Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities:

Medicine, Media, Activism,

1960-1990

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy Graduate

Department of History

University of Toronto

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Abstract

How did trans people emerge as a minority group in the United States between 1960 and 1990? Trans people and advocates have been articulating ways to improve the social lives of trans people throughout the second half of the twentieth century by drawing on discourses of American liberalism. “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” provides insight into the norms, definitions, expectations and tactics developed by trans advocates in social and cultural conditions not of their choosing. It draws on trans-centric primary sources including conference proceedings, newsletters and magazines produced by, for, or about trans people, as well as mainstream media coverage of trans people and issues. These sources enrich existing accounts of pathologization, gay liberation, employment discrimination, sex activism, and other topics of broad concern.

The first two chapters show that the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) worked with trans advocates and “helping professionals” in fields such as medicine, law, religion, and social work to promote social acceptance on the basis of medicalized notions of transsexuality, gender dysphoria, and various diagnostic and treatment options. The third chapter looks at the
worlds of female impersonators, transvestites, and the Queens Liberation Front to argue that trans people like Lee Brewster and Sandy Mesics developed their politics in the contexts of commercial and entertainment cultures, gay liberation, feminism, and pornography. The final chapter looks at a series of cases in which a number of white transsexuals, including Paula Grossman, Steve Dain, Joanna Clark, Karen Ulane, and Bobbie Lea Bennett, each fought against the discrimination they faced in employment and health care. They asked the courts to apply the Civil Rights Act and the Rehabilitation Act to their situations and they became galvanizing public figures in social debates about the nature of gendered participation in American economy and society. Overall, “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” shows that American liberalism has been central to trans advocacy and the formation of trans people as a minority group in the United States between 1960 and 1990.

**Keywords:** transsexual, transgender, transvestism, gender dysphoria, female impersonator, queen, liberation, gay, feminism, fetish, pornography, allies, rehabilitation, Reed Erickson, Erickson Educational Foundation, Virginia Prince, Joanna Clarke, Steve Dain, Paula Grossman, Karen Ulane.
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Introduction

When Laverne Cox recently appeared on the June 2014 cover of *Time* magazine, she was introduced as “one of 1.5 million transgender Americans” and part of “the next civil rights movement.” Cox has become widely recognized for her role on Netflix’s streaming program *Orange is the New Black*, particularly because she is the first trans woman to play a trans woman character. In the series, she plays an African-American trans woman who lives in a women’s prison after robbing a bank to pay for her sex reassignment surgery. Her character is presented as facing relatively few insurmountable problems as a transgender woman (aside from a brief and quickly-resolved storyline in which her access to hormones is potentially threatened). She is accepted by inmates and prison authorities. Cox’s character is widely lauded as being a positive and respectful portrayal of transpeople, especially in contrast to more derogatory or stereotypical caricatures, such as that of “Rayon,” played by Jared Leto in the 2013 film *The Texas Buyers’ Club*. Beyond her character in the show, Cox has also become an important spokesperson for transgender rights in the mainstream media.¹

Aside from the fact that she is quoted in the article identifying herself as “a proud, African-American transgender woman,” race is not explicitly mentioned either on the cover or in the story. As a representative of “the next civil rights movement,” *Time* presented Cox as primarily as transgender, and incidentally as African-American. The story itself further narrated transgender as the “next civil rights movement” in terms of the history of same-sex marriage in the United States, rather than a history of racialized civil rights activism or trans activism. Cox might appear to be at the nexus of mainstream American celebrity culture, the

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fight for civil rights for transgender people, and prison justice campaigns for African-Americans, but *Time* magazine identified her only as a trans woman and civil rights crusader, and neither of which were described in racial terms. This represents several of the legacies of the racialized civil rights movement, including a liberal inclusion model whereby individual members of minority groups can participate in social, media, and political campaigns to better themselves and their group’s social position. Cox’s *Time* cover has been seen as a victory amongst left-leaning liberals and radicals, and has flown in the face of conservatives who refuse to recognize civil rights protections for trans people.

Cox’s *Time* cover in many ways exemplifies the triumph of what I refer to as “liberal American transnormativities” throughout this dissertation. She represents an ideal of gender and racial minority inclusion as being both “in progress,” and as having already been achieved in American society. It may be tempting to see Cox as part of a progress narrative that culminates in a celebration of the present moment or terminates with current political goals. Indeed, much has changed in recent decades for many trans people in the United States. However, as this dissertation will argue, this progress narrative of liberal inclusion renders invisible that present gains may be understood as both partial and limited in that they rest on histories of difficult compromise and liberal inclusion in social, cultural, institutional and legal contexts. These liberal ideals are not equally beneficial and do little to radically transform systems of inequality, but rather simply shift some of the conditions of inequality and marginalization to benefit particular groups under specific terms.

Between 1960 and 1990, cultural associations between trans people and liberalism in the arenas of medicine, media, and various forms of social and legal activism were essential to defining, legitimizing and gaining a certain measure of social acceptance for trans people in
the United States. Notions of self, gender, sex, and trans expression were shaped by liberal American ideas about such factors as personhood, equality, embodiment, social subjectivity, race, sexuality, disability and capitalism. This dissertation looks at a series of influential examples, cases, and discussions to demonstrate how trans-centric discourses during this formative earlier period presumed and entrenched a socio-cultural association between trans people and American liberalism. The primary contribution of this dissertation is to demonstrate that discourses of liberal American transnormativity made it increasingly possible to be recognized as trans in the United States between 1960 and 1990.

While the relatively recent term ‘transnormativity’ has a variety of context-specific potential definitions, I use it throughout this dissertation to highlight trans-centric discourses that produced expectations and assumptions about who would be recognized as trans and what that would imply. I use “transnormativities,” to focus on discourses that represent efforts to ameliorate social conditions for trans people. These discourses have been part of a wider socio-cultural context in which transphobia authorizes the systemic oppression of trans people and gender diversity while hegemonic cis-centrism animates the pervasive assumption that most people “are not trans,” thereby containing and shoring up an oversimplistic (albeit always contested) binary division between trans and non-trans (“cisgender”) people. Specific, dynamic, ever-changing norms that defined and redefined what it would mean to be trans in American society were developed by and about trans people over decades and established often unrecognized cultural norms operating on many levels, including the personal, social,

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cultural, political and economic.

Discourses of transnormativity have had a major impact on trans people and trans issues primarily because trans people are often referred to in a universalizing way that does not recognize how trans people have emerged as a socio-cultural formation in a series of specific local, regional, national, international, and transnational contexts. It is now common to claim some variation of trans-ness as an essential, ahistorical, perhaps even inherent individual identity, often in defense against the claim that a trans identity is chosen and therefore justifiably punished or stigmatized.3 Educational and activist workshops throughout North America emphasize a distinction between sex, gender and sexual orientation and teach people to self-identity as trans or cis-gender (non-trans). This way of thinking counteracts systematic cis-centric and transphobic perspectives of sex, gender or sexuality that refuse or marginalize people who don’t conform to the socio-cultural expectations of the sex assigned at birth. It does little, however, to address systemic factors that influence and determine social identities and experiences such as class, race, disability, gender and sexuality.

By conceptualizing discourses of liberal American transnormativity as historical it becomes possible to examine some of the historical socio-cultural and structural elements at play in defining trans people and to assess the influence and ramifications of these transnormativities in the present. It becomes possible to ask: how have specific socio-cultural relations of power and inequality been experienced, reproduced, or dismantled along particular, trans-specific lines? How do liberal American transnormativities relate to broader systems of power at work in the U.S. during this period, such as capitalism, disability, sexuality, gender,

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and racism?

The purpose of historicizing liberal American transnormativities in the way I do here is not to highlight or critique the norms to which trans people have been subjected or to formulate a resistance strategy. Rather, it is to demonstrate that efforts to end the marginalization of trans people and broaden sex, gender and sexuality in the United States established discourses in which both trans people and non-trans people could define, discuss and address the existence and socio-cultural life of trans people in the United States. These efforts both recognized and created a social group.

Trans people and communities have significant histories that are not always compatible with current trans politics and cultural formations. It is important to carefully historicize liberal American transnormativities at play between 1960 and 1990 for several reasons. First, “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” helps make sense of generational shifts and divisions amongst people who articulated trans identities and politics in different times and contexts, under different terms than we do today. Second, it provides some explanation for entrenched liberal politics and racialized histories within trans communities and politics. Finally, it helps to more accurately chart trans politics in relation to queer, crip, and anti-racist politics and to move beyond trans identity politics to assess and understand current challenges without losing track of trans issues and histories.

One of the ongoing challenges of trans history and histories that attempt to address people and issues we might currently define or relate to as some variation of “trans” is that “trans” terminologies and categories have changed over time and are constructed, questioned or contested in politically charged ways. During the period covered here, for example, the
most commonly used terms were “transsexual” and “transvestite,” while terms like “gay,” “queen,” “ftm” and others were also sometimes used interchangeably or in combination with more specifically “trans” terms. For example, “gay transvestite” was used to describe people who might today more likely be understood simply under the broader term “trans.” Transvestite activist Virginia Prince had first coined the term “transgenderist” to signify a subject position outside the transvestite/transsexual (“tv/ts”) dichotomy, while the broader post-1990 usage of “transgender” was meant to recognize and create a more diverse and radical trans community and politics. Prince never intended “transgenderist” to include transvestites and transsexuals as it does now, but rather to provide what was to her a more liberating option: for people assigned male at birth to live publicly as a woman without having to undergo sex reassignment surgery.

The shift in terminologies from transvestite/transsexual to transgender also represents somewhat of a conceptual and political gap between the pre- and post-1990 eras. Even the term “transgender” is now often replaced by “trans-”, “trans*” or simply “trans.” These variations of “trans” have come into common usage as shorthand for a wide range of social, political, and even theoretical positions and are usually presumed to be politically progressive. The changing use of different terms and concepts represent the fact that trans identities, communities and politics were actually constituted along different lines and by different people in the pre- and post-1990 periods. This presents unique challenges to the development of trans

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histories, especially those that do not reflect present-day “anti-oppressive” politics. It can be
difficult to grapple with trans histories that do not necessarily reflect what people today
remember or want to remember. Doing so is particularly important, however, for addressing
entrenched norms and learning from previously employed strategies. At the very least, it is
important to recognize the long-standing diversity and complexity of trans identities,
communities and politics in the United States.

It has been suggested that current distinctions between sex (understood as a genitally-
configured biological status), gender (understood as a combination of social roles and
expression of an internal identity), and sexuality (understood as sexual orientation) must by
necessity frame historical accounts of the recent past. It has been suggested that current
distinctions between sex (understood as a genitally-configured biological status), gender (understood as a combination of social roles and
expression of an internal identity), and sexuality (understood as sexual orientation) must by
necessity frame historical accounts of the recent past.6 Explaining sex, gender and sexuality as
distinct has been central to claiming cultural legibility for gays, lesbians and trans people in the
United States. Susan Stryker provides the most accessible and clear trans-centric explanation
when she writes that “a transgender person may be of any sexual orientation, just like a
nontransgender person” and that “sex is not the same as gender, although many people us the
terms interchangeably in everyday speech.”7 Distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality,
however, while pragmatic and conceptually tidy, have not always been so easily separated and
in fact were often used in overlapping ways that don’t translate easily in the present, as will
become evident in the following chapters.

The most extensive and sustained scholarship on trans history thus far has taken
slightly different approaches to addressing the issue of historicizing trans conceptual

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6 Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal, 2008), 7-16; John Howard, *Men Like That: A
Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22-27; David Valentine,
*Imagining Transgender: an Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007),
148-172.

7 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 7, 16.
frameworks and social communities. Joanne Meyerowitz, in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, focuses specifically on transsexuals while Stryker, in *Transgender History* accepts and strategically employs the more recent framework of “transgender” to broaden the social history narrative and connect trans history to current politics and communities. Robert Hill and Brice Smith use the terms used by the activists and community organizers about whom they write (Virginia Prince and Lou Sullivan, respectively).\(^8\) In her oral history work with transvestite and transsexual cabaret performers, Viviane Namaste similarly uses the terms used by her research subjects.\(^9\) “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” foregrounds the social processes involved in the construction of different terms in an effort to emphasize the ever-changing nature of trans discourses developed in specific socio-cultural historical circumstances.

There is a risk in employing a categorical term like “trans” without historical context of inadvertently recreating at the core of the term a rigid and problematic series of essentialized assumptions, identity politics and cultural associations. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and others in the field of transgender studies have emphasized the liberating and progressive potentials of trans politics, theories, and subject positions and argued that it in order to avoid constructing limited meanings it is important to keep a certain instability of meaning at the core of “transgender.” David Valentine, in *Imagining Transgender: an Ethnography of a Category*, argues that the very concept of transgender is somewhat flawed

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in that it has allowed mainstream lesbian and gay activist organizations to avoid addressing unjust racial and economic power structures while debating or celebrating the inclusion of trans people.\textsuperscript{10} Racism is certainly one of the most glaring oversights in the discourses of liberal American transnormativity examined here.

Radical activist-scholarship seeking greater social, economic, and racial justice in the present neoliberal era has largely focused on queer and trans politics in terms of homonormativity and homonationalism. This activist-minded scholarship emerged in the context of a gay and lesbian rights movement in the United States. Lisa Duggan’s 2003 book \textit{The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy} provided a critical starting point. In it, Duggan coined the influential term “homonormativity” to describe a mainstream gay and lesbian rights movement that emerged through the 1980s and presented gays and lesbians as normative citizens, thus reproducing normative gendered, racial and economic formations. Following Duggan’s lead, leftist scholars and activists have argued that by focusing on privacy and civil rights without addressing racial and economic inequality, mainstream (centrist) gay and lesbian organizations have failed to address revolutionary politics or a queer militancy, thereby further marginalizing people who challenged homonormativity. By this logic, trans people are often constructed as being outside (cis-centric) gender norms and therefore marginalized by homonormativity and central to queer resistance politics.

Trans Studies scholars have begun rethinking homonormativity from trans-centric perspectives. Susan Stryker, for example, has demonstrated that transgender activists in the

\textsuperscript{10} David Valentine, \textit{Imagining Transgender}, 148-172.
1990s who also identified as “queer militants” developed their own critiques of homonormativity. She writes that “like other queer militants, transgender activists sought to make common cause with any groups… who contested heterosexual privilege” and also “needed to name the ways that homosexuality, as a sexual orientation category based on constructions of gender it shared with the dominant culture, sometimes had more in common with the straight world than it did with us.”11 In the influential 2011 text *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, Dean Spade similarly outlined “critical trans politics” in opposition to homonormative legal activism, asking rhetorically “should trans activism follow the strategies, deemed ‘successful’ by some, of the lesbian and gay legal reform agenda?”12 Spade, like Stryker, associated trans activism with radical queer politics, and argued that “trans activists and organizers can and are finding common cause with some of the most important political agendas of our time: prison abolition, wealth redistribution, and organizing against immigration enforcement.”13 Spade therefore writes of “the indispensability of trans organizing and analysis for both leftist thinking and left social movements.”14 While Spade writes about the present moment in trans activism, “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” shows that trans people and radical politics are not inherently linked and that historically, liberalism has been central to many discourses of trans activism and politics, alongside more radical/transformative political movements.

Historians of sexuality have likewise often incorporated trans people within a rubric of

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14 Ibid.
gay, lesbian, or queer social and cultural histories. For example, Nan Alamilla Boyd, in *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*, and John Howard in *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* have both written about transfeminine people together with (non-trans) gay or queer males, taking up all as gay or queer. Similarly, Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, who describes himself as a gay Latino, writes of a shared queerness that benefited his oral history work with Alberta Nevaeres/Terista la Campesina, whom he describes as a “male-to-female (MTF) transgender performer.” Ramirez, Boyd and Howard and others often construct queerness as the theoretical “umbrella term” to address the complexities of gender and sexual diversity. In contrast, historian Marc Stein employs a focus on “gay and lesbian” as opposed to “lgbt” or “queer” movements in *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* to highlight the fact that the movement he discusses, in the period he discusses, was organized primarily as a (non-trans) gay and lesbian movement. He writes that while there are overlaps, “trans and intersex movements deserve in-depth historical studies of their own.” Each of these approaches contextualizes trans histories in relation to predominantly (non-trans) gays and lesbians historical narratives.

The fact that much queer, lgbt and trans scholarship is rooted in political concerns about political resistance to heteronormativity and queer representation has led to some inadvertent (and sometimes purposeful) entrenchments of “homo,” “cis” and “trans” as essential categories, on the one hand, and to queer and trans politics as inherently radical or progressive,

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on the other. This dissertation outlines how discourses of liberal American transnormativity have not simply been a product of the ongoing reconstruction of sex categories and movements, but have also defined and redefined these social constructions under specific socio-historical conditions.

While liberal American transnormativities are clearly connected to the politics of gender and (homo)sexuality within the United States, the connection to the history of disability and health politics is perhaps less evident. What will become clear in the following chapters is that historically-specific disability policies and frameworks have been key socio-cultural resources available for the definition, regulation and articulation of liberal American transnormativities. The rehabilitation model, for example, in which an individual is physically and socially transformed into a “productive citizen,” usually through a series of medical and technical interventions, was central to the social and economic integration of transsexuals. Political scientist Dan Irving argues that the primary issue at play with regards to transsexuals during the period covered here was the desire to construct transsexuals as economically and politically “productive” by creating “normalized transgressions.”

In order to resist the naturalization of ableist systems of power, scholars working in disability studies have by and large taken an approach that focuses on and thereby perhaps inadvertently prioritizes norms and normalcy. Lennard J. Davis and others, for example, have argued that since the eighteenth century the “normal” body has been constructed in contrast to the “disabled” body. Julian Carter has argued that the idea of a “normal” American

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19 Lennard J. Davis, Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body (New York: Verso, 1995),
emerged in the early twentieth century and represented normalcy as white, heterosexual, and “uniquely qualified for citizenship.” Mary Louise Adams writes that by the mid-twentieth century, the idea of ‘normal’ was taken for granted, with notions of normal and abnormal sexuality operating “as a profound space of social marginalization and exclusion” by which “the imperative to be normal limited possibilities in people’s lives.” A great deal of scholarship has therefore focused on interrogating and tracing the effects of normalcy and the specific ways in which trans people were understood or constructed through norms and normativity, often in medicine and law. While the idea of normal bodies and normal sexes, genders, or sexualities has certainly informed the ways in which trans people have been understood and recognized, “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” focuses mainly on norms established by and on behalf of trans people.

One of the key systemic forces explicitly reproduced in mainstream discourses of American transnormativity, however, was liberalism. As the dominant socio-political discourse in twentieth century America, liberalism’s promise of freedom and equality is deeply entrenched in American culture. In his 1830 tour of the United States, European political theorist Alex de Tocqueville noted that the fundamental character of the American

23 See also Elizabeth Stephens, “Normal,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1.1-2 (May 2014), 141-144.
people was that their equality stemmed from the fact that unlike their European counterparts, who had had to shed the mantle of feudalism, Americans were “born free.”

However, early liberalism was based in a market-based model of nation-states and constructed mainstream economic activity, political citizenship, and legal rights primarily as the realm of white (non-trans) men serving in patriarchal or heteronormative roles.

The liberal theory of political equality has accounted for America’s material and social inequalities and systems of power. In the first half of the twentieth century, Progressive activists, labor unions, and liberal political programs like the New Deal sought to address poverty and economic inequality with legislation and social programs, but racism, sexism and heteronormativity persisted. Americans thus continued to experience different and unequal social, political and economic situations along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality. Between 1945 and 1972, a period Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley call the “liberal era,” inclusiveness and equality expanded. It was during this period that numerous marginalized groups such as African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and trans people fought to be recognized and included in liberal society.

Liberal American transnormativites during this period also formed in the context of U.S. racial politics. In Race and the Making of American Liberalism, Carol Horton calls the period from 1945 to 1980 “the second Reconstruction” in that it was the second time in American history that African-Americans seemed to be on the verge of achieving social, political, and

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economic equality through the transformational civil rights movement. During the Cold War Era, racial inequality had become a national embarrassment, prompting political leaders to find ways to address the situation. Civil rights activists achieved a number of key legal victories through the 1950s and 1960s. The landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which forced racial integration in public schools, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Voting Rights Act of 1965 all promised greater racial equality. It seemed that the racism which had structured American society, economy and politics from its slavery economy to the brutal violence and discrimination against racially marginalized people might be ending. The 1960s and 70s, however, saw a turn towards even more radical race politics as black activists encountered the racial limits of white liberalism in the wake of the 1964 Democratic convention and black power and black nationalism developed racialized identity politics that rejected the middle-class, white mainstream norms. Liberal transnormativities therefore were therefore increasingly out of step with radical race politics which critiqued mainstream American liberal norms as racist.

In *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, Meyerowitz calls this period “the liberal moment” in the history of transsexuality because a number of doctors, lawyers and judges were expanding attitudes towards transsexuals and sex-reassignment surgery by accepting and advocating for transsexuals in law and medicine. She notes, for example, that physicians championing the treatment of transsexualism with hormone therapy and sex-reassignment surgeries “respected one another as liberal pioneers in

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a conservative profession.” Meyerowitz defines doctors, lawyers and judges as liberal when they supported transsexuals and sex-reassignment in the face of conservative efforts to maintain and enforce a binary definition of sex as permanently assigned at birth. A similar definition of liberalism has also been used to discuss the liberalization of medical attitudes towards homosexuality during the same period.

One of the first generational shifts in the relationship between liberalism and trans people emerged with regards to politicizing sex and gender roles. Meyerowitz also cites trans activist Susan Cooke who sees a first wave of transsexual activists as those who “believed that women should marry or work in traditional women’s jobs” and who “did not consider themselves radicals, feminists or hippies and disassociated themselves from gays even though most of them had flouted sexual and gender conventions in their earlier lives as street queens.” Meyerowitz argues that the more “radicalizing trends” in trans social movements through the 1970s nevertheless built on and also defined themselves in contrast to the work of the earlier liberal doctors, legal authorities, and trans activists, leading to the development of increasingly more radical trans activism. Building on Meyerowitz’s work, “Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities” demonstrates that by the 1980s, the underlying liberalism of mainstream transnormativities were clear in public transsexual civil rights activism as well.

29 Ibid., 252.
In many ways, liberal norms and expectations became embedded in what it meant for individual subjects, social programs and broader institutional contexts to define certain people as trans. Whether explicitly or implicitly, a number of actors used a variety of liberal notions to advocate for establishing trans people’s cultural legibility in significant contexts such as medical institutions, state-funded social programs, and public debates surrounding gender and sexual equality. In each of these contexts, liberal ideologies were often taken for granted as an underlying set of truths about the existence of trans individuals and their rights, at least theoretically, to equal participation in American economic and political systems.

Between 1960 and 1990 liberal individualism, liberal economics, and liberal citizenship rights provided the socio-cultural and conceptual resources that shaped the definition of trans people in the United States. In the realm of medicine and medical services and programs, even when social factors were considered important, the diagnosis and treatment of individual patients was primary. In the realm of social debates about gender and sexuality, even when activists focused on larger social systems and structures, individual identities, subjectivities, and freedoms often took precedence. The underlying framework of liberal individualism also led to the privileging of liberal notions of economic and citizenship rights. Many argued that trans people were entitled to political protection from discrimination and to economic participation in American capitalism. Trans people and issues became defined through liberal discourses of individual freedom and equality in social, economic and political realms. These underlying liberal sentiments harkened earlier notions of liberalism, however, and were at odds with more radical political
movements of the era, such as the civil rights, women’s liberation, and gay liberation movements.

One of the broader promises of liberalism during this period was the extension of civil rights to previously marginalized groups and this aspect of liberalism informed trans people’s conception of themselves as a distinct minority group in liberal American society. But the discourses examined in this dissertation did not prioritize questions of race or address structural issues of racism. Neither did they account for the fact that not all racial positions were equally viable in America’s capitalist consumer economy. As Charles Mills writes, blacks have never had trouble seeing inequality in American liberal democracy, while white privilege has led to what he calls color-blind liberalism, racial liberalism, or white liberalism.32 The racial stakes of both liberalism and the civil rights movement during the period in question are significant to understanding how discourses of liberal American transnormativity were racialized in often-invisible ways. The fact that racism was not explicitly addressed or discussed as part of the development of these discourses of liberal transnormativity reflects both the persistence of hegemonic whiteness and the shifting racialization of liberalism.33

The period from 1960 to 1990 saw a wide range of productive efforts to address medical, social and economic issues on behalf of the emerging group of people who, by the 1990s, activists brought together under the umbrella term “transgender.” Trans people and non-trans allies worked to build access to health care services; to combat social stigma,

marginalization and isolation; and to address the legal and economic issues that often led to criminalization and poverty for trans people. They created spaces within existing social institutions with the hopes of benefiting and establishing public understanding for trans people in American culture. Experts and advocates who did not themselves identify as trans worked to de-stigmatize trans people at local, state, national and international levels and within various professional disciplines, branches of government, and educational centres. They also worked with mainstream media to publicize their efforts and influence public opinion. Some trans people worked with these non-trans advocates in mainstream cultural contexts, personally representing the possibility of trans people integrating within mainstream liberal American culture, albeit under highly structured terms.

Trans people during this period also worked in the contexts of activism, social communities, and media to develop support networks, political goals, and visibility for trans people. Transvestites, drag queens, transsexuals and other trans people created organizations, social networks, business ventures, and subcultural worlds central to social and economic opportunities for some trans people. Their efforts were shaped by structural, social, economic and political opportunities as well as by the personalities, experiences and opinions of those involved.

Trans-oriented media, particularly print publications, provided an essential resource during this “pre-internet” era, when many people who might have identified as trans never connected with or located others like themselves. In contrast to those who remained isolated, trans activists such as Reed Erickson, Virginia Prince, and Lee Brewster made contact with as many others as they could and made it their mission to facilitate resources for trans people. They engaged in extensive organizing and networking, producing newsletters and magazines
such as *Transvestia*, *Erickson Educational Foundation Newsletter* and *Drag*, among many other smaller trans-oriented print publications in circulation at the time. Such publications were labor intensive and required a great deal of personal effort and financial commitment to produce. Unlike the often-pathologizing discourses about trans people being developed in other contexts, trans publications reflected and developed trans-centric discourses that took a variety of perspectives. The bulk of these rich primary sources were produced in the United States and circulated nationally and internationally through transnational interpersonal networks. They provide the primary sources for this dissertation, along with private papers, letters, and articles published in academic journals and the mainstream media.

Many Americans first became familiar with trans issues in 1952 through the widespread mainstream media coverage of Christine Jorgensen’s highly publicized ‘sex change.’ Reports of her traveling to Denmark for an operation that would change her from male to female were framed in terms of transsexualism, but also related to questions of how sex (including what would today be expressed as sex, gender and sexuality) was being redefined.\(^\text{34}\) Hers was considered an extreme and relatively unique case. Even by 1960, very few people could have predicted that over the course of the following thirty years, trans people would emerge as a distinct socio-political minority population in the United States.

From the 1960s onwards, as the number of people seeking to “change sex” in the United States grew exponentially with the formation of gender identity clinics, people

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recognized as some variation of ‘trans’ began to be integrated into American society. By the late 1970s, gender identity clinics across the country had treated hundreds of pre-operative transsexuals and thousands of people were seeking out medical treatment. As will become evident, medical categorization, diagnoses and treatment were always shifting and formal research lead to the formation of new and broader concepts than transsexualism, such as gender dysphoria. During this key period, mainstream American culture developed a growing awareness of trans people as suffering from a medical condition, leading scholars to define the 1960s and 1970s as “the gender clinic era” and the “big science period of transgender history.”

Medical experts and transsexuals who worked within medical frameworks organized campaigns to publicize the existence of transsexuals and possible medical treatments. The mainstream American media regularly reported on the potentially galvanizing and controversial possibility of an individual changing sex, using trans people to represent a range of social debates, usually about sex, but also about gender, public social and economic policies, as well as freedom of self-expression.

This dissertation demonstrates how discourses of liberal transnormativity have been historically shaped and reshaped both through conscious efforts to have trans people recognized in mainstream American society and by the cultural contexts in which these efforts were formulated. The idea that a person or group could be trans took shape in specific

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situations where the people involved were navigating complex and unique circumstances. This purposefully partial perspective highlights contexts in which activists, professionals, and others represented or described trans people in liberal terms. Each chapter shows how discourses of liberal transnormativity shaped trans people’s social recognition in the United States between 1960 and 1990. It is essential to recognize that identifying and being recognized as trans has depended in part on the cultural specificity and historical development of discourses of liberal American transnormativities.

In the first chapter, I argue that medicalization was central to constructing liberal transnormativity between 1964 and 1973. During these years, the Erickson Educational Foundation worked with medical experts and homophile allies to promote transsexualism as a medically legitimate condition. The EEF built a community of specialists who considered themselves to be working on behalf of trans people as a patient group. By the late 1960s, critics of this approach began to raise issues at EEF-sponsored conferences, objecting to the fact that medical experts were conceptualizing trans people and sex, gender and sexuality individualistically, discounting social and cultural contexts. Debate thus emerged as critics questioned the authoritative perspectives of medical experts, which were based on discourses of liberal transnormativity, but their critiques were limited to contexts in which liberal individualism remained the norm. For years activists have questioned medical standards and expectations about gender and sexuality. It is true that some gender identity clinics and treatment models have forced trans people to present themselves as heterosexual, gender- conforming people in order to gain access to medical treatments and procedures. The first chapter demonstrates, however, that a medical approach was central to early efforts on behalf of trans people.
In the second chapter, which concentrates on the years from 1971 to 1976, I argue that the EEF used educational, social, and media programs to expand its medicalized discourse of liberal transnormativity into various professional and public contexts. The EEF collaborated with authoritative advocates deemed to be “helping professionals” on a broad series of programs designed to promote mainstream understanding of trans people and decrease social stigma. EEF activists believed that key professional experts could educate and inform both the public and their professional peers to support trans people by acting as trans advocates and representing trans people as suffering from valid but misunderstood medical problems. At the same time, transsexuals who could personally represent the non-threatening idea that trans people simply needed greater social acceptance and better medical treatment became an important component of professional and public constructions of liberal transnormativity. In numerous educational programs, they represented transsexuals as people who could and did fit into mainstream, normative American society, provided they had could get access to appropriate medical treatment and professional support. While these programs recognized the social needs of transsexuals, trans people were represented by transsexuals publicly claiming that they suffered from a medical condition. Even as the programs emphasized the need for socio-cultural changes to support trans people, medicalization was reinforced by individualistic notions of the body and health as singular and distinct from their social and cultural contexts. Trans as an expression of a liberal individualism proliferated culturally through the voices of medical authorities, expert professionals, and transsexual representatives.

In the third chapter, I argue that by the mid-1970s, trans people working outside the medical framework were able to represent trans people as a more socially and politically
diverse group of people engaged with the broader gender and sexual politics of the era. Groups such as the Queen’s Liberation Front presupposed autonomous freedom of expression for a wider variety of trans people, including not just medically-legitimated transsexuals but also transvestites, drag queens, and those active in the commercial entertainment and sex industries. They argued against any external limitations being imposed on their gender presentations and railed against what they saw as conservative attempts to restrict their complex, sometimes stereotypical, sexual and gender expressions by some gays and lesbians. This chapter argues that despite interest in working politically with gays and lesbians, these trans communities faced distinct limitations in doing so. The result was a liberal discourse of transnormativity which advocated for economic and civil rights for trans people separate from gays and lesbians. Prioritizing individual freedom of expression, particularly in economic contexts of consumption and work proved a limited strategy, and by the end of the 1970s, transvestites and transsexual women were being overtly fetishized for commercial profit, sometimes in highly racist ways.

The final chapter examines the articulation of liberal transnormativity through political and economic activism in the tail-end of the period in question. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, a number of white, middle-class transsexuals began fighting openly against economic discrimination in health care and employment. I show that this new wave of transsexual advocates worked with legal and labor allies to argue that recent civil rights laws designed to protect American citizens from discrimination on the basis of sex and disability should apply to trans people. Advocates of liberal transnormativity during this period began representing trans people not simply as suffering from a medical condition or as members of sexual or gendered communities, but rather as people who could and should
be treated as deserving, respectable, rights-bearing citizens of the American nation-state. This expression of individual rights for trans people relied on liberal notions of equality and entitlement but ignored questions of class, race, and broader structural inequalities.

Each of these chapters demonstrates how fundamental liberal values were to framing trans people as a minority group in the United States during an era now often defined by current queer and trans scholarship in terms of pathologization and the rise of neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{36} This dissertation shows that trans people and advocates often used individualistic notions of self, identity, and personhood to argue for greater social and economic recognition, protection, and freedoms for trans people. Such a liberal framework overshadowed more radical critical social and economic discourses and played a central role in framing discourses of transnormativity in the United States between 1960 and 1990. As will become evident, liberal discourses of American transnormativity initially defined trans people as individuals in need of social recognition and medical treatment, and later drew on that medicalization to define liberal projects meant to achieve social, economic and political rights for trans people. The ways in which these advocates argued for trans people’s recognition in American culture were framed by abstract liberal values that failed to address the material and social inequalities of capitalism and race, making liberal transnormativities much less critical, and also by extension less radical than many of the critiques being developed by contemporary social movements. By extension, these efforts reinforced an association between trans people, gay and lesbian rights, and a colour-blind liberalism at the heart of liberal American transnormativities. Advocates of liberal

American transnormativities achieved many social gains between 1960 and 1990 and laid the groundwork for the more radical post-1990s transgender politics. Discourses of liberal American transnormativity also, however, sometimes also reproduced and entrenched the racial and economic structural inequalities of liberalism in U.S. society.
From 1964 to 1975, liberal American transnormativity was driven in large part by the Erickson Educational Foundation and its medical specialist allies. They focused on how to understand, recognize, classify, and treat a group of patients who, on the one hand, seemed to be articulating something in common, while on the other, seemed to be very diverse. It was unclear to early specialists who took a primarily medical approach, whether transsexualism was a distinct condition with varying degrees of severity or whether there were a number of different conditions. Since at least the late 1800s, medical and legal authorities in Europe and the U.S. largely constructed “cross-gender” behaviors, “gender transgression,” or “non-normative gender expression” as potentially distinct from, but often at least somewhat related to homosexuality. This was increasingly changing in the 1960s and 1970s as many clinicians, researchers, and Americans sought to make sense of those for whom gender seemed to be a more significant concern than sexual attraction. It was clear that there were distinct social, cultural, legal and medical issues raised by people who did not conform to the gendered cultural expectations of their assigned birth sex.

Broader discourses of liberal transnormativity blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s as it became increasingly possible to be diagnosed with some kind of medical condition and treated with hormone therapy and “conversion operations” or “sex-change surgeries” (later more formally called sex reassignment surgery). This was facilitated largely by the vision and support of Reed Erickson, a wealthy philanthropist and female-to-male transsexual, and the
interest and efforts of clinicians, researchers and other supporters. Throughout the early 1960s, Erickson worked with medical experts and homophile activists who were interested in expanding sexual and gender freedom and provided significant financial support for a range of projects in research, treatment, media campaigns and social change. These collaborative projects were particularly significant because many people in the mainstream medical community and broader homophile movement condemned, denied, or were otherwise negative towards people who sought to ‘change sex’ or the idea of doing so. Erickson supported the work of people addressing trans issues in numerous sectors.

The primary element of liberal American transnormativity established between 1964 and 1975 established by the EEF and its allies was that of medical authority and expertise. During these years, the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) and its collaborators also promoted the idea that there was a distinct group of people who should be considered as patients suffering from poorly understood medical conditions. This new patient group was originally imagined as consisting of transsexuals and sometimes also transvestites, but later broadened to include a wider group under the rubric of gender dysphoria. This chapter focuses specifically on the efforts of those who worked to create the conditions whereby some people would be able to identify and be understood as a distinct, medically-treatable minority group.

Essentially, this chapter argues that the ‘medical model’ was the basis of liberal American transnormativity between 1964 and 1975. During this early part of the broader period in question, scientific experts operating within the medical model were established as the appropriate authorities and they defined the group of people who would, by the 1990s,
become most readily recognized under the wider rubric of ‘transgender,’ largely through the mobilization of medical model expertise, specialists became regulators of what were in fact complex and diverse socio-cultural issues which they often over-simplistically and loosely described as individual problems of sex, gender, or sexuality. Their authority was based in deeply rooted norms of liberal individualism that assumed that individuals could be diagnosed, identified and treated by medical experts, regardless or in spite of socio-cultural context.

The roots of liberal transnormativity examined in this chapter in part typify what medical sociologists have called the recent socio-historical process of medicalization.37 Peter Conrad explains that as the medical profession expanded its jurisdiction resulting in the “medicalization of deviance” as “medical solutions” were “sought for a variety of deviant behaviors or conditions.”38 The concept of medicalization stems from a variety of 1960s critiques by public intellectuals like Thomas Szasz, R.D. Laing, Irving Goffman, Ivan Illich and Michel Foucault, all of whom objected to and historicized the increasing regulation of life by what was essentially conceptualized as the medical establishment. Historian Robert Nye writes that in these early conceptual formations of medicalization, “the real villains were the doctors, the psychiatrists, and behavioral scientists who had used their knowledge and authority to shore up the ‘establishment’ and to segregate and pathologize the recalcitrant.”39 This way of thinking became highly influential in later trans studies, and remains a powerful cultural narrative in debates about the costs of approaching gender and sexual diversity in medical or pathologizing terms.

More recent work in history and medical sociology, however, has built on and added important nuance to some of these early formulations of medicalization by outlining a process and period of biomedicalization. Adele Clarke, Janet Shim, Jennifer Ruth Fosket and Jennifer R. Fishman write that biomedicalization is a broader, more complex historical social process than medicalization, a process made evident by focusing on “technoscientific interventions not only for treatment but also increasingly for enhancement.” In their view, whereas theories of medicalization “typically emphasize exercising control over medical phenomena – diseases, illnesses, injuries, bodily modifications,” biomedicalization makes it possible to see that the establishment of medical authority was not simply a “top-down” enforcing of power by medical authorities over trans people.40

It will be clear from this chapter that there was often overlap between trans and intersex people and conditions in this regard, as practitioners sought to understand what they saw as related but different conditions. Current scholarship in trans and disability studies questions and politicizes the notion of the pathologized embodied individual, but this chapter demonstrates that from 1964 to 1975, proponents of liberal transnormativity embraced the medical model and their work contributed to the ways in which trans people were culturally defined as individuals in need of medical treatment. By foregrounding without discounting the medical framework established as the grounds for liberal American transnormativity, this chapter also contributes to and helps deepen historically-based scholarship and activism that has critiqued and questioned the medical model in relation to disability and intersexuality. For example, disability scholars like Tom Shakespeare, Rosemarie Garland Thompson, Lennard Davis and others have been at the forefront of identifying and engaging with the social model

of disability which sees disabilities as socially constructed rather than as pathologies defined
by medical norms.41 This chapter helps demonstrate that the field now known as transgender
medicine was established both with the input of some of the people treated as patients and
with the desire, at least by many of the specialists involved, to move beyond a pathologizing
model. This chapter highlights differences between particular variations of sex, gender and
sexuality with regards to medicine, medicalization, or the ‘medical model.’ For example, a
number of scholars have explored the histories of medicine and medicalization in relation to
people who are now referred to as intersex, emphasizing that the medical treatment of intersex
conditions is both deeply related to the history of medical research into sex, gender and
sexuality and to intersex people’s social and medical experiences.42 Essentially, the “medical
model” was more beneficial to trans people than to intersex people, a significant difference for
disability studies and “queer/crip” scholarship.

Historians of homophile and gay and lesbian movements have likewise noted that
during the period under examination in this chapter the gay and lesbian movement shifted
towards a critique of the medicalization of homosexuality and rejected medical models in
general.43 Relatedly, this chapter will also demonstrate that early proponents of a medical

41 Tom Shakespeare, Disability Rights and Wrongs (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29; Rosemarie Garland
Thompson, Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability (New York, Columbia University Press,
42 See Alice Domurat Dreger, Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Reis, “Impossible Hermaphrodites: Intersex in America, 1620-1960,”
Journal of American History 92.2 (September 2005): 411-441; Elizabeth Reis, Bodies in Doubt: An
American History of Intersex (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Margrit Shildrick, “The
Disabled Body, Genealogy and Undecidability,” Cultural Studies 19.6 (November 2005): 755-770; 756;
Franklin H. Romeo, “Beyond a Medical Model: Advocating for a New Conception of Gender Identity in
Social Model of Disability,” in The Disability Studies Reader (New York: Routledge, 2006), 197;
Stryker, Transgender History, 97-98.
43 John D’Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the
United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 140-142; Marc Stein, Rethinking
model for trans people saw their efforts as distinct from the pathologization of homosexuality. For example, this chapter covers the period during which homosexuality was becoming increasingly decriminalized and depathologized in the United States, Britain, and many other Western countries. During this period, both activists and scholars such as Vern Bullough, Jeffrey Weeks and Frank Kameny produced critiques of the medical model in works that traced the history of homosexuality as one of regulation, surveillance and pathologization. Bullough, for example, who received funding and support from Erickson, wrote in 1976, that “the continued classification of homosexuality as a pathology… indicates just how deeply Western prejudice has been embedded in the unconscious assumptions of the medical community.” Similarly, the following year, in his groundbreaking 1977 text *Coming Out*, Weeks wrote that the medical model “cast an enveloping shadow over homosexual consciousness” and “had its effects on the minds and behaviors of generations of homosexuals,” while having “nothing to do with real medicine or proper science.” This chapter’s focus on how early liberal transnormativity adopted a medical focus thus also deepens the social history of gender and sexuality and underscores the diversity of perspectives on medicine amongst sexual and gender minority groups. As Marc Stein writes about the 1960s, “One potential division between homophiles and transsexuals opened up as the former increasingly rejected the medicalization of homosexuality while the latter increasingly demanded medical services.” In other words, by highlighting the strategy of medicalization taken up in the early years of liberal American transnormativity, the chapter helps to reconsider the relationship between the history of homosexuality and the history of

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46 Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 69.
transgenderism.

While later critiques of medicalization have often focused on the ways in which the medical definition and treatment of transsexualism during this period forced a generation of people to conform to what often amounted to damaging norms and procedures, there are a number of important reasons that this chapter’s primary focus is not to critique medicalization as the main strategy of liberal transnormativity between 1964 and 1975. First, general critiques of medicalization have already been well-outlined in numerous ways, particularly in terms of medical specialists’ preference for creating patients who were interested in (and capable of) becoming passing, heterosexual, socially and economically successful people. Second, discussions of the ways in which medicalization and liberal transnormativity during this period shaped and were shaped by class, race, disability and other factors are limited by the fact that many medical files are confidential and very few records document such issues explicitly.

This chapter focuses on medicalization as the main strategy of early liberal transnormativity in order to demonstrate the sheer breadth and scope of work to redefine sex, gender and sexuality in ways that, it was hoped, would benefit a then ill-defined and much-maligned group of people now broadly referred to as “trans.” To simply criticize or reject those who supported this strategy as misguided because of some of the negative ramifications of their work misses the opportunity to see how sex, gender, sexuality, and other forms of

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physical and social embodiment have been radically and rapidly reconfigured through complex social processes in which varying interests and cultural contexts allow for and limit who it is possible to be and how. The definition of trans people as a distinct group in many ways began with people who saw transsexualism, specifically, as providing new opportunities to live embodied gendered and sexualized lives that are now recognizable as trans.

Structurally, this chapter traces three key components of the historical development of liberal transnormativity in this early period. First, it looks at how the EEF developed networks of medical and professional experts specifically focused on research, diagnosis and treatment. Second, it looks at the EEF’s work with homophile activists and medical specialists to establish cultural authority for medical specialists with regards to diagnosing and treating expressions of sex, gender or sexuality that would today be recognized as ‘trans’ – that is, people who had some sense of cross-gender identification or behavior. Finally, it demonstrates that from 1969 onwards critics like transvestite-leader Virginia Prince began publicly challenging medical specialists to adopt a more critical socio-cultural perspective on sex, gender and sexuality by questioning whether medical authority and a medically-oriented approach was appropriate or beneficial.

Overall, this chapter focuses on efforts to counteract what would today be recognized as institutional transphobia and cis-centrism. Early trans advocates operated in contexts where people indicating any kind of cross-gender desires would have been heavily pathologized, and likely institutionalized as suffering from severe mental illness. The chapter argues that between 1964 and 1969 the EEF, medical experts, and homophiles collaborated to establish a discourse of liberal transnormativity that constructed medical experts as those
most qualified to define and discuss transsexualism and related medical issues while defining transsexuals as a distinct patient population. By 1969, diagnostic and treatment options were broadening as specialists recognized greater complexity and critics began using a socially-based perspective to challenge the authority, norms and assumptions of medical specialists. The underlying framework animating these early discourses of liberal American transnormativity were medical in nature and even critics of this model framed their critiques in relation to medical research, expertise and concerns.

Establishing Medical Expertise

The collaboration between the EEF, homophile activists and medical specialists that emerged in the 1960s was part of a broader historical effort to decriminalize and destigmatize certain groups of people who had previously been considered sexually and socially deviant. Members of sexual minorities had worked with medical researchers to study sexual behaviors considered criminal or pathological as early as the late 19th century in Europe and the 1920s in the United States.48 During the 1940s and 1950s, Alfred Kinsey and his research associates at the Kinsey Institute had used scientific research methods to debunk irrational social stigmatization of those considered sexually deviant. Kinsey’s work

sparked controversy, however. Many considered it controversial to study human sexuality at all, and sex researchers often had to contend with social resistance. Furthermore, laws and medical treatments designed to punish or ‘cure’ stigmatized sexual and gendered behaviors meant that the accusation of “sexual deviance” was broadly applied to a wide range of people, including those who today are defined as trans, queer, gay, lesbian or bisexual, as well as those now referred to as “sex offenders.” When Reed Erickson decided to start the EEF, his primary aim was to fund research that could save transsexuals from the stigma of sexual deviancy. As Erickson, homophile activists and medical specialists worked together to support medico-scientific work that would benefit transsexuals, they followed in the footsteps of other patient/researcher collaborators who had demonstrated that it was possible for previously stigmatized people to shed the label of sexual deviancy and prove themselves to be contributing members of mainstream American society.

Erickson is best known as a wealthy, eccentric philanthropist and female-to-male transsexual. He was born in 1917 in Texas and grew up in Philadelphia, raised as a girl, and

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50 Minton, Departing from Deviance, 94-121.
often called “Eric” by friends. After Erickson’s father moved the family to Louisiana, Erickson became the first female graduate of the school of mechanical engineering at Louisiana State University. Erickson then returned to Philadelphia and lived with a female partner in a lesbian relationship. There they participated in leftist political activities, including the 1948 Progressive Party U.S. presidential campaign of former Vice President Henry Wallace, a campaign supported by many gays and lesbians. In the late 1950s, Erickson began taking testosterone to masculinize his appearance. After his father died in 1962, Erickson inherited the family business, and over the course of his life he ran it successfully, amassing over $40 million dollars in personal wealth. In 1963, he became a patient of Dr. Harry Benjamin, famed “father of transsexualism.”

Harry Benjamin in many ways defined transsexualism. Trained as a general practitioner and gerontologist in Germany, he had a particular interest in the effects of hormone therapy. He immigrated to the United States in 1914. In the late 1940s, Kinsey consulted with him about a patient to whom Benjamin began administering cross-gender hormone therapy. Throughout the 1950s, he was one of the few physicians in the country who would do so, and he published articles in medical journals in support of this controversial treatment. He also regularly traveled in progressive social circles that included many sexual and gender minorities and acted as a medical supporter for both transsexuals and homophiles.

52 Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed, 45-49; Susan Stryker, Transgender History, 44-45; Judith M.
In 1964, Erickson formed three collaborative organizations: the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF), the Harry Benjamin Foundation (HBF), and the Institute for Human Resources (ISHR). The EEF, Erickson’s private foundation, provided funds, oversight, guidance, and resources for other organizations and specific projects. ISHR was a financial shell organization designed to support the work of ONE, Inc., a homophile group based in Los Angeles that Erickson courted, supported, and worked with to develop programs that were beneficial for both transsexuals and homosexuals. HBF, a clinical research group, was to provide leadership in medical and scientific research. All three groups worked to develop medical expertise that would benefit transsexuals, with HBF acting as the initial incubator for establishing medical expertise in transsexualism.

Erickson provided the financial backing for HBF and saw his investment as an opportunity for Benjamin to turn his clinical experience into formal medico-scientific research. Erickson’s first grant to the HBF was to support Benjamin's plan to translate his existing patient files into research data. Erickson and Benjamin saw this as an opportunity to expand medical understanding and treatment for trans people. Benjamin was in a unique position to advance the social acceptance of transsexuality as a legitimate medical condition because of his extensive work with transsexuals. Benjamin had already begun to do so with the publication of scholarly articles, and it was hoped that Erickson’s support would allow him to do so in a more influential way.

HBF brought together a number of budding clinical and research specialists interested

in understanding and developing treatments for transsexualism. At meetings in Benjamin’s New York office, specialists such as Wardell Pomeroy and Ruth Doorbar of the Kinsey Institute and Henry Guze and John Money of the Johns Hopkins University Hospital discussed their transsexual patients and presented their clinical and research findings. In 1965 HBF participants discussed Benjamin’s twelve (sometimes overlapping) “aims” of the foundation, which essentially were broad questions to consider as they discussed their patients: Were the causes of transvestism and transsexualism “external or internal”? Did transvestites and transsexuals represent “different people or a continuum”? Were they observing a “progressive phenomenon”? Was there a continuum between homosexuality, transvestism and transsexuality? What were the effects of hormone therapy? Were “conversion operations” effective? Was transsexualism “a psychotic reaction to frustration or a part of a psychosis? Similarly, was transsexualism “a partial psychosis”? Finally, were there moral or legal justifications to reject “conversion operation being justified”?  

Both the Erickson Educational Foundation and the Harry Benjamin Foundation combined broad goals and a more specific interest in transsexuality. One pamphlet announced that “research and education are the twin goals of the Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation,” while the EEF often stated that its mission was to “provide assistant and support in areas where human potential was limited by adverse physical, mental or social conditions, or where the scope of research was too new, controversial or imaginative to receive more traditionally oriented support.”

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53 “Meeting of Committee Member of Harry Benjamin Foundation,” April 30, 1965: 1-4.  
54 Pamphlet, *Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation*, (c.1964), 2, published in New York City by the Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation Inc. I consulted this document while collecting archival materials concerning the Erickson Foundation from Monica Erickson, with Prof. Aaron H. Devor; this material is now in the personal collection of Aaron Devor, University of Victoria; hereafter
and analysis of his patient files as well as follow-up studies with “patients who have become established as members of the opposite sex.” The EEF’s projects, in contrast, were much more wide ranging.

Erickson was the only non-medical specialist to attend the HBF meetings. Although Benjamin and some of the other specialists were aware that Erickson was himself transsexual, he rarely presented himself as such, instead emphasizing his position as supportive benefactor. In 1965 Benjamin reminded him to consider strictly confidential all the information presented at the meetings, especially patients’ names. Through the 1960s, trans people themselves were typically included within medical discourses only when being discussed as patients, a framework that limited the kind of open discourse afforded to medical experts. Reed Erickson and Christine Jorgensen were considered exceptions, in that they played important roles in supporting the recognition of medical expertise and the social validation of hormone therapy, sex reassignment surgery, and transsexuality.

HBF was designed primarily to expand medical experts’ opportunities for further research into transsexualism, but the question of how to best present and explain their work to the public was complicated initially by the social stigma of sexual deviancy and by the fact that the group’s ideas were still in formation. John Money suggested adding a subtitle to the organization’s name, making it “The Harry Benjamin Foundation: for research in gender identity.” Benjamin objected, however, telling Erickson that he was “not enthusiastic about

cited as Devor Collection. See also “Avant Garde in Concept,” EEF Newsletter 1.1 (Spring 1968), Devor Collection.
55 Pamphlet, Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation, (c.1964), 2-3, Devor Collection.
57 Harry Benjamin to Reed Erickson, June 17, 1965, Kinsey Institute Archives, Harry Benjamin Collection, Box 1 Series 1C, Folder 6; Pamphlet, Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation, (c.1964), 2-3, Devor Collection.
the term ‘identity,’ which he thought would be misunderstood by “the majority of interested people, many of them laymen.” While he did not further explain his resistance to “identity,” Benjamin suggested that the foundation could be described as supporting “research in gender role orientation,” which was language that Pomeroy also apparently preferred. Benjamin also thought it "best to leave out 'sex,'" as this would help the foundation “avoid controversy." The group’s discussion about potential names for the foundation highlights the extent to which these specialists framed their work in relation to the social stigma associated with sex and the extent to which ‘gender’ was seen as a more culturally palatable term. In the end, the organization was usually simply referred to as the Harry Benjamin Foundation, though the organization's literature used many name variations. After the HBF dissolved, its successor organization was called the Benjamin Gender Identity Research Foundation, Inc.58

Benjamin and Erickson’s relationship soon became strained because of financial and interpersonal conflicts and by the fact that Erickson was pushing Benjamin to work harder to legitimate transsexuality at a time in Benjamin’s life when he wanted to start winding down his career. Although Benjamin had been an active public advocate of transsexuals for many years, he found Erickson to be too unrealistic and demanding and by 1967 he insisted that if the HBF were to continue, its new president and director of research had to be "a professional man.” His dissatisfaction with Erickson was veiled in the language of professionalism, and Benjamin also wrote that in 1967 he had experienced "the flagrant ingratitude of a former patient who betrayed the trust I had placed in him.”59 In a 1967 letter to Erickson he wrote: “Far be it for me to overlook the fact that you have given money to good causes, but you

58 Harry Benjamin to Reed Erickson, February 2, 1966; Kinsey Institute Archives, Harry Benjamin Collection, Box 1 Series 1C, Folder 6.
cared little for the welfare and comfort of those who worked with and for you." 60 Benjamin resented the fact that Erickson was not fulfilling his financial commitments and mistrusting Benjamin, leaving Benjamin to pay many agreed upon expenses from his own personal funds. Despite the unraveling of the HBF in the late 1960s, it was highly successful in establishing a network of medical experts interested in promoting medical research and expertise that defined diagnostic and treatment options for trans people. As will become evident, the HBF, with Erickson’s support, also laid the groundwork for major expansion in the field of transsexual research and medicine.

One of the first major public outcomes of Benjamin’s work and Erickson’s support was the publication of Benjamin’s influential text *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966. In it, he discussed his work with and treatment of a range of patients. It was his contention that certain individuals would benefit from being able to live as the ‘opposite sex’ by taking hormones and undergoing ‘conversion operations.’ Benjamin believed that popular prejudices that stigmatized such notions should be disregarded and that proper medical study of transvestites and transsexuals should determine whether and when physiological treatments were in order. He developed a “Sex Orientation Scale,” which was much like Kinsey’s scale, but rather than constructing a sexual attraction and behavior scale, it constructed a gender continuum between transvestites and transsexuals. Essentially, he defined transsexuals as those identifying entirely with the “opposite sex” and requiring hormone therapy and surgeries, while he defined transvestites as those whose need to cross-dress was not as permanent. Another important feature was that transsexuals were defined as largely asexual,

60 Harry Benjamin to Reed Erickson, September 5, 1967, Kinsey Institute Archives, Harry Benjamin Collection, Box 1, Series 1C, Folder 6.
while transvestites were thought to be more sexually motivated. In the coming years, Benjamin’s original scale remained remarkably unchanged as researchers used it as a basis for their explorations.\(^{61}\)

As Erickson’s relationship with Benjamin deteriorated, he became more involved with John Money, whose work he saw as increasingly promising, and in 1966 Erickson provided the funds for Money to establish the first gender clinic in North America at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Erickson saw the Hopkins clinic as an opportunity to extend the work being done through the HBF. He agreed to pay not only for the costs associated with forming a gender identity treatment clinic but also for the sex reassignment surgery of a patient who medical specialists had deemed a viable candidate. The Hopkins clinic was intended to be a pilot project; Money and his team would investigate the diagnosis and treatment of transsexualism and develop study results that proved whether or not sex reassignment surgery (“SRS”) alleviated transsexualism, essentially testing Benjamin’s conviction that it would. Erickson saw the clinic as promising not only because of the immediate benefits for patients but also because Hopkins could provide a model for new clinics to follow as well as an institutional context in which new specialists could be trained.

After Benjamin, Money was one of the most influential medical experts on what was colloquially referred to as ‘changing sex.’ Where Benjamin was more of a clinician interested in treating transsexuals, Money was more of an academic and experimental gender researcher. Originally from New Zealand, Money had completed a dissertation on intersexuality at Harvard University in 1952 and was a professor of pediatrics and medical psychology at Johns

Hopkins University. In the 1950s, Money introduced the concept of gender as an individualistic “role” or “identity” that a person enacted or experienced in a social environment, which he viewed as distinct from their physiological sex make-up.\(^6^2\) Distinguishing physiological sex from gender role or identity was an essential concept and a rationale for considering sex reassignment surgery as an option for both intersex and trans people. While Benjamin had called for sympathetic treatment of transsexuals, Money provided a theoretical and scientific framework for doing so.

Money’s work on gender was based on the medico-scientific assumption that an objective, normative theory of human sexual development could be established and that deviations from the norm could be treated. Theoretically, interruptions of an individual’s normal sexual development might occur at any of Money’s many theorized stages. According to Money, from a child's conception to adulthood, normal sexual development proceeded along a long and diverse potential path of sex stages, from genetic or chromosomal sex to gonadal sex to fetal hormonal sex to internal morphologic sex to external morphologic sex to hypothalamic sex to sex of assignment and rearing to pubertal hormonal sex to gender identity and role to procreative sex impairments.\(^6^3\)

Money worked with his colleagues to develop the first gender identity clinic and, with Erickson’s continued financial support, Johns Hopkins became a training hub for experts who


could go on to provide transsexuals with both clinical treatment and cultural legitimacy. With
the clinic established, Erickson continued to develop and expand the expert network of
medical specialists by providing EEF grants to various budding researchers and clinicians
interested in training there to work with transsexual patients. The expectation was that these
specialists would continue to advance knowledge about transsexualism and establish further
treatment options for transsexuals, which many did. For example, the EEF gave Paul Walker
a grant during his PhD candidacy to train as an assistant to John Money and Walker later
became the director of a gender clinic at the University of Texas Medical Branch in
Galveston.  

Similarly, the EEF provided a postdoctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins to Anke
Ehrhardt, who would go on to become a specialist in psychoendrocrinology at the Department
of Pediatrics at SUNY-Buffalo and who, according to the *EEF Newsletter*, was “frequently
called on for professionals lectures” owing to her “expertise in hormonal and sexual
disorders.”  

Likewise, clinical psychologist John G. Brennan received an EEF grant for the
“collecting and evaluation of research data at the Gender Identity Clinic.”  

These grants are
evidence of the hope that work at the Hopkins clinic would have a lasting impact in addition to
its immediate clinical benefits.

Throughout the 1960s, medical expertise was an important component of liberal
transnormativity as communities of researchers and clinicians who shared similar concerns
and frameworks began their efforts to understand and treat transsexuality. By the late 1960s,
these experts were poised to be the primary voices in professional and public discussions that

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65 Matte and Devor, “Building a Better World,” 60; “From Baltimore to Buffalo,” *EEF Newsletter* 3.2 (Fall
1970), 4, Devor Collection.
defined trans people and issues. Experts like Benjamin, Money, and others all understood sex (at least partially) from a scientific perspective and sought to identify norms and deviations that would define trans people as suffering from illnesses that medical experts could treat.

This framework was a significant development in the discourse of liberal transnormativity because it reinforced divisions between "experts" and "patients" and further entrenched the medicalization of trans people that had been popularized by the media’s portrayal of Christine Jorgensen’s ‘sex change’ in the 1950s.67

Throughout the 1960s, the EEF and its collaborators focused primarily on developing networks of medical professionals and researchers interested in the definition and treatment of transsexualism. In the late 1960s, the EEF began more actively and publicly promoting the authority of these newly established medical specialists in the burgeoning field of transsexual medicine.

Promoting Medical Authority

In 1968, the EEF began publishing a newsletter that would further extend and develop the network of specialists that had been building through collaborative efforts such as the HBF and the Johns Hopkins Gender Clinic, as well as publicize and promote their efforts and authority. Erickson paid to have the quarterly EEF newsletter distributed free of charge and used its mailing list of 20,000 professional and other contacts to make it a very widely circulating source of information and networking among clinicians, researchers and other

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professionals. Because the EEF focused on constituting a community of non-transsexual specialist readers who could act as advocates for transsexuals, however, the newsletter rarely addressed or featured the voices of transsexuals, not even Erickson’s.

The EEF operated under the assumption that scientific success would result in social progress and that specialist discussions about medical and social issues would directly benefit transsexuals. Although this assumption was usually unstated within the EEF’s celebratory progress narratives, it did explicitly refer to some of the specific tangible benefits it hoped to achieve in one of its main goals: “to establish a network of concerned physicians throughout the United States and Canada, who will be sympathetic to transsexuals and administer tests and treatment where indicated.”

It also constructed transsexuals in terms designed to elicit the sympathy and pity of non-transsexual readers to show that transsexuals were worthy of aid. For example, it frequently referred to “the plight of transsexuals” and “the problem of transsexuality.”

As it promoted medical authority, the EEF newsletter defined trans people as a distinct patient group suffering from a pathological condition, a group that remained largely silent in the pages of the EEF newsletter.

The EEF newsletter presented specialists who endorsed sex reassignment surgery as invaluable socio-cultural resources. Sex reassignment surgery had been so contested in the United States throughout the 1950s and 1960s that it was illegal in many places for doctors to treat transsexuals with hormones or surgery. This left both patients and medical

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70 Pamphlet, Erickson Educational Foundation, Information on Transsexualism for Law Enforcement Officers (Baton Rouge, LA: February, 1974), 17; initially consulted via the Devor Collection; now available at the Transgender Archives, University of Victoria at [http://hdl.handle.net/1828/4088](http://hdl.handle.net/1828/4088).

professionals who wanted to treat transsexualism with hormones and surgery at risk, with few options. One of the EEF’s tactics, therefore, was to promote specialists who would fight to have sex reassignment surgery accepted socially, legally, and medically. For example, it told newsletter readers that Benjamin, along with Robert Levidow, an advocate for transsexual legal rights and an EEF-affiliated lawyer, had given a talk to the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy called “Should surgery be performed on transsexuals?” According to the newsletter, Benjamin and Levidow answered the question with a resounding and authoritative “yes.”

Similarly, the EEF told readers that Money and Jones, both from Johns Hopkins, had given a talk to the Chicago International Meeting of the Society of Pediatric Urology and held a symposium on “the current Status of the Sex Reassignment Operation” for Hopkins’s Departments of Urology, Neurology and Psychiatry, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

In the face of public skepticism about sex reassignment surgeries, the EEF promoted specialists’ authority to define who was a ‘true transsexual’ and who should and should not be operated upon. Arguing against a ‘surgery on demand’ approach, both specialists and the EEF stressed the importance of proper diagnosis and medical supervision, encouraging potential patients to defer to the judgment of specialists. It told newsletter readers that Money had heard of two male-to-female transsexuals who had regretted undergoing surgery and recommended that “candidates for transsexual surgery can safeguard themselves against regret by considering surgery not the first but the last step in their rehabilitation as a member of the other sex.”

By providing an ongoing public platform in its newsletter, the EEF gave

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medical specialists like Money the opportunity to promote the idea that transsexuals required proper medical authorization before undergoing sex reassignment surgery.

The EEF newsletter was careful to build the impression that sex reassignment surgery and gender clinics were the ideal solution to transsexualism and assured its readers that specialists were supportive of these methods. For example, when the EEF reported that the first sex reassignment surgery had been performed at “a city hospital,” it drew on a number of experts to construct the operation as a success, telling readers that the Harvard University plastic surgeon and former member of the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic who had performed the surgery confirmed that “a psychiatrist, urologist and a gynecologist were in consultation before the decision was made.” Furthermore, the unnamed surgeon reportedly stated that “there was no question in his mind that the operation was justified from the medical point of view.” The EEF told readers that the Commissioner of Health and Hospitals said that “he considered the surgery difficult to turn down,” in that “a patient presented herself with a genetic defect, suffering physically and emotionally with the possibility of serious psychiatric problems if the surgery were not done.”75 In providing such coverage, the EEF newsletter played a key role in promoting the idea that transsexuals constituted a distinct patient group over whom medical specialists should act as the ultimate authorities.

In addition to broadly promoting medical specialists’ authority over diagnosing and treating transsexualism, the EEF also continued to build and promote medical authority and networks by creating an advisory board, which it populated with well-recognized and

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75 Ibid.
respected clinicians and researchers. These included Charles Bahn, Association Professor of Psychology at The City University of New York; New York City endocrinologist and gynecologist Leo Wollman; criminologist Marie Mehl; psychotherapist Evelyn Hooker; and many others, all of whom had advanced degrees in medical and other fields. The advisory board was largely honorific, but it emphasized that the EEF was working with specialists at the highest academic institutions and leant further legitimacy to both the EEF and medical specialists who supported sex reassignment surgery.

In reporting on the professional activities of its advisory board members, the EEF highlighted its commitment to supporting progressive sex researchers such as Hooker, who were presented as leading advocates of social change. In the 1950s, Hooker had worked on a major government-funded research study with the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to examine a group of homosexuals who were considered to be functioning normally in mainstream society; the study had challenged the social stigma against homosexuality by providing scientific evidence that many homosexuals were not, in fact, mentally unstable. Whereas previous studies of homosexuality had often focused on prisoners or psychiatric patients and concluded that homosexuals had criminal tendencies or were mentally ill, Hooker had drawn attention to the ways that researchers’ heteronormative assumptions had led them to present gays and lesbians as sexual deviants.

The EEF called Hooker’s work with the NIMH “a step forward” and used her

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experiences as a sex researcher working to depathologize homosexuality to highlight the fact that funding for such efforts was in short supply. For example, the EEF newsletter told readers that the government had no plans to follow through with the NIMH committee's recommendation that a Center for the Study of Sexual Behavior be established. When the government tried to bury Hooker’s “Final Report of the NIMH Task Force on Homosexuality,” the EEF funded its publication and distribution through the homophile group ONE, Inc. For the EEF, Hooker’s work was proof that scientists could conduct studies that debunked the notion that sexual minorities were criminal or deviant. Researchers like Hooker attracted Erickson’s interest because he wanted to support and publicize under-funded sex research that he saw as progressive. Reporting on her project, supporting her work, and recruiting her for the advisory board implicitly highlighted what were seen as potentially useful similarities between legitimizing homosexuality and legitimizing transsexuality through scientific research and advocacy.

Erickson also collaborated with ONE, Inc. to promote a medically-defined discourse of liberal transnormativity. This Los Angeles-based organization had been publishing one of the major nationally-circulating homophile publications since the early 1950s, as well as hosting educational programs, and Erickson likely knew of the organization because of his lifelong ties to gay and lesbian communities on the East Coast. When ONE issued a

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80 Devor and Matte, “ONE Inc. and Reed Erickson,” 193.  
national appeal for financial support in 1953, Erickson invited a representative of the organization to his home in Louisiana to discuss funding possibilities. Dorr Legg, one of the organization’s leaders, later recalled that when Erickson sent him an airplane ticket, his colleagues and friends thought that he was simply being invited to entertain some “southern queen for the weekend,” an assumption that demonstrates that Erickson had not presented himself explicitly as a female-to-male transsexual. Erickson asked Legg to identify specific projects his organization would like to undertake, and when he heard about the idea of a large-scale bibliography project to compile all existing research on homosexuality, Erickson agreed to fund it. A first installment of $10,000 arrived for the “Research Study Project in the Bibliography of Homosexuality” shortly after Legg’s return to Los Angeles, solidifying Erickon’s commitment. In 1966, One, Inc. published its first version of “An Annotated Bibliography of Homosexuality,” the first of many collaborative ventures between the EEF and homophile groups.82

Erickson and the EEF’s relationship with One, Inc. and other homophile groups raises many questions about how they understood differences and similarities between homosexuality and transsexuality and the politics of their distinct and mutual efforts. EEF literature explained the connection between homophile and transsexual activism in terms of their mutual interest in a general broadening of sexual acceptance or in terms of populations that often overlapped socially. Erickson had certainly been involved in gay and lesbian communities before transitioning, and his support for homophile activism seems directly

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related to that historical sense of kinship. As for why One, Inc. was interested in supporting transsexuality, the organization and its publications often situated homosexuality within a larger universe of gender and sexual politics, focusing attention, for example, on the politics of sex work, sexual censorship, and sexual reproduction, even when these did not relate directly to gay and lesbian agendas. As was the case with Erickson, homophile activists also lived in social and cultural communities that included transsexuals. In addition, Loftin, White, Stein, and other historians of gay and lesbian politics have demonstrated that by the mid- to late-1960s One was in decline and no longer represented the leading edge of gay and lesbian politics. It was in fact Erickson’s financial support that allowed One, Inc. to continue to exist after a series of divisive splits almost destroyed the organization. Moreover, it was during the years of Erickson’s support that the One Institute was founded and became the first institution to offer accredited graduate degrees in sexuality studies. Thus, it was likely a combination of shared histories, coalition politics, material interests, and similar support for the work of sympathetic experts and researchers that bridged the gaps between Erickson and the homophiles with whom he worked.

Erickson’s collaborations with American homophile activists at One also resulted in important connections with British homophiles during the late 1960s. The EEF became involved with the British Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) through Legg, who met Antony Grey, the group’s leader, while in London. Shortly after their meeting, Erickson

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agreed to sponsor a month-long speaking tour of the United States in which Grey would discuss homophile legal reform efforts in Britain. HLRS had originally been formed in 1958 to pressure the British government to follow through on the Wolfenden Report, which had been commissioned by the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution and advocated the decriminalization of homosexuality. Erickson assigned Zelda Supplee, an EEF employee who was quickly becoming its public face, as Grey’s press secretary for the tour. She accompanied him to more than 25 events, including public lectures as well as appearances on television and radio. The hope was that Americans could learn from British homophile efforts.

Building on these connections, in 1969 the EEF, medical specialists, and British homophiles collaborated to host a gathering in London called “The 1st International Conference on Gender Identity Disorder: Aims and Functions of a Gender Identity Unit.” The conference, cosponsored by the EEF and the Albany Trust (the charitable wing of the HLRS), adopted the newly coined term “Gender Identity Disorder,” signaling a shift away from a discourse of homosexuality, transvestism and transsexuality and toward more refined medical diagnostic criteria and treatment programs. The stated purpose of the conference was to “encourage and co-ordinate an intensive programme of study and help” and spur “the international co-operation of scientists, researchers, teachers and social workers, as well as the assistance of socially concerned citizens.”

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87 Devor and Matte, “ONE Inc. and Reed Erickson,” 193-4.
gender clinics in the United States, defined the primary problem as a lack of adequate medical
care for transsexuals, and promoted the formation of more gender identity units, which were
clinics composed of interdisciplinary teams of specialists, as the solution.

The first conference extended the growing international network of specialists, giving
participants an opportunity to define a seemingly culturally-neutral, objectively scientific
diagnosis of pathological gender conditions and allowing budding experts to discuss similar
plans for treating transsexuality. Conceptual frameworks and research on intersexuality in both
countries had provided institutional contexts and experts who could consider treating
transsexuals as a related, albeit distinct, patient group. Just as Money’s work on transsexuality
in the United States had emerged from his research on intersexuality, British specialist C.J,
Dewhurst, who chaired the conference, had been studying intersexuality and considered
transvestites and transsexuals to be “non-physical” variations of intersexed conditions.89 That
both countries had homophile groups and researchers who were interested in treating
transsexualism and intersexuality was significant. The EEF encouraged and promoted
transsexualism as a socially valid medical condition and transsexuals as a distinct social group
by drawing on and working with homophile activists and medical specialists.

The EEF saw the London conference as an opportunity to build the social authority of
gender specialists and use their authority to make a public appeal for greater social acceptance
of transsexuals and sex reassignment surgery. Organizers issued a press release inviting
mainstream British media to attend a special session at the end of the conference where
specialists would answer questions from the press and explain the purpose of the conference.

89 Christopher Dewhurst, The Intersexual Disorders (London: Baillière, Tindall & Cassell, 1969), 103-
106; Transcript of First International Symposium on Gender Identity, July 1969, London, Devor
Collection.
At the press conference, medical specialists were also able to publicly establish their authoritative explanations in the budding field of transsexuality and sex and gender disorders. Organizers explained that the mainstream media and general public had been purposefully excluded from the more substantial parts of the conference because it was felt that their presence “might inhibit a free exchange of ideas amongst specialists.” By emphasizing the scientific complexity of the topics under discussion and defining appropriate limits on who could and should have authority over trans discourses, such publicity efforts extended medical authority over transsexualism and promoted transnormative frameworks for the general public.

The conference organizers did make copies of the conference proceedings available at the press conference and encouraged the mainstream media to spread the message that transsexuals were a specific group of people suffering from a medical condition for which they deserved treatment. They asked media representatives to report on the conference, but cautioned them to be aware of their own role in constructing and stigmatizing transsexuality. The press kit told reporters: “‘Sex change’ is a topic that easily lends itself to sensationalism and highly coloured reports which can sometimes bring great distress to those involved.” It described transsexuals as pitiable people in need of all the help they could get, people who were “often socially maladjusted and, if denied positive help, may commit suicide.” Furthermore, the press kit told reporters that transsexuality was a condition that affected 1 in 100,000 children and that a great deal of their suffering could be relieved if society would

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91 Ibid., 1.
recognize the value of human beings who were considered socially or sexually deviant. This was important given the history of eugenics in the United States, and the fact that it had been common to institutionalize and forcibly sterilize those considered “sexually deviant.”

Conference organizers told the press that one of their goals was to raise awareness about transsexualism and “the need to reduce social waste and human misery associated with it.”

Thus, the EEF promoted medical authority and medical solutions to the broader public, whom it hoped would see transsexuals with sympathy as opposed to disdain.

While the first conference clearly contributed to a medically-oriented discourse of liberal transnormativity, U.S. transvestite leader Virginia Prince also used it to challenge the ideas and assumptions being developed by medical and research experts. Prince’s magazine *Transvestia*, which began publishing in 1960, circulated throughout the United States and other English-speaking countries, particularly Canada, Britain and Australia, and had created a social network of mainly closeted, heterosexual transvestites, making her a knowledgeable and powerful figure in the underground social world of transvestites. At the 1969 London conference, Prince spoke out against what she saw as specialists’ misunderstanding of sex, gender and sexuality. During one of the discussion periods, Prince vehemently disputed their conflation of the concepts of “gender identity” and “transsexualism” and their conviction that gender identity units and sex reassignment surgeries would resolve the problems of the

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94 Registration and Program Pamphlet, *First International Symposium on Gender Identity*.
patients seeking their assistance. Prince was the only person at the conference to go on record
publicly as personally experiencing the gender identity “issues” under discussion.
Participation in the conference was limited to specialists, but Prince was able to attend
because she had a Ph.D. in chemistry, an academic credential she used to establish herself
among professional researchers and clinicians. As was the case with Erickson, Prince’s class
privilege also allowed her to participate in discussions that were otherwise closed to trans
people.

Prince questioned experts’ claim that a medical transformation of a person’s physical
sex characteristics would resolve their desire to live in “the opposite” gender. Based on her
personal and social experiences, she felt that this was not always the best solution. Prince was
confident that she was better equipped to understand and explain sex and gender than many of
the specialists because she was acquainted with hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of
transvestites, many of whom were not available to sex researchers. Her open critique at the
London conference represented one of the first public interventions where a trans person
critiqued the emerging strategy of prioritizing medical experts as the best advocates for trans
people. As the EEF, homophile activists and medical specialists promoted this key element of
liberal transnormativity, Prince questioned it.

Despite Prince’s concerns, the EEF remained focused on building gender identity
clinics where medical specialists could further define, diagnose and treat pathological gender
conditions. The EEF clearly saw these specialists as playing key roles in a massive global
project to expand transsexual research and treatment. The conference constructed gender
identity clinics as a sign of national progress and encouraged British specialists to follow the
lead of their U.S. counterparts. For example, conference participants heard that six gender
units were already providing hundreds of U.S. patients with hormone therapy and surgery, but that no permanent gender identity units had been formed in Britain. In the wake of the first conference, the EEF announced to newsletter readers that it was working with the Chelsea Hospital for Women in London and the chair of the conference to establish the first gender identity clinic in Britain. The EEF committed funding for the clinic for at least a year and told its newsletter readers that it was happy to “help this progressive project.” Despite Prince's concerns, the project of establishing and promoting gender clinics to treat transsexuals further developed the discourse of liberal transnormativity based on medical authority.

In 1971, the EEF sponsored a second international conference in Elsinore, Denmark, which it presented as a major event in the growth of a global specialty field. The promotional pamphlet for the Danish conference repeated the exact same wording as that of the London conference, telling potential participants that as had been the case with the first symposium, the aim was “to focus attention on the problem of gender identity disorientation, not only as a psychiatric entity but as an area requiring specialized medical study and treatment as well as social understanding.” The EEF again declared that transsexuals were “maladjusted” individuals who might commit suicide without treatment and invited “professionals wishing to attend” to contact the EEF for more information. Since one of the goals of these international conferences was to build relationships between researchers, clinicians and other experts who could represent transsexuality as a legitimate medical condition, trans people and others who might have disputed or complicated the norms being established there were largely excluded from participating.

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97 Pamphlet, Second International Symposium on Gender Identity, Devor Collection.
The Elsinore conference program emphasized the idea that experts around the world should both push for social acceptance within their own cultural contexts and work to expand the field of transsexual medicine globally. This was made most explicit in a presentation called “International Plea for National Treatment of Transsexuals.” A whole morning of the program was devoted to “international questions” and included representatives from different nations who discussed “transsexual treatment” in their respective countries. One specialist, for example, gave a presentation titled “Transsexualism in Japan and Its Future Management.”

Although U.S. experts considered themselves global leaders, other experts were included to represent their nation or culture. If trans people from different nations had been included, there might have been a greater sense of difference in personal, gender and sexual expressions and experiences. Instead, medical experts shored up such differences under the diagnosis of transsexuality and constructed socio-cultural questions in terms of what was possible for transsexuals and the clinicians who worked for them in different cultural contexts. Thus, medico-scientific researchers constructed transsexuality as both an objectively valid medical condition and a universal condition that crossed national borders.

The EEF newsletter similarly billed the third international conference, which was held in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, as a prestigious professional opportunity for specialists to network with one another and engage in expert discussions. The EEF told its newsletter readers that the conference was a response to “the growing worldwide attention to gender identity problems” and reflected “the keen interest evoked by the First Symposium in London… and

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the second in Copenhagen. At this third exclusive gathering, the EEF continued to foster an international, interdisciplinary research culture, one that discouraged social controversy or dissent by focusing on the concerns of specialists who were either open advocates of the usefulness of hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery as treatment options for trans people or open to the possibility of learning about their use.

The EEF and medical specialists also continued to limit any counter-discursive constructions of sex, gender, transsexuality or sex and gender variance that developed outside of medico-clinical interpretive frameworks. They did this not only by limiting participation but also by using specific terms and concepts without further explanation and by drawing on clinical jargon to attract participants. Essentially, they created an elite specialist discourse. For example, the EEF described the third conference as focused on “transsexualism and related problems of gender orientation,” but did not specify how transsexualism was distinct from gender orientation or what “problems” were considered related. This vagueness resulted in a lack of clarity about new diagnostic definitions and concepts, such as the distinction between transsexualism and gender disorientation, as well as the social, professional, and personal ramifications for individuals defined as transsexual or suffering from problems related to gender disorientation.

The EEF newsletter entrenched the medicalization of trans people as a key element of transnormativity in this period by providing an ongoing public platform to advance the idea that transsexuals in the United States and around the world needed proper medical diagnosis and treatment. By actively constructing medical experts as advocates for transsexuals, the

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102 Ibid.
EEF further established the division between medical experts and trans patients as a core element of transnormativity during this period. The EEF expanded the discourse of liberal transnormativity between 1964 and 1975 by promoting medical authority through its newsletters and the series of international specialist conferences it sponsored. These venues not only consolidated medical expertise but also publicized medical experts as socially authoritative leaders on the topics of sex, gender, and trans people.

Promoting medical authority was both liberal and normative. It was liberal not only in that it continued to fit trans people and issues within an individualistic medical framework but also in that it constructed experts’ medico-scientific approach to sex, gender, and trans people as compatible with a sympathetic liberal ‘understanding’ that the EEF and homophile groups hoped to advance in the wider society. Promoting medical authority was normative in that it deferred to the authority of medical expertise and did not challenge the division between medical experts and community-oriented organizations. Even Prince’s critique at the 1969 conference only insisted that her expertise was more valid than that of the medical experts in attendance, since she had had more contact with the subject populations of trans people they were discussing; she did not object that the conference was excluding the majority of trans people under discussion in the first place.

Promoting medical authority was also liberal and normative in that it rendered invisible the class privileges of those with the greatest power to define who should be considered trans and what medical and social treatment they should receive. Limiting conference participation to those with appropriate educational degrees and professional status made sense, given the expert medical context, but as a result, no radical challenges to the liberal transnormative discourses being developed were nurtured or heard at these conferences. Erickson, Prince, and
the homophile organizers with whom they worked were primarily well-educated, white, middle-class people who sought to assist trans people they considered in need of their assistance. Thus, the discourse of liberal transnormativity established through the promotion of medical authority was not based on the insights and experiences of trans people of colour, trans people of low socio-economic status, or trans people in general.

It bears noting that the medical experts themselves drew upon limited notions of gender, especially, in defining who would be defined and treated as transsexuals, and that this in part related to the broader conservative social environment that rejected transsexualism altogether. While Joanne Meyrowitz has shown that people from all socio-economic groups sought diagnosis and treatment, she also writes that doctors were motivated by personal biases and concerns, often favoring trans women who could pass as non-trans women and who would not draw attention to their transsexualism.103 Similarly, Susan Stryker writes that “access to transsexual medical services became entangled with a socially conservative attempt to maintain traditional gender, in which changing sex was grudgingly permitted for the few of those seeking to do so.”104 Likewise, the majority of medical professionals were highly resistant to approving sex reassignment surgery for a patient, and some vocally opposed transsexualism altogether.105

The EEF and medical specialists both expanded and limited the socio-cultural articulation of sex and gender. By supporting an expert research culture concerned primarily with defining normality and treating transsexualism as an abnormal expression of gender and sexuality, researchers and clinicians during the 1960s and 1970s broadened their conception of

104 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 93-94.
transsexuality and sex reassignment surgery not only in relation to what they had been defining as ‘normal’ sexual development, homosexuality, transexuality, and transvestism, but also through what was increasingly becoming known as “gender dysphoria syndrome,” which was based on the earlier concept of ‘gender identity.’ Gender dysphoria was a more capacious diagnostic concept that fit with the specialists’ academic interest in sex and gender and with Erickson’s desire to help not only transsexuals but all sex and gender minorities. In 1973, it became the most heated topic of discussion as it both expanded the scope of specialists’ work with transsexuals and consolidated the pathologization of various forms of sex, gender and sexual expression.

Broadening Medical Frameworks

Thus far this chapter has argued that the EEF and its allies focused on developing an international culture of research and treatment and promoted the cultural authority of specialists working on transsexualism. During this period, the medical model was under attack by numerous social groups demanding a greater say in their treatment, such as women in the feminist health movement. In the case of gay and lesbian activists, protests over the American Psychiatric Association’s pathologization of homosexuality had famously led to a total removal of homosexuality as a mental illness. In 1973, when specialists at the Stanford Gender Identity Clinic volunteered to host the next major conference on transsexuality, there was a new and marked turn towards critical self-reflection as well as a greater openness to criticism of the medical model itself.

Like the EEF-sponsored conferences, the Stanford gathering was meant to give specialists the opportunity to learn from one another's’ clinical and research findings. The Stanford conference was designed specifically to bring together specialists who had been
working in gender clinics across North America. Many specialists also saw the conference as a sign that their field was growing tremendously. A number of speakers admitted that when they had begun their gender clinics, they had done so with little preparation for the complexities involved in such work, although they seemed to see this as evidence of their early innovation. For example, Milton Edgerton told participants that “little was known” when he had helped establish the Johns Hopkins clinic in 1963 with Money and Jones. Similarly, Norman Fisk of Stanford told participants that when he and his team had “embarked upon the development of a gender reorientation program in 1968,” none of them had any “firsthand or personal experience in this area” and “early patient selection was uncritical and relatively unsophisticated.”

The 1973 conference was a departure from the international conferences that the EEF had sponsored, but it continued to nurture a medicalized, expert-led discourse of liberal transnormativity.

Although the EEF did not sponsor the 1973 Stanford conference, it promoted and praised the work of its expert organizers and participants. Like the participating specialists, the EEF constructed the Stanford conference as a progressive sign that “the field” was advancing. The EEF issued public congratulations in its newsletter, expressing its “deep appreciation” for the organizers’ efforts. It called the event a “historic meeting” and told readers that it wished “to commend the Stanford Gender Identity Team for spearheading this conference.”

Despite the fact that conference organizers referred to the gathering as a national meeting, the EEF newsletter told readers that it was “the most intensive gathering of

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107 “First National Meeting,” EEF Newsletter 5.3 (Fall 1972): 1, Devor Collection.
medical and related expertise ever held on this problem” and noted that more than 120 professionals had attended from twenty-three states and as far away as Australia, Mexico, Canada, Morocco and the Philippines. Thus, the EEF continued to encourage the development of research and treatment networks and supported medical authority over the diagnosis and treatment of trans people.

Expert medical specialists from gender clinics across North America gave an overview of their patient populations at the Stanford conference and reported in detail about just how broadly gender identity programs had expanded in recent years. The Toronto Gender Identity Project at the Clarke Institute for Psychiatry, for example, reported that it had been in operation for one year as a pilot project between 1969 and 1970, during which time it had assessed 88 patients and provided surgeries for 8. The Montreal Gender Identity Clinic, which had been established in 1971 at the Montreal General Hospital, a teaching hospital associated with McGill University, noted that the majority of its applicants had been raised as boys and came from rural, working class backgrounds. Representatives from clinics in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, Ann Arbor and Jacksonville, Florida, also shared the results of their efforts at the conference. Most of the clinics reported success in forming gender identity clinics within the context of teaching and research hospitals, a feat which seemed to prove that sex-reassignment surgery and their work diagnosing and treating trans people had achieved a measure of acceptance, efficacy, and legitimacy.

According to reports shared at the conference, each clinic operated under different circumstances, particularly in relation to the financing and costs associated with their programs.

108 Ibid.
For example, the University of Minnesota Gender Clinic reported that in the four years since its inception in 1966, it had been able to perform operations on 25 transsexuals because the state of Minnesota covered the costs of medical care for indigent citizens.\textsuperscript{110} By contrast, Passavant Memorial Hospital at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago reported that between 1967 and 1971 it had approved 18 patients for sex reassignment surgery at a cost of $2500 each, following forty evaluations, for which the clinic charged $250 each.\textsuperscript{111} While the specialists recognized the significance of such cost differences, the disparities clearly had a greater impact on the patients, establishing regional economic norms that shaped trans communities and individual trans people’s opportunities.

Erickson continued to identify medical specialists as singularly and uniquely qualified to "solve" gender identity problems and supported the development of research and treatment networks. Although he usually remained behind-the-scenes, in this case he contributed a “foreword” to the conference proceedings that again glossed over the fact that he himself was a transsexual man. His foreword demonstrated his commitment to a discourse of liberal transnormativity that saw trans people as suffering from a medical condition. For example, he wrote, “We have all seen the hopeless, depressed person with the ‘unsolvable’ gender identity problem bloom forth happily and fit into the more normal matrix of society.” The conference proceedings, he wrote, contained recommendations for “how we may best aid in this transformation.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Donald Hastings, “Experience at the University of Minnesota with Transsexual Patients,”\textit{ Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome}, ed. Patrick Gandy and Donald Laub (Stanford, Calif.: Division of Reconstructive and Rehabilitation Surgery, 1973), 234.
\textsuperscript{111} Alex Arieff, “Five-Year Studies of Transsexuals: Psychiatric, Psychological and Surgical Aspects,”\textit{ Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome} (Stanford: Division of Reconstructive and Rehabilitation Surgery, 1973), 240.
\textsuperscript{112} Reed Erickson, “Forward,”\textit{ Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender
While experts continued to understand and represent their work as beneficial to trans people, major shifts in liberal transnormative thinking emerged at the Stanford conference as some experts questioned both their own motivations and their responsibilities in working with trans people as a patient group. Several specialists were beginning to recognize that their own research interests were distinct from the concerns of patients and that it was important to address the dynamics of those differences if they were to make further progress. Ira Pauly, of the University of Oregon, for instance, said that clinician-researchers were often less concerned with the well-being of their subjects than they were with “collecting our data, doing our pilot studies, publishing our articles, contributing to research, and I suppose, increasing the money in our pockets.” He also expressed concern that because gender identity units were being developed as pilot studies and research centres, specialists were ignoring the need for ongoing health care services for trans people. He noted that when research studies ended, “the service that should be available to these people who need help seems to be coming to an abrupt end, because we are collecting our data and running home to study it.”

Pauly was one of the first specialists to explicitly identify trans people’s needs as distinct from those of researchers at an expert conference. He pointed out that there had been “some comment about the transsexual being difficult to deal with, manipulative, exploitative, hysterical,” but reminded the audience that “exploitation and manipulation can be a characteristic of the researcher as well.” Thus, Pauly drew specialists’ attention to the fact that experts’ research interests did not always coincide with the needs of gender variant people and

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that specialists had an obligation to address not only their own interests, but those of gender variant people as well. Pauly boldly told conference participants that if it were not for transsexuals, they would not have the opportunity to study gender identity at all and proclaimed that “we are in debt and owe our gratitude to the transsexual who has made all of this research possible.”\textsuperscript{114} This attitude represented a major shift from the attitudes expressed at earlier conferences in the 1960s, when patients were expected to be grateful for researchers’ attention.

It was clear that many specialists genuinely cared about the fate of the gender variant people they encountered in the course of their work and many also recognized gender dysphoric patients as an important resource for researchers’ professional development and for scientific inquiries into sex, gender and sexuality. One participant reminded his peers that “we must not forget that the personal and human needs of the individual patient with gender dysphoria constitutes the only real justifiable indications for considering surgical treatment on these patients.” Likewise, Edgerton told participants that “it is not yet established that surgical alteration will become the best method of treating an adult transsexual,” but that “it offers doctors an unrivaled opportunity to study and understand the dynamics of gender as it relates to human function and self imagery.”\textsuperscript{115} Thus, as the number of gender identity clinics grew, some specialists began questioning their relationship to patients and their ability to simultaneously study and treat transsexuals and others dealing with sex and gender issues.

The biggest shift at the Stanford conference came when expert representatives of the

\textsuperscript{114} Pauly, “Female Transsexualism,” 49.
Stanford clinic announced that they had decided to stop focusing on diagnosing and treating transsexuality exclusively and instead take a new approach to patients who applied to their clinic for treatment. They reported that they were finding themselves in complex and problematic relationships with patients and research subjects who were rejected as inappropriate candidates for sex reassignment surgery because they did not conform to the then-current diagnostic criteria for transsexualism. As a result of the large number of such applicants, the Stanford clinic had decided to expand its criteria for surgical consideration and provide alternate forms of treatment for those deemed inappropriate for surgery. Pauly praised Stanford for its new approach, which he described as including and prioritizing a “service component” alongside the research component, which had evidently been given primary consideration up to that point. Thus while the EEF and health professionals continued to believe in specialists’ authority to (re)define gender and sexual conditions such as transsexualism, Stanford specialists were beginning to recognize the need to provide clinical services for a broader group of patients than those traditionally accepted as transsexuals.  

Whereas in the late 1960s the term “gender identity disorder” had been used interchangeably with "transsexualism," Stanford specialists explained in several presentations at the 1973 conference that they were expanding the availability of sex reassignment surgery to all those diagnosed with “Gender Dysphoria Syndrome” and that they were applying this diagnosis more broadly than transsexualism. Norman Fisk told audience members that many patients who had previously been denied surgery after being diagnosed as transvestites and effeminate homosexuals might actually benefit from sex reassignment surgery and “gender re-

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116 Pauly, “Female Transsexualism,” 49.
orientation.”117 This was especially striking because not only had “effeminate homosexuals” and transvestites previously been excluded from full surgical and hormonal treatments, but transsexuals had been defined against those two groups, particularly in terms of their erotic desires and sexual behaviors. Pre-operative transsexuals were largely expected to have been asexual while transvestites were usually seen as heterosexual or bisexual and effeminate gay men were seen as homosexual.118 The idea that all three groups might benefit from sex reassignment surgery reflected a major change in how the construction of sexuality and sexual preference related to the construction of who would and could be considered appropriate candidates for hormone therapy, sex reassignment surgery, and the attendant medical and social recognition that followed from a diagnosis of transsexualism. It was a serious expansion of the conditions governing who would be able to physically transform their bodies and claim a new gendered social status.

Specialists from several other clinics also suggested that expanding diagnostic and treatment criteria would allow them to identify and assist female-to-male transsexual patients, who had previously been categorically ignored, rejected, or marginalized by gender clinics. Notwithstanding the important leadership role that Erickson had played in the 1960s, until the early 1970s many specialists had considered female-to-male transsexuals, whom they often referred to as “female transsexuals,” to be not only small in numbers, but also of relatively minor concern. At the Stanford conference, however, Ira Dushoff, who operated a private gender clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, announced that his clinic had been “contacted by a large

number of female transsexuals.”¹¹⁹ He attributed this to the fact that his clinic staff had made it clear that they “felt that there was a wide variety of transsexuals” and that patients at their clinic need not lie or tell the “book story” to be approved for surgery. Similarly, the Toronto Gender Clinic reported that its initial assumptions about transmen’s acceptability for sex reassignment surgery were proving incorrect. Originally, the Toronto specialists had rejected all 14 applicants who had been born female because they felt that current surgical results were insufficient to warrant approval. After putting these patients through mandatory ten-day institutionalized “observation periods” at the Clarke Institute for Psychiatry, however, clinicians had found that these applicants were, in general, the most emotionally stable. As a result, they decided to approve an unprecedented equal number of female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals for sex reassignment surgery.¹²⁰ Female-to-male transsexuals, like “effeminate homosexuals” and transvestites, challenged existing assumptions about “true” or “classical” transsexuality and, like these other previously marginalized groups of trans people, became more readily accepted after specialists at the Stanford conference established the need to expand diagnostic and treatment criteria.

The EEF interpreted the shift in diagnostic norms at Stanford as a boon for the 90% of applicants who had been denied treatment because they did not fit the old criteria for transsexualism. The Foundation told its newsletter readers that conference participants “generally agreed that only 10% of the individuals who go through evaluation for surgery eventually achieve it” and that specialists at the Stanford conference had addressed the

¹²⁰ Steiner and Paitich, “The Toronto Gender Identity Project,” 74.
question of “what happens to the other 90%?” It praised the Stanford clinic and its conference for recognizing and attempting to deal with the diversity of patients who were presenting themselves to gender identity clinics. The EEF congratulated Stanford “on their endeavor to include this 90% in their program” and reminded readers that for those not diagnosed as transsexual or approved for sex reassignment surgery, “their need for counseling and rehabilitation is great.”

In short, while the EEF modified and expanded the parameters of liberal transnormativity, it continued to place a great deal of faith in specialists’ authority and constructed specialists as working for the ongoing betterment of trans people.

While the EEF and medical experts saw the Stanford conference as progressively expanding treatment options to a broader range of trans people, Virginia Prince again spoke out against the dominant and pervasive medical emphasis being promoted. Prince told participants that she was pleased to hear Norman Fisk use the new term “gender dysphoria syndrome,” but declared that they should call it “sexual dysphoria syndrome,” since what they were changing was people’s sex, not their gender. In her talk, titled “Sex vs. Gender,” Prince drew attention to the terms that had already been used throughout the conference, such as "surgical gender reorientation," "gender conversion surgery" and "anatomic and genetic gender," and argued that “not one of these three expressions is even possible, let alone sensible.” From her perspective, medical specialists were confusing the issues by using the term "gender" when they were really talking about sex. Prince defined sex as a biological genital reality and gender as a personal identity and social role. Her distinction between sex


and gender stood in contrast to specialists’ frequent conflation of the two and had potentially significant implications for diagnosis and treatment; in her formulation, it essentially undermined the idea that one needed to undergo sex reassignment surgery in order to live in one’s preferred gender.

Prince’s main concern was that scientific specialists posed a grave danger to patients if they established new medical norms that failed to account for what she saw as a basic distinction between sex and gender. She chastised conference participants harshly, telling them to “get clear in your own mind the difference between sex and gender” before proclaiming expertise and performing irreversible operations on people’s sex organs. For Prince, the danger was not only that overzealous specialists were prescribing unnecessary genital surgeries but also that in doing so they were creating “confused people [who] think that they want a sex change when what they really want is to change their social gender role.”123 The crux of her concern was that medical specialists were acting from a position of mistaken certainty about sex and gender and that they were perhaps doing more harm than good for patients.

Prince adamantly insisted that sex reassignment surgery was not necessary to change one’s social gender role. She boldly identified herself as a prime example of a person who had successfully managed to live as a woman without undergoing sex reassignment surgery or being diagnosed as a transsexual. Indeed, Prince had become an active researchers herself, co-publishing a number of academic articles on transvestites between 1969 and 1971.124 To

123 Ibid., 21.
make her distinction completely clear, she told conference participants, “Any kind of carving you might do on me might change my sex, but it would not change my gender, because my gender, my self-identity is between my ears, not between my legs.” Thus, Prince continued to question medical specialists’ authority, in this case by arguing that their emphasis on genital sex and sex reassignment surgery was dangerously mistaken, instead emphasizing self-identification over physical body modification.

Like the scientific specialists, Prince was concerned about the estimated 90% of people who were being turned away from clinics because they did not qualify for sex reassignment surgery, but she defined the problem and its solutions through a critique of medical specialists’ existing assumptions. She thought that specialists were doing a disservice to the vast majority of patients by focusing on surgery as the only possible solution to their desires or discomforts. Prince told the group, “We very badly need to have an understanding on the part of the profession as to just what these people are seeking to achieve.” Using herself and her experiences with other trans people as an example of what she had in mind, she said, “From my side of the street, which is the transvestite side, people who really wanted to become women needed to be taught that you could live as a woman without changing your sex.” The idea of focusing on helping people live in their desired gender roles without surgery fit well with experts’ expanded notion of gender dysphoria, but not with their focus on surgery as the primary “solution.” Essentially, Prince implored the specialists at the Stanford Conference to consider the serious damage they could do if they did not consider trans people as whole people, rather than just as surgical candidates, ultimately questioning

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the medical emphasis on the physiological, rather than the social, psychological and emotional.¹²⁶

Prince also encouraged specialists to recognize and take into consideration the ways that sex, gender and sexuality were changing in American society and culture. She even imagined a utopian future in which their very conversation would in fact be nonsensical, telling them:

Society is moving in a direction where all of us sitting at this table are obsolescent (homosexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, and heterosexuals). Your practice is obsolescent too, because it will not be too many years in the future before there will be no transvestite, no transsexual, no homosexual. At that point, no doctors will be necessary to take care of them for the simple reason that they will all be just people.¹²⁷

Furthermore, Prince asked specialists to avoid recreating what she called the highly polarized and highly stereotyped world of masculinity and femininity and asked specialists to “learn that being a person is more important than being either man or woman, male or female,” and to “think about… the world in the middle: humanity.”¹²⁸ She thus called for specialists to recognize their own role in reconstructing what would come to be called sex, gender and sexuality and work to make such distinctions between people a thing of the past.

Unlike at the 1969 conference in London, Prince was not the only person at the Stanford conference to voice concern about adopting a strictly medical framework for dealing with trans people. Joel Fort and Sandra Jordan offered similar critiques based on their experiences working with diverse people in social support programs. Fort was the director of a Sex and Gender Program in San Francisco at the National Center for Solving Special Social and Health Problems, often referred to simply as the Center for Special Problems.¹²⁹ Jordan provided

¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁹ Interview with Elliot Blackstone by Susan Stryker for the GLBT Historical Society, November 6,
counseling and employment support through a telephone support line at the Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities (SCSSM). Both organizations addressed the issues of individuals socially marginalized on the basis of sex and other factors. The SCSSM was originally a branch of the Seattle-based Dorian Society, a primarily gay and lesbian group which had changed its name after becoming familiar with transvestites and transsexuals through its community support work.  

Like Prince, Fort questioned the assumed authority of medical specialists and critiqued what he called the "medical model," which he saw as pathologizing sex and gender diversity. Fort saw a direct connection between labeling trans people as sick and the harmful social stigma many of them experienced. He encouraged conference participants to remember that “the sickness concept is built into the medical-psychiatric model” and to understand how this approach affected medical care for people diagnosed as transsexual. He also reported that when he had worked with the San Francisco Health Department to create the first public health program for transsexuals, the biggest problem he faced was “resistance from the medical, nursing, and social service staff of that program to the concept of working with
transsexuals,” whom they often “defined as a deviant group, strange and unfamiliar… and thus to be shunned.” More to the point, Fort boldly stated that “the negative effects of stigmatization, rejection, and criminalization are objectively much worse than conditions such as transsexualism.”

Thus, like Prince, he challenged medical specialists to use their positions to support social change around sexual stigma and he linked the destigmatization of transsexuality to broader social and legal efforts to secure sexual freedoms. Without further explanation, he concluded by encouraging attendees to participate in legislative reform to decriminalize private sexual behavior between consenting adults. Like Prince, Fort drew attention to the role that clinicians were playing in perpetuating gender and sexual normativity. Fort emphasized the importance of “allowing a homosexual or transsexual to be themselves rather than seeking to convert them to heterosexuality” and told participants that he hoped clinicians could learn to allow those with whom they worked “to define for themselves” their goals rather than determining those goals for them.

Critiquing heterosexuality as the primary normative framework, Fort evidently saw transsexuals’ relationship to the medical model as analogous to that of homosexuals, without recognizing that transsexuals could identify as heterosexual. Essentially, he was focused on ending efforts to “convert” transsexuals to what would today be called heteronormativity.

Like Fort, Jordan critiqued and provided an explicit alternative to the medical model. Jordan claimed that “there is a significant difference… between the way we deal with individuals at the gender clinic in Seattle and the way many physicians have been dealing with them.” While the medical model implied that “the patient is sick,” she explained that “at the

132 Ibid., 69.
Counseling Service, we do not imply that at all.”SCCSM did “not deal exclusively or even primarily with transsexuals,” but rather with “anyone who has some degree of cross-gender identification and is seeking help.” Available services included “rap sessions” (support groups), referrals for other services, such as hormone therapy, and community education on what they called sexual minority issues, including speaking engagements at colleges and high schools. Thus, while clinicians were beginning to expand their diagnostic criteria, community-based social services were already employing an expansive sense of sex, gender, and sexuality as personal and social issues. Like Fort, Jordan tied the problems people were having to wider issues of social marginalization. “All of the services we provide,” she told conference participants, “are geared toward helping sexual minorities exist in a society that wishes they did not”; SCSSM therefore rendered all its services “free of charge, in recognition of the economic oppression.”

Like Prince, Jordan and Fort weighed in on the issue of replacing transsexualism with gender dysphoria syndrome as the primary diagnostic framework and treatment criteria for hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery. Jordan approved of the shift, since it allowed different kinds of questions to be asked. Noting that gender identity had always previously only been used to refer to transvestism or transsexualism, she argued that “gender dysphoria syndrome is a better term, because … practically every individual in this society suffers from it

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133 Ibid., 68.
135 Ibid.
to one degree or another.”137 She told participants that “the question before the transsexual therefore becomes: How extensive is my personal cross-gender identification?”138 Fort even went so far as to say that “transsexuals should not be segregated from other sex or gender problems” and that “sex and gender should be seen as a continuum, with all of us having some elements of male and female gender or sex.”139

Jordan also extended elements of Prince's and Fort’s critiques of medical authority by introducing the notion of ‘gender dysphoria phobia.’ Fort defined this as a socio-cultural problem affecting non-trans people as much as trans people. Rather than implying that people suffering from gender dysphoria were sick, she told participants that at her Seattle organization, “if we imply anything, it is the reverse, that most people in our society suffer from gender dysphoria phobia,” meaning that “they have an inherent fear of having any cross-gender identification.” For Jordan, the problem was not how to treat individual trans people, but how to address the socio-cultural roots and effects of this particular stigma. Jordan told participants that “the major functional and emotional problems” facing all the people they counseled at SCSSM “stem from society’s attitudes toward them.”140 In an appeal to medical specialists, she further stated that “to ignore the way society deals with these people is to have a totally ineffective rehabilitative program.”141 Like Prince, Jordan contextualized her discussion within a hopeful progress narrative, telling conference attendees that “in the coming

137 Ibid., 212.
138 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
Thus, like Fort and Prince, Jordan called for specialists to recognize their own role in addressing the needs of those marginalized within American culture on the basis of sex and gender.

Notwithstanding these important challenges, the EEF skimmed over the important critiques raised at the Stanford conference and instead reported on the formation of a formal expert professional organization as its most significant outcome. The EEF newsletter told readers that the Stanford conference laid “the framework…for the establishment of a national society to facilitate the interdisciplinary dissemination of scientific information on transsexualism.” Thus, the EEF continued to report on and construct a liberal, transnormative discourse based on the expertise of medical specialists as cultural authorities.

Many specialists also felt that consolidating their professional authority in a formal professional organization would be beneficial in that it could influence social institutions that currently penalized and stigmatized transsexuals. Edgerton, for example, told participants at the Stanford conference that “medical societies, courts, juries, insurance companies, and rehabilitation agencies all need the guidance of a group such as this in setting up policies that may meet the needs of all transsexuals.” He further argued that in countries that “still have laws…against the surgical treatment of transsexualism,” a formal professional organization could promote social acceptance of transsexuals and sex reassignment surgeries. Thus, despite and alongside concerns and critiques, liberal transnormativity based on the medical

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142 Ibid.
143 “First National Meeting,” EEF Newsletter 5.3 (Fall 1972): 1, Devor Collection.
145 Ibid.
model forged ahead with the notion that the continued development of professional expertise and authority would benefit trans people and encourage more global acceptance of sex reassignment surgery.

By the mid-1970s, the EEF had stopped organizing conferences, but it continued promoting American specialists as authorities around the world. The newsletter regularly reported that American specialists were teaching experts in other countries about transsexualism with the hope of expanding gender identity programs globally. The EEF frequently reported on American specialists speaking to foreign audiences and praised Benjamin for giving talks in Germany and Money for his extensive touring to universities and clinical centres in Japan, South Africa, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Bergen, and Budapest.146 Similarly, the EEF newsletter reprinted a letter from a colleague who thanked Money and Pauly for their “steady injection of clinical knowledge” in New Zealand and Australia.147 The EEF thus was clearly invested in the notion that American medical experts were successfully promoting and having their research on transsexualism accepted abroad, implying that such international efforts would expand treatment options for transsexualism, which it considered an objective medical condition.

Perhaps nowhere was the enthusiastic rhetorical use of internationalism to validate the success of the EEF’s mission more obvious than when the EEF reported on the First International Congress of Medical Sexology in Sorbonne, France, in 1975. Sponsored by the French Minister of Public Health and the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, the Congress was a meeting of the international professional organization with which a number of EEF-

147 “Word from ‘Down Under’,” EEF Newsletter 5.2 (Summer 1972): 1, Devor Collection.
affiliates were involved. The EEF newsletter highlighted the fact that American specialists had successfully promoted their work on transsexualism at the gathering, telling newsletter readers that a large number of EEF-affiliates were among “the list of distinguished speakers,” including members of the EEF’s Board of Directors and “former or current EEF grantees” John Money, Anke A. Ehrhardt, Roger A. Gorski and June Reinisch.\textsuperscript{148} The EEF newsletter even quoted John Money as having proclaimed, “We have brought sex to France!” a ridiculously arrogant statement given that the conference was sponsored by the French government and France had a longstanding and well-known reputation as a sexually-progressive country.\textsuperscript{149}

The EEF emphasized that specialists working in the United States were inspiring their colleagues elsewhere to follow their lead and establish their own gender clinics. The newsletter further told readers “it was evidence to us from concerned participants that there is a dire need for enlightenment on the subject in many other countries” and that the EEF had distributed “information material” at the conference and received requests “for mailing to all parts of the world.”\textsuperscript{150}

The idea that transsexualism was an objective medical condition that must affect people around the world in roughly the same way was fundamental to the professional recognition of transsexual specialists. American specialists noted differences between how


transsexualism was treated in the United States and the rest of the world largely in terms of
differences in the legal, medical, and social status of transsexuals and sex reassignment
surgery rather than different cultural conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. By
promoting a narrative in which all countries should be aiming to identify and treat
transsexuals in the same way, the EEF and American medical specialists worked to construct
socio-cultural differences in ways that promoted a discourse of liberal transnormativity in
which medical specialists were recognized authorities over medically accepted deviations
from sex and gender norms.

The discourse of liberal transnormativity remained strong throughout the mid-1970s as
medical experts were able to broaden their frameworks to account for desires, embodiments
and articulations that would have previously fallen outside their diagnosis and treatment of a
‘true transsexual.’ While Prince, Fort and Jordan had all raised potentially radical critiques
of the medical model that animated contemporary liberal transnormativity at the 1973
Stanford conference, their arguments did not lead to any radically shifts in authoritative
circles. Medical experts were already eager to expand their diagnosis and treatment criteria,
and rather than reconstructing their entire framework, they broadened their scope to treat
more patients for more conditions, all under the rubric of gender dysphoria syndrome. Thus,
rather than shifting the terrain of liberal transnormativity, Prince, Fort and Jordan offered
limited critiques in that they simply represented alternative perspectives within the
medicalized discourse. Rather than extending these critiques, experts instead consolidated
their authority with the formation of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria
Association in 1979. They also continued to promote their international authority based on
the liberal model of transnormativity.
Thus, even as medical frameworks broadened to recognize more diversity and a greater need to address social and cultural contexts, the main discourse of liberal transnormativity remained rooted in the expectations of individual medical treatment. By defining their work as international and by assuming a liberal distinction between individuals and their socio-cultural environments, medical experts entrenched liberal assumptions that human beings everywhere would suffer from the same conditions. In this context, they turned their efforts to advocating for legal changes that would allow experts to diagnose and treat trans people in various countries in similar ways. While this expansion of treatment networks may have had positive effects, it also prevented a closer examination of the social and cultural factors that played into the ways in which people experienced, defined, and articulated their sex, gender, sexuality and embodiment. Thus, liberal transnormativity in this period continued to largely disregard questions of race, class, gender, and other significant social factors, presuming the essential neutrality of the categorical definitions under construction.

**Conclusion**

Erickson’s initial purpose was to help transsexuals and others afflicted with gender and sexuality problems by supporting and promoting broad, in-depth research into gender and sexuality. The work he funded and promoted, however, often wound up redefining notions of gender and sexuality in ways that deviated from this broader purpose in the sense that liberal transnormativity remained confined within a medical and research framework. Because the EEF’s research and treatment culture was largely open only to those with professional qualifications, the discourses established in that context were dominated by specialists who were mainly interested not only in establishing diagnostic and treatment criteria for what they considered pathological gender and sexual expressions, but also in constructing theories of
normative (and non-normative) sexual development. The EEF trusted that these specialists would produce work that was beneficial to transsexuals, but created very few formal opportunities for the perspectives of those defined as patients or research subjects to be considered alongside those of specialists, at least within the context of the international, interdisciplinary research culture it helped establish. Reed Erickson and Virginia Prince stood out as exceptional trans people, but their influential presence was unique because of their financial and social capital.

The EEF newsletter frequently implied that a specialist’s clinical or academic interest was born strictly of goodwill towards transsexuals and motivated by a desire to support them. It used language such as “concern” and “understanding” to imply that clinicians and researchers were working in the best interests of trans people. In doing so, however, the EEF downplayed the possibility that researchers could be interested in sex, gender and transsexualism without being interested in serving the needs of (or benefiting) trans people. This likely occurred because they truly intended and believed that such research would ultimately be beneficial.

Because the EEF was focused on establishing the medical legitimacy of specialists willing to treat transsexuals, however, it rarely encouraged or reported on critics like Prince, who questioned the authority of such experts or the frameworks they used. Both Erickson and the homophiles with whom he had collaborated hoped that by promoting medical expertise and the treatment of trans people, they could address the personal and social problems facing trans people. There was a second ramification of the fact that the EEF and its medical allies constructed transsexuals and other trans people as anonymous patients within a discourse of expert professionalization and progress. It was often unclear that a specific group of trans
people was being defined through the development of the new, interdisciplinary medical field largely based on an initial conviction that sex reassignment surgery was the correct medical treatment for admittedly poorly understood expressions of sex and gender.

This chapter has demonstrated that a series of collaborations between the EEF, homophiles, and medical specialists nurtured a discourse of liberal transnormativity between 1964 and 1975 in which medical experts established both professional networks and cultural authority over diagnosing and treating gender conditions that they defined as pathological. In that context, trans people became defined as a distinct group of patients, despite critics’ concerns that medico-scientific experts were failing to adequately define and consider gender and sexuality as socio-cultural constructs.

As will become evident in the next chapter, one of the ways the EEF attempted to resolve the tension between scientific and socially-oriented approaches to transsexuality, gender dysphoria, and the redefinition of sex and gender was to relegate social and cultural work to a distinct arena, relatively separate from the clinical research culture of medical specialists. As it established and promoted medical authority over trans people, the EEF simultaneously introduced and developed discourses of liberal transnormativity that it felt would be palatable to both the broader American public and potential professional allies. Many of its mainstream publicity efforts, sex education and professional development programs drew on a discourse of rehabilitation, which more seamlessly combined medical and social aspirations, to address social issues in liberal, individualistic terms. These public education programs, however, would not have been possible without first establishing and developing medical expertise and authority as the foundational cornerstones of liberal transnormativity.
Chapter 2
“No Fault of their Own”:
Rehabilitation, Helping Professionals, Transsexual Representatives
and the EEF’s Education Campaigns, 1971-1976

In 1975, the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) sponsored an educational program
called "Sex, Role & Gender" at ONE Inc.’s Los Angeles-based Institute for the Study of
Human Resources (ISHR). The EEF told its newsletter readers that the program had been
designed to help “professionals with practices that deal with persons having atypical sex
orientation and interests.” The gathering reflected the EEF’s longstanding hope that
“helping professionals” could promote sex reassignment surgery and transsexuality as socially
acceptable by establishing transsexuals as potentially normative members of American society.
Helping professionals included police officers, clergy, social workers, counselors, nurses, and
various others, such as sex educators and advocates working for sexual minorities. The EEF
defined helping professionals loosely as any professional who could help transsexuals and
focused on those with education, class status, cultural authority and institutional power,
particularly in arenas such as law, religion, medicine, and media. These “helping
professionals” played a central role in shaping liberal transnormativity.

The EEF saw Jorgensen as particularly important to the “Sex, Role, & Gender”
program because she was able to testify to the social problems facing transsexuals in a
tangible and personal way that resonated with non-transsexual audiences. Essentially, her job
was to inspire, encourage, and congratulate non-trans helping professionals for their interest
and efforts. Jorgensen had played the role of transsexual celebrity in American culture since
the early 1950s, and by the 1970s, she was part of broader public education efforts, regularly

speaking to lay and professional groups about her experiences as a transsexual woman who exemplified successful post-surgical integration into mainstream American society. As far as the EEF was concerned, Jorgensen also served as a reminder of the major strides in American medical attitudes towards transsexualism; while she had had to go abroad for her own sex reassignment procedures almost twenty years earlier, American transsexuals in the 1970s could be diagnosed and treated at a number of gender identity clinics throughout the United States. The EEF saw Jorgensen and other transsexuals as potentially able to represent just how important it was for professionals to accept, support, and help integrate transsexuals into mainstream American society and to publicly demonstrate that transsexuals could become normative members of society, if given the right support and opportunities.

Jorgensen and other transsexual representatives in the early 1970s not only represented transsexualism as a medical condition; they also represented the broader liberal notion of equality and inclusion that denied the regulatory, repressive, and marginalizing forms of power at play. For instance, they strengthened cultural associations between transsexualism and white, middle-class, gender-normative heterosexual femininity. In analyzing Jorgensen’s 1962 performance in a Filipino film called *Kaming Mga Talyada (We Who Are Sexy)*, Susan Stryker considers “the global spectacle of her transsexuality as a white (post)colonial phenomenon.” Tatiana Young writes that up until the 1970s, Jorgensen “symbolized in many ways the quintessential white, upper-middle-class woman and the medicalized standard by which other transgender women were measured, including poor

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transgender women and transgender women of color.”\footnote{Tatiana KalaniopaYoung, \textit{Transsituated Publics: from Christine Jorgensen to Holly Woodlawn}, Master’s Thesis (2011), University of Texas Austin, vi.} Indeed, Jorgensen’s public career through the 1960s and 1970s as a performer and public speaker was based largely on the fame she had achieved in the 1950s, when she was widely represented in the press as embodying a normative white femininity. Her personal representation of transsexualism became popular again through the 1960s and 1970s as a greater number of people identified with the rubric of transsexualism, gender dysphoria, and other related formations.

Liberal transnormativity thus was able to draw on existing cultural forms of normativity in gender, sexuality, class, and race to achieve recognition for some transsexuals, while simultaneously defining others as distant from the “classical transsexual” narrative. A growing number of scholars, activists, and other observers have debated and critiqued the “classic transsexual” narrative pervasive during this period because it erased the fact that many trans people were involved in sex work, didn’t wholly identify with these notions of transsexualism, or, in the case of transmen, did not have access to the same quality of surgical procedures as was available for trans women.\footnote{See Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” \textit{The Transgender Studies Reader}, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 229-230; Jason Cromwell, “Queering the Binaries: Transsituated Identities, Bodies, and Sexualities,” \textit{The Transgender Studies Reader}, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 511.} While Young argues that the 1970s saw the emergence of new and more expansive types of trans visibility in mainstream culture, this chapter suggests that within professional and educational campaigns, transsexual representatives were almost uniformly presented as un-marked in social location, while in fact presenting primarily as white, gender-normative, feminine, heterosexual women who were legally employed or financially supported by their husbands. A key component of liberal transnormativity was precisely the idea that the only “difference” that counted when
considering a transsexual woman was the fact that she was transsexual. Several significant expectations of this classical transsexual narrative include the assumption of undergoing sex reassignment surgery (and therefore of “pre-operative” or “post-operative” status; the (often correct) assumption of legal difficulties until all elements of the person’s transsexualism had been erased; the assumption of being largely asexual pre-operatively and becoming heterosexual post-operatively; and the assumption that transsexuals wanted legal employment and could obtain it after transitioning.

Despite expanding expectations about gender and sexual identities and expressions, the EEF’s educational campaigns in the first part of the 1970s provided fairly conservative representations of transsexualism. In general, the EEF presented transsexual representatives in an overly simplistic way that focused on establishing the notion of difference between transsexuals and non-transsexuals and the need for non-transsexuals to help transsexuals. The EEF was run mainly by Erickson and Zelda Suplee, the director and editor of the EEF newsletter and the primary public voice of the organization. Suplee was a non-trans woman with eclectic interests in alternative healing and nudism and a bold personality with a great deal of freedom but always under Erickson’s direction.155 She shared Erickson’s desire to achieve acceptance and respectability for transsexuals.

The previous chapter highlighted the EEF’s strategy of building medical authority and expertise, first on transsexualism and later on gender identity and gender dysphoria. This chapter focuses on the EEF’s social and cultural work during the early 1970s. The EEF’s mission to have transsexuality accepted in American society began with the simple strategy of

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educating “helping professionals” and it encouraged the most enthusiastic among them to become professional advocates for transsexuals. Just as it had with medical specialists working in the context of clinical research and treatment, the EEF believed that educating a wider group of helping professionals would benefit transsexuals in a broader social and cultural context; the EEF saw helping professionals as playing a key role in educating the broader general American public, both through their specific professional work and as cultural advocates and authorities in the mainstream media. The EEF thus targeted professional groups at work sites and through professional organizations and conferences. It also worked to educate the broader public through the mainstream media, including newspaper, radio, television, and film. In both cases, the goal was to convince non-transsexuals to accept transsexuals based on sympathy, expert authority and a vision of transsexuals as “normal” individuals. While this strategy may have been effective, particularly for trans people who most closely approximated the new cultural ideals of transsexuality, it also continued to establish transsexuality as white, middle-class, and legally employed. Not only did these standards not apply to all transsexuals, they also framed who might identify or be recognized as transsexual in the first place. Transsexuals who were incarcerated, for example, had an especially difficult time being accepted as transsexuals and afforded medical treatment as such.

The EEF constructed transsexuals and helping professionals as working together towards progressive social change in American society, but it also established a service-provider/client relationship that only slightly modified the doctor/patient and researcher/subject relationship examined in the previous chapter. Focusing primarily on helping professionals and only promoting transsexuals who could represent transsexuality as a
bona fide medical condition for which sex reassignment surgery was the appropriate treatment was a response to the lack of acceptance facing many trans people at the time, but this also constructed a notion of transsexual “otherness.” By supporting the definition of transsexuality as an individualized, diagnosable medical condition, the EEF overlooked the possibility that its educational campaigns would construct a form of transsexual normativity that in fact applied to very few people, further marginalizing those who did not match what was becoming a normative transsexuality. The liberal assumptions embedded in the EEF’s approach privileged those whose access to the helping professions mirrored that of Christine Jorgenson: those trans people who were white, middle-class, gender-normative, feminine, heterosexual, women, and either pre- or post-operative.

Helping professionals and transsexual representatives played key roles in the EEF’s educational campaigns and were significant in the development of this new transsexual normativity because they focused on constructing transsexuals as simply slightly different from non-transsexuals. The more successfully the helping professionals and transsexual representatives educated their audiences about transsexual difference, the more they constructed and reified this difference, a process that might now be referred to as racialized cis-centrism (the assumption and prioritizing of white cisgenderism or non-trans-ness). Again, without addressing economic and racial issues, inequalities and differences, the transnormativity being developed in this context framed trans people in terms that discounted any complex social positioning and shaped the category of ‘trans’ in terms of achieving acceptance from and as white, middle-class people.

Rehabilitation was central to the EEF’s construction of liberal transnormativity during the early 1970s. The EEF’s reformist and integrationist framework fit well with the notion of
rehabilitation, the idea that an individual could be transformed from a position of deviancy or illness to one of normalcy or normativity, particularly with the help and support of professionals. David Serlin has written that rehabilitation discourses were central to Christine Jorgensen’s very public transition and other public medical transformations in the 1950s. One classic definition of rehabilitation, in wide use between 1956 and 1976, was that rehabilitation involved “the whole process of restoring a disabled person to a condition in which he is able, as soon as possible, to resume a normal life.” Indeed, the EEF worked towards making a “normal life” possible for transsexuals, but defined transsexuals as reliant upon non-transsexuals and did not address the racial and class biases of liberal rehabilitation discourses and practices.

Rehabilitation programs in the 1970s flourished as a result of the liberal expansion of federal funding and legislation during the 1960s, when President Lyndon Johnson had declared a War on Poverty, but rehabilitation programs began developing during and after WWII. Through the 1940s and 1950s, the field of vocational rehabilitation had focused on producing economically viable workers, particularly after injury; the Disabled Veterans Act of 1943 and Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 provided assistance for military personnel to return to work after WWII and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1954 devoted federal funding to train rehabilitation professionals. In 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and broadened those who could be covered by new initiatives in Johnson’s Great Society plan. In 1966, fifty million dollars in

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federal funding was allocated for neighbourhood health care centres.\textsuperscript{159} That same year, with the advent of Medicare, Medicaid, and the Allied Health Act, more jobs and training opened up in a variety of health care fields.\textsuperscript{160}

In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act (overriding the veto of President Nixon), which radically shifted older paradigms of rehabilitation. Instead of simply supporting the least handicapped and most economically viable potential workers, assistance was now available to those for whom employment was not a feasible option, with the goal of developing the capacity for independent living rather than permanent, enforced institutionalization.\textsuperscript{161} Alongside other legislation, this was a major coup for disability rights, greatly expanding notions of equality. Jonathan Drimmer writes that two models of disability operated in the 1970s: the medical model, in which “disability is an infirmity that can only be properly addressed by doctors and rehabilitation professionals who attempt to ‘cure’ and ‘fix’ the person,” and the social pathology model, which also sees “disability as a defect that the individual must seek to remedy with the help of experts,” but which is “based on sociological definitions of ‘deviation’ and ‘deviant groups.’” The latter, sociological model encompassed a broader range of people who found themselves subjected to “widespread social disapproval and censure,” including “criminals, delinquents, prostitutes, religious fanatics [and] addicts.”\textsuperscript{162} In many ways, transsexualism made perfect sense in the new culture of


\textsuperscript{160} Glenn Gritzer and Arnold Arluke, \textit{The Making of Rehabilitation: A Political Economy of Medical Specialization, 1890-1980} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 123.

\textsuperscript{161} Paul Longmore, \textit{Why I Burned my Book and Other Essays on Disability} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 103.

rehabilitation, since transsexuals were thought to undergo a major transformation to normalcy in their new sex/gender after a lifetime of supposed gender deviance or pathology. Indeed, they also relied on a host of medical professionals and increasingly, during the 1970s, other “helping professionals.” Those who argued that new rehabilitation legislation should include services to trans people combined the medical notion of transsexualism with the notion of individual citizenship rights to full economic and social participation under a social welfare state. In doing so, they entrenched discourses of transnormativity based on liberal notions of able-bodied citizenship, turning to the state to compensate for medical procedures and conditions.

In the early 1970s, the EEF increasingly used the term “sex reassignment surgery” in its professional education campaigns to both access institutional resources earmarked for rehabilitation and to enroll rehabilitation professionals in the project of normalizing transsexuals in American culture. Professional advocates for transsexuals could, for example, promote transsexuals’ interests to other professionals in positions of power, but also mobilize institutional authority to help transsexuals access social services designed to rehabilitate them into normative citizens. The EEF framed surgery as “the last step in their [transsexuals’] rehabilitation” and stated of transsexuals that “their need for counseling and rehabilitation is great.” The EEF, however, never explicitly discussed the costs of surgery as being covered by rehabilitation programs. The question of achieving state funding for sex reassignment surgeries, which will be taken up at some length in chapter four, was considered more in relation to Medicaid programs for the poor. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was seen more as

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a statement of citizenship rights and new potential forms of institutional support for transsexuals.

Although McRuer has more recently noted the limits of rehabilitation models for what he calls queercrip politics, rehabilitation was central to liberal transnormativity in the 1970s. Disciplines such as psychology, physiology, sociology, and criminology each used and understood rehabilitation as a primary concept in their work, albeit in somewhat different ways. In a hospital setting, a “rehab team” of physical therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech or hearing therapists, psychologists, and vocational counselors would be consulted by a physician who would choose which patients would be rehabilitated. Criminologists thought of rehabilitation in terms of shifting a person from deviant/criminal status to that of normative citizen engaged in legally sanctioned, economically productive work. In 1974, criminologist Tony Platt wrote that liberalism and the “rehabilitative ideal” had been influential in American criminology; it focused on ‘abnormal’ aspects of criminal behavior” and “typically reflected and reinforced the values of the State.” In all of these fields, the notion that a person could be rehabilitated combined both individually- and socially-based considerations and emphasized ways to better integrate potentially deviant individuals into mainstream American society, in part by encouraging them to embody socially normative roles.

This chapter begins by looking at the various contexts in which the EEF encouraged professional advocates in the “helping professions” to educate themselves and their peers

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about transsexualism at workshops and other staged learning opportunities in fields as diverse as law, religion, medicine, and counseling. In each of these contexts, audiences responded favorably to the authority and expertise of the helping professionals as well as to the bodies and the personal, biographical stories of normative transsexual representatives. It soon became apparent to the EEF that normative transsexuals could play a strategic role in representing transsexuals and sex reassignment as socially acceptable and the foundation began pairing transsexual representatives with professional advocates in all its educational programming.

The chapter then goes on to show that as it developed a standard format for its educational programming, the EEF extended its campaign into the broader American culture by aiding in the creation, distribution, and promotion of various media productions, including documentary films, television shows, and other audio-visual “edu-tainment.” The EEF pleaded with non-transsexual audiences to accept transsexuality as a medical condition requiring social support and understanding. It thereby constructed a relationship between non-transsexuals and transsexuals in which transsexuals were not only defined as a distinct group but also were called upon to demonstrate their acceptability as transsexuals. Helping professionals played the role of authoritative cultural mediators as they explained transsexuality to non-transsexual audiences and constructed transsexuals as both other and normative.

Non-transsexual audiences were encouraged to become sympathetic and understanding towards transsexuals and to see them as suffering from a condition that the EEF emphasized was “through no fault of their own.” Thus, the EEF extended the messages of its professional educational programs to the broader American public by constructing a new cultural
normativity in which transsexuals were associated with achieving social acceptability through a medical diagnosis, the assistance of helping professionals, and the acceptance and support of non-transsexuals. What the EEF perhaps underplayed was the extent to which public opinion was much more inclined to disregard trans people as sexual deviants, though the tactic of pleading for public support was indeed precisely to address the kinds of transphobic treatment many trans people were experiencing. While the EEF may have made social change seem simple, it was actually anything but.

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The EEF’s educational campaigns targeting professional audiences began with helping professionals who stood out as advocates for transsexuals, like Elliot Blackstone. Blackstone was a driving force in normalizing transsexuality for police officers in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s and devoted much of his working life to advocating for transsexuals within the criminal justice system. To the EEF, Blackstone represented the type of “helping professional” who could make a profound difference in having transsexuality accepted socially and it regularly featured stories about his work in its newsletter, singing his praises and constructing him as a role model for others. By the 1970s, he was a well-established San Francisco police officer, having worked in the force for close to twenty years, and the EEF presented him to other professionals as an example of both the overall progress being achieved and the difference they could make by working within their own professional context. Blackstone also fulfilled the EEF’s goal of working both regionally and nationally and he had a major impact within the policing profession in both San Francisco and nationally. It was in part because of his work that the EEF began focusing its strategic support
on professional advocates working in the criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{167}

Blackstone’s social and institutional power came from his involvement with reform efforts to change the role that police officers played in their communities, reforms that stemmed from the broader social justice, anti-authoritarian, and civil rights movements of the 1960s. As part of wider social efforts to achieve greater economic and racial justice in American society in the 1960s and 1970s, segments of the criminal justice system and police force shifted from acting as a punitive force against those considered socially deviant to a force focused on crime prevention, rehabilitation, and positive “community relations,” particularly in relation to African American and other marginalized minority groups, including those previously considered “sex deviants” or “sex offenders.”\textsuperscript{168} The EEF proudly reported that Blackstone took part in many such progressive police reforms, acting as Liaison Officer with the Office of Economic Opportunity and working for San Francisco’s Police Community Relations Unit.\textsuperscript{169} The EEF called him an award-winning “peace officer in every sense of the word” and told newsletter readers that he had been a major advocate for transsexuals, having “given immeasurable assistance to people with this problem.”\textsuperscript{170} Indeed, the EEF saw Blackstone as a model professional advocate for transsexuality in American culture and used his work as proof of “progress in the handling of social problems of the transsexual.”\textsuperscript{171} To the

\textsuperscript{171} “Eyes Right on San Francisco,” \textit{EEF Newsletter} 3.1 (Spring 1970): 1, Devor Collection.
EEF, Blackstone represented a wider social shift in mainstream American society towards accepting transsexuals as normative members of society.

The EEF also saw transsexuals like Wendy Kohler as integral to its campaign to teach helping professionals that sex reassignment surgery could result in normative, productive, socially successful individuals, because she could actually personify successful rehabilitation as a transsexual woman. Kohler was a patient of Harry Benjamin who worked with numerous helping professionals in San Francisco. Kohler represented not only the promise that rehabilitation would result in normative individuals, but also that transsexuals needed professional assistance to succeed. The EEF noted that Kohler had been successful in part because she had received help from both Blackstone and the EEF. Kohler, then a twenty-seven year old trans woman, received an EEF grant to found the National Transsexual Counseling Unit (NTCU) to develop social programs for transsexuals in San Francisco, and she went on to become a major spokesperson for transsexuality. Joanne Meyerowitz writes that one of Kohler’s peers later remembered that she took up a conservative perspective on transsexuals and believed “that women should marry or work in traditional women’s jobs.” As such, she fit well with the EEF’s program of presenting transsexuals as respectable and culturally legibility normative citizens. The EEF told newsletter readers that Kohler had first started working for Blackstone as a volunteer in order to gain work experience as a woman, after which she was appointed to a paid position as Research Coordinator. The EEF used her story to encourage others to see volunteer work during the preoperative period as a viable option in preparation for the expected full social integration post-operatively. The EEF thus

saw Kohler as an ideal transsexual representative in that she demonstrated that vocational rehabilitation was indeed possible.

The EEF considered unemployment and the establishment of new post-operative social roles to be two of the central social problems facing transsexuals, given social prejudices against hiring transsexuals and the high level of gender segregation in the workforce, which left post-operative transsexuals with “gender-inappropriate” resumes. The EEF therefore saw professionals working in the field of rehabilitation as important allies in addressing the socio-economic marginalization facing many transsexuals. For example, in 1971, the newsletter reported that Blackstone and Kohler were organizing an event called the First Bay Area Conference on Gender Identity to gather “rehabilitation department representatives” to clarify “services that are available and will be made available to pre-operative transsexuals, following medical evaluation, through various state, county and city offices and agencies.”175 Blackstone and Kohler also worked with San Francisco’s Center for Special Problems, a subdivision of the San Francisco Department of Public Health’s Community Mental Health Services, to encourage government representatives to help transsexuals become rehabilitated into normative mainstream American society and to educate them about what the EEF often referred to as “the social problems of transsexuals.”176

San Francisco was an ideal place for such a conference because it had a number of progressive social programs with which to collaborate and the EEF reported proudly that the conference addressed “more than two dozen representatives of local helping-profession agencies [who] discussed problems, programs, clinics and projects” available to

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Many such programs combined various types of social services for people who were struggling and socially marginalized. For example, the Centre for Special Problems, which was run by Dr. Joel Fort, offered hormone therapy for transsexuals and was one of the first facilities to offer a methadone clinic for heroin addicts; it also provided both groups with counseling and vocational rehabilitation therapy.\(^{178}\) By supporting transsexual integration into existing vocational rehabilitation programs and other social services, the EEF constructed transsexuals as suffering from pathologized problems similar to disability and addiction. The benefits of doing so were obvious; the more problematic elements were that the programs left trans people dependent on particular state-funded programs and often promoted entrenched norms regarding transsexualism, leaving little room for broadening and reconsidering the diversity of social experiences and issues facing those whose lives did not approximate the classic transsexual image.

The EEF drew on a discourse of rehabilitation in order to increase the options available to transsexuals, particularly during their transitions or in their immediate post-operative periods, times when transsexuals often faced discrimination, arrest and unemployment. In relying on the rubric of rehabilitation, however, the EEF also constructed a normative transsexual trajectory. It saw institutionalized rehabilitation services as potentially helpful to transsexuals, telling newsletter readers that existing rehabilitation services could apply to transsexuals in “areas of vocational training, schooling, personal and social adjustment to the new gender role.”\(^{179}\) The rehabilitation framework was based on the fear that pre-operative transsexuals were at risk for social deviancy, particularly in terms of unemployment or


\(^{179}\) “San Francisco Sidelights,” *EEF Newsletter* 3.2 (Fall 1970): 3, Devor Collection.
criminalization, and the hope that post-operative transsexuals would achieve social normativity to become well-adjusted members of society. The EEF asked “helping professionals” to assist transsexuals in bridging the gap between deviancy and normativity. Ultimately, however, post-operative transsexuals were expected to personally exemplify the social success they had achieved through a process of hormones, rehabilitation, and sex reassignment surgery; this was especially true for those who would go on to be transsexual representatives in education and media campaigns.

EEF’s normative ideal for post-operative transsexual women was white, fully employed, gender-normative, and non-incarcerated. The rehabilitation and support services that the EEF promoted were often limited to pre-operative transsexual women who had been medically evaluated, since they were thought to be in a period of rehabilitation during their gender transitions, before undergoing sex reassignment surgery; when their new legal status took effect, they would presumably be able to live freely as women through the gendered and racialized norms being established by the medical practitioners, helping professionals, and the EEF. “Rehabilitation” thus proved a critical discourse through which liberal norms were reproduced in defining trans people and framing trans people’s lives as well as in framing non-trans people’s experiences of gender and sexuality, which were understood, often implicitly, in relation to the experiences of trans people.

In part because of Blackstone’s and Kohler’s successful work with vocational rehabilitation professionals and in part because it recognized that many transsexuals did indeed require such assistance, the EEF encouraged other professional advocates to develop additional training programs for vocational rehabilitation professionals. The Foundation told readers that “employment prior to surgery remains a problem still to be solved” and that there
was a real need for “the cooperation of professionals…to aid in handling personal, psychological and social problems” facing transsexuals, “particularly in terms of the vocational-making job opportunities available to preoperative transsexuals living in the role of the opposite sex.” Because the goal of professionals working in the field of vocational rehabilitation was to re-train individuals for employment after significant changes that affected their ability to work as they had in the past, the EEF saw them as an ideal group of “helping professionals” to enroll in its work. The EEF encouraged rehabilitation professionals to find ways to help transsexuals find employment so that they could integrate into mainstream American society.

The EEF encouraged enthusiastic helping professionals such as Deborah Feinbloom to take a leadership role in developing targeted educational programming for professionals working in vocational rehabilitation and saw such professional advocates as playing a key role in its education campaign and broader social goals. As it had with Blackstone, the EEF supported Feinbloom and presented her as both a role model for other helping professionals and a professional advocate for transsexuals. The EEF had originally given Feinbloom a research grant for her graduate work in sociology and she went on to become the director of Boston’s Gender Identity Service. In 1971, the EEF announced that she had presented a workshop called "Transexualism - A Career Gone Sour" to the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA), in which she educated ASPA members about what the EEF called “the economic problems facing the transexual during the preoperative period of treatment and adjustment to the desired gender role prior to sex reassignment operation.” The EEF made copies of the presentation available and announced that it would like to see them

The rehabilitation discourse she drew upon allowed her to translate the social problems facing transsexuals to professionals with the institutional power to include or exclude transsexuals from normative American society. The EEF presented Feinbloom as another example of a professional advocate who could use her authority strategically to teach other professionals to help transsexuals become integrated into mainstream American society.

In addition to targeting helping professionals working in vocational rehabilitation, the EEF developed educational programming to try to recruit police officers for the project of accepting and rehabilitating transsexuals. Because police officers had the power to arrest, harass, or assist transsexuals and because cross-dressing in public remained illegal in many places, the EEF worked with professional advocates within the criminal justice system to teach police officers that transsexuals were not deviant or criminal, but rather individuals who were attempting to become normative members of society and worthy of their sympathy and support. Professional gatherings provided the perfect opportunity to target police officers and in 1974 the EEF cosponsored a “hospitality hour” with Blackstone at the 5th Annual Workshop Seminar of the National Association of Police Community Relations Officers, held that year in Arkansas. The audience would have been particularly receptive, as police-community relations officers were generally considered to be among the most liberal and progressive of all the police. The EEF hoped that as a group they could teach as many police officers as possible to be aware of the EEF, its mission, and its resources and to see transsexuals as normative, law-abiding citizens rather than as criminals.

The EEF soon began using its workshops with police officers to validate its work

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181 “In Boston,” EEF Newsletter 5.3 (Fall 1972): 4, Devor Collection.
culturally and to reach a wider audience, particularly in relation to police willingness to accept transsexuals as a “minority” group. Initially, the EEF simply put some of the questions that police officers had raised at various workshops and training sessions together in a pamphlet called “Information on Transsexualism for Law Enforcement Officers.” The EEF made copies of the pamphlet available through its Baton Rouge office and told readers that it had been created "in the hope that this information may be useful in assisting in the current progressive review of police policies and practices” and was “designed for distribution to schools of criminal justice, police academies, chiefs of police, and other concerned professionals.”

The newsletter later reported that the pamphlet was in wide circulation and was being well-received by the criminal justice profession; not only was it reviewed by a professional journal called Sex News, but publishers of the Police Community Relations Publication series also turned the pamphlet into a full book chapter of a police training textbook called Case Studies in Minority Programs. The chapter, called "The Transexual as a Misunderstood Minority," taught police officers to understand and accept transsexuals as simply another minority group in society. Just as it had effectively mobilized a discourse of rehabilitation, the EEF was able to draw on police reform efforts and the civil rights activism that had encouraged them to include transsexuals under the rubric of existing programs and efforts.

Building on the success of professional advocates like Blackstone and Feinbloom, the EEF hired Marie Mehl, a criminologist in Florida, as its Director of Research and Education in 1971. Mehl became well-known as a professional educator on the topic of transsexualism and

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184 Ibid.
185 “For Law Enforcers,” EEF Newsletter 8.1 (Spring 1975): 3, Devor Collection; also note that two spellings, “transexual” and “transsexual,” were used and considered correct.
one of its most important professional advocates. She held a PhD in criminology and the EEF emphasized her expertise and authority by regularly referring to her as Dr. Mehl. Like Blackstone, Mehl was especially successful working within the criminal justice system. For example, she regularly educated Miami Police Academy recruits “on gender identity problems,” and the EEF announced that it hoped to see this type of educational program develop in other cities. Mehl also gave workshops for the Department of Criminology at Florida State University and co-taught a workshop called "Sex and the Law" to the annual Southeastern Conference on Correction in Tallahassee several times. Unlike Blackstone, Mehl focused mainly on training future professionals and she travelled widely from her post in Florida, particularly throughout the southeastern United States. Mehl also worked with many transsexuals around the country, most of whom, unlike Kohler, went largely unrecognized in the newsletter beyond a generic reference to their presence in her workshops.

The EEF also worked with professional advocates and prison officials, particularly prison clergy, to normalize transsexuality within institutions that would have previously condemned them as “sex deviants.” For example, the EEF reported to newsletter readers that Charles Ihlenfeld, another professional advocate and a physician with a longstanding interest and expertise in transsexualism, had developed a workshop for the annual meeting of the Clergy Program of New York City’s Board of Correction called "The Homosexual and the Transexual," in which he discussed the differences between the two and “available treatment for transexuals.” The newsletter told readers that “there is a great need for information and education in that area in our prison system” and that the Deputy Director of the program had contacted the EEF to let them know that she had received numerous requests for more

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information from the EEF after the workshop. Thus, the EEF saw the presentation as a success in that it brought together professional authorities and cultivated a network of professional advocates who could use the EEF’s educational resources and work together to create institutionalized acceptance of and support for transsexuals.

Clergy and religious groups with social justice commitments were particularly important professional advocates and helping professionals in that, as was the case with the police, liberals and progressives were in the process of redefining their attitudes towards sexuality. They also focused on both individual and systemic support for those considered to need their help, and the EEF newsletter was happy to report that clergy and faith groups were joining in the effort to create institutional acceptance of transsexuals. For example, it told readers that the National Conference of Christians and Jews, a longstanding social justice organization, endorsed the EEF’s legal pamphlet and that its journal had called the pamphlet “extremely helpful” in addressing the "public prejudices and legal ambiguities [that] compound[ed] the difficulty of the police officer in his dealings with persons whose sexual tendencies are out of the ordinary."188

The EEF clearly saw transsexuals as benefiting from the work of those working within a social justice framework and supported and promoted their efforts to address the social problems facing transsexuals; it told readers that it appreciated the publicity and saw it as a sign of progressive social change.189 Because it focused on educating professionals on treatments available to transsexuals, however, the EEF contributed to professional frameworks that conceptualized transsexuals as a distinct group and primarily as service-recipients in need

189 Ibid.
of medical treatment and sympathy. The EEF’s framework of understanding transsexuals as a
distinct minority group deserving of specific professional services showcases a liberal
approach towards individual, rights-bearing citizens, rather than systemic critiques of
gendered social relations or other social formations of power.

As it did with other professional advocates, the EEF encouraged sympathetic members
of the clergy who had worked with transsexuals in their professional capacity, such as Cannon
Clinton Jones of Connecticut, to become involved in educating other helping professionals
about transsexuality. Jones, like Blackstone, was part of reform efforts within his profession;
indeed, many religious groups and representatives across the United States were reconsidering
their relationship to those who had previously been considered sexually deviant during the
1960s and 1970s, and the EEF reported that Jones had been counseling “individuals with
sexual problems including transsexualism” and had even published a tract called “What About
Homosexuality?”190 The EEF encouraged his interest in and work with transsexuals and
announced that he was giving seminars to the Connecticut Police Community Relations
Department. Although the EEF recognized that advocates like Jones could be called upon to
provide practical support to individual transsexuals, it was perhaps more important that the
EEF could draw on their cultural authority and support as a form of social capital in its
educational campaign to normalize and legitimize transsexualism. As it had with its police
education work, the EEF soon produced another educational pamphlet, this one focusing on
religion and transsexuality and offering perspectives from religious representatives who
supported transsexuals. They, too, constructed transsexuals as potentially normative
individuals who were worthy of non-transsexuals’ sympathy and understanding.

190 “In Hartford,” EEF Newsletter 5.3 (Fall 1972): 3, Devor Collection.
In addition to encouraging individual professional advocates like Jones, the EEF also worked with progressive liberal religious groups that supported a social vision in which transsexuals could be accepted as normative individuals.\textsuperscript{191} For example, in 1972 the newsletter reported that the EEF worked with Dignity, a newly formed group for gay Catholics, and ONE, Inc., to produce a symposium on transsexualism at St. Sebastian’s Church in Chicago.\textsuperscript{192} The educational opportunity was designed for the broader public rather than a particular professional group, but the EEF drew on the cultural authority of the church to present a broad audience with the notion that they should learn about and try to sympathetically understand transsexuals and transsexualism. The St. Sebastian’s event also used what was quickly becoming the EEF’s standard format for broader public education: an expert-led, demonstration-style panel and discussion.

The newsletter reported that the presentation was given by Dr. Marie Mehl, who represented the EEF, and Dr. Tamara Braun of the Chicago Gender Identity Clinic. Their program included “interviews with transexuals and a transvestite,” but as was typical of such presentations, especially in the early 1970s, the transsexuals involved were neither named nor described in much depth; their personal identities were shielded and their individual histories glossed over, presumably to protect their anonymity, but also, unfortunately, diminishing both


their individuality and the extent of their contributions. Furthermore, that they were “interviewed” highlighted their difference from the non-transsexual experts and encouraged the audience to objectify the transsexuals and relate to the interviewers rather than the interviewees. Indeed, the interviewing style replicated several different professional relationships, positioning the audience to imagine themselves as counselor, social worker, or other “helping professional” and constructing the transsexual as a service-recipient in need of aid. Such a format also called upon transsexuals to replicate and perform clinical and other intake-type interviews for wider public audiences as part of the process of constructing themselves as normative transsexuals.

The EEF saw counseling programs designed for homosexuals as another important context in which it could promote the normalization and acceptance of transsexuals and transsexuality, since a number of religious and professional social institutions in the 1970s were accepting homosexuality rather than rendering it deviant. Gay and lesbian politics within numerous organizations were undergoing massive transformation in numerous arenas during the 1970s. Stephen Cohen writes that in counseling and social work, “more moderate organizations and thinking” redefined youth in general as “clients and participants.” The EEF encouraged organizations that provided services to homosexuals to recognize that they could also serve a wider range of people with gender or sexual concerns, particularly transsexuals. Using the Gay Community Services Center of Los Angeles as a model, the EEF newsletter told readers that the Center offered gay programming, but also “counseling and

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discussion groups for transexuals and transvestites.”¹⁹⁵ As with so many of its programs, the EEF promoted the inclusion of transsexuals within institutional frameworks that were sympathetic to trans people, such as gay organizations that distinguished between homosexual and transsexual, but nevertheless served both populations. This tactic made transsexual resources potentially vulnerable to the fact that transsexuals did not represent the primary concern of such groups, but the EEF saw itself as constructing transsexuals as part of mainstream American society and favored approaches that constructed transsexuals as distinct from other groups (as opposed to contemporaries who favored an expanded concept of ‘gay’ that included trans people, as examined in the following chapter).

A number of homosexually-oriented counseling services were developing social services in the 1970s that approached homosexuals in much the same way that the EEF saw transsexuals: as a vulnerable, potentially deviant social group suffering from social stigma, institutionalized marginalization, and mental health problems requiring professional support and rehabilitation services and facilities.¹⁹⁶ The EEF thus provided support to homosexually-oriented organizations that shared its vision and could also provide support for transsexuals. For example, the EEF provided a grant to the Seattle Counseling Service for Homosexuals, which had been founded by Dr. W. Deisher, a professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine. The newsletter reported that Deisher found that “young people were seeking help with problems other than homosexuality,” so counselors were “being trained to help in these associated areas of gender role disorientation, such as transvestism and transsexualism” and that the centre was changing its name to the Seattle Counseling Center for

Sexual Minorities, a title that reified the notion that transsexuals represented a distinct minority group. It was clear that the EEF saw the Centre as expanding in the future, noting that “the demands on the service are reaching the point where a fulltime co-ordinator-counselor is needed,” but that it was “not feasible as yet” to provide such funding. Integrating transsexuals into existing services was not only a more efficient use of EEF resources than creating whole new services, but doing so also further constructed transsexualism as a more normative part of American society by associating it with other existing groups, interests, and institutions, such as the growing field of gender and sexual counseling.

The EEF continued to emphasize a discourse of rehabilitation by encouraging facilities that would help otherwise potentially deviant trans people become normative, healthy, acceptable, social citizens. For example, it gave a grant for an “educational program” to a facility in Seattle called “Stonewall,” which it described as a new “residential, re-habilitation center for men and women with psychosexual problems who have been in trouble with the law,” including “parolees, probationers, drug abusers, [and] alcoholics.” The newsletter noted that Stonewall’s belief was that “sexual orientation is a primary element in one's personality, which, when denied, often leads to neurotic and anti-social behavior” and that the center would provide “a family environment of mutual trust and support to help the individual learn new patterns of self-expression.” By emphasizing the personal costs of social marginalization, the EEF saw both transsexuals and homosexuals as potentially benefiting from the same kinds of rehabilitation services, and it worked to collaborate with professionals

to build programs that would address both.

Because transsexuals were controversial in many psychology and counseling professions, the EEF also targeted professional conferences where attendees might be receptive to being exposed to normative transsexuals and could potentially help educate their professional peers.¹⁹⁹ For example, in 1972 Mehl facilitated a “tutorial discussion” at the Midwestern Regional Conference of the American Humanistic Psychology Association which featured two sets of interviews by professional advocates, one by the Director of the Gender Identity Clinic in Chicago, who interviewed “three male-to-female preoperative patients” in counseling at the clinic, the other by Mehl, who “interviewed a female-to-male preoperative transexual now living and working as a male.”²⁰⁰ The newsletter gave no indication as to the content or scope of the interviews, but they likely followed the standard format of replicating clinical interviews. The EEF was happy to report an enthusiastic response from the audience and told readers that not only had the session been attended by 135 participants, but “so sustained was the interest in the subject” that the group had opted to extend the session so that they could watch an educational film which had been mentioned during the discussion.²⁰¹

The EEF was proud to report that its seminar programs at professional conferences sometimes converted potential professional allies into major professional advocates and that transsexuals themselves benefited directly from the joint efforts. For example, the EEF newsletter reported that after attending Mehl’s 1971 presentation to the National Council on

²⁰⁰ “On to Temple!” *EEF Newsletter* 4.3 (Fall 1971): 3, Devor Collection.
²⁰¹ “In Chicago,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.2 (Summer 1972): 1, Devor Collection.
Family Relations, the Director of Omaha’s Creighton University School of Medicine had organized a gender identity team that was evaluating five individuals, including “the transsexual who participated in the workshop.” Indeed, this transsexual had moved to Omaha based on the promise of such treatment, and the EEF considered the whole situation to be “an illustration of the dynamics in one phase of EEF aims.”

The EEF saw the potential for gender clinics around the country to provide cultural authority and expertise that could sustain an education campaign, keeping transsexuality in the public eye as a regular part of normative American society and also providing direct benefits to transsexuals. It reported, for example, that Mehl had worked “with the cooperation of two evaluated transsexuals” and the Creighton Clinic to produce an EEF seminar on transsexualism that was attended by one hundred medical students. After the gathering, Mehl and other specialists also conducted a smaller meeting with twelve transsexuals who were “receiving professional guidance and help in the Gender Identity consultation and evaluation center” and who had “regular meetings which provide personal, vocational and mutual help.”

The EEF saw the educational efforts of professional advocates who worked at gender clinics as particularly useful in addressing the need for both increased medical treatment options for transsexuals and social acceptance. For example, the newsletter reported that in both Florida and Georgia, a team of non-transsexual helping professionals working together as “Gender Identity Association, Inc.” was conducting its own “concerned educational process” on the subject of transsexualism. Unlike the university-based gender identity clinics,

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the Jacksonville group followed what was becoming a new model of gender clinics by providing services rather than conducting research and the EEF noted the practical and educational benefits of its work. It told readers that Dr. Ira Dushoff, who led the clinic, had given a paper at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons called “The Organization and Experience of a Private Gender Team,” a presentation that encouraged other plastic surgeons to approach transsexual surgery as a promising professional field. The EEF told readers, “We welcome this assistance to the Foundation effort to educate the medical profession on this problem, and saw both groups as working towards the same goal.”

The EEF considered educational workshops targeting medical professionals to be part of a cooperative movement that would ultimately benefit transsexuals, and it praised the many workshops that were conducted at hospitals throughout the country. Using Dushoff as a model professional advocate, the EEF told readers that he had also been featured as a speaker at meeting of the Northeast Florida Association of Operation Room Nurses and had worked “in an educational capacity with staff physicians at the Methodist hospital and related lay and nursing groups.” The EEF also conducted many of its own workshops in hospitals and medical training facilities around the country; in 1973 alone it listed workshops at the Hudson River State Hospital, Allentown General Hospital, Lincoln Hospital, Hunter College Institute of Health Sciences, the School of Allied Health Professions at the State University of New York (SUNY), and the School of Medicine at New York Hospital. The newsletter also boasted about participating in numerous seminars for medical audiences in the New York

204 “In Jacksonville,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.3 (Fall 1972): 4, Devor Collection.
205 Ibid.
area, including at Bellevue and Beth Israel Hospitals, the Lutheran Mental Health Center in Brooklyn, and Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. 207

As medical professionals adjusted to accepting a more diverse range of gender and sexuality, the EEF was able to present transsexuality as part of a wider social change with which many were already familiar.208 The newsletter reported, for example, that an overflow audience of more than six hundred people attended a professional symposium called "Human Sexuality Today and Where Tomorrow?" which the EEF cosponsored with the Allentown Hospital Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Pennsylvania and various regional medical societies.209 Thus, the EEF capitalized on the medical practitioners’ interest in questions of sexuality and encouraged professional groups to learn about transsexualism by attending EEF educational programs.

The EEF saw all efforts to educate medical professionals as part of a shared effort to normalize transsexualism and took the fact that so many programs were duplicating their format as a sign of success. The EEF newsletter often told readers about educational programs across the country and listed its own role as one of co-sponsorship or cooperation. For example, the EEF reported that it had helped Naomi Smith, professional advocate and member of the Lincoln Hospital gender identity team, put together a panel in which she “presented one of the patients attending her group therapy sessions who is successfully undergoing Vocation Rehabilitation training” to the department of psychiatry, alongside

presentations by Bertha Santos, PhD, and EEF representatives Marie Mehl and Zelda Suplee.\textsuperscript{210} As with previous educational efforts, the normative transsexual representative was called upon to publicly respond to the questions of the professional advocate in order to educate the audience about transsexualism as an acceptable medical condition.

The newsletter repeatedly described its professional medical education workshops as dramatic events, constructing them to readers as a major sign of success and emphasizing the authorities presenting the transsexuals, the helping professionals being educated, and the normativity of the transsexual representatives. It told readers, for example, that one program had featured “five attractive young women, postoperative transexuals,” who were “interviewed by Dr. Lionel Ovesey in regard to their personal feelings and reactions, followed by discussion.” The newsletter emphasized the experts and also praised Professor John Kingsley Latimer, M.D., who had narrated a series of slides for the audience and whom the newsletter described as “internationally known Chairman of the Department of Urology.” It also told readers that the event was attended by “an overflow staff audience” and that in another similar “medical seminar on transsexualism… the ninth floor amphitheatre of the College of Physicians and Surgeons at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center was filled to overflowing with medical students and staff.” The EEF saw the popularity of such events as wholly positive, telling readers, “We applaud this seminar and the enthusiastic response… and look forward to similar programs becoming a part of all medical school curricula.”\textsuperscript{211} Indeed, rather than focusing on what it was they were teaching about transsexuals and to whom they were teaching, it simply saw the existence and popularity of such programs as a sign of

\textsuperscript{210} “In the Bronx,” \textit{EEF Newsletter} 5.3 (Fall 1972): 4, Devor Collection.

success.

The EEF saw the growing presence of sex education within the social sciences and medical disciplines as an opportunity to normalize transsexuality within mainstream medical professional education. Just as it had arranged to have specialist conferences count towards professional accreditation, as discussed in the previous chapter, the EEF announced that it would also be possible to count some of its shorter, workshop-style programs towards participants’ professional development. For example, participants in one series were given the option of receiving either course credit or credit with the American Medical Association, depending on whether they were professionals, graduate students, or undergraduate students. The newsletter described the series as having attracted over a hundred and thirty participants and covering topics from gender identity, gay liberation, and human sexuality to bisexuality and the effects of prenatal hormones. The EEF constructed such programs as further evidence that transsexuals’ needs were being widely and significantly incorporated into professional education programs, particularly through a broader program of sex education for medical professionals.

As in other professional education campaigns, the EEF drew on individual professional advocates to promote educational programs for specific groups, and just as it had with Blackstone and Mehl in educating police officers, it encouraged Bonnie Bullough to act as a professional advocate to educate nurses. Erickson had come into contact with Vern and Bonnie Bullough through their work with Evelyn Hooker’s NIMH research and ONE Inc., and the EEF became a supporter of their research and professional activities. In 1973, for

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213 See Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 62; Bonnie Bullough and Vern Bullough, “How We Got into
example, the EEF worked with Bonnie, a registered nurse, to organize an educational panel for the U.C.L.A. Medical Center School of Nursing students and staff. Like other EEF programs, the event featured a panel of helping professionals and transsexual representatives that also included a gender clinic expert, Patrick Gandy, of Stanford University, and a transsexual representative described as “an attractive married woman, postoperative for many years.”

The EEF emphasized to readers that the personal touch of the transsexual representative was one of the most effective elements of the program format. For example, the EEF told readers that many of the nurses who attended a presentation to the North Nassau School Nurses Association in New York had “enthusiastic response to the program, particularly to the discussion with the transexual who freely discussed her experiences and problems” and that the nurses “frankly admitted their lack of understanding and information on the subject before the presentation.” The newsletter told readers that there was a great need “in the minds of many present… for education on the subject in the nursing field” and that it hoped that “professional journal material on transexualism will be forthcoming in the not too distant future.” The EEF saw its educational work with nurses as part of a wider cultural move towards greater professional acceptance of transsexualism and saw normative transsexual representatives as playing a vital role in mobilizing sympathy and understanding.

Just as the EEF sponsored and enthusiastically participated in educational workshops in hospitals and medical associations, so too did it provide education about transsexualism to medical classes at colleges and universities. Like professional gatherings, colleges and

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Sex,” *Personal Stories of ‘How I Got Into Sex’: Leading Researchers, Sex Therapists, Educators, Prostitutes, Sex Toy Designers, Sex Surrogates, Transsexuals, Criminologists, Clergy, and more...* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1997), 55-62.


215 Ibid.
universities offered existing institutional contexts with pre-determined audiences, and the EEF was regularly featured in a number of classes. For example, in 1972 the newsletter noted that it had given presentations to physical education teachers and students of the Physicians Associates Program at the State University of New York at Stony Brook for the third year in a row.\textsuperscript{216} The following year it reported that a course in Human Growth and Development for first year medical students at Temple University had included a three hour session on transsexualism and was using the EEF pamphlet “Medical Management of the Transsexual” as a background reading.\textsuperscript{217} The EEF clearly felt that the popularity of education about transsexuality was a sign that the EEF was achieving its goals and the EEF newsletter told readers that “the demand for EEF seminars at colleges is rapidly increasing and in some cases they have already become traditional.”\textsuperscript{218}

Under Mehl’s leadership as Research and Education Director, the EEF also became increasingly involved in the growing field of sex education, which provided the EEF with yet another institutionalized professional group with whom it could work to normalize transsexuality. The incorporation of sex education into various curricula was a growing trend in the early 1970s, and through Mehl, the EEF was able to support integrating normative transsexuality into wider educational contexts.\textsuperscript{219} The EEF newsletter reported proudly, for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} “Long Island Double Feature,” \textit{EEF Newsletter} 5.4 (Winter 1972): 3, Devor Collection.
\item \textsuperscript{218} “Campus Activities,” \textit{EEF Newsletter} 6.2 (Fall 1973): 3, Devor Collection.
example, that Mehl had given a paper called “Educational Aspects of Transexualism” at the First International Symposium on Sex Education in Israel in 1972, which had been attended by about 500 participants. It called her work in this field “another forward step in our effort to ‘educate the educators’ in the area of sexual differences and the various aspects of transsexualism” and told readers that she would also be serving on the International Advisory Committee for the Second International Symposium on Sex Education. Thus, Mehl not only fulfilled the EEF’s desire to work regionally, nationally, and globally; she also increased the likelihood that future sex educators would include transsexuals in their frameworks and lessons.

Professors introduced normative transsexual representatives to their classes as an educational opportunity for the benefit of their non-transsexual students and transsexual representatives who appeared in classroom presentations were often asked, as they were in other EEF programs, to be interviewed in a way that mirrored clinical or research relationships. For example, Dr. Harold T. Christensen regularly offered a course called "Men and Women in Modern Society" at Purdue University, in which he featured invited guests, the highlight of which, according to the EEF newsletter, was “the annual visit of a postoperative transexual.”

Although the EEF described the transsexual representative’s appearance informally as a “visit,” the presentation was, in fact, the dramatization of a clinical interview in which...
Christensen addressed the transsexual woman as a patient or research subject, asking her highly personal questions as part of teaching his students about how to approach transsexuals in their own professional lives, such as “Were you attracted to girls during adolescence?” and “Did you wonder at that time if you were normal – if something was wrong?” Christensen’s “transsexual interview” was so effective that he even published a copy of one as an academic journal article. The EEF fully supported the cultural proliferation of professional advocates using transsexual representatives to explain transsexualism to audiences presumed to be non-transsexual, in a format that was, with the EEF’s help, becoming standard.

The EEF encouraged transsexual representatives, particularly those who could represent transsexualism and sex reassignment surgery in socially acceptable ways, to make themselves available as interview subjects for the edification of helping professionals. The newsletter asked “any transexual under professional care who is willing to cooperate in an educational program that may be scheduled in her/his area” to contact the EEF, noting that “because of the rapid growth of teaching human sexuality in college curricula, we are preparing for program requests from other parts of the country.” In 1973, the EEF announced that it had “an increasing list of transsexuals who are willing to be interviewed on the subject before academic groups” and between 1972 and 1974 the newsletter announced dozens of institutions where it had provided educational programs to classes of graduate and undergraduate students.

The EEF saw the fact that transsexuals were speaking to public audiences as a sign of

progress and attributed the popularity of transsexual speakers to the “constant flow” of media pieces across the country, telling its newsletter readers that “an increasing number of postoperative transexuals are appearing on campuses and before civic organizations.” While few transsexual guest speakers were identified by name, a few normative, public transsexual representatives became known for their eloquence and experience in addressing college classes and professional groups. Wendy Kohler, for example, was recognized as having given talks at college classes “across the continent,” and Christine Jorgensen had almost made a full-time career out of college presentations by the 1970s. The newsletter used Jorgensen’s popularity to narrate the success of its educational programming, noting that just ten years earlier, she would not have even been allowed on campus, whereas by the 1970s, she was “the most widely booked and enthusiastically received lecturer on transexualism on the circuit,” having spoken to over a hundred thousand people about her life.  

Seeing media opportunities to extend its educational campaign, the EEF encouraged professional advocates like Leo Wollman to use their cultural authority to become media spokespeople for normative transsexualism. The EEF told readers that Wollman was giving regular “lecture-demonstrations on transsexualism” to New York City teachers taking professional development courses in “Family Life and Sex Education.” Wollman, who gave regular presentations and workshops at numerous venues, used transsexuals who usually remained anonymous to explain transsexualism to teachers, and he presented transsexuals as an exciting opportunity for non-transsexuals to engage in a new kind of experiential learning. Wollman, a gynecologist with whom Benjamin shared his medical practice, also treated

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225 Ibid.
226 “In Brooklyn,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.2 (Summer 1972): 5, Devor Collection.
transsexuals in individual and group therapy settings.\textsuperscript{227} The EEF supported his work and told readers that one of Wollman’s seminars included both “live subjects and films.”\textsuperscript{228} The seminar, which took place at the Virginia Institute for Comprehensive Medicine, was called the "Management of Sexual Inadequacy" and included what the EEF referred to as "A Comprehensive Approach to Transexualism, Intersexuality and Transvestism." The seminar promised to situate normative transsexuality within the context of a number of gender and sexual conditions usually stigmatized and deemed non-normative.

While the work that the EEF and Wollman were doing was incredibly important, it also continued to frame trans people in terms of a liberal transnormativity that allowed for exclusions and oversights. For example, the quality and style of Wollman’s work left transsexuals extremely vulnerable to an invasive, cis-normative gaze. Perhaps the most shocking example is one of the films Wollman starred in, called \textit{Let me Die a Woman}, which was released in 1977 and screened in smaller movie theatres around the country. In it, Wollman replicated physical exam scenarios and actually probed the new vaginal cavities of trans women for the audience’s viewing. While this scene is partially understood in the context of the exploitation film genre to which the film often conformed, it nevertheless objectified these trans people’s bodies and provided broad social permission for such objectification to be considered acceptable as part of “learning about transsexualism.”

As the value and popularity of education about transsexualism became evident, professional advocates began making films that could be used as teaching aids during EEF presentations or to target audiences where EEF programs were unavailable. Most educational

\textsuperscript{227} Meyerowitz, \textit{How Sex Changed}, 214.
\textsuperscript{228} “In Brooklyn,” \textit{EEF Newsletter}, 5.
films about transsexualism in the 1970s replicated the same format as EEF presentations, demonstrating clinical interview techniques, establishing the authority of medical professionals, and presenting transsexuals as patients to be diagnosed according to medical criteria. For example, in 1973 the EEF newsletter reported that Creighton’s Gender Clinic put together a fifty-five minute documentary called “Transsexualism (Gender Dysphoria),” which included an interview with “male and female transsexuals, panel discussions with students and lecture material by Dr. Marie Mehl.” The newsletter described it as “excellent visual materials for students, counselors, medical schools and professional organization education meetings.”  

The EEF considered films to be an important tool for educating medical professionals and announced that the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine was beginning to use audiovisual material to train “members of the health care community who are called upon to provide sex counseling” in a continuing medical education course called “Human Sexuality,” which the EEF told readers would “improve sex education.” Indeed, the EEF felt that exposing professionals to cultural materials that reframed sexual diversity in a positive light would benefit everyone, including transsexuals, and told readers that the course would also "pioneer an acquaintance with new audio-visual materials made available through the Baltimore Human Sexuality Film Festival.” In the 1970s there was a surge of professional organizations highlighting the pedagogical possibilities of film; the National Council on Family Relations, for example, held annual awards for sex education films in a number of categories, and while it did not highlight transsexualism, it included such topics as sexuality

amongst the elderly, teenagers, and people with disabilities. The EEF was well aware of such efforts and saw its own work as drawing on the cultural popularity of film to educate professional and public audiences.

The EEF saw film festivals as playing an important role in raising the profile of educational films about transsexuality and the EEF was proud to announce that films about transsexualism were becoming popular to a wider audience. For example, in 1973 the newsletter reported that the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania would be showing a twenty-minute feature that addressed transexualism as a "biogenic, psychogenic, sociogenic phenomenon." Similarly, the Annual Film Festival of the Brooklyn Arts & Culture Association and Pratt Institute screened an EEF-sponsored documentary film and selected it for distinction as one of the top twenty films of the 200 entrants.

When doctors began receiving awards for screening films about their work at professional conferences, the EEF announced that these professional advocates were playing a key role in promoting and bringing prestige to their joint efforts. For example, in 1971 it announced that the National American Urological Association had presented an award to Dr. Colin Markland for a film referred to simply as “the University of Minnesota Transsexual Research Project Movie,” which he had screened at the annual meeting of the American

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233 “Film Honored,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.7 (Spring 1972): 2, Devor Collection.
College of Surgeons. The film followed Minnesota’s gender identity clinic five year treatment program, giving what the newsletter called “an interim report on how well the total project is faring” and reviewing “surgical procedures and results” of its twenty-five “male[-to-female] transsexuals.”

In 1973, the American Medical Association gave Dr. Roberto Granato a similar award at its annual meeting for his film on "the surgical conversion of the genitalia, male to female," which he had also screened for attendees. Both films encouraged medical audiences to think of transsexuality as a medical condition for which sex reassignment was the appropriate treatment, and the EEF supported the use of clinical and surgical footage as an excellent way to train surgeons to both accept and conduct sex reassignment surgery. Such films also taught audiences to understand transsexualism and sex reassignment surgery almost exclusively as a medical process of changing from male to female, reinforcing and constructing a liberal transnormativity that precluded broader conversations about gender, sexuality, and diversity.

The EEF believed that by promoting films about transsexuality, professional advocates were improving surgeons’ attitudes about transsexuals and improving access to sex reassignment surgery for transsexuals. For example, the newsletter reported that discussions following the screenings of the Minnesota film “showed an improved attitude toward the role of transexual surgery” and the EEF told readers: “Dr. Markland believes that recent workshops in transexualism have so increased understanding of it in the urological field that any individual who may have this condition would do well to get in touch with the urology department of any major medical school.”

The EEF saw films as directly connected to the resources available to transsexuals and an important resource in advancing the foundation’s

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234 “Minnesota Film Honored,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.2 (Summer 1972): 3, Devor Collection.
235 Ibid.
mission. It praised professional advocates’ film screenings as a major sign of success and told readers that Granato’s film had been shown to large and varied medical audiences at numerous venues, including the American College of Surgeons conference in Chicago and the international meeting of the Society of Urology, as well as at screenings in Amsterdam and South America.  

The EEF rarely mentioned the transsexuals who were involved with such films or the ways in which they came to be the subjects of the surgical films and transsexuals were almost always represented as anonymous patients in such films. For example, the newsletter noted that Granato’s film was narrated by Dr. John K. Latimer of Columbia-Presbyterian School of Medicine, but the transsexuals being operated on remained anonymous. While this was clearly standard practice for medical films, it also trained medical professionals to see transsexuals primarily as anonymous surgical patients.

While gender clinics and professional advocates screened educational films for medical audiences, the EEF also participated in the production of films targeting a broader audience by cooperating with those already making a broader range of sex education films. For example, when the National Sex and Drug Forum of Glide Urban Centre in San Francisco began producing films “for use in sex education courses for medical and educational institutions, therapists and counselors,” the EEF told its newsletters that it had contributed to sections on transsexualism. The newsletter announced that the film had explored “the entire spectrum of the transexual phenomenon” and commended everyone involved “for their wide contribution to the cause of education in human sexuality, not only to the participants and members of the helping professions through the forums, but through the production and

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distribution of their films.”238 Glide was an important venue for bringing together urban and social initiatives that extended to the organization of services for transsexuals in San Francisco, where a group of trans people had begun meeting in the late 1960s and formed the group “Conversion Our Goal.”239 The screening of educational films at such a venue in turn extended the EEF’s educational efforts beyond institutional contexts and into broader mainstream American culture.

The EEF was also pleased to cooperate in the creation of films for broadcast on national television, seeing such productions as teaching a wider audience to accept transsexuals as part of normative American culture. The newsletter reported in 1973, for example, that the EEF was involved with the production of a film called “Second Chance” and that it was “delighted to cooperate with co-producer Robert MacBride in the research and preparation of the documentary.” The three-hour documentary film on transsexualism had been filmed in San Francisco as part of a documentary series by a company called “Productions for Tomorrow Entertainment” and was narrated by Truman Capote, who the EEF called “one of America’s leading writers.” The EEF was proud of the fact that the film would be broadcast on national television and called the production “undoubtedly the most exciting and most gratifying forwar step in our aim to have the American public fully understand the problems of fellow human beings with a transsexual condition caused by no fault of their own.”240

Noting the popularity and success of educational films about transsexuality, the EEF began providing non-transsexual professional advocates with the resources to produce more educational films about transsexuality. The EEF provided a range of resources to facilitate

239 See Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed, 229-232; Stryker, Transgender History, 75.
such films, from background information and publicity to expert contacts and transsexuals willing to be filmed. For example, the EEF made arrangements for a Queensborough Community College student and her professor to film and interview “a postoperative transsexual” at the EEF’s New York Office for a class presentation on transsexualism in their human sexuality class.\(^{241}\)

Similarly, it used its New York office to stage a 28-minute documentary film called “I Am Not This Body,” which it produced with professional advocates and a production company called Sunrise Films. The film essentially replicated the type of panel discussion one might have encountered in its educational workshops. The EEF told newsletter readers that its premise was that Pamela Lincoln, who the newsletter described as being “of stage and TV” and “largely unfamiliar with the subject,” was seeking information about transsexualism by interviewing Zelda Suplee, the EEF’s main representative in New York, Dr. Leo Wollman, medical expert and professional advocate, and transsexual representatives Lynn Raskin and Deborah Hartin, who the newsletter identified as pre- and post-operative.

The EEF saw the film as representing its broad educational aims and indeed used it widely in its educational programs. The EEF constructed such films as truthful accounts, often referring to them as documentaries, but the films presented mainly normative narratives about transsexualism. The newsletter told readers, for example, that “I Am Not This Body,” was a “cinema verite optical sound production” and described a similar film, called "My Name Is Debbie," as a “10-minute documentary film on a postoperative transsexual” that would be used in educational presentations for medical audiences.”\(^{242}\) Many such films used personal narratives to elicit audience sympathy and the EEF encouraged non-transsexuals to view the


\(^{242}\) “In Manhattan,” *EEF Newsletter* 5.3 (Fall 1972): 2, Devor Collection.
stories of individual transsexual representatives both emotionally and rationally; transsexuals represented the personal and emotional, while professional advocates gave authoritative explanations of transsexuality through techniques such as voice-over interpretations. EEF descriptions rarely included much demographic or personal information about the transsexuals in question. This genre of media and educational programming constructed trans people as those who undergo surgical transformation to become a socially-integrated, newly gendered people.

By including transsexuals as “demonstrations” alongside expert narration, many educational films replicated the EEF’s “seminar” or “workshop” format, encouraging non-transsexual audiences to understand transsexualism as a distinct medical condition and to see transsexuals as potentially normative post-transition, but always "other" in the sense of being subject to the assistance or acceptance of non-transsexuals. As with its other educational efforts, the EEF focused on educating non-transsexuals about transsexuals and promoted the films as a successful example of how specialists and professional advocates could teach the general public about transsexualism. For example, the EEF promoted “I'm Something Else," which it described as an eighteen minute film that had been produced for the CTV (Canadian Television) network by Deborah Pecker. The film included authoritative commentary from Dr. Betty Steiner, a psychiatrist at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, Canada’s top gender clinic, a voice-over description of a lengthy step-by-step presentation of the surgical processes of male-to-female sex reassignment surgery by Dr. Roberto Granato of New York, and another voice-over by an electrologyst who described the process of hair removal. Transsexual representatives played the typical role of demonstrating their lives to help non-transsexual viewers understand transsexuals and some of the issues they faced. The EEF
simply described the film as including “interviews with three male-to-female transexuals in different states of reassignment.” Such productions provided a simplistic narrative that primarily addressed non-transsexual audiences by presenting them with transsexual representatives who could personally exemplify transsexualism.

Nevertheless, the EEF used the same educational films to help stimulate discussions for a variety of professional and lay audiences and encouraged educators to discuss ways that the films could be used for educational and therapeutic purposes. Although “I’m Something Else” was developed for a television audience, the EEF began using it in its educational workshops with professional audiences. For example, the EEF told newsletter readers that a group of “second-year medical students at New Jersey College of Medicine in Newark were shown the film a week after receiving a presentation” and that Charles Ihlenfeld showed it during lectures to the Ob/Gyn Department at Coney Island Hospital and to the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Arkansas Medical Center in Little Rock. Another screening of the film, at a meeting of the Columbia-Presbyterian College of Physicians and Surgeons, also featured a panel discussion with three transsexuals.

Professional advocates presented a variety of such films at workshops and educational events around the country and the EFF encouraged professional advocates to teach non-transsexual audiences about transsexualism by incorporating films about transsexualism into their educational programs. For example, the EEF told readers that Charles Ihlenfeld presented “I Am Not This Body” to a group of residents at Bucknell

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University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1975. The fact that such films almost always presented the same narrative about transsexuals extended the EEF’s standardized education campaign about transsexualism to a broader audience.

The EEF’s educational modules thus came to consist of an EEF-associated facilitator, such as Mehl, one or more normative transsexual representatives, who were interviewed by the facilitator or specialist, a film on transsexualism, and an expert specialist, if one was available. In one typical medical training session, for example, at the department of psychiatry at the University of Florida, Zelda Suplee gave a talk on the EEF and showed the film “I Am Not This Body.” Mehl also interviewed two transsexuals in front of the group and one of the staff psychiatrists with a background in surgery showed a set of surgical slides of male-to-female sex reassignment that had been loaned for the occasion by the Johns Hopkins Clinic. In another program, graduate students, faculty members, “and professional guests” in a Human Sexuality class at the University of Connecticut saw “I Am Not This Body” alongside a presentation by Deborah Feinbloom, Suplee, and transsexual representative Dorothy Deans.

By the mid-1970s the newsletter was reporting that the EEF was working to meet the increasing requests for audiovisual resources and the EEF was promoting and advertising films that educators who wanted to learn and teach about transsexuality could use as teaching aids. The EEF asked readers to let the foundation know about any “videotapes, films or tapes concerning transexualism which can be used for educational purposes” and began making

films like "I'm Something Else" available for rental or purchase. The EEF announced that it had a copy of the film “on magnetic sound track” and printed contact information so that newsletter readers could also rent or buy copies through CTV directly. The EEF also told readers that for fifty dollars they could rent a copy of Feinbloom’s presentation on transexualism and transvestism at the Community Sex Information Center in Massachusetts.

The EEF also created an informal network of media advocates and representatives who could be called upon to fill media requests. Such advocates appeared in educational films and made themselves available as cultural authorities on transsexualism. Wollman, for example, became quite famous for his public representation of transsexuality, and in 1974, the newsletter even noted that *Cosmopolitan* magazine had mentioned him as someone who “conducts seminars for transsexuals.” Wollman regularly appeared with transsexuals as an authoritative doctor-character, as in the 1978 film *Let Me Die a Woman*, which featured various staged scenes that emphasized his authority and expertise. In one, for example, he sat behind a desk and addressed the audience directly, while in others he facilitated discussion among a group of transsexuals. The film encouraged viewers’ lurid fascination with post-operative, surgically-

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reconstructed genitalia and even featured one scene in which Wollman inspected a transsexual woman’s body, conducting a digital exam of her vagina on camera and using a pointing stick to “explain” parts of her body to viewers.

In addition to its involvement with film production, the EEF worked with professional advocates and transsexual representatives to promote public education about transsexualism on television. When several news channels began presenting segments on transsexualism featuring gender clinic specialists, the EEF believed that its strategy of using professional advocates as spokespeople was working. The newsletter mentioned and described many such programs in detail, listing the broadcast station, the length of the program(s), and the names of the non-transsexuals involved. For example, the newsletter reported that Paul Walker, who it described as “EEF grantee Paul Walker of the Office of Psycho-hormonal Research at Johns Hopkins Hospital School of Medicine,” had worked with a New Orleans station to develop both a half-hour special on transexualism and a five-part series of two to three minute segments. Similarly, it reported to readers that a Jacksonville, Florida, station had produced a half-hour special called "Transexualism - Out of the Darkness" which featured Dr. Ira Dushoff and Judy Jennings of the Jacksonville Gender Identity Association. Ironically, “Out of the Darkness” actually created a “darkness” from which the transsexual representative spoke by featuring a “shadowed interview with the patient,” who was later shown only as a body undergoing surgery.²⁵³ As with so many other cultural representations of transsexuals in the 1970s, the transsexuals involved were included in an anonymizing and potentially shaming way.

By the mid-1970s, the EEF was pleased to report that the mainstream news media was

using the model the EEF had developed in its educational programming by pairing a professional advocate with a transsexual representative to increase transsexual visibility in mainstream American media and teach the broader American public to accept transsexuals as potentially normative members of society. It reported numerous occasions in which stations had aired such programs. For example, it noted that Metromedia News was developing a series of ten-minute segments on transsexualism for television broadcast in New York and Los Angeles featuring “interviews with transexuals, professionals in the helping disciplines.” In 1976, it told readers that WBNS-TV in Columbus, Ohio, had aired a four-part series on transexualism that included footage of a surgery performed by Dr. Roberto Granato and an interview with an “EEF representative.” That same year, it told readers that the EEF had cooperated with a New York television program that featured “four postoperative transsexuals” and that “New York Hospital Psychiatrist Dr. Anthony Zito and a postoperative transexual” had been interviewed on the Pat Collins television show. Another television program was described simply as a panel of “transexuals and professionals,” including a “member of EEF” alongside Dr. Roberto Granato.

As it had with transsexual representatives in their professional education programs, the EEF encouraged normative transsexuals to volunteer to be incorporated into media presentations as well. For example, the EEF worked with a New-York based group called “ADAPT,” which stood for “Association for the Development of All Potential Talent,” to

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bring transsexuals into the public spotlight for public education. Two ADAPT members appeared on a New York cable television program that focused on human sexuality called "Kaleidoscope." The episode replicated the EEF’s standard panel format, pairing the transsexual representatives from ADAPT with Drs. Charles Ihlenfeld and Leo Wollman, professional advocates who acted as media spokespeople and represented medical authority, Naomi Smith, the professional advocate who had founded ADAPT with EEF assistance, and Zelda Suplee, who represented the EEF.

Although the EEF began praising transsexual representative participation in mainstream media, the emphasis remained on non-transsexual helping professionals and audiences. For example, in 1975 the EEF worked with the science editor at NBC-TV on the production of a program called “Sex Changes,” a program that featured what the newsletter called “a cinema verite presentation of a group therapy meeting of A-D-A-P-T.” The group therapy scene was led by Charles Ihlenfeld and Naomi Smith and the program also included what the newsletter called “interviews with professionals.” The newsletter continued to consider the construction of a voyeuristic scenario to be a positive way to engage the interest of non-transsexual viewers and congratulated NBC-TV NEWS for its successful portrayal of transsexuals.

The EEF saw the fact that transsexuals were being featured in the mainstream media at all as a major success against what it saw as a taboo and prejudice against transsexuality. For the EEF, the very presence of transsexuals in the media was a sign that they were being accepted as normal, although the EEF focused on reporting “respectable” mainstream media

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258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
appearances. For example, the EEF noted that “Jan Morris, author of the autobiography *Conundrum*, was given network coverage on The Dick Cavett TV show,” and saw such interest as a real cultural breakthrough.²⁶⁰ Likewise, the EEF reported that when transsexual representatives Deborah Hartin and Jennifer Fox appeared on WRC-TV in Washington, D.C., the two “evoked one of the most favorable reactions they have had from any program.” Transsexual representatives like Hartin could combine their experience working with the EEF and its model of transsexual normativity with the media’s desire to represent transsexuals as personally fascinating characters. When she was interviewed for a radio program in 1976, for example, the newsletter described her as having “lectured on transexualism and her own pre- and postoperative experiences to many scores of college human sexuality classes, professional groups and the audio-visual media.”²⁶¹ The EEF did not, however, mention Hartin’s more salacious activities, such as the fact that she had also appeared nude in *Screw* magazine.²⁶²

Savvy and experienced transsexuals like Kohler and Hartin used public access television and radio to bring attention to issues facing transsexuals and, like the EEF, saw the opportunity to use media to educate the broader American public. Kohler, for example, hosted a live one-hour program on San Francisco’s main public radio station, KQED-FM, every second Friday and fourth Tuesday from Crown-Zellerbach Square in downtown San Francisco. The EEF newsletter described Kohler’s radio show as an “educational program [that] features professional, invited guests in public discussion of the medical, social and legal problems of transsexualism, including such specific aspects as the differences between transexualism, transvestitism and homosexuality” and congratulated her on “the caliber of

the program, guests and its reception by the public,” which it said “marks this as a high spot” of public educational efforts.263

To the EEF, it seemed that the mainstream media was full of examples that transsexuals were becoming understood not just as individuals with personal problems but instead as normal individuals with specific social problems that could affect all those they came into contact with, especially family members, intimate partners, and health care professionals. The newsletter told readers, for example, that an NBC program called “Tomorrow” featured host Tom Snyder interviewing “a transsexual, her fiancé and a surgeon,” constructing the woman’s transsexuality as a subject of controversy, building the idea that sharing the intimate details of her life on television was culturally appropriate.264 Likewise, the newsletter reported that "Dear Abby," the nationally syndicated daily advice column, had printed a letter from a reader asking for advice on how to deal with the media disclosure of a relative’s transsexuality. The reader’s son was engaged to a transsexual woman who was planning to make a television appearance and the future mother-in-law asked Abby, “Shouldn’t it be kept a secret?” The EEF newsletter happily reported that Abby responded that it was “up to them” and advised: "Hold up your head. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”265 The EEF constructed a trajectory of social progress based on intentional, concerted efforts to educate the American public about transsexuality, telling readers that “seven years ago EEF announced, as one of its aims, the education of the lay public as well as professional on the problems of the transexuals whose dilemma was caused through no fault

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of their own.266

By the mid-1970s, the EEF wrote that mainstream audiences seem to be accepting transsexuality as a medical issue that affected those around them and the EEF saw this willingness to engage with transsexuals as a sign that normative transsexuality was becoming accepted not only in the media, but also socially. For example, in 1975, the EEF told its newsletter readers that their joint educational effort had paid off and that transsexuals were being accepted as a part of mainstream American culture. It promoted a progress narrative in which the presence of transsexualism as a source of popular conversation in American media was considered a huge success, telling its readers, as it often did, that “we have come a long way from the pioneering days of Dr. Harry Benjamin's early lectures when many of his colleagues considered him foolhardy to be concerned in research and treatment of transexualism.”267

The EEF was happy to report that the mainstream American media was beginning to incorporate the idea that transsexuals were sympathetic characters at the centre of a personal and social drama and the EEF saw sympathetic media dramatization of transsexual issues as a key sign that sympathetic public interest towards transsexuals had been achieved. In 1975, when the EEF told readers that the CBS television network had aired a two-part program called "The Man in Limbo" on the medical drama “Medical Center,” for example, it praised the program for its portrayal of how one medical professional could educate others on the topic of transsexualism. The newsletter went on to say, “We deeply appreciate the effort to bring this controversial subject into the homes of millions of Americans who hitherto may not have

267 Ibid.
given much thought to it.” The EEF newsletter expressed gratitude to Robert Reed, the actor who played the part, for his “willingness to star in the role of the troubled doctor who suffered in his need for the sex reassignment operation.” The EEF connected the television program to its own mission, telling readers that it was a sign that “when a subject like transexualism reaches two episodes of national television, then we know it has become part of the national medical-social topical scene.”

The EEF saw medical acceptance of transsexuality as going hand-in-hand with social acceptance of transsexuals and took pride in media pieces that emphasized transsexualism as an acceptable medical condition that could convince the public to accept transsexuals and sex reassignment surgeries and show evidence that they were doing so. In 1976, for example, the newsletter drew readers’ attention to the fact that the New York Times had featured a front-page headline story announcing: “500 in the U.S. Change Sex in Six Years with Surgery.” The EEF also told readers that the paper had received a “favorable response” to the story and called the article “an immeasurable contribution to EEF efforts to assist public understanding and help to human beings burdened with problems due to no fault of their own.” The EEF saw the story as a sign of success that gender identity programs were becoming accepted in the United States and constructed the media piece as fitting within a broad set of social goals, but continued to focus the foundation’s efforts on creating programming for a non-transsexual audience, encouraging them to see transsexuals as normative individuals to be pitied for their unfortunate abnormality. It considered the victory as one accomplished largely by non-transsexuals on behalf of transsexuals and congratulated all its readers on what it considered to

be a mutual success with the simple message, “We thank you all.”

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Whether transsexuals were portrayed as real people or fictional characters, and whether they were named and celebrated or remained anonymous, the EEF’s campaigns to educate professionals and the broader American public on transsexuality during the 1970s constructed a relationship between transsexuals and non-transsexuals that used transsexual spokespersons and professional advocates, including medical and other social authorities, to convey a model of transsexual normativity to non-transsexual audiences. Together, professional advocates and normative transsexual representatives taught audiences that transsexualism was a medical condition to be resolved through sex reassignment surgery and rehabilitation, and that, with the right support, transsexuals could change from pitiable, suffering individuals to happy, successful members of mainstream American society.

The EEF assumed that audiences were likely confused non-transsexuals who were potentially sympathetic and simply in need of proper education. The EEF therefore constructed transsexuals as potentially normative individuals who could act as a learning opportunity for non-transsexuals by demonstrating a normative transsexuality through the personal stories of transsexual representatives. Central to this strategy was the assumption that medical evaluation and validation was a necessary prerequisite to becoming a transsexual spokesperson, and the EEF used professional advocates as cultural mediators in its educational programming. The EEF constructed its work as part of a larger educational effort towards social change, creating transsexuals as objects of public sympathy, inquiry and scrutiny.

Throughout the 1970s, the EEF attempted to integrate transsexuals into normative American

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society and it used targeted workshops and media pieces to promote the idea that the public should accept transsexuality on the grounds of being sympathetic towards transsexual individuals.

Unlike the specialists examined in the previous chapter, who recognized that the ideal ‘true transsexual’ represented a very small minority within a much broader range of gender expression and diversity, the EEF inundated both professionals and the American public with examples of “true transsexuals.” These transsexual spokespeople played a key role in the EEF’s public education campaigns. As in the specialist discourses, non-transsexuals were encouraged to think of transsexuals as symbolic characters for whom they should feel sympathy and express support. Perhaps more importantly, transsexualism became a topic to be discussed and considered by non-transsexuals, making transsexuals themselves both hyper-visible and simultaneously marginalized as subjects within a discourse of liberal transnormativity. While pre-operative transsexuals were called upon to demonstrate how strongly and urgently they required surgery, post-operative transsexuals were to emphasize their post-surgical happiness and the radical transformation they had achieved in their lives. However, by constructing relations of difference between transsexuals and non-transsexuals, and in defining how transsexuals should be, the EEF also forged and contributed to a new cultural form of trans-normativity, one which sociologist Vivianne Namaste would later refer to as part of an “autobiographical imperative” that structured trans people’s representations in the mainstream media.270

By the mid-1970s, transsexuals were often being portrayed as at once anonymous,

generic patients and interesting characters available to the American public for discussion and scrutiny. To the EEF, it seemed that transsexualism was becoming well established and normalized in American culture. As Reed Erickson’s personal interests moved towards more spiritual and esoteric issues, the EEF became much less directly involved in guiding socio-cultural constructions of transsexuality. In 1974, the EEF announced to its newsletter readers that although it would continue to support publication efforts and act as a clearing house for speakers, it would be shifting its focus to “unorthodox methods of healing as well as psychoenergetics.”

By the end of the 1970s, when the EEF stopped working to promote normative transsexuality, it seemed to have quite successfully accomplished its mission, having enrolled numerous helping professionals and having established successful and potentially self-sustaining educational programming.

Especially during the first half of the 1970s, the EEF was a powerful and effective organization, but other trans-oriented groups were also equally interested in changing how they were perceived and treated in American culture. Unlike the EEF, many other groups were much less focused on advancing a specific vision of transsexuality and had much fewer economic resources. Many were more concerned with sexual freedom, politics, and consumption than they were with normalizing transsexualism or making transsexuals acceptable within medical or mainstream American cultures. The following chapter looks at a series of alternate visions of sex and gender during the 1970s that competed with the EEF’s educational campaign to establish transsexual normativity and the liberal transnormativities produced in those arenas.

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Chapter 3

The Social, Economic and Sexual Politics of “Transvestite Liberation” in the 1970s

The central idea of this dissertation is that trans people became socially and culturally defined as a distinct minority group in multiple contexts in the United States between 1960 and 1990. I use the concept of “transnormativities” to draw attention to the ways that the norms defining who was considered “trans” were complex, nuanced, and dynamically shifting over the period. The notion of transnormativities (as opposed to transnormativity) also suggests that multiple norms were established; norms were diverse and neither fully imposed upon trans people nor created in a cultural void but were rather an ongoing cultural negotiation and articulation of a sense that there was such a thing as trans people. Transnormativities were developed organically by individuals and groups who were in positions to define and make statements about trans people based on their own perspectives and experiences. These norms always extended beyond individuals and groups, however, as they were articulated in conversation with broader socio-cultural, economic and political developments. While the notion of transnormativity could be used to discuss expectations about how trans people should live and act, either to challenge or reproduce essentialist definitions of trans people, this chapter continues to look at how transnormativities informed cultural ideas about who counted as trans or not trans in different contexts. It does so by focusing on and developing trans-centric historical interpretations.

Chapters 1 and 2 focused on norms that were developed in the 1960s and 1970s in medical and research contexts and extended into the public sphere via universities, media and educational campaigns. This chapter looks at the norms developed in social, economic, and political contexts in the 1970s where trans people became more distinctly defined as a group
not primarily in relation to medical diagnoses or treatments, but in relation to broader sexual developments. In particular, the chapter focuses on the rise of gay liberation and lesbian feminism and the emergence of commercial sexual subcultures in which transfeminine people participated as business owners, editors, writers, photographers, and models. I argue that during the 1970s, transfeminine people came to define a broader group of trans people through a variety of social, political and economic discourses of “liberation,” including gay liberation, “transvestite liberation,” and sexual liberation.

As I have shown in previous chapters, medical and research contexts primarily defined trans people in relation to transsexualism and other diagnostic criteria such as “gender dysphoria.” In those contexts, the primary focus on transsexuals and transsexualism contributed to institutional limitations on who could “count” as trans, who could define trans people as such and under what conditions they could do so. In the medical context, “transvestism” was used specifically as a diagnostic category that was distinct from transsexuality. It referred to cross-dressing heterosexual men, who were considered to be inappropriate candidates for hormone treatment or sex reassignment surgeries; medical experts saw transvestites as men who enjoyed cross-dressing for erotic purposes (or felt compelled to do so for other reasons). Such experts paid less attention to transvestites than they did to transsexuals, other than to weed them out of medical programs. One of the key differentiating assumptions was that transvestites were attracted to “the opposite” sex, whereas transsexuals were attracted to "the same" sex, which was understood in relation to their pre-transition sex. This massive oversimplification of transfeminine sexuality created major structural issues for transfeminine people and resulted from what we might call today cis-sexist heteronormativity on the part of medical experts. It also reflected the extent to
which ideas about sexuality informed transnormativities before the more recent mobilization of gender and gender identity as key concepts for differentiating trans people.

In the trans-oriented social and economic subcultures examined in this chapter, however, trans people not only recognized a great deal of sexual diversity, but also used “transvestite” as an umbrella term that included queens, transsexuals, professional female impersonators and anyone who “cross-dressed.” Categorical differences were not the main focus of the transfeminine subcultures examined here, as many people fit within more than one of these categories and the medical distinction between transvestites and transsexuals did not apply as readily to the social and sexual contexts in which a wide range of people were exploring their interests and desires. Professional female impersonators, for example, could be heterosexual men who worked as entertainers or in other jobs that hinged at least in part on their “transvestism.” People who at one point identified as transvestite men could decide to take estrogen and become transsexual women. In their personal and social lives, they faced many more issues than whether or not they could be diagnosed and treated, and the distinction between transvestites and transsexuals was much less strict in transfeminine communities.

More than in medical contexts, transvestite social subcultures recognized and incorporated a greater level of complexity and a greater depth of lived experiences amongst trans people. In the context of transfeminine subcultures, some people took it upon themselves to address the difficult social and economic issues that affected many trans people’s lives but which escaped the scope of medical experts’ interest in the diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. As in medical contexts, however, this subcultural context also (re)produced assumptions that limited who could be considered trans and who was being
considered in generalizations made about trans people. In this case, the overriding assumption was that of hegemonic transfemininity, in the sense that it was assumed that trans people were feminine. This gendered assumption framed the economic and liberation politics discussed in this chapter.

Transfemininity, although a relatively recent term, is central to this chapter’s exploration of the norms established in trans cultures and discourses during the 1970s. I use the concept to encompass all people born male who inhabit or convey feminine gender expressions, including, among others, transsexual women, cross-dressers, drag queens and some genderqueer people. It is an important concept for recognizing commonalities between these groups and for discussing those elements of transnormativity specifically shaped around cultural concepts of femininity. Although it was not a term used in the period in question, it is an appropriate and useful concept in this chapter as it conveys both the gendering and the diversity of those who were considered trans people in the 1970s. Even though it was recognized in numerous other contexts at the time that transsexuals could also include transmen, the politics of transfeminine gender expression shaped the participation, experiences, and relationships of all trans people in the public and subcultural discourses examined in this chapter.272

Transsexual men or other transmasculine or “assigned-female-at-birth” trans people

were often marginalized within transfeminine social contexts because these contexts were designed around transfeminine interests. Transmen would not likely be present in venues where people came together to discuss the application of eye shadow, for example. The main experiences and concerns of transmen such as Reed Erickson, Lou Sullivan, and Rupert Raj were outside the scope of the vast community of transfeminine people explored in this chapter. The fact that these transvestite subcultures did not develop resources or communities for transmen contributed to the social isolation faced by transmasculine people and shaped the gendered contexts in which their articulation of social identities as trans people emerged. The gendered division between transfeminine and transmasculine people should not, however, simply be considered an act of willful segregation or a reflection of gender inequality, as Raj and other transmen activists of the era involved themselves with transfeminine communities and took up activities not examined in this chapter.

Transfemininity was more legible within the wider socio-economic and sexual contexts of the liberation politics and capitalist economics of the era not necessarily because transfeminine people were associated with male-ness (though this was sometimes the case), but rather because they were associated with politicized notions of both femininity and masculinity, as well as with homosexuality. A particular combination of liberation politics and capitalist economics led to transfeminine people’s greater visibility, centrality to political debates, and sexualized commercialization, at least in the sources examined here. This chapter focuses especially on a few groups and publications operating in the Northeastern United States and it should also be noted that much more research remains to be done on the topic of trans people and gay liberation before any widely applicable national narratives can be established.
This chapter makes three related arguments. First, it demonstrates that trans people who lived and worked in the contexts of transfeminine social and commercial subcultures experienced a sense of common identities and interests that they used to define their sense of community, which they generically saw as representing transvestites and transsexuals. They defined this group based not on medical diagnosis or authority, but in terms of their own particular transfeminine gendered states and their social, economic and political lives and experiences.

This first argument demonstrates that the assumption of transfeminine identities and experiences (re)produced a sense that transvestites and transsexuals embodied some kind of transfeminine gender practice; as a result, the social and economic lives of transfeminine people were central to the constitution of the social and economic worlds they created. Second, this chapter demonstrates that transfeminine people during the early- and mid-1970s engaged with the sexual and gender politics of gay liberation and lesbian feminism by proclaiming their own right to participate freely in gendered public life as transfeminine people with their own distinct economic and social roles, in part by defining and redefining the meaning of “gay” and, to a lesser extent, "lesbian." Finally, the chapter argues that by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the commercialization and sexualization of transfemininity led to greater economic exploitation and racialization of transfemininity and transfeminine social worlds.

The chapter draws attention to the centrality of economics in the trans-centric discourses that circulated throughout the country in the 1970s. Gender, sexual and racial dynamics all shaped power relations and played important roles in the definition of trans people. Commercial subcultures and capitalist consumption frameworks, however, defined many transfeminine people’s participation in distinct trans cultures and politics, whether as
consumers, business operators, or workers. As trans people began to play a more distinct role, particularly in the entertainment, media, and sex industries, discourses of liberal American transnormativity in this era were increasingly informed by capitalism relations, which in turn became part of the distinction between trans people and cisgender people.

The primary sources for this chapter, trans-centric media publications, circulated nationally and internationally and often attempted to frame their subject matter as widely as possible, but in truth they only partially represented trans communities and politics. Urban centres such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all received greater attention, while stories, news, and trans voices from other locations, such as New Orleans and Minneapolis appeared occasionally and circumstantially. Editors, often in New York City, had tremendous power over which areas were represented in the widely circulating national and international periodicals. Similarly, the majority of the voices represented in these pages were white, with a few key exceptions, despite the presence of non-white trans people in photographs of events. Finally, the publications examined here created trans-centric narratives that were commercial in nature and do not represent the many voices of trans people that appeared in periodicals that used a broader gay and lesbian framework. Thus, the discourses of transnormativity discussed in this chapter must be considered only partial; further research on the history of racialized, regional, and subcultural differences during this era of liberal transnormativity is warranted.
Fan Culture and Female Impersonators Magazine in the 1960s

The first section of this chapter introduces two social contexts from which the transfeminine transvestite social and commercial cultures of the 1970s emerged. Both of these contexts informed the ways in which commercial transfemininity ventures became central to defining trans expressions, experiences, communities and politics in the 1970s. The first context was the consumption- and entertainment-oriented world of professional female impersonation. This was part of mainstream American commercial culture and also operated on a global scale. Second, the transfeminine transvestite social and commercial cultures of the 1970s emerged in the context of a burgeoning underground world of “closeted” cross-dressers in and beyond the United States. These self-defined transvestites were largely heterosexual and bisexual and had begun contacting one another and forming small, secretive groups in the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1960s, these two contexts overlapped in the pages of a niche print publication called Female Impersonators. Capitalizing on interest in female impersonator shows, the glossy, full-colour magazine cultivated a celebrity and fan culture in which closeted transvestites could privately and in their own ways enjoy and fantasize about professionals whose performances were in fact highly regulated and policed.

Female impersonation had been a staple of American stages and entertainment industries since at least the late nineteenth-century, when both male and female impersonators were regular components of the vaudeville and minstrelsy circuits.

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274 Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York:
Many of the greatest performers of the twentieth century got their start in show business families. During the early twentieth century, male impersonation waned, in part due to the increased stigmatization of “mannish women,” while female impersonation acts flourished in nightclubs and cabarets across the country.\textsuperscript{275} For example, San Francisco had numerous clubs such as Finnochio’s, the Beige Room and the Black Cat; New York had Club 82; New Orleans had the My-O-My Club, Dew Drop Inn, and Caledonia; and Chicago had the K-9 Club.\textsuperscript{276} Many of these entertainment clubs were part of Mafia-run tourist industries and some were owned by African American entrepreneurs or female impersonators who were able to work around existing prohibitive laws.\textsuperscript{277}

In the 1930s and 1940s, many female impersonators were able to earn a good living as performers and were able to avoid being arrested under laws against cross-dressing by adhering to careful rules about what they could wear and when.\textsuperscript{278} Many performers, like Tony Midnite, started out working alongside women in strip-tease and chorus lines, where their co-workers knew that they were male but the audiences did not.\textsuperscript{279} In Chicago and New

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\textsuperscript{275} Gillian M. Rodger, \textit{Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage} (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1998), iv.
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\textsuperscript{277} Anthony Stanford, \textit{Homophobia in the Black Church} (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 78.
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York, the 1930s “pansy craze” popularized drag balls and performances, associating them with homosexuality.\(^{280}\) Similarly, famous female impersonator Minette recalled that in 1948 Boston was “drag wild” and “anyone who looked pretty in a dress was assured of employment as an impersonator.”\(^{281}\) Military entertainment often included female impersonation acts and numerous servicemen were introduced to cross-dressing during their stints in the armed forces.\(^{282}\)

By the 1950s, commercial establishments throughout the United States in which female impersonators could work were often controlled by the Mafia, preferred white performers, and policed any suggestion of homosexuality or gender non-conformity off-stage, as the majority of patrons were (assumed to be) heterosexual.\(^{283}\) Off-stage, female impersonators often performed heterosexuality by stressing that their cross-dressing was simply part of their acts, not a reflection of their own predilections, described largely in terms of sexual normativity.\(^{284}\) At a time when sexual and gender expressions were legally, socially and economically regulated, female impersonators both maintained and transgressed numerous cultural taboos. For example, they maintained taboos against flagrant


\(^{284}\) Dauphin, “A Bit of Woman in Every Man,” 6.
homosexuality and at the same time transgressed taboos against male feminization, the
expression of homoerotic desire, and the blatant expression of sexual desire more broadly.

The Jewel Box Revue’s show “25 Boys and One Girl” was perhaps the most famous
female impersonation show to cater to mainstream, straight audiences, capitalizing on the
gimmick of surprise and the shock-value associated with expert cross-dressing. The show
started when New York entrepreneurs Danny Brown and “Doc” Brenner turned a Miami
Beach, Florida club act into a touring cabaret that impressed audiences and developed a major
following around the country from 1932 to 1973. The major concept of the show was that
the audience was challenged to try to discern who amongst the cast was the only “real girl.”
The surprise came when it turned out that the “she” was the lone male impersonator and
emcee, Stormé DeLaverie. The Jewel Box Revue played extended engagements in various
cities, including Chicago and New York, often keeping theatres afloat during times when it
was otherwise difficult to book performers and fill seats. In the late 1960s, however,
Roman Catholics objected to the show in Chicago and the company eventually folded after
black nationalists formed picket lines and threatened to burn down the Apollo Theater in
Harlem if it continued to host the show, as they felt that it “glorified the homosexual” and
posed a “threat to the black family.” The racial dynamics of the Jewel Box Revue were
complex in that the troupe had to navigate a racialized theatre structure and confront racism,

288 Fox, Showtime at the Apollo, 282.
sexism and homophobia in both white and black contexts.

As the heyday of classic female impersonation waned in the late 1960s, *Female Impersonators* magazine promoted shared fantasies of transfemininity by celebrating, advertising and reporting on the world of professional female impersonation. The glossy magazine was published irregularly without dates and little information about its publishers, though the contents suggest that it began as early as 1960 and continued to publish as late as 1973. The subjects of the magazine were the male performance artists who worked in cabarets, dinner clubs and stage shows and entertained large, mixed audiences by performing idealized variations of femininity that were meant to amaze audiences with their ability to appear completely female. Many female impersonators were trained in theatrical arts, where feminine costumes, make-up, and other feminine embodiment techniques were all considered part of their profession.

*Female Impersonators* magazine catered to those whose interests in “the art of female impersonation” went beyond those of the casual audience member; most readers could be classified as fans or “admirers.” Though very little information has been discovered about the publication’s origins, its glossy, colour format indicate popular commercial distribution. Every issue had at least one multi-page spread featuring both text and photographs about a given act, club, or show. Featured locations included venues throughout North American as well as common travel destinations for continental, Anglophone North American tourists such as Australia, Paris, Montreal and Puerto Rico, all of and all of which were known to sustain and produce excellent female impersonator shows. The magazine gave readers detailed information about where they could attend upcoming female impersonator shows and simultaneously acted as a virtual proxy that enabled readers to privately peruse images of
female impersonators. Pudgy Roberts, the magazine’s editor and primary voice, was himself a professional female impersonator and positioned himself as offering readers “insider knowledge” into its specialized world. Roberts frequently told readers that in addition to his role as magazine editor, he had eight and a half years of experience as a female impersonator, and he claimed to have been the only female impersonator ever to have been featured on the Johnny Carson show.  

During the 1960s there was always tension between what the magazine offered and what readers desired from it. Roberts carefully constructed representations of professional stagecraft, which he presented as distinct from any type of overt sexualization or gender or sexual deviancy. He cultivated a veneer of respectability that structured all communications within Female Impersonators. The magazine's emphasis on professionalism also consistently re-oriented readers to their roles as consumers, either of the magazine or of the shows, thus constructing their social subjectivities and transfeminine fantasies in commercial and profitable terms that might also protect the magazine from legal troubles.

Female Impersonators magazine focused on the professionalism of female impersonator shows to establish its legitimacy and balance readers’ desires to contact one another against the restrictive legal and social environment. A complex subtext throughout the magazine hinted at the limits of what could be communicated in print and in public. For example, Female Impersonators explicitly restricted itself from sale to minors and Roberts explained to readers that “the legal authorities frown on correspondence or in aiding in making personal contacts.” When readers requested an opportunity to meet one another, Roberts responded by encouraging them to “visit some of the places where impersonators

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appear,” although he also warned that single men were scrutinized by security at female impersonator shows and that female impersonator shows were not necessarily good meeting places. Similarly, *Female Impersonators* discouraged readers from identifying with the impersonators, encouraging them instead to admire the skill and beauty of celebrity professionals like Coccinelle and Toni Lee. The magazine played up readers’ fantasies while making clear that it was not a contact magazine.

By the end of the 1960s, *Female Impersonators* began to more explicitly recognize readers’ personal and potentially sexualized transfeminine fantasies. Whitney Strub has written that in this period, a “cultural shift regarding sex-themed media transpired in the context of a broader evolution of social mores known as the sexual revolution.” In the case of *Female Impersonators*, it began printing more explicit materials that recognized readers' desires. For example, it printed a letter from a reader identified as Caroline, who wrote that she “would love to be a professional female impersonator,” even though “she recognized that it [was] a far-fetched dream.” In an effort to provide transvestite readers with material that at least somewhat validated the practice of sexualized cross-dressing off-stage, the magazine then featured a multi-page photo spread of two female impersonators, Gypsy and Avis, supposedly “dressing” together in a domestic setting. For all intents and purposes, the spread presented a fantasy montage of two very beautiful and passable female impersonators cross-dressing in lingerie in their living room. The text portion of the feature explained: “This

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photo session is an exclusive solely done for Female Impersonators with the amateur mime in mind, since we have had so many requests by fans of this magazine to pictorially illustrate just how it’s done.” The fact that the scene included both a white and an African American female impersonator recognized racial and ethnic differences in transfeminine embodiment practices and likely indicated an effort to appeal to both white and African American readers, both of which were significant in the context of 1960s American culture.

*Female Impersonators* was able to maintain the respectability associated with its emphasis on stage shows and ensure readers’ continued patronage as consumers by continuing to distinguish featured professional female impersonators from potentially closeted transvestite readers. For example, while the spread of Gypsy and Avis was clearly staged for readers’ private fantasies, the magazine justified it by explaining that Gypsy and Avis had “the experience of many seasons in the entertainment world and the art of impersonation and disguise.” Maintaining the overall premise, the magazine told readers that the spread was their opportunity to “see how the professionals do it.” Avis and Gypsy, however, also foreshadowed the more explicitly sexual and participatory exhibitionism and voyeurism that would become increasingly prevalent in trans-oriented publications of the 1970s.292

*Drag Magazine, Transvestite Tourism and Queen’s Liberation Front*

The early 1970s saw the expansion of a consumer market for products and services catering to the transfeminine fantasies and desires of various groups, from closeted transvestites and drag queens to male-to-female transsexuals, described at that time simply as “transsexuals.” In the wake of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, trans-oriented

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publications and businesses grew on two related fronts: first, as part of consumption, entertainment, and ball cultures that more explicitly validated sexual and gender expressions that had previously been considered deviant, and second, as a form of social and political advancement in the context of gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and the increasing sexual openness in many parts of American society. For Lee Brewster, one of the leaders of the era, trans-oriented businesses and economic activities were an important component of a broadly- and inclusively-defined gay liberation movement.

Brewster’s social and economic efforts typify the politicization of trans people and issues in the 1970s. He saw the advancement of gay men, lesbians, and trans people as intrinsically linked under the banner of gay liberation. Brewster moved to New York City in 1969 after being accused of homosexuality and fired from his job as an FBI clerk. In New York, he began hosting drag balls to raise money for what he referred to as the homophile movement, with which he initially identified. Brewster was especially interested in decriminalizing cross-dressing, a significant issue since police regularly used the prohibition against cross-dressing as an excuse to raid bars and other entertainment venues where gay, lesbian and trans people were patrons. They targeted those whose bodily aesthetics were deemed unacceptable for their legal sex, arresting those who deviated from gender norms in even minor ways. This literal gender policing evidently had a disproportionate effect on

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queens and others with visibly trans gender expressions. Brewster’s cheerful, public and economic flaunting of non-normative gender and sexual expressions was socially and politically significant in and of itself.

During the early 1970s, Brewster began to question whether the beneficiaries of his efforts were actually supporting trans people in their political work or simply cashing in on consumer interest in transvestite and drag parties and Brewster’s willingness to fundraise. Brewster had a complicated relationship with gays and lesbians that reflected the shifting boundaries and definitions of whether and how trans people “counted” as gay. Although Brewster identified consistently as “he,” he also lived a good deal of his life in women’s clothing as an out homosexual transvestite or drag queen. In the early 1970s, he was concerned about the changing place of cross-dressers within the gay movement. In 1972, for example, he praised a San Francisco production of “Dolly,” which featured female impersonators and was being used as a fundraiser for the Society of Individual Rights (S.I.R.), a gay organization, but he also wrote,

Profit from the ‘Dolly’ show is placed in the S.I.R. bank account and is used to help operate the organization throughout the year…. Wonder how much of this is used to forward the rights of the homosexual transvestite… PREJUDICE? EXPLOITATION? You decide.294

Brewster’s interest in advancing the interests of homosexual and non-homosexual transvestites was central to his political and business ventures, all of which focused on transvestite interests and often on the relationship between transvestites and the gay movement, which Brewster saw as encompassing most, if not all, sexual minorities, but especially gay men, lesbians, and transfeminine people.

Brewster and others who identified with both homosexuality and transvestism often linked their sexual desires and feminine gender expressions while maintaining a male identity. In this way, they posed a serious challenge to heteronormative efforts to segregate different types of “deviants” from one another. They also represented a variation of homosexuality that embraced gender variance and a variation of transvestism that they saw as compatible with homosexuality and gay liberation. Brewster usually dressed in women’s garb and consistently used male pronouns, describing himself as a queen and an “out homosexual transvestite.” Consistent with this, the business ventures that he established and promoted were complex and varied in their gender and sexual politics, but they were deeply entwined with a trans-centric notion of gay liberation.

Brewster’s public activities were both social and commercial. Most famously, Brewster hosted huge Mardi Gras Balls in New York City through the 1970s. He advertised that “the press” called the parties “the most bizarre social event this side of ancient Rome” and that they “commanded quite a turnout of gay celebrities.” The balls were held annually in major hotels like The Diplomat and The Riverside Plaza Hotel and featured performances by New York’s “top female impersonators” as well as go-go boys dancing in an “outlandish live show.” Tickets were $10 at the door or whole tables could be reserved in advance for just over $5 per person.295 Within a few years, Brewster’s balls were attracting over 1500 participants, all eager to be entertained in a context where both homosexuality and cross-dressing were welcomed and encouraged.296 Perhaps less obvious to the participants was the fact that Brewster was simultaneously gathering a formidable group of consumers and

contributing to the development and expansion of a niche consumer market based on gender and sexual minority interests. As the transfeminine-oriented magazines, parties, balls, and consumer goods business developments expanded in the 1970s, they not only created new social and economic opportunities for consumers, but also created new employment opportunities for sexual and gender minorities, particularly in creative and service sectors, such as media, entertainment, and tourism. Organizing these parties flew in the face of previous police efforts to limit public cross-dressing or homosexuality, but the ethos of the parties was celebratory and entertaining rather than overtly political.

The drag balls of the 1970s drew on a long tradition in American culture, particularly among racialized and sexualized communities in the Midwest and Northeast. Large, public masquerade, drag or costume balls often occurred on Halloween or New Year’s Eve, when local law enforcement allowed public cross-dressing until midnight.297 For example, the annual Finnie’s Ball in Chicago, which started in 1935, ran until the mid-1970s.298 Similarly, female impersonator Phil Black, who performed throughout the northeastern United States, attracted huge crowds to his “Funmakers’ Balls” in Harlem, one year attracting 350 participants, 2,700 spectators, and 25 police officers “to keep order.”299 Jet, Sepia, and other African American publications reported widely on such affairs throughout the 1950s, often emphasizing the affluence of and freedom experienced by participants. Such balls also provided a racial and sexual culture in which black men and white female impersonators could mingle in a milieu of wealth and affluence, with the opportunity to compete for appearance-

298 de la Croix, *Chicago Whispers*, 126, 152.
based cash prizes. By the early 1970s, *Sepia* reported that whites were taking over black balls.\(^{300}\) Brewster’s balls were always racially mixed and focused on queens and other transfeminine people, but likely benefited from this trend.

In addition to hosting balls, Brewster established a company called Queens Publications, which distributed numerous transvestite publications and perhaps more importantly produced *Drag* magazine. The large, graphic-heavy magazine featured artwork, reprinted news articles, and many black-and-white photographs of social and commercial events. *Drag*’s subtitles, “A Magazine about the Transvestite” and later “The International Transvestite Quarterly,” was meant to address transfeminine people of all sexual orientations, including transsexual women, who were referred to simply as “transsexuals.” Brewster was the general editor of *Drag* magazine and provided employment opportunities for trans people by hiring a staff photographer and a team of editors, including a Washington Area Editor, a West Coast Editor, a Managing Editor, an Art Editor, and several Contributing Editors.\(^{301}\)

*Drag* politicized transvestite issues while entertaining readers and catering to their consumer desires. It offered products and services specific to transfeminine people, such as wigs and breastform prostheses. Following in the footsteps of *Female Impersonators* magazine, *Drag* also featured many show reviews and photographs of social events. In contrast to earlier publications, however, *Drag* paired entertainment and commercial content with politicized news stories of specific interest to trans readers, such as updates on Brewster’s efforts to make cross-dressing legal. In connecting readers with an “out” social world, the magazine filled an important need for many readers, extending the opportunity to enjoy male


\(^{301}\) “Contents,” *Drag* 2.6 (1972), 3.
feminization or cross-dressing beyond the realm of private fantasy or female impersonator shows.

For customers who wanted a more extensive social opportunity to immerse themselves in transvestite consumer culture, Brewster also sold vacation tour packages throughout the 1970s to the annual Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans, where travelers could cross-dress the entire time and meet others interested in doing the same. The festival was particularly meaningful to transvestites and transsexual women in that it valued their skills and interests in transfeminine expressions and culture and gave them the opportunity to dress together in feminine clothes. The main feature of the trip was the Bourbon Street costume contest, which Brewster described as a gathering where “queens from all over the country [came] to compete… to be judged and a Miss Bourbon Street (drag) is crowned.”302 The tour cost $110 and included hotel accommodations, entertainment opportunities and group activities such as sight-seeing tours and a welcome mixer party for participants.303

Brewster situated the tour within the complex gender and sexual dynamics of gay men, queens, transvestites, and other transfeminine people. He described his tours to readers as “the travel industry’s most novel tour offering…, which caters to the gay and the transvestite… exclusively!”304 Mardi Gras festivals were an important context for the emerging tourist market catering to gay, lesbian and trans consumers and Brewster assured travelers a welcoming experience by explaining that their host hotel had recently also been used for a gay group described as “leather not feather.”305 The statement distinguished

303 Ibid.
304 “Mardi Gras ’72 in New Orleans,” Drag 2.8 (1972), 35.
305 “Lee G. Brewster’s 5th Annual Mardi Gras Tour,” Drag 5.19 (1975), 29. See also Kevin Markwell,
transfemininity from gay masculinity, typified by “leather,” but presumed that readers would see both groups as related. Indeed, the rise of “macho” gay masculinities in the 1970s meant even further distinction between masculine gay men and homosexual transvestites or drag queens. But as was always the case, Brewster simply prioritized transfemininity over any other form of gender or sexual expression, and participants were encouraged to see themselves as special because of their participation as consumers in the Mardi Gras Tour and their transfeminine gender expressions. The symbolic association of transfemininity with “feather” also implied a connection to showgirl culture and professional transfeminine gender performances. Indeed, “Madame X” of New Jersey reported happily that the hotel staff regarded and treated tour participants as celebrities.

Part of what Brewster was selling on the tour was the opportunity to feel liberated from the social limits that constrained many trans people in their daily lives, particularly those who closeted their transfemininity and lived primarily as men. One participant wrote, for example, that the tour was not only “pure fun” but also “an excellent form of therapy” in that it provided the “total freedom to be free.” Brewster’s tour facilitated new friendships in near anonymity and allowed consumers to fulfill their fantasies with relatively few social risks. Participants could trust that they were with a group of people with whom they could relate, share tips, and enjoy the same kinds of entertainment. Brewster told Drag readers that many also found the trip to be a good opportunity to explore the “problems and joys of living...”


308 Ibid., 30.
in drag,” which could include everything from daring to go to a beauty salon to have one’s hair done to going shopping cross-dressed for women’s clothes with others for mutual support and encouragement. Embracing the commercialism of the tour, Brewster continued:

If this sounds like a sales pitch..., you’re damn right it is…. You don’t know what you’re missing if you don’t let your hair down in New Orleans… relaxed and Free!”

Not surprisingly, Brewster boasted that over 70% of participants were return customers and told readers that the tour had become “one big happy family of friends who get together each year.” The “sales pitch” included, then, the promise of long-term community and a vacation from invisibility and stigma.

Tour participants also garnered a certain amount of social status nationally through Drag’s annual reporting and advertising of the event each year, and they were often featured in extensive photographic magazine spreads of the tour. In addition to the many candid shots of participants enjoying themselves and the festivities, formal photographs were often arranged in a “yearbook” style layout that gave every individual a special feature, with each participant’s “femme name” (the name they used when dressed as women) and their home location listed below their image. Drag’s extensive coverage also undoubtedly encouraged many readers who did not attend the tour to fantasize about becoming part of Brewster’s world, and Drag capitalized on these different levels of consumer participation. In 1972, for example, Brewster told readers that even if they couldn’t attend any of the events themselves, they could still experience the fantasy by buying a special-issue, forty page photographic
magazine that covered all of Brewster’s events from 1969 to 1972. In this way, Brewster continued the tradition of transfeminine celebrity admiration that had been so effective with female impersonators in the 1960s, but with a major twist: consumers could now more explicitly move from being “fans” to being celebrities themselves.

Celebrity status was important in transvestite publications and communities, and Brewster provided the opportunity to live the ultimate transvestite consumer fantasy: to go from being a closeted cross-dressing consumer to a liberated “full-time” transvestite entrepreneur immersed in the celebrity culture of the magazines. Wilma Sharman, a self-described sixty-nine year old grandfather, perhaps best embodied that dream. Sharman had first become involved with the transvestite world as a consumer when on tour with Brewster’s New Orleans Mardi Gras trip. On her third tour, Sharman roomed with Sandy Mesics, the editor of another trans publication, *FI News*. When Mesics offered Sharman a position as “roving reporter” for the publication, Sharman happily accepted the position and eagerly looked forward to the opportunity to turn a personal interest into a part-time job.

Brewster’s tourism and party business drew on and built up consumers’ personal experiences of transfemininity as part of a social and economic context in which transfeminine people created and enjoyed commercialized social opportunities together. Trans people thus became further defined as a group through the extension of personal experiences of transfemininity into an integrated economic and social world of transfeminine people who connected through leisure, consumption, and business. This played an important part in translating personal experiences into group norms, as advertising, reporting, and solicitation

for businesses like Brewster’s encouraged transfeminine people to identify with and take pleasure in the ways that they were being constructed as a group.

Brewster’s many commercial activities can be understood in the context of a growing entrepreneurial market for sex-oriented businesses in the early 1970s, when it was relatively easy to start a mail-order business that sold sexually-oriented goods and services. The consumer market was ripe for goods and services and individuals with as little as a thousand dollars to invest could quickly begin turning a profit. Businesses providing a wide variety of sexual paraphernalia were becoming quite common; the U.S. Commission on Pornography and Obscenity found, for example, that “a prospective mail order customer may select from an incredible array of sexually oriented materials,” including books and magazines, eight millimetre films, photographs, as well as information about social club memberships and other miscellaneous items like “playing cards, whips, chains, and fetishistic clothing.”

Linked by a shared consumer base and potentially mutually beneficial business interests, several entrepreneurial activists in the early 1970s promoted each other’s work to consumers as simultaneously social, commercial, and political. Self-proclaimed representatives of “the transvestite community” included Lee Brewster, Bebe Scarpie, Sussie Collins, Wilma Thordsen and Pudgy Roberts, all of whom were involved with the publication of transvestite periodicals. By regularly working together and referring to each other’s work, they constructed the transvestite and transsexual commercial world as a well-developed social space and encouraged consumers to consider themselves members of it. Mesics, for example, encouraged her FI News readers to support the Queen’s Liberation Front, asking them to try to

“actively campaign for TVs rights,” but that if they could not do that, they should at least contribute membership dues towards the group’s legal costs. Together, a group of transfeminine people involved in trans social groups and publications announced “the beginning of a transvestite-transsexual movement like it has never has never been seen before..., a new national force that will fight for our civil rights.” The “coalition of groups” included not only the Queen’s Liberation Front but also smaller groups from other regions, such as Salmacis and the United Transvestite and Transsexual Society. Each of these groups represented local efforts to create national groups, and their political coalition was possible because leaders were celebrities in social and economic transvestite subcultures, able to draw on their roles in transvestite media to enroll consumers in political efforts. Brewster can be considered one of the most successful of these leaders as he was able to draw on a multifaceted business empire to promote his vision of trans politics and his articulation of transfemininity.

Once Brewster built up a market of consumers and made a name for himself through his parties and his magazine and mail order business, he decided to open a brick and mortar shop called “Lee’s Mardi Gras Boutique,” which began operations in 1969. The shop took up 2,000 square feet of floor space on the second floor of a centrally located building in a discreet neighbourhood of New York City near the Port Authority bus terminal and the Lincoln Tunnel, making it accessible via public transportation. The shop soon became a physical home for Brewster’s growing community of consumers as well as a hub of

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employment and commercial opportunities for those who otherwise, as a result of their non-normative gender or sexual expressions, faced a great deal of social and economic discrimination.

Drag described Brewster’s boutique shop as a “transvestite paradise” in an almost twenty-page photo and text spread that provided readers with a virtual tour. Brewster told readers that if they shopped at his store, they could expect a zebra carpeted reception area, a fifteen foot bar and a large area with clothes, wigs, and various publications, including over three hundred titles on transvestism. The south wall was lined entirely with undergarment storage and featured “rows and rows of stockings and waist cinshers,” as well as “every imaginable kind of panty and bra.” For everyday-wear, consumers could also find a “practical pant suit or sensible blouse.” For those new to public cross-dressing, the shop employed Terry, the “hairstylist in residence,” who specialized in wigs and transvestite hairstyles as well as makeovers that promised consumers a transformation from “your boy-self into your girl-self.” Perhaps most importantly, Drag described the shop as being designed specifically for the transvestite consumer, a “place where he could shop and feel no sense of shame.” In this way Drag constructed the act of consumption as one of the central experiences of personal liberation from the internal effects of social stigma for the group Brewster broadly called transvestites.

Drag also publicized Brewster’s shop as a key site of trans celebrity, media, and socializing. The magazine published photographs of monthly parties held at the store,

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320 Ibid., 21-22.
321 Ibid., 35.
hinting that readers could meet glamorous, interesting and attractive people if they were to attend. Furthermore, it encouraged readers to come and see the magazine being produced and suggested that if they did, they might even run into Vicky West or Bebe Scarpie, whose photographs, columns and activities were regular Drag features. In all of these ways, Brewster’s shop and related businesses continued to draw on and traffic in a discourse of transfeminine fantasy and celebrity, but in a much more participatory and politicized way than had Female Impersonators magazine in the 1960s.

Brewster rhetorically distinguished between transfeminine politics and transfeminine entertainment, even though they were intimately connected and Drag reported on both. The main focus of the magazine was to provide the opportunity for transfeminine people to openly enjoy cross-dressing, which in the early 1970s, when it was illegal in most places, could be considered a political act in and of itself. Brewster recognized that most of his trans consumers, however, were primarily interested in having fun, meeting other trans people, and dressing up, though Brewster himself also hoped to achieve the decriminalization of cross-dressing and regularly mentioned using profits from his businesses to support these efforts. Overall, trans people were represented in Drag as a diverse group of cross-dressers, transvestites and transsexuals, some of who considered themselves gay and all of whom would benefit from a more open social culture in which they were permitted to enjoy their interests and express their gendered and sexual selves.

Gay and trans politics in New York City greatly influenced Brewster, and because Drag circulated nationally, it became a major context in which social and political differences

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between gay people and trans people were expressed and trans people became defined as distinct from gay people. The question of whether and how transfeminine people related to gay politics was a heated one in New York City, where nationally-influential political demonstrations and groups were being organized and generational, gender and political divisions caused serious problems.

The June 1969 Stonewall Riot in New York City, most often recognized as the birthplace of gay liberation, was also a turning point in the definition of trans people as a distinct group. Although the 1966 Compton’s Cafeteria riot in San Francisco and the Dewey's sit-in in Philadelphia preceded it by several years, the Stonewall riots were more influential in that they led to the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Queen’s Liberation Front (QLF), and numerous other activist groups around the country. Both riots exemplified increased resistance to widespread the police harassment and bar raids, which had been common throughout the 1950s and 1960s. When New York police attempted to raid the Stonewall Inn, patrons pelted them with coins, paving stones and parking meters; they set the bar on fire and inspired three days of rioting. The question of whether it was primarily gays and lesbians or trans people who started the riot has since become historically contentious, partly due to concerns that trans people have not been appropriately recognized in historiography that prioritizes gays and lesbians.324 Debate about the meaning and usage of

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“gay” shaped many of the sex and gender politics that emerged in the wake of Stonewall. “Gay” was often used expansively as an umbrella term during this period to encompass any number of gender or sexual expressions, including trans people, rather than in the more specific way it is now usually used to refer to (often only cisgender) gay men. Marc Stein writes that in New York, GLF presumed “that ‘gay’ was a capacious term that would appeal to all relevant constituencies” and that three distinct “orientations” of national gay and lesbian activism were especially influential from 1969 to 1973: gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and gay and lesbian liberalism. Trans activism and transnormativities likewise shaped and were shaped by each of these formations, as trans people became increasingly defined as distinct from gays and lesbians throughout the 1970s. Not only transsexuals, but also a broader group of trans people were becoming defined as distinct from non-trans people.

When Brewster formed Queen’s Liberation Front (QLF) in 1969, his experience as a gay transvestite shaped his articulation of sex and gender politics. Brewster and his colleagues spearheaded the QLF as the political and activist wing of their efforts. While the name clearly linked the group to the much more recognized Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Brewster’s magazine, Drag, which later advertised itself as “the official voice of Queen’s Liberation Front,” referred to QLF as “a homophile organization founded in 1969.” While historians may distinguish between homophile activism, gay liberation, lesbian feminism and gay and lesbian rights, Brewster and other trans activists often interchangeably related to these terms and groups depending on the context. Essentially, Brewster considered himself and other trans people to be part of the gay liberation movement, except when trans people’s presence or

Stryker, Transgender History, 63-67, 82-85.
325 Marc Stein, Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement (New York: Routledge, 2012), 82, 79.
issues were rejected, in which case it became necessary to distinguish trans people from gays and lesbians. As will become evident, however, Brewster and QLF were often less compatible with lesbian feminist politics than with other variations of gay and lesbian politics.

The notion that being “gay” could encompass a wide range of people as well as diverse gender and sexual expressions led trans activists to work with numerous gay groups with different politics, including GLF and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). Although both groups formed in New York City in 1969 and both inspired the formation of similarly named groups around the country, historians consider GLF the more radical of the two because it emphasized anti-oppressive politics and solidarity with numerous social justice issues, whereas GAA was formed by activists who wanted to work solely on gay and lesbian issues. During the early 1970s, trans people worked as members of gay and lesbian group as well as distinctly trans groups. Bebe Scarpie, for example, was a member of both QLF and GAA and later sat on the board of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). Similarly, Stephen L. Cohen writes that Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) “came out of GLF and was shaped by the experiences of transvestites within GAA.” One of the basic expectations within trans communities in the early 1970s was that trans people


327 Stein, Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement, 100.


could and should work with groups organized around the notion of “gay” liberation to advance the issues particular to transfeminine people, even if all gay or lesbian people did not support or understand their specific issues. While gay and lesbian groups differed across the country, national trans publications like Drag, because of their focus on an often overly-simplistic national trans-centric narrative, often did not recognize important social and political differences amongst primarily gay and lesbian groups.

GLF, in many ways more radical than GAA, was not always a welcoming environment for trans people, because GLF politicized and debated trans people in symbolic terms. Hillman writes that in San Francisco, GLF activists saw drag balls as “promoting capitalist exploitation of the gay community” and “called on drag queens to recognize that drag balls perpetuated their oppression.” Hillman also notes that a transvestite at one GLF meeting was accused of playing into social stereotypes and “castrating gay men” by wearing makeup.330 Marc Stein has shown that Philadelphia’s GLF was exceptional in its approach to supporting transvestites and transsexuals on feminist grounds.331 Similarly, a group called Transsexuals and Transvestites (TAT) also formed under the GLF banner.332 In contrast, Angela Douglas, a militant transsexual who had been active in GLF-Los Angeles and in 1970 founded Transsexual/Transvestite Action Organization (TAO), felt that “many of the male homosexuals were extremely antitransvestic and wished for transvestites to participate in GLF actions solely for the shock value afforded by their presence.”333

331 Stein, City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves, 323.
In many cases, trans women faced unintended and serious personal and legal consequences for working with gays and lesbians. For example, Marcia P. Johnson of STAR reported that after agreeing to be interviewed by gay activist Arthur Bell for a newspaper article about transvestites, the police sought out and arrested all of the activists who had been named in the article, mainly on prostitution charges. Although this was not the fault or intention of gays and lesbians working with trans women, it was an additional issue that trans women faced because many were engaged in sex work and were more vulnerable to police harassment and arrest.

The GAA’s more singular focus, gender-normative politics and emphasis on legal reforms appealed to many trans people, even if the GAA was primarily concerned with laws related to gays and lesbians rather than trans people. Kissack writes that some trans people found GAA gatherings to be a better fit than GLF since GAA groups often brought together ex-homophile activists and less radical gays. San Francisco’s GAA, for example, organized resistance to police arrests of transsexuals and drag queens. In New York, Bruce Voeller, one of the founders of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, encouraged trans activist Sylvia Rivera to do “outreach” to street transvestites for the GAA, and Gay Power published a letter from Rivera vouching that GAA members are "all right" and "don’t put down no one because they act different or wear make-up.” Rivera encouraged other transvestites to translate their personal experiences and identities into a broad gay politics,

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writing, “We are all gay. Girls, we are needed.”  

An expansive notion of “gay” that included trans people was evidently more possible in trans-positive gay environments, which allowed trans people to define themselves as simultaneously gay.

Brewster focused on advancing the issues he saw as most important and rarely distinguished one gay or lesbian group from another, participating in numerous activities and conversations with gay and lesbian activists of many different types. He told one group of gay liberationists, for example, that the two most important legal and social issues that they should all be fighting for were “the right to congregate” and the “right to dress as we see fit.” Brewster complained that the existing “license for a drag ball or Masquerade/costume ball clearly states that no men dressed in the female attire will be admitted as guests, under penalty of law.”

Brewster rarely discussed sexuality, arguably one of the most important elements of gay liberation; he was concerned instead that laws against cross-dressing were dividing gays into those who demonstrated acceptable gender norms (masculine men and feminine women) and those who did not (particularly queens and other transfeminine people). His work in the early 1970s became focused on representing transfeminine people as an important part of the gay liberation movement, but his focus on single-issue legal reforms was more in line with GAA politics.

Brewster used Drag to promote the QLF’s efforts to address the ambitious goal of legalizing cross-dressing, both locally in New York City and nationally. He occasionally used Drag to address readers as a political leader rather than a business person, writing on behalf of

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the QLF with group-based political statements that established political norms of interest to
transfeminine people. For example, in 1971, he wrote, “We feel that the wearing of a
particular article of clothing does not make one a criminal.”\textsuperscript{339} Furthermore, Brewster vowed
that the QLF would “attack the law shortly on the grounds it shows discrimination as it doesn’t
mention women in men’s clothes.”\textsuperscript{340} Essentially, this "reverse discrimination" argument was
based on the notion that women were gaining the right to wear men’s clothes and that
transfeminine people should obtain equal rights to wear whatever symbolically gendered
clothing that they desired, too. This strategy both demonstrates the gender specificity and
criminalization of transfemininity in particular and illustrates how certain transfeminine
political actions were undertaken in ways that grouped transfeminine people’s interests
together, sometimes in opposition to those of people born or raised female. Similarly, it shows
how these transfeminine arguments opposed or rejected feminist arguments that women were
generally disadvantaged.

Brewster’s efforts to decriminalize cross-dressing overlapped with his interest in
creating social and economic space for transfeminine people and the efforts of other trans
people who worked with gay and lesbian groups in the early 1970s to achieve their own
specific ends. For example, Brewster reported that he had called the Bureau of Consumer
Affairs to request the removal of a New York City law stating that “no homosexuals, lesbians,
or persons pretending to be” were allowed in licensed establishments, proclaiming that he
represented those “persons pretending to be.”\textsuperscript{341} This fit well with the radicalism of gay
liberation and provided space for transfeminine people to exist within structures where gays

\textsuperscript{339} “Queen’s Liberation Front…What is it?” \textit{Drag} 1.6, 1972, 13-14: 14; Teal, \textit{The Gay Militants}, 210.
\textsuperscript{341} “Queen’s Liberation Front…What is it?” 13-14.
and lesbians were being more readily defined (and more specifically regulated) in terms of sexual orientation rather than gender identity or expression.

*Drag* frequently reported that gay and lesbian organizations all over the United States were working to have laws against cross-dressing removed and claimed their efforts as a joint project of a unified gay movement. Even though Brewster and his QLF specifically claimed to represent queens, transvestites, and transsexuals (all of whom were assumed to be trans women), *Drag* told readers, with its typical lack of differentiation, that it made sense to “work with gays” since police were also targeting them with cross-dressing laws and because gay groups were becoming more politically powerful. It reported that one group from Toledo, Ohio, for example, called the Personal Rights Organization, which *Drag* described as “a rank-and-file homophile group,” had paid for a campaign to overturn a city ordinance stipulating that “no homosexual, lesbian, or other perverted person” could appear in public in the clothing of the opposite sex.342

Similarly, *Drag* reported that the National Coalition of Gay Organizations had campaigned to have city ordinances against cross-dressing struck down in Miami over concern that police would use those laws to harass and arrest delegates to the group’s national convention.343 Since many laws simultaneously criminalized both sexual and gender expression, it made sense for gay, lesbian and trans people to work together to eliminate these laws. In such situations, Brewster recognized that gay groups had a wide base of appeal and told readers quite simply, “We must co-operate with the gay organizations if we wish to get

any laws changed across the country.”\textsuperscript{344} Through \textit{Drag} and the QLF, Brewster also encouraged other transfeminine people around the country to undertake similar alliances with gay groups and to see trans people as distinct but related.

Brewster saw QLF as creating social and political spaces where transfeminine people could work with gays and lesbians but challenge the ways in which trans people’s issues were often considered secondary by gay and lesbian activists. Explaining the formation of QLF, for example, Brewster announced that “not one” of the existing gay groups, nor the EEF, “is working for the drag queen" and therefore it was "now time for the 'drag' to place a little of 'her' energy and talent to support an organization that has 'her' as the CENTRAL figure."\textsuperscript{345}

During the key years of the early- to mid-1970s, as transfeminine activists claimed a distinct and valid space for trans people, \textit{Drag} defined trans politics in part in relation to gay and lesbian movements. Public demonstrations and events were key sites for trans people to articulate their expectations of recognition and accommodation. QLF saw the first Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, in 1970, as an ideal opportunity to stage its first major public demonstration. The parade organizing committee had warned that participants would likely be arrested if they came in drag, but QLF told \textit{Drag} readers that “since the purpose of the organization is to change the law in regards to cross-dressing…, this was as good a time as any to start the offensive.”\textsuperscript{346} The parade was symbolically important on a national level because it commemorated the birth of the gay liberation movement in America. After the parade, \textit{Drag} reported that queens had been the centre of attention and had received

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{345} Teal, \textit{The Gay Militants}, 209.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid., 7.
international press coverage, proudly proclaiming that “queens contributed financial support to the parade and officers of the organization marched the entire three mile hike in high heels!”  

QLF members knew that their gender presentations were potentially at odds with those they referred to as the “so-called ‘straight’ looking, manly homosexual,” but they focused instead on what they saw as transfeminine people’s right to participate in the parade and be recognized regardless of gay and lesbian strategies or agendas. *Drag* later announced that “the most satisfying things about the demonstration was that a drag queen and a heterosexual T.V. [transvestite], for the first time marched under the same banner, with both proclaiming their desire to be treated as full-fledged American citizens.” By bringing together trans people with different sexual preferences and orientations, including heterosexual transvestites, rather than focusing only on those identified as gay, trans activists began broadening their understanding of trans people as a socially and politically coherent group.

In the next several years, *Drag*’s annual coverage of gay pride festivities in New York City continued to chart the progress of transvestites in the gay liberation movement from a trans-centric perspective, constructing both utopian and dystopian visions of the relationship between gays, lesbians, and transvestites. Each year, the magazine developed a specifically transvestite narrative of the gay liberation movement by publishing a spread of snapshot-style photographs of the parade, the crowd, and individual transvestites. Such images displayed flashy clothing and behaviour alongside visual representations of political divisions, such as

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348 Ibid., 5.
showing transvestites posing with blatant facial expressions of disgust. As the years went on and many gay and lesbian people rejected trans people as politically suspect or outside the boundaries of gay and lesbian politics, *Drag* also increasingly differentiated trans people from gays and lesbians.

New York City soon became a battleground for competing representations of what “gay liberation” meant, even as similar situations arose across the country. One of the first issues to put transfeminine activists on the defensive was economic, as some gays and lesbians began challenging the inclusion of female impersonators on political grounds. Many of the more radical (anticapitalist) gays and lesbians objected to the presence of commercial drag performers in their parades, not on grounds of gender respectability, but because they saw transvestite commercial activities as part of the hetero-patriarchal economic exploitation of gay and lesbian culture. This political critique of capitalism would certainly have been easier to make for middle- and upper-class activists who were more financially secure. In contrast, transfeminine activists, including members of QLF and STAR, experienced their economic roles as central parts of their lives. Many trans people saw professional female impersonators, whether they were gay or straight, as their celebrities and idols, not as mockeries or as perpetuating stereotypes. Out of concern over what seemed like a series of increasingly restrictive limitations in gay and lesbian movements, *Drag* and other transvestite activists loudly protested what they saw as the marginalization of transvestites at the annual pride celebrations in New York City.

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In 1973, political differences over the inclusion of female impersonators caused splits amongst transfeminine, gay, and lesbian activists, who wound up working directly against one another while trying to organize the annual parade. QLF’s Bebe Scarpie had personally recruited showgirls from the 82 Club to join the parade and represent female impersonators as a profession.\footnote{Cohen, \textit{The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New York}, 156.} A group representing lesbians, however, objected to the use of female impersonators as entertainment and approached the Christopher Street Parade Co-ordinating Committee a few days before the parade, asking to preview the scheduled acts. \textit{Drag} told readers that the organizing committee agreed to the women’s request and accused both the women and the committee of being intolerant of transvestites and infringing on the artistic freedom of the performers.\footnote{“Drags and TV’s Join the March,” \textit{Drag} 3.11, 1973, 44.}

In the early 1970s, the anti-commercial politics of the pride parades in the context of gay liberation were clearly at odds with the social norms of transfeminine communities, which valued commercial entertainment, personal consumption, and economic opportunities for transfeminine people. In an article for the \textit{Village Voice}, Arthur Bell highlighted concerns regarding the economic exploitation of gay people by calling the female impersonators under scrutiny “‘a commercial drag act,’ as opposed to gay people whose lifestyle is transvestism.”\footnote{Arthur Bell, “Hostility Comes out of the Closet,” \textit{Village Voice}, June 28, 1973, 16.} Bell thus summarized an attitude which defined only transfeminine people who were motivated by politics rather than profit as socially and politically acceptable to gays and lesbians, failing to account for the constrained economic and employment options facing trans people. To Bell, female impersonators represented a wider economic problem. He also
wrote that the emphasis on gay bars and bathhouses at the parades was turning the festivities into a “mock-shock promo time” for those seeking to profit from the social and political aims of gay liberationists. The paper singled out “straight media entertainers who play the gay bar and bath circuit” as well as “Gay Media Inc.,” a company it said was “one of the city’s biggest porno entrepreneurs,” was run by the Gambino mob and profited from gays as publisher of the parade schedule. Gay and lesbian radicals had raised similar concerns about the exploitation of gay and lesbian people by the straight publisher of Gay Power newspaper. Lesbian feminists in other parts of the country were likewise concerned that drag queen participation in parades in the absence of feminist politics created a “male drag show for the straights.” For Brewster, a trans activist whose consumer base included heterosexual transvestites and for whom commercialism and consumption were central to his liberation politics, community and culture, that critique was an outrage.

According to Drag, the women who objected to the female impersonator performances were concerned about how these entertainers would represent gays to the wider mainstream American public. Drag ignored the substance of their concerns by simply constructing their position as a threat to transfeminine people’s freedom of expression. The magazine didn’t recognize the ongoing ways that many radical gays and lesbians were campaigning against patriarchy and capitalism within the gay and lesbian movement. Confrontations between transvestite and lesbian activists were perhaps somewhat inevitable.

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353 Ibid.
355 Stein, City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves, 376.
given that both groups felt marginalized and oppressed within the gay liberation movement and both were fighting for the right to speak and have their priorities addressed. Neither side seemed to be particularly interested in accepting or understanding the politics of the other.

One of the ways that *Drag* extended personal and social experiences of transfemininity into the national political sphere was by constructing and distributing a narrative that blamed lesbians for the threat of transfeminine people’s exclusion from gay politics, particularly in New York City and at its pride parades. Rather than addressing the more difficult issues of commercialism, economic exploitation, and the ways in which gendered symbolism affected men and women differently, *Drag* and QLF instead promoted the idea that lesbians were simply trying to oppress transvestites. Because many transvestites were also sex workers and took commercialized sexuality for granted as part of the reality of their lives, their critique of lesbians who objected to transvestites as economically exploiting gay culture was thus also in part class-based. Of course, some trans lesbians and some non-trans lesbians were also sex workers. The anti-lesbian, transfeminine-centric narrative that *Drag* and others constructed, however, simplistically represented lesbians as monolithic and cisgendered, possibly hindering potential alliances with some lesbians and feminists.

Tensions between transfeminine people and lesbian activists came to a head at the 1973 festivities when Sylvia Rivera took to the stage to make an impromptu speech. The parade organizing committee had set a policy that year that all speeches had to be scheduled and approved in advance. Furthermore, in the interests of unity, no “special interest” groups were to make speeches that were disruptive or condemned others. According to *Drag*, however, Rivera “seized the microphone” after being “goaded on by certain glory hunting
Reporters, professional disrupters of the radical right, and the man hating lesbian contingent. She critiqued the organizing committee for failing to address the most socially and economically oppressed, particularly those who couldn’t attend because they had been imprisoned. Her intervention was considered a disruption, however, and she was removed by force. The Village Voice reported that she was “struck down twice and carried off by a team of burly marshals.”

*Drag* officially condemned Rivera’s tactics, but blamed lesbians for the discord. It charged that “the whole thing was planned by the lesbians, as they came with prepared speeches” in case such an opportunity arose. Similarly, Rivera would later remember Jean O’Leary, one of the Lesbian Liberation Front leaders, as having “started the big commotion at the rally.” Rivera described O’Leary as “a radical lesbian…who felt that the transgender community was offensive to women because we liked to wear makeup and we liked to wear mini-skirts.” According to Rivera, O’Leary never took the opportunity to recognize that those embodiments of femininity were “part of the business that we’re in at that time!” For Rivera, gay liberation needed to take into account how the business of sex work and street hustling shaped the lives of prisoners, street queens, and transvestites; to her, gender, commercialism, and freedom of expression were intertwined in ways that were very specific to the lives of transvestites.

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356 “Drags and TV’s Join the March,” *Drag* 3.11 (1973), 44; see also “Sylvia Rivera: A Woman Before Her Time,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!*, 173; Stryker, *Transgender History*, 102.
358 “Drags and TV’s Join the March,” *Drag* 3.11 (1973), 44.
Drag reported on the scene with typical flair and acrimony, representing Rivera as part of a radical group of trans people fighting for their rightful place. Encouraging readers to draw on anti-feminist language and disassociate themselves from gay liberation on account of the lesbian feminists’ tactics, Drag proclaimed with pride that during Rivera’s speech Brewster had enthusiastically thrown her tiara into the crowd, screaming “Fuck gay liberation!”360 Lesbian feminists were similarly disassociating themselves from gay liberation, for reasons of patriarchal sexism, which QLF members failed to grasp. Scarpie “accused the movement of sacrificing the drag to please ‘a few bitches,’” disregarding the misogyny of her statement.361 According to Drag, when the emcee tried to restore peace by telling the crowd “we’re one people,” a radical lesbian apparently shouted out, “You must be kidding.” Brewster dug in his heels, insisting that he “cannot sit and let my people be insulted,” clearly maintaining his vision of simultaneous unity and difference.362 After the rally, QLF continued its critique of gay liberation and decided to give Rivera a “special humanitarian award.” QLF wanted readers to recognize Rivera’s “sincerity and dedication” during what it saw as an “era of phoniness, when the Gay Movement is dominated by writers, psychiatrists, politicians, pseudo-intellectuals, and possibly paid revolutionaries.” Drag told readers that “Miss Rivera’s life is a history of the gay movement,” insisting that transfeminine activists such as Rivera better represented the ideals of a movement under dispute.363

In the coming years, Drag continued to skim over critical questions about class and commerce, presenting lesbian feminists as antagonistic to transvestite interests. For example,

360 Ibid.
Drag published stories about QLF’s conflicts with lesbian separatist Jill Johnson to warn its national reading audience about what it considered the threatening tyranny of lesbian feminism. Johnson was a Village Voice newspaper columnist and prominent lesbian feminist who regularly issued statements, made proclamations, and gave talks about lesbian feminism. In 1973 she published the book Lesbian Nation, which argued that lesbians needed to prioritize their feminist solidarity with other women over their sexual solidarity with gay men. Johnson was QLF’s worst nightmare and the antithesis of its vision of gay liberation; she provided a perfect foil because of the ways she challenged its aspirations and interests, both in terms of the potential for broader unity and in terms of policing gender boundaries and expressions.

In 1974 Drag reported that at a local feminist conference QLF’s Bebe Scarpie challenged Johnson’s insistence that men be excluded entirely from feminist discussions. Drag proudly told readers that Scarpie had “managed to successfully… infiltrate the question line, from which men were excluded,” and proceeded to publicly accuse Johnson “of being a Neo fascist and dictating to women as well as men.” When one of the Radicalesbians in attendance realized that Scarpie was a transvestite, however, she shouted out, “Jill don’t answer it’s a male question.”

QLF believed that no one group or individual should limit others’ individual freedom of expression, and Johnson and other feminists seemed to be doing just that. Indeed, one

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366 Ibid., 8.
former New York feminist would later remember that “the principle of equality was distorted into an anti-individualist mania” during those years.\textsuperscript{367} Other feminists, like Susan Brownmiller, remembered facing a similar accusation: that by identifying potentially divisive political issues, she had “set back the cause of civil rights and civil liberties ten years.”\textsuperscript{368} Drag encouraged readers to believe that most people would see through Johnson’s platform, reporting that after Scarpie’s turn at the microphone, a heterosexual woman in the audience demanded to know how Johnson felt about women’s freedom to have relationships with men, given that she had been arguing that mothers should neglect male babies and that only as many men as were necessary for species reproduction should be allowed to exist.\textsuperscript{369} With such examples, Drag was able to construct a trans-centric narrative in which alliances with heterosexual people sometimes made more sense than coalitions with gays or lesbians.

By the mid-1970s, QLF was particularly concerned that mainstream media representations of debates about gay gender politics were misrepresentative of trans people. In 1975, for example, Drag discussed a cover article of Time magazine, titled “I Am a Homosexual: The Gay Drive for Acceptance,” which contrasted a photograph of a gender-normative military serviceman alongside photographs of hairy men in dresses, outlandish make-up, and women’s wigs. To underscore how much the article failed to speak to transfeminine realities, Drag printed a letter to the editor in which the confused reader asked how the kind of cross-dressing portrayed in the article could so “violently contradict my image of the typical cross-dresser.” In response, Drag explained that this type of drag,

\textsuperscript{368} Susan Brownmiller, \textit{In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution} (New York: Delta, 1999), 247.
\textsuperscript{369} “Bebe Infiltrates Feminist Conference,” 8.
“commonly known as ‘genderfuck’ drag or ‘skagdrag’ … [is] the image acceptable by the Gay Liberationists as valid as it is making a political comment about masculinity and femininity.”\(^\text{370}\) Another trans publication, *TV Times*, gave its readers a similar explanation, defining genderfuck as entirely “different from transvestism” and “emerging as a social and political practice associated with Gay lib and women’s lib.”\(^\text{371}\) By the mid-1970s, it was thus clear that many transfeminine activists began seeing themselves as excluded from and defined in opposition to what they (often over simplistically) saw as mainstream gay politics, with the mainstream discourses of gay gender norms excluding those increasingly being differentiated as trans.

By 1975, *Drag* had begun representing gays and lesbians as having joined together to oppress transvestites. In an accusatory, multi-page feature called “Gay is not Proud of Queens on Parade,” *Drag* told readers that gays and lesbians had become a serious threat to transvestites’ freedom of expression because of their own bid for social acceptance. Calling the Gay Liberation Movement “the most organized oppressor of the transvestite lifestyle,” it charged that gays and lesbians had “begun to openly attack the transvestite lifestyle” and were trying to push transvestites out of the movement.\(^\text{372}\) The article explained that two Hunter College student groups, the Lesbian Rising Collective and Gay Men’s Alliance, had banded together to write a manifesto that they circulated during the 1975 pride parade called “Statement Against Transvestism.”\(^\text{373}\) *Drag* reported the Hunter College group's seven

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\(^{370}\) “Letter to the Editor,” *Drag* 5.20, 1975, 41. See also Hillman, “‘The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act a Homosexual Can Engage In’,” 175.

\(^{371}\) *TV Times* 2, ca.1975, n.p.


\(^{373}\) Ibid., 37.
specific objections to cross-dressing, most of which reflected a desire to distance themselves from transvestites. Earlier groups, such as the Male Homosexual Workshop of the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, sponsored by the Black Panther Party, had embraced more radical gender politics, demanding, for example, “the right to free physiological change and modification of sex upon demand” and “the right of free dress and adornment.”374 But by 1975, the Hunter College group was defining gay identity in opposition to transfemininity, writing, for example, that “as Gay men, our sexual orientation and affectional preference is towards other men" and "our goals, hope, and loves are not represented by men playing at being women."375 They also argued that being associated with transvestism could jeopardize the work of “lesbian feminists," who had "gained support for the Gay movement from heterosexual sisters in the Feminist movement.”376 Claiming that transvestites were “not specifically a Gay concern or priority” but rather “victims of heterosexual society,” the Hunter College groups clearly imagined gays and lesbians as having only two (gendered) components, excluding broader gender diversity from their vision, but in the process defining trans people as a distinct and separate group.377

Drag soon began taking an increasingly critical tone in reporting on political conflicts with gays and lesbians, promoting the work of trans activists around the country like Diana Slyter and Vera Jones, who were successfully working to achieve political gains for trans people despite problems working with gay and lesbian groups. Slyter and Jones had been

375 “Gay is Not Proud of Queens on Parade,” 37.
376 Ibid., 36.
377 Ibid., 37.
working with the Minnesota Committee for Gay Rights, which Drag referred to as a group of gay Democrats, on a campaign to protect transvestites and transsexuals from discrimination. They had gotten the support of both the Minnesota Human Rights Commission and a group called the Coalition of Concerned Gays, which represented over 18 different gay organizations, but faced opposition from the Minnesota Committee for Gay Rights, a group determined to put forward a bill that would protect only gays and lesbians from discrimination, purposefully and explicitly excluding transsexuals and transvestites. Committee member Steve Endean later recalled that when approached about including transvestites and transsexuals, “we declined, pointing out that the bill would be lucky to pass and just couldn’t stand the additional weight of such an inclusion.”

Slyter and Jones insisted that any non-discrimination bill must include transsexuals and transvestites. Drag reported that Slyter and Jones staged a small street march in protest, though gave few details. When no one from the local media showed up to report on it, Drag told readers that Jones and Slyter simply “took their demonstration to the newsrooms” of the local press, managing to get both the St. Paul Pioneer and the Duluth News to print articles on the transvestite issue shortly thereafter. In fact, the latter paper implored the legislature to “get every sexual variation in the same legal bag" and "be done with it." By circulating such stories, Drag presented gays and lesbians as unreliable sources of support and encouraged readers to work specifically for transvestites and transsexuals rather than wasting their energy with resistant gay or lesbian groups, which were caught up in divisive efforts.

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In fact, *Drag* increasingly saw coalition building with mainstream heterosexual society as an important political tactic for trans people, even when it involved working directly against liberal gays and lesbians. For example, it reported that Slyter and Jones had found an opportunity to form a political alliance with Republican Minnesota State Senator Arne Carlson, the state senate's minority whip, who framed his concerns over the gay rights bill in terms of individual rights, public health policies, and appropriate use of state funds, but also offering a moving speech supporting trans people. Carlson promised to enshrine into law a specific recognition of gender expression concerns as distinct from those of gay and lesbian ones; he officially proposed an amendment to the gay rights bill which would protect from discrimination those “having or projecting a self-image not associated with one’s biological maleness or one’s biological femaleness.” *Drag* reported with glee that John Tomlinson, author of the gay rights bill, “trembled visibly as he spoke against Carlson’s motion,” and while “he alleged sympathy with transexuals,” he also “urged his colleagues to defeat the amendment because it would also apply to transvestites.” Another Republican seconded Carlson’s motion to include transsexuals and transvestites, but the overall bill failed because of controversy over the fact that it would allow gays and lesbians to be school teachers.\(^{381}\)

While recognizing that gays and lesbians could sometimes be allies, *Drag* continued to criticize gays and lesbians for failing to consistently address trans issues, instead presenting readers with numerous examples of transfeminine people who were forging successful, productive alliances outside the gay and lesbian movement. In 1975, for example, it told readers about Jean Michele Peters, a transsexual activist in Detroit who was challenging the

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constitutionality of local laws against cross-dressing with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Gendered symbolism was central to transvestite rights in the case; one of the expert witnesses called to testify was a fashion columnist from The Detroit Free Press, who argued that the gendered nature of clothing had changed to such an extent that it was no longer possible to enforce a law against cross-dressing, an argument the judge accepted.\footnote{382 "Jean Michele Peters: A Profile in a Courageous Legal Overturn of Detroit’s Drag Laws,” Drag 6.24, 1975, 34-36.}

Such successes provided a clear contrast to reports of continued resistance by a number of vocal gays and lesbians. In 1977, for example, Drag reported that Rosemary McGrath, the co-founder of a human rights committee, was asked to leave the pride march in New York City because several radical feminist lesbians found her sign, “Straight Women for Gay Rights,” offensive.\footnote{383 “Gay Pride March ’77,” Drag 7.25, 1977, 20.} The implication was that trans people had more in common with straight human rights activists than they did with lesbians separatists and that transfeminine people likely had a better chance of achieving their aims with heterosexual allies than with gays or lesbians. Drag continued to develop its political definition of transfeminine interests in part based on the conflicts that specific leaders had experienced in their dealings with gay and lesbian activists in New York City and elsewhere.

Increasingly in the late 1970s, Drag represented gay liberation as a lost cause, citing the disappointment of other transvestite activists as well. More specifically, Brewster argued that conflicts with gays and lesbians were sucking up financial resources that could be better spent. Brewster told the Village Voice that the QLF devoted $3000 a year to keeping a lawyer on retainer, the majority of which was “spent fighting the gay movement.” Furthermore, the “biggest problem isn’t with straights… but with the gay liberation movement" and "they take
credit for work we’ve done and they put us down as stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{384} Transsexual activist Angela Douglas, president of the international group TAO: The Transsexual Action Organization, similarly told \textit{Drag} readers:

\begin{quote}
Gay Lib to me, was and is a very beautiful and needed concept. I became involved for many reasons. I don’t mind being considered gay. I do mind being oppressed as a gay: when I got into Gay Lib I encountered a tremendous amount of prejudice on the part of the male gays because I am TS, so I stayed with it basically to confront anti-TS prejudices on the part of homosexuals. Some of the scenes were very brutal ones.\textsuperscript{385}
\end{quote}

For many transvestite and transsexuals, the idea of an all-inclusive gay liberation movement had become an almost nostalgic ideal whose time had passed.

The number of cases in which gays and lesbians excluded transvestites from their efforts had taken a toll on transvestite activists. After another legal battle in Chicago, transsexual activist Sandy Mesics wrote, “I must admit that I was glad to see those bills defeated, not because I am against gay lib, but because the crossdresser had been sold down the river.”\textsuperscript{386} One \textit{Drag} reader joined in lamenting the disrespectful attitude of some gays and lesbians to drag queens, but encouraged readers to be proud of themselves nonetheless, writing to them in the letter to the editor section, “Don’t let the feminists or the macho men get you down. Gay Liberation owes a lot to the drag queen.”\textsuperscript{387} Indeed, from a trans-centric perspective, the gender norms being promoted by many cisgender gays and lesbians seriously marginalized drag queens. The overall tone by the end of the decade was pessimistic and did not reflect the many fruitful and positive efforts of gays and lesbians who had worked to include and address trans-specific needs. Instead, numerous trans publications focused on

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what was becoming an emerging norm within trans circles: the idea that trans people could not count on gays or lesbians as allies. Perhaps ironically, this enabled transfeminine activists to see each other as more related to one another, as a group forming through common work on specific issues in a relatively hostile environment.

Notwithstanding the disappointments of trans activists in the late 1970s, in this period some trans activists began to reconsider the necessity of working with gays and lesbians as Anita Bryant’s massive right-wing “Save Our Children” campaign against homosexuality threatened all those considered sexually deviant, regardless of their differences. Bryant, a minor celebrity and former beauty queen, claimed that gay and lesbian rights represented a serious threat to the future of the American nation and particularly to the heteronormative nuclear family structure. A religious conservative from Dade County, Florida, former Miss Oklahoma, and spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Growers, Bryant began her fight when a Dade County municipal law was proposed to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination. She positioned herself as representing the majority against the threat of minority gay rights activists and described her mission as an epic battle by an “unorganized but deeply concerned and committed group of parents and citizens upon whom had been foisted an ordinance which


was against everything we believed in and stood for.” In this battle, she wrote, “the foot soldiers were housewives and mothers, religious and civic leaders in opposition to a well-organized, highly financed, and politically militant group of homosexual activists.” While Bryant focused most of her ire on homosexuality, it was clear from her conservative sense of gender and sexuality that she would also oppose trans people and trans rights.

Because it was staged as a deeply simplistic confrontation between two clearly opposing forces, Bryant’s campaign also quickly became a rallying point for a new kind of oppositional politics, erasing much of the complexity and many of the divisions that had plagued trans people in the context of gay and lesbian politics. For many transvestite and transsexual activists, Bryant’s campaign represented a greater threat to their freedom of expression than did gays and lesbians, and they encouraged readers of their publications to support gays and lesbians in the fight against Bryant. Even transsexual and transvestite organizations that had not previously had strong links to the gay or lesbian movements encouraged their readers to take up the cause of fighting Anita Bryant, alongside not only gays and lesbians but also mainstream cisgendered, heterosexual liberals who also opposed Bryant’s campaign. The Journal of Male Feminism, for example, reprinted a Washington Star article titled “Anita’s the real threat, not the gay community.” Similarly, another article that circulated in multiple trans publications acknowledged that trans readers might still resent gays and lesbians because of their “misdirected effort to avoid or overcome the false popular stereotype of gay men as effeminate sissies,” but told them, quite simply, that if “Anita Bryant

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wins, we both lose.”392 With the rising tide of right-wing conservatism threatening to erode some of the hard gains of the 1970s, many trans people began to see alliances with gays and lesbians as an important response. As will become clear in the next chapter, however, mainstream media campaign continued to shape and highlight a cultural differentiation between gay/lesbian and trans people.

Despite continued concerns amongst gays and lesbians about whether or not transvestites represented the commercial exploitation of gay culture, Drag reported that gay pride festivities in New York were more open to trans people in 1977. Declaring renewed solidarity, Drag told readers that the fight against Anita Bryant was a success for transvestites and their freedom of expression in that “it seems that the unifying factor of the visible enemy caused many gays to set aside political differences and march together again.”393 Indeed, gay and lesbian groups around the country were finding power in what Brewster had been claiming all along: that consumerism was central to American sexual politics and protest.394 For example, the San Francisco Tavern Guild and other gay bars boycotted Florida Orange Juice in what Alexandra Chasin has called the first major gay and lesbian economic protest and Harvey Milk and others thanked Bryant for having inspired “what so many of us have talked about – a true national movement.”395 The boycott of homophobic conservative companies,

however, was a unifying project, whereas gay and lesbian support for and recognition of specifically transfeminine consumption initiatives remained somewhat contentious and many of the conflicts that were rooted in differences between transfeminine activists and gays and lesbians remained unresolved.

In 1977, the same year as the Bryant controversy, drag queens, female impersonators, and cross-dressers were again officially welcomed to participate in New York's gay pride parade as entertainers and consumers on a float sponsored by GG Knickenbocker, “New York’s biggest hangout for the crossdresser.”396 Trans newspaper *FI News* reported that although “there was a debate over whether commercial businesses such as baths and gay bars should be allowed to participate” in the festivities, it was eventually decided that they should.397 *Drag* noted cynically that the prominent drag club’s major donation to the parade that year had greatly influenced the organizing committee.397 Thus, regardless of whether or not the majority of gays and lesbians considered it acceptable, transfeminine people, including heterosexual transvestite cross-dressers, were able to participate in the parade, in part because of their power as consumers and their communities built on businesses like GG Knickenbocker.

Thus far this chapter has focused largely on *Drag*’s coverage of trans politics in relation to the changing context of gay and lesbian activism in the 1970s. As I have shown, trans people were sometimes included, sometimes excluded, and often considered contentious or controversial in those contexts. Trans activists thus differentiated themselves and were differentiated from gays and lesbians, sometimes by choice and often by exclusion or

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397 Ibid.
marginalization. As activists focused on social and political priorities stemming from the experiences of transfeminine people, such as the right to “cross-dress” in public, transfemininity became a central and defining feature to being considered trans and to expressing one’s self as a trans person.

But as has already been suggested, trans communities also existed as entities unto themselves, rooted largely in commercial arenas and subcultures in which the expression of transfemininity was valued. In what follows, I further explore how this social and economic community translated personal experiences and gender desires into group norms and articulated gendered and racialized representations of trans people primarily in terms of white transfemininity. As will become clear, one of the ramifications of a commercially-oriented community was that transfeminine activists were subject to the whims of the markets in which they operated. *FI News*, a widely-circulating pornographic newspaper in which many transfeminine people articulated their relationship to trans people as a group, typified a new norm in the late 1970s: the sexual fetishizing and symbolic commodification of transfemininity.

While the early 1970s saw the expansion of a transfeminine commercial market, the mid- to late-1970s saw some of the earlier political hopes and gains dashed as profit motives led to greater levels of exploitation. As a small business owner, Brewster had had a great deal of control over the social and political directions of his commercial activities. Those who worked for or participated in *FI News*, in contrast, faced more limited prospects, despite the fact that the politics of the newspaper were similar to the politics of *Drag* in its focus on combining consumption and politics, its connection to transfeminine consumers, and its primary concern with transfeminine people and their gender and sexual expressions and
FI News and the Commodification and Fetishization of White Transfemininity

Like Drag, FI News employed a staff composed almost exclusively of transfeminine people (referred to at the time as a mix of transvestites and transsexuals), including its managing editor, Sandy Mesics, its New York editor, occasional contributors, and general staff it referred to as “worker bees.” Like many other commercial sex publications at the time, FI News provided very little information about itself, including when or why it started publishing, but it seems to have started publishing in the mid-1970s. Mesics, the primary voice of the publication during the mid-1970s, was a self-described pre-operative transsexual from Philadelphia who also wrote for a variety of smaller transvestite publications, including TV Times and Image, both based in Seattle. It was as editor of FI News, a bigger publication that circulated nationally out of New Jersey, for which she was most famous. Like Brewster, she was a social and political activist as well as a known celebrity figure and organizer in the transvestite consumer world. Not only did she organize drag balls and cross-dressing parties, but she had also been a draft counsellor with the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors and offered transsexual counselling at the “Philadelphia Gay Alliance,” which may have referred to Philadelphia’s GAA.398

FI News, which stood for “Female Impersonator News,” was a newspaper-style publication that circulated nationally in the mid- to late-1970s and early 1980s; it shifted the terrain of liberal transnormativity in that it profited from selling fantasy notions of transfemininity to both trans and non-trans consumers. Billing itself alternately as “the only ‘heterosexual ‘ transvestite newspaper” and “the only drag newspaper,” it was an undated,

pornographic publication, with pages of news items, editorials, fantasy erotica literature, as well as extensive personal classifieds and advertising. It was one of many publications distributed by Neptune Publications, a largely mail-order business which also sold pulp novels, pornographic magazines and various goods and services, such as pornographic card decks, dildos, and photo finishing services. Annual subscriptions to the paper were available for roughly $15 or through various packages in which readers could order Neptune publications together. Originating in Belmar, New Jersey, it catered primarily to consumers in the U.S. Northeast, Midwest, and South. Unlike Brewster’s operations, however, it was unclear who exactly was profiting from FI News, which was less politically-motivated and more exploitative.

The transfeminine people who worked for FI News fused the politicized idea of sexual liberation with a fantasy of increasingly commercialized transvestism, extending the transfemininity characteristic of the time. For example, Sussie Collins encouraged readers to become more involved in the commercialized social world available to transfeminine people. In just six months, she wrote, she herself had gone from “living the secret life of crossdressing alone” to seeing “more of the transvestite world than I had previously known existed.” She, too, focused on participating in a celebrity culture, telling readers that she had quickly become part of a world that was full of people she had previously “always felt were untouchable.” Collins urged readers forward with almost missionary zeal, enthusiastically proclaiming her message of personal empowerment in a world full of opportunity: “I’m trying to show you that the TV world is out here and all you have to do is step across the threshold. … I want to show you that it is possible to break out of the closet.” Her rallying cry, “It’s time for the TRANSVESTITE LIBERATION!” provided readers with an imagined social movement in
which their enjoyment of transvestism was directly linked to their consumption of media, goods and services. For readers of *FI News*, “coming out of the closet” was primarily a social and commercial affair, and even if they couldn’t become as involved in the transvestite world as Collins had, they could still participate as consumers of the transfeminine publications.

*FI News* was more explicitly pornographic and geared towards mass consumption and sexualized interpersonal contact than previous trans-oriented publications had been and featured content that marketed transfeminine people as a fantasy for sale to each other and everyone else. Its extensive personal classifieds section created a marketplace of voyeurism and exhibitionism catering to consumers’ desire for a semi-anonymous venue in which to express both their specific individual desires and their broader desire for supportive social contact. The classified section also provided a forum for escorts and sex workers to advertise to clients in a context where commercial and non-commercial social and sexual connections were equally acceptable. One ad, for example, from Misty Monroe of Virginia, told readers that she was seeking a “generous gentleman” who wanted to live out his fantasies with a “hot transsexual.” The majority of those advertising services were transsexual women and *FI News* clearly also catered to consumers who were interested in sexualized fetishistic representations of trans femininity as embodied by transsexual women.

*FI News* represented the world of commercial sex as one of mutual entertainment and fantasy and depoliticized transfeminine sex work by downplaying divisions between sex workers and clients, rendering depictions of trans people less political and more for

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entertainment and titillation. For example, it reported on the “the Big Apple’s first Hooker’s Ball” as a news item, basically describing the event as an exciting party that had transpired at the famous Copacabana night club in New York. The event, it said, “brought out a lot of the city’s whores, who partied it up until dawn… [including a] group of drag queen whores [who] made their appearance to help the festivities.”

Sex activist Annie Sprinkle later recalled that the event had attracted hundreds of people, including many johns, photographers, and journalists. It was clear, however, that FI News’ coverage of sex work was limited to stories that would sell papers, and while it did mention that the event was not as profitable as similar events on the West Coast, it failed to mention that such balls were typically fundraising ventures for sex work activist groups. In contrast, mainstream media journalist Earl Wilson noted that while the event had advertised the attendance of numerous celebrities and feminists, attendees were primarily “sightseers” and “50 or 60 real live hookers.”

Neither his mainstream media article nor the coverage in FI News reported in any depth on the role that the transfeminine sex workers played in politicizing and attempting to decriminalize sex work.

As the burgeoning movement for sex workers’ rights garnered momentum and attention in the 1970s, the FI News coverage of the Hooker’s Ball placed the publication squarely in the genre of pornographic news publications, which reported regularly on sex worker activism. Indeed, between 1970 and 1978, sex work activists across the country had begun raising money and public awareness for the decriminalization of sex work at various similar events, such as The Whores’ Masquerade Ball, Hookers’ Conventions and Hookers’

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The 1977 Hookers’ Ball in San Francisco, for example, raised $93,000 for the sex-work activist group Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), which had been founded by sex worker Margo St. James in 1973 and which was at the heart of these events. Similar groups formed around the country throughout the 1970s, including chapters of COYOTE in San Diego, New Orleans, Des Moines and Miami as well as Associated Seattle Prostitutes (ASP) and Prostitutes of New York (PONY).

*FI News* most likely skimmed over the politics of sex work because it was less interested in political content than in titillating readers into a state of sexual frenzy that would encourage increased consumption of the publications and the products and services advertised therein. Indeed, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the voices of entrepreneurial transfeminine community leaders replaced by a new type of transsexual in the pages of *FI News*, characters who, by selling a fantasy of sexual mutability, sexual and gender transgression, and semi-anonymous intimacy, represented transfemininity in profitable terms. *FI News* began using transfeminine people like Haley Tiresius to seemingly push the boundaries of sexual taboos and expand the company’s profitable sexualized services in pornography, which Carolyn Brownstein has called the 1970s “market manifestation of the sexual revolution.” Like Brewster and Mesics, Tiresius was a hard-working entrepreneurial transfeminine person. Before she worked for *FI News*, she had been managing editor and monthly columnist at a publication called Unique Encounters, a Florida-based sexual contact magazine for swingers. She also ran her own business, Tiresius Fashions, which she advertised in the pages of *FI*

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News, and she was regularly featured in the paper through her column “Tiresius Knows.” Tiresius’s work history and social involvement resembled those of Mesics and Brewster, but her position at FI News more directly served the paper’s profits, exemplifying the late 1970s shift to more commercial, fetishized representations of trans feminine people. In the pages of FI News, she represented a character designed to titillate and appeal to consumers’ sexual fantasies.

Tiresius represented a fantasy ideal of white transfemininity as the ultimate sexual pleasure and encouraged readers to cultivate their own sexual pleasure and fantasies in ways that commodified and fetishized male feminization and transfemininity. Although never stated this explicitly, her name referred to the mythical Greco-Roman goddess who, after experiencing sex as both a male and female, determined that womanhood and femininity offered greater pleasure. In contrast to the shame and stigma that mainstream hegemonic masculinity associated with male feminization, FI News introduced Tiresius as “a pre-op transsexual who claims to be quite content being what she is.” Her catch phrase, “Tiresius Knows,” was a kind of wink to readers that implied that by reading her column and taking part in the consumer culture of FI News, they could share her in-depth knowledge about the sexual pleasure of femininity. Indeed, in her first appearance, she told readers, “Tiresius knows that it is a lot of fun being a girl – if only for part of the time.” This reference spoke directly to men who engaged in cross-dressing occasionally as a sexual activity, the transvestite consumers who seemed to make up the bulk of the paper’s target audience and for whom a “preoperative transsexual” or transfeminine person with a penis could represent the fulfillment of their fantasies.

409 Ibid.
Tiresius provided important emotional and social support to readers by coaching them through their fears about expressing their transfeminine sexuality, but her advice always took the form of encouraging them to use the paper’s contact ads to find sexual partners, defining transfemininity in sexual terms. Her motivational pep talks coached readers through their fears and constructed their transfeminine gender expressions as intimately linked to their sexual desires. For example, she wrote:

Don’t let yourself begin to believe that no one out there wants to meet you. Don’t sell yourself short. If you do, you will end up on the short end! Be specific about what you want, and how what you want includes sex; ‘coming out’ often involves ‘going down.’

Part of her job was ostensibly to empower readers who might become sexual consumers and pay to participate in *FI News*’ classifieds and contact club services. By essentially selling a message of personal sexual liberation from secrecy and shame and encouraging readers to be sexually explicit in their ads, she was also generating potential content for the publication that would likely attract another major group of consumer: non-trans people who fantasized about having sex with a transfeminine person.

By the early 1980s, Tiresius had become a full-blown caricature in a multi-page, spoof presidential campaign feature that positioned transsexual politics fully within a pornographic discourse of outrageous content and camp humour, simultaneously widening her appeal to non-trans readers and producing a commercially-oriented vision of radical sex politics. The back cover of the issue featured Tiresius as a typically attractive, slender, demure-looking white woman with long curly blond hair, wearing a cupless corset with garters, her breasts and (flaccid) penis exposed. Inside the issue, the headline “Transsexual for President”

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410 Ibid.
accompanied cartoon-style drawings and an article in which she boldly declared her supposed intention to run for president of the United States. Her ridiculous promises were evidently meant to be entertaining and contained elements of both political and economic commentary. For example, she told readers that if elected she would pass the Equal Rights Amendment, a longstanding feminist goal for achieving gender quality, by “fiat,” and guarantee every American a “Piece of Ass Daily” or “POAD.” Encouraging readers to focus on sexual satisfaction and sexual objectification, she asked, “Do you want a POAD? Are you one?”

Through this exaggerated, satirical, and perhaps utopian fantasy in which a transsexual could get rich and become president of the United States by running on a platform of sexual satisfaction, *FI News* capitalized on selling Tiresius and her transsexuality as the antithesis of American sexual conservativism. Lampooning American culture and politics for widespread and damaging sexual repression, Tiresius promised that daily sex would cure everything from inflation to hunger. Jogging, for example, she argued “has seduced even our leaders into believing that going in circles is getting somewhere and is to be encouraged.” In contrast, she argued

> Skillful fucking will exercise every muscle, … make for a trim and healthy nation and will stop us from running in circles. We may again achieve vision.

Tiresius’s spoof campaign was a far cry from earlier and continuing attempts to achieve genuine legal rights for trans people as a minority group; the satirical nature of her approach to political representation became evident as she announced that her campaign was to be completely profit-oriented. She told readers:

> Running for president… looks like a damned lucrative business to me,

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412. Ibid.
which is one of the reasons I’m getting in the race…. Candidly, about seven of your dollars will be profit, which will go toward furthering my other campaign activities, which will also mostly consist of raising money. Down the road I see mass mailing, bumper stickers, and of course campaign pins, all for profit! In fact, as a campaigner, I promise to do nothing but raise money and spend it on our cause.  

Furthermore, she encouraged consumers to donate money to her campaign and buy $15 T-shirts that read “Go POAD.” Evidently, the campaign was a sexualized socio-economic critique of a political culture of economic exploitation, even as Tiresius and FI News profited from it in jest. Perhaps more importantly, however, the presidential campaign feature contributed to a broader public discourse in which transsexual political power was presented as a pornographic joke and transfeminine people were considered bizarre, outlandish, and highly sexualized fantasy characters. This type of pornographic representation, by the early 1980s, was completely disconnected from genuine discussions about trans people’s cultural and political place in American society and shifted transnormativity’s emphasis on transfemininity and engagement with commercial employment into the realm of pornography.

Lori Stevens, another new transsexual character, also typified Neptune’s focus on producing commercially viable representations of transfemininity in the guise of radical sex politics, in her case with very racist implications. Stevens’s role was specifically to promote a racialized mediated fantasy of “interracial” sex between white transfeminine consumers and masculine African American male consumers. Stevens first appeared in FI News as a white, very female- and feminine-looking person, dressed in lingerie that hid her own genitals, holding the penis of a fully-dressed, fairly average-looking anonymous African American man. Beside this photograph was an extensive story describing a mutually pleasurable sexual

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413 Ibid., 24.
414 Ibid.
rendezvous between Stevens and the unidentified man after they reportedly met through her new contact club service. The story marked both Stevens and the man as sexual objects associated with taboo interracial and possibly homoerotic desire, reducing both to their sexual symbolism and implying that such a reduction was mutually pleasurable. The African American man was highly racialized with excessive southern dialect. For example, when expressing his fascination with Stevens’s penis, he was quoted as saying, “Ah don’t wanna take mah hand away.”

Race, racial stereotypes, sexual racism, sexualized racial taboos and racialized homoeroticism were all central to the complex gendered and racialized integration of African American men as pornography consumers and to Stevens’ representation as a sexualized, sexually-liberated white transfeminine person. The story was supposed to introduce readers to this new contact club “for getting white tvs together with black studs,” with Stevens as the club’s spokesperson and leader, and included a very short column of personal ads. Readers were asked not only to mail in their ads but also to identify themselves as one of three categories: white bitches, black studs, or white sissy fags. Stevens thus encouraged both white transfeminine readers and non-trans African American men to embrace sexualized and racialized gender categories that were usually considered demeaning and to become consumers of her mediated racialized sexual services.

The introduction of race as a central component of the transfeminine fantasies that FI News constructed in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be understood in the context of the contemporary emergence of “inter-racial pornography” as a burgeoning pornographic genre and as evidence of racism in transfeminine communities. The early 1980s saw the mainstream

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416 Ibid.
American porn industry expanding dominant racial stereotypes in what Mireille Miller-Yonge calls “the manufacture and distribution of racial difference as a specialized fetish in hardcore media.” Neptune Publications, which published *FI News*, became part of this trend when it introduced a new spin-off publication called *IR News*, which stood for “Inter-Racial News.” This new publication fetishized “inter-racial” sexual experiences much as *FI News* had been fetishizing male feminization and transfemininity. Both publications encouraged consumers to sexualize and fetishize sexual taboos by transgressing normative expectations of gender, sexuality and race, and both created unique and problematic pornographic discourses and sexual cultures for the groups they fetishized and targeted as consumers, models and participants.

Neptune’s new interracial transvestite pornography, like other interracial pornography of the time, represented oppressive racial tropes as a potentially empowering source of individual sexual pleasure for both white transfeminine and African American (non-trans) male consumers. Tapping into deeply psychological and socio-cultural symbolism, it reframed the power of gender, sexual, and racial symbolism into something that could be bought, sold, and rendered personally and sexually satisfying. It offered African American men the opportunity to express masculininity, possible racial dominance, and seemingly acceptable homoerotic desire for the penises of transfeminine people or femininized white men. This phallocentric fantasy reduced the African American men to their symbolic, racialized penises. Stevens's association of blackness with hyper-phallic masculinity stood in stark contrast to the presence of black transfeminine people, who had previously been well-represented in *FI*

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News’ coverage of social events. Likewise, the assumed whiteness of her targeted transfeminine audience indicated a major shift towards racially marginalizing African American trans people in an effort to appeal to potential “average” African American (non-trans) male consumers, who were valorized for their supposed virility. The longstanding racist cultural associations between blackness and masculinity, on the one hand, and whiteness and femininity, on the other, no doubt also contributed to the racially gendered dynamics at play in the emergence of “inter-racial transvestite porn” as a genre.

The racial and sexual dynamics of Stevens’s “club” not only established a racialized symbolic economy in the pages of FI News; it also reflected the extent to which both specialized niche pornography and mainstream, heterosexual pornography established and maintained hegemonic whiteness and racialized gender binaries through the fetishizing of both African American and transfeminine sexualities and embodiments. With regards to mainstream, heterosexual interracial pornography, Miller-Yonge argues that although it did find a market amongst African American men, “the constant reproduction of interracial sex as both subversive and hegemonic in this genre is really about the sexual desires of white men.” Miller-Yonge’s criticism that mainstream heterosexual interracial pornography had black men “perform[ing] roles as studs, coons, criminals, pimps and giant talking phalluses” applies somewhat to Stevens’ contact club, FI News and IR News. The symbolic exchange was somewhat different, however, not only because of its transvestite and potentially homoerotic overtones, but also because FI News always represented black men as sexually powerful men to be worshipped, typically at the supposed symbolic expense of the white

419 Ibid., 35.
males, who were always feminized. Given that the sexual enjoyment of white femininity had historically been used to justify white male violence against black men, African American men may have been positioned as empowered by the feminization of white males, and feminized white males may have indeed constructed the sexual and racial objectification of African American men as a twisted form of anti-racist gesture. The sexual charge probably stemmed from the combined gender, sexual and racial transgressions at play and Neptune always insisted on constructing encounters in racial and sexual objectification as mutually pleasurable for all involved. It was evidently carefully catering to many possible ways of capitalizing on the complexities of American sexual, racial, and gendered desires.

On the surface, *FI News* suggested that a re-articulation of sex, gender, and race between white transvestites and black men would result in greater sexual and racial freedom for all; in reality, it sold white consumers a racialized fantasy of being dominated by black men. Characters like Stevens absolved white readers of their racialized (and racist) sexualized desires. For example, a similar character, “Princess Temptation,” was quoted as stating: “Some of my TV’s like black dicks and I understand.” Furthermore, she wrote: “I endorse the latent feelings of black domination and worship of the black penile organ for happiness.”

White readers were also encouraged to develop such racialized sexual desires. One letter to

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the editor testified to this possibility, exclaiming, “I never thought this would happen to me, but it has, I’m a nigger-lovin’ white TV faggot and glad of it!” Evidently, such content played an important role in racializing and fetishizing sexual representations of trans femininity and expanding sexual racism. It commercialized and capitalized on those readers interested in participating in racist, homophobic fantasies, so long as they fit within the given categories and roles.

*FI News* advertized its transvestite race porn as having a kind of radically liberal, anti-racist sexual politics, billing itself as a more extreme version of the mainstream American media’s changing race politics. Just as it had framed Tiresius’s presidential campaign primarily as a tirade against American sexual conservativism, *FI News* implied that its interracial porn demonstrated a more radical racial politics than mainstream American liberalism. One of *FI News*’ front-page headlines, for example, read: “The American public was ready for ‘Roots,’ but are you ready for this?” The question capitalized on the popularity of the 1976 television miniseries that had captivated the nation by dramatically documenting the history of African Americans from slavery to emancipation through the story of former slave Kunta Kinte, played by actor Levar Burton, and his family. The 1970s had seen an increasing recognition of African American media representations, and the popularity of Blaxploitation films identified black consumers as a lucrative market base, despite the mixed and highly-charged political reception of these films. *Roots*, therefore, in some ways

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425 See Joe Wlodarz, “Beyond the Black Macho: Queer Blaxploitation,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 53 (Spring
represented the culmination of African American representations in mainstream American culture and media. *FI News* positioned its racialized sexual politics as extreme, radical, and controversial by contrasting its content with *Roots*, and Stevens taunted readers with the idea that “if you’re offended, maybe you’re not the liberal you thought you were.” The idea that readers could express their ‘radicalism’ by consuming sexualized media which fetishized and objectified socially marginalized people according to dominant gendered, racialized and sexual symbolism was a significant turn of events for the politics of trans representation at the end of the decade and evidence of the extreme violence to which trans people and people of color have been rendered particularly susceptible in American culture.

Transfeminine activists and others who had hoped that *FI News* and its commercialized sexual media culture would provide a community context for connecting transfeminine people and discussing personal, social and political issues were likely disappointed by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The ramification of working in such a context was that participants were limited by the fact that trans-centric social politics were not always economically viable and trans people were not always in control of the businesses. Likewise, transfeminine consumers were not always interested in politics and represented a small segment of society in any case. The outright disappearance of transfeminine activists like Mesics from the pages of *FI News* in the late 1970s also reflects the commodification and fetishization of transfemininity and the representation of transfeminine people as fodder for

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parody, camp, and sexual and racial objectification, a much more marketable representation that theoretically had much broader consumer appeal.

One of the significant ramifications of defining trans people within this commercial culture was the eventual shift to transfeminine people being defined and represented as lucrative sex symbols rather than as real people with genuine issues and concerns. By exploiting cultural links between femininity, capitalism and race, *FI News* redefined trans people for a broader audience, essentially both erasing specifically trans or transfeminine politics by emphasizing an absurd and outlandish parody that positioned transfeminine people as sex objects.

This chapter has examined trans politics and communities in relation to emerging gay and lesbian movements and in the context of social and economic business and media ventures. In both contexts, transfeminine people articulated their own sense of community and became defined by circumstances beyond their control. They translated their individual experiences into group norms and also developed assumptions about who was trans based on the specific contexts in which they experienced and articulated themselves as such. While whiteness was often taken as an unspoken norm, both gender and racialization played major roles in the articulation of transnormative political and economic articulations of desire, entertainment, and consumption.

Three striking norms were established in the context of transvestite subcultures in the 1970s: the assumption of transfemininity, the differentiation of trans people from gays and lesbians and the linking of political aims to consumption-oriented economic ventures. All of these norms developed in socio-cultural conversations that contributed to the sense that trans people, represented largely by white transfeminine people, formed a distinct minority group
with their own social, political and economic concerns, beyond and separate from the medical
discourses examined in the previous two chapters. In the 1980s, as the following chapter will
show, trans people continued to redefine themselves in new contexts and with new
ramifications through the ongoing cultural articulation of liberal transnormativities in
American culture.
Chapter 4

Sex, Disability, and Economic Discrimination:

The Rearticulation of Liberal Transnormativities through the 1980s

Chapters one and two demonstrated that from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the EEF and the professionals and trans people with whom it worked expressed a liberal transnormativity based on medicine, sex research, rehabilitation, and public education. Chapter three outlined the emergence of a commercially viable culture of transfemininity that separated trans people from gays and lesbians and, by the end of the 1970s, left transfeminine people easily exploited as pornographic fantasy figures. This chapter demonstrates that from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, liberal transnormativities continued to grow and develop as a new generation of trans communities turned to a liberal model of mainstream social inclusion that redefined transnormativity from the commercial liberation politics examined in the previous chapter to a discourse of civil rights. As a wave of professional, white, middle-class transsexuals, represented primarily (but not exclusively) by transsexual women, began fighting very public battles against what they saw as blatant social and economic discrimination, particularly in relation to health care and employment, they reconstructed liberal transnormativity in mainstream American cultural and legal contexts, re-emphasizing transsexualism but prioritizing economic rights.

This chapter examines the extension of what Joanne Meyerowitz has called “the liberal moment” in transsexual civil rights. Meyerowitz writes about the successful initial efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s to have transsexuals able to legally change sex.\(^{428}\) She also writes,

however, that “liberal influence in the courts dwindled in the 1980s and did not expand again until the 1990s.”429 This chapter, by looking at transnormative discourses and legal efforts during the 1970s and 1980s, extends her research to demonstrate that trans activists continued to approach the courts for recognition and to see the legal system as a valid option for achieving social integration. While the courts did not consistently render liberal findings, trans activists nevertheless defined themselves in part through a fight for civil rights protection.

Starting in the late 1970s, trans activists and community builders who published politically-oriented trans media worked on what they saw as shared political goals in an effort to achieve protection against discrimination. What was at stake was their economic stability and often their social status as white, middle-class Americans. Transsexuals had previously been advised to adopt entirely new identities and social lives after transitioning, including changing careers and, if married, divorcing. By the late 1970s, however, some white, middle-class transsexuals sought to keep their existing, well-paying jobs, and saw economic and employment security as their right. A number of these transsexuals who felt that they had been discriminated against ---and were willing to become publicly known as transsexuals ---worked with trans activist-publishers as well as powerful and high-profile groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and labor unions to fight for what they saw as their civil rights. They also faced a mixture of opposition and support in the courts and the media. The mainstream media publicized the legal cases and the liberal discourses of transnormativity by reporting on both transsexuals’ efforts to establish civil rights as well as objections and reactions to their efforts. Finally, trans people also had to contend with a rising wave of

429 Ibid., 270.
widespread moral and economic conservatism, as many Americans associated trans people with liberalism’s destructiveness to American society.

A new wave of liberal transnormativity placed greater emphasis on legal rights for transsexuals by bringing forward highly public legal cases in which individual transsexuals claimed citizenship and economic rights that could potentially benefit other trans people as well. These cases were in part a reaction to rising social, moral and economic conservatism and also paralleled major civil rights efforts by feminist, gay and lesbian campaigns in this period. They hoped and assumed that transsexuals could draw on new and existing laws to achieve economic security and state protections. Specifically, activists argued that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which provided limited protections against discrimination on the grounds of sex (as well as a number of other criteria) and Section 503 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability, could be applied to transsexuals. As will become evident, transsexuals began demanding civil rights protections within numerous professional employment contexts, often asking municipal, state and federal courts to clarify if and how Title VII and Section 503 would apply to protecting trans people from discrimination, and to enforce state protections from economic discrimination. Some of these cases took place in closed administrative meetings, while others made it all the way to the Supreme Court.

There were six key groups contributing to the progress transsexuals made towards achieving political and social recognition through a discourse of liberal transnormativity from the late 1970s to the late 1980s: trans publisher-activists; transsexuals who made public discrimination charges; the courts; the mainstream media; conservative Americans who opposed transsexuals; and non-trans liberal supporters of transsexuals. This chapter describes
several of the key cases in which transsexuals argued publicly for civil rights and shows how trans people’s fight for legal protection and recognition in the United States was influenced by the contested contexts of the courts, the mainstream media, and both rising conservatism and feminist and gay and lesbian liberalism in mainstream American society.

Because so many cases of transsexuals fighting for civil rights protection were fought in the public sphere, I argue that both the transsexuals who mounted the resistance and the trans publisher-activists who circulated their stories influenced many Americans’ understanding of who trans people were and what they represented. They also contributed to a powerful discourse of liberal transnormativity that presented trans people as sharing a common set of social experiences by prioritizing a political goal of achieving state recognition and protection from shared discrimination, largely for white, professional, middle-class transsexuals. This civil rights strategy failed to address larger systems of inequality, such as racism, which remained unchallenged in liberal transnormativity, because activists assumed a liberal notion of equality achieved through individual rights.

The battle for trans civil rights was deeply connected to transsexualism, specifically, because it was possible for transsexuals to argue within the existing gender framework for rights as men and women and because transsexualism could be understood and explained in the context of disability. The discourse of rehabilitation that had been central to earlier liberal transnormativities, as described in chapter two, translated well to a civil rights discourse defined in relation to disability status. As will become evident in this chapter, the strategy of focusing on discrimination on the basis of both sex and disability was not only a response to available legal options for trans people, it also re-entrenched white, middle-class values and norms as a core of liberal transnormativity between the late 1970s and mid-1980s. Much as
activists examined in chapter three had imagined that “gay” could be broadly interpreted to include trans people, the activists examined in this chapter often used the language of “sexual status,” and spoke specifically about transsexuals’ sexual normativity, especially in the case of transsexual teachers who were often considered morally repugnant and potentially harmful to children. Sexual normativity was also thus central to many of the arguments that transsexuals should be protected from employment discrimination, and the notion of sexual status, rather than what would today be called gender or gender identity, framed transsexual claims to civil rights protections in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The transsexual activism examined in this chapter also demonstrates important parallels and difference between liberal transnormativities and gay and lesbian activism of the era and continues to demonstrate that trans people became a distinct group in ever-changing socio-cultural formations redefining sex. Marc Stein writes that numerous major gay and lesbian legal advocacy groups formed during the 1970s, including the National Gay Task Force (1973), Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (1973), Gay Rights National Lobby (1976), Gay Rights Advocates (1977), Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (1978), and Human Rights Campaign (1980). Meanwhile, the labor movement increasingly incorporated feminist and gay and lesbian concerns during this decade. Transsexual activists worked on similar projects, but, in the cases examined here, always outside the framework of gay or lesbian rights. Finally, liberal transnormativity during this period was defined centrally in relation to class status, employment stability, and professional security. By

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In the late 1970s, transsexuals were arguing that they had a right to maintain their employment through the transition process and that employers, insurance companies, and state welfare programs did not have a right to discriminate against what they (and many others) considered to be a bona fide medical condition.

Transsexual activists Paula Grossman, Steve Dain, Karen Ulane, and Joanna Clarke claimed protection for their economic roles as public servants and professionals, while Bobbie Lea Bennett represented entitlement claims to state support due solely to disability. They used their personal experiences of discrimination to create a public discourse of civil rights protection for transsexuals, continuing to reshape sexualized, racialized and classed discourses of liberal transnormativities in the process.

**Paula Grossman: New Jersey Music Teacher**

Paula Grossman of Bernard County, New Jersey, was one of the first transsexuals to draw on Title VII to publicly and legally fight back against employment discrimination. In the fall of 1971, after undergoing sex reassignment surgery, Grossman attempted to return to her job as a music teacher in Bernard County, New Jersey. The school board asked her to resign on the basis of being unfit to teach, but Grossman refused. Instead, she held a press conference on school grounds, vowing to take her case to the Supreme Court rather than give up her tenured position. Grossman was able to capitalize on both new civil rights laws and media interest in her case to resist and reconfigure the old ‘rules’ of transnormativity, which had stressed invisibility and starting a new post-transition life in which one was not known to be a transsexual. Instead of leaving quietly when her employer tried to fire her for being a transsexual, Grossman retaliated by charging discrimination and mobilizing public attention to claim her civil rights to employment as a transsexual.
After the Associated Press initially picked up on Grossman’s story, media outlets around the country published articles on her case, emphasizing her heteronormativity and the social support she was receiving in her civil rights campaign. One news photograph showed Grossman as a woman with her wife, Ruth, and many articles told readers that Grossman was recognized as an excellent teacher and that her wife and children were supportive of her efforts to stand up for civil rights as a transsexual. Circulation of Grossman’s story was in part facilitated by the use of computers, rather than wire services, by national and international news agencies in the early 1970s, and many Americans in small towns and cities alike were exposed to Grossman’s claims to employment rights as a transsexual through their local newspapers. Reporting of transsexual cases fundamentally shaped public understanding of transsexuals. For example, many articles referred to Grossman by both her current female and her previous male names and did not explicitly support her claims beyond writing about and circulating them, rendering her open to potential criticism, harassment and abuse.

Mainstream media coverage of Grossman’s case enabled her to convey her own representation of transsexuals and Grossman was adamant that her sexual status did not affect her professional capacity and should not affect her employment status, emphasizing that transsexuals were sexually normative people. As early as 1971 Grossman was quoted in the mainstream press as saying,

People conjure up ideas that we are child molesters, degenerates or sexual deviates…. It’s nothing like that. Transsexuals have no disgusting or obnoxious sex habits. They are not homosexuals. No one can even recognize a transsexual unless they themselves tell you.433

Grossman thus contributed to the construction of American transnormativity by claiming that transsexuals were both respectable and normative, but this was also in part a response to the mainstream idea that all sexual minority groups were threatening ‘deviates.’ Just as Christine Jorgensen had earlier, Grossman distanced herself from the stigma of sexual deviants to present herself as transnormative.

Grossman’s public battle with the Bernard County school board became more widely significant in the late 1970s as a major Supreme Court test case that addressed whether or not the courts would begin to use Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to protect transsexuals in the United States from employment discrimination. Grossman was one of the first transsexuals to attempt to achieve legal protection under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in employment, housing and public accommodations. In fact, the courts were unclear about what exactly the law would cover and in the process of interpreting what was actually quite a vague law. Grossman’s case provided the courts with an opportunity to address directly whether or not transsexuals would be protected from being fired on the basis of sex discrimination.

The fact that protection against employment discrimination on the basis of “sex” may have been added to the law at the last minute in an effort to stop it from being passed meant that there was a great deal of room for interpretation and debate. Originally designed to address widespread discrimination on the basis of race, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), which had been established in 1965 to administer Title VII, found itself over-burdened with the number of claimants coming forward with complaints of unanticipated types of discrimination, such as sexual harassment, which was widespread, and maternal rights
to health care leaves. Historian Alice-Kessler Harris writes that the EEOC therefore “decided to follow through only on class action cases, leaving many women with no recourse for their own problems.” Grossman, like many other women, sought to claim protection under Title VII through the courts, but the question of whether or not the courts would interpret her situation as a case of discrimination on the basis of sex remained to be seen.

Grossman’s legal efforts were substantial but ultimately unsuccessful. In September 1975, the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey dismissed her complaint “because he was terminated on the basis of a change in her sex and not because of her sex.” In June 1976, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit affirmed the original decision and in October 1976 the U.S. Supreme Court declined to re-open the case. Grossman faced what would come to be a lynchpin in legal decisions regarding sex discrimination against transsexuals during the 1970s and 1980s: the assumption that the discrimination transsexuals faced was not covered by protection from discrimination on the basis of sex. Gays and lesbians also faced exclusion from protection under the grounds of sex. Grossman’s case was one of the first to demonstrate the court’s similar reluctance to explicitly protect transsexuals from discrimination on the basis of sex under Title VII.

The mainstream media depicted Grossman’s Supreme Court challenge as part of a shift in American society towards greater gender freedoms and a growing number of controversies

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surrounding the expansion of civil rights to previously unprotected groups. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court also denied Grossman’s petition to have her case reviewed, it was nevertheless significant that the mainstream media reported widely on the case and linked it to other mainstream sexual freedom and civil rights cases. For example, newspapers across the country ran an article from the United Press International wire that reported on the Supreme Court ruling in Grossman’s case alongside another ruling on whether Susan L. Vorcheimer, an honors high school student in Philadelphia, had the right to attend an all-male school that had stronger science programs.437 The article also mentioned the issues of parental consent for abortions and children’s right to independent representation in adoption proceedings. The mainstream media represented Grossman’s case and transsexual civil rights as linked to other civil rights developments in American society, but also as beyond the scope of what either the Supreme Court or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission would enforce. While these stories may have persuaded some readers to treat trans civil rights as an important issue to consider, the mainstream media also left room for conservative Americans to see transsexuals as representing an extreme potential of the liberal expansion of civil rights.

While Grossman’s case failed to establish protection for transsexuals under Title VII, it was one of the first to suggest that transsexuals might be able to achieve civil rights on the basis of disability claims, particularly in relation to employment discrimination and pension benefits. In fact, Grossman’s case ended in 1978, when she was awarded a disability pension after the State Commission of Education “found that Grossman was incapacitated to teach.

children because of the potential psychological harm to her students." As a result of being dismissed due to incapacity, she was also ordered to be given back-pay, though that decision was later overturned. Although the courts recognized that her transsexuality had no bearing on her actual ability to teach, they also recognized that social discrimination was preventing her from continuing to work in her professional capacity as a teacher. The original charges filed against her by the school board included claims that she had “exhibited conduct unbecoming a teacher” and that her notoriety would “severely impair the board’s ability to conduct an efficient and orderly school system.” The final ruling was in part based on older notions of rehabilitation that recognized and addressed social and interpersonal dynamics in defining disability as one’s inability to ‘integrate’ socially into the workforce, and the court ruled that if “no school will employ her because of her transsexual status and the feared effect that may have on pupils she might be called upon to teach,” she was essentially no longer able to teach as a result of transitioning and therefore due a disability pension.

Grossman was pleased with the results and saw it as a social victory, since other transsexuals might now also be able to receive disability benefits as compensation for what was essentially social prejudice. She told Transition, a community newsletter based in Tappan, New York, that she was delighted because “if a state decides to disable anybody for any reason, then they’re going to have to pay for it.”

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440 In Re Grossman; In the Matter of Paula M. Grossman.
disability as a state imposed on her as a result of discrimination was not the commonly recognized or understood meaning of disability; this challenged the more usual sense of the term, which implied that she was unable to work due to transsexuality itself, even though the court had clarified that this was not the case.

Trans publications used Grossman’s case to debate the ramifications of being defined as disabled in cases of employment discrimination. Many were concerned that defining individual transsexuals as disabled based on social prejudices could only work against trans people in the long run, primarily since it went against their efforts to prove that transsexuals could be normative and productive citizens, socially and economically integrated into American culture. *Transition* was particularly concerned that Grossman’s case, for example, lent “additional credence to the idea that transsexuals are unfit to mingle with children.”442 It argued that Grossman’s disability pension may have offered short-term financial gain and a personal sense of vindication for her, but at too heavy a cost to trans people’s social and economic futures. It in fact demonstrates that the use and definition of disability is historically contextual. Liberal transnormativites certainly developed in conversation with the regulation and definition of disability. Grossman remained steadfast that her case was both a personal victory and one that could have positive wider ramifications for other transsexuals and she encouraged others who found themselves in her position to follow her lead.

In 1979, Grossman published a seventy page book called *A Handbook for Transsexuals*, which she circulated as widely as she could by advertising in a number of North American trans publications. In it, she provided other transsexuals with advice based on her experience, such as: “don’t let non-transsexuals formulate rules for you,” and “get a good lawyer.” But

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442 “Paula’s Pyrrhic victory,” 6.
she also urged transsexual to stand up and publicly fight for the right to continued professional recognition and economic stability and tied this with middle-class standards of sexual and class propriety. Because transsexuals faced so much prejudice, she wrote “there is nothing more important than remaining ladies and gentleman,” urging:

   If you must become a slob, or if you have always been a slob, or if slobbishness is your desired way of life, please don’t advertise the fact that you are also the victim of a very little-known and greatly-misunderstood medical problem from which thousands of people suffer – who are not slobs.

Indeed, professional, middle-class transsexuals were objecting to the discrimination they seemed to be facing solely on the grounds of being transsexual. White privilege and class status provided a sense of righteous indignation and grounds for establishing a discourse of liberal transnormativity that prioritized a right to employment and economic security.

**Steve Dain: California Gym Teacher**

By the late 1970s, an organized conservative movement was conducting its own campaigns to try to prevent members of sexual and gender minority groups (including trans people) from working as teachers in public schools. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Anita Bryant’s “Save the Children” campaign had created a homophobic national discourse in protest of gay liberation and gay and lesbian rights. Bryant’s campaign originated in Florida, but she also mobilized national support for Proposition 6, also known as the Briggs Initiative because it was put forward by Orange County California Senator John Briggs. The bill would have allowed schools in California to discriminate against any teacher “advocating,

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encouraging, or publicly and ‘indiscreetly’ engaging in homosexuality.” Although the Briggs initiative failed, historian Martin Durham argues that it laid the foundation for a strong, emerging Christian Right. As conservatives across the nation began calling for gay and lesbian teachers to be fired, transsexual teachers who attempted to transition openly on the job became flashpoints in public debates over the extent to which the state should protect sexual and gender minority groups and who was in control of public schools’ approaches to sex education and morality.

In September 1976, when Emery High School teacher Steve Dain arrived to a teachers’ orientation meeting for the upcoming school year, school superintendent Lewis Stommel made a very vocal citizen’s arrest, charging that Dain was causing a “willfull disturbance” by attending the meeting. Dain had transitioned from female to male through the Stanford Clinic program earlier that year. When he returned to work, Stommel called the local police, who filed the requested charges. Stommel told the media that Dain was never granted a sick leave and that on a more personal note: “I always wonder whether this person has his act together.

444 Jean Hardisty, Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999): 100. See also Karen L. Graves, And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), xiv.
A teacher is dealing with impressionable kids.”

School board attorney William Johnson likewise told the media that “the district is not satisfied that Dain is medically able to return to work and that he might be a ‘distraction’ to students.” Dain’s case soon became a media circus and a flashpoint for labor rights for tenured teachers.

Like Grossman, Dain had attempted to return to his teaching position after transitioning, only to find himself fired, but publicly defended his right to continued employment on the basis of his civil rights and employment security of being a tenured teacher. Dain recognized that it was no longer appropriate for him to teach physical education to girls, but his attorney announced that he was prepared to teach math or science or to take on any other reasonable teaching assignment. Stommel told the media that it was a case that should be decided by the Supreme Court.

The mainstream media, which commonly referred to Dain as ‘Sex-change teacher’ followed the ensuing legal actions with interest. By the end of September 1976, Alameda Superior Court Judge Roderic Duncan had denied a motion to dismiss the charges against Dain and set a trial date. But when Dain took a case against the district to the Alameda County Court in early October, Judge Robert Baker ordered the school district to reinstate

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450 “Teacher Doris becomes Steve but Hopes to Retain Position,” A7.
451 “Sex-change Teacher gets Date for Trial,” The Independent Press-Telegram [Long Beach, California], September 24, 1976, 10.
Dain with $3,200 in back pay.\textsuperscript{452} In response, Superintendent Stommel was quoted in \textit{The Bakersfield California} as saying, in reference to Dain, “I don’t know about this free floating chromosome… Where do you place him?”\textsuperscript{453} The very next day, the school district served Dain at his home with a notice of suspension, telling him that he was “not to report for work or otherwise appear on any school district property” due to “immoral conduct” and “unfitness.”\textsuperscript{454} The suspension, which was decided by the five-person Emery School Board, was approved by a majority vote (3 for, 1 against, and 1 abstaining).\textsuperscript{455}

The conservative opposition Dain faced reflects the increasing voice of suburban, moralistic, Christian conservatives who were taking an active, aggressive stand to protect what they called “family values” in the 1970s and 1980s, as clearly demonstrated by the Anita Bryant’s campaign and the Briggs Initiative. As Lisa McGirr and others have shown, Southern California was a hotbed of activism designed to nurture a national “New Right” movement during this period.\textsuperscript{456} Historian Eileen Luhr explains that emerging conservative movements used the concept of ‘family values’ to invoke “white, suburban, middle-class, patriarchal and heterosexual authority” and Linda Kintz argues that the idea of ‘family values’ was rooted in regulating pleasure “in order to establish the discipline… necessary for the


\textsuperscript{453} “Sex-change Teacher to Get Job, Pay Returned,” 11.


\textsuperscript{455} “Board Suspends Dain from Teaching Post,” \textit{The Argus} [Fremont-Newark, California], October 16, 1976, 2.

reproduction of the social order and the production of capital.\textsuperscript{457} Dain’s transition was particularly controversial because he was a high-school gym teacher and his job involved physical contact and potential nudity with young women, Dain’s transition likely hit a nerve amongst conservatives who associated transsexuality with dangerous sexual perversion that could threaten their children by exposing them to realities and experiences outside the realm of their tightly contained ‘family values.’

Immediately following Dain’s suspension, the school hosted a community meeting which Superintendent Stommel told media was to provide an opportunity for parents and students to express their views on Dain’s case.\textsuperscript{458} The local press reported that over “100 parents, students, and former student and community residents turned out,” and “a dozen speakers took to the floor to denounce Steve Dain’s attempt to teach in the high school here.”\textsuperscript{459} The mainstream media emphasized the strong religious basis of the objections to Dain teaching. An Associated Press article carried around the country told readers that “the gathering resembled a revival meeting” with shouts of “amen” amongst the crowd whenever someone spoke against Dain. W.L. Parks, who identified himself as a local church deacon, said, “According to God’s law, it is not right. Miss Richards is not capable of teaching in Emeryville.” Marrie Williams, who was identified as “an outspoken Dain opponent,” said that Dain’s presence would undermine morality and that “we don’t want anyone in the classroom influencing our children to have their sex changed.” Likewise, parent Maxine Duncan was quoted as saying, “God made her [sic] a woman, and I think she [sic] should stay that way. If

\textsuperscript{458} “Parents Back Dain Suspension,” \textit{The Argus} [Fremont-Newark, California], October 20, 1976.
\textsuperscript{459} “Ex-woman Not Wanted: Efforts to Teach Bitterly Opposed,” \textit{Corpus-Christi Times}, October 19, 1976, 6A.
one of my children gets in her [sic] class, I want them pulled out.” Another parent explained more explicitly: “We don’t want anyone in the classroom influencing our children to have their sex changed.”

Trans activists through the late 1970s and 1980s began focusing on discrimination and drawing on the newer discourse of civil rights, particularly in arenas in which experiences of discrimination were greatly affecting many transsexuals, such as health care and employment. As right-wing objections to transsexual teachers took greater hold in key communities across the nation, trans people and their advocates adopted a new form of transnormativity in direct opposition to such claims. They continued to rely in part on the older, more established discourse of transnormativity that prioritized working for greater social “understanding” of transsexualism as a medical condition in an effort to achieve a rational, scientifically enlightened and liberal society, but they also pushed for new legal solutions to the social prejudices and problems transsexuals were experiencing.

While Dain faced clear and evident discrimination in his community, he also had a great deal of support, not only from students and parents, but also from his professional colleagues and labor organizers. When the case first broke, supportive students, parents, and school trustees made their perspectives known, including picket lines in front of the school and a petition signed by 175 of the school’s 358 students. The president of the Emeryville Teachers Association, Juanita Forester, had advocated on Dain’s behalf within the school, while another teacher, Mrs. Doreseter, told the media that Emeryville teachers believed in “his

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460 Ibid., 6; “Sex Change Denounced by Parents,” Indiana Evening Gazette, October 19, 1976, 12; “Speakers Oppose Sex Alter Teacher,” The Bakersfield Californian, October 19, 1976, 44.
461 Students, Parents Back Transsexual Teacher,” The Argus [Fremont-Newark, California], September 19, 1976, 7; “Students back transsexual school teacher,” The Argus [Fremont-Newark, California], September 25, 1976, 3.
right to teach based on his status as a tenured teacher.” Similarly, the California Teachers Association (CTA) provided Dain with legal services. The CTA had been at the forefront of such labor support for sexual minorities, having passed, in 1969, a resolution to end discrimination against gay and lesbian teachers, followed in 1973 by a similar resolution being passed nationally in 1973 by the American Federation of Teachers. By the time of the public meeting about Dain’s suspension in 1976, the only supporter in attendance was his CTA union representative, who publicly criticized the session as prejudicial to Dain’s case. The union representative also implored the community to recognize that “education is education whether a man or a woman teaches it,” a comment which reportedly resulted in a chorus of boos. The mainstream media made readers aware that the teacher’s union supported Dain’s desire to continue to teach, and an Associated Press report later noted that Dain was legally represented by Penn Foote, a lawyer for the California Teachers Association.

The fact that Dain could be represented by a teachers’ union was part of the new social, economic and labor realities of this period. New collective bargaining laws for teachers were being adopted across the nation and the percentage of teachers covered by such legislation rose from 8% in 1975 to 86% in 1977. California adopted collective bargaining laws for teachers in 1975 and Dain clearly benefited from having a labor representative to act in his interest. Meanwhile, gay and lesbian teachers’ associations formed across the country, and in California

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462 “Transsexual teacher enters not guilty plea,” The Argus [Fremont-Newark, California], September 11, 1976, 16.
466 Terry M. Moe, Special Interest: Teacher’s Unions and America’s Public Schools (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2011), 53.
the Bay Area Gay Liberation and Gay Teachers’ Caucus picketed the California Board of Education in 1975.\textsuperscript{467} Although Dain’s case was never reported in relation to gay or lesbian activism or organizations, there were evident parallels, and in the case of how discrimination was articulated, much overlap between transsexuals and gays and lesbians.

Part of the conservative backlash Dain faced was a result of the messy mix of moral panic and conservative attempts to control and determine the presence of religious, sexual and racial dynamics in their children’s schools as the state began enforcing new anti-discrimination laws. Debates over social change in the school system were at the forefront of public debate; controversies over new school bussing programs to address racial discrimination, and debates about the presence of prayer and sex education in school lent themselves to impassioned public battles over values, morals and rights. Historian Matthew C. Moen writes that conservatives were outraged in 1977 when the Internal Revenue Service began enforcing a law that prevented schools practicing discrimination from claiming tax-exempt status, a policy that greatly affected the increasing number of Christian private schools that had sprung up in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{468} Williams writes that The John Birch Society, for example, opposed sex education in the public school system.\textsuperscript{469} Similarly, Dochuk has also shown that parent and community groups were powerful promoters of “cultural conservatism” and battles over sex education in schools were central to grassroots resistance to the secular humanism supported by the nation state in schools during this era; in nearby Anaheim, California, he writes, school superintendent Paul Cook was forced to resign due to pressure from “parent-activists” who wanted to ban sexual education materials produced by the Sexuality Information and

\textsuperscript{467} Hunt and Boris, “The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Challenge to American Labor,” 85.
Education Council of the United States from city schools.\textsuperscript{470} As I demonstrated in chapter 2, SEICUS had earlier played an important role in efforts to incorporate transnormativity into the American public education system, but by the late 1970s, conservative groups sought to ban what they saw as radical, experimental, sex education programs. Dain’s case therefore not only represented transsexuals as deserving legal protection against prejudice, but also reflected resistance to conservative claims that neither the state nor teachers should have the power to override parents’ right to determine whether or not their children were taught about or exposed to positive expression of gender and sexual diversity.

By early 1977, Dain and the school board were again involved in multiple actions against one another. Dain filed for $1.7 million in damages under the State Education Code, specifically naming the Superintendent Stommel, as well as Dean of Women Rita Dixon and Dennis Campbell, who taught boys’ physical education at the school.\textsuperscript{471} In January, Judge Charles Bobby of the State Commission on Professional Standards dismissed the school’s charges against Dain, citing that they were vague and denied Dain due process.\textsuperscript{472} In August, Dain’s claim for damages proceeded to the Alameda County Superior Court. Part of his allegations included slanderous public statements that Stommel had made against Dain, including that he had molested children, was a pervert, had exposed his genitals to students, was a homosexual, and encouraged two female students to engage in sexual behaviors.\textsuperscript{473} By 1978, after two years of fighting to regain his job or receive financial compensation, however, Dain decided that it was too discouraging to face the “prospect of more hearings on ‘the

\textsuperscript{470} Dochuk, \textit{From Bible Belt to Sunbelt}, 300.
\textsuperscript{473} “Dain Alleges Slander, Wiretaps, in Latest Suit,” \textit{The Argus} [Fremont-Newark, California], August 31, 1977, 3.
transsexual element’ and stopped trying to defend his civil rights. The mainstream media reported that he instead began a new career in construction, having ultimately received no financial compensation whatsoever.474

Throughout his case, Dain provided an important public example of the potential and actual experiences of many transsexuals in American society. African American magazine Jet, for example, told readers that “the State of California… must rule whether former female physical education teacher… Steve Dain, may continue on in his high school…. If ruling is favorable other transsexuals may be encouraged.”475 He likewise appeared on national television on the Merv Griffith Show. His visibility as a female-to-male transsexual was an important component of liberal transnormativities during the 1980s in that it brought attention to the fact that not all transsexuals were trans women.

One of the tactics that newsletters used to address discrimination, keep readers abreast of political developments and construct a liberally antidiscrimination narrative was to reprint articles from professional publications and the mainstream press about cases in which transsexuals were fighting for legal protection against discrimination. In doing so, they encouraged transsexuals’ efforts to achieve political rights. For example, Transition told readers that “transexuals have not received adequate judicial recognition of their rights.”476 It later noted that a recent article in Sex Law Reporter had stated that transsexuals “are demanding the right to change their names and the sex indications on their birth certificates,

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475 “Sex-Changed Athletes, TeacherAwaiting Fate,” Jet, September 2, 1976, 46.
476 Joanna M. Clark, “How to Protect your Job: Is TSism a ‘Handicap’? Then Make the Most of It!” Transition 12 (October/November, n.y.): 6.
and to be free from employment discrimination and police harassment.  

By reprinting such reports, trans newsletters established and entrenched a liberal sense of trans community based on resistance to discrimination and legal marginalization and encouraged transsexuals to fight for their legal rights as citizen-subjects of the nation state.

Reprinting articles from the mainstream press also gave transsexuals an opportunity to discuss the fact that many Americans did not support their desire for civil rights protections. Although trans advocates may have hoped to achieve protection from discrimination under the Civil Rights Act, others saw trans people as trying to take liberal legal policies to an unacceptable extreme. *Transition* went on to explain that the *Sex Law Reporter* had made its statement about transsexuals demanding rights in the context of a case in which a multilith operator had been fired for transitioning from male to female and sought protection under the Civil Rights Act, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit had determined that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was only “intended to place [non-transsexual] women on equal footing with men” and that “Title VII couldn’t be used in a case of employment discrimination against a transwoman.” Furthermore, in a phrase that would become ominously familiar to those engaged in trans legal battles, the court ruled that its decision was based in part on the idea that when Congress had passed the legislation, it “had only the traditional notion of sex in mind.”

*Transition* thus told readers that despite the fact that “Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964… prohibits discrimination in employment in federal, state and local government, as well as in the private sector, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin,” it had not proved to be “of much help to transsexuals.”

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Despite the court’s denial of protection against discrimination for transsexuals under Title VII, trans newsletters nevertheless saw existing legislation as an opportunity to consolidate rights for transsexuals, and they also drew readers’ attention to mainstream media reports about federal government programs designed to combat employment discrimination against people with disabilities. In 1979, for example, Renaissance reprinted an article from a publication called New Word that observed:

Now that President Carter has signed a new tax law that gave a tax benefit to employers who hired from seven specific categories, three of which were ‘disability’ categories…employers can now find it financially attractive to hire disabled workers.480

President Carter was known to be sympathetic to gays and lesbians and First Lady Rosalynn Carter was a very active supporter of people with disabilities.481 Renaissance also told readers that it was therefore also planning on “initiating a lobbying effort to get President Carter to amend Executive Order 11246 …to prohibit private companies doing more than $10,000 worth of business per year with the Federal government from discriminating against transsexuals” and also hoping to get President Carter to amend the Civil Rights Act to include “sexual status” as a protected category, with the expectation that such a framework would include trans people.482

Bobbie Lea Bennett: Transsexual with a Disability in Louisiana

Transsexuals clearly had a long and complex history with both rehabilitation discourses and disability status, but the late 1970s witnessed the rise of civil rights discourses for ‘the disabled’ that trans advocates saw as also working to help transsexuals. Bobbie Lea Bennett, a

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482 “Renaissance Gender Identity Services,” 1.
transsexual wheelchair user originally from Louisiana, was able to draw on her status as a person with a recognized disability to pressure the government to support her rights claims as a transsexual woman. When Bennett transitioned through the Gender Identity Clinic at Galveston, Texas, in 1978, she had been told that the cost of her surgeries would be covered by Medicare under Social Security’s disability benefits program. Subsequently, however, she was denied payment without explanation. Following on the heels of the infamous Willowbrook State School media scandal, in which reporter Geraldo Rivera had exposed horrific abuses that prompted calls for increased rights and legal protection for people with disabilities, Bennett was able to mobilize media interest in disability spectacle and public outrage to argue that the state should pay for all her health care needs, including those related to being transsexual.483

Bennett was also an ideal test case for a legal claim to financial coverage through disability administration systems because she suffered from a degenerative bone condition. The courts had extended access to the Medicare program to the disabled in 1972, qualifying her for access to health care funding.484 In her case, unlike those of Grossman and Stephens, in which disability funding had also been an issue, the question of whether or not transsexualism was a disability became irrelevant to the question of whether or not Bennett qualified for funding for sex reassignment surgery, since she would be considered disabled even if she weren’t a transsexual woman. Her case forced Medicare to consider only one issue: whether or not Medicare would consider sex reassignment surgery a legitimate medical treatment, separate from whether otherwise healthy transsexuals would be considered disabled simply by

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virtue of being transsexual. These controversial questions engaged not only transsexuals but also health insurers, government administrators, and sometimes the broader American public, as they involved public spending of taxpayers’ money.  

Whether or not transsexual surgeries would be acceptable to state funders was more than a simple medical issue and the trans media highlighted the role that public protest and controversy played in determining whether or not diagnosed transsexuals would be able to have the costs of their medical care covered by government health insurance programs. In 1978, Transition reported that Bennett’s coverage had been denied after “irate taxpayers” flooded the Medicare offices with the phone calls opposing state payment for sex reassignment surgery under any circumstance.  

In response to conservative public opposition and institutional economic discrimination, Bennett mounted a very public media campaign to claim what she saw as her rightful benefits. She drove from her home in San Diego, first to the White House and then to Medicare Director Thomas M. Tierney’s office at Medicare headquarters in Baltimore, which she refused to leave until he would meet with her. She later told Transition that Tierney told her that a committee was working on determining the validity of her case and would get back to her soon. Three days after their meeting, she received a cheque in the mail for $4600. According to Transition, when the Los Angeles Times picked up the story, Medicaid denied that the purpose of the cheque was to cover her sex-reassignment surgery and claimed that they were simply correcting a bureaucratic error in payments owed.

The trans media played an important role in publicizing Bennett’s case to other trans people and constructed Bennett’s efforts as politically justified and worthwhile. *Transition* saw the possibility of state-funded sex reassignment surgery as an important step not only for Bennett, but for transsexuals as a group, writing that “if Medicare finally approves coverage for transsexual surgery, it could set a precedent not only for the disabled receiving Medicare benefits, but for transsexuals on Medicaid as well.” Bennett’s case is thus a clear example of how an individual transsexual could cooperate with the trans-oriented media during this period to not only receive personal support, but also to politicize individual experiences through a liberal discourse of civil rights for transsexuals.

*Transition* politicized Bennett’s case for readers by using it as an opportunity to advocate more broadly on behalf of trans people’s right to freedom from economic discrimination in the form of financial coverage for their medical care. The publication reported to readers that it had written to Medicare soliciting answers on behalf of transsexuals and that Tierney responded that whether or not sex reassignment surgery would be covered by the program was a matter of whether or not it was “considered reasonable and necessary for the treatment of an illness.” Furthermore, he told *Transition* that “because of the controversial nature of the surgery” and the general lack of understanding about it, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare was putting together “a distinguished group of experts on the subject of transsexual surgery… to advise the Department on whether there are circumstances when Medicare should pay.” Trans activists, however, remained concerned that government administrators and insurance providers were more likely to favor expert opinions that would save money than to advocate for economic rights for transsexuals.

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487 Ibid.
While *Transition* reported in Bennett’s favor, the mainstream American news media reported the story more from the perspective of the health care bureaucrats. Bennett’s press conference received minimal media attention, but the mainstream media reported widely on the press conference officials held in response; Joseph Califano, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington specifically to discuss the issue of whether or not Medicaid would fund sex reassignment surgeries. An Associated Press article about Califano’s press conference appeared in numerous cities across the country, telling readers that that several states had been ordered by courts to pay for sex reassignment surgery as a result of the fact that “Congress had extended Medicare coverage to the disabled in 1976,” but that many, including New York, Iowa and Georgia, were refusing to pay. Califano announced that as a result of this face-off between federal and state governments, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare had decided to create an expert panel to establish a consistent policy.488

The visibility of Bennett’s cases had unwanted consequences for trans advocates in that it brought conservatives’ attention to the possibility of state-funded sex reassignment surgeries, and the trans media continued to report on the effects of conservative backlash long after the mainstream media lost interest in Bennett’s case. By June 1979, *Renaissance* advised readers that neither Medicare nor Medi-Cal were paying for sex reassignment procedures, in large part “because of certain erroneous and misleading newspaper reports that received widespread publicity several months ago alleging that Medicare had decided to cover the procedure.” Like *Transition, Renaissance* politicized Bennett’s case through a liberal

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discourse of civil rights and encouraged readers to recognize transsexuals’ inability to access state funding for health care coverage as a form of social, legal and economic injustice.

*Renaissance* urged readers to join Bennett in the fight for legal rights. It advised readers who were “Medicare beneficiaries, undergoing sex reassignment at their own expense,” to submit a claim and hope for a favorable outcome, as several hospital bills, it told readers, had been paid on appeal.489 *Renaissance* further told readers that the San Diego chapter of the ACLU was preparing a legal action on behalf of a transsexual who had been illegally denied coverage for costs related to sex reassignment, after the California Court of Appeals had ruled that transsexuals were “eligible for sex reassignment surgery under the state’s Medi-Cal program for indigents.”490 Thus, trans activist-publishers continued to draw attention to the difficulties trans people faced not only in being granted legal protections through the courts, but also in being able to enforce the rights they were granted. By drawing attention to anti-trans discrimination and transsexuals’ need for civil rights throughout this period, they consistently constructed a liberal transnormativity that assumed that the state should protect transsexuals from employment and economic discrimination, a norm that likely reflected both the white privilege and middle-class status of the transsexuals fighting for these rights.

**Joanna Clark: Military Transsexual in California**

There wasn’t always a clear distinction between the trans activist-publishers who wrote and circulated trans newsletters and the transsexuals who fought highly visible public cases against discrimination; Joanna Clark is an important example of a person who worked on many

fronts to try to protect trans people, herself included, from social and economic discrimination, particularly in relation to health care and employment. Clark’s challenge to employment discrimination exemplifies the historical shift from the older form of liberal transnormativity, which emphasized discretion and privacy, to a new form of transnormative visibility and transnormative discourse of civil rights. As a male, Clarke had been a well-respected Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. After twelve years of service, however, she was given a dishonorable discharge, accompanied by “a folder full of letters of commendations,” indicating that the discharge was not a result of poor performance but rather due to military enforcement of gender and sexual normativity.\footnote{“Sex-change Officer Fights Army Release,” \textit{Boston Globe}, October 10, 1977: 88; Shearlean Duke, “A Transsexual Wars with the Army,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, September 14, 1977, G1:3; “Transsexual wins Drawn-out Battle over Army record,” \textit{Eugene Register-Guard}, May 23, 1981:3.} After she transitioned through the Stanford Gender Clinic program, Clark managed to get her naval records changed to female through a personal connection to the Chair of the Armed Services Committee, U.S. Senator Phil Hart. Once she had done so, she enlisted in the Army reserves as Sergeant First Class. Two years later, however, when one of her superiors discovered that she was a transsexual woman, she found herself facing fourteen charges, including subversive activities, immoral sexual activity and fraudulent enlistment; in 1977 she received a second dishonorable discharge.\footnote{Deborah Rudacille, “Fear of a Pink Planet,” in \textit{Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism and Transgender Rights} (New York: Anchor Books, 2004): 279-280; Los Angeles (UPI), “Bishop Repudiates vows: Ex-sailor not a nun,” \textit{The Bulletin}, January 8, 1988 [Bend, Oregon]: A7; “Hospital Under Fire,” \textit{The Southeast Missourian}, September 21, 1977: 20.}

Clark resisted the military’s effort to shame her with another dishonorable discharge and sought the support of both other transsexuals and the mainstream media to argue that she should be protected from this kind of employment discrimination. She later recalled that her first response when she found out about the charges was to phone Christine Jorgensen, who put
her in touch with a reporter from *The Los Angeles Times*. When the story broke, Clarke mailed a copy to President Carter and later recalled that likely owing to personal military connections, the White House responded with a three-page letter explaining that she would be cleared of all charges but would not be allowed to return to work since trans people had been determined to be psychologically unstable and unfit for military service.\(^{493}\) This was a particularly damning situation because Clarke only had nine and a half months of service left before she would have retired with a pension. Many trans people used a discourse of civil rights to fight against discrimination in employment and health care, though they remained acutely aware of the economic aspects of this discrimination as they invested large amounts of their personal money, time and energy into fighting for what often turned out to be very small successes and rarely the economic and employment security they were seeking. After a four-year battle with the U.S. Army Reserves, Clarke won a $25,000 settlement and an honorable discharge, but not the right to return to her position or continue serving in the military.

The broader mainstream media picked up Clarke’s story as both controversial and noteworthy, circulating the liberal discourse of civil rights for transsexuals to the broader public, many of whom were probably unsympathetic or would not have otherwise been aware of transsexuals’ social experiences or rights claims. The *Los Angeles Times* told readers that Clarke was “believed to be the only person ever to serve in the armed forces as both a man and a woman” and continued to report on her efforts to become re-employed by the military.\(^{494}\) Oregon’s *Eugene-Register Guard* reported that while she would not be reinstated, a military administrative hearing had ruled that “the dishonorable discharge was unfair because she was

\(^{493}\) Deborah Rudacille, “Fear of a Pink Planet,” 279-280.

not given proper credit for her years of military service. The *Los Angeles Times* called the result “a little more proof that she was right and the U.S. Army Reserve was wrong.” Clarke was able to act as a public role model for others and develop her advocacy skills on transsexual issues as a patriotic and respectable transsexual in that she had been successful and accomplished in her military career. By devoting herself to public activism on behalf of other trans people, she worked towards eliminating some of the types of discrimination they were experiencing, on the basis of arguments for the social normativity of transsexuals.

Clarke worked with a number of stakeholders throughout the 1970s and 1980s to achieve legal recognition and protection for other trans people. As the Erickson Educational Foundation disintegrated, she took over publishing and updating one of its informational booklets, “Legal Aspects of Transsexualism,” expanding it to include military issues such as veterans’ benefits and pension rights. Military benefits were especially significant economic rights to secure for transsexuals, given both the number of transsexuals who served as members of the military and the fact that the U.S. military regularly and consistently used accusations of sexual and gender non-normativity to deny pensions to its service members. Allan Berube has shown that the U.S. military consistently discharged an average of 1500-2000 personnel per year on the basis of perceived gender and sex deviance and Lawrence R. Murphy has noted that the U.S. navy was particularly severe in such purges.

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Clarke also used her position as a trans newsletter editor to promote a liberal discourse of civil rights for transsexuals, particularly through the rubric of disability. Although disability carried with it a certain amount of social stigma, it was also a protected civil rights category under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Clarke encouraged trans newsletter readers to embrace the idea that it might be beneficial to claim themselves as legally disabled. In an article called “How to Protect Your Job: Is TSism a ‘Handicap’?” Clarke argued that if transsexualism could be defined as a disability, the Rehabilitation Act would provide transsexuals with protection from employment discrimination. She reminded Transition readers that many “judges and administrators have classified transsexual individuals as handicapped or disabled in contexts other than fair employment,” and she suggested that someone should try using this strategy as a basis for protection from employment discrimination. She wrote, “Since the medical and legal professions generally regard transsexual persons as ‘handicapped,’ the courts could logically be expected to afford these individuals the same protection enjoyed by all others who are so classified.” This hopeful expectation made particularly good sense if the courts would cooperate with her logic and as a political strategy it also brought the contentious question of transsexuals’ medical status into the arena of civil rights. Clarke, like many other trans activists, saw disability claims as part of a liberal discourse of civil rights that was becoming a significant component of the new liberal transnormativity.

Clarke eventually became so impassioned to fight for political change that she even

499 Joanna M. Clark, “How to Protect Your Job: Is TSism a ‘Handicap’? Then Make the Most of It!” Transition (October/November, n.y.): 7.
decided to step down from her position with Renaissance so that she could pursue more extensive political activism than the organization’s non-profit status would allow. In 1980, Clarke and a number of others joined forces with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California to create a group that would specifically address civil rights for transsexuals. Together, they developed a liberal discourse of trans people as deserving and entitled to civil rights, particularly by drawing attention to cases of outright discrimination and to existing laws that were designed to prevent or at least discouraged discrimination against transsexuals. The ACLU had already worked with local groups on regional issues to try to establish legal protections for trans people. Not only had the San Diego chapter worked on a Medicaid case in California, but also Transition reported that the ACLU was also collaborating with Northwestern University Law Clinic and Gender Services of Chicago to challenge an Illinois state law that essentially criminalized trans people; the law in question penalized with a fine of twenty to five-hundred dollars anyone who “cross-dressed” in public, which was defined as publicly appearing “in a dress not belonging to his or her sex, with intent to conceal his or her sex.”

Renaissance told readers that the new ACLU Transsexual Rights Committee would extend the ACLU’s work on behalf of transsexuals, with a mandate to promote “advocacy of transsexual rights on a national level,” as well as to “push for legislation that will protect the rights of transsexuals” and advance “selected cases that will have the most impact in advancing the transsexual rights cause.” Thus, trans activist-publishers played an important role in developing and circulating a discourse of civil rights by founding and publicizing the ACLU Transsexual Rights Committee.

As it broadened its initial work against discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation, the ACLU became one of the key mainstream organizations to support civil rights for transsexuals in the 1980s. Marc Stein writes that homophile activists of the 1950s and 1960s had considered the ACLU “among their most important allies.”\textsuperscript{503} The Lesbian and Gay Chapter of the Southern California ACLU was formed in 1976, and previous to that gay and lesbian cases had been addressed nationally through the “Gay Rights Panel” (1975-1976) and in conjunction with the Rights of Homosexual Committee (1973-1976).\textsuperscript{504} Carrie N. Baker notes that the ACLU Women’s Rights’ Project was instrumental in promoting congressional hearings to investigate sexual harassment, which helped make it possible to have legally recognized “the severity of sexual harassment and the need to allow unemployment compensation for women who quit because of harassment.”\textsuperscript{505} Similarly, Rebecca M. Kluchin has shown that the ACLU also supported a range of “activities included defending women’s access to legal abortion and representing victims of forced sterilization… [and participated in] a collaborative effort with feminist groups to achieve greater reproductive freedoms for women.”\textsuperscript{506} In the 1970s and 1980s, Whitney Strub has shown that the ACLU also backed significant cases related to sex work and pornography.\textsuperscript{507} Samuel Walker writes that during this period, the ACLU recognized and committed itself to a new focus in terms of civil liberties and that the ACLU was especially concerned with public schools and the

\textsuperscript{503} Stein, \textit{Sexual Injustice}, 133-134.


\textsuperscript{507} Strub, \textit{Perversion for Profit}, 205.
military, which ACLU president Ira Glasser called the “only two public institutions in the United States which steadfastly deny that the Bill of Rights applies to them.”\textsuperscript{508} Indeed, transsexuals faced heavy discrimination in each of these institutions and the ACLU supported transsexuals’ efforts to have their fundamental civil rights protected.

The Transsexual Rights Committee of the ACLU was a collaborative effort, chaired by transsexual leaders, representatives, and advocates, many of whom also edited or worked on trans publications. Trans activist-publishers Joanna Clarke, Jude Patton and Carol Katz, co-directors of Renaissance newsletter and Renaissance Gender Identity Services, as well as Diane Saunders, publisher of Phoenix Monthly International and director of Gateway Gender Alliance, all sat on the committee, alongside members Joy Shaffer and Kay Brown. Susan McGrivery, who Renaissance described as the legal consultant to the committee and the staff attorney of the ACLU gay rights chapter, also played an important role in the committee’s work.\textsuperscript{509}

Trans publishers solicited support for the Transsexual Rights Committee from readers. Renaissance, for example, encouraged readers to join the ACLU and told them they could have their $20 membership fee directed towards the TS Rights committee. Phoebe Smith, who was not on the committee but was in contact with many transsexuals and published Transsexual Voice in Georgia, similarly endorsed the committee’s political efforts and told her newsletter readers outright: “I urge you to support the American Civil Liberties Union Transsexual Rights Committee.” Like the Renaissance editors, she promoted a sense of mutual


\textsuperscript{509} “First Transsexual Rights Unit Formed on West Coast by ACLU,” Renaissance Update 6.2 (May/June 1981): 2.
interest and responsibility amongst transsexuals: “We must be willing to give support where it is needed.” Despite activists-publishers’ attempts, the TS Rights Committee eventually found that there were insufficient funds to continue its activities and thus unlike similar but successful feminist, gay and lesbian political efforts, the Transsexual Rights Committee of the ACLU eventually disbanded.

Before its collapse, however, the ACLU TS Rights Committee developed an important discourse of liberal transnormativity by advancing the idea that trans people could access resources and service otherwise unavailable to them and achieve protection from discrimination in both employment and health care. For example, in 1981 Renaissance told readers that the ACLU TS Rights Committee had successfully convinced the Rehabilitation Services Administration that transsexualism should be treated as a mental or physical disability and therefore that federal funds should be authorized for “counseling, employment counseling, hormone therapy, for diagnostic services.” By the 1980s, many trans newsletters had moved away from the more medicalized social welfare notion of rehabilitation that had been such a significant component of trans advocacy at the height of the Erickson Educational Foundation’s work and instead emphasized transnormative claims to individual legal, social and economic citizenship rights.

Karen Ulane: Transsexual Pilot in Illinois

Like many of the other transsexuals pioneering the new civil rights discourse of liberal transnormativity, Karen Ulane, a pilot for Eastern Airlines, was a highly skilled professional who was fired for being a transsexual. In 1980, Ulane told her employer of her plans to

undergo sex reassignment surgery at the University of Chicago. Eastern responded by offering her a ground position or a medical disability retirement, but Ulane insisted on her right to continue flying, pointing to the fact that the Federal Aviation Association, not Eastern, determined pilots’ fitness for flight.\footnote{“Transsexual files $4 million suit over firing,” \textit{The Telegraph-Herald}, August 5, 1981: 19; “Sex-Changed Pilot Loses Court Fight,” \textit{The Chicago Tribune}, April 16, 1985: A3.} Eastern nevertheless served Ulane with a letter informing her that she no longer worked for the company. In short, Eastern wrote that the operation had changed Ulane from the person they had hired to a different person, and that “no Karen Ulane appears on Eastern’s seniority list.”\footnote{“Ex-Pilot sues to get job back: Airline fired her after sex-change operation,” \textit{The Courier}, September 26, 1988: 20; “Sex-change airline captain vows: I will fly jets again,” \textit{World Weekly News}, September 1, 1981: 5.} Ulane refused to accept the dismissal, however, and filed a discrimination claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as well as a lawsuit charging discrimination on the basis of sex.

The hope that transsexuals might still be able to achieve protection from employment discrimination as normative citizens without being defined as disabled seemed near when in April 1983 the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, ordered the airline to reinstate Ulane and pay her almost $160,000 in lost pay. Judge D.J. Grady ruled that a transsexual woman could, in fact, seek protection from discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Ulane’s lawyer, Fay Clayton, told the Associated Press that Grady’s decision “marks the first time any federal judge has ruled that transsexuals are protected under Title 7” and that their team “consider it a major victory.” The case was indeed historic in significance in terms of advancing civil rights for trans people, and Judge Grady “compared her case to the plight of blacks who fought for civil rights in the 1950s and

Just as other transsexuals had received support from labor unions and the ACLU, Ulane’s legal victory was based in part on support from the Federal Aviation Association. Ulane had gone through a medical recertification process after her surgery and was issued a first class medical certificate, which approved her for return to work as a commercial pilot. The FAA required all pilots to be assessed and have their certificates renewed every six months by one of the 3,000 designated Senior Aviation Medical Examiners, most of whom were physicians in private practice.\footnote{Institute of Medicine, Report of a Study: Airline Pilot Age, Health, and Performance: Scientific Medical Considerations (National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1982): 27.} Pilots could be disqualified if they were found to have “mental disorders requiring continued or intermittent medication” or a number of other conditions, such as alcoholism or drug addiction, psychoneurotic disorders, anxiety reaction, obsessive compulsive reaction, or depressive reaction; pilots who reached the age of 60 were also disqualified, though that policy was also being reconsidered at the time as possibly constituting age discrimination.\footnote{Institute of Medicine, Report of a Study: Airline Pilot Age, Health, and Performance: Scientific Medical Considerations, iv, 88.} Ulane’s claim as a transsexual woman was thus part of a wider social process in which broadening civil rights discourses were protecting groups against whom discrimination had previously been permitted.

The FAA’s support for Ulane’s discrimination claim also played an important role in mainstream media coverage of the story, and newspapers across the United States circulated
Ulane’s claim as a legitimate story about the complex question of expanding civil rights and addressing discrimination. *The Pittsburgh Courrier* reported that Dr. Gerald Whitmarsh, the FAA-approved psychologist who had examined Ulane after her operation, testified, “I would remain on the flight deck if I saw Miss Ulane go into the flight deck.”517 Likewise, the *Miami News* and *Chicago Sun-Times* both reported that Dr. Rappaport, the psychiatrist who had been independently hired by the FAA to assess Ulane, told the court, “There was no psychological reason that I could see why Karen Ulane could not be a pilot for a commercial airline.”518 Ulane’s lawyers told the court that they had discovered that the FAA had already approved 19 other transsexual pilots to return to work post-operatively.519 The Associated Press reported that the Airline Pilots Association confirmed that it was filing a grievance on Ulane’s behalf and was representing her.520

Eastern said that it rejected Ulane’s continued employment on the grounds that she would disrupt the social functioning of the flight crew. Thomas R. Buttion, Eastern’s Senior Vice President of Operations, wrote in the dismissal letter sent to Ulane (and submitted to the court) that Ulane’s “presence in the cockpit would have undermined Eastern’s efforts to assure the public that airline travel is safe” and “was inconsistent with the safety considerations which underlie to so-called ‘coordinated crew’ concept of Eastern.”521 Buttion’s concerns reflected shifting commercial airline industry policies and social scientific research, both of which called for stricter psychological testing for pilots and more sensitivity to social group

dynamics. During this period an increasing number of industrial studies on these issues were conducted by psychological and behavioral scientists and supported because of the commercial airlines’ economic concerns about profit and liability. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s “airlines and aircraft operators started requiring flight crew[s] to participate in Crew Resource Management (also known as CRM) training courses” and the ability to participate in the flight crew as a functioning as a social group became considered part of effective job duties.\(^{522}\) Such work was also a result of the shift from a state-run military model of aircraft operations to that of a more capitalist-oriented, corporate commercial airline industry.\(^ {523}\) In both cases, issues of social discrimination such as stigma against transsexuals could be argued to be an impediment to the ability to work, much as Grossman and Dain had faced arguments that their presence would interfere with their teaching environments.

Ulane’s case was an important part of the history of employment discrimination against women as well as a significant gain for transsexual women specifically in that her defense focused on her status as a woman. During the early 1980s, the Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission had released an official statement that “the government has taken the position that transsexuals are not covered by the law” and that the EEOC would

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therefore not be supporting Ulane’s case. Fay Robbin, one of Ulane’s lawyers, however, was regularly quoted as pointing out that only two of Eastern’s 4,500 pilots were women and that Ulane’s defense team felt that hers was “a simple case of refusing to keep Karen in their employ as a woman even though they’d be only too happy to have her as a man.” Ulane’s case was one of many in which diverse types of sex discrimination were being considered and defined. For example, other feminists were fighting similar battles to expand legal protections against sex discrimination, sexual harassment and wage discrimination. The EEOC supported many feminist groups in their efforts to establish protection against sexual harassment for women and ruled that “sexual harassment was sex discrimination, in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.” It did not, however, see transsexual women as facing a form of discrimination within the scope of Title VII.

The mainstream media used Ulane’s case as an opportunity to both defend and advertise Eastern as a self-regulating corporation. The Milwaukee Sentinel told readers that Buitton said, in one court document, “We didn’t think the cockpit was an area to experiment as to relationships that may or may not develop because of the controversial nature of that operation.” The World Weekly News similarly reported that one veteran pilot said “there could be lingering psychological problems resulting from Ulane’s operation, and this poses a

potential threat to the safety of her crews and passengers.”\textsuperscript{529} Thus, the readers of mainstream media reports continued to be exposed to the idea that transsexuals posed a threat to their security, alongside the fact that professional transsexuals were seeking civil rights protection from discrimination.

Despite Eastern’s claims that Ulane posed a threat to their customers, mainstream media accounts emphasized Ulane’s skills and accomplishments as a pilot. Numerous articles cited her years of experience as a pilot in Vietnam; between 1964 and 1968 she flew 25 combat missions for which she was awarded the Air Medal of Honor.\textsuperscript{530} They also noted her expertise as a flight instructor at “the Army Aviation School in Ft. Rocker, Atlanta” until her military service had ended and she became a commercial pilot for Eastern Airlines.\textsuperscript{531} Press articles also noted that during her time at Eastern, Ulane had become the head of the Pilot’s Union and continued a respected and accomplished career. As was the case with Clarke, Ulane’s public image was dependent on her outstanding professional achievements and her distinguished military service to her country, both of which lent her additional respectability and enabled the press to represent her as a normative citizen deserving of legal protection against employment discrimination. The distance between Ulane’s claim of discrimination and Eastern’s fear that Ulane was a threat reflected a growing division between the liberal discourse of civil rights and the conservative, corporate desire to minimize economic and social risks.\textsuperscript{532}

\textsuperscript{532} For recent work on this phenomenon, see Neil J. McLean, “The Influence of the Media on Perception of Risk Associated with Flying,” in \textit{Psychological Perspectives on Fears of Flying}, ed. By Robert Bor and
While the mainstream media saw Ulane’s case as a general interest story, trans newsletters focused on the fact that it might set a groundbreaking legal precedent for other transsexuals. 

*Phoenix Monthly International*, for example, encouraged readers to imagine a future in which “there will then be no more open discrimination based on expressed or implied transsexualism” and wrote that the case could provide “a legal precedent on which to base a claim to your job or acceptable compensation”; it also called Ulane’s case a move towards the end of “open discrimination based on expressed or implied transsexualism.” It did warn readers, however, that Ulane’s case did not “open the door for other pre- or post-operative transsexuals to seek shelter under the Civil Rights Act just yet,” since it was still open for appeal. *Phoenix Monthly International* nevertheless happily announced that transsexuals had taken a “step forward…when Judge John F. Grady ruled, in the Chicago US District Court that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects citizens from sexual discrimination, applied to transsexuals as well as other minorities.”

Ulane, like other transsexuals who publicly defended themselves against discrimination, thus became an inspiration to others and a representative of the new liberal transnormativity prioritizing civil rights for transsexuals as members of a marginalized minority group.

Ulane’s case continued the reversal of earlier imperatives for transsexuals to “blend in” and “disappear” into mainstream normative society. As *Phoenix Monthly International* pointed out, transsexuals would have to fight openly as transsexuals against transsexual-specific discrimination if they were to achieve legal protections. *PMI* told transsexual readers:

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534 Ibid., 3.

535 Ibid., 3.
“Employers tend, at this time, to run roughshod over those thought to have no legal protection or who are afraid to express or demonstrate their legal rights” and “you have to be willing to stand up and be counted when your time comes.” Readers of the trans publications were thus made aware of the importance of individual efforts to establish protection for transsexuals as a group, but also that all such efforts were based on one’s willingness to be openly known as transsexual.

Since Title VII protected citizens from employment discrimination on the basis of ‘sex,’ the changing meaning and interpretation of ‘sex’ was central to Ulane’s case. Different groups, however, had different interests in (re)defining sex legally and socially. In his ruling, Judge Grady wrote:

Prior to my participation in this case, I would have had no doubt that the question of sex was a very straightforward matter of whether you are male or female. That there could be any doubt about that question had simply never occurred to me. … After listening to the evidence in this case, it is clear to me that there is no settled definition in the medical community as to what we mean by sex.

Grady further described Ulane’s case as opening “a can of worms” by demonstrating “the difficulties posed when dominant social and legal classifications of identity such as male and female are called into question.” His final ruling took this complexity into account, and Grady ruled that ‘transsexuals are protected by Title VII’ because ‘the term ‘sex,’ as used in medical sciences, ‘can be and should be reasonably interpreted to include among its denotations the question of sexual identity.’ Again, throughout this period, in legal cases and many popular discourses, transsexuals were considered under the rubric of sex or sexuality.

536 “Pilot Suit Follow-Up,” 3.
Thus, as Joanne Meyerowitz has argued, Ulane’s case also represented a battle between medical and state authorities over who should interpret, regulate and control the legal meaning of ‘sex.’

Institutionalized state homophobia also played a key role in efforts to secure Ulane’s civil rights as a transsexual. Legal scholar D. Douglas Cotton writes that before Grady’s decision, all other courts had consistently denied transsexuals Title VII protection because the U.S. Congress had specifically excluded sexual preference from being covered.540 Richard Green, one of the experts who testified in the case, later wrote, “In 1975, several (unsuccessful) bills were introduced in Congress aimed at prohibiting discrimination based on ‘sexual preference’… However, whether or not Title VII protects homosexuals should have nothing to do with the issue of transsexual coverage under the Act.”541 By distinguishing transsexuals from transvestites and homosexuals, both of which were considered to be different (and potentially less normative) sexual subjectivities, medical experts pushed the courts to develop a more specific legal understanding of what had simply been referred to in Title VII as ‘sex.’ Similarly, conservative homophobia put transsexuals in the position of having to make strong claims that they were not homosexuals or transvestites and not like either of these groups, a major difference from some of the earlier efforts to collaborate and work together, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Ulane’s individual self-presentation and gender normativity became important defining factors as to whether or not the courts would recognize her as a woman and therefore whether or not Eastern Airlines was justified in discriminating against her. Eastern’s lawyer, Catherine

Tinker, argued that Eastern did not discriminate against Ulane on the basis of her sex because, according to Eastern, she was not actually a woman. Ulane’s lawyer, however, argued that “this is a Title VII case brought by a pilot who was fired… for no reason other than the fact that she ceased being a male and became a female.” Legal scholar Lisa Bower argues that the claim that Ulane had successfully acquired a female role is crucial in the testimony because it undermined the defense’s argument that Ulane was actually a psychologically unstable man and therefore unfit to pilot an aircraft. The appeals court Judge noted that Ulane “conducts herself as a woman.” Furthermore, he wrote:

She dresses as a woman. There is nothing flamboyant, nothing freakish about the plaintiff. It would take an extremely practiced eye, it seems to me, to detect any difference between the plaintiff and the biological woman and… she appears [to me] to be a biological woman.

Ruling that Eastern had discriminated against her because she was a transsexual, not because she was a woman, the Court of Appeals determined that the crux of the matter was whether or not transsexuality itself was covered by Title VII.

Despite extensive medical testimony, Ulane’s immaculate record and clear evidence of her success as a pilot, the Court of Appeals overturned the original ruling, claiming to be upholding the ‘traditional concept of sex’ that it thought Congress had intended in passing Title VII. In short, the ruling clarified that it was “unlawful to discriminate against women because they are women and against men because they are men,” but that gays, lesbians and transsexuals who were discriminated on the basis of those identities were not protected by

543 Ibid., 1022-1024.
Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Joanne Meyerowitz writes that Ulane’s case reflected the dwindling liberal influence in the courts in the 1980s, while legal scholar J.L. Levi writes that Ulane’s case typifies “the hostility of the federal courts towards transgender litigants.” Either way, the outcome of Ulane’s case seemed to further dash the hopes of trans advocates, who for over a decade had been imagining and working towards a future in which trans people were widely accepted and legally protected in American society. The Supreme Court denied her efforts to further review her case in 1985, significantly influencing future rulings, which relied on the Ulane case to uphold the notion that transsexuals were not covered by Title VII.

Trans newsletters became an important site for trans people to express their outrage at the outcome of Ulane’s case and some readers were galvanized to use it as an opportunity to construct trans people as a consumer group that should mobilize against Eastern Airlines as part of their broader struggle to achieve legal and social recognition and acceptance. Stephen E. Parent, Director of TranScend Counseling Services, wrote an article for The Transsexual Voice calling for readers to boycott Eastern Airlines “in the names of our own moral convictions on the issue of Civil Rights.” Although he recognized that they could not, “as individuals or as a group of people influence the decision of the Supreme Court” or “hurt Eastern Airline to the point of bankruptcy,” he nevertheless urged everyone to consider that “however small the effort there is a way in which our feelings and opinions can be expressed.

and felt.” Unlike gays and lesbians, who had effectively marshalled political and economic power in boycotting Coors beer in California and oranges from Florida when producers discriminated against gays and lesbians, trans people were much fewer in number and had much less political and economic power.\(^5\) Parent also implored other minorities to stand in solidarity with transsexuals. He wrote: “All minorities everywhere who know that they could be in Karen Ulane’s shoes should take it as a personal affront that in losing her rights to a livelihood, Eastern Airlines has managed to infringe on our rights, too.” Thus, although Ulane’s case was disappointing in terms of failing to achieve legal rights under the Civil Rights Act, it was nevertheless highly effective in contributing to the emerging transnormative expression of trans people as a marginalized social group brought together by shared struggle against their discrimination and oppression.

Trans publications provided a context for readers to voice trans-positive perspectives and highlighted the importance of transsexuals who were willing to be visible and fight for legal rights. For example, Chris, another Transsexual Voice reader who firmly supported Parent’s proposed boycott, wrote,

Karen has (for us all) been punched firmly in the face by more of that same uninformed ignorance and bigotry that we all face. Unfortunately, the response of the court truly shows what a minority in this country STILL faces. How many of these events must pass before we realize that we have NO CHOICE but to work for our rights[?]\(^5\)

He further constructed Eastern’s bigotry as dangerous, writing that Ulane’s case “shows me that Eastern would rather have socially correct people in the cockpit of their aircraft than


people who have solved their problems” and that “it scares me to think that there me be someone up in the cockpit worrying about a solvable problem that they would be fired for dealing with instead of having a free head to deal with the problems of getting an airplane to its destination.” Chris turned Eastern’s discourse on its head to acknowledge that Ulane had done the emotional work to be more psychologically safe than other pilots; indeed, a number of mainstream industry psychiatric specialists recognized that pilots, as a group, tended to “avoid and deny their internal emotional life.” Like others actively engaged with trans publications, Chris used transsexual discrimination and visibility to construct a motivational narrative of oppositional politics in which trans people could become empowered and respond to prejudice as a distinct minority group.

Ulane was disappointed with the outcome, both for herself personally and also for transsexuals as a legally marginalized minority group. The World Weekly News reported that Ulane said that “the worst part of losing her court battle was the court’s decision that transsexuals aren’t protected against discrimination under the law.” She told the paper, “I’m beginning to wonder where all those ideas of justice are that I’ve heard so much about” and stated that she was personally affronted by the fact that “the court said I wasn’t a woman.” Despite the fact that she considered herself to be as female as a biological woman and worthy of civil rights protections against employment discrimination, the court referred to her as “what remains of a man.” Ulane went on to become a florist, like Dain, finding work in a less professional and more gender-normative context.

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553 Ibid.
The mainstream media featured Ulane’s case because the question of a transsexual literally changing sex in a highly-respected, male-gendered profession highlighted wider social concerns about the appropriateness of expanding gender roles for women and the supposed threat to patriarchal masculinity and gender- and hetero-normativity. Just as transsexual teachers Dain and Grossman had provided a flashpoint for public controversy over children’s vulnerability to non-normative expressions of gender or sexuality, transsexual women like Ulane were able to draw on their social and economic class status to argue for the right to be protected from discrimination and legally recognized as women.

Because of individuals like Paula Grossman, Steve Dain, Bobbie Lea Bennett, Joanna Clark and Karen Ulane, the 1980s saw the emergence of a new kind of visibility for transsexuals in the mainstream media and a new, politicized type of transnormativity that emphasized economic discrimination and attempted to achieve state protection and recognition for white, middle-class transsexuals within existing civil rights law. Trans advocates from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s focused particularly on achieving civil rights protection in employment and health care by attempting to apply Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act and to argue that transsexuals were entitled to protection from discrimination on the basis of sex and disability.

For the growing trans community that followed their stories, this wave of visible public discrimination cases also represented a broader shift from identifying as patients to identifying as members of a minority group of rights-bearing citizens; American transsexuals increasingly defined transnormativity in liberal terms, promoting trans people as individualistically normative citizens deserving of legal, economic, and social rights and as members of a marginalized minority group. For trans activists, these new transsexual representatives also
became unfortunate proof that the highest courts would not apply or enforce civil rights protections on the basis of sex or disability for transsexuals without a fight. The cases did establish that transsexuals who were willing and able to invest in lengthy legal proceedings could sometimes achieve individual economic compensation for their marginalization. For the individuals defending themselves against what they framed as systemic discrimination, these cases were about negotiating their own place in American culture and establishing economic and social citizenship rights, as well as attempting to do so in a way that would apply more broadly for other transsexuals.

Overall, this chapter has argued that trans activists from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s set the stage for trans people to mobilize as a distinct economic, social and political minority group by building on the previous decades’ efforts while also responding to the new social and economic realities of the late 1970s and 1980s. Their political mobilization was enabled by, and worked to produce, a discourse of liberal transnormativity that emphasized trans people, particularly white, middle-class transsexuals, as rights-bearing citizens deserving of full political and economic equality through state protection from discrimination.

Transsexuals’ stories of discrimination in both the mainstream media and trans-oriented newsletters contributed to a sense of common cause and joint political goals. Their new politicized liberal transnormativity built on the achievements of the civil rights movement by arguing that various existing progressive laws that had been established in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act,
could, would or should protect transsexuals from economic discrimination, though these cases were argued largely about professional, white, middle-class transsexuals. The question of who the new social and political formations would represent remained part of the ongoing articulation and negotiation of liberal transnormativity in American culture.
Conclusion

One of the key reasons to historicize liberal American transnormativities is to draw attention to the fact that we are still living in the shadow of a period in which liberalism initially defined what it meant to identify or be recognized as some variation of trans in the United States. Today, trans people continue to be constructed as a sometimes troubling “add-on” to mainstream gay and lesbian or “lgbt” (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) politics or as the more radical or extreme end of a queer spectrum. Even present-day critiques of liberalism generally focus on the notion of a liberal inclusion model from an inadvertently homo-centric perspective, erasing a wide variety of trans issues and people who are neither radical nor politically queer. Not only do such perspectives discount the powerfully established discourses of liberal American transnormativities, they limit the potential for trans-positive communities and politics to address pressing issues related to the historical entrenchment of unequal systems of power, including both those specific to American cultural relations and to the transnormativities shared and developed globally.

Because trans people have been defined in different ways in different contexts, transnormativities – that is, assumptions and expectations about who is trans and what that implies or should imply – become potentially dangerous discourses of erasure and marginality. The lines along which these transnormative erasures and marginalities occur are imminently social but become intensely personal, often in surprising ways that veer from mainstream expectations about the usual frameworks for understanding systems of power, such as gender, race, sexuality, class, disability, indigeneity, and so forth.

Two political approaches to address unjust systems of power have been combined with some success in activism and scholarship and have translated to new transnormativities. The
first approach has been to identify, explore, and attempt to address such systems of power as heteronormativity, homonormativity, transphobia, cis-centrism, racism, colonialism, ableism, the prison industrial complex, and others. Second, attempts have been made to prioritize the people most marginalized by each of these systemic social structures in order to counter-balance, or at least speak back to hegemonic power relations. This second approach focuses on the voices of people of color, poor people, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and others living in conditions of relative marginalization or abjection.

Both approaches are limited in terms of the history of liberal American transnormativities. In the first instance, the central, recognized systems of power such as racism, colonialism and ableism are, for the most part, understood and discussed from cis-centric perspectives. This results in trans people and issues needing to be endlessly added into broader historical accounts from which trans people and issues are generally systematically erased. In such a situation, people who may be recognizable as some variation of trans need to be continually written into historical accounts of mainstream power relations, often in individualistic ways that do not transform how such power relations are understood. In the second instance, the tactic of prioritizing people marginalized on the basis of race, ability, and other systems of inequality has been successful and done a great deal to prioritize such politics within present-day transnormativities. This approach, however, does little to address the problems of ahistoricism or the politics and burden of representation; it often leaves marginalized individuals to bear the intellectual brunt of systems of inequality. Further, it risks reproducing systems of power resulting from broad historical erasures. Individual experiences of marginalization may garner rich expressions of power relations in the present, but how are those individual experiences to be translated through cis-centric systems of power
and understood as part of a variety of historical discourses, including liberal American transnormativities?

Many present-day American (particularly queer, anti-racist) transnormativities call for radical anti-violence politics that align trans people with social transformation and justice for the most marginalized. Bassichis, Lee and Spade write that “radical politics offer queer communities and movements a way out of the murderous politics that are masked as invitations to ‘inclusion’ and ‘equality’ within fundamentally exclusive, unequal systems.”

Eric Stanley and others are expanding political and historical analyses of prisons as institutions structuring fundamental inequality in the United States, drawing attention to the disproportionate number of people of color and the systemic abuse of queer and trans people. It is also clear that racism structures relations between trans people in public representations of trans activism. In the context of activists organizing Transgender Day of Remembrance, Sarah Lamble writes that “the narrative erasure of racialized violence in the TDOR/Remembering Our Dead project is arguably not isolated, but symptomatic of broader racial hierarchies within transgender politics.”

Transnormativities is perhaps in some ways able to make sense of how white trans organizers


are drawing on a tradition of white liberalism in failing to address racism and racial violence while publicly purporting to represent trans people as a group.

The call for more radical trans politics demands greater accountability amongst trans people in positions of power and privilege, particularly academics and activists, and especially in terms of racial and economic justice. Some of the evident limitations are structural. For example, Snorton and Haritaworn write that “while radical formulations of violence and anti-violence have tended to focus on colonial feminist and homonormative subjects, dominant trans subjects are rarely held accountable and remain awkwardly frozen in positions of analogy and equivalency with other ‘diversely diverse’ locations.”557 Similarly, Nael Bhanji writes that “transgender and transsexual Euro-American academia has often resorted to comparative frameworks that naturalize and reproduce nationalist discourses of sexuality through fetishizing gestures that map racial difference as spectacle.”558 Likewise, Lamble writes that “if we are to engage in effective struggles against violence, we must resist remembrance practices that rely on reductionist identity politics; we must pay attention to the specific relations of power that give rise to acts of violence; and we must confront violence in its structural, systemic, and everyday forms.”559

*Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities* has attempted to draw attention to everyday forms of articulating trans-ness in the period from 1960 to 1990, some of which might rightfully be considered structurally violent from our present-day perspective. One of the key lessons from the narrative developed here, however, is that trans advocates were able to achieve limited successes in part by

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establishing trans people as a group of people with the potential to be(come) normative American citizens. These “partial successes” were therefore limited to some more than others, and did little to address racism, in particular.

Recent calls to address ableism and end the marginalization of trans people with disabilities have been more limited than those focusing on racism and violence, and such calls have usually been presented in terms of analogy or ahistorical intersectionality. Eli Clare, who has perhaps written most extensively on these issues in the present-day, troubles ableism within trans communities and writes that trans people (many of whom are people with disabilities) can learn important lessons from disability rights movement.\(^{560}\) While Clare frames his calls for anti-ablist transnormativities in individualistic terms that will result in systemic changes in the present and future, *Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities* has begun to trace a history of the longstanding and ongoing mutual construction of disability and transnormativities in the context of American liberalism. Trans people and issues have been a major part of the history of health care programs, policies, and disability rights within the United States, but much more research remains to be done to historicize trans people’s health activism and its influence. Future work may explore in more depth how this longstanding relationship between the socio-cultural construction of biopolitics relates to other, more prominently studied groups engaged in health activism during the same period, such as women’s health and HIV/AIDS activist groups.\(^{561}\) The radicalization of both trans and


queer politics in United States in the 1990s resulted in a generational shift as well as a series of new priorities and transnormativities.562

While trans and queer politics have both challenged heteronormativity and homonormativity (sometimes on different grounds), transgender studies and transgender activism has also broadened the scope of transnormativities in ways that distanced trans communities from the liberal, transsexually- oriented traditions of the preceding era.563 The formation of liberal American transnormativities between 1960 to 1990 has directly influenced trans communities and politics since then, but in some ways this early period stands in stark contrast to present-day transnormativities.

Mainstream trans politics are certainly more radical now in the sense that it is generally expected that trans people will represent radical ideas about social justice and social norms. On the other hand, many mainstream trans political initiatives remain focused on liberal inclusion and achieving policy gains for the most privileged trans people, in part because trans people remain discriminated against, and because basic legal protections and recognitions remain elusive in many contexts.

One of the major differences between the 1960-1990 period and our present era is that violence and racism are now greater priorities amongst the most powerful trans activists and academics. Trans advocates during the earlier period focused on promoting social change by presenting trans people as viable productive citizens, often through a politics of respectability. It has become clear that such a strategy worked more effectively for white, middle-class, otherwise normative Americans, and did little to end the marginalization of people of colour,

who, for example, continue to face much greater rates of violence and incarceration.\textsuperscript{564} Activists and academics who have more recently focused on the relationship between criminalization of race, sexuality in the prison industrial complex carry forward a more radical tradition in queer and trans activism by more marginalized activists like Sylvia Rivera.\textsuperscript{565} Scholarship in the history of race and civil rights likewise provides important context for understanding the racialization of liberal transnormativities. For example, Singh writes that “the assumption that time-honored national norms and ideals have been the effective guarantors of racial justice has an air of unreality that continues to whitewash our history” and indicates a “civil mythology of racial progress in late-twentieth century America.”\textsuperscript{566} Similarly, Reddy demonstrates how African-American civil rights activism is now being used to promote state protection against hate crimes. He outlines how Obama’s Shepard-Byrd Act “extended the antiviolence protections originally designed by the federal government to combat white supremacy and to promote race-neutral liberalism within the nation-state.”\textsuperscript{567} The ongoing centrality of supposedly race-neutral liberalism in the United States thus remains a key force within and perhaps against which radical trans activists must content in developing present-day transnormativities.

Civil rights and legal protections are one of the key continuities between the 1960-1990 period and our present era. \textit{Historicizing Liberal American Transnormativities} has demonstrated that the fight for legal justice for trans people in bureaucratic structures and for

explicit and enforceable civil rights protection was a major component of the era. While it has become clear that achieving legal protections is neither clear nor simple, trans advocates continued to push, in particular, for the right to health care under the Medicaid benefits program. Debates over whether and which federal laws might protect trans people from denial of medical services have continued as health-care providers and private companies have refused to treat or insure trans people. Very recently, however, there has been a major shift in civil rights protections for trans people. The EEOC ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act does in fact now protect against discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Similarly, President Obama has openly discussed transgender people, guaranteed protection against employment discrimination for government employees, and named transgender political appointees.

What measures need to be taken to address historically-embedded liberal American transnormativities in relation to present-day experiences, needs and politics? What does it look like to develop a historically-embedded collaborative politics that simultaneously addresses transphobia, cis-centrism, and other forms of power inequalities? There are many key issues needing to be addressed amongst trans communities, including racism, nationalism, ableism, and intergenerational politics of disconnection, among others. Some of these issues are also dependent on non-trans people writing trans-positive histories and developing politics that neither take up trans people and issues tokenistically nor assume trans people to be

inherently different from non-trans people or radically transformational.

This dissertation has begun to provide evidence for reconsidering the centrality of American liberalism to the historical formation of trans people and issues in the United States between 1960 and 1990. It has emphasized that much of the successful early trans advocacy work was accomplished through liberal notions of equality and justice in relation to individualistic medical norms within the capitalist nation-state. This narrative attests to the present-day need for radical trans politics, as is currently under formation. It also demonstrates that transnormativities are always under construction in specific, limited, socio-cultural historical contexts that can always in turn be contested on a variety of grounds.
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