucky Kernal* (Lexington), October 13 2022, n.p., https://kykernel.com/88547/news/college-democrats-host-on-campus-rally/.

"Year of the Doll."[12] This is doubly so among trans women, given the existing usage of "doll" within trans communities. Otamere Guobadia, in a 2022 article and interview with the British writer and transsexual activist Shon Faye in the online style magazine, *AnOther*, discusses the doll's role and lasting influence in transsexual culture. In the interview, Faye defines the doll within the context of "the 'synthetic' nature of trans women's hyper-femininity" where a trans woman "rejoices in the spectacularity of her femininity, and its synthetic nature that, ultimately, she's usually created herself through surgery [and/or] cosmetics."[13] "To be a doll," Guobadia and Faye argue "is to be in a kind of rapturous and devout practice of a deep aestheticism: an ostentatious assertion of the value and opulence she is told by a transmisogynistic world is not her birthright."[14] In effect, it is a way for transsexual women to claim their womanhood in a world that denies it. It is inherently artificial, in the most literal understanding of that term as referring to an "artifice," but that artificiality is, in Guobadia's words, "a means to a truth" of a womanhood denied.[15] Philosophically, Guobadia and Faye's definition comes closest to what my understanding of the doll is and the reasons why the doll is important to transsexuals today, but it lacks an exploration of why and how the doll came about.

Within the context of *Barbie*, another understanding of the word "doll" was articulated by trans actress and model Hari Nef in relation to her involvement with the 2023 film. Nef, upon release of the film, tweeted about the importance of the word "doll" to her own life, saying that:

> Me and my girlfriends – okay, yeah, me and my other transgender girlfriends – we started calling ourselves 'the dolls' a couple years ago, though the phrase stretches back into the

[12] Otamere Guobadia, "Welcome to the Age of the Doll," *AnOther*, 2022, n.p., https://www.anothermag.com/design-living/13907/welcome-to-the-age-of-the-doll-otamere-guobadia; Michael Love Michael, "On *Barbie*, Femininity, and the Year of the Doll," *Nylon*, July 18, 2023, n.p., https://www.nylon.com/entertainment/the-year-of-the-doll-barbie-movie.
[13] Guobadia, "Welcome to the Age of the Doll," n.p.
[14] Guobadia, "Welcome to the Age of the Doll," n.p.
[15] Guobadia, "Welcome to the Age of the Doll," n.p.

> language of our foremothers in the ballroom scene. 'The Dolls.' Maybe it's a bid to ratify our femininity, to smile and sneer at the standards we're held to as women. It's a joke, of course; we throw our voices: 'the do-o-lls!' But underneath the word 'doll' is the shape of a woman who is not quite a woman – recognizable as such, but still a fake. 'Doll is fraught, glamorous; she is, and she isn't. We call ourselves 'the dolls' in the face of everything we know we are, never will be, hope to be. We yell the word because the word matters.[16]

Nef traces the origins of the doll to the predominantly Black and Latine ball culture of Harlem that first developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nef does not provide a source for how the term originated outside of its usage in her friend group, however, and the term is absent from the primary sources on Harlem ball culture that I have examined, namely documentaries about ball culture, coverage of balls in the alternative press, and correspondences between balls and the fashion world. While I believe that the "doll," as a reference to transsexual women, very likely emerged out of ball culture, there is no direct evidence for the term originating in it.

Alongside Nef's theory, the doll appears within a primary source in a seemingly surprising location that is disconnected from the Harlem ball culture or their precursors in drag balls in major Northern metropolises in the first half of the twentieth century: Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia. Savannah-born, raised, and based cabaret dancer, The Lady Chablis, in a 2012 interview[17] with journalist Miguel Figueroa, in the Spanish[18] and trans-focused niche fashion magazine, *Candy Transversal*, refers to herself as "The Doll."[19] Chablis either could have picked it up from travelling performers based in the New York area, could have convergently developed it outside of the New York scene which gave birth to the "doll" as a distinct subculture, or could have adopted the term

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[16] hari nef (@harinef), "when i heard i was cast as a barbie in the barbie movie ..." Twitter, July 25, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230725134800/https://twitter.com/harinef/status/1643257294753259522.

[17] The lack of chronological approach here stems from the need to have a definition of doll from which we can work from. Nef's definition is the one closest to my own, hence, it makes sense to lead with it and return to how other definitions fit into its, admittedly flawed, framework.

[18] "Spanish" as a term on its own will refer to "originating in Spain." When referring to the Spanish language, I will explicitly call it the "Spanish language" or use the term "Hispanophone."

[19] Miguel Figueroa, "Southern Belle: A Day in the Life of Lady Chablis," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2012, 265, 70.

later, when the rise of the internet and online forums made subcultural diffusion easier and quicker. While Nef's explanation and the Lady Chablis's usage both indicate that the term emerged within Black or Latine LGBT nightlife and drag cultures, where and when this specific usage of the term "doll" truly originated is unclear within the sources that discuss the term.

Michael Love Michael, in a 2023 article in the style magazine *Nylon,* takes a deeper dive into Nef's quote about the origin of the doll. To frame Nef's quote, Michael examines how, for those born male, "exploring femininity, whether for fun or for real, was punishable; to do anything that was 'for girls' was forbidden."[20] This restricted ability to display femininity, such as playing with Barbie dolls in youth, causes transsexuals to latch onto "the doll" as a concept of exploration, "a plasticine commentary on perfection," or a "method of subversion" of masculine expectations.[21] This dialectical nature of the "doll" for Nef and Michael, as both a form of artificiality meant to serve a lodestar for trans women's desire for femininity and as a form of realness meant to reenforce our actual femininity that we display daily, means that "doll," as a term and concept, is "inherently malleable."[22] In its malleability, the doll can be seen as a manifestation of how transsexuals understand and treat our own bodies, molding and transforming them to our own desires and making them truly ours.

While all of these definitions generally agree on the parameters of "who is a doll," the two academic definitions of Wark and Troia lack an exploration of *why* and *how* the doll exists as a distinct culture.[23] It is those two questions, the *why* and the *how,* that this thesis seeks to answer in an academic context. To answer these questions, it is necessary to provide my own definition of

[20] Michael, "On Barbie," n.p.
[21] Michael, "On Barbie," n.p.
[22] Michael, "On Barbie," n.p.
[23] Wark, *Raving*, 12.

doll as it exists in 2024. This definition is based on a combination of the definitions of the doll explored in the previous paragraphs, my primary source research, and my own experiences as a transsexual woman with an interest in many of the same topics that the "doll" cares about. A doll is a transsexual woman who is interested in high fashion, participates in nightlife that has been traditionally been patronized by homosexual men (disco, house, techno, pop, raves, circuit parties, etc.), is on hormone replacement therapy or wants to be on hormone replacement therapy but because of severe financial barriers, is unable to get hormonal treatment, even on the black market, has had / wants facial feminization surgery, sexual reassignment surgery, and other plastic surgeries that involve making the body more feminine, and has a desire to be glamorous. This glamour includes non-bodily aspects like designer clothes and shoes, as well as more bodily aspects like styled hair, a full face of makeup, a manicure and pedicure, and very low to no levels of visible body and facial hair, augmented by shaving, waxing, laser hair removal, and electrolysis. The doll does not necessarily embody all the traits described here, but dolls tend to embody the vast majority of them. Furthermore, an absence of many of these traits symbolizes that someone is *not* a doll.

Additionally, it is important to note that this definition and conception of the doll is based on my experience, both in real life and in research, in predominantly white transsexual and gay spaces and sources. As a white transsexual, I do all that I can to center the voices of African American and Latine academics, scholars, and ball participants within this thesis. However, part of this thesis is indeed based on my life experiences as a white transsexual woman in white transsexual and gay spaces. It is the emergence of the doll in these spaces that this thesis tracks. The doll almost certainly initially came out of Black and Latine LGBT spaces, most likely ball culture or an adjacent performance culture. When discussing the origins of ball culture and the vital role that femme queens played in creating a community and culture in which Black and Latine

LGBT people could thrive, I seek to center the voices and experiences of those women. At the same time, much of this thesis is about how the predominantly white and trans-adjacent and involved fashion and media industries took the concept of the doll and applied it to themselves, hence those individuals begin to play a prominent role, especially later in the thesis.

Theory

In the context of the general academic disinterest and disgust for transsexuality (as opposed to "transgender"), transsexual subcultures find themselves orphaned and erased in the existing historiography. To begin to understand the milieu I write in as a transsexual, we must start with understanding *why* transsexuals are in the societal position that they are currently in. That understanding begins with Viviane Namaste's 2000 work, *Invisible Lives*. One important note before continuing to an examination of her work on transsexual erasure is that I must explain Namaste's use of language in *Invisible Lives*. Namaste makes use of two separate terms to refer to the people she is researching and discussing: "transsexual" and "transgender," shortened to TS/TG. Namaste uses "transsexual" to refer exclusively to "individuals who take hormones and who may undergo surgery to align their biological sexes with their genders."[24] Namaste uses "transgender" as "an umbrella term used to refer to all who live outside of normative sex/gender relations," hence anyone from a cross-dresser, to a drag queen, a transvestite, or a transsexual.[25] As Namaste is an exceptionally important scholar who has strongly influenced my thinking and scholarship on TS/TG-related topics, these are generally the definitions for these terms that I make use of

[24] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 1.
[25] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 1.

throughout the thesis. I tend to replace "transgender" with just "trans" to refer to the same group of individuals when discussing them in my own words as, I, personally, have an aversion to the term "gender" relating to medical and social experiences of my own transition that I would rather not bring up.

Namaste's work discusses the concept of TS/TG (transsexual/transgender) agency, erasure and exclusion from society, and the consequences of how transsexual people experience that erasure of agency and exclusion. Namaste's engagement with the question of the erasure of transsexual agency in *Invisible Lives* provides the best theoretical backing for understanding the importance of agency in the context of its erasure. The importance of centering TS/TG agency stems from the dominance of queer theory within academic discourse on TS/TG topics and its subsequent erasure of the lives of TS/TG people. Specifically, according to Namaste, queer theory in general, and the work of Judith Butler more specifically, ignores the reasons why people may participate in cross-gender behavior, whether that be drag queens or TS/TG, reducing their existence to the spectacle rather than understanding them within the context of a desire to explore the possibility of transitioning or financial incentives for performance, in the case of drag queens, or the actual medical and social strife that TS/TG go through engaging with the state and bureaucracy.[26] It is this "utter disregard for how transgendered people live" through "queer theory's epistemological and methodological presuppositions" about the theorized lives of TS/TG people that requires listening to and drawing upon the actual lives and experiences of TS/TG people and avoiding "privileging literary and cultural objects and … ignoring the social and institutional relations in which these objects are located and embedded."[27]

[26] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 11, 13.
[27] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 23.

In her process of drawing upon the actual lives of TS/TG women, Namaste discusses two groups of interviews done during the late 1990s, one done with transsexuals from Quebec who sought care in Quebec City or Montreal clinics, and the other done with a group of transsexuals in Toronto who sought care at the Clarke Institute (now CAMH). Within these clinics, TS/TG navigated a healthcare system that attempted to force them into normative behaviors or "face exclusion from the institutional health world."[28] These normative behaviors include the "real life test" which required that TS/TG live as their actual sex "for [at least] one year before beginning hormones."[29] This test meant that to receive hormones, TS/TG needed to either live in a supportive area with a supportive boss so that the "real life test" could be tracked by clinicians or face abuse and exclusion from family, work, and society if they lived and worked in an unsupportive community. As this "real life test" was predicated on reporting from a place of employment, it excluded TS/TG who were unemployed or who engaged in sex work. Those who did not fulfill the stereotype of a "professional transsexual," were excluded from access to hormones and treatment through the clinical process.[30] While these TS/TG were often able to obtain hormones in the grey or black market, demonstrating transsexual agency and their ability to make the most of the limited resources available, the inability of these clinics to adapt to and meet the needs of TS/TG who sought care is merely one example that is emblematic of the mistakes to avoid when engaging with TS/TG topics in academia. While this may be more of a failure of medicine than queer theory, ultimately the erasure of TS/TG agency manifests itself in very similar ways in both cases, as both rely on the fundamental exclusion of transsexuals from their works in order to reenforce their understanding of transsexuals.

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[28] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 159.
[29] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 199.
[30] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 212.

Namaste's 2005 book *C'était du Spectacle,* to some extent, provides an effective approach to follow for exploring the importance of the term "doll," and its relationship to a subculture within the wider history of transsexuality. It is Namaste's labor focused-analysis of cabaret workers in 1960s-1980s Montreal that I draw the most upon in framing my analysis of the development of the doll. Namaste's focus upon the "daily lives of transsexuals and transvestites"[31] who worked in the cabarets of Montreal and the importance of said work to their lives and existence as transsexuals is a vital lens to understand how the "doll" initially developed and continues to exist today.[32] Whether they worked within nightlife, fashion, or journalism, the individuals who made and popularized doll culture constructed this culture through their labor within scenes traditionally associated with cultural production. The women who have made manifest and popularized doll culture since the 1980s in New York did so through their own agency in a society and medical system where transsexuals have been subject to "a lot of prejudice."[33] It is in the face of these prejudices and transsexuals' subordinated position in wider society that transsexuals have used their agency to create and maintain their own subcultures, namely that of the doll.

While Namaste's discussion of TS/TG agency, erasure, and queer theory are very useful approaches to centering the lives and experiences of transsexuals, she provides less of a guide on transsexual life experiences. Namaste is transsexual, but even in her discussion of the punk scene, which she was a part of in the 1980s and 1990s, she does not discuss her own experiences. This is not an error on her part as it is merely an academic perspective she chose not to adopt, as she does not approach her theory from an autobiographical perspective, but within this thesis, I do not want

[31] All translations of *C'était du Spectacle* are done by myself unless otherwise noted.
[32] Viviane Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 139-41.
[33] Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle*, 84.

to avoid discussing the importance of the doll to the lives of transsexuals, like my own, so I will, to some extent engage in the auto-history and auto-theory that are absent in Namaste's work.

For a more comprehensive exploration of transsexual life and experiences, specifically stemming from the life of the author, we must turn to Julia Serano's 2007 work, *Whipping Girl*. Serano's work is an effort to integrate trans experiences into feminism.[34] Much like with Namaste's work, we must familiarize ourselves with the language that Serano makes use of before we can understand her contribution to trans studies. While not citing *Invisible Lives*, ultimately her definition of "transgender" is very similar to that of Namaste's, in the sense that Serano classifies it "as an umbrella term to describe those who defy societal expectations and assumptions regarding femaleness and maleness."[35] Ultimately, however, she avoids the use of "transgender" as she classifies it as "too vague of a word to imply much commonality between individual people's identities, life experiences, or understanding of gender."[36] Instead, she adopts the word "trans" "to refer to people who (to varying degrees) struggle with a subconscious understanding that there is something 'wrong' with the sex they were assigned at birth."[37] This new definition is inclusive of the individuals whose existence she focuses on: "transsexuals," i.e. "those who make the choice to live as the sex other than the one [they] were assigned at birth."[38] It is from this focus on transsexuals that she attempts to avoid the use of the word "transgender" as "many transsexuals disavow the term because of its anti-transsexual roots or because they feel that the transgender movement tends to privilege those identities, actions, and appearances that most visibly 'transgress' gender norms."[39] What we can see from this understanding of transsexuality and its

[34] Serano released a 2016 revised version with a new preface, but the text of the book is ultimately the same.
[35] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 2nd ed. (Berkley: Seal Press, 2016), 25.
[36] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 26.
[37] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 27.
[38] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 27.
[39] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 26; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 39-40.

relationship to the language of "transgender" activism is that, for many transsexual female writers, transsexual female sex workers, and just transsexual women in general (such as myself and many of my friends, both inside and outside the academy), the language of "transgender" is ultimately alienating to our lives and erases the specific experiences and resources that we need to survive that are distinct from either those of transsexual men, genderfluid people, cross-dressers, or drag queens. It is in this way that I attempt to integrate the arguments of both Namaste and Serano, while also providing my own analysis from my experiences as a transsexual woman.

However, this linguistic minutia is merely part of the broader argument that Serano makes in *Whipping Girl*. Serano enters a debate that has been a part of second-wave feminism since the birth of the Gay Liberation movement: the conflict over the place and role of transsexual women and femininity within the feminist movement. Specifically, she responds to feminist scholars like Mary Daly, who called feminine women "painted birds," and Sheila Jeffreys, "who believes that femininity 'is the behavior required of the subordinate class of women in order to show their deference to the ruling class of men."[40] These feminists, who were also deeply homophobic and transphobic, with Sheila Jeffreys claiming "that [male-to-female] transsexuality and gay male femininity arise exclusively from sexual masochism," are classified by Serano as "unilateral feminists" who "viewed sexism as a straightforward matter of women being oppressed at the hands of men."[41] Yet, unilateral feminism is not the only form of feminism Serano critiques, for she also critiques feminism drawn from queer theory, or "deconstructive feminism," as well. This form of feminism believes, according to Serano, "that the category 'woman' is socially constructed and therefore doesn't exist independent of the social norms and discourses that bring it into being."[42]

[40] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 334.
[41] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 330, 34.
[42] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 335.

This understanding means that deconstructive feminists "typically depict the 'othering' of 'woman' as an inevitable by-product of that identity being binary-paired to [the identity of] 'man'."[43] For transsexuals, this classification of femininity being contingent on the existence of masculinity means that "straight expressions of femininity," even if they are done by someone "queer," i.e. transsexuals, are "bad" forms of femininity used to "naturalize the system" of binary gender.[44]

While these two feminisms may have broadly different underlying outcomes and perceptions of sex and gender, Serano argues that, in fact, both of these forms of feminism have something very important in common: their understanding of femininity as "artificial," as compared to masculinity, which is seen as a perceived "default" form of gender expression.[45] For Serano, this artificiality comes from four shared beliefs among these feminisms:

1. "Femininity is not a natural form of expression but rather one that is socially imposed"
2. "Most women are 'duped' in (sic) believing that their femininity arises intrinsically rather than due to extrinsic forces such as socialization or social constructs"
3. "People who are 'in the know' recognize that gender expression is easily malleable, and thus they can purposefully adopt a more radical, antisexist gender expression"
4. "Feminine women choose not to adopt these supposedly radical, antisexist gender expressions; [therefore], they may be seen as enabling sexism and thus collaborating in their own oppression."[46]

It is from these assumptions, which are not feminist, but have been internalized by wider society, that "transmisogyny," or the phenomenon "when a trans person is ridiculed or dismissed not

[43] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 335.
[44] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 336-37.
[45] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 336-37.
[46] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 337.

merely for failing to live up to gender norms, but for their expression of femaleness or femininity," manifests.[47] This transmisogyny, while not based on feminism, has influenced how feminism has thought about transsexual women and femininity as transmisogyny, being a variant of misogyny, is ever present in Western culture. In this sense, Serano argues that "we should learn to empower femininity itself," rather than considering femininity and vulnerability "as a sign of weakness."[48]

As stated previously, however, femininity, specifically transsexual femininity, is not only or mostly denigrated by feminism. Rather, Serano argues American culture itself contributes the most to societal transmisogyny. Specifically, she argues that mass media's focus on transsexual women compared to other types of trans people comes from "the assumption that femininity is inherently 'contrived,' 'frivolous,' and 'manipulative'," in contrast with masculinity, which is perceived as "natural" and "practical."[49] This results in an image of transsexual women as fake, even compared to cissexual femininity, and that transsexuality is a manifestation of a fetish.[50] Specifically, in contrast to transsexual women, transsexual men are ignored by culture the media as they are "unable to sensationalize them the way they do trans women without bringing masculinity itself into question."[51] This denigration of femininity means transsexual women are either treated as vain fetishists if they display conventional femininity or as delusional men if they do not.

Outside the context of transmisogyny, the scholar Rhey Ashley Hoskin has drawn upon this throughline of the role of anti-femininity in culture and LGBT, especially transsexual, embodiment through her concept of "femmephobia." For Hoskin, femmephobia "is prejudice,

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[47] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 14-15.
[48] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 18.
[49] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 43.
[50] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 44.
[51] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 46.

discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone who is *perceived* (sic) to identify, embody, or express femininely and toward people and objects gendered femininely," specifically stemming from a "perceived deviation from patriarchal femininity" as conceived of in the West.[52] Hoskin's understanding of this "patriarchal femininity" is "heterosexual, cis gender (sic) female, white, altruistic, self-sacrificing, remaining in the domestic sphere, silent, able/normative-bodied, upper-class, virtuous—a gender culturally projected onto a vacant, unclaimed, unassuming, female body, as opposed to arising out of self-actualization."[53] Femmephobia, Hoskin argues, while drawing on the existing concepts of misogyny and sexism, "differs from [them] in its focus on gender and femininity as opposed to… sex and femaleness," such that being seen as non-masculine is the axis upon which femmephobia functions.[54] In this distinction, Hoskin claims that while "feminist theory has distinguished sex from gender," "a comparable distinction of sexism/misogyny from the manifestations of feminine devaluation" had not entered into feminist discourses by 2017.[55] Hoskin argues that this femmephobia manifests in four different ways, ascribed femmephobia, based on the subordination of femininity to masculinity, perceived femmephobia, based on the target's perceived femininity, femme mystification, based on the dehumanization of feminine bodies, and pious femmephobia, based on shaming the femininity of the target.[56] Femmephobia is not merely restricted to transsexual women, like transmisogyny is, but rather applies to any individual who displays femininity outside of normative, or, "monolithic and patriarchally sanctioned femininity," such as trans women, femme lesbians, or feminine gay men.[57] While I do not use Hoskin's femmephobia as an analytical lens on its own, the explanation of the term helps

[52] Rhea Ashley Hoskin, "Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens," *Atlantis* 38, no. 1 (2017): 101.
[53] Rhea Hoskin, "Femme Theory: Femininity's Challenge to Western Feminist Pedagogies" (2013), 17-18.
[54] Hoskin, "Femme Theory," 100.
[55] Hoskin, "Femme Theory," 100.
[56] Hoskin, "Femme Theory," 102-03.
[57] Hoskin, "Femme Theory," 98.

describe how the doll can embody what would typically be seen as a form of normative femininity if embodied by a cissexual heterosexual woman, but is seen as lesser if embodied by a transsexual woman. Specifically, the "normative femininity" of these transsexual women is, by definition, non-normative, as it is not being performed by a cissexual heterosexual woman.

This four-pronged approach to understanding the emergence and development of contemporary scholarship on transsexuality and said scholarship's errors, based on the importance of trans agency, knowledge of the thriving trans subcultures which have been existent since the middle of the twentieth century, an understanding of the vital importance of femininity to transsexual women, and femmephobia as a lens of subjugation for transsexual women, relies both on understanding the transsexuals who were vital in the term's development and the institutions those transsexuals emerged from.

Thesis Structure

This thesis seeks to track the embrace of the doll among a predominantly white transsexual cultural and media sphere that emerged out of the downtown fashion avant-garde in New York City in the late 1980s. Doll culture consists of ideas, hopes, and desires already existent among transsexuals during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Specifically, the doll can partially be seen as a synecdoche for transsexuals and femme queens who embrace the interests in high fashion, surgery, and glamour that were influential among the generation of members of ball culture who came of age in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Women like Tracey Norman, Sugar, Octavia St. Laurent, and Venus Xtravaganza were the first dolls. As discussed earlier, it is unclear when or where the term "doll" emerged as a self-reference for transsexuals. This term likely originated among trans drag,

ball, and cabaret performers based in New York, but that is merely conjecture based on the scraps of evidence available. Starting in the second half of the 1980s, the term and the culture it embodied began to spread beyond the Black and Latine Harlem-based ball culture. This spread occurred through the burgeoning interactions between Harlem ball culture and the downtown fashion and nightlife avant-garde enabled by people like Patricia Field and HIV/AIDS fundraisers like the Love Ball. Women like Amanda Lepore and Connie Fleming are some of the earliest transsexual women from outside of ball culture to embrace the culture of the doll, and it is the development of the doll mediated by those women that this thesis tracks. Moreover, it is this development of the doll that is referred to whenever I make use of the term "doll." If I am discussing the doll as it existed and emerged in ball culture, i.e. the original understanding of the "doll" within a trans context, I am sure to specify it.

The first chapter explores the historiography of ball culture, fashion, and realness throughout the past two and a half decades. I begin this section by exploring the basics of ball culture, the gender system, the house system, and the physical form of the balls. In the first subsection of this chapter, I chart the pre-history of ball culture, tracing ball culture's origins back to pre-War drag balls popular among African-American LGBT people in New York and Chicago while demonstrating the continuity between the drag balls and ball culture. As I begin the historiography of ball culture, I examine how historians have dealt with the lack of primary source documents associated with the early generations of ball culture from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. After examining ball culture's basics, I examine the historiography of fashion as it relates to LGBT people. Alongside examining this broad historiography, I take a deeper look at how trans women are present in this historiography. Beyond just fashion's relationship to LGBT people, I also take a brief detour to examine niche fashion and style magazines, the types of fashion periodicals which

form the primary source base of my thesis. Finally, in this chapter, I examine the historiography of the concept of "realness" as it manifests in ball culture. For the first half of this final section, I focus on the historiography of realness in *Paris is Burning*, tracing how most understandings of realness in this context erase the lives of transsexual women. The second half of this section focuses on the manifestations of the realness in contemporary ball culture and Black and Latine LGBT life. Namely, I examine how the concepts of "realness" and "passing" appear in the historiography and how the slight differences between the meanings of those two terms are vital for understanding contemporary transsexuality, both in the form of the doll and writ large. Through the historiography of these three topics, I hope to provide an effective overview of the content necessary for understanding the arguments present in my thesis.

The second chapter explores Harlem ball culture and the downtown fashion avant-garde in New York during the 1980s, tracing the celebration of the doll by the fashion scene as stemming from interactions between ball culture and avant-garde facilitated by people like Patricia Field and Susanne Bartsch. I explore the history and development of contemporary ball culture, tracing it through three documentaries, *The Queen*, *T.V. Transvestite*, and *Paris is Burning*, which depict balls from 1967, 1982, and the late 1980s, respectively. Through those documentaries, I draw out the vital importance that fashion and glamour hold within ball culture and how fashion's influence manifested throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, I explore the development of the "doll" as a possibly unnamed yet very much present concept embraced by femme queens. The third section of the chapter examines the other culture influential to the popularization of the doll, transsexual women's involvement in the fashion industry in the 1980s and 1990s. Focusing on the figures of Teri Toye, Connie Fleming, and Amanda Lepore, I examine how predominantly white trans women broke through the unofficial exclusion of openly trans women within the fashion

industry, and how, despite systemic transphobia in the fashion industry, these trans women were able to achieve success, even if their success was limited. Finally, I conclude the chapter by exploring the lives of two cissexual women, Patricia Field and Susanne Bartsch, who, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, helped connect the uptown ball culture with the downtown fashion avant-garde and facilitated the cultural interaction which led to the later spread of the doll. By examining these two separate cultures and their eventual interactions, I hope to demonstrate the cultural milieu from which the doll emerged and how the doll spread among transsexual women outside of ball culture.

The third chapter explores how the components of the doll subculture started to diffuse beyond the New York nightlife and fashion scenes who had adapted the term from ball culture. I open my exploration in examining the development of a trans modeling culture in the 2010s. Specifically, I look at how Hari Nef's success in 2014 and 2015 helped lay the groundwork for the contemporary growth in the number of trans models working in high fashion. Alongside my exploration of the development of the contemporary trans modeling renaissance, exemplified by Nef, I trace the history of the trans-focused fashion magazine, *Candy*, from its early existence as a niche fashion magazine starring drag queens and cross-dressing celebrities, into its transformation, through the inclusion of transsexual women, into a niche fashion magazine focused on the high fashion and culture that the doll cares about. I coin this transformation, which I understand as occurring through an increase in the number of transsexual writers working for *Candy*, as "onlinegirliefication," based on the similar and more contemporary phenomenon occurring at *Paper* since Alaska Riley's (a.k.a @onlinegirlie) hiring.

The fourth chapter traces the spread of doll culture that began with *Candy* into the style magazines of *Paper* and *Interview*. I continue my exploration of onlinegirliefication, this time

tracing the term to its source in *Paper*, where I examine it within the context of the coterie of trans journalists employed at *Paper*, namely Alaska Riley, Linux, and Joan Summers. Alongside my examination of *Paper*'s onlinegirliefication, I also look at the onlinegirliefication of *Interview*, tying in Dara's employment as the fashion editor for the magazine with *Interview*'s recent foci on trans women's involvement in the fashion industry. Finally, drawing upon all of my findings throughout this thesis, I create a formalized definition of the doll within this predominantly-white transsexual media and fashion cultures. This definition, unlike the one I discuss in the introduction, does not set out a positive vision of who the doll is, but rather sets out a negative vision of who the doll is not.

This definition of who the doll is *not* should not be seen as universal or necessarily objective. Rather, like all categorizations, my definition of the doll refers to the doll as it exists within the relatively small and insular transsexual media and fashion spheres. While this manifestation of the term exists in the context of all that came before it, namely the contributions of Black and Latine trans women and femme queens who pioneered the doll, the women who whom this definition is applied to in this thesis tend to be whiter and wealthier than the pioneers of the term. This whiteness and wealth are partially what has enabled their presence in the historical record as it has contributed to their success in fashion and journalism.

Victoria, British Columbia, is a difficult place to conduct primary source research on a group of women (i.e. ball participants) whose presence in "mainstream" media available across the continent in a different country is lesser compared to their white counterparts. I would have loved, with more time and a better geographic location, to also explore the emergence of the doll in predominantly Black and Latine LGBT cultures that occurred parallel, however this research would require interviews and extensive primary source analysis that I lacked the time to pursue.

In the future, if I have the time / ever return to the academy, I would love to pursue this complementary research, but for now, it remains absent from this thesis.

Chapter One: To Be Real (To the History of Balls)

Because the dressing rooms and runways of balls are where the doll first developed as a distinct culture, understanding the history of drag balls, ball culture, and the associated concepts of fashion and realness, are fundamental to understanding dolls. Ball culture, according to Detroit-born professor and former butch queen performer Marlon Bailey, is a subculture where predominantly African-American and Latine LGBT people engage in "competitive presentation and performance categories at balls," whose participants form "houses," or non-biological families, and make use of a "gender system" unique to ball culture.[58] This system, depending on the source, consists of anywhere from four main genders, as mentioned by ball scholar Tara Susman-Peña in her 2000 paper in *disClosure,* "The Vogue of Life," to six main genders outlined by Marlon Bailey in his book, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps* (2013). The four common categories within these two works are "women," who are "biological females who live as women and are lesbian, straight-identified, or queer," "butches," who consist of masculine lesbians and transsexual men, "butch queens," cissexual "gay men who look like men," and "femme queens"/fem queens, who are "transgender women at various stages of gender transition involving hormonal and surgical processes, such as breast implants."[59] Butch queens, who are termed "housemothers" or "housefathers" are almost always the leaders of houses, and they often switch between which gendered term or category better defines them.[60] It is important to note, before proceeding further, that transsexual women and transsexual men who have undergone sexual reassignment surgery exist in a blurry indeterminate between either women and femme queens for

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[58] Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 4-5.
[59] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 36; Tara Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life: Fashion Culture, Identity, and the Dance of Survival in the Gay Balls," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2000): 119.
[60] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 43, 45.

transsexual women, or butches, men (a separate category Marlon Bailey mentions), and butch queens, for transsexual men and hence, there is often controversy over what categories they are eligible for.[61] The other two categories mentioned by Bailey but not Susman-Peña are: "men/trade," who are masculine men who identify as straight, and "butch queens up in drag," who are "gay men who perform in drag but do not take hormones" nor "live as women."[62] Ball culture's distinct system of identity provides a place where trans women are able to perform as women, as opposed to having to be considered drag queens or men, and therefore ball culture forms an important site of formation for transsexual cultures.

This complex system of identity and houses manifests in what Bailey calls a "community fashioned kinship system" and "kin labor."[63] This kinship system is convergent with the more common contemporary concept of the "chosen family;" the relationships between the members of the family or kin are not biological, but the non-biological family still serves "as a primary form of community and cultural belonging."[64] For Bailey, the creation of the kinship system of houses in ball culture, at least in the case of the Detroit ball scene, emerges from a restrictive notion of family within African-American communities that developed in the wake of the white backlash to the 1960s Civil Rights Movements and the Moynihan Report on African-American family structures, where African-American biological families of the 1970s and beyond became "bound together and undergirded by an ideology that fetishizes a heteropatriarchal (straight male-dominated) nuclear family structure."[65] This changing family structure was deeply homophobic, such that the families of the ball house were often directly formed by those African-American gay

[61] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 130.
[62] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 36.
[63] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 79.
[64] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 80.
[65] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 84.

and trans children who fled the increasing homophobia of the evolving African-American biological family structure of the 1970s and 1980s.[66] That is not to say that ball houses lack the patriarchal dimensions found in biological families. Bailey argues that the house mother and house father system characteristic of ball houses reproduces the "hegemonic norms" of biological families, such that house fathers, almost always butch queens, come out of a "fetishized masculinity" of fatherhood, and the house mothers, generally feminine butch queens or femme queens, are responsible for "all the work" necessary for running a house.[67] While house mothers do indeed hold more power within their houses, that power comes because of the "kin labor" that they do to run the house in spite of the discrimination they face because of their femininity by both other, more masculine, members of ball culture and society writ large.[68] The kin relations that emerge from ball culture provide a familial relationship where participation in the family is not contingent on conforming to a "heteropatriarchal" system of kinship, however, these kin relations still, filtered through the lens of the ball, uphold a masculine normativity where the labor dynamics found in heteropatriarchal biological families remain, such that ball mothers and fem queens face subordination and discrimination because of their femininity.

The Ball is a Drag

The precursors to ball culture emerged in pre-Prohibition and Prohibition era New York, where a pair of factors led to the development of the predecessors of modern ball culture. The first of these factors were the less stringent regulations on (compared to the post-Prohibition period),

[66] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 88.
[67] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 106-07.
[68] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 109.

and eventually illegality of, alcohol sales, which meant that there were far fewer incentives for bartenders and bar owners to exclude LGBT people from bars and clubs.[69] Specifically, the presence of LGBT people at bars was, even before Prohibition, used as an excuse by "social-purity societies" like the Committee of Fourteen, to raid and attempt to shut down establishments.[70] However, the less stringent official regulations meant that the power of vice squads and the liquor control boards that dogged LGBT life in the post-Prohibition period was present to far less of a degree before and during Prohibition, allowing the development of an open and complex LGBT bar and club culture. This social freedom of the Jazz Age in New York for LGBT people also brought them to the spotlight as performers at these bars and clubs. This second factor resulted in what became referred to, initially by George Chauncey in *Gay New York*, as the "pansy craze," or the increased interest among the cosmopolitan New York middle and upper middle classes, both Black and white, in drag performances.[71] The pansy craze, which was not an exclusively New York phenomenon, featured drag shows recognizable as being the predecessors of the drag shows of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, where 1920s and 1930s drag queens like Gene Malin and Jack Mason danced and performed the pop standards of the era on a stage for patrons of a bar or nightclub.[72]

More significant for this research, however, are the drag balls of Harlem. These drag balls were precursors to what became ball culture. Drag balls in Harlem emerged out of the heterosexual masquerade balls which became popular in New York in the 1880s and 1890s, where attendees wore masks "covering at least the upper third of the face" to engage in a cross-class and cross-sex

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[69] Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 24.
[70] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 138-39.
[71] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 301.
[72] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 314.

fête.[73] These early masquerade balls, while neither by nor for LGBT individuals, provided an opportunity for same-sex-relationships and cross-dressing to exist in public under the veil of disguise.[74] In the context of this LGBT-tolerant space, gay men began to organize their own masquerade balls by and for LGBT individuals, which they termed "drag balls," from the 1890s onwards.[75] These early balls shared with their modern iterations a focus on couture, where ball attendees prepared their outfits for a ball "for weeks beforehand."[76] Outfits in a 1933 ball included "the powdered head dresses of the period of Madame Pompadour," "the billowy, ballooning skirt of that picturesque pre-guillotine era," "the long, tight-fitting gowns which were a recent vogue," and "the long trailing skirts and the constricting coresets of the 1880s."[77] Again, much like their contemporary counterparts, these balls offered prizes for the best dressed, who "marched down a long elevated runway in the center of the hall to the applause and delighted screams of spectators."[78] In a precursor to designers like Thierry Mugler and Jean-Paul Gaultier drawing upon ball culture in the 1980s and 1990s for their runway looks, fashion designers were rumored to attend the drag balls of the 1920s and 1930s, drawing upon what the drag queens wore for next season's designs.[79] The fallout from the Great Depression and the end of alcohol prohibition in the United States meant that the funds to hold balls began to dry up and the non-enforcement of vice laws at establishments that served alcohol ended. Balls survived the austerity of the War and post-War cultural conservatism; however, they no longer held the cosmopolitan cultural cache that the pre-War drag balls and the pansy craze had.

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[73] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 291-92.
[74] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 292-93.
[75] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 294.
[76] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 294.
[77] La Forest Potter, *Strange Loves: A Study in Sexual Abnormalities* (New York: National Library Press, 1933), 188 Cited by; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 294.
[78] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 297.
[79] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 297.

Scholars continue to downplay and minimize the importance of femininity and effeminacy to the history of LGBT people. Understanding this exclusion is vital in helping contextualize the history of balls. The gay rights revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s and its contribution to the development of a contemporary gay male dignity, Chauncey argues, partially led to the erasure of the knowledge that the relative societal tolerance of LGBT people in pre-War New York had as the popular gay memory, despite the work of scholars like John D'Emilio, Allen Bérubé, and Lillian Faderman, was deeply ignorant of pre-World War II gay history.[80] This ignorance of gay history partially contributed to the development of an institutional anti-femininity among gay cultures by the 1970s and beyond, especially within the leather subculture, because of the widespread perception in heterosexual society that femininity among men was and is seen as lesser.[81] I bring this development of anti-femininity up to demonstrate how homosexual femininity and the "fairy" has, in contemporary gay life, become marginalized and erased, even among men who embrace a self-identification of "homosexual." That is not to say that femininity among cissexual gay men no longer exists (see twinks), but their position within wider society has become subordinate compared to their more masculine counterparts. This distaste for femininity among men who have sex with men is not new, with the "normal men" of pre-War New York defining themselves in opposition to the highly visible and feminine fairies.[82] Hence, in this trans-temporal environment of anti-femininity, I wish to build on the factual information provided by Chauncey about these early drag balls and connect it to the contemporary manifestations of femininity among LGBT people assigned male at birth, specifically in ball culture. My scholarship is based on an argument

[80] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 9.
[81] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 10-11; Lucas Hilderbrand, *The Bars are Ours* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 39.
[82] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 115.

that the pre-War drag balls of New York are the direct predecessors to modern-day ball culture, and therefore, the milieu from which the doll emerges.

It is important to note, that despite my focus on New York drag balls (as they are ultimately what birthed contemporary ball culture), drag balls were not an exclusively New York phenomenon. Drag balls flourished in Chicago, America's second city, surviving with better documentation in the post-War and post-pansy craze period. In 1997, historian Allen Drexel published his exploration of ball and drag culture from 1935 until 1960 in the South Side of Chicago, "Before Paris Burned." As the title indicates. Drexel contextualizes his work within the media and academic coverage of ball culture after the release of *Paris is Burning*, arguing that existing scholarship on LGBT history after the Great Depression has ignored the influence of race and class on how LGBT people constituted gay social and cultural lives, especially among poor African-American LGBT individuals.[83] In one example of the ignorance displayed by historians towards Black and working class LGBT people, Drexel examines 1940s and 1950s Chicago drag balls, their participants, and how the tolerance, if not acceptance, of drag queens among African American communities differs from the "bleak and monochromatic picture" of 1940s and 1950s gay life in America found among the works numerous academics, such as John D'Emilio.[84] Drexel's tracing of this conditional gay acceptance and thriving gay culture into the post-War period is what differentiates his work from that of both D'Emilio's and Chauncey's, even if Drexel's underlying argument is very similar to that of Chauncey's. Drexel argues that, even more than New York (because of laxer policing), drag balls in Chicago were sexually and racially integrated spaces where "working-class, mostly [but not exclusively] Black, gay men and lesbians"

[83] Allen Drexel, "Before Paris Burned: Race, Class, and Male Homosexuality on the Chicago South Side, 1935-1960," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119-20.
[84] Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 121.

could "socialize publicly" and, where for fairies, they could earn a (tenuous) living performing as a drag queen.[85] Chicago drag balls, like their New York counterparts, "centered around elaborate fashion shows replete with runway competitions" for drag queens.[86] These balls also were written about, if not particularly sympathetically, in the mainstream African-American press like "*Jet, Ebony*, and *The Chicago Defender*." Because of Chicago's national role in the publishing and distribution of African-American media in the midcentury, coverage of these drag balls became even more widespread than their New York counterparts.[87]

Drexel connects drag balls and the struggles and triumphs of Chicago drag queens in the 1940s and 1950s with the Stonewall Revolution of 1969, arguing that drag queens protecting themselves from homophobic violence by fighting back in 1953 against "a crowd of about a hundred teen-ages youths," embodied the "same resistant spirit" displayed by the queens who "helped launch the lesbian and gay liberation movement" by fighting back against the police at Stonewall.[88] Drexel's analysis is sadly incomplete as he ultimately restricts his understanding to "gayness," rather than transness. As such, he ignores the effects of transphobia and transmisogyny in discrimination against drag queens and the importance of drag balls as a place for *drag* and *femininity* to be performed. In tracing the historiography of drag balls, I hope to be able to highlight the desert that is writing on early twentieth-century drag balls from a trans lens, and while the temporal focus of my scholarship lies later, I hope to provide groundwork for a more extensive exploration of drag balls to be researched and written in the future.

[85] Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 133, 29.
[86] Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 138.
[87] Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 139.
[88] Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 139.

Broaching the Generational Gap

A significant challenge faced by historians documenting ball culture is the fact that, while the culture emerged in the relatively recent past, its emergence was poorly covered by media and the pandemic of HIV/AIDS has taken an extreme toll on the ball community. In the absence of textual primary sources, as participants generally did not leave a written record about their time in ball culture, historians must turn to other types of sources to construct their histories. One group of alternative sources historians turn to are oral histories. Chantel Regnault, in her 2011 book of photojournalism of New York ball culture, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York 1989-92*, includes an introduction by British academic Tim Lawrence on the history of ball culture, a collection of Regnault's photos, and writings by and interviews with former members of New York ball culture reflecting on their time in the culture.

Lawrence's short introduction provides a brief history of ball culture, tracing it from Marcel Christian LaBeija's first all African-American drag ball in 1962 to examining its relationship to pop culture at large, especially in relation to Madonna's 1990 release of "Vogue" and on to the influence of the ball in the 2000s. Regarding ball culture's relationship to the popular culture, Lawrence discusses how ball culture broke into the mainstream initially through the downtown club scene, specifically the scene surrounding diva queen (cissexual female drag queen) Chi-Chi Valenti's journalism focusing on the predominantly white House of Field and the predominantly Latine House of Xtravaganza.[89] While Valenti's journalism, which began with an article for the downtown avant-garde magazine, *Details* in 1988, was not the only spark for increasing involvement in ball culture by the fashion industry, her journalism was read by people heavily

[89] Chantal Regnault and Stuart Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York, 1989-92* (New York: Soul Jazz Books, 2011), 6.

involved in the downtown scene and the fashion world. Lawrence argues that Valenti's writing played a part in fashion designer Thierry Mugler choosing a variety of drag queens and ball culture participants to walk for his 1989 spring/summer show in Paris and in fashion designer and downtown it-girl Susanne Bartsch's staging of the AIDS Love Ball the same year.[90]

While important in the fashion world and the downtown scene, Valenti's and Bartsch's roles in bringing ball culture to mainstream fame paled in comparison to the 1990 release of Jennie Livingston's documentary on Harlem ball culture, *Paris is Burning* and Madonna's release of "Vogue" the same year, which brought vogue pioneers like Jose Xtravaganza and Willi Ninja, into the spotlight.[91] This publicity, Lawrence argues, did not bring a greater level of financial or social support for balls and their participants, however, outside of the lucky few like Jose Xtravaganza, who became a backup dancer for Madonna.[92] In the years following ball culture's fifteen minutes of fame in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of its participants like the aforementioned Willi Ninja or *Paris is Burning* star Dorian Corey would pass away from the genocidal pandemic of HIV/AIDS.[93] Lawrence claims that while the lack of wider support in the wake of the media obsession may be disappointing in retrospect, "the queens … shared few illusions about their prospects in the fashion world," and instead had a "shared impetus … to socialize, have fun and survive, because this was the only life they had in front of them and they might as well live it."[94] This short introduction, detailing the fame and travails of ball culture in the late 1980s and 1990s is merely one part of Regnault's wider work.

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[90] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 6.
[91] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 8.
[92] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 9.
[93] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 9.
[94] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 10.

Even more fascinating and vital for understanding ball culture are the interviews Regnault conducted with numerous people active in ball culture during this time, many of whom passed away during the compiling and editing of her book and in the decade since. The interviews and memories share a common theme of nostalgia for the ball culture of the 1980s compared to ball culture in the early twenty-first century. The first of the components of this nostalgia is an observation of the increasingly butch queen nature of ball culture, as compared to its femme queen origins. Hector Xtravaganza, Kevin UltraOmni, and an anonymous femme queen interviewed by Regnault all mention the absence of butch queen categories in ball's earliest years in the 1970s. Hector Xtravaganza, while not going as far as the others in mentioning the disproportionate femme queen presence, discusses how his introduction to ball culture was meeting Dorian Corey, whom he refers to as his "gay auntie."[95] Kevin UltraOmni discusses how "all the categories were drag queens" in 1975 and the category of "drag queen" became "queen" and refers to "the ones that take hormones and get implants."[96] The anonymous femme queen, obviously more in tune to trans representation in ball culture, claims that "if you go back to the original pageants, it was all femme queens," and as ball culture became more formalized, especially through the development of the house system, "femme queens got less and less."[97] Another aspect of nostalgia present in the interviews is a consistent claim that balls have gotten too competitive in more recent times. For Hector Xtravaganza, this manifests itself in a claim that there are too many balls, such that "the kids are not going to church, they don't need sleep."[98] Within the increasing competitiveness and prominence of the balls within Black and Latine LGBT life, Hector Xtravaganza fears that balls have consumed other aspects of Black and Latine culture for the younger generation. Furthermore,

[95] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 32.
[96] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 60.
[97] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 179.
[98] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 35.

he claims that the physical act of voguing has become too intense, which he compares to "voguing on meth."[99] Voguing, as defined by vogue pioneer Willi Ninja in *Paris is Burning*, is a form of "throwing shade," or battling, based on pantomiming moves originally drawn from fashion magazines like *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*.[100] This pantomiming often relies on intense flexibility in one's limbs and back and skill at contorting one's body. While Hector Xtravaganza is the most critical of contemporary balls, Kevin UltraOmni still critiques how "vogue fem,"[101] the vogue style most common in contemporary ball culture and what a non-participant imagines when they imagine voguing, which relies even more on flexibility than traditional voguing, "is something that teenagers or people in their 20s should do, because anyone over 40 that tries that dip will regret it."[102] UltraOmni's critique does not have the bitter rhetoric of Hector Xtravaganza, but still demonstrates pangs of regret over the old ways of voguing and balls dying. Unlike the other two, the direct critique of contemporary voguing is absent in the interview with the anonymous femme queen, but the critique of the lack of femme queen involvement mentioned previously parallels the agèd regret of the two older voguers. This oral history demonstrates some of the missing ideas and information necessary to understanding the history of ball culture, namely the extremely early years of ball culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s and how people were initially socialized into ball culture, that, because of ball culture's obscurity for much of its existence, can only be found through talking to former participants.

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[99] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 35.
[100] Jennie Livingston, *Paris is Burning* (Off-White Production, 1990), 36:30-37:15.
[101] As an aside, "vogue fem" is merely the name of this style of voguing, which tends to be more feminine, but "vogue fem" does not involve femme queens, other than then fact that "vogue fem" was the first style of vogue that femme queens were allowed to perform in ball culture.
[102] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 60.

It Costs a Billion to Look This Good

Fashion plays a vital role in the preconditions for the emergence of the doll as a distinct subculture as it is one of the common interests among nearly all participants of ball culture. However, scholarly engagement with the history of LGBT people's involvement in the overall fashion industry has been scant. Valerie Steele's 2013 book, *A Queer History of Fashion, from the Closet to the Catwalk*, released as a companion book to an exhibition of the same name at the Museum at FIT (Fashion Institute of Technology), and the 2019 book by Elspeth Brown, *Work!: A Queer History of Modelling,* are by far the two most prominent monographs in the field. Neither of these works are trans-focused and both touch on transsexual women only briefly, but, because of the very small number of academics focusing on LGBT fashion history and the subsequently small number of books and articles about LGBT involvement, they are what we must focus on.

Steele's *Queer History of Fashion* consists of both her main essay sharing a title with the book, as well as six shorter essays dealing with lesbian, gay, and activist fashion written by other historians. I will focus on the main essay, as that is the only work directly relevant to my exploration of transsexuals in the fashion industry. Steele uses the common observation and stereotype that "many fashion designers were and are gay men," especially those in high fashion, "from Cristóbal Balenciaga and Christian Dior to Yves Saint Laurent and Alexander McQueen" to explore the involvement of LGBT individuals in fashion throughout history.[103] In her exploration, she argues that either:

[103] Valerie Steele, ed., *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 7.

> A: LGBT people's disproportionate involvement in fashion stems from LGBT people's "complicated perceptions of both fashion and sexuality."
>
> B: Disproportionate LGBT involvement in the fashion industry is illusional, [i.e. no more prevalent than the percentage of the general populace that is LGBT], but still "fashion cannot truly be understood without taking account of the creative contributions, both individual and collective, of generations of LGBT people."[104]

In tracing this LGBT involvement, Steele reaches back to the earliest of the modern queer subcultures in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the mollies, the macaronis, and the man-milliners.

The mollies, whom Steele defines as "'effeminate sodomites' of the popular classes," were feminine gay men who congregated in "molly-houses," or the earliest modern predecessor to what became gay bars.[105] The mollies were joined by the macaronis, who were a predecessor group to the dandies of the nineteenth century who displayed unconventional and androgyne masculinity.[106] Finally, these groups were joined by the man-milliners, which was a term that "referred to men in the fashion trades who made, decorated and/or sold dresses, hats, and other fashionable items of women's clothing."[107] Steele argues that these three groups, while not exclusively "queer," demonstrate the earliest involvement of disproportionately "queer" men in shaping the development of the conservative fashions of the nineteenth centuries, which set themselves in

[104] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 72.
[105] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 12-13.
[106] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 15.
[107] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 15.

opposition to the more "colorful," "embroidered," "trimmed," and "accessorized" fashion that dominated menswear in the middle of the eighteenth century.[108]

Both men's and women's fashion in the nineteenth and twentieth century featured substantial contributions from LGBT people. The dandies, a successor group to the macaronis, were a culture that Steele sees as closely related to both Oscar Wilde and the existing gay cultures in New York in the nineteenth century. They represented "a type of sartorial conformity with the potential to be profoundly nonconformist," especially when compared to the common LGBT stereotype of flamboyance.[109] The focus on aesthetic perfection played a role in the numerous gay male fashion designers in fashion design and other industries like "fashion photography, hairdressing, the performing arts, and costume design for film and theater" were often "relatively tolerant havens for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals."[110] These gay male fashion designers often found themselves at odds with an initially female dominated industry. Steele describes how Coco Chanel mocked François Dior and other gay French designers as "dreaming of being women so [much that] they make real women look like transvestites."[111] This hostility towards gay designers was enhanced by the intense sexual conservativism on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1950s. Even during this nadir of gay acceptance, there were gay fashion designers, but they were rarely openly gay in public.[112] While the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its importance to public health meant that gay visibility had been significantly expanded by the 1980s, Steele argues that "it is not clear … to what extent the public was aware of the sexual orientation of even celebrity designers."[113] While people like Calvin Klein were out as homosexual and frank about their sex lives, other designers

[108] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 15-16.
[109] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 20.
[110] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 35.
[111] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 42.
[112] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 45.
[113] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 55.

like Halston and Yves Saint Laurent were far more discreet about their sexuality.[114] Designers like Jean Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler, and Gianni Versace, however, were not only openly gay, but also made use of androgynous clothing, LGBT models, and fetish wear in a way not done by major designers before.[115]

As gay men became more visible in the fashion industry in the 1970s and 1980s, partially due to the HIV/AIDS crisis, Steele argues the backlash demonstrated by Coco Chanel in the 1940s and 1950s returned. Radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys claimed that "gay fashion designers project their unalleviated hatred and fear onto women through cruel fashions," and that there is a "cult of femininity among men" which manifests itself through transsexualism.[116] This history demonstrates for Steele, not only the importance of LGBT people to fashion, but also that the fashion industry still contains and deals with homophobia and conflict between women and gay men.[117] Steele's overview of LGBT people in the fashion industry, while brief and incomplete, provides an important starting point for all contemporary research on the relationship between fashion and queerness.

The history of transsexuals in modeling, especially in designer fashion, is a field barely explored, but, one understanding of the relationship between transsexuals and the modeling industry can be found in Elspeth Brown's 2019 book, *Work!: A Queer History of Modeling*.[118] Brown uses the word queer both in its historic sense, as a term meaning "odd, or crooked," and in its modern sense, "as those with nonnormative sexualities," to discuss how individuals outside of "whitestream" culture, whether they be African-Americans, Asians, gay men, or trans women,

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[114] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 55-56.
[115] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 59-60.
[116] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 69.
[117] Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion*, 69.
[118] Elspeth H. Brown, *Work! : A Queer History of Modeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 9.

helped shape modern commercialization and capitalism through their bodies.[119] Brown's expansive definition of "queer" leads to some spurious historical analysis, such as her argument that black stage modeling groups, like Irvin C. Miller's "Brownskin Models," in their exclusion from the segregated modeling industry, have a parallel in the gay and lesbian tendency to "produce market-mediated cultural institutions – whether bars or newspapers - due to their exclusion from nonmarket forms of association."[120] The conflation of one group which was historically enslaved, excluded from society, and subject to disproportionate state violence, with (almost exclusively white in her work) "queers" who were heavily involved in the fashion industry (especially the design and photographic side) from its earliest days is an assertion that, if not anti-Black outright, minimizes the centuries long struggles for humanity by and for African-Americans.[121] While "queer" and "Black" are not mutually exclusive terms, attempting to co-opt non-LGBT Black history as queer history is an ineffective mode of historical analysis. These conflations come in spite of Brown's own acknowledgement in the introduction of criticisms of use of the term "queer," by Gloria Anzaldúa and Susan Stryker, who call attention to its erasure of the different struggles that non-white "queers" go through and for its erasure of the trans experience, respectively.[122] Brown's acknowledgment of said issue, but inability to acknowledge that the way she uses "queer" is the exact way that Anzaldúa and Stryker are criticizing, demonstrates why I feel Brown misunderstands the critiques of the term in the first place.

Brown touches upon the history of transsexuals in the modeling industry. Brown uses Tracey Norman, a black transsexual model, who began her career in ball culture before being picked up by Clairol to model for hair dye, as a synecdoche for transsexuals' history in the

[119] Brown, *Work!*, 14, 16.
[120] Brown, *Work!*, 101.
[121] Brown, *Work!*, 25-67.
[122] Brown, *Work!*, 10.

modeling industry.[123] Despite her success in working with Clairol, Norman was outed in 1979 by stylist and former childhood acquaintance André Douglas as a transsexual and subsequently was blackballed from the modeling industry.[124] According to Brown, Norman's fate demonstrated that "while the modeling industry was willing to cross gender lines," i.e., by allowing female models to perform photoshoots in masculine attire, "it was not willing to cross the lines of sex."[125] The fashion industry's exclusion of transsexuals paralleled most of society at the time, and fits into the radical feminist critique of modeling, which had been partially internalized by the fashion industry in the 1970s and 1980s, as "tying femininity to technologies of commercialized, synthetic, [and] normative beauty."[126] This industrial desire for "natural beauty," stemming from the fashion industry's partial embrace of second-wave feminist critiques, conflicts inherently with the beauty of a transsexual, as we rely on surgery, hormones, cosmetics, and attire to achieve beauty.

During the 1980s, the importance of natural beauty waned as the era of the supermodel began, and transsexuals became more accepted within the fashion industry, partially thanks to the efforts of the people involved in nightlife culture. Teri Toye was a transsexual model originally from Des Moines who became involved in the East Village avant-garde of Andy Warhol and his Superstars, where she worked initially with photographer Steven Meisel and designer Stephen Sprouse.[127] Toye, despite being out as a transsexual, broke into the mainstream modelling industry, working for Jean-Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler, and Chanel.[128] Toye's success opened the door for future trans models, like Janet Mock, Hari Nef, and Hunter Schafer. While Brown's work barely

[123] Brown, *Work!*, 3.
[124] Brown, *Work!*, 4.
[125] Brown, *Work!*, 263.
[126] Brown, *Work!*, 226.
[127] Brown, *Work!*, 267.
[128] Brown, *Work!*, 268.

scratches the surface of transsexual involvement in the fashion industry, her work stands alone in covering it beyond one sentence or a short comment, hence its value must not be understated.

Fashioning an Insider Press

Outside of just studying LGBT involvement in the overall fashion industry, my focus on niche periodicals as sources makes it necessary to understand these small periodicals on their own terms. For this, I turned to Ane Lynge-Jorlén's 2017 work, *Niche Fashion Magazines: Changing the Shape of Fashion.* "Niche fashion magazines," in Lynge-Jorlén's work, are understood as "small scale independent fashion magazines that merge high fashion with art and style cultures, often targeting both men and women."[129] These niche fashion magazines emerged out of and exist alongside "style magazines," which originated as self-published fashion magazines focusing on street style, but over time became a synthesis of fashion shoots featuring models' and stylists' own clothes, the new works of young designers, and "1990s' ecstasy 'drug culture' and hedonism."[130] Lynge-Jorlén argues that niche fashion magazines are "a glossier extension of the style" magazines which were seen as "subcultural and perhaps more subversive" for "models, new stylists, new photographers, and art directors."[131] Despite their small circulation (no more than seventy thousand a year globally for the most successful periodicals), niche fashion magazines end up being extremely important to the fashion industry as they "merge edge [in the form of style magazines] and elite [in the form of high fashion], bridging the avant-garde and the

[129] Ane Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines: Changing the Shape of Fashion*, ed. Reina Lewis and Elizabeth Wilson, Dresss Cultures, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 32.
[130] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 25-28.
[131] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 31.

establishment."[132] This mixing is important, according to Lynge-Jorlén, because niche fashion magazines include both "newcomers and established talent," creating a space where young designers, photographers, and writers can "gain prestigious exposure" and "propel their careers."[133] Niche fashion magazines, Lynge-Jorlén argues, are "the haute-couture of the fashion press" because of their low print numbers and their content, which assumes a level of familiarity with the fashion industry, either lightly and ironically mocking the industry without outright critiquing it or serving as the fashion world's version of academic journals, "taking fashion seriously … as a high cultural art form."[134] Lynge-Jorlén's work is vitally important for this thesis as are the three magazines which I focus on: two are style magazines (*Interview and Paper*) and one is a niche fashion magazine (*Candy*). Despite the very limited intellectual work done on niche fashion magazines, all of it is based upon the scholarship of Lynge-Jorlén, whose PhD thesis originating the concept was adapted into this book.[135]

While Steele, Brown, and Lynge-Jorlén all focus their research on the industry-side of fashion, whether that be designers, models, or publishers, Tara Susman-Peña's "The Vogue of Life: Fashion Culture, Identity, and the Dance of Survival in the Gay Balls," published in *disClosure* in 2000, explores the importance of fashion to members of ball culture and the influence of fashion on the physical and social structure of ball culture. The title itself is a reference to the 1990 Eric Pooley article in *New York Magazine*, "The Vogue of Death," documenting the murder of Chino DeJesus by Vuitton LaBeija over a scoring dispute at a ball.[136] Despite this titular similarity, the articles bear little topical relationship to each other. Susman-Peña focuses on the importance of

[132] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 33-34.
[133] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 38.
[134] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 69-70.
[135] Ane Lynge-Jorlén, "Between Edge and Elite: Niche Fashion Magazines, Producers and Readers" (Doctoral University of the Arts London, 2009), n.p.
[136] Eric Pooley, "The Vogue of Death," *New York Magazine*, October 16, 1990, 55-56.

fashion to the development of and perpetuation of ball culture as a distinct subculture. Specifically, she discusses how participants within ball culture mythologize designer fashion, and even among those who do not wear / cannot afford designer, the participants "are among the most fashionable youth of New York."[137] She details how the physical practice and process of balls mirrors that of fashion shows, through "the use of the runway, the restriction of the movement to the runway, the concern with display and evaluation of the most fashionable clothing, and the blaring music."[138]

Most important for Susman-Peña is the connection between the dance practiced in ball culture, voguing, and its relationship with fashion. Beyond its name and origin, stemming from early forms of the dance looking as if one flipped through an issue of the fashion magazine, *Vogue*, voguing's relationship with fashion manifests itself "if fashion is used as a verb."[139] This fashioning exists in ball culture as voguing's and wider ball culture's "ability to create a world, to reinvent family, and to reconfigure [participants'] bodies, in short 'to sit down at the sewing machine and take a simple garment and turn it into a grand-prize-winning ensemble'."[140] Among the predominantly African-American or Latine communities of gay men who make up the participants in ball culture, "the ability to change oneself by shaping one's looks and one's movements may be one of the few options to assert power" in a homophobic and white supremacist world.[141] Given the centrality of fashion to ball culture, a community closely connected to transsexuals, especially non-white transsexuals whose lives during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s birthed modern transsexual lingo and culture, it is unsurprising that fashion has been highly influential for transsexuals writ large.

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[137] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 121.
[138] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 122.
[139] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 124.
[140] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 125.
[141] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 134.

Realness is a Verb

Another deeply important concept in the history and sociology of ball culture is the concept of "realness." As a primer for what "realness" is and what its basic components are, let us return to Marlon Bailey's *Butch Queen Up in Pumps.* Bailey defines realness within ball culture as a "criterion requir[ing] adherence to certain performances, self-presentation, and embodiments that are believed to capture the authenticity of particular gender and sexual identities."[142] For Bailey, realness serves two separate purposes in ball culture: first, as "a guide that members use to construct, rehearse, and hone their performances and the presentation of the bodies to compete, be judged, and snatch trophies at balls," and, secondly, as "the way in which members enact their realness performances to create the illusion of gender and sexual normativity and to blend into the larger heteronormative society to avoid homophobic discrimination, exclusion, violence, and death."[143] The first of these two purposes manifests itself within competition categories, like "thug realness," with butch queens dressing like a stereotypical young male gang member or "femme queen realness," with femme queens being scored based on if they are perceived as a feminine cis woman or not.[144] This conception of realness has not generated discourse or controversy in the same way that the second purpose has.

The role of "realness" off the ball runway has been a matter of debate within the academy, not coincidently, among queer theorists. As briefly touched upon earlier within the context of Namaste's scholarship, Judith Butler's transmisogynistic jeremiad against Venus Xtravaganza and

[142] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 55.
[143] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 55-56.
[144] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 59-60.

Paris is Burning in their book, *Bodies That Matter,* has served as the basis of academic critique of the concept of realness since the book's initial publication in 1993. Butler argues that Venus Xtravaganza's desire for a husband and the perceived security of white womanhood, both expressed through Venus Xtravaganza's realness, are a "phantasmic (mythical) pursuit of a transubstantiation (transformation) into various forms of drag, transsexualism, and uncritical miming of the hegemonic" institutions and gender roles in society.[145] In Butler's mind, Venus Xtravaganza's mimicking of white heteronormative gender roles is emblematic of a false consciousness developed from her (impossible) desire to be seen as a "real" woman. Whilst Namaste critiques Butler's erasure of Venus Xtravaganza's material reality as a transsexual sex worker and how that status influenced her life and death, my criticism of Butler's critique of realness comes from Butler's misunderstanding of the psychology and life experiences of a transsexual woman and why one transitions in the first place.[146] One way Butler's misunderstanding of the lives of transsexual women manifests in "Gender is Burning" is in their one-dimensional attempts to make sense of Venus Xtravaganza's desire to be seen as "a real woman" through her hope to get married and "find an imaginary man who will designate a class and race privilege that promises a permanent shelter from racism, homophobia, and poverty."[147] In the text, there is no thought or assumption that Venus Xtravaganza has gender dysphoria and not living her life as a "real woman" causes her intense psychological distress. No, for Butler, Venus Xtravaganza's transition and desire for full womanhood has to reflect an "idealized identification," common among ball culture participants with, presumably cissexual, "poor Black women and Latinas" which supposedly "originat[es] in the complex of racist, homophobic,

[145] Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," 131.
[146] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 14.
[147] Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," 130.

misogynist, and classist constructions that belong to larger hegemonies of oppression."[148] This denaturalization and socialization of transsexuality, while not claiming that "all gender is drag" or "all gender is performative," (two statements that Butler does not make but are frequently and falsely attributed to them), places transsexuality as being part of a understanding of gender outside of the boundaries of sexual reassignment, raised in opposition to transsexuality being a condition which manifests itself in distress at one's natal sex that is present whether or not the societal assumptions attributed to sex roles exist in their hegemonic form.[149]

Whilst Butler's understanding of Venus Xtravaganza demonstrates an ignorance of transsexual life, their theorizing about Octavia St. Laurent, another femme queen featured in *Paris is Burning*, pointedly misunderstands the film and Octavia St. Laurent in order to advance their argument despite the overwhelming evidence against it. In describing the scene where Octavia St. Laurent is having a photoshoot done in a studio by a male photographer, Butler claims that "a white lesbian [Livingston], phallically organized by the use of the camera (elevated to the status of disembodied gaze, holding out the promise of erotic recognition), eroticizes a black male-to-female transsexual—presumably preoperative—who 'works' perceptually as a woman."[150] Besides the explicit lesbophobia towards Livingston reducing Livingston's documentary work to a merely a sexual gaze, continued in the next paragraph where Butler asks if "Octavia is Jennie Livingston's kind of girl?", Butler's argument hinges on an assumption that Octavia St. Laurent has no autonomy or agency of her own and only does a photoshoot or participates in the film in order to attempt to achieve an "impossible dream," even at the cost of her own sexualization at the hand of the director.[151] Less than fifteen minutes before the scene in which Octavia St. Laurent has

[148] Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," 132.
[149] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 336.
[150] Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," 135.
[151] Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," 135.

her photoshoot done, she is giving a tour of her apartment, covered in posters of models, to Livingston, discussing with her and another unnamed person how she idolizes Swedish supermodel Paulina Porizkova and saying:

> Someday I hope to be up there with her. If that could be me, I think I would be the happiest person in the world just knowing that I am, that I can compare to Paulina, to stand next to her and take pictures with her.[152]

It is unsurprising, based on the examples that I have shown of Butler's errors in comprehending the lives of transsexuals, that Butler misunderstands in "Gender is Burning" why a young trans woman might want to become a model, but this misunderstanding undermines their writing in such a way that Butler's work directly erases transsexual lives and transsexual struggles, especially those of Black and Latine transsexuals.

However, it is important to note that Butler's personal views on trans people have changed since they initially wrote *Bodies That Matter* in 1993. Butler recognizes that their conception of transness in their works from the early 1990s was easily interpreted as arguing "that a person's felt sense of gender was … unreal" even if they argue that was not what they actually meant in their understanding of gender present in these works.[153] As such, my critique is targeted at the work as it was written in the 1990s. *Bodies That Matter* is still a highly influential text within queer theory, hence it still deserves exposé on the anti-trans and anti-feminine views the work perpetuates, but these views are no longer the views of Butler themself, and therefore, should not be seen as an indictment of Butler as a person or as a philosopher in their current form.

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[152] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 44:36-45:08.
[153] Williams and Butler, "Judith Butler on gender and the trans experience," n.p.

On a moderately more positive note, let us turn away from queer theory to film studies dealing with *Paris is Burning.* Lucas Hilderbrand's 2013 book-length study of *Paris is Burning*, entitled *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic* engages in a discussion of the meaning of "realness" within the context of the film. Hilderbrand, much like Butler, misunderstands ball culture and its participants. However, rather than going into the Freudian concept of penis envy, as Butler does, Hildebrand's analytical errors, specifically those regarding realness, come from a central misunderstanding of the gender system found in ball culture. Theorizing about the ball categories featured in *Paris is Burning*, Hilderbrand discusses the "Butch Queen First Time in Drags At A Ball" category, claiming that "Butch Queen (sic) suggests an intentional failure to pass."[154] This sentence is prima-facie not true: butch queens are gay men who may participate in categories involving drag queen realness, and butch queens are not necessarily masculine in either their day-to-day lives or time on the catwalk.[155] Furthermore, the phrase "first time in drags" is the part of the category which implies a failure to pass as the category is based on "doing bad drag," something that Hilderbrand mentions in the same paragraph.[156]

Outside of his somewhat flawed understanding of gender and categorization in ball culture, Hilderbrand does draw out an extremely important and useful throughline in the film: the generational differences around realness. Hildebrand argues that realness in *Paris is Burning* is, "for the ball" participants, "about creating the identities and spaces they need to live," whether it be as butch queens or fem queens.[157] The importance of realness, while something that is shared among all ball participants, is understood quite differently depending on the generation of ball

[154] Lucas Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, ed. Thomas Waugh and Matthew Hays, Queer Film Classocs, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013), 50.
[155] Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 43-45.
[156] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 50.
[157] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 56.

performers defining its importance. Beginning with Dorian Corey's discussion of Venus Xtravaganza's walking in the Femme Queen Realness category, he points out how FQ Realness, shaded, or subtly insulted, by Dorian Corey as a category "usually … for *young* queens" highlights the "generational divides among the ball walkers" over what categories are reserved for which groups of people.[158] Hilderbrand's mention of the generational divide continues in his discussion of Pepper LaBeija's comments about many younger members of the culture transitioning, where Pepper LaBeija claims that those who transition supposedly end up with "worse lives" than the "fabulous lives" Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent dream about.[159] While pointing out this generational divide, Hilderbrand stops short in actually analyzing *why* this generational divide exists. He does not discuss why the younger generation of ball participants may not have had the dislike that Dorian Corey had about the importance of consumerism and fashion to realness or the reticence Pepper LaBeija had about transitioning or displaying femininity outside of balls. Ultimately, this failure of exploration stems from the same place as his failure to explore Venus Xtravaganza's and Octavia St. Laurent's transition within the book, despite alluding to an exploration of it; a general ignorance and disconnect from transness necessary to understand the film. Hildebrand acknowledges this ignorance in his introduction, saying that "the difference between [the ball participants'] lives and [Hildebrand's] has been part of what allowed the film to make such a strong impression on [him]."[160] However, despite this acknowledgement of his positionality, his scholarship drifts into attempts to understand the psychology of transsexuals run headlong into his relative ignorance of the lives of trans youth, and leads to a situation where he seemingly fails to engage in an examination of younger fem queens like Octavia St. Laurent or

[158] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 57.
[159] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 71-72.
[160] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 20.

Venus Xtravaganza, who are central to understanding the film. This failure and avoidance of going the extra mile is better than Butler's theories about the significance of "hegemonic gender norms" to the transsexual lives of Venus Xtravaganza or Octavia St. Laurent or their Freudian analysis of Livingston's camera, but ultimately Hilderbrand's exploration of the film feels incomplete in a way that neither he nor any cis writer could truly solve.

As I have touched upon it before, cis writers' incomplete understanding of trans self-conception stems from the over-intellectualization of transness as a state of being. Scholars like Butler and Hildebrand, in their attempts to understand transsexual femininity, fail to consider the basal cause of gender dysphoria as a reason for embracing femininity. Ultimately, a perspective that privileges identity over materiality, as this understanding implies, is one of the epistemological failures of queer theory which I seek to correct. However, there still is a space for what is ultimately an identity-based critique stemming from a failure to acknowledge how the dissonance between the mind and body stemming from gender dysphoria contributes significantly to a desire for femininity in a way that one who has never experienced gender dysphoria cannot comprehend. I am not a psychologist nor do I have any psychological training outside of a single course in my undergraduate degree, yet as someone who does suffer from severe gender dysphoria, I find its absence glaring enough to justify my commenting upon it.

Ricky Tucker, a ball scholar and friend of numerous current and former ball performers like Leiomy Maldonado, Michael Roberson, and Gia Love, explores the concept of realness from a Black and Latine ball participant's perspective in his 2022 book on ball culture, *And the Category Is…*. Tucker's exploration of ball culture and realness stems from his critique of the commercialization of ball culture brought about from its mainstream fame and "a false narrative

of ownership" by white musicians like Madonna.[161] In Tucker's view, this commercialization of ball culture is ignorant of the origins of ball culture and realness among Black trans women and femmes. Madonna, and the overall commercialization of ball culture in service of consumption by cis white audiences[162] ignores the power of "realness" to "subvert the collective 'reality' we all assume" whether, it is "allow[ing] the poor to be rich, the masc to be fem (and celebrated)," or "the outcast to perform center stage."[163] In Tucker's view, this ignorance of realness within popular conceptions of ball culture must exist because a frank acknowledgement of realness includes an acknowledgment of Black trans women's womanhood and femininity, which he sees pop culture as being unable to properly acknowledge.[164]

Tucker demonstrates this erasure of Black trans women's importance to realness through the use of a pair of examples: voguing troupe Vogue Evolution's appearance on the MTV show *America's Best Dance Crew* in 2009 and Sydney Baloue's 2019 *New York Times* editorial, "Has the Ballroom Scene Outgrown 'Realness'?". In his discussion of *America's Best Dance Crew*, Tucker focuses on Leiomy Maldonado, a trans woman and member of Vogue Evolution who was subject to transmisogynistic questioning of her femininity by one of the co-hosts of the show, rapper Lil Mama. In episode two of season four, where Vogue Evolution performs to Beyoncé's "Déjà Vu" with Beyoncé herself in attendance, Leiomy's portrayal of Beyoncé's alter ego, Sasha Fierce, receives non-transphobic acclaim from all the judges on the show bar Lil Mama, who

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[161] Ricky Tucker, *And the Category Is...: Inside New York's Vogue, House and Ballroom Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2022), 12.
[162] This debate has recently reignited with a June 2024 appearance on the *FQ Crazy Sexy Cool* podcast by Leiomy Maldonado where Maldonado and the hosts, Asia Snowden, Tabytha Gonzalez, and Tempress discuss and critique the lack of femme queen voguers on Beyonce's 2023 *Renaissance* World Tour.
[163] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 7; Asia Snowden, Tabytha Gonzalez, and Tempress, *FQ Crazy Sexy Cool*, podcast audio, S2 EP 7: Leiomy Maldonado2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6O5I71V2Qk.
[164] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 120-21.

claims that "it took a transgender woman to bring out the femininity in Beyoncé."[165] In response to Lil Mama's comment, Tucker argues that she is claiming "that transgender femininity should be so qualified as 'other' that it's (sic) shocking when it is quintessentially female," and that femininity among trans women is seen as inherently inferior to that of cis women.[166] In episode four of the same season of the show, Lil Mama's transphobia continues as Vogue Evolution is eliminated from competition, with Lil Mama claiming that Leiomy Maldonado walking off the set after Vogue Evolution's poor performance "is unacceptable" because she needs to "act like a lady" because she was "born a man and is becoming a woman."[167] Tucker highlights this comment, not only to demonstrate Lil Mama's transphobia, but also the conditional acceptance of trans woman's womanhood in culture, where her success in episode two and her failure in episode four are both framed via her gender instead of her skill or errors as a dancer.[168] Because of the centrality of trans women to ball culture and its development, an understanding of ball culture and realness that sees trans women's femininity and womanhood as so conditional on their performance ultimately misunderstands the central basis of ball culture: Black and Latine LGBT self-expression and agency.

Tucker's exploration of realness within the context of Sydney Baloue's article picks up on a very small but important difference that I have not seen explored in any formal context before: realness's difference from "passing." While both passing and realness are similar in that they connote being perceived in a certain way, for Tucker, Baloue's merger of "realness" and "passing" to argue for the retirement of "realness" as a category because it "perpetuates rigid and oppressive beauty and body standards, as the battle to 'pass' implies that to be considered beautiful one must

[165] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 14-15.
[166] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 14-15.
[167] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 23.
[168] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 23.

look like a cisgender person" proves problematic.[169] Tucker, with the help of trans model and ball performer Gia Love, argues that while "passing is what one has to do in the streets, in the greater culture, in order to dodge the persecution of being othered and/or to reap the benefits of reading as one of the people in power," realness "is a performance of something that can be oppressive [(heteronormativity)], but ultimately, at the end of the day, challenges the gender binary – whether or not you look 'real'."[170] This minor difference that Tucker sees, where realness is both a form of passing and a performative critique of the norms one must follow while passing, is important as Baloue's conflation of the two ignores the importance of realness as an act of Black transfeminine resistance in a society deeply hostile to Black trans women.[171] Realness's connection to passing is obvious, as they both indicate the ability to blend as a cissexual/normative idea of a woman/man. However, the ability of realness to undermine the "gender binary," stems, in Tucker and Love's words, from realness's ability to "reclaim from mass culture who is allowed to be 'real'," i.e. whose femininity and womanhood is deserving of being seen as worthy of respect within a cisnormative and white supremacist society.[172] Completely unsurprisingly, given the context of Baloue's systemic anti-femininity, Love argues, is that Baloue is a non-Black trans man, someone who has the least stake in feminine realness mattering to his survival in real life.[173] This critique of the perceived "out of touch" understanding of how a trans man understands ball culture and the importance of realness is one I agree with, and ultimately is demonstrative of how the importance of realness and femininity to transsexual women differs greatly from how it influences the lives of other, non-transsexual, LGBT people.

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[169] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 118-19 from; Sydney Baloue, "Has the Ballroom Scene Outgrown 'Realness'?," *New York Times* (New York), Oct 22 2019, n.p., https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/opinion/ball-culture.html.
[170] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 120-21.
[171] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 121.
[172] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 120.
[173] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 120-21.

Conclusion

In drawing upon the historiography of ball culture, fashion, and realness, I hope to provide a slightly different lens of approach than a conventional history of "transness" entails. My work, stemming from the explored historiography, begins with the assumption that transsexual women exist, and are in the process of pursuing medical transition, but that pursuit does not override any social or cultural interests or desires that transsexual women may have. Much of the seminal work in trans history has focused on transsexual women's relationship to the medical system, whether that be *How Sex Changed* by Joanne Meyerowitz, *Histories of the Transgender Child* by Jules Gill-Peterson, *Trans America: A Counter History* by Barry Reay, or even parts of Namaste's *Invisible Lives*.[174] Even though surgery and hormonal treatment remain important to contemporary understandings of transness, I disconnect myself thematically from that history. Through this different focus, I hope to be able to provide an alternative lens into understanding how transsexual women exist within the world and live our daily lives, one focused more on what we do and how we see ourselves rather than on how we exist within the medical system under the panoptic eye of cissexual expectations. Furthermore, most of these works primarily or only focus on transsexual women who have had interactions with the "official" medical system. This focus excludes many Black and Latine trans women who have relied on non-traditional means to acquire hormones and surgical modifications, and as such, never left the paper trail that their predominantly white peers did. By shifting my focus away from the medical lens towards a cultural one, I attempt to

[174] Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexualism in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), n.p; Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), n.p; Barry Reay, *Trans America: a Counter-History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), n.p; Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, n.p.

demonstrate the central importance that Black and Latine trans women have held in the development of transsexual culture in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Two: Ball's Dolls: The Emergence of Ball Culture and the Origins of the Doll

While the term itself may be a recent invention, the cultural and social milieus that the doll emerged from can be traced back more than a century. The origin of the doll stems from two separate but related subcultures, one dating to before the Harlem Renaissance of 1920s New York and the other slowly emerging throughout the post-War period in North America and Europe before coming into its own in the Lower East Side starting in the 1980s. The first of these cultures is composed of: one, the drag balls that existed in New York and originated among gay men in New York in the late nineteenth century and came into their own in the 1920s, and two, the Black and Latine ball culture that emerged from those drag balls in the 1960s and 1970s. The second of these cultures consists of transsexual involvement within the fashion industry, which began among closeted transsexual women in the post-War era of the 1950s and 1960s, but was not accessible to openly transsexual women, and therefore, did not come into its own until the sex barrier in the fashion (specifically, modeling) industry was broken in the early 1980s. It is in the first of these cultures where the doll was born and it is in the second of them where the doll entered the mainstream.

Drag into Culture: The Transformation of the Balls

While early drag balls shared some of the characteristics of contemporary ball culture, such as the centrality of feminine dress, the mimicry of the process of fashion shows, and their central importance to African-American gay and trans life, drag balls *were not* ball culture. Drag ball communities lacked the formalized social networks and chosen families, in the form of houses,

that characterize contemporary ball culture.[175] Drag balls, while partially following the form of fashion shows, took the form of more conventional beauty pageants, extremely popular during the 1920s, like Irvin C. Miller's *Brownskin Models* or the *Ziegfeld Follies*, with prizes offered for the best dressed or most glamourous queens, but without the numerous categories integrated into a complex gender system like that which exists in contemporary ball culture.[176]

The transformation of drag balls into ball culture, which occurred throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, was a gradual process. Through good fortune/luck of history, this process was filmed and therefore can be observed through three of the earliest and most important documentaries about ball culture, Frank Simon's 1968 documentary about the "1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Contest," *The Queen*, Michele Capozzi and Simone de Bagno's 1982 documentary of an early House of LaBeija ball, *T.V. Transvestite*, and Jennie Livingston's classic 1990 documentary of ball culture, *Paris is Burning*. Throughout these three films, I will be tracking Tara Susman-Peña's description of how the layout of the ball itself mimics that of a fashion show "as evidenced by the use of the runway, the restriction of movement to the runway, the concern with display and valuation of the most fashionable clothing, and the blaring music."[177] Beyond the comparison with fashion shows, the development of other important aspects of ball culture, like realness or the gender system, will be noted.

The ball in *The Queen,* the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Contest, while a direct predecessor of contemporary ball culture, shares little with the fashion show form that characterizes contemporary ball culture. The ball was held at the Town Hall theatre in Midtown Manhattan on a theatrical stage. This use of a theatrical stage means that the runway form and walk

[175] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 4.
[176] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 297-98; Brown, *Work!*, 91.
[177] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 122.

that characterizes more contemporary balls is absent, with contestants remaining on the stage. Contestants do step forward on the stage and pose for the judges, therefore, it is difficult to tell how much of the nature of this ball was due to venue restrictions rather than balls not embracing the runway form at the time.[178] The layout of the venue in the film precluded the presence of a traditional runway, however the runway form absent in this ball was present in the balls of the Harlem Renaissance.[179] Therefore, the ball shown in *The Queen* is not useful as a way of determining the physical form that balls of the time took. The fashionable clothing and the blaring music of contemporary ball culture are also absent. Depicting what a participant in the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Contest, Pepper LaBeija, later said in *Paris is Burning* about her time at earlier balls, the contestants dressed and acted like "Las Vegas Showgirls [with b]ackpieces, tailpieces, feathers, beads and all that," as opposed to the couture and glamour of contemporary ball culture.[180] Furthermore, the music sung and lip-synced by participants were slow-paced standards of the traditional pop of the 1940s and 1950s, which was the style sung by performers in the nightclubs of the mid-twentieth century.[181] This is in contrast to the fast-paced house, techno, hip-hop, and disco genres, which have characterized the music choices at contemporary balls. The dramatic differences from contemporary ball culture date the ball in *The Queen* as being from a bygone era, but the presence of future ball culture icons like Pepper LaBeija, Dorian Corey, and Crystal LaBeija demonstrate its continuity within the history of ball culture.

The Queen also documents a pivotal event in the history of the transformation of drag balls into ball culture, as well as the continuity between the two forms: the separation of white and Black balls in New York. At the end of the film, contestant Crystal LaBeija, who finishes third, claims

[178] Frank Simon, *The Queen*, ed. Si Litvinoff and Don Herbert (United States: Vineyard Film, 1968), 44:31-45:00.
[179] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 297.
[180] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 11:35-11:39.
[181] Simon, *The Queen*, 44:30-45:00.

in an iconic diva rant that Jack Doroshow, the emcee and organizer of the event, rigged the result in favor of his protégée, Rachel Harlow.[182] In her rant, Crystal LaBeija enlists the help of three queens: Miss Fire Island, who Crystal LaBeija appears with after walking out of the pageant, Monique, who Crystal LaBeija claims told her that the pageant was rigged in advance, and a disembodied voice, possibly that of Dorian Corey, who argues with Doroshow that Crystal LaBeija lost because she did not lighten her skin.[183] The fallout and anger from this event and the anti-Black racism of the predominantly white drag community writ large, led to the founding of the first modern ball house, The House of LaBeija, by Crystal and Lottie LaBeija, in 1972.[184]

While *The Queen* depicted Crystal LaBeija's split with the more "mainstream" white drag community emblematized by Jack Doroshow, one of the events that birthed contemporary ball culture, the once-integrated drag balls had been racially splintering since at least the early 1960s. While the balls themselves were still integrated, legendary ball performer Paris Dupree claims that participants were informally divided by race, where "the Black girls were known as 'The La Chanels,' the Latin girls were 'The Delightful Ladies' and the white girls were known as 'The Pattie Girls'."[185] The performers in drag balls of this time, who all referred to themselves as "girls,"[186] began to develop the modern houses that characterize modern ball culture out of the racialized categories already present in drag balls.[187] While the founding of the first ball house did not occur until 1972, balls were in the process of racially splintering. Tim Lawrence, citing a discussion on a now defunct internet forum devoted to ball culture, "Juan La Perla's Walk 4 Me

[182] Simon, *The Queen*, 59:45-62:20.
[183] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 38-39.
[184] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 4.
[185] Lee Soulja, "And Then There Were Houses: A Coversation with the Pioneers," *Swerv*, 2021, 12, https://www.swervmagazine.com/entertainment-2/pioneers/.
[186] If there exists a term which is the predecessor to "doll" among ball culture members, it is "girl" or "gworl," which according to Paris Dupree, was the term used by drag ball participants in the 1960s.
[187] Soulja, "And Then There Were Houses: A Coversation with the Pioneers," 12.

Wednesdays Shade Board," states that the first Black ball in New York began in 1962 under the supervision of Marcus Christian LaBeija.[188] Neither Lawrence nor Kevin UltraOmni, an active forum participant and ball historian who began his ball career in the late 1970s and early 1980s, are clear on the form that these early balls took, but based on the evidence from *The Queen*, as well as the balls of Chicago during the same period, it seems likely that Marcus Christian LaBeija's extremely early balls resembled the drag balls of old as opposed to contemporary ball culture. According to a piece UltraOmni contributed to *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York 1989-92*, in the earliest days of ball culture in the early and middle 1970s, "all the [ball] categories were for drag queens," who at the time also included femme queens and butch queens up in drags as the complex gender system of ball culture had not fully developed at this point in history.[189]

1982's *T.V. Transvestite* contains some of the oldest existent footage of a ball recognizable as representative of contemporary ball culture. This early look at ball culture allows us to identify the influence that fashion had on the development of the form of the ball. Voguing was very early in its development at the time, so while a short section of the film includes butch queens proto-voguing and engaging in basic moves, the dance form was not yet central to the form of the ball.[190] Susman-Peña's basic form, partially present in the drag balls of the first half of the century through a runway that the queens walked down, is very much present by 1982, as seen in the film *T.V. Transvestite*, featured a runway, glamorous clothing, and loud music.[191] While the bingo hall the ball was held at did not have a raised runway à la contemporary fashion shows or the highest

[188] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 3.
[189] Regnault and Baker, *Voguing and the Ballroom Scene of New York*, 60.
[190] Michele Capozzi and Simone de Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite* (Ireland: Rock Hardy Productions, 1982), 26:40-27:27.
[191] Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*.

budget balls of today, the performers at the ball still walked down the center of the room with seating pushed off to either side of the hall.[192]

During an interview by the directors with the ball performer, Sugar, about her transition, she highlights that in the process of changing her wardrobe, she "bought more gorgeous gowns, heels, and garter belts" that she incorporated into her daily life and her ball performances., demonstrating the importance of glamour and clothing to balls.[193] Beyond Sugar, most scenes featuring femme queens show them wearing glamourous gowns and dresses, angel wings à la Las Vegas showgirls, and big hair characteristic of the 1980s.[194] The genres which dominate the music of ball culture in 2024, house and techno, were still in their infancy and restricted mainly to their cities of origin (Chicago and Berlin/Detroit, respectively) in 1982, therefore the diegetic music of *T.V. Transvestite*, while "blaring," consists of a combination of genres that preceded house, techno, garage house (a New York offshoot of house that developed during the middle of the 1980s by Larry Levan at Paradise Garage), and hip-hop yet were influential in those genres' development: new wave, synth-pop, disco, and R&B.[195] Beyond the three aspects highlighted by Susman-Peña of the runway, glamorous clothing, and loud music, Pepper LaBeija, the MC of the ball, emphasizes "realness," especially for categories for femme queens. For the first femme queen category of the film, *FQ realness*, beginning at the nine-minute mark, not only do Pepper LaBeija and the category itself emphasize realness, but also the music choice for the section, "To Be Real,"

[192] Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*, 3:20-5:50.
[193] Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*, 17:57.
[194] Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*, 28:15-30:25.
[195] Micah E. Salkind, *Do You Remember House?: Chicago's Queer of Color Underground* (New York: Oxford University Press 2019), 95, 130; Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*.

by Cheryl Lynn, whose chorus repeats the title, highlights the centrality of realness to both the category and femme queen involvement in ball culture, in general.[196]

Beyond its early documentation of ball culture and the processes and fashions of the culture in the 1980s, the film stars one of the earliest North American transsexual models, Tracey "Africa" Norman. Norman began her transition during the earliest era of modern ball culture, taking hormones while attending New York and Newark area balls.[197] By the latter half of the 1970s, she distanced herself from ball culture over a perceived lack of recognition, and, during this time of disillusionment, she described how a friend of hers involved in the fashion industry, encouraged her to try out modelling.[198] Norman, while stealth, attended fashion shows to learn how to mimic models' walks and was eventually cast, initially by *Vogue Italy*, and then more famously by Clairol, the hair dye manufacturer.[199] Norman was outed in 1980 by a former acquaintance who worked as a production assistant at *Essence Magazine*, a client she was modeling for. She was blackballed from the industry, and her North American modeling career was over.[200] This did not mean the total end of her modeling career, as she moved to Paris and was hired as a house model, i.e. a model used by a designer to provide a real human body upon which they can design, for Balenciaga.[201] This gig was not permanent and after failing to find success elsewhere, she returned to balls in the New York area by 1982.[202] While Norman returned to the modeling industry after the twenty-first century renaissance for transsexual modeling, the harsh reality was that the fashion

[196] Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*, 9:00-10:30.
[197] Brown, *Work!*, 265.
[198] Tracey Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," *Viscose*, 2022, 22.
[199] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 22.
[200] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 25; Brown, *Work!*, 265.
[201] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 26.
[202] Paul Jobling, Philippa Nesbitt, and Angelene Wong, *Fashion, Identity, Image* (London: Bloosmbury, 2022), 77; Capozzi and Bagno, *T.V. Transvestite*, 49:32.

industry of 1980 was not yet tolerant enough for trans women to be out, no matter how talented or glamorous they were.[203]

Paris is Burning, released in 1990 and filmed over the course of the second half of the 1980s, documents the lives of participants in Harlem ball culture and their experiences in balls. While mainstream interest in ball culture began in the late 1980s through its relationship with avant-garde fashion designers like Patricia Field and Thierry Mugler and musicians like Malcolm McLaren, and most famously, Madonna, *Paris is Burning* was the first documentary to receive a wide release that exposed the public to the participants in ball culture as opposed to just the aesthetics, music, and dance mediated through the media frenzy in the late 1980s. By the time *Paris is Burning* began filming in 1986, the balls took the basic form that Susman-Peña describes in "Vogue of Life" and that they continue to have today.[204] Voguing had become institutionalized in ball culture by 1986, with pioneers like Willi Ninja voguing in the old way (the original form of voguing restricted to butch queens based on posing).[205] The runway layout is universal in all the balls featured in the film, growing in size for voguing the audience moves back from the edges of the runway to make more room. The music of the balls continued, as in *T.V. Transvestite*, to be heavily dominated by disco and post-disco genres, with Cheryl Lynn's disco standard "To Be Real" maintaining its prominence. The film also features early hip-hop like Doug E. Fresh's 1985 "The Show" and Malcolm McLaren's 1989 tribute to house and ball culture "Deep in Vogue," however both of these songs are non-diegetic, and, therefore, might be unreflective of the music actually played at balls at the time.

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[203] Brown, *Work!*, 271; Jobling, Nesbitt, and Wong, *Fashion, Identity, Image*, 77.
[204] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 121.
[205] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 36:04-37:12.

Significantly for my research, Livingston let participants discuss in their own words why realness and fashion were important to them. Dorian Corey, the first person Livingston interviewed about realness, defined realness within ball culture "as being able to blend … [to] the untrained eye, or even the trained eye, and not give away the fact that you're gay" such that "the realer you look mean[t] you look like a real woman or you look like a real man."[206] For Dorian Corey, realness occupies a similar definition to that of passing among twenty-first century trans women, such that both definitions rely on the person embodying realness being unclockable.. Keeping Tucker's and Love's analysis of Baloue's commentary on realness in ball culture in mind, saying that realness and passing are the same is incorrect because of their different cultural implications, however, they are still closely related, even during the 1980s.[207] In addition to Dorian Corey's previous comments about passing *within* ball culture, she refers to those participating in femme queen realness as "undetectable, when they can walk out of that ballroom into the sunlight and onto the subway and get home and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies."[208] It is clear in Dorian Corey's understanding of realness, that the idea of passing as a cissexual woman and being unclockable to avoid violence that would be faced if one was not real, while not stated in such an overt or modern way, is central.

Dorian Corey's views on the influence of high fashion on the ballroom scene are emblematic of a generational difference among ball participants that mirrors Pepper LaBeija's views on the younger generation deciding to transition discussed in Chapter One.[209] Dorian Corey (born in the 1930s) laments that the state of ball culture in the late 1980s for younger members

[206] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 18:14-18:25.
[207] Tucker, *And the Category Is...* 120-21.
[208] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 22:01-22:15.
[209] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 71-72.

was "all about designers, and not about what you create, it's about what you can acquire."[210] The film plays with these generational divides, especially in the case of Dorian Corey's thoughts on designer fashion. The very next scene after Corey's comments shows Octavia St. Laurent (born in 1964) window-shopping at the Saint-Laurent (brand) store.[211] This generational divide around fashion is something that Hilderbrand, in *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic,* picks up on, but does not engage with in what I consider a satisfactory manner. Hilderbrand's work has deeply influenced the way I understood the role of fashion in the film, especially in what he misses due to his lack of focus on transness. In a cross-cut interview with Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent near the end of the film where they "describe their longing for relationships, careers, and comfortable domestic lives," Hilderbrand argues that their desire for wealth and the glamour of high fashion "reflect the contradictions of American ideology" between normality and fame and wealth and love.[212] Hilderbrand understands that "their dreams are bound up … in transitioning to become biological women," but beyond connecting the modeling that Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent desire to do with "becoming biological women," he does not focus on transsexuality, and therefore he does not understand the psychological importance of fashion for transsexuals who are participants in ball culture. Specifically, he does not examine how fashion often serves as one of the ways that trans women can acculturate themselves into womanhood, such as by looking at fashion magazines and blogs or visiting boutique stores to help define an aesthetic that we want to pursue. The process of acculturation and interest in fashion is demonstrated in the vignette that opened the paragraph: Octavia St. Laurent visiting the Saint-Laurent store to window-shop.[213] In Hilderbrand's attempts to understand the influence of fashion,

[210] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 49:22-49:25.
[211] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 49:25-49:39.
[212] Hilderbrand, *Paris is Burning: A Queer Film Classic*, 74-75.
[213] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 49:00-49:40.

he comprehends the general idea, but, because he does not understand the influence of fashion among younger generations of transsexuals on a deeper level, his analysis ultimately falls short.

These three films allow us to see that by the late 1980s, the most important parts of contemporary balls and ball culture became nigh-universal. This is not to say that balls have not changed or innovated over the years, but rather, the basic form of the ball that was influential in the development of doll culture became solidified. Furthermore, in addition to the basic fashion show-inspired form, we see an increasing interest and desire for more formal connections and involvement between the fashion industry and ball culture, in designers like Thierry Mugler and Jean-Paul Gaultier and in femme queen ball culture participants like Tracey Norman, Venus Xtravaganza, and Octavia St. Laurent. While this connection did not result in an economic transformation of ball culture or its participants because of their relationship with the fashion and nightlife industries, it did bring both ball aesthetics and ball participants closer to the mainstream and to other trans women involved or interested in the fashion industry, but not involved in ball culture. It is that relationship between ball culture and trans women involved or interested in the fashion industry outside of ball culture that birthed the doll and doll culture as something distinct.

The Birth of (Out) Transsexual Modeling

The transsexual body has been an object of display for glamour since at least the 1950s. The earliest successes for trans women being able to display their bodies were found outside of the United States. French and American transsexuals, like Coccinelle, Bambi, and Christine Jorgensen, were performing and working in nightclubs and cabarets in Montreal during the 1950s

and 1960s.[214] In these nightclubs and cabarets, trans women worked as burlesque dancers, drag performers, and prostitutes, and they were responsible for selling diluted drinks called "phoneys" to attendees.[215] They worked alongside cis women and were treated with some level of respect by the mafiosos who ran Montreal nightlife in the 1960s.[216] Bambi, Coccinelle, Marie-Andrée Schwindenhammer, and Amanda Lear, among others, also performed in France as both cabaret dancers and sex workers at *Le Carrousel* in Paris, where many of them traded information about early Casablanca-based vaginoplasty surgeon Georges Burou.[217] In Britain, April Ashley experienced brief success modeling for major London designers and publications, like *Vogue Britain,* in 1960 and 1961, until she was outed and blackballed.[218] Later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, women like ex-Bond girl Caroline Cossey and future RHOM (Real Housewives of Miami) star Lauren Foster saw some modeling success in Britian and Mexico, respectively, until they were also outed.[219] Foster, while excluded from the formal fashion industry, still maintained her involvement in trans life, serving "as a mentor for transgender youth" in Miami up to the present day.[220] While it is unclear if all of these women, especially in the cases of Coccinelle or Bambi, had a formal desire to be involved in the fashion industry, the centrality of visible femininity and glamor to their work in nightclubs was very similar to that required by models, hence their inclusion here.

These early models and performers in Canada and Europe demonstrated the existing desire of transsexual women to display their physical femininity, yet the discrimination and exclusion

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[214] Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle*, 19-20.
[215] Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle*, 32.
[216] Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle*, 27.
[217] Allanah Starr, "BAMBI: « I'D DECIDED TO LIVE IN WOMEN'S CLOTHES »," *Antidote*, May 20, 2022, https://magazineantidote.com/culture/bambi/.
[218] Jobling, Nesbitt, and Wong, *Fashion, Identity, Image*, 76.
[219] Jobling, Nesbitt, and Wong, *Fashion, Identity, Image*, 77.
[220] Devan Diaz and Jamie Berrout, "Pioneers," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 117.

that they faced in the more established industries, like the fashion industry, especially in the United States, led them to have their professional ambitions restricted to nightlife. Others who were able to be stealth surely exist, living their professional lives in such a way that no one questioned their birth sex. Trans women who were outed, like April Ashley or Tracey Norman, are still viewed as trans icons by trans women for their glamor. However, the loss of work from being outed begs the question: "When were out trans women able to participate in the fashion industry?" To find the answer, we must first look to Andy Warhol and his legacy.

The first out transsexual model to walk for a high fashion designer was Teri Toye. Toye grew up in Iowa and moved to New York to attend Parsons School for fashion design, where in addition to her studies, she worked as a model for fashion illustration courses.[221] It is either through her work in these courses or through attendance at the Mudd Club, backed by pop artist Andy Warhol (she has claimed both at various times) that she met the fashion designer and photographer Steven Meisel, in 1979 or 1980.[222] Over the next few years, Toye became Meisel's muse, as well as the muse for another designer and photographer based in the Lower East Side; Steven Sprouse, forming a trio called "The Odd Squad."[223] Toye walked at the opening of the famous Canadian club owner Peter Gatien's New York megaclub, Limelight, in 1983.[224] Toye and Meisel, in addition to their artist-muse relationship, were engaged in 1984.[225] This relationship, and the entire "Odd Squad" was not to last the year however, as Toye, "unconcerned with making the most of her disposable role" as a model, absconded to Europe via Florida, where she walked for Jean-Paul

[221] Brown, *Work!*, 268; Teri Toye, "Heroes: Teri Toye," interview by André Walker, 2009, n.p., https://web.archive.org/web/20091216145810/https://vmagazine.com/article.php?n=12232.
[222] Toye, interview; Steven Meisel and Teri Toye, "Steven Meisel and Teri Toye," interview by Lisa Robinson, *Vanity Fair*, 1984, n.p.
[223] Michael Gross, "The Odd Squad," *Vanity Fair*, January 1985, 22.
[224] Brown, *Work!*, 268.
[225] Meisel and Toye, interview.

Gaultier's 1985 spring/summer collection at Paris Fashion Week.[226] While in Europe, Toye also walked for Thierry Mugler and Chanel.[227] Toye then split her time between New York and Paris, continuing to spend time in New York nightlife where she initially grew her fame, rubbing elbows with some of the biggest celebrities of the 1980s, like Van Halen frontman David Lee Roth, at clubs like Limelight.[228]

Toye, in her year of fame in the United States, faced significant transphobia in the media. In the conservative *New York Post*, she was featured in a "Page Six" article, where in reaction to Toye's winning of the "Girl of the Year" award from Fashion Group International, the newspaper attempted to out Toye to the Fashion Group to get the award revoked.[229] This attempt by *The Post* failed. Even in publications seemingly more friendly to her, authors discussed Toye through the lens of her not being a cissexual woman, with *Vanity Fair* calling Toye a "former boy, former Girl of the Year."[230] Toye later left New York and the fashion industry for good in 1988 when she moved, with her new husband, Patrick Fox, back home to Iowa.[231] After returning to Iowa, she adopted actual children, unlike those she and Meisel joked about having in 1984, eventually divorced Fox, and now works as a preservationist and environmental consultant in the Midwest.[232] She returned to New York for various events, such as a performance of a song titled "Teri Toye" by punk singer Dean Johnson in 1989/1990, the fiftieth birthday of a woman named Valerie Filipovna in 2004, and the release of Sprouse's self-titled 2009 book, but she continues to live in the Midwest.[233] Toye, while not having large influence nor staying power in the fashion industry,

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[226] Gross, "The Odd Squad," 23.
[227] Brown, *Work!*, 268.
[228] "Here & There," *New York Daily News* (New York), July 14 1985, n.p.
[229] Susan Mulcahy, "Teri: not so Ms.terious," *New York Post* (New York), May 26 1984, 6.
[230] Gross, "The Odd Squad," 23.
[231] Brown, *Work!*, 268.
[232] Toye, interview; Meisel and Toye, interview.
[233] "American Gothic: Husband and Wife Patrick Fox and Teri Toye at Red Zone," 1989/1990, n.p.

broke the sex barrier that had previously excluded transsexual women from opportunities in modeling unless they were able to hide their transness from agents, bookers, and designers.

While Toye was the first out trans woman to receive work in the modern fashion industry, she did not continue her involvement in it for more than half a decade. Connie Fleming, another early trans model, has had a longer-lasting career in fashion and a greater influence within the fashion industry. Fleming was born in the late 1960s or the early 1970s on the island of Jamaica before moving to New York "when she was five years old, so her mother could further her education and make a new life away from Fleming's alcoholic father."[234] Fleming's first experience with the New York avant-garde scene came when she joined the drag troupe known as the "Boy Bar Beauties" at the age of eighteen.[235] The Boy Bar Beauties were based out of the nightclub, Boy Bar, located in the Ukrainian Village neighborhood in the East Village.[236] Much like other clubs of the day, including Pyramid, Mudd Club, Club 57, and Area, Boy Bar held drag shows and competitions. Other clubs had trans women involved in their drag performances, like Holly Woodlawn's performances at Club 57, but, Boy Bar's drag performers were *disproportionately* trans, partially due to the influence of trans woman and drag performer International Chrysis and her role as a drag mother for many performers there, specifically Fleming, Codie Ravioli, and māhū (Indigenous Hawaiian gender which is neither male nor female) performer Raven-O.[237] Boy Bar, in this sense, was an intermediate ground between the downtown megaclubs like Area or Limelight, which held drag shows, but targeted them at a broad cissexual audience, and the "tranny bars" of Sally's and Edelweiss, targeted to trans women and the men who are sexually attracted to

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[234] Elena Feldman, "The Untold Story of the Fearless Connie Fleming," *The Standard: Culture*, 2017, n.p., https://www.standardhotels.com/culture/connie-fleming-limelight-nyc-nightlife-boy-bar.
[235] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 22.
[236] Walt Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper* (Bologna: Damiani, 2019), 51.
[237] Tony Heiberg, "Proscentium Prowl," *East Village Eye*, June 1982, 31. Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 51, 55; Joey Arias, "Burning Rubber," *Paper*, May 1997, 82.

transsexual women.[238] Fleming, in particular, started her transition upon reading a book given to her by Crysis at Boy Bar, *April Ashley's Odyssey*, a biography of the trans British model and socialite.[239] Fleming argues that she "had the safety net of [her] tribe and Boy Bar in order to transition," whereas if she worked any other job, like at McDonald's, in her example, she would have been unable to do so.[240] Specifically, Fleming says that "nightclubs were where [transsexuals] found out everything [they] needed to know; what doctor to see about hormones, what time of day to go, and even what receptionist would be the most helpful."[241] She credits her time at Boy Bar as taking "her out of the world of sex work," as, when she started to transition, trans women either had "to walk the street or … get on the stage [at a nightclub]."[242] Through the community Fleming built in nightlife, she was able to pursue her transition from a position of strength, during a time when women transitioning faced significant institutional and financial barriers to medical access. The aid that nightlife communities provided in transitioning allowed for an amount of success for young transitioners in the 1980s, in Connie Fleming's case, which would have been unheard of had she transitioned exclusively through the formal, conservative, and restrictive medical system which most transsexuals had to deal with at some point in their transitions.

Along with serving as a nightclub where transsexuals could survive and thrive, Boy Bar and the Beauties had a close relationship with the fashion designer Patricia Field, whose own boutique, often staffed by trans women, played an important role in connecting the predominantly white Lower East Side scene with Harlem ball culture.[243] International Chrysis, the

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[238] Mickey Boardman et al., "Fag Bashes: Midtown," *Paper*, January 1998, 111.
[239] Connie Girl and Honey Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," *Interview*, 2020, n.p., https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/connie-girl-honey-dijon-compare-notes-star-14th-street-nyc.
[240] Girl and Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," n.p.
[241] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 129.
[242] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 29.
[243] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55.

aforementioned drag mother at Boy Bar, appears in *The Queen* as a dancer, prior to her transition, demonstrating a pre-existing connection between the Boy Bar and drag balls, even prior to Patricia Field's creation of a formal relationship between Boy Bar and ball culture.[244] Field, a cissexual designer, created her own house for balls, called the House of Field, upon recommendation of Princess Myra Lewis, one of Field's cissexual employees.[245] This house was the first predominantly white house to perform in contemporary ball culture.[246] While the House of Field, as a ball house, eventually disappeared, Field continues to use the name for one of her in-house labels.

Unlike her fellow early Black trans model colleague, Tracy Norman, Fleming did not come of age in ball culture: she spent her time in the Lower East Side nightlife scene.[247] Fleming parlayed her experience performing as a drag queen and walking balls for Field into a career in mainstream fashion. While Teri Toye predated her entry into fashion by five years, Fleming used her connections in nightlife and previous fashion experience with Field to become an early "out" trans model and celebrity in contemporary mainstream fashion. Fleming, at nightlife impresaria Susanne Bartsch's Love Ball in 1989, met designer Thierry Mugler, who was so impressed with Fleming's body and form that he chose Fleming to walk at his 1989 fall/winter show during Paris Fashion Week.[248] Fleming continued to walk for Mugler and started to walk for British punk designer Viviane Westwood, beginning in the early 1990s.[249] However, because of the increasing prominence of drag to fashion shows throughout the first half of the 1990s starting with Mugler's

[244] Simon, *The Queen*, 27:08-28:04.
[245] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55; Patricia Field and Rebecca Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules* (New York: Dey Street, 2023), 79.
[246] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55.
[247] Brown, *Work!*, 268; Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 22.
[248] Girl and Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," n.p.
[249] Feldman, "The Untold Story of the Fearless Connie Fleming," n.p.

use of drag queen and trans models but reaching its apogee in RuPaul's involvement in the industry, Fleming exited the fashion industry and began her work as a doorwoman at Le Bain, a nightclub in the Meatpacking District.[250] Fleming left as she did not want to be associated with drag as a trans woman and because she faced transphobic and intrusive questioning by the media and backstage workers.[251] She also continued to attend the clubs and events with Patricia Field and the House of Field, even after her departure from fashion.[252] In 2012 she returned to modeling, appearing as Michelle Obama for a *Candy Transversal* photoshoot.[253] This feature was the start of Fleming's return to modeling, where she would return to walk for Mugler by the early 2020s.[254] Fleming's involvement in the fashion industry, while more extensive and successful than Toye's, was still derailed by transphobia in a way that is more reminiscent of the traditional exclusionary attitudes in fashion that people like Tracey Norman faced, even if Fleming had more say in the cession of her involvement in the industry.

Unlike Toye's limited involvement in the fashion industry or the exclusionary discrimination faced by Fleming, Amanda Lepore, the erstwhile Club Kid and David LaChapelle muse, has been deeply involved in the fashion industry for over three decades. Lepore was a member of the Club Kids, a group of around 750 regular attendees of downtown megaclubs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, de facto led by party impresario and eventual manslaughterer and drug kingpin, Michael Alig.[255] These megaclubs, which were large nightclubs, generally in Lower

[250] Feldman, "The Untold Story of the Fearless Connie Fleming," n.p; Girl and Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," n.p.
[251] Girl and Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," n.p.
[252] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 150.
[253] Danielle Levitt, "Politically Correct," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2013, 124-45.
[254] Dara, "Connie Girl Seasons The Dolls at the Launch of Mugler H&M," *Interview*, April 20, 2023, n.p., https://www.interviewmagazine.com/fashion/connie-girl-seasons-the-dolls-at-the-launch-of-mugler-hm.
[255] Christopher Bollen, "Michael Alig," *Interview*, March 24, 2010, n.p., https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/michael-alig.

Manhattan, targeted themselves towards an irregularly attending and predominantly heterosexual bridge and tunnel crowd.[256] While the majority of the attendees at the megaclubs were heterosexual, the Club Kid scene, and the nightlife elite at large, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, according to Waltpaper / Walt Cassidy, a friend and collaborator of Alig's, had many gay members, like Alig and Cassidy themselves, as well as "a large percentage of trans personalities."[257]

Specifically, Cassidy discusses how the aforementioned drag bar, Boy Bar, had a large number of drag performers who were trans women; including the aforementioned legendary drag mother International Crysis, actress and model Codie Ravioli, as well as Connie Fleming.[258] Cassidy also discusses how the nightclub, Building, also featured trans performers and staff, such as Page, drag queen Linda Simpson's partner/assistant, Page's friend Petra, model and dancer Sophia Lamar, actress Gina Varla Vetro, and Amanda Lepore.[259] In addition, other trans women were involved in the New York City nightlife scene, such as Missy and Kathleen, who were nightclub workers who appear in Nan Goldin's 1993 book of drag and trans photography, *The Other Side.*[260] Also included in the scene was the costume designer Alexis del Lago and another transsexual model who served as one of Nan Goldin's subjects, Joey Gabriel.[261] Even prior to the rise of the 1980s nightlife scene, the Warhol superstars Candy Darling and Holly Woodlawn, along with Club 54 based Salvador Dali lover, Potassa de Lafayette, existed as trans women and demonstrated trans resilience in New York nightlife.[262] Specifically, the presence of all these

[256] Conversations with Rachel Hope Cleves about her experiences at the clubs in the early 1990s.
[257] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 176.
[258] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55.
[259] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 102; "BEING TRANS IN THE 1980s - PAGE & PETRE," Documented: Digital Collections of the History Project, 2020, accessed October 2, 2022, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20221002191642/https://historyproject.omeka.net/items/show/801.
[260] Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (1993), 66; Goldin, *The Other Side*, 71.
[261] Sunny Suits, "Life is a Chance, Love is Infinity, Grace is Reality," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2019, 395.
[262] Connie Fleming and Honey Dijon, "Potassa de Lafayette," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2021, n.p.

women indicate that while they may have been excluded from the dominant culture and fashion, much like their foremothers, in the twenty short years since the birth of modern ball culture, trans women in New York had achieved a level of success and acceptance among the wider nightlife scene that enabled individuals like Lepore to make their way into the fashion mainstream.

Lepore socially transitioned at a young age with the aid of her brother's girlfriend's family, who taught her "all the basics of female beauty."[263] They also helped Lepore facilitate the beginnings of her medical transition by introducing her to a transsexual co-worker at the strip club where the girlfriend worked and where the co-worker, Bambi,[264] gifted the fifteen-year-old Lepore estrogen pills in exchange for Lepore designing outfits for Bambi to use on stage.[265] At that same club, Lepore met a plastic surgeon, who, in exchange for a date and sexual favors, performed a rhinoplasty on her, Lepore's first plastic surgery.[266] Lepore underwent sexual reassignment surgery at the age of seventeen through a loophole of being adopted by her first husband's family, who gave her the permission for surgery that her biological family did not grant.[267] While this marriage did not last and ended in abuse, Lepore was able to further her transition and socialization through the aid of the connections she made in nightlife prior to her divorce. Before she had her sexual reassignment surgery, Lepore met designer Keni Valenti at a bar and they exchanged phone numbers.[268] By chance, at the same time Lepore's marriage was faltering, Valenti contacted Lepore and asked for her "help with his fashion line," where she was responsible for sewing and embroidering.[269] With a combination of Valenti's aid and the aid of an unnamed drag queen who

[263] Amanda Lepore and Thomas Flannery, *Doll Parts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 136.
[264] This is not the same Bambi as Marie-Pierre Pruvot, the famous French transsexual of the 1950s and 1960s.
[265] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 260.
[266] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 359-61.
[267] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 448-49.
[268] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 330.
[269] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 472.

Lepore had made friends with at her surgeon's clinic, she was able to escape from her marital home in suburban New Jersey to New York City.[270]

Lepore's friendship with Valenti helped her parlay herself into her greatest nightlife fame. Valenti introduced Lepore to Michael Alig at Limelight, which led to Alig adopting Lepore as a friend and go-go dancer, i.e. a nightclub employee who is paid to dance for entertainment.[271] Through her relationship with Alig, Lepore began to build wider fame, initially through an appearance on *The Joan Rivers Show* where she was introduced as someone who "dresses to get attention."[272] Lepore remained associated with the Club Kids for much of the early 1990s. However, the scene surrounding the Club Kids began to disappear with the closure of the megaclubs and Michael Alig's arrest and conviction for manslaughter. Lepore, through her relationship with the remaining Club Kid diaspora, furthered her career in fashion. Specifically, her friendship with Club Kid Armen Ra allowed her to get an interview, and then a position, with Patricia Field's boutique. Lepore worked for Field in the second half of the 1990s while also being involved in transsexual nightlife. Lepore and her friend and fellow transsexual Sophia Lamar, whom Michael Alig introduced her to, became successful party hosts, a more expansive and well-compensated role compared to their previous roles as go-go dancers. Through this hosting, specifically at the Bowery Bar in New York, Lepore achieved her most mainstream success. At the Bowery Bar, Lepore connected with fashion photographer David LaChapelle, who upon meeting her and performing their first photoshoot together, took Lepore on as a muse.[273]

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[270] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 542.
[271] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 643-44, 57.
[272] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 658; *The Joan Rivers Show*, "People Who Dress to Get Attention,"1990.
[273] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 821.

Much like Norman, Lepore did not initially have an interest in modeling, claiming that: "I don't have the model's measurements; I'm short and I'm curvy, with big tits and hips."[274] However, it was this non-modelesque physique which attracted LaChapelle to her, because of her similarity to a series of doodles LaChapelle made as a teenager.[275] LaChappelle's photos of Lepore are "digitally hyperrealistic," a term coined by Danish fashion scholar Charlotte Andersen, for a genre that combines bold and contrasting colors, sexual themes and drug use, nods to the pop art of Andy Warhol (in LaChappelle's case),[276] and a shininess and perfectionism that characterizes LaChappelle's overall artistic process.[277] Through her success with LaChappelle, combined with her early collaboration with Heatherette, a fashion house founded by ex-Club Kid Richie Rich, Lepore was invited into the world of high fashion modeling.[278] Her first high fashion experience was with Armani in either 1999 or 2000, when a LaChappelle-directed promotional video for Armani Jeans starring Lepore and actor Ryan Phillippe premiered in Milan.[279] The video itself is undated, but based on Lepore's mention in her autobiography of the attendance of Drea de Matteo (Adriana from *The Sopranos*, which premiered in 1999) and the relationship between Rose McGowan and Marilyn Manson, which lasted until January of 2001, the premier most likely occurred in either 1999 or 2000.[280] Throughout the 2000s and beyond, Lepore continued working

[274] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 845.
[275] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 831.
[276] According to Andersen and Lynge-Jorlén, other photographers who embrace digital hyperrealism include Pierre et Gilles, Rankin, Mert and Marcus, and Inez and Vinoodh.
[277] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 849-50; Charlotte Andersen, *Modefotografi: En genres anatomi* (Copengahen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2006), 233. Cited and Translated in; Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 30.
[278] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 750.
[279] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 978.
[280] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 984; "Rock Romance Shocker: Manson and McGowan Split," *ABC News* (New York), January 18 2001, n.p.

with LaChappelle and modeling for designers and houses like Sergio K, Christian Cowen, and Balenciaga.[281]

Beyond being a pioneer in modelling, Amanda Lepore also was emblematic of the early development of the "doll" as a distinct, yet likely unnamed at the time, culture because of her extensive surgical modifications, such as rhinoplasty and vaginoplasty. Angelo Pitillo argued in *Paper* in 1999 that "drag queens and transsexuals," specifically Amanda Lepore, "were, in a sense, way ahead of … culture's … obsession with self-improvement."[282] Pitillo claimed, that liquid silicone injections, known among trans women as "pumping," were the latest manifestation of this transsexual medical avant-garde.[283] Among the most famous of the women who had gotten pumped by the late 1990s was Lepore herself. Besides the aforementioned rhinoplasty and vaginoplasty, silicone injections, specifically in her lips, were some of the earliest body modifications which Lepore underwent.[284] Silicone injections, while a pure manifestation of the plasticity of the human body, with silicone literally being a form of plastic, also have proved extremely dangerous, especially when done by an unlicensed physician. While silicone does enhance traditionally feminine features, like bulbous and exaggerated lips and butts, poor quality and contaminated silicone can lead to silicone calcification, infection from the wound, infection from the needle, and even death.[285] Despite these risks, however, the ease of treatment (requiring non-invasive injections) and generally great results continue to encourage many transsexual women to modify their bodies with silicone.

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[281] "Amanda Lepore," 2023, accessed February 9, 2024, https://models.com/people/amanda-lepore/1/year/all; Mel Ottenberg, "BFRND Tells Us What Amanda Lepore Smelled Like at Balenciaga SS24," *Interview Magazine*, October 2, 2023, n.p.
[282] Angelo Pitillo, "Pump it Up," *Paper*, March 1999, 70.
[283] Pitillo, "Pump it Up," 70.
[284] Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 615-16.
[285] Pitillo, "Pump it Up," 72.

Even amongst cissexual women, those who ran in similar culture spheres as transsexual women, like nightlife, engaged in silicone pumping. For example, early in her time as a muse of LaChapelle, Lepore was joined by Joclyn Wildenstein, a cissexual woman who has undergone similar surgical treatments and silicone injections as Lepore.[286] This pumped look, despite being adopted by some cissexuals, continued to be associated with transsexuality, as Wildenstein, despite being cissexual, was scouted by Thierry Mugler for her hyperfeminine and transsexual aesthetic, like so many transsexuals around the world were during the 1990s.[287] Lepore's look also attracted the attention of designer Patricia Field, who referred to Lepore as "a living doll" and employed Lepore as a central model for a Barbie-themed collection that Field prepared.[288] The centrality of this aesthetic and surgery to one of the figures most central to the popularization of the "doll," its aesthetic, and some of the fashion designers most closely associated with the development of trans modeling in the 1980s and 1990s is vital to understanding how doll culture grew beyond just the balls.

Toye, Fleming, and Lepore all were pioneers in transsexual inclusion in the fashion industry, breaking down the strict barriers that excluded openly transsexual women from the field. However, this acceptance and participation was still hemmed in by a broader transphobic fashion industry and restrictions on what roles trans women could be cast for. Houses and designers that sought an avant-garde aesthetic, such as various smaller independent fashion houses and designers that got their start in the nightlife scene, like Steven Sprouse, Patricia Field, or Heatherette were among the earliest to make use of trans models.[289] Thierry Mugler was one of the earliest of the

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[286] Peter Davis, "Born to be Wildenstein," *Paper*, November 1998, 24.
[287] Davis, "Born to be Wildenstein," 24; Saylesh Wesley and Jamey Jesperson, *"Waking to Dream": The Life Stories of Saylesh Wesley, Trans Stó:lō Elder-to-Be*, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Stó:lō Nation & Stó:lō Tribal Council, University of Victoria, University of the Fraser Valley (2022), 14.
[288] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 143.
[289] Meisel and Toye, interview. Lepore and Flannery, *Doll Parts*, 977.

more mainstream designers to use trans models, beginning in the 1980s, and his fashion house has consistently been one of the places where trans women have found fashion success since then.[290] Outside of these designers and relationships built around them, trans women, including those discussed who were pioneers in the industry, were generally excluded from the most important roles until at least the early 2010s. Even then, it took until the "trans tipping point" of 2014 where Laverne Cox's success in *Orange is the New Black* and Caitlyn Jenner's coming out led to an increased societal and political awareness and acceptance of trans women, for trans women to achieve wide acceptability in the modeling industry.[291]

Transsexual involvement in the fashion industry grew through the 1980s, to a point where, while not achieving mainstream success, trans women were not explicitly blackballed because of their status as *trans* women. Toye, Fleming, and Lepore embraced cultural aspects also important in ball culture, such as an interest in fashion and modeling, an involvement in nightlife vital in popularizing post-disco electronic dance music, and a desire to pass and be real and complete as women. Toye exited the downtown scene before the downtown scene became directly involved in ball culture, but she was an important pioneer for trans women entering into modeling.[292] Fleming and Lepore, through their involvement with Patricia Field, became either participants, in the case of Fleming, or deeply tied into the cultural milieu of the balls, through Patricia Field, in the case of Lepore. This embrace of vital aspects of ball culture by transsexuals associated with the predominantly-white downtown fashion scene is what characterizes these women as separate from other groups of white transsexuals who lived in New York in the late 1980s. The doll aesthetic, as

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[290] Sam Macaulay, "Is Mugler Carrying Trans Representation in Fashion Right Now?," *Reborn Comms*, March 23, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20240207233239/https://blog.yorksj.ac.uk/sammacaulay/2021/03/23/mugler/.
[291] Katy Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," *Time*, 2014, n.p., https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/.
[292] Brown, *Work!*, 268.

demonstrated throughout the first half of this chapter, originated in balls and continued to be embraced by femme queens involved in ball culture. However, its adoption and co-option by transsexuals in the downtown fashion scene is the socio-cultural origin of the "doll aesthetic" found very commonly among the trans-focused fashion and nightlife spheres of the 2020s.

Cis Women Who Can Say Tranny

While trans women and femme queens achieved success and popularity in fashion and ball culture through their own strength and fortitude in a systemically transphobic world, the reality was that they did not have the cultural cache on their own to temporarily unite the fashion avant-garde and ball culture, as occurred in New York in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Instead, this task fell to cissexual women with connections in both cultures. Most important among these women are designer Patricia Field and nightlife impresaria Susanne Bartsch. These two women were vital to the birth and development of connections between the fashion industry, downtown nightlife, and ball culture. The events enabled by these connections were where the doll became popularized outside of ball culture. Because of their importance, I bestow upon these two women the honorary title of: "Cis Women Who Can Say Tranny," because of their vital importance to trans life and culture.

Patricia Field's work in fashion has crossed all the barriers and subcultures that I have broken my examination of New York trans women into. She was a cissexual renaissance woman in a transsexual world. Field ingrained herself within the burgeoning club culture of late 1970s New York, becoming a regular partygoer at the New York nightclub, Studio 54, and selling clothing

and cosmetics out of her store in Greenwich Village.[293] Referring to herself as the "mother of trannies," Field made her store a place of refuge for many trans people, employing them and providing a space for community building, when most businesses refused to employ them.[294] Her famous early trans employees included Codie Ravioli, Connie Fleming, Amanda Lepore, and ex-Howard Stern crush Danna Daniels.[295] Beyond merely serving as a place of employment for trans women, Field's store was also a popular shopping spot for both trans women and drag queens. A hair stylist working for Field named Paul (not the better-known Boy Bar stylist named Paul McGregor) and the drag queen and hair stylist Perfidia collaborated with Field to open a wig and hair salon above her store, which attracted drag queens like RuPaul, celebrities like Ivana Trump, and numerous ball performers.[296]

The increasing patronage of Patricia Field's store by ball attendees led to the development of a relationship between Field's store, her employees, and ball culture. This connection between the two separate communities not only created a new market where Field could advertise her clothes, but also led to the birth of a close relationship between the predominantly white fashion scene in Lower Manhattan and the predominantly Black and Latine ball culture in Harlem.[297] This connection was also facilitated by a cissexual employee of Field's named Princess Myra, who first invited Field into ball culture.[298] While Field had attended balls before in the 1970s with "a Singaporean trans client" named Leong "who invited [her] to a ball up in Harlem that she was

[293] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 48.
[294] Bruce Weber, "Patricia Field: Hey Girlfriend," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2012, 117; Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55; Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 64.
[295] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 64-65.
[296] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 87, 90.
[297] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 70.
[298] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 91.

walking in," it was Myra who got Field into actively participating in them.[299] Myra aided Field in founding her own eponymous ball house, the House of Field, which became the first predominantly white house to compete in New York ball culture.[300] The House of Field achieved its greatest success in Fashion categories, where Connie Fleming, wearing Field styled outfits, won numerous prizes.[301]

While designers and their labels have been immensely important to the culture of balls, the primary attendees and performers at balls, overwhelmingly Black and Latine LGBT youth, lacked the money to buy genuine designer items outright, and, therefore, often resorted to either theft, returns, or bootlegs.[302] The unreciprocated interest by the fashion industry in ball culture ended with the founding of the House of Field. While the economic and social situation of participants did not meaningfully improve, Myra and Field introduced former *Vogue* editor-in-chief André Leon Talley and designers "Giorgio di Sant' Angelo, Malcolm McLaren, Mary McFadden, and Betsey Johnson" to the culture in 1988.[303] After this initial introduction to balls, all of those designers' future collections would be heavily influenced by ball culture.[304] That year, Neil Kirk photographed members of the House of Xtravaganza with a group of non-ball culture involved models for *Vogue;* not coincidently, the models were wearing Patricia Field in the shoot.[305] In addition to celebrities in the fashion industry, Susanne Bartsch also attended that ball, which served as an at least partial inspiration for Bartsch to start a ball as an HIV/AIDS fundraiser, the Love

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[299] Weber, "Patricia Field: Hey Girlfriend," 117; Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 91.
[300] Cassidy, *New York Club Kids: By Waltpaper*, 55; Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 79.
[301] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 81.
[302] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 121.
[303] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 82.
[304] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 82-83.
[305] José Criales-Unzueta, "From Underground Subculture to Global Phenomenon: An Oral History of Ballroom Within Mainstream Culture," *Vogue*, 2023, n.p., https://www.vogue.com/article/oral-history-ballroom-pride-2023.

Ball, in 1989.[306] While the Love Ball was only held twice, in 1989 and 1990, the idea of using balls as fundraisers for HIV/AIDS research reemerged in 1993 through the Latex Ball, put on by the GMHC,[307] an HIV/AIDS service non-profit in New York City. These balls, in addition to raising money for HIV/AIDS research, brought cis supermodels like Naomi Campbell and Iman into contact with ball culture.[308] Patricia Field's importance in ball culture waned as she became more and more famous, having to devote more time to her work for shows like *Sex and the City* than she could to her boutique and her ball house.[309] Her alumni continued to take inspiration from trans women, however, with ex-Field designer David Dalrymple taking Britney Spears' outfit at the 2000 Video and Music Awards whole cloth from trans performer Candis Cayne.[310] Field's work in more closely connecting trans women, ball culture, and the fashion industry was vital to the popularization of the doll, and that is why she is "one of the cis women who can say tranny."

Though Patricia Field had a more direct relationship with ball culture, fashion, and the doll culture that emerged from it, Susanne Bartsch's nightclubs and parties also were and continue to be important sites of community formation for doll culture.[311] Bartsch was born in Switzerland, but began her involvement in nightlife and fashion in London, where she became influential in the development of the punk fashion scene of the 1970s.[312] Already an established London designer and personality, Bartsch moved to New York in 1981 and opened a boutique which was one of the

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[306] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 88-89.
[307] Formerly the Gay Men's Health Center.
[308] Criales-Unzueta, "From Underground Subculture to Global Phenomenon: An Oral History of Ballroom Within Mainstream Culture," n.p.
[309] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 178.
[310] Field and Paley, *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Breaking All the Rules*, 152-53.
[311] As I was nearing the completion of this thesis, Bartsch released a memoir of her time as a club queen. Regrettably, I have not had the time nor ability to read this memoir yet, so this section does not draw upon it. I am sorry for any errors of inconsistencies present in this section because of this lack of access.
[312] Valerie Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 9.

first stores that sold the clothes of British, and later Japanese, punk-influenced designers.[313] While Bartsch's introduction of British fashion was important to how clubgoers of the 1980s dressed, unlike Field, her fashion was not tied to her involvement with trans women.[314] Instead, Bartsch's experience as a club owner and promoter led to her connections with trans women. Bartsch took an active role in New York nightlife, dancing and chatting with guests at venues she owned.[315] This active role in partying also applied to her staffing. Bartsch, similar to Field, employed drag queens in her clubs, including RuPaul, saying that she "liked the way they put on a look and transformed themselves."[316] I do not know how many, if any, of the drag queens she employed were trans women, but given Bartsch's close relationships with Mugler, Lepore, ball culture (her hosting of AIDS fundraising balls), and the Wigstock (the premier drag festival of the 1990s in New York) crowd, it seems likely that at least some of them were.[317] Beyond the close social relations she had with drag and ball culture, Bartsch's clubs and parties were also important meeting sites. Designer André Walker and columnist Michael Musto argue that "club culture was the social media of the time," and that Bartsch's early morning parties "welcom[ed] gays, straights, drag queens, [and] people across the spectrum" to attend and form communities.[318] This community formation, which as the 1980s rolled into the 1990s and the Love Ball began, played an important role in introducing the doll to those outside of balls by providing more spaces where the cultural interests of different communities of ball culture and fashion could merge and steep. Even today, she continues to involve trans women in her parties, with women like Linux and

[313] Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch*, 28.
[314] Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch*, 31.
[315] David Yarritu, "Queen of Clubs," *Paper*, November 1988, 23.
[316] Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch*, 40.
[317] Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch*, 149.
[318] Steele, *Fashion Underground: The World of Susanne Bartsch*, 107.

Amanda Lepore continuing to be performers, hosts, and collaborators at her events.[319] Bartsch, while having a less active role in the formation of doll culture when compared to Field, still helped create a community in which trans women and LGBT people of various origins could interact and find a space amiable to their presentation. It is why Susanne Bartsch is also "a cis woman who can say tranny."

Conclusion

The doll emerged out of the aesthetics and cultural tics of ball culture, with the new generation of dolls developing an interest in fashion and glamour, a desire to perform, and an embrace of the power of surgical modification in manifesting physical femininity. The early popularization of the doll among white transsexuals came out of increasing interaction between the downtown fashion avant-garde and Harlem ball culture, enabled by the combination of the increasing visibility of ball culture in the popular consciousness through films like *Paris is Burning* and songs like Madonna's "Vogue," increasing trans representation in the fashion industry, and HIV/AIDS fundraisers organized by cissexual women, like Patricia Field and Susanne Bartsch within the downtown fashion and nightlife scene. Since the 1960s, the Black and Latine butch queens and femme queens who birthed ball culture created an LGBT subculture where femme queens and trans women could exist openly, decades before systemic advocacy for trans equality had entered into the activist sphere. Balls, even though they declined in importance after World War II, still were one of the most important sites of community formation for Black and Latine

[319] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in New York City (According to Linux)," *Interview*, July 1, 2021, n.p., https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/what-you-missed-last-month-in-new-york-city-according-to-linux.

trans women. The development of ball culture in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s took the aspects of fashion shows that existed in early drag balls and turned them into the center of the spectacle, attracting Black and Latine trans women and femme queens interested in fashion and helping reproduce that interest among new generations of trans women and femme queens.

At the same time, trans women began to become involved in professional modeling. While some trans women modeled through the 1960s and 1970s, they could only do so if they were not outed to their agency or designers. It took until 1984, with the rise of Teri Toye, for the fashion industry to begin to cast models who were out as transsexuals. This growth of trans modeling, while restricted to the most avant-garde designers with connections to the post-Warhol downtown art scene like Steven Sprouse, Thierry Mugler, and Jean-Paul Gaultier, among others, meant that modeling no longer was merely a dream for trans women, even if it still was an extremely rare opportunity. The idolization of the supermodel, facilitated by the rise of icons like Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, and Paulina Porizkova meant that the trans women and femme queens in Harlem ball culture shared similar idols to the trans models and aspiring models in the downtown art scene.

The links between downtown and Harlem were amplified with the help of Patricia Field and Susanne Bartsch, two cis women whose efforts temporarily joined Harlem ball culture and the downtown art scene, via balls held as fundraisers for HIV/AIDS treatment and research. These balls brought together downtown divas like Connie Fleming and Harlem icons like Octavia St. Laurent, along with existing designers and models like Field herself, Marc Jacobs, and Naomi Campbell.[320] Interactions at the balls helped create opportunities for designers to scout trans

[320] Criales-Unzueta, "From Underground Subculture to Global Phenomenon: An Oral History of Ballroom Within Mainstream Culture," n.p.

women and for trans women to build relationships and connections with designers, facilitating a growth in formal transsexual involvement in the fashion industry. These fundraisers also helped the concept of the doll diffuse from the femme queen ball performers to the predominantly-white aspiring models and night sirens of the downtown fashion avant-garde.

Chapter Three: The Nefaissance and the Onlinegirliefication of *Candy*

In the latter part of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, media visibility and representation of trans women tended to be negative. For example, in episode eighteen of season three of *Sex and the City (SATC)*, "Cock a Doodle Do!," the plot partially revolves around Samantha Jones' new apartment in the Meatpacking District and the trans prostitutes who solicit outside of her apartment. Samantha iconically describes her experience by saying that she is "paying a fortune to live in a neighborhood that's trendy by day and tranny by night" and calls trans women "chicks with dicks, boobs on top, balls down below" and "the other white meat."[321] While I find it extremely funny and find the blatant transphobia as very camp, the audience of *SATC* was not full of delusional transsexuals who spend their entire time in a stew of transsexual discourse and are able to find it funny and campy in a non-transphobic way. The audience was full of young and middle-aged people, predominantly straight cis women and gay men, with whom *SATC* may have been their first exposure to trans women, and may have formed their perceptions of trans women around the rhetoric used in this episode. This rhetoric and portrayal of trans women was typical to the time. Talk shows like *Maury* or *Jerry Springer* often featured trans women as guests, where they were demeaned just for being trans, often by family members. This is all to say that trans women, were, until the 2010s, routinely mocked and subjugated in the popular culture of the Western world.

The late 1990s and the first half of the 2000s also happened to be a period of decline in the influence of ball culture, both in popular culture and in the academy. The music world, so instrumental to introducing a (flawed and whitewashed) portrait of ball culture to the masses, had

[321] *Sex and the City,* season 3, episode 18, "Cock a Doodle Do!," directed by Allen Coulter2000.

changed. In the 1990s, the music at balls remained house, dance-pop, techno, and other related genres, but these genres' mainstream popularity declined throughout the 1990s and early 2000s in favor of country and hip-hop.[322] These two genres, heavily masculine, and the former tied in with the post-9/11 ultranationalist wave in the United States, had, with some far more contemporary exceptions like Lil Nas X, Frank Ocean, or Quay Dash, next to no LGBT involvement in their performance, especially not among the groups of people involved in ball culture. Significantly, while genres like house, dance-pop, and techno drew heavily upon the sounds and themes of ball culture, country and 1990s hip-hop did not, demonstrative of an indirect decline in the mainstream influence that ball culture held. Similarly, academic interest in ball culture began to wane in the years after *Paris is Burning*'s release, focusing almost exclusively around said film, with Google Scholar searches on May 6, 2024 of "drag balls" and "ball culture" from 1994 until 2008 (four years after the film's release until the premier of *RuPaul's Drag Race* that revived interest in the drag and ball cultures of the 1980s and 1990s) featuring 551 results and 157 results, respectively. Many, especially under "ball culture," bear no relation to ball culture as understood in this thesis, for instead they discuss culturing plants for hydroponics with balls of water, baseball/football cultures, or debutant balls of Enlightenment Europe. By comparison, a search for "*Paris is Burning*" using the same constraining years on the same day brings back 1330 results. While Google Scholar is a deeply imperfect tool, I hope this vast difference in the amount of scholarship produced displays not only the disproportionate focus of the academy on *Paris is Burning* in the second half of the 1990s and the 2000s, but also the relative dearth of engagement with ball culture outside of the confines of the documentary. Specifically, I hope it demonstrates my historical

[322] Susman-Peña, "The Vogue of Life," 120.

approach in both going beyond merely focusing on *Paris is Burning* as well as my relative lack of focus on the second half of the 1990s and the 2000s in my scholarship.

The 2000s also proved to be a lull in the inclusion of trans models in the fashion industry. Amanda Lepore continued her work with David LaChapelle and some new trans models and celebrities emerged, like the Greek supermodel Jenny Hiloudaki, the Brazilian dominatrix Bianca Exotica, or the Spanish talk show icon, La Veneno.[323] However, these models tended not to be North American and generally did not reach the heights of high fashion characterized by the trans models of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This lull was only temporary, however as trans involvement in the fashion industry, and public life at large, began to grow again in the very late 2000s and the early 2010s.

The Dolls Bounce Back into the Cultural Zeitgeist (But the Balls do not)

RuPaul's Drag Race brought the aesthetics and culture of balls and transsexuality into the zeitgeist within LGBT communities beginning with its premiere in 2009. The first closeted trans woman on *Drag Race* was Sonique, who appeared on Season Two in 2010, while the first out trans woman who was a contestant on the show was Peppermint, who debuted on Season Eight in 2017. For a cissexual public unfamiliar with the minutiae of drag and trans culture, the increased visibility of trans people in popular culture shot into the mainstream around 2014, five years after *Drag Race* started, but three years before the first out RuGirl, initially through Laverne Cox's role in *Orange is the New Black*, Caitlyn Jenner's transition, and the Amazon Prime show *Transparent*'s debut in 2014. This mainstream visibility and tempered acceptance of trans people was christened

[323] Luis Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity* (New York: Rizzoli, 2020), 255.

by *Time* in 2014 as the "Transgender Tipping Point."[324] This "tipping point" represented less a specific event and more a general change of societal attitudes, where trans people started to become more included in society through advertising, the aforementioned media, admission to single-sex schools and universities, and anti-discrimination protections.[325] It is important to note, however, that this increase in acceptance was very conditional, where the struggles which trans people endured were (and continue to be) erased by the media and pop culture to create a narrative about "the magical transformation that trans people are expected to go through."[326] These travails, like for example, the struggle to achieve representation and inclusion in an industry, like fashion, highly dependent on physical appearance and perceived normative sexuality, are ignored by mainstream media and culture in exchange for a rosy and whiggish view of transition, trans inclusion, and trans success.[327]

In the face of these struggles, trans women have carved out a space for themselves in the fashion industry and fashion journalism. This space has not been in the mainstream women's fashion magazines like *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*, but rather in the smaller and more independent spaces of niche fashion magazines and style magazines.[328] Niche fashion magazines are low-volume, high-prestige periodicals that merge high fashion with the arts and the cultural avant-garde, often with high production values relative to their low levels of readership.[329] The niche fashion magazine most significant to the development of transsexual involvement in the fashion industry is *C*ndy Transversal* (stylized with a star), or just, from now on, *Candy*. *Candy* is a trans-focused, Spain-based, but predominantly (90%+) anglophone, fashion magazine edited by Luis

[324] Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," n.p.
[325] Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," n.p.
[326] Evelyn Deshane, "A Trans Tipping Point," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 43, no. 2-3 (2017): 119.
[327] Brown, *Work!*, 8.
[328] For style magazines, see Chapter Four
[329] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 32.

Venegas, that has, since 2009, in the words of publisher and trans man Amos Mac, "acknowledged queerness in fashion, highlighted people all-but-forgotten in LGBTQ history, and introduced an audience to up-and-comers who were changing the landscape of art, music, runway, and trans culture."[330] *Candy*'s unique focus on transsexuals in the fashion industry, and Venegas's industry connections through his other more conventional niche fashion magazines, like the gay male-focused *EY!: Electric Youth* and the fanzine inspired *Fanzine 137,* provide an important lens through which the relationship between transsexual women and the fashion industry can be analyzed.

Candy's contributions by trans women who are/were models, artists, and performers emblematize its tenuous avant-garde status from its beginning in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when trans women were generally absent from the fashion industry. Its role in helping develop a trans culture and history which draws upon various pasts to constitute itself has provided a space for trans women to be able to write about and reproduce transsexual culture. This basic dignity of cultural reproduction and humanity is typically denied to trans women by the dominant culture in the West, through a false and sexualized form of femininity promoted by mainstream media meant to display transsexuals as "merely some sort of femininity fetish or sexual perversion."[331] I struggle to not feel like I am overstating the importance of magazines like *Candy*. It is a low-run magazine microtargeted to a specific niche of both trans and cis people with an interest in designer fashion and transsexual involvement in the fashion industry. It is not *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*, both of which have been extremely influential on the broader fashion industry. However, *Candy* was and

[330] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 44.
[331] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 47.

is, especially in its contemporary form, a place where trans women could be themselves and work in the fashion industry. *Candy* is transsexual dignity on 25x34cm glossy paper.

A focus on periodicals like *Candy*, should not gloss over the activism and effort that trans women have contributed to the fashion industry to make space for themselves. Glimpses of the struggles that trans women face appear in *Candy* as well as the niche magazines discussed in Chapter Four, but these glimpses, by their short and ephemeral nature, cannot tell a full story on their own. In issue ten of *Candy* from 2017 (guest edited by Hari Nef), there is a letter from an anonymous trans model who discusses why, despite the success of people like Nef or Andreja Pejić throughout the middle of the 2010s, she continues to remain closeted.[332] Specifically, she describes her fears of how coming out would be seen within the industry. She recalls the story of a casting agent who said that they did not want to cast trans models because they were "distracting" for the brand and the show.[333] She also references the fear of a media firestorm because of a perception that her modeling while stealth would be seen as "trick[ing] big brands" that she worked with, like Prada and Louis Vuitton.[334] Around the same time, Andreja Pejić gave an interview in *Candy* where she describes how she "basically grew up with and on the pages of *Candy*" during an era in the early 2010s when "*Candy,* Lea T, and [Pejić]" were some of the few trans models and outlets in fashion.[335] These two examples, one expressing fear over being outed, and the other expressing *Candy*'s vital importance in acculturating a generation of trans models and fashionistas that likely includes the anonymous model from the first letter, demonstrate the conflicting nature of trans involvement in the fashion industry and the importance of *Candy*, where in a deeply transphobic

[332] Anonymous, "Almost a Confessional," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 100.
[333] Anonymous, "Almost a Confessional," 101.
[334] Anonymous, "Almost a Confessional," 101.
[335] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 214.

fashion industry that both searches for and consciously excludes trans women, *Candy* provides a very small place of respite.

The inclusion and discussion of ball culture and its influence on trans women's involvement in fashion, especially among non-white trans women, is generally absent from *Candy* and the other publications discussed in Chapter Four. Whilst ball performers appear scattered throughout the magazines, most commonly in *Candy,* like Carmen Xtravaganza appearing on the cover of issue eight in early 2015 or Atlanta ball icon Amiyah Scott appearing in issue ten from 2017, their involvement in balls is not the main focus of each of their appearances, whether that main focus is the experience of the cover shoot for Carmen Xtravaganza or Scott's acting roles in *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and FX's *Star*.[336] Ball culture has a glaring lack of presence in these periodicals, despite trans involvement in fashion owning a great deal to ball culture's pioneering influence in connecting trans women with the fashion industry. The common themes in ball culture of the importance of fashion and realness remanifest in the conception of the doll understood by the descendants of the downtown avant-garde and in the periodicals read by the doll like *Candy, Paper, Interview*, and others, but these themes are orphaned, besides maybe a few words, from their origins in ball culture.

The Hari Nefaissance

The growth of trans women's involvement in the fashion and nightlife press paralleled the increasing number of trans models throughout the middle and late 2010s. Models like Lea T,

[336] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 124-25; Zac Bayly, "Amiyah Scott," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 140-55.

Andreja Pejić, and Ines Rau were, however, still outliers in an industry that generally continued to fail to include trans women. In early 2014, a woman who would change the face of trans inclusion in fashion began medically transitioning.[337] That woman, Hari Nef, even more than her foremothers in the industry, would be the figure that finally began the integration of trans women into the fashion industry.

Nef began her transition while attending Columbia University in New York. Her life and experience with transsexual women and culture in New York began way before a single hormone entered her bloodstream. As early as 2011, Nef was attending the same nightclubs and events as Amanda Lepore, where much like Linux's "Gen Z trann[ies] that grew up idolizing" Lepore, Nef met and was awed by her.[338] It was through her involvement in nightlife, much like Lepore herself, that Nef was able to begin her medical transition by asking for and receiving transition advice from "transsexual night sirens" like "Sophia Lamar, DeSe Escobar, [and] Juliana Huxtable."[339] Much like Connie Fleming said about her experiences at Boy Bar in the 1980s and 1990s, Nef claims that she "might not have" transitioned "so soon — or at all — had [she] never met these women in nightclubs."[340] Not only did Nef's involvement in nightlife facilitate her transition, it also facilitated her rise to prominence in performing and modeling. At the same time she was clubbing with Lepore, Lamar, et al., Nef was performing on stages as a member of the drag troupe, Chez Deep, a group that was part of the LGBTQ artistic avant-garde in New York in the early 2010s.[341]

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[337] Hari Nef, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Gay Bar," *New York Times* (New York), November 24 2023, Books, https://archive.ph/4cU18.
[338] Nef, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Gay Bar," n.p; Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in New York City (According to Linux)," *Paper*, March 16, 2022, n.p., https://web.archive.org/web/20240214212348/https://www.papermag.com/linux-nyc-february#rebelltitem25.
[339] Nef, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Gay Bar," n.p.
[340] Nef, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Gay Bar," n.p.
[341] Hari Nef, "Read Hari Nef's poem 'Performance and Severance: A Redress'," *Dazed*, 2014, https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/20995/1/read-hari-nefs-poem-performance-and-severance-a-redress.

While Nef's involvement with Chez Deep ended once she began to medically transition, due to personal and ideological disputes with other members, her time in the group helped develop her performance skills, which served her well in her career change to modeling.[342] Nef, through the talent she developed while performing and connections she made while working in the fashion industry in university as an intern, was scouted by and walked her first show during New York Fashion Week in 2014 for Hood by Air, designer Shayne Oliver's brand.[343] Nef's success with Hood by Air led to her being signed by the modeling agency IMG, making Nef the "first openly [trans] woman to receive a worldwide modelling contract."[344]

Nef's contract and employment with IMG made her a social media icon among young trans women interested in fashion and participation in the industry. For example, Dara, the current fashion director at *Interview*, describes how she saw Hari Nef's signing and involvement in the industry as "radical" and how she thinks Nef's pioneering work in modeling partially led to the beginning of Dara's own involvement in the industry.[345] Cruz Valdez, a trans fashion photographer and childhood friend of Dara's, describes how Nef's employment in the fashion industry was the impetus they needed to start their own medical transition as it demonstrated that trans women could be institutionally involved in the fashion industry without needing to hide the fact that they were trans.[346] Unlike the trans models of an earlier era, like Toye, Fleming, or Lepore, Nef's involvement in the industry, parallelled by increased trans visibility and acceptance around the "tipping point," represented a systemic change in how trans models were perceived. Rather than

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[342] Michael Schulman, "Hari Nef, Model Citizen," *New Yorker*, September 26, 2016, n.p., https://web.archive.org/web/20161211044739/https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/26/hari-nef-model-citizen.
[343] Schulman, "Hari Nef, Model Citizen," n.p.
[344] Schulman, "Hari Nef, Model Citizen," n.p.
[345] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 25.
[346] Norman et al., "Roundtable on Trans Fashion Working," 25.

being a curiosity for avant-garde designers like Steven Sprouse and Thierry Mugler, trans models were seen as models first rather than trans first, and were institutionalized in the industry as female models. Ironically, this change, rather than erasing or occluding transness in fashion, more than the trans involvement in the fashion industry in the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s, encouraged trans women to begin to try to find work in the industry, whether that be on the catwalk, behind the camera, or in media.

This change not only led to more trans women being involved in the fashion industry but also transformed the way they participated in the fashion industry. Specifically, they started to participate in their labor as women. For example, one of Connie Fleming's impetuses to leave the fashion industry in the early 1990s was the increasing prominence of drag and her fear that she would be pigeonholed as a drag queen model rather than a female model.[347] In Amanda Lepore's case, her career has revolved around her surgical modifications and her involvement in nightlife, where she displays a plasticine form of femininity that is at odds with the physical form sought by most designers. In Nef's case, however, she was cast as a woman, in the same roles as cissexual women. For example, in a 2015 photoshoot with Chanel and *Exit*, Nef is cast in one image wearing a black cropped sweater, white blouse with oversized neck, and black mesh dress, while in another photo in the same set, she is nude with a Chanel branded belt wrapped loosely around her neck and a white flower in her hair.[348] Beyond Chanel being a relatively conservative fashion house, especially compared to houses like Valentino, Miu Miu, and Mugler, who are well known for their androgyny and ambiguity in design and marketing, the inclusion of Nef wearing selections from Chanel's women's collection and being shot no differently than the cissexual female models

[347] Girl and Dijon, "Connie Girl and Honey Dijon on Being at the Wrong Place at the Right Time," n.p.
[348] Santiago Sierra and Mauricio Sierra, "Chanel," *Exit*, 2015, n.p., https://models.com/work/exit-magazine-chanel/426882.

included in the shoot, like Emily Astrup or Anya Lyagoshina, represents a significant change in how trans models were treated.[349] In a sense, it harkens back to the modeling undertaken by the trans models of Tracey Norman's era and earlier, where they modeled alongside and in the same roles as cis women.[350] However, unlike this earlier era, trans women's contemporary participation in the fashion industry was not conditional on being closeted. In this sense, the working situation of trans women in the fashion industry, like Nef, during the second half of the 2010s parallels the working situation of the cabaret dancers and prostitutes of 1960s and 1970s Montreal, profiled in Viviane Namaste's *C'était du spectacle*, where trans women were able to work as women in a field of labor where the body plays a central role.[351]

The Onlinegirliefication of *Candy*

Central to comprehending how *Candy* and the two style magazines that will be discussed in Chapter Four became so influential in transsexual spaces and vital to the contemporary development and popularization of the doll in fashion media is the understanding that, instead of viewing transsexual women through a cissexual writer's eye, transsexual women writing for these magazines have been given the power of journalism and cultural production. The term, "onlinegirliefication," was coined by Alaska Riley, the current social editor at the style magazine, *Paper*, to refer to the magazine and its social media accounts after Riley, whose Twitter handle is @onlinegirlie, first started running *Paper's* Instagram and Twitter accounts. It will be used in this thesis to refer to the increasing presence of trans women and trans cultural signifiers, specifically

[349] Sierra and Sierra, "Chanel," n.p.
[350] Brown, *Work!*, 263.
[351] Namaste, *C'était du Spectacle*, 34.

those associated with dolldom, in niche fashion and style magazines throughout the second half of the 2010s and the early 2020s.[352] This transformation postdates the beginning of the current wave of trans inclusion in the fashion industry, represented by women like Andreja Pejić and Lea T in the early 2010s, but is deeply indebted to their pioneering influence. Onlinegirliefication is both organic, in that this transformation came from trans writers being employed and pitching their work to these magazines, and top down, in that these magazines have embraced the new market of urbane and fashion-conscious trans women by marketing to them in a way which would not have been possible before social media, both economically and politically.

The onlinegirliefication of *Candy* predates the term being coined by over half a decade, however, the concept still is applicable to its transformation. The first seven issues of *Candy*, published between 2009 and 2013, exemplify the contradictory nature of *Candy's* initial attempts at trans inclusion. These early issues overwhelmingly featured drag queens like Lypsinka and Joey Arias or cissexual people cross-dressing, like DJ Luke Worrall and James Franco.[353] Transsexual women, when featured, did not have journalistic duties, and instead, were only employed as models. Amanda Lepore, Brazilian dominatrix Bianca Crawford, and Dutch model Valentijn de Hingh were featured models in the first two issues published in 2009 and 2010, but they were the exception to the dominant subject matter of drag queens and cross-dressers.[354]

Despite this marked lack of early transsexual involvement in the magazine, there are still examples where the "doll" is visible. In issue three, published in Winter 2011-2012, transsexual pornographic actress Allanah Starr is featured in a story where she is styled like 1970s golden age

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[352] alaska★彡 (@onlinegirlie), "the onlinegirliefication of paper magazine," Twitter, February 21, 2024, https://twitter.com/onlinegirlie/status/1760418780621013313.
[353] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 256-57, 66.
[354] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 247; "C*ndy Transversal 2," 2024, https://byluisvenegas.myshopify.com/collections/candy/products/candy-transversal-2.

Dolly Parton. The story-cum-photoshoot focuses on Starr mimicking "Parton's trademark features," like "big breasts, out-of-this-world platinum blonde wigs, glittery outfits, and plastic surgery."[355] These traits are also shared with transsexual women who embrace the identity of the doll, who, in the process of transitioning, have breast augmentation surgery, rely on wigs until our natural hair grows out, build our wardrobes from scratch, often focusing on the ostentatious and high fashion, and have extensive plastic surgery on our faces to make them more feminine. Beyond having a transsexual woman playing the part of Dolly Parton, *Candy* transforms the physical traits of a cis woman into the physical traits of a transsexual woman, indicative of the similarity of the traits which cissexual women and transsexual women share within the context of the doll. Starr's photoshoot, while communicating the aesthetic components of the doll, does not fall under the banner of onlinegirliefication as it is not an example of trans women reproducing their own culture but rather an ersatz reproduction mediated through a cissexual photographer and editor.

The fifth issue of *Candy*, published in 2013, featured the magazine's first transsexual cover model, the iconic Connie Fleming. Previous issues of *Candy* were not lacking for star power, featuring Luke Worrall, James Franco, Chloë Sevigny, and Tilda Swinton for the first four cover models. However, all four were modeling in drag. Fleming's cover was significant not only for featuring *Candy'*s first trans cover model, but also for its coverage by mainstream media. Published in 2013 but shot and released as a digital shoot in 2012, issue five featured an election year special where Fleming modeled as American First Lady and fashion icon of the 2010s, Michelle Obama.[356] The cover photoshoot drew upon inspiration from Michelle Obama's large repertoire of dresses, calling upon certain iconic outfits, like the strapless Naeem Khan dress worn

[355] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 221.
[356] Levitt, "Politically Correct," 124-45.

by Michelle Obama during a state dinner with the Prime Minister of India in 2009.[357] Because of the somewhat provocative nature of the shoot (a trans woman modeling as one of the most respected cissexual women of the era, as well as right-wing conspiracies around Michelle Obama being a secret transsexual woman), the cover received media interest from more mainstream publications, like *Huffington Post* and the *Daily Mail*.[358] While this coverage, especially by the *Mail* was not particularly positive, it was emblematic of the overall increasing involvement of trans women within the fashion industry, such that trans women's involvement began to be noticed outside of the fashion industry.

Issues six and seven of *Candy*, also both published in 2013, continued the limited trans inclusion of their predecessors, however we do find an example of quasi-onlinegirliefication as well as the first example of true onlinegirliefication in *Candy.* The quasi-onlinegirliefied article found in issue six is an interview with *Le Carrousel* performer and French trans icon, Bambi, briefly discussed in Chapter Two.[359] The interview, of which my access to only contains the first page, details Bambi's early life in French Algeria in the 1930s and 1940s and her move to mainland France to transition in the 1950s.[360] The interview demonstrates the role that onlinegirliefication, even absent its full form, has in preserving trans cultural memory of our foremothers, like Bambi's early transition. The first example of true onlinegirliefication in *Candy* is found in issue seven from 2013.[361] Trans journalist Sunny Suits wrote a retrospective on the life and work of Lower East Side

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[357] Levitt, "Politically Correct," 143.
[358] Jessica Misener, "Michelle Obama Played By Transgender Model Connie Fleming On Candy Magazine Cover (PHOTO)," *Huffington Post*, December 17, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/michelle-obama-candy-magazine-transgender-connie-fleming_n_2317992; Sean O'Hare, "Outrage as magazine uses transgender model to pose as Michelle Obama," *Dail Mail* (London), December 18 2012, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2249837/Michelle-Obama-played-TRANSGENDER-model-Connie-Fleming-Candy-cover.html.
[359] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 172.
[360] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 172.
[361] It is a shame that the onlinegirliefication is found in an article that I only vaguely can describe because of lack of access as the archive that I traveled to that holds issue seven of *Candy* was in the process of reorganizing their collection when I visited.

trans artist Greer Lankton, which included previously unpublished photographs of Lankton and her art taken by Nan Goldin collaborator David Alexander.[362] Beyond this short description, I know no more than that it was the first example in *Candy* (as far as I know) of a trans woman doing journalism for consumption by other trans women. This taste of onlinegirliefication featured in issue seven serves as a precursor for the growing trans involvement within the fashion industry, especially modeling and fashion journalism, in later issues throughout the second half of the 2010s and early 2020s.

Issue eight of *Candy*, published in 2015, marked the first major turning point in the history of the magazine because, starting with this issue, trans women became involved with the magazine in a more systemic way. The cover story, entitled "The Role Models," features a photoshoot involving fourteen trans women who were at the cutting edge of trans inclusion and consciousness in 2015, both in fashion and in society at large. The cover stars *Orange is the New Black* actress Laverne Cox, writer Janet Mock, *RuPaul's Drag Race* season three contestant Carmen Carrera (who transitioned after her season), Filipina-American model Geena Rocero, *America's Next Top Model* star Isis King, Xtravaganza house mother Gisele Alicea, model Leyna Ramous, actress Dina Marie, actress Nina Poon, DJ and nightlife personality Juliana Huxtable, makeup artist Niki M'Nray, Thai model Pêche Di, model Yasmine Petty, and ball culture legend Carmen Xtravaganza.[363] Rocero, in a piece about the cover in *The Candy Book of Transversal Creativity*, describes how the cover was "the image [she] wished [she] had seen when [she] was a young trans woman growing up in the Philippines."[364] Creating a platform where trans women are visible and normalized, while not a panacea to systemic anti-trans discrimination, allows trans women,

[362] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 150.
[363] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 126-27.
[364] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 124.

especially trans youth, to have role models who demonstrate that being trans, successful and famous are not mutually exclusive goals.

The cover also helped reinforce the importance of glamour to the subset of trans women interested in fashion culture and the fashion industry. Rocero argues that the desire for this glamour is tied closely together with trans equality and liberation, claiming that "the fight [for the recognition of trans humanity] and the glam" are part of the same struggle of being seen as women.[365] British model and makeup artist Monroe Bergdorf similarly sees the importance of the connection between glamour and liberation, explaining that the cover "was a real defining media moment for visibility and it made [her] feel extremely empowered to see such beautiful, aspirational, incredible women come together in the relatively early days of [her] transition."[366]

The importance of appearance within visibility to trans women is magnified because of the way that the vast majority of cissexual focused media portrays trans women. Trans representation in media, especially representation from before the "tipping point," "plays," as Julia Serano says, "to the audience's subconscious belief that femininity itself is artificial."[367] This perception of the artificiality of femininity makes the depiction of trans women as glamourous and naturally feminine an important counterpoint to anti-trans tropes and an important affirmation of transsexual womanhood. While it may seem bizarre to claim that a photoshoot, with a group of models whose appearances were prepared by a team of stylists, hairdressers, and makeup artists, is "natural," the cover depicts the trans women as confident modern women who embrace their trans bodies as glamourous while rejecting the anti-trans tropes surrounding vain obsession with makeup or a fetishization of femininity. To trans women like myself, Rocero, or Bergdorf, this naturalization

[365] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 124.
[366] Venegas, *The C*ndy Book of Transversal Creativity*, 125.
[367] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 43.

and positive depiction of femininity is exceptionally important, as something like this cover on issue eight was one of the very first times that trans women were depicted as someone that you, as a glamorous, beautiful, and successful trans woman, want to be. Furthermore, it may seem contradictory to describe the femininity of the doll as both "natural" and "artificial." However, it is in this dialectic between naturality and artificiality, where the femininity of the transsexual is both "natural" in the sense that it is a material representation of the feminine id of transsexuality and "artificial," in that the technologies of beauty and glamor are used to help make that femininity manifest in a way consistent with femininity's depiction within transsexual culture, where the femininity of the doll is seen in its most emblematic form.

While issue nine of *Candy,* published in 2016, included little in the way of onlinegirliefied media or the construction of the doll, issue ten of *Candy*, published in 2017, marked two firsts for the magazine: its first trans editor and its first guest editor. Hari Nef was both. It is in this issue where onlinegirliefied content became a substantial part of the magazine. Much like issue eight, this transformation is visible before even opening the magazine. Starting with issue nine, *Candy* began to feature multiple different covers for each issue, but its first use was to feature four different photographs of pop singer Miley Cyrus. Issue ten, however, took this multiple-cover format and applied it to feature trans women. Cover stars for this issue included Nef, future *Interview* fashion editor Dara, *Real Housewives of Atlanta* star and ball performer Amiyah Scott, model Andreja Pejić, Spanish *Le Carrousel* performer Triana Seville, Connie Fleming, and New York model and singer Torraine Futurum. The inclusion of both contemporary models and fashion icons alongside trans women from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, like Fleming and Seville, provide evidence for how the transsexual past is constructed trans-temporally and trans-geographically. From its opening pages, issue ten features increased trans representation, beginning with the first

photoshoot, “Searching for Magic Hour,” shot by legendary photographer and chronicler of AIDS-era New York and Boston, Nan Goldin. The photoshoot features models standing and sitting on or near the balconies, roofs, and windows of the Jane Hotel and Bowery Hotel in New York during “golden hour,” or the time of dawn or dusk when the sunlight is softest and reddest.[368] Starring six trans women out of the nine models featured; Hari Nef, Torraine Futurum, model and artist Misty Pollen, artist Aurel Haize Odogbo, Canadian model Siobhan Atwell, and Brooklyn designer Third, the photoshoot carries on the (sadly) revolutionary *Candy* tradition of shooting trans models as women, rather than as a trans “other,” whether it be glamour shots on a sofa, chats among the girls on the balcony, or girls sitting at a restaurant in elegant formal dresses.[369]

Candy’s issue ten, published in 2017, also provides readers with an onlinegirliefied history of transness in an article titled, “Pioneers,” by Devan Diaz, which looks at a group of trans foremothers who were still alive in 2017. “Pioneers,” which discusses and interviews Amanda Lepore, Chicago house DJ and legend Honey Dijon, Lauren Foster, New York DJ and actress Nomi Ruiz, Geena Rocero, Dina Marie, Gisele Alicia, cabaret performer Justin Vivian Bond, Connie Fleming, and Philadelphia and New York based drag queen and *The Queen* (1968) star Flawless Sabrina: all besides Vivian Bond and Flawless Sabrina are transsexual women.[370] Each of the interviews, paired with a professional, feminine, and dignified photograph of the interviewees, discuss both their experiences transitioning and existing as a trans woman before the “tipping point” as well as their experiences and hopes while modeling and performing as out trans women in 2016/2017. Diaz’s interviews contextualize the actions and success of these women within a broader transsexual historical moment and community. While interviewing Lepore, Diaz discusses

[368] Nan Goldin, "Searching for Magic Hour," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 38-99.
[369] Goldin, "Searching for Magic Hour," 48-49, 84-85, 95-97.
[370] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 112-31.

how Lepore "placed herself into a realm of beauty that trans… women weren't historically allowed into," and how her glamorous and classically Hollywood type of beauty and its inspirational nature has led to "seeing [Lepore] at a club or on a sidewalk [becoming] a dream come true for many queer and trans kids who move [to New York] in search of freedom."[371] By anchoring Lepore both in the past, through the discussion of her time as a Club Kid, and the present, through her iconic status to young trans women today, Diaz firmly locates Lepore as a quintessential representative of a historical and present community of trans women interested in fashion and nightlife. This process of location is something that Diaz does for the other trans women interviewed, such as locating Dijon as a "conduit [of] necessary healing" from "the daily troubles of existing outside cisgender heteronormativity" done on "the dance floor."[372] Furthermore, Diaz situates Foster as spanning both "the Golden Era of Models" and the "current trend" of trans models (language Foster dislikes, arguing that "if being trans has nothing to do with the final image [sought by the photographer and ad team], [she does not] see the need to mention it").[373] Diaz then locates Marie in the long struggle for material improvements in the health of trans women being substituted by visibility.[374] This history has helped create a common community, where transsexual women who see women like Amanda Lepore and Connie Fleming as iconic can meet others and feel included in a world and society that is typically deeply hostile to transsexual women. This, ultimately, is the importance of *Candy* and the word "doll;" it is a creation and codification of a distinct transsexual community across geographic borders, non-existent before the development of the internet and specialty publications that allowed those borders to be broached.

[371] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 113.
[372] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 114.
[373] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 117.
[374] Diaz and Berrout, "Pioneers," 122.

Following Diaz's interviews on trans history, there is a short memorial for Christina La Veneno, the Spanish trans women and talk show icon, who in 2020 became famous through the release of the mini-series *La Veneno* on HBO. Unlike all other articles in the issue and almost all other stories in all other issues, it is printed in the Spanish language only, demonstrating the near non-existent knowledge of La Veneno outside of the Hispanophone world prior to the HBO show.[375] While the text of the article itself is only accessible to people who can read or translate Spanish, the photoshoot associated with the article, showing La Veneno's pumped lips and surgically exaggerated body, places her firmly within a transsexual milieu of the doll associated with people like Amanda Lepore, and therefore, eminently familiar to the readers of *Candy*.[376] Much like Diaz's article about trans foremothers, the memorial article for La Veneno is a demonstration of how *Candy*, especially in its modern form since 2017 (issues ten and beyond) has helped create and circulate a common trans or "doll" culture through trans people informing other trans people of trans icons, who because of linguistic and geographic barriers, may be unknown to them.

Alongside La Veneno, issue ten of *Candy* also featured an interview by journalist and author Valerie Vegas with Spanish *Le Carrousel* performer Triana Seville. *Le Carrousel*, briefly mentioned in both the introduction and Chapter Two, was the Paris cabaret famous for its trans dancers, like the iconic Bambi, Amanda Lear, and Coccinelle.[377] While the heyday of the club was during the 1950s and 1960s when *Le Carrousel* served as the Mecca for European transsexual women, *Le Carrousel* only closed in 2016, so there exists an over fifty-year history of the cabaret that is far less well known. One of the trans performers from that lesser-known era of *Le Carrousel*

[375] Valeria Vegas, "Christina La Veneno (1964-2016) In Memorium," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 135.
[376] Vegas, "Christina La Veneno (1964-2016) In Memorium," 133, 36-37.
[377] Starr, "BAMBI: « I'D DECIDED TO LIVE IN WOMEN'S CLOTHES »," n.p.

was Triana Seville. Seville, who began working in *Le Carrousel* in 1974, was a protégé of those iconic performers.[378] Seville, a Spaniard, moved to Paris and joined *Le Carrousel* at a time of intense political transformation in Spain, where the dictatorship of Francisco Franco was beginning to democratize under King Juan Carlos II and Basque and Catalan nationalists were engaging in a militant campaign against the fascist government. Seville's return to Spain in 1977 during the blossoming, if tempered, cultural liberalism of the post-Franco era, led to her working with Spanish LGBT icons of that era, such as drag queen Paco España and actress Lola Flores.[379] While Vegas's interview with Seville focuses mainly on her time at *Le Carrousel* and life in Paris and Spain, Vegas and Seville also discuss Seville's interest in fashion, specifically Valentino, Chanel, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Mugler, four brands which were and continue to be associated with earlier pioneers of transness in fashion.[380] Much like *Candy*'s treatment of La Veneno, Seville's work and interests are placed within the history of a larger transsexual involvement and interest in the fashion industry and culture. The iconic cabaret dancers of *Le Carrousel* are connected with the lesser-known ones like Triana Seville and both are linked with the designers that the type of trans women who are the targeted audience of *Candy* are interested in. In this way, La Veneno's memorial and the interview with Seville both demonstrate *Candy*'s attempts at and successes in internationalizing the history and sociocultural milieu of the doll.

Candy, despite its limited distribution and small publication numbers, has proven extremely influential among transsexual women involved in and interested in the fashion industry. However, this influential status did not come about overnight. While for the first nine issues, trans women were occasionally featured and written about, it would be an error to claim that the

[378] Valeria Vegas, "Triana Seville," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2017, 182.
[379] Vegas, "Triana Seville," 188.
[380] Vegas, "Triana Seville," 188.

magazine focused on transness rather than a nebulous "transversality" of gender non-conformity. However, issue ten (and beyond) marked a significant change in transsexual involvement in the fashion industry and *Candy*. No, issue ten of *Candy* did not directly lead to trans women getting modeling contracts or trans women being able to freely work in the industry while out without harassment. What issue ten did, however, was provide a location where trans involvement in the fashion industry could be celebrated and communicated to a wider group of people; a phenomenon that has continued among the issues of *Candy* published since. Looking back at issue ten allows one to see the popularization of modern "doll" culture and how the current transsexual renaissance in the fashion industry, represented by models like Hunter Schafer, Alex Consani, and Colin Jones, came into the limelight.

Candy and the Trans Present

While the initial onlinegirliefication of *Candy* is now in the distant past, within the context of the modern media environment, that does not mean that *Candy* has stopped being relevant nor stopped being vital to the continuing popularization of the doll. The most recent issue of *Candy* (as of writing this), issue fourteen, published in the summer of 2022, provides a sort of bridge from which we can transition from the earlier onlinegirliefication of *Candy* to the more recent onlinegirliefication of the style magazines *Paper* and *Interview*, while, at the same time, understanding trans women's involvement in the fashion industry in the early 2020s. Specifically, there are three photoshoots in issue fourteen that demonstrate both doll culture and contemporary trans involvement in the fashion industry. The first of these is a photoshoot by Diego Villarreal with New York based model Ella Snyder entitled "New York State of Mind." This shoot has Snyder

and her friend Grey Hoffman posing in the communal spaces of a New York apartment building (lobby and laundry room) while wearing Diesel's fall/winter 2022/2023 collection.[381] Beyond serving as a promotional shoot for Diesel, this shoot also serves to highlight one of the biggest trans stars in the fashion industry in 2021/2022. Snyder served as a muse for Diesel's head designer Glenn Martens during those two years, and through her relationship with Diesel, reached significant fame in the fashion industry. She went on to be in shoots for Heaven by Marc Jacobs, Ugg, and Miu Miu, and walked for A Bathing Ape and Mirror Palais in 2023. While she does not have the social media stardom of Alex Consani or the acting successes of Hunter Schafer, Snyder has developed a successful career in the fashion industry as a woman while being openly trans, something unimaginable even a decade ago.

While Ella Snyder represents the quotidian success that trans women have had in the fashion industry today, a photoshoot by Bryce Anderson of social media superstar Alex Consani in Saint Laurent's spring/summer 2022 collection, is an example of a trans model who has achieved worldwide fame.[382] Consani, while entering the industry in a more traditional way, through her mother finding an advertisement for models on Facebook in 2015, only exploded in popularity more recently, when she started her TikTok account during the COVID-19 lockdown.[383] Consani's skits on TikTok are eminently quotable, with her rendition of Lana Del Ray's 2023 song "Peppers" and her "the girls will be serving down, well yes" rant on the dressing room floor permeating trans and gay online youth culture.[384] Consani's TikTok success has led to her being able to walk for

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[381] Diego Villarreal, "New York State of Mind," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2022, 327.
[382] Bryce Anderson, "You're a Step in the Right Direction," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2022, 328-29.
[383] Christian Allaire, "The Rising Model is the Master of Gen-Z Humor on TikTok," *Vogue*, April 19, 2022, https://archive.ph/vbFsJ.
[384] ms.mawma (@ms.mawma), TikTok, July 1, 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/@ms.mawma/video/7250931742692003118?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7172773621755430405; Alex Consani (captilcroook), "Who let me in here," 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/@captincroook/video/7276103219611192606?lang=en.

some of the largest and most glamorous houses in fashion. Beyond walking for trans staple Mugler, Consani, just for the fashion weeks of February 2024, has walked for Ferragamo, Thom Browne, Luar, Helmut Lang, Marc Jacobs and others. Consani's global success as a model who is trans, unthinkable even a decade ago, demonstrates the star and staying power that trans women have gained in fashion industry in recent years.

Not all trans women who begin in the industry as models or later work as models spend their time in the fashion industry in front of the camera. In *Candy* issue fourteen, we can see two examples of differing contributions to the fashion industry by trans women with the cases of Emilio Tamez and Alaska Riley. Tamez is a freelance fashion photographer who is both the stylist and photographer for "With a Little Help from My Friends," a Givenchy SS 22 promotional shoot in *Candy* issue fourteen, starring Cici Tamez (no relation as far as I can tell), Jake Junkins, Alaska Riley, Charlie Ford Nishimura, and Zholie Valentine.[385] Beyond her work with *Candy*, Tamez has also shot for Dion Lee and has been featured in *Paper* for her involvement and photography in New York nightlife.[386]

On the other side of the camera in "With a Little Help from My Friends" is Alaska Riley, a friend of Tamez's and rising star in the New York fashion media world.[387] Riley, during 2022 and early 2023, spent her time working in the fashion industry as a runway model, walking for Coach and Miu Miu. However, throughout 2023, low pay and lack of opportunities dissuaded her further participation, and by November of 2023, using the connections she built in the fashion industry,

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[385] Emilio Tamez, "With a Little Help From My Friends," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2022, 376.
[386] EMILIO TAMEZ (e.miliotamez), "O Come All Ye Faithful," Instagram, 2023; Justin Moran, "Paper People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends," *Paper*, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/paper-people-40th-anniversary#rebelltitem39.
[387] Tamez, "With a Little Help From My Friends," 371-72.

she became the social media editor for *Paper.*[388] Riley's disillusionment with modeling is representative of the way vanity and desire for youth permeates the industry, such that Riley, aged twenty-three or twenty-four, is deemed too old to walk. However, she is also representative of a new generation of trans fashion journalists and media stars who grew up in the wake of the Nefaissance and the transformation of *Candy*, and whose familiarity with the "doll" has allowed them to serve as important conduits through which dolldom can reach beyond the elite corners of niche magazines and New York gay clubs to get to the yearning transsexual masses.

Conclusion

While onlinegirliefication may still be in an embryonic period when discussing the fashion press at large, substantial changes within fashion and avant-garde journalism have occurred. As there are a limited number of transsexual women, and even a smaller number of those of us who are interested in fashion, nightlife, and the cosmopolitan cultural avant-garde, I am under no illusion that there will ever be room for more than a few publications that will cater to trans women and the topics that interest them. However, the fact that there exists a subculture of transsexual women who can be catered to and who are employed within fashion media is demonstrative of the transformation within the fashion industry that took place throughout the 2010s and the early 2020s. Unlike so much of the reporting and writing relating to trans topics, whether in academia, mass market publications, or magazines that cater to "LGBT issues" in general, the onlinegirliefied publications, like *Candy* target and cultivate a transsexual readership with an assumption that the

[388] alaska★彡 (@onlinegirlie), "the industry does not gaf " Twitter, January 4, 2024, https://twitter.com/onlinegirlie/status/1743080412480692272; alaska★彡 (@onlinegirlie), "new onlinegirlie bio just dropped :)," Twitter, November 13, 2023, https://twitter.com/onlinegirlie/status/1724088532715593761.

reader is knowledgeable enough about the trans and homosexual subcultures to understand what is being discussed. By catering to this transsexual market, *Candy* embraces the avant-garde, not just of fashion, but of sex and gender. It is *Candy'*s status as a niche fashion magazine, linking the transsexual avant-garde of fashion and culture with established forces within the fashion industry, that has provided transsexual involvement in the fashion industry, both in front of and behind the camera, with a level of official sanction befitting Venegas's important status within the fashion publishing industry.

Additionally, *Candy* has been vital to continuing to popularize the concept of the "doll" among this demographic. The cultural lineage of those featured in *Candy* can be traced back to the transsexuals involved in the downtown fashion avant-garde of the 1980s and the 1990s.[389] However, *Candy*'s lack of coverage of ball culture in general, and Black trans women more specifically, is emblematic of the appropriation of the doll from ball culture by that cultural lineage. *Candy*'s focus on fashion, glamour and transsexual normalization mirrors the interests and desires of Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent's generation of femme queens, yet outside of Carmen Xtravaganza appearing on issue eight's cover or a short story in issue ten about Amiyah Scott, the clear cultural connection between ball culture and *Candy* is not manifested in reality. The style magazines discussed in the next chapter are no better than *Candy* at making this connection between themselves and ball culture material. However, *Candy*'s clear close relationships with the predominantly white trans fashionistas who brought the doll into wider consciousness does make the lack of such a relationship between balls and *Candy* more disappointing.

[389] In the cases of Amanda Lepore and Connie Fleming, the same people are featured.

Chapter Four: The Onlinegirliefication of *Paper* and *Interview*

Alongside the niche fashion magazine, *Candy,* which is partially responsible for the current renaissance of trans involvement in the fashion industry, there are two style magazines, *Paper* and *Interview* that have built upon this trend. They both predate the first issue of *Candy* by decades but only have recently come to the forefront of trans inclusion in the fashion industry. Style magazines are periodicals that started in the 1980s, initially in Britain, and originally focused on street style, but which gradually began, as they grew, to focus on the intersections of fashion and nightlife culture, adopting an irreverent tone towards the fashion industry at large.[390] Unlike niche fashion magazines, style magazines in 2024 tend to have higher print runs or are exclusively online, and market themselves towards a wider audience. Hence, these magazines are an excellent place to observe the developing consumption of culture associated with the popularization of the doll beyond its origins in ball culture.

The first of these magazines, *Paper*, began in 1984 as a more countercultural and independent competitor to the long-running alternative newspaper, *The Village Voice*, and over the past four decades, it has come to focus on fashion, celebrity, and pop culture news and discussion. *Paper*, through its history, has hired writers and written about people who were drag queens or "gender-non-conforming," like the drag queens Lady Bunny and Joey Arias, who were employed as journalists, or Tabboo and Linda Simpson, who were regular subjects of articles.[391] This coverage and authorship, which was part of *Paper*'s broader avant-garde journalistic mission,

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[390] Lynge-Jorlén, *Niche Fashion Magazines*, 25-28.
[391] Lady Bunny, "Planet Jayne," *Paper*, September 1995, 112; Joey Arias, "Jayne Country, Goddess of Wet Dreams and Patron Saint to the Obscene," *Paper*, Summer 1993, 23; Mickey Boardman, "Tranny Talk," *Paper*, December 1996, 51.

however, generally did not include actual transsexuals. Writers like Arias and Bunny, as well as the cis gay male contingent of the authorship, made liberal use of the word "tranny," but trans writers were not given a voice in early issues of *Paper*.[392] While over the first fifteen years of publication, Lower East Side artist Greer Lankton, Warhol superstar Jackie Curtis, country and punk singer Jayne Country, Amanda Lepore, and Honey Dijon (pre-transition) all had stories written about them in *Paper*, four and a half trans women being written about over two and a half decades does not trans inclusion make.[393] This exclusion of trans women is not what I would consider actively transphobic, as tabloids like the *New York Post* and *The Daily Mail* were throughout the same time period, but it was representative of the passive societal transphobia that I have discussed, in the context of the fashion industry, throughout Chapters Two and Three. I preface my discussion this way, because as much as it sounds like I am indicting *Paper*, in reality, *Paper* was still at the forefront of trans inclusion outside of zines by talking about transsexual women in a positive light at all.

The second of the style magazines that have been important to the current renaissance of trans involvement in the fashion industry is *Interview*, a magazine with an extremely venerable legacy in the New York avant-garde world. Founded by Andy Warhol in 1969 and run out of his Factory until Warhol's death in 1987, *Interview* through its various iterations over the years, has focused on celebrity and pop culture interviews and fashion, often with celebrities serving as both interviewees and interviewers. *Interview*'s most recent edition, revived in 2018 and edited by former David LaChapelle collaborator Mel Ottenberg, is the version of *Interview* that has been

[392] Boardman, "Tranny Talk," 51; Boardman et al., "Fag Bashes: Midtown," 111.
[393] For a selection of some of the stories featuring these women see: Brigitte Engler, "Shocking Dolls," *Paper*, October 1984, n.p; Victoria Weaver, "Jackie Curtis 1948-1985," *Paper*, June 1985, n.p; Arias, "Jayne Country, Goddess of Wet Dreams and Patron Saint to the Obscene," 23; Peter Davis, "Plastic Fantastic," *Paper*, August 1998, 28; June Joseph, "On Wheels of Steel," *Paper*, November 1998, 108.

most influential to the current trans fashion renaissance.[394] Warhol's legacy within the New York avant-garde and his contribution to the success of the trans Warhol Superstars Holly Woodlawn, Candy Darling, and Jackie Curtis, precede the increasing trans involvement in *Interview*. However, those women were never formally part of the magazine staff nor had any control over the content of the magazine. As such, *Interview*'s legacy in trans inclusion has been far less venerable than *Paper*'s.

You Can Read, Doll!

In the late 2010s and the early 2020s, a new generation of trans fashion influencers and models have gained fame and spurred on trans inclusion in the fashion industry beyond just *Candy* and Hari Nef. It is this next generation that has helped push magazines like *Paper* and *Interview* to begin the process of onlinegirliefication and has helped mediate the current day trans renaissance in the fashion industry and nightlife to a readership, that based on the magazines' content, is disproportionately LGBT. I do not know the readership demographics of the magazines; however, the content of the magazines is clearly targeted towards a gay and trans audience, hence I make the assumption that gay and trans people make up a disproportionate amount of the readership compared to the general public. The onlinegirliefication of *Paper*, however, does not represent a break with the magazine's previous history, but rather an adaptation to a new societal paradigm in which trans women have become more prominent and accepted, especially in the industries and subcultures that *Paper* covers. The onlinegirliefication that has characterized recent articles from

[394] Sarah Cascone, "'Interview' Magazine Will Relaunch in September After Peter Brant Essentially Repurchased It From Himself," *artnet*, Aug 18 2018, n.p., https://news.artnet.com/art-world/interview-relaunch-brant-1340087.

Paper is best shown through their fortieth anniversary article and photoshoot in 2024, entitled "PAPER People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends."[395] This article features thirty different personalities and "local legends," who, throughout the history of *Paper*, have been regular stars and contributors to the magazine and the New York nightlife and fashion avant-garde.[396] Out of the thirty different personalities featured and interviewed in the article, at least seven of them are trans women: Connie Fleming, *Paper* nightlife writer Linux, Emilio Tamez, model Emira D'Spain, Gia Love, Twitter personality Blizzy McGuire, and one of the voices of the New York City Subway system, Bernie Wagenblast.[397] Also interviewed are honorary transsexual Susanne Bartsch and non-binary femme models and performers Jazelle and Richie Shazam.[398] The fact that out of the thirty people chosen as individuals being representative of *Paper*, nearly one third are some variety of transfeminine, compared to less than one percent of the general population, indicate that in its modern form, *Paper* centers trans women and their interests to a greater extent than almost all non-trans focused periodicals.

While Linux is a columnist at *Paper* (originally *Interview*), focusing on her escapades being a major hostess in the gay and trans New York nightlife scene, she is the only one of the three regular trans contributors to *Paper* who were photographed and interviewed for the "PAPER People" story. Alaska Riley, besides being the "social editor," or the social media manager for *Paper* on Instagram and Twitter, has begun to take an active role in the journalistic side of the magazine as well, by becoming a photographer and interviewer. For Charli XCX and A.G. Cook's February 2024 Boiler Room DJ set, Riley was the on-the-ground reporter and photographer,

[395] Moran, "Paper People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends," n.p.
[396] Moran, "Paper People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends," n.p.
[397] Moran, "Paper People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends," n.p.
[398] Moran, "Paper People: NYC Icons, Freaks and Legends," n.p.

responsible for the live coverage of the event for *Paper*'s Instagram and TikTok.[399] Furthermore, in March 2024, she interviewed Canadian pop star Tate McRae about the summer 2024 tour for McRae's second album, *Think Later*.[400] Her transformation from model and *Paper* reader to journalist and *Paper* employee demonstrates one form of onlinegirliefication of the fashion and nightlife press, where trans women parlay their experience in the two industries into being a journalistic observer-cum-participant. Linux and Riley are not the only trans journalists who currently write for *Paper*. Joan Summers, writer and podcast host of *Eating for Free* alongside journalist Matthew Lawson, has become a consistent fashion and music writer for *Paper*. Living in Philadelphia, Summers covers the club music scene for *Paper*, recently (as of March 2024) interviewing club artists like DJ_Dave and Cobrah.[401] Furthermore, she also covered the recent (as of March 2024) international Fashion Weeks and the Oscars, analyzing new collections and celebrity outfits.[402] Summers' involvement with *Paper* represents the other way onlinegirliefication can manifest; by hiring writers who are trans who will write about things that they and other trans people find interesting. Unlike the onlinegirliefication undertaken by Riley, this form is more passive but long-lasting, when it comes to its influence on the content of the magazine. While publicly facing transsexuals can inspire short bursts of trans content, to continue having trans stories and photoshoots in the magazine, it takes transsexual women working behind the scenes to synthesize the image with the articles.

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[399] alaskaonline (onlinegirlie), "@Charli XCX @Boiler Room was iconic i ❤️ partying and also @PAPER Magazine shoutout nyc ?," TikTok, February 24, 2024.
[400] Alaska Riley, "Tate McRae, Pop Girl on the Rise," *Paper*, March 15, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/tate-mcrae-think-later-tour.
[401] Joan Summers, "Cobrah Goes Hard in NYC," *Paper*, March 20, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/cobrah-photo-diary; Joan Summers, "DJ_Dave Conquers the 'World's Hardest Game'," *Paper*, March 28, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/dj-dave-interview#rebelltitem1.
[402] Joan Summers, "Hollywood's Archival Fashion Arms Race," *Paper*, March 18, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/red-carpet-archival-fashion#rebelltitem1.

While the focus of the journalists who are trans women at *Paper* has been on nightlife and pop culture, *Interview*'s onlinegirliefication has been concentrated within fashion. With the hiring of Dara as the fashion director at *Interview* in 2022, the onlinegirliefication of the periodical began in earnest. Beyond having control over the fashion chosen for the photoshoots associated with the interviews in the magazine and being responsible for *Interview*'s coverage of the big four fashion weeks (Paris, New York, Milan, and London), Dara also began to interview trans women involved in the fashion world. In relation to the 2023 H&M/Mugler collaboration, Dara interviewed Connie Fleming about Fleming's experience modeling for Mugler in the late 1980s and early 1990s and her experience returning to model for Mugler for this collaboration.[403] Beyond merely discussing Fleming's involvement in the H&M campaign, Fleming praises Dara's success for her employment at *Interview* and her role in increasing trans involvement in the fashion industry.[404] Outside of her interviews with the trans fashion legends of the past, Dara has also conducted interviews with some of the most iconic trans women of today. In an interview with Geena Rocero, the Filipina trans icon, Dara and Rocero discuss the transnational nature of the contemporary "doll" culture and language.[405] The two of them discuss Rocero's involvement in beauty pageants in her native Philippines, her experience transitioning in the late 1990s and early 2000s Filipino LGBT culture, and the state of trans existence and representation in the Philippines in 2023.[406] It is important to note that the usage of the word "doll" by Dara is as a synonym for "trans woman." While the people she discusses, like Connie Fleming or Geena Rocero, are legible as emerging from the understanding of the doll developed in the downtown fashion avant-garde, there is no explicit

[403] Dara, "Connie Girl Seasons The Dolls at the Launch of Mugler H&M," n.p.
[404] Dara, "Connie Girl Seasons The Dolls at the Launch of Mugler H&M," n.p.
[405] Dara, "Pageant Queen Geena Rocero Teaches Us Filipino Doll Slang," *Interview*, May 30, 2023, n.p., https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/pageant-queen-geena-rocero-teaches-us-filipino-doll-slang.
[406] Dara, "Pageant Queen Geena Rocero Teaches Us Filipino Doll Slang," n.p.

reference on Dara's part to restrict use of the word "doll" to a specific subset of trans women in which Fleming and Rocero are included.

Dara's involvement in the onlinegirliefication of *Interview* is exemplary of both halves of the onlinegirliefication described in *Paper*. Dara parlayed her previous experience as a model, discussed both in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, into a behind-the-camera role in the industry, combining her experience on the runway with her employment as a writer and a designer while publicly out as a trans woman. However, Dara's journalism is also emblematic of the more passive form of onlinegirliefication, where, through her writing, she discusses both fashion in general as well as trans women's involvement in the fashion industry. Her writing, therefore, likely attracts trans women interested in fashion to *Interview* to read her regular pieces, maintaining trans interest in *Interview*'s journalism. Unlike *Paper*, *Interview* is not as onlinegirliefied, with most of the articles and interviews still starring cis interviewees and interviewers, however, Dara's success with *Interview* demonstrates how, even in small numbers, sustained inclusion and employment of trans women who write about topics of interest to trans women can cultivate a likely disproportionately LGBT readership.

The Doll as a Cultural Icon

But what of the doll in 2024? Stars like Hari Nef and magazines like *Candy, Paper*, and *Interview* helped popularize the doll as a cultural icon for transsexual women, but the concept and culture has been prominent among transsexuals since at least the 1980s. However, since it first originated among ball culture participants, the term has developed, adapted, and been co-opted by trans women outside of ball culture. The evolution of the term within the fashion and media

industries over the past forty years of transsexual existence is what this thesis has sought to track. While I have framed the "doll" as being an urban dwelling (specifically New York-dwelling) transsexual woman who is interested in fashion, glamour, and transsexual cultural products, the doll in 2024 has spread beyond the municipal boundaries of America's first city. While onlinegirliefication, as a term, describes the spread of the doll from the side of niche fashion and style media, the organic spread of the doll through trans social media users, influencers, and content creators is another important vector via which the doll has gone beyond its geographic and subcultural origins.

Connections between onlinegirliefied media and trans social media users, influencers, and content creators have been vital to the spread of the doll outside of the New York communities in which it originated. We return to *Candy,* specifically its twelfth and thirteenth issues, released in 2019 and 2021, respectively, to help explore one of the most important figures in the transmission of the concept of the doll, Arca. Arca, a Venezuelan electronic musician based in Barcelona, who transitioned in 2018 after the release of her first three albums, is featured in issue twelve by way of a photoshoot-cum-poetry excerpt, featuring aesthetics which draw upon the plasticine body horror which characterizes the cover art of her early albums (See Figures 1, 2, and 3 for said cover art).[407]

Figure 2: Mutant (2015)

Figure 3: Xen (2014)

Figure 1: Arca (2017)

[407] Arca, "Sing From Your Heart," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2019, n.p.

While Arca was already thoroughly integrated in the mainstream music industry, being a producer on Kanye West's 2013 album *Yeezus*, Bjork's 2015 album, *Vulnicura,* and her 2017 album, *Utopia*, Arca's choice to publish her photography and music in a smaller scale magazine is indicative of the value and connection to a broader trans public that *Candy* has developed since its founding in 2009. Arca has continued to be a regular feature in *Candy* since issue twelve. She was featured as a cover star for issues thirteen and fourteen, from 2021 and 2022, respectively, and did a promotional shoot for *Kick I* and Bottega Veneta in issue thirteen. This promotional shoot features Arca in Bottega Veneta's Salon spring/summer 2021 collection, shot in various low-light industrial environments, interspliced with more of Arca's poetry.[408] Arca's inclusion of her poetry, in both issues twelve and thirteen, indicates that *Candy* provides a place for publication of trans artistic content.

Arca also has been important in the proliferation of the use of "doll" as a term and concept among trans women. In her promotional tweet for the release of issue thirteen of *Candy* in 2021, Arca headlines her post "*RC* L* MUÑEC*," "Arca la Muñeca," or translated from Spanish: "Arca the Doll."[409] The tweet also includes a photo of the cover, featuring Arca in a blue vinyl or patent dress from Bottega Veneta's spring 2021 collection with her holding Venegas's pug. The connection that Arca makes between herself and her art, *Candy*, and high fashion demonstrates the importance that *Candy* has had in the formation of the "doll." Outside of Arca's use of the word "doll" during her appearances in *Candy*, on her 2021 album, *Kick II*, she has a song entitled "Muñecas," or "Dolls," where the lyric "Todas mis muñecas," or "All my dolls," is repeated

[408] Arca, "Arca," *C*ndy Transversal*, 2021, n.p.

[409] Arca (@arca1000000), "☆RC☆ L☆ MUÑEC☆ for C☆NDY 13 COVER! Brilliant! Bombastic! Super! Fantastic! Alive! in Bottega Veneta ❤️ shot by founder and editor of CANDY, Luis Venegas. This magazine showed trans beauty in a way I had never seen when I first picked up my 1st copy on St Marks years ago?," Twitter, 2021, https://x.com/arca1000000/status/1382001489703493636?s=20.

throughout the song.[410] While "doll" as a culture and concept had become more solidified by 2021, especially by late November and early December when *Kick*s *II* through *IIIII* released, the songs were written earlier than that and represent an important discursive relationship between the grassroots conception of the "doll" and the trans influencers and celebrities who helped bring it into wider consciousness. Beyond that, Arca's song represents that, by 2021, the concept of the doll had gone beyond the anglophone trans world.

The rise of trans social media users, influencers, and content creators have led to the development of a symbiosis between the trans underground and public and the journalists responsible for the onlinegirliefication of the niche fashion and style media that the trans public consumes. Linux's monthly column in *Paper* (formerly *Interview*) about New York nightlife, "What You Missed Last Month in New York City (According to Linux)," demonstrates one way in which this media-driven relationship has popularized and transmitted the doll. The content of the column demonstrates not only the connection between the doll, fashion, and nightlife but also how that connection has been enabled through the relationship between onlinegirliefied publications and the trans public. For example, in the February 2024 edition of the column, published on March 11, 2024, Linux discusses her attendance at events at Brooklyn clubs Elsewhere and Paragon, as well as the Charli XCX Boiler Room DJ set.[411] The event she discusses at Elsewhere, held by "three-member party collective Papi Juice" is described as "monthly she-bang celebrating queer and trans people of color."[412] Linux's involvement in helping promote an event that is billed as "celebrating queer and trans people of color" and attended by New York designers Telfar Clemens (Telfar), Raul Lopez (Luar), and Laquan Smith (Laquan Smith)

[410] Arca, "Muñecas," in *Kick II* (London: XL Records, 2021).
[411] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," *Paper*, 2024, n.p., https://www.papermag.com/linux-what-you-missed-mar24#rebelltitem2.
[412] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," n.p.

demonstrates the close relationship between dolls, the fashion industry, and the New York gay nightlife scene.[413] The event at Paragon, "Dance Planet," continues to demonstrate these connections. At Dance Planet, the two DJs who Linux emphasizes "slay[ed] in the club" were trans women River Moon and Toccororo.[414] Unlike the event at Paragon, the connection to the fashion industry is minimal, however Linux, and the onlinegirliefication of *Paper* she helped contribute to, promotes trans artists to an LGBT audience, reinforcing the importance of nightlife to the doll.

Even more than the first two events, Linux's documentation of the Charli XCX Boiler Room set demonstrates the unity of transness, fashion, and nightlife to creating a conception of the doll. Boiler Room (not the similarly named Manhattan gay bar) is an electronic music promoter and broadcaster who schedules DJ sets from various EDM (electronic dance music) artists and uploads them on their YouTube channel. Charli XCX's set, held at 99 Scott, a Brooklyn event space, also featured her frequent producer, A.G. Cook, and Charli XCX protégée Addison Rae. Linux, who attended as a VIP, describes the meeting of her and her guests, influencer Blizzy McGuire, drag queen and former *RuPaul's Drag Race* season ten winner Aquaria, fashion bloggers Fashion Faguette and Blair Spicer, and the club DJ Arra as a "doll linkup."[415] Linux, McGuire, Fashion Faguette, Spicer, and Arra are all trans women while Aquaria is a cissexual gay man. The usage of the phrase "doll linkup" by Linux indicates that not only does she conceive of herself as a "doll," but also understands the concept of "doll" as beyond just trans women to also include a form of femininity of those assigned male at birth, with Aquaria. Linux's more liberal use of the word "doll" in this context demonstrates that despite my academic desires to compartmentalize the

[413] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," n.p.
[414] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," n.p.
[415] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," n.p.

term, the way trans people make quotidian use of the term does not lend itself to such restrictive claims.

Returning to Faye's definition of the doll explored in the introduction, as "the 'synthetic' nature of trans women's hyper-femininity," where a trans woman "rejoices in the spectacularity of her femininity, and its synthetic nature that, ultimately, she's usually created herself through surgery [and/or] cosmetics" can help explain why Linux defines Aquaria as a doll despite his status as a drag queen rather than a trans woman.[416] The artificial femininity of a drag queen, like Aquaria, while not created surgically through facial feminization surgery or sexual reassignment surgery like transsexuals' femininity often is, is still created through cosmetics, which would make Aquaria, at least while in drag, a doll. At the aforementioned Charli XCX Boiler Room set, Aquaria wore a cropped black tank top, black thong, black mesh shorts, and a Ziggy Stardustesque pompadour.[417] Much like David Bowie himself, Aquaria's fashion choices at the set frustrate the idea that Aquaria could be considered either in or out of drag at the time. Linux's inclusion of Aquaria as being part of the "doll linkup" does lead me to consider that even if he is not in drag, he is close enough to being in drag that the difference is so academic as to be meaningless, at least in how the word "doll" is used by Linux.

The Doll in 2024

It is in that malleability of the term that we can explain Linux's inclusion of Aquaria as a doll. Doll can mean a "feminine and glamorous transsexual woman." Doll can also refer to a form of femininity, not just restricted to trans women, applied to those all assigned male at birth who

[416] Guobadia, "Welcome to the Age of the Doll," n.p.
[417] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in NYC (According to Linux)," n.p.

embrace the creative and transformative power that transsexual femininity has, even if they are not transsexuals themselves. Aquaria is representative of the flexibility of the use of the term "doll." While the feminine transsexual who embraces the power of surgery, makeup, and fashion to change her body is present among all conceptions of the term doll, whether academic or intracommunal, the limits on who the term applies to varies by who is defining it and how it is being used. In this sense, a strict definition of the term "doll" is a fool's errand. While the definition I gave within the introduction is useful as a baseline, it ultimately does not represent the way all dolls make use of the term.

In the absence of a strong positive definition based on evidence, we can still give some parameters that indicate who is *not* and *never will be* considered a doll. First, a doll must be assigned male at birth. The doll is an avatar of transfemininity and the importance of the perceived synthetic and artificial nature and societal disdain of femininity of those not born as cissexual women are the reasons why the doll is important to transsexuals in the first place. The idea that masculinity may not be ideal or desired or that it is inconceivable to "most people … why someone would give up male privilege and power in order to become a relatively disempowered female" are central to the societal disdain of femininity in those assigned male at birth.[418] The doll is an example of femininity, shorn from its relationship to birth sex, that those not assigned female at birth can relate to. Secondly, along the same lines, the doll must be feminine and be willing to embrace and enjoy the transformative power of surgery, glamour, and fashion. Embracing all three is not necessary to be considered a doll, but embracing none of them is a surefire example of a non-doll. Those embraces must also not be autoerotic nor be related to any manifestation of transvestic fetishism or transvestic disorder, even if non-erotic, as the doll lies outside of the

[418] Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 47.

eroticism of the self.[419] Thirdly and finally, a doll can never be a heterosexual male, no matter how feminine. The doll's association with fashion and nightlife culture ties it firmly within the larger lens of LGBT culture, and therefore a doll must be gay (if not a trans woman), bisexual, or transsexual, such that a doll can be a gay male or bi male who displays the femininity displayed by the doll. There are more restrictions I apply in my personal use of the term "doll," including for this paper, namely restricting it to transsexual women alone, but it is not used in that way by some of the most important individuals associated with doll culture, thus I do not apply it to a more objective definition of "doll" that I give here.

Conclusion

The revolution of the onlinegirliefication of style magazines in the early 2020s represented a substantial transformation for transsexual women within the fashion press. *Paper*'s contemporary development in targeting an explicitly transsexual audience is revolutionary, as it does not do so from the lens of appealing to an older generation of late transitioners and cross-dressers. Instead, the magazine targets an audience of young culture-conscious and fashion-conscious transsexual women, yet is still consistent with *Paper*'s progressive origins and history.[420] *Interview* underwent a more substantial change from its roots, both in focus and in content, but ultimately it remains a part of this same zeitgeist. By combining Dara's involvement in the fashion press with her involvement in styling some of the most famous trans women in fashion, like Hunter Schafer, Dara

[419] The reason why I focus on the non-autoerotic nature of the doll is to distance the term from the concept of "transvestic fetishism." While drag queens in drag can be dolls, those who cross-dress for erotic purposes do not embrace the glamorous form of femininity as displayed by the doll.
[420] Chris Aino Pihlak, "A Moveable Closet: Construction of Femininity Among Twentieth Century Transfeminine Periodical Communities" (Master of Arts University of Victoria, 2023), 3-4.

has created a direct connection between transsexual cultural reproduction and the fashion industry, via the medium of *Interview*. Furthermore, the cross-pollination of journalists between *Interview* and *Paper*, especially in the case of Linux writing the same column for both magazines, demonstrates a continuing connection between the two style magazines. Beyond this transformation within the fashion press, trans women within pop culture began to engage with the concept of the doll more and more. Arca's embrace of the word doll and its plasticine nature, both in her photoshoots and her music, has been vital in spreading the concept of the doll worldwide. The large fanbase that Arca has in Latin America has enabled the doll to exist beyond the anglophone world, permeating the Hispanophone world, as well.

When Linux talks about Amanda Lepore "meeting and greeting every Gen Z tranny that grew up idolizing her" or when Dara and Rocero discuss "the [Tagalog] word … for unclockable," they are writing to an audience who understands the linguistic and cultural ticks and histories that drive doll culture.[421] Discussions of icons like Amanda Lepore recount decades of trans nightlife and fashion culture. Discourses on "unclockablity" call to mind the discourses on transitioning and realness dating back to *T.V. Transvestite* and *Paris is Burning*. This is not to say that these articles are necessarily hostile to cissexual readers, but rather they do not make cisnormative assumptions that the readership needs every concept or idea explained to them. *That* is why onlinegirliefication is significant: it is media by and for *transsexual* women, not an "umbrella" of trans people.

[421] Linux, "What You Missed Last Month in New York City (According to Linux)," n.p; Dara, "Pageant Queen Geena Rocero Teaches Us Filipino Doll Slang," n.p.

Conclusion: The Importance of Vibes

I have chosen to focus on the development and manifestation of the doll through periodicals because, as a historian, my training and scholarly field focuses on the analysis of documents, whether text, visual, or oral. However, a focus via periodicals ultimately gives an incomplete understanding of the doll. Periodicals, especially niche fashion and style magazines, have a limited readership and, despite the outsized influence that they have had on the popularization of the doll, they are not where the doll, both culturally and linguistically, originated. This approach's gaps are most noticeable when it comes to questions of race and class. The trans women who made up ball culture were overwhelmingly Black and Latine, and their experience transitioning and living their lives was mediated by the ever-present anti-Black and anti-Latine racism in the United States. Moreover, the women involved in ball culture tended to be poor, relying on sex work to help fund their holding of and participation in balls.[422] These significant gaps have changed my approach and argument in my thesis to specify that I am focusing on understandings of the doll emerging from the adoption of the culture by the predominantly white transsexuals who originated out of the New York downtown fashion and nightlife avant-garde, as opposed to focusing on the "doll" overall. While examining the origin of the "doll" within ball culture is something I would have loved to do / do in the future, the reality is that Victoria has neither the people nor the primary sources available to make a proper systemic analysis of the "doll" in ball culture possible.

However, I hope that in my examination of "doll" as a term among the predominantly white transsexual fashion, media, and nightlife industries, I have elucidated why the doll remains important for so many transsexuals. The doll is a positive construction of femininity and glamour

[422] Livingston, *Paris is Burning*, 53:35-53:48.

for a group who has faced exclusion and mockery because of their femininity. Even more than that, it is a term that transsexuals have coined for themselves. It is not a term that has its origins in the medical system or activism. It comes out of how transsexual women lived their daily lives. Even in the context of the appropriation of the term by those uninvolved in ball culture, the doll is remains important as the group of women who it refers to were already present beyond ball culture. The common cultural interests between people like Octavia St. Laurent and Amanda Lepore were present even before the term began to be used outside of balls, hence it seems completely logical that, once introduced to it, trans women outside of ball culture would also make use of “doll” in similar ways.

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