Where does the sex go? Excavating sexuality in trans studies' early years

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the question of sexuality in trans studies' formative years (1990s to mid-2000s). This question – the relationship between trans and sexuality – is one that has been carried out in many discourses throughout the 20th century. However, there has been little consideration given to the knowledge production around transness within humanities scholarship (as opposed to medical or psychotherapeutic), and how the relationship between trans and sexuality is conceptualised in that space. This thesis addresses this space, considering how trans studies in different modes addresses sexuality, what possibilities it sees for sexuality and how it understands sexuality in relation to transness and gender. It addresses this through two sites, one of which (*The Transgender Studies Reader*) represents the dominant narrative of the field and the second (*TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*) which represents a narrative that has since been lost from trans academic discourses. Through these sites, this thesis argues that over this period we see trans studies' scope for sexuality narrowing, and some earlier modes of talking about sexuality foreclosed, particularly in terms of the potential for a trans politics that includes sexuality. The figurations of transmasculinity and transfemininity in the field, it argues, are crucial in this process of defining the scope of sexuality, delimiting both what can be said and the centrality that sexuality can take in the field. Further, this thesis argues that at both sites we can read resonances in the approach to sexuality with the site's feminist contexts. This usefully allows us to move the question of the relationship of "trans" and "feminism" into more productive ground than the in/exclusion model that dominates the literature. Trans studies and feminisms, it argues, can often be found to share discursive limits, and this can be seen in conceptions of transness, sexuality and race.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 29995 words
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Signed: Brell Wilson-Morris

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1. An introduction to sexuality and trans studies

1.1 Two portraits of a transfag drag hag as a young man

Louis (Lou) Sullivan has become a central feature of recent transgender history in the US, widely recognised for his contribution to building FTM community in the 1980s and 90s, and for his role in persuading medical and psychiatric professionals working with transgender people to accept the possibility of gay FTMs and the plausibility of gay FTM lives. [1] To begin backgrounding this thesis and its central concern with the treatment of sexuality in transgender studies, I want to start by discussing two different accounts of Lou's life published two decades apart. The first is Susan Stryker's essay "Portrait of a transfag drag hag as a young man: The activist career of Louis G. Sullivan" (1999), and the second is *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan* (2019), the diaries upon which Stryker's "Portrait" is also based.

In her biographical essay, Stryker explores Sullivan's activism, building FTM networks and advocating for gay FTMs within medical and psychiatric institutions. She gives an account of Sullivan as an activist within the medical establishment that he worked to reform by refusing the heterosexuality that it tried to push on him. This is where Stryker's discussion of his sexuality largely remains, in his demands that medical and psychiatric institutions no longer see homosexuality as grounds for denying claims to FTM identity and medical access. One of the few moments where Lou's sexuality takes a different mode in the story is in what Stryker describes as an uncharacteristic "orgiastic fling" in San Francisco in the summer of 1980: "After being on testosterone for over six months and completing his mastectomy, Sullivan had spent that summer revelling in his new-found ease in passing as a gay man. He frequented San Francisco's many gay sex clubs and bathhouses, taking special pleasure in sucking off any number of men in 'glory holes'" (Stryker 1999b, 75). That summer, she explains, is likely the summer that he was exposed to HIV, eleven years before he died from an AIDS-related illness. In Stryker's narrative arc, where Sullivan's "revelling" in his changing body becomes so closely tied to a sexuality which is so closely tied to his death, it becomes hard to see much glory in the glory holes. Stryker's "Portrait" tells us that Lou was a trans man, an important one, who used the last ounces of energy in his life to help trans men build community and

[1] FTM is an acronym, standing for female-to-male. Although the term has largely fallen out of contemporary academic and activist discourse, I use it here both to reflect the understanding of transmasculinity which Sullivan relates to in his own life and because I find it quite charming.

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challenge the heteronormative expectations of the gender identity "experts" who refused to believe that trans men could be (or should be allowed to be) gay. The story that she tells is an important one, but sexuality is confined to a singular mode, an identity that prompts Lou's activism, and his death, but what else sexuality might mean is not the story that she is telling. When I first read Stryker's "Portrait", I wasn't that excited by it. As someone who has been around the trans block a few times (and with his nose in a book the whole time walking), it told me nothing about transness, or American trans history, that I didn't already know. As such, I did not find myself much interested in Lou, until I was gifted a copy of his own account of his life: *We Both Laughed In Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan, 1961-1991.*

We Both Laughed In Pleasure was simply nothing like what I had come to expect from a trans text around sexuality. While the general structure of Stryker's "Portrait" seemed accurate (she based it on these diaries, almost two decades before their publication), what I took from it was completely different.

Lou breaks all the "rules" of how trans people are supposed to talk about sexuality, and its relation to transness. For starters, he is having the best time. His first trip to the beach after top surgery is with his extended family – his sisters, their husbands, and some nephews. Describing the other men at the beach, he writes:

> I watched the young men and I felt so attractive, even though I still have to put tape over my scars to keep the sun off them. Who cares anyway. I was still one of the best looking guys around… Thereafter [upon identifying a group of older gay men at the beach] I put on a little show for them and they watched as I pranced around, sunning myself, oiling myself, combing my hair, towelling dry. (Sullivan 2019, 275)

His joy spirals off the page, but it is not just his changed body that he's thrilled with but his changed body being looked on, enjoyed, by other gay men. He has no concern about his scar tape, his only concern is being the sexiest man on the beach and being seen to be that by gay men. In Lou's embodiment of masculinity, there is always some element of this – it is always an openly sexualised, overtly gay masculinity that he desires. Relatively early in his diaries, while still living as a transvestite, he writes: "Both Loren & Liz [two friends] asked why I buttoned the top button of my shirts all the time & I told them cuz that's how J [his partner of many years] does it & I like it, it's almost like a fetish to be like him, to be all the beautiful things I love about him" (ibid., 127). Similarly, the way he talks about starting testosterone is

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also always tingling with an excitement for sexuality. He writes: "I have begun to think of those damn hormones & have stopped fearing them. The changes would be so erotic to me - to think I'd get a boy's voice!" (ibid., 130). Even a change that is ostensibly not that sexual—vocal pitch—is erotic to him. The moments where Lou writes the most about the possibility of hormones are always also moments of sexual desire, of being a different kind of desirer than he currently is, or of embodying that desire differently. Recounting another conversation with J, he writes "[J] [t]old me he always told people he has a "man," that he can't call me his girlfriend. That he wanted me to be his boyfriend & seduce & fuck him. I began thinking hormones, hormones, I want them so bad, I could be his man then" (ibid., 136). Lou describes a gendered and sexual existence thoroughly drenched in each other. They are hard to pry apart, and it becomes difficult to see why we would *want* to separate them.

Similarly, where Lou discusses what would now be explained in terms of the resolutely desexualised state of "gender dysphoria" always in relation to his romantic/sexual context:

> I've said it before & it's becoming true again this time. Whenever I'm alone (i.e., without a boyfriend) my crossdressing becomes more serious & constant. In my search for the perfect male companion, I find myself. In my need for a man in my bed, I detach myself from my body and my body becomes his… I catch the hungry eyes of another beautiful youngman, I reconsider male hormones–trying to remember why I decided against them before. (Sullivan 2019, 209)

He takes the term "youngman" from John Rechy's gay classic *City of Night* (a book to which he returns time and again throughout his life), applying it to himself and those whose eye he catches. This gendered term, his model of masculinity (or his "gender identity" although he never uses the term), is Rechy's term for his protagonist, the young male hustler at the heart of *City of Night*, a term that is gender and sexuality and sex in equal measure.

While cultivating FTM community as in Stryker's account, Lou also builds his life in the wider gay community in San Francisco. He joins a therapy group for "'gay men with hidden disabilities' and sounds like I certainly qualify" (ibid., 351) after his AIDS diagnosis, and even pivots his transness to join a group for gay men with small penises (ibid., 365). Sexuality, in *We both Laughed in Pleasure*, is energetic, never simple, and always intimately implicated in Lou's conceptualisation and experience of gender. It was, in short, nothing that I ever expected

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to read. Which led to the question of why not? What was it in academic trans texts that made sexuality and transness so seemingly incompatible?

Here then is the starting point of this thesis' central concern with how early transgender studies, in fifteen or so years of field formation, deals with sexuality. These two portraits conceptualise sexuality, and the relationship between sexuality and transness, so differently. It is with these different modes and articulations of trans sexuality that this thesis is primarily concerned. It explores this relationship at two sites which are differently located in regard to what becomes the central space of transgender studies; *The Transgender Studies Reader* (*The Reader*) represents what becomes the "common-sense" of the field and its relation to sexuality, while *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism* (*TransSisters*) represents a discourse which does not make it into that "common-sense". Oscillating between the two sites, the spaces where sexuality emerges and the modes in which it does become visible and denaturalised, bringing to light possibilities that do not get taken forward, modes of articulation that have disappeared. What is it about trans studies that meant that Lou's account of his own life took me by such surprise? And how can thinking trans studies in terms of feminist theory help us understand and contextualise this?

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1.2 Transgender studies, sexuality, and '90s America

To background the concerns of this thesis, this section argues that questions of sexuality have remained salient in the activist and academic spaces from which trans studies in the US emerged, despite growing popular understanding of transness and sexuality as distinct. This section begins by briefly discussing the arrival of trans studies in the American academy in the 1990s and popular consciousness more generally before discussing it in relation to sexuality in particular. It argues that in both the academic fields in relation to which trans studies articulated itself and the academic spaces in which it was institutionalised, sexuality was a consistent and core concern. Similarly, in trans activism (also important in shaping and directing the academic field) sexuality was a relevant concern both in terms of activist demands and in terms of how sexuality operated in other fields of equality legislation which impacted the space in which activists were operating. In both contexts, sexuality functioned as a key term in relation to which transness–its ontology, its study, its articulations of a good life–was articulated. This section will explore some of these relationships in trans studies' activist and academic contexts to establish the proximity of transness and sexuality, some of the ways in which they interact, and set the scene for the ambivalence with which trans studies as a field does come to relate to questions of sexuality that will be explored in this thesis.

1.2.1 A new transgender: trans studies' emergence

While there had been a prior century of writing on what would become known as "transgender", what emerged in the 1990s under the heading "transgender studies" was a distinctive shift in the *way* that trans phenomena were being approached and by whom. As Stryker and Aizura (2013) comment, from being objects of knowledge (either as pathology in psychology or glossed over as symbolic in literary criticism) or speaking through "constrained autobiographical modes", the shift in knowledge production around transgender phenomena in the 1990s brought trans people into critical engagement with those earlier modes (2). Describing earlier trans autobiographies as "constrained" offers a useful dual meaning in understanding the nature of these earlier knowledges. It can be read to include both the terms which governed what was allowed to be said about trans lives and as reflecting the limited scope of autobiography, as the sole trans genre, to serve as a ground for collective political claims. This recasting of the legibility of 'transgender' within academia in the 1990s was nurtured into a watershed moment, the beginning of a "transgender studies" that was largely unrecognisable from those studies of transgender phenomena that pre-existed it (Stryker 2006, 12). This academic emergence was deeply tied to growing trans collective action, and many of

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those writing within academia and on its borders were doing so as engaged activist scholars, writers, and artists. While the historian Susan Stryker was breaking ground for trans studies in academia, people like Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein were writing this new transgender politics through pamphlets, popular press books, and plays (Stryker 2006, 4–5). Much of that cultural production, although not developed in or for the academy, would later come to be recognised as the "first wave" of transgender studies. In this way transgender studies' emergence in the 1990s was both born of and simultaneously nurturing the social movements taking shape. The sites of analysis with which this thesis is primarily concerned – *TransSisters: A Journal of Transsexual Feminism* (1991-1995) and *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) – offer an interesting comparison in regard to this emerging discourse. While *TransSisters* is part of the non-academic periodical/zine subculture that was proliferating in the 1990s, *The Reader* collates academic and non-academic sources (including from publications like TransSisters) which it frames as the first wave of trans studies as an academic field; within that field, its significance and authority is not matched for perhaps a decade. This first wave of trans studies is a consolidation of academic texts which understood themselves as part of a burgeoning academic field, and non-academic texts which retrospectively come to be cast as part of transgender studies. No articles from *TransSisters* do make it into *The Reader*, and only one of its regular writers (Riki Anne Wilchins) is included. This shows the process of defining the field as a selective one, where certain ideas and discourses come to be seen as plausible and credible while others are not. To understand the position of sexuality within trans studies, this is a crucial observation from which to start.

1.2.2 Sandwiched by sexuality: trans studies in the academy

Trans studies emerged into a space where one would expect to find interest in sexuality, sandwiched between feminist theory and queer theory, two fields which are themselves very concerned with sexuality. These fields are not exactly distinct, but from the way in which trans studies scholars have tended to talk about trans studies' relationship to other fields there seems to be an assumption that they are, broadly, distinguishable enough from one another. Blending the language of academic genealogies with familial genealogies, queer theory and feminist theory are often described in familial terms, and in that are differentiated from each other, given distinct positions in the family. Stryker, for example, refers to trans studies as queer theory's "evil twin" (Stryker 2004), while Chu contests Stryker's framing, posing trans studies as "the twin that queer studies ate in the womb. (The womb, as usual, was feminism.)" (Chu in Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 103). These familial metaphors imply both a shared substance and a

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level of differentiation, a sharing (though not complete merging) of interests. It would be expected, then, to find some of the sexuality-DNA lingering in trans studies. This is particularly the case in terms of how (some) queer and feminist theories in the early 1990s account for gender and sexuality *together*. Indeed, in this project I hope to show the need to think (trans)gender in terms of both gender and sexuality. Further, many of those involved in early trans studies and its academic institutionalisation were sex radicals and involved in BDSM communities, a subculture where talking about sex – rather than taking the meaning of sexuality as given – is unavoidable (a presence which, as both analytic chapters explore, comes out very differently at my sites of analysis). What this suggests to me is that it would not be unreasonable to expect early trans studies to have a critical tendency around sexuality, one which would refuse the naturalisation of sexuality/sex, and which instead would regard sexuality as a process of creation and innovation.

The institutional crevices within which trans studies was beginning to forge space for itself from the 1990s and into the 2000s were also centrally concerned with sexuality. This can be seen in both the academic publications which were accommodating this emerging scholarship as well as academic departments where trans scholars were finding positions. In terms of university departments, first creeping into syllabuses and then staff positions and then forming whole courses, trans studies was sedimenting into departments where sexuality was a salient concern, departments of women's studies, gender studies, and sexuality studies (although not always without friction (Stryker 2020b). In terms of academic publications, again, sexuality and feminist journals were the places that were eliciting and supporting the development of trans studies material. In 1998, several major gender/sexuality journals produced special issues on trans issues, including *GLQ*: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies (4:2)* and *Journal of Gender Studies* (7:3). In its early institutional homes trans studies was working itself into and around academic structures which understood sexuality as a central concern. In this context, sexuality is something which trans studies could not have avoided framing its own relationship to, wherein lies the concern of this thesis.

1.2.3 A (trans)sexual cause: trans activists and sexuality

Trans activism in the 1990s was also growing rapidly, shifting from a more internally oriented emphasis on mutual aid, support, and self-help in the 1980s towards an activism that was preoccupied with collectivising and politicising trans experience (Stryker 2017, chap. 5), and sexuality was often at issue in this activism. It was recognised as part of the better collective life which activists were pursuing for trans people. Until the late 1980s, the medical

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establishment in the US had insisted upon heterosexuality as a criterion for access to technologies of transition. This was being increasingly resisted by trans people, for example in the activist work of Lou Sullivan already discussed in "Two portraits of a draghag fag as a young man". Sullivan's activism was successful; in 1994, the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association removed heterosexuality from their diagnostic criteria (Stryker 2017, chap. 5).

Sexuality was also an activist issue for trans women, who were critiquing surgical approaches to vaginoplasty which prioritised "normal" appearances and "sufficient" vaginal depth for heterosexual intercourse without any consideration of genital sensation, pleasure, of non-heterosexual purposes to which these vaginas might be turned (a point that will be returned to in Chapter 3, "Scientists or Sluts?"). Trans activist texts and concerns were part of the ferment out of which the first wave of transgender studies, as chronicled in *The Reader*, emerged. While sexuality was not their foremost concern, sexuality – particularly the right to self-determined sexual orientation and surgical intervention that did not impede sexual pleasure – was seen by activists as an important part of trans life that needed collective action.

Sexuality was also a structuring feature that mediated the relationship between trans collective life and wider American politics in the 1990s, supporting some directions for collective life while foreclosing others. The successful campaigning by gay and lesbian groups to depathologise homosexuality was a success that many trans activists and groups were trying to emulate, and as such, gay and lesbian politics was constantly on the radar for emerging trans activist groups. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) is also recognised as having influenced the ground on which trans collective life was articulated (Stryker 2017, chap. 5, Puar 2017). As Jasbir Puar argues in *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, the ADA responded to and reinforced a stigmatisation of trans identities, excluding trans people from ADA protections as a stigmatised sexual disorder (along with exhibitionism, voyeurism, and pedophilia) (Puar 2017, 37). In this way, trans-ness (or, in this case, transphobia), also reshaped other political contexts, as gender normativity became encoded as "integral to the productive potential of the disabled body" (ibid., 38). Put differently, a disabled body worthy of ADA protections to facilitate employability needed to be a normatively gendered body. Puar notes that many gay and lesbian activists celebrated the ADA as a straightforward win, having successfully managed to keep themselves excluded from the categorisation of "sexual disorder", reinforcing their progress after the earlier depathologisation of homosexuality (ibid.,

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40). This shows that the *idea* of (disordered) sexuality was being leveraged at a national level to deny the possible materialisation of disabled trans life, to insist on these categories as distinct from each other with very material consequences. Whether trans scholars in the 1990s wanted to think about sexuality or not, it seems that the matter was always at play in the models that the trans movement was adopting and in the legislative sites where the meaning of transness was being articulated in law such as the ADA.

Trans activism at the time was operating in two very different political atmospheres. In one scene, activist energy and direction was developing a "rethink [of] the cultural politics of homosexuality" that was more engaged with intersecting structures of marginalisation that emerged during the AIDS crisis (Stryker 2017, chap. 5). New queer activist organisations emerged – such as ACT UP and Queer Nation – which were more open to trans issues than many earlier gay and lesbian organisations. In this context, trans-specific activist groups also emerged, sometimes as spin-offs of queer groups (such as Transgender Nation, a trans chapter of Queer Nation) and sometimes independently, such as The Transsexual Menace and FTM International. The AIDS crisis also had a legacy of structural changes in American urban queer communities, where the eventual arrival of AIDS funding provided stable infrastructure that could sustain trans activists and organisers, and often acted as a base for trans community organising both related to AIDS and otherwise (Stryker 2017, chap. 5). Not only did these organisations support existing communities that understood themselves as transgender, but they brought the concept of transgender to new spaces/ people to whom they perceived it as applicable (see Valentine 2007). Concurrently to this queerer, more radical trans politics, the 1990s was also growing another activist scene more influenced by a wider political moment of the suffusion of neoliberal values and modes of governance in American society (Puar 2017; Stryker 2017; Irving 2012). In the shift from queer activism towards a new formation, Susan Stryker identifies "an 'LGBT+ community'", a "neoliberal model of minority tolerance and inclusion" which retreated from the queer commitment to wider oppressive structures (Stryker 2017, chap. 5). The well-funded, effective, LGB organisations that were emerging in that space also offered a political opportunity for trans organisations and interests that could find their way in. As well as impacting the kinds of politics being done by activist groups, the logics of neoliberalism would also seep into some of the dominant transgender subjectivities that were emerging at the time (Irving 2012). These logics, driving shifts in national governance, would also shape the opportunities and foreclosures for trans lives in this period (Stryker 2017, chap. 5), their whiteness foreclosing possibilities of trans of colour life (Puar 2017, 34–35). Both the

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queer and neoliberal political atmospheres which trans activists navigated posed the problem of sexuality in different ways as an ever present, albeit different, concern.

This section has set out the background of this thesis by demonstrating how sexuality remained proximate to trans activist and academic concerns in the 1990s. Sexuality was a site where trans activists made collective claims to rights; sexuality politics offered different political formations in which possibilities of trans politics would be articulated; ideas around sexuality mediated the relationship between trans life and wider American politics; and trans studies' academic grounding and structures for institutional growth were also deeply intertwined with fields and sites concerned with sexuality. The presence of "sexuality" can be felt both around the edges of and inside the ferment of trans studies in the 1990s, which begs the question of why there is a relative absence of sexuality in the field in those years, a question that will be further elaborated shortly.

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1.3 Trans studies, sexuality, and feminist theory

This chapter situates this thesis through two sets of literature and questions arising from them. The first part considers how trans studies has taken sexuality, exploring the continued relative absence of sexuality in the field and the common forms that it took in trans studies' early years, primarily in the idea of sexuality as a "technology" of gender before considering *why* discussions are so limited. First, it considers a division of labour often articulated – particularly in trans studies' early years – between trans studies (gender) and queer theory (sexuality). It then moves on to two accounts of subjecthood from the mid-2000s that consider questions of (trans)gender and sexuality (David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* and Paul Preciado's "Pharmaco-pornographic Politics"), arguing that these in different ways maintain a sexual quarantine around transness, despite their different claims to address it. The second part of this literature review considers trans studies' relationship to another field – feminist theory. It discusses how the relationship between the two fields has typically been construed, and the limitations of the in/exclusion model that dominates these discussions. This model I argue, is fundamentally structured by an (often unrecognised) sexual anxiety which seems like terrible ground from which to begin.

1.3.1 Where does the sex go?

1.3.1.1 The division of labour between trans studies and queer theory

Trans studies' origin story as it is commonly told accounts for the absence of sexuality in the field through a perceived division of labour between trans studies (gender) and queer theory (sexuality). While this distinction between trans studies and queer theory has come under increasing criticism (Chu in Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 103; Halberstam 2020, 325), queer theory is often still taken as "the disciplinary surface against which trans studies must constantly narrate itself" (Keegan 2020, 349). This arrangement was particularly visible in trans studies' early years as scholars were arguing for a place for trans studies in the academy, necessarily insisting that it offered something that "queer" did not. In an often-cited essay, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin", Susan Stryker (2004) argues that queer theory has failed on its potential to restructure ideas of gender through a persistent privileging of "sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity" (214). The effect of this critique, this claim of distinction, is an implied division of labour between queer theory (questions of non-heteronormative sexuality) and trans studies (questions of non-heteronormative gender). Yet despite this asserted division of labour (and it is not clear that it is a division of labour that queer theory would recognise itself), there

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are constant slips which reflect the unsatisfactoriness of any such division. In her introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, discussing the relationship between queer theory and trans studies, Stryker (2006) reiterates this division of labour suggesting that "[t]ransgender studies is in many ways more attuned to questions of embodiment and identity than to those of desire and sexuality" (7). Yet this is troubling – in what framework are questions of "desire and sexuality" understood as clearly distinct from those of "embodiment and identity"? Further, while "Evil Twin" seems to pose trans studies as addressing different ground to queer studies' privileging of sexuality, Stryker also notes in the same essay that trans studies "has the potential to address emerging problems in the critical study of gender and sexuality, identity, embodiment, and desire" (Stryker 2004, 214). This feeling of ambivalence, that sexuality both is and is not quite the proper domain of trans studies is persistent, both within and across texts which survey the field and particularly its relationship to queer theory in its earlier years.

1.3.1.2 Trans studies and sex: always a question of individual reconciling?

This absence of sexuality in trans studies does not seem attributable to scholars seeing trans studies as having nothing to say about sexuality; sexuality is commonly part of the gloss that is given of the subject matter of the field (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 3; Stryker 2020b, 354; 2006, 2). For example, Stryker (2006) argues trans studies' early success as a field can be seen in "a sea-change in the academic study of gender, sex, sexuality, identity, desire, and embodiment" (2), and in trans studies' early years – which this thesis is focused on – a limited literature did emerge around sexuality, characterised by several main themes.

One common theme in early trans studies regarding sexuality is a critique of the older medico-psychotherapeutic models of transsexuality which actively denied trans people as sexual subjects. Some such responses are more theoretical contributions (Stone 1991), while others are based on interviews with trans people about their experiences of sexuality (Cromwell 1999; Rubin 2003). While some of these accounts work with a conceptualisation of sexuality based on a relatively stable model of desire based on gendered object-choice which mirrors the dominant gay and lesbian discourses at the time (Rubin 2003), others argue that trans sexualities disrupt these very classifications as the basis for understanding sexuality by messing with the man/women or male/female split that underpins them (Hale 1997; Cromwell 1999).

Beyond their critique of medico-psychotherapeutic denial of trans sexuality, many accounts of sexuality in trans studies have tended to follow an approach to sexuality that defines its relevance in terms of how it can function *in aid of gender*, or in aid of supporting a particular

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gendered sense of self. In his account of leatherdyke culture, and the experience of trans men coming out in that community, Jacob Hale (1997) explores daddy-boy play as "ftm transitioning technologies" (224), a "means of gender exploration, solidification, destabilization, and reconfiguration" in a trajectory from leatherdyke to FTM (ibid., 226). In *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men*, Henry Rubin (2003) describes sexuality functioning in a very similar way, as an arena for taking on and enacting a male identity, "playing boys" with a lover in private to stabilise an identification that will eventually become public (Rubin 2003, 119). Sexuality, and sex itself as an interaction, become sites of interest primarily as arenas in which to explore and reinforce a felt gender identity. Within this approach to sexuality, there is a common discussion of what Hale refers to, from SM culture, as "'retooling' or 'recoding'", wherein genitals and sex acts are linguistically resignified in line with gender identity (Hale 1997, 230; Cromwell 1999, 132; Stryker 2008, 43). In Hale, Cromwell, and Stryker's accounts this remapping is portrayed within a trans life-narrative of successful, affirmative transition – it is a remapping that is, ultimately, successful. Tala Brandeis' (1996) essay in *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader* entitled "Dyke with a Dick" offers a less resolved discussion of remapping as she reflects on her own sexual practice: "Several lovers have asked for penetration with my… clit?" (58). [2] The "… clit?" signals a recognition of the potential for difficulties or failure in the retooling which Hale, Cromwell, and Rubin all portray as (eventually) successful. Yet despite her recognition of this, Brandeis keeps her account within that mode, even while questioning its resolvability.

Sexuality in these early accounts of trans sexuality is both inseparable from gender and irrelevant outside of gender or, more precisely, transition. Gender is something that gets explored through sexuality; whether that exploration is a positive experience (one that affirms gender through a positive interaction) or a negative one (where gender is affirmed in a negative way, i.e. the discomfort of a gendered sexual interaction that feels wrong), sexuality comes to these accounts both in its joys and its pains always as an expression of gendered joys or pains. Ultimately, sexuality will be good if it can be retooled to reinforce gender identity, and sexual desires will reveal to us gendered identity. This is what Andrea Long Chu (2018), in an essay on desire, calls "the 'gender identity' model" whereby "desire becomes a kind of press release for identity: What you want tells you who you already are" (5). To put it into terms similar to those offered by Rubin: if I want to play 'boys', it must be because I am a boy.

[2] This is not an academic reader.

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I find this model as unsatisfying as it is dominant in the literature. I do not wish to argue that these methods of retooling are not useful or, undoubtedly, common (I would guess, among trans and non-trans people alike). However, the picture of sexuality that they offer is so circumscribed. It offers, simply, an insufficient account of sexuality, one which suggests that the only meaningful engagement of transness and sexuality is whether sexual practices are "gender affirming" or not. While gender is, no doubt, continually called into the service of the erotic, it is not the only force there. Further, it fails to do justice to the question of desire. It makes desire simple – we all have desires, they come from our soul, they are straightforward in form, we either want something or we don't. In *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent*, Katherine Angel argues that such an approach to desire in consent discourse fails to grasp many of the ways in which desire happens, or what it means (Angel 2021). I read exactly the same logic of desire underpinning "retooling". By taking desire as a given, we fail to do it justice. There is no space in this to consider any aspect of desire not strictly conforming to, or pulled into the service of, gender. Power too becomes conspicuously absent in these accounts; sexuality seems apparently produced entirely within the interaction between the (two) people having sex. Indeed, the whole encounter becomes remarkably under control in a way which, I suspect, sexuality rarely is.

The inadequacy of "retooling" as the sole account of trans sexuality is reinforced when it is considered (in one of my less generous moods) in relation to claims from the medico-psychotherapeutic claims around trans sexuality from the 1960s and 70s which are often the target of critique in the field's early years. In his account of trans male sexuality, Jason Cromwell (1999) first draws out the lines of this psycho-medical literature from the 1960s and 70s, which claimed that true transsexuals "were only able to engage in sexual relationships (homosexual or heterosexual) by using intense fantasies of themselves as women (if MTF/transwomen) or as men (if FTM/transmen)" (124). Although far less pathologizing and condescending, the emphasis on "retooling" as successful trans sexuality is, ultimately, agreeing to think about trans sexuality in very similar terms. Ultimately both sets of literature approach trans sexuality solely through the question "how do trans people possibly manage to reconcile their bodies with sex?". As a wider question, how any of us – trans or otherwise – reconcile with our bodies in sex is not uninteresting and is perhaps a useful contribution that the existing trans literature on sexuality could make to thinking about sexuality outside trans studies. Yet this universalising move is never made, and "retooling" remains figured as a distinctively trans thing, apparently not relevant elsewhere.

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1.3.1.3 Trans subjects and the quarantining from sexuality

In *Imagining Transgender: an ethnography of a category* (2007), David Valentine gives another possible account for the absence of sexuality in trans studies, through his account of the formation and take-up of identity categories and the uneven landing of the term "transgender" as it gets brought into social and health services provision in New York in the 1990s. In particular, he explores how the category "transgender" emerges in distinction to male homosexuality, the classed and raced patterns of its use, and the subsequent inequalities that this understanding is connected to as poor people of colour become illegible within the new discourse of "transgender" offered to them by the same healthcare and social services upon which they rely. Valentine (2007) approaches gender and sexuality as "linguistic tools which extract certain information, experiences, and feelings… for the purposes of making meaning about, and representing, ourselves and others", rather than understanding them as words which reflect two pre-existing, distinct domains (31). However, despite pitching his argument at the level of gender/sex distinction, Valentine's argument does not quite follow along this frequency; instead he consistently slips and slides between "sexuality" and "homosexuality". The story which he tells is more about how the term "transgender" becomes de-gayified, distinct from male homosexuality, rather than stripped of sexuality in its entirety. This thesis is interested in looking at "sexuality" as a domain broader than (male) gayness, to consider less how transness becomes uncoupled from (male) gayness and how transness and sexuality at its broadest are conceptualised as together or apart and in what modes.

Another account of the formation of sexual and gendered subjects at the end of the twentieth century comes from Paul Preciado's essay "Pharmaco-Pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology" (2008). In this essay, Preciado (2008) attempts to account for a new kind of power operating in the late twentieth century, a "mutation" of capitalism fuelled by the Cold War's scientific research through which "the political management of body technologies that produce sex and sexuality can be seen to progressively become *the* business of the new millennium" (105). Preciado mentions myriad things that are part of this "ecology" which come together to form contemporary Western economic organisation and embodiment of post-industrial capitalism as it gets, literally, under our skin and creates new sexual subjectivities (ibid., 108), in "*a sophisticated form of 'liquid' control"* that "becomes" the body (ibid., 110). He writes: "So we will speak of Prozac© subjects, cortisone subjects, silicone subjects, hetero-vaginal subjects, double-penetration subjects, Viagra© subjects...". This era of capitalism, he argues, has moved away from scientific endeavours to discover gender/sexuality's innate,

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"hidden secret" (ibid., 108), and moved toward an ethos of creation, what he calls "*sexdesign*" (ibid.). Instead of the goods of industrial capitalism, pharmaco-pornographic capitalism "produces mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions and conditions of the soul" (ibid.). Preciado locates the emergence of the term "gender" in this regime, part of the "bio-technological discourse from the end of the [19]40s" (ibid., 110), as something understood as "synthetic, malleable, variable, and susceptible of being transferred, imitated, produced and technically reproduced" in a way that sex was not understood before (ibid., 111). He defines gender as "*a techno-political ecology*" – a collection of practices and capacities which create the possibility of something called gender, understood to be malleable and out of which the possibility of transsexuality emerges. An "ecology" is a deeply interconnected system, where separate entities meet each other and through different interactions produce, reproduce, and change each other within one, multi-nodal system. Sex and sexuality, then, are being posed as part of the same living, breathing "thing". When trying to apply Preciado's account to the period and space that this thesis is concerned with – trans studies in the US around the start of the twentieth century – what becomes visible is that he seems to be missing an active engagement with the fact that we are not all produced the same within this ecology; not all of us are plausible candidates to become the different subjects that he names, and the transsexual subject of medical production (and subsequently of trans studies) are, it seems, not plausible candidates for subjecthoods defined primarily as sexualised. He writes: "We are equipped techno-bio-politically to fuck, to reproduce or to control the possibility of reproduction" (ibid., 112) – but does not explore how that equipment and its goals – "to fuck, to reproduce or to control the possibility of reproduction" – are not distributed equally.

Preciado (2008) uses the term "gender programming" as a chain of historically contingent self-understandings which, in pharmaco-pornographic politics produce: "an individual = a body = a sex = a gender = a sexuality" (ibid., 12). The rhythm of the sequence, set by the repeated "=", suggests a kind of domino effect – one cannot be achieved without necessarily tumbling into the next – yet the history of transsexuality shows us that this is not so straightforward, that the accomplishment of one step does not make the next a foregone conclusion. In medico-psychotherapeutic literature on transsexuality we find a truncating of this process, where "a gender", in the very realisation and instrumentalization of its plasticity, is stymied, posed as a bar to sexuality. Near the end of the essay, Preciado discusses trans activists who fought efforts to "normalize" trans bodies through transition technologies, and instead "produce self-designed sexes", insisting on "re-appropriating hormonal and chirurgical techniques to construct

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themselves" (ibid., 115). What happens to these "self-designed sexes" in relation to sexuality is not clear. Even within this account of the interrelatedness of sexuality and gender/sex, transness is somehow kept quarantined from sexuality and this separation is not accounted for.

1.3.2 The nature of a shifting field

To consider the status of sexuality within trans studies as a field, it is important to recognise that trans studies as a field is inherently unstable, its constitution contested. In *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, the anthropologist David Valentine (2007) explores the emergence, institutionalisation, and consolidation of the category "transgender" as an identity category dispersed through practices of community building and activism as well as social service provision (particularly in HIV/AIDS related services) in New York in the 1990s. The field of transgender studies, he argues, is similarly a process of negotiation, of organisation and emergence of "intellectual and hermeneutic practices [that] are part of a broader reorganization of what "gender" and "sexuality" are coming to mean in the United States" (Valentine 2007, 144). As such, he argues, decisions of what is "in" the field and what is not are part of "a social practice of figuring out the "transness" of a particular text by teachers, scholars, and readers… (by, for example, including it in a bibliography or syllabus or appropriating it in a critical reading" (ibid., 145). What is useful here is Valentine's awareness that transgender studies does not simply speak to a given, common-sense space; rather, what constitutes trans studies is an ongoing and complex process which continues to go unresolved or is contested as understandings of "transgender" in activism, academia and lives outside these realms are also subject to disagreement and change (ibid., 147). One way in which this contestation is often framed is between "people who think of 'trans studies' as a primarily social-scientific field… versus people who think of 'trans' as more of a methodology, rubric, heuristic or what have you, through which we interrogate the world" (Stryker in Lavery 2020), or, as Valentine puts it, "both as a personal identification and as a way of knowing about the world" (Valentine 2007, 145), or, as a kind of framework for thinking about boundary crossing (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008).

Another way in which we can see the contestation around the proper boundaries of trans studies is in a process of historical change of trans studies' shifting emphases, its central subjects. The introductions to the first and second *Transgender Studies Readers* are informative in this

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regard.[3] While the first *Reader* uses the term "transsexual" as a term through which to explore the growth of interest in trans issues (Whittle 2006, xi), the second refers to it only to note its decline in favour of "transgender" (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 2). With this shift in language comes the decline of the visibility of the figure of "the transsexual" in trans studies (although, I would argue, she remains a central structuring anxiety). A similar, though accelerated, decline can be seen in the figure of the transvestite; while included in the gloss of "transgender" as understood in the first *Reader*, this figure has disappeared from language and analysis by the second. This ongoing restructuring of the field around some figures and preoccupations and away from others is closely tied to trans activism, cultural production and wider understandings of "trans" outside academia. The ways in which the field of trans studies does implicitly speak to/of what "transgender" can mean more widely, as well as the perceived precarity of particularly young scholars working around transgender studies in the context of the neoliberalisation of academia in the US (see Seymour 2020), make this contestation over the proper domain of trans studies a wider ethical question in terms of what the field owes, to whom, and how that owing ought to be paid. With the boundaries of the field identified as subject to change, and that change recognised as political, the marginality of sexuality as dealt with in this thesis becomes an interesting question, no longer taken as a given but rather the outcome of a process of field formation related to wider academic and cultural trends.

1.3.3 Inclusion, anxiety, and activism: the relationship between trans studies and feminisms

The relationships between "trans" and "feminisms" since the emergence of transgender studies in the 1990s can be posed on different levels. In the editor's introduction to *TSQ*'s special edition *Trans/Feminisms*, Stryker and Bettcher (2016) recognise the vexedness in the relationship on the level of "movements, communities, and identities" (7). Much recent scholarship focuses on these sites, exploring trans/feminist relationships in activist spaces (Hines 2019; Williams 2016a; Heaney 2016). In recent years, these accounts have begun to challenge a popular casting of so-called "second wave" feminism as straightforwardly anti-trans, through narratives of trans inclusion in feminist activist spaces (Williams 2016a; Heaney 2016; Enke 2018). Such approaches offer nuanced historical retellings that move away from the idea that "feminism" has always been, somehow genetically, anti-trans. However, while

[3] *The Transgender Studies Reader* is one site of analysis for this thesis' analytical content. However, it is so authoritative in the early years of the field that to exclude it entirely from the literature review seems unworkable since it occupies crucial spaces that are otherwise empty.

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attempting to balance stories of exclusion with nuances of inclusion, this in/exclusion binary upon which they structurally rely still places some strong limitations on the kind of relationships which they can conceptualise between trans and feminism. Instead of just telling a story of exclusion (the old approach), they now tell a story of exclusion *and* inclusion, but the structure persists whereby "feminism" remains in the position of the established, trans-free, gatekeeper which can choose (or not) to be inclusive, while the trans position remains the "outside" position, knocking on the door asking to be let in. The structure maintains 'trans' and 'feminism' as two distinct and antagonistically arranged positions, which seem fated to remain bound in the question of in/exclusion decided by an act of feminist grace (or its absence). This question of in/exclusion also seems to have a lingering shadow of sexual anxiety about the presence of trans women in women's spaces. Many of the women-only spaces to which access is being debated in this time (music festivals, feminist conferences, coffee houses) are themselves ambivalently sexual spaces, not primarily sexual but nonetheless places for dating and cruising. In an essay on a women's coffee house in Minnesota in the 1970s and 80s, Finn Enke explains that sexuality was often vexed in these spaces which did not necessarily want to gain a reputation for being sexual spaces (Enke 2003, 639). Many of these spaces were sexual spaces (functionally if not ostensibly), and that must linger in the background of debates about access to them. I speculate here, but if the in/exclusion debate does rest on unnamed sexual anxieties, then it seems a particularly bad place from which to try and rethink the relationship between "trans" and "feminism".

In this literature, theoretical relationships between trans and feminist thinking become difficult to address as they cannot be accounted for in the in/exclusion framing. I offer an historical comparison to illustrate this point. Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (1991) is widely recognised as heralding the arrival of trans critique in the academy, and it is an essay rich in feminist theory. In an interview with Susan Stryker in the *Trans/Feminisms* issue of *TSQ*, Stone reflects on her own thinking about language which was developing while writing her "Manifesto". She recounts: "I met Monique [Wittig], and we had some interesting conversations about this. And of course Adrienne Rich wrote The Dream of a Common Language around this time. There was a lot of this stuff happening, it was something in the air" (Stone in Stryker 2016, 301).[4] Stone has since given

[4] I find this suggestion of ideas being "in the air" really useful for thinking about how ideas become part of the dominant discourse; it gives a way of thinking about how ideas move that is distinct from academic citation practices and seems more attuned to spaces where activism and academia overlap as both trans and feminist theory tend to. However, the claim that something is "in the air" is as risky as it is useful. In her critical discussion of the

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many interviews on that work, which cover her own career (in her non-academic life, Stone was a music producer), her time in a radical feminist collective, and the transphobia (and support) which she received in radical feminist spaces more widely in the 1970s and 80s (see Williams 2016b; Drucker 2018). These interviews address well the narrative of in/exclusion in activist spaces, but the interview with Stryker is exceptional in that the feminist underpinnings of her work are rarely discussed.

In the introduction to *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, Finn Enke identifies a similar lack of integration between trans studies and feminist theory in terms of their theoretical resonances and shared concerns as, in part, a result of the way in which transgender studies has entered academic feminism in women's and gender studies departments in US universities. Enke argues that this entry has been permitted on the basis of "a framework of "liberal identity-based values that continue to bring 'marginalized others' into curricular relevance" (Enke 2012, 2). What Enke is arguing here is that trans studies is permitted passage as an "add-on, without fundamentally changing the theoretical articulations and material practices that all but ensure that the definition of 'women's studies' will position transgender as something outside or other than itself" (ibid.). This suggests that the travel of theory, frameworks, and insight goes in only one direction from the supposed universal (feminism) to the supposed particular (trans).

Where Enke (2012) frames trans and feminist thinking as "far from integrated" despite a shared project concerned with "epistemologies and practices that produce gender" (Enke 2012, 1), we can also return to the deployment of familial metaphors mixed with academic genealogy in the section "Trans studies, sexuality, and '90s America" of this thesis to consider how the relationship between the two fields is posed. As already discussed, trans studies has been alternatively framed as "born of the union of sexuality studies and feminism" (Stryker 2004, 212), or "the twin that queer studies ate in the womb. (The womb, as usual, was feminism.)" (Chu in Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 103). While Chu rejects the equal stature that Stryker attributes to trans studies vis-à-vis queer theory (a fetus consumed during gestation rather than a born twin with the potential for disruption), both place feminism in a parental role. Where Stryker does not attribute to either feminism or sexuality studies a specific reproductive role, Chu's framing of feminism as the "womb" offers more specificity around the relationship

take-up of intersectionality in white academia, Salem (2018) argues that the idea that intersectionality was circulating in this way works to hide the contributions of feminists of colour to that thinking. There is much more to be said on this, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here I note it only to say that while still finding something useful in it, I approach it very cautiously.

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between trans studies and feminist theory. Instead of a single, isolated ingredient (like a gamete) it is framed as an incubating environment which circulates numerous substances that a fetus-theory needs. It suggests a more prolonged interaction, months through which it spatially confines – and in so doing *structures* – the fetus while the fetus also changes the gestating body. This reading is very different to the division of labour framed with queer theory, where the implication is "we do this because queer theory has decided not to". It is hugely useful for this thesis, as it offers an approach to the relationship between trans and feminism that moves away from a structure of in/exclusion and instead allows us to consider what feminisms offered as theoretical spaces for trans studies to develop. Further, it allows us to keep within view possibilities of the ways in which that travel goes both ways, with feminisms changing through engagement with trans phenomena and trans theory. While this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it seems an important goalpost to bear in mind to avoid reinforcing the marginalisation that Enke points us to.

As set out at the end of "Two Portraits of a transfag drag hag as a young man", this thesis is centrally concerned with how trans studies in its formative years (from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s) takes on the issue of sexuality. The first analytic chapter begins with *The Transgender Studies Reader*, understood as a defining object in the field, providing the dominant framing for the relationship between trans and sexuality which is still familiar in the shape of the field of trans studies today. *The Reader* cannot be underestimated in defining trans studies; not only was it the first reader to define the field, but it has also continued to be hugely authoritative, still cited and still an essential piece in trans studies courses in American universities. This thesis then moves backward in time, away from the common-sense which *The Reader* both articulates and reinforces and into the mid-1990s, a time and space where the common-sense of *The Reader* is yet to be established, and into the *TransSisters* periodical. Through this movement backward I hope to explore how the "common-sense" of trans studies, in regard to sexuality, is the result of some discourses of sexuality being enabled and others having been foreclosed and long vanished. Given their different forms and readership contexts, these sites clearly have different purposes and possibilities. However, much of early trans studies happens in this crossover from activist texts and academia and as such *The Reader* and *TransSisters* offer an informative contrast. *TransSisters* can point us to the kinds of possible discourses on sexuality that never made it into the field.[5]

[5] I do not wish here to make the common move in trans studies of demonstrating an underground rebel politics that gets hidden by the nefarious mainstream narratives. Bluntly, a lot of the politics (sexual and otherwise) in

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At both sites, this thesis probes two questions: how sexuality in general is articulated – what possibilities it has, what spaces it can(not) occupy, and in what forms it can(not) be discussed – and how the relationship between (trans)gender and sexuality is understood. These articulations are considered in relation to a third major consideration of this thesis, in terms of how they resonate with or reflect the context of the feminisms within which we can understand them to be historically located where, I argue, we can read a progressive narrowing of the scope and possibilities of sexuality.

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TransSisters is not good. I want to resist the urge to find a text to play hero. Instead, I want to show how both sites are engaged in particular contexts of ideas which make some articulations of sexuality more and less plausible.

1.4 What is the point? Thinking sexuality in trans studies.

Trans studies is not typically considered a space constructing views of sexuality. However, that the field rarely makes explicit arguments about sexuality does not mean that it has no ideas/assumptions about what sexuality is (and is not), particularly given the historical and academic proximity of "trans" and "sexuality". As a boundary, sexuality can be considered a key concept in trans studies, delimiting the domain of gender that "trans" speaks to. The relationship between gender and sexuality, then, is central to understanding how trans studies has conceived of itself. Still a young field, trans studies has not yet extensively reflected on its own formation, and this can, I think, be best approached through genealogy, by understanding trans studies as a space interacting with other spaces. Susan Stryker (2004) has described trans studies as having a "trajectory" of its own, distinct from feminist and queer studies (214). I find the idea of "trajectory" useful to consider the relationship between trans and feminist studies as it immediately implicates forces outside the object in question (here, trans studies). Never entirely the property of the moving object alone, a "trajectory" is a kind of negotiated outcome of forces – the initial force (the "impetus"), and forces that act on the object as it subsequently moves through space and the substance of that space itself (different substances, for example, cause more or less friction). Considering trans studies' "trajectory" in this way helps to contextualise the field and speculate as to *why* sexuality took on particular modes and spaces at the (long) moment of its emergence, to argue that these framings are contextual rather than inherent.

While trans studies' relationship to queer theory has been discussed more, the role of feminist thinking in shaping trans studies is less explored. Exploring the resonances between the two fields, feminism's contribution to the "trajectory", on the issue of sexuality allows me to negotiate an alternative to what Enke notes about the way women's studies continues to "position transgender as something outside or other than itself" (Enke 2012, 2), a positioning which the in/exclusion model also reinforces. Instead, I use sexuality to consider how trans studies and feminist thinking resonate with one another and to look at feminist legacies in trans studies. By looking at sexuality in a place often not recognised as relevant to it in academia, yet where some idea of sexuality is structurally critical, will open the possibility of thinking sexuality in more engaged, inquisitive ways and creating a similarly inquisitive path for thinking about how trans studies and feminist thinking were developing together at the end of the twentieth century.

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I hope to push the idea that while trans studies has not been a space very engaged with sexuality, this need not be so. If trans studies can engage with sexuality in different spaces and modes, it can be an interesting site for developing thinking around sexuality and challenging the dominance of identity as the sole relevant framework for thinking sexuality which I think is something that we have see in both activist and academic discussions around sexuality in the US/UK. To not challenge this dominance leaves us with a bland vision of what sexuality and desire, might mean.

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1.5 Methodology and theoretical framework

1.5.1 Methodology

Having established the background and literature supporting this thesis, I now move on to setting out the methodology which guides this research, primarily informed by Foucault's notion of 'genealogy' and discourse analysis.

1.5.1.1 Genealogy

This thesis is primarily interested in how trans studies as a field becomes constituted as a domain of knowledge in which sexuality is only accommodated in limited forms. Genealogy as an approach to historical analysis developed by Foucault, addresses just this space, "the power of constituting a domain of objects" (Foucault quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 105). Genealogy allows us to grapple with questions of how a domain (in this case, an academic field) gets populated, with what, and how relationships between dimensions of it are understood. It allows us to think about not only what is included but on what basis inclusions and exclusions are articulated. Thus guided, it becomes possible to consider sexuality in trans studies as a question – where does it emerge? In what modes? And where is its emergence foreclosed?

One characteristic of genealogy which makes it well-suited to tracing concepts is its rejection of fixity – both in terms of essences and telos – and consequent focus on change (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 106); while Foucauldian archaeology as a method of historical inquiry compares discourses between epochs, genealogy concentrates on the moment of *transition* between discursive epochs. This allows me to look at a prolonged moment of the emergence of transgender studies (early 1990s – mid 2000s) as a moment of discourse-orientation, a time when the rules of coherence for a new field are being set. Genealogy's view of history as neither progressive nor moved by deliberate, pre-existing subjects, makes room to explore field formation as characterised by contingency rather than inevitability. Instead of seeing history as being moved by subjects, Foucault thinks of it as being moved by spaces (ibid., 110). Understanding movement through space or spaces allows the wider conditions of a discourse formation to be considered, thus being more open to multiplicity than subject-driven events; numerous paths can emerge from a space. This is particularly useful for this thesis, as a project which looks both at academic and not-quite-academic discourses of trans and feminist activism and academia, which overlap significantly and between which ideas and associations seem to move frequently. These spaces are also limiting –the possibilities of what can be produced in them are not infinite and will bear traces of them. This is useful for considering about how the

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problem-spaces of trans studies emerged *from a context* or set of conditions within feminist thinking, rather than that problem-space gaining some kind of transcendent ontology whereby trans studies becomes *this* because that is what trans studies fundamentally is. I argue that we can find in academic trans studies the traces of feminist resonances in the ways in which sexuality can, and cannot, be articulated in the field.

Genealogy's level of analysis is the wider space which conditions the formation of the content of a discourse (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 123). This means not only texts, but the material, political, and social conditions of their production in a very wide sense – the circumstances under which a set of ideas are brought to bear on a particular question and arranged in a particular way. This level of analysis allows me to engage with the politics of developing trans studies, in addition to the theory. Instead of giving a fixed location of sexuality in trans studies, it offers scope for considering *how* that location gets settled (or not) through relationships and negotiations with other disciplines and social movements, particularly feminist theory. Thinking of trans studies in terms of other strands of academic thought can work to counter the marginalising of trans studies through an isolation from other disciplines – a "universalizing" move to use Eve Sedgwick's concept (Sedgwick 1990).

Genealogy also has implications that are useful my project in terms of the types of materials that can be subject to analysis, allowing a vast swathe of cultural arrangements to be thought together (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 121). While my research will be limited to texts, this heterogeneity does allow me to bring together a combination of academic and non-academic sources within my analysis. I think this is particularly important for trans studies in its first two decades: the lines of academia and activism were often very blurred, and ideas and people often moved between the two spaces, or occupied both at once. Indeed, much of what *The Reader* solidifies as the first wave of what Stryker and Aizura (2013) call "field formation" (3) was work that came from outside academia and only retrospectively came to be seen as "trans studies" along with more straight-forwardly academic contributions.

Finally, genealogy recognises the politics of the construction of histories. It embodies a refusal to claim objectivity (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 113), both because of our history's presence in us and thus the impossibility of stepping outside it (ibid., 122), and because it recognises that we are only accessing interpretations, rather than objects of history that are in some other way more concretely true (ibid., 108). This makes visible the kind of politics of knowledge

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production that this thesis engages with in attempting to explore the links between trans studies and feminist theory.

1.5.1.2 Discourse analysis

In my approach to discourse analysis I am also informed by Foucault's understanding of "discourse" as a "series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable… a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault 1988, 100). This perspective allows me to approach my textual sites of analysis in a particular way. It demands an openness to multiple (potentially contradictory) articulations and modes of sexuality. Rather than attributing a fixed meaning to sexuality, and then raising each site to the ground in pursuit of that meaning, it orients my attention instead to the sites themselves, demanding an openness to articulations of sexuality which may not produce one coherent entity. I am also informed by Tonkiss' approach in "Analysing discourse" (1998). Tonkiss (1998) understands discourse analysis as an approach to language that begins from the understanding that language is not a "neutral medium" through which we reflect an already existing social reality, but rather as "constructing and organizing that social reality for us" (246); instead of understanding the distinction of transness and sexuality as ontological, we look instead at *how* texts formulate that distinction in the first place, as "sites in which social meanings are created and reproduced, and social identities are formed" (ibid.). Discourse analysis is also concerned with the relationship between text and context on two levels. The first level is that of a text's more immediate context, the interaction within which it emerges (ibid., 249) and the second level concerns the place of a text within the wider "rhetorical organization" of a discourse, "within which certain forms of knowledge will be privileged, certain modes of argument will be persuasive, and certain speakers will be heard as authoritative" (ibid., 250). Engaging with a text through both these levels is crucial in this project; the first one allows me to consider the specificities of different types of text, and why a periodical might engage one way and an academic reader in another, while the second sensitises my reading to how both sites engage with broader patterns of knowledge and concepts in articulating their visions of transness and its relation to sexuality.

1.5.2 Theoretical framework

This research is structured by three main theoretical concepts: Foucault's understanding of power as both restrictive and productive; his understanding of sexuality as part of a wider ethics of the self; and finally, the resonances between his idea of "a way of life" (Foucault 1997, 135)

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and Sandy Stone's hope of "spectra of desires" that could be generated through a new subject position for transsexuals speaking for themselves (Stone 1992, 164) .

The conception of power that Foucault articulates in *The History of Sexuality vol I* offers a useful starting point for this thesis. Here, Foucault (1988) rejects the charge – common in his contemporary political theory – that power is essentially repressive, fundamentally "a power to say no: in no condition to produce… capable only of posting limits… basically anti-energy", and that its assumed relationship to sexuality as one of silencing something natural that pre-exists it (85). The "analytics of power" that he proposes to replace the more unitary and brittle "theory of power" is attuned to the dynamic, multi-sitedness and flexibility of a productive power that he sees characterising modernity, which not only denies us but also compels us. Further, this "analytics of power" compels us to engage with its ongoingness (ibid., 82). Of sexuality, Foucault notes that "[t]here is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all manifestations of sex" (ibid., 103). This notion of power, and its relation to sexuality, helps this thesis in several ways. First, it lets us take the claim sometimes made that trans sexuality is rarely discussed because it is taboo and open it up into a series of questions: is there really the deafening silence claimed? Where are opportunities to speak created, and how do particular conceptualisations of the relationship between transness and sexuality flourish, while others wither? How are these the result of negotiations with particular landscapes of thought within which they emerge?

The second theoretical concept that I draw from Foucault to informs the reading of this thesis is his understanding of sexuality as part of a wider ethics of the self. In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault turns his attention to how sexuality gets taken up in antiquity in particular articulations that link it with an ethics of self. His project, looking at sexual ethics in antiquity, does not seek to find core prohibitions about sexuality but rather to find "problematizations" – "the areas of experience and the forms in which sexual behaviour was problematized, becoming an object of concern, an element for reflection, and a material for stylization" by an ethical subject forming themself (Foucault 1990, 23). He thus draws our attention to the way in which sexuality comes to be linked to different experiences and clusters of social relationships, and how some of these (and not others) "occasion anxiety, discussion, and reflection" (ibid., 24). A concern with "problematizations" is very relevant for this thesis; while it seems clear that trans studies has an issue with sexuality, it is not immediately clear what that issue is. And indeed, as has been discussed in the literature review, some articulations around sexuality sit quite comfortably in trans studies and pose no issue at all. Trans studies is, I would argue, a

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project intimately linked with techniques of the trans self; it attempts to address questions of how to articulate the self, how to articulate community, and is riddled with value judgements on those questions as questions of "what we are" are inevitably intertwined with ideas of "what we should be". My concern instead lies in adding a layer of historicising around how our current conceptions come to be formed in trans studies. This I hope will offer a significant contribution to the field since, as a still relatively young field, little such reflection has yet been done. Foucault allows us to think through those enunciations in the realm of sexuality, and consider where sexuality becomes problematic to trans studies, where it can thrive, and the wider network of experiences and relationships within which these problematizations are formed.

In order to look critically at received notions of sexuality this thesis also draws on Foucault's conception of a "way of life" through its resonances with Sandy Stone's idea of "spectra of desire". These concepts resonate in interesting ways, and together articulate the possibility of trans sexualities meaning something other than the limited meanings that sexuality is typically attributed, inventing new ways of being, rather than reproducing existing modes of sexual life. For Foucault (1997), a "way of life" offers an alternative to the scripts of gay liberation politics, where sexuality can take on the meaning of either a "pure sexual encounter" or the total, complete "lovers' fusion of identities" (137). A "way of life" Foucault argues, offers new possibilities where sexuality is characterised by its potential for "inventiveness" beyond a sexual act (ibid., 139), implicating whole "mode[s] of life" that can contain "everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship" (ibid., 136). Instead of being a kind of end-point ("I now know who I am and thus what my life will be") of a typical coming out narrative, sexuality instead becomes a starting point for as yet unknown relationships and pleasures, an ethics and culture rather than a category of "psychological traits and… visible masks" (ibid., 138). While sceptical of Foucault's perception of the degree of unscriptedness possible as a basis for building new relations of pleasure and care, I find the deliberate project of inventing, as opposed to a claim of discovering, an exciting one and particularly salient to trans studies in the time period which this thesis considers. The 1990s was an unprecedented emergence of trans collective life in (largely urban) America (Stryker, 2017 chap.5), and the script that had been supplied by the medical establishment which kept trans people apart in order, supposedly, to pass more successfully, would clearly no longer hold. But beyond that there were very few scripts for

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what trans life in general, and sexuality in particular, could look like: invention was desperately needed.

Seemingly searching for something similar to a "way of life" is Sandy Stone's idea of "spectra of desire" articulated in "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto". In the "Manifesto", Stone draws on Donna Haraway's figure of the cyborg and Gloria Anzaldúa's figure of *la mestiza* to move away from the epistemologies of organic wholeness and singularity which have dominated the accounts of transsexual women before her. She finds in these earlier autobiographical accounts an untenable insistence on purity (Stone 1992, 158): "Each of these adventurers passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other. If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. And nobody *ever* mentions wringing the turkey's neck [a euphemism for penile masturbation]" (ibid., 159). Throughout the text, Stone seems to slip (her intention is not clear) between "sexuality" as meaning erotic life and as meaning sexed/gendered bodies, and I find this ambiguity helpful as it opens possibilities for complex ways in which these realms may implicate each other. The "counterdiscourse" which Stone endeavours to begin, a speaking position for transsexuals outside of the crushing discursive productions of anti-trans radical feminism and medico-psychotherapeutic discourses could, she argues, "generate new and unpredictable dissonances that implicate entire spectra of desire" (ibid., 164-165). Like Foucault, Stone is looking toward the generation of new ways of living, which include gendered ways of being, ways of being sexual, and ways of building trans community which are not necessarily clearly distinct from each other.[6] Where trans "desires" are so often considered only in terms of "the desire for transition", and sexual desires as "the desire for a gendered sexual object", Stone's spectra holds open the possibility of a much more expansive frame of what desire could be. It is this promise of a "way of life" or "spectra of desire" that this thesis is pursuing, considering in what modes and spaces such creation is happening, or indeed the modes and spaces which stifle it.

With this theoretical framework in mind, the following two chapters approach first *The Reader* and then *TransSisters*, to critically engage with their articulations of sexuality. Where does it emerge, and in what modes? What possibilities are opened, and which foreclosed?

[6] This last part is not typically recognised in Stone's work. However, I believe that it is a crucial part of her hopes for posttranssexuality. Of one of the autobiographies which she is critiquing, Stone footnotes: "Star's book has disappeared from history, and I have been unable to find reference to it in any library catalog [sic]. Having held a copy in my hand, I am sorry I didn't hold tighter." (Stone 1991, 300)

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2. Who gets to laugh in pleasure? Sexuality and *The Transgender Studies Reader*

This chapter begins with a short discussion of *The Transgender Studies Reader* and what it offers as a site of analysis for the concerns of this thesis. The chapter will then turn the question of how sexuality is articulated within *The Reader*. It will argue that sexuality as formulated in *The Reader* – both its place (how it is understood in relation to trans studies) and its modes (the ways in which sexuality itself comes to sight) – is organised across two important lines. The first is a gender/sexuality distinction, sometimes functional and sometimes more ontological, which treats both sexuality and gender as matters of identity, with sexuality articulated primarily in terms of the object of one's desire. This chapter then turns to the second mode of organisation of sexuality, which is the centrality of transmasculinity (rather than transfemininity) as the site where sexuality emerges in *The Reader* which, it will be argued, limits the depth of the resonance that sexuality can take within *The Reader* and, by implication, the field of trans studies as it is constituted at that moment by its first academic reader.

The Transgender Studies Reader

The Transgender Studies Reader (*The Reader*), published in 2006, is a collection of fifty pieces (essays, pamphlets, and excerpts from books) dealing with transgender phenomena, running over 700 pages . It was edited by the trans historian and theorist Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, a British trans legal studies scholar. The foreword is written by Whittle and largely focuses on popular understandings of transgender, while Stryker's introductory essay "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies" sets more of the cultural and theoretical backdrop to the emergence, at the end of the twentieth century, of a field that became recognised as transgender studies. There she explains, *The Reader* is "intended to provide a convenient introduction to the field as it has developed over the past decade, an overview of some of the earlier work that informed this scholarship, and a jumping-off point for more sophisticated analyses in the next generation of inquiry" (Stryker 2006, 6). In 2013, Routledge published *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, this time edited by Stryker and Aren Aizura and covering the decade of scholarship that followed the first *Reader*.

The Reader is an interesting site for this thesis, because it is the first place in which transgender studies *as a field*, its objects and its interests, is really declared. As such, we can look at it as a kind of solidification of trans studies within academia, after the dust of its formative years has settled. The first published reader for transgender studies, *TSR* became central to the field in

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the US and continues to be heavily referenced and commonly found on syllabi for transgender studies courses at American colleges. As such, it can be read as constituting the mainstream of transgender studies in American academia in the mid-2000s, a stand-in through which we can read the field as it becomes institutionalised. This will be set against *TransSisters*, as an example of modes of sexuality which do not make it into the institutionalised field.

It is necessary to briefly explain the way in which I have approached *The Reader* in the analysis which informs this chapter. *The Reader* collates a vast amount of material from numerous disciplines/discourses, and a vast chunk of historical time from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. With this in mind, I have chosen to approach *The Reader* largely through its structural elements – that is, instead of examining the contours of each piece collated (although for a few key pieces, I do), I have approached the pieces through the manner of their collation into trans studies, the structural elements brought to them by the editors. This includes the Foreword and Introduction, the structure of *The Reader's* sections, the index, and the editorial glosses which accompany each piece. While this was partly a practical consideration, it also serves an important purpose from the perspective of the overall interests of this thesis. This thesis is oriented towards the constitution of trans studies as a field, and the structural elements of *The Reader* allow us to engage on that level, articulating the ways in which each piece is understood by the editors (themselves leading thinkers in the field) to relate to the field that they are constituting.

2.1 The distinction of gender and sexuality: sexuality as "something that happens elsewhere"

As already established in "Trans studies, sexuality, and feminist theory", sexuality is, officially, considered to be relevant to the purview of trans studies in general and within the scope of *The Transgender Studies Reader* in particular, as it is set out in Stryker's Introduction. However, this explicit intent of *The Reader* is repeatedly un-met in its formulation of transness, sexuality, and the relationship between the two. This happens through an ontological and functional distinction that is produced between (trans)gender and sexuality.

2.1.1 Gender and sexuality: an ontological distinction

The limited nature of cutting across

In her Introduction, Stryker (2006) frames the relationship between sexuality and gender as a "cross-cutting" (7), and considering the nature of this cross-cutting helps us understand how gender and sexuality are being posed together and, consequently, what opportunities are

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plausible for thinking about sexuality. In an essay "Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question" written around the same time, Stryker gives the clearest explanation of what she appears to mean (although slightly less clearly) in *The Reader's* introduction. She writes:

> Trans is not a 'sexual identity', and therefore fits awkwardly in the LGBT rubric. That is, 'transgender' does not describe a sexual orientation (like homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual or asexual). Nor are transgender people typically attracted to other transgender people in the same way that lesbians are attracted to other lesbians, or gay men to other gay men. Transgender status is more like race or class, in that it cuts across the categories of sexual identity. (Stryker 2007, 66)

This quote makes several points which are relevant here. It establishes that the relevant way to think about sexuality is in terms of "identity" understood as "sexual orientation". It also poses transness "like race or class, in that it cuts across the categories of sexual identity". It seems that there are two ways to think about these "cuts across". The first image suggests independently constituted lines (race, class, transness, sexuality) hitting into each other; thus, in terms of sexuality, it makes the point that trans people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight etc *in addition to* being trans. The implication of this image is that these categories are constituted independently of transness but can be identified with, or claimed by, trans people. In this image, transness (or its absence) "adds" to gayness, but is not intrinsically part of it. The second image that I associate this idea of "cutting across" comes from the conception of intersectionality originating in black feminism (Crenshaw 1991) and the claim that categories (in Crenshaw's argument, 'woman' and 'black') does not uniformly speak to us all the same. Rather, what we experience in one category (black) will impact the materialisation of another category (woman). In this conception, the meeting is less additive and more ontologically formative – there is no, pre-existing 'blackness' or 'woman', as race is always gendered and gender is always raced. This understanding of transness and sexuality could be fruitful, but I am sceptical, from the way in which sexuality is treated throughout *The Reader*, that this is the intended image of "cuts-across"; the first image seems to resonate much more. By insisting that 'trans' is not 'sexual', Stryker leaves intact the idea that transness is an inherently desexualised state which only *acquires* sexuality through its *interaction with something else* – a realm called sexuality that is ontologically distinct from, existing separately to, transness (or gender more widely). Perhaps at this imagined meeting there can be new beginnings, but the structure of that meeting suggests that trans articulations of sexuality must always be framed as responding to (non-trans) articulations of sexuality. There is a second limitation in Stryker's framing, in her reliance on "sexual identity" or "orientation" as the ways in which to consider the relationship of transness to sexuality. She may well be correct that transness, as it currently

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understood, does not entail its own sexual identity distinct from LGB, but it need not follow that "trans" cannot have important relationships to other aspects of sexuality, or sexual meanings, that do not come from one very specific (non-trans) conception of what it means to be sexual (i.e. identity). However, the framing of "cuts-across" seems to imply that sexuality is already constituted elsewhere, and already exists prior to its bumping into transness. This limits the possibilities for sexuality in trans studies which, as "Trans studies, sexuality, and feminist theory" makes clear, is understood as happening elsewhere.

Temporal banishment of mixed models of gender/sexuality

The mode of interaction of gender and sexuality that is articulated as two separate, distinct things can also be read in the structure of *The Reader*. After its Introduction and Foreword, *The Reader* is divided into seven sections. The first two, "Sex, Gender, and Science" (*SGS*) and "Feminist Investments" (*FI*), seem to function as trans studies' pasts – two genealogies of thinking around gender variance that preceded academic, interdisciplinary trans studies – before the four sections that function as trans studies' present, and a fifth which the Introduction frames as trans studies' present and also a crucial site of its future. *SGS* and *FI* seem to occupy a very different status, two pasts differently posited in relation to what is understood as trans studies' present. "Investments", on the one hand, invokes a contribution from that past that is in some way still ongoing, even if it has changed form, invoking the idea of a feminist underpinning that continues to be relevant for how scholars think about transness in particular and gender in general. An interesting example of this is an excerpt from Janice Raymond's infamous (at least, infamous within trans studies) book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male (1979),* in which Raymond argues that transsexual women are agents of the patriarchy, infiltrating women's spaces and bodies in literal and metaphorical rape. It was this book, in which Raymond singles out Sandy Stone for personal attack which led to Stone's response of "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" which came to be seen as the start of trans studies. It is undeniable that the *shape* of Raymond's diatribe forcefully shaped transgender studies well into the twentieth century by spewing many of the lines of attack that the field would contend against. Thoroughly reviled, Raymond's work continues to structure reams of trans scholarship that set out to claim that we are not the things that she claims we are. The "Feminist Investments" – mostly good, some bad – in this section continue to be seen in trans studies.

While "Feminist Investments" suggests an ongoing legacy, a living presence in the trans studies present, the other past, *SGS* seems to be placed quite differently. In his Foreword, Stephen

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Whittle (2006) draws a distinction between work before the 1990s "when the primary concern was the psychology and medicalization of transsexualism" with the scholarship that started emerging in the 1990s "informed by community activism, started from the premise that to be trans was not to have a mental or medical disorder" (Whittle 2006, xii). [7] The trans studies present is positioned in contestation with that past, a past which Whittle tells us is "falling rapidly by the wayside" (ibid., xiii). While "Feminist Investments" are ongoing, *SGS* is more or less over (or at least, the implication is, it ought to be). Referring to *The Reader's* Index, we find that "Feminist Investments" is the only section in *The Reader* which has no references at all to "sexuality" or related concepts, while *SGS* has plenty. Sexuality as deeply implicated in transness is contained within the part of trans studies' past which needed to be contested and moved beyond.

If we look further into the structure of "Sex, Gender and Science" we can read this pushing of sexuality further into the past. The eight selections are presented chronologically, running from 1877 (selections from Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*) to 1985 (Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto"). Through the editors' glosses we can read an historical arc of psychological and medical knowledges where gender and sexuality are progressively disentangled until we reach "A Cyborg Manifesto" which (being such an odd bed-fellow of the other pieces in this section) seems to function as a water-shed, the emergence of critical engagements with science which trans studies might want to take forward. The impact of these ontological distinction of (trans)gender and sexuality are interesting in that they constrict the possibilities for the modes of interaction that can be articulated. The *place* of sexuality within transness becomes, almost unavoidably, limited to articulations of sexuality that are already worked out elsewhere, defined largely by notions that always assume a non-trans body and life.

2.1.2 Disappeared linkages

We can consider the positioning of sexuality in relation to gender in *The Reader* by exploring the editors' glosses which accompany each piece. In half a page they introduce the author, the context from which the piece was taken, and frame the piece's relevance to the field of trans studies. Many of the authors collated in *The Reader* are engaging in radical sexual politics and practices. Around the time that she was writing *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (excerpted in *The Reader*), Kate Bornstein was living as a sub in an SM relationship with

[7] As will be explored in chapter 'TransSisters', this move away from a medical model was not always absolute.

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a butch/femme couple, Sailor and Lula.[8] Patrick Califia spent most of his career writing lesbian erotica and editing volumes on leatherdykes.[9] Jacob Hale, in an essay already discussed, reflects on his own past in leather spaces (Hale, 1997). Riki Wilchins was running fisting workshops for non-trans lesbians to "feel a real live transcunt" (Wilchins 1997, 116). Susan Stryker and Gayle Rubin were hanging out at flog-a-thons on the back patio of gay leather bars in San Francisco (Stryker 2011, 80), while Lou Sullivan was in erotic cinemas getting covered in strangers' cum.[10] Yet anything that we might recognise as sexuality is almost entirely absent from the editorial glosses – both biographical and in terms of the authors' corpus of work.[11] One informative exception is the gloss to Califia's piece "Manliness", which describes a "prolific author, sex activist, and psychotherapist" (Stryker & Whittle 2006, 434). In this sentence, a comma is placed between "author" and "sex activist", creating some space between his writing and his sex activism when, looking at his corpus of work, little such space can be found. There are, I think, a couple of ways to read this elision of the radical sexual politics of many contributors and I think they can be informative together. At first, we might suggest a kind of respectability politics may be at play: demanded by the inevitable representational responsibility of collating the first reader for transgender studies, it is just easier to leave some details out. Then at least we can *look* like a reasonable bunch. Alternatively, sexuality is just not considered relevant enough to make the cut in these necessarily short glosses and this, I think, tells us a lot about how the field of trans studies is being conceived in relation to sexuality; sexuality may be a topic of discussion for trans studies, but it can also be lifted out and trans studies is considered no worse off for it (this is in line with my earlier reading of "cuts across"). Ideas of sexuality, or sexual politics, are not considered potentially central to or constitutive of ideas of transness or trans politics. If the primary purpose of the gloss is to situate each piece's relevance to trans studies then perhaps making these links to radical sexuality politics is just not felt to be worth it; these politics are not considered relevant as part

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[8] For an account of this, see Bornstein's autobiography *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: The True Story of a Nice Jewish Boy Who Joins the Church of Scientology and Leaves Twelve Years Later to Become the Lovely Lady She is Today* (2012).

[9] Califia's published works include: *Macho Sluts* (1988) and *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (1994), while his edited volumes include *Doing It for Daddy: Short and Sexy Fiction about a Very Forbidden Fantasy* (1994) and *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader* (1996).

[10] For a full account see *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The selected diaries of Lou Sullivan, 1961-1991*

[11] I am confident that, while some of the events/links named above may not have been public knowledge at the time they occurred, the majority would have been knowledge available to *The Reader's* editors (and indeed to a wider interested audience) by the time that *The Reader* was published. The only exception is perhaps Kate Bornstein, whose autobiography was published in 2012. While Lou Sullivan's diaries were not published until 2019, Stryker had access to these for a piece she published in 1999. The other events and links referenced are noted, either in academic publications or in well established, published, bodies of non-academic work.

of a contextualisation of their contribution to trans studies. In this way, trans studies becomes solidified as a place where sexuality is unimportant, as these links to radical sexual politics are left unclaimed.

2.2 Sexuality as a question of 'whom'

While *The Reader* makes an ontological distinction between (trans)gender and sexuality, framing trans studies such that it is not quite the proper place for discussing sexuality, it does allow for some proper articulations of sexuality. The foremost of these is sexuality addressed as always a question of whom, the object of desire. In this framing, articulations of sexuality as a question of practice is largely absent and, where present, hidden.

Exploring *The Reader'*s Index identifies several essays as the notable nodes in which sexuality is raised as an issue of consideration for trans studies.[12] The densest of these is David Valentine's essay "'I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once': The Erasure of Desire in the Name of Identity". [13] One of the claims made by Stryker in her introduction to *The Reader* is that trans phenomena disrupt one of the underlying conceptualisations that feminist and queer studies remain committed to, the idea of sexual object choice which underpins hetero and homosexuality, insofar as the sex of desiring subject and object of desire are called into question (Stryker 2006, 7), and Valentine's essay explores precisely this.

In this essay, Valentine argues that the distinction between sexuality and gender, which has underpinned assimilationist gay politics and shaped the understanding of "transgender" adopted in social services/ healthcare provision fails to speak to the experiences of desire among poor people of colour in urban north America. The essay is framed around a series of clashes carried on throughout a session at a support group for "Alternative Lifestyles" between the group's facilitator (a social services worker, Nora) and one participant (Miss Angel). Throughout this encounter, Miss Angel articulates her sense of self and her desire through a range of identity labels (homosexual, pre-op transsexual, woman, gay) which Nora resists, finding the simultaneous coexistence of (male) homosexuality and transsexual womanhood to be ontologically incompatible. Valentine's argument here is an important one: that the institutionalisation of a particular understanding of "transgender", which rests on a distinction from homosexuality, makes the articulation of some people's desires, particularly those

[12] This involved tracing through the Index and then body of *The Reader* terms that might be connected to sexuality, not just "sexuality" itself.
[13] This essay became, several years later, a chapter in Valentine's monograph *Imagining Transgender: an ethnography of a category* discussed already in "Trans studies, sexuality, and feminist theory".

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marginalised through race and class, apparently incoherent, apparently impossible. Identity, he tells us (labels such as "trans" or "gay"), can be inadequate for talking about desire which often outstrips its meaning and yet, unfortunately, it is the dominant one we have (Valentine 2006, 408).

Valentine's point is useful, and his introductory remarks are promising in terms of offering a wider understanding of erotic desire "in the intimacy of a particular encounter, reports of past experiences, or fantasies spoken out loud" which fail to cohere with identity categories (ibid 410). However, while he is able to disrupt the primacy of identity labels in desire, he is not able to get away from the idea of sexual orientation which underpins it. In every exchange that he discusses between social-services-Nora and Miss Angel, with Miss Angel's articulation of a "non-identitarian politics of sexual desire" (ibid 414) desire remains bound, able only to reflect on the gender of sexual partners. Desire is approached only as a question of "whom", the object of one's desire. While the question of "whom" may be very relevant for thinking about desire, Valentine fails to register the scope for desire or sexuality to pose itself in other modes. This return to sexual object choice ends up keeping questions of desire in a similar realm to the identity categories which he identifies as failing particular, marginalised, populations in these moments, rather than really leveraging open conceptions of desire that are constituted much differently. While Valentine's essay disrupts the conventional arrangement of gender and sexuality identities categories (and makes an important critique of the arrival of "transgender" in poor communities of colour), it remains firmly within the logic of sexual orientation insofar as it assumes that the relevant issue at stake in discussing desire is a question of towards whom that desire is felt. This leaves questions of sexual pleasure, or questions of what it means to be a particular kind of desiring subject, somewhat out of view.

The dominant framing of sexuality as identity or a question of "whom" can also be read in the framing of Patrick Califia's short essay "Manliness", where *The Reader's* structural elements cannot recognise the sexuality that pulses at the heart of masculinity for Califia, a misrecognition that comes, I suggest, from an inability to recognise sexuality that does not conform to a question of "whom". In discussing his vexed relationship to manliness, Califia spends half a page (of a four-page essay) talking about perceiving changes to his sexuality after starting testosterone. He never frames sexuality in terms of the object of desire (it seems that he's not overly bothered about the question of "whom" at all – either in terms of an individual sexual interaction or the bigger picture life-narrative), but rather a more embodied experience of sexuality, of arousal, of energy, "need" (Califia 2006, 437). As well as being central to his

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experience of manliness, sexuality also figures as key to his hope of reconciliation with it that Califia expresses. Discussing "cocksucker" used as a slur, he writes: "I am struck not just by the antigay hatred behind it, but also the self-hatred" (ibid., 438). His figures of hope are pagan gods, "[d]ivine heroes like Gilgamesh and Enkiddu, men who loved each other" (ibid.). He ends the essay saying "I believe someday I will hear the word "cocksucker," and know that it's said with awe, with admiration, to designate a holy person, a state of priesthood, a healer, a hero" (ibid.). Both the violence of manliness and the hope of its redemption, for Califia, lie in a place where manliness and sexuality do not so much overlap but are part of each other, inherently. Despite the centrality of sexuality to his understanding of manliness, *TSR* does not frame Califia's essay in these terms at all: it is indexed once in the slightly obfuscating "Sexuality; location", while the editors' gloss does not mention it at all. It seems that talking about sexuality outside of the question of the object of desire fails to register as a discussion of sexuality as relevant to trans studies, and the potential with which he invests sexuality, a potential to offer something healing to masculinity, cannot appear in the *Reader's* framing.

It seems that the claim, made in both academia and activism and (now) popular culture that "Trans is not a 'sexual identity'" (Stryker 2007, 66), has the effect of forcing trans studies to speak of sexuality only within the modes already dominant elsewhere, making sexuality beyond sexual orientation unreadable. As sexuality is collapsed into sexual orientation many doors are closed for understanding the modes of engagement between trans and sexuality, which be explored more in the upcoming chapter, "Scientists or sluts? Sexuality in *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*".

2.3 The impossibility of trans feminine sexuality

There is another structural feature which, I argue, constrains the modes of engagement between trans and sexuality in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, keeping the engagement more superficial, and that is the configuration of sexuality largely within transmasculinity and rarely within transfemininity.

Section five of *The Reader*, "Transgender Masculinities", is unmatched by a corresponding chapter "Transgender Femininities". This structure is not explained, but I read it as a recognition that transmasculinities do not offer the central figure, the imagined body, of trans studies and so a niche is carved into *The Reader* to compensate. When discussing the figure of the transsexual in the US cultural milieu that gave rise to transgender studies, Andrea Long Chu explains of the central figure of the field: "paradigmatically she is a she, especially if we're

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talking about twentieth-/twenty-first- century US culture more broadly" (Chu in Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 109). This plays out in the framing of contemporary trans rights issues. The resounding response to anti-trans rhetoric/legislation from both the conservative right-wing and "gender critical" feminists in the UK and US in the past few years has been "trans women are women". This phrase gets printed on t-shirts, hash-tagged on Twitter, and stated by Daniel Radcliffe to put distance between himself and J. K. Rowling. "Trans women are women". Even though many of the concerns of 'gender-critical' feminism, particularly related to teenagers/young people, are concerns around transmasculinity and the idea that young lesbians are being tricked into "becoming men" (please read the air quotes as scare quotes), the response from the internet is still "Trans women are women". The central figure of both pop cultural ideas of transness, as well as trans studies as a field, is the figure of the trans woman.

These two domains – pop culture and academic trans studies – are not unconnected in this preoccupation with the figure of the trans woman. The cultural preoccupation with trans femininity is fuelled by a historically long worry over what I will call "femininity out of place" – i.e. femininity in people where it "ought not to be" (again, take air quotes as scare quotes). The result of this is a huge amount of cultural production around trans femininity, which an academic field like trans studies then chews over. *The Transgender Studies Reader*, for example, includes essays on *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, while Judith Butler draws on the documentary *Paris is Burning* in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. Not one essay on trans masculinity in *The Reader* reflects on trans masculinity in popular culture because, well, what would you write about?[14]

As an academic field, trans studies has also orbited around the figure of the trans woman because of the place that "experience" is given as both an epistemological and moral value. The field articulates itself early as talking back to the (medico-psychotherapeutic) discourses that were encasing trans lives from the place of "experience". While we can think critically about what we take "experience" to mean and how we consider it in our ways of knowing (for example, Joan Scott's 1991 essay "The Evidence of Experience") – a topic which seems relatively under-articulated in trans studies in its early years – the category, and a claim around it, is central to the claim that the field is making: this intervention matters *because* we speak from a place of experience (unlike the discourses before us). The early big theorists in trans

[14] I am not suggesting that this pop cultural interest is any way helpful or positive for trans women. Indeed, much of it is violent and/or dehumanising. My point is just that cultural production has primed us, when we think of "a transsexual", to think of a trans woman.

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studies, those who define the field in its first decade (or two), are Sandy Stone and Susan Stryker, writing from transfeminine experience. In "The Empire Strikes Back" Stone recognises that the transmasculine and transfeminine figures in feminist and medical discourses are not merely inversions of one another, doing the same thing in the opposite direction (or: "how I like to describe myself in relation to Caitlyn Jenner"). When explaining the autobiographical accounts that she is working from, she notes, in parentheses that are easy to skim over, "(I will consider female-to-male transsexuals in another paper)" (Stone 1992, 155). No such paper has appeared in the 29 years since, but what it tells us is that the central theoretical position that Stone is taking is, undoubtedly, a transfemininity that she recognises as distinctly trans*feminine*, rather than generically trans. The central theoretical positions of trans studies are based in the body and image of the trans woman.

Returning to *The Reader* it seems that there is one thing that trans masculinities can do, which trans femininity cannot: talk about sexuality. Transfeminine modes of sexuality are rarely discussed, and where they are it is either in a way that manages to avoid questions of sex through a limiting question of "whom" (Valentine) or in a possibility not yet delibered on (Stone's *hope* for spectra of desire). In contrast, Patrick Califia, Gayle Rubin, and Jason Cromwell are able to discuss sexuality and sex in terms of sexual practice (albeit in a way that does start towards identity again) within the frame of trans masculinities (although this too is limited in its scope, a point returned to in the conclusion). Similarly, in his Foreword, Stephen Whittle is able to close with the following anecdote:

> … I was astonished to discover that after my appearance on a television show in 2003, a month-long discussion had taken place on an e-mail list for gay bears, in which the participants debated whether sleeping with me (or people like me) would call their own sexual orientation into question. (I was rather pleased to discover that overall they concluded I was rather attractive and that sleeping with me would apparently not make them any less gay.) (Whittle, 2006 xiii)

Finding something similar about trans femininity in *The Reader* seems inconceivable. It is hard to articulate exactly why, but it just would not be the funny-ish anecdote that Whittle can tell. The way in which discussions of sexuality are corralled into the frame of transmasculinities presents two kinds of limits on what trans studies, as a field that is based around the central (if often unnamed) figure of the trans woman, can offer as a space for talking about sexuality. These limits are both a matter of volume, *how much* space sexuality can take, and of kind, the

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way in which it can occupy space. In terms of volume, sexuality will remain peripheral because it can only be discussed in the minority of spaces that are dedicated to transmasculinity. Spaces of "general transness", being inherently transfeminine, cannot contain it. In terms of the way in which it can occupy space, its mode of entry, it seems that the containment in transmasculinity keeps sexuality away from the central space of trans studies, its fleshy heart, because "what it means to be trans" is always, ultimately, a question of "what it means to be a trans woman". In this way, the containment of questions of sexuality largely within transmasculinity keeps the issue of sexuality safely quarantined from the core space of trans(woman)ness that is at the heart of *The Reader* and, I would argue, the field more widely.

2.3.1 Sexuality as a question of masculinity in feminist theory

The absence of transfeminine sexuality in *The Reader* seems to resonate with a tendency in feminist theory to also approach sexuality as a question of masculinity. In an article "Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Theorizing Femme Narrative", Clare Hemmings (1999) explores the logic of Havelock Ellis' figure of the feminine invert as it guides in contemporary femme narratives and proposes ways to resist these narratives and the "skewed logic" at the heart of them (451). In this essay, Hemmings begins from the observation that "[w]here the masculine woman has been visible, if demonized, her presumed counterpart has been passed over as really (or finally) straight, misguided or unattractive – a desperate misfit whose story cannot be told" (ibid., 451-2). This has entailed a "reliance on masculinity as the catalyst for sexual signification" (ibid., 456), the "centrality of the gaze of the masculine woman/butch in making femme subjectivity visible" (ibid., 457). Thinking more widely around this event, Hemmings reflects on a "'butch revival' within contemporary [1990s] lesbian popular culture and theory" (ibid., 457). Sharing in this moment of butch revival in 1990s Anglo-American culture and theory, there is a similarly revealing moment in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" where Butler *shows* us what Hemmings has *told* us. Here Butler (2004) uses the figures of butch/femme to demonstrate the "logic of inversion" which she sees as the very matter of sexuality, that "psychic excess" which "exceed[s] any definitive narrativization" (131) and which offers the possibility of subversive performances of gender and sexuality. While ostensibly demonstrating how this inversion unfolds in "lesbian butch and femme gender stylization" (ibid.,) what Butler discusses is framed almost entirely in terms of the figure of the butch. The femme reads as tacked on at the end, something of an afterthought. The lack of transfeminine sexuality in *The Reader*, its containment of sexuality within transmasculinities, seems to resonate with the tendency among some feminists (identified by Hemmings and shown in Butler) to identify

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sexuality primarily through masculinity rather than femininity. However, as the conclusion returns to, this containment within transmasculinities also has consequences for the modes sexuality can take.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how sexuality arises, in what modes and what spaces, in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, the first (and hugely authoritative) reader to frame the field in around a decade after its emergence in academia in the US. Sexuality is largely kept to the side, I have argued, through a distinction between (trans) gender and sexuality as a separate realm of experience accounted for elsewhere, a theme picked up in the literature review but manifesting here through a primarily ontological distinction rather than a more functional division of academic labour. Where sexuality does figure, it is primarily approached as a question of 'whom' and contained within transmasculinity, in keeping with 1990s Anglo-American feminist theories influenced by a "butch revival". The significance of this will be returned to in the concluding chapter. The immediate effect of these framings of sexuality is their quarantining from the heart of the field. Such is the status of sexuality in trans studies by the mid-2000s: sexuality is neither central nor, it seems, particularly promising of newness. The next chapter explores another site, outside this dominant discourse, which shows how this singular placing (within transmasculinity) and singular modality (a question of "whom"), are constricting and not inevitable.

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3. Scientists or sluts?[15] Sexuality in *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*

This chapter first introduces *TransSisters*, making the case for its inclusion and expanding on how it usefully compliments *The Reader* in this project's genealogical project. Then, it argues that in *TransSisters* we can find an energy around sexuality and sexual politics that is absent in *The Reader*, and the efforts to build a new trans sexual culture in the midst of anxieties around particular forms of trans sexuality, particularly those involving the penis.

TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism

TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism (*TransSisters* or *TS*) was published over ten issues between 1993 and 1995. Based in Kansas City, Missouri, *TransSisters* was available in the USA and Canada, and emerged at a time of increasing trans cultural production – both mainstream and subcultural – in North America (Stryker 2017, chap. 5).[16] *TransSisters* occupies more the subcultural space, nestled amidst a "burgeoning international trans periodical subculture" (Cunningham 2019, 13), including publications such as *gendertrash* and *Transsexual News Telegraph (TNT)*. However, *TransSisters* situates itself in such a way that makes it particularly insightful for the concern of this thesis. Where other periodicals situated themselves clearly as activist interventions, *TransSisters* very explicitly attempts to straddle both activist and academic discourses, trans and feminist, to intervene in both spaces – hence the title *'**The Journal** of Transsexual Feminism'* (emphasis mine). This thesis is interested in the place of sexuality within the field of (academic) transgender studies that is, in the 1990s, in its first years of field formation. In these early years, individuals, ideas, and works successfully cross-over into the academic discourse while others do not. *TransSisters* is consciously trying to shape that emerging discourse and while it is consistently brushing up against academic space, it largely fails to impact it. Of all the contributors throughout *The Journal* only one becomes recognisable in the field of transgender studies, and many of the broad political positions around which *TransSisters* broadly coalesces get eviscerated in the academic

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[15] This phrase is taken from Riki Anne Wilchins' book *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversions and the End of Gender* (1997).

[16] Although shipping was advertised as available to Mexico, the USA, and Canada, the main sense that we have of where copies actually reached (either to individual subscribers or stocked in bookshops) is from readers corresponding in the section 'Letters to the Editor' which were only from the USA and Canada. It seems that subscribers did circulate copies further (as reflected on by one contributor who notes copies reaching the UK (Xavier 1996)), but the content and the conversations running through the publication seem firmly located in the USA and Canada.

discourse to come. This makes *TransSisters* a useful compliment to *The* Reader as it denaturalises the latter's framing through its difference in the time before the field's ossification in its first reader, creating a dialogue between "the discourse that makes it" and "the discourse that does not".

3.1 Possibilities for sexuality in TransSisters

At first glance, it is not easy to locate sexuality in *TransSisters*. Only once (1994a) does the word 'sexuality', or any term immediately associated with it, appear on the front cover where the key themes of each issue are printed. The contents pages do not offer a huge amount more – across the publication there are five entries in the contents which refer to sexuality, out of over 120 articles that cover almost 500 pages. However, on closer reading, the pages of *TransSisters* are, not quite sodden with, but definitely lightly showered by, sexuality. Sometimes it is quite explicit – a short paragraph that suddenly turns to sexuality before turning back to the subject in which it is embedded – while others are implicit, with sexuality lingering, haunting, at the base of an argument that is, ostensibly, about something else. The editions of *TransSisters* are also richly embedded in webs with other texts, threads which delicately anchor *TransSisters* to other spaces which are deeply concerned with sexuality, such as other publications or conferences and protests attended by the writers. These threads, pulled together, offer several strands of thought about sexuality, transness, and their modes of interaction.

It is clear across *TransSisters* that sexuality as identity within the discourse of sexual orientation matters to contributors. It is consistently cited in the short staff bios which follow each individual piece, as well as in the longer staff bios (for example, Issue 4's section "Meet the Staff").[17] However, where *The Reader* struggles to move beyond questions of sexuality as a question of "whom", the object of desire, *TransSisters* moves quickly into other modes of thinking about the relationship between transness and sexuality, what sexuality means in a context of transsexual womanhood, in discussions of sexuality as a collective politics of sexual pleasure.

3.1.1 Sexuality as a collective politics

The strongest engagement with sexuality across *TransSisters* comes in a conceptualisation of sexuality as a site of political struggle, something which transsexual women are being systematically denied by a patriarchal medical establishment. Critiquing the medical

[17] "Staff writers", might imply that contributors were paid, but this seems very unlikely due to the small circulation (approximately 250 subscribers) estimated by one contributor Jessica Xavier (1996).

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establishment's attitude towards, and treatment of, transsexuals has been an established frame in trans scholarship since its inception, at roughly the same time that *TransSisters* is printing. However, the forms that this critique takes in *TransSisters* is a slightly different form to other, perhaps more radical, critiques which form the mainstream of trans studies as it takes shape in the following years. Rather than rejecting the authority of medicalisation entirely, *TransSisters* articulates a limited critique of medical interventions which insists on their necessity yet demands that they do better, focusing on the common failure of surgeons performing gender reassignment surgery to respect the possibility of trans sexual pleasure.

This critique begins by arguing that medical professionals (surgeons, but also doctors and psychotherapists who were, in the 20th century, hugely powerful in providing people with access to medical transition) do not recognise transsexuals as sexual beings after surgery. In an interview in *TransSisters*, Sandy Stone describes her own experience at the Gender Dysphoria Program at the Stanford University Medical School in the 1970s, and the assumption from medical staff there that she would not have a sexual life after surgery: [18]

> I had read the laundry list [things that the Clinic expected from a legitimate transsexual] quite well, and one of the things on that list was that one should accept the possibility that one will be completely unattractive to people of any gender or sex afterwards, and this was repeated to me a number of times by therapists and by the people at Stanford… I did proceed, but that was why I was doing so without any real sense of sexuality; I didn't expect to have one necessarily. (*TS*, 1995b,16)

This denial of possibilities resulted in surgical practice was negligently blind to the relevance of sexual pleasure for transsexual women. In a report on the XIII International Symposium of the Harry Benjamin Association, a presenting surgeon is quoted as explaining: "What the male-to-female patient wants… is a functioning vagina with a good cosmetic appearance", with the reporter clarifying that "[b]y "functioning" he meant – of course – the ability to receive a large penis"" (*TS* 1994b, 32).[19] Surgeons who do conceive of a possible sexual relationship after surgery, it is commonly claimed, can only consider transsexual women from the perspective of the sexual object (to be seen, to be penetrated), rather than a subject who herself might *feel* anything. Indeed, in the same article, it is noted that many of those performing genital surgery have little understanding of how vaginas *in general* work, with one surgeon

[18] The Stanford University Medical School's programme to develop transsexual medicine opened in the late 1960s, along with several other programmes based at major universities. Stanford's programme was one of the most advanced trans medicines programmes in the US at the time.

[19] The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (now WPATH) was the leading professional organisation for trans medical treatment in the US. Like the Stanford programme, this is supposed to be the leading professional insight on trans issues and medicine.

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reporting that "as we know, orgasm for (nontranssexual) women takes place in the uterus" (*TS* 1994b, 33). The irony could not be more bitter.

This critique of incompetent, negligent surgery that denies trans sexuality sits within a wider attitude towards science and medicalisation that is actually quite positive across *TransSisters* and gets drawn upon to provide a way to talk about the sexual pleasure that transsexual women can wrestle back from the hands of a patriarchal medical establishment. There is a strong consensus across *TransSisters* in favour of the depathologisation of transsexuality (an issue that was of ongoing activist concern following in the footsteps of the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973), but this is not at all followed by a demand for demedicalisation (the removal of trans bodies from the domain of doctors). Transsexuality is unwaveringly discussed as something that, while not pathological, still demands medical technologies. This positive orientation towards medicalisation sits within a broader positive orientation towards science. While they (mostly) reject biological essentialisms, contributors frequently draw on the language of biological sex to position transsexuality within a spectrum of the sexual diversity of womanhood, drawing on framings of biology which reinforce claims of variance (rather than homogeneity) in sexual characteristics, and which offer grounds for including transsexual women within biological womanhood. One contributor, for example, writes of her exclusion in some lesbian separatist circles: "Even though fifteen percent of genetic women are born infertile and/or have never had a period, the fact that I don't bleed monthly and can't bear children is reason enough in their eyes to exclude me from the community" (*TS* 1994c, 38). While the contributor identifies ideas of biological sex (menstruation and pregnancy) as the grounds for her exclusion, she argues for inclusion still within the terms of biological sex (the regularity of infertility among non-trans women). Her discourse of biological sex is less binary and absolute, one which has more space for variation and difference among women, but it reflects well the perception, common across *TransSisters,* that science *in general* is necessary and can be good for transsexual lives.

It is within this orientation that the critique of the medical establishment can be understood not as a rejection of medicalisation but a demand to be medicalised *better*, less negligently and with less disdain. As one contributor writes: "Done conscientiously, with existing surgical techniques, our sexuality can be enhanced – not destroyed" (*TS* 1994a, 30). From this position a particular conceptualisation of sexuality emerges, a language of "functionality" that becomes speakable and legitimate in this wider context that validates scientific discourses.

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3.1.2 Orgasmic functionality

The article "Orgasmic Function in Postoperative Transsexual Women" (*TS* 1994a) is the most focused and extensive explicit discussion of trans sexuality throughout the publication and it shows how a particular articulation of sexuality comes to be possible in this environment. The article reports the findings of a workshop on sexuality after genital surgery, and follows a scientific journal format. Following an abstract, the report proceeds as follows: "Introduction"; "Investigation Techniques and Results"; "Respondents"; "Conclusion"; "Recommendations"; "Table I" (which reports various questions asked to respondents, and records their responses (yes/no/maybe)), and finally "Table II" (where the following information is recorded about participants: surgeon, year of surgery, type of surgery, whether or not the woman is able to orgasm, and her sexual orientation). This article is the most focused discussion in *TransSisters* on sexuality and it is also the only time across the publication that this kind of scientific format is used. This format demands that the sexuality of transsexual women gets read within a discourse of science, and by locating it within this discourse pulls from it a certain legitimacy and respectability: this is not smut, this is science[20] It makes it possible to talk about something that is, otherwise, very hard to talk about. However, as it is enabling it is also constraining, because a scientifically-oriented discourse of "orgasmic functionality" only provides a very limited (albeit important) vocabulary for what kinds of sexuality can be talked about and how they can be talked about.

This article is by far the most prominent discussion of sexuality throughout *TransSisters* and it seems to draw on two discourses for the legitimacy that enables such a discussion. Not only does it draw authority from the scientific format and quantitative mode, it also resonates with feminist critiques of a patriarchal medical establishment that were a key part of the feminist activism in the US that has come to be cast as the Second Wave (for details on the Women's Health Movement of the 1970s onwards in the US, see Norsigian 2019), a political legacy that often goes unrecognised. In examining the relationships between trans health activism and earlier feminist activism, Christoph Hanssmann has argued that the influence of the latter is rarely recognised in contemporary narratives of the roots of trans health activism (Hanssmann

[20] This approach seems very much in keeping with the approach of (social) scientific sex research in the US in the later part of the twentieth century. Writing of American sex researchers Masters and Johnson and Alfred Kinsey in the 1960s, Katherine Angel explains: "[their] white lab-coated appearances were a careful strategy to evoke the scientific respectability of their work. Sex research has always to had to manage its image, insisting perhaps more than is useful or accurate on the neutrality of its methods. And because quantification is closely associated with objectivity and neutrality… sex research has often leaned on its methods in order to reassure" that it is "objective, neutral and above all non-pornographic." (Angel 2021, 79)

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2016). While Hanssmann is making his argument from within in health-professional settings, the same lack of recognition presents in academic accounts from within trans studies. In the introductions to the first and second trans studies readers, queer AIDS activism is recognised as the force which politicised trans communities' relationship to the medical establishment and its heteronormative regime (Stryker 2006, 7; Stryker and Aizura 2013, 1). However, it is difficult to read *TransSisters* within that legacy. While the term "queer" does occasionally get used, it is rare and AIDS is, somehow, never mentioned. More plausible seems a feminist lineage of a politicised relationship to the medical establishment that long preceded the AIDS crisis in books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1970), campaigns around reproductive rights, and efforts to establish women-run health centres. From how contributors narrate their own feminist backgrounds, and the kind of projects *TransSisters* is engaged in, this lineage seems more plausible.[21] With the medical establishment as an institution that was firmly established as a site of feminist critique, both on an academic and activist level, there is a kind of feminist dignity in approaching sexuality in this way which allows a (limited) framework for talking about sexuality. It is somewhat ironic then that what emerges from this critique is a conception of sexuality that is very much framed in medicalised terms, "orgasmic functionality" in the title of the article, which pulls its authority simultaneously from this feminist dignity and a belief in the possibility of practices of "good'" medical/scientific practice.

3.1.3 New pleasures?

"Orgasmic functionality" provides a language for disclosing experiences of, and demanding the relevance for trans women of, sexual pleasure that draws on both feminist critiques of a patriarchal medical establishment and then a reappropriation of the language of science to claim sexual genital sensation and "orgasmic functionality." While giving a language, and not an unimportant one, for speaking about sexuality, it does so from a discourse which very much constrains it coming as it does from the space of what Foucault calls the scientific knowledge of sexuality.

In an interview in 1982, printed the next year in the American gay magazine *The Advocate*, Foucault draws a distinction between the project of sexuality which he sees happening in American SM communities and the proliferations of sexual identities which took shape in the sexual sciences. Where these earlier identities rested on a model of desire, a disclosure of inner, existing, desires, SM practices make no such claim. Rather, they involve "the real creation of

[21] The positioning of *TransSisters* in this political legacy will be further explored in the concluding chapter.

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new possibilities of pleasure" through a wider relation to the body as erotic beyond "fucking" (Foucault 2000, 165). It is this wider conception of erotic pleasure which the language of "orgasmic functionality" cannot speak to. The outcome, the definition of eroticism, is already set in "orgasm", a sexual goal that – while an important political claim for transsexual women who are denied it – is not open to reinvention. Where the framing of sexuality as orgasmic functionality, or as identity within a discourse of sexual orientation, occupy more comfortable space in *TransSisters*, framing sexuality in terms of this kind of sexual or erotic practice seems more fraught. However, we can read traces of an impulse towards such a conception of pleasure, first in the threads which tie *TransSisters* into a wider landscape of radical lesbian sexuality in the US at the time and secondly in an effort to embed that culture in the pages of *TransSisters*.

Sexuality and intertextuality

TransSisters is a very intertextual publication, and in its intertextuality the publication reveals its proximity to engaged, radical sexual politics. Issue 7 (*TS* 1995a), which focuses on activism surrounding the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, includes a reprint of the schedule for 'Camp Trans' – a protest camp which had been held for several years outside the Festival to protest its policy of excluding transsexual women. [22] There are two events in the programme that are explicitly focussed on a more radical sexual politics and practice:

> 3:30 pm Transsexual Sexuality: Our Cunts Are Not The Same. Riki Anne Wilchins, author of Read My Lips, will conduct a (hands-on?) workshop that will begin as a talk-and-listen, may evolve into a show-and-tell (and perhaps a scratch-and-sniff, or even a touch-and-feel).
>
> 10:00am SM 101: Everything you always wanted to know about SM but were afraid to ask, led by Mary V. Cochran, PhD in Clinical Psychology and Headmistress of Female Trouble, Philadelphia. (*TS* 1995a, 37)

TransSisters' editor, and many staff writers, are very involved in Camp Trans throughout the 1990s. Riki Anne Wilchins, leader of the workshop "Our Cunts Are Not The Same", is a staff writer for most of the publication. Similarly, *TransSisters* is connected to other publications pushing radical sexuality through its writers in another way; most of the women writing in *TransSisters* are also being published in other publications which are focussed on bisexual and lesbian sexuality, erotica, sex work. The wider activism and periodical world in which *TransSisters* is embedded, and literally embeds within itself in re-printed articles and

[22] The Michigan Women's Music Festival was an annual, women-only, music festival held in Michigan between 1976-2015. After a trans woman was expelled from the Festival in 1991 for violating its "womyn-born-womyn" policy, an annual protest camp – Camp Trans – was formed and ran alongside the Festival for many years.

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references, is clearly important to the self-conception of *TransSisters*. The periodical visibly links itself to a wider context that is actively committed to radical sexuality.

Thinking in terms of genealogy returns us to considering the spaces (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 110) in which both *TransSisters* and *The Reader* are located and their impact on "constituting a domain of objects" (ibid., 105) to think about why the latter refuses to take up similar opportunities to link to radical sexual politics in its editorial glosses (as already discussed in "Sexuality and *The Transgender Studies Reader*"). My speculation is that sexuality can be so visible in *TransSisters*, indeed it is important that it is visible, because sexuality matters in the transsexual feminism being developed, just as it matters in the feminisms of the Second Wave where *TransSisters* is located (a point that is expanded in the concluding section). Trans studies, as an academic field, is less insistent that its ideal subject must be sexual. In its association of sexuality with queer studies, and its argument that trans studies is a necessary addition to that, the point of trans studies must be something other than sexuality. *The Reader*, therefore, does not have the same incentive to emphasise such links. While radical sexual politics makes *TransSisters* respectable in its political milieu, it does not serve the same function in *The Reader* which is operating in a very different atmosphere (again, a point that will be returned to in the conclusion).

Erotica here, please

As well as this entanglement with other spaces of radical sexuality, there is also an explicit effort to develop a more radical discourse of trans sexuality within *TransSisters*. *TransSisters'* editor, Davina Anne Gabriel (founder, editor, and author of many pieces in *TransSisters*) states, regretfully, in an interview: "It seems to me that transsexuals don't really have any of their own erotica, that the whole idea of transsexual erotica is just too threatening, both to society and to transsexuals themselves" (*TS* 1994c, 21). This absence is something which she tries to rectify through *TransSisters.* Every issue of the publication runs a request for submissions and instructions on how to submit pieces. Until issue 3, it is titled "Submissions", but from issue 4 onwards the title is changed to "Get Submissive", and the text is playfully rewritten with the "editor" now referred to as the "Dominedtrix". This format gets played with again from issue 8, where a cartoon picture is added, of a woman brandishing a whip. There is another useful detail in the submissions section which indicates a desire to bring sexuality to the fore. In issue 4 a specific request for erotica gets added to the text and remains there throughout the rest of the publication. This is the only thing ever singled out in submission requests, the only subject specifically solicited. This suggests not only a desire for erotic content, but also a reflection

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that potential contributors might not instinctively assume that this content has a place in *TransSisters*, that it doesn't necessarily "belong" in the way that other topics might. Put differently, the fact that the request for erotica needs to be spelled out suggests that it sexual or erotic practice is not an established part of transsexual discourse at that moment. Yet there is a real desire expressed that it *could* be, that it just needs spaces in which to be created.

Despite the proximity of *TransSisters* to textual and non-textual spaces which engage explicitly with radical sexuality and ideas of eroticism, the request for erotica in "Get Submissive" seems to be an invitation without a response; no-one, it seems, submits the requested erotica. But this doesn't necessarily mean a failure; the demand for erotica still sits in the pages of *TransSisters*. The suggestion of, as the possibility of, a transsexual erotica is there and the possibility of new sexual practices are opened up by Riki Anne Wilchins and Mary Cochran's workshops. However, these efforts to talk about sexuality do not take as easily as identity or "orgasmic functionality" seem to. In her mostly-autobiographical book *Read My Lips: sexual subversion and the end of gender* (1997), Wilchins recounts a workshop which seems to be the one mentioned above, "Our Cunts Are Not the Same". She recounts how the workshop begins with a "comfortingly didactic" discussion of surgical techniques and technologies before moving on to the second part, where "everyone pulls on latex gloves (safe sex only) and gets to feel a real live transcunt" (Wilchins 1997, 116). In her recounting, Wilchins describes how one of the more forthcoming participants takes it on herself to see "if she can make me moan a little. Then someone tries to make me moan a lot" (ibid.). Wilchins explains that this is when she calls it a day: "It's about this point that I have to call a halt to the proceedings: after all, we're scientists here, not sluts" (ibid.). What she draws attention to, mockingly, is a clear awareness of the protection that the language of science provides to an exploration of her genitals. She mockingly frames her workshop as scientific endeavour, in opposition to a lesbian sex workshop; that would be slutty, but this is science.

3.2 'Pleasure and danger'[23]: where gender is resolved (vs. where it is not)

Efforts to talk about sexuality in *TransSisters* do not take hold with equal effect. Some take easily while other, less established, modes struggle more yet still open up possibilities for newness, for creation. However, as this chapter now explores, sexuality does not figure without danger in TransSisters, which can be read through the way in which *TransSisters* configures the relationship between gender and sexuality. It will first be argued that sexuality seems to

[23] 'Pleasure and danger' is a reference to Carole Vance (ed) book of the same name (1992). In her introduction, Vance argues that feminist discourses around sexuality are simultaneously driven by both of these forces.

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present a kind of danger to the integrity of claims to transsexual womanhood, demonstrating this through the treatment of the marginal figure of the transvestite in *TransSisters*, and the difficulty in embracing sexuality among transsexual women who have not yet (pre-) or do not intend to have (non-op) sexuality. However, as will be then argued, once the danger has been "resolved" (through SRS), sexuality is able to appear again in a way that is safe, that supports rather than threatens transsexual womanhood. [24]

The conventional wisdom expressed across *TransSisters*, what seems to be the "official line", is that sex/gender and sexuality are not the same thing. Indeed, this is still the "official line" in trans discourse, mainstream feminist thinking and, increasingly, popular understanding in the US. One staff writer expresses this as follows:

> Gender and sexuality are often confused with one another. Let's face it: ya wanna fuck who ya wanna fuck, and it doesn't matter if you're a man, a woman, or if your gender identity falls somewhere in between. To wit, neither the gender identity nor the anatomical sex of an individual is a reliable indicator of whom you might find her or him in bed with. (*TS* 1994a, 32)

We are told two key things here: that people *wrongly* equate gender and sexuality (they are "confused with one another"), and that our own sex/gender does not predict the sex/gender of our object desire. We are back in the discourse of sexual orientation where the relevant aspect of sexuality is the sex/gender configuration of two sexual participants, desirer and object of desire. Desire, we are told, does not follow from sex/gender and may strike in all manner of directions towards differently sexed/gendered objects. That sexuality and gender are often "confused" is a source of deep frustration in *TransSisters*: "Doesn't everyone out there understand that gender and sexuality aren't the same thing?" (*TS* 1994c, 49). In this frequently repeated assertion I read an effort to articulate a definition of transsexuality as solely a matter of gender, putting conceptual space between sexuality and transness through this claim that they should not be "confused" (which, as will soon be discussed, some contributors refuse). This effort to purge sexuality from transsexuality (transsexuality as a state where sexuality is not, inherently, implicated) can be read in the treatment of transvestism across the publication.

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[24] SRS is sex-reassignment surgery which, in the 1990s, was the current nomenclature.

3.1.2.1 Reading the relationship of sex/gender and sexuality through transvestism[25]

Conflations of transsexuality and transvestism in public and media perceptions are an obvious source of anxiety in *TransSisters*. However, it seems that this anxiety goes beyond external perceptions. Several elements of *TransSisters* reflect the close proximity of transsexual and transvestite communities in the early 1990s, which go beyond public (mis)understandings and conflations. Rather, they are linked by a chain of texts (articles, publications, and adverts) throughout *TransSisters* which muddy the otherwise heavily policed distinction. *TransSisters* mixes original pieces with reprints from other North American gay and trans publications, and many of the staff writers write for these publications. Some of these publications take a different stance to *TransSisters'* commitment to transsexualism, and recognise themselves as also speaking to transvestite identity, or something which sits less clearly between the two. One example is *The TV/TS Tapestry Journal*, whose strapline describes it as "the journal for persons interested in crossdressing & transsexualism". The "&" in the strapline is very ambivalent – it can be read as structuring crossdressing and transsexualism as two distinct things, or as grouping them together as the shared concern of one imagined reader. The "/" in the title offers similar ambivalence and can be read positing them as two things which are not, perhaps, so distinct. More damning still, the "/"; with the direction of its slant, the preceding word tilts forward, tipping into and over the word which follows it. The "/" obviates the need for a space, " ", between the two terms, it blends them together with no room to breathe. Adverts in *TransSisters* pose similar proximity, regularly including adverts aimed at crossdressers as well as transsexuals. It seems that advertisers perceive that crossdresser content will be relevant for the readership of *TransSisters*, and that the editor of *TransSisters* agrees enough to accept these adverts adding to the chain of texts through and around *TransSisters* that reveal some proximity between transsexual and transvestite communities.

The anxiety caused by this proximity is demonstrated by the countless times that the distinction is explicitly reasserted, and in these reassertions sexuality often functions as grounds of distinction. In discussing women-only spaces, one contributor writes: "Lesbians have a legitimate interest in ascertaining whether someone with a penis in such space is a woman or a crossdresser looking to get his dick wet" (*TS* 1995a, 53). In this formulation, the legitimate trans person in this space is gendered ("a woman") while the illegitimate one is both inappropriately gendered ("his") *and* sexualised ("get his dick wet"). It is not only gender that distinguishes the legitimate and illegitimate trans presence, but the visibility or invisibility of

[25] This section was developed in a term paper for the course 'Discourse Analysis', winter 2021

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their sexuality, which functions to indicate the (inappropriate) gendering. Elsewhere, when less morally loaded and without the (not so vague) threat of sexual violence, sexuality still functions to maintain the integrity of transsexual identity through its absence. Another contributor, for example, differentiates transvestism and transsexuality as follows: "Male transvestites enjoy putting on women's clothes. Early on in their cross-dressing career, it is mostly a sexual thrill, a fetish. Yet, many of these men reach a point where just "becoming" female for a period of time is a reward in itself. Sexual activity seldom plays a major role at this stage." In this articulation, when the sexual element disappears, transvestism morphs into something else, it moves towards transsexuality. Interestingly when the same contributor returns to this distinction in a later issue, arguing against transsexual hostility to transvestites, sexuality is absent in her description of transvestism. Sexuality gets invoked when lines of difference are being drawn and is disappeared where political unity or solidarity are being posed.

3.1.2.2 Space for sexuality once gender is "resolved"

While sexuality gets invoked to draw distinctions between transvestism (where sexuality is implicated) and transsexuality (where it is not), once safely within transsexuality, sexuality can thrive. This hinges on the resolution of sex/gender through SRS and its corresponding limit then is the sexuality of trans women who have not had genital surgery (who are typically referred to as "pre-op");[26] there is no discursive space to defend or celebrate such sexuality and we can read this through the framing of the controversy over the New Woman Conference where, I argue, we can read pre-op sexuality, the symbolic presence of the penis, posed as a threat. It is no coincidence, it seems, that this debate takes on remarkably similar contours to the radical feminist in/exclusion around trans women discussed in "Trans studies, sexuality, and feminist theory".

Issue 6 is dedicated to a schism among *TransSisters* readers and contributors about the New Woman Conference (NWC), a (very small) annual weekend retreat held in a small town on the Russian River 100km north of San Francisco. The schism is over whether or not the NWC – a retreat aimed at post-operative transsexual women which focuses primarily on their experiences of SRS – should be open to pre-op transsexual women. While different contributors disagree with one another for a variety of reasons, one notable framing is the threat of pre-op sexuality. Perhaps the most derisive argument in favour of pre-op inclusion comes from Riki Anne Wilchins who, over the course of three pages, writes with mounting (mock)

[26] The "pre" here speaks to an understanding of transsexuality which assumes that every transsexual woman does want and will eventually have SRS. Life then is split into two phases: pre- and post-op.

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hysteria about the supposed risk of pre-op women at NWC, a situation that could only end in a great flood of genital fluids:

> "SMEGMA… Smega at breakfast. Smegma at lunch. Smegma in the hot tub, just a'cloggin' up the Smegma Drains we had removed this year on accounta' wer weren't gonna need 'em. Smegma, seducing and defiling our womenfolk. And penises, penises russling cattle and raping women, or russling women and raping cattle", at which point she suggests that the National Guard should be called in. (*TS* 1994d, 32)

On the other side of the argument is *TransSisters* editor, Davina Anne Gabriel. Of her own position, she writes:

> I'm aware that it sounds like a very facile cliché to say that some of my best friends are preoperative transsexual women, but I can in fact truthfully say that one of my two very closest friends in the world is a preoperative transsexual woman. I recently spent a week camping out in the woods with this woman, and not only did we share a tent, but also a bed, for that entire week. (*TS* 1994d, 49)

Although they take different sides of the argument, Gabriel and Wilchins both structure their arguments around an acknowledgement that this argument plays out around an anxiety of the threat of the presence of penises. Wilchins inflates and mocks this anxiety, while Gabriel pre-emptively insists that she is not driven by it. Both recognise that this is the relevant framing of the debate; even as they both reject the supposed risk, they structure their arguments in its terms. Neither agrees to equate pre-op sexuality with sexual violence, but both recognise that that claim is already sitting somewhere in the debate, just below the surface and must be addressed. Although the implicit claim is about sexual violence (we read this clearly from Wilchins and Gabriel), I read that as a stand-in here for another kind of violence, a violence towards the integrity of transsexual womanhood perpetuated by the presence of the penis. *TransSisters*, it must be noted, is within a discourse of transsexuality which more or less demands genital desire or, at minimum, the desire for genital surgery. In both Wilchins' and Gabriel's comments, we can read the association of pre-op women with sexuality, and that sexuality is framed as being a threat to the integrity of an event that is supposedly about gender. The resolution of sex/gender through surgery allows a space to talk about sexuality.

In the news section of issue 5, there is an article "Powersurge Drops "Woman-Born-Women" Only Policy" (*TS* 1994c). *Powersurge* was a lesbian SM conference in Seattle (the centre of the lesbian BDSM and leather scene at the time). Beginning in 1992, *Powersurge* adopted a policy of excluding trans women in its second year before deciding to drop the policy in its third year, replacing it with one that included trans women who had had genital surgery and excluded those who had not. The news report in *TransSisters* describes the new policy as

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follows: "…the 'dick-in-the-drawer' rule still applies… [which] stipulates that "you must be able to put your dick – if any – in a drawer, slam the drawer shut, and walk away without causing yourself bodily harm"" (1994c, 10). In short, the policy says: dildos are an acceptable/appropriate expression of sexuality, but having a penis is not. On this, many of the contributors to *TransSisters* agree with *Powersurge*.

One such contributor later writes of her sexual self after surgery, directly referencing the *Powersurge* policy: "The only penis I have is one I can tuck away in a drawer after I take it out of the harness" (*TS* 1995a, 55). This sentence illuminates the violence in the *Powersurge* policy that she also endorses; instead of getting trapped in a drawer being slammed shut, this strap-on gets "tuck[ed] away", it can be treated gently, it doesn't get slammed. This example illustrates a tendency that reappears several times across *TransSisters*; where the question of sex/gender is felt to be adequately resolved through surgery it opens a discursive space to speak about sexuality more richly. When the question of sex/gender has not been adequately resolved, sexuality tends to be expressed with some sense of threat needing violent containment in a (preferably lockable) drawer.

3.1.2.3 Sexuality as a trans practice

One effect of the repeated assertion that sex/gender and sexuality are not the same, both in its explicit assertions and through the use of sexuality to claim gendered differences between transvestism and transsexuality, is that it seems to close down space for thinking about how sex/gender and sexuality *are* related or might be interacting in a non-deterministic way. Transness, then, is produced as a space which is not inherently sexual (unlike transvestism) and sexuality comes in from another facet of existence. This effect is not inevitable, but it does seem to happen. However, at the edges of *TransSisters* there is an alternative discourse in which sexuality's banishment is challenged, and it is inserted at the heart of discussions of sexual reassignment surgery (SRS). The desire for SRS is usually framed in terms of gender, and the sexual aspects of what a person might do with their newly configured genitals sits somewhat uneasily, lingering at the edge of the conversation. In an interview with *TransSisters'* editor, Kate Bornstein (whose book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* is regarded as one of the books which drove the increasingly visibility of trans people in the 1990s) places sexuality at the heart of the meaning that she gives to SRS: "But for me the surgery and the state of the flesh in my genital area has nothing whatsoever to do with my gender. I like my vagina because it permits me to experience things in an erotic way in the way that I've always wanted to. But that's sex, that's not gender" (*TS* 1994c, 19). Similarly, another contributor

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writes: “Gender is spiritual and psychological, and it isn’t really affected by my body. To me, the operation is just a way to attract a certain kind of sex partner.” (*TS* 1994b, 31). While “just” may be read as downplaying significance, she clearly values sexual relationships, of the kind she can now engage in, immensely. Another explains her rejection of analogies between SRS and more cosmetic plastic surgeries: “But the genitals are not just a minor skin blotch. Genital surgery is not cosmetic. It involves cutting and reshaping the very base of our sexuality. It is profound and meaningful in very subtle ways.” (*TS* 1994d, 39). Each of these articulates a sense in which sexuality is necessarily at the heart of her SRS. This is expressed by another contributor, who writes: “‘transgenderism’ used as a euphemism for changing sex masks the reality that transsexuals seek to change their bodies in order to experience genital sexual pleasure without a prick getting in the way” (*TS* 1994a, 28). Again, SRS gains much of its meaning through sexual pleasure, rather than solely through an affirmation of gender completely devoid of anything resembling sexuality or desire.

Conclusions

Through *TransSisters* this chapter has explored an alternative discourse of transness and sexuality to that offered by *The Reader*, offering sexuality in a plurality of modes beyond questions of identity and the object of desire. Through a critique of medical approaches to SRS and the negligent disregard for sexuality the language of “orgasmic functionality” emerges as a space of trans sexual pleasure and a site of sexual politics. Still other spaces of new pleasures are invited by *TransSisters*, including the prospect of transsexual erotica and links that tie *TransSisters* into a world of radical sexual politics. However, these sometimes struggle more, lacking the authority that “orgasmic functionality” draws from both feminist critiques of medicine and the language of science itself. Sexuality is largely confined to post-op life and the penis seems to be a site of sexuality which few are willing to try and redeem, a site of anxiety. While the distinction of (trans)gender and sexuality is often made, and asserted through the marginalisation of the figure of the transvestite, there are nonetheless some contributors who insist on putting sexuality at the heart of the meaning of SRS and, consequently, at the heart of the discourses of trans womanhood in *TransSisters*.

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4. Conclusions: Feminist resonances and possibilities for sexuality, race, and discourses of transness

Reading *TransSisters* through this thesis' theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the engagements with sexuality in *The Reader* are neither inevitable nor natural. While it may have *become* the common-sense of trans studies' in regard to sexuality, *The Reader* is itself a process of cementing the field which takes up certain modes of engagement with sexuality while avoiding others. This thesis has argued that sexuality, by the time of *The Reader*, has narrowed into a question of identity and orientation (a question of "whom") and lost the promise that it held in *TransSisters,* the hope of a politics and invention. In the possibility of transsexual erotica, in *TransSisters'* intertextual ties to other spaces of radical sexual practice and politics, and in its hope that once questions of gender are resolved transsexual women can, potentially, flourish sexually, *TransSisters* develops an ethics where sexuality is an important part of the trans good life and (to some degree) a space of possibility. The idea expressed (albeit in a fraught way) in *TransSisters* that parts of transness (particularly SRS) can be sexual as much as about gender disappears, and instead sexuality is positioned as a separate realm to transness or gender. This happens through the structure of *The Reader*, the way it seems to conceptualise cross-cutting categories, and the way sexuality is minimised in the editorial glosses. Indeed, *TransSisters* too works hard to distinguish gender and sexuality – for example in its treatment of transvestism – but but there are consistently some voices in *TransSisters* which refuse to fully desexualise their transness. Finally, where *The Reader* largely contains sexuality in transmasculinities (and consequently keeps it marginal in the field), *TransSisters* places sexuality at the heart of transsexual womanhood.

In this speculative conclusion, I wish to return to some of these arguments, to understand them better by reading both sites' articulations of sexuality within their feminist contexts. I do not intend to make a causal argument (too many of the texts in *The Reader*, and the entirety of *TransSisters*, are not engaged in citational practices which would allow a tight tracing of specific ideas or thinkers), but rather an argument of resonances with broad feminist contexts. If feminist theory is indeed the "womb" from which trans studies emerged, or a provider of its early intellectual investments, we can trace resonances between trans and feminist sites in how sexuality comes to be articulated in different trans discourses. Where queer theory has been more commonly acknowledged in terms of trans studies' theoretical resonances (for example Stryker 2004; Keegan 2020), its roots in feminist thinking are, while claimed, much less

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explored. I hope to move beyond the confining discussions of this relationship in terms of in/exclusion, and instead trace some of the ways in which feminist contexts can be found, already present, in trans discourses. They are best understood in a dialogue with their feminisms, I argue, for better and worse. This section is speculative, and each of these three avenues is worth further research.

4.1 Shifting feminist priorities at the end of the twentieth century

Although typical framings of feminism's Second Wave in the US would consider it over by the mid-1990s, the time of *TransSisters*, we can read throughout *TransSisters* implicit and explicit investment in a feminist politics of the Second Wave that is often characterised as committed deeply on matters of sexuality (see, for example Gerhard 2001; Vance 1992). Many of *TransSisters* most prolific contributors locate their own feminist awakenings in 1970s feminist activism (*TS* 1993a, 2; *TS* 1994c, 32), in the period that has come to be cast as the Second Wave. Similarly, the feminist concerns and practices that occupy *TransSisters* also resonate with a politics of that era. In her book *Desiring Revolution: Second-wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982*, Jane Gerhard (2001) identifies women's music as part of a wider programme of building women's spaces that was a core project of cultural feminism and the Second Wave more widely (Gerhard 2001, 157). We can see this focus in *TransSisters'* intense preoccupation with the Michigan Women's Music Festival and its policy of excluding trans women.[27] Indeed, Michigan is the primary site around which the transfeminism that *TransSisters* is trying to build gets articulated. That Michigan is the central battleground of transfeminist politics, according to *TransSisters*, speaks powerfully of the cultural and political horizons of the publication, locating it within what Gerhard identifies as the radical feminisms of the Second Wave. Beyond Michigan, the kinds of concerns reflected in *TransSisters* resonate with a similar feminist politics. From its vision framed in the language of raising "feminist consciousness among transsexuals" (*TS* 1993a, 3) to the workshops that it promotes, radical feminism is very much the cultural and political horizon, such that one disgruntled (evidently non-lesbian) reader wrote in a letter to the editor: "Not every "little girl" wants to be a radical lesbian politico; some of them just want to be wives and mothers" (*TS* 1995b, 2).

[27] Michigan features heavily throughout the publication, and has one issue dedicated entirely to it (1993b). That this issue is the second issue of the periodical suggests the high priority placed on the issue within the transfeminist project of the periodical.

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The cultural and political milieu where we find *TransSisters* is within a feminist politics deeply, centrally, concerned with sexuality as the foundation of women's oppression and therefore the prime site for liberation. In *Desiring Revolution*, Gerhard (2001) explores the centrality of sexuality politics to the white middle-class radical feminisms of the Second Wave (Gerhard 2001, 3). She positions 1970s radical feminism as a response to 1960s counterculture in the US, critiquing its "sexist, male-centered"-ness, while claiming for itself counterculture's "celebration of pleasure for pleasure's sake" (ibid., 7). One of Gerhard's claims of the period which she identifies as the Second Wave (approximately 1970 to the mid-80s) is that despite changes in radical feminist politics over these years, sexuality remained absolutely central throughout. Reading across a genre that she calls "feminist sex novels" from the 1970s, Gerhard argues that they offer "a window onto how feminism and sexuality became bound together, at times problematically, in the 1970s" (ibid., 118).[28] Sexuality, she argues, "provided white feminists with the sense of shared oppression and commonality that proved necessary to the movement in the seventies" (ibid., 119); it was on this ground that they "sought to define womanhood" (ibid., 120). One result of this which Gerhard takes pains to excavate is the resulting elision of other categories of difference, other forces which shape desires, in these feminisms. Through claims of the authentic and inauthentic, women's sexual pleasure was posited as an undifferentiated, universal battle of womanhood, as differences in terms of race and class were elided and white middle-class womanhood masqueraded its sexual politics as universal (ibid., 133).

Gerhard moves from 1970s feminist sex novels to the so-called feminist sex wars of the 1980s, in which the categories of authentic and inauthentic pleasure were refashioned and deployed into an internal battle over what constituted appropriately feminist sexuality. Both sides in Gerhard's analysis – the "pro" and "anti" sex feminists – are underpinned by the same starting point, the white radical feminist analysis which Gerhard finds emerging in the 1970s that "sexual oppression occupied a privileged site for the production of feminist consciousness" (ibid., 148). A similar point is made by Leo Bersani in his essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?". Dwelling on the sexual politics of "anti-sex" feminist theorists – particularly Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon – Bersani (1987) finds them to be thoroughly coherent with "pro-sex" feminists (he cites Gayle Rubin and Patrick Califia) in the wider feminist project seeking "the *redemptive reinvention of sex"*, the idea that if we can just *change* sex then it can be finally

[28] Examples of these novels which Gerhard includes in this analysis are: *Rubyfruit Jungle* (Rita Mae Brown) and *Fear of Flying* (Erica Jong)

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good for us (215). What Gerhard and Bersani both point to is a deeper consensus among white radical feminists who apparently disagree on sexuality, a consensus that sexuality is *the* central question for feminism, that getting it right is crucial to any feminist project. They just disagree about what "right" looks like. *TransSisters*, I would argue, also resonates with this prioritising of, and hopefulness around, sexuality: *if* surgeries become better; *if* surgeons come to care more; *if* transsexual women have their sexual consciousnesses raised; *if* we can write a transsexual erotica. These are avenues for the redemption of transsexual sex with which *TransSisters* is very concerned and which, I argue, resonate clearly with the feminist milieu in which the periodical is located.

By the mid-2000s, when *The Transgender Studies Reader* is being collated, sexuality has lost its status as the central site of feminist concern that Gerhard argues in her characterisation of Second Wave feminisms. While the white radical feminisms which Gerhard explores, and within which we can locate the politics of *TransSisters*, were "propelled" by "the commitment to women's sexual freedom" (Gerhard 2001, 185), this propulsion has run out of steam at the same time that sexuality (rightly) loses its privileged centrality as concerns with differences *among* women (particularly from critiques from feminists of colour) reveal the illusory façade of sexuality as a universal source of women's oppression and site of potential liberation (ibid., 4). This deprivileging of sexuality is not a bad thing; as Gerhard's argues, prioritising sexuality as *the* shared source of women's oppression worked only within a logic of projecting white middle-class womanhood as universal, and deprivileging need not lead to the loss of energy around sexuality.[29] However, such is the state of feminist theory, where Gerhard reads a "vacuum in feminism around sexual pleasure" around the start of the 2000s (ibid., 11). This change, I would expect, comes from many spaces including the deprivileging of sexuality as the source of women's oppression in the transition out of the Second Wave, a fatigue around sexuality after the so-called feminist sex wars, and the impact of neoliberalism and postfeminism on the way that sexuality is conceived of. I think that we see the effects of the "vacuum" that Gerhard identifies in *The Reader.* There is simply no energy around sexuality. Where *TransSisters* recognises sexuality as an integral part of the transsexual good life, a communal political endeavour, sexuality in *The Reader* becomes more limited to speaking of sexuality only in terms of a question of the object of desire, and with little sense that sexuality

[29] Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* for example deals beautifully and seriously with race, sexuality, gender, and their interplay.

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should or could take on some shared political meaning among trans people. The hope of any "redemptive reinvention of sex" seems, by this time, over.

4.2 The constraining of sexuality by masculinity in academic feminism

The second point to which I return in this conclusion is the way in which *The Reader* tends towards containing sexuality within transmasculinities and not transfemininities. This location, I argue, leads to different possibilities for articulating sexuality to those, the energy and possibility, of *TransSisters*. This somewhat depleted sexuality, one that is neither central to the ethics of the trans self nor to collective trans endeavour, resonates clearly with the discursive dampening apparently necessary in academic feminism around sexuality that invokes – literally or symbolically – the phallus.

In *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018), monograph-length rumination on dildos, Paul Preciado reflects on the way in which the "rather banal and material artifact" that is a dildo seems to be imbued with immense power, the malefic potential to distort his (at the time) "female and lesbian sexuality" into something more sinister (7). [30] The dildo's power, he argues, seemed to be felt far beyond itself, and was "equally bothersome to my Lacanian psychoanalyst and my feminist friends. For both, it was the bad signifier, a pathological symptom of my uncastrated desire for power and the replication of a dominant and phallic form of masculinity" (Preciado 2018, 7). For Preciado's friends, the dildo represents (or perhaps embodies) an uninterrupted link between the penis, the phallus, power and, ultimately, harm. Liking it too much, then, is deeply suspect. Returning to a discussion in "Scientists or Sluts?" on the lesbian leather conference *Powersurge* and its 1992 policy on the inclusion of trans women – the "dick in a drawer" rule – I read the hint of a similar concern, interestingly in a space which is supposed to be fine with sex involving dildos. On the face of it, the *Powersurge* policy is about trans women who have not had SRS, but in light of Preciado's comment I am inclined to think it slightly differently. As well as arbitrating on trans women, this policy can also be read to arbitrate on dildos and their appropriate limits. It can be read to suggest that the dildo is an acceptable object *only insofar as* it is not, perhaps fantasmatically, considered in any way a part of the body. For Preciado, this is precisely the problem of our sex/gender system that grounds itself in claims of the natural, making some bodies superior (natural) and others inferior (unnatural). In the *Powersurge* context, you can like the dildo, but there is a limit to

[30] It is worth noting that *Countersexual Manifesto* was originally published in 2000 (as *Manifesto Contrasexual*), but not translated into English until 2018. As such, it sits in the same context (temporally) as *The Reader*.

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the appropriate level and meaning of that liking. For Preciado, the matter seems more simple: like it as much as you want.

Symbolically (rather than sociologically), transmasculinity is tied to the phallus through a supposed relationship of desire, of wanting.[31] This association, I speculate, takes the trans man irredeemably far beyond the realm of acceptable, feminist, sexuality. There is an interesting chapter in *The Reader* which sheds some light on how far into trans masculinity is "too far" to still accommodate sexuality– Gayle Rubin's essay "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries" in which she explores the categories of "butch" and "FTM". In her analysis of "butch", Rubin reflects on aspects of what we would consider "gender" and what we would consider "sexuality"; the butch has both. Her reflection on "FTM", by contrast, has no sexuality; he is all gender. The figure who claims (or is claimed by?) female masculinity (the butch) is the site of acceptable masculine sexuality, but the FTM who claims "male" is simply not. He went too far. In the mid-2000s, "FTM" was still a very common term in trans studies, as was "trans man". Both are less common in academic discourse now, which has thoroughly taken on the language of *The Reader* of "trans masculinities", but in the mid-2000s trans masculinity was still dominated by the FTM/trans man figure. Where "masculinity" has, to some degree, been renovated and redeemed through female masculinities, male-ness or man-ness have resoundingly not especially in relation to sexuality. While masculinity tends to rise to the top of some feminist discussions of sexuality (as per Hemmings and Butler in "Who gets to laugh in pleasure?), this can only take on certain modes and registers as long as a claim to man-ness/male-ness and, by symbolic extension, the phallus, is either made or assumed or symbolically implicated.

Where *TransSisters* can draw simultaneously on a Second Wave sexual politics and scientific discourse to legitimate its politicising of, and discussion of, sexual pleasure in the context of SRS, the same claims cannot be made for transmasculine sexual pleasure through *The Reader*. While it does include references to transfeminine SRS and sexual pleasure, transmasculine SRS is now allowed the same status as a hopeful thing worth fighting for. Indexed once in the entire *Reader*, there seems to be almost a taboo on the subject which reflects the "vitriol" that Emmett Harsin-Drager identifies in much queer theory reserved for phalloplasty (Harsin Drager in Chu and Harsin Drager 2019, 111). In short, there is no acceptable stance from which to want a penis, particularly to want it for sex. In a context of broadly conceived feminist theory,

[31] The dubious sociological content of this is irrelevant here, as I am more concerned with the symbolic association.

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phalloplasty (as the culturally loaded, heavily associated transmasc SRS par excellence) cannot sustain the kind of claims and discourses of trans sexuality that transfeminine SRS can in *TransSisters*, and because transness is so symbolically associated with SRS this is extended to trans men's sexuality more widely.

What seems to happening here is the situating of sexuality within trans masculinities – in keeping with a pattern in 1990s American feminist theory – but a resulting circumscription of the possible articulations of sexuality as it claimed in relation to male-ness, man-ness, and a fantasmatic association with the wish for a penis, the worst of bad signifiers, the signifier of all the ways in which sex itself can be hurtful and of a domain that can only be thought of in terms of a weapon. The articulations of transmasculine sexuality in *The Reader*, then, are limited in this way and cannot move too close to the kind of politicised claim to, or discussion of, sexual pleasure that emerges in *TransSisters*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this resonates with the pattern for discussing sexual pleasure in *TransSisters* itself in "Scientists or Sluts?", where I have argued that such discussions are only made possible, speakable, after SRS when the penis has been literally and symbolically removed. Interestingly, the discussions of "retooling" genitals discussed in the literature review as a common avenue for discussing transmasculine sexuality do not exist in academic literature in a transfeminine register, despite the colloquial persistence of similar practices. Perhaps the penis is just too symbolically defined, too saturated with meaning, in academic feminism to be "retooled". The penis, in the feminist context which trans studies is emerging in, cannot be separated from the phallus nor the phallus from power, leaving transmasculine sexuality – tied by the figure of the FTM to a claim to the phallus – an ultimately limited place from which to articulate the kind of claims to sexual pleasure, the project of building sexual culture that we find in *TransSisters*.

4.3 Possibilities of race and transness

In the literature reviewed, the beginning of the story of transness is typically located (either explicitly or implicitly) to lie in one of two places. For those with a longer historical view, it sits in early European sexology, in the works of Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard von Krafft-Ebing (the approach taken in *The Reader*). For those working in a shorter historical lens, the historicising of transness begins in the mid-twentieth century, with Christine Jorgensen and the technologies developing in the science of the Cold War (this is the story Preciado tells in "Pharmaco-pornographic Politics"). These different historical arcs share a foundation of transness as, implicitly, a place of whiteness. And such is the state of the field in trans studies' early years.

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As already explored in this chapter, unacknowledged whiteness was a central part of much radical feminist politics of the Second Wave.[32] In seeking a universal source of women's oppression, identified in sexuality, racism as a source of many women's oppression was elided. This elision happened throughout the different levels of political and cultural production in many feminist spaces. The genre of "women's music", for example, adopted as universal a model of European music, with non-European and black American women's music consistently marginalised in these spaces (Gerhard 2001, 157), while on the level of theory, "woman" was theorised as a class unaffected by racism. In this way, *TransSisters'* complete lack of attention to race (unfortunately) resonates clearly with its feminist location. *The Reader* is much more attuned to race, recognising in the introduction that the field is characterised by "overwhelming (and generally unremarked) whiteness of practitioners and the "uneven distribution of the term "transgender" across different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic communities" (Stryker 2006, 15). In response, *The Reader's* final section is "Multiple Crossings: Gender, Nationality, Race", designed to accommodate such work as there was and facilitate more. Pieces like Emi Koyama's essay "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway? The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate" and Valentine's analysis on the raced take-up of the language of "transgender" do challenge the ways in which trans right, services, and studies are figured in terms of an unstated whiteness. However, there is a discursive limit to the ways in which whiteness, non-whiteness and transness are understood to interact at that time, which more recent work has begun to move beyond.

In *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity,* C. Riley Snorton moves beyond reclaiming the black trans histories that trans historians have passed over (although he does produce such histories as a kind of side-effect). Instead of prioritising such a "'shadow history' of blackness in trans studies" (Snorton 2017, xiv), Snorton takes aim at the heart of the field arguing that ideas of blackness developed during slavery enable the historical emergence of transness at all. Instead of treating blackness as additional to transness, Snorton argues that it is fundamentally constitutive, that what we have come to know as "trans" would be impossible without the ideas of blackness developed during slavery. In his history, Snorton explores sex and gender as racial arrangements, "inextricably linked yet irreconcilable and irreducible projects" (ibid., 8).

[32] As Becky Thompson (Thompson 2010) argues in "Multiracial Feminism Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism", feminist politics of the Second Wave were not uniformly white, and to assume that it was is to ignore the activism of women of colour in the US during that period. However, the politics of *TransSisters* does resonate with the whiteness that the Second Wave is now renowned for.

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Snorton focuses his argument on the conditions of slavery, and the Black people forced to live under those conditions, as a central site for the establishment of ideas of sex, gender, and race. He takes Hortense Spillers' idea of "ungendered flesh", and traces a history connecting this – Black people being isolated from the privileges of the bestowal of heteronormative gender – with the construction of "sex" as a category, focusing on the story of John Marion Sims' horrifying use of Black women in the development of gynecology. The ungendering of blackness thus becomes the site on which the idea emerges that gender can become subject to rearrangement, a huge contrast to the histories of gender as malleable that are typically recounted in trans studies (such as Stryker 1999a; Preciado 2008).

Snorton does pick up the story of Christine Jorgensen but uses that story to show again the constitutive role of blackness in realising Christine. Through the media portrayals of black transwomen around the time of Jorgensen's ascendence in 1950s America, he argues that "anti-blackness [was] a critical paradigm for making sense of Jorgensen's figuration" (Snorton 2017, 157). Snorton's approach to Christine's story, and the histories of Black transwomen with whom he compares her, is an interesting twist on a very dominant genre in trans studies. He picks up the narrative which has been typical since Sandy Stone's 'posttranssexual', wherein trans studies scholars find narratives which disrupt the claim of medical narratives on trans lives and declare radicalness in their difference from them. But Snorton twists this move slightly and uses it to say that blackness has both underpinned that medical model (and its presumably its repudiation) and simultaneously been systematically denied from it.

In the time period that this thesis covers, analyses like Snorton's which take on the ways in which sex and gender are inherently racial categories are still some way off. Transness, as a category of whiteness/anti-blackness has not yet been developed or, to put it in language from "Sexuality and *The Transgender Studies Reader*", the nature of what it can mean for categories to "cut across" is still more superficial and less deeply constitutive. *The Reader*, at least, makes visible the beginnings of some of these connections in so far as the discourses in trans studies at the time allow, but *TransSisters* is resolutely silent on its whiteness. In this way, both are in keeping with what they take from their feminist contexts, the theme of this final chapter. Here I hope to have shown the value of considering the feminist contexts of trans studies through exploring feminist contexts with which both sites resonate. Only in context can the trajectory of trans studies and sexuality make sense. By drawing these connections, it also becomes easier to see "trans" and "feminism" as less distinct, not posed as antagonistic by default.

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I continue to be compelled by the early period of trans studies which this thesis addresses, a period where particular directions were taken and alternative paths lost to history. As a transnormative subject has emerged, these preceding moments become yet more important. I was concerned, at the start of this project, that I would find that this era simply did not have much to say about sexuality. Yet I remained compelled by it; afterall, these are the popular discourses of transness that I grew up in, they formed many of my first notions of transness. I was relieved to find that these sites of trans discourse, even though not ostensibly about sexuality, have a lot to say about it. In excavating both *The Reader* and *TransSisters* it becomes clear that sexuality can, under particular conditions and in particular spaces, mean many things; even its separation from gender becomes a question, a project rather than fact. This kind of thinking is starting to appear trans literature – not just the publication of Lou's diaries, but also books like Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby.* Both convince me that trans studies can grow into a really promising place to think about sexuality at its most complex, its most challenging.

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