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(NON) TRANSNORMATIVE WOMEN: VIOLENCE, DATING, AND SEX WORK

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ABSTRACT

The intent of this research is to critically examine “transnormativity”. This concept prioritizes trans bodies that are gender normative, heterosexual, middle-class, white, and have access to gender affirmative methods, such as surgery and/or hormones (Malatino, 140). During the mid-twentieth century, a specific medical movement in the global north sought to produce trans women’s bodies that aligned with the medico-scientific construction of womanhood. Criteria that facilitated this construction of womanhood revolved around the embodiment of white racial indicators, heterosexuality, and normative gender representation. These transnormative attributes, served as a way to assimilate trans women into a seemingly dimorphic view of gender. Women who deviate from this medical model, due to a myriad of reasons, have been silenced, dehumanized, and subjected to violence. This research will examine trans women’s experiences, through autobiographical and biographical means, to complicate the medico-scientific construction of womanhood which aims to restrict the complexity of non-normative desires and embodiments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The theory and practice of transnormativity is positioned in response to the medico-scientific, dimorphic view of gender. Trans bodies have been particularly subjected to this binary model because of how society has pathologized gender variation. Throughout this thesis, there will be specific attention to trans women who fall outside the area of transnormative considerations. The chapter “Thinking Through Transnormativity” gives an in-depth analysis of transnormativity. One of the most lauded trans figures in modern American history is Christine Jorgensen, and her notoriety is directly linked to her race and assimilationist tendencies in regards to gender and social etiquette. The concepts of transnormativity and non-transnormativity were facilitated by a medical scientific model. The standards surrounding access to transition developed in the late 1960s by physicians and were facilitated by clinics that specialized in gender transition. In practice, these clinics disregarded the diverse experiences and representations of trans women in favor of “rejecting candidates who would not conform after surgery to the dominant conventions of gender and sexuality” (Meyerowitz, 225). The structure of this thesis will incorporate trans and gender theory, from theorists such as bell hooks, Eve Sedgwick, and Gayle Salamon, in concert with autobiographical and biographical accounts of trans women who are considered to be non transnormative given factors such as their race, gender expression, and profession.

Chapter 2 will analyze the story of Latisha “Larry” King. Latisha was a teenager of color who was murdered by one of her fellow classmates by two gunshots to the back of the head at

point blank range. Gayle Salamon attended the trial and realized that the case had been falsely presented as an act of homophobic, rather than transphobic, rage. Salamon asserts that framing this act of violence in terms of the familiar narrative of sexual orientation erases the centrality of gender expression in motivating the homicide. This discrepancy affected the murder trial given that sexual orientation was repeatedly conflated with gender expression (Salamon, 4). Theories underpinning this act of violence revolve around “transmisogynoir”, which involves the intersection of transphobia, misogyny and antiblackness, and builds on Julia Serano’s term, “transmisogyny”. Trans porn performer Drew DeVaux coined the term “cotton ceiling” to refer to the transmisogynistic tendency for trans women, especially those who still have a penis, to be excluded from echelons of cis dominated women and queer spaces for their supposed inability to express femininity. The cotton ceiling unveils two facets of transmisogyny, one of which serves to deem trans women as unable to participate in cis dominated realms of sex, while the other facet portrays trans women as constantly signaling a sexual act, which elicits the seemingly justifiable response of violence. Details and analysis of this case will show how trans bodies that are beyond normative parameters surrounding gender, sexuality, and race, which are produced through the medico-scientific construction of trans bodies, are subjected to violence.

The chapter “Openly Desiring Trans Women: Does That Make Me Gay?” covers issues trans women face in terms of their desirability, specifically by cis men, who are oftentimes regarded by trans women as “chasers”. Amy Marvin defined the chaser as “someone who encounters trans people through a reductive sexualized lens, usually by focusing on their trans status at the expense of how a trans person wants to be presented in the world” (Marvin, 4). Additionally, trans writer and activist Christin Milloy outlines a pattern she has encountered by prospective partners in that they fixate on her genitals, especially given that she is non-operative

(Milloy). This fascination with trans bodies that showcase both supposedly “male” and “female” aspects are seen as destabilizing cis men’s negotiation with their heterosexual status. Trans author and activist Janet Mock highlights how her husband’s sexuality is continually questioned, even though she often passes as a cis woman of color (Mock, 2013). Mock also had bottom surgery at the age of 18, which allowed her work as an exotic dancer, which is a space typically reserved for cis women. This section argues that dating attracts social commentary and urges trans women to portray themselves as transnormative. Trans women who appear as non-transnormative, by not overtly passing or are pre/non operative, are seen as destabilizing heterosexuality because they are not seen as women.

Chapter 3 focuses on the autobiographical account of trans porn performer Tobi Hill-Meyer to argue that feminist porn offers a space for trans women to have empowerment and exercise their desires. While mainstream porn exemplifies the abjection of trans performers, feminist porn prioritizes the authentic desire of trans performers by presenting sexual acts that revolve around non-hegemonic understandings of sex beyond penetration and ejaculation. Trans women’s participation in sex work has been socially and economically sanctioned, partly due to current stigmatization, especially for trans performers of color. Racial stereotypes are heavily entrenched in the perception of trans women sex workers given the exoticization and hypersexualization of women of color. This stereotyping dates back to the 19th century portrayal of South African slave Sara Baartman, which serves as a historical reference point for black sexuality’s assimilation with deviance. The section concludes with two personal accounts from trans women of color sex workers who overall regard their time as positive, but nevertheless comment on the ways race adds another layer of oppression in regards to trans femininity.

When medical transition is used as the predominant way of validating trans women as women, it ignores trans women as complex subjects, and continues to marginalize their navigation in the world. Professor Eliza Steinbock stated at the Netherlands Transgender Film Festival that mainstream trans films attempt to show trans people as more than simply subjects of that transition (Steinbock, 582). Perceiving trans bodies through the primary mode of medical transition assumes the process is linear. This consideration ignores complex narratives and embodiments that constitute and evolve throughout the life of every trans individual. Trans people are “not only surgeries, sad narratives, or murder, but are complex protagonists, moving beyond these stereotypes” (Steinbock, 582). Steinbock argues that trans films should not be regarded as appealing to primarily trans or other minority audiences, but as media that can be of interest to society in general given that every individual, at some point or another, “confronts gender” (Steinbock, 582). Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick argues that seeing the issue of homosexuality through the lens of a minoritizing view falsely limits the scope of the issue to affecting certain individuals with that identification. Instead, she proposes a universalizing view towards homosexuality. Her belief is that there is no such thing as a fixed erotic identity, but rather sexualities exist on a spectrum (Sedgwick, 1). Similarly, this thesis serves to comment on the way transnormative, dimorphic views in regards to sexuality, gender, and representation, do not only negatively impact trans women, but both inform and limit every individual’s life. Fixed, stable, dimorphic conceptions of embodiment, sexuality, and gender identity fail to do justice to the reality of human variability.

Thinking Through Transnormativity

The intent of this research is to give a platform for absent, non-transnormative voices in order to complicate the medico-scientific system, which aims to restrict the complexity of desires and experiences of trans women. Perspectives and practices that are “transnormative” include gender normative, heterosexual, middle-class, white, and able to access gender affirmative methods (surgery and/or hormones). “Non-transnormative” experiences revolve around systemic and interpersonal violence due to an inability to access quality healthcare (Malatino, 140). The reinforcement of transnormative practices was facilitated through a medico-scientific model. This standard developed during the mid-twentieth century as a specific movement in the global north which hinged on the medical establishment’s investment in gender and sexual normativity. The aftermath of this movement continues to reverberate throughout the trans community and benefits predominantly white, heterosexual, passable trans bodies. Conversely, this system fetishizes, silences, and reprimands voices, primarily those of color. The realms of medical science and fetishization do overlap, however their delineation is pertinent to understanding how race, gender, and sexuality are woven into trans stereotypes and existence.

As early as 1910, Europeans began to experiment with sex transformation on animals. These experiments influenced German sexologist Magnus Hirschfield to perform human sex-change operations in the 1920s to early 1930s as a way to reimagine the definition of sex outside of the binary sex model. American historian Joanne Meyerowitz in her book *How Sex Changed*, articulates that Hirschfield’s newly formed definition of sex revolved around the idea that all

humans were bisexual, in that they were partly male and partly female, which revolutionized the preconceived notion of opposite sexes (Meyerowitz, 15). However, the developments in Europe did not truly reverberate throughout America until the debut of ex G.I., transsexual Christine Jorgensen in 1952.

Christine Jorgensen is one of the most lauded transsexuals in American transgender history (Skidmore, 270). Jorgensen was a Danish American born on May 30, 1926 as George William Jorgensen Jr. in the Bronx. By her young adolescence, she was confronted with feelings of disdain when she dressed in masculine clothing. Jorgensen stated, “I was unhappy, I wasn’t like other children... I knew something was wrong” (Abramson & Haskell, 1968). On December 1, 1952, the front page of the *New York Daily News*, was titled, “Ex-GI Becomes Blond Beauty.” In this article, Jorgensen stated in a letter to her parents that, “Those things (human variation) are all a part of life, but we do not accept them and strive through science to answer the great question of ‘Why’- ‘Why did it happen’, where did something go wrong and, last but not least, what can we do to prevent and cure it if it has already happened” (White, 1952). Jorgensen’s rhetoric presents trans bodies as biological conundrums that are best approached with scientific questions that revolve around “prevention” and “curable” measures. In order to answer these questions in regards to treatment for trans women, scientists relied on genitals and gender expression as the main indicators of a person’s sex. This logic was applied to trans women in that if their genitals and/or gender expression revolved around essentialist ideals of femininity, then the transition could be seen as curative. This mindset sets the stage for a medico-scientific regard applied to trans bodies. The English medical term, “transsexual”, which was defined as a person’s request to have a surgical sex change, was coined by David Cauldwell and Harry Benjamin as a result of Jorgensen’s attention in the press (Meyerowitz, 15).

The historical and medical lineage of trans women's bodies in contemporary America seems to surface in the public mind thanks to Jorgensen's assimilation of trans notions of white, feminine beauty with cis, white womanhood. Indeed, Jorgensen's intelligibility and respectability hinged on her portrayal of white, feminine, heterosexual ideals of womanhood. Her story was widely circulated throughout mainstream media sources such as *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times* (Skidmore, 270-271). According to Emily Skidmore, Jorgensen was instrumental in defining the "good transsexual", "articulating transsexuality as an acceptable subject position through an embodiment of the norms of white womanhood with respect to domesticity, respectability, and heterosexuality" (Skidmore, 271).

The nuclear family held a prominent place in the perception of domestic stability. The fathers worked, while the women tended to issues relating to child care and domesticity. The press showcased Jorgensen embodying the role of the dutiful daughter, since her parents publicly supported her. Jorgensen's father went so far as to say his daughter "deserves an award higher than the Congressional Medal of Honor" for pioneering the field of sex reassignment surgery (Skidmore, 275). In 1953, Jorgensen was showcased as participating in domestic work in an *American Weekly* feature, shown cooking in the kitchen with her mother (Skidmore, 275).

Jorgensen also distinguished herself as adhering to norms revolving around respectability. To achieve this, Jorgensen did not deviate from societal or gender norms and showed disdain for cross dressing, homosexuality, and prostitution. Her actions were taken as "respectable" given that she reported dressing like a woman only after the sex on her passport had been changed, instead of after her sex reassignment surgery. She did this in order to avoid endorsing "cross dressing". Additionally, when regarding a prostitute that was put on trial, Jorgensen stated "Those people make me sick...She had her fun – now she has to pay the price"

(Skidmore, 277). Jorgensen's hatred for prostitutes reinforces norms surrounding conservative sexual values. Her view as an object of permissible heterosexual desire is evident in the title "Ex-GI Becomes Blond Beauty", given in the mid-twentieth century, prim blonde women were seen as representative of normative "white womanhood", thus permitted to be desired by men (Skidmore, 273). She reported that "unlike other women I had to become super-female and couldn't have a single masculine trait" (Skidmore, 276). Jorgensen attempted to "sanitize" the common perception of deviant transsexuality, which was strongly associated, in the press at least, with representations of black transsexuals (Skidmore, 271).

One example of this association is evident in the showcasing of black transsexual Delisa Newton. By comparing the coverage Newton received to that of Jorgensen, it becomes clear how integral whiteness was to the perception of Jorgensen as the "good transsexual". The African American press, which gained substantial readership in the early 1950s, treated trans women very differently from the mainstream white coverage that Jorgensen received. An example of this is in the April, 1966 front page coverage of transwoman Delisa Newton in the African American magazine *Sepia*. The magazine offered Newton the opportunity to talk about her desire to transition, and her experiences regarding that transition. Like Jorgensen, Newton articulated her proclivity for the domestic sphere, from recounting her time cooking with her mother to being photographed wearing an apron and holding a broom. However, unlike the predominantly white press outlets, *Sepia* regularly depicted black women who were career oriented and entertainers. Newton understood "the stakes for appearing respectable were much higher than with biological African American women who appeared in *Sepia*" (Skidmore, 291). Nonetheless, she used her platform to air potent criticisms against white hegemonic ideals: "Because I am a Negro it took me twice as long to get my sex change operation as it would have a white person. Because I am a

Negro many doctors showed me little sympathy and understanding. ‘You people are too emotional for such an ordeal,’ one doctor told me” (Skidmore, 292). Newton’s honesty resonated with the primarily African American readership because of their ability to empathize with encounters of white supremacy, even if her identity as a transwoman unsettled them (Skidmore, 292).

The white mainstream media’s coverage of Newton was starkly different from *Sepia*’s. The only other publication that covered Newton was the tabloid *National Insider* in 1965, with the incendiary headlines: “My Lover Beat Me” and “Why I Could Never Marry a White Man” (Skidmore, 292). The *National Insider* had no interest in showing Newton’s domestic tendencies, but rather highlighted her sexual encounters: “Whereas *Sepia* provided Newton the space to articulate her story in her own words,” observes Skidmore, “the editors of the *National Insider* narrated her story for her, shaping it to conform to mid-America’s racialized gender expectations” (Skidmore, 293). Unlike Newton, Jorgensen is regarded as a mainstream pioneer of the early trans woman’s movement. The key difference between Jorgensen and Newton was their race, which is at the center of biases that continue to contribute to the exclusion of trans women of color and trans women who do not embody beauty norms that derive from white womanhood.

Jorgensen’s story was sensational, however it did not garner legitimacy from the medical establishment until 1966, with the announcement that John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore would perform sex reassignment surgeries. The clinic was spearheaded by native New Zealander Dr. John Money. This catalyzed a medical movement centering around trans bodies as legibly white, heterosexual, and passible, while restricting access to treatments to candidates who did not align with those values. This often centered around race as a point of demarcation for those who did or

did not receive treatment. The diagnostic approach to trans bodies was largely due to Dr. Money's background in studying children born with "ambiguous genitalia" (Gill-Peterson, 54). Dr. Money's work led to his conclusion that an intersex child should be quickly assigned a sex after birth, followed by parentally reinforced gender socialization patterns. The assumption that gender identity could be molded based off of genital status was heavily criticized and challenged by the intersex children once they reached adulthood. Hilary Malatino attested to their experience being diagnosed at the age of 16 as intersex and subsequently given Premarin, which contained conjugated estrogen. However, Malatino recounted feeling severely depressed, largely as a side effect of the Premarin. They ceased taking the medication declaring the act as a "refusal of medical tactics of gender normalization aimed at intersex youth and adults; a refusal of the notion that I understand as my corporeal queerness needed to be fixed or remediated" (Malatino, 149). Malatino, in their book chapter "Gone, Missing: Queering and Racializing Absence in Trans & Intersex Archives" argues that "folks whose desires for transformation run counter to hegemonic, white, bourgeois understandings of masculinity and femininity were systematically prevented from accessing technologies of transition, deemed unacceptable candidates or non-compliant patients" (Malatino, 133). As a result, there is a lack of perspective from trans and intersex bodies that did not reinforce normative transitions.

Julian Gill-Peterson argues in their article "Implanting Plasticity Into Sex and Trans/Gender" that Money's incorrect assumption that "the biological body and psychic component of gender are both so plastic at birth and early childhood that they can be transformed by doctors" stemmed from the "historical availability of plasticity in endocrinology" (Gill-Peterson, 55). The concept of plasticity in relation to the human body refers to the susceptibility for human development to be molded, shaped, or modified. Gill-Peterson looked to highlight the

historical trajectory of endocrinology in order to argue how transgender medicine is based in eugenic practices (Gill, Peterson, 48). In the 1950s, Dr. Money and his colleagues coined the term “gender” as a way to “describe the psychological and social dimensions of what had long just been called “sex” (Gill-Peterson, 50). Prior to the classification of gender, human and non-human life was seen as embodying “bisexual” tendencies that was more or less a blend of both sexes (Gill-Peterson, 50). Dr. Money perpetually advocated that gender and sex were malleable until the age of three. A cascade of endocrinological experiments followed and intended to show that manipulating gonadal functions, which regulate sexual characteristics, would alter a person’s sex and gender expression. This evolved into the notion of the “sex change” (Gill-Peterson, 50-51). Given that experiments were tested on animal subjects, and then transposed onto trans bodies, a perception formed in which sex changes were seen as both primitive and subhuman. Gill-Peterson argues that during the mid-twentieth century, endocrinology became a eugenic science, which facilitated the “improvement and “perfection” of the human body, through the hormonal manipulation of sex (Gill-Peterson, 52). In many ways, the “improvement and perfection” directly refers to the ability for a medical solution to a social dilemma in which “a body... doesn’t fit neatly within the parameters of sexual dimorphism” (Malatino, 137). The advancement of the medical establishment resulted in the reciprocal outcomes for trans-led social movements due to their diverging interests, the first desiring normalization/containment, while the latter emphasized the need for diversification/non-conformity.

The first genital surgery performed at Johns Hopkins was on a Male-to-Female (MTF) woman of color by the name of Avon Wilson. In 1966, the *New York Daily News* published a story about this historic event and reported that, “a stunning girl who admits she was a male less than one year ago... underwent a sex change operation at John Hopkins” (Meyerowitz, 220).

John Hopkins had previously handled cases involving intersex conditions, which lent well to the transition to transsexual patients. For many transgendered people, the endorsement from the medical establishment was a major milestone in the transgender movement. In fact, Jorgensen regarded the program at Hopkins as a “verification of our beliefs”, even though in reality, the Hopkins center “turned away almost all applicants for surgery” (Meyerowitz, 221). Nevertheless, their pioneering efforts allowed for the opening of transgender focused medical centers, at University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, and at Stanford University, which established the Gender Identity Clinic — the largest university-run program performing gender confirmation surgeries. In 1969, the result of this nation-wide medical recognition culminated into *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*, written by Richard Green, which outlined procedures on how to treat transsexual patients with both hormone therapy and surgical interventions. With this handbook came the emergence of criteria for gender, and guidelines to determine which patients were to be deemed fit for genital surgery.

The doctor’s evaluations of ideal surgical candidates revolved around several criteria, including a required psychological evaluation, undergoing hormone therapy for at least several months prior to surgery, and a regard for the patients’ future plans, particularly in respect to their employment. This method of evaluation deliberately allowed doctors to “control access to treatment” (Meyerowitz, 225). Doctors favored patients who avoided “exhibitionism” and promised to live “quietly” and showed overt preference for those who would pass as the other sex (Meyerowitz, 225). In some cases, doctors required patients to receive training in “conventional gender stereotypes” (Meyerowitz, 225). In short, doctors “rejected candidates who would not conform after surgery to the dominant conventions of gender and sexuality” (Meyerowitz, 225). The transgender community quickly realized the quest for surgery was an

audition that required a certain performance. There was a particular emphasis on avoiding mentioning certain details about their sex lives, especially if they took pleasure from their pre-operative genitals, or wished to be with same-sexed partners after surgery (Meyerowitz, 226). The word-of-mouth network among transgender people regarding surgery was one of the first instances of grassroots organizing within the transgender community.

One of the first transsexual led organizations COG (Conversion Our Goal or Change: Our Goal), was founded in 1967 by a group of MTFs. The group was primarily comprised of white, lower class transsexuals in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, however the organization disbanded after two years due to lack of financial resources. Many transgender grassroots organization failed to sustain themselves due to a lack of support, however a nationally recognized organization, TAO (Transvestite/Transsexual Action Organization) founded in 1970 by MTF Angela Douglas, urged political entities to endorse trans rights. Douglas petitioned the leftist California Peace and Freedom political party to allow trans people to "determine the uses of one's body, as in sex change operations" and the Socialist Workers' party to demand an end to arrests for crossdressing (Meyerowitz, 238). Douglas also opposed the medical model applied to trans bodies.

Douglas firmly believed that the medico-scientific model casted trans people as agentless patients who should rely on the care of expert doctors. Another nationally recognized organization was the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF), which was created by the philanthropic donation of Female-to-Male (FTM) Reed Erickson. However, unlike TAO, EEF was a major proponent of the medical model regarding trans people and continually supported medical endeavors. Douglas believed EEF endorsed the "pathologization of transsexuals" (Meyerowitz, 239). Ultimately, TAO was foremost organization led by and fighting for

transgender rights. Once coalitions of trans people started to form, there was a deliberate effort to achieve certain goals, such as legally changing forms of identification to reflect gender transitions. Altering forms of identification hinged on the question of how to define sex and gender? The EEF argued that science had altered the definition of sex to include several factors, including gender role and orientation, which derived influenced from Harry Benjamin and John Money (Meyerowitz, 246). EEF distributed pamphlets that informed trans people on current crossdressing laws and information regarding the modification of documentation, which centered around letters from doctors that verified gender confirmation surgeries. The endorsement from the medical establishment allowed for the recognition of trans people within the public domain.

In 1980, the recognition of trans identities within the medical framework gave way to “transsexualism” being deemed a “gender identity disorder” in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. Unfortunately, by the late 1970s, most of the transsexual-led advocacy groups had disintegrated, such as TOA and EEF. The fragmentation was mainly due to lack of resources and support from gay and women’s movements, which moved away from their earlier stance of supporting queer forms of gender. Within the gay movement, drag queens were some of the strongest allies that trans people lost as a result of this shift. Some lesbian rights organizations, such as the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis in 1973, excluded the group’s vice president MTF Beth Elliott on the grounds that, “she did not qualify as a woman” (Meyerowitz, 259). Margo, a MTF in a 1975 article “The Transsexual/Lesbian Misunderstanding” stated, “We are women because we have female gender identities, regardless of our genitals or our adherence or nonadherence to sex roles; in short, we are women because we feel ourselves to be women in our own terms” (Meyerowitz, 261). The pinnacle of trans hatred was seen in Janice Raymond’s book *The Transsexual Empire* published in 1979, which

argued that MTFs “rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves” (Meyerowitz, 260). The isolation of trans people from mainstream gay and women’s movements led to their disintegration, which created space for the authority of medical organizations, such as seen in the creation of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIIGDA).

In 1979, HBIIGDA was formed and mostly comprised of physicians, therapists and researchers to provide standards of care regarding transgender patients, “without organized counterclaims from transsexuals themselves” (Meyerowitz, 255). In response, a new generation of trans people began appearing in films and talk shows as a way to increase trans visibility within public domains. The death of iconic figures such as Christine Jorgensen in 1989 sparked a movement which sought to redefine sex, gender, and sexuality, which is apparent in Sandy Stone’s 1987 essay, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto”.

Stone’s essay argues that “transsexuals” should forgo passing and be consciously “read”, should read oneself aloud, and “write oneself into discourses by which one has been written” (Stone, 16). This request is daring trans people to be “posttranssexual”. Historically, trans bodies have been medicalized, treated, subject to a taxonomy of symptoms, which originated from “transsexualism” being classified by the *American Psychological Association* as a “gender identity disorder”. This diagnosis brought about criteria for gender and gave authority to medical professionals to deem whether or not a person was fit for gender confirmation options.

Membership to the gender of choice was dependent upon transsexual women disavowing their life prior to surgery and, in essence, disassociating themselves from their bodies and ultimately their penises. Stone mentions the “obligatory ceremony” MTF transsexuals performed prior to their surgery called “wringing the turkey’s neck”, which was the “ritual of penile masturbation

just before surgery which was the most secret of secret transitions, given that so natural a desire would be to risk a crash landing; that is, ‘role inappropriateness’ leading to disqualification” (Stone, 11). In essence, the “highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase s/herself, to fade into ‘normal’ population as soon as possible” (Stone, 13). The erasure of trans bodies, which was facilitated through the medico-scientific model, speaks to a specific medical movement. This movement hinged on the assimilation of trans bodies as white, heterosexual, and passable, while excluding candidates that did not align with those values. In response to trans women’s erasure, Stone argues that true and effective discourse for trans people lays outside the boundaries of gender, and suggests thinking of trans bodies as a genre, which is defined as “a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored” (Stone, 14).

The medical and social investment in regulating the sex, genitals, and gender expression of trans bodies is rooted in the disappearance of understanding humans as naturally “bisexual”, or variable, with the replacement of institutional reinforcements of the gender binary. Gill-Peterson argues that “buried in the discourse of sex, gender, and transsexuality is a latent fear that the more medical science can reshape the human body, the less natural its binary phenotypes will appear” (Gill-Peterson, 57). Questions revolving around whether trans people will regret their procedures or if hormone therapy is reversible in children centers around the unsubstantiated theory that humans must embody a certain phenotype of sex and gender. Legal theorist Dean Spade recounted his discussion with psychiatric professionals in order to access transitional services and concluded that, “I need to want to pass as male all the time, and not feel ambivalent about this. I need to be willing to make the commitment to “full-time” maleness or they can’t be sure that I won’t regret my surgery (Spade, 21). Continued investment in the gender

binary portrays trans bodies as directly upending norms surrounding dimorphic gender representations.

Chapter 2

Trans Phobic Violence: The Murder of Larry for being Latisha

Trans bodies are often subjected to violence because they are seen as gender non-normative, as the murder of Latisha “Larry” King demonstrates. The account of this trial, although not in the words of Latisha King, is a testament to how a non-transnormative student of color was murdered due to her non-whiteness, perceived homosexuality, and not passing as a cis woman. Gayle Salamon is interested in this particular case since during the entirety of the trial, Latisha was always referred to as “Larry” because this case was seen as a homophobic, rather than a transphobic hate crime. Salamon argues that we should “resist” seeing this case as a “crush gone wrong” but rather understand “what gets covered and rendered illegible” and offers a different scope of analysis to grapple with what happened in that classroom (Salamon, 4). An analysis of this case will comment on components of trans existences that deal with physical and psychological markers that are assumed to indicate gender, such as dress, and the role of race, in order to inform the ways non-normative bodies are socially policed and chastised.

On February 12, 2008, fifteen-year-old Latisha “Larry” King was shot twice in back of the head during English class by a fourteen-year-old fellow student, Brandon McInerney, at E.O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California. King died in the hospital the following day. *Newsweek* titled the story, “Young, Gay and Murdered in Junior High: A Tale of Bullying, Sexual Identity, and the Limits of Tolerance.” The article portrays the brutal killing as McInerney’s homophobic rage at being asked to be King’s “valentine”; *Newsweek* urged tolerance for same-sex love. Salamon attended the murder trial, which began in June of 2011.

She quickly realized that the *Newsweek* article had inaccurately depicted the murder as resulting from an unrequited crush between a gay and a straight boy. McInerney's lawyers had built their defense around "gay panic", which had been banned in California law, but asserted that "Larry's" romantic advance had filled McInerney with such rage, that violence was justifiable. Feminist theorist Eve Sedgwick has argued that the homosexual panic defense hinges on the false individualizing and pathologizing assumption that hatred of homosexuals (typically by a man) is a private reaction, rather than a response that works in concert with homophobic culture (Sedgwick, 19). Framing McInerney's reaction as a psychological break resulting in violence, as the lawyers did, ignores the systemic nature of homophobia. Furthermore, there was no evidence of sexual aggression. Rather, gender expression was at the crux of this issue given "Larry's" feminine gender was already a panic-inducing provocation" and she had asked her classmates to address her as "Latisha" (Salamon, 5). This case shows how violence against gender-nonconforming and trans people is seen as legitimate, "by characterizing non-normative gender as itself a violent act of aggression and reading the expression of gender identity as itself a sexual act" (Salamon, 5).

A former classmate reported that "Larry" had asked him to be called "Latisha", but the student refused to do so because "Larry" would have to "officially change his name" (Salamon, 21). The ability for a trans person to legally change their documents heavily relies on the backing of the medical establishment, which is not easily accessible to people of color. Latisha's declaration of her name change is arguably what sparked the hatred that led to McInerney's rage. During the trial, "Larry's" race was all but forgotten. The name "Latisha" held racial and gender significance; however, during the proceedings of the trial, "Larry", the gay boy whose race was forgotten, was never referred to as "Latisha", a trans girl of color (Salamon, 22). This erasure

speaks to Latisha's subjection to transmisogynoir, which is defined as the oppression trans women of color face at the "intersection of transphobia, misogyny and antiblackness" (Krell, 237). This term builds off of transmisogyny. Trans activist Julia Serano coined the term transmisogyny to articulate a certain kind of discrimination, "when a trans person is ridiculed or dismissed not merely for failing to live up to gender norms, but for their expressions of femaleness or femininity" (Serano, 14). In effect, trans women are held to the standard of gender assimilation, rather than the ability to express their gender individualistically. However, Elias Krell argues, in "Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?", that current discourses surrounding transmisogyny, including Serano's contributions, continue to omit "race and class and allows white middle-classness to stand in as a universal, greatly diminishing the capacity of transmisogyny to describe the oppression(s) that trans women of color, and Black women in particular, face" (Krell, 232). In response to a lack of engagement with race, activist Moya Bailey developed the term *misogynoir*, which is defined as "the intersection of racism, antiblackness, and misogyny that Black women experience" (Bailey, 2010). The omission of race from Serano's term, transmisogyny, speaks to how Latisha was presented as "Larry" whose race was deemed inconsequential. In addition to race, Latisha's sexual orientation was perceived to be "gay" due to her gender expression.

One student reported that he did not associate with "Larry" because "he was gay". The student justified his assumption that "Larry" was gay because in eighth grade, "he was wearing women's clothing, like heels and stuff like that, and makeup" (Salamon, 9). *Ventura County Star*, a local newspaper, reported that "King dressed in a feminine manner and told friends he was gay" (Salamon, 26). This raises the question: how do we assimilate gender expression and sexual identity, and how does that affect the way King is socially perceived? One of King's

school administrators stated, “we have a student expressing his sexuality through makeup” (Salamon, 29). However, the administrator imprecisely substitutes “gender” for sexuality. The fact that King wore makeup speaks to her gender expression, not her sexuality. The administrator perceived King’s act of wearing makeup as signaling hyperfemininity, which is always sexualized and assumed to be attracting the male gaze. Hence, Salamon’s argument is convincing since King’s gender expression of wearing makeup and appearing “feminine” was taken as a “social event, asking something of others in asserting something about herself, whereas the same logic would stipulate that normative gender identity asks nothing and demands nothing of others” (Salamon, 30). The former is framed as disruptive, while the latter is digestible. Trans bodies are perceived as being the site and catalyst of gender performance through the assumption that their actions seek an audience. The logic of non-normative gender expression as a socially disruptive act is further used to justify King’s murder, essentially concluding that King had a role in her own death. Non-normative gender expression is seen as an act of sexual aggression. However, one of “Larry’s” friends is able to see the distinction between gender expression and sexuality when she testified, “I don’t think Larry is gay. He’s transgendered. It’s a big difference” (Salamon, 20).

The conflation between gender representation and a person’s genitals leads to the basis of justification for violence against trans women, especially those who have not had bottom surgery or do not appear to pass as cis. Trans porn star and activist Drew DeVaux developed the term “cotton ceiling” to refer to the transmisogynistic tendency for trans women, especially those who still have a penis, to be excluded from echelons of cis dominated women and queer spaces given their inability to express femininity. Given DeVaux’s background, she felt the need for the term due to the transnormative conditions of the porn industry. However, this form of transmisogyny

also manifests in terms of violence against trans women given their dismissal of feminine expression. The cotton ceiling unveils two facets of transmisogyny, one of which regards trans women as unable to participate in cis dominated realms of sex, while the other facet portrays trans women as constantly signaling a sexual act, eliciting the seemingly justifiable response of violence. Trans feminist philosopher Talia Mae Bettcher in her article, *Evil Deceivers and Make Believers*, looks at the ways trans people whose “gender representation does not represent their genital status” are labeled as “deceivers” and how that is used to justify transmisogynistic violence (Bettcher, 43). The “trans panic” defense hinges on the notion that the “victims of transphobic violence can be subject to blame shifting through accusations of deception” (Bettcher, 47). This stems from the perception that genitalia are absolute determinants of ones’ sex. If a transwoman has a penis, she must not be a woman. Forcing trans people to verify their genitalia is also a form of sexual assault and abuse (Bettcher, 55). The fascination with genitalia determining someone’s sex as either male or female is rooted in a medical-scientific understanding of sex as dimorphic, however this consideration ignores the biological reality of human variability. Trans people are thus presented with the double bind of either disclosing who they are, and risking an accusation of being a “pretender” or refusing to disclose and possibly being labeled as a “deceiver” (Bettcher, 50). Furthermore, in order to receive gender affirming surgeries, trans people must adhere to disavowing genitals that would not match their desired gender representation. The need for trans women to “disclose” their identity is ubiquitous in the realm of dating, which is another aspect of trans life that is subject to normative interventions regarding sexuality and genital surveillance by prospective romantic and sexual partners.

Openly Desiring Trans Women: Does That Make Me Gay?

Amy Marvin stated the general definition of chasers as “someone who encounters trans people through a reductive sexualized lens, usually by focusing on their trans status at the expense of how a trans person wants to be presented in the world” (Marvin, 4). The notion of a chaser feeds into rhetoric that serves to fetishize trans women’s bodies. Writer and activist Christin Milloy in her *Slate* article, “Beware the Chasers: “Admirers” Who Harass Trans People”, outlines a pattern that many trans women face in which cis men have a fascination with trans women bodies that are pre or non-operative, given that they are seen as situated outside of the category of “woman” (Milloy). Milloy found that “chasers”, typically men, will fixate on her genitals, given that she is non-operative. She recounted a prospective partner told her, “you are the cutest boy I’ve ever met”, which meant “he was completely fixated on the idea of my penis and how I was different than other women” (Milloy). A simple equation Milloy articulated to explain a “chaser” mentality was $Women = (You - x)$. Solve for x . Essentially, trans women will never be seen as women “unless body parts mean nothing to him” (Milloy). Marvin proposes the chaser continuum which places a chaser’s behavior on a spectrum which consists of “Everyday Chasing Behaviors”, which includes sexual fascination and curiosity during everyday encounters, “Extended Chasing Behaviors”, which extends sexual fascination into public and/or professional spheres, and “Cultural Production Chasing”, which involves reducing or excluding trans experiences from pieces of cultural production about trans people (essay, poem, etc.) (Marvin, 12). The fascination with trans women’s bodies that are seen as showcasing both “male” and “female” aspects is an outlet for exoticization. The fetishization of trans women’s bodies directly inhibits their ability for self-expression that is devoid of sexual objectification.

In many ways, society has not sanctioned men to openly desire trans women. Trans rights activist and author Janet Mock articulated that men are told to keep their attraction to trans women in clandestine domains of porn and sex work (Mock, 2013). Mock recounted “my husband, Aaron, recognized me as a woman, and my being trans did not negate my womanhood”, however he is continually questioned regarding his sexuality (Mock, 2013). Given that trans women tend to not be perceived as women, men who are involved with trans women are seen as crossing a line that could jeopardize their heterosexuality. Women who do not appear to “pass”, unlike Mock, are even less likely to participate in public displays of desire from cis men, and are subjected to transmisogyny. An analysis of Mock’s account of her time as a dancer showcases how trans women’s ability to “pass” as transnormative allows them to participate in certain realms of society that are typically reserved for cis women.

Janet Mock has published memoirs and dedicates her website to her experiences transitioning and issues trans women face. At the age of 16, Mock began sex work in order to pay for health care that her family could not afford (Mock, 2013). Mock has never shied away from her past as a sex worker, and in fact has used her platform to argue “I do not believe using *your* body – often marginalized people’s only asset, especially in poor, low-income, communities of color – to care after yourself is shameful. What I find shameful is a culture that exiles, stigmatizes, and criminalizes those engaged in underground economies like sex work as a means to move past struggle to survival” (Mock, 2013). Mock’s idolized figures predominantly worked in the sex trade, therefore she “correlated trans womanhood and sex work” and “perceived sex work as a rite of passage” (Mock, 2013). However, given the stigmatization of sex work, she recounts, “Because I learned sex work is shameful, and correlated trans womanhood and sex work, I was taught that trans womanhood is shameful” (Mock, 2013).

At the age of 18, Mock underwent gender confirmation surgery in Thailand. Shortly after, she started working at Club Nu, which was a strip club in her native state of Hawaii at the age of 21. She found her time as a stripper helped build her confidence as a woman. Mock states, “Dancing in the club gave me the greatest confidence in my body, particularly enabling me to appreciate the aesthetics of my vagina. I had feared that mine did not look “normal”, as if there was a standard for all vaginas. It was at Club Nu that I was exposed to vaginas from all walks of life. No two were identical, yet all belonged to women” (Mock, 17). Mock revealed that her “stealth”, or ability to pass, meant “blending in at all costs” (Mock, 17). This does not mean to assert that Mock was trying to pass, in fact she takes issue with the term and believes “it promotes a false impression that trans women are engaging in a process through which we are passing ourselves as cisgender women – which we are not” (Mock, xix). The realm of exotic dancing is largely preserved for cis women; nonetheless, Mock was able to occupy this space because of her ability to pass as heterosexual and feminine, both aesthetically and anatomically. One of her greatest fears as a dancer was that a patron would recognize her and reveal her trans identity.

When working with clients, she felt desired. She recounts, “Sex was not for sale; intimacy was” (Mock, 21). This intimacy with clients was in essence “selling the girlfriend experience” (Mock, 22). Arguably, the realm of sex work is a clandestine setting in which tabooed desires can be appreciated and explored. Mock has claimed her past, but is able to distance herself from hypersexualized tropes that inform the way trans women of colors bodies are thought of, largely because of her ability to pass. Whereas in the realm of dating, trans women are encouraged to pass and appear transnormative, the sphere of mainstream porn deliberately fetishizes non-transnormative bodies. Trans, multiracial performer, Tobi Hill-Meyer,

recounts her experience in sex work and highlights how non-transnormative bodies are dehumanized and restricted from receiving pleasure within mainstream porn. However, she finds pleasure and agency once she starts directing her own productions. Additionally, specific attention will be given to trans women of color within the porn industry given the somewhat double oppression they face as stigmatized sex workers and trans women of color.

Chapter 3

Trans Women Fucking: Porn, Sex Work, and Representation

Dr. Mireille Miller-Young argues that the “sex panic” surrounding porn is a way society attempts to avoid the conversation of how sexual morality should be perceived in a democratic society (Lee, 2015). Dr. Miller-Young’s foreword in genderqueer porn star Jiz Lee’s book, *Coming Out Like a Porn Star: Essays on Pornography, Protection, and Privacy*, lays the foreground for why sex work has been an area of such contention and further asserts that the performers “challenge the notion that porn labor is bad and should be hidden, and instead insist on openness, pride, and vocal resistance to the status quo” (Lee, 11). The social stigma surrounding porn affects performer’s lives, aspirations, and the degree to which their personal and private lives are able to be intertwined. Lee shares their insight on the ways porn can be self-expressive and pleasurable for the performer by stating, “Porn is an extension of my own sexual expression, a blend of art and documentation” (Lee, 15). However, there has been a constant debate by scholars on the degree to which sex can be regarded as a source of empowerment.

The height of this debate resulted in the Sex Wars of the 1980s. The point of contention centered around anti-porn feminists arguing that pornography perpetuated misogyny and violent treatment of women. Anti-porn feminist Robin Morgan stated that, “Porn is the theory, rape is the practice” (Taormino, 10). In effect, porn signified and perpetuated rape. The term pornography derives from the Greek work “porne” which means whore. Therefore, anti-porn feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin, centered their argument on the fact that the term porn cannot

be separated from its' etymological roots and therefore women in porn can only be regarded as whores in the patriarchal porn industry (Dworkin, 298). The frequent policing of sex workers by law enforcement, as well as transness being conflated with sex work, has underpinnings in the social abjection of sex workers (Rev & Geist, 113).

Pro-porn feminists have argued that feminist porn can be a site for women's empowerment and exercise of sexual pleasures. In 1984, a model of feminist pornography was produced by the creation Candida Royalle's Femme Productions. The basis of feminist porn revolves around the model of a regard for the performers, storylines, a high production value, female pleasure, and romance (Taormino, 11). Therefore, in order to examine trans women's pleasure within the realm of sex work, it is necessary to confront the ways women's sexual desires blossom within feminist frameworks. In order to have an understanding of non-transnormative identity within the realm of sex work, it is pertinent to engage with personal stories from trans sex workers, such as multiracial trans activist Tobi Hill-Meyer. Hill-Meyer sought to diversify trans representation in the media and offer an alternative to the "overwhelmingly exploitative and exotic ways that trans women's sexuality is often portrayed" (Hill-Meyer, 176).

Sex work has been a realm in which trans women's participation has been socially and economically sanctioned, partly due to the fact that the realm of sex work is already socially stigmatized. The expression "walking while trans" embodies the idea that transgender women, particularly women of color, are inherently seen as sex workers by police (Rev and Geist, 113). Along that vein, "transgender women cannot walk down the street without being stopped, harassed, verbally, sexually, and physically abused and arrested, regardless of what they are doing at the time... This relentless harassment on the basis that transness is conflatable with sex

work and projects social stigma about sex work onto the trans community” (Rev and Geist, 113). The ways trans bodies are policed as suspects upholds the notion that trans women are social spectacles operating in an abject sphere of society. The criminalization of sex workers constricts the space in which trans women can experience pleasure and maintain a profession that allows them to access medical transitional procedures that are otherwise financially impossible. In order to mediate this social stigma that trans women sex workers face, scholars Nihil Rev and Fiona Maeve Geist in their article, “Staging the Trans Sex Worker”, suggest that in order to move beyond the abstract concept of trans sex workers, it is pertinent to understand concrete and contextualized understandings of the issues trans sex workers face (Rev & Geist, 114). The mainstream usage and hypersexualization of trans women starkly contrasts with the transnormative portrayal of Christine Jorgensen. However, solely depicting sex workers in terms of poverty, exclusion, and suffering strips away their agency and lacks the intervention from trans women sex workers. Giving voice to trans women sex workers, such as Tobi Hill-Meyer, troubles the seemingly inherent relationship between trans sex work and trans hypersexuality (Rev & Geist, 116).

Tobi Hill-Meyer began her career in porn in order to finance her journey to Camp Trans, which is an annual trans activist training and community space. Camp Trans was formed in response to trans women’s exclusion from the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival in 1991. Hill-Meyer recounts the basic function of the nude-photoshoot, followed by a 5-10 minute film, was “maintaining an erection and orgasming on command” (Hill-Meyer, 176). Prior to the shoot, she doubted it would be an “empowering” experience, and it wasn’t; however, she notes, “it was the only work environment I’ve ever had where I was out as trans and was never mis-pronounced or misgendered.” (Hill-Meyer, 176). The production, she felt, was a “very uncomfortable, unsexy

situation... “I wasn’t allowed to be sexy the way I would be with my own lovers or partners... I’m a butch dyke and my sex life has never focused much on penetration, but for the shoot I had to shave myself, put on stockings and heels and implicitly consent to being labeled a horrible slur, ‘shemale’” (Hill-Meyer, 176). It is common for trans women to be marketed in mainstream porn under slurs such as “tranny/shemale”, which comes with certain expectations such as “wearing makeup and high heels, shaving one’s legs, appearing traditionally feminine, getting and keeping a strong erection, ejaculating, and either giving or receiving penetration” (Hill-Meyer, 178). The tendency for mainstream media to prescribe femininity to trans sex workers builds upon an argument in *Whipping Girl* by Serano, that nearly all depictions of trans women perpetuates the assumption that they want to achieve a stereotypical feminine appearance and gender role (Serano, 41). The conclusion of the session, which is seen as the standard in mainstream porn, was to ejaculate, which she recounts as being “stressful” given her discomfort. Additionally, most trans women are unable to ejaculate. Hill-Meyer articulated that the ability for trans women to ejaculate is about as un/common as cis women’s ability to do so. Overall, the experience left her “freaked out” and “shaking” so badly that she could not drive herself home. This experience led to the self-realization that there was no place in mainstream porn for someone like herself, “someone with short hair and unshaved legs wearing a dapper vest and fedora while packing a strap on and engaging in non-genitally focused sex”, ultimately the mainstream industry “sacrificed authenticity for convention” (Hill-Meyer, 178). The desire to have authentic portrayals of trans women’s experience in porn led Hill-Meyer to feminist and queer porn outlets.

Hill-Meyer’s exposure to trans performers in feminist porn came in the form of several trans men, but only a few trans women, who were assumed to be cis. This by no means is meant

to invalidate their accomplishments, however it spoke to the lack of diversity within the genre. The disparity between trans men and women performers harkens back to the origin of feminist porn within the queer women's community. As previously mentioned, several cis women's movements excluded trans women because they were not regarded as women. This exclusion is due to transmisogyny, which encompasses both transphobia and misogyny. In response, Hill-Meyer decided to direct her own film "Doing it Ourselves: The Trans Porn Project", and won the emerging film maker award at the 2010 Feminist Porn Awards. *The Center for Pleasure and Sexual Health* offered a raving review of Meyer's film in that she truly included various genders, sexual acts, and representations of trans embodiment, and all performers were trans women. The review praised Hill-Meyer for showing that, "The fact of the matter is that lots of different people can have lots of different bodies and use words like "vulva" or "vagina" in place of what others may call a "cock" or "penis"; what is important to know is that it's an individual's right to identify as themselves, owning their parts how they feel is appropriate for them (Fitzgerald et. al, 2015). Hill-Meyer's work is crucial for trans women's ability to navigate into the narrative within feminist porn discourse. In order to diversify her film, she intentionally cast performers of underrepresented demographics, especially trans women with a range of surgical statuses. Instead of porn being a site of abjection for trans women, it can be a field that embraces non-transnormative forms of embodiment and sexual pleasures.

The experiences recounted by Hill-Meyer in her first experience with porn is horrific, but predictable once understood within the context of trans women's existence within a medico-scientific framework. Additionally, Hill-Meyer is not an academic, but can be thought of as a theorist due to her honest and transparent recounting of her traumatic experiences. Mainstream porn perpetuates non-transnormative perceptions of gender and desire, by means of fetishizing

trans women's bodies which have not adhered to transnormative standards. This is apparent in Hill-Meyer's account of how she was expected to embody the slur of "shemale". This slur is rooted in perceptions that trans women who have not had genital reconstruction, as seen with Hill-Meyer, ought to embody both extremes of the gender dichotomy. This involves the expectation of presenting oneself as feminine, but also able to maintain an erection and ejaculate. This oxymoronic expectation highlights mainstream porn's investment, much like the medical establishment, in gender and sexual normativity, and the suppression of complex, non-normative desires.

Another example of the malignant treatment trans women face in mainstream porn is highlighted by performer Chelsea Poe. In her interview on Peepshow Podcast with hosts Jesse and PJ Sage, she sheds light on the experiences working on mainstream trans sites, and explained how mainstream sites take advantage of trans people who are homeless and in economic despair. Mainstream porn was also where Poe was labeled by trans slurs such as "shemale" and "tranny". Poe started a petition for mainstream cis sites to remove trans slurs and acquired over 3,000 signatures. However, this did not deter the companies. In fact, this action "black listed" her from mainstream trans porn sites. In response to this, Poe decided she would start making her own films. She regards her works as true collaborative pieces of art. She utilizes trades which allows performers to negotiate compensation and the disbursement of their content on their own terms. She has found that this collaboration mitigates the exploitative measures she encountered in mainstream porn. Her target audience is queer people and she deliberately selects queer videographers, directors, and editors, given that she believes they best understand her vision. She calls this a "queer gaze". She believes ethical porn can be financially feasible if their overhead is low, and when performers utilize trades.

Racial stereotypes are also heavily entrenched in the perception of trans women sex workers given the exoticization and hypersexualization of women of color. Whereas a majority of white, trans women's bodies were built upon preexisting ideals of feminine submissiveness, black women's bodies, in particular, have been a site for exoticization and violence. A notable example of misogynoir in the form of the aesthetic juxtaposition of black women and sexual desire, dates back to the 19th century image of Sara Baartman. Examining the story and treatment of Baartman serves to outline how black women's sexuality was subjugated and made perverse by classifying Baartman's genitalia as abnormal to the human species.

Sara Baartman was born in South Africa in 1789 where she lived until she was sold into slavery and taken to be displayed to crowds in Europe. Dutch colonists were particularly interested in her genitalia and large, protruding buttocks. Baartman was regarded as someone of a different species with a "primitive" sexual appetite and genitalia, which led to the belief that black women copulated with apes (Gilman, 213). She was marketed at freak shows and upon her death in 1815, her skeleton was dissected and her genitals were preserved and remained on display at the Muse de L'Homme in Paris until 2002. Historian Sander Gilman in his piece *Black Bodies, White Bodies*, accounts that, "If their (people of color) sexual parts could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that the blacks were a separate, lower, race as different from the European as the proverbial orangutan" (Gilman, 216).

The story of Sara Baartman has had continued implication for women of color given that visual representations are seen as the primary sources in which we perceive and understand the world around us (Gilman, 204). The perception of black sexuality as deviant and exotic continues to affect black women, which inherently affects trans women of color, particularly those who participate in sex work. Black feminist bell hooks in *Black Looks* articulated that

Gilman's article showcased how whites sexualized black bodies in order to distance themselves from sexualization. Therefore, black women's bodies served as an icon for all sexual behavior, which was seen as deviant (hooks, 52). Sara Baartman serves as a historical reference point in which genitalia is fetishized and pathologized. According to Gilman, the "black female thus comes to serve as an icon for black sexuality in general", which can be assumed to be deviant and primitive (Gilman, 212).

According to Dr. Jennifer Moorman, who is both an artist and pornographer, alt-porn "originated as a form of online, amateur, independent media production in opposition to the mainstream commercial porn industry", and can encompass a realm where sex and art are intertwined (Moorman, 30). Dr. Moorman argues that this anti-mainstream ethos serves to challenge legitimized and racialized modes of porn production. Moorman addresses racialized rhetoric in mainstream porn, such as scenes entitled "Big Black Dick" and "Tight White Pussy" which serve to reinforce miscegenation taboos. However, Moorman uses the example of alt-porn filmmaker Joanna Angel's rhetoric of "Big Black Dicks and Tattooed Chicks" which overtly acknowledges problematic racial dynamics, and offers the recognition of racism as hooks had proposed (Moorman, 38).

Trans Canadian researcher Tor Fletcher, who identifies as a trans man and has engaged in sex work, investigated trans sex workers' negotiation with sex, gender, and non-normative desire. In order to accomplish this, Fletcher gives voices to trans women sex workers. Fletcher recounts the experiences of two trans women of color sex workers Farah and Monica in Ontario, Canada. Farah recounted how most men seek her out due to her trans identity, and she entices men given that she still has a penis (Fletcher, 68). Farah also noted that most straight male clients are interested in trans women sex workers rather than trans men because sex with a trans man

would destabilize their heterosexual identification. Farah states, “You have a bit of an edge or whatever, but on the flip side you have a lot of rejection too, right? Like disclosure and all that stuff and questions, and, you know about your body... I assume they don’t ask ciswomen all these questions about their bodies, right? (Fletcher, 68). This harkens back to prior discussion of trans bodies as a site of instability regarding sex, gender, and sexuality. However, Farah appreciates benefits of being a trans sex worker in that cis women in their industry realize that trans sex workers occupy a niche, sought after market. Therefore, Farah experiences economical and personal benefits, but has been in situations where she has felt unsafe due to her race (Fletcher, 71).

Farah’s coworker, Monica shared similar sentiments in that there are negative, but primarily positive experiences as a sex worker. Monica shared, “Trans is a taboo erotic form, which the opposite sex finds intriguing... Trans women will always be sexualized in society, which can be a good thing or bad thing depending on the individual” (Fletcher, 70). Therefore, Monica is redirecting trans as a taboo erotic form from a site of abjection to one that stimulates interest and commerce within the realm of sex work. Monica also gained financial stability and appreciates how trans women in the sex industry share a sense of comradery. She finds her work as an outlet to meet people and serves as a form of personal validation given that trans women sex workers are seen as sexually desirable by their clients. However, Monica is greatly attuned to how her race adds “another layer of oppression” in that she describes “police regularly targeting her for being brown and that some clients have been aggressive or tried to dominate her because she is a racialized sex worker” (Fletcher, 69). Both Monica and Farah’s experiences as trans women of color sex workers gives insight and validates the notion that sex work can be a site of

pleasure and financial stability. However, their narratives comment on the ways trans femininity is subjected to additional scrutiny when working in concert with race.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The main movements of this thesis encompass the biographical and first-hand accounts of trans women's experiences that lie outside the realm of normative notions of sexuality, gender expression, and forms of embodiment. Centering these experiences around the concept of non-transnormativity serve to examine trans bodies which were not gender normative, heterosexual, middle-class, white, and did not readily have access to gender affirmative methods, such as surgery and/or hormones. Representations of non-transnormativity are often neither prioritized, nor read as socially significant.

The constant threat of violence that trans women, especially women of color, face in terms of violence perpetrated against them, is relevant and by no means negligible. The murder of Latisha King showcases the racialized nature of transphobic violence. The societal repulsion of trans women that do not pass as cis, but attempt to embody trans femininity, is driven by the supposed belief that trans people occupy space as either "deceivers" or "make believers" (Bettcher). This dualistic view ignores a wide breath of trans women that do not wish to pass, but rather insist on being seen. Authentic trans visibility comes in the form of partners, cis or otherwise, who openly desire trans women.

Recounting the experiences of trans women, such as Janet Mock, in regards to their experience with visibility, highlighted how she was able to pass in a cis environment as an exotic dancer, yet was still confronted with issues of needing to feel authentic. She particularly worried about her medically constructed vagina and feared it would not appear as normal. However, her

time as a dancer taught her that every vagina is unique, as is every woman. Her epiphany crystalized the notion that trans women are allowed to occupy diverse forms of embodiment, and this awareness does not diminish their ability to be regarded as women.

The final section centered around trans women sex workers. As previously articulated by Janet Mock, many trans women are aware of the correlation between trans womanhood and sex work, primarily based on financial need. While this is the case for some trans sex workers, there is also a space within this field where trans women derive both empowerment and pleasure. Tobi Hill-Meyer's experience in mainstream porn shows the incorrect assumption that trans women want to achieve a stereotypical feminine appearance and gender role. In feminist porn, Hill-Meyer was able to directly respond to this assumption by directing and producing content that showed trans women's right to identify themselves and have ownership over their bodies. An element that further complicates assumptions surrounding trans women sex workers is the element of race. Through the personal experiences of trans women of color sex workers Farah and Monica, there was a predominantly positive regard to their careers, however they both felt racialized and subjected to another layer of scrutiny and oppression. This speaks to the intersectional aspect of identities.

Transnormativity, in many ways, serves to stifle the desire and sexuality of trans women. Genital reconstruction surgeries operate under the promise of viable treatment options that will allow trans people to function, in their desired gender, in a society that continually diminishes trans existences. Trans women are aware of their inferiority in relation to cis women, no matter their methods of transition. However, this consciousness is rarely discussed given that it could jeopardize access to treatment. However, trans essayist and critic Andrea Chu Long revealed her truth in her *New York Times* opinion piece titled, "My New Vagina Won't Make Me Happy".

Chu conveys that she will soon be getting bottom surgery. She considers how her body will see her new vagina as a “wound” that will take months to recover from and need constant monitoring. She also expresses the false perception people have of those that transition, which is that “people transition because they think it will make them feel better, but it won’t” (Chu, 2018). However, Chu notes that the medical industry holds the power to determine what will be in the best interest of the patient in hopes to minimize their pain, but argues that “negative passion, self-loathing, shame, and regret are as much as human right as universal health care, or food”. Chu concludes that “there are no good outcomes in transition. There are only people, begging to be taken seriously” (Chu, 2018). Chu’s experience shows how the medical establishment continually holds the power to regulate access to treatment.

Regarding trans bodies outside the sphere of the medico-scientific construction of sexuality and desire results in positive implications. Such outcomes include offering a platform for trans women to articulate how they experience pleasure, in concert with their sense of embodiment. An example of this is trans student Mira Bellwether’s Zine “Fucking Trans Women: A Zine About The Sex Lives of Tran Women”. This source is written for, by, and about the sex lives of trans women. It is meant to serve as a resource for how trans women can have good sex. This involves looking at trans bodies from an anatomical perspective in order to derive sensation points on the body. This perception allows trans women to understand how to have pleasurable sexual experiences that do not necessarily involve having an erection. This zine stemmed from Bellwether’s belief that there was a lack of information on how trans women view their bodies, which can lead to trans people and prospective partners not knowing how to pinpoint pleasure. This source highlights trans women as sexual subjects and reflects on how trans women experience pleasure. For example, a pre or non-operative trans woman may not be

able to or even want to attain an erection. A possible reason for this is the potency of testosterone blocking hormones, however this should not be viewed as an impasse in terms of access to desire, but rather a facet of life that trans women and their partners should be equipped to navigate. Bellwether extensively highlights that, “soft penises are one of the most neglected subjects in studies of sexuality” and are continually desexualized (Bellwether, 27). Framing erect, rock-hard penises as the standard for erotic function serves as highly “unimaginable” and ignores the sexual acts of pre and non-operative trans women (Bellwether, 27). In fact, Bellwether openly discusses her penis and states, “My body is a woman’s body and part of it is my penis, a woman’s penis” (Bellwether, 33). Bellwether admits that having a “woman’s penis” has made her life more difficult in certain ways, however she has never hated her penis. The ability to imagine a “woman’s penis” is achieved once sexuality, gender, and desire are uncoupled. In effect, deconstructing the “monolithic transsexual”, which attempts to separate trans people from their genitals when they are pre/non operative (Steinbock, 156). Furthermore, Professor Steinbock attests to the many ways porn is able to delink sexuality, gender, and desire, especially when trans women filmmakers “challenge narratives of forced feminization and Tribadism by claiming erotic space and flirting with becoming fetishes for a cisgender or transgender gaze” (Steinbock, 156). The political strategy behind diversifying trans women’s portrayal in porn aims to actively replace fetishization with desire.

The medico-scientific construction of trans women’s bodies serve to produce trans bodies that assimilated, rather than diversified, the conceptualization surrounding gender, sexuality, forms of embodiment, and ultimately, womanhood. The intent of this research was to complicate the medico-scientific construction of womanhood, which aims to restrict the complexity of non-normative desires and embodiments, in order to argue that the term “woman” is beautifully

distinct and concretely undefinable. Julia Serano in her book chapter “On Being a Woman”, aptly asserts “Instead of pretending that all women share the same experience, that we are one and the same, let’s make the word “woman” a perpetual agent of change. Instead of repeating history by chaining ourselves to one specific definition or concept, let’s make the word “woman” a celebration of each of our uniqueness” (Serano, 39).

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Schreyers Honors College of Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania
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EXPERIENCE

Eurasia Foundation US-Russia Social Exchange Program Intern, Washington, D.C. 2018

- Drafted a variety of technical documents and assisted with arranging international exchanges
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Armenian Assembly of America, Terjenian-Thomas Assembly Intern, Washington, D.C. 2018

- Lobbied members of the Congress and Senate on issues pertinent to Armenia

Dining Commons Employee, Penn State University, State College, Pennsylvania 2015 - 2017

- Certified to abide by food safety guidelines and completed sexual harassment training
- Tasks included directing fellow crew members, meal preparation, and food distribution

COMMUNITY SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Cor Unum Food Shelter - Lawrence, MA 2013 - Present

- Assist in preparing and cleaning up meals for economically disadvantaged persons
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Captain and Former President of Penn State Women's Rugby Club 2016 – 2017

- Tasks include communicating with parents and staff
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- Plan community service events

ATHLETICS

Pennsylvania State University 2014 - Present

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