A Movable Closet:
Constructions of Femininity Among Twentieth Century Transfeminine Periodical Communities
by
Chris Aino Pihlak

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Chris Aino Pihlak

Supervisory Committee
Dr. Rachel Hope Cleves, Department of History
Supervisor

Dr. Lynne Marks, Department of History
Departmental member

Abstract

I examine conceptions of 'proper' femininity across North American and South African English-speaking transfeminine networks from the 1960s through the 1990s via a range of transfeminine periodicals. I first demonstrate the liminal nature of many members' transfemininity and how the prevalence of an affluent and otherwise normative positionality informed a subcultural idealized construct of (trans)femininity. This model of transfemininity was both heteronormatively desexualized and distanced from homosexuality. The process of erasure of alternative articulations of transfemininity from this desexualized ideal, I term transfeminine normatization. This process played out at the level of idealized comportment and aesthetics, as sartorial and etiquette advice largely matched this subcultural ideal that was further congruent to white, heteronormative, whorephobic, middle-class, and gender normative societal valuations of ideal femininity. Finally, such norms were readily internalized by members through the affective power of transfeminine social spaces, given members' former isolation and ignorance on knowledge of transfemininity in general.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is for trans women, femmes, trans people, gender fucky freaks, mascs, and trans men.

For those who came before. Those of this moment. And those who will come after.
Trans community sustains me. It saved me, it gives me joy, it heals me, it is how I remain in academia, and in turn everything I do in the academy is for it.
I was able to make this thesis in part from the many trans people in my heart, in my communities, and my memories.
To my kids, one of the greatest honours and duties in my life is to be your chosen mom.
To my sisters and sibling Jamey Jesperson, Clara Sorrenti, and Esther Suwannannon, I love you so very much.

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The settler-colonial academy doesn't like trans people. Well, that's not entirely true. It likes to use us as generative metaphors, interview us for no/low honoraria, study us to burnish resumes, misread us as 'effeminate men' or 'masculine women,' exoticize, exploit, pathologize, and ultimately dehumanize us. But! When it comes to employing us, not really. There are no trans women history professors in the Canadian academy. So here I am, an out trans woman, who wrote a transfeminine history. That doesn't often happen! So, I am marking this occasion by flipping the script. Everyone in my acknowledgements is trans. This thesis, that a trans woman produced, centers trans femmes when we are so often erased from history. There are so many non-trans people that made this work possible, and there are many that fill my heart! But they go unacknowledged to make up for the collective transphobic sins of the academy.
And you might say, 'that's not fair.'

And you're right: it isn't.

For Mira Bellwether

Introduction

The most powerful intervention scholars working in trans studies can make, at this juncture within the academy, is to defend the claim that transness requires that we understand, as we never have before, what it means to be attached to a norm—by desire, by habit, by survival.

Andrea Long Chu, "After Trans Studies" [1]

Trans peoples' complex relationship to norms haunts the archives of trans pasts. This is utterly apparent in the pages of transfeminine periodicals. Underneath twentieth century Global North societies, a subcultural ecosystem of transfeminine periodical communities built tendrils of ephemeral sisterhood. In this subculture, transfeminine people for transfeminine audiences collaborated on norms of 'proper' (trans) femininity.

My object of study is 423 issues of eighteen different transfeminine magazines that variably existed from 1960 to 1995, and these predominantly American publications collectively constituted a subcultural periodical network. The 1990s marked a generational change in North American trans communities as some embraced 'transgender' as an umbrella term.[2] For preeminent trans historian Susan Stryker, this shift marked a political and generational divide between older transvestite/transsexual/drag terminologies, and the emergence of a (trans)gender political formation that was explicitly and self-consciously queer.[3] My thesis concerns the former milieu, and the femme transvestites, transsexuals, and other transfeminine members which constituted a particular subcultural community. I refer to this porous community as the 'straight transfeminine subculture.' I use 'straight' to encapsulate two discourses held by many members. First, many subculture members supported the disarticulation of transfemininity from sexual non-normativity: particularly homosexuality. Secondly, I use 'straight' as in proper, conventional, and, above-all, respectable. To varying degrees of ferocity, many subculture members desired respectability to the non-trans, white, middle-class, and heterosexual mainstream. These members pursued this respectability in every articulation of their community,

[1] Andrea Long Chu, and Emmet Drager, "After Trans Studies," *TSQ* 6, no.1 (2019): 108.
[2] Susan Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review,* no. 100 (2008): 146.
[3] Ibid

as it underpinned who could join certain subcultural groups, the nature of events, and what constituted proper feminine apparel and comportment.

The straight transfeminine subculture's embrace of 'transgender' determined my thesis end-date. In 1995, subcultural tentpole *The TV/TS Tapestry* changed its name to *The Transgender Tapestry*.[4] The editorial staff of the now *Transgender Tapestry* explained that the name-change commemorated an important year for the community, as they wrote that, "1995 was a watershed year for the transgendered community…[it] was the year the public became aware of the transgendered community; and the year in which the transgendered community became aware of itself."[5] Though by this time *Tapestry* was the backbone of the subculture, it was far from alone. Across national and continental lines, dozens of periodicals of variable quality and longevity latticed together a community by and for transfeminine people.

Appendix A lists the eighteen periodicals and 423 issues that this thesis uses. After the historiography and theory section, I profile four periodicals and contributors that exemplified certain themes which underpinned the straight transfeminine subculture. As Virginia Prince effectively founded this network, she and her iteration of *Transvestia* are profiled first. For much of the 1960s to 1970s *Transvestia* was the most prominent transfeminine periodical, and it was an influential homophobic, transmisogynistic subcultural space. *Transvestia's* contributors elevated a desexualized model of transfemininity that was part of an effort to make transness respectable to the heterosexual, white, middle-class, and non-trans mainstream. I then analyze *The TV/TS Tapestry* and its long-time editor Merissa Sherill Lynn, as it replaced *Transvestia* as the subculture's public-square. Next comes *LadyLike* and its editor JoAnn Roberts as it is representative of the constellation of similar periodicals that catered to an affluent milieu.

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[4] Jean Marie Stine, "Welcome to *Transgender Tapestry*," *The Transgender Tapestry*, no. 74 (1995): 1.
[5] Ibid. 1.

These prior magazines were all spaces that consciously operated apart from 'homosexuality' (sexual contact with men), and their editorial staffs elevated a mode of desexualized transfemininity. The final profiled magazine was a subcultural pariah as it violated both norms. *Female Mimics* and its successor *Female Mimics International* (*FMI*) were unique as they were dual community and erotic spaces, and both iterations most visibly embraced both transfeminine sexuality and gay transfeminine subcultures. Though for decades *FMI* was one of the more popular periodicals, straight transfeminine subcultural elites shunned it and all other erotica as they wished to project a veneer of desexualized transfemininity due to their wider pursuit of respectability.

I group my collective subjects under the umbrella of transfemininity, and my porous definitional borders are informed by currents in trans historiography, the burgeoning field of transfemininity studies, and my sources. I adopt trans theorist Julia Serrano's conception of femininity as "the behaviors, mannerisms, interests, and ways of presenting oneself that are typically associated with those who are female."[6] This definition aligns with Ulrika Dahl's call for critical femininity studies to not simplistically conflate femininity with studies of non-trans womanhood. Instead, she calls for scholars to view femininity as a genre of idealized embodiment which has endless socio-historical variations.[7] Alex Alvina Chamberland's elucidation of transfemininity studies further informs my work.

Chamberland concurs with Dahl that scholars must move beyond the conflation of femininity studies as interchangeable to analysis of non-trans womanhood. She further differentiates transfemininity studies from the purportedly gender-neutral trans studies, for Chamberland

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[6] Julia Serrano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), 320.
[7] Ulrika Dahl, "Turning like a Femme: Figuring Critical Femininity Studies," *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 20, no. 1 (2012): 60-62.

insists on the epistemological differences between the (trans) feminine position from the (trans) masculine, and scholastic analysis of the former must analyze the relationship(s) between femininities.[8] In this subculture many diverse feminine subjects pursued an ideal of normative femininity, and much of this thesis concerns the relationships between communally legitimated versus pariah transfemininities. This subculture's legitimated feminine ideal, like the American mainstream it existed within, was built on unmarked whiteness.[9]

My conception of trans reflects Susan Stryker's definition as a historicized set of behaviors, aesthetics, and self-understandings which all reflect one's movement away from their gender assigned at birth.[10] Stryker's definition best encapsulates the nuances of the straight transfeminine subculture, for it cogently includes behaviors in its conceptualization. Subculture members articulated a range of behaviors and identities which included heterosexual male cross-dressers; transgender, transsexual, and transgendered women; transvestites; third-gendered people; new women; bigender men and women; cross-overs; transes; women of transgendered and transsexual pasts; male lesbians; female mimics; gender-transients; androgynes; and further variances that intermingled in community periodicals.

This diverse assemblage all engaged with femininity though they did so with varying degrees of permanency. Subculture members could have held easily legible identities to the contemporary reader as many were out transsexual or transgender(ed) women. But at least a plurality of subculture members only temporarily expressed their transfemininity. These members may have done so just at subcultural conventions or social groups, in private rooms, in

[8] A.A. Chamberland, "Femininity in Transgender Studies: Reflections from an Interview Study in New York City," *Lambada Nordica* 21, no. 1-2 (2018): 107-108.
[9] Sabrina Strings, Irene Headen, and Breauna Spencer, "Yoga as a technology of femininity: Disciplining white women, disappearing people of color in *Yoga Journal*," *Fat Studies* 8, no. 3 (2019): 335-336.
[10] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, 2nd ed. (New York City: Seal Press, 2017), 1.

their homes while their wives were away, or when they hurriedly read periodicals in the sex shops where they were commonly sold. No matter how liminal one's engagement to transfemininity was, I define transfemininity as an engagement with femininity. As Chapter 3 illustrates, some members' sole engagement with their transfemininity was when they read these periodicals. Closeted transfeminine people were and are members of transfeminine communities, and they were a key pillar of this subculture. I highlight their membership to honor the unfathomable number of transfemmes who could not be out due to transmisogynistic societies.

At present, many view it as offensive to categorize cross-dressers under the umbrella of transfemininity. Trans scholar Julian Honkasalo writes that if one groups together supposedly discrete gender and sexual identities like trans women and cross-dressers "then transfemininity in particular risks becoming either de-eroticized or hypersexualized as a mere sexual fetish or a predatory perversion in line with the long psycho-sexological and pathologizing traditions of medical discourse."[11] Yet most of this subculture's members would disagree.

Contributors largely intuitively grouped cross-dressers and transsexual women under an umbrella of transfemininity. The notable exceptions were clubs like Prince's Tri-Ess sorority system, as these groups denied (and continue to deny) membership to transsexual women and homosexuals due to their desire to form a space for "heterosexual male crossdressers and their wives."[12] Relatedly, most of the straight transfeminine subculture had a specific idea of what constituted homosexuality. Most understood homosexuality to mean any sexual and/or romantic interest in men though transsexual women were mostly exempted from this classificatory logic. Additionally, these members viewed non-transsexual transfeminine articulations as ultimately

[11]Julian Honkasalo, "Transfeminine letter clubs, community care and the radical politics of the erotic," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 30, no.2 (2023): 278.
[12] Merissa Sherrill Lynn, "Special Review of Our Project to Date," *The TV-TS Tapestry,* no. 7 (January 8,1979): 3.

asterisked men, so many believed it was gay to have sex with other transfeminine people. In addition, numerous members assumed *any* attempt to look sexually attractive was done to seduce men, and they despised this as it would be gay behavior.

Though Tri-Sigma was an important exception, most members commonly blurred trans identities within a spectrum of shared affinity to femininity. The most obvious example of this comfort was the title of the straight transfeminine subculture's tentpole periodical: *The TV/TS Tapestry*. The title referenced transvestites (TV) and transsexuals (TS). Countless mottos, editorial statements, or group charters all emphasized this umbrella of shared difference. The South African-based *FanFare*'s 1988 charter said that, "membership [was] open to ALL CROSSDRESSERS, TRANSSEXUALS, TRANSGENDERISTS, TRANSVESTITES and any other persons of similar persuasion, subject to acceptance by the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE."[13] *En Femme's* 1987 debut editorial proudly proclaimed that it was, "the definitive magazine for the transvestite, transsexual, crossdresser, and female impersonator."[14]

But straight transfeminine subculture members did have a consensus on who was *not* part of the community. Those in the subculture distinguished themselves from gay transfeminine identities like drag and street queens, hair fairies, and female mimics or impersonators. Members varied in their level of differentiation. Some had an unemotional sense of difference, and other members were virulently homophobic.

Furthermore, many members had a contextually specific conception of sexuality. Though it was not hegemonic, the many members who were homophobic oftentimes also desired subcultural spaces which were desexualized. This still reflected a sexuality: heterosexuality, though more specifically a desire for spatial heteronormativity.

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[13] Membership Secretary Joy, "Proposed Constitution," *FanFare* no. 32 (1988): 34.
[14] Robyn Ann Dormer, "Welcome to *En Femme*!" *En Femme* no.1 (July/August 1988): Back-Cover.

Michael Warner coined the term heteronormativity in 1991, and this concept refers to the cultural construction of heterosexuality as a strictly enforced sexuality that is societally normalized, naturalized, and invisibilized.[15] Though Warner and most scholars understand heterosexuality to mean sex between an uncomplicated non-trans man and woman, most straight transfeminine subculture members had a different understanding of this sexuality, and this informed how heteronormativity manifested. As members internalized the above-mentioned conception of homosexuality, so too they often understood heterosexual sex to include when a non-transsexual transfeminine person had sex with a non-trans woman.

This conception of heterosexuality informed how heteronormativity manifested in the subculture. Many in this community pushed for ostensibly 'non-sexual' spaces, or they elevated desexualized modes of comportment and dress. For these members non-sexual meant the erasure of non-normative articulations of sexuality as most did not view heterosexuality as a sexuality. One was either 'normal,' gay, or a deviant, and many members believed those last two terms overlapped. Many did not view themselves as sexually deviant, and as part of their pursuit of respectability to the non-trans, heterosexual mainstream they strove to expel or erase *anything* in the subculture that they perceived as sexually non-normative.

Though these members most despised homosexuals and sex-workers, they also loathed those who took pleasure in the myriad erotics of transfemininity. I use this phrase to encompass five main themes. Three of these involved the straightforward pleasures of feminine dress. This could be the general expression of one's femininity, or the pleasure when one felt femininely sexually attractive. Oftentimes, members described the pleasure of their transfemininity by reference to the sensual feel of apparel that members saw as feminine. In *FMI* a contributor named Essie

[15] Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet," *Social Text* no.29 (1991) 3-4.

proclaimed that, “There’s nothing like that ‘pulling’ feeling of a sexy pair of earrings to remind you that you are feminine.”[16] Community stalwart Merissa Sherill Lynn described the pleasure of her transfeminine embodiment as she wrote, “The sensation of feeling pretty is different than feeling handsome. The touch of women’s clothing is different than the touch of men’s…Feeling ‘feminine’ is different than feeling ‘masculine,’ and to me feeling feminine is much more rewarding.”[17] The third main erotic of transfemininity was when others found one’s transfeminine embodiment sexually attractive. As part of an *FMI* letter by Desiree that described her feminization routine before she cruised at a sex shop, Desiree was delighted that when she approached the store, “-with a walk so slow and sexy, I retrieved several cat whistles, which thrilled me and heightened the adventure as I opened the door to all those hard cocks displayed on slick mag covers.”[18] These proceeding themes map onto Julian Honkasalo’s historicization of gender euphoria to when one was ‘otherly and pleasurably gendered.’ This concept refers to the voluptuous, joyful, euphoric, and possibly erotic feelings when others viewed one, or one felt embodied, in their desired gender.[19]

Fourthly, some members interlinked fetish-play with transfemininity. In a 1960 *Transvestia* letter, Rita commented that she had met many transfeminine people and that, “some like bondage and paddling, others love to be dressed in leather or rubber. But mostly all I have known have been true TVs, loving high heels, sheer long hose, pretty dresses etc.-”[20] Whether one was delighted by bondage, corsets, petticoats, or super-high heels, many people had interlinked their transfemininity with fetishes.

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[16] Essie Warner, “Letters to Kim Christy,” *Female Mimics International* 24, no. 3 (1994): 18.
[17] Merissa Sherill Lynn, “A Reason to Crossdress,” *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.12 (June 4, 1979): 4.
[18] Desiree, “Hot-To-Trot Transvestite,” *Female Mimics International* 20, no.1 (1990): 15.
[19] Honkasalo, “Transfeminine letter clubs,” 278-279.
[20] Rita, “Letters to the Editor,” *Transvestia* 1, no. 5 (September 1960): 28-29.

Relatedly, the final erotic of transfemininity was the sexual pleasure that one felt to be a man who cross-dressed: transfemininity as fetish. For one example, Jackie wrote into the more sexually open *FMI*, "What a turn-on to go to the beauty salon for the day for waxing, manicure, pedicure, wash, set and party make-up…the WORKS. What beauty and love one feels to be treated so much like a woman while everyone recognizes your maleness."[21] Though these erotics of transfemininity appeared in most periodicals, their importance comes from their relative *absence.* Subcultural elites largely suppressed both representations of the erotics of transfemininity, and they minimized depictions of their conception of sexuality. I term the myriad suppressions of pariah transfeminine articulations: transfeminine normatization.

In the thesis I use the term 'non-trans women' for those that we presently call cis women. Cisgender is a mainstay of endless Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion materials, and it is now an uncritical shorthand for a non-trans person. I concur with critics of cis like trans scholar Finn Enke that cisgender is a poor epistemological container, for the term disciplines women as a self-evident and stable category, and it implies one can both, "stay 'a woman' but also that one is 'born a woman' after all."[22] Those we would call cis women were present in these magazines. Often they were columnists, though more commonly transfeminine members referred to their non-trans lovers in articles. The straight transfeminine subculture had terms for non-trans women. RG (real girl) and GG (genetic girl) were the two most common, and these are novel predecessors to the similarly epistemologically shallow cis. But the primary subcultural context of non-trans women was figurative, as members constructed a feminine ideal that they sought to emulate through proper embodiment.

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[21] Jackie, "Letters to the Editor," *Female Mimics International* 20, no.1 (1990): 15.
[22] Finn Enke, "The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies," in *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, ed. Finn Enke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012): 62-63.

In quotations I do not substitute the terms of identity used by historical actors with transfeminine. I do this for two reasons. First, I am not convinced that one should sanitize archaic terminology. But I do agree with Clare Sears's point, that they made in their study of nineteenth century gender-transgression, that terms like cross-dressing imply someone can 'belong' to one of two discrete sexes, and their sexed identity is not complicated through their 'crossing.'[23] Though many members expressed profoundly feminine senses of self, they declared themselves transvestites or cross-dressers. In such cases, I highlight their explicit identification as crossdressers not to imply a fixity to identity as in Sears' critique, but I do so to foreground the categorical messiness that was common to this subculture.

To that end, subculture members often referred to their entire diverse community as simply transvestites, transes, or 'the gender community.' Members frequently called the subculture a community of 'transvestites and transsexuals,' for these were the community's seemingly two largest gender articulations. If I were to replace 'transvestites and transsexuals' with 'transfeminine community,' it would contribute to the historical erasure of the longstanding presence of cross-dressers within transfeminine communities. Though contemporary transfeminine communities have largely exorcised cross-dressers, they were an unproblematized presence in many historical trans subcultures. Ultimately, I make these choices due to a desire for my thesis to join a lineage of cogent examinations of similarly complex communities.

Since John D'Emilio published *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* in 1983, histories of gay and lesbian periodical communities have trickled out. Roger Streitmatter, Jan Whit, Martin Meeker, James Sears, and Craig Loftin, are some of the scholars on gay and lesbian periodical

[23] Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 20-21.

communities that this work benefits from.[24] I am most indebted to Martin Meeker's *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*. At a time of severe social isolation in the early Cold War, Meeker demonstrates that the early lesbian and homophile press was a subcultural, trans-continental communication network.[25] My thesis mirrors Meeker's focus on socially isolated individuals, and how periodicals functioned as a virtual network.

In addition, I draw from the works of Agatha Beins, Jody Valentine, Cait McKinney, Amy Murphy, and Josie Rush.[26] These scholars have examined the role of lesbian periodicals as subcultural spaces, and their function as discursive areas on how one could be a 'proper' lesbian. In Jody Valentine's analysis of *The Ladder,* a seminal early lesbian periodical, she notes that, "each month subscribers to *The Ladder* interacted as though they were together thinking and talking about what it meant to be a lesbian, they became a sort of community of letters sustained by the monthly magazine."[27] Similarly, straight transfeminine subculture periodicals were spaces where contributors discussed how to *be* a respectable non-normative identity.

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[24] John, D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Craig M. Loftin, *Letters to ONE: Gay and Lesbian Voices from the 1950s and 1960s*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); James Thomas Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York City: Harrington Park Press, 2006); Roger Streitmatter, "Creating a Venue for the 'Love that Dare Not Speak its Name: The Origins of the Gay and Lesbian Press," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no.2 (1995): 436-447; Jan Whit, "A 'Labor from the Heart': Lesbian Magazines from 1947-1994." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 5, no. 1-2 (2001): 229-251.

[25] Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 8-16.

[26] Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017); Cait McKinney, "The Internet that Lesbians Built: Newsletter Networks." In *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies*, edited by Jonathan Sterne and Lisa Gitelman, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 33-66; Amy Tooth Murphy, "*Arena Three* Magazine and the Construction of the Middlebrow Lesbian Reader," in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1940s-2000s*, eds., Laurel Foster, and Joanne Hollows (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) 185-199; Josie Rush, "Going Online to be a Lesbian: After Ellen, Vice Versa, The Ladder and Queer (?) Theorizing in Discursive Spaces," *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2019): 139-154; Jody Valentine, "Lesbians Are from Lesbos: Sappho and Identity Construction in *The Ladder*," *Helios* 35, no. 2 (2008): 143-169.

[27] Valentine, "Lesbians Are from Lesbos," 145.

Though this community of letters was an enduring, well-documented, and complex subcultural ecosystem, academia has largely ignored it. Nicholas Matte, Valerie Korinek, myself, Robert Hill, Julian Honkasalo, and a few others have all written on certain aspects of these periodicals.[28] Academic attention has mainly focused on Virginia Prince's iteration of *Transvestia,* and her magazine has a deserved status in post-war transfeminine historiography as it was both one of the first English-language transfeminine periodicals, and it profoundly influenced transfeminine community life.[29] Yet, Prince's *Transvestia* was a homophobic, elitist, and transmisogynistic social space.[30] Though this subcultural faction is important, this thesis expands its gaze beyond the ostensibly heterosexual male cross-dressers of *Transvestia,* and I consider the many other works that constituted the larger transfeminine periodical community.

Relatedly, Lucy Delap's notion of periodical communities informs my analysis. Delap's concept refers to the sets of periodicals that cross-pollinated contributors, material, and otherwise inhabited the same socio-cultural milieu.[31] The periodical staffs who idealized a desexualized 'straight' transfeminine ideal often reprinted each other's articles, shared contributors, and referenced each other's works.

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[28]Alex Bakker, Rainer Herrn, Michael Thomas Taylor, and Annette F. Timm, *Others of My Kind: Transatlantic Transgender Histories* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2020); Joe E. Hatfield, "Trans* Media Ecology: The Emergence of Gender Variant Selfies in Print," *Explorations in Media Ecology* 20, no. 2 (2021): 151-174; Robert Hill, "'We Share a Sacred Secret': Gender, Domesticity, and Containment in '*Transvestia's* Histories' and Letters from Crossdressers and Their Wives." *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (2011): 729-750; Honkasalo, "Transfeminine letter clubs;" Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Nicholas Matte, "Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities: Medicine, Media, Activism, 1960-1990," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2014); Nicholas Matte, "Rubert Raj and the Rise of Transsexual Consumer Activism in the 1980s," in *Trans Activism in Canada*, eds., Dan Irving, and Rupert Raj (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2014), 33-43; Chris Aino Pihlak, "How Transgressive a Transsexual? The Contradictions in Transgression and Conformity Within Transfeminine Print Erotica," *The Graduate History Review* 11, no.1 (2022): 107-146.

[29] Bob Davis, "Using Archives to Identify the Trans* Women of Casa Susanna," *TSQ* 2, no. 4 (2015): 630-631.

[30] Robert Hill, "'As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live': Heterosexual Transvestism and the Contours of Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007) 61.

[31] Lucy Delap, "The *Freewoman*, Periodical Communities, and the Feminist Reading Public," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 61, no. 2 (2000): 233-276.

Due to the presence of transmisogyny in contemporary society, I must emphasize that my scholastic subjects are not exceptional in their sometimes-problematic ideals. In Jamie Hood's deconstruction of 'the chaser' she identifies that oftentimes when non-trans women act in certain ways, like they dress high-femme, it is unremarked upon, but when trans women and femmes do these same things we are singled out as agents of patriarchy.[32] I reject these transmisogynistic arguments. Though I analyze a distinct feminine subculture, its members were not unique in their oftentimes patriarchal conceptions of femininity.

Indeed, my thesis is indebted to scholarship on non-trans women's magazines as key disciplinary sites for normative femininity. The seminal 1983 work *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* and more recent analysis by Laurel Foster, Rosalind Gill, and Elizabeth M. Sheehan, analyze the role of women's magazines as discursive spaces for what constituted 'proper' femininity.[33] As well as scholarship on the discursive power of these texts, there is also rich analysis on the function of these works as social spaces. In Cynthia White's 1970 *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* she makes this point as:

> [women's magazines] have a valuable role to play in ministering to the submerged needs of all sorts and conditions of women, particularly those who due to the breakup of kin and

[32] Jamie Hood, "Against Discourse: The Chaser Myth & the Un/Making of a Modern Woman," *TSQ* Now,* August 3, 2020. https://www.tsqnow.online/post/against-discourse-the-chaser-myth-the-un-making-of-a-modern-woman-by-jamie-hood.

[33] Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London, Heinemann, 1983); Laurel Foster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Elizabeth M. Sheehan, "To Exist Serially: Black Radical Magazines and Beauty Culture, 1917–1919," *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 30-52; Marama Whyte, "The 'old girls' network': media newsletters as feminist technologies in 1970s America." *Women's History Review* 31, no. 4 (2022): 626-644.

> community-groups in modern society, are lonely and isolated, and want encouragement, approval, understanding, and friendship.[34]

White's point applies to this community. The straight transfeminine subculture provided some readers with an unfathomable sense of connection and warmth, and simultaneously many subcultural elites advanced restrictive patriarchal norms of femininity. Again, this multi-faceted conception of feminine periodical communities is not unique to this subculture. Marie-Pier Luneau, Jean-Philippe Warren, and Tracey Seneca have similarly emphasized the dual role of women's magazines as both sites of community and patriarchy.[35]

This thesis' final historiographic touchstone is scholarship on marginalized groups that associated societal acceptance with individual comportment. Scholars Marissa Chappel, Jenny Hutchinson, Brian Ward, and many others, have shown the key role early to mid-20th century Black American magazines played in the enforcement of respectable, middle-class, and implicitly white norms of femininity that Black women were to embody as a means to gain white acceptance. [36] The promotion of sartorial respectability from marginalized communities to gain mainstream acceptance is unfortunately not unique to Black Americans.

Though often activists in marginalized groups believed that individual respectability had group-level implications, this is a surprisingly under-studied historical field. This lack of scholastic attention is particularly acute in histories of LGBT activism. Simon Hall is one of the few scholars to engage with this topic. In Hall's analysis of the 1960s homophile coalition East

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[34] Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph LTD, 1970), 299.
[35] Marie-Pier Luneau, and Jean-Philippe Warren. "Building a Virtual Community: Confession Magazines in French Canada." *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 12, no. 2 (2021): 131-157; Tracy Seneca, "The History of Women's Magazines: Magazines as Virtual Communities," *Impact*, http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/impact/s94/students/tracy/tracy_hist.html.
[36] Marissa Chappel, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward, "'Dress modestly, neatly…as if you were going to church': Respectability, Class, and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement," in *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*, eds., Peter J. Ling, and Sharon Monteith (New York City: Routledge, 1999), 73-74.

Coast Homophile Organization (ECHO) he noted that ECHO enforced a dress code at pickets of "suits and ties for men and dresses for women."[37] ECHO believed gay and lesbian adherence to American white middle-class norms of sartorial respectability would show that non-heterosexuals could be "dignified, non-threatening, and assimilable to the mainstream."[38] As Chapter 2 analyzes, many subculture members believed that transfeminine people's individual actions had collective impacts. If a transfeminine person violated one of the subculture's ideals of 'proper' embodiment, they would negatively impact societal transfeminine acceptance.

Historiographical Methods and Theory

The original and more recent elaborations of trans historicity underpin my historiographical methodology. Trans historicity is analysis of moments of gender-diverse practices without an ahistorical conflation with contemporary transness.[39] This primarily informs my categorization of cross-dressers under the umbrella of transfemininity. Elsewhere, subculture members had understandings of transfemininity that have fallen out of contemporary trans communal circulation. Some members were bi-gendered, and feminine dress was how they expressed their femme-selves. How members understood their identities could and did evolve over time, and sometimes their identities appeared incongruous to the modern reader. I reject the imposition of legibility upon these people. My refusal to do so aligns with other trans scholars who made similar choices like Rachel Cleves, Marta V. Vincente, Jamey Jesperson, Samantha Rosenthal,

[37] Simon Hall, "The American Gay Rights Movement and Patriotic Protest," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no.3 (2010): 544.
[38] Richard Meyer, "*Gay Power* Circa 1970," *GLQ* 12, no.3 (2006): 450.
[39] Susan Stryker, and Aren Z. Aizura, "Introduction," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, eds., Susan Stryker, and Aren Z. Aizura (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 9-11.

Leah DeVun, and Zeb Tortorici.[40] Though I offer several potential reasons as to why certain discourses of femininity predominated in this subculture, I do not claim to know how people knew themselves. My focus on collective discourses rather than individuals is partly due to my refusal to declare how someone understood themselves.

This discomfort with the historian's imposition of a veneer of certainty on the past extends to a similar skepticism of the archive. My position is influenced by those in queer and trans studies who have rightfully problematized the epistemological and liberatory potential of the archive. I am convinced by Abram J. Lewis and their deep skepticism of the archive's hegemonic position within trans history, and they saliently criticize the archive's purported ability to produce a coherent picture of the past.[41]

Trans historian Jonah I. Garde and their elaboration of asterisked histories provides a further cogent problematization of the archive. Garde's conception affirms the opaqueness of much of the past due to the uncountable number of individuals who are absent from the archive, and these stories are unable to ever be meaningfully recovered.[42] Asterisked histories center a refusal to treat archival presence as representative of historical reality, and it foregrounds the potential for erasures and absences in extant records. In addition, Garde problematizes the common conflation of specific white trans histories as universal narratives of transness.[43] My thesis incorporates

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[40] Rachel Hope Cleves, "Six Ways of Looking at a Trans Man?: The Life of Frank Shimer (1826–1901)," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 27, no.1 (2018): 32-62; Leah DeVun, and Zeb Tortorici, "Trans, Time, and History," in *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*, eds., Susan Stryker and Dylan McCarthy Blackston, 369-379 (New York City: Routledge, 2022); Jamey Jesperson, "Trans Misogyny in the Colonial Archive: 'Re-Membering' Trans Feminine Life & Death in New Spain, 1604-1821," *Gender & History* 35, no. 3 (forthcoming); Samantha Rosenthal, "How to Become a Woman." *Southern Cultures* 26, no. 3 (2020): 122-137; Martha V. Vicente, "Transgender: A Useful Category?: Or, How the Historical Study of 'Transsexual' and 'Transvestite' Can Help Us Rethink 'Transgender' as a Category." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2021): 426-442.

[41] Abram J. Lewis, "I Am 64 and Paul McCartney Doesn't Care:' The Haunting of the Transgender Archive and the Challenges of Queer History," *Radical History Review* 120 (2014): 15.

[42] Jonah Garde, "Provincializing Trans* Modernity: Asterisked Histories and Multiple Horizons in *Der Steinachfilm*," *TSQ* 8, no. 2 (2021): 212-213.

[43] Ibid., 209-210.

these views through a refusal to provide any authoritative claims to readers' senses of self, and I make explicit the limits of my analysis. My work examines a specific subculture's periodicals across thirty-five years; it is not a master narrative of 20th century American transfemininity.

Michel Foucault identified a range of institutions like the school, military, prison, and factory that discursively discipline and produce certain practiced embodiments conducive to Western modernity.[44] This means of control is rigidly enforced through a system of self-surveillance as one internalizes institutional discourses: one becomes both jailer and jailed.[45] Many theorists have subsequently applied Foucauldian analysis to a range of institutions, and one of the most famous is Judith Butler.

For any history of gender not to acknowledge Judith Butler would be a flagrant oversight. Butler's conception of gender's performativity has become received wisdom within swaths of the academy. I am no different.

For Butler gender is a socially constructed performance as societies create culturally legible genders and the naturalized category of sex through historically and socially contingent processes, and these are constituted through mundane and ritualized actions that a culturally eligible (congruent) gendered/sexed body performs. While the embodied self performs such actions, one does so within a society, and through the collective repetition and resignification of these norms society/societal actors recognize one's valid/invalid social performance.[46]

I use this Butlerian foundation. Subcultural elites identified a certain feminine ideal that they trumpeted as *the* means to pass as the culturally legible category of 'woman.' As Butler noted in

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[44] Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory,* eds., Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 129-134.
[45] Ibid., 130-131.
[46] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (December 1988): 525-527.

Bodies That Matter, regulatory regimes of sexuality inform gender. [47] This societal apparatus impacted the straight transfeminine subculture, and homophobic sex-negative discourses informed its ideal of transfemininity. Though I work from a Butlerian base, my main analytic touchstone comes from one of their fellow travelers: Sandra Lee Bartky.

My analysis adopts Bartky's application of Foucauldian discipline to normative femininity. Bartky notes that "the imposition of normative femininity upon the female body requires training, that the modes of training are cultural phenomena properly described as disciplinary practices, and that the discipline they represent is disempowering to the woman so disciplined." [48] This disciplinary power is dispersed and asymmetrical as Bartky elaborates that "the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere…[It] can be institutionally unbound as well as institutionally bound."[49] Transfeminine periodicals were key disciplinary institutions of 'proper' transfemininity.

Within Bartky's theory is her concept of 'technologies of femininity,' the retinue of disciplinary objects and knowledges that are designed to "produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine."[50] The advertisements, self-help sections, and advice columns of transfeminine periodicals that showed 'properly' feminine dress and comportment constituted technologies of femininity. Scholars like Sabrina Strings, Irene Headen, Breauna Spencer, and Alvaro Jarrín have subsequently elaborated on Bartky's work and applied it to a range of technologies of femininity.[51] I integrate their incorporation of race into analysis of

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[47] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York City: Routledge, 1993): 14-16.
[48] Sandra Lee Bartky, "Skin Deep: Femininity as a disciplinary regime," in *Daring to be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics,* eds., Bat-Ami Bar On, and Ann Ferguson (New York City: Routledge, 1998), 17.
[49] Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity," 139.
[50] Ibid., 131.
[51] Strings, Headen, and Spencer, "Yoga as a technology of femininity;" Alvaro Jarrín, "Technologies of Beauty: The Materiality, Ethics, and Normativity of Cosmetic Citizenship Beauty," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Anthropology of Technology,* eds., by Maja Hojer Bruun et al., 569-584. Berlin: Springer Nature, 2022.

technologies of femininity. [52] I make two further elaborations: first I apply Bartky's concept to hitherto untheorized feminine non-women and trans women, and second through the incorporation of a nuanced sense of agency. For Bartky disciplinary practices are "-disempowering to the women so disciplined."[53] I diverge as I do not view technologies of femininity as entirely oppressive. Transfeminine folks, like many non-trans women did, sought out these disciplinary regimes to legitimate their identities. If I rework the above Bartky quote, this thesis examines how feminine disciplinary regimes could *empower* transfeminine people.

Bartky's view of femininity reflects a common discourse within gender studies, as femininity is oftentimes reduced to an appendage of patriarchy that is enforced upon nonautonomous women.[54] My work does not take the opposite yet similarly problematic view that when women embrace normative femininity it is an uncomplicated assertion of agency. My approach adheres to Patricia Gagné and Deanna McGaughey's conception of autonomy as it relates to technologies of femininity. Their conceptualization arose from the study of non-trans women who pursued breast augmentation. For these scholars, the pursuit of cosmetic surgery reflects agency and subordination as hegemonic cultural norms inform women's agency.[55] Gagné and McGaughey surveyed non-trans women who pursued breast augmentation, and these women did so to be more desirable, feel more feminine, and to fix an incongruency between their sense of self and body. These reasons all reflected a desire for gender affirmation as informed by hegemonic gender norms.[56]

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[52] Strings, Headen, and Spencer, "Yoga as a technology of femininity," 335-336.
[53] Bartky, "Skin Deep," 17
[54] Rhea Ashley Hoskin, "Femme Interventions and the Proper Feminist Subject: Critical Approaches to Decolonizing Western Feminist Pedagogies," *Cogent Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2017): 7.
[55] Patricia Gagné, and Deanna McGaughey, "Designing Women: Cultural Hegemony and the Exercise of Power Among Women Who Have Undergone Elective Mammoplasty," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 6 (2002): 814.
[56] Ibid., 822, 834.

But I do not wish to linger on this question. I agree with Butler that "the effort to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to."[57] Material stakes inform(ed) transfeminine folks' need to pass and avoid transmisogynistic violence. I cannot in good conscience decry those who adhere(d) to normative femininity.

Profiles

Any work on English transfeminine periodicals cannot ignore the influence of *Transvestia* and its infamous longstanding editor Virginia Prince. Though Virginia Prince is often attributed as the founder of *Transvestia,* she started its second iteration in 1960. In 1952 Long Beach, an informal transfeminine social group Prince was part of started the first run of *Transvestia.*[58] Editor Joan Thornton and the transfeminine staff of the first *Transvestia* largely reflected the conception of transfemininity that Prince was later associated with.[59] Both issues of *Transvestia's* first iteration emphasized that heterosexual transvestism was 'aesthetic and innocuous,' whereas homosexuals were 'deviates of psychopathic origin.'[60] The inception of transfeminine-specific and transfeminine-produced periodicals reflected the two main discourses that marked much of what followed. After it was defunct for eight years, Prince launched her iteration of *Transvestia,* and she continued the exclusionary views of its predecessor.

Virginia Prince cannot be briefly summarized. In the words of one who knew her "I continue to simultaneously admire and despise her."[61] Admirers point to her importance as a visible

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[57] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 2nd ed (New York city: Routledge, 1999): xxi.
[58] Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed,* 179.
[59] Zagria Cowan, *Virginia Prince (1912-2009): A Conflicted Life in Trans Activism* (A Gender Variance Whose Who Publication, 2020), 9.
[60] *Transvestia: Journal of the American Society for Equality in Dress* 1, no.2 (1952):2, quoted in Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* (Harvard University Press, 2002), 180.
[61] Dallas Denny, "Remembering Virginia," *Chrysalis Quarterly*, August 7, 2013. http://dallasdenny.com/Chrysalis/2013/08/07/remembering-virginia-prince/.

transfeminine person in the normative media, and her abundant engagement with transfeminine community as she wrote prodigiously for periodicals and established many groups. Those who despise her point to her authoritarian personality along with the homophobic and transmisogynistic content of those same writings and groups. The limits of the thesis confine me to a brief profile as it relates to her contributions to subcultural periodicals and groups. Elsewhere, critics and supporters have written more extensive biographies.[62]

Until she retired as *Transvestia's* editor in 1980, each issue featured two of her essays along with extensive editorial remarks that she inserted into other articles. Prince's zeal to build her vision of transfeminine community made her a lightning rod of deep affection and controversy. Within three years of Prince's editorship, the still miniscule field of transfeminine periodicals featured two parodies of her in *Drag* and *Turnabout.* The latter article mocked one of Prince's sorority meetings, and it featured many of her characteristic behaviors that she engaged in throughout her long subcultural presence. The *Turnabout* parody included references to Prince's frequent observation, expulsion, and denouncement of transfeminine people, along with her trademark verbosity as Prince (referred to in the article as "Fearless Leader") gave the sorority a two-hour tape that "-repeat[ed] her latest lecture on 'Feigned Femininity as Divine Inspiration.'"[63]

While such attacks bothered Prince and she often responded to them in *Transvestia,* her detractors did little to slow her down. She made countless television appearances, edited, wrote, and published every issue of *Transvestia*, and ran its larger publisher Chevalier Publications. By

[62] See for example Richard F. Docter, *From Man to Woman: The Transgender Journey of Virginia Prince* (Northridge: Doctor Press, 2004); Zagria Cowan, *Virginia Prince (1912-2009): A Conflicted Life in Trans Activism* (A Gender Variance Whose Who Publication, 2020). For an example of a hagiography of Prince see Richard Ekins and Dave King, *Virginia Prince: Pioneer of Transgendering* (Binghamton: Haworth Medical Press: 2005).
[63] Louella, "Minutes of the Omega Chapter," *Turnabout: A Magazine of Transvestism*, no. 3 (1964), 14.

the 1970s, the company had published several fiction and non-fiction books by Prince.[64] In 1961, Prince started a formal transfeminine group, Hose and Heel. In turn, this Los Angeles based group, after it was briefly renamed the Foundation for Personal Expression (FPE) and then Phi Phi Epsilon, became the Alpha chapter of Tri-Ess (The **S**ociety for the **S**econd **S**elf). This was a sorority for ostensibly heterosexual transvestites and their wives.[65] This non-exhaustive list of ventures continued throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s for Prince. At the same time, a small ecosystem of periodicals, that *Tranvestia* often directly influenced, grew in her shadow.

Despite Prince's 1974 expulsion from leadership of Tri-Ess after she sold the legal names and addresses of chapter members to a gold and silver broker, and her 1980 retirement as *Transvestia's* editor, she remained an elder stateswoman in the subculture.[66] She carried on her regular transfeminine convention appearances, and editors still regularly published Prince in their respective magazines. In these articles, she continued to proclaim her homophobic, transmisogynistic, and anti-feminist positions.

In 1987 community leader Merissa Sherill Lynn reflected on the straight transfeminine subculture's organizations and magazines, and she noted a pattern in that, " (1) Nearly every organization had in some way or other been influenced by Virginia, and (2) it seemed the way to accomplish something was to disagree with Virginia or get excommunicated from FPE."[67] Prince's influence extended to supporters, detractors, and those who nursed a soft-spot for the controversial figure that introduced them to the possibilities of transfemininity. This context is critical to understand the straight transfeminine ecosystem. Except for *FMI,* each of these examined periodicals emerged from the socio-intellectual milieu of *Transvestia*. Moreover, each

[64] Cowan, *Virginia Prince (1912-2009),* 32-33, 53-56
[65] Virginia Prince, "Phi Phi Epsilon News," *Transvestia* 3, no. 14 (April 1962), 33.
[66] Docter, *From Man to Woman*, 86.
[67] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "Virginia," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.50 (1987): 8.

of the profiled magazines were some of the most popular and long-running transfeminine periodicals. Though she retired in 1980, Prince cast a long shadow.

While *Tranvestia* was an influential foundation for all transfeminine periodicals that followed it, Prince's vitriolic exclusion of transsexuals, homosexuals, and transfeminine fetishists meant that the periodical never purported to be a pan-trans space. By contrast, *The TV/TS Tapestry* was the closest to a 'public square' for the broader subculture. This magazine was founded in the late 1970s, and by the mid-1980s *Tapestry* had the largest circulation of any trans periodical.[68] As this was a small subculture that was further confined to those who could afford the magazine, *Tapestry's* peak monthly circulation in the mid-1990s was just over ten-thousand copies.[69] For much of its run, *Tapestry* was a key site for *a* trans community, though its contributors often fashioned it as a site of *the* trans community. Relatedly, *Tapestry* should be understood in the analyzed period as an overwhelmingly transfeminine space, though it was ostensibly a magazine for all trans people and allies. Though it was rare, even in the analyzed period trans masculine and androgynous writers were published in *Tapestry*.[70]

As was the case for many transfeminine periodicals, *Tapestry* also was a newsletter for an associated in-person club, and Merissa Sherill Lynn ran both. Lynn was a long-time member of the Gamma Chapter of Tri-Ess that in 1973 split from Prince's larger organization and became the Cherrystone Club.[71] Subsequently, due to what Lynn calls "an atmosphere of conservatism and a solid resistance to growth," she led a split from Cherrystone in September of 1978.[72] After

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[68] Dallas Denny, "A History of Tapestry Magazine Part II, Personal Ads," *TG Forum*, December 5, 2022. https://tgforum.com/a-history-of-tapestry-magazine-part-ii-personal-ads/.
[69] Dallas Denny, "A History of *Tapestry* Magazine, Part 1", *TG Forum*, November 28, 2022. https://tgforum.com/a-history-of-tapestry-magazine-part-1/.
[70] Andrea James, "Transgender Tapestry," *Transgender Map*. https://www.transgendermap.com/politics/media/outlets/transgender-tapestry/.
[71] Laura Granger and Joan Hoff, "A Brief History of Trans Community of New England," *The Trans Community of New England*, 2004. https://tcne.org/a-brief-history-of-trans-community-of-new-england/.
[72] Lynn, "Special Review of Our Project to Date," 3.

several name-changes the new group called itself the Tiffany Club. In contrast to Tri-Ess' homophobic and transmisogynistic policies, the Tiffany Club was a "social and service organization for transvestites, transsexuals, and their friends and relatives."[73] In addition to this more open policy, Lynn displayed an initially more open attitude towards the erotics of transfemininity, as she wrote in 1980, "We all recognize that people cross-dress for a multitude of reasons. Some dress for relaxation and fun, others for sex, some from a sense of compulsion or simply as a matter of Identity."[74]

Though Lynn initially demonstrated a degree of openness, from the outset she refused for Tiffany to serve as a site for members to engage in sexual acts with other attendees. In 1980 Lynn emphasized that "Tiffany is not concerned with the sexual preferences of its members and guests. Tiffany is Concerned that everyone behaves themselves and protect the security and the peace of mind of everyone, members and guests alike."[75] The pages of *Tapestry* also reflected this constrained openness. Though Lynn avowed the legitimacy of the erotics of transfemininity, *Tapestry* articles on these subjects were rare.

This absence is particularly salient as an early article in *Tapestry* by Lynn featured an article that outlined her erotic and gender-euphoric delights that she gained from transfeminine dress.[76] After *Tapestry* published a rare article on the erotics of transfemininity in 1991, the next issue featured a letter by Donna that congratulated Lynn, "How wonderful that you printed Andy Plumb's article which actually admitted that we girls do have a sexual self too. The [International Foundation for Gender Education] and *Tapestry* have studiously avoided anything of a sexual

[73] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "Monthly Report," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.25 (July 7, 1980): 1.
[74] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "Cooperation and a Way to Grow," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 23 (May 5, 1980): 2.
[75] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "The Nature of Mayflower and Tiffany," *The TV/TS Tapestry* no. 25 (July 7, 1980): 2-3.
[76] Lynn, "A Reason to Crossdress," 3-5.

content for these many years-."[77] She went on to write of her slow discovery of her transfeminine lesbian identity in which she, "- received no help from my favorite expert, *Tapestry."*[78] Donna ends her letter with the hope for Lynn to, "keep up the fine work, and don't be afraid of this topic. Its avoidance is a lie in itself."[79]

Lynn's exclusionary policy stemmed from a belief that subcultural popularity came from a respectable image, and only desexualized spaces could provide such a veneer. In 1980, she argued Tiffany would only continue to be successful if it provided policies that were, "-growth oriented, service oriented, and [able to] provide facilities and activities that are secure and free of fear and of what some persons may consider sexual or 'far out' behavior."[80] This attitude only increased over time. In June 1981, *Tapestry* expanded from an 8-page broadsheet to a 40-page magazine, and it began to feature a list of polices on the inside cover which included that, "Although sexually oriented organizations and services will be supported, it is understood that the Tiffany Club and the *Tapestry* are intended to be neutral, and acceptable to all. Therefore, no sexually oriented ads, photos, or articles will be accepted for publication in the Tapestry."[81] Though Lynn ostensibly supported the erotics of transfemininity, her desire for a periodical 'acceptable to all' meant that it centered the comfort of those repelled by *any* association between sexuality and transfemininity.

Yet, through organizational skill, a market desirous for *any* trans community, or a large audience for Lynn's vision of social-spaces, by the mid-1980s *Tapestry* was the most popular trans periodical. Though it overwhelmingly focused on transfeminine people, some used

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[77] Donna, "Bravos for 'Bi& Bi,'" *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 61 (Fall, 1991): 21.
[78]Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 22.
[80] Lynn, "The Nature of Mayflower and Tiffany," 3-4.
[81] Editorial Staff, "Policies," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.38 (Winter 1982-1983): 2.

'*Tapestry'* as a shorthand for the trans mainstream. When a transfeminine person named Deb learned that MasterCard allowed one to sign traveler's cheques regardless of gender presentation, she wrote into the small periodical *Miss C's Musings* that "-this is a MIRACLE DISCOVERY!! And something to be advertised in *Tapestry* and passed to all clubs in North America."[82] Of course, not everyone believed *Tapestry* was the central square of 'the community.' In more counter-subcultural spaces *Tapestry* was a byword for a staid, white, and middle-class group, as in a contemporaneous personal ad in the radical zine *gendertrash* that stated, "Seeks funky TS/TG/TV/DQ who doesn't shop from *Tapestry* (and also who can't afford to)."[83]

In 1991 Lynne reflected on her magazine's success, and she framed *Tapestry* as "-very conservative, non-erotic, a bit on the intellectual side, comparatively expensive, and hard to get. Only a small minority of people interested in the cross-dressing and transsexual phenomena are going to be interested in *Tapestry*-."[84] Though Lynn believed this, her publication's status as the most popular trans periodical, and contributors frequent claim to speak for 'the gender community' meant that the transfemininity represented in *Tapestry* became a subcultural received wisdom of what constituted 'proper' transfeminine embodiment.

Though *Tapestry* was quite popular, it had its critics, and Lynn published many of them in the magazine's pages. Detractors most frequently attacked those contributors who upheld *Tapestry* as *the* representative tentpole of the community despite its specific and desexualized articulations of trans social life. A contributor named Billie pointed to the fact that the sex-positive trans periodical *TV-Epic* carried three times as many California personal ads as *Tapestry*, and they

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[82] Deb, "I.F.G.E Re: American Express 'Dual' Signature Cheques," *Monarch Social Club Newsletter* 3, no.4 (Summer, 1993): 12.
[83] Montreal #160, "Gender Outlaw," *gendertrash* 1, no.3 (Winter, 1995): 41.
[84] Merissa Sherrill Lynn, "Three Short Editorials: 'What's Happening?' 'How Many of 'Us' Are There?' 'Lead, Follow, Or Get Out of the Way!'" *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no. 57 (Spring, 1991): 7.

believed this showed that a significant portion of the trans population were comfortable in their sexuality. They then argued that "there are those who say persons with a TV/TS sexual orientation are a minority in the so-called 'gender community,' and so they are excluded. Homosexual crossdressers (Drag Queens) have been a visible element of the larger culture for a very long time, but their voices are almost routinely omitted/excluded in the so-called 'gender community.'"[85] A subsequent letter in *Tapestry* by Billie again referenced the large number of sexual personals in *TV Epic,* and they then went on to declare that, "Who speaks for this community? A minuscule percentage who influences a few people. And what of this influence? It seems to follow that the voices of the minuscule percentage may well cause adoption of their message by the few, who will in turn perpetuate these messages." They go on to decry the dominance of transfeminine spokespeople for 'the community' who are uniformly sex-negative, and Jones believed that this occluded the presence of more sexually-forward trans people who, "-generally don't have a voice except sex ads. Which means that their perspective is not represented in 'our community.' Therefore, it is my further contention that the voices who speak 'for the community' rather than for themselves, perpetuate misinformation and myth."[86] Though by the early 1990s it increasingly published critiques of its feminine ideal, *Tapestry's* prominence meant that its favored transfeminine model occluded alternative articulations.

In addition to the purportedly pan-trans *Tapestry* and avowedly heterosexual transvestic *Transvestia,* there were a further constellation of explicitly transfeminine periodicals, and they also upheld a desexualized transfeminine ideal. This thesis draws from a number of such periodicals, and though they typically had shorter runs, when they existed these texts provided sisterly style advice for those who had the income. As is illustrative of the community's ethos,

[85] Billie Jean Jones, "And more on DSMIII-R," *The TV-TS Tapestry*, no. 60 (1991): 19.
[86] Billie Jean Jones, "Who Speaks GenderLingo?" *The TV-TS Tapestry*, no.62 (1992): 44.

one of the longer-lasting texts in this category was *LadyLike*, and its editorial staff positioned it as a "-quarterly magazine dedicated to the principles of beauty, fashion and style, but not entirely restricted by them. Each issue will be packed full of entertaining features, informative articles and inspiring personal profiles that will help you to be a better Ms."[87] *LadyLike* was published from 1987 until 2007, and it lived up to this promise as it featured editorials and advice columns that evoked a construct of respectable middle-class transfemininity. Style and advice columns made unceremonious reference to the purchase of expensive dress. One article opened with "If you have a hankering for designer clothes but rely on mail order to complete your feminine wardrobe, take heart; this year the Spiegel catalog offers more designer clothes than ever before."[88] In contrast to *Tapestry* and *Transvestia*, *LadyLike* was not directly tied to a transfeminine social group as it was a conventional magazine based out of a Philadelphian suburb.[89] Yet, long-time editor JoAnn Roberts was still heavily involved in the network of transfeminine conventions and retreats that were typically tied to subcultural social groups.

Whereas Prince and Lynn eventually lived femininely fulltime, Roberts was a crossdresser who was content in her liminal engagement with transfemininity.[90] Yet Lynn and Roberts did share three similar life experiences and thought processes. As a child JoAnn saw Virginia Prince on a California talk-show, and this was a key emotional moment in her realization that others like herself existed.[91] Similarly, Merissa Sherill Lynn credited Virginia Prince with, "-keeping me sane, keeping me whole, and perhaps even saving my life."[92] In addition, JoAnn also spoke

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[87] The Editorial Staff, "Dear Readers," *LadyLike*, no.1 (1987): 2
[88] Paula Sinclair, "For a More Glamorous You," *LadyLike*, no.6 (1990): 19.
[89] "Creative Design Services," *LadyLike*, no.1 (1987): 3.
[90] Dallas Denny, "Remembering JoAnn (with Digression)," *Chrysalis Quarterly*, June 8, 2013. http://dallasdenny.com/Chrysalis/2013/06/08/remembering-joanne-roberts/?fbclid=IwAR3Iv-moErJD_W_jeuLxN-VuytCYkbUfbSkJzwcvUuG73Qq9anQQ_VzU_NQ.
[91] Angela Gardner, "TGF Founder JoAnn Roberts has passed away," *TG Forum*, June 10, 2013. https://tgforum.com/tgf-founder-joann-roberts-has-passed-away/.
[92] Lynn, "Virginia," 6.

openly about the erotics of her transfemininity, as she recalled that "-like many TVs, I started crossdressing when I was pre-teen. It was very erotic and very pleasurable. I would cross-dress, at least partially, and masturbate. Then I would feel tremendously guilty about it."[93] Thirdly, in the same profile Roberts noted that she upset others in the TV/TS community because of her "very strong stand against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender role."[94]

Yet, as was the case in most subcultural spaces, the erotics of transfemininity or discussions of sexuality were largely absent from *LadyLike.* In the words of a transfeminine person named Belinda, "Eroticism is being written out of the equation. It is poo-pooed as not being important ([by] Joanne Roberts)-."[95] *LadyLike's* few articles on the erotics of transfemininity were smaller than other columns. In an article on the pleasures of high heels the author jokingly lamented how "our beloved editor, JoAnn, the all-seeing, all-knowing top tootsie only gave me two pages to define something within us all that we may at times suppress in order to be more passable."[96] Like Lynn, Roberts allowed the rare article on the erotics of transfemininity, though she otherwise asserted a desexualized image of transfeminine existence.

The final magazine covered is *Female Mimics,* later *FMI. Female Mimics's* initial run was from 1963-1968, and then it ran from 1974-1976. After there was a brief hiatus, it relaunched as *Female Mimics International* in 1979 before it ceased publication in 1999. Both iterations of *FMI* were unique amongst the profiled periodicals as in the words of one-time editor Pudgy Roberts they were, "-porn type publication[s]."[97] In addition to *FMI's* dual role as both transfeminine community space and erotica, its staff cared little for the pursuit of respectability

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[93] "*LadyLike's* Profile," *LadyLike,* no.6 (1990): 6.
[94] Ibid., 8.
[95] Belinda Doree, "Dear Janet," *Monarch Social Club Newsletter* 4, no.4 (early 1994): 24.
[96] Veronica Anderson, "Fetish Dressing," *LadyLike,* no.2 (1988): 39.
[97] Bob Davis, "*Female Mimics* Part 2: The Late '60s & Early '70s," *TG Forum,* February 6, 2012. https://tgforum.com/female-mimics-part-2-the-late-60s-early-70s/.

that the straight transfeminine subculture staffs engaged in, and the most prominent example of this was that the magazine frequently published photos from the world(s) of 'gay' transfemininity.

Both iterations included frequent exposés on balls and female impersonators.[98] In 1986 longtime-editor Kim Christy used her editorial to "-thank the lovely Empress Lerey. Lerey has always provided us with an opportunity to cover the most elegant parties in town, her balls! (No pun intended.)"[99] *FMI* provides the most in-depth example of a transfeminine periodical from the 'gay' sphere of transfemininity and the one most sexual in its content.

Though *FMI* published large amounts of visual and written erotica, contributors did not intellectualize the erotics of transfemininity. *FMI* published models who were from gay and straight transfeminine subcultures, but its staff cared little for the discourses on identity that straight transfeminine subculture periodicals often engaged in. Kim Christy said *FMI* was ultimately for those that wished to see "-men who enjoy dressing like women. Not gays, not straights. Let's not forget our unifying desires and let's keep our connections strong."[100] This refusal to say what it meant to desire transfeminine models derived from two main motivations.

First, *FMI*'s primary purpose was to make money. Transfeminine community stalwart Lee Brewster said that those who bought *FMI*, "-had to feel secure in their heterosexuality."[101] *FMI* refused to label what it meant to be attracted to a transfeminine person, and so it could be all things to all consumers. The second factor was the positionality of Kim Christy, who ran *FMI* from 1979 onward. In the period of the thesis Kim understood herself under the umbrella of

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[98] Bob Davis, "*Female Mimics* Magazine- Part 1, the Early Years," *TG Forum*, January 16, 2012. https://tgforum.com/female-mimics-magazine-part-1-the-early-years/.
[99] Kim Christy, "Editorial," *Female Mimics International* 16, no.1 (1986): 1.
[100] Kim Christy, "Editorial," *Female Mimics International* 21, no.4 (1991): 1.
[101] Davis, "*Female Mimics* Magazine — Part 1."

transfemininity, and in the late-1990s understood himself to be a man. In an interview in *The Advocate* Christy reflected on this period and said, "I was with men -- when I lived as a woman- who never would have called themselves gay, but they were not unhappy about my extra parts at all." He went onto say "-back then we did not name things so much. I never thought of any of the things I did as who I was. They were things I liked. Things I did."[102] Kim's lack of interest in labels aligned with the larger aims of *FMI's* publishers.

Across the non-sexual periodicals, members often wrote for each other's works, and they republished articles from other magazines. While JoAnn Roberts published *LadyLike* and *International TranScript,* she also wrote a style column for *The Canadian Cross-Dressers Club.*[103] But this cross-pollination did not include *FMI* and similarly sexual periodicals. This is not because *FMI* was obscure. Lee Brewster ran a prosperous transfeminine-centered sex shop, and they noted that *FMI* was a "-consistent best seller," with a "-long, loyal following."[104] Furthermore, a 1983 *FMI* editorial claimed a readership of thousands.[105] Even if this was hyperbole, similar numbers would place *FMI* as one of the most popular transfeminine periodicals. *FMI's* conspicuous absence demonstrates the desire of non-sexual subcultural periodicals to sharply segregate themselves from any connection to sexuality.

The material dimensions of how one purchased subcultural periodicals further reinforces the deliberate nature of this exclusion. Adult bookstores and sex shops were primarily how people bought these works, and this held true no matter how desexualized the periodical was. One fan of *LadyLike* wished for the periodical "–[to] be more broadly distributed in stores other than adult

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[102] Christopher Harrity, "Kim Christy's Lost World," *The Advocate,* February 12, 2011. https://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/photography/2011/02/12/kim-christys-lost-world.
[103] JoAnn Roberts, "Hot Stuff," *The Canadian Cross-Dresser* 3, no.4 (July/August, 1993): 8-11.
[104] Davis, "*Female Mimics* Magazine — Part 1."
[105] Kim Christy, "Editorial," *Female Mimics International* 12, no. 6 (1983): 3.

bookstores. It seems that as long as crossdressing remains a topic of publication that is only fit for such stores, it will continue to carry the mark of perversion as its cross of burden."[106] Yet many 'respectable' transfeminine people secretly carried this cross. *Notes From the Underground* is an important source because of its frequent critical appraisal of the straight transfeminine subculture. In one issue of it, Sharon mocked the prevalence of community members who secretly owned transfeminine erotica but "not too many people will likely ever fess up to owning [transfeminine porn]."[107] Furthermore, editorial staff were certainly aware of transfeminine erotica as they often denigrated these works as a means to elevate their publications. In *LadyLike's* premiere editorial, the staff claimed they were, "-very, very happy to see the positive response to a publication that took a risk! The risk was to produce a 'clean' and 'tasteful' magazine, full of honest, self-help information and entertainment value." [108]

Subcultural elites' denigration of erotica was one sign of a larger distaste for any link between sexuality and transfemininity. This subculture had an elite consensus that was averse to representations of transfemininity that linked it to eroticism, sex-work, and (homo) sexuality. Some pursued this due to a desire to render transfemininity acceptable to themselves, to the unmarked white, middle-class, non-trans, and heterosexual mainstream, to make a social-space 'safe for all,' or out of homophobic, sex-negative, whorephobic, and/or transmisogynistic malice. Though they had many motives, subcultural elites moved in lockstep. This consensus was a predecessor to discursive currents that successfully disarticulated gender and sexuality.

In what follows I show the complexities of a community that arrived at subcultural norms due to societal and interpersonal pressures that were informed by transmisogyny and a desire for

[106] Lori Ann, "Dear JoAnn," *LadyLike*, no. 8 (1990): 8.
[107] Sharon, "Those Scandalous Sex-Magazines," *Notes from the Underground* 3, no.3 (May/June 1991): 3.
[108] The Publishing Staff, "Publisher's Comment," *LadyLike*, no.2 (1988): 46.

normativity. First, I demonstrate how the oftentimes liminal transfemininity of many members shaped a desexualized transfeminine ideal. The second chapter shows how a desire for desexual transfemininity was interwoven with the need to pass as a non-trans woman, and how these factors informed the subculture's favored styles of comportment and dress. Finally, I discuss how members were often guarded and isolated, though if they joined this subculture, they gained unfathomable affective sisterhood. Subsequently, I examine how subcultural membership created a profoundly receptive mindset for the assimilation of subcultural norms. I hope this thesis benefits contemporary transfeminine communities. We can learn from it, we can laugh, cry, or get angry about parts of it, and we can see that people like us navigated problems that we continue to face. This history is not a triumph or a tragedy. It is an examination of a complex community. As I reflect on this subculture, my mind continues to turn to transfemme elder Cei Bell's recollection of their decades in community: "How could the past be so simultaneously horrible and yet so wonderful and sweet?"[109] How indeed.

[109] Cei Bell, "The Radicalqueens Trans-formation," in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!*, ed. Tommi Avicolli Mecca (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009): 124.

Chapter One:
The Dimensions of the Movable Closet

Unless it is drag, trans and queer studies mostly ignores those who transfemininely cross-dressed.[110] This silence is particularly acute for histories of twentieth-century transfemininity. The straight transfeminine subculture included large numbers of those who temporarily expressed their femininity. These members, who were often married, publicly existed as seemingly normative men, and they consequently reaped the financial rewards granted by their ostensible gender position. This context is essential to understand this subculture. Yet for contemporary trans communities, closeted or pre-transition transfeminine peoples' potential[111] possession of male privilege is a taboo topic.[112] Nevertheless, members with liminal transfemininity often possessed economic affluence, and they desired to maintain their normative lifestyle. The prevalence of this socio-economic position in the subculture profoundly shaped the communal popularity of certain transfeminine discourses. The demographic prevalence of members who desired respectability buoyed the subcultural acceptance of transfeminine normatization; the hierarchical collapse of the spectrum of transfemininity into legitimated desexualized transfeminine identities-principally transvestites and transsexuals- and pariah transfemininities, primarily those who understood themselves under an umbrella of

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[110] Simone Chess, *Male-To-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 33 n67.

[111] The male privilege of pre-transition transfeminine people primarily applies to those who presented as normatively masculine men. Rich inter-community discourse correctly problematizes the uncritical application of the privilege framework to *all* pre-transition transfeminine people. Critically, transfeminine people often grow up perceived as 'effeminate boys.' The privilege framework does not straightforwardly apply to this and other cases of gender non-normativity. See: Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Elisa Juárez-Chávez, Erin E. Cooney, Alberto Hidalgo, Jorge Sánchez, and Tonia Poteat, "Violence Experiences in Childhood and Adolescence Among Gay Men and Transgender Women Living in Perú: A Qualitative Exploration," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, no. 9-10 (2021): 4235-4255; Wayne Martino and Wendy Cumming-Potvin, "'Effeminate arty boys and butch soccer girls': investigating queer and trans-affirmative pedagogies under conditions of neoliberal governance," *Research Papers in Education* 34, no.2 (2019): 131-152; Tey Meadow, "Child," *TSQ* 1, no.1 (2014): 57-59; LaSai Wade, "Growing Up Trans-Without Male Privilege," *Believe Out Loud*, https://www.believeoutloud.com/voices/article/growing-up-trans-without-male-privilege/;

[112] See: Rose Dommu, "Trans Women & the Myth of Male Privilege," *Out*, March 15, 2017. https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2017/3/15/trans-women-myth-male-privilege; Julia Serrano, "Why are AMAB Trans People Denied the Closet?" *Medium*, February 28, 2022. https://juliaserano.medium.com/why-are-amab-trans-people-denied-the-closet-7fd5c740ce30.

homosexuality, were sex-workers, did not conceal their sexuality, and who vocalized the erotics of their transfemininity. Yet the ubiquity of this socio-economic positionality also supported a subcultural ecosystem for decades, and this network provided support for countless people. It is important to integrate this socio-economic context in scholastic analysis of transfeminine communities as it complexifies examination of both this subculture and Western trans histories more broadly.

Marta Vincente's genealogy of the term transgender traces "-a process, the historical journey to progressively demand a single identity from individuals."[113] This is one's gender identity, and it is presently strictly separated from sexual orientation. It is this question of taxonomic separation, as an oft-celebrated progressive move towards more accurate self-identity, which animated David Valentine's ethnographic analysis of one manifestation of this supposed distinction: the category of transgender. [114] He writes "I am interested in why it is that transgender-identified people—are seen to be figures which can tell us something about a category of experience we call 'gender,' but not about other kinds of human experiences, that we call 'race,' 'class,' or most importantly, 'sexuality.'"[115] Key to Valentine's interrogation of transgender's epistemological underpinnings is his examination of predominantly Black and brown people that his white progressive intellectual milieu would readily label transgender, but who understood themselves under the porous umbrella of 'gay.' He goes on to write, "-I soon discovered, everyone at the ball[116]—fem queens, butch queens, butches, women, butch queens in

[113] Vicente, "Transgender: A Useful Category?" 438.
[114] David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 15-16
[115] Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 16.
[116] Balls, or ballroom culture, emerged out of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, though with a 19th century genealogy. Balls are social and community spaces for predominantly queer/trans Black and brown people. Part-pageants, parties, and celebrations of Black and brown queer/trans joy and resistance, I cannot summarize what balls are in a footnote. For more in-depth examinations see: George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York City: Basic Books, 1994); Lynn Matluck Brooks, "Race,

drags—refer to themselves and each other as 'gay.'"[117] This incongruity between the supposed umbrella of transgender, as wholly divorced from any terms related to sexuality, and how poor and racialized groups narrativized their gender/sexual variance reflected the large gulf between these communities and affluent white subcultures of gender and sexual variance. Indeed, the American late twentieth-century academy's assumption of transgender's universality, due to the rapid adoption of this term by white subcultures of gender variance, exemplifies invisibilized white universality: white trans people adopted transgender, and so everyone else must have too.

Decades of hard-fought definitional border wars preceded Valentine's late 1990s study. As post-war psychology distinguished sexuality from gender, white homophile, lesbian, and trans groups also emphasized their differences, and they often did so through the denigration of each other as part of their desire for middle-class respectability.[118] Homophiles disavowed any non-normative model of homosexuality, and these were primarily any association with gender-variance, sex-work, or criminality in general.[119] The early homophile movement wished to demonstrate their respectable, middle-class, and unmarked white bonafides as a way to emphasize that gay men had much in common with other 'normal' citizens.[120] Esther Newton's *Mother Camp* is a landmark ethnographic analysis of the gay transfeminine subcultural world of female impersonators that she based off 1960s interviews with them, and in her analysis she noted her subjects were, "always anxious to tell me in no uncertain terms that they were not

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Rank, and Reform in Antebellum Philadelphia Social Dance," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 144, no.2 (2020): 147-178; Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*; Shane White, and Graham White, *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); James Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

[117] Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 80.

[118] Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 177.

[119] Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity," 150.

[120] Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 13.

transvestites; this label was a source of a good deal of fear, although they had no hesitation about revealing their homosexuality."[121]

Conversely, the straight transfeminine subculture also engaged in this hierarchical pursuit of respectability. This took two forms. First, through the denigration of those who understood their transfemininity under an umbrella of gayness, sex-workers, those who did not conceal their non-normative sexuality, and those who vocalized the erotics of their transfemininity. This was transfeminine normatization. Secondly, many subculture members denigrated *any* sexual non-normativity, and they were particularly vicious to homosexuals.

Though first among equals, homosexuals were not the only target of this subculture's representational purges. Trans historian Jules Gill-Peterson wrote on the erasure of the trans lesbian in this milieu, and she noted part of this history of expungement encompassed the social and subcultural formation of the categories of 'transvestite' and 'transsexual women.' Within the taxonomic classifications the former were to be strictly heterosexual (through attraction to non-trans women) while the latter were to be asexual until they obtained vaginoplasty, and then they were to exclusively have sex with non-trans men. While these were matters of gender, so too they were "-matters of sexuality, of a mode of prohibited desire between women, and much richer worlds of erotics, sociality, and relationships than contemporary taxonomies separating gender and sexuality allow for-."[122] Gill-Peterson focused on trans lesbians, and I analyze the erasure of articulations of transfemininity linked to fetishism, homosexuality, and those who pursued transfeminine desirability. The creation of the taxonomic separation of sexuality and gender has a history. Historical factors underpinned the rapid acceptance of 'transgender' as an

[121] Esther Newton, *Mother Camp* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 51 fn3.
[122] Jules Gill-Peterson, "Toward a historiography of the lesbian transsexual, or the TERF's nightmare," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 26, no.2 (2022): 143.

umbrella for gender but not sexual variance. This is a chapter on some of these factors. This is a history of the border guards.

Acceptable (Trans)femininity

Across the pages of transfeminine periodicals, the contributors to these works declaimed myriad conceptions and borders of 'proper' transfemininity. This manifested in editorial valuation of prudish feminine comportment and apparel examined next chapter, and profoundly desexualized spaces examined in Chapter 3. This discourse of 'proper' transfemininity erased or otherwise minimized expressions of transfemininity linked with sexuality; particularly homosexuality and the erotics of transfemininity. Robert Hill's discourse analysis on *Transvestia* informs my examination of the prevalence within the wider straight transfeminine subculture of homophobic, sex-negative, and oftentimes whorephobic distaste for 'deviancy.'

Hill demonstrated a common ethos of self-management and containment of the transfemininity of readers through the breadth of *Transvestia*. Virginia Prince articulated a bi-gendered model of transfemininity in which a husband could exist as their non-sexual femme self as a temporary stress-reliever or expression of 'feminine' personality traits, but they otherwise presented as a normative heterosexual man. I concur with Hill that the frequent appearance of this discourse in *Transvestia* was meant to alleviate husbands' and wives' anxieties over the formers' transfemininity.[123] Indeed, this was also a key discursive pillar in the wider straight transfeminine subculture. Subcultural elites only legitimated forms of transfemininity which were reconcilable to heteronormativity, and they particularly focused on articulations of transfemininity which preserved marriages between non-trans women and their husbands. Yet,

[123] Hill, "'We Share a Sacred Secret,'" 730-731.

direct transference of Hill's concept is insufficient for the entirety of this subculture as he centered the interpersonal dynamics of married readers.

Notions of legitimate versus illegitimate transfemininities brings to mind Austin H. Johnson's concept of transnormativity that he defined as a regulatory ideology which legitimates some trans people's identifications, articulations, and behaviors, and marginalizes and renders invisible others.[124] But Johnson's work focused on a binary of medicalization between trans people who sought transsexual medical interventions and those who did not.[125] Johnson's model cannot address the complexities of this subculture as most members did not pursue permanent feminization techniques. While Hill and Johnson provide contextually cogent tools of analysis, both are insufficient when applied to the straight transfeminine subculture.

Contributors and editors within this subculture hierarchically flattened the spectrum of transfemininity into legitimated desexualized transfeminine identities-principally transvestites, crossdressers, and transsexuals- and pariah transfemininities, primarily those who understood themselves under an umbrella of gayness, pursued sex-work, did not conceal their sexuality, and who vocalized the erotics of their transfemininity. Adherents promoted this discourse to render their transfemininity non-deviant to loved ones or heteronormative society. I term this discourse of the reduction of transfemininity to narrow desexualized modes: transfeminine normatization.

As she was one of the primary ideological architects for aspects of transfeminine normatization, Virginia Prince's insights on normative transfemininity are particularly important. But Prince did not support all aspects of transfeminine normatization, as she disdained trans women who obtained vaginoplasty. Accordingly, Prince's 'proper' transfemininity was explicitly

[124] Austin H. Johnson, "Transnormativity: A New Concept and Its Validation through Documentary Film About Transgender Men," *Sociological Inquiry* 86, no.4 (2016): 466-467.
[125] Ibid.

homophobic, transmisogynistic towards transsexual women, and vicious to those whose transfemininity included any hint of sexual fetish. In 1962 one reader for *Transvestia* lamented the common association of their heterosexual transvestism with "masochists, sadists, fetishists, and transsexuals."[126] In Prince's reply she declaimed, "separation of TVs from the other groups named has been the purpose of [*Transvestia*]."[127] From the outset, Prince propagated her view of transvestism as wholly divorced from homosexuality or any other 'deviancy.' In her first issue of *Transvestia* Prince noted her irritation that mentions of transvestism always included sexual orientation, i.e., heterosexual and homosexual transvestites. Prince instead argued "-if a person's sole or principle deviation from the norm is that of liking the clothing of the opposite sex, that he, and only he (or she), should be designated a Transvestite - period."[128] By her third issue, Prince encapsulated this argument into a term: true transvestite. Prince explained to readers that "cross-dressing as a behavior pattern can exist uncomplicated by other patterns as in what I consider to be 'True Transvestism'; or it can be incidental to other patterns which are more fundamental for the individual concerned, such as homosexuality, masochism, (the humiliation and punishment bit), fetishism, etc."[129] While Prince's favored term for her conception of 'proper' transvestism evolved, she always desexualized and separated it from homosexuality. Though Prince centered transvestism, she had much to say about transsexual women.

Across her long decades in the subculture, Prince heaped vitriolic scorn on transsexual women. Her polemics against transsexual woman would often include a gesture to magnanimity before she otherwise denigrated these women. She opened one article with the concession that, "For a very few, and by no means all of the self-proclaimed transsexuals [vaginoplasty] is

[126] "Dear Virginia," *Transvestia*, 3, no. 16 (August 1962): 64.
[127] Virginia Prince, "Editorial Response," *Transvestia*, 3, no. 16 (August 1962): 64.
[128] Virginia Prince, "Virgin Views," *Transvestia* 1, no.1 (January 1960): 53.
[129] Virginia Prince, "Where do we go from here?" *Transvestia* 1, no.4 (July 1960): 4.

perhaps the answer."[130] Then she usually described three different pejorative motivations as to why someone would pursue vaginoplasty. In the same quoted article Prince believed people sought vaginoplasty due to neurosis, a desire to make money through sex-work, or they were secretly gay, and they wished to find an acceptable way to have sex with men. In 1961 Prince demonstrated an example of this last argument as she wrote that many transsexual women "were essentially homosexual whether they had experienced it or not, but the removal of male organs and the creation of an artificial vagina gives them the physical means and the moral license to bed down with men without the 'gay' tag being pinned on them."[131] Prince purposefully used the term 'artificial vagina' as she believed vaginoplasty granted one an artificial womanhood while they 'remained male.'[132] Prince's consistent transmisogynistic, homophobic, and whorephobic characterizations of transsexual women reflected her desire to Other forms of transfemininity that she believed were disreputable. Her polemics also legitimated her favored trans model.

For Prince the appropriate transfeminine form was 'bi-genderism.' This ideal premised the idea that a person contained both male and female personalities, or specifically one contained both male and female character traits. Though societies discursively gender personality traits, Prince and her supporters believed this to be an objective taxonomy. Like how she renamed 'true transvestite,' Prince continually changed what she called this model. At one time it was 'femmepersonation,' or the expression of one's 'femmeself,' but she eventually settled on 'Full Personality Expression.' Prince trumpeted the need for her bi-gendered model in countless articles, editorial, and inside-covers of *Tranvestia,* as in this example she declaimed:

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[130] Virginia Prince, "Virgin Views," *Transvestia* 2, no.7 (January 1961): 76.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid, 76-77

> The customs and attitudes of our society while recognizing and allowing great freedom to the female in the expression of the masculine side of her personality are largely blind to and repressive toward the male who discovers the feminine aspect of his total self. Feminine expression in the male does not imply sexual deviation. This magazine is dedicated to the needs of the sexually normal individual who has discovered the existence of his or her 'other side' and seeks to express it.[133]

These 'feminine aspects' reflected a dainty infantilized ideal of femininity. In 1962, *Transvestia* stalwart Susanna Valenti identified the supposedly gendered nature of some personality traits as she wrote, "TVism [transvestism] is not the place for fights—Tvism is good natured, soft, tender, kind, pretty, friendly, wonderfully dreamy and has no place for bitterness roughness or anger. Let's leave that to our 'other selves' huh?"[134] This conception of feminine personality traits was remarkably stable over time. Thirty years after Valenti's quote, Charlotte Suthrell completed an ethnography in the mid-1990s of the English Beaumont Society. Prince had helped found this sorority of ostensibly heterosexual cross-dressers decades earlier. Suthrell wrote that for members "-cross dressing is, to varying degrees, about expressing their desire to explore the (perceived) gender attributes of women. For them, the female behaviors they would express may well include 'softness', 'gentleness', 'vulnerability', 'passivity', 'elegance', 'sensitivity', 'tenderness', 'intimacy' and a whole host more."[135]

The members of the Beaumont Society were not alone in their instrumentalized conception of transfemininity. Across the subculture, contributors often argued that they used feminine dress[136] to unlock their femme-selves and her corresponding traits. Of course, contributors implicitly

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[133] "Purpose of *Tranvestia," Transvestia* 4, no.30 (December 1964): inside cover.
[134] Susanna Valenti, "Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 3, no.18 (December 1962): 66.
[135] Charlotte Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dresssing, and Culture* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004), 134.
[136] Chapter 2 examines what this constituted, but this was essentially dresses, skirts, and other high-femme apparel.

framed how they understood masculinity when they articulated 'feminine traits,' and oftentimes these authors expressed profound dissatisfaction at the masculinity that society expected of them.

If I masculinize the above list of feminine traits from the Beaumont Society, this social group understood masculinity to be hard, unkind, strong, active, inelegant, unresponsive, callous, and aloof. Straight transfeminine subculture members commonly professed a similar conception of masculinity. They did so implicitly through how they identified femininity, or explicitly when they recommended how to properly perform femininity. A 1991 *Tapestry* article on proper feminine comportment demonstrates the latter. The author identified masculine traits and behaviors to avoid in order to pass as a non-trans woman, and these included: to quantify success through external criteria, to constantly be in the process of 'doing', to be active, to be competitive, to judge behavior and care little for feelings, to be logical and evaluative, to be primarily focused on reason, and to not smile or cry.[137]

These examples reflected a profound dissatisfaction with American twentieth century norms of masculinity. As one yearned to unlock feminine traits through feminine dress, they *simultaneously* yearned to unlock traits that normative society barred for men. In many periodical letters members resented the stoic masculinity that society expected of them, and in these same messages they often lamented the daily need to perform masculinity. In a 1970 letter from a transfeminine member named Heidi she noted that her femme-self was, "the epitome of lighthearted freedom from the masculine image of predatory cannibalism that has been man's role since no one knows when."[138] Heidi's sentiment was not uncommon. Less ferociously, a 1994 *Tapestry* ad for a make-up instruction video promised readers that they could go from,

[137] Lee Reynolds, "Lighten Up, Ladies," *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no. 58 (1991): 34-36.
[138] Heidi, "Who is Heidi?" *Empathy Magazine* 3, no.28 (1970): 14.

"Boy-Blah to Femme-Fatale."[139] Whether closeted transfeminine people viewed masculinity as a cannibalistic vampirism or menial 'blah', many resented mid-to late-twentieth-century norms of masculinity. Yet, from these archival fragments it is impossible to parse if members' critiques stemmed from a resentment at a gender that they otherwise embodied comfortably, or the sublimated desire to be transfeminine fulltime, or other reasons motivated these critiques.

As well as members who used feminine dress to unlock certain traits, people often used feminine dress as an 'escape valve' to relieve stress. In 1964 Virginia Prince informed readers that, "the reason TVs so universally claim that they feel more relaxed, quieter and more comfortable when in femme dress is, I believe that in this role they can shed a good part of the characteristics and personality that they live by day to day.-"[140] Prince, Valenti, and others' invocation that through transfeminine dress they felt more relaxed, quieter and more comfortable, fits the contemporary framework of gender euphoria, that scholars commonly define as the non-exhaustive range of positive emotions which includes comfort, confidence, satisfaction, and joy in response to affirmation of one's gender identity.[141] Yet bi-gendered proponents did not frame the pleasures of transfeminine dress as an experience to affirm one's feminine gender-identity. Instead, they emphasized that a *man* experienced these pleasures, and this man took a *temporary* break from their immutable sex. One could experience the joys of their transfemininity, but these were always temporary releases before they returned to the bounds of purported masculine normativity.

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[139] Alternative Images Inc., "How to Go From 'Boy Blah' to 'Femme Fatale,'" *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no. 73 (Fall, 1995): 151.
[140] Virginia Prince, "The Dual Personality Concept," *Transvestia* 4, no.26 (April 1964): 83.
[141] Ashley Austin, Ryan Papciak, and Lindsay Lovins, "Gender euphoria: a grounded theory exploration of experiencing gender affirmation," *Psychology & Sexuality* 13, no.5 (2022): 1406-14.

While it is impossible to reconstruct most bi-gendered proponents' relationships to masculinity, it can be done for Susanna Valenti and Virginia Prince. And they did not adhere to bi-genderism. They were hypocrites. Prince began to live full-time as a woman in 1968.[142] For the next forty-years Prince continued to trumpet bi-genderism as *the* model of proper transfemininity, yet she did not abide by it. Susanna Valenti in October 1969 announced her decision to live full-time as a woman. Then, after an impersonal article in the 100th issue of *Transvestia* in 1979, she disappeared from the historical record.[143]

Despite how she conducted herself, by the late 1960s Prince and others like her had popularized the disarticulation of transfemininity from sexual expression, and for many transfemininity was now solely an aspect of gender expression/identity. Long after she had left *Transvestia,* Prince's belief-system continued to influence how members of the straight transfeminine subculture narrativized their sense of self. An anonymous contributor to a 1985 issue of *Tapestry* wrote, *"*For me cross dressing is a 'uniform for femininity'. It is a way to enlarge my personality into realms normally disallowed to me as a man. It's an effective means to an end."[144] In 1991 Fantasia Fair founder Ari Kane, who in 1975 created what became the largest annual gathering of this subculture, described how "nurturance for me in either role is one of those qualities I can do in either role, but I can't really hug like I can hug in this role [feminine], when I'm a man, especially in a suit."[145] In that same year a *Tapestry* contributor named Susan noted, "There is in the Gender Community a popular rationale for crossdressing

[142] Cowan, *Virginia Prince (1912-2009),* 29.
[143] Zagria Cowan, "Susanna Valenti (192? -?) translator, broadcaster, activist," *A Gender Variance Who's Who….* Accessed March 20 2023, https://zagria.blogspot.com/2012/02/susanna-valenti-192-translator.html.
[144] Anonymous, "A Personal Reply to the Question 'Why I Cross-Dress In Spite of Social Disapproval,'" *The TV-TS Tapestry*, no. 47 (1985): 22
[145] Chris Busa et al., "P'Town is Burning," *International TranScript* 2, no.1 (January, 1992): 21.

behavior, that by indulging in such behavior, it 'allows' men to feel those emotions which are outside the cultural and social boundaries of the male role."[146]

This subculture's favored bi-gendered model was a patriarchal infantilization of femininity as synonymous with passivity, nurturance, and emotional-receptivity. In addition, members often used this model to seemingly stabilize their day-to-day masculine gender-presentation. Prince and her acolytes often framed transfemininity as both a stress-release and twin to one's 'main' gender identity, and both of these reasons buttressed the purported validity of one's 'masculine core.' Prince often included notions of 'balance' and 'moderation' in her essays on Full Personality Expression, as she wrote in one instance, "Life is a balance and accepting of one's limitations personal, social or domestic is part of achieving this balance. Recognition of the femmeself within you is the important thing…Your masculine life can be fuller and easier for recognizing her, but it need not be spoiled by catering to her."[147] Like her larger disarticulation of gender from (homo)sexuality, Prince's bi-gendered model served a larger purpose. The heterosexual bounds of white middle-class marriage could contain Prince's favored ideal. Though she was one of the most prominent subcultural cheerleaders of respectability to the white, middle-class, non-trans, and heterosexual mainstream, Prince was not alone.

Proponents of transfeminine normatization did not just elevate their favored articulations, they also denigrated both pariah transfemininities and 'sexual deviants'. While many subculture periodicals were ostensibly open to all forms of expression, editors routinely published attacks on those who understood their transfemininity under an umbrella of homosexuality as well as those who interlinked transfemininity and eroticism. A 1988 letter from Ester encapsulated both attitudes as she wrote: "Dear *En Femme*; I would like to comment that I would like to see your

[146] Susan Edwards, "What are 'Feminine' Feelings?" *The TV-TS Tapestry*, no. 59 (1991): 76.
[147] Virginia Prince, "Editors Note," *Transvestia* 3, no.22 (August, 1963): 39.

content be limited to transgenderism, heterosexual or otherwise, I do not care for blatantly gay material." She went on to write, "I also do not feel that material relating to strange fetishes such as bondage, rubber, or baby clothing (Good Lord!) belong in a magazine dealing with transgendered people."[148] In *Tapestry*, a profile on a lifelong cross-dresser included the anecdote that "-Tom considers homosexuality 'repugnant and abhorrent. However, I would vote for a homosexual president as long as he ran on a Republican ticket!'"[149] Finally, in a 1990 *LadyLike* letter Ashlee explained that, "I've always felt my being a transvestite was not an endorsement to slime and kink but rather an enhancement of character, a joining of genders that complement each other and advocate understanding, acceptance and dignity."[150]

Undoubtedly the 'drag queen' was the ultimate target of scorn for transfeminine normatization proponents. Though this figure faced consistent vitriol from some readers, members often did not define what they meant by 'drag queen.' The definition provided by straight transfeminine subculture member Ruby was most common, as she explained that a drag queen was, "The kind of crossdresser that hustles men for sex and other such gay activity. And these 'Drag Queens' call us a bunch of conservative housewives, maybe so, but at least we are normal in our sexual liaisons."[151] Across magazines, contributors routinely pilloried the archetype of the drag queen or street queen, for her 'homosexuality' and her avowed use of feminine desirability to have sex with men. This figure encapsulated all that transfeminine normatization proponents loathed, for this transfeminine figure was intrinsically sexually desirable as part of her active pursuit of sex with men. It is important to keep in mind the

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[148] Ester, "No Gay Material," *En Femme,* no.4 (January/February, 1988): 3.
[149] Carol, interview by Mariette Pathy Allan, "The Women Who Live Inside: Portraits of Men as Women," *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no.50 (1987): 67.
[150] Ashlee, "Letters to the Editor," *LadyLike,* no.8 (1990): 8-9.
[151] Ruby Jensen, "The Fords Versus the Chevies," *The Monarch Social Club Newsletter* 4, no.1 (Fall/Winter 1993): 32.

subtextual racism of these frequent insults as many drag queens were Black and brown transfeminine women.[152] In the counter-subcultural zine *gendertrash* sex-worker Justine Piaget called attention to the straight transfeminine subculture's consistent whorephobia as she bemoaned that, "There are a number of pervasive anti-prostitute attitudes amongst some transsexuals, most of whom happen to be white, 'well-educated,' and middle-class."[153] Proponents of transfeminine normatization wished to segregate transfemininity from both any desirability for/to men and to erase links between transfemininity and sexuality, so the sustained vitriol against sex-workers was part of their larger pursuit of respectability.

In addition, some subculture members were evidently insecure about their purported heterosexual transfemininity as the number of insults directed at sex-workers further reads as an attempt by some members to feel more secure through the denigration of those 'beneath them.' As part of a larger critique of Tri-Ess, author Belinda DeRee argued "Like priests hiding under a cloak of moral-superiority their hierarchy is filled with power hungry zealots nursing their unemancipated male egos by feeding on the guilts and vulnerabilities of defenseless, insecure cross-dressers."[154] Though some were simply proponents of transfeminine normatization, other members kink-shamed and expressed homophobic, whorephobic, and transmisogynistic opinions in subculture periodicals potentially due to insecurity about their own femininity. These people denigrated others supposedly lower on a racialized, class-based hierarchy to feel more secure.

If one just read the periodical contributions of subcultural elites, it would appear that the community overwhelmingly supported transfeminine normatization, yet both the recollections of former subculture members and contemporary articles point to contradictions between the

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[152] Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 190.
[153] Justine Piaget, "Hooker of the Year: Justine Piaget," *gendertrash*, 1, no.2 (Fall, 1993): 28
[154] Belinda Doree, "Another View of the 20th Century," *Notes From the Underground* 4, no.1 (January/February 1992): 14.

respectable veneer, and how many actually lived. In a 1991 *Tapestry* letter a well-established subculture member named Donna remarked that she has "written to at least fifty or sixty of the girls in *Tapestry*, and in about 90% of the cases, we eventually discuss sex quite openly. In my opinion, this topic represents another 'closet' equally as intimidating as the one we left in bra and panties."[155] Elsewhere, Rochelle, who was a purported 22-year reader of transfeminine periodicals, complimented *LadyLike's* editors as they had recently published several articles on the delights of lingerie and even a photo-essay on fetish wear (the usual subcultural touchstones of French maid uniforms and super-high heels). She applauded the editors for "how tastefully you have handled the erotic aspects of crossdressing…it is important that this aspect of crossdressing not be swept under the rug."[156] Rochelle's compliment implied that common practice was to not represent the erotics of transfemininity.

As it contained the most exclusionary policies, Tri-Ess was rife with contradictions between rules and the lived-realities of members. In a June 1961 *Transvestia* survey 21.5% of the 140 respondents said that they desired vaginoplasty.[157] Whereas in a 1982 poll which 60% of the Tri-Ess membership participated in, 87% of members voted that they wished to continue to exclude transsexual women and 'homosexuals.'[158] Dallas Denny, who was a Sigma-Epsilon member of Tri-Ess in the late-1980s to early 1990s, recalled that sorority members oftentimes had sex with men or other transfeminine members.[159] Finally, in a mid-1990s survey of the Tempe Arizona chapter of Tri-Ess, 64% of respondents said that they would like to magically transform into non-trans women if it was possible.[160] Over the decades, significant portions of the Tri-Ess

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[155] Donna, "Bravos for 'Bi & Bi,'" 21.
[156] Rochelle, "Something Was Missing," *LadyLike*, no. 12 (Fall, 1991): 6.
[157] Virginia Prince, "Results of the Questionnaire on Transvestism," *Transvestia* 2, no. 9 (June 1961): 73.
[158] Carol Beecroft, "The Development of Tri-Ess," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.61 (Fall, 1991): 43.
[159] Dallas Denny, "The Tri-Ess Wars," *Chrysalis Quarterly*, April 22, 2014. http://dallasdenny.com/Chrysalis/2014/04/22/the-tri-ess-wars/.
[160] Dina Amberle, "Vis a Vis," *Renaissance News* 10, no.1 (January 1996): 8.

membership desired an exclusionary normative veneer, yet many also craved possibilities of transfeminine life that the larger 'heterosexual transvestite' network excoriated.

Beyond Tri-Ess, the greatest breach between the façade and reality of the straight transfeminine periodical subculture was the commercial dimensions which sustained this community. Subculture periodicals were overwhelmingly sold in sex-shops, and within the magazines staff filled their pages with lucrative advertisements for fetish wear, hardcore erotica, and sex-workers' contact information. Next to these ads, authors castigated the association of transfemininity with sexuality, or they denigrated sex-workers and those who dared to dress erotically. A 1989 *LadyLike* editorial reemphasized their policy against sexually explicit content in articles, but then staff justified the inclusion of ads for fetish-wear and hardcore erotica as simply "the price of doing business."[161] Fetishists, sex-workers, trans amorous consumers, and transfeminine people who delighted in their desirability financially supported the platform that supporters of transfeminine normatization used to excoriate these groups. The consistent subcultural presence of exclusionary policies, that members often violated, indicated that many desired at least a veneer of heteronormative normalcy. They may have desired this image to preserve their socio-economic positionality, or to make transfemininity respectable to 'normal society' or themselves, or for reasons that are forever unknown to the historian.

Demographics

Subculture members were cognizant of the potential violence that they faced if outed. This valid fear manifested in an aversion to subscriptions, the proliferation of aliases, and other efforts that members did to obfuscate their subcultural engagement. All these actions prevent the exact

[161] JoAnn Roberts, "From the Editors Pen," *LadyLike* no.12 (1989): 2.

demographic reconstruction of mid-century transfeminine communities. My attempt encompasses reader polls, quotes from staff on their imagined audience, and the economic tenor of advertisements. Of course, all these sources are susceptible to falsification or the projection of a phantom demographic. Sometimes people lie about their lives. Yet, across decades and sources there was a cogent demographic profile. The typical member was white, at least middle-class, often married to a non-trans woman, and their transfeminine expression was liminal.

The scholarship on the same or similar transfeminine networks affirms this picture. Nicholas Matte's analysis of the mid-twentieth century Erickson Educational Foundation noted this transsexual organization cultivated a network of representatives who were to epitomize an ideal that was: "white, fully employed, gender-normative, and non-incarcerated."[162] Trans historian Bob Davis characterized the regular existence of visitors to the 1960s transfeminine resort Casa Susanna as "-the men in the gray flannel suits."[163] Robert Hill in his extensive analysis of *Transvestia* argued that the readership, "comprised mostly white, middle-to-professional class crossdressers who were born in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s."[164] Finally, in David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* Nancy, who in the mid-1990s was president of the New York Chapter of CrossDressers International, estimated that the vast majority of her members were "-married (the wives may or may not know about their husbands' cross-dressing), white, and while they range in employment from plumbers to executives, a significant proportion (40 percent, she estimates from her own rough tallies) are, like herself, freelance business or computer consultants."[165] Transfeminine subcultures often had a large number of white economically affluent members, and they derived this wealth due to their positions as ostensibly gender-normative men.

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[162] Matte, "Historicizing," 104.
[163] Davis, "Using Archives," 625.
[164] Hill, "'We Share a Sacred Secret,'" 732.
[165] Valentine, *Imagining Transgender,* 85.

Virginia Prince's love of surveys grants the most cogent picture of *Transvestia's* readership. A June 1961 poll of 140 respondents provided a robust demographic profile for *Tranvestia,* and it also reflected the readership of most subculture periodicals. 88.5% of respondents declared themselves heterosexual, and 70% of them were reportedly married.[166] 77.1% of respondents said that they were over 30. 74.6% of them purportedly had yearly incomes which exceeded $5,000, and 54.3% of respondents said their income was between five to ten thousand dollars.[167] If one assumes no respondent lied, three-quarters of *Transvestia's* readers had incomes which far exceeded the then poverty line of $3,000.[168] Across the decades, this demographic profile was remarkably stable, and this conceivably reflected the appeal of *Transvestia's* model of transfemininity to those of a particular milieu. Thirty years after the above poll, a 1991 report from Tri-Ess continued to note that the average member was middle-aged, upper-middle-class, and married.[169]

More open periodicals than *Transvestia* also had readerships who mostly did not live femininely fulltime. In an unnumbered 1987 survey the *En Femme* staff noted that readers purportedly had an average age between 36-45, 75% were transvestites, 83% belonged to an in-person group, and most seldom or never went out femininely dressed.[170] Though likely hyperbole, the Greater Toronto Area-based Monarch Social Club claimed 95% of members were heterosexual.[171] In the temporal focus of the thesis, the subcultural tentpole *Tapestry* never commissioned a readership survey. Yet contributor statements and the economic tenor of its ads reflected this profile. A *Tapestry* reader named Christine declared that "The great majority of

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[166] Prince, "Results of the Questionnaire," 72.
[167] Ibid., 74.
[168] Gordan M. Fisher, "The Development and History of the Poverty Thresholds," *Social Security Bulletin* 55, no.4 (Winter, 1992): 43.
[169] Cynthia Phillips, and Linda Peacock, "Wives & the Family-Orientated," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 61 (1991): 33.
[170] "Letter from the Editor," *En Femme,* no.3 (November-December, 1987): 1.
[171] Anne, "Dear Ted (Allison)," *Notes from the Underground* 2, no.4 (July/August 1990): 6.

readers of *Tapestry* are fortunate never to have known a life of drug addiction or prostitution."[172] When longtime *Tapestry* editor-in-chief Merissa Sherill Lynn met street-based sex worker and racialized transfeminine revolutionary Sylvia Rivera in 1984, she noted that, "Sylvia represents a segment of our Community that is totally foreign to me - drag queens, and the city streets. It is not a segment in which most of us would long survive."[173]

Lynn was totally correct. The brown and Black transfeminine subcultures Sylvia was in were completely foreign to the straight transfeminine subculture. Richard Dyer in *White: Essays on Race and Culture* wrote that white people commonly believe we represent a non-raced, universal category of people.[174] One of the strongest indications of white presumed universality is the absence of reference to whiteness in our speech and writings.[175] The straight transfeminine subculture reflected this unmarked whiteness. Throughout the periodicals, the presumption of a white reader was near universal, and mentions of race overwhelmingly came from non-white contributors, who themselves were rare in the extant record.

The presumption of whiteness primarily manifested in two themes. First, members implicitly assumed a universal whiteness to transfemininity as most calls for trans political action referenced Black and gay civil rights like they were parallel streams of inspiration. In 1986 an editorial by Merissa Sherill Lynn spoke of the fights for gay and Black civil rights, and she highlighted to readers that, "The Gay Community has come a long way since then [the 1960s]…The Black community has come a long way since then. How far have we come?"[176]

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[172] Christine Beatty, "Escaping the Twilight World," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 70 (Winter, 1994): 38.
[173] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "Tiffany Club Quarterly Report," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 41 (1984): 26.
[174] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 1-2.
[175] Ibid., 2.
[176] Merissa Sherill Lynn, "Self-Validation," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 49 (1986): 6.

Secondly, those who provided makeup advice assumed a white spectrum of skin tones. Typically, contributors only referenced ivory concealer or other makeup which only suited pale complexions. In a 1988 guide on concealer, JoAnn Roberts provided advice on fair, medium, and olive complexions, and she did not remark on the absence of dark skin tones.[177] Roberts possessed knowledge on cosmetics for Black consumers as four issues later she provided detailed advice to a Black trans woman named Tisha when she asked for makeup help.[178] As Roberts did not include this knowledge in the earlier article, she likely presumed that this information would be a pointless inclusion to what she perceived to be the magazine's audience.

Of course, members remarked on the conspicuous whiteness of the subculture. In 1993 Devita, who was a Black reader of *Female Mimics International* (*FMI*), called attention to an invisibilized Black readership as she opined, "Though we're not represented as often and not as gracefully through pictorial and/or articles per *FMI* etc. publications, trust me, honey, our consumer contribution is significant."[179] A year before JoAnn Roberts noted that she was "-part of a relatively large support group in Philadelphia. We have about 350 members, yet very few are minorities in our support group and it's not because we're not open to them."[180] Jessica, who was a rare Black member of JoAnn's group, expressed how it felt to be one of its few racialized members "-when I attend meetings as a full-fledged, card-carrying member of Renaissance, I still feel that awful sense of detachment, of isolation because I am Black. Don't get me wrong, it's not like I'm shunned at meetings, that isn't the case-." They then wrote, "-I often wonder just

[177] JoAnn Roberts, "*LadyLike* Special Hints and Tips," *LadyLike,* no.2 (1988): 13.
[178] Tisha, "GirlTalk," *LadyLike,* no.6 (1990): 12.
[179] DeVita Chanee, "Letters to Kim Christy," *Female Mimics International* 22, no.6 (1993): 19.
[180] Chris Busa et al., "P'Town is Burning," 22.

what I'm doing at such an assemblage. Then I ask, 'Where are the others like me? Why am I alone in a sea of white faces?'"[181]

While racial disparities in wealth were factors in this absence, there were two other persuasive answers to Jessica's question. In Rochella Thorpe's analysis of the predominantly white lesbian bar-culture of Detroit in the 1940s through 1970s, she identified a two-fold attitude amongst white subculture members. First, they took their sexual non-normativity to mean that they either could not be racist, or they believed because they had a marginalized sexuality that they understood what it meant to be racially marginalized.[182] Secondly, this behavior meant well-meaning white lesbians were never aware of racism and they never sought, or they chose not, to address racism within their white social spaces.[183] Thorpe explained how this two-fold phenomena meant that, "-the lack of awareness about racial problems in white lesbian bars in Detroit existed precisely because race was never adequately dealt with as an issue in these bars."[184] This attitude likely marked the straight transfeminine subculture too, due to both the overwhelmingly white demographic of these spaces and the casual racism in the extant record. For one example, JoAnne Roberts, who went 'out of her way' to accommodate a Black member in Renaissance, believed her social-group lacked racialized members due to the "culture of large inner cities," and, "the concept of 'macho' in Hispanic and Black communities."[185] It is probable that this white ignorance of non-white communities was one manifestation of other racist actions, and these microaggressions alienated racialized transfeminine people from this subculture.

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[181] Jessica Charlene Brandon, "Color Scheme," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 67 (Spring, 1994): 33-34.
[182] Rochella Thorpe, "'A House Where Queers Go': African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975," in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*, ed. Ellen Lewin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 48-49.
[183] Ibid., 49.
[184] Ibid., 50.
[185] Chris Busa et al., "P'Town is Burning," 22.

Jessica's question has a second plausible answer. Racialized transfeminine folks likely joined the many other subcultures that poorer Black and brown people transfeminine people were the majority in. If someone joined one of these groups, they likely would have felt more comfortable in a less potentially racist space, and they would have had more in common with fellow racialized transfeminine people. But the main caveat was that these communities typically moved within, and were part of, gay subcultures.[186] If a racialized transfeminine person was loath to associate with gay people, they would not want to join such groups.

Just as members were aware of the absence of racialized people in their subculture, they were also conscious of the intercommunity gulf between the straight transfeminine subculture and gay Black and brown transfeminine groups. In 1992 JoAnn Roberts commented on the "division between our 'suburban' white crossdressers and the inner-city minority crossdressers. It's almost like two totally separate worlds."[187] Similarly, Mariette Pathy-Allen, who was a long-time non-trans member of the subculture, reflected on how the Black and brown transfeminine documentary subjects of *Paris Is Burning* freely mixed gender and sexuality, but she noted that in the straight transfeminine subculture, "-the focus is forever on gender roles and there's a great fear and anxiety about sexual orientation."[188] Indeed, those comfortable with their transfemininity as it related to/was part of their sexuality noticed this anxiety from straight transfeminine people. Mother of the House of Selina, Chelsea Selina noted "It is common for self-described Drag Queens, transsexuals and people like myself who fall into both camps (pun

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[186] See for example Mecca, *Smash the Church, Smash the State!*; Barry Reay, *Trans America: A Counter History* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020); Rosenthal, "How to Become a Woman;" Benjamin Serby, "Gay Liberation and the Politics of the Self in Postwar America" (PhD diss., Colombia University, 2020); Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*; Susan Stryker, "Radical Queen: An Interview with Tommi Avicolli Mecca," *TSQ* 3, no. 1-2 (May 2016): 278-284;

[187] JoAnn Roberts, "Personal Transcript: Diane Marlene Knoetze," *International TranScript* 1, no.1 (January 1992): 19.

[188] Chris Busa et al., "P'Town is Burning," 19.

intended) to be mother/daughter/sister and lover to one another in the same House with no conflict in love and loyalty by how we define ourselves sexually." She then said, "What is more difficult is for us to feel at one with white, middle-class crossdressers whose determination to disassociate from the Gay and Drag communities borders on outright homophobia."[189] Indeed, many white middle-class members of the straight transfeminine subculture would have been unsettled if they were connected with those who understood their gender under the gay umbrella.

As part of Syrus Marcus Ware's examination of the erasure of racialized histories within predominantly white trans archives, he noted that the archival absence of Black and brown trans femmes was partly due to their very struggle to survive, for they lacked the affluence to create, much less have the capacity to store, eventual historical ephemera.[190] Similarly, the extant archive provides few sources as to what economically precarious transfeminine people thought about this affluent subculture. *Tapestry* provides a few examples, and the aforementioned *gender trash* along with *Notes from the Underground* are valuable counter-subcultural sources. Of the extant record, marginalized transfeminine people oftentimes resented the socio-economic comfort of straight transfeminine subculture members. In *Tapestry*, Lofofora, who was an incarcerated trans woman, lamented that those, "- transsexual organizations and so-called transsexual 'support groups' on the streets are not at all concerned about their transsexual sisters in prison, lip service aside." She went on to write "these 'support groups' aren't supporting anyone but themselves, their egos and their treasuries. While these support groups are holding gala conventions, luncheons, dinners, and fund-raisers at extravagant plazas, events that you must pay to attend, a transsexual sister may be lying naked on a cold concrete floor-."[191] Also in

[189] Chelsea Selina, "Response to DQ ≠ TG," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.70 (Winter, 1995): 24.
[190] Syrus Marcus Ware, "All Power to All People? Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto," *TSQ* 4, no.2 (2017): 175.
[191] Lofofora C., "Letter from Prison," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 57 (1991): 16-17.

Tapestry, a Black transfeminine reader wrote "you don't get rich in the military! [Attending] major conventions are out of the question. (And I'd kill to go to Fantasia Fair!) It is difficult enough just to maintain a decent femme wardrobe on my salary."[192] The most damning indictment of this subculture's opulence came from its most denigrated figure: a transfeminine sex worker.

In a 1995 *gender trash* interview, Mirha-Soleil Ross spoke with Two-Spirit former sex-worker Dancing To Eagle Spirit, and she identified the power differential between out working-class transfeminine people and those who had transitioned later in life. Though she specifically protested her mistreatment from transsexual women, Dancing To Eagle Sprit's complaint was directed at the same socio-economic milieu of much of the straight transfeminine subculture. When Ross asked her if she experienced whorephobia from trans social group members, Dancing To Eagle Spirit said:

> Totally. The transsexuals from the upper middle class, I call them the secondary transsexuals. They're the ones who have been fortunate to live long enough as men before coming out as women so that they didn't have to live through the poverty, through the discrimination, through the ostracization. They established themselves as men and then they became women.[193]

She then defined 'primary transsexuals' as street-based sex-workers who came out as women young. She contrasted this group with those "-who came out after getting their houses, their wives, and their kids and who then put us down for not having taken advantage of hetero male privileges."[194] Twenty-eight years later, Dancing To Eagle Spirit's critiques ring true.

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[192] Brandon, "Color Scheme," 33
[193] Dancing To Eagle Spirit, interview by Mirha-Soleil Ross, *gendertrash*, no.4 (Spring, 1995): 8.
[194] Ibid.

The liminal transfeminine existence of much of the subculture's membership directly informed their socioeconomic position, and this had discursive impacts. This population was why a model of desexualized avowedly non-gay transfemininity permeated the subculture. Prosperous closeted members stood to lose their affluence and normative social networks if outed as a member of a 'deviant' subculture, so many pursued transfeminine normatization because they believed that it would make them respectable to the gender normative, white, middle-class, and heterosexual mainstream. In the 1990s, the popularity of these discourses informed this subculture's ready acceptance of the term transgender, for it disarticulated gender and sexuality. Transfeminine normatization supporters had spent the prior thirty years in the dogged erection of these categorical borders as part of their pursuit of respectability.

Transfemininity's lack of acceptance from gender normative, white, middle-class, and heterosexual society kept uncountable numbers of members in the closet. Some pursued transfeminine normatization as they believed it would enable them to one day come out. Yet however one feels towards transfeminine normatization, the closeted existence of many straight transfeminine people caused them acute distress, and this sometimes led to suicide.

The Violence of Outing, the Violence of the Closet

> There are, of course, cross dressers who have gone to the grave with their crossdressing secret intact. For some, I imagine the fear was greater than the need for revelation. For others, I have no doubt, the secrecy itself brought them to an earlier end. Either way, their lives were acts of self-sacrifice that were never acknowledged.[195]

All transfeminine communities feared transphobic violence, and this was true no matter their whiteness or economic affluence. Kate Redburn in her analysis of this straight transfeminine

[195] "Of Misunderstanding and Sacrifice," *Notes from the Underground* 4, no.1 (January/February 1992): 2.

subculture noted, “the small world of trans publications shared tips for managing an arrest, fictionalized accounts of cross-dressing prosecutions, and news items covering cross-dressing law enforcement and challenges to ordinances.”[196] Indeed, most subculture periodicals had offices in America, where by the 1960s anti-crossdressing ordinances latticed the country from “-major metropolitan centers such as Chicago and Los Angeles to small cities and towns including Cheyenne, Wyoming and Vermillion, South Dakota.”[197] Although states slowly repealed some of these ordinances, this subculture’s periodicals were always filled with exposés on transmisogynistic violence faced by members. Oftentimes next to these reports were guides on how to safely exist in public while transfeminine.[198] Periodicals frequently reprinted a story where the police jailed a transfeminine person without charge for four days.[199] Their illegal stay caused them to be forcibly outed to their wife and boss, but thankfully those contacted all accepted the person’s transfemininity. This outcome was unfortunately rare.

Oftentimes periodicals intermixed reports of strangers who committed transmisogynistic violence to subculture members, and stories of the catastrophic disclosure of one’s transfemininity to a loved one. An upsettingly common article-type was a member who wrote in to describe the ruinous loss of their wife and custody of their children because they disclosed their transfemininity. Marla provided one example as she wrote that she and her wife had, “-separated. Although we do love each other, and our kids, it seems she can’t accept my TVism. It’s an age-old story, but one that goes on and on.”[200] A 1988 profile on Joy described how she was, “-a TG who was married, but whose wife threw her out when her preference for dressing

[196] Kate Redburn, “Before Equal Protection: The Fall of Cross-Dressing Bans and the Transgender Legal Movement, 1963–86,” *Law and History Review* 40, no.4 (2022): 697.
[197] Ibid., 687.
[198] Ellen Somers, “Do We Dare?” *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no.50 (1987): 81.
[199] Peggie, “Femme Identification,” *Transvestia* 6, no.35 (October 1965): 61.
[200] Marla, “Crossdressers Club,” *Female Mimics International* 18, no.5 (1989): 19.

was revealed…-As a result Joy lost her wife, children and job."[201] Contributors offered many perspectives on how to approach the impossible dilemma of disclosure.

Oftentimes members transfemininely dressed, but they did not tell their non-trans lovers. Carol employed this strategy, and she explained that she kept her, "-crossdressing completely separate from my married life, dressing without the knowledge of my wife. I think that is a better way for the transvestite who does not dress on a daily basis."[202] As Chapter 3 illustrates, other members' sole engagement with their transfemininity was through these periodicals, for these texts provided them gender-affirmation and community engagement. One closeted transsexual woman explained that, "Due to my job and family matters I cannot be the female I'd like to. So, I must settle for knowing that I am a TS and will always be a woman in a man's body and ugly men's clothes."[203] Though for those who did not want to be fully closeted, a common strategy was to articulate a model of non-homosexual transfemininity that one's lover could accept.

These periodicals were full of advice as to how one could reconcile their transfemininity to their non-trans wife. Prince's model could allow one to articulate their transfemininity as a means to relieve stress or temporarily explore their femme side, and then they could safely return to their gender-normative position as a husband in a securely heterosexual marriage. Members often pursued this and similar strategies, as they articulated a desexualized and non-deviant transfeminine identity to their non-trans lover.

In 1994 Mr.X provided one such example, as he explained that "After 30 years of hiding my wardrobe, I finally found the courage to tell my wife. Although it took her awhile to accept it, with the help of a counsellor, she came to understand that transvestism is not a sexual-orientation

[201] "The Phoenix Society," *LadyLike*, no.4 (1988): 15.
[202] Carol Francine, "What do we want?" *En Femme*, no.10 (January/February 1989): 20.
[203] Karen, "The Big Hurrah," *Female Mimics International* 19, no.6 (1990): 18.

problem."[204] Mr.X recounted that he told his wife his transfemininity was a "harmless activity [which] allows me to get in touch with my softer side and has made me a better husband."[205] The popularity of this desexualized model of transfemininity reads as the desire of some members to secure a degree of normativity within their heterosexual marriage. If subculture members presented their transfemininity as a harmless activity, an expression of 'the girl-within,' and critically not evidence of 'sexual deviancy,' they could avoid the implosion of an otherwise normative middle-class existence.

As part of Joanne Meyerowitz's work on the history of transsexuality, she argued that "marginalized subjects used available cultural forms to construct and reconfigure their identities."[206] This chapter has shown the popularity of one such cultural form, and this was a form of transfemininity divorced from sexuality, though it was particularly ferociously separated from homosexuality and sexual non-normativity. That this model ran against the reality of many readers and even its promoters, is not a simple historical demonstration of hypocrisy. Rather, the continual presence of a demographic of white, economically affluent community members sustained the discursive popularity of this transfeminine articulation. They upheld it due to a desire to preserve their marriage or economic affluence, to be 'normal,' to find a way to make sense of their difference, and for other causes unknowable to the historian. The subsequent two chapters demonstrate the many discursive ways that straight transfeminine subculture members embodied this desexualized mode of transfemininity.

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[204] Mr.X, "Cross-Dressing Helps Release Tension," *Mis C's Musings* 4, no.4 (Early 1994): 16.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sex Change and the Popular Press: Historical Notes on Transsexuality in the United States, 1930–1955," *GLQ* 4, no.2 (1998): 160.

Chapter Two:

“Anyone in a skirt and heels with purse and gloves and makeup is a woman:”

Technologies of Femininity

> I must take issue with Terri Scott who said in *Tapestry* #46 that it is preferable to go out as a 'Lady' rather than looking like a Woman of the Town. Terri is evidently of the opinion that looking like a 'Lady' will help one 'pass' in public and will make a better impression on people. One of the worst features of organized TVism[207] in my opinion, is that many TVs [transvestites] regard the apeing of house-wives and DAR members as some sort of a virtue. Most TV events that I have ever attended could be mistaken by a casual observer for rituals dedicated to the god of frumpiness.
>
> Malinda Lee Anderson, "Tired TV Club"[208]

Most subculture members disagreed with Malinda. Despite the lamentations of those like her, the bulk of periodical columnists advocated 'frumpiness' as the ideal transfeminine aesthetic, and subcultural elites particularly supported it due to its purported ability to help a transfeminine person pass in public as a non-trans woman. Someone who is visibly trans continues to be susceptible to transmisogynistic violence; therefore, the concealment of one's trans status is an understandable desire. Yet regardless of the context subcultural elites trumpeted this aesthetic as *the* style for transfeminine people. One was to embody unmarked white, non-trans, middle-class, and desexualized high femininity.

Advice on proper clothing and comportment largely embodied the ethos of transfeminine normatization i.e., the conflation of transfemininity to heteronormative desexualized articulations. Contributors consistently excoriated erotic or gaudy outfits. On some level, subculture elites' proscriptions on gaudy dress genuinely served the goal of what would help members discretely exist in public. Yet, the level of scorn columnists spewed at erotically conspicuous outfits belied the transfeminine normatization which underpinned their thought-processes. Many columnists believed the conduct of individual subculture members politically

[207] Transvestism, recall that oftentimes authors casually collapsed all transfeminine articulations to terms like transvestites, cross-overs, transes, etc.
[208] Malinda Lee Anderson, "Tired TV Club," *The TV/TS Tapestry* no. 47 (1985): 26.

impacted all trans people, and this further galvanized contributors to emphatically police the aesthetics of members. The idea that the conduct of marginalized individuals impacted the collective status of an oppressed group is not historically uncommon. My work is in conversation with histories of gay and lesbian subcultures which similarly linked sartorial respectability (to the white, middle-class mainstream) with political advancement. [209]

Marcia M. Gallo, in her landmark study of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), one of the first and certainly most significant lesbian-rights groups in post-war America, identified such a strain of discourse. The DOB's first point in its statement of purpose advised lesbians to embody, "-a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society," to achieve societal integration.[210] Co-founder of the Washington D.C branch of the homophile Mattachine Society Frank Kameny, as an architect of the 1965 gay and lesbian protest of the federal government, enforced a dress-code of suits and ties for men and dresses for women. Kameny explained that these rules were, "-to get bystanders to hear the message rather than be prematurely turned off by appearances."[211] Through this display of respectability, Kameny and his supporters hoped to present gays and lesbians as "dignified, non-threatening, and assimilable to the mainstream."[212]

My work has clear similarities to these histories, yet the differences exemplify the conservatism of the straight transfeminine subculture. The above examples are from the 1950s to

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[209] See for example: Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York City: Dutton, 1993); Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York City: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006); Hall, "The American Gay Rights Movement and Patriotic Protest;" Martin Meeker, "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practices, 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no.1 (2001): 78-116; Meyer, "*Gay Power*;" Liam Kale Perkins, "Visibility, Respectability and Sexual Citizenship: The Strategy of the American Gay Rights Movement from 1950-1987," (master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2022); Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Abingdon-On-Thames: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012); Stephen Valocchi, *Capitalisms and Gay Identities* (Abingdon-On-Thames: Routledge, 2019).
[210] Daughters of Bilitis, *Daughters of Bilitis Statement of Purpose*, 1956, quoted in Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York City: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 11.
[211] Duberman, *Stonewall*, 111.
[212] Meyer, "*Gay Power* Circa 1970," 450.

mid-1960s, and by the 1970s queer liberationist tendencies directly challenged these longstanding assimilationist groups.[213] The straight transfeminine subculture lacked a similarly diverse genealogy of contrary factions. Now celebrated organizations like Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries emerged from radical gay/queer milieus and not the straight transfeminine subculture. Critics were always present in this subculture, but they were always outnumbered by transfeminine normatization supporters. Noticeable amounts of written dissent against transfeminine normatization discourses only materialized in the late 1980s, and usually it appeared in *Tapestry*. This does not mean revolutionary transfeminine factions only substantially emerged in the late-twentieth century. Radical transfeminine political agitation took place outside these works. Straight transfeminine subculture members were mostly white, middle-class, and married. This demographic would typically not associate with radical anti-assimilationist groups.

Dressed Embodiment

> Our goal is to imitate the physically ideal woman as much as possible. Long hair, bold high breasts, slim waist, rounded hips, long tapering revealed legs, high heels- all these which we try to achieve or imitate are our way of worshipping womanhood, the unattainable mother of us all. [214]

Cogent analysis of the straight transfeminine subculture must consider the society it existed within. Members had "one foot in the normative mainstream and the other in the social margins."[215] This 'foot' in the mainstream shaped subcultural notions of ideal femininity as it related to body-shape, comportment, apparel, and beauty.

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[213] Ibid. 441.
[214] "Editorial," *Turnabout*, no.11 (1967): 14.
[215] Hill, "'As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live,'" 111

A 1986 longitudinal analysis of twentieth century representations of womanhood collated feminine representation in American film, television, and magazines read by both the public and those with majority female readerships.[216] The study found American mass-media representations of women premised thinness, and the level of slimness slowly increased over time.[217] A related study of American women's magazines from 1959-1999 found an almost identical trend, but the tempo of weight-loss in models sharply increased in the 1980s.[218] Scholar Kristen Harrison provides a critical intervention to these earlier analyses. Harrison correlated the Silverstein study and similar analyses of periodicals and erotica. She illustrated that feminine representations did not holistically become thinner over time, but instead models became skinnier while they maintained B-cup breasts.[219] As J. Robyn Goodman and other scholars emphasize, this archetype reinscribed both youthfulness and white traits as the feminine ideal.[220]

Subcultural writers in countless advice columns, letters to the editor, and articles idealized this same construct. In 1964, Beatrice in *Transvestia* informed readers "the ideal [feminine] PROPORTION revolves around these figures: BUST: 34- WAIST: 25- HIPS: 36."[221] These dimensions directly map onto the thin but busty archetype. It is not a revelation the American mainstream and the straight transfeminine subculture shared the same bodily ideal. It *is* notable mass-media representations frequently sexualized this beauty archetype, yet the straight

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[216] Brett Silverstein et al., "The Role of the Mass Media in Promoting a Thin Standard of Bodily Attractiveness for Women," *Sex Roles* 14, no. 9/10 (1986): 520-521.
[217] Ibid., 531-532.
[218] Mia Foley Sypeck, James J. Gray, and Anthony H. Ahrens, "No Longer Just a Pretty Face: Fashion Magazines' Depictions of Ideal Female Beauty from 1959 to 1999," *The International Journal of Eating Disorders* 36, no.3 (2004): 346.
[219] Kristen Harrison, "Television Viewers' Ideal Body Proportions: The Case of the Curvaceously Thin Woman," *Sex Roles* 48, no. 5/6 (2003): 255-257.
[220] J. Robyn Goodman, "Perfect Bodies, Imperfect Messages: Media Coverage of Cosmetic Surgery and Ideal Beauty," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, eds., Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin (Abingdon-On-Thames: Routledge, 2013), 358.
[221] Beatrice, "What Shall I Wear?" *Transvestia* 4, no. 28 (August 1964): 49.

transfeminine subculture almost never did. As part of the larger hesitancy to link transfemininity and desirability, periodical staff rarely sexualized models.

In addition to members' idealization of a bodily archetype, they also aggrandized a single aesthetic. Some members lambasted this style as secretarial, frumpy, and staid. Most lionized it as professional, secretarial, and respectable, and some even gave it the highest compliment of all: normal. Straight transfeminine subculture members' assumptions of the sartorially 'normal' encompassed an unmarked white, middle-class, and desexualized aesthetic.

American women's fashions radically changed throughout the second half of the 20th century, but this subculture's idealized style was quite stable. A contributor named Joanne in a 1960 *Transvestia* article noted, "- frocks and skirts and suits of the suburban matron, the housewife and the office girl are the clothes most worn by women," and readers were to dress the same if they wished to correctly perform femininity.[222] Thirty years later in *LadyLike,* Cindy informed readers that, "a simple, below-the-knee skirt with a business suit is very appropriate for a mall trip, but those of you who 'pass' regularly already know this."[223]

The straight transfeminine subculture arose at the same time as a revolution in American unisex fashion: women could now wear pants. This did not significantly impact the idealized aesthetic of the subculture. In the words of *Female Mimics International* (*FMI*) editor Kim Christy "the guidelines of men's and women 's clothes have opened up so much that many items are interchangeable. In fact, when dressed in a T-shirt and jeans and sneakers, whose gender uniform do we have on?"[224] Many members understood 'feminine dress' as clothing normatively

[222] Jo-Anne, "What to Wear?" *Transvestia* 1, no.4 (July 1960): 25.
[223] Cindy, "Random Thoughts," *LadyLike*, no. 8 (1990): 36.
[224] Kim Christy, "Editorial," *Female Mimics International* 21, no.4 (1991): 3.

exclusive to non-trans women. The subculture's periodicals overflowed with references to blouses, skirts, and dresses, while they contained scant references to slacks and shorts.

Although much of the criticism came later, members lamented the common subcultural conflation of feminine dress to just high-femme garments. In 1990, a transsexual woman named Roberta rhetorically asked, "Why do women need to wear a sun dress and make-up to dig in the same garden, just to be considered a lady? Is there a double standard? Most transsexuals and genetic women would agree with this argument."[225] Yet Dee noted on this same question cross-dressers "would be placed at somewhat of a loss. How could they be feminine without the trappings of femininity? How could a crossdresser crossdress without wearing a dress?... I suggest they could not."[226] Oftentimes people who could only occasionally express their transfemininity consequently gravitated to what they viewed as peak femininity. For example, a cross-dresser named Marlene in the periodical *FanFare* wrote, "It is, I believe, true to say that the majority of TV's endeavor to dress, behave and appear in the most feminine way possible when the opportunity presents itself, in complete contrast to our everyday masculine appearance. Not for most of us the ambiguity of Unisex."[227] The large number of crossdressers in the subculture provided a supportive constituency for discourses which defined feminine dress as just high-femme garments. Across the decades subcultural contributors recommended a diverse range of styles, yet their suggestions were within a spectrum of respectable, professional, and unmarked white femininity. As a shorthand, I term this aesthetic: prim femininity.

Conversely the straight transfeminine subculture had six aesthetic qualities that members most often excoriated. These included: if you did not fit your social context, if you did not match your

[225] Roberta Angela Dee, "The Transsexual Trail: The Pitfalls of Perfection," *En Femme*, no. 17 (1990): 10.
[226] Ibid. 10.
[227] Marlene, "How do we handle this Situation," *FanFare*, no. 17 (July 1985): 15.

age, if you did not fit your clothes, if you had a male body shape, if you looked 'fake,' and most grievously if you looked too sexy. I term these subcultural infractions: gaudy femininity. In case one was unable to keep track of all these guidelines, many subculture members loved to judge, remind, and insult anyone who violated the tenets of prim femininity.

The key value of prim femininity was its purportedly generic quality. In 1960 a contributor to *Transvestia* argued, "exotic garb is certainly thrilling, but if you are going out in public it is a lot better to merge with the landscape…A casual glance identifies you [as a woman] unless there is something out of the ordinary to hold someone's attention."[228] Thirty-two years later, in *International TranScript*, Rita Ambrose declared that, "the widespread advice for passing in public is to dress down in an attempt to blend in with the surroundings and not stand out like a...well , a man in women 's clothing, hence increasing one's chances of passing."[229] Across thirty-five years, straight transfeminine subculture members largely extolled prim femininity as *the* way to pass as a non-trans women. An *FMI* writer explained she lived full-time as a woman through, "[dressing] very conservatively. If you're too flashy, it just draws attention to yourself."[230] Subculture columnists frequently told readers to avoid gaudy or exotic aesthetics, yet contributors rarely defined these detestable attributes.

Commonly subcultural advisors identified an incongruity between outfit and context as a way to look gaudy. JoAnn Renee Cone in an issue of *Tapestry* illustrated this mindset as she told readers, "Many times, I find myself simply going to the grocery store and dearly wanting to put on a very dressy dress, long glittery gold earrings, maybe flashy textured hose and, of course, heels. But, how many 'real' women get dressed to kill to get a head of lettuce?"[231] Cone went on

[228] L.M., "Letters to the Editor," *Transvestia* 1, no. 5 (September 1960): 26.
[229] Dina Amberle, "Passing or Pleasure," *International TranScript* 2 no. 4 (May 1992): 10.
[230] Karla, "Letters to the Editor," *Female Mimics International* 17, no. 2 (1987): 17.
[231] JoAnn Renee Cone, "Afterthoughts," *The TV/TS Tapestry* 49 (1986): 27.

to reassure members "Yes, we want to pass, but we also want to blend in, become anonymous. The more out of place we look the more attention we are going to draw, and the harder people look, the more chance our secret will be discovered."[232] Though many subculture members desired to femininely exist in public, ultimately the main consideration was to not draw attention.

Rules on proper dress also extended to 'age-appropriate' clothing. In the words of a *Transvestia* columnist named Lorraine, "-just as some older women dress like teenagers and evoke unfavorable attention and comment, so do some TV's tend to do likewise."[233] Fashion articles usually included at least one attack on those who did not 'dress their age.' A stylist named Cynthia in a general article on fashion recommended to, "first, try to dress your age and secondly, try to get an opinion of what your age has turned into when you put on your makeup."[234] As most straight transfeminine subculture members were not in their twenties, the advice to readers to 'dress their age' were implicit admonishments.

Furthermore, the smaller number of younger subculture members also internalized this orthodoxy. In *FMI* Erica, who was a college-age trans woman, wrote, "I don't always wear evening gowns, leather miniskirts and 4' spiked heels which lends to my passability in public. I just wear what any attractive young college girl might wear: low-heeled boots, flared out denim miniskirt, sweater, etc."[235] The American conflation of youth with beauty influenced the subculture, as members commonly believed that young people could wear a wider range of clothes. The above-mentioned JoAnn Renee Cone emphasized, "if you are, say, 19 or 20, you can wear colors and styles of clothing and accessories that let you blend in with the more colorful, youthful set." JoAnn then recommended that, "-if you are over 30, be careful to not

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[232] Ibid., 27-28.
[233] Lorraine, "On Successful Impersonation," *Transvestia* 2, no. 10 (August 1961): 36-37.
[234] Cynthia, "Well Girls, It's Fashion Cents," *Monarch Social Club Newsletter* 4, no.4 (Winter, 1994): 31.
[235] Erica, "Letters to the Editor," *Female Mimics International* 20, no.3 (1990): 15.

look anything other than your age. Bright red lipstick and polish, short skirts, ultra tight sweaters may indeed make you look like a lady - a lady of the evening."[236]

Many believed the ideal feminine body had to be young, but it also needed to be thin. Millie wrote an article on the virtues of a waist-cincher, and she noted that "most of us can greatly improve our feminine figure by cinching a few inches of flab off the midsection."[237] The periodical models were typically young, white, passed as non-trans women, and often embodied the 'thin but busty' archetype. As most people did look like this, subculture contributors had two main often intermixed responses: sartorial accommodation and/or body modification.

While thinness was the ideal, contributors commonly advised body acceptance: one should dress in their proper size. In *Transvestia,* Beatrice wrote an article on how to develop a personal feminine style, and she emphasized that one must first "-select suitable clothes. WITHIN YOUR SIZE RANGE."[238] Columnists often emphasized the need to know your measurements and dress accordingly to ensure you "-[don't] stand out for either good or bad, but merely fade and blend into the crowd as just another woman."[239] Likewise, subcultural mainstay Maggie Morgan asserted, "you can pass, and you can be happy, provided you work with what you have and not what you wish you had."[240] Of course, this advice comingled within subcultural and societal veneration of a body-type unobtainable to most people, hence members frequently ignored it. In an article titled "The Most Common Mistakes Made by Cross-Dressers" regular *En Femme* columnist Donna Miller cited ill-fitted clothing as the number one error made by transfeminine

[236] Cone, "Afterthoughts," 28.
[237] Millie, "Millie's Helpful Hints," *Female Mimics International* 16, no. 4 (1986): 19.
[238] Beatrice, "What Shall I Wear?" 45.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Maggie Morgan, "Real Life: Doin' the Do," *International TranScript* 2, no.5 (July 1992): 8.

people.[241] As much as members may have avoided this advice, its consistent appearance over the decades reflected the subcultural importance placed on discretion.

Another recommended form of bodily accommodation was to use clothes to deemphasize or emphasize purportedly negative or positive features, and of course members understood negative features to mean the ostensibly masculine aspects of one's body. Across periodicals contributors most often cited, "-wide shoulders, wider waists, and narrow hips," as the most negative of body qualities.[242] Columnists incorporated bodily congruity in their advice on how to femininely exist in public successfully, and contributors understood success to mean to not draw attention. One author recommended "utilizing clothing, accessories, jewelry, hairdo, etc., which are appropriate to [your] size, age, face, and figure."[243] Oftentimes periodicals contained style-guides which grouped specific body shapes or features with recommended dress styles, for the members' use in their search for apparel appropriate or complementary to their bodies. To illustrate, Millie in *FMI* told readers to "wear skirts or slacks which are lighter in color than the blouse. This tends to make the hips look more prominent, and to de-emphasize your shoulders."[244] Across the advice was a principle that one should "minimize the masculine and emphasize the feminine for the TV figure."[245]

When this periodical network began in the 1960s, it was a time of immense change in American women's undergarments as girdles and shapewear receded while panties became the

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[241] Donna Miller, "The Most Common Mistakes Made by CrossDressers," *En Femme* no.8 (September/October 1988): 40.
[242] D. Rhodes, "Turntable," *Turnabout* 1, no. 4 (1964): 18.
[243] Virginia Prince, *How to Be a Woman, Though Male,* (Los Angeles: Chevalier Publications,1971), quoted in Julia Matheson, "The Edge of Illusion," *En Femme,* no.9 (1988): 40.
[244] Millie, "Millie's Helpful Hints," *Female Mimics International* 16, no.3 (1986): 6.
[245] Virginia Prince, "Dresses- Specifically Designed and Custom Made for the TV's," *Transvestia* 1, no. 6 (November 1960): 77.

dominant form of underwear.[246] But not with this subculture. If a transfeminine magazine had ads, no matter the year, some would be for shapewear. Prince's first issue of *Transvestia* in January 1960 advertised shapewear in half of its ads.[247] The subculture's most focused upon forms of body modification were not diet and exercise, but shapewear: breast-forms, hip-pads, corsets, girdles, among many others.

By far the most popular body-modification items were breast-forms. Transfeminine periodicals overflowed with ads and coverage on the temporary or permanent creation of breasts. The subculture elevated breasts as the epitome of femininity as in the words of JoAnn Roberts, "ask any crossdresser what is the ultimate sign of femininity and almost to a person they will say breasts."[248] Advertisements and instructions for water-filled balloons, repurposed mastectomy prosthetics, adhesive tape, latex/plastic/gelatin falsies, exogenous estrogen, breast implants, and the tried-and-true tissue paper and sock in a bra, all mingled within these periodicals. The Toronto based Wildside boutique even offered breast-forms with concave backs to supplement those with partial breast growth due to "hormones, being overweight, or just the natural shape of your body."[249] Since straight transfeminine subculture members devoted considerable attention to breasts, the 'proper' dimensions of this body part were a site of further conflict between supporters of gaudy versus prim femininity.

FMI columnist Millie hoped to provide good advice on breast-forms by way of her own folly as she told readers "-that the very full C cups were a bit too much—they made me 'stand out' in a crowd."[250] For transfeminine people, breasts could be 'too big' and threaten one's ability to go

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[246] Maria Carolina Zanettea, and Daiane Scaraboto, "From the corset to Spanx: shapewear as a marketplace icon," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 22, no.2 (2019): 190.
[247] Virginia Prince, "Advertising Section," *Transvestia* 1, no.1 (January 1960): 55-56.
[248] JoAnn Roberts, "The Shopping Maven," *International TranScript* (January 1992): 12.
[249] Paddy, "Catalogue Query," *The Canadian Cross-Dresser* 3, no.3 (May/June 1993): 39.
[250] Millie, "Millie's Helpful Hints," *Female Mimics International* 16, no.3: 18.

unnoticed. A *Tapestry* columnist named Holly informed readers, "average women fit 'misses' sizes and take a B-cup bra. So should you. Just because you like well-endowed females doesn't mean that you will look believable that way.''[251] Although breasts were a celebrated aspect of embodiment, prim femininity supports policed their 'proper' dimensions.

After breast-forms the most prominent shapewear items were waist-cinchers and corsets, and the latter were particularly venerated by erotically minded people. One subculture member in 1964 hyperbolically claimed 90% of transvestites had a corset fetish.[252] Whatever the actual figure both commercial and personal ads consistently featured corsets as an object of desire. Outside of ads, only *FMI* and early *Transvestia* included an occasional article on the erotics of corsets. More typically columnists wrote advice on how to locate a corsetier, or when one was fitted for a corset what feminine dimensions to keep in mind. Indeed, contributors often wrote about this latter benefit of a properly fitted corset, as put by one of its many fans "the corset plays three roles: it gives me a waspish waist, it creates the image of a pair of hips and buns, and it creates cleavage where I need it."[253]

Like the use of breast-forms to embody normative womanhood, shapewear was a way to manifest 'normal' proportions, and subcultural elites often recommended this as a way to not look out of place. In 1990, *En Femme's* Roberta Angela Dee argued that "a woman's' hips are ten inches larger than her waist. By contrast, the average man only has half that." Hence "-ideally, his hips should measure 42-44 inches if he wants to mimic female proportions."[254] If one failed to do so, "the CD [cross-dresser] who wears a dress designed for the average woman

[251] Holly Cross, "About Sizes (for Big TVs)," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 42 (1984): 42.
[252] D. Rhodes, "Overs and Unders: Parallel Streams of Transvestism," *Turnabout*, no.3 (1964): 3.
[253] Warner, "Letters to Kim Christy," 18.
[254] Roberta Angela Dee, "Shopping," *En Femme* 20 (October 1990): 7.

[would] look extremely odd without the required padding."[255] The reverse was also recommended, for writers often suggested one coordinate their shapewear and clothing to accentuate/create attractive feminine features. In the late 1980s fashion consultant Paula Sinclair advised that, "because the [sack dress] works best when it lightly hugs your shape, you may want to investigate hip and perhaps fanny pads to add to your curves."[256] The advice on body-forms reflected the idea that one needed to minimize markers of an imagined 'masculine' body and emphasize/create 'feminine' traits, as a way to appear congruous in body and dress, and this then increased their chance to exist in public undetected.

Discourse over heels were a site of further conflict between prim and gaudy femininity. Heels were the most celebrated footwear across transfeminine periodicals, and they were consistently venerated as a highlight of transfeminine expression. In the words of one devotee, "a 5-inch stiletto, pushing your foot stylishly towards the heavens, flattering your foot in a trendy style, is one of the simplest and most satisfying ways of changing from him to her."[257] Like those who policed 'proper' use of corsets and breast forms, columnists frequently tried to temper members' erotic passion towards heels.

Contributors often advised members to consider their social context in the selection of their footwear. In 1988 regular subcultural contributor Donna Miller wrote, "What could be more exciting than wearing those five-inch-high heeled pumps with your new low-cut black taffeta number? But is the dress appropriate for an informal luncheon? Or a walk through the local shopping mall?"[258] The most transfeminine-specific consideration for what shoes to wear was the impact of heel-height on one's passability. Virginia Prince recommended that, "If you are quite

[255] Ibid., 7.
[256] Paula Sinclair, "A More Glamorous You," *LadyLike* no. 4 (1988): 38.
[257] Veronica Anderson, "Getting High," *LadyLike* no.6 (1990): 16.
[258] Miller, "The Most Common Mistakes Made by CrossDressers," 40-41.

tall go in for ‘little heels’ don’t wear full height heels, but don’t wear flats either as they will make feet look bigger and won't alter your stride from your usual masculine length.”[259] As much as members expressed their love of super high heels, the subcultural orthodoxy was for smaller heel-height, lest one wished to draw attention in public.

> We need quite a bit of makeup to conceal some masculine features while enhancing others to create a feminine visage. And makeup in the quantities that we often need to apply is quite a bit more than most women wear even if they 're going to a fancy dress affair. Of course, subtlety in makeup application is something that can be learned but for the most part we are still heavily made up compared to most women in almost any setting.[260]

Transfeminine members who used makeup faced a tension between the desire to feminize the face but not to look like they have put on ‘too much’ makeup, as violation of the latter would draw attention to oneself. Many community members fervently tried to balance these concerns as in the words of Kay Gould, “-to begin to wear makeup is a sign that you are becoming a woman.”[261] Interestingly, except for beard-cover periodicals infrequently had practical advice on makeup application. Periodical staff seemingly did not believe a short article could contain the detailed instructions required to properly make-up one’s face. Instead, magazines had numerous advertisements for seminars, makeovers, tutorial videos, and private lessons by makeover artists.

One such vendor in *International TranScript* provided one of the few explicit examinations of what constituted the ‘masculine’ face and how to feminize it. Jim Bridges boasted twenty-five years of experience in the beauty field, and he had a line of informative makeup videos for the transfeminine market. Bridges applied this expertise to an unfinished multi-part makeup series in

[259] Virginia Prince, “The Art of Female Impersonation: Part One,” *Transvestia* 2, no. 10 (1961): 58-59.
[260] Amberle, “Passing or Pleasure,” 10.
[261] Kay Gould, “The Mystique of Makeup,” *The TV/TS Tapestry* 50 (1987): 73.

International TranScript.[262] After two parts on the preparation of the face, Bridges finally began to analyze how to feminize the 'male' visage. In the words of Bridges "the ideal female face is a perfect oval."[263] The straight transfeminine periodicals contained little explicit feminization advice for makeup, while the most common cosmetic guidance was for the use of powder and concealer to feminize the face.[264] The extant tutorials oftentimes made no direct reference to which actions feminized the face. What far outweighed advice were the countless admonishments of those who 'improperly' wore makeup. This criticism typically fell into two categories.

First, writers admonished those who purportedly wore makeup incongruent to their social context. In the words of Maggie Morgan, "-everyday makeup is substantially different from the Hollywood looks you've probably been practicing. Once again, pay attention to the women you see in public. They don't have showgirl eyes or lashes out to there."[265] Many believed more flamboyant makeup committed the subcultural sin of gaudiness. One columnist advised her subcultural sisters that, "The less flamboyant colours are best for someone who wants to become acceptable as a woman but doesn't want too much attention."[266] Even those who provided tutorials on splashy makeup looks centered discretion, as a makeup artist named Barbera in 1974 promised to help readers, "create a face that will stand out in a crowd but not give you away."[267]

Secondly, transfeminine members often feared the public saw their femininity as artificial, hence many contributors called those who wore 'too much' makeup fake. A *Transvestite* columnist named Pamela advised against one makeup technique as it was, "-not attractive as it

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[262] Jim Bridges, "Jim Bridges' Boutique and Cosmetic Workshop," *International Transcript* 2, no.4 (May 1992): 14.
[263] Jim Bridges, "The Art of Makeup," *International Transcript* 2, no.2 (March 1992): 37.
[264] Lorraine, "On Successful Impersonation," 36.
[265] Morgan, "Real Life: Doin' the Do," 9.
[266] "Woman to Woman," *The TV/TS Tapestry* 51 (1988): 68.
[267] Barbara Jo, "Barbara's Powder Box," *The Transvestite*, no. 43 (1974): 23.

[was] too artificial. One thing we don't want to do is look fake."[268] One stylist's top recommendation for transfeminine people interested in cosmetics was: "Above-all, don't overdo your makeup!"[269] Consequently if one looked overly made up, fake, or out of place, they once more risked detection of their trans status, or they violated the norm of prim femininity.

The battle between proponents of prim and gaudy femininity further played out over hair. As with the conflation of dresses and skirts with the totality of feminine dress, feminine hair in this subculture meant long locks. The 1960s trend of 'unisex' hair and clothing did not significantly disrupt these ideas within the straight transfeminine subculture.

Hair could enhance one's passability or betray one's trans status. A transfeminine person who could wear their natural hair was the ideal, though the fact many members expressed their femininity temporarily meant hair advice usually considered both wigs and natural hair.[270] Like advice given on makeup and clothing, contributors advised readers to know which hair styles paired well with one's face shape.[271] The affluence of this subculture meant contributors regularly endorsed the purchase of expensive hair care, whether one was at the salon or wig-store. As to the latter point, one writer advised that "a junky wig bought as a 'bargain' isn't worth any amount of money, no matter how small, if the TV is striving for the kind of authentic appearance which will permit him to 'pass' in public."[272]

Other advice reflected the familiar guidance to conform to one's context, hence one had to both 'act their age' and to generally not look out of place. Like clothing, body shape, and makeup, hair could betray one's trans status. In 1994 Lady Di recommended "-choosing a [wig

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[268] Pamela, "Pamper Yourself," *The Transvestite*, no. 39 (1973): 20.
[269] Peggie, "Modern Makeup Tricks," *Transvestia* 2, no. 10 (August 1961): 54.
[270] Morgan, "Real Life: Doin' the Do," 9.
[271] Ibid.
[272] "TV Marketplace: The Wig Boom- A Boon to TV Buyers!" *Turnabout*, no.5 (Spring, 1965): 45.

style] for yourself, [and to] be realistic if you want to pass in public."[273] Contributors advised members to observe non-trans women around their age and to adopt the hairstyles they liked as a means to develop a sensible feminine hair style.[274] Many columnists believed only young people could wear their hair certain ways, so if older readers wished to not look out of place they had to avoid such styles. Virginia Prince advised that, "ponytails, page boys, and recent bouffant styles are all right on young, real girls, but they begin to be out of place as you grow older."[275] This quote exemplifies both the common subcultural idealization of youth and the aversion of many towards purportedly androgynous hair.

As to what colours the subculture supported or admonished, contributors often labeled blonde hair immature and frivolous. In the words of a forty-year-old reader of *Transvestia,* "I love shoulder length hair in a light shade but at my age it appears foolish."[276] A decade later in *The Transvestite* a writer's list of apparel synonymous with amateur bad transfeminine dress included: "platinum blond wigs or similarly outlandish hair pieces."[277] The subcultural proscription against blonde hair was clearly influenced by the societal conflation of blonde hair with the pejorative blonde bimbo stereotype.[278] The straight transfeminine subculture's standards of prim femininity governed hair, clothing, shoes, makeup, body-shape, and breasts. A transfeminine person commonly violated these rules if they purportedly did not match various contexts. Yet the ultimate violation to prim femininity was not dependent on variable

[273] Lady Di, "Wig Classification," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 67 (Spring, 1994): 46.
[274] "Woman to Woman," 68.
[275] Virginia Prince, "The Art of Female Impersonation: Part One," 67.
[276] Helen, "Letters to the Editor," *Transvestia* 2, no. 7 (1961): 48.
[277] Jessie Collins, "Your Public Awaits," *The Transvestite*, no. 39 (1973): 31.
[278] Limor Shifman, and Dafna Lemish, "Virtually Blonde: Blonde Jokes in the Global Age and Post-Feminist Discourse," in *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media,* ed. Karen Ross (New York City: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 88.

circumstances, as it was always wrong. Subcultural elites were most venomous towards any transfeminine person who looked 'too erotic.'

As it epitomized the subcultural proscription on embodied desirability, the figurative transfeminine sex worker was a frequent shorthand for who to not dress like. Terri Scott was a well-established subculture member, and she wrote an article which encouraged people to go out dressed femininely for the first time, yet her words of motivation contained the caveat, "- if you are reading these words of encouragement and are planning to go out dressed like a hooker, STOP! Note, I said as a lady."[279] Another writer advised readers, "Don't be flashy like a prostitute, but fashion is grand-."[280] Like how style columns typically included brief admonishments on members who did not dress their age, articles on fashion commonly included cursory whorephobic insults while the piece otherwise focused on practical clothing tips. Like Chapter 1's general examination for the subcultural distaste of this figure, the common subcultural usage of a metaphorical transfeminine sex worker to signify the ultimate aesthetic faux pas reflected many members' support for transfeminine normatization. Often members assumed any attempt to look sexually attractive was done to seduce men, a behavior they despised and often labelled gay. The figurative transfeminine sex worker's pursuit of sexual liaisons would have been repugnant to those who supported transfeminine normatization.

Furthermore, some members extended the conflation of a desire to look attractive as always for male appetites to include the very thought-processes of those who dressed 'too sexually.' After Terri Scott lambasted those who went out dressed, 'like a hooker,' she then lamented that "unfortunately, many crossdressers dress not in a way that is most becoming to them but rather

[279] Terri Scott, "Terri's Thoughts: *Tapestry* Reflections," *The TV/TS Tapestry* no. 46 (1985): 19.
[280] Collins, "Your Public Awaits," 33.

in a way that they find sexually attractive to their male mind."[281] Elsewhere, a writer in a 1985 issue of *FanFare* narrativized her first time femininely out in public. She described her thought-process in her outfit selection as, "Joy wanted to wear something more mature, with medium to low heeled shoes, James [her male-half] wanted the 4' stiletto heels."[282]

The admonishments on those who dressed 'too sexy' stemmed from two aspects of transfeminine normatization. First, a proper transfeminine subject should avoid homosexual activity i.e., sexually attract men. This is a straightforward feature of the homophobia in the concept. Second, some of the erotics of transfemininity were the pleasures of feminine embodiment. This could be through the erotic sartorial expression of one's femininity, or the fetishistic delights of the transgression of one's manhood through feminine dress. Whichever the type of pleasure, critics excoriated these articulations of transfemininity, for they each generated masturbatory and/or euphoric delights from the erotics of transfemininity. Ultimately proponents of prim femininity were not content to just dictate 'proper' embodiment, but they also strove to snuff out divergent articulations as part of the larger enforcement of transfeminine normatization.

Where are Fashion Trends?

As the straight transfeminine subculture intensely focused on ideal aesthetics, one would assume these periodicals overflowed with discourse on the myriad styles of twentieth century women's fashion. As fashion historian Jo Paoletti notes, the 1960s through the 1980s were a time of intense change in American women's styles, and these developments were accompanied by

[281] Scott, "Terri's Thoughts," 19.
[282] Joy, "Passing Out Parade (A Letter to My Sister)," *FanFare,* no. 19 (November 1985): 12.

acrimonious discourse on the gendered significance of clothing.[283] Many subculture members had disposable income and were eager to blend into the milieu of respectable womanhood, so surely news on fashion trends filled periodicals. Yet this was not the case.

Only Paula Sinclair's 1987-1991 column in *En Femme* provided coverage of trends in women's fashion. As a generic piece of advice, columnists advised readers to be fashionably dressed so, "you will attract less attention."[284] Contributors did not provide coverage on new styles, but they instead recommended members read women's fashion magazines as the ideal way to learn about new trends. In the words of one columnist, "women learn from these publications, so there's no reason why we can't also."[285] As subculture magazines had limited space, staff prioritized transfeminine specific advice that people could not easily find elsewhere. Though straight transfeminine periodicals contained little fashion news, trends in style were still occasionally subjects of discourse, and these primarily fell into two categories.

Correspondents most often referenced fashion trends when they could impact transfeminine people. Writers for *Turnabout* celebrated the 1960s popularization of wigs as it enhanced hairpieces' quality and affordability. The fad also meant more non-trans women wore wigs so this, "-leaves the TV less conspicuous when he's dressed in public and his wig is detected."[286] Subculture columnists were particularly interested in the 1980s trend of shoulder pads due to members' common desire to not draw attention to their masculine-coded broad shoulders. One writer lamented that, "when I'm in drag, I certainly don't want to emphasize my shoulders. Maybe some of you readers disagree. But I'll be happy to see the end of the shoulder pad fad."[287]

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[283] Jo B. Paoletti, *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism, and the Sexual Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 6-8.
[284] Millie, "Millie's Helpful Hints," *Female Mimics International* 17, no.2 (1987): 42.
[285] Cone, "Afterthoughts," 28.
[286] "TV Marketplace," 45.
[287] Millie, "Millie's Helpful Hints," *Female Mimics International* 16, no.3: 6.

Paula Sinclair attempted to accommodate this style: “A truly natural shoulder—no padding at all—makes your male bone structure stand out. A small, thin pad that does nothing more than artificially extend the drop of the sleeve results in a more feminine look for all but the smallest-shouldered transvestite.”[288] The subculture’s primary engagement with women’s fashion was practical as contributors examined the impact of trends on transfeminine people before columnists provided ways to accommodate or benefit from aesthetic developments.

The second less common engagement with trends in women’s fashion were those who believed that non-trans women’s new ability to wear pants meant they had acquired more rights than other genders. This argument was typically included within larger anti-feminist reactionary diatribes. Then editor-in-chief of *Tapestry* Merissa Sherril Lynn lamented this argument’s popularity as she noted “-in this issue I have accepted no less than five items that contain the argument, ‘It's all-right for women to wear pants, but not all-right for men to wear dresses, and that's not fair.’”[289] This notion occurred throughout the second wave of Western feminism. In 1963 Virginia Prince believed society constrained men’s range of expressions and dress while “women are invading more and more of the men’s fields of activity, mode of behavior, occupations, dress, etc.”[290] Typically, this argument encompassed two points. First, the author declaimed to readers that women were substantially less policed for their appearance than men. In the words of Terri Scott in 1984, “Women are so free that their style can range from glamourous to almost masculine without any problems with society.” Second, the writer decried that society considered non-feminine, non-trans women to be women, yet this did not hold for transfeminine people. Terri Scott continued, “We all know women whose only cosmetic is

[288] Paula Sinclair, “A More Glamorous You,” *LadyLike* no. 4 (1988): 37.
[289] Merissa Sherril Lynn, “The Fashion Argument,” *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 48 (1986): 5.
[290] Virginia Prince, “The Expression of Femininity in the Male,” *Transvestia* 3, no. 24 (December 1963): 79.

lipstick, women who haven't worn a dress in years, women who haven't an ounce of style in their being but they are not considered not to be female, and not deviants."[291] Elsewhere another writer argued, "women can wear pantsuits, even with vests and neckties, in a variety of social settings. But if a man wears a skirt, it had better be plaid and he had better be playing bagpipes."[292]

Some subculture members denigrated masculine non-trans women because of misogyny, internalized misogyny, anti-feminism, queerphobia, and butchphobia. These members engaged in a familiar act though they attacked a less-familiar target. They policed the expression of more masculine non-trans women as opposed to the typically attacked violators of transfeminine normatization. These actions were all cruel enforcements of gender norms. Yet, many who engaged in these attacks were deeply unhappy. Many transfeminine people with masculine gender identities resented the societal embrace of non-trans women who wore masculine clothes, yet the reverse had not occurred for men who wished to wear feminine garb. Others felt trapped by societally imposed expectations of masculinity. Some transfeminine people channeled their frustrations at society into venom that they directed at similarly marginalized targets.

[291] Terri Scott, "Women are all Female Impersonators to Some Degree," *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 43 (1984): 25.
[292] "What is a Woman?" *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 43 (1984): 28.

Comportment

> In the quest for total femininity and passing, it is imperative that we 'ladies' be observant of genetic women and incorporate all the little things which make a woman attractive, special, and different. Subtle differences in how a man or a woman walks, gestures, sits, stands, eats, drinks, smokes, and moves are all vital things we must consider in passing.[293]

A dizzying array of advice on how to 'femininely' act appeared in subculture periodicals due to the desire of many members to pass as non-trans women. Since these rules of etiquette concerned the visceral performance of femininity, straight transfeminine subculture comportment guides provided the most explicit articulations as to how subcultural authors understood femininity. "Feminine is smaller and quieter. Feminine is daintier and softer. Walk with a light step, speak with a soft voice, and emanate a gentle bouquet."[294] These words by Lucy Lands in a 1992 *Canadian Cross-Dresser* article epitomized how many subculture members understood femininity. In 1986 regular columnist to *LadyLike* J.L. White wrote "the feminine part of you tends to be more receptive and passive than this. She is the quieter, intuitive, non-rational part of our psyches that slows down and moves with quieter, shorter and more delicate movements."[295] Countless subculture elites understood femininity as gentle, graceful, restrained, and delicately passive. This construct of femininity was both patriarchal and contained an almost Manichean quality as proponents understood femininity to be an uncomplicated fount of virtue and kindness.

This dainty passive femininity corporeally manifested in numerous subculture guides. The author of the above block-quote went on to advise readers that "laughter should be somewhat restrained, a roaring laugh is for 'Mr. Macho'. If a laugh naturally becomes more pronounced,

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[293] Wendy H. Reed, "The Little Things Mean a Lot," *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no. 50 (1987): 72.
[294] Lucy Lands, "Consider Everything When You Want to Appear Womanly," *The Canadian Cross Dresser* 2, no.6 (June 1992): 12.
[295] J.L. White, "Grace & Style," *LadyLike,* no.3 (1988): 16.

delicately shield your mouth with your spread fingertips."[296] The same article advised readers on how to femininely walk, stand, sit, cross one's legs, gesture, hold glassware, pick up food, eat, use straws, drink, light one's cigarette, smoke, and discard a cigarette.[297] As one of the most ardent promoters of this model, Virginia Prince wrote a widely reprinted guide titled *The Art of Female Impersonation,* and it contained a substantial etiquette section. Prince's advice overlapped with the previous source's recommendations, and she included further guidance on how to hold one's hands, go through doors, be introduced, the order of handshakes, vocal volume, conversational level of intelligence, and the movement of one's eyes.[298]

Feminine voice and walk were the two most frequently examined subjects of comportment. Straight transfeminine subculture members believed these were critical in one's passability as a community member named Shirley explained that, "there is nothing funnier than a beautiful looking TV who walks and talks like a truck driver."[299] General wisdom was that "a woman walks from the hips, she does not give the initial impetus for the step from the knees as men do….Men propel themselves along using their shoulders, women don't."[300] This idea of what constituted the feminine walk was remarkably stable, as a generation later virtually the same advice continued to appear. J.L. White in 1988 intoned that "women, see their centre of gravity in their hips, which explains why we have a softer sway to our walk." As the first step in the adoption of this stride, White recommended you "hold your head up, take small steps, keep your knees close together, and move from the hip area first."[301] Similarly, another writer advised that, "a woman of style will move gracefully with an erect spine and head held high."[302] A man by

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[296] Reed, "The Little Things," 73.
[297] Ibid., 72-73.
[298] Virginia Prince, "The Art of Female Impersonation: Part Two," *Transvestia* 2, no.11 (October 1961): 65-70.
[299] Shirley K. Knight, "How to Be 'Read' Properly," *The TV/TS Tapestry* no. 44 (1984): 56.
[300] Susanna Valenti," Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 3, no. 16 (August 1962): 52.
[301] J.L. White, "Grace & Style," *LadyLike* no. 2 (1988): 15.
[302] Reed, "The Little Things," 72.

contrast, "-either ambles or charges ahead leading with the top of his body. A woman walks from the hips down."[303] The subculture's normative feminine walk demonstrated the physical embodiment of their feminine ideal. Across decades, authors' consistent emphasis on grace and advice not to 'barrel forward' reflected the subcultural conflation of passivity and femininity.

"Often, the new woman is so well-groomed and stylishly attired that detection of male origin is impossible. Unfortunately, the voice reveals the secret instantly."[304] The voice was a key marker of gender, as it still is. All articles on comportment emphasized the importance of a feminine voice, but columnists disagreed over what dimensions constituted this important gender-marker. Pitch was the main area of disagreement. One columnist argued "the average feminine voice is middle C on the piano, and the range of notes may extend beyond three octaves, or more than 24 notes. The untrained male voice is immediately identifiable by its lower, heavier tone, as well as the lack of melodic intonation."[305] Conversely in a review for vocal feminization tapes JoAnn Roberts pronounced that, "a high pitch is **not** essential for a feminine voice." [306] Like how to properly apply makeup, articles rarely explained the technical qualities. Ads for vocal coaches were much more common than articles. When contributors wrote about the transfeminine voice the focus was not on *how* it sounded, but *what* it said.

As with other aspects of comportment, passive daintiness and feminine speech purportedly went hand in hand. Lists of properly feminine topics, phraseology, and even grammar filled columns on ideal transfeminine speech. In 1961 Virginia Prince explained that "women pay more attention to little things, they are more effusive in their speech and use words of affection

[303] Ibid.
[304] Don Bowling, "Learning the Fem Voice; A Total Body Approach," *The TV/TS Tapestry* no.64 (1993): 44.
[305] Ibid.
[306] JoAnn Roberts, "Service & Product Reviews," *En Femme* no.24 (1991): 9.

like 'dear' and 'darling' more frequently."[307] Thirty-three years later a columnist posited, "think about the phrase, 'I Got a pain in my gut.' Who would say that, a man or a woman? A woman might say, 'I have a pain in my stomach.'"[308] This quote particularly emphasizes the oftentimes classist dimensions of prim femininity. A keynote speaker for a 1990 transfeminine convention identified relationships, feelings, and emotions as the usual topics non-trans women talked about. The speaker went on to say, "Being sensitive to others and relating to them appropriately, is a feminine approach."[309] The subcultural idealization of prim femininity was most explicit in the recommendations as to how one should ideally embody femininity.

The subculture's demographics supported the popularity of these patriarchal codes of comportment. Some thought feminine embodiment was the only way to fully express kindness, sensitivity, and emotionality more generally. Some had a holistic sense of feminine identity, as only through feminine dress and comportment could they manifest their femme selves. Similarly, many straight transfeminine subculture members had bifurcated selves as they possessed a male and female self. Many subculture members presumably wished to sharply delineate their male and female halves, so the subcultural support for a transfeminine construct of non-androgynous high femininity reflected these members desires. Yet these were not the only viewpoints.

Counter-Discourses & Collective Impacts

As well as subculture members who outright criticized prim femininity, many had a nuanced engagement to prim femininity because of its potential to shield one from transmisogynistic violence. Alex A. Chamberland interviewed a trans woman named Polly in 2018, and she

[307] Prince, "The Art of Female Impersonation: Part One," 68.
[308] Melanie Ann Phillips, "Develop a Female Voice," *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 69 (Fall, 1994): 28.
[309] Wendi Danielle Pierce, "Keynote Address," *The TV-TS Tapestry* no.55 (1990): 9.

described the decision to pass as a non-trans woman as, “an important survival mechanism for many, in the same way that working for McDonalds is an important survival mechanism for many, but that does not mean one has to like it.”[310] Some straight transfeminine subculture members made similar arguments.

In the early 1990s community leaders Alison Laing and Paula Sinclair released VHS tapes on comportment and voice respectively, and these works both expressed norms of prim femininity. When the interviewer asked why one should follow the tape’s advice, Alison Laing explained a transfeminine person might choose to embody prim femininity due to “It [being] far easier for transgendered persons to act like a lady than like a woman. Why? For the simple reason that ‘lady’ is a social construct.” [311] Sinclair seconded Laing’s point as she acknowledged “the femininity [Sinclair] discusses is a stereotype most women would prefer to modify significantly if not leave behind altogether. But [this] ladylike behavior is indeed a means of gaining acceptance from the general public, if not passing.”[312] There were material dimensions which underpinned the popularity of prim femininity. People embodied prim femininity for a variety of reasons, and one was the visceral desire to be safe from transmisogynistic violence.

The same pages which trumpeted prim femininity also contained criticism of it. Critiques were ever-present in transfeminine periodicals. The three main themes of criticism were the patriarchal aspects of prim femininity, the incongruity between prim femininity with the actual comportment of non-trans women, and anti-transfeminine normatization.

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[310] Chamberland, “Femininity in Transgender Studies,” 125.
[311] Alison Laing, quoted by JoAnn Roberts, “The Shopping Maven,” *International TranScript* 2, no.5 (July 1992): 10.
[312] Paula Sinclair, quoted by JoAnn Roberts, The Shopping Maven,” *International TranScript* 2, no.5 (July 1992): 10.

Critics of prim femininity's patriarchal aspects most frequently scorned 'the feminine walk,' as one writer lamented, "one of the most common misconceptions among trans concerns the 'walk'…-We've all read innumerable passages about trans being forced into so-called feminine 'mincing' walks, tiny, delicate steps, suggesting bondage. Honestly, have you ever in your life seen a woman who walks like that?"[313] Critics also lambasted the construct of 'feminine speech' as it infantilized women. A subculture member named Ronda provided a salient example, "'Women don't even know what the word 'logic' means.' This was said during a voice lesson by a crossdresser to emphasize the difference between men's and women's behavior. Exaggerating such stereotypes seems normal at crossdressing meetings."[314]

In addition, subculture members critically remarked on the dissonance between how non-trans women lived and the prim femininity advocated by subcultural elites. Within the first ten issues of Prince's *Tranvestia* a subscriber named Linda criticized the femininity advocated by Virginia and her columnists, as she noted, "-women are more 'masculine' than many of us think, so that burlesque histrionics are more liable to arouse curiosity than give the outward appearance of conventional femininity."[315] Thirty years later a trans woman, who was also named Linda, wrote to *Tapestry* that at a lesbian bar she had been clocked by two patrons, and she then asked the two non-trans women how they noticed she was transfeminine. The two non-trans lesbians responded "Gee, I don't know. It's kind of, well, you know, it's just that you're TOO feminine! None of US walk, or act, or wear makeup like that."[316]

Prim femininity's focus on delicate movements and baroque etiquette replicated a high femininity increasingly out of step with how Western non-trans women existed in the late

[313] Morgan, "Real Life: Doin' the Do," 8.
[314] Ronda S., "Consciousness Raising," *The TV-TS Tapestry,* no. 57 (1991): 27.
[315] Linda, "Don't Be Too…," *Transvestia* 2, no. 10 (August 1961): 43.
[316] Linda, "Nothing Succeeds Like Success," *The TV-TS Tapestry,* no.59 (1991): 17.

twentieth century. The second wave of feminism, that some subculture members loved to criticize, enabled new modes of societally acceptable styles, embodiments, and livelihoods for non-trans women, and these developments rendered prim femininity an increasingly anachronistic ideal. The best illustration of the increased incongruity of prim femininity to casual feminine existence was in one of its ideological centers: Fantasia Fair.

Since 1975, the Provincetown Massachusetts based Fantasia Fair has been the clear highlight of the straight transfeminine subculture social calendar.[317] Across ten days of workshops, vendor fairs, pageants, and social events attendees absorbed the values of prim femininity and the norms of the straight transfeminine subculture more broadly. Members who wrote about their visits inadvertently demonstrated the weakness of prim femininity in more casual contexts. Ironically, Virginia Prince in a 1987 keynote speech provided one such anecdote as she told attendees, "-no TV 'passes' in Provincetown for the simple reason that the only 'ladies' in town who wear dresses, heels, and makeup are the TVs. All the local women and most of the tourists who come to visit the town are in slacks and flat shoes and not particularly 'feminine'…"[318] While these anecdotes point to weaknesses in prim femininity's purportedly generic quality, criticism of it on this and all other points always remained a minority viewpoint.

The third main current of dissent was criticism of transfeminine normatization, and this frequently took the form of members who argued for the validity of gaudy femininity. Those who could only rarely transfemininely dress often celebrated their loud aesthetic. A subcultural member named Jocelyn told *FMI* readers, "I do not dress up often (perhaps, twice a year now), but I try to be a sexpot when I do…-some of the outfits I put on were truly indecent, which of

[317] Ariadne Kane, "The CD/CG 'Paraculture:' A Review of the Past 25 Years," *The TV-TS Tapestry Journal*, no. 67 (Spring, 1994): 49.
[318] Virginia Prince, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *The TV-TS Tapestry*, no.50 (1987): 50-58.

course is why I loved wearing them."[319] Other members critically pointed out not everyone in the subculture valued the discretion that proponents of prim femininity ascribed to this ideal. Many members wanted sexual attention, and Kim Christy was one such person as she said, "I often go grocery shopping in the San Fernando Valley, and I see dozens of women that I don't want to dress like…What we really want to dress like is whore/goddess/beauty-queen /movie-star/sexpots. Or something close to that any way. We want to be stared at and admired."[320] Finally, some members criticized the frequent erasure of the links between fetishism and transfeminine dress that some delighted in. In a 1960 *Transvestia* issue, Rita identified that, "some TVs frown on others if they stray from the straight and narrow path of just dressing like a woman… [we should] stop censoring others who have desires just as strong for other things while enjoying the art of being a TV at the same time."[321]

The acknowledgement of any link between eroticism and transfeminine dress was an existential threat to many members of the transfeminine community because of their belief in transfeminine normatization. But these members were further motivated by a belief that the conduct and aesthetic of transfeminine individuals collectively impacted every trans person. In 1963 Susanna Valenti noted the precarious position of transfeminine people, hence members needed to keep in mind, "how important it is for each one of us to show ourselves in the most savorable and pleasant light to others…even a handful of bad examples such as those I have just described will hurt all of us whenever we attempt to have non-TV understanding and acceptance."[322] Twenty-nine years after this quote one subculture member named Cynthia advised her community that, "when venturing out in public, we must dress our age and weight if

[319] Jocelyn, "A TV Slut," *Female Mimics International* 19, no.2 (1989): 14-15.
[320] Kim Christy, "Editorial," *Female Mimics International* 21, no.4 (1991): 3.
[321] Rita, "Letters to the Editor," *Transvestia* 1, no.5 (September 1960): 28.
[322] Susanna Valenti, "Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 3, no. 23 (October 1963): 75.

we are to be accepted in the community as just wonderful harmless people out to have a good time."[323] This need for respectability extended into the very pages of subcultural periodicals, as a concerned *Tapestry* reader named Leslie intoned that, "Self-expression is an important part of cross-dressing. But, when we are trying to raise public awareness and hope for public tolerance, it is very important to put the best face forward. Pictures showing scandalous poses and showing more undies than necessary gives people the wrong message."[324]

Some also believed in the importance of a respectable appearance when explicitly engaged in political advocacy. Paula Grossman was a transsexual woman who in the early 1970s pursued a lengthy high-profile claim of sex-discrimination against the Bernard County school board, and she later wrote an advice book for other transsexuals.[325] The book included a chapter on political activism, and in this section Grossman explained to trans people that the most important factor in trans political advocacy was, "-remaining ladies and gentleman."[326] She then told trans readers, "if you have always been a slob, or if slobbishness is your desired way of life, please don't advertise [your trans status]."[327] A belief in the collective impact of individual actors motivated many members' enforcement of respectability.

Yet some subculture members believed trans people were societally marginalized *because* of the disrespectable appearances of members. In 1992 member of the board of director for the International Foundation for Gender Education Naomi Owens argued, "we [trans people] have been stereotyped by society in generally unflattering terms. This is because the personal image, or style, of some particularly blatant public persons in our community has-been outrageous, or at

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[323] Cynthia, "Letter to the Editor," *Monarch Social Club Newsletter* 2, no. 7 (Fall/Winter 1992): 1.
[324] Leslie G., "*Tapestry* Mailbag," *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 55 (1990): 15.
[325] Matte, "Historicizing," 226-231.
[326] Paula Grossman, *A Handbook for Transsexuals* (Plainfield: Broadview Enterprises, 1979), 11, quoted in Nicholas Matte, "Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities: Medicine, Media, Activism, 1960-1990," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2014), 233.
[327] Ibid.

the least, non-conforming."[328] Many subculture members believed societal acceptance would only come from the respectable dress and conduct of *all* trans people.

At the chapter's start I noted early gay and lesbian protestors often enforced sartorial norms when one was in the public eye. But straight transfeminine subcultural admonishments were not in the context of any protest. This distinction is essential. In histories of gay and lesbian protest regulations on dress occurred at specific times of agitation, as radical activists temporarily adopted a normative veneer to "get bystanders to hear the message."[329] Yet when one was femininely dressed, transfeminine people were to *always* be prim, as a visit to the store became potentially dangerous to the acceptance of the community. This mindset demonstrates the level of scrutiny applied to transfeminine members from both the public and fellow subculture members. Prim femininity was in part a means to avoid intense societal surveillance, so a transfeminine people could blend in and simply exist in public bereft of the shadow of transmisogynistic violence. Yet all too often community members were both jailers and jailed, as some subculture members oftentimes cruelly enforced norms of prim femininity upon their transfeminine sisters.

[328] Naomi Owens, "Legal Briefs," *The TV-TS Tapestry* no. 62 (1992): 16.
[329] Duberman, *Stonewall*, 111.

Chapter Three: “LET'S KEEP OUR SKIRTS CLEAN!”

The Establishment of Sisterhood/ The Obliteration of Freaks

> When immersed in a community of like-minded others, the perceived norms of that community can be very powerful…when the community of presumably similar and accepting others suggests that membership is conditioned upon achieving certain characteristics and behaviors, new members have a tendency to accept the judgments and perspectives of existing members. When individuals exploring transgenderism and searching for a comfortable identity and style of presentation first locate and initiate interactions with a transgender community, they often believe that they have found the only few others who 'truly understand' and accept them for who they are. Therefore, being accepted by these others is highly valued, and the norms that structure this newly discovered community become important. Perhaps more importantly, the community's values and belief systems are believed to be correct and to deserve conformity.
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> Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury, "Conformity Pressures and Gender Resistance among Transgendered Individuals [330]

When an isolated transfeminine person realizes she is not alone, it is a sacred experience. I felt that way. The realization that others share one's non-normativity is an emotionally impactful experience. Indeed, this block-quote is not about a group from my thesis, but it concerns a similar transfeminine group. In the early 1990s scholars Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury interviewed 65 transfeminine people on normative pressures of gender.[331] They solicited interviewees from transfeminine support groups and the Cincinnati-based periodical *Cross-Port*.[332] While not one of my analyzed periodicals, *Cross-Port* existed within the same subcultural milieu. Indeed, my analyzed sources contained the *exact* phenomena that Gagné and Tewksbury identified in their study.

When a transfeminine person first joined this subculture, they were finally amongst a group of like-minded peers, and this environment provided ideal conditions to inculcate people to

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[330] Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury, "Conformity Pressures and Gender Resistance among Transgendered Individuals," *Social Problems* 45, no.1 (1998): 97.
[331] Ibid., 81.
[332] Bobbie L., "Potpurri," *Cross-Port: InnerView* 11, no.2 (February 1995): 3-4.

subcultural norms. This persuasive capacity was further reinforced by a transfeminine normatization influenced form of safety present in community social spaces. To properly analyze this phenomenon requires contextualization of subcultural forms of 'safety' and 'social spaces.'

Safety refers to the capacity to conceal one's trans status from the public and loved ones, safety to transfemininely exist, safety from transmisogynistic harassment and violence, and critically safety from a conflation with homosexuals or general sexual 'deviancy.' This last point reflected the ideal of transfeminine normatization, and in it manifested here as a profound absence of sexuality in subculture social spaces.

Social spaces include easily legible in-person events, like the conventions, club meetings, and retreats, which subculture members held throughout the year. Social spaces also include the periodicals themselves, as this chapter examines the virtual social environment that they provided members. Transfeminine people read these works in locked rooms, motel suites on feigned business trips, or hurriedly in the aisles of the sex shops where they were commonly sold. For the many closeted members of this subculture, these more liminal examples were essential lifelines to transfeminine social life. This chapter's focus on the persuasive power of subcultural social spaces joins a lineage of similar histories of LGBT communities.

The gay and/or lesbian bar holds a place of prominence in queer social histories of modern North America. These were key collaborative spaces for socialization, the establishment of communal norms, and the erection of definitional borders of sexual identities.[333] As part of his review of queer social histories, Stephen Vider commented that "Scholars have long pointed to bars and nightclubs as primary incubators for LGBT community."[334] In her study of female

[333] Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 2nd ed. (New York City: Routledge, 2014), xii-xiii.
[334] Stephen Vider, "Consumerism," in *The Routledge History of Queer America*, ed. Don Romesburg, (New York City: Routledge, 2018), 349.

impersonators Esther Newton noted gay bars provided the community, "an informal, semi-public place where homosexuals may meet, socialize, and make sexual contacts. It is a place to congregate away from the hostile pressures of the straight world, providing a quasi-public square of gay life."[335] As 'quasi-public squares' these spaces assisted in the definitional formation of sexual identities. Rochella Thorpe's analysis of the emergence of Black lesbian identity in the Mid-West provides one such example, as she notes, "in the sixties and seventies, bars helped lesbians of colour learn about what it meant to be gay in Detroit."[336] Like the gay bar was to many queer subcultures, transfeminine periodicals were key sites of community, connection, communal definition, and the discursive establishment of *how* to be a reputable subculture member. Due to my analysis of how transfeminine texts were key social spaces, I am in conversation with scholars who expand LGBT histories beyond a focus on the queer bar.[337]

Scholars Agatha Beins, Cait McKinney, Jody Valentine, Amy Murphy, and Josie Rush further inform this work due to their analysis of the generative virtual communities facilitated by lesbian periodicals.[338] In Jody Valentine's analysis of the seminal early lesbian periodical *The Ladder* she noted, "each month subscribers to *The Ladder* interacted as though they were together thinking and talking about what it meant to be a lesbian, they became a sort of community of letters sustained by the monthly magazine."[339] The small constellation of scholastic analysis of the social functions of trans periodicals further informs my work.[340]

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[335] Newton, *Mother Camp*, 115, 117
[336] Thorpe, "'A House Where Queers Go,'" 57.
[337] See Thorpe, "'A House Where Queers Go;'" White, and White, *Stylin'*.
[338] See for example, Beins, *Liberation in Print*; McKinney, "The Internet that Lesbians Built;" Murphy, "*Arena Three* Magazine;" Rush, "Going Online to be a Lesbian;" Valentine, "Lesbians Are from Lesbos."
[339] Valentine, "Lesbians Are from Lesbos," 145.
[340] See for example Gill-Peterson, "Toward a historiography of the lesbian transsexual;" Matte, "Rubert Raj;" Bakker, Herrn, Taylor, and Timm, *Others of My Kind*; Hatfield, "Trans* Media Ecology;" Hill, "'We Share a Sacred Secret;'" Korinek, *Prairie Fairies*; Raechel Tiffe, "*Original Plumbing*: Performing Gender Variance Through Relational Self-Determination," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 9, no. 4 (2013):1-19.

But the above should not be understood to imply an epistemological bifurcation between sexual and gender identity, or that lesbian and transfeminine histories are discrete genres. This subculture's elites keenly separated sexuality from gender expression, yet many (sub)cultures understood gender and sexuality to be a holistic category. The entangled history of transfeminine lesbians is a nascent field, as these two attributes are usually historicized as discrete categories.[341] I have focused on a subculture which keenly separated sexuality and gender identity, yet this does not mean transfeminine lesbians were not present in this subculture. The elites of the straight transfeminine subculture suppressed transfeminine sexuality in both textual and in-person social spaces, and this included the relative erasure of transfeminine lesbians. These expungements were themselves actions informed by links between sexuality and transfemininity, but through acts of negation as subcultural elites suppressed articulations of non-heteronormative sexuality. This chapter concerns itself with this complex and contradictory dualism of suppression and affirmation, and the intangible joy it provided to some.

Transfeminine Bubbles

Straight transfeminine social spaces were effective platforms to spread subcultural ideals to participants. Since subcultural institutions provided a contextually secure environment for straight transfeminine people, newly embraced members felt safe, and in turn they were more likely to embrace community norms. Often members felt safe due to the sense their chosen transfeminine space(s) were heterosexual, or at minimum, desexualized. In these environments

[341] See: Andrea Long Chu, "On Liking Women," *n+1* 30 (2018). https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-30/essays/on-liking-women/; Nerissa Gailey, and AD Brown, "Beyond either/or: Reading trans* lesbian identities," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no.1 (2016): 65-86; Gill-Peterson, "Toward a historiography;" Finn Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s: Toward a Less Plausible History," *TSQ* 5, no.1 (2018): 9–29; Susan Stryker, "Lesbian Generations—Transsexual... Lesbian... Feminist...," *Feminist Studies* 39, no.2 (2013): 375-383.

members could express their transfemininity, and often people first embodied their femininity in front of others in these spaces. In case one did not already support subcultural ideals of femininity, the emotional power of such an experience was a persuasive means to internalize ideological norms of femininity that members often presented as 'common-sense' wisdom.

Subculture members often wrote of the sense of connection and community that transfeminine periodicals provided to readers. This bond provided both emotional support and implicitly inculcated members to group norms. A 1987 *LadyLike* quote encapsulated this sense of impactful attachment:

> Correspondence is a very important part of the transvestite lifestyle. Not only is there an inner desire to share your activities with someone, by letter and photo exchange, but this network of communication, this 'grapevine,' if you will, also circulates information. Correspondence with other enthusiasts creates social contacts, it acts as an exchange for ideas and opinions, and best of all, it provides an opportunity to show off a little. [342]

The premiere issue of Prince's *Transvestia* made a similar argument to the role of transfeminine periodicals as she noted that they granted readers "-a real psychologically stabilizing experience to learn that not one of us is unique in our desires and our problems but that thousands of others fight the same battles and experience the same frustrations."[343] Many members intensely feared the discovery of their transfemininity, and this heightened the emotive connection. One who overcame their reticence and connected with other transfeminine people would have experienced an intensified affective bond, as once one overcame their isolation, they joined a sacred and secret sorority of peers who shared their non-normativity, and this heightened the inculcative power which accompanied membership. Though it is important to

[342] "Foreign Correspondent," *LadyLike* no.1 (1987): 26.
[343] Virginia Prince, "The Purpose Behind *Transvestia*," *Transvestia* 1, no.1 (1960): 3.

emphasize the real material and social stakes if others learned of one's transfemininity, the degree of secrecy pursued by members is not reducible to paranoid delusion.

Indeed, in 1989 a subculture member named Ted joked about the community's love of subterfuge as they wrote about "the secrecy which surrounds transvestism, and which keeps the average cross dresser employed in clandestine activities that would do the CIA proud."[344] This desire for privacy usually manifested as a refusal to subscribe to transfeminine periodicals, as that would require the disclosure of personal information. Since this could be as little as the location of a PO Box, members' common refusal to provide magazine staff an address *near* to where they lived demonstrated the intensity of their fear. In 1966 the editorial team of *Turnabout* noted "-some readers are reluctant to establish contact with us under the mistaken idea that somehow their identity as TVs will be revealed. And if they are willing to pay $2 or $3 more for each copy to remain anonymous, that is certainly their privilege."[345] A generation later a community member named Karen explained they, "-would like to subscribe [to *Notes From the Underground*], but that would not be possible as with so many others like us — our families wouldn't understand. This would mean getting a second P.O. box and that would be somewhat too clandestine." [346] Unfortunately, these concerns were valid. In 1974 Virginia Prince sold the addresses and legal names of *Transvestia* subscribers to a gold and silver broker, and this was seemingly the final straw in her expulsion from Tri-Ess' leadership.[347]

One's level of comfort in detection mediated how they accessed periodicals. Though many shared Karen's attitude, columnists often endorsed the use of PO Boxes as a discrete lifeline for

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[344] Ted, "Some Notes Regarding *Notes from the Underground,*" *Notes from the Underground,* no. 2 (Spring 1989): 5.
[345] "Newsstand Buyer-Beware!" *Turnabout,* no.6 (Winter, 1966): 14.
[346] Karen, "The Big Hurrah," 17.
[347] Docter, *From Man to Woman,*" 86.

one's transfeminine existence.[348] In addition, members often drove great distances to sex stores that they knew stocked their preferred magazine(s). Every two months an admirer of *Female Mimics International* (*FMI)* would, "get in [their] car and rush into Chicago to find a bookstore that has [this] wonderful magazine."[349] While editors did not advocate this, periodicals were frequently shop-lifted too. An adult bookstore owner told *Tapestry's* staff their magazine, "-was particularly vulnerable to shoplifting."[350] Theft could have been the only way one felt secure to engage with transfeminine community, a lonesome act motivated by a desire for connection. The popularity of theft emphasizes the subcultural valuation of secrecy because in such instances even the clerk would not know who had acquired the magazine.

Transfeminine members' myriad fears were further heightened due to the state's attacks on transfeminine print culture. In the American context the initial legal basis of the subculture's periodical network relied on the 1957 *Roth v. United States* Supreme Court decision that codified a test for obscenity based on if media was "utterly without redeeming social value;" consequently, the queer and trans press often fulfilled the requirement for 'social value' through the advertisement of their periodicals as educational works which taught the public about 'bizarre subcultures.'[351] The subsequent *One, Inc. v. Olesen* (1958) decision declared that homosexual content was not by definition obscene.[352] Yet these rulings did not grant comprehensive legal protection, and the subculture faced frequent state repression.

The longstanding American Comstock laws, that prohibited the use of the Postal Service to send erotica, contraceptives, abortifacients, sex toys, information on the obtainment of these

[348] Karen Hope, "By the Inch, Life's a Cinch," *Notes from the Underground*, no.2 (Spring, 1989): 1.
[349] Carol, "Letters to the Editor," *Female Mimics International* 15, no.5 (1986): 12.
[350] Jamie H., "Just a Note of Thanks," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 69 (Fall, 1994): 20.
[351] Laurence O'Toole, *Pornocopia,* 2nd ed. (London: Blackstock Mews: 1999), 9-10.
[352] Vider, "Consumerism," 351.

aforementioned items, and sexual letters, were the main legal basis for the attacks on this subculture.[353] Infamously, Virginia Prince was one such victim as she received a three-year suspended sentence for 'obscenity' in the early 1960s.[354] A few years later, frequent *Transvestia* columnist Susanna Valenti and her wife Marie reduced their contributions to the periodical after two of Susanna's transfeminine friends faced obscenity charges.[355] This government harassment extended past the 1960s, as the late twentieth-century social conservative backlash impacted the subculture. As these periodicals were overwhelmingly accessed in sex shops or through mail-order services, Reaganite crackdowns against these venues acutely impacted members.[356] One reader lamented that their search for *FMI* had become harder as, "A number of adult bookstores are gone in the Sacramento area which hampers my search."[357]

Early in the subculture's history, columnists often directly addressed censors, or at least presumed inspectors would read their articles, so authors often played up their periodicals' legal respectability. In a *Transvestia* article, Virginia Prince celebrated that the periodical had passed a Post Office inspection for obscenity, and she went on to say, "I hope no subscribers to the magazine are sending off color, obscene, or 'sexy' mail…the purpose of this magazine to build up knowledge about, interest in, and acceptance of Transvestism and I don't look favorably upon anyone doing things that have the opposite effect. LET'S KEEP OUR SKIRTS CLEAN!"[358]

Prince accommodated censors, but some of her contemporaries were not conciliatory. A 1963 issue of *Turnabout* contained an excerpt from Judge Clark's decision in *Grove v. Christenberry*

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[353] Alex Diva Ketchum, "'Say 'hi' from Gaia': Women's Travel Guides and Lesbian Feminist Community Formation in the Pre-Internet Era (1975-1992)," *Feminist Media Studies* 22, no.3 (2022): 508, 515.
[354] Virginia Prince, "How I Became a Convicted Felon," *Chrysalis Quarterly* 1, no.5 (1993): 23-24.
[355] Dallas Denny, "The Historical Roots of Casa Valentina," *Dallas Denny*, May 10, 2014. http://dallasdenny.com/Chrysalis/2014/05/10/the-historical-roots-of-casa-valentina/.
[356] O'Toole, *Pornocopia,* 108-109.
[357] Carol, "Letters to the Editor," 12.
[358] Virginia Prince, "Editorial Emanations," *Transvestia* 1, no.6 (November 1960): 62.

(1960) that noted, "to determine whether a work of art or literature is obscene has little, if anything, to do with the expedition or efficiency with which the mails are dispatched."[359] Though aspects of the Comstock laws were eventually declared unconstitutional, the above-mentioned crackdown on sex shops along with the residue of illegality and perceived malfeasance continued to impact the subculture. This continued sense of societal precarity likely informed some members' pursuit of respectability. Yet the attempted state suppression of this subculture failed as communities and communication flourished within the pages of periodicals.

The bond between periodicals and their correspondents contained a powerful sense of intimacy. As one of the main manifestations of this, writers commonly included descriptions of the settings that they composed their messages in. A *Transvestia* correspondent named Tekla began her letter, "as I sit down to write this, I cannot help but wonder how much of your mail is composed in this way. I am away from home in a strange hotel room (locked, of course!) completely dressed and my only desire is to communicate with those who understand."[360] Yet for subculture members what truly mattered was not *where* a letter was written, but what someone *had on* when they wrote it. Letters often opened with voluminous descriptions as to what the author ostensibly wore when they composed the letter, and inevitably in these accounts writers were elaborately dressed in high-feminine apparel. These intense descriptions of one's body rarely included *explicit* eroticism, yet the verbosity of description reflected at minimum an intense emotionality at one's embodied femininity. Indeed, this directly maps onto trans scholar Julian Honkasalo's historicization of gender euphoria as when one was 'otherly and pleasurably

[359] "POSTAL INSPECTORS PLEASE TAKE NOTE," *Turnabout: A Magazine of Transvestism*, no.1 (June 1963): 44.
[360] Tecla, "Letters to the Editor," *Transvestia* 4, no.29 (October 1964): 68.

gendered,' or the voluptuous, joyful, euphoric, and possibly erotic means when others viewed one, or one felt embodied, in their desired gender.[361]

The effusively descriptive letter was such a popular format that it was mocked three years into the emergence of this network. In 1963 Susanna Valenti wrote a list of her despised aspects of transfeminine culture, and in it she lamented, "TV's who simply MUST list in great detail every single garment they happen to be wearing when they sit down to write."[362] As an example of what these messages contained, for the sexually open *FMI*, Essie wrote a 1500-word letter on her feminization routine, and in it she shaved her body, plucked her eyebrows, did a full-face of makeup, applied nail-polish, put on 5-inch heels, corseted to a 25-inch waist, wore three other types of panties, and placed a tampon in her anus "to truly be a woman," before she stayed in to masturbate.[363] Essie ended her letter with the admission that she has not disclosed her transfemininity to anyone in-person, but she avidly sought correspondence.[364] This is illustrative of a common subcultural mindset. Isolated and often closeted writers provided such levels of description due to their seclusion from in-person community. Many who wrote these letters ached to blur the border between the virtual and physical, and so through the intensity of their descriptions they perhaps felt closer to the sisterhood they craved to experience.

Yet in-person and virtual transfeminine community was further muddled as people often read these magazines in physical transfeminine social spaces. For historians of LGBT periodicals, this is not a revelation. In an interview with Roger Streitmatter an old subscriber to the lesbian periodical *The Ladder* recalled that she held parties where thirty to forty lesbians attended, and

[361] Honkasalo, "Transfeminine letter clubs," 284-285.
[362] Susanna Valenti, "Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 3, no.19 (February, 1963): 60.
[363] Warner, "Letters to the Editor," 17-18.
[364] Ibid., 18.

they would read the magazine aloud.[365] Similarly, people who wrote into transfeminine periodicals often mentioned that they read these magazines with friends or lovers. Jenypher and her girlfriend Paige, who were both trans women, wrote into the sexually-open *FMI* and spoke of how much they loved to "[sit] down together and go through the personals, send letters off, not only to these potential gentleman friends, but letters to *FMI* for a personal ad."[366] Merissa Sherril Lynn gave a 1991 estimate that "on the average, each *Tapestry* gets read by four people."[367] Subculture members had different levels of involvement with in-person transfeminine community, and this often impacted how they engaged with these periodicals. For some these works let them gaze at an imagined community of transfeminine sisters, and for others these magazines were one of several trans community spaces in their lives. But for many these periodicals were *how* they socialized with their community.

Personals sections were a key aspect of this subculture's communication network as they allowed people to find others for in-person or correspondence-based relationships. Kim Christy described the purposes of *FMI's* personals section as, "-a place where folks like us can meet and talk. We make new friends here and maybe find a lover or two, or just a playmate but here is where it all waits for you."[368] Kim's quote exemplifies the purpose of the entire subculture's personals. If a magazine lacked a personals section, inevitably letters to the editor would demand one. Conversely, magazines with many new personals flaunted this mark of subcultural quality. A cover of the subcultural marquee *Tapestry* promised both "over 700 accurate and up-to-date personal listings" plus an "updated directory of organizations and services."[369]

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[365] Streitmatter, "Creating a Venue for the 'Love that Dare Not Speak its Name,'" 439.
[366] Jenypher Foley, "Letters to the Editor," *Female Mimics International* 24, no.3 (1994): 18.
[367] Lynn, "Three Short Editorials," 7.
[368] Kim Christy, "Untitled," *Female Mimics International* 14, no. 4 (1984): 37.
[369] "Cover," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 56 (Spring, 1990): Cover.

Lest the dual erotica and subcultural periodical *FMI*, personal sections featured the most explicit references to transfeminine sexuality. While editors imposed certain rules on ads like no nudity, non-elite subculture members could use this section to communicate who they were and their desires. The level of sexuality in poses, outfits, and prose found in the personals was substantially higher than the comparatively desexualized editorial content of periodicals. Consequently, these egalitarian sections acquired a reputation of sexual 'impropriety.' Former *TV/TS Tapestry* editor Dallas Denny lamented "-the willingness of some publishers to allow slutty poses and nude photographs with erect penises proudly on display, made personals sections seem tawdry in the eyes of many, including mine."[370] Denny reflected the common distaste held by many periodical staff for overt sexuality, but they still often published personals as Denny explained that they were "both a liability and a financial windfall."[371] The consistent appearance of amorous ads in otherwise desexualized periodicals demonstrated a persistent desire for sexual correspondence, and it further showed members with non-transfeminine normatization articulations of transfemininity always existed in this subculture's margins.

In-Person Community

Like the desire to femininely exist in public, a much-valorized goal for subculture members was to join an in-person group. Due to the common subcultural desire to hide one's transfemininity, many dreaded the potential harms that accompanied group membership. As part of an article she titled, "the biggest fear in the mind of lone girls," Susanna Valenti wrote of common anxieties faced by those who wished to join a transfeminine group, and these included: "Can I trust the group? Am I safe in joining them? This is perhaps the biggest fear in the mind of

[370] Denny, "A History of Tapestry Magazine Part II."
[371] Ibid.

the lone girls who hesitate to contact us. Family, happiness, a job, standing in the community, are in the balance."[372] Yet those who joined such groups gained heretofore unfathomable connection to other transfeminine people. Before one had access to a group, they typically had to pass an interview process. How closely the group supported the subcultural notion of safety determined how difficult it was to join.

Exemplary of what this intake process usually entailed was the Philadelphian Renaissance group's process. One had to be interviewed by phone or correspondence by the group's executive before they would disclose the location and time of gatherings.[373] Virginia Prince's exclusive network of sororities for heterosexual male transvestites carried out the most stringent assessment process. Before her 1974 expulsion, Virginia Prince conducted all intake interviews for the Alpha chapter of Tri Sigma, and she held veto power over the admission of new members.[374] This vigorous intake process was to ensure the exclusion of all potential gay and/or transsexual members.[375]

Prince justified her homophobic and transmisogynistic policies along similar logics of the contagion model of queer and trans identity as she argued in 1983 Tri-Ess' rules existed "not out of an antagonism to TSes [transsexuals] and HSes [homosexuals] but in the interest of the wives participation which would definitely be put off if our membership included other types since they would see their husbands as drifting in those directions."[376] Prince argued that if Tri-Ess included alternative models of transfemininity then wives would grow paranoid their partners would 'become' gay or come out as transsexual woman. Prince had lived full-time as a woman for

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[372] Susanna Valenti, "Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 3, no.14 (April 1962): 68-69.
[373] JoAnn Roberts, "Renaissance Organization Profile," *En Femme,* no.1 (July/August 1987): 40.
[374] Docter, *From Man to Woman,* 86.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Virginia Prince, "Letter from Virginia Prince, founder of FPE (Now Tri-Ess) and Chevalier Publications (Including 'Transvestia' Magazine)," *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no.39 (Spring, 1983): 13.

fifteen years at the time of the article's publication.[377] It is easy to single out Prince's beliefs as uniquely distasteful, but these exclusionary and hypocritical polices were repeatedly supported by the membership of Tri-Ess who themselves often did not abide by these rules.

Beyond Tri-Ess, those who organized subcultural social spaces trumpeted transfeminine normatization as countless social groups and conventions erased or kept out those with fetish-based or erotically minded articulations of transfemininity. The typical basis for exclusion relied upon several deeply ideological assumptions, but subculture elites often framed these ideas as common-sense. A 1987 letter to *Tapestry* by Virginia Prince provided one such example of these thought processes as she contrasted the prestige of the magazine with other periodicals which interlinked transfemininity and sexuality:

> Unfortunately, there are a lot of other publications [presumably includes *FMI*] which directly relate sex and cross-dressing which do not improve our image. Not that CDs are not as sexual as anyone else, but unfortunately there are many shrinks, as well as the lay public that think that the only reason we cross-dress is to get our sexual kicks and when so many magazines of this type appear it tends to vindicate their position. [378]

As Chapter 1 examined, subculture elites enforced transfeminine normatization partially because of a desire for the white, middle-class, heterosexual, and non-trans public to tolerate their specific articulations of transfemininity. Though *FMI* was a popular erotic periodical, transfeminine magazines and advertised social groups overwhelmingly reflected transfeminine normatization as subculture staff catered to those who wished to erase links between transfemininity and eroticism. But Prince's viewpoint was not an outlier. Indeed, subculture elites often lamented that 'the mainstream' (white, middle-class, heterosexual, and non-trans

[377] Doctor, *From Man to Woman,* 86.
[378] Prince, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," 52.

people) believed them to be uncouth homosexuals. Partially due to this anxiety, many subculture elites conflated the existence of transfeminine erotica, and the fact sex-shops were where many trans periodicals were distributed as to why this 'mainstream' did not tolerate them. The ideology of transfeminine normatization spatially manifested as a desire to purge any association of transfemininity to sex-work, pornography, and sex shops, in order to present a respectable veneer to the white, middle-class, heterosexual, and non-trans public. Potential subculture members who saw this virtuous image could then feel safe to join a group which shared their views on respectable transfemininity.

In addition, subculture organizers often called other trans organizations which violated transfeminine normatization unprofessional. Again, what constituted 'professionalism' was deeply ideological. Community pillar Merissa Sherill Lynn provided one example of this rhetoric as she described her plan for the future success of her Boston-based support group:

> Tiffany is a legal non-profit corporation with the stated objective of being of actual and effective service to the TV/TS community. That means Tiffany must be growth-oriented, service-oriented, and provide facilities and activities that are secure and free of fear and of what some persons may consider sexual or "far out" behavior. In order to develop and retain the trust and confidence of old, new, and potential members and supporters, Tiffany must maintain an image of integrity, and remain strictly on the up and up. Tiffany is not concerned with the sexual preferences of its members and guests. Tiffany is concerned that everyone behave themselves, and protect the security and peace of mind of everyone, members and guests alike. [379]

For Lynn and most subculture organizers, this attitude reflected a 'common-sense' orthodoxy. Those who subscribed to this discourse believed 'overt' displays of eroticism or sexual fetish would distress or alienate potential members, and so these exclusionary policies were reinscribed as *inclusive* measures to accommodate a fuller rainbow of transfemininity. For such adherents,

[379] Lynn, "The Nature of Mayflower and Tiffany," 3-4.

non-normative sexualities undermined the healthy growth of the subculture, and so these people needed to be excluded. Due to these two ideals of what made a successful transfeminine space, potential members who also held these beliefs could feel safe to embrace a sisterhood which often also craved normative tolerance and a desire to keep out uncouth transfeminine articulations.

Yet subcultural elites did not impose these ideals on the membership. Due to the subcultural proliferation of non-sexual groups, most transfeminine people seemingly did desire such spaces. As part of *Tapestry's* commitment to be a pillar of the trans community, each issue contained a list of trans community groups, events, and organizations. *Tapestry's* Fall 1982 issue contained a list of twenty-four social groups, individuals, and organizations captioned open or closed, and the former referred to acceptance of all sexual orientations while the latter invariably meant the organization was for heterosexuals. In addition, the list contained a second tag for if the group was or was not sexual. Of the twenty-four entries, only three gestured to a degree of sexual openness. First, the Boston-based Mayflower Society was for those with 'sexual alternative lifestyles.' This meant attendees could wear fetish gear like latex, maid costumes, or petticoats. Second, Harriet Lane's TV Set had a monthly party where people could have sex. Third, Sue Hall was unique as she was the only entrant who explicitly hosted, "sexually orientated parties."[380] Harriet Lane's TV Set only *permitted* sex at open parties.[381] Transfeminine social groups and conventions were overwhelmingly advertised as non-sexual affairs. The dominance of ostensibly desexualized spaces indicated support for transfeminine normatization. If one wished to flirt or cruise other transfeminine or non-trans people, they could not do so within

[380] "The Tiffany Club Works Cooperatively with, and in Support of the Following Non-Profit Organizations and Individuals," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 37 (Fall, 1982): 4.
[381] Ibid.

straight transfeminine subcultural in-person spaces without the risk of subcultural censure. For many transfeminine members this absence of sexuality was what they needed to feel secure to femininely exist around others. For one to simply femininely exist and feel safe in this embodiment was oftentimes a key reason that someone joined physical subcultural groups.

Once someone joined a transfeminine group or attended an in-person event, they gained access to a social space which in the words of Merissa Sherill Lynn was an "extended closet."[382] For those who were previously isolated in their transfemininity these gatherings were a magnificent oasis as one could finally meet others like them. As Chapter 1 illustrated, when a transfeminine person first saw another like themselves in media, like many subculture elites experienced with Virginia Prince, it was often a profoundly impactful experience. A member named Jessica narrated this pleasure of discovery as she wrote "I started dressing in my late mother's clothes at 14 and thought I was terribly alone, apart from the 'normal' world until 1983 when I discovered what I was and learned that there were thousands more like me. The knowledge left me giddy-."[383] Similarly, when a transfeminine person broke their isolation and met other transfeminine people, they often experienced a euphoric rush as they could femininely socialize with other transfeminine people. This was a deep pleasure in-person subculture spaces provided to members, and it was not the only one.

Membership further granted a safe space where one could exist femininely. These social spaces, like secluded campgrounds, clubhouses, or apartments, allowed members to dress femme and to be amongst members that understood them. These experiences provided a further source of deep happiness due to the sense of community and gender affirmation that they gave people.

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[382] Merissa Sherill Lynn, interview by Jo Schneiderman, "Dressing the Part: Two Approaches to Drag," Gay *Community News*, May 5, 1984, quoted in *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 44 (1984): 51.
[383] Brandon, "Color Scheme," 33.

Subculture members provided countless anecdotes of the profound pleasure that they experienced from feminine embodiment. In the early 1960s Susanna Valenti ran a transfeminine resort named Casa Susanna, and she recalled what the campground meant to members:

> We have some swings originally placed there for children. A few weeks ago, Dorothea from Chicago who was our guest discovered with Susanna that it was marvelous fun to sit on those swings and 'catch up' so to speak with that part of our girlhood which had been denied to us. That's why every type of activity, no matter how trivial it may seem, takes on a fascinating quality when we allow our 'girl-selves' to perform them. [384]

Advertisements for conventions, vacations, and support-groups, consistently had two themes: you could express your transfemininity, and you could do this in a *safe* environment. One subculture member attended a cruise where attendees could transfemininely dress, and she enthusiastically recounted that the ship "transformed some of our girls into princesses and gave all of us a chance to touch the full spectrum of personality."[385] The Fantasia-Fair inspired Euro Fantasia consistently advertised the convention as "-a chance to be the person you want to be for a full week, together with friends."[386] Though rarely present within straight transfeminine periodicals, contributors who wrote about fetish conventions extolled their secure nature. In *LadyLike's* coverage of the 1988 BDSM and latex Dressing for Pleasure convention the correspondent reported that, "there was one big difference between this event and the Premiere the year before. After seeing or hearing about the extraordinary security measures taken for this event, many crossdressers were in attendance."[387] This article further included a note from the editor who emphasized the "absolutely impeccable" quality of security.[388] Though *En Femme's*

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[384] Susanna Valenti, "Susanna Says," *Transvestia* 2, no.11 (October 1961): 51.
[385] Peggy Rudd, "Dignity Cruise a Success," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 59 (Summer, 1991): 89.
[386] "EuroFantasia '93," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 63 (Winter, 1992): 72.
[387] "Dressing for Pleasure," *LadyLike*, no. 5 (1988): 17.
[388] Ibid.

coverage of this convention was slightly different, they too highlighted the level of privacy provided by the event, and in a subculture which extolled discretion this was high praise.[389]

The subculture's myriad articulations of safety all ensured formerly isolated members felt securely ensconced in a community of peers and experts. This 'extended closet' of safety was an incredibly persuasive environment that implicitly inclined transfeminine people to internalize the straight transfeminine subculture's various norms. Historian of gender and emotion Michael Roper notes "the social scripts of gender circulating within a culture at any given time do not, by themselves, constitute subjectivity, but that they operate in relation to more primitive emotional investments."[390] A transfeminine person may have spent decades alone in their transfemininity as they grappled with self-hatred, uncertainty, and a helplessness at their non-normativity. Then they joined a sisterhood that seemingly possessed the answers to long-asked questions and provided sacred community. This would have been an overwhelming event. After one experienced this, a new member was highly receptive to the wisdom her new comrades could provide her, and often transfeminine people joined these spaces to obtain this knowledge.

New members often expressed a common desire for authoritative information on transfemininity. An unnamed staff writer for *LadyLike* wrote "most TVs, when they come out, are at an equivalent age of about 14 years old, says one psychologist friend. S/he has a lot of learning to do, just like any other teenager."[391] Elsewhere, columnist for *International TranScript* Niki Nash explained, "It's not easy being a woman, but genetic women learn the 'mysteries of femininity' from their mothers as young girls. Where do we, as 'crossovers' learn these necessary skills? Anywhere we can; from wives, girlfriends, fashion magazines, or by very

[389] Daniel M. T. Graham, "Special Report: Dressing for Pleasure Gala '90," *En Femme*, 22 (Feb. 1991): 18.
[390] Michael Roper, "Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History," *History Workshop Journal,* no. 59 (Spring, 2005): 66.
[391] "It's Casual," *LadyLike,* no. 8 (1990): 44-45.

careful observation."[392] This common mindset amongst new members, that one lacked knowledge and sought it from any vaguely authoritative source, reinforced the persuasive power of subcultural social spaces. Straight transfeminine periodicals and groups were one of the few non-hostile representations of transfeminine existence available, and people new to their transfemininity saw these sources as pinnacles of objective knowledge. This is not to say these entities did not provide useful information, for these organizations gave many people information on clinics, transition resources, and the intangible emotional nourishment of community. Yet all too often straight transfeminine subculture members framed their ideological beliefs on gender as 'common-sense' wisdom.

For example, a transfeminine person named Lisa joined a support group where she "-met a bunch of absolutely wonderful and very helpful sisters. For instance, I did not realize that I was holding my cigarette like a man, or that I do not walk like a lady, for which I still need more practice."[393] Community members presented deeply ideological norms of comportment and dress (prim femininity) as objective wisdom on proper transfeminine existence. As one received this knowledge non-coercively from their clandestine sisters in an oasis of trust, a transfeminine person would have been inclined to internalize these norms. The persuasive impact of this environment matched a subsequent study by Gagné and Tewksbury with the same interviewees that opened this chapter. In their analysis "transgender events and settings were described as supportive rather than coercive or as a source of pressure. Although the hegemony of scientific knowledge was not evident to most persons attending transgender cultural events, its assumptions provided the foundation and pervaded the very structure of such events."[394]

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[392] Niki Nash, "Useful Secrets," *International TranScript* 2, no.4 (May 1992): 32.
[393] Lisa, "Supportive 'Sisters,'" *Female Mimics International* 19, no. 6 (1990): 19.
[394] Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury, Knowledge and Power, Body and Self: An Analysis of Knowledge Systems and the Transgendered Self," *The Sociological Quarterly* 40, no.1 (1999): 75.

For a historical example, a *Tapestry* reader named Jessica wrote "when I came out as a transsexual in a support group, I was taught by the older, wiser transsexuals that I should immediately assimilate after my surgery and never tell anyone of my true sex origin."[395] Such 'common-sense' subcultural wisdom reflected the medical establishment's orthodoxy at the time. Beyond medicine, straight transfeminine subculture members similarly framed prim femininity in neutral terms. In 1991 the long-time director of Fantasia Fair, since 1975 the straight transfeminine subculture's largest in-person event, Ari Kane said the workshops for the ten-day convention reflected an ethos of personal growth, that she defined as "the practical, the basic 'art and illusion' stuff; make-up, comportment, accessories, wigs, etcetera. The second area is the social. We want people to develop social skills and learn how to relate as their femme personas, as 'Jane', and not as 'Jack.'"[396] This personal growth corresponded to prim femininity. In addition, at a material level the presence and absence of consumer goods and services further shaped the dimensions of what constituted transfeminine goods and apparel, and consequently this non-coercively molded what subculture members viewed as 'normal' to transfemininity.

Though Fantasia Fair remained the premiere social event of the subculture, a constellation of smaller conventions and social weekends dotted the calendar. Due to the subcultural clout of Fantasia Fair, many conventions directly copied its structure, hence most of these gatherings had workshops, social events, fashion shows, pageants, talent nights, and a vendor room.[397] For those who wished to discretely purchase feminine goods and services that last aspect was of particular importance. The 1991 Southern Comfort convention's description of its vendor fair provides an exemplary demonstration of what was usually sold at conventions:

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[395] Jessica Xavier, "Choosing Terms of Empowerment," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 71 (Spring, 1995): 52.
[396] Ariadne Kane, "Fantasia Fair: The Fantasia Fair Experience, the Director's Perspective," *The TV/TS Tapestry,* no.58 (Spring, 1991): 22.
[397] Robyn Dormer and Donna Miller, "Provincetown," *En Femme,* no.3 (November/December 1987): 38.

> The Gender Vendors are the main outside support of any convention. Southern Comfort has consistently attracted the top names in the business and adds a number of local vendors that support the community. Among those attending that advertise on a national scale were: Fashion Fantasy of Manassas, Virginia who carry a full line of clothing and accessories; the first lady of Shoe-dom, Ann West, owner of Shoe Express, Lafayette, Louisiana, displayed a wonderful selection of ladies' shoes in men's sizes; Jim Bridges brought his nationally renowned makeup talent, a large selection of every accessory that you have ever thought that you needed, along with Anthony and Monica Pedone to help with wigs, transformations and advice.[398]

As the quote indicated, vendor fairs usually featured a mix of transfeminine specific wares along with more general femme goods. Vendors typically sold clothes that embodied prim femininity. This fair's status as convention highlight reflected that much of the subculture's membership highly valued its subcultural presence, and what wares it provided shaped what constituted the bounds of 'typical' transfemininity. These markets, like social groups, conventions, and periodicals, were all subcultural pillars that discursively, subtly, and of course non-coercively inculcated members as to what were proper technologies of transfemininity.

It is uncomfortable to write about the persuasive power of transfeminine community. Transfeminine sisterhood saved my life. As seen in the archive and my experience, the tender emotional support it can provide is undeniable, but this atmosphere also possessed a potent non-coercive capacity to influence. I do not wish to take away from the emotional salvation members gained when they joined these communities. Yet it is impossible to ignore the same emotive power of community was simultaneously a formidable means to inculcate members to subcultural norms. The transfeminine groups covered here are illustrative of this historical process, but they are not unique. Similar mechanisms occur within all subcultures, and indeed this occurs in all societies.

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[398] Mystie, "Southern Comfort '94," *The TV/TS Tapestry*, no. 70 (Winter, 1995): 70.

Conclusion: Time is a Flat Circle

It was around December. I had just finished Chapter 2, and my mind was awash with the subculture's norms of comportment. I found the advice on to how to 'femininely' hold a cigarette particularly ridiculous. I thought to myself, 'how silly,' 'how archaic,' 'who cares about this shit?' Then, I had a casual conversation with a trans femme friend of mine about our marijuana habits, and she mentioned off-hand that a decade ago someone said she masculinely held a joint. Since then, this caused her not to want to smoke a joint: a cigarette. Time is a flat circle.

A decade ago, Craig Loftin published *Letters to ONE,* and he told the history of gay and lesbian Americans who sent letters into one of the first English-language gay magazines in the 1950s and 60s. He noted these letters were, "-strikingly contemporary, as if they could have been written in 2012 rather than 1955 because so many of the problems described in these letters persist today."[399] I wish that I did not feel the same.

There is a profound joy when I see echoes of my friends, people I know, or intercommunity trans Twitter discourse play out in the pages of these periodicals. I feel ancestral connection and kinship. There is also deep pain when I see fears and problems in seventy year old sources that continue to happen now. They happen to me, my loved ones, those in my communities, and my distant compatriots.

I wrote a thesis on how transfeminine members of a certain subculture discursively responded to pressures of societal and inter-personal alienation. They debated respectability versus rebellion, visibility or to pass unseen, hew to 'normality' or rebel against it. I have very different answers to their most popular responses, but their problems are my problems.

I wrote this thesis in a transmisogynistic university, within a transmisogynistic city, and within a transmisogynistic society. The University of Victoria, its surrounding city, and its

[399] Loftin, *Letters to ONE,* 3.

surrounding settler-state are not uniquely transmisogynistic. We live in a society that continues the transmisogyny those in *Transvestia*, *Tapestry*, and *gendertrash* responded to.

I am a trans woman, and I wrote this thesis on transfemininity while I faced transmisogyny from university staff, library executives, professors, Special Collections archivists, my fellow grad students, and so on and so on. I wrote this thesis within trans studies and trans history, and in the salient words of Jules Gill-Peterson these fields are "'institutionalizing' at the same moment that the [academy] is in the throes of a death-spiral-become-normal."[400] I wrote this thesis, in the face of a continually ascendent white-supremacist, misogynist, and Christo-fascist wave to my south, and a white-supremacist, xenophobic, fascist tide to the East. These are the white-supremacist states of America and the United Kingdom. These are the white-supremacist states with some of the most visibly ascendent annihilationist fascist movements that center trans people as the latest in a line of scapegoats for the evils of modernity/gender-ideology/social justice/imperial decline.

In such a climate, it is easy to feel frustrated at this subculture's members: for their lack of radicalism, for their petty cruelties, for their bigotries, and for their intense focus on sartorial respectability to the white, heterosexual, middle-class, and gender normative mainstream. In 1995, the year I was born, trans activist Riki Anne Wilchins remarked that for one of the subculture's many conventions, "There were workshops about passing, putting on makeup, styling your hair, disguising your voice, you name it. But nothing on the oppression we as transpeople face every waking day of our lives, and therefore none whatsoever about how we might change our lot for the better."[401]

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[400] Jules Gill-Peterson, "The Little Yellow Book; or, Does Trans Studies Care?" *Feminist Foundations* 34, no. 3 (2022): 133.
[401] Riki Anne Wilchins, "Closets are for Clothes, NOT Transpeople," *The Transgender Tapestry*, no. 70 (1995): 29.

Yet, we cannot blame this subculture, for it was not a societal force. Though many members collaborated with transmisogynistic medical gatekeepers like Harry Benjamin and Leo Wollman, this was perhaps a community of under fifty thousand people. A larger non-trans society far outnumbered this subculture. Its norms ultimately shaped this community.

I am critical of much of this subculture, but it did provide an unfathomable sense of comfort and connection to many. This does not take away from members' homophobia, racism, internalized transmisogyny, whorephobia, and petty cruelties. The bad does not cancel out the good. Yet, we should not discard this subculture, or any trans community for that matter.

The sisterhood this subculture provided, though it was so damn imperfect, is what we should take from this community. This subculture saved lives. Trans sisterhood saves lives. It saved mine. It sustains me in the academy. Within historical, contemporary, and future oceans of bigotry and transmisogyny, trans sisterhood has, does, and will keep trans femmes alive and connected. Even if we judge how each of us hold our cigarettes, at the very least, we will always have each other.

Appendix A: Archival Sources

Canadian Cross-Dressers Club issue 5; volume 1, number 12; volume 2, numbers 1-9; volume 3, numbers 2-5; 15 total issues (1992-1993).

Empathy Magazine volume 3, no. 28, 1 total issue (1970).

En Femme issues 1-25, 25 total issues (1987-1991). Becomes *International TranScript.*

En Femme Comics 1-2, 2 total issues (1988,1990).

En Femme Fiction Magazine issue 3, 1 total issue (1990). A successor to *En Femme Comics.*

FanFare issues 17-32, 16 total issues (1985-1988). Missing issues 1-16,

Female Mimics volume 1 issues 1-12, 13 total issues (1963-1968), volumes 5-7, 10 total issues (1974-1976). Missing volume 5, issue 1, and volume 6 number 3.

Revived *Female Mimics* and *Female Mimics International* volume 5, no. 1 and no. 3 and volumes 11-25, 88 issues total (1979-1995).[402] Missing volume 5, issues 2 and 4; volume 14, issue 2; volume 16, issue 5; volume 24, issue 5.

gendertrash 1-4, 4 total issues (1993, 1995).

International TranScript 1-5, 5 total issues (1991-1992). Issue number jumps from volume 2, number 2 directly to volume 2, number 4.

LadyLike issues 1-26, 26 total issues (1987-1995).

Monarch Social Club Yearbook ’*93-94* (1995). A publication of the Monarch Social Club.

The Monarch Social Club Newsletter[403] issue 1; volume 2 issues 1-2, 4/5-7; volume 3 issues 1-4; 9 total issues (1993).

[402] Volume 11 contained 8 issues spread across 1980-1981, before moving to publishing 5 issues a year.
[403] Includes the *Monarch Social Club News Flash* (number 1).

Miss C's TV Briefs[404] volume 1 issues 1-2; volume 3 issue 4; volume 4 issues 1-2, 4; 6 total issues (1993- 1994). A publication of the Monarch Social Club.

Notes From The Underground issues 1-32, 32 issues (1988-1995).

The Transvestite issues 34, 39, and 43, 3 issues (1971, 1973, circa 1974).

The Transvestite World Directory one total issue (circa 1974). A publication of *The Transvestite.* One issue identified as issue 41.

Transvestia 1-111, 111 total issues (1960-1986). The 109th issue does not carry any numbering, before continuing to the final two issues.

Transvestite Post-Box: All New Letters from Transvestites. A publication of *Turnabout.* One issue (circa 1967).

Turnabout: A Magazine of Transvestism 1-6, 11, 7 total issues (1963-1967). Missing issues 7-10.

The TV/TS Tapestry[405] 7-74, 68 total issues (1979-1995). Issue 29 is called Volume 28 & 29 (there is also a volume 28).

[404] Includes *Miss C's Musings* (volume 3, issue 4; volume 4, issue 1-2, and 4).
[405] Includes *The TV/TS Tapestry Newsletter* (7-11), *The TV/TS Tapestry Journal* (64-73), and *The Transgender Tapestry* (74).

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