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## Solidarity in the Centerfold

*Trans Social Safety Networks in the Adult Magazine*

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**ABSTRACT** This essay argues that certain print pornography featuring “crossdresser,” “transvestite,” and “transsexual” subjects was, counterintuitively, part of a distributed information and care network by and for US transfeminine people between the 1970s and 1990s. While this genre of “transploitation” magazine did reproduce transfeminine bodies as fetish objects, transfeminine individuals themselves also used the adult magazine and bookstore market to distribute clandestine information on hormonal, sartorial, and social self-fashioning and support. This symbiotic relationship with the pornographic allowed information about transfemininity to circulate to individuals with little economic means as well as to reach people who did not have regional or cultural access to the respectable “CD,” “TV,” or “TS” community media of the era. In this way, these magazines formed part of a social safety network: a shadow system of circulating subcultural knowledges within mainstream media in order to survive legal censorship, medical exclusion, and economic abandonment. **KEYWORDS** Crossdressing, Pornography, Print Culture, Transgender, Transsexual

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In a 1989 issue of the magazine *TVScene*, a full-page advertisement implored curious readers to send \$19.95, plus \$2.00 for shipping and handling, to a company called Executive Imports. In exchange, consumers would obtain a fifty-capsule bottle of “Estro Femme,” purportedly “a natural product used by Chinese Herbalists to enhance and balance feminine hormones.” After a year of use, when combined with wearing an “Uplift Breast Harness” (also available from Executive Imports) and doing at-home exercises such as pinching one’s nipples and pulling them outward to increase skin elasticity, Estro Femme pills promised to help clients (patients?) grow “small beautiful size breasts” within a year (figure 1).<sup>1</sup> In the accompanying informational guide “Hormones and Me” (\$4.95), “TV” (transvestite) and “TS” (transsexual) readers could learn more about feminizing hormones, including how to access them via a doctor’s prescription rather than a mail-order catalog. Neither advertisement makes a distinction between cosmetic body modification and

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# ESTRO FEMME





**"CLEVER PEOPLE . . . . . THOSE CHINESE!"**

An old saying, but true throughout the ages! We have done extensive research and came up with the herb that has been traditionally used by these intelligent and resourceful Orientals to balance and enhance female vitality! To enhance and balance female hormones! We guarantee nothing! We cannot say that it will do "this" or "that"! It is against the law for anyone to say these things in print, no matter what they may believe and no matter what results they have witnessed! You know the business we are in! Put 2 plus 2 together! ESTRO FEMME sells for only \$19.95 for a container of 50 capsules. Remember now — we can guarantee nothing. The next step is up to you!

Everything mentioned is for reading enjoyment only.

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**AVAILABLE FROM: DEPT. TS3  
EXECUTIVE IMPORTS  
210 FIFTH AVENUE, N.Y.C., N.Y. 10010**

Please send me **ESTRO FEMME** for only \$19.95 plus \$2.00 for shipping and handling. Enclosed please find

Check    Cash    Money Order

Total Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Add Applicable Sales Tax

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
(I AM OVER 21 YEARS OF AGE)

These will not work miracles, nor will it happen overnight. If you start this, you will have to be prepared to stick to it and exercise. Here are some of the things we've learned.

Take these for 21 days — then stop for 9 days, continue again if you want a larger improvement.

Wear one of our Uplift Breast Harnesses for as many hours a week as you can! This will help mold breasts as they grow to outward position.

Exercise by pulling your breasts outward. Using your fingers to grasp just outside nipple and pull outward on both breasts at the same time.

Improvement should be noticed in approximately 3 months. At this time you should shave entire chest. Go for another 3 months and so on until desired effects are accomplished. It could take one or two years to get small beautiful size breasts.

Please send in pictures of your progress so we can publish them in our magazines.

FIGURE 1. "Estro Femme" advertisement in *TV Scene*, 1989.

"transition-related" medical care; instead, they promise readers support for breast growth, with minimal psychiatric or medical barriers, and at a reasonable price, paid in cash, check, or money order.

*TVScene* magazine was not a licensed outlet for the distribution of hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Nor was it the newsletter of a "TV" or crossdressing support organization. Instead, it was one of dozens of titles published by the New York-based adult publishing imprint and

miscellaneous fetish gear purveyor Executive Imports (EI). Between 1986 and approximately 1996, EI published dozens of nearly indistinguishable pornographic magazines with titles like *Crossdressers' Forum*, *Femme Images*, *Transvestite Lifestyles*, and *TV Bondage*, featuring both posed images of transfeminine models and presumed self-produced images submitted as personals ads by “CDs” (crossdressers), “TVs,” and “TSs.”<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, a significant function of these periodicals was pure masturbatory aid for cisgender men: the emphasis on genitals, full-frontal nudity, and photographic depictions of penetrative sexual acts between presumably cisgender men and transfeminine subjects make this clear. However, the persistent presence of “feminizing” supplements, not simply as a plot device within a constructed sexual fantasy but as advertisements for real mail-order products purporting to produce somatic changes, disrupts any totalizing account of cisgender voyeurism or fetishization. If, for at least a decade, EI published advertisements aimed directly at “the TV or TS who contemplates taking female hormones,” as a spot for the educational pamphlet “Hormones and Me” reads, we might reimagine transfeminine readers as not merely incidental audiences of trans pornography during this era, but as deliberately invoked and solicited audiences (figure 2). As such, these media objects were both spaces where transfemininity was rendered as something to be consumed and spaces for the transmission of crucial endocrinological techniques.

This essay reconceptualizes these adult magazines as part of a symbiotic circuit between US print pornographers and trans community members between the early 1970s and the early 1990s. In a chapter titled “difficult decades,” Susan Stryker has identified 1973 as potentially the nadir of the twentieth-century transgender movement, remarking that “the early 1970s . . . represented a watershed moment . . . when the transgender political movement lost its alliances with gay and feminist communities.”<sup>3</sup> In the wake of the abandonment by their one-time allies, compounded by the closure of university-based clinical programs that provided (conditional) care to trans people, and a larger national backlash against the liberation movements of the 1960s, many gender nonconforming people in the 1970s United States found themselves in desperate need of material support and basic health-related information, an emergency that did not subside until the introduction of the commercial web during the mid-1990s. I add to Stryker’s litany of ’70s-era trans-antagonistic systems 1973’s *Miller v. California*, a Supreme Court decision that ended what Lisa Z. Sigel calls the “liberal consensus on obscenity” in the United States and raised the legal stakes for the

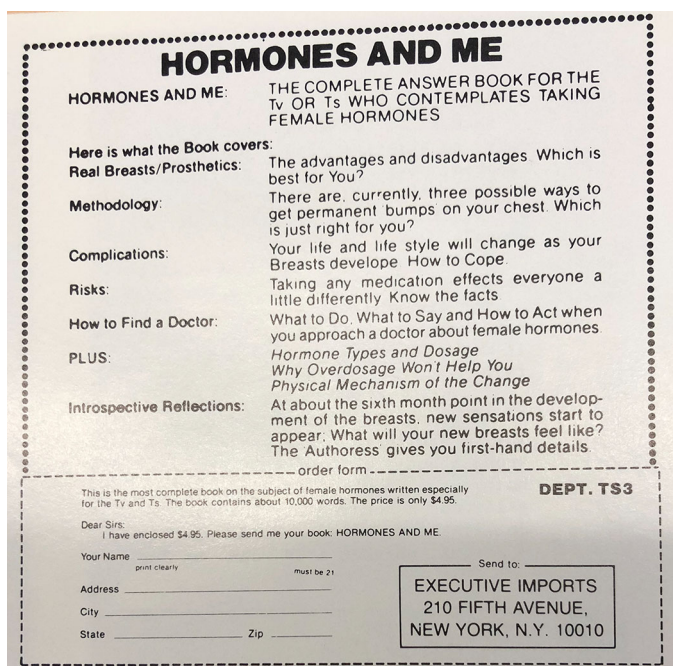


FIGURE 2. “Hormones and Me” booklet sold in pages of *TVScene*, 1989.

circulation of trans-related material that did not meet nebulous “community standards” of social or artistic value.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of these waves of conservative retrenchment, some mainstream pornography distributors emerged as unlikely safe havens for the circulation of alternative gender knowledges to uninitiated audiences, even as those same companies simultaneously engaged in the objectification of transfeminine subjects.

These enmeshed attachments to exploitative media systems prefigure what I have elsewhere called “social safety networks”: the interconnected and life-sustaining socialities paradoxically provided by distributed capitalist media forms.<sup>5</sup> By contrast to the contemporary app-based transition support and hormone-prescription telemedical companies that profit from the market niches created by transphobic exclusion from psychiatric and medical services, social safety networks are informal and even surreptitious adaptations of existing media infrastructures, such as adult magazine distribution systems, for subcultural knowledge circulation. Using oral histories and print archives, I examine how transfeminine actors during the “difficult decades” of trans life in the United States built symbiotic and strategic relationships with

pornographic distributors, forming a loose alternative system of trans care knowledge. In doing so, I ask: what social, economic, and creative relationships existed between pornography purveyors beginning in the early 1970s such that, during the 1980s and into the early 1990s, “CD,” “TV,” and “TS” audiences could find hormone therapies advertised to them directly within the pages of magazines that otherwise conscripted their embodiments and experiences for erotic consumption? What networks of care emerged from the infertile soil of “trans sleaze?”

Before proceeding, I want to first situate this essay’s messy methods. For trans media history, and trans history in general, pornographic material from this period presents myriad challenges for scholarly inquiry. As Tim Dean points out in his introduction to *Porn Archives*, pornography’s subterranean status means its archives are often destroyed, and those archives that remain are usually personal collections, “saved from obliteration thanks to ‘the passions of the collector’” and therefore “likely to be incomplete, disordered, and irreducibly subjective.”<sup>6</sup> The archive that I surveyed for the purpose of this essay—one of the seven boxes that constitute the Marlene Somers Collection at the University of Minnesota’s Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies (hereafter, the “Tretter Collection”)—is no different. Somers’s papers were once “14 grocery bags filled with magazines, newspaper articles,” hidden from her wife in corners of her Minneapolis home. Somers has never come out to her children, dresses as a woman only in private and when away from home, and lives what she describes as “a life of two people in the same body.” But when she read about the Tretter Collection in the local newspaper, she arranged to have her collection of magazines and books removed from their garbage bags and collated into storage boxes. In an interview after her donation, Somers tells trans oral historian Andrea Jenkins about her path to becoming a collector of pornography:

MS: Over the years, that was my connection with the world of . . . there wasn’t a lot of organizations back then. There were some.

AJ: There were a few but not . . .

MS: Not like now. So I kept going to the newsstand, bookstores—adult bookstores were wonderful.

AJ: Did you say adult bookstores?

MS: Yeah, they always had a good section of transsexual information. And then the regular newsstands—there was old magazines . . . well, at any rate, I just collected all this.<sup>7</sup>

Today, the collection is not fully cataloged; as I completed this essay, I created my own informal catalog of Box 7, which the archive describes simply as “Assorted magazines, 1958–2009.”<sup>8</sup> Although I do not claim that my investigation of this “irreducibly subjective” archive constitutes anything like a scientific sampling of this genre, a summary of my survey findings helps articulate the extent to which transition-related care circulated symbiotically with transploitation. Of the sixty-six magazines in Somers’s Box 7, sixty-three contain trans or cross-dressing content, ranging from trans-specific fetish magazines like *TVScene* to “straight” porn magazines like *Night and Day* (1964–65) that include articles like “The Girl Who Used to Be a Boy.”<sup>9</sup> Of those sixty-three issues, forty-five feature advertisements for hormonal supplements, sartorial or cosmetic feminization materials, crossdressing support or information guides, or directories of crossdressing and/or transsexual support groups; in other words, content that directly addresses a transfeminine readership. Despite the incomplete nature of the collection, made even more ephemeral due to what I argue is its strategic appeal to individuals living closeted or in stealth, I maintain that this is sufficient material from which to draw tentative conclusions about audience and intent, especially when combined with accounts of this material’s production history.

That said, the categories of identity at work in EI’s magazines and similar publications—“CD,” “TV,” “TS,” and such, not to mention terms with more explicit status as slurs—are challenging to integrate into a contemporary account of “trans” media history. None of these categories is necessarily commensurate with “trans,” as Marta Vicente has compellingly argued. Debates as to whether these terms index distinct forms of political and social identity or are simply outdated synonyms for “transgender” raise larger class, race, and national quandaries.<sup>10</sup> As such, the extent to which the history of individuals who identify as (or are deemed by others to be) cross-dressers, tranvestites, and transsexuals is the same history as “trans history” is a live question, even within the demographic scope of this essay (the Anglophone United States). Furthermore, it is not always clear that individuals used these terms for their gender or sexual experience outside of the pages of the magazines, destabilizing potential assumptions about identification and community. While an individual might identify themselves in a personal advertisement as a “submissive CD,” for example, the status of this term varied (and varies) so widely in community usages that it might just as easily mark a heterosexual and cisgender-identified male cross-dresser as it does someone who lives as a woman but uses the limited terminology available to her

through mass media such as porn periodicals. The still incomplete—and rightly fraught—process of arriving at shared terminology for multiple expressions of transfemininity was and is both subject to intense debate within transfeminine communities and largely invisible to the media world outside of these in-group spaces. As such, whether any individual figure who appears in these magazines has, for example, the desire to undergo hormone therapies in order to express a felt sense of gender rather than for cosmetic reasons—a nonfalsifiable distinction that is, nonetheless, often applied as a litmus test to distinguish the “CD” from the “TS”—is impossible to determine merely via the language by which they identify themselves in personal advertisements, or via the terminology used to title the publications in which their images (self-produced or modeled) appear.<sup>11</sup> Whether any of these individuals would be validated or horrified to be studied under the sign “trans” is likewise difficult to ascertain; in part for this reason, I do not offer close readings of any individual images or narratives within this essay.

Furthermore, existing scholarship has long argued that trans readership of “trans pulp” or “trans sleaze” was merely incidental, if at all extant. In her discussion of trans pulp literature of the mid-twentieth century, for example, Susan Stryker argues that the “disproportionate number of transgender titles that told . . . the stories of actual lives [were] actually intended for more prurient uses.” Although trans people may have been interested in depictions of trans medical treatments that appear incidentally in “sex change” plots, in Stryker’s read, “the bulk of transgender paperback fiction has . . . consisted of sheer sleaze, throwaway books designed for one-handed reading.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise, RL Goldberg, in their account of porn company Star Distributors, argues that while “trans sleaze, was, also, of course, read by trans people,” and that “trans sleaze was also marketed to trans people,” the primary consumers and audiences of the “trans sleaze” genre were “mainstream consumers, largely comprising nontrans men.”<sup>13</sup> Nowhere in this scholarship is the possibility of trans authorship of these media forms considered. Given the understandable critical impulse to repair epistemological violence against trans subjects by centering trans-authored texts aimed at trans people, the commonplace that these texts represent simply phobic cis imaginaries of transness makes them marginal objects for scholarly reconsideration, and risky objects to attempt to reconsider.

Finally, the periodicals produced by EI and others appear at a historical period when less exploitative cultural production, created by and for organized trans communities, had already emerged. Before the loosening of US

obscenity laws after 1957's *Roth v. United States*, print information about transsexuality in the United States was available in narrow medical contexts (although that material was not mutually exclusive with pornographic depictions, as evidenced by the collections of community member Louise Lawrence and cis psychiatrist Robert Stoller).<sup>14</sup> After 1957, however, nonerotic material about cross-dressing and gender expression could more easily circulate via US mail. Trans-authored newsletters and mailing lists began to emerge in the 1960s and have been relatively well preserved, leaving what is now a rich archive of late twentieth-century community-authored care systems and emergent “trans” political consciousness for scholarly examination.<sup>15</sup> Now available via physical sites such as the University of Victoria's Transgender Archives and aggregated via the Digital Transgender Archive, these periodicals provide scholars with windows into these social worlds without the mediation of potentially trans-antagonistic publishing houses or editors. With the availability of community-authored print media, why focus on texts presumably created, to echo Stryker, for cisgender men's “one-handed reading?” Especially as the “difficult decades” of the 1970s and 1980s gave way to the relatively more gender-fluid 1990s, what were periodicals like *TVScene* doing for transfeminine knowledge-seekers that a support group newsletter couldn't do better?

Yet a closer examination of the production and circulation of these porn periodicals reveals that adult magazines aimed to reach an audience for whom more formal support systems were out of reach, both due to the narrow strata of individuals included within the newsletter system and the paucity of *discovery tools* for finding information about gender difference, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. In doing so, they subverted both the limitations of medical gatekeeping and self-imposed community silences on the topics of sex and sexuality, creating strange and surprising forms of circulation and connection among transfeminine creators and readers. Without significant capital or financial support, despite the legal, social, and medical strictures of the period, a stealthy and subversive long-distance information and care system emerged: a social safety network via dirty magazines.

#### REDEEMING SOCIAL VALUE: TRANS KNOWLEDGE CIRCULATION IN THE 1970S PORN SCENE

In this first section, I investigate how unlikely intimacies between some CD/TV/TS porn distributors and transfeminine individuals during the



1970s created space for hormonal information to circulate via Executive Imports' adult magazines in the 1980s and early 1990s. To tell this story, I trace the career of Sandy Mesics, an editor at Executive Imports rival Neptune Productions between approximately 1974 and 1978. Echoing Marlene Somers, Mesics told me that "there were a tremendous amount of people that were . . . not willing to enter into the medical arena to get their care," but "a lot of trans people went into . . . adult bookstores in those days, and looked for stuff that they could relate to." At Neptune, she said, "we were tapping into that."<sup>16</sup> Despite the commonplace that cisgender men authored "trans sleaze" periodicals for other cisgender men, Mesics is, herself, a transgender woman. She was already out as a cross-dresser by the time she began producing CD/TV/TS pornographic content in the early 1970s, and she later transitioned. By thinking of porn customers not simply as fetishistic outsiders but also as information-seeking community members, trans writers and photographers like Mesics helped produce magazines that carefully interpolated both audiences.

Mesic's media philosophy of distributed information networks emerged from her own circuitous path to transition-related care. Born in 1952 and raised in small-town Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Mesics had no formal language for her childhood experience of gender and hid her feelings from her mother out of a (not unreasonable) fear that she'd be subjected to electroshock therapy. However, she was exposed to the idea of transition through pulp sources in everyday consumer places. She relayed this anecdote from her adolescence in the early 1960s to oral historian AJ Lewis:

Every Sunday morning my mom and I would stop on our way home from church and we would stop at the local grocery store on the way home . . . and there were newspapers. . . . So you had your, your respectable newspapers like, the *New York Times* and the local—like the *Morning Call* or something like that—[and] down toward the end there were these racks that were like the *National Enquirer* and the *National Insider* and they would splash these flashy stories with pictures on the front cover that said "I Changed my Sex" and stuff like that, and I was attracted to that because it was information of some kind. And so—I think the statute of limitations is up on this—but I did figure out a way to fold those newspapers inside respectable newspapers, get it through the checkout line and remove them from the rest of the paper before my mom found out.<sup>17</sup>

In her retelling, young Mesics literally combined respectable and nonrespectable print media so that she could secrete away information about gender

transition. Although these tabloid sources were undoubtedly sensationalized, they also provided glimmers of hope that there were others like her. When Mesics was old enough to attend Penn State University, she found accounts of the Erickson Foundation while paging through John Money and Harry Benjamin's studies of gender difference in the university library. The Erickson Foundation had been set up by eccentric trans millionaire Reed Erickson to distribute information about gender transition (as well as occult and other fringe topics); Mesics wrote the foundation and received the names of three doctors in Pennsylvania. She recalled:

MESICS: No appointments. You walked in, you gave your name to the receptionist, and you sat down, and you were called in the order in which you arrived in his office. So, [I] drove 180 miles, went into his office, gave my name. And he saw me when it was my turn. I told him what I wanted, he talked to me for about, I don't know, forty-five minutes. Gave me my first hormone shot. It was basically an informed consent model, because there were no standards of care yet. But you had to know who would do it. And that's why you had to write to Reed Erickson.

For Mesics, it was only the glimpses of trans life that she found in the pilfered 1960s supermarket tabloid that gave her sufficient language to, eventually, get connected with a community-led information network run by a fellow trans individual. Mesics acquired the privilege of university library access as a young adult, but her childhood encounter with the tabloid racks made it easy to imagine other gender-questioning people whose primary encounters with print culture, let alone trans culture, happened at the newsstand, or in the magazine rack at the adult bookstore. Rather than assuming that other small-town trans people would find social and medical support via authorized channels, or by stumbling on euphemistically named organizations for epistolary peer support, she envisioned reaching them through mass print media modeled after the nation's most popular—and racy—periodical.

Therefore, in 1973 or 1974, she started a short-lived publication called *Image*.<sup>18</sup> Mesics imagined *Image* as the trans community's answer to *Playboy*:

MESICS: You know, *Playboy* made its thing the centerfold, and the pinup pictures. But that was probably to draw readers in. And if you looked at *Playboy*, it had like, celebrated authors who were publishing in *Playboy*, you know? Interviews, book reviews, stereo equipment reviews, and all this kind of lifestyle stuff. And so that was my big, you know, lightbulb that went on in the day. It was like, "Let's do something like this for the trans

community,” even though we didn’t have that language in those days. So, you know, *Image* would include anything relevant to, like, drag shows, or you know, the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or whatever Divine was doing in the day. And we’d run reviews . . . but we would put a centerfold in there.

Although other “trans” publications already existed at the time that Mesics dreamed up *Image*, she saw those existing periodicals as “more or less catering to the heterosexual” and “mired in the 1950s.” Virginia Prince’s *Transvestia*, for example, a magazine “published by, for and about transvestites,” began its run in 1960, aiming to provide “Entertainment—Education—Expression” in order to “promote Understanding—Acceptance—Peace of Mind.”<sup>19</sup> While offering readers insight into the supposed “deviant” world of cross-dressing, *Transvestia* also foregrounded the “redeeming social value” of its contents, an anti-titillation ethos that would dominate much trans-authored print media for the following three decades. While this framework offered protection from obscenity prosecution, it also reflected Prince’s own personal biases: her investment in white, middle-class forms of femininity as well as her rejection of homosexuality.<sup>20</sup> When Mesics understands (anachronistically) *Transvestia* as a product of the 1950s, she is reflecting the larger cultural mores of the stereotypical 1950s white feminine housewife, the image that Prince worked tirelessly to connect with the respectable cross-dressing subject of her periodical.

By contrast, Mesics wanted to produce media that reflected a post-sexual revolution, post-Stonewall world. “[Prince] was in Elvis Presley mode,” she said, “and we were like, Beatles mode.” In creating a new type of periodical, one that connects the uncensored circulation of nude images to a larger notion of gender and sexual freedom, Mesics hints at the complex politics of even “straight” porn periodicals at the time. Feminist media scholars continue to debate how to interpret *Playboy*’s dual status as quasi-progressive lifestyle magazine, one that contained fervent arguments in favor of birth control and published work by luminaries such as Vladimir Nabokov and Margaret Atwood, and yet was simultaneously a purveyor of sexist and heterosexist pornography.<sup>21</sup> But as a media-maker with the goal of reaching new trans audiences, Mesics understood *Playboy*’s nude images, not the articles, as the real sales gimmick. While cisgender male audiences may have joked about reading the magazine “for the articles,” it seemed to Mesics that *Playboy* had struck on an ideal business model not just for heterosexual porn but for circulating any niche content (such as, say, updates on the comings

and goings of various female impersonators) within a popular marketplace. The economic logics of mass-market print circulation, in which one had to gain enough subscription or bookshop sales to recoup the costs of production, might otherwise seem to inevitably bar trans periodicals from success: how does one create a high-quality, full-color, glossy magazine for an unknown but undoubtedly tiny readership, congregating in no one specific geographic location, many of whom cannot safely receive trans-related mail at their home address without risking exposure as a targeted gender minority? Putting “a centerfold in there,” perhaps of a beautiful woman in fishnet stockings or a tight corset, could resignify the purchasing of a “trans” magazine as a reinforcement of, rather than a threat to, one’s heterosexual masculinity. Such a strategy therefore would provide exposure for those uninitiated to gender’s possibilities and concealment for those keeping their gender identity secret.

While *Image* itself didn’t live up to the dream of a trans *Playboy*—the magazine was, after all, “a small kind of kitchen table enterprise,” which churned out something “very, very, very, very rough” that “looked like an underground newspaper”—Mesics would soon have another chance to circulate a *Playboy* sensibility to a trans audience. Mesics’s work with *Image* put her in contact with fellow trans media-maker and activist Sussie Collins.<sup>22</sup> As a Neptune Productions staff member and a community activist, Collins’s presence at Neptune had meant that this adult imprint had already experimented with combining trans support and pornographic content by the time Mesics connected with the publisher. As well as answering “Dear Sussie” letters from apparent fellow crossdressers in various Neptune periodicals, Collins also had a column called “Suzy Sez” in Neptune’s the *Female Impersonator*. The column served as a scene report / Dear Abby-style advice column for trans people and their admirers, appearing as personals ads and erotic photographs (including ads for other adult lifestyle or fetish magazines like those from the then-new Executive Imports).<sup>23</sup>

By the middle of the 1970s, however, Collins was increasingly busy with overtly activist work, such as her new organization the United Transvestite and Transexual Society (UTTS).<sup>24</sup> Around 1975, Collins invited Mesics to a Philadelphia cross-dresser party, where Neptune boss Jack O’Brien was in attendance. What began as a friendly work-trade, in which Mesics would produce some freelance photography and typesetting for Neptune in exchange for use of Neptune’s facilities for *Image*, eventually morphed into Mesics taking over for Sussie entirely, beginning with ghostwriting “Suzy Sez.” As Mesics put it, Collins “certainly did a lot for the community in the

day, but Suzy couldn't write. And you know, I could write. . . . It was the running joke at Neptune. Suzy had a column that was Suzy Sez. And when I started doing it, it was Sandy Says Suzy Sez." Although Sussie maintained her connections to Neptune—according to trans historian Cristian Williams, Collins had announced that *Shemale* would be the "official publication" of UTTS when it was first founded in 1973, and continued to help grow the magazine's reach—Mesics soon took her place working full-time for Jack O'Brien at Neptune.

Mesics understood that her job as a pornographer was not primarily to serve as a community liaison; it was to produce material that would make money for the higher-ups at Star Distributors as well as move the small amount of mail-order product that was sold in Manhattan storefronts and could therefore bypass Star's mafia-controlled distribution and payment networks.<sup>25</sup> The work was hard, for little pay. At one point, Mesics—herself "one or two steps away from being a virgin"—was writing a forty-page porn novella every week, in addition to locating talent, managing shoots, and writing copy. But at the same time, Mesics was working to reach trans audiences: "The sexy stuff . . . how can I express this. It helped us enlarge our outreach, you know. We knew guys were buying this stuff to masturbate, we knew that, you know. But . . . it still had some good content in it. And so, if putting that [pornographic] stuff in there increased circulation . . . it was a trade-off."<sup>26</sup> After Collins's successful integration of social support into Neptune's *Female Impersonator News* opened "the floodgates" of demand for more trans community news, Neptune responded by increasing production, with Mesics driving the content.

In the years that followed, Mesics wrote columns in magazines like *Shemale* with her fellow transfeminine people in mind.<sup>27</sup> She imagined her audience as both fetishists and the "trans people [who] went into adult bookstores in those days, and looked for stuff that they could relate to." As such the explicit, even derogatory, language of these publications, including publications whose contents were partially or even primarily organized around community information-sharing and support, was in part an attempt to clearly communicate the contents of these publications to their audiences. They were trying to catch the eye, not just of the fetishizing cisgender man, but also of the curious proto-trans person who just happened to wander into the adult bookstore, maybe not even yet knowing the type of information they needed to find. In this way, the symbiotic relationship between pornography publications and trans media workers allowed information about

hormone therapy to reach outside of established social networks, breaking through the regional boundaries that delimited in-person support groups and the respectability politics that demarcated the social boundaries of the community newsletters. Once exposed to the world of fabulously dressed transfeminine people posing *en femme* for a Neptune photoshoot, perhaps gender-questioning, cross-dressing, or trans individuals would write into the magazine. If they lived near New York, maybe they could even pose for Mesics’s camera, which could in turn lead to an invitation to a drag party, or nights out with infamous female impersonators Pudgy Roberts or Lee Brewster. For audiences farther afield—such as thousands of miles away in the upper Midwest—nationally distributed print pornography offered a mediated, yet thrilling, experience of the larger social and somatic possibilities of transfeminine life.

#### MEDIATED SURVIVAL: EXECUTIVE IMPORTS AND ESTRO FEMME IN THE 1980S

While Sandy Mesics was dreaming up *Image* and getting connected with Neptune, someone named Carol Avery was writing in to a cross-dressing support group in upstate New York called the Transvestite Independence Club (TVIC). Her missives listed her as affiliated with a group called Executive Imports and explained that she was willing to pay a fair price for original creative work from TVIC’s members. EI had been founded two years before, allowing it to initially take advantage of what is arguably the most pro-pornography period of US obscenity regulation to date: the decade and a half after 1957’s *Roth v. United States*, which defined obscenity only as that material that was *utterly* without redeeming social value. But in 1974, the Supreme Court’s finding in *Miller v. California* revised the definition of obscenity to include all that lacks “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.” Suddenly, there was renewed pressure on outlets like EI to justify the aesthetic and social value of their pornography.<sup>28</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Avery, that same year, suddenly appears in the respectable newsletter archive, hoping to buy literature and art.<sup>29</sup> She would continue to do so well into the 1980s, in community callouts such as that shown in figure 3, as EI expanded their line of transfeminine fetish magazines to dozens of individual periodicals.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, as advertised in the pages of EI’s magazines, one could send away to “Carol” to buy “exciting, provocative, privately printed stories written for and by transvestites,” as shown in figure 4.

Dear Wilma,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health.

I've put the following advertisement together and I hope you will be able to include it in your next edition:

NOTICE:- I NEED A HELPING HAND

Dear TVIC Subscribers,

Can you help me? I'm looking to secure the following TV/TS material:

Original manuscripts-Full length or short stories (Fiction)  
 Photographs - Color or black & white  
 Drawings - Pen & Ink or watercolor/oils  
 Out-of-print- Books, magazines, novels, tabloids, newsletters, etc.

Please send samples or lists of what you have available and asking price.

Reply to: Miss Carol Avery, Executive Imports Int'l,  
 210 Fifth Ave. (Suite 1102) New York, NY 10010


FIGURE 3. From *TVIC Journal*, December 12, 1981.

Tracing “Carol Avery” from the trans support group archive back into the transploitation archive reveals that the respectable newsletter and the non-respectable adult magazine were part of a fluid network of information transmission, albeit operating distinct print genres that appealed to different audiences within cross-dresser, transvestite, and transsexual readerships. While my attempts to locate Avery herself led me only to a series of defunct LLCs, filed under a name of a still-living individual that I do not disclose here, the very fact that Avery was able to write in to “TV/TS” spaces demonstrates extraordinary knowledge of an intentionally private scene.<sup>31</sup> While there is no obvious evidence to suggest Avery herself was a trans woman, cross-dresser, or had a partner who was (and if so, I suspect other trans women working in the print pornography/magazine industry at the time such as Sandy Mesics or Sussie/Suzy Collins would have known her), it is likely that Avery was not a total outsider to this community.<sup>32</sup> Not only was she able to get her call for papers printed in a small in-group community newsletter, but she also knew enough about the everyday struggles of trans life to market shoes, especially high-heels, in above-average sizes, wigs and breast-forms to enhance feminine appearance, and, ultimately, pills like *Estro Femme* (or “Mammary” or “Feminizer,” or “Feminique,” or “Fem Glan”) that purported to induce estrogenic changes in the body without the necessity of a prolonged and often humiliating psychological evaluation. Even as Avery’s motives may have been purely commercial, and potentially even economically exploitative in their own right—she paid a small one-time fee

**AN EXCLUSIVE FIRST TIME OFFERING!**


# TRANSVESTITE MANUSCRIPTS

**Exciting, Provocative, Privately Printed Stories Written for and by Transvestites**




**HOOKER'S CAPTIVE**  
An exciting tale of "Tisim combined with female domination. A young, good-looking, wealthy man, is disciplined and humiliated by a group of prostitutes. He is completely feminized and utilized as a "maid and sex slave". A very exciting and stimulating story.

No. TMT 22 \$7.50




**EX-WIFE'S REVENGE**  
My ex-husband used me, then forces me to become a common stripper. But then my chance came, and he had to go through the same punishment! He looked so cute up on the stage, dancing in his frillies while the crowd applauded.

No. TMT 23 \$10.00




**TV SUBSTITUTE PLEDGE**  
They told me it was all for a prank, disguising myself as a girl and joining their sorority. So I went along with it, even when they started making changes in my looks, my walk, my body. The girls were so sexy, and they promised such fun... But then came the initiation, and suddenly the job became a terrible transvestite nightmare!

No. TMT 14 \$30.00




**MAN INTO PANTIES**  
A scientist's exploration into the Occult leads him into a bizarre transvestite trap, with only one chance to escape!

No. TMT 11 \$7.50




**THE LINGERIE SALESMAN**  
The story of a young man who was trying to make it in the sales field. He gets a job as a lingerie salesman. He is suppose to show his line to the biggest customer and the model doesn't show up. She talks him into doing his own modeling and this leads him into the world of Transvestism.

No. TMT 6 \$10.00



**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**  
Finding himself hard up for work, Tom decided to check out an executive secretary position. Surprised when he finds out that the boss is a beautiful lady in her mid 30's, he is more surprised when he finds out the requirements of the job. The pay is high enough for him to take a chance. Theres competition however and two young men find out what it means to move into the female world.

No. TMT 1 \$7.50



**HALLOWEEN PARTY**  
The story opens when a young lady talks her football playing friend into dressing in a mini-skirt and attending the annual costume dance. There is problem until no one knows who he is and a problem with the car after the dance finds them both in plenty of trouble with some young ruffians.

No. TMT 3 \$5.00

**FREE BONUS ORDER ALL (7)**

**TV MANUSCRIPTS AND RECEIVE A BONUS STORY AT NO ADDITIONAL COST - POST PAID!**

OUR CHOICE OF SELECTION

CHECK ONE

SHIP  UPS  US MAIL

Shipping & Handling \$1.50 for first Manuscript and \$0.60 for each additional one. \* ADD APPLICABLE SALES TAX

**FREE!**  
MANUSCRIPT CATALOG  
LISTING OVER 950  
DIFFERENT STORIES  
WITH EVERY ORDER.

ORDER FROM: DEPT. TD1  
**EXECUTIVE IMPORTS**  
P.O. Box 1839 NYC, NY 10116

Dear Carol,  
Please send the transvestite manuscripts checked off below:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

I CERTIFY THAT I AM 21 YEARS OF AGE  Check  Money order  Cash  
(which includes shipping & handling charges and sales tax where applicable)

TMT 1 Executive Secretary \$7.50  TMT 14TV Substitute Pledge \$30.00  
 TMT 6 The Lingerie Salesman \$10.00  TMT 22 Hooker's Captive \$7.50  
 TMT 7 Halloween Gay \$10.00  TMT 23 Ex-Wife's Revenge \$10.00  
 TMT 11 Man into Panties \$7.50  All (7) which entitles me to a free bonus selection (your choice)

FIGURE 4. From *Drag Mates*, no date (likely late 1980s).

to a trans person whose writing she would then publish and distribute for decades—the archive nevertheless clearly demonstrates the interrelation, even intimacies, between these two print communities.

As cisgender feminists warred over the providence of both pornography and transfemininity through the 1980s, transfeminine subjects and mass-market print pornographers found themselves lumped together on one side of this censorious debate.<sup>33</sup> As Stryker has suggested, the exile of



transfemininity from many cis feminist communities left trans movements in a precarious position. Yet it also spurred more ingenious and strategic use of nonfeminist media distribution. In this section, I show how the relatively small circuits of CD/TS/TV print porn from outlets like Neptune evolved into larger-scale distribution and even direct “medicine” sales in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. I do so by tracing overlaps between literary exchange, supplement distribution, and pornographic profits during this transitional period in US transfeminine life. As numerous historians of pornography have noted, the line between obscenity and aesthetics, or obscenity and education, has never been clear, and it is especially unclear in periods of legal and social stigma against porn, such as the United States would enter in the latter half of the 1970s and more intensely throughout the 1980s.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the veneer of “explaining” kink, queer sexuality, or gender difference to a curious (or prurient) audience has long served as a shibboleth for the wider circulation of transgressive sexual knowledge. As such, it is unsurprising that the business model of EI relied heavily on “lifestyle” magazines, “educating” readers about the (straight and gay) leather, dominance/submission, swinging, and “gender” scenes.<sup>35</sup> EI proliferated images of gender nonconforming bodies as ripe for sexual commodification. At the same time, advertisements for pills like Estro Femme, supposedly factual information about hormonal body modification, and creative stories written by “real” trans writers appeared in dozens of EI’s quarterly adult magazines published during the 1980s and early 1990s. As Sandy Mesics joked with me in 2022, “the stuff that I put into these publications was the redeeming social value.”<sup>36</sup> And just as Mesics understood the value of mass-market pornographic periodicals for reaching underserved or disconnected transfeminine knowledge seekers, pornographers understood the value of circulating material that could pass as artistic or scientific.

The quiet dialogue between EI and formal trans support outlets via the figure of Carol Avery helps situate advertisements for Estro Femme within a larger circuit of distributed care and safety networking during the 1980s. The AIDS crisis, the closure of the university clinics, the Reaganite turn toward cultural conservatism, the beginning of the end of the welfare state—all these overlapping emergencies meant that the economic and information environments for US trans individuals were rapidly contracting during this period. At the same time, the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care (SOC) for the treatment of “transsexualism” or “gender identity disorder” were first adopted in 1979 and were increasingly implemented by medical

practitioners during the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> These guidelines created stringent requirements for access to medical technology such as hormones and surgery, transforming what had been a distributed, nonuniform assessment process into a distinct battery of diagnostic and treatment steps. While Sandy Mesics was able to get a hormone shot as soon as she found a sympathetic doctor, the SOC would have required her to undergo psychological evaluation and a “real life test” in order to procure hormones. If she did not meet the clinical criteria for transsexualism, she would not be prescribed estrogens. And if she admitted to having once been a “cross-dresser” or “transvestite,” much less being involved in the pornographic depiction of such individuals, she likely would not have met those clinical criteria, being instead deemed a fetishist. As such, while the SOC’s proponents had argued that the new guidelines would expand the number of doctors who felt safe treating trans patients, the material effect on trans individuals was often that hormone access was more labyrinthine and restrictive. The promise of EI’s booklet “Hormones and Me” to tell potential patients “What to Do, What to Say, and How to Act” when seeking hormones from a doctor is a visceral reminder of the strictures of meeting these standards for anyone whose gender and sexual desires deviated from clinical norms, which included, by default, anyone who found CD/TV/TS content arousing. As such, ads for supplements like Estro Femme spoke directly to the needs of EI’s shadow readership, the audience of individuals who were finding identification, even if accompanied by arousal, in the “trans sleaze” centerfolds.

At the same time, these pills were likely not a substitute for hormone therapy. There’s no evidence that Estro Femme ever helped anyone grow “small beautiful size breasts.”<sup>38</sup> Soy, the likely ingredient in Estro Femme, has long been rumored among various trans communities to be a cheap/noninstitutional substitute for HRT, but in fact does not typically produce significant breast growth.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, I do not mean to suggest that Estro Femme was a form of HRT in the same way that estrogens and anti-androgens from a physician would have, or that it truly ameliorated the medical or somatic needs of the community. However, the “failure” of Estro Femme as a hormonal therapeutic (or, for those CD/TV-identified individuals who may not desire gender transition, as a cosmetic feminization product) does not undermine its importance in the history of trans media or media of care.

Estro Femme ads also advance an orientalist mystification of hormone replacement therapy, situating the audience of these sleaze magazines within race and class, as well as gender, categories. The baldly racist ad copy claims

that the secrets of estrogen-dominant supplements come from "Clever People . . . Those Chinese!," capitalizing on an association between Asia and gender fluidity that has long haunted conversations about transness in the West.<sup>40</sup> With a small number of exceptions, including the notably racist inclusion of a single-run publication called *Call of the Wild* that featured a Black model, the trans figures that appear in the Somers collection overwhelmingly appear to be white. Even the inclusion of "interracial" dating ads in one contact magazine ("Swinging TV Contactor," date and publisher unknown) provoked angry pushback from a reader in a letter to the editor. Just as these publications interpolated a transfeminine audience in stealth, masking the radical possibility of trans becoming within the mundane reality of fetishistic male desire for transfeminine people, they also used advertising copy to invoke a fantasy of a modern transsexual whiteness, advancing the "clever" innovations of the "Chinese" while simultaneously positioning Eastern medicine as ancient wisdom, derived from a time before the rationalization of the gender binary. By rhetorically adopting techniques of supposed bodily alteration from people of color while also consigning "those Chinese" to a foreign Other, the transfeminine readers of magazines like *TVScene* were interpolated into an era of white trans scientific modernity.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the advertising copy of *Estro Femme* reflects Jules Gill-Peterson's discussion of how racialization of sex and gender plasticity produced white trans children as "living laboratories" for hormonal intervention, while disqualifying Black trans children and other trans children of color from medical support. *Estro Femme* hails white "patients" while casting the knowledges themselves as racialized, just as the mainstream trans medical establishment was, during this same late twentieth-century period, constructing the deserving white patient from the medical knowledges it had violently extracted from Black and colonial subjects.

#### **CODA: DECODING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK**

The aim of this essay is not to unduly idealize a past in which economic pathways for so many trans feminine people were narrowly routed through sex work, nor to simply recuperate the media that emerge from racism, transmisogynist fetishization, and even dehumanization. (Indeed, it would be incorrect even to consign these exploitative systems to the past.) My goal instead is to offer a layered account of a period when the mass distribution of alternative gender possibilities—outside of a few socially conservative and

class-striated support channels—depended on masquerade, stealth, and symbiosis in print forms. I do so with urgency; as I write in 2022, state legislators are aggressively taking aim at trans medical intervention, newly constructing the prescription of common endocrinological treatments such as puberty blockers and exogenous testosterone and estrogens as a criminal act. Illustrating the unique trans social safety networks that emerged out of the previous wave of anti-trans and anti-sex reactions, therefore, reveals how trans life has long been sustained through tentative alliances with unlikely and disreputable forces.

In closing, I contrast the subterranean circulation of trans care knowledges through adult magazines from the 1970s through early 1990s with a contemporary phenomenon: the conveyance of trans care knowledges via paid digital apps. Beginning in 2019 with the launches of Folx and Plume, trans telehealth companies became big business in the United States. The business model of these apps is to charge a monthly fee—not unlike a magazine subscription—in exchange for which a trans individual will receive hormones and injection materials via mail order. Given that the subscription fee outpaces the cost of hormones themselves (for those trans people with Medicaid, Medicare, or private health plans, and in some cases even out-of-pocket), the monthly fee model has been met with significant community criticism.<sup>42</sup> Yet these services offer the mediation of the digital screen and the relative anonymity of mail delivery as the main product. As Sus Labowitz writes in their account of trans VC, despite the fact that their social media marketing strategies feature trans people living in urban, hip, coastal cities, the founders of these companies “profess a strong desire to serve trans people in areas without good access to trans healthcare.”<sup>43</sup> This puts companies like Folx and Plume, both founded by white transgender people, in the uncomfortable position of compensating for (and thus profiting from) the social stigma (and, often, geographic impossibility) of presenting one’s physical body to a clinician or psychiatrist in order to receive care. Meanwhile, investors believe this distributed model, which Chris Barcelos has aptly called “complicit care,” is profitable: FOLX, at least, raised \$25 million in venture capitalist (VC) funds.<sup>44</sup>

As an uncountable number of trans critics on social media and elsewhere have already pointed out, these apps seem to exploit for profit an ethos that trans communities have long adopted: using extant long-distance media forms to circulate care. While *Estro Femme* itself was likely bunk, its appearance in advertising invoked, and helped to constitute, a reading public curious about or open to hormonal therapies—at least for those who could tolerate

the racist copy. And while magazines like *TVScene* or *Shemale* weren't free, they were only a few dollars each, and theoretically could be passed around a community of readers (although privacy or sanitary concerns may have limited this hand-to-hand circulation). That trans writers and photographers could construct trans support print media that would appear alongside content designed for one-handed engagement, that they carved out economic lives for themselves while doing so, is just one example of trans capacity to hack a network for our own ends, to weave a safety net with the imperfect strands at our disposal. Telehealth apps, however, constitute a closed system, one in which knowledge and care cannot be stumbled on by the uninitiated browser, but rather must be purchased by the knowing consumer.

In order to resist the commodification of trans social safety networks, it is crucial to continue to uncover trans media histories of care, even those mired in the unsavory (exploitative pornographic genres) or the too-often disavowed (white trans complicity with white supremacist representations of trans femmes of color). As Hil Malatino and Cam Awkward-Rich write, whether any trans collective politics can thrive depends on “what we (fraught, imperfect, ongoing) do next”; it is up to us to determine whether the “tough recognitions” of past trans social safety networks will be “failures or lessons.”<sup>45</sup> But it is already clear that we need not swallow the false pill of VC-backed subscription telehealth or risk wholesale isolation in a hostile climate. Instead, we can send support signals through whatever weird, strange, semicensored means we have: we are here, and we got you. ■

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Thank you to Carta Monir for additional review of this essay, and for everything.

## NOTES

1. “Executive Imports,” *TVScene* 1, no. 3 (1989). Identical advertisements appeared across twenty distinct publications in my study sample between 1985 and 1996.
2. I use “transfeminine” as an admittedly problematic term to describe the category of bodies that appear within these magazines. I use the language of TS, TV, or CD (transsexual, transvestite, or cross-dresser) when referring to publications or individuals

that named themselves as such. I make these distinctions while understanding that many of these terms are now understood in some contexts as obsolete or offensive; my insistence on repeating this language here is both to impress on contemporary readers the variability of trans naming practices and to avoid eliding communities that, within the period in which these texts were published, often understood themselves as mutually exclusive or at odds with one another, especially when it came to medical and somatic alteration practices. I join Jules Gill-Peterson in resisting reading these identities as “backward, literal, or failed trans social forms”; see general editor’s introduction to “The Transsexual / Transvestite Issue,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (November 2021): 414.

3. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (New York: Seal Press, 2008), 101.

4. Lisa Z. Sigel, *The People’s Porn: A History of Handmade Pornography in America* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), 181.

5. See discussion in Precarity Lab, *Technoprecarious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 55.

6. Tim Dean, Steven Rusczycky, and David Squires, eds., *Porn Archives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 13.

7. Marlene Somers, interview by Andrea Jenkins, September 23, 2015, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Transcript. The Transgender Oral History Project Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota. <https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll97:114>.

8. Emily Atchison and Amanda Wick, “Finding Aid: The Marlene Somers Collection, 1950–2010.” <https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/13/resources/2111>. The account provided by the Tretter’s finding aid espouses the commonplace notion of these as primarily fetishistic: “the target audience of many of these publications was arguably people that fetishize TV and TS (Transsexual) bodies.”

9. The remaining three were fetish magazines about lace or nylon stockings; these potentially have trans resonance with a crossdressing readership but do not hail such a readership via direct advertisement of feminine clothing or hormonal supplements. Furthermore, some magazines have unknown content removed with scissors.

10. Marta V. Vicente, “Transgender: A Useful Category?: Or, How the Historical Study of ‘Transsexual’ and ‘Transvestite’ Can Help Us Rethink ‘Transgender’ as a Category,” *TSQ* 8, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 426–42.

11. A full accounting of body modification in “CD,” “TV,” and “TS” lifeworlds is beyond the scope of this essay. Medical and psychiatric systems attempted to distinguish between fetishistic and “true” transsexuals, yet this diagnostic sorting was unevenly applied subject to manipulation and subversion by “patients” themselves. See Beans Velocci, “Standards of Care: Uncertainty and Risk in Harry Benjamin’s Transsexual Classifications,” *TSQ* 8, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 462–80.

12. Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2001), 89.

13. RL Goldberg, “(Trans) Sex Sells: Star Distributors Ltd. and Trans Sleaze,” *TSQ* 8, no. 2 (November 1, 2001): 449n7, n3.

14. For the impact of *Roth* on the circulation of nonmedical depictions of sex, including gender nonconforming sexuality, see Sigel, *People's Porn*. For the role of pornographic material in the sexological archive, see Chase Joynt and Kristen Schilt, "Anxiety at the Archive," *TSQ* 2, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 635–44.

15. For how tropes of respectability and social uplift circulated in periodicals such as *Transvestia* and *FTM International*, see Aren Aizura, "Flailing at Feminized Labor: SOFFAs, 1990s Trans Care Networks, *Stone Butch Blues*, and the Devaluation of Social Reproduction," in revision for *South Atlantic Quarterly*; and EJ Gonzalez-Polledo, *Transitioning: Matter, Gender, Thought* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 28.

16. Interview with Sandy Mesics, March 7, 2022, conducted by Cassius Adair. Transcribed by Academic Audio Transcription.

17. "Sandra Mesics Interview with AJ Lewis," New York City Trans Oral History Project, the New York Public Library and the New York City Trans Oral History Project, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/oral-history/transcripts/NYC+TOHP+Transcript+128+Sandra+Mesics.pdf>.

18. Exact date of production start unknown. Earliest archival copy available is from 1974: [www.worldcat.org/title/1050142576](http://www.worldcat.org/title/1050142576).

19. *Transvestia*, August 1967; "Virginia Prince and *Transvestia*," University of Victoria Transgender Archives, [www.uvic.ca/transgenderarchives/collections/virginia-prince/index.php](http://www.uvic.ca/transgenderarchives/collections/virginia-prince/index.php).

20. Stryker characterizes Prince as having "open disdain for homosexuals, frequently express[ing] negative opinion of transsexual surgeries, and conservative stereotypes regarding masculinity and femininity." Stryker, *Queer Pulp*, 46.

21. See Monique Mignon Bourdage, "Beyond the Centerfold: Masculinity, Technology, and Culture in Playboy's Multimedia Empire, 1953–1972," PhD diss., University of Michigan. See also Amy Grace Lloyd, "Nabokov on One Page, Nudes on the Next: A Playboy Literary Editor Reveals All," *The Guardian*, October 6, 2017. [www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/06/playboy-hugh-hefner-literature-amy-grace-loyd](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/06/playboy-hugh-hefner-literature-amy-grace-loyd).

22. Collins's first name is variously spelled "Suzy" or "Sussie," depending on the source; it is Sussie in Williams and in Meyerowitz as well as in the Neptune masthead. I use "Suzy" to indicate the persona behind "Suzy Sez," and Sussie elsewhere. For the brief mention in Joanne Meyerowitz, see *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 237.

23. The scanned copy of *The Female Impersonator* available in the Digital Transgender Archive inadvertently omits the "Suzy Sez" column, but otherwise it is a good example of the genre; note the "China Doll" feature and the ways that Asian American trans femininities are portrayed by white trans media producers, p. 23. The *Female Impersonator* 5, no. 8 (1975), on *Internet Archive*: <https://archive.org/details/femaleimpersonat58unse/page/24/mode/2up>.

24. The exact date of this handoff is uncertain; Mesics did not recall, and the use of Sussie's name throughout the period makes it difficult to denote when Sussie officially exited the project.

25. Goldberg discusses connections with organized crime. See more extensive documentation in Nicholas Gage, "Pornographic Periodicals Tied to Organized Crime," *New York Times*, October 13, 1975, and "Mobsters Skim New York City Sex Industry Profits," *New York Times*, July 27, 1977. Both Executive Imports and Neptune advertised Star products, but it is unclear what type of relationship Executive Imports, especially their direct-sales supplements, had with Star. For more on pornographic distribution and the archive, see Finley Freibert, "Distribution Struggle: Assembling a Media History with J. Brian's Enterprises with Court Proceedings and Public Records," *Spectator* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 40–52.

26. Mesics is not clear on the total readership for any given Neptune periodical, but guesses it was "eight or ten thousand folks" monthly. Interview with Cassius Adair.

27. "Shemale" is widely understood as a slur against trans women, in part due to its pornographic usage during the mid-twentieth century. Mesics said of the title, "I didn't name most of those—not that I would've come up with anything better, or anything—but that was Jack [O'Brien]'s call." I leave the term uncensored here to reflect both Mesics's and Collins's historical usage, and to illustrate the extent to which pornographic and dehumanizing language in these periodicals could nevertheless accompany pro-trans content.

28. After 1974, legal challenges to sexual material became easier to sustain in state and local courts. See Bethany C. Miller, *Miller v. California: A Cold Shower for the First Amendment*, *St. John's Law Review* 48, no. 3 (1974).

29. Brief appearance in *TVIC Journal* 3, no. 26, March 16, 1974, soliciting manuscripts in a section titled "Books."

30. *TVIC Journal* 10, no. 99, December 12, 1981.

31. The paper trail for Executive Imports is difficult to follow. Some public filings associated with New York State-licensed business "Executive Imports, Intl" list a private home as the incorporation address, and there is no Carol Avery associated with this address. There was no response to any of my attempts to contact individuals associated with this filing; out of respect for their apparent privacy, I do not name those individuals here. Thank you to Walt Hickey for his help in locating these business records.

32. Mesics said of Avery only, "I—now that you jogged my memory, I remember the name, but I don't—I can't put a real person to that."

33. Stryker, *Queer Pulp*, 112–13.

34. In making the case for the pedagogical function of porn for non-normative sexual subjects in the modern United States and Europe, Lisa Sidel writes, "Pornography provided detailed information on topics as varied as the genital kiss, anal intercourse, and multiple partners that legitimate works refused to acknowledge. This type of information, of no small importance to the 'normal' male or female, became even more important for those whose desires deviated from the norm." Lisa Z. Sigel, "Introduction: Issues and Problems in the History of Pornography," in *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800–2000*, ed. Lisa Z. Sigel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1–26, at 3. I have elsewhere argued that trans pornography is a legitimate site of identity formation:



Cassius Adair and Aren Aizura, “The Transgender Craze Seducing Our [Sons]; or, All the Trans Guys Are Just Dating Each Other,” *TSQ* 9, no. 1 (February 1, 2022): 44–64.

35. While WorldCat (and my selected archive at the University of Minnesota) list only CD / TV / TS magazines, the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago holds thirteen publications outside of this category, primarily dominatrix content. <https://leatherarchives.org/ca/index.php/Search/publications/search/%22executive+imports%22>.

36. In *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476, a book may be considered obscene, and therefore subject to censorship, only if “the material is utterly without redeeming social value.” *Memoirs v. Massachusetts*, 383 U.S. 413 (1966) expanded and strengthened this qualification, therefore permitting sexual magazines like those found in the Somers Collection to circulate if they could offer some “educational” material. As such, transgender / transsexual pornography was often circulated in the guise of scientific “case studies” of psychological or biological difference. Stryker, *Queer Pulp*, 81.

37. Nicholas Matte, Aaron H. Devor, and Theresa Vladicka, “Nomenclature in the World Professional Association for Transgender Health’s *Standards of Care*: Background and Recommendations,” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 11, no. 1 (2009): 42–52.

38. Consumer testimonies appear online during the late 1990s, denouncing the products as “too good to be true” and telling fellow trans women to “BEWARE!” See “Hormones Available! No prescription required!” alt.transgendered, Usenet archive, January 31, 1998.

39. The only scientific assessment of ESTRO FEMME that I was able to find was a warning letter from the US Food and Drug Administration’s Office of Compliance to a wholly different website that claimed to sell a similar supplement (or the inheritor of its trademark) in 2005. “Warning Letter to Buyinnovation.com,” Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services, November 9, 2005. Reproduced on *Quackwatch.com*: <https://quackwatch.org/cases/fdawarning/prod/fda-warning-letters-about-products-2005/estrofemme/>. (Buyinnovation.com was a mass goods distribution website likely unrelated to Executive Imports.)

40. For an account of the orientalism in mainstream trans studies, see Howard Chiang, Todd A. Henry, and Helen Hok-Sze Leung, “Trans-in-Asia, Asia-in-Trans: An Introduction,” *TSQ* 5, no. 3 (August 2018): 298–310. See also Susan Stryker, “*We Who Are Sexy*: Christine Jorgenson’s Transsexual Whiteness in the Postcolonial Philippines,” *Social Semiotics*, vol. 19, no. 1 (March 2009), 79–91 for the construction of twentieth-century white transsexualism vis-à-vis orientalist fantasies of Asian gender difference.

41. See Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 197. See also C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

42. See Mattie Lubchansky, quoted in *The Verge*: “My brain is in hell.” Kait Sanchez, “Imperfect Offerings: Inside the Complex New World of Trans Tech,” *The*

*Verge*, May 19, 2021, [www.theverge.com/2021/5/19/22433056/transgender-tech-apps-euphoria-clarity-solace-bliss](http://www.theverge.com/2021/5/19/22433056/transgender-tech-apps-euphoria-clarity-solace-bliss).

43. Sus Labowitz, unpublished term paper, no title. Obtained via personal communication with author, February 28, 2022.

44. Quoted in Lil Kalish, “Is Trans Telehealth the Future—or Just a Cash Grab?” *Mother Jones*, July 8, 2021, [www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/07/is-trans-telehealth-the-future-or-just-a-cash-grab/](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/07/is-trans-telehealth-the-future-or-just-a-cash-grab/). Accessed March 17, 2022.

45. Cameron Awkward-Rich and Hil Malatino, “Meanwhile, t4t,” *TSQ* 9, no. 1 (February 2022): 7.